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Lesson 1: The Promise of Jesus' Return #1 (The 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?

1. Jesus' Earlier Teaching Regarding a Future Return

The parables of the tares and dragnet – Mt 13:36-43, 47-50.

- *Features:* Who: Harvest, catch of fish signify the gathering of all men; What: a separation of wicked and just; When: "at the end of this age." Presumably, the age of the kingdom which Jesus is describing in these parables.
- 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.

2. Later Indications of Future Return

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

- *Features:* The master is coming at an unspecified time. The servants are to be vigilant, prepared for his return. If they are prepared, the master will reward them for their faithfulness.

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.

- *Features:* Jesus highlights the delay in the master's return. Some servants might take advantage of this delay and act inappropriately.

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

➤ *Features:* The following events take place “when the Son of Man comes in His glory.” Angels are again pictured, as well as a throne of glory. A separation also occurs again. Emphasis is upon serving Jesus faithfully via serving those who belong to Him. The two fates: everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels (25:41), and eternal life (25:46).

D. The promise of Jesus’ return to the disciples – Jn 14:1-3. See further reference to this return in 14:27-29.

➤ *Features:* This assurance of Jesus’ return is to comfort the increasingly anxious disciples. Jesus says:

I go → to prepare a place for you (mansions/dwellings).

I will come again → and receive you to Myself.

That where I am → there you may be also. (This promise is extended to all Jesus’ servants – Jn 12:26.)

3. The Book of Acts

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

➤ *Features:* This same Jesus who was taken → Will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven

➤ “In like manner” indicates that the return of Jesus will be a bodily, visible return. As He went visually into the sky, so He shall return.

B. The rest of Acts. 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. Paul declares to the Athenians that “*He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained ...*” (Ac 17:31-32; cf. 10:42).

2. Paul divides the Jewish Sanhedrin by his declaration concerning resurrection (Ac 23:6-8; 24:15; 21).

3. Paul reasons with Felix “*about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come*” (Ac 24:25).

C. What Acts emphasizes is the way to blessing at Jesus’ return – forgiveness!

Questions:

1. Who are the reapers in the parable of the tares?
2. Where are the wicked cast in the parables of the tares and dragnet?
3. How would the master reward the servants who were prepared for his return (Lk 12:37)?
4. Who will inherit the kingdom as described in Mt 25:34?
5. What were the disciples lacking toward Jesus in their anxiety (Jn 14:28)?
6. What statement concerning Jesus' return was misunderstood in Jn 21:22-23?
7. What received Jesus out of the sight of the apostles in Ac 1?
8. What is the assurance of man's future judgment by Jesus (Ac 17:31)?
9. Why did Paul's statement about the resurrection cause chaos in the Sanhedrin?
10. What was Felix's reaction to Paul's teaching about "the judgment to come?"
11. What does Jesus wonder if He will find when He comes (Lk 18:8)?

Lesson 2: The Promise of Jesus' Return #2 (The 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 return and some representative passages.

1. 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.

➤*Features:* The future coming of the Lord is variously described as follows:

- A. 1 Th 2:19 – "*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His **coming**?*" The coming of the Lord is a real event which Paul personally expected to experience along with the Thessalonians.
- B. 1 Th 4:15ff – "*... we who are alive and remain until the **coming** of the Lord ...*". While Paul did not believe that Jesus would necessarily return in his lifetime, he does acknowledge that people will be living upon the earth when it occurs.
- C. 1 Jn 2:28 – "*... abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His **coming**.*" God has given us all we need to look forward to that coming with confidence and boldness.

2. 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 are a family of words which describe the coming appearance of Jesus, the root verb of which is *phaino* and the noun *epiphaneia* (the 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.

➤*Features:* We are assured in a number of passages that Jesus will not only return but will appear. Note a few of them:

- A. Heb 9:28 – “To those who eagerly wait for Him He will **appear** a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” 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.
- B. Tit 2:13 – “... looking for the blessed hope and glorious **appearing** of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”
- C. Col 3:4 – “When Christ who is our life **appears**, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

3. 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).

➤*Features:* Many exhortations arise from the knowledge that Jesus will one day be universally revealed as true Lord and Savior.

- A. 2 Th 1:7 – “... when the Lord Jesus is **revealed** from heaven with His mighty angels ...”.
- B. 1 Pet 1:7 – “... that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the **revelation** of Jesus Christ ...”.
- C. 1 Cor 1:7 – “... eagerly waiting for the **revelation** of our Lord Jesus Christ ...”.

Questions:

1. What promise would even scoffers be aware of in the future (2 Pet 3:4)?
2. What does Paul wish to be found blameless at the coming of the Lord (1 Th 5:23)?
3. What does the writer of Hebrews mean when he says that Jesus will appear “apart from sin”?
4. What will Jesus do at His appearing (2 Tim 4:1)?
5. How is Jesus described in 1 Pet 5:4? What will the faithful receive at that time?
6. From where will Jesus be revealed?
7. 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. As the year 2000 approaches, and as we become increasingly aware of global tragedies, 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.

1. 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).

2. As a Thief in the Night

A. Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians – 1 Th 5:1-6.

➤ *Features:* The reappearance of Jesus is called “the day of the Lord.” This day will be unannounced, sudden: it “*so comes as a thief in the night.*” He contrasts the unpreparedness of unbelievers with the readiness of Christians: “*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*” He is not indicating that believers know *when* Jesus is coming but *why* He is coming and *what* they need to do to be prepared for that event *whenever* it occurs.

B. Peter’s agreement with Paul on the return of Christ – 2 Pet 3:10.

➤ *Features:* 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 additional phrase “in the night” is omitted in earlier manuscripts).

C. Jesus amplifies what “as a thief” means – Mt 24:43-44.

➤ *Features:* Though Mt 24 is controversial and difficult to apply exactly to the destruction of Jerusalem or the second coming, the point Jesus makes in these verses is clear. A thief is successful only because the owner of the house has no clue when he is coming, else “*he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.*” Some say, “Well, we don’t know the day or hour when Jesus is coming, but we can see signs which point to its approach.” This contradicts plain statements to the contrary.

3. What Is the Christian's Outlook upon 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 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. term *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

➤*Features:* 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.

Questions:

1. Why did Paul say to the Thessalonians "*you have no need that I should write to you*"?
2. Since we know that Jesus is coming, describe our state of alertness (1 Th 5:5-6).
3. What effect should the Lord's eventual return have upon our thoughts (1 Pet 1:13)?
4. What is not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed when Jesus returns (Rom 8:18)?
5. 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?

1. The Personal Appearance of the Lord

A. “For the Lord **Himself** will descend ...” (1 Th 4:16).

➤ *Features:* The return of Jesus will not be symbolic, representative or otherwise impersonal. Jesus **Himself** is coming; He will **descend**. This is the opposite of the ascension which took place in Ac 1. 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).

➤ *Features:* Though not visible, Jesus exists now in heaven. But He will eventually be seen again in this earthly realm.

C. “... to wait for His Son **from heaven** ...” (1 Th 1:10).

➤ *Features:* We are not the only ones at present waiting; Jesus “*sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool*” (Heb 10:13). But the time will come that He will leave heaven and descend to this world.

2. The Heralding of the Lord’s Return – 1 Th 4:16

➤ *Features:* The return of Jesus will be a noisy affair. At least three audible elements will herald His coming: a shout; the voice of an archangel; and the trumpet of God (1 Th 4:16).

A. “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.

B. 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!*

3. 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.

➤ *Features:* Jesus first indicated this in Mt 16:27 – “*for the Son of Man will come ... with His angels ...*”. He further includes them in Mt 25:31. These angelic assistants take on an ominous role as they are described as “mighty angels” 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 and dragnet.

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

➤ *Features:* Paul writes to the Thessalonians to calm their spirits on this subject. Fearing for the well-being of their loved ones, Paul tells the Thessalonians that “*God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Th 4:14). This echoes his earlier declaration that Jesus will come “*with all His saints*” (1 Th 3:13). The implication is that these are the spirits of the righteous who are to be reunited with their resurrected and transformed bodies and then rewarded for their faith: “*receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls*” (1 Pet 1:9).

4. The Glory of Christ’s Return

The latter days of Jesus upon the earth were rather inglorious. He was despised, afflicted, rejected by men and shamefully abused. He died as a common criminal; He was abandoned by those who professed to love Him; His body received horrendous injury reserved for the vilest of criminals. The earth did not esteem Him as noteworthy, but it will when He returns in glory.

A. “*Rejoice ... that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy*” (1 Pet 4:13); “*... when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe ...*” (2 Th 1:10). Jesus has already been glorified as He reigns and rules at God’s right hand (Jn 17:5). But all the creation will be made aware that Jesus is truly God’s Son. There will be no room for scoffers, doubters and atheists.

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. What a wondrous thought – to be redeemed from a frail human body with all its indignities, to be honored before those who ridiculed and derided in unbelief, to stand with the Lord as the whole of humanity past and present acknowledge what they denied and despised: that Jesus is “*the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unap-*

proachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.” (1 Tim 6:15-16).

Questions:

1. How is the trumpet of God described in 1 Cor 15:52?
2. What is the nature of the “shout” that will accompany Jesus’ descent?
3. From where will Jesus descend?
4. How is the appearing of Jesus described in Tit 2:13?
5. How should Christians react when Jesus is manifested in glory?
6. Who are those who “sleep in Jesus”?
7. What will the “mighty angels” do when Jesus returns (Mt 13:41-42)?
8. What will be the condition of the righteous after Jesus’ coming (Mt 13:43)?
9. What state will be given to God’s “many sons” (Heb 2:10)?
10. What is Jesus said to be waiting for at the present time?

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.

1. Only Two States Depicted – Lk 16:19-31

➤*Features:* 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>Torment</u>	<Afar Off> <Gulf Fixed>	<u>Abraham’s Bosom</u>
Tormented in this flame		Comforted

Additional features of this parable indicate that consciousness continues after death. Though no response from Lazarus is suggested, both Abraham and the rich man are portrayed as thinking, communicating individuals.

2. 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 and wealth, will eventually be joining them (Is 14:9-11, 15).
- B. Hades is a different word and place than the final abode of the unbelieving: hell (gehenna). Jesus, Himself, went into Hades and returned therefrom 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).

3. “Today, You Will Be with Me in Paradise” – Lk 23:43

➤*Features:* Certainly much error as a result of wishful thinking has arisen via this passage. Whatever the conditions upon which the offer is 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. Paul says that he had been privileged to see Paradise (2 Cor 12:4). He called it "the third heaven" (2 Cor 12:2); i.e., the heaven beyond the atmosphere and outer space. No description of Paradise is given by Paul, but what he saw was so glorious as to tempt him to be "exalted above measure" (2 Cor 12:7). This may explain why more is not said about our residence after death. The thoughts of heavenly grandeur might be too much of a distraction. Thus Paradise and heaven are spoken of with great economy.

4. "To Depart and Be with Christ" – Ph 1:23

➤ *Features:* 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 hesitate to accept these plain statements because they think it in some way circumvents or nullifies judgment. It does not. 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 issued (2 Tim 4:8). But compare Rev 6:9-11. These 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 ...*". 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 take care of us in the most appropriate manner.

5. 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. The Bible is plain that judgment is based on the "*things done in the body ... whether good or bad*" (2 Cor 5:10). Further, it is by a man's own actions, in this life, that he will be judged (1 Pet 1:17; Rom 2:6-10). "Purgatory," either as a place or a concept, is not mentioned.

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 alleviate the fear of death and de-emphasize 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.

Questions:

1. How did Lazarus get to Abraham's bosom?
2. What is the difference between "hades" and "gehenna"?
3. What is another term for "the third heaven"?
4. What was given to Paul to temper his pride in what he had seen of Paradise?
5. Paul says that to depart and be with Christ would be _____ for him.
6. Paul said that to be absent from the body was to be _____ with the Lord.
7. Who did Stephen cry out to as he was dying?
8. What after-death concept is currently popular in Hollywood?

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). Let's look at the resurrection.

1. 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).

2. What Happens at the Resurrection?

A. The definitive passage on resurrection is 1 Cor 15.

➤ *Features:* 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. The physical body will be raised – 15:42-44a. However this is accomplished is not an issue: God has the power to recover the material even though burned, rotted, vaporized or otherwise deconstructed.
2. The body will be changed "*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*" (15:52). It will be transformed from its former corruptible state to incorruption (15:52-54). Thus we will be fashioned after the Lord (15:47-49; 1 Jn 3:2; Ph 3:21).

B. Consider additional elements from 1 Th 4:13-18.

➤ *Features:* This passage was written to assure the Thessalonians that there would be joint participation between them and those who had already died at the resurrection.

1. The souls of the saints who have already died will accompany the Lord, *“And the dead in Christ will rise first”* (4:16). This is the process of resurrection as we noted in 1 Cor 15.
2. *“Then”* indicates the next event in the sequence. *“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”* (4:17). Note that Jesus **never steps foot upon the earth** in the second coming scenarios in the NT. The instantaneous transformation to an incorruptible state has taken place as the saints, the living and those formerly dead, are gathered to the Lord in the sky.
3. The permanence of heavenly fellowship is then asserted: *“And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”* This is reminiscent of Jesus’ promise in Jn 14:3.

3. A House Not Made with Hands – 2 Cor 5:1-8

- *Features:* 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, when in fact it is but a shell or “tent” (2 Cor 5:1, 4).
- B. This vulnerability, suffering and temporary sense of existence is burdensome and creates a desire *“to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven ... that mortality may be swallowed up by life”* (5:2, 4). The body to be given to us will not be subject to the debilitation, disease and distress that plagues us in this life.
- 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 ambitions and hopes not only upon future *location* (heaven) but *condition* (a glorious body).

4. Attaining the Resurrection – Phil 3:10-11

- *Features:* Paul says in this passage that he will forfeit anything that interferes with his relationship with Christ.
- A. *“I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ”* (3:8).
- B. Paul is awed by Jesus’ suffering, death and the *“power of His resurrection”* (3:10). When he states his hope to attain the resurrection from the dead (3:11), he is speaking *qualitatively*. That is, he knows that he, along with all men, will be physically

raised. But some will be raised to condemnation, and others will be raised to glory. He is totally focused on being in the latter category.

5. Denial of the Resurrection

A. The Corinthians had been entertaining the idea that there is no resurrection: "... *how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*" (1 Cor 15:12). The consequences of such a doctrine:

1. Christ is not risen (15:13, 16).
2. Paul's preaching is vain, and the faith of the Corinthians, based upon that preaching, is likewise vain (15:14).
3. The apostles are false witnesses (15:15).
4. Still in sin (15:17).
5. Those who have died have perished (15:18).
6. Christianity makes for a miserable existence (15:19).
7. Leads to reckless, indulgent lifestyle (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).

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. Which occurs first: the resurrection of the dead or the ascension to meet the Lord?
4. In what concept did Paul have the utmost belief (2 Cor 4:13-14)?
5. What effect should knowledge of the resurrection have upon us (1 Th 4:18)?
6. What was Paul willing to lose in order to participate in the resurrection (Ph 3:8)?
7. What is referred to by "*a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*"?

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).

1. Everyone Will Appear

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

➤*Features:* Christ is pictured upon His “judgment seat.” The picture is of each one going before the exalted and elevated judge to *“receive the things done in the body ... whether good or bad.”* Elders will give account for their stewardship (Heb 13:17).

B. Everyone, living and dead, will appear – 1 Pet 4:5.

➤*Features:* Peter assures his readers that those presently persecuting them will answer to the Lord, Himself, for their opposition. They will *“give an account.”* This word literally means to give a verbal defense. What a frightening prospect to answer to Jesus for the words and deeds which God finds unacceptable!

C. Nothing will be hidden – 1 Cor 4:5.

➤*Features:* While men can be fooled by hypocritical behavior, and we can even fool ourselves through rationalization and other forms of self-justification, we cannot fool the Lord. When He comes, He will expose every thought and motive and intent and judge accordingly. We will answer even for *“every idle word”* (Mt 12:36).

2. Jesus Will Be the Judge

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).

A. Jesus will judge “at His appearing” – 2 Tim 4:1.

➤*Features:* 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. 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.] 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. His words are the standard of judgment – Jn 12:48.

➤*Features:* Jesus has spoken truths about His identity, His redemptive offering, His will and expectations, and the reality of eternity. How a man responds to Jesus' words will determine whether or not he successfully negotiates the judgment.

C. 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. Some things we cannot know. Those things outside of our senses must be left to the Lord who can make perfect judgments.

3. The Wicked Reserved for Judgment – 2 Pet 2:9

➤*Features:* Peter affirms that the unjust are reserved "*under punishment for the day of judgment*" (2 Pet 2:9; comp. 3:7). The delay of judgment is attributable to the mercy of God in allowing as many as possible to be saved (2 Pet 3:9). But this delay is of no benefit to the wicked who have died. They are suffering now, and they will be assigned to their eternal fate when the Lord comes.

4. Boldness in the Day of Judgment – 1 Jn 4:17

➤*Features:* As dreaded as the judgment of the Lord is, there is a way to approach it with boldness (1 Jn 4:17). 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. 1 Jn 2:28 – John urges his readers to constantly "*abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*" "Confidence" is not a term often coupled with "judgment" in our vocabulary. Yet those in Christ not only can be confident but have no basis for shame when illuminated by divine judgment.

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). 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."* 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?

Questions

1. What is the guarantee of coming judgment (Ac 17:31)?
2. 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)?
3. From where will a man's praise ultimately come (1 Cor 4:5)?
4. According to Jn 12:48, on what day does the judgment occur?
5. What will each mentally responsible person give to God (Rom 14:12)?
6. What is our only hope of acquittal before the judgment seat of Christ?
7. For what will elders give account? Are they the only ones who will answer for how they responded to their obligations? What about deacons? Preachers? Teachers?
8. How is God's judgment against ungodliness described (Rom 1:32)?
9. What will God judge by Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16)?
10. 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 plain 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.

1. The Folding of the Garments – Heb 1:10-12

➤*Features:* The writer is arguing for the supremacy of Jesus Christ over angels. He quotes Ps 102:25-27 and applies its meaning to Jesus.

- A. The author states that Jesus was the instrument of creation and that He transcends created things: *“They will perish, but You remain”* (1:11a).
- B. 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 **demand**s the cessation of the earth, for the contrast is Jesus whose *“years will not fail”* (1:12).

2. A Fiery Conflagration – 2 Pet 3:3-13

➤*Features:* 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’s description in 2 Pet 3:3-13 ought to satisfy all curiosity.

- A. The destruction is **certain** (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 the word of God which promised the flood (3:5-6). The promise was delivered.
 - 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. The destruction is **complete** (3:10-12). The heavens will pass away; the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.
1. A divinely sparked conflagration 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.
 2. 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. The destruction is **permanent** (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). **Illus:** A similar usage might be an exclamation by someone in a beautiful jungle setting: "This is truly Eden."

3. Delivered from the Bondage of Corruption – Rom 8:19-22

- **Features:** In this cryptic passage Paul personifies creation; he gives it personality. Sin has not only decimated man, Paul says it has spoiled and corrupted the

creation itself, the glorious home made for man.

- A. To emphasize his point, Paul gives creation thoughts and feelings: it *“eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God”* when *“the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”*
- B. Consider other passages where inanimate objects are given “life”: Jsh 24:27 (the stone heard); Ps 96:11-13 (heavens, earth, sea, fields, trees rejoice); Hab 2:11; Lk 19:40 (stones cry out). Many other examples may be cited.
- C. When Jesus comes, everything which has been tainted and spoiled by sin will be purified and made right. The passage graphically encourages hope and anticipation as we are *“eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”*

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. Who will remain when the earth is folded like a garment?
4. What will be audible when the heavens pass away? What other audible features are to accompany the Lord’s return?
5. What guarantees that we will inhabit “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13)? What is said to dwell here?
6. Where is there “no continuing city”?
7. For what does the creation “eagerly wait” (Rom 8:19)?
8. “New heavens and new earth” is an example of what type of figure of speech?

Lesson 9: What Will Hell Be Like?

Introduction

Recent statements by the pope rekindled discussion of this issue: 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.

1. 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.

2. Various Descriptive Terms

A. Hell is often described as a place of fire:

- *"... where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched"* – Mk 9:44, 46, 48.
- *"... will cast them into the furnace of fire ..."* – Mt 13:42, 50.
- *"... to be cast into the everlasting fire ... into hell fire"* – Mt 18:8-9.

B. The image of fire conjures up extreme suffering:

- *"... that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame"* – Lk 16:24.
- *"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* – Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk 13:28.
- *"There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth"* – 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.

- *"... will be cast into outer darkness"* – Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30. Robertson explains this phrase thusly: "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).

- *“to whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever” – 2 Pet 2:17.*
- *“... for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” – Jude 13.*

4. The fire of judgment and hell is tied to the wrath and vengeance of God:

- *“... in flaming fire taking vengeance ...” – 2 Th 1:8.*
- *“... suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” – Jude 7.*
- *“... a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” – Heb 10:27.*
- Other passages stress the coming wrath of God upon the disobedient: Jn 3:36; Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8-9; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6.

5. 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).

- *“... wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction ...” – Mt 7:13.*
- *“If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him” – 1 Cor 3:17.*
- *“when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them” – 1 Th 5:3.*
- *“For the end of those things is death ... the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:21, 23; see also 8:2, 6, 13).*
- *“... he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death” (Jas 5:20).*

6. 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 unimagin-

able 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.

Questions:

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)?
4. Where does the punishment of everlasting destruction take place (2 Th 1:9)?
5. What is reserved for false teachers who are motivated by their own lusts (2 Pet 2:17)?
6. How would you answer the belief that hell is merely annihilation or ceasing to exist?

7. What did the rich man desire to relieve his agony?
8. Describe the way leading to destruction.
9. Whom will God destroy according to 1 Cor 3:17?
10. What kind of death is bought with the wages of sin?
11. In the article on p. 27, how would you respond to the view of Theodore Tsitsilianos about hell (second column, last paragraph)?

12. Check a concordance and answer this question: Who used the term "gehenna" more often than anyone else in the NT?

Lesson 10: What Will Heaven Be Like?

Introduction

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.

1. Various Descriptions of Heavenly Existence

A. Eternal life – As man finds the concept of death revolting and frightening, heaven is described as the opposite: *life, eternal* life at that.

- *“in the age to come, everlasting life”* – Lk 18:30.
- *“should not perish but have everlasting life”* – Jn 3:16.
- *“has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”* – Jn 5:24.
- *“eternal life ... glory, honor, and immortality ... glory, honor, and peace”* – Rom 2:7, 10.
- *“who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light ...”* – 2 Tim 1:10.

B. Fellowship with God – The highest state of existence is to be intimately associated with God. This is spoken of as knowing God or being where God is. It is also referred to as fellowship with God.

- *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”* – Jn 17:3.
- *“I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”* – Jn 14:3.
- *“And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* – 1 Th 4:17.
- *“whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him”* – 1 Th 5:10.
- *“that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ”* – 1 Jn 1:3.

C. Reward/treasures/inheritance – What these entail is not clearly portrayed, but they seem to refer to the whole heavenly experience itself.

- *“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven ...”* – Mt 5:12.
- *“but 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.
- *“knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession ... in heaven”* – Heb 10:34.
- *“what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”* – Eph 1:18.
- *“partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light”* – Col 1:12.
- *“to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you”* – 1 Pet 1:4.

D. In the heavenly kingdom – Though the NT clearly says that saints are even now citizens of the kingdom of Christ, there is a sense in which this kingdom will be more fully realized and enjoyed after death. We are *in* the kingdom, but we have not completely *possessed* the kingdom in its fullness as yet.

- *“who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom”* – 2 Tim 4:1.
- *“the Lord will ... preserve me for His heavenly kingdom”* – 2 Tim 4:18.
- *“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* – Mt 13:43.
- *“for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* – 2 Pet 1:11.
- *“Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”* – Jas 2:5.

E. Like the angels – Mt 22:30.

➤ *Features:* This passage gives an interesting insight into heavenly existence, but only a glimpse. The question posed by the Sadducees involved marriage in the resurrection (22:28). Jesus replies that the question reflects ignorance of heavenly life: there is no need for marriage, for there is no need for procreation; there is no need for procreation because there is no death. As angelic beings do not pair off according to gender, so saints will not do so in heaven.

F. Sharing in divine glory – We know that, whatever our heavenly state entails, we will share in the glory of God to some degree.

- *“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” – Col 3:4.*
- *“that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” – 1 Th 2:12.*
- *“to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord” – 2 Th 2:14.*
- *“you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” – 1 Pet 5:4.*

2. 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 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.

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. What is the Christian’s reward in the age to come (Lk 18:30)?
7. How may Christians take comfort when they are deprived of material possessions (Heb 10:34)?
8. To whom does God promise participation in His kingdom (Jas 2:5)?
9. Entrance into the kingdom is supplied abundantly/sparingly (circle one).
10. According to Jesus, how is angelic life in heaven different from earthly life?

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?

1. Coping Mechanisms

Death is such a traumatic and terminal event that the survivors are often desperate to comfort themselves with whatever can assuage their sorrow. This is a perfect opportunity for Satan to promote false notions about future existence.

- A. “My loved one is in a better place.” Regardless of how they lived, the grieving often convince themselves that their loved one is now in heaven and blissfully happy. They further envision the loved one to be looking down upon them, guiding their endeavors or being present in some unexplainable way.
- B. “Maybe God will be merciful; maybe hell is not real; etc.” These people see eternal fate as a mishmash of maybes. They are afraid to look clearly at what God says about the conditions of going to heaven for fear of condemning their loved one. This leads to denial of what God says about the fate of mankind. This is really hoping against hope.
- C. When people learn that eternity is an either/or proposition, judged by this life and certain teachings are absolute, the thought of a lost loved one can kill spiritual interest altogether. The coping mechanism is to turn against God, ignore His word and maintain the “honor” of the dead person even to one’s own personal condemnation.

2. Some Well-Meaning But Misplaced Answers

- A. “You shouldn’t worry about that.” This ignores the natural feelings that humans have for each other. They **are** worried about it, and rightfully so.
- B. “You won’t think about that in heaven.” This is basically a selfish outlook. The anxiety arises from the *lostness* of the loved one, not merely the supposed unhappiness of the saint in heaven.
- C. “God will make allowances.” It is not our place to hold out false hopes, especially when the truth may clearly indicate the destiny of an openly ungodly person.

While it is not our intention to usurp God's prerogative to judge men, the Scriptures do clearly categorize behavior which excludes from the kingdom. We cannot deny these.

3. Rational Answers Which Don't Always Help A Very Emotional Issue

- A. "God doesn't **owe** anyone salvation; it is by grace based upon condition." No matter how much we may love someone, God is not obligated to save apart from the grace He has chosen to bestow. While this is a true concept, it isn't usually comforting.
- B. "What is to be gained by destroying yourself?" Grieving people often identify with the dead person to the degree that their own lives do not matter to them. They may be so overcome by sorrow that they say, "If _____ is not in heaven, then I don't want to go either." Thus they have no regard for their own welfare at that moment.
- C. "There's nothing you can do about their eternal welfare now." Again, true, but not very comforting.
- D. "If everyone felt the way you do, then no one would go to heaven. Everyone has loved ones who have not obeyed the gospel." This contains a powerful truth, but it may not break through the emotional veil of grief that settles over someone who contemplates their mother or father, husband or wife suffering eternally.

4. 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.

- A. "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 the **dead** do not say that! See Lk 16:27-28. This answer appeals to the wishes of the dead person and affirms their honor.
- B. "None of us can make choices for other people." Even God, as grieved as He is over man's disobedience, respects the principle of free will. Neither He nor we can force a person to believe what we want them to believe.
- C. "It is beyond our ability to render judgment in specific cases." If we have trouble with lesser judgments of one's character in this life, how can we make eternal judgments? People are difficult to understand, and they have hidden elements of their character that only the Lord will be able to account for (1 Cor 4:3-5). We must do all we can to avoid making eternal judgments without watering down what God's word says.

D. "God's judgments are *always* right." Whatever God decides will be right. This takes the focus off of the loved one and puts it where it belongs: on God, the righteous Judge.

E. "We must want to please God more than anyone or anything else." Paul grieved over his Jewish brethren but worked to save them without falsely accusing God or compromising the truth (Rom 9:1-3; 10:1-3). If we *really* loved the person, we would work to save those whom that person loved and would wish to see in heaven.

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 saved. But we must not let that interfere with our own eternal destiny.

I know of a lady who lost her young son in a tragic automobile accident. In her distress over his death (in which the son displayed no spiritual interest), she stopped observing the Lord's supper. When I spoke to her about this, she dissolved in tears and said, "I just feel I am condemning him by taking the Lord's supper." I didn't understand her reasoning, but I could see the fallacy of it. *She* couldn't condemn her son; 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 sad reaction to her son's death, and what a compounding of tragedy. In what possible way would it benefit her son to be lost herself?

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 more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*" (Mt 10:37).

Questions

1. What did Paul feel in his heart regarding his lost Jewish brethren?
2. How did Jesus feel about the city of Jerusalem which had continually rejected God through the centuries (Mt 23:37-38)?
3. God will repay evil men according to what (2 Tim 4:14)?

4. What is the nature of condemnation for those who slander the gospel (Rom 3:8)?
5. What kind of judgment does God render, even if it results in eternal death (Rom 2:5; 2 Th 1:6)?
6. What did the rich man wish for his brethren who were still alive on the earth?
7. How do strong emotions tend to affect our reasoning skills?
8. How likely is it for any Christian that everyone he/she loves will be saved? How might this affect our outlook?
9. Who did Jesus say is not worthy of Him?
10. T/F Jesus experienced unbelief even in His own immediate family (cite passage for your answer: _____).

Lesson 12: The Errors of Premillennialism

Introduction

As we shall see in our next quarter's study of Restoration History, churches of Christ had a battle with the errors of premillennialism in the early 20th century. Errors concerning the return of Christ are often the result of 1) ignorance and misuse of prophetic Scriptures, and 2) fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the kingdom Christ has established.

1. 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 pre-millennial 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.

2. Answering the Premillennialists

The depth of sloppy scholarship, reading into texts, baseless assertions, and flagrant contradictions among premillennialists is shocking. And the naivete and ignorance of people who lap it up without question is equally shocking. It is an elaborate system of misapplied passages woven together to support contentions that run completely counter to the Bible. Note the following observations which destroy the notions of premillennialism:

The church: 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. Yet Eph 3:10-11 says that the establishment of the church was “according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The kingdom: 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, the Hebrew writer says, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace ...” (12:28). Furthermore, Paul says of the Colossian brethren and himself that God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col 1:13). Paul, in dealing with contemporary issues among brethren, said that “the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). In responding to usurpers of apostolic authority, Paul asserted that “the kingdom of God is not in word but in power” (1 Cor 4:20), and he claimed to have such power (2 Cor 12:12). Finally, John, in writing the Revelation, the very book so often cited to support premillennial doctrine, claims to be in the kingdom (Rev 1:9).

The rejection, death of Christ: This “unexpected” turn of events, according to the premillennialists, was completely foretold in the Old Testament. Peter says Jesus was “delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Ac 2:23). He then said, “But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Ac 3:20). The apostles later acknowledged that “truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done” (Ac 4:27-28). Sound like an unanticipated event to you?? (Actually, what do you think of *any* doctrine 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 pre-millennial folks don't think too highly of God, do they?!). However, note these plain statements of Scripture:

Jsh 21:43-45 – “So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it ... not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken ... all came to pass.” (See also Jsh 23:14; 11:23)

1 Kgs 8:56 – At the completion of the temple, Solomon says, “There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses.”

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, jj), 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).

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. 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: (1) the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the resurrection program (1 Cor. 15:23); (2) the resurrection of the church age saints at the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16); (3) the resurrection of the tribulation period saints (Rev. 20:3-5), together with (4) the resurrection Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19) at the second advent of Christ to the earth; and finally (5) 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 brassy 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, however, teaches only one resurrection for mankind wherein good and evil alike will be raised (Jn 5:28-29) and judged (Mt 25:31-33).

Questions:

1. According to premillennialism:

- a. Where will the battle of Armageddon be fought?
- b. Where will Jesus reign for 1000 years?
- c. Why didn't Jesus establish the kingdom when He came the first time?
- d. Where is the church spoken of in the Old Testament?
- e. Who will be taken from the earth in the rapture?
- f. What will the earth be like during the thousand-year reign?
- g. Who will rule the world during the tribulation?

2. According to the Bible:

- a. What was established according to the eternal purpose of God?
- b. What are Christians delivered from and translated into?
- c. In what was John a brother and companion of the Asian churches?
- d. T/F When Israel entered Canaan and took possession of the land, the conquest was only partial and left certain elements of God's promise unfulfilled.
- e. T/F Jesus presently sits on David's throne in heaven.

3. How do premillennial doctrines portray God?

Lesson 13: A Special Look at Matthew 24

Introduction

The difficulty of this passage (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21) is attested to by the different views of commentators and the indiscriminate and arbitrary way in which they treat it. Most hop and skip haphazardly in their interpretation between the destruction of Jerusalem and Christ's appearance at the end of the world. The following observations are offered with a view to encouraging further study, not as the final word on the meaning.

1. The Context: What Prompts the Disciples' Questions in Mt 24:3?

A. The context of Mt 23: Jesus has just unleashed a scathing rebuke of the hypocritical Pharisees and pronounced eight woes upon them (vv. 13-16, 23, 25, 27, 29). He says such things as:

1. *"How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"* (23:33).
2. *"... that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth ..."* (23:35a).
3. *"Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation"* (23:36). This statement must be seen in conjunction with 24:34, the two serving as "book-ends": *"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled."* **This statement is crucial to the scope of what Jesus is discussing in the intervening verses.**

B. A lamentation and a warning: Mt 23:37-39:

1. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often I wanted to gather your children together ... but you were not willing"* (23:37).
2. *"Your house is left to you desolate"* (23:38).
3. *"... you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"* (23:39).

C. Jesus prophesies the doom of the temple: *"... not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down"* (Mt 24:2). As the apostles have heard all these pronouncements and declarations of Jesus, and as they indicate things of a terminal nature, they are naturally curious to know more of the particulars. Thus they (Peter, Andrew, James and John – Mk 13:3) question Jesus further.

2. The Questions – Mt 24:3

- A. *“When will these things be?”* – This is a natural question of human curiosity. Maybe they wish to see the Jewish aristocracy get their comeuppance; perhaps they are anxious to receive their thrones of judgment (Mt 19:28).
- B. *“What will be the sign of Your coming ...?”* – It was in the Jewish mindset to seek signs, to see heavenly credentials of prophecy (1 Cor 1:22; Mt 12:38). It is difficult to apprehend clearly what is in the mind of the disciples in asking this question. What is their view of coming events? They will later indicate that they have little or no awareness, even at this late date, that Jesus is about to die.
1. Only a few days later at the Passover meal Thomas asks: *“Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”* (Jn 14:5).
 2. At that same meal, *“Then some of His disciples said among themselves, ‘What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?’ They said therefore, ‘What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying’”* (Jn 16:17-18).
 3. They apparently expected some glorious manifestation of the Lord in conjunction with the stones of the temple being destroyed, but it is unwarranted to attribute any sophisticated understanding to them concerning Jesus’ death, ascension and return at the end of time.
- C. *“... and of the end of the age?”* Again, what did the disciples consider to be the “end of the age”? The end of the Jewish age, as indicated by the destruction of Jerusalem? Were they asking, as they did on the day of the ascension, *“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Ac 1:6). What age did they understand to be near an end? **This is part of the difficulty of this passage: It is hard to understand Jesus’ answer when we do not know the full intent of the questions.**

3. What Must Precede the “End” – Mt 24:4-14

- A. Jesus points to some definite occurrences that will take place and pose a danger of deception for the disciples (24:4-6), including false messiahs and military conflict. But Jesus assures: *“but the end is not yet.”*
- B. Jesus continues to speak of civil unrest and natural calamities, noting that these are not the *end* but the *“beginning of sorrows”* (24:8). He adds that persecution, betrayal, anarchy and the hardening of people’s hearts will abound but *“he who endures to the end shall be saved”* (24:13). This “end,” contextually, is not “the end” (the second coming) because Jesus is speaking directly of events to befall that generation (remember 24:34).

C. Jesus then makes a statement that throws people off track: *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations ...”* (24:14).

1. At this point, regardless of contextual parameters, people tend to assume that He refers to preaching thousands of years later. This, however, is unwarranted, for the NT bears witness to the fulfillment of Jesus’ words within the next 2-3 decades: *“because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, **as it has also in all the world**”* (Col 1:5-6); *“... moved not away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, **which was preached to every creature under heaven** ...”* (Col 1:23).

2. Further, consult Mark’s account of Jesus’ words. He makes it plain that Jesus is referring to the apostles and His commission to them to *“preach the gospel to every creature”* and the persecution they will face in doing so: *“But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must be preached to all the nations ...”* (Mk 13:9-10).

3. Jesus says that His gospel will be proclaimed thoroughly throughout the world before Jerusalem falls. Hence, it is to be a matter of years, not weeks or months.

D. *“And then the end will come”* (Mt 24:14b). Again, the context indicates that the “end” about which Jesus speaks is not the end of the world at His second coming. The end of Judaism, as a formal system with its temple, sacrifices, etc., will come crashing to a halt after the spiritual kingdom gains a foothold in the world. The end of Jerusalem, and the casting down of the temple stones, occurs in AD 70. This is what Jesus meant by *“Your house is left to you desolate”* (Mt 23:38).

4. Immediate Signs of Jerusalem’s Demise – 24:15-28

A. Jesus now speaks very specifically regarding signs of Jerusalem’s end. These warnings are given that *“those who are in Judea [may] flee to the mountains”* (Mt 24:16). Luke is even more detailed: *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled”* (Lk 21:20-22).

1. Again, note that these are *specific indicators* which men will be able to see and identify, quite unlike some of the things Jesus will say later in Mt 24.

2. Further, Jesus warns against going back into one’s house for clothing, the difficulty of flight for pregnant or nursing women and the complication of traveling in haste on the Sabbath or in winter (24:17-20). **These things cannot refer to the second coming, for their will be no fleeing when that event occurs.**

- B. This buildup to Roman invasion, with physical calamities, false prophets/messiahs, wars and rumors of wars, *"will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be"* (24:21). This chaotic upheaval will be "shortened" to give the elect time to save themselves. Those who would remember and heed His words would be blessed, for *"See, I have told you beforehand"* (24:25).
- C. Jesus then warns against heeding false prophets who would claim that Jesus had come secretly (Mt 24:26-28). His answer, in essence: "You'll know it when you see it." Jesus says His "coming" – of judgment on Jerusalem, not His second coming – will be *"as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west."* I.e., you won't miss it; it'll be obvious: look for the vultures (eagles), for they will be gathered around the carcass (Jerusalem). Just like seagulls around a shrimp boat, the vultures followed conquering armies to feed on the corpses left behind.

5. The Apocalyptic Description of Jerusalem's Fall – 24:29-31

- A. This is another key to understanding the passage: The apocalyptic language used here by Jesus of Jerusalem's end throws many off course as it does in the book of Revelation. But our experience in studying that book should prepare us for the nature of the language.
 - 1. Many automatically take these graphic descriptions as referring to the end of time. However, Jesus says, *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days ..."* (24:29). In other words, after the signs just referred to in regard to armies amassing against Jerusalem, its end is going to come. "Immediately" is not several thousand years later, just as "shortly take place" and "the time is near" are not several thousand years later (Rev 1:1, 3).
 - 2. The descriptions are in classic apocalyptic style: the sun and moon darkened, the stars falling from heaven, the powers of the heavens shaken (24:29; cf. Is 34:4; Joel 2:31; etc.). This does *not* match Peter's more literal description of the universe ending, not in darkness, but in the blazing light of a divine inferno (2 Pet 3:10, 12).
- B. The "sign of the Son of Man" in heaven (24:30). Again, people automatically assume that this *must* be the second coming. But we saw this same concept almost word for word in Rev 1:7: *"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him."* This language is descriptive of great wrath being poured out from heaven, in Mt 24 against Jerusalem, in Rev 1 against Rome. In each case the events cause worldwide consternation and grief. When Jerusalem fell, it would ripple throughout all Jewish communities around the Roman Empire. The world will not "see" Jesus with their eyes, but they will certainly behold the *effects* of His wrath: Jeru-

salem will be left in a smoking heap as a consequence of the curse they brought upon themselves: *"His blood be on us and on our children"* (Mt 27:25).

- C. The angels gathering the elect (Mt 24:31). Again, this is classic apocalyptic imagery (Rev 7:1-3). This, in context, refers to the provisions God has made for the saints to be saved by their apprehension of the signs and their subsequent flight.

6. Lesson from Nature – 24:32-34

- A. Note yet again that Jesus is taking great pains to make people aware of what is to happen. In citing the budding of the fig tree, He declares: *"So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, at the very doors."* This tone of signs and certainty will change in a few short verses.
- B. We now come to the other "bookend": *"Assuredly ... this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled"* (24:34). The normal, common meaning of "generation" (Gk, *genea*) is "the whole multitude of men living at the same time" (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 42; cf. Thayer, p. 112). **This means that everything Jesus has been saying will come true within the next few decades**, a generation usually being measured as approximately 40 years.
- C. To avoid the impact of this verse, theologians want to make "generation" mean anything they want it to mean, just like they want to make "immediately" mean anything of their choosing. Up to this point, there is no compelling reason to interpret Jesus' words as applying to anything other than the coming destruction of Jerusalem for their rejection of God's Messiah. Again, this is the cause for Jesus' lamentation in Mt 23:37.

7. A Change in Subject – 24:35ff

- A. It is at this point that the Bible student is called upon to make a most difficult judgment. Does Jesus introduce a different topic, i.e., His second coming at the end of the world, or does He continue with the subject of the destruction of Jerusalem and the events of the next 40 years? Whatever we decide, to be consistent we must carry it through ch 25, for there is no break in the discourse until 26:1.
- B. *In my opinion*, though I am aware of the difficulties of this position, I believe Jesus shifts gears, however subtly, and addresses His second coming.
 - 1. Why would He do so? The answer is speculative, but possibly to separate in the minds of His disciples the destruction of Jerusalem from the end of the world. It would be tempting for them to see the two as connected. Jerusalem has been not only the Jewish capital for a thousand years but *the city of God*. Jerusalem was where God put His name (Dt 12:11; 1 Kgs 8:29). It represented the covenant with Abraham and the heritage of the Hebrews for so long that it would be hard for

them to comprehend the world without it or its lack of centrality to the plans and purposes of God. Today, the rebuilt city of Jerusalem has *no bearing* upon the relationship of God with this world. It is a city like any other city of antiquity. Again, this would have been hard for a Jew to envision, and the Jewish apostles might be tempted to see Jerusalem's downfall as portending the end of the world.

2. It is not uncommon for prophecies to blend from a more immediate fulfillment to a more distant one. The covenant God makes with the house of David in 2 Sam 7:11-16 has dual fulfillment as does the prophecy of the virgin in Is 7:10-17. Many other examples could be cited. Jesus perhaps views the destruction of Jerusalem in its unbelief as a harbinger of the annihilation of the world in its unbelief at the end of time.

B. A change of topic: 24:35.

1. We must remember that chapter and verse divisions and subheadings are additions of men. In the Thomas Nelson NKJ version from which I study, there is a subheading and paragraph division *after* 24:35. But we have indicated that 24:34 is a "bookend" which complements 23:36, limiting Jesus' words in between to the then-current generation.
2. But as Jesus finishes His thoughts concerning Jerusalem's fall in 24:34, He then says, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away ... but of that day and hour no one knows ...*" (24:35-36). If there is a transition of subject, it seems to me that this is the most likely place that it occurs.

C. A change of emphasis: 24:36ff. It seems that *some change* in topic has occurred, for Jesus now begins to speak very differently from how He had previously.

1. He now speaks in terms of ignorance instead of knowledge: "*no one knows, not even the angels of heaven*" (24:36); "*you do not know what hour your Lord is coming*" (24:42); "*the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*" (24:44). All this is in contrast with seeing clearly the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and fleeing beforehand.
2. The example of Noah (24:37-39). This example is cited to indicate *no warning or sign* preceding the events: "*... they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away*" (24:38-39). Further, the example of Noah is used in 2 Pet 3 in reference to the second coming and final destruction of the world.
3. The example of the thief (24:43). This example is also used in 1 Th 5:3-5 of the return of the Lord (cf. 2 Pet 3:10).

- D. Other parables in Mt 25 stress preparedness, foresight, stewardship – the qualities that will be needed by *every generation of believers* until the Lord returns. Matthew 25 ends with a picture of judgment and the rewards of the righteous and the punishment of the ungodly (25:46).

Conclusion: Centuries of controversy attest to the difficulty of this passage. We must approach it carefully and cautiously, realizing that every potential explanation has its problems. But I have endeavored to be fair with the language and context in the above explanation. This study is offered in the hope that it will spur further investigation on the part of each individual and that we will all strive to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Questions:

1. What animal relationship does Jesus use to describe His love for Jerusalem?
2. What are the two “bookends” of this section of Scripture?
3. What concern does Jesus have about His faithful people (24:4-5, 11, 24)?
4. Are wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes signs of an end or a beginning?
5. What would be “a witness to all the nations”?
6. What OT prophet spoke of these events that Jesus is foretelling?
7. What specific problems would make flight difficult?
8. For whose sake will the days be shortened?
9. What natural phenomenon describes Jesus’ coming in judgment upon Jerusalem?
10. What kind of literary style is Mt 24:29-31 written in?
11. How does Jesus use a fig tree to describe His coming?
12. What does the term “generation” commonly mean?
13. Who is the only one with knowledge about the events of Mt 24:36?
14. What indication was given to Noah’s generation that the flood was about to occur?
15. Who is a faithful and wise servant (Mt 24:45-46)?

Lesson 14: Ready for Jesus' Return

Introduction

There are obviously grave concerns which should weigh on our minds if, indeed, the Bible testimony concerning Jesus' return is true. As Peter said, *"Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness ...?"* (2 Pet 3:11).

1. Over in an Instant

- A. We sometimes comfort and excuse ourselves for what we are not by imagining that we will eventually get around to being something different. With all good intentions we think that we have plenty of time to make necessary changes and mature in our faith. And, God willing, if we live we certainly must be growing.
- B. *But life may not continue!* At any moment our eyes may behold the coming of the Lord and we will have to face our Judge on the basis of the faith we presently possess. Our newspapers daily chronicle the sudden and unexpected end of life that comes to many people. No final prayer. No final plea for forgiveness. No contemplation of the end of life and appeal for mercy and grace.
- C. Thus it is crucial that we apply the greatest effort to each moment of life to be faithful and in fellowship with God. Would you feel confident in meeting the Lord *at this moment?* *"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night ..."* (1 Th 5:2).

2. No Second Chances

- A. There is a harsh finality to the end of life: when it's over, it's over. There are no second chances. *Within* this life there are many chances. Each day is a new opportunity to start again, make corrections and try harder. But there are no second chances to live life over or to change our eternal status.
- B. To some this may seem fundamentally unfair of God. But who are we to argue with our Creator? *"Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'"* (Rom 9:20). *"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment"* (Heb 9:27). Surely this truth should fix our minds clearly and soberly on the importance of each day.

3. Forgetting What We Know

- A. It is all too easy for life to encroach upon our eternal goals, for our spiritual vision to be blurred by the distractions, ambitions, wants and immediate gratification of

this world. Satan's tactics are described as "wiles" (Eph 6:11); Paul says we are not ignorant of his "devices" (2 Cor 2:11); by his enticements our "*minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*" (2 Cor 11:3).

- B. One of the most effective tools of Satan is to distract man from thinking about eternity and dying at all. The notion of dying creates discomfort; consequently, many shove the thought into the recesses of their mind. But we can't afford **not** to think about the terminal nature of life and the eternity that rides upon how it is lived.
- C. Peter warns against being distracted from the essence of spiritual life and the development of character to which it leads: "*For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble ...*" (2 Pet 1:9-10).

4. What If There Was No Judgment?

- A. Paul answers this: "*If the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'*" (1 Cor 15:32). There is great moral impetus in being called to account for one's life.
- B. Would we really want to live otherwise? Would we want to live in a world where men could act in total selfishness – brutalizing the helpless, defrauding the weak, and otherwise serving their own desires – with no accountability?
- C. Granted, the knowledge that we will be judged brings pressure to bear upon us, pressure to live honorably in every situation. But evil would be given full reign if men did not have consciences which were responsive to a higher authority.

5. "But You, Brethren, Are Not In Darkness ..."

- A. Though Paul affirms that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, as a thief, he also tells the Thessalonians that they "are not in darkness" on the **fact** of His coming (1 Th 5:4-8).
- B. Knowledge is power, and we have the power to live acceptably via the knowledge that we will eventually be called to account for our deeds. Peter exhorts, "*Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless*" (2 Pet 3:14).
- C. There are many reasons to do what is right: love and compassion for others, personal benefit, the good of society, etc., but a strong motivation is to be ready for examination whenever the Lord returns.

6. Take Someone with You If You Can

- A. When Paul contemplated the final judgment, he truly wanted to see others standing justified before God whom he had influenced. *“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?”* (1 Th 2:19).
- B. When the Lord comes, it will be a day of glory, joy and vindication for the people of God. But the same event will be unspeakable horror and doom for those outside of Christ. May we so live that our example shines as a beacon, that we have the courage to lovingly rebuke error, that we have the drive to teach those whom we can, so that we can influence all we can in any way possible to come to the Lord.
- C. The consequences of being found unprepared when Jesus returns are eternal and unalterable. May we be prepared ourselves, and may we stand triumphantly with family, friends and brethren whom we have assisted to walk in the light along the way.

Questions:

1. How would you answer someone who says, “I just don’t think it is fair of God not to give someone a second chance at salvation after they die.”?
2. Look up the word “device” in Vine’s dictionary. What is the basic definition as used in 2 Cor 2:11?
3. Who is the man who will never stumble, according to Peter?
4. What keeps some people from thinking about dying as much as they should?
5. In what sense are we “not in darkness” about the Lord’s return?
6. Comment on the strength of Paul’s desire to get to heaven (Ph 3:12-16).

Consider the following fictional story and picture in your mind what the last day will be like for people like George Smith.

Imagine ... the day Christ came again

It wasn't just an ordinary day ... it was the most extraordinary day. This was the day the Lord came again.

It would seem that George Smith should have had at least some kind of premonition as he arose that morning ... but had he done so, then God's promise would not have been true: *"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night"* (1 Th 5:2). So George arose as usual, still feeling a little tired and still not used to these early hours, even after two years. George was a milkman.

He decided this morning that he would not awaken his wife, Marge. "She needs the rest," he thought, "what with running around after our active little daughter all day!" As he got up quietly, he looked down at his still-sleeping wife and smiled. Marge was a Christian, and she so very much wanted him to become one! In fact, they had a long discussion about it just a few days ago. And last Sunday it seemed as if the preacher was preaching right at him.

"Of course, that wasn't actually the case," he told himself as he started breakfast. "After all, I wasn't the only one there. But I guess the shoe did fit ... What was that he preached on? Oh yes, he preached on Christ coming again." George had enjoyed most of the sermon. He had especially enjoyed the stories of those who had tried to set the date of Christ's coming, how some had donned white robes on the appointed day and climbed to the top of houses, trees and mountains to be ready to meet the Lord. He had also been impressed with the Biblical proof that Christ was coming again and that, according to the teaching of the Bible, He could come at any time.

"I do think though," thought George as he ate his bacon and eggs, "that the preacher was being overly dramatic when he said Christ could come again in the next five minutes. After all," thought George, "he *didn't*."

"Of course, Marge and the preacher are probably right," he admitted as he stacked his dishes in the sink. "I don't really know what I'm waiting on. But someday I will take the step and become a Christian."

"When he was ready he peeked in to see their sleeping daughter, Julie. Love welled up in his heart as he looked on her angelic little face. Then he went in to kiss Marge good-bye. As she sleepily returned his kiss, he smiled as he thought how happy she would be when he went down the aisle to be baptized. "What are you smiling about?" she asked. "Oh, nothing," he said, as he turned and headed for the door.

Little did George know that he would never see his family again!

For the next hour or so George was too busy to think of much more than his job. There were instructions to check, bottles to load, arrangements to make. Finally, however, he started his deliveries. It was a beautiful day. This was one of the things George liked most about his job. He liked to see the world wake up each morning. He liked to see it bright and fresh after a night's rest and before it had a chance to become tired and soiled again. He also enjoyed the quietness. He got a chance to think between his deliveries.

As he drove along, he saw signs of the neighborhoods beginning to stir. From the homes came the sounds of electric razors and the smell of bacon frying. Behind him he could see women in their housecoats and their hair still up in curlers as they opened their doors, looked about furtively, grabbed their bottles of milk and darted back inside. George continued on his way, enjoying the beautiful day.

But for some reason, the preacher's sermon from last Sunday just kept coming back to him. As he smelled the breakfast cooking throughout the neighborhood, a passage quoted by the preacher suddenly forced itself into his mind: "... *they were eating and drinking ...*" (Mt 24:38). He passed a church building and noticed rice scattered around – evidence of a wedding the night before – and he thought again: "... *marrying and giving in marriage ...*". He passed a home with a sign on the front door: "Night workers. Please do not disturb." And he thought of this verse: "... *there will be two ... in one bed; the one will be taken and the other will be left ...*" (Lk 17:34). He passed a bakery and he thought: "*Two ... will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left*" (Lk 17:35).

As his route took him near the edge of town he saw a group of farm workers on their way to the field: "*Two ... will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left*" (Lk 17:36). He then passed a development site where a hundred new homes were being built. The construction crews were finishing their coffee and getting ready to start another day's work. Then it all came to him: "*And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed*" (Lk 17:26-30).

In spite of himself, George gave a little shudder and then pushed these thoughts to the back of his mind. "Why am I getting so morbid?" he angrily asked himself. "If Christ hasn't come in over 1900 years, why should He suddenly choose now? After all, I'm strong and healthy and good for a long time yet. I ought to be thinking about living, not the end of everything!"

It really was a beautiful day. All the people he saw smiled and waved at him. "On a wonderful day like this," George thought, "it's hard to believe that there are so many

troubles in the world – famine and war and sickness and death. On a morning like this, it's just good to be alive!" And this, too, should have sounded a warning: *"For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them ..."* (1 Th 5:3). But it sounded no warning. George continued on his way. He carried full bottles to houses. He carried empty bottles back to his truck. Down the street. Back and forth. The same as every morning.

There really was no advance warning at all when it happened. Generally there is a feeling in the air when something is about to happen, but there was nothing. Animals are often nervous when tragedy is about to strike. But there was nothing. As usual, half-awake men were snarling and growling. As usual, women were yelling at their children. As usual, boys and girls were turning up their noses at the food before them. In Asia, a sleeping child was whimpering in its sleep because it had no food. In Russia, an official was working late checking the daily quotas. In Australia, a bushman was stalking his game as he and his ancestors had done for centuries. In America, a man was worrying himself sick over how he was going to pay his bills. He needn't have bothered. A preacher was looking through his notes wondering what he would preach on next. He needn't have bothered. Life, with all its good and evil – was going on as usual. There was no warning.

AND THEN IT HAPPENED!

"... the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them" (1 Th 5:2-3). "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (1 Th 4:16). George was near a cemetery when it happened. The shout traveled through the atmosphere faster than the speed of sound or light. It was a shout that penetrated to the core of the earth ... to the depths of the sea ... to the very center of man's soul!

George wrecked his truck, but it didn't matter. George had never before heard the voice of God, but there was no question in his mind of what he had heard. Neither had he seen Jesus, but again, he knew exactly Who this was and what was happening. "No! No! No!" his thoughts began ... "Not now!" *"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him ... and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him" (Rev 1:7). "... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Th 1:7-8).*

The sky was filled with color, the blue of the atmosphere was blotted out by the whiteness of the cloud, the glory of the angels, the appearance of fire – and all of this was almost blotted out by the magnificence of Jesus, Himself. Now the earth began to tremble and its surface began to be filled with fissures. In the nearby cemetery graves began to open. The dead started coming forth from here, from there, from everywhere. Their bodies were unlike anything George had ever seen. They were flesh, but not flesh. Solid, but not solid. For some reason the word "incorruptible" came to his mind. It was

no surprise to him that some looked happy ... and some did not. George could also feel that something was happening to himself. *“For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn 5:28-29). “We shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor 15:51-52).*

George was now running. He was not far from home, and his only thoughts were to reach that haven. He was in a daze. Faintly he could hear the sound of a trumpet – a sound that chilled him to the very marrow. Out of the corner of his eye he was aware of many glorious bodies rising into the air to meet the Lord. It was hard now to keep his feet for the tremors were increasing. In his head he was aware of the most terrible cry he had every heard, a searing cry of a soul in agony. It was some time before he realized that this cry was coming from himself.

He passed several standing dazed whose funerals he had attended. But this did not surprise him. Nothing surprised him now. He passed a funeral procession that had stopped in the middle of the street. The back door of the hearse was open. The lid of the casket was thrown back. It was empty.

He ran on. Around him the cries and wails and shrieks increased, and from above him came the sound of singing – a glorious refrain of rejoicing and triumph. But it brought no comfort to George’s soul. He glanced up once more. Just a few were still rising to meet the Lord. Evidently almost all were there now. He ran and ran. He forced one foot after the other. He passed block after block. And then he was at home.

He burst in the front door and began running from room to room. He shouted, “Marge! Julie! Marge! Julie!” There was Julie’s favorite rag doll on the floor. Marge’s housecoat was still lying on the chair beside the bed. There was evidence of Marge’s housework everywhere. He sailed into the kitchen. The dishwasher was half-loaded. Water was in the sink. It was almost as if ...as if ... **THEY WERE PREPARED!** He raced back into the front yard and looked up, but now all was darkness. He was all by himself now ... alone ... alone in his sin.

Suddenly the earth shuddered, and he realized that it was an old machine that had served its purpose – an old machine running down. The sun was running down, too. Now he could stare at it without blinking. It became dimmer and dimmer. There was a chill in the air. The stars and the planets became visible at midday. But nothing was motionless. Heavenly bodies were darting here and there. Everything was going crazy. The universe was literally flying to pieces.

“... behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men,

the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" (Rev 6:12-17).

The thought finally occurred to George that he must now **FACE GOD**. His soul was filled with terror. "No ... no ...no ... I'm not ready!" he shrieked. "I must hide ... I gotta hide ... I gotta hide." Stumbling blindly he made his way back into the house and down the steps into the cellar. Huddling in the darkest corner he continued to mutter, almost insanely, "I gotta hide ... I gotta hide."

But there was no hiding. George was at that moment riding on a huge ball streaking through the heavens. It was a ball almost 8,000 miles thick but with a cool outer crust only a few miles deep. Inside there were tremendous pressures – fires and gasses and molten rock. Just one slight touch by the finger of the Almighty God ... just one small command ... and this world was no more. *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up"* (2 Pet 3:10). One moment of intense light. A moment of intense heat. Then darkness. Then silence.

When George raised his head again, he knew exactly where he was and why he was there. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor 5:10). George knew that he was with all the people who had ever lived upon the face of the earth, and that all would be judged. He knew, too, that he had also acquired a new body, one that was "incorruptible," one that would never fade away, one that could never be destroyed. But there was no consolation in that, for he knew exactly where that body would spend eternity.

Yes, he knew many things now that it was too late. He knew that he had had time for Christ, that those other things that he had put first were not really important now. He knew, too, that those hypocrites in the church whom he had thrown in his wife's face time and time again would spend eternity where he was going to spend it. There was no comfort now in the fact that he was "as good as they are." And he even knew that somehow his wife and his little daughter would be happy without him, for an Almighty God that can do everything would see to that. But he also knew that he would have to spend eternity without them with the full knowledge of that fact, and that it would be an eternity spent without God and without Christ.

And somehow, somehow, he even knew now what *eternity* was like. He had heard eternity talked about. He had even heard eternity joked about. But why, oh why, had not someone conveyed the feeling of bigness ... the emptiness ... the vastness of it all?! "Without end ... without end ... without end." So very much had happened. There had been the shout, the sound of the trumpet, the dead rising, the saved meeting the

Lord in the air, the destruction of all things. And yet he really knew that no time at all had elapsed. It was as if time had stood still ... and now eternity had begun.

Then, in his heart, he heard a name being called. It was his own. It was **his** turn to face the Throne of God and receive his sentence. He stepped forward. Looking up he suddenly fell to the ground as if he were dead. He was stricken with a terrifying fear that he had never known before. The pure white, fiery brilliance of God's presence was so intense that he felt as if he were looking straight into the sun. *"Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead"* (Rev 1:12-17).

On his knees, George could contain himself no longer. He began begging and crying for mercy, and in doing so he said, "Truly you are the God of all creation; the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!" *"For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God'"* (Rom 14:11). Then God passed sentence upon George. George *knew* what that sentence would be. For the first time in his life, the truth of God cut him to his very heart. But, alas, too late. For the first time, George understood how awful and how terrible it was to be a sinner.

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ...' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels ...' and these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mt 25:31-34, 41, 46). *"And everyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire"* (Rev 20:15).

AND GEORGE WENT AWAY INTO EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT.

(Author unknown)

This story is based on Scriptural principle and some knowledge of natural reaction. It has been told for one reason – to make you think and thus to make you turn to God in love. Though some parts of this story are fiction, we do know that: 1) Christ is coming; 2) Christ could come before this day is over; 3) When He comes every person will know it; 4) When He comes, every person will know where he stands.

ARE YOU READY FOR THE JUDGMENT DAY?