

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

The Bible's teaching presented
for Bible students

Paul Mallison

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for Bible students

15. 'The Last Things'

Paul Mallison

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Contents

A Quick Word	iv
Suggestions for Study Groups	v
I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment	
a) Prologue: Judgments Preceding Jesus Christ's Return	2
b) The Timing of Jesus Christ's Return	5
c) Jesus Christ's Return	8
d) The Final Judgment (I): Its Scope and Outcomes	10
e) The Final Judgment (II): The Process	12
f) Jesus Christ's Universal Rule	15
II. The Afterlife	
a) The New Creation	20
b) Eternal Life	23
c) The Heavenly State of God's People	26
d) Being with God	29
e) The Punishment for the Ungodly	32
Topics in This Series	35
The Seven Editions	37
Supporting Persecuted Christians	38

A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net.

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God and/or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment

The history of the world as we know it will culminate in Jesus Christ's dramatic and awesome return. Associated with this is God's final judgment of all people, through Jesus Christ, in which the eternal destiny of each person will be pronounced.

Note that *The Antichrist and the Final Persecution*, Ch. 40, also deals with events of the end times – in its case, events that precede Jesus Christ's second coming. As such it is a further aspect of the biblical teachings that are often referred to as "The Last Things".

a) Prologue: Judgments Preceding Jesus Christ's Return

The passages in this section are largely extracts from visions that the apostle John received. Bear in mind that they are from Revelation, chapters 6–18, which contain apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is prophetic and largely symbolic. It mostly speaks of events of the end times. Many of these events involve great destruction, but show God's emphatic control and justice. As such apocalyptic literature provides great encouragement to God's people of all eras.

Commentators differ on a number of aspects of the three series of seven judgments. Such points of difference include: to what extent each of the judgments are symbolic or literal; the timing of the judgments; and whether the three sets describe the same events.

Extracts from the first series of judgments: The seven seals

REV 6:3–4, 7–8 [JOHN:] Then when the Lamb [Christ] opened *the second seal*, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come!" ⁴And another horse, fiery red, came out, and *the one who rode it was granted permission to take peace from the earth, so that people would butcher one another, and he was given a huge sword. ...* ⁷Then when the Lamb opened *the fourth seal* I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come!" ⁸So I looked and here came a pale green horse! *The name of the one who rode it was Death, and Hades followed right behind. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill its population with the sword, famine, and disease, and by the wild animals of the earth.* NET

Quite possibly the seven seals represent events leading up to the end of the age, although it is open to conjecture as to whether these take place just prior to the end or over a longer period. The latter two sets of judgments (see below) certainly appear to be among the events of the end of the age, with the bowl judgments – the most severe – taking place immediately prior to Jesus Christ's return.

Extracts from the second series of judgments: The seven trumpets

REV 8:7, 12 *The first angel blew his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was thrown at the earth so that a third of*

the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. ... ¹²*Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. And there was no light for a third of the day and for a third of the night likewise.* NET

REV 9:15 *The voice said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Free the four angels who are tied at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵And they let loose the four angels who had been kept ready for this hour and day and month and year so they could kill a third of all people on the earth.* NCV™

Extracts from the third series of judgments: The seven bowls

REV 16:2–3, 8 *So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth. Then ugly and painful sores appeared on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. ³Next, the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea and it turned into blood, like that of a corpse, and every living creature that was in the sea died. ... ⁸Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was permitted to scorch people with fire.* NET

REV 16:17–18, 20–21 *Finally the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying: "It is done!" ¹⁸Then there were flashes of lightning, roaring, and crashes of thunder, and there was a tremendous earthquake – an earthquake unequaled since humanity has been on the earth, so tremendous was that earthquake. ... ²⁰Every island fled away and no mountains could be found. ²¹And gigantic hailstones, weighing about a hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people, but they blasphemed God because of the plague of hail, since it was so horrendous.* NET

Do you think that these judgments are more likely symbolic or literal?
Why?

What is the reason/s for these horrific judgments?

What encouragement can believers draw from such awesome prophecies?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) The Timing of Jesus Christ's Return

God has set a time for Jesus Christ's return

MATT 24:36–37 *No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows.* ³⁷*When the Son of Man comes, it will be like what happened during Noah's time.* NCV™

In v. 36, "that day" most likely refers to the day of Jesus Christ's return – "the coming of the Son of Man" (v. 37). The verse indicates that God has set a time for it.

Jesus Christ's return will be at an unexpected time, while people are living as usual

1THES 5:1–3 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves are fully aware that *the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.* ³*While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.* ESV

MATT 24:38–39 *In those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage right up to the day when Noah went into the ark.* ³⁹*They were unaware of what was happening until the flood came and swept all of them away. That's how it will be when the Son of Man comes.* ISV

Jesus Christ's return will be preceded by distressful events . . .

LUKE 21:9–11 *And when you hear of wars and rebellions, do not be afraid. For these things must happen first, but the end will not come at once.* ¹⁰*Then he [Jesus] said to them, "Nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, and famines and plagues in various places, and there will be terrifying sights and great signs from heaven.* NET

2THES 2:1–4 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now regarding the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to be with him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, ²not to be easily shaken from your composure or disturbed by any kind of spirit or message or letter allegedly from

us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. ³Let no one deceive you in any way. *For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.* ⁴*He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God.* NET

This "man of lawlessness" (v. 3) appears to be a final antichrist, probably the first beast of Revelation 13. Presumably he will be the prime instigator of this momentous "rebellion" (v. 3) against God.

... Awesome cosmic events will occur just prior to Jesus Christ's return

MATT 24:29–30A Immediately after the suffering of those days, *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.* ³⁰*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn.* NET

Note that these cosmic events may be the ones referred to in Luke 21:11 in the previous subsection.

Jesus Christ's return is spoken of as being imminent

JAMES 5:8–9 [JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] You, too, must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because *the coming of the Lord is near.* ⁹Do not complain about each other, brothers, or you will be condemned. Look! *The Judge is standing at the door!* ISV

Obviously when the NT was written Jesus Christ's return was not near in terms of our perception of time. One explanation of this is that as "a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day" (2 Peter 3:8, NET), Christ's return can be spoken of in a sense as "near" from any point in time. Another view is that the writers are asserting the certainty of Christ's return rather than its nearness in time.

What are the signs that indicate Jesus Christ's return is drawing near?
(Do not limit your answer to just what is mentioned in this study.)

Are any of the signs of Jesus Christ's return more prominent in the world today than in past generations? If so, which?

How strong a possibility do you think there is that Jesus Christ's return will be in your lifetime?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Jesus Christ's Return

Jesus Christ will return with his angels

2THES 1:7B He will do this *when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven with his mighty angels, ...* GNT

JUDE 1:14B *Look! The Lord has come with countless thousands of his holy ones.* ISV

Jesus Christ will come in great glory

LUKE 21:27 Then *they* [people] *will see the Son of Man arriving in a cloud with power and great glory.* NET

Believers who have died will be resurrected and all of them will be gathered to him

1THES 4:16–17 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.* NET

MATT 24:31 The great trumpet will sound, and *he* [Christ] *will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other.* GNT

On Jesus Christ's return his followers will be rewarded

1PET 5:4 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Then when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away.* NET

On Jesus Christ's return evil powers will be crushed

1COR 15:23–25 But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; then *when Christ comes, those who belong to him.* ²⁴*Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all rule and all authority and power.* ²⁵*For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.* NET

What is one aspect of Jesus Christ's return that either you find particularly stunning or are looking forward to the most?

How do you think that Jesus Christ's glory will be manifested on his return?

If the teaching about Christ's return was more prominent in your mind, what do you think would be different about yourself and also your interaction with other people?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) The Final Judgment (I): Its Scope and Outcomes

See also:

■ *II. The Afterlife*, Ch. 15

As reflected by the above cross reference, the outcomes of the final judgment are further discussed in the second half of this chapter.

God will judge every person, for all they have done

ROM 14:10B For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. NET

ECCL 11:9B But remember that God will judge you for everything you do. NCV™

The dead will rise . . .

ACTS 24:15 [PAUL:] I have a hope in God (a hope that these men themselves accept too) that *there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.* NET

. . . They will rise to be judged, and either rewarded with eternal life or be condemned

DAN 12:2 Many of those who sleep in the dusty ground will awake – some to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting abhorrence. NET

Eternal life will be the reward for godliness

MATT 25:46 And these [unrighteous] will depart into eternal punishment, but *the righteous into eternal life.* NET

ROM 6:22 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But now that you have been freed from sin and have become God's slaves, *the benefit you reap is sanctification, and the result is eternal life.* ISV

God's wrath and destruction will be the recompense for ungodliness

ROM 2:8 ... but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, *there will be wrath and fury.* ESV

2THES 1:8–9A Then he will punish those who do not know God and who do not obey the Good News about our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹Those

people will be punished with a destruction that continues forever.

NCV™

How can you be more mindful of and influenced by the fact that all we do will be brought to light and judged?

Do you think that people who die now exist in a conscious or unconscious state until Judgment Day? What do Acts 24:15 and Daniel 12:2 suggest? Do you know of any other verses that suggest one of these states?

What do you find most challenging about the Bible's teaching on the final judgment, either in relation to yourself or to other people?

e) The Final Judgment (II): The Process

As this section shows, there will be two prominent factors in the final judgment: people's deeds; and people's response to Jesus Christ (i.e. whether one has believed in or has rejected Jesus Christ). This has led many theologians to conclude that people's eternal destiny (i.e. heaven or hell) will be determined by their response to Jesus Christ, with their deeds then determining the degree of their reward or punishment.

However bear in mind that there is a correlation between godly deeds and belief in Jesus Christ, and likewise between ungodly deeds and rejection of Jesus Christ (cf. *Those who have rejected Jesus Christ – not obeying and doing evil – will be condemned*, below). As such, there may be a strong correlation between judgment on the basis of one's deeds and judgment on the basis of one's response to Jesus Christ.

God has appointed Jesus Christ judge and will judge all people through him

ACTS 10:42 He [Christ] commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that *he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.* NET

ROM 2:16B [PAUL:] *God will judge the secrets of human hearts, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.* NET

On his return, Jesus Christ will judge and reward all people according to what they have done

MATT 16:27 *For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.* NET

REV 20:12–13 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT:] *And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. Then books were opened, and another book was opened – the book of life. So the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to their deeds.* ¹³*The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each one was judged according to his deeds.* NET

Those who have believed in Jesus Christ will be saved and have eternal life . . .

ACTS 16:30B–31 [A JAILER, TO PAUL AND SILAS:] *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* ³¹*They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.”* NET

JOHN 20:31 But these [miracles of Jesus] are recorded so *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* NET

. . . Those who have rejected Jesus Christ – persisting in doing evil – will be condemned

JOHN 3:18–21, 36 The one who believes in him is not condemned. *The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.* ¹⁹*Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.* ²⁰*For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed.* ²¹*But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God. . . .* ³⁶*The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him.* NET

The basis of God's judgment – “the basis for judging” (v. 19a) – is people's acceptance or rejection of the “light” that came in Jesus Christ and his teaching. One's acceptance or rejection of the “light” is reflected in one's deeds (vv. 19–21).

What people have known will be taken into account

ROM 2:12 *For all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.* NET

Gentiles without knowledge of the Mosaic Law, by nature have a grasp of its requirements (cf. vv. 14–15) and will be judged as such (v. 12a). Those who know the law have a clearer understanding of what God requires, and so they will be judged more strictly (v. 12b).

What factors will be taken into account when each person is judged?

What connection is there between people's response to Jesus Christ and their deeds?

What does the teaching on the final judgment show about God and his justice?

Pray for persecuted Christians

f) Jesus Christ's Universal Rule

The subject of Jesus Christ's universal rule and a messianic age has different interpretations. One view is that they should primarily be correlated with the present form of God's kingdom, over which Jesus Christ rules as Lord and where people from among the nations have turned to God. Another view is that there will be a period of widespread righteousness at the end of the age prior to the consummation of God's kingdom and the afterlife (as per "The Millennium", see below). A further possibility is that verses speaking of the Messiah's universal rule are portraying the afterlife. (Additionally, some of the passages may have different stages of fulfillment, and so be relevant to more than one of these scenarios.)

Accordingly, it is debatable whether chronologically this section – or particular subsections in it – should be placed: before the earlier sections on Jesus Christ's return; before the above sections on the last judgment; or even in the second half of this chapter.

Prelude: The thousand years

REV 20:4B–5 *They [believers who had been martyred] came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* ⁵*(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection.* NET

Revelation 20:1–6 is critical to the significant concept of "The Millennium". Each of verses 2–6 refers to a thousand year period – a millennium. This millennium is arguably also referred to by numerous OT passages (cf. *II. God's Plans for Israel*, Ch. 20) and possibly a few other NT ones.

Probably the two most popular interpretations today of this "Millennium" are the Amillennialist and Premillennialist viewpoints. Amillennialists view the reign of deceased believers with Christ (cf. Rev 20:4b †) to refer to a present reign in heaven. They see this reign as having been introduced by Jesus Christ's first coming, with him being pronounced Lord of all. They believe that Jesus Christ will return, and then the general resurrection will occur, followed by the final judgment. Following this would be the reign of Jesus Christ over the new earth in the afterlife.

Premillennialists believe that Christ's return will be followed by a first resurrection of believers, who will reign with Christ in a literal thousand-year rule of righteousness on earth. This would then be followed by the final resurrection and then the final judgment.

God will establish the Messiah as ruler over all

Ps 72:8, 11 *His kingdom will reach from sea to sea, from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth. ... ¹¹All kings will bow down before him; all nations will serve him.* GNT

The Messiah will have a universal reign of righteousness and peace

ISA 11:4–5 *He will treat the poor fairly, and make right decisions for the downtrodden of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and order the wicked to be executed. ⁵Justice will be like a belt around his waist, integrity will be like a belt around his hips.* NET

MIC 4:3 *He will arbitrate between many peoples and settle disputes between many distant nations. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not use weapons against other nations, and they will no longer train for war.*

NET

"He" (v. 3) refers to the LORD (cf. v. 1), but many understand this prophecy as being fulfilled through the Messiah.

All nations will turn to God . . .

ZEC 8:20–21 *The LORD who rules over all says, 'It will someday come to pass that people – residents of many cities – will come. ²¹The inhabitants of one will go to another and say, "Let's go up at once to ask the favor of the LORD, to seek the LORD who rules over all. Indeed, I'll go with you."* NET

As with the verses in the adjacent subsections, this appears to have in view the time of the Messiah's universal reign of righteousness.

. . . and all nations will worship God

Ps 86:9 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *All the nations, whom you created, will come and worship you, O Lord. They will honor your name.* NET

All people will acknowledge and submit to Jesus Christ

PHIL 2:9–11 As a result God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that *at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth –¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* to the glory of God the Father. NET

As the Messiah, all people will bow in submission and acknowledge Jesus Christ's identity and authority.

God's people will reign with Jesus Christ

2TIM 2:12 *If we endure, we will also reign with him.* NET

Which view of "the millennium" do you think is most likely correct? Why?

What encouragement is there in the above teaching for all Christians, irrespective of their view of "the millennium" and the Messiah's comprehensive rule?

How is the Messiah's promised universal reign of righteousness and peace relevant to believers today?

II. The Afterlife

The believer's hope is largely based on God's wonderful promises for his people concerning the afterlife, the life begun by their resurrection from death. At the center of these promises is the final, everlasting phase of God's relationship with his people. In contrast to these wonderful promises are the teachings about the horrific eternity that the ungodly face.

a) The New Creation

The present heavens and earth will pass away . . .

MATT 24:35 [JESUS:] *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.* NET

. . . The devastation of the heavens and earth in association with God's judgment of the wicked

2PET 3:7, 10–12 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Now by the same word *the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire and are being kept for the day when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed. . .* ¹⁰But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. *On that day the heavens will disappear with a roaring sound, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be exposed.* ¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, think of the kind of holy and godly people you ought to be ¹²as you look forward to and hasten the coming of the day of God, by which *the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire.* ISV

God will create new heavens and a new earth

2PET 3:13 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] But, according to his [God's] promise, *we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides.* NET

Commentators differ on whether Scripture speaks of the creation of an entirely different heaven and earth, or a renewal of the old heaven and earth. The former seems the more likely, with the previous subsections seemingly supporting this view. However the verses in the following subsection could be interpreted to support the latter. In either case, this new creation will be free of any corruption – moral or otherwise – and will exist in harmony with God.

God will renew all things

MATT 19:28 Jesus said to them [his disciples], “I tell you the truth: In *the age when all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* NET

ROM 8:20–21 For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly but because of God who subjected it – in hope ²¹that *the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children.* NET

The “glorious freedom” (v. 21) would appear to encompass freedom from decay and anything harmful.

God’s people will live in the new Jerusalem

REV 21:2, 27 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] *And I saw the holy city – the new Jerusalem – descending out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. ...* ²⁷ *...but nothing ritually unclean will ever enter into it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or practices falsehood, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.* NET

Note that a number of other verses in the remainder of this chapter are also from Revelation 21–22 (cf. Rev 21:10–11, 23–26 ↴), in which John describes a vision of the new Jerusalem.

Note: The new Jerusalem is linked with the renewed Jerusalem prophesied in the OT

REV 21:23–26 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.* ESV

This speaks of the new Jerusalem. The following passage from Isaiah speaks of the future renewed Jerusalem prophesied in the OT. The striking parallels here – and in a number of other references – suggest a correlation between the two cities. See also the introductory comment on *II. God’s Plans for Israel*, Ch. 20.

ISA 60:3, 11, 19 *And nations shall come to your [Jerusalem] light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ...* ¹¹*Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. ...* ¹⁹*The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.* ESV

List three ways in which the new creation will be better than the old. (You do not need to limit your answer to only what is mentioned in the above verses.)

What do we know about the connection between the new Jerusalem and: (a) heaven; and (b) the renewed Jerusalem prophesied in the Old Testament?

What points are there for and against the assertion that God will create an entirely different heaven and earth, as opposed to changing the old heaven and earth?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) Eternal Life

As God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, God will also raise his people

1COR 6:14 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Now God indeed raised the Lord and he will raise us by his power.* NET

On Jesus Christ's return, their bodies will be made imperishable, glorious and spiritual – like Christ

1COR 15:42–44, 49–52 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown [one's natural body] is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ... ⁴⁹And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [Adam], let us also bear the image of the man of heaven [Christ]. ⁵⁰Now this is what I am saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed –⁵²in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.* NET

Note that the "last trumpet" (v. 52) is one which will sound to announce Christ's return.

As such, God's people will be given eternal life

JUDE 1:21 [JUDE, TO BELIEVERS:] *Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the Lord Jesus Christ with his mercy to give you life forever.*

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Eternal life transcends physical death and precludes eternal spiritual death . . .

JOHN 11:25–26 Jesus said to her [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. *The one who believes in me will live even if he dies, ²⁶and the one who lives and believes in me will never die.* Do you believe this?"

NET

In v. 25 “dies” refers to physical death, whereas in v. 26 “never die” speaks of never being subject to eternal spiritual death – i.e. destruction in hell.

. . . So, there will be no more death for God’s people

LUKE 20:36 *Nor can they die anymore, because they are like the angels and, since they share in the resurrection, are God’s children.* ISV

1COR 15:26, 53–55 *The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ... ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* ESV

God’s people will have the right to the tree of life and the water of life

REV 22:14, 17B *Blessed are those who wash their robes so they can have access to the tree of life and can enter into the city by the gates. ... ¹⁷ ... And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wants it take the water of life free of charge.* NET

Being given access to “the tree of life” (cf. Gen 2:9; 3:22) and being able to drink from “the water of life” signify being given eternal life.

God’s people will have accompanying eternal blessings

1PET 1:3–4 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ...* ESV

What do we know about what believers' beings will be like in eternity?

What other differences will there be between the life to come and our current life?

What are the tree of life and the water of life? What do they signify?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) The Heavenly State of God's People

God's people will enter the kingdom of God . . .

ACTS 14:22B Paul and Barnabas told them [believers], "We must suffer a lot *to enter the kingdom of God.*" GW

. . . and they will inherit the kingdom

MATT 25:34 Then the king [Christ] will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*' NET

Believers will inherit the kingdom of God. As such they will participate in it (as reflected in the previous subsection) in a fuller sense than they do now, and it will be their domain.

God's people will be in heaven . . .

JOHN 14:2-3 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³After I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am.* NCV™

In v. 2, "my Father's house" is a reference to heaven. As mentioned earlier, God's people will dwell in the new Jerusalem. Although this is spoken of as "coming down out of heaven" (Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10) it also appears to be closely connected with heaven, perhaps in some sense a manifestation of it. For the verses in this and the following subsection appear to suggest that in the afterlife God's people will be in heaven.

. . . Heaven is where their reward is kept

MATT 5:12A [JESUS, TO THOSE WHO WOULD FOLLOW HIM:] Rejoice and be glad because *you have a great reward in heaven!* GW

MATT 6:20 But *accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven*, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.

NET

God's people will be made perfect

PHIL 3:12 [PAUL:] Not that I have already attained this – that is, *I have not already been perfected* – but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me. NET

Paul implies that believers will be made perfect.

God's people will have glory

1PET 5:1B, 4 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] I make this appeal as a spiritual leader who also witnessed Christ's sufferings and *will share in the glory that will be revealed*.⁴Then, when the chief shepherd appears, *you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away*.

GW

God's people will have great joy . . .

JUDE 1:24 [JUDE, TO BELIEVERS:] Now to him [God] who is able to keep you from stumbling and *to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy*, ... ESV

. . . and there will be no more sorrow

REV 21:4 *He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist any more – or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist*. NET

Note: The salvation and redemption of God's people will be fully realized

1PET 1:5 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Through faith you are being protected by God's power for *a salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time*. ISV

LUKE 21:28 But when these things begin to happen [signs of the end of the age], *stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*. NET

In accordance with the teachings in the subsections above and in the previous section – *Eternal Life* – the above verses (1Pet 1:5; Luke 21:28) indicate that the salvation and redemption of God's people will come to fulfillment in the afterlife, at the end of this age. The following section – *Being with God* – further reflects on what will be involved.

In what sense/s will God's people be made perfect?

What do you think that the "glory" that God's people will have will involve?

How should the teaching in this section affect believers?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) Being with God

God will dwell with his people . . .

REV 21:3 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] And I heard a loud voice from the throne [of God], saying, “*Now God’s presence is with people, and he will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God.*” NCV™

Note that this speaks of the ultimate fulfillment of one of the key aspects or aims of God’s relationship with his people throughout history – that they be his people and he be their God.

. . . and God’s people will see God

REV 22:4 *They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads.* NCV™

God’s people will be with Jesus Christ

1THES 4:17B [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And so *we will always be with the Lord.* NET

God’s people will have God’s and Jesus Christ’s names written on them

REV 3:12 [JESUS CHRIST:] The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never depart from it. *I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God (the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from my God), and my new name as well.* NET

Having God’s and Jesus Christ’s names written on them will identify those who conquer or overcome worldly opposition (i.e. faithful believers) as belonging to God and Jesus Christ – forever. As such, it is also indicative of the fact that believers will forever be with God and Jesus Christ.

God’s people will share in God’s and Jesus Christ’s glory

1THES 2:12 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] We encouraged you, we comforted you, and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases *God, who calls you to share in his own Kingdom and glory.* GNT

ROM 8:17 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, and we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for *if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory.* GNT

God's people will praise God . . .

REV 19:5–7 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] Then a voice came from the throne, saying: *"Praise our God all you his servants, and all you who fear Him, both the small and the great!"* ⁶*Then I heard what sounded like the voice of a vast throng, like the roar of many waters and like loud crashes of thunder. They were shouting: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the All-Powerful, reigns!"* ⁷*Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory, because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.* NET

Presumably such praise of God will continue throughout eternity.

. . . and God's people will serve God

REV 7:15 [JOHN, SPEAKING OF BELIEVERS IN HEAVEN:] For this reason *they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple,* and the one seated on the throne will shelter them. NET

How will God's presence with his people differ to how it is now?

In what other ways will the relationship between believers and God (and Jesus Christ) be richer than it is now?

What do we know about what believers will be doing in the afterlife?

Pray for persecuted Christians

e) The Punishment for the Ungodly

The ungodly face God's wrath . . .

ROM 2:5 [PAUL, ADDRESSING SELF-RIGHTEOUS READERS:] *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed!* NET

. . . As such, the ungodly face destruction

PHIL 3:18–19 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹*Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.* ESV

The ungodly will be separated from God and Jesus Christ – shut out from the holy city

MATT 7:21, 23 [JESUS:] *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ...* ²³Then I will declare to them [ones who do not do God's will], 'I never knew you. *Go away from me, you lawbreakers!*' NET

REV 22:14–15 Blessed are those who wash their robes so they can have access to the tree of life and can enter into the city [the new Jerusalem] by the gates. ¹⁵*Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood!* NET

The ungodly will be thrown into fire

REV 20:14–15 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. *This is the second death – the lake of fire.* ¹⁵*If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, that person was thrown into the lake of fire.* NET

There will be darkness and torment

MATT 22:13 Then the king said to his attendants, 'Tie him up hand and foot and *throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!*' NET

The punishment given to the man in this parable is indicative of hell.

The punishment is eternal

MATT 25:46 And *these* [unrighteous people] *will depart into eternal punishment*, but the righteous into eternal life. NET

Note: There will be varying degrees of punishment

MATT 11:23–24 [JESUS:] And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be thrown down to Hades! For if the miracles done among you had been done in Sodom, it would have continued to this day. ²⁴But I tell you, *it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you!* NET

MARK 12:40 They [teachers of the law] devour widows' property, and as a show make long prayers. *These men will receive a more severe punishment.* NET

Have you become somewhat indifferent to the teaching about hell? How should we respond to it, both in regard to ourselves and to others?

How prominent should the teaching about hell be in our message to unbelievers? What are the dangers of over emphasizing it and the dangers of not mentioning it?

Do you think that the punishment for the ungodly involves eternal conscious existence and suffering?

Pray for persecuted Christians

Topics in This Series

Section I: What to Know

Part A. God and Spiritual Powers

1. **God's Being**
 - I. Basics
 - II. God's Pre-Eminence
2. **God's Character**
 - I. Holy Characteristics
 - II. Loving Characteristics
3. **Jesus Christ**
 - I. General
 - II. Jesus Christ and God
4. **The Holy Spirit**
 - I. General
 - II. God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit
5. **Angels, Satan and Demons**
 - I. Angels
 - II. Satan and Demons

Part B. God and the World: Basics

6. **God's Creation**
 - I. General
 - II. God's Creation of People
7. **God's Sovereignty**
 - I. God's Supreme Authority
 - II. God's Control over the World
8. **God's Word**
 - I. General
 - II. Key Old Testament Covenants
9. **The Problem of Sin**
 - I. General
 - II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin
10. **God's Judgment**
 - I. Basics
 - II. The Manifestation of God's Judgment

Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ

11. **God's Promised Messiah**
 - I. The Messiah's Identity
 - II. The Messiah's Purpose and Person
12. **Jesus Christ's Mission**
 - I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ
 - II. Jesus Christ's Ministry, Death and Resurrection
13. **Salvation through Jesus Christ**
 - I. Salvation from Sin
 - II. Salvation for the World
14. **The New Order**
 - I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role
 - II. Key Elements of the New Order
15. **'The Last Things'**
 - I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment
 - II. The Afterlife

Part D. God and His Own People

16. **The Standing of God's People**
 - I. Basics
 - II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ
17. **Keys to God's Interaction with His People**
 - I. Basics
 - II. God's Holy Spirit in His People
18. **God's Transformation of His People**
 - I. General
 - II. Spiritual Attributes
19. **God's Care of His People**
 - I. God's Saving of His People
 - II. God's Preservation of His People
20. **God's Plans for His People**
 - I. General
 - II. God's Plans for Israel

Section II. What to Do

Part E. Relating to God

21. **Being Right with God**
 - I. Getting Right with God
 - II. Staying Right with God
22. **Having Faith in God**
 - I. Faith and Hope
 - II. What Not to Do
23. **Loving, Fearing and Obeying God**
 - I. Loving and Fearing God
 - II. Obeying God
24. **Connecting with God**
 - I. Being Close to God
 - II. Praying to God
25. **Exalting God**
 - I. Instructions
 - II. Reasons to Exalt God

Part F. Church Life

26. **Being One Body**
 - I. General
 - II. Caring for the Body
27. **Worshipping God**
 - I. General
 - II. Offerings
28. **Serving God**
 - I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights
 - II. Doing God's Work
29. **Significant Practices**
 - I. Symbolic Rites
 - II. Other Significant Practices
30. **Church Leadership**
 - I. General
 - II. Teaching in the Church

Part G. Relating to People

31. **Love**
 - I. Loving Qualities
 - II. Antitheses of Love
32. **Justice**
 - I. Justice in Action
 - II. Being True
33. **Wisdom**
 - I. Being Wise
 - II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge
34. **Common Relationships**
 - I. Family Relationships
 - II. Civil Relationships
35. **Spreading the Gospel**
 - I. Instructions
 - II. Insights

Part H. Persevering

36. **Standing Firm**
 - I. General
 - II. Spiritual Warfare
37. **Rejecting Sin**
 - I. Encountering Sin
 - II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy
38. **Major Pitfalls**
 - I. Pride
 - II. Riches and Sex
39. **Hard Times**
 - I. General
 - II. Praying in Hard Times
40. **Persecution**
 - I. The Persecution of God's People
 - II. What to Do in Persecution

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Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

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Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com.au

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The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

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