

Christian Ministry Unit 1
Introduction to Theology
Week 10 – Eschatology Part 2

Introduction

The End of This Age: Matt. 24:1-36 & Lk. 21**

Note the three questions Jesus' disciples asked him (Matt. 24:3):

-
-
-

They evidently thought that these three things would occur at the same time. But Jesus revealed that they are separate events, each with its own “sign.”

- The sign of the Temple's destruction (Lk. 21:20-24)

FULFILLMENT:

- The sign of the end of the age (Matt. 24:4-22)
NOT THE SIGN(S) (24:4-13)

WHAT MUST HAPPEN FIRST (24:14) ¹

**THE SIGN: THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3,4*;
Dan. 9:27)**

2 Thessalonians 2:3–4* ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it (the great tribulation) will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself

¹ For details on this, see Patrick Johnstone, *The Church Is Bigger Than You Think!* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998).

above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Daniel 9:27 ²⁷ “And he (the prince who is to come) will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

MORE ON THE TRIBULATION

- The Antichrist makes a covenant with Israel(?) at the beginning of a seven-year period (Dan. 9:27). During the first 3.5 years, he evidently consolidates his power and persecutes believers.
- He commits the Abomination of Desolation in the middle of the seven-year period (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:3,4).
- God pours out his wrath on him during the second 3.5 years, ending with his destruction when Jesus returns. This is the period Jesus calls “the great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). Rev. 6-16 probably describes this period as a time of intense judgment and evangelism:

God’s judging activity is described as 7 “Seal” Judgments (6:1-17; 8:1), 7 “Trumpet” Judgments (8:2-9:21; 11:15-19), and 7 “Bowl” Judgments (15:5-16:21). Most of these judgments are *indirect/passive*—God allowing His enemies to do as they wish to: (1) demonstrate the folly of rebellion, and (2) polarize humanity so that as many as possible will turn to Him. Some of these judgments are *direct/active*—God intervening to destroy his enemies (Rev. 19:19-21) in order to rescue His creation (Rev. 11:18) and His people (Matt. 24:21,22).

God’s evangelistic activity is extraordinary and reaps an extraordinary harvest: see the Martyrs (6:9-11), the 144,000 (7:4-17), the Two Witnesses (11:3-12), and the Angel (14:6,7,14-16?).

The sign of Jesus' coming (24:23-31)

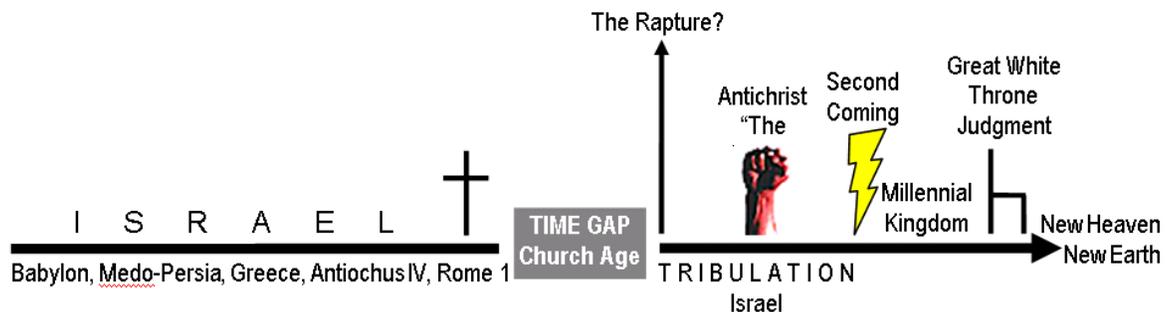
- World-wide & unmistakable (Matt. 24:27,30)
- Physical (Acts 1:11; Zech 14:4)
 - Acts 1:11 ¹¹ They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."
 - Zechariah 14:4 ⁴ In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.
- Accompanied by unique and awesome cosmic events (Matt. 24:29,30)

Jesus makes three summary statements:

24:32-34

24:35

24:36



The Second Coming and Millennial Kingdom (already covered)

The Rapture

Some time before Jesus' bodily return to earth (Second Coming), he will remove Christians from the earth to meet him in the air.²

² The term "rapture" comes from the Latin verb *raptus*, used in the Latin Vulgate and translated "caught up" in 1 Thess. 4:17.

Why is the rapture important?

- 1 Thess. 4:13-18 ¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.
- 1 Cor. 15:50-58 ⁵⁰ Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. ⁵⁵ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

When will the rapture occur? None of the Rapture passages directly speaks about the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Second Coming. Its timing must therefore be inferred from other eschatological passages, and therefore depends on one's interpretive framework.

- Because Covenantalists believe the Church replaces Israel, they see the Rapture as the first event of the Second Coming (POST-TRIB).
- Because Dispensationalists believe the Church is a parenthesis in God's working through Israel, they see the Rapture as a distinct event from the Second Coming—usually just before the beginning of the tribulational period (PRE-TRIB), or just before the Abomination of Desolation (MID-TRIB). On balance, we believe the Dispensational pre- or mid-tribulational view makes more sense.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Some time after the rapture, Jesus will evaluate the service of each Christian. Many New Testament passages speak of this evaluation, and draw important practical implications from it.

Why is this judgment important?

- 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 4:1-5 ^{3:10} According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire . . . ^{4:2} In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. ³ But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. ⁴ For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. ⁵ Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.
- 2 Cor. 5:9-11 ⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God . . .
- Rom. 14:1-12 ¹ Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. ² One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. ³ The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind . . . ¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." ¹² So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

What kinds of service will result in Jesus' reward?

- Helping people come to faith in Jesus (1 Thess. 2:19,20), helping Christians to mature (1 Pet. 5:2-4), enduring suffering as his servants (Mk. 10:29,20; Jas. 1:12), undergoing training and character development as his servants (1 Cor. 9:19-24; 2 Pet. 1:5-7,11), ministering to the poor and needy (Lk. 14:12-14), and being materially generous to advance his kingdom (1 Tim. 6:18,19).

The Great White Throne Judgment & Hell

Rev. 20:11-15 is one of *dozens* of passages that teach the final judgment and eternal punishment for all non-believers of all time. This sobering teaching is clearly taught by scripture, which we have no liberty to delete or dilute. From a biblical perspective, it is amazing *not* that God condemns sinful people, but that He gave his Son so that repentant sinners might escape the condemnation they deserve and spend eternity in God's kingdom (Jn. 5:24). God will justly punish all sin with death—either we receive His Son's punishment in our place, or we will face His punishment.

All those who are judged are condemned for two reasons:

- Because their deeds (“the books”) find them guilty before God
- Because their names are not in “the book life” (Lk. 10:20)

All those who are judged will spend eternity (Rev. 20:10; 14:10,11) in conscious alienation from God (2 Thess. 1:9), experiencing God's wrath (Matt. 25:46) in just measure for their sins (Mk. 12:40).

The New Heavens & the New Earth

Rev. 21,22** is the most comprehensive description of the final destination of every true believer.³ Christians differ over how much of this description is literal versus symbolic, but even symbolic language is used to describe a literal reality.

21:1 – It will be a “new heaven and a new earth” because “the first heaven and the first earth passed away” (see 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Heb. 12:26-28).

21:2,3a – John describes life in God's eternal kingdom with three images—a holy city, a bride made ready for her husband, and a tabernacle. The rest of the passage elaborates on these three images—all of which emphasize *personal relationships*.

- A “holy city” (“new Jerusalem”)
- “Made ready as a bride for her husband”

³ Rev. 21,22 contains many allusions to Isaiah's descriptions of the Messianic Kingdom. Some of Isaiah's descriptions appear to refer to the New Heavens and New Earth, while others seem to refer to the Millennial Kingdom, which (while different in key ways) is also in some ways a foreshadowing of the NH/NE.

- “The “tabernacle” (21:3)

This is why the “bride” (21:9) is the “holy city” (21:10). They are simply two images conveying the same reality.

This is why the “holy city” has 12 gates with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (21:12) and 12 foundation stones with the names of the 12 apostles (21:14). God’s eternal kingdom will be filled with believers from both Old Testament Israel and New Testament Church.

This is why the “holy city” is described as a mammoth cube (21:16b). “The cube is symbolic: there is only one cube in the Old Testament, and that is the Most Holy Place of the temple, where only the (high) priest could enter once a year, bearing blood for his own sins and for the sins of the people. Now the entire city is the Most Holy Place: in the consummation all of God’s people are perennially in the unshielded splendor of his glorious presence.”⁴ This is why there is no need for a temple (21:22).

This is why in the center of the city (22:1-2a) is the “tree of life” and the “water of life.” We will all have eternal life and fullness of God’s Spirit (Jn. 7:37-39).

This is why 22:4 f is the distillation of this whole vision. Together we will belong to God fully and know/be known by God fully (1 Cor. 13:12).

Because heaven will be the above, it will by definition be completely absent of sin and its results. Thus the negations of this passage:

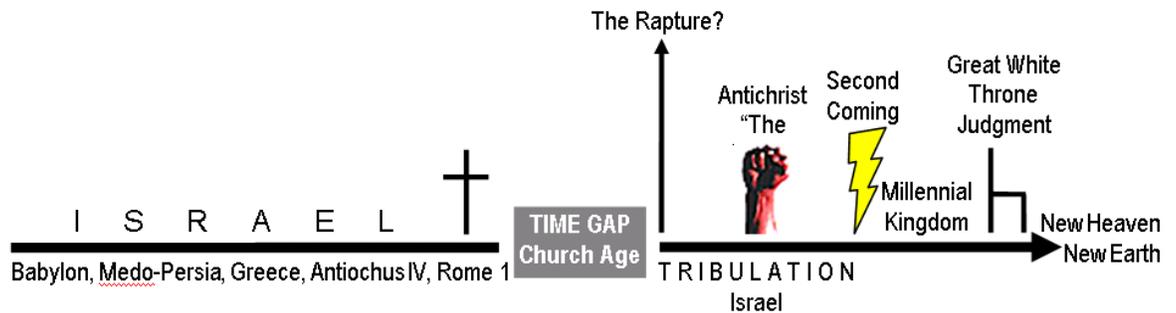
- No more “curse and death” (21:4; 22:3)
- No more “tears or mourning or pain” (21:4)
- No more “closed gates” (21:25)
- No more “night” or “sea” (21:1; 21:25)

Many Christians are not fortified by the promise of the new heavens and earth because they have misconceptions concerning what it will be like. Consider:

- We may assume it will be non-earthly and disembodied, but it will be a new earth (e.g., nature; animals; etc.) and we will have resurrected bodies to enjoy this new earth!

⁴ D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), reading for December 30.

- We may assume it will feel totally foreign to us and that we will be leaving favorite things behind, but it will be “home” (all the comforts of home with all the innovations of an infinitely creative God) and retain all that is best in this life (e.g. culture; music; art; food & drink; etc.)!
- We may assume it will be static—with no time and space and nothing fun to (e.g. floating on the clouds & strumming a harp), but it will be dynamic—with time and space and many great things to do (e.g., a universe to rule, purposeful work to accomplish, friends to make and enjoy, and an infinite God to know)!
- We may assume it will mean the loss of desire, but it will mean continuous fulfillment of desire—(never-ending and ever-increasing joy)!
- We assume that it will be merely the absence of the bad (no more suffering, tears, pain or death), but it will also be the presence of all that is good and wonderful!⁵



Memory Verses

2 Thess. 2:3,4* - the Antichrist will declare himself to be God in the Temple

Matt. 24:1-36** - Jesus describes the end of the age and his return

Rev. 21,22** - the New Heavens and the New Earth

Assignment – study for exam

⁵ Adapted from Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), p. 161.