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What the Bible Says About the Future: ISBN 1-59872-275-1

Published by *Biblical Reader Communications*/Sam A. Smith
www.BiblicalReader.com

Softcover edition printed in the United States of America, December, 2005

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A Tour of What the Bible Says About the Future

Before we begin an in-depth study of future prophecy, and the various ideas as to what those prophecies mean, it would be beneficial to survey what the Bible says about the future so we have a general outline in mind. (You can think of it as a roadmap.) Naturally, since the details of our study have not yet been presented, our survey will include some assumptions that will be supported later. For now, we will assume a dispensational, premillennial perspective. (I'll explain the terminology as we go.)

“Dispensationalism” is a view of biblical history (past, present, and future) that recognizes divine/human relations are governed by principles unique to particular historical eras. For example, we are no longer expected to offer animal sacrifices in worship, as did the Old Testament saints; the reason is that a change has taken place—a change of dispensation. When there is a dispensational change, the operative principles of the age change. A dispensational change always requires new revelation from God in order for man to know what is expected of him. We see dispensational transitions most clearly between the Old and New Testaments, but they can also be seen in other places as well. For instance, we see dispensational transitions at the fall of man, the flood, the tower of Babel, the call of Abram, and in the future at the second coming of Christ when He sets up His kingdom on earth. Each new dispensation has its own “operative principles” (though salvation never changes, since there is only one way man can be saved). In order to properly understand the Bible, including prophecy, we must take into account the dispensational context, just as we must consider the grammatical and historical contexts. When we work from this interpretive frame of reference, the literal statements of Scripture make sense. If we try to understand Scripture apart from its dispensational context, it simply doesn't make sense, which prompts some interpreters to look for (or

contrive) some other sense, which always turns out to be some sort of figurative or allegorical interpretation. Such a mode of interpretation allows the interpreter to find some “meaning” to passages for which they reject the literal (and true) meaning. This process leads to subjective interpretation and is often referred to as “spiritualization,” though there is nothing particularly spiritual about it. Dispensationalism follows the principle of literal/normal interpretation. Of course, the Bible does contain figures of speech and symbolic language, and dispensationalists interpret them normally/literally as one would, as figures and symbols; but dispensationalism, as an interpretive system, does not approve of “spiritualization,” which is entirely disconnected from the exegetical process. When biblical future prophecy is interpreted in its grammatical, historical, and dispensational (historical-theological) context, the following picture of the future emerges.

The Partial Regathering of Israel

Many Old Testament passages indicate the Jewish people will be regathered to the land of Israel in the days preceding the coming of Christ (Isa. 11:11-16; Hos. 3:4-5; Jer. 31:30-31; Ezek. 37:1-29; Amos 9:8-15; Mic. 4:6-8). One of the most interesting prophecies of the regathering of Israel is found in Ezekiel 37:1-29. In the first part of this passage Ezekiel prophesies the rebirth of the Jewish nation after their long period of not being a nation; notice also the resurrection of the dead associated with this regathering.

[Ezekiel 37:1-14] The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that

I am the LORD.” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

Ezekiel goes on to say that when Israel is regathered, it will no longer be a divided kingdom, as was the case with Israel and Judah; it will be a kingdom united politically and spiritually, with God dwelling in their midst, and His servant “David” (referring to the Davidic Messiah) ruling as king over them. Concerning the future unity of the previously divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Ezekiel says,

[Ezekiel 37:15-28] The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, ‘Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, ‘Ephraim’s stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand. When your countrymen ask you, ‘Won’t you tell us what you mean by this, say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim’s hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah’s stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they

will become one in my hand.' Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.'"

Although the full regathering of Israel will take place in the millennium, we can surmise that a partial regathering of Israel must take place prior to the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period. Since the tribulation will begin with the signing of a treaty between Israel and a satanically controlled world political figure (Dan. 9:26-27), the period cannot begin until Israel is at least partially regathered and restored as a nation. (This, of course, has been underway since May of 1948 when the modern state of Israel was created.)

The Rapture of the Church

While we don't know exactly when, in relation to the tribulation, Christ will appear in the sky to receive His church, we do know that His coming is imminent (*i.e.*, it could happen at any moment), and we also know it will occur before God's wrath is poured out upon the earth at the day of the Lord. This leaves a rather broad window

in which the rapture could occur (anytime from the present to the moment just prior to the beginning of the day of the Lord). Scripture indicates the rapture will happen almost instantaneously. In 1 Thesalonians, Paul describes the event in this way:

[4:13-17] Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left to the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

The rapture of the church will involve the bodily resurrection of the dead in Christ and the transformation of living saints. (The Old Testament redeemed will be resurrected at the beginning of the millennium, along with those saved after the rapture.) The raptured saints, in their glorified eternal bodies, will be taken to Heaven to appear before the judgment seat of Christ; Paul gives a sobering account of this judgment of believers in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17 when he says,

[3:10-17] By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

The judgment of the church in Heaven is not a judgment in which one's eternal destiny is determined; it is a judgment of the faithfulness of believers, that they might give an account to Christ for the way they lived since the time they received Christ. Each person will be rewarded (or not) based upon what is revealed at this judgment. Following the judgment of believers, the marriage of Christ to His bride, the church, will take place. John gives the following picture of the Bride of Christ at the second coming; note that the Bride appears to have already received her rewards.

[Rev. 19:7-9] "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints).

The Time of Tribulation on Earth

The first major time period in the future is "the tribulation;" it is to be a seven-year period of great distress upon the earth. While all of the tribulation is a time of global distress, a period of divine wrath called "the day of the Lord" begins sometime in the second half of this period. The Lord in His Olivet Discourse gave this summary of the tribulation.

[Matthew 24:3-31] As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, I am the Christ, and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because

of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

Many interpreters mistakenly identify the entire tribulation as a time of divine wrath, but as we will see, that view is lacking in biblical and theological support, and has resulted in incorrect teaching regarding both the nature of the tribulation and the timing of the rapture of the church.

God will use the hardship of this period as a means of turning the hearts of the Jewish people to their true Messiah—Jesus Christ (Zech. 13:7-9). The period begins with the signing of a covenant (perhaps some type of security agreement) between Israel and an international alliance that Scripture pictures as a latter-day form of the Roman Empire. Eventually a leader will emerge from this alliance, who in the book of Daniel is referred to as, “the Prince to come” (Dan. 9:26, AV). This person will use the first three and one-half years of the tribulation period to come to full power over this European alliance (or amalgamated “kingdom”), eventually, for a short while, extending his power to global proportions. The first half of the tribulation will consist of war, famines, physical disturbances and great loss of life (one quarter of the world’s population will perish, *cf.* Rev. 6:8), yet it will be far less intense than the second half of the period. Since numerous passages indicate that the Jewish temple will be in operation by the midpoint of the tribulation (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; Rev. 11:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:3-4), its reconstruction will likely begin early in the first half of the period, though it is possible that the construction of this temple (the third temple in Israel’s history) could begin even prior to the tribulation. As of this writing, preparations for the rebuilding of the third temple have been underway for over a decade (*see*, The Temple Institute <www.templeinstitute.org>, and The Temple Mount Faithful <www.templemountfaithful.org> for current information on plans and preparations to build the third temple).

Several key events occur at or near the midpoint of the period. As a result of angelic warfare in the heavens, Satan and his host of fallen angels will be confined to the earth (Rev. 12:7-17); and God will send two prophets who will prophesy throughout the remainder of the period, until they are killed, probably just prior to the second coming (Rev. 11:3-13). At the midpoint, Satan’s prince, believing he is firmly in control of the governments of the world, will enter the Jerusalem temple proclaiming himself to be God, and demanding that all the peoples of the world worship him (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3-4). Satan will raise up a false prophet who will perform great signs so as to deceive the unredeemed into worshipping this prince (the Antichrist) *cf.*, Rev. 13:11-18; at that time it will be necessary for believers in Christ living in Judea to flee (Matt. 24:15; Rev.12:13-14) because a great persecution will break out,

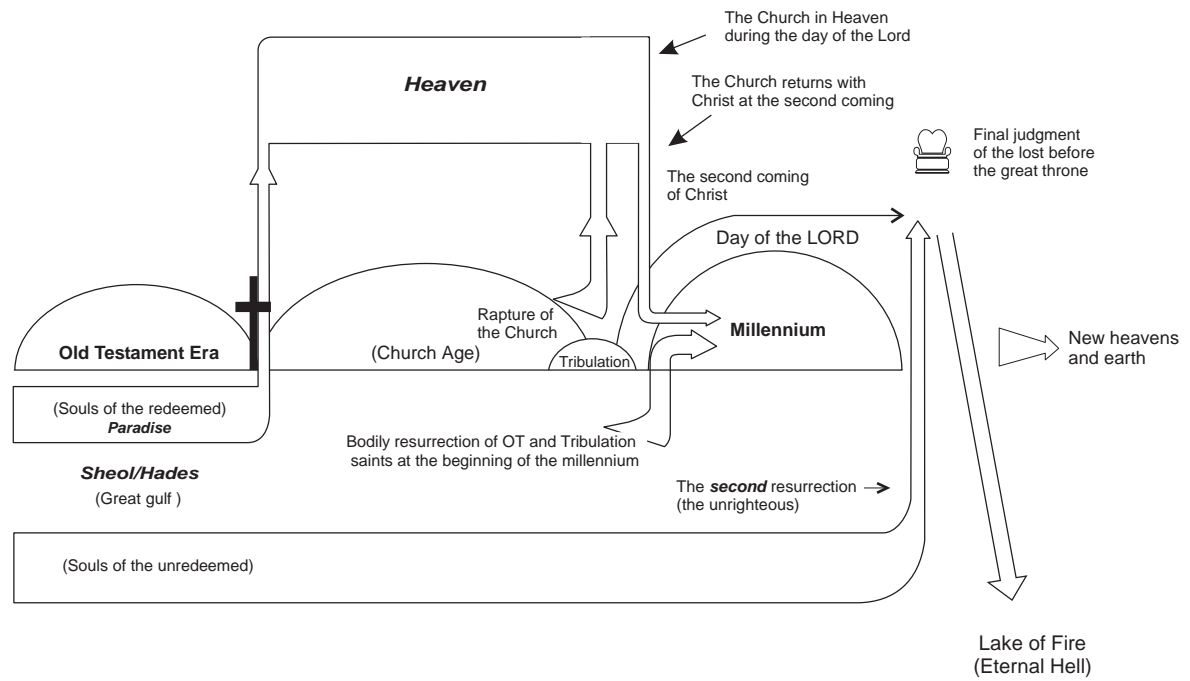


Figure 2.1 An Overview of the Future

followed by a falling away from the faith on the part of many who profess to be believers in Christ (Matt. 24:10). As the second half of the period progresses, spiritual deception will increase (Matt. 24:11; Rev. 13:11-18, *cf.* 17:1-18; 2 Thess. 2:8-12), and moral degeneration will grow rampant (Matt. 24:12).

The most severe of the tribulation events will occur in the last three and a half years of the period. All the preceding distress of the first half of the tribulation has come under the first four seals of Revelation 6:1-8 (*cf.* Matt 24:4-9). The fifth seal, which allows the Antichrist to persecute a multitude of Christians, will occur shortly after the midpoint of the period (Rev. 6:9-11 *cf.* Matt. 24:9,15-22). Well into the second half of the tribulation, the sixth seal – an object from space hitting the earth, *cf.* Rev. 6:12-17 – seems to serve as a warning of the divine wrath to come with the opening of the seventh seal (Rev. 8:1). It is important to note the distinction between “tribulation” and “divine wrath.” While all of the seven-year period is “tribulation” (hence the name, “the tribulation”), it appears that only a portion of the second half (probably only the seventh seal) is divine wrath (*see*, “The day of God’s wrath,” p. 125). During the time of the seventh seal (Rev. 8:1-6) a manifold judgment composed of the seven “trumpets” is unleashed. Under the divine judgment of this period (described in the Old Testament as “the day of the Lord”) much of the world’s population will perish (Rev. 8:7-13). Following the astrophysical judgments of the first four trumpets, there will be demonic affliction, war, and another manifold judgment referred to in Revelation as the “bowl” judgments (the seventh trumpet is comprised of the seven bowls). The first five judgments in the bowl sequence are plagues poured out upon the earth (Rev. 16:1-11). The sixth and seventh bowls involve war, widespread destruction, and preparation for Armageddon – the final conflict of the period (Rev. 16:12-21). At the close of the tribulation, Satan’s prince (the Antichrist) will be locked in military conflict in an attempt to maintain his global domination (Dan. 11:36-45). The destruction from this conflict will be of a magnitude never before seen in human history. It is only the personal return of Christ in the midst of this conflict that ensures the survival of God’s elect (Rev. 16:12-19:21). At His second coming, Christ will descend to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:1-4) and go forth to vanquish the forces of the Antichrist. Satan’s false messiah and his prophet will be taken and thrown into the Lake of Fire, and their

armies will be destroyed (Rev. 19:19-20). Zechariah gives this account of the coming of Christ:

[Zechariah 14:1-5] A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

John, in Revelation, gives the following account of Christ's second coming.

[Revelation 19:11-21] I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But

the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

The Interlude Between the Tribulation and Millennium

There will be a short interlude between the tribulation and the millennium (Dan. 12:11-12), possibly a forty-five day gap. There are two events that must take place before the millennium begins. The first event is the confinement of Satan to the "Abyss" (Rev. 20:1-3); it is assumed that his host of angelic followers (including the demons) will be confined with him. Little is known of the Abyss; it is distinct from Hades (the interim abode of the dead) and the Lake of Fire (the eternal abode of the unrighteous); it is a place of temporary confinement for evil spirits (fallen angels) who will eventually be consigned eternally to the Lake of Fire (Lk. 8:31; Rev. 9:1-12). The other event that will take place prior to the beginning of the millennium is the judgment of Matthew 25:31-46. This judgment is necessary in order to ensure that no unredeemed people enter into the millennial kingdom from the tribulation.

The Millennial Kingdom

The millennial kingdom is the beginning of the fulfillment of many promises made to Israel in the Old Testament. In actuality it is only the first of two phases of the visible kingdom of Christ on earth. The second phase of this kingdom will take place upon the new earth, which will be created after the millennium, and which will continue eternally (Rev. 21:1-5). The prophet Micah gives the following picture of the coming kingdom.

[Micah 4:1-5] In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to

the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

One of the first events of the millennium will be the resurrection of the righteous dead (Rev. 20:4-6). Since the church-age saints will have been raised earlier (at the rapture), it remains for the Old Testament saints, and those saved after the rapture, that did not survive until the Lord's coming, to be raised. This resurrection likely marks the beginning of the millennium. There are four distinct groups of people who will enter the millennium: 1) the glorified church-age saints, having been raptured earlier, who will return with Christ at the second coming; 2) those saved after the rapture that survive until the second coming will enter the millennium in their natural (untransformed) bodies; 3) the Old Testament saints, who will be resurrected at the beginning of the millennium; and 4) those saved after the rapture who do not survive until the Lord's coming and are resurrected at the beginning of the millennium (along with the Old Testament saints). Of these, only those saved after the rapture that survive until the Lord's coming will enter the millennium in natural (untransformed) bodies, all the rest will enter in transformed, or resurrected bodies.

Life in the millennium will be quite different from life in past ages. Christ will be personally present to rule over the earth. There will continue to be governments, but those governments will ultimately be accountable to Christ (Mic. 4:1-8; Zech. 14:17). The curse placed upon the earth at the fall of man will be lifted, at least partly (Isa. 65:17-25). This change in the natural order will affect both animal and plant life, and the earth will become highly productive (Amos 9:13). Nevertheless, the millennium will not be a perfect age.

Although only redeemed people will enter the millennium, those in their natural bodies will soon reproduce (Isa. 65:19-23), introducing unredeemed sons and daughters into the kingdom. As the millennium proceeds, the population of both saved and lost will soar.

The millennium derives its name from the fact that its duration is to be approximately one thousand years (Rev. 20:2,7-10). After Satan and his host have been confined for a thousand years, he will be released. God will allow Satan to organize a final rebellion at the close of the millennium. John tells us in Revelation 20:7-10,

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

This rebellion will have the effect of polarizing humanity into two camps—one belonging to God, the other belonging to Satan. Christ’s enemies will be slain by fire from heaven, and Satan (along with his host) will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:7-10); then the millennium, the final dispensation of the original creation, will be over.

Interlude Between the Millennium and the New Creation

Following the millennium, the present heavens and earth will pass away (2 Pt. 3:10-11; Rev. 20:11), and the unrighteous dead will be resurrected to face judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). At that time it will be manifested to every unrighteous person that his name is not recorded in the Book of Life, and he (or she) will be thrown into the Lake of Fire—which is the second death (v. 14). John records the following account of the second resurrection and the judgment of the unredeemed before the great white throne.

[Rev. 20:11-15] Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The New Heavens and Earth

Having made a final disposition of sin and sinners forever, God will create new heavens and a new earth (Rev. 21:1-5). In this eternally perfect age, the New Jerusalem, the Heavenly City, will descend out of heaven to rest upon the earth (Rev. 21:9-22:5). This city will be the eternal home of the saints. Sin, suffering, and sorrow will be no more, and God will dwell forever in the midst of His people.

