

The Optimism of Jesus: Never Fear the Future Again

Bible Study

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How to Use This Study

Your benefit from this Bible study is dependent on several principles. The degree of personal growth is not based simply on heaping up more information, but on spiritual illumination, transformation and application. There are four principles I encourage you to embrace from the beginning:

1. Learning

The Bible never actually teaches us to study it. The mistranslated verse “study to show yourself approved” is better translated by another version as “present yourself to God as...” (2 Tim 2:15).

People typically think that the gathering of more information will change our lives. We think knowledge is a commodity in which we gain power. It is true that ignorance is not a virtue, but it is the kind of knowledge that is important: head knowledge verses heart knowledge.

We are thousands of years separated from the culture and history of the Bible, so it is true that we need to study in order to set the context for understanding. Understanding, though, is not a knowledge base but means knowledge that is experienced personally. *Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.*

2. Meditation

All transformation comes at a heart level. Throughout Biblical history, it is meditation that was the tool for change and influencing the heart. Meditation is anytime that we think or see with our hearts’ sanctified imagination until it becomes real and personal to us. “*Set your mind/heart on things above where Christ is at the right hand of the Father*”. “*Let the word of Christ (the truth of the gospel) dwell in your richly...*” To see yourself “in Christ” seated with him relationally before the Father, as loved as Jesus is, and as right with the Father as Jesus is... is to begin to transform effortlessly and experientially into that reality.

Pause to put yourself in the stories of the scripture. See and feel yourself sweating in the hot streets of Jerusalem as Jesus walks past you. Let the images sit in your heart for a while because the Bible purposely uses them to paint pictures worth a thousand words. Suggested meditations are given throughout this study for that purpose. I recommend our course on Biblical Meditation if you would like to know more.

3. Humility

Humility is of the utmost importance with approaching the Word of God, primarily because one of the greatest obstacles to growth is that our personal opinions and stubborn beliefs get in the way of the Truth. Learn that the greatest place of teach-ability comes from being more loyal to the person of Truth, Jesus Christ, than to individual truths. He is the Good Shepherd and the Holy Spirit is the great Teacher, leading us into all Truth.

Over and over the Bible says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” In other words, we have to choose to let our guard down before Jesus and be willing to hear what he says. Invite the Holy Spirit to teach you through this study.

Mark Twain once said, *“It is easier to fool people, than it is to convince them that they’ve been fooled!”* This is why instead of simply telling you to believe something, we intend to let the truths that transform emerge from the scriptures themselves.

Pray that God will help you see through emotional attachments to any teaching that is not rooted in the truth.

4. Practice

You will also be provided with some practical ways to inculcate these truths. Sometimes you will be invited to discover for yourself some way you can walk out a truth in relationship with Christ. Personal transformation comes as we “see” the truth in our hearts with faith, but faith without works is dead. It’s like watching a video or reading a book about golf, but never getting on the course to put what you are learning into practice. I encourage you come up with your own ways to make these truths a part of your life.

5. The Purpose of This Study:

The purpose of this study is for you to discover, through the Word of God and the help of the Holy Spirit, the relationship between the Kingdom of God, an optimistic future, and how the “Great Tribulation” was in our past. In so doing it will stir faith and hope for your future.

THE OPTIMISTIC KINGDOM

Many have heard teaching that “the end is near”, that the antichrist is alive; that blood moon signs are revealing a soon coming Great Tribulation. There is a lot of gloom and doom in the world and in the Church. As a result, fear grips many people today.

What if the future is brighter than we imagined? What if our hope is that Jesus is not going to bring a world-wide tribulation, but instead, a world-wide transformation? Would we look at our place of responsibility in government, business, arts, education and family differently? Would we plan to leave a legacy?

In this study we will explore some of the biblical imagery of the future and reset it in its accurate historical setting.

It was common knowledge and a common expectation that when the Messiah came, he would be ushering in a new era of the kingdom. The Jews had an expectation of the closing out of one age and the institution of another, they just didn't quite understand what that looked like. So when Jesus shows up preaching “*repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand*” they knew exactly what he was talking about. They knew HE claimed he was somehow ushering in that new era, that new day!

Dispensationalists or futurists who see the kingdom only coming after a great tribulation teach that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are two different things. They teach that one is Jesus as the Davidic King reigning on the earth and the other is him reigning from heaven presently. They teach that the church age is what we are living in and the unfulfilled promises to Israel for a kingdom will be fulfilled in the millennium after the 7 year tribulation.

The only difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are the words *kingdom* or *God*. The kingdom of *heaven* is used mainly in Matthew instead of the kingdom of *God* for a reason. Matthew was written to Jewish believers and the Law said not to take the name of the Lord in vain. So they decided to not use his sacred name at all for fear that they might break the commandment accidentally. In desiring to reach those Jews, Matthew accommodated his language in that light. Therefore, kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven mean exactly the same thing.

The phrase “kingdom of God” occurs 68 times in 10 different New Testament books, while “kingdom of heaven” occurs only 32 times, and only in the Gospel of Matthew. For instance:

“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of HEAVEN is greater than he.” (Matthew 11:11)

“For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of GOD is greater than he.” (Luke 7:28)

Is there a difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven? _____

All scriptures are NKJV unless otherwise noted.

WHAT KIND OF KINGDOM DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

Daniel 2 :44, “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

1. If the God of *heaven* sets up a kingdom, then where does it originate? Is it spiritual or natural. Is it made with hands?

Acts 2:29-36, “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’ “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

2. David knew that God would raise up the Christ to sit on David’s throne. When did this happen? (30, 31)

3. This means that the Davidic kingdom will not reign from where?

Hebrews 12:28, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

4. This means they were already beginning to receive this kingdom when?

5. What does it mean that the kingdom cannot be shaken?

John 18:36, *“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but My kingdom is not from here.’”*

6. Where does the kingdom of God originate? Where does it NOT now or EVER originate from?

John 6:15, *“Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.”*

7. The kind of kingdom that the Jews offered Jesus would have looked like what? What functions would he have performed as an earthly king?

8. When he had the chance, did he accept this kind of kingdom? Yes/No

1 Samuel 8:6-7, *“But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. 7And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected ME as their king.’”*

9. It was never God’s idea for Israel to have a natural earthly king. So what do you think had to happen in order to restore things back to God’s ideal?

This wasn’t the last time they rejected God as king. John 19:15 says, *“But they cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’”* So Jesus refused to be an earthly king, and the unbelieving Jews renounced him as king altogether! (By virtue of claiming Caesar as king, they were also renouncing God as king.)

Luke 17:20-30, *“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’”* Then He said to the disciples, *“The days will*

come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after them or follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

10. When the kingdom came it would be after Jesus experienced what? (25) What did he first have to go through? _____

11. Where does the kingdom come to? (21) _____ Therefore is it a natural one, or a spiritual one that affects the natural? _____

12. What seems to coincide with the kingdom coming? (27-30) Lot was saved from Sodom when he went out. Who do you supposed would be saved from this coming judgment and how? _____

13. If the kingdom coming in power doesn't come by observation, then what does he mean? The clue is verse 23.

Matthew 16:27-28, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

14. In Matthew 24 Jesus said the kingdom would come with signs preceding it, but Luke 17:20 says the kingdom itself would not come with observation. What does that tell us about the Son of Man coming in His kingdom? Would it be visible or not? _____

Romans 14:17, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

15. Why does he mention eating and drinking? Those were specific laws of the Old Covenant that regulated each. What will this new kingdom NOT be like? Give some examples:

Righteousness is being made right with God by the work of Christ (Rom 1:16,17). It is not by anyone “establishing their own righteousness” (Rom 10:3).

16. What will you begin to experience when you accept your relational/legal position in the kingdom as righteous? (Rom 14:17) How would that influence your daily life specifically? _____

1 Cor. 4:20, *“For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.”*

Luke 11:20, *“But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”*

17. What were some of the displays of God’s kingdom power in Jesus’ ministry? _____

18. Should we expect to see those today? Consider that the kingdom is still here. _____

19. Recall a story in your life or another’s in which God’s kingdom power has healed the sick, changed a situation, or released a gift of the Spirit to someone. _____

MEDITATION: Find a place to quiet your heart before God. Imagine in as many details as possible that you are standing with the other disciples as Jesus turns and looks to you and says, *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”*

Let that sink in. What insights are you gaining? What questions does that raise? Turn and ask Jesus to help you to understand.

THE PREVIEW OF THE KINGDOM IN DANIEL

(Please read Daniel 2:1-44)

1. How many kingdoms does this prophetic dream reveal? _____

- The head of gold: Daniel 2:1 represents the Babylonian Kingdom
- The breast and arms of silver (See Daniel 5:31) which is the Mede/Persian kingdom.
- The belly and thighs of brass represent the Greek Empire/kingdom
- The legs of iron and feet represent the Roman Empire.
- Each is in sequential order with no time gaps between them. There is no time gap between the legs and feet because they are the same time period of Rome and its kings. Notice the image doesn't have the feet or toes cut off and separated.

Daniel 2:44, "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

2. So the final kingdom of Christ would be set up during what Empire specifically?

3. What do you think it means that his kingdom will never be destroyed?

4. What does it mean that this kingdom will not be left to other people? Does it mean other people will never experience it? (see Luke 12:32) Or does it mean that he will not leave it to others to be in charge over? _____

5. What are the implications of that? _____

6. What does it mean for the kingdom of Christ, the Messianic kingdom, to stand forever?

7. What does this mean regarding your beliefs about the end times and antichrist?

In this context a fifth kingdom was being set up which would never be destroyed and will stand forever. The kingdom of God is set up during the Roman Empire days. There is nowhere which says anything about the toes being separated into some future restored Roman Empire. There is continuity here. IT IS ONE STATUE with continuity, not a separation of 2000 years. It is the DAYS OF THESE KINGS.

Daniel 7:13-14, *"I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed."*

The larger context again is the same 5 kingdoms except this time in apocalyptic language, (the cartoonish language describing them as beasts and leopards, etc.) Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man.

At the point of Jesus receiving his kingdom from the Father what are the characteristics of this kingdom?

8. Is the kingdom in Israel or in heaven? _____

9. Is this kingdom one in which Israel serves him or do all people groups? _____

10. What are the phrases used to describe the length of this kingdom? What other synonyms could you use?

11. Since the kingdom was to arrive in the time of the Roman Empire but these time phrases describe a never ending kingdom, when do you think the kingdom began?

Daniel 2: 31-35, 44-45, *"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver,*

its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth...

And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

12. What is the stone that struck the image? _____

13. What did the stone become? _____

14. It doesn't say that this stone filled a Christian... what does it fill? What do you think this means about our future? _____

Summarize what you have learned so far about the kingdom in Daniel.

Application: What is one aspect of your perspective on Islam or politics that would change if you believed that the kingdom of God would never be destroyed and was destined to fill the whole earth?

WHEN DID JESUS' KINGDOM BEGIN?

Matthew 3:2, "and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"

Luke 4:43, "but He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.'"

The Greek word is *eggizo* (*eng-id'-zo*), "to make near, that is, (reflexively) approach:- approach, be at hand, come (draw) near, be (come, draw) nigh"

For example:

"Now when they *drew near* Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples..." (Matthew 21:1)

"Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread *drew near*, which is called Passover." (Luke 22:1)

"But when the time for the promise *drew near* which God had sworn to Abraham..." (Acts 7:17)

1. So what did Jesus mean when he said it was at hand? Paraphrase Jesus' words

Yet we also have these passages of the kingdom coming some time in their future:

Matthew 16:27-28, "*For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. 'Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.'*"

Luke 21:31 "*Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*"

Mark 8:38, "*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*"

2. What generation is he speaking of (Mt 16:28; Mark 8:38)? _____

3. What kind of generation was it? (Mk 8:38) _____

4. Speculate as to when Jesus was saying it would occur? _____

5. When would the “judgment” and “rewards” according to each man’s work occur according to Jesus? (Mt 16:28)

It could not be the Mt of Transfiguration because they didn’t even have time for ANY to die. (It was only a few days before when Jesus said this). It could not be Pentecost because that was the coming of the Spirit and there were no attendant angels, or judgment.

In addition, the phrase “*assuredly I say to you*” is used some 95 times and never once does it describe a change of thought. It always introduces an explanatory thought of the previous statements. So there can be no time division between Matthew 16:27-28.

6. What earthly kingdom was in power during the life of Jesus? (John 11:48)

The only context in which this could have occurred was in 70AD at the time of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans. This is the only event where there were some of those standing there still alive. It was a time of judgment (Matthew 23-24).

THE INCREASE OF THE KINGDOM:

Isaiah 9:7, “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

Since the influence and rule of the kingdom and peace can only increase from the time of its inception until forever... then what does this teach us about hope for our culture?

1. Upon whose shoulders does the ultimate responsibility rest? _____

2. Since we don't create the kingdom, nor control the kingdom. What then, do you suppose, is our relationship with an increasing kingdom?

3. What is Jesus Christ zealous about and what do you think that looks like toward you?

4. How does that affect the way we pray? Think of a recent problem that you have been praying about. Do you pray trying to convince, manipulate or strong arm God?

5. Does one need to beg in prayer? Why based on this passage?

6. How much of the world will this government of Christ influence? _____

7. There are no passages that teach that there will be a one-world government under an anti-Christ. Does this mean that God intends the earth to be under an ultimate one-world government with Christ as king on his spiritual throne?

“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.’” (Matthew 13:31-32)

8. What are the characteristics of Jesus' kingdom? _____

9. Its size starts _____ like a mustard seed.

10. Whose field do you think this is? _____

11. Does a seed become a tree overnight? What are the implications of this for the world in which Jesus sowed the kingdom?

12. What is the meaning or implication of a nest for a bird? How do we apply that to the kingdom?

13. Does a mustard seed become an apple tree? No. Then what will the seed of the kingdom grow up to look like in the earth? _____

14. Take a moment and speculate on what that world would look like? Please do some "visioneering" and write it down.

"He spoke another parable to them, 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.'" Matthew 13:33

The dictionary defines leaven as: An element, influence, or agent that works subtly to lighten, enliven, or modify a whole. (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/leaven>)

15. Since the kingdom is like leaven, how many ways can you imagine it working subtly to modify the world?

16. Based on Matthew 13:33, for how long will the leaven of the kingdom be at work? Until what? What does this mean in your own words?

How much impact has the kingdom of God had over the last 2000 years in worldwide transformation? This is but a tiny sketch!

Recently in America

- As of 2014, gun homicides are down 49% in America since 1993.
- Teen pregnancy rates have dropped by 50% in the same time period.
- High school graduation rates are at an all time high.
- Property crime & violent crime rates are at lowest numbers since the 70's.

What about globally?

- In 50 years, over a billion people worldwide have risen out of extreme poverty.
- There are half as many poor people in the world as there were in 1990.
- "Since 1960, China's real income per person has gone up eightfold. India's has quadrupled, Brazil's has almost quintupled, and the small country of Botswana, with shrewd management of its mineral resources, has seen a thirty-fold increase. There is a class of nations in the middle that barely existed 50 years ago, and it includes more than half of the world's population."
- More children have access to education, immunizations & vaccines for preventable/curable diseases. The lifespan of the average human is up and the mortality rates are down across the board.
- More people have been saved, responded to the gospel in our generation than in all the combined salvations of all of human history. Some suggest there are up to 200 million Christians in China.
- In the beginning of the Church there were about 1 in 360 who were Christians. Now it is estimated that there are about 1 in 3.
(http://thinkprogress.org/security/2013/12/11/3036671/2013-certainly-year-human-history/?utm_content=bufferc059a&utm_source=buffer&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=Buffer)

A Guideposts reader said, "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow." (Patricia Egan, Connecticut) That is what Jesus did. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat*

falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)

Jesus so believed in tomorrow that he was willing to plant his life as a tree, as a kingdom, that would slowly grow to look like him... even if it meant 2000, 3000, 4000 years.

Do you believe in the future enough to leave a legacy? Do you believe that the zeal of the Lord of hosts will increase his kingdom... which Paul said was righteousness, peace and joy? Will you believe that the world will look more righteous in 100 years than it does today? Will you believe that the world will have more peace in 200 years than it does today? Jesus said the kingdom was the power of the Spirit. Will you believe the truth that the influence of the Spirit's power will increase in the earth and not decrease?

17. What did God plant in you? What are you planting spiritually in your life? In what ways are you cooperating with the kingdom?

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORDS KINGDOM

Isaiah 2:2,4 “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days (“last days” KJV) That the mountain of the Lord’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it... He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.”

This passage takes place in Israel’s last days as an earthly kingdom, consummated in 70 AD by the destruction of the temple, priesthood, and city by the Romans. Isaiah begins to prophesy about this transition period which comes after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Just as Moses brought them through the Red Sea and yet it was a 40 year journey until entering the promised land, so too there is a 40 year “one generation” transition gap between the death of Christ (30AD) and the destruction of the temple (70AD).

1. Mountains in the scripture many times typify kingdoms. What will happen to the mountain kingdom of the Lord beginning in the last days and what do you think that means? _____

2. Since the kingdom starts as a small seed the increase and impact of this is progressive, just as Jesus taught. What will happen as the kingdom of God is established progressively in the earth regarding war? How might that happen?

3. What are plowshares and pruning hooks used for? In what specific ways can you see the instruments of war being turned into tools of productivity?

Isaiah 11 is in the context of when the root of Jesse comes (Jesus) and receives the 7 fold work of the Spirit of God (at his baptism). In THAT context the prophet says (4-9),

He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the

cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Again we see that the establishment of the kingdom will come after some kind of judgment (the slaying of the wicked in the Last Days of Israel's Old Covenant kingdom culminating in the Day of the Lord in 70AD).

Micah the prophet borrows from Isaiah and says essentially the same thing:
"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. Everyone will live in peace and prosperity, enjoying their own grapevines and fig trees, for there will be nothing to fear." (Micah 4:3-4)

4. Does Jesus really have a literal rod coming out of his mouth? _____

5. Is his breath so bad that it kills people? _____

6. Then are we to assume that the wolf and the lamb are to be literal? _____ What do you think it means? _____

The contrast here between the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the goat, is the contrast between the two groups of people in the earth before the coming of the Kingdom: Jews and Gentiles. They typify the extreme racism that is removed because now there is neither "Jew nor Gentile" but all are one in Christ. The Gentiles were considered the ravenous beasts and the Jews were the lambs and victims of the other nation's atrocities. You can see in the story of Jonah his deep hatred of Nineveh and even his anger afterwards when God didn't destroy them. The wolf and lamb are simply figures of speech to reveal the end result of the kingdom or mountain of God where there is peace, not harm or destruction. That could certainly spill over literally into the animal kingdom, but isn't the primary meaning.

7. Which of the following world views at this point seem more biblical? _____

The New Agers? "As the Age of Aquarius unfolds, a New Age will develop. This will be a utopia in which there is world government, and end to wars, disease, hunger, pollution, and poverty. Gender, racial, religious and other forms of discrimination will cease. People's allegiance to their tribe or nation will be replaced by a concern for the entire world and its people." (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/newage.htm>)

Or is John Darby closer to the truth? John Darby is the father of our fearful end-time theory about the demise of the world. With the help of D.L. Moody, the Scofield Reference Bible and Moody Bible Institute they began spreading the message of a rapture before a world-wide judgment in the earth. Here is what Darby said in one of his lectures:

“What we are about to consider will tend to show that, instead of permitting ourselves to hope for a continued progress of good, we must expect a progress of evil; and that the hope of the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord before the exercise of His judgment, and the consummation of his judgment on the earth, is delusive. We are to expect evil, until it becomes so flagrant that it will be necessary for the Lord to judge it...”

8. Without embracing either, which has a greater confidence in the future?

Our generation is waiting for Jesus to come in flaming vengeance at the end of the world, killing people and blowing up governments, when the Bible very clearly teaches that the kingdom of God is going to increase in the earth until it leavens the *entire lump*. It is not ultimately going to get worse and worse until Jesus finally has to come and stop the evil in the world by a rapture and tribulation. It is going to get better and better over the course of history.

9. Where does the idea of the world getting worse and worse come from?

One is from a very poor interpretation of the seven churches in Revelation 1-3. Some have taught that these literal churches represent 7 ages of the church. The last church listed there is the church of Laodicea and is described as the lukewarm church that Jesus spews out. Therefore, it is believed that history will end with the church being spiritually backslidden, blind and naked. The problem is that there is no indication in Revelation that these are periods of history. Rather, they are very real churches in the emergence of the early church. It is also a very nationalistic egocentric idea that America's state of being is defining the whole world. Most parts of the world don't look anything like the Laodicean church.

When in the late 1800's this idea of a "rapture bail out" and coming world cataclysm became popular, it began to shape the influence of Christianity until today. Christians spiritually abandoned government, the arts, business, and every area of society because Jesus was coming soon and was going to destroy everything anyway! The salt

and light ceased to influence its sphere's and the Church essentially handed it all over to darkness by a hopeless perspective.

Our beliefs corporately have real world influences... or lack of influence! Either the Bible is true and of the increase of his kingdom and peace there will be no end, OR evil is going to win out in the end. One of them is going to increase in the earth and I believe that it is the kingdom of God according to the promises of God.

A second reason people have a negative expectation of the future is based on 2 Tim. 3:3,13, *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come...But evil men and seducers shall wax WORSE AND WORSE, deceiving, and being deceived."*

Many miss what Paul was saying... those last days were in HIS day. They were the last days before the temple and city was destroyed by Rome. The Jews after the crucifixion became more and more violent and wicked and were considered the worst generation morally and spiritually in their history. (Mat 12:43-45)

Notice what Paul said in verse 5, *"...from such turn away."* He wasn't speaking to OUR day 2000 years later, but people in HIS day.

What about the wheat and the tares growing together until the harvest? Doesn't that indicate that there is going to be evil growing up until the end of the world? No it doesn't.

Matthew 13:37-43, "He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

10. What does Jesus say this is the end of? The world? (39) _____

11. Where is the field in which these things are taking place? (38) _____
Therefore so is the gnashing of teeth.

12. If this is the end of the world, who will the righteous be able to influence and shine for? _____

Notice that Jesus interprets his parable teaching that it takes place at the end of the age, not the end of the world. The field is the world, so this is taking place *in* the world, not in a heaven/hell scenario. The furnace of fire and wailing and gnashing of teeth occur in 70 AD at the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans. Note what the eye-witness and historian said happened in the fire that burned the temple (and eventually the city):

"While the Temple was ablaze, the attackers plundered it, and countless people who were caught by them were slaughtered. There was no pity for age and no regard was accorded rank; children and old men, laymen and priests, alike were butchered; every class was pursued and crushed in the grip of war, whether they cried out for mercy or offered resistance.

Through the roar of the flames streaming far and wide, the groans of the falling victims were heard; such was the height of the hill and the magnitude of the blazing pile that the entire city seemed to be ablaze; and the noise - nothing more deafening and frightening could be imagined.

There were the war cries of the Roman legions as they swept onwards en masse, the yells of the rebels encircled by fire and sword, the panic of the people who, cut off above, fled into the arms of the enemy, and their shrieks as they met their fate. The cries on the hill blended with those of the multitudes in the city below; and now many people who were exhausted and tongue-tied as a result of hunger, when they beheld the Temple on fire, found strength once more to lament and wail.

The Temple Mount, everywhere enveloped in flames, seemed to be boiling over from its base; yet the blood seemed more abundant than the flames and the numbers of the slain greater than those of the slayers. The soldiers climbed over heaps of bodies as they chased the fugitives." (Josephus' account appears in: Cornfield, Gaalya ed., Josephus, The Jewish War (1982); Duruy, Victor, History of Rome vol. V (1883).)

Among the tragic events that at this time occurred, the following is more particularly deserving of notice: A false prophet, pretending to be a divine commission, said that if the people would flee to the Temple, they should behold signs of their speedy deliverance. Accordingly, about six thousand people, chiefly women and children, assembled in a gallery that was yet standing, on the outside of the building. While they waited in anxious expectation of the promised miracle,

the Romans, with the most wanton barbarity, set fire to the gallery. Multitudes, rendered frantic by their horrible situation, threw themselves from the gallery onto the ruins below and were killed by the fall. Meanwhile, awful to relate, the rest, without a single exception, perished in the flames. (Welton, Jonathan (2013-11-01). Raptureless: An Optimistic Guide to the End of the World - Revised Edition Including The Art of Revelation (Kindle Locations 1380-1385). BookBaby. Kindle Edition.)

Notice that John the Baptist uses this same imagery in Matthew 3:7-12:

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the WRATH ABOUT to come (Greek- mello)? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And EVEN NOW (Greek- mello) the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize YOU with the Holy Spirit and FIRE. His winnowing fan is (Greek- mello) in His hand, and He will thoroughly CLEAN OUT HIS THRESHING FLOOR, AND GATHER HIS WHEAT INTO THE BARN; BUT HE WILL BURN UP THE CHAFF WITH UNQUENCHABLE FIRE.”

13. When John said there was a soon coming wrath on the Pharisees and Sadducees who do YOU think warned them about this wrath? (Deut. 32; Is 54; Mal. 4)

The Greek word *mello* is a word related to time and it means “even now, about to be, about to do” in terms of something happening. It is used in John 18:32 for instance (NASB), “*to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death he was about to die.*” No one would say that this means we are still waiting 2000 years later for Jesus to die! So to, John the Baptist describes the wheat and chaff fire metaphor as something about to happen in their day!

In addition, Jesus description of, “*Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*” is a direct citation of Daniel 12:3 which an angel swears in verse 7 “*that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.*” This would take place in 70AD at the destruction of the temple by the Romans siege of 3.5 years (times, time and half a time). ALL described in Daniel would be finished in that event.

Notice...

Genesis 49:1,10, *“And Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days... The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”*

Genesis means “beginnings”, so it contains not only the beginnings of the world, but the first use of many important words that influence the rest of Scripture. This is the first mention of the last days, and informs every other mention of it in the Bible. Jacob/Israel called together his sons to tell them what would befall THEM in the last days. These are not the last days of time, but the last days that Judah will bear the earthly kingdom. It is the last time that Judah will carry the scepter. When does this take place? It will be the time when Shiloh/Jesus comes and the obedience of the people will not be to Israel or Judah, but to Jesus.

When? Jesus said in Matthew 21:43, *“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”*

14. Imagine and describe what would need to happen for the earthly kingdom to be removed from Judah/Jerusalem? _____

What you believe about the future will determine how you live in the present. If you expect satan to take over the world and that the world will get worse before it gets better, then it will affect how you live. If you believe that the world will gradually, over history, be impacted more and more by the kingdom of God, then you will live with a legacy mindset.

Luke 21:20-24, ²⁰But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. ²²For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ²³But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and WRATH UPON THIS PEOPLE. ²⁴And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

15. According to Jesus in Luke the destruction of Jerusalem and surrounding events would mean what scriptures were being fulfilled? (22)

16. What kind of legacy would one seek to build if the end of the world is near?

15. How would you live differently if you knew there is not a cataclysmic world-wide destruction of creation in the future? How would you live differently if you believed that there is an increasing kingdom that will never be destroyed and will never end? Do you have negative beliefs about the future that you are being gently confronted with by the Holy Spirit? Write them down as questions to him.

MEDITATION:

Get alone and quiet your heart before the Lord. Imagine sitting in the presence of the Father, in Christ with the power and light of the Spirit pulsating through your being. See it. Feel it. Imagine the details. Then in that safe place before God, ask him to open your eyes to your future. Tell him you will begin to notice what he is doing to encourage you to see the good unfolding in the world. Write down anything you feel he is sharing with you and test it with the Word of God. Believe!

The Optimism of Jesus About Our Future

Any expectation of the world being a better place must take in consideration the words of Jesus regarding the “last days” and the “tribulation”. He said, ***“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”***(Mt 24:21) If we place this in the future, then it means since the time of Jesus the world will get worse and the great tribulation is the culmination of evil in the world. If this has already happened, then we can hope and participate in a better tomorrow.

Jesus said this would be a one-time event, but it cannot mean the end of the world because it says it will never happen again afterwards. Notice that *there is time and history after this event* when he says, *“nor ever shall be”*.

So to embrace the optimism of Jesus, we must answer the question of the timing of the tribulation. The key to answering any question like this is context and asking ourselves what the original audience would have understood it to mean.

In Matthew 23, Jesus is pronouncing the “woes” on a specific group of people in time:

29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ 31 “Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. 33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of [Gehenna]? 34 Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,35 that on you may come all the righteous bloodshed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

1. Who was the “you” he was addressing? _____
2. In verse 36 when will these things happen? _____
3. What will the Jews, particularly the religious leaders, do in the coming days to Jesus’ prophets and wise men and scribes? _____

In the same context (there are no chapter divisions in the original documents), it says, ***“Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” (24:2)***

4. What will happen to the temple? _____

“Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (3)

5. When the disciples ask the “when” question, in what is it in regard to?

6. When they ask what the sign of his coming will be, do you know what this means? What was he coming to do?

If we are really going to let “scripture interpret scripture” we have to be honest about the language the bible uses to describe certain things instead of importing our meaning into the Bible.

Pay attention to how the Bible uses the language of “coming” It was about coming in judgment upon a city or a nation. In none of the following scriptures was there a literal physical coming of the Lord in judgment, but it is the use of apocalyptic language and metaphor to describe God’s judgment (in the form of allowing another nation to come and bring judgment on them). Each were historically fulfilled already.

The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind (Psalm 104:2-3).

See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear (Isaiah 19:1).

The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness (Zephaniah 1:14-15).

The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. (Nahum 1:3).

7. So when the disciples ask about the sign of his coming, it was not in reference to the end of the world, or a physical return, but what? _____

*Listen to this apocalyptic “coming down” language in Psalm 18:7-13, “Then the earth shook and trembled; The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, Because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, And devouring fire from His mouth; Coals were kindled by it. **He bowed the heavens also, and came down With darkness under His feet.** And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters, And thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire.*

Did God literally shake the earth? Did the earth literally quake? Did smoke come out from God’s nose? Then did God literally come down with darkness under his feet? The answer to all of these is no. In fact, this had nothing to do with a nation or a coming of the Lord in the future. This is the introduction to the Psalm: *To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.* It was a poetic song which in the natural was David having victory over his enemies. No one saw God come in judgment of his enemies. It came through David’s hands. So the “coming” language was specific to judgment and deliverance here in this past event.

Then the disciples ask a third question. There is no context at all for them to be asking if this was the end of the world. In fact, it is a continuation of the second question: what will be the sign of the coming judgment and the sign of the end of the AGE?

8. Does Matthew 24:3 say it is the end of the world? _____

What does the end of the age mean? All these phrases have the same connotation: the end of the age, the latter days, the last days, or the last hour. It meant the end of the age in which Israel would be defined by the old covenant, by a natural Jerusalem, or by a temple made of stones. It would be the end of the age in which the kingdom or scepter (Gen. 49:1,10) would be in the hands of an earthly kingdom. It was when Rome sieges and destroys Jerusalem, just ONE GENERATION later, according to both Jesus and historians.

Note some of the language of “the last days”:

2 Corinthians 2:6-8, *“Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;”*

9. Who were the rulers of “this age” (that Paul was still living in) that he said crucified the Lord of glory? _____

2 Timothy 3:1-5, *“But know this, that in the LAST DAYS perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”*

10. He speaks of the last days and perilous times coming, so we might think that is in OUR future, but notice how he admonishes Timothy saying those last days people were already living in his day and he was to turn away from such people. That means the last days were when? _____

Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in THESE LAST DAYS spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”*

Hebrews 9:26, 26 *He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but NOW, once at the END of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*

11. When did Jesus put away sin by the sacrifice of himself? _____

12. How did the crucifixion begin the process of ending the ages? When was the end of the ages? _____

The author of Hebrews goes on and in chapter 8:13 says, *“A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

13. If the old covenant law, sacrifices, priesthood, and temple system were still in operation after the new covenant was created, when did it vanish?

1 Peter 1:19-20, "*but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in THESE last times for you.*"

1 Peter 4:7, "*But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.*"

(Twice Peter references the last times and end of all things and describes it as the time when Jesus the Lamb of God was manifest. Those last times were between Jesus crucifixion and the end of the old covenant system.)

1 John 2:18, "*Little children, it is the LAST HOUR; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.*"

13. If Jesus said no one knew the day or the hour (Mt 24:36), how did John now know that it was the last hour? (**see John 16:13** and of course all the signs of Matthew 24)

John knew it wasn't the last hour of the world, He knew that they were living in the last hour of the end of the old covenant age, a perilous time where there were many false messiahs, false christ's, just like Jesus said there would be.

The word *antichrist* is used only by John in his epistles. John is speaking of the spirit of antichrist that was already in the world that denies that Jesus came in the flesh. He says many false messiahs already came.

The word, antichrist, isn't used in Revelation, nor by Paul. We do have a description of a man called *the man of sin* by Paul and we have a description of Nero (666) in the book of Revelation. The man of sin, the man of lawlessness was a real person. Most likely it was a man named John Levi of Geschala. The historian and eyewitness Josephus tells us it was John Levi who resisted giving in to Rome and caused the city to be destroyed. It was John Levi that promised signs and wonders if the people would set all the food on fire, and he was going to restore it... he was a false prophet who caused many of the people to then starve to death.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2:3 KJV).

Also, it is important to note that this verse is about a rebellious person called the man of sin, not about the Church falling apart in our present or future. There are no 7 Church ages ending with a Laodecian age.

Notice in the NIV translation: *Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction (2 Thessalonians 2:3).*

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

As Jonathan Welton shows in *Raptureless*, this is a clear indicator of who could and could not be the "man of sin." For example, this would have to be a person who would have physically been able to stand in the Temple and proclaim himself God. This would require a person who was living before AD 70, and before the Temple was destroyed because at no time since AD 70 has there been a Temple for the man of sin to stand in.

Also, there is no New Testament verse, not even one, that predicts a rebuilt Jewish Temple. So the Temple had to be standing for the man of lawlessness to stand in it. The following is quote from *Raptureless*:

The Jewish historian Josephus wrote of how John Levi was a selfish, man with persuasive powers who convinced many that he was sent by God to liberate them. Further, John Levi took over the Temple, set himself up in the Temple as the Jewish savior (as God), looted the vessels of the Temple for their gold, and caused the daily animal sacrifices to cease. He also plundered the people, even burning their storehouses of food and causing the great famine that starved tens of thousands to death, and he enlisted aid from the Idumeans, who killed 8,500 of the Jews, including the priests. (Second Thessalonians 2:9 speaks of counterfeit signs, the main one being that John Levi declared that he was God and would deliver the people from the Romans. He commanded the storehouses of food to be burned in faith that God would miraculously deliver them from their enemies. Instead they starved to death.)

Even when the Roman General Titus pleaded that John Levi leave the Temple, so that it wouldn't be destroyed in battle, John flatly refused. John Levi caused the Temple to be destroyed; without him, the Temple might have been spared, considering that it was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

Paul goes on to explain more about the man of lawlessness: Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back [Ananus], so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back [Ananus] will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way (2 Thessalonians 2:5-7).

John was not only a rebel leader, but also a false messiah. He claimed godhood by taking over the Temple, and the only person who stood in his way was the Jewish Chief Priest, Ananus. Ananus had tremendous diplomatic skills and had been able to negotiate peace treaties with Rome many times before. Ananus was literally able to restrain the full-scale rebellion that John Levi was aiming to accomplish.

That is why Paul referred to the one who restrained, who must be taken out of the way. Even Josephus noted that once Ananus (the one who restrains) was killed, then the destruction of Jerusalem began:

I should not mistake if I said that the death of Ananus was the beginning of the destruction of the city, and that from this very day may be dated the overthrow of her wall, and the ruin of her affairs. (Welton, Jonathan (2013-11-01). Raptureless: An Optimistic Guide to the End of the World - Revised Edition Including The Art of Revelation (Kindle Locations 2327-2358). BookBaby. Kindle Edition.)

1 Timothy 4:1-5, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in LATTER TIMES some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

Here the latter times will be marked by people commanding others to abstain from certain foods (that was the Jews and the food laws of the old covenant) and they were persecuting them even for the food they ate. Paul said they, right then, could eat anything if it was received with thanksgiving.

James 5:3, 7-8, “3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. YOU have heaped up treasure in the LAST DAYS... 7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”

Here is that same word, *eggizo* (*eng-id'-zo*) again, “to make near, that is, (reflexively) approach:- approach, be at hand, come (draw) near, be (come, draw) nigh” The coming in judgment was at hand, near, close in time so much so that the Judge was standing at the door.”

14. Who did James tell to be patient for the coming of the Lord? (1:1)

_____ Therefore, this “coming” is not our future. It was in theirs.

There were people in James day who were heaping up treasure and not helping the poor. Many of them were storing their treasures of gold in homes and the temple that would soon be destroyed. This is why in Acts 2:34-35 the believers were selling their properties and giving some or all of the proceeds to the Church leaders... they knew the city was about to be destroyed. This was the last days of the old covenant system!

Then he said be patient until the “coming of the Lord” which was “at hand” because the coming of the Lord he is referring to is the coming of the Judge in judgment upon the city of Jerusalem and the old covenant system.

Jude 17, 20, “17 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: 18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. 19 These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit...”

Here Jude is reminding them of the apostles words who learned about the coming destruction and judgment from Jesus (Mt. 24). He said there would be mockers in the last time and then he said THESE persons were living in that day.

There is no verse in the Bible that speaks of the last days as somewhere out in our future. It was all in their immediate future. They were at the end of the age, the old covenant age! EVERY SINGLE VERSE THAT REFERS TO THE LAST DAYS, LATTER

DAYS, HAS TO DO WITH THE LAST DAYS OF ISRAEL AS A NATION BEFORE THEY ARE UTTERLY DESTROYED BY THE ROMANS IN 70AD! Read Deut. 32 for a description of their last days in the law covenant.

When you read through Jesus' description of the signs you begin to realize these are the SIGNS of THEIR end times, not ours! This was THEIR FUTURE not ours. He is telling THAT generation what to watch out for so they can be saved from it!

Back to ***Matthew 24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.***

After the death of Christ, false messiahs suddenly sprang up everywhere. "But I saw a video on Facebook or YouTube about a man who thinks he is the Christ and has this huge cult following him!" Maybe so, but Jesus was speaking about THEIR end times. This is in a very specific time period leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Matthew 24:6-7, "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

That seems normal right? But not for them, because they were in the time of the *Pax Romana*, a period of peace over the Roman Empire... but all that changed.

- AD 40, Mesopotamia, 50,000 killed
- AD 49, Jerusalem, 20,000 killed at Passover
- Unknown, Caesarea, 40,000 Jews killed
- Unknown, Alexandria, 50,000 killed
- Unknown, Scythopolis, 13,000 Jews killed
- Unknown, Damascus, 10,000 killed in one hour
- AD 67, Gadara, Vespasian 60,000 slew all the youth
- AD 67, Jotapata, 15,000 killed, 2130 made slaves
- Ad 67, Mt Gerizzim, 11,600 killed
- AD 67, Taricheae, 6500 killed
- AD 67, Gamala, 4000 killed, 5000 mass suicide
- AD 67, Gischala, 6000 women and children killed
- AD 67, Jerusalem, 12,000 siege of Idumeans

Some 1.3 million Jews were killed by the Romans.

Matthew 23:7-8, "...And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows."

Famine:

- Agabus foretold one in Acts 11:28-30 and see also 1 Cor. 16:3
- According to Eusebius and Orosius it was Helena, queen of Adiabena who sent supplies during this famine to Israel.
- Historian Dion Cassius said in the first year of Claudius there was a famine in Rome and other parts of Italy.
- Josephus the Jewish historian records a famine where "an assaron of corn was sold for five drachmae" [about a week's wages].
- During the siege of the city of Jerusalem by Rome the "man of sin" convinced the people to burn all the food and watch how he would miraculously restore it... which didn't happen. It was so severe in the city that some were eating their children. Here are the words of Josephus:

Among the residents of the region beyond Jordan was a woman called Mary, daughter of Eleazar, of the village of Bethhezuba (the name means "House of Hyssop")... Famine gnawed at her vitals, and the fire of rage was ever fiercer than famine. So, driven by fury and want, she committed a crime against nature. Seizing her child, an infant at the breast, she cried, "My poor baby, why should I keep you alive in this world of war and famine? Even if we live till the Romans come, they will make slaves of us; and anyway, hunger will get us before slavery does; and the rebels are crueler than both. Come, be food for me, and an avenging fury to the rebels, and a tale of cold horror to the world to complete the monstrous agony of the Jews." With these words she killed her son, roasted the body, swallowed half of it, and stored the rest in a safe place. But the rebels were on her at once, smelling roasted meat, and threatening to kill her instantly if she did not produce it. She assured them she had saved them a share, and revealed the remains of her child. Seized with horror and stupefaction, they stood paralyzed at the sight. But she said, "This is my own child, and my own handiwork. Eat, for I have eaten already. Do not show yourselves weaker than a woman, or more pitiful than a mother. But if you have pious scruples, and shrink away from human sacrifice, then what I have eaten can count as your share, and I will eat what is left as well." At that they slunk away, trembling, not daring to eat, although they were reluctant to yield even this food to the mother. The whole city

soon rang with the abomination. When people heard of it, they shuddered, as though they had done it themselves. (The Jewish War Book 6. Chapter 3.4)

Pestilences:

- Babylon about AD 40
- Rome in AD 65
- Jerusalem AD 66-70

Earthquakes

- Crete
- Smyrna
- Miletus
- Chios
- Samos
- Laodicea
- Hierapolis
- Colossae
- Campina
- Rome
- Judea
- Pompeii
- Phrygia

Matthew 24:9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.

Persecution against believers broke out when Stephen was martyred and people like Saul of Tarsus were putting Christians in jail and to death. Stephen testified at his stoning that he had a vision of the Lord standing (Acts 7:56). This was to fulfill Isaiah 3:13, “*The Lord will stand to judge his people!*”

15. According to Acts 17:1-5 and 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 who were the ones persecuting Christians? _____

Matthew 24:10-11, “And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”

One eyewitness during this time said these words,

“The Jews went on heeding the insane ravings of false prophets who assured them of deliverance and victory: ‘Thus were the miserable people beguiled by these charlatans and false messengers of God, while they disregarded and

disbelieved the unmistakable portents that foreshadowed the coming desolation; but, as though thunderstruck, blind, senseless, paid no heed to the clear warnings of God.” (Josephus, The Jewish War, vi.v.3.)

Matthew 24:12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

16. What did Jesus say about this generation of unbelieving Jewish people in the following passage of Matthew 12:39-45?

But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”

17. What does Jesus compare the last generation with? (39,45)

That last generation of apostate covenant Jews were the most lawless generation in their history. Notice... he who endures to the end of this end of the old covenant age generation...

Again Josephus says,

“every city was divided into two armies encamped against one another, and the preservation of the one party was in the destruction of the other; so the day-time was spent in the shedding of blood, and the night in fear... It was then common to see cities filled with dead bodies, still lying unburied, and those of old men, mixed with infants, all dead, and scattered about together; women also lay

amongst them, without any covering for their nakedness; you might then see the whole province full of inexpressible calamities, while dread of still more barbarous practices which were threatened, was everywhere greater than what had already been perpetrated.” (Josephus, The Jewish War, ii.xviii.2)

18. So what do you think it means that those who endure to the end will be saved? Saved from what? (Please read Acts 2:40, Matthew 23:35-36)

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Again this is not the end of the world, but the end of the Jewish nation and the Jewish covenant just like the prophets and Jesus foretold. Now some people doubt this because they think the gospel hasn't been preached in all the world yet, but remember, we have to let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Jesus said *go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations*. We can say that discipleship hasn't happened in every nation of the earth. Right? True.

But this passage in Matthew 24:14 is about the good news of the soon coming kingdom.

Notice that Paul said a few years before the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem...

“The hope of the gospel that you have heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I Paul have become a minister. (Col. 1:23)

Paul said it was fulfilled. In his epistle to the Romans, he informs them that *“their faith was spoken of throughout the world”* (Rom. 1:8)

He said in Romans, *“But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for ‘their voice has gone out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world.”* (Rom 10:18)

Remember Luke 2:1, *“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.”* Did that mean Africa or America? No, for them, the world was the known world of the Roman Empire. That means the known world... and ALL THE NATIONS was all the Roman Empire. In fact, within the Roman Empire were all the different nations they had conquered.

So Jesus just gave us an outline of the end time, which was THEIR end times. But now he is about to give us the FINAL SIGN!

Matthew 24:15 “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation, ’spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 “then let those who are in Judea (not the whole world) flee to the mountains. 17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. 18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

When we read Luke’s version of the same story, we find that the abomination of desolation is not simply something happening in the temple. Instead Luke says *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.”* (Luke 21:20)

19. This means the abomination that brings desolation was whom? _____

Did you know that according to church history, this is exactly what happened? At some point in the events leading up the destruction of Jerusalem, all the believers fled, because they recognized these signs. Think of what he was telling them to do. It was counter-intuitive! Most people would run TO the city for refuge, but Jesus told the believers to run FROM the city.

Matthew 24:21-22, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.”

This a VITAL verse if you want to understand the future! Jesus is quoting from Daniel 12:1 in which he tells us there will only be ONE great tribulation-trouble.

20. When were you told that the Great Tribulation would take place?

Yet Jesus says that this event was in the near future, within one generation.

This is another one that sort of trips people up because they will say, *Yes, but what happened to the Jews during the holocaust was way more devastating than this. In this*

destruction of Jerusalem only 1.3 million Jews were killed, whereas in the holocaust they estimate up to 6 million.

Jesus doesn't say that this many people dying will never happen again. This is a covenant vengeance, a covenant divorce (God divorced Israel through scattering them by the Assyrians, but God had not divorced Judah until now). Never again will God operate like this toward any people because he is establishing a covenant of everlasting righteousness. Never again will he bring one nation against another. Never again will the convergence of earthquakes, pestilence, false messiahs be signs of an impending time of judgment from God. Never again will there be a covenant judgment against the city of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 53 is about Jesus' death, and burial and Isaiah 54 is about what happens after he is raised... they will stretch out their tent cords to include Gentiles (which took place in Paul's day) but then he says,

"7 For a mere moment I have forsaken you, But with great mercies I will gather you. 8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," Says the Lord, your Redeemer. 9 "For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, So have I sworn That I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. 10 For the mountains shall depart And the hills be removed, But My kindness shall not depart from you, Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," Says the Lord, who has mercy on you.

21. What is the oath that God swears? _____

22. Who did he hide his face from? America? _____

Those Jews who believed the gospel of the resurrected Christ were alive during the time of great tribulation and fled the city when they saw the Roman armies approaching. They were saved from the "coming" wrath by trusting the prophetic word of John the Baptist and Jesus. Never again will this covenant tribulation happen in the history of the world, because the New Covenant is a covenant of peace and mercy! THIS IS THE OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK OF JESUS AND THE KINGDOM.

Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation 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 the heavens will be shaken.

AFTER or AS A RESULT OF THE TRIBULATION OF THOSE DAYS... *The sun darkened, moon, stars and powers of heaven.* I love this verse because once you understand it, it makes so much sense. There certainly were many signs in the heavens, but this language that he is using here is the apocalyptic language of metaphor. ALL THROUGHOUT the Bible, those words were used to describe a time when nations, leaders, and governments fall. Do you remember in Genesis 37 that Joseph had a dream about his family, the beginnings of the nation of Israel? He saw them like the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him?

In Genesis, we see the first use of the words literally and figuratively. In Deuteronomy 1:10 he calls the people "stars". Let's see how it continues through the Bible.

The words of Jesus about the sun, moon and stars must be taken in light of the entire Bible's common prophetic language of the destruction of a city or nation such as Isaiah's prophetic words to Babylon *"For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine."* (Is 13:10). Babylon was destroyed just as the prophet said, but the apocalyptic language is meant to convey the idea in our idiom saying, "your world is about to fall apart." The rulers and governing powers are about to be put out of place.

When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD (Ezekiel 32:7-8). (Speaks of Egypt and was fulfilled in history but not by a literal ceasing of the moons light)

All the stars in the sky will be dissolved and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed (Isaiah 34:4-5).

Jesus did not make any indication that he was changing the prophetic language of the entire Bible suddenly. Regarding something this important one would think that he would provide a clear explanation of this dramatic change of language. But, consistent with the prophets, he was speaking in Old Testament pictorial, metaphoric language that interpreters call de-creation language about the destruction of Jerusalem, not the end of the world.

In fact in the book of Revelation 6:12-14, *"And I looked and He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair,*

and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the heaven vanished like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of the places...

Now if we were to take that literally, then

There wouldn't be any mountains for the people to hide in and...

-the book of Revelation would have ended right there and there couldn't be a 7th seal of the grass being scorched.

Matthew 24:30-31, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

It reads better in Young's Literal Translation: "*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven*". This is "The sign of the Son of Man in heaven", not a sign in heaven of the Son of man. The Son of Man is in the heavenly realm not the sign. A sign was not going to appear in the heaven's themselves, in this instance, but the destruction of Jerusalem WOULD be the SIGN that the SON OF MAN IS REIGNING in heaven. The Sign is that his words came to pass, that Rome came in destruction, just as he said.

The Son of Man coming on the clouds, the figure of speech only used in the Bible to describe judgment and deliverance has gathered the Gentiles and the Jews together into ONE covenant people. That is why it says this in John 11:51-52, "*He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to (gather) bring them together and make them one.*"

At the destruction of the temple and everything surrounding it, there is not a covenant of Law with Israel, simultaneously with a covenant of grace from Christ. Now there is not a kingdom from a nation on the earth called Judah. The scepter has been given fully to Christ. Now there is a declaration that there is only ONE people of God... those who have received Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free.

The word *angels* simply means *messengers*. There is also a strong possibility that he is speaking of not heavenly angels but how the gospel is going out after the destruction of Jerusalem, into the whole earth.

Matthew 24:32-35 “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”

23. What would have to take place in that single generation? (34) _____

24. Who is the “you” that Jesus addressing? Us or that generation? _____
(The word “this” generation is called a “near demonstrative” in grammar, ie, THAT generation that was near, not one far away.)

25. What would have to pass away when this happened? _____

26. What does the fig tree image teach us? _____

Dispensationalists teach that the parable of the fig tree is about Israel and the restoration of Israel in OUR days, but that is absolutely not what this is about. Israel is sometimes connected to the fig tree, and the fig tree was a symbol of the prosperity of the nation. So *they* teach that when Jewish people returned to the land and reestablished the nation of Israel in 1948, that this was THE fulfillment. Since Jesus says that the end would be within one generation (of this supposed 1948 date), that is why there has been such end time tribulation fervor in our lifetime.

The PROBLEM is that

1- A generation is 40 years and places the tribulation in 1988. This is why the book 88 Reasons Why Jesus is Coming Back in 1988 has come and gone. It has been 66 years since then!

2. But THEN there is a second problem: Luke 21:28-31 says, *“But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Then He told them a parable: “Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. “So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.*

And *ALL THE TREES*... the point is not that the fig trees represent Israel, he is saying when you see the fig trees and all the trees blooming, you know that summer is near. In the same way when you see all those signs he just referred to, know that the judgment on Jerusalem and the kingdom being consolidated in only one kingdom instead of two, is very near! All these things must happen, according to Jesus in THAT generation which lived in Jesus' time!

This is the same language that he started all this with in chapter 23, that all this will happen to THAT particular generation of Jews. It is the generation that was spoken of in Genesis, their last days as a covenant people.

Maybe you heard some say that this word means "race of Jews" and means that the Jewish race will continue until the end of the world. That meaning is never once used anywhere, in any context in the Bible. Notice he said, "I SAY TO YOU!"

How long is a generation? Biblically a generation is 40 years (Num. 32:13). Do you remember how long the transition time was from the crucifixion to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD? Exactly 40 years. Every single thing Jesus just prophesied was to happen within THEIR generation. ALL THESE THINGS. Matthew 24:34, "*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*"

MEDITATION:

Quiet your heart as you become aware of his abiding presence. Imagine in as vivid detail as possible that Jesus is taking you by the hand and leads you into his secret place. Then he opens a scroll. In it is the good future that he has in store for nations, for cities, for people, and for you. Would you want to see it? Would you be willing to believe that he has plans to prosper us and to give us a future filled with hope? Look in the scroll and imagine reading the good things he has planned for your city. Are you willing to surrender to and cooperate by expecting his best and following his leadership for your city?

The New Heavens and the New Earth

According to Jesus heaven and earth would pass away when all those things were fulfilled which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem. (In the context of Jerusalem's destruction -Matthew 24:35, "**Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.**")

Again in Luke notice the context: **21:20-22, 31-33, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; for these are days of vengeance, TO FULFILL ALL THAT IS WRITTEN... So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."**

1. Jesus indicates that there are some things left to be fulfilled after the cross. T/F
2. Did Jesus say heaven and earth *might* pass away or *will* pass away at this time?

Deuteronomy 32:35-36, is a prophetic promise of Israel's "last days": "*Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.*" "For the Lord will judge His people..."

Those verses are applied here after the cross and before AD 70: Hebrews 10:30, "*For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people."*

3. If there are unfulfilled parts of the Law still being fulfilled after the cross and the author of Hebrews is applying the Law to that generation, this means what? Also, was the cross the fulfillment of the Law?

Jesus said in Matthew 5:17,18, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.*" (NRS)

4. Heaven and earth would pass away when? _____

All of the Law's threats and promises had to be fulfilled to the Jews before the Law could cease. So either the Law is still in operation today or everything in it has been fulfilled. It is a whole, so if it is still in effect today, then we must continue with every sacrifice, every offering, every feast day as well as forbidding work on the Sabbath.

"Heaven and earth" refers first to the natural created order right? But heaven and earth also refers to the place in which heaven and earth meet in covenant. For Israel, "heaven and earth" was the covenant built around the tabernacle/temple system of the Law.

Isaiah 51:15-16, *"But I am the Lord your God, Who divided the sea whose waves roared— The Lord of hosts is His name. And I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, That I may plant the heavens, Lay the foundations of the earth, And say to Zion, 'You are My people.'"*

5. When did the Lord split the sea? _____

6. Who said that he could not speak well but God promised to give him the words to speak? When did God cover someone with the shadow of his hand? (Ex. 6:30; 33:22)

7. When did God say, "You are My people?" (Ex. 7:7) _____

Therefore the giving of the covenant of Law was also called planting the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth.

Josephus understood heaven and earth in this terminology too.

...for if any one do but consider the fabric of the tabernacle, and take a view of the garments of the high priest, and of those vessels which we make use of in our sacred ministration...he will find they were everyone made in way of imitation and representation of the universe. When Moses distinguished the tabernacle into three parts, and allowed two of them to the priests, as a place accessible and common, he denoted the land and the seas, these being of general access to all; but he set apart the third division for God, because heaven is inaccessible to men...Now the vestment of the high priest being made of linen, signified the earth; the blue denoted the sky, being like lightning in its pomegranates, and in the noise of the bells resembling thunder. And for the ephod, it showed that God had made the universe of four elements... – Josephus, Antiquities Book III, 6:4;7:7

Or we can see in Jeremiah 4:23-31 that he is speaking of the soon destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587BC. The prophet describes it as a destruction of heaven and earth... *“I looked on the earth, and behold, it was formless and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light...for thus says the Lord, the whole land shall be a desolation, yet I will not execute a complete destruction. For this the earth shall mourn and the heavens above be dark...”*

8. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 587BC, did the entire planet become formless and void and the heavens cease to have stars literally? _____

Now notice what he says in Isaiah 66:12, 17-19

*Therefore I will number you for the sword, And you shall all bow down to the slaughter; Because, when I called, you did not answer; When I spoke, you did not hear, But did evil before My eyes, And chose that in which I do not delight.”...
“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, (a new spiritual Jerusalem) And her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, And joy in My people; The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, Nor the voice of crying.*

9. What slaughter and to whom would this happen before the new heavens and earth (12) (who is the audience) _____

The New Heavens and New Earth are COVENANT WORLDS not PHYSICAL WORLDS.

Charles Spurgeon’s words:

“Did you ever regret the absence of the burnt-offering, or the red heifer, or any one of the sacrifices and rites of the Jews? Did you ever pine for the feast of tabernacles, or the dedication? No, because, though these were like the old heavens and earth to the Jewish believers, they have passed away, and we now live under new heavens and a new earth, so far as the dispensation of the divine teaching is concerned. The substance is come, and the shadow has gone: and we do not remember it.”

In other words, the world as they knew it, organized around the Jewish faith, was going to collapse and be destroyed. Jerusalem wasn’t simply the capital of Israel, but it was the center city from which all the world was to be impacted.

2 Peter 3:3 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, 3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." 5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, 6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. 7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Was the entire planet destroyed by the flood? No. It is still here. Their "world" of organized culture was destroyed. Here is God's response to the flood:

Genesis 8:21, "... Then the Lord said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.'"

10. Wouldn't destroying the entire earth by fire be cursing the ground because of sin?

11. Wouldn't a worldwide fire destroy every living thing? _____

12. Then will the earth be destroyed by fire? _____

Peter is speaking of the last days that HE is living in. He refers to Jesus having spoken promises about these last days, (Mathew 23-24).

Secondly, the word “earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” is not the word KOSMOS meaning the entire world, but GE meaning LAND.

When Peter uses the word the “elements will melt with fervent heat”, the Greek word Peter used for “elements” is *stoicheion*. Every time this word is used in the NT it doesn’t mean elements like helium, oxygen, or iron. The other times this word is used, it is always a reference to the Mosaic Law or human philosophical teachings. This word appears only five other times in the New Testament (see Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20; Heb. 5:12). It always refers to the weak and beggarly elements of the Law that they were tempted to return to.

As we saw earlier in this study, Jerusalem was literally burned with fire. The priesthood, the temple, the altar, the rituals, the sacrifices were all literally destroyed by fire. Even the bodies of the people were thrown into the valley of Hinnom and burned.

The whole concept of the new heavens and the new earth was centered around a covenant concept where Peter describes what this new covenant would look like: It is the new heavens and new earth, where RIGHTEOUSNESS dwells. It is the establishment of the New Covenant. It is a covenant of God relating to humanity through the righteousness of Christ.

13. Where is it that God and humanity met together in the Old Covenant? In whom does God dwell in the New Covenant? Where is the New Covenant temple?

For, behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (Isaiah 65:17 NASB).

“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD... (Isaiah 66:22).

14. What do you think it means that the new heavens will “remain before” Him since this speaks of the new covenant? (65:17) _____

15. How long does it appear that the new heavens and earth will be the covenant before the Lord? (66:22) _____

16. In order for this covenant to be destroyed what would have to happen in your opinion? _____

This is an eternal covenant not with a Jewish nation, but with the whole of humanity. It is based on righteousness and God will not remember or bring to mind the old covenant ever again. The Law is dead and gone and should barely ever even be in our vocabulary. God will cause this new covenant, new creation based on righteousness to remain before him forever!

This explains also what Paul meant when he had a visionary third heaven experience. The first heavens and earth are the canopy given to us by creation, the ENVIRONMENT that we live in physically. The second heavens and earth, according to everything we have seen, is the system of covenant around which the Law is given. The third heaven and earth... the new heavens and new earth, is the new covenant, which for the first time, Paul was able to see because of Christ.

Summary

1. Draw together all the concepts you learned from this study and summarize:

2. Define the Kingdom of God in your own words

3. Since there is no future tribulation from God, how does that affect the way you will live? _____

4. In what ways do you see the Church being held back by a wrong focus?

5. What will you do with what you have learned? _____

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