

When All Things Become New



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Thess. 4:16–18, Revelation 20, 1 Cor. 4:5, Rom. 8:20–22, Rev. 21:11–22:5, Rev. 21:3.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’ ” (*Revelation 21:4, NKJV*).

Key Thought: What is the millennium, when does it happen, and to what does it lead?

Sir Thomas More (1478–1535) was an English author who coined the word *utopia* in order to depict an imaginary island with a seemingly perfect social and legal system. Since then the word has been often used pejoratively to denote the impossibility of the idea of a perfect society. After all, look at how many times that humans have tried to create “utopias.” They have always failed, and miserably too.

The Bible, however, teaches about the true utopia. In a sense it has been the goal toward which the Godhead has been working ever since the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. God wants to bring humanity back to the utopia He originally created for us.

In the heavenly sanctuary, Christ will conclude His work for the salvation of humanity. After that, He will come to earth a second time, but with a glory never before seen. He will resurrect the dead saints and translate those who are living; and all of them will reign with the Lord Jesus in heaven for 1,000 years.

This is the time that we call the “millennium” (for the word *thousand*). The beginning of the millennium marks the onset of the only utopia humans will have known since Eden before the Fall.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.*

Events Inaugurating the Millennium

If the millennium marks the beginning of God's "utopia" for His people, it is only natural for us to try to know when the millennium will begin and what it will be like. The millennium, as a concept, appears in Revelation 20, where it is mentioned six times between verses 2–7. In order to know the time of the millennium, the place of Revelation 20 in the overall flow of the book of Revelation needs to be determined. Although the book does not follow a straight time line, in this case it is not too difficult to determine when the millennium begins.

Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and Revelation 20. How does the nature of the resurrection as mentioned in these two passages help to determine when the millennium begins? What connected events can you find in these passages?

Sometime before Jesus' second advent, Revelation predicts that three powers (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet) will gather the nations to oppose the work of Christ and His people (*Rev. 16:13*). At the time of Christ's coming (*Rev. 19:11*), the nations will gather to make war against Christ, but in the process the beast and the false prophet will be destroyed (*Rev. 19:19, 20*). Revelation 20, then, takes up the fate of the third power, the dragon. While the dead in Christ are being resurrected, during what is here called the first resurrection (*vs. 5*), the dragon (Satan) will be captured and cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (*vs. 1–3*).

Some of these amazing events are depicted also in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9. These passages together help to explain what happens before the millennium begins.

That beginning, of course, coincides with the second advent of Christ. The dead in Christ will be resurrected to join the faithful living, and both groups will be taken to heaven. The wicked living at the time of Christ's advent will be slain by His "brightness" (*2 Thess. 2:8*). And the desolated earth will become the prison house of Satan, who will be "bound" for 1,000 years by, as it were, a chain of circumstances. The reason given for Satan's imprisonment is "so he might not deceive the nations any longer" (*Rev. 20:3*). Many see a symbolic link between the "banishment" of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 16:22*) and the circumstances of Satan during the millennium.

Go back over the events revealed in these verses. They talk about supernatural happenings that reveal the greatness and power of God in contrast to the weakness and impotence of humankind. How can we always keep this important contrast before us? Why would that be a good remedy for pride and self-sufficiency?

In the Midst of the Millennium

Read Revelation 20:4–6 again. What evidence there shows us that the millennium unfolds in heaven (at least for the saved)?

A specific segment of the group who will participate in the millennium are described as “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands” (*NKJV*). As Seventh-day Adventists, we understand that the Bible doesn’t teach the existence of separate, immortal, conscious souls. This text, instead, is portraying those who went through the experience of persecution as portrayed in Revelation 12:17–13:18. At the Second Advent (at which time occurs the first resurrection), these persecuted souls come back to life and, after the resurrection, reign in heaven with Christ (*compare with 1 Thess. 4:15–17*).

Revelation 20:4 draws our attention to another event during the millennium, when it says that judgment will be given specifically to the redeemed. Knowing that the faithful are reigning with their Lord and that the wicked were slain by the brightness of Christ’s coming, what is the nature and purpose of this judgment?

One of the three things that we focused on last week (Monday) was the judgment connected with Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary before the Second Advent. That judgment is different from the judgment in Revelation 20:4, which is really a fulfillment of Christ’s promise in Matthew 19:28, and which corresponds to Paul’s statement that the saints will judge the world (*1 Cor. 6:2, 3*).

The concept of judgment in the Bible is rich and multifaceted. The final judgment has three phases, the first of which is the one associated with Christ’s priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Seventh-day Adventists call this the investigative phase of the final judgment. Next, there is the millennial review phase of the judgment, which is referred to in Revelation 20:4 and 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3. In this phase, the redeemed will have an opportunity to examine God’s ways and judgment with regard to the agents of rebellion. The third phase of the final judgment is the executive phase, which is part of the events that will occur at the end of the millennium.

Keeping what you’ve read today in mind, read 1 Corinthians 4:5. What important hope is found here in view of the fact that we have so many unanswered questions?

Events at the End of the Millennium

Read Revelation 20:7–9. What event marks the close of the millennium, and what opportunity does it provide Satan?

Reversal of the circumstances of Satan marks his being "released." This event is linked with the resurrection of the rest of the dead who "did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (vs. 5, *NKJV*). The phrase "Gog and Magog" is used figuratively, as in Ezekiel 38:2, to describe those whom Satan will succeed in deceiving—the wicked from all ages. It is this universal multitude that Satan will inspire to try to overthrow the city of God. Revelation 20:9 suggests that the city, the New Jerusalem, at this time will already have descended from heaven to earth (presumably with Christ), and Satan and his hosts will march against it. A detailed description of the city is given in Revelation 21.

As said earlier, Revelation does not move in a distinctly chronological order. Look at Revelation 20:11–15. How is the idea of judgment expressed here? What is the significance of the fact that final punishment occurs after the saints are involved in judgment? *Rev. 20:4.*

"During the millennium the saints participate in a deliberative judgment that reviews the cases of the lost of this earth and the fallen angels. This judgment is evidently necessary in view of the cosmic nature of the sin problem. The course of the rebellion of sin has been the object of concern and interest on the part of other worlds (Job 1; 2; Eph. 3:10). The whole interlude of sin must be handled in such a way that hearts and minds throughout God's universe are satisfied with its treatment and conclusion, with particular reference to God's character. It is especially important for the redeemed from earth to understand God's dealings with those who called for the rocks to fall on them and deliver them from the 'face of him who is seated on the throne' (Rev. 6:16). They must be totally satisfied that God was just in His decision regarding the lost."—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 2000), p. 932.

What does it say about the character of God that we, ourselves, can be involved in the judgment of the lost? How does this concept fit in with the whole idea of the great controversy?

The New Earth

Revelation 20 ends with the elimination of Satan and his hosts. Revelation 21 opens with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

Revelation 21:1–5 carries the promise that God is making all things new. In what ways does this reflect the Genesis creation account? (*Genesis 1–2*). What are the differences?

The word translated as “new” in Revelation 21:1 emphasizes something that is new in form or quality rather than a “new” event in time. God’s purpose in the Genesis Creation remains unrealized until the promise to make all things new is fulfilled on the new earth. Hence the whole creation groans and longs for liberation (*Rom. 8:20–22*). God’s new creation, then, will consist of the liberation of the cosmos and the earth from their present states of incompleteness, and the bringing of them into conformity with His design. Consequently, while the new creation will definitely be different from the old, there will be some continuity between the two. Like the old, the new earth will be a real, tangible place inhabited with real, physical beings. The new earth will be a renewed earth, purified as it were, by fire (*2 Pet. 3:10–13*).

Read Revelation 21:11–22:5 in order to capture the physical aspects of the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the new earth. In what way does John’s description portray the reality of the city?

One thing is clear: we are talking about a literal, physical place. The pagan heresy of the physical being bad and the spiritual being good is, again, debunked by Scripture. Although words are limited in what they can convey, even inspired words, they can teach us to know that a real inheritance awaits us. How important it is to remember that this world, with all its imperfections, is not the way it was supposed to be; it is an aberration, one that Christ came to fix. In contrast, the depiction that we see in Revelation, no matter how hard it is for us to grasp (knowing only a fallen world), is the eternal reality that awaits us. What a hope we have, especially compared to those who believe that death is the end of everything.

Life in the New Earth

Read Revelation 21:3. In what way will this stupendous fact alter the life experiences of the inhabitants of the new earth?

Perhaps there isn't another awe-inspiring vision throughout the Bible comparable to the one that John the Revelator describes here; the new earth will not only be home to human creatures but also to God. The holy, transcendent Creator of the universe will grace the community of the redeemed with His presence. Of course, God will forever remain distinct from His creatures, but in the new earth, the separation between God and humanity that was brought about by sin will be removed.

Also, true fellowship will be restored—not only between God and humans but between humans and nature and within nature itself. John describes there being no more curse (*Rev. 22:3*), and the prophetic anticipation of the cessation of animosity within the animal world is also described as coming to pass (*Isa. 65:25*).

Beyond the restoration of complete fellowship, the elimination of the “groaning of the creation” will mean that all that is harmful—decay, disease, death, and suffering—will be things of the past (*Rom. 8:21, Rev. 21:4*).

Read Psalm 8. What is the message for us here, especially in light of what we have studied this quarter?

The implications of God's presence on the new earth, and the implications for life there, are immense—especially as science has revealed to us, as never before, the size and scope of God's creation. The estimated size of the “visible” universe is many billions of light-years wide; however, scientists now speculate that this immense and vast cosmos represents only about 7 percent of what's actually out there!

And to think: the God who created all that not only died for us but will dwell with us for eternity! At some point, because of the limits of our fallen minds, we have to stop trying to think about this rationally and, instead, fall to our knees and worship and praise the One who not only created us but redeemed us and now promises to live with us for all eternity.

Further Study: “In the typical service the high priest, having made the atonement for Israel, came forth and blessed the congregation. So Christ, at the close of His work as mediator, will appear, ‘without sin unto salvation’ (Hebrews 9:28), to bless His waiting people with eternal life. As the priest, in removing the sins from the sanctuary, confessed them upon the head of the scapegoat, so Christ will place all these sins upon Satan, the originator and instigator of sin. The scapegoat, bearing the sins of Israel, was sent away ‘unto a land not inhabited’ (Leviticus 16:22); so Satan, bearing the guilt of all the sins which he has caused God’s people to commit, will be for a thousand years confined to the earth, which will then be desolate, without inhabitant, and he will at last suffer the full penalty of sin in the fires that shall destroy all the wicked.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 485, 486.

“A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. . . . Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.”
—Pages 674, 675.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ There are three basic positions (with some variations) within the Christian church regarding the millennium: (i) that it represents the era between the first and second advents of Christ; (ii) that it is a long period of peace and righteousness on earth before Christ appears, brought about in part because of the preaching of the gospel and social reforms; and (iii) that the millennium, a period of 1,000 years, will take place after Christ’s return and it will happen in heaven. Seventh-day Adventists, as we have seen, take the third position, with the millennium unfolding in heaven, not on earth (as some erroneously believe). What problems do the other options present?
- ❷ Read Revelation 21:27. What do you understand about this exclusion from the New Jerusalem? What other exclusions are there, and why?
- ❸ Dwell on the idea of human attempts to create “utopias.” What examples can you think of? What were the results? Why have they always failed, and why do these failures reveal to us our utter dependency upon God’s supernatural intervention in our world?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 21:4*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the judgment that precedes the millennium, the millennium itself, and those events that culminate in the creation of the new earth.

Feel: Sense the sweeping drama of earth's closing events and God's power that ushers in eternal peace and joy.

Do: Rejoice in the liberation of the cosmos and the promise that God will dwell with His people.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Judgment and Settlement

A What are the three types of judgment that precede the creation of the new earth?

B What will the saints be doing during the millennium? Why is this activity an important part of the closing events of the great controversy?

II. Feel: Shock and Awe

A How do the dramatic scenes of the closing of earth's history affect the wicked?

B How are the righteous affected by the display of God's power that reveals His holiness to the nations and saves them?

III. Do: Every Knee Shall Bow

A How does God cause every knee to bow in the final scenes of earth's judgment? Why is this event significant?

B What comfort and joy can Christ's followers take in the promises of the new earth?

► **Summary:** In the end, God will save the righteous, allow the saints to review His judgments, and execute the final sentence on all evil. Then He will bring about a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people in peace and joy forever.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Through the hope presented by the biblical teaching of the millennium and new world, we gain fresh insight into God's commitment to remove sin, vindicate His name, and make all things new in our individual lives.

Just for Teachers: Spark discussion about the millennium by asking class members the following questions. But first, as a prelude to discussion, remind class members that if God can change an entire world of decay and sin into a beautiful paradise, then surely He can do the same in our individual lives.

Opening Questions for Discussion: What kind of discussions would most likely take place during the millennium in regard to the tragedies that have darkened human history?

1. In what sense do these tragedies encourage us to hope beyond this world?

2. What kind of surprises do you think will take place during the millennium?

3. If God can change this world with all of its history of evil, in what further ways can He change our lives, the products of shameful history and evil?

► STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: This section provides opportunities to explore examples of the connection between the condition of the earth and the condition of humankind. Thus, establishing the encouraging truth of God’s ability to change and renew an entire world will serve as an illustration of His regenerative power and desire to change and renew our own hearts.

I. Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust *(Review Genesis 2:7, 3:19, and Ecclesiastes 3:18–20, 12:7 with your class.)*

The connection between humanity and the earth begins with creation itself. The Bible tells us that God *formed* man from the dust of the ground. Humanity is dust or earth, plus breath or life from God. In fact, the very name Adam carries the idea of red or ruddiness in reference to clay. While the English in Genesis 2:18 and 19 transitions from the words “the man” to “Adam,” the Hebrew words remain the same. It is after the animals are referenced as being formed from the dust that the word *Adam* becomes not just a description of the origin of humanity but also the proper name of the father of our race. We see that after the fall of man, God declares that Adam will return to the ground, or *adamah* in Hebrew, for out of it he was taken.

II. Disobedience’s Effect Upon Dominion *(Review Genesis 1:26–28 and 3:17, 18 with your class.)*

The Bible tells us that when God created humankind in His image, it was His intention to allow man to have dominion over everything that God had created in the previous six days. This intention is clear from the topographical references used in Genesis 1:26–28, “of the sea,” “of the air,” and “over all the earth.” When man is overcome by temptation in the Garden of Eden and God describes sin’s consequences, He states to man that “cursed is the ground *for your sake*” (3:17, NKJV; *emphasis added*). The ground, referring to the earth, was under Adam’s dominion and, in fact, was not cursed because of itself but because of the disobedience of its lord, Adam. Adam’s choice did not simply affect his relationship with God but with the earth as well.

Consider This: Why did God curse the earth as a consequence of sin? The phrase “for your sake” implies something done *for* someone as opposed to *against* them; this suggests that even as the earth was cursed, God designed a blessing to come forth from it. What was the nature of the curse, as a consequence of sin, and how was that curse ultimately meant to lead to a blessing for the fallen race?

III. The Whole Creation Groans *(Review Romans 8:18–23 with your class.)*

The apostle Paul composes some of the clearest and most compelling statements regarding the connection between the condition of humankind and Creation. By reminding us of the incomparable glory that shall be revealed in us, Paul poetically suggests that the Creation groans for deliverance.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The Bible’s clear teaching on the connection between Creation and humanity encourages us to look upon God’s interaction with nature as an illustration of what He is able and willing to do in our individual lives. Use the following questions to help the class learn in practical terms to let God make all things new in their individual lives.

Application Questions:

- 1 How can we become better acquainted with the things that need to become new in our lives?

2 What lessons can we learn from Jesus' references to nature in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5–7*) that will help us to cooperate with God as He seeks to make things new in our lives?

3 Just as Solomon was, surely many of us are puzzled about many things in the world. How can we practically live meaningful lives even as these questions go yet unanswered?

4 What promises in Scripture can we memorize and rest upon in prayer so as to aid us in our journey to “all things new”? How can parents, Sabbath School teachers, and pastors make this hope more central to their teachings?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: These activities are intended to help class members to accept the millennium and heaven as realities and to speak of them as such.

Group or team activities: Encourage the class members to imagine and discuss what their first seven days might be like in heaven. Have them speak of the first Sabbath worship service, what it will be like to speak with their guardian angel, whom they will want to meet from the Bible and why, and the experience of sitting on a throne and judging with Jesus, et cetera.