

When All Things Become New



SABBATH—DECEMBER 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18; Revelation 20; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Romans 8:20–22; Revelation 21:11–22:5; Revelation 21:3.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be’ ” (Revelation 21:4, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: What is the millennium?¹ When does it happen, and to what does it lead?

SIR THOMAS MORE (1478–1535) WAS AN ENGLISH AUTHOR who coined the word *utopia*. The word first meant an imaginary island with a perfect social and legal system. Since then the word is often used to suggest that such an idea of a perfect society is not possible. Look at how many times humans have tried to create “utopias.” Their creations have always become terrible failures.

But the Bible teaches about the true utopia. In a way, a true utopia has been the goal of the Godhead (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) since the fall of humans in the Garden of Eden. God wants to bring humans back to the utopia He had originally created for us.

In the heavenly sanctuary (where Jesus is in heaven), Christ will close His work for the salvation of humanity. After that, He will come to earth a second time with a glory (power and authority) never before seen. And He will raise the dead saints back to life and take them with the living, up to heaven. Then all of them will rule with the Lord Jesus in heaven for 1,000 years.

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

1. millenium—a thousand years; one thousand years will pass between the Second Coming and the final return of Jesus and His saints to the earth. The saints will spend this one thousand years in heaven with Jesus, judging the dead who did not accept salvation.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 23

**EVENTS STARTING THE
MILLENNIUM
(1 Thessalonians 4:16–18)**

The millennium marks the beginning of God’s “utopia” for His people. So, it is only natural for us to try to know when it will begin and what it will be like. The idea of the millennium appears in Revelation 20. It is mentioned six times between verses 2–7. If we are to know the time of the millennium, the place of Revelation 20 in the flow of the book of Revelation needs to be known too. The book of Revelation does not follow a straight timeline. But it is not too difficult to decide when the millennium begins.

Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and Revelation 20. How does the raising of the saints back to life in these two groups of verses help us to figure out when the millennium begins? What connected events can you find in these verses?

Sometime before Jesus’ second coming, Revelation foresees that three powers (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet [messenger]) will gather the nations to attack the work of Christ and His people (Revelation 16:13). At the time of Christ’s coming (Revelation 19:11), the nations will gather to make war against Christ. But in the war, the beast and the false prophet will be destroyed (Revelation 19:19, 20). Then Revelation 20 describes

the future end of the third power, the dragon. The dead in Christ will be brought to life. This is called the first resurrection (return to life) (verse 5). During this time, the dragon (Satan) will be captured and thrown into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (verses 1–3). The bottomless pit is a symbol (word-picture) that means Satan will not be allowed to leave this earth for that entire time.

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

This beginning takes place with the second coming of Christ. The dead in Christ will be raised to life to join the faithful living. Then both groups will be taken to heaven. The wicked living at the time of Christ’s coming will be struck dead by His “brightness” (2 Thessalonians 2:8). And the barren (without crops or life) earth will become the prison house of Satan, who will be in chains for 1,000 years. The reason for Satan’s imprisonment is “to keep Satan from fooling the nations [people and beings in other parts of the universe]” (Revelation 20:3, NIV). Many see a connection between the “putting away” of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:22) and the imprisonment of Satan during the millennium.

Go back over the events shown in these verses. They talk about the greatness and power of God as opposed to the weakness and

helplessness of humans. How can we always remember this important difference? Why would that be a good cure for pride?



At the Second Coming, the dragon (Satan) is thrown into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 24

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MILLENNIUM (Revelation 20:4–6)

Read Revelation 20:4–6 again. What proof can be found in those verses that shows us that the millennium happens in heaven (at least for the saved)?

A special part of the group who will take part in the millennium is described as “the souls of those whose heads had been cut off because they had given witness for Jesus and because of God’s Word. They had not worshiped the beast or his statue. They had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or hands” (Revelation 20:4, NIV; empha-

sis added). As Seventh-day Adventists, we understand that the Bible does not teach that a soul can be separated from the body at death and still go on living. Instead, this verse is showing those who went through the experience of great suffering as described in Revelation 12:17–13:18. At the Second Coming (the first resurrection or return to life) these souls who were killed for their faith will come back to life and rule in heaven with Christ (compare with 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17).

Revelation 20:4 directs our attention to another event during the millennium. It says that judgment will be given to the saved. We know that the faithful will be ruling with their Lord and that the wicked will be killed by the brightness of Christ’s coming. So, what is the nature and purpose of this judgment?

One of the three things that we focused on (put our attention to) last week (Monday) was the judgment connected with Christ’s ministry (work) in the heavenly sanctuary before the Second Coming. That judgment is different from the judgment in Revelation 20:4. This judgment is really a fulfillment of Christ’s promise in Matthew 19:28. It agrees with Paul’s saying that the saints will judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

The understanding of judgment in the Bible is that it is rich and has several sides. First, the final judgment has three parts. The first judgment is the one connected with Christ’s priestly ministry (work) in the heavenly

sanctuary. Seventh-day Adventists call this the investigative judgment.² Next, there is the millennial judgment,³ the part of the judgment described in Revelation 20:4 and 1 Corinthians 6: 2, 3. In this part, the saved will have an opportunity to examine God's ways and judgment about the people who rebelled (turned; fought) against God. The third part of the final judgment is the executive judgment.⁴ This part of the events will happen at the end of the millennium (1,000 years).

With what you have read today read 1 Corinthians 4:5. What important hope is found here among so many unanswered questions that we have?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 25

EVENTS AT THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM (Revelation 20:7–9)

Read Revelation 20:7–9. What event shows the close of the millennium? And what opportunity does it give Satan?

Satan's freedom from his "prison" shows the end of the millennium. This event is joined with the return to life of the rest of the dead who "did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (verse 5, NKJV). The wording "Gog and Magog" is used as a symbol, as in Ezekiel 38:2, to describe those

whom Satan tricks into joining his army against God's people. They are the wicked from all ages. It is this crowd of people that Satan will inspire (lead) to try to overthrow the city of God. Revelation 20:9 suggests that the city, the New Jerusalem, at this time will already have come down from heaven to earth with Christ. Satan and his groups of evil angels and people will march against it. A detailed description of the city is given in Revelation 21.

As said earlier, Revelation does not move in the order of the normal passage of time. Look at Revelation 20:11–15. How is the idea of judgment described here? What is the importance of the fact that final punishment happens after the thousand years in heaven? What is the importance of the judgment that takes place there? Read Revelation 20:4.

"During the millennium the saints take part in a judgment that reviews the cases of the lost of this earth and of the fallen [sinful] angels. This judgment is clearly necessary for the whole universe because of the sin problem. Also, the other worlds have been interested in the history of the rebellion [war] against God (Job 1; [Job] 2; Ephesians 3:10). So, the whole history of sin must be handled in such a way that beings all over God's universe are satisfied with its fair punishment. And they need to be satisfied that God's character [who

2. investigative judgment—the first part of judgment that takes place between 1844 and the Second Coming.

3. millennial judgment—the middle, and second, part of judgment that begins after the Second Coming and continues for 1,000 years in heaven.

4. executive judgment—the final part of the judgment, in which all the wicked will be destroyed in a lake of fire after the 1,000 years is finished.

God is] is cleared too. It is very important for the saved from earth to understand God's dealings with the wicked who called for the rocks to fall on them and save them from the 'face of the One who sits on the throne' (Revelation 6:16, NIRV). They must be satisfied that God was fair in His decision about the lost."—Adapted from *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology [Study of God]* (Maryland: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), page 932.

What does it say about the character (who God is) of God that we, ourselves, can take part in the judgment of the lost? How does this idea fit in with the whole picture of the great controversy?



During the 1,000 years the saints take part in a judgment that reviews the cases of the lost of this earth and the fallen angels.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 26

THE NEW EARTH (Revelation 21:1–5)

Revelation 20 ends with the removal

of Satan and his evil army. 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 show the Genesis Creation story? (Genesis 1–2). What are the differences?

The word translated as “new” in Revelation 21:1 shows a “new” of a different kind. It is not a “new” event in time. Instead, it has to do with God’s original (first) plan in creation—to make all things new. God’s purpose in the Genesis Creation will remain unfulfilled until the promise to make all things new is fulfilled on the new earth. So the “whole creation groans” and desires freedom from the old (Romans 8:20–22). In other words, the new creation will be different from the old. But there will be some likeness between the two. Like the old, the new earth will be a real place with real people. The new earth will be a renewed earth, made pure by fire (2 Peter 3:10–13).

Read Revelation 21:11–22:5 in order to have a picture of the physical parts of the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the new earth. In what way does John’s description picture the city as real?

One thing is clear: we are talking about a real, physical place. The pagan (false) idea that what is real is bad and only the spiritual is good is not taught by the Bible. Words are

limited in what they can explain. But even inspired words can help us to know that a perfect future awaits us. How important it is to remember that this imperfect world is not the way it was supposed to be. It is just temporary. But the picture that we see in Revelation shows a real, eternal world waiting for us. What hope we have in comparison with those who believe that death is the end of everything!



The new earth will be made pure by fire.

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 27

LIFE ON THE NEW EARTH (Revelation 21:3)

Read Revelation 21:3. In what way will this glorious (beautiful, wonderful) fact change the life experiences of the people of the new earth?

Perhaps there is no vision that is more wonderful in the whole Bible than the one that John the Revelator describes in Revelation 21. The new earth will not only be home to humans

but also to God. The holy Creator of the universe will bless the community of the saved with His presence. Of course, God will forever remain specially different from His people. But on the new earth, the separation between God and humans that was caused by sin will be removed.

Also, true fellowship will be restored (brought back) not only between God and humans but between humans and nature and within nature itself. John describes how there will be no more curse (death, sin, sickness) (Revelation 22:3). And the fear that animals have for humans will be removed (Isaiah 65:25).

Fellowship of humans with God will be restored. Also, the groaning (cry) of the creation will stop. That means all that is harmful (decay, disease, death, and suffering) will no longer bother humans (Romans 8:21; Revelation 21:4).

Read Psalm 8. What is the message for us here from what we have studied this quarter?

The ideas of God's presence on the new earth and of life there are so great that we cannot imagine what they are like. For example, science has shown to us, as never before, the greatness of God's creation. We can "see" only a small part of the universe. But we have understood that it is many billions of light-years wide. However, scientists now guess that this great universe represents (shows) only about 7 percent of what is actually out there!

Stop to think: the God who created the whole universe died for us and will live with us for eternity! At some point we have to stop trying to think about this fact with our fallen (sinful; limited) minds which have limits. Instead, we must fall to our knees to worship and praise the One who created us, saved us, and now promises to live with us for all eternity.



God Himself will live with His people on the earth made new.

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 28

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “In the Old Testament sanctuary service the high priest finished the work of offering sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel. Then he came forth and blessed the group of people. In the same way, Christ, at the close of His work as High Priest, will appear ‘without sin unto salvation’ (Hebrews 9:28) to bless His waiting people with eternal life. In removing the sins from the sanctuary, the priest confessed [placed] them upon the head of the scapegoat. In the same way, Christ

will put all these sins upon Satan, who started sin. The scapegoat, carrying the sins of Israel, was sent away ‘to a place where there are no people’ (Leviticus 16:22, NIV). In the same way, Satan will carry the guilt of all the sins he has caused God’s people to do and be imprisoned on the earth for a thousand years. The earth will then be barren, without people. And Satan will at last suffer the full punishment of sin in the fires that shall destroy all the wicked.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War]*, pages 485, 486.

“A fear that the future home in heaven seems too worldly-like has led many to misunderstand the very truths that lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ promised His disciples that He went to prepare mansions [homes] for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s Word [the Bible] will gain some understanding of the heavenly home. . . . Human language is not enough to describe the reward of the righteous (the saved). It will be known only to those who experience it. No human mind can understand the glory (beauty and protection) of God’s home for us in heaven.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War]*, pages 674, 675.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① There are three basic positions (points of view) about the millennium within the Christian church: (1) It represents the period between the first and second comings of Christ; (2) it is a long period of peace and

righteousness on earth before Christ appears. It is brought about in part because of the preaching of the gospel and social reforms. And (3) the millennium, a period of 1,000 years, will take place after Christ's return and will happen in heaven. Seventh-day Adventists take the third position, with the millennium happening in heaven, not on earth. (Many people mistakenly believe that it will happen on earth.) What problems do the other choices present?

② Read Revelation 21:27. Why do you think that the wicked or unsaved people are not allowed to enter the New Jerusalem? What else is not permitted to enter there? Why?

③ Think about the idea of humans trying to create "utopias." What past examples can you think of? What were the results? Why have they always failed? Why do these failures show us how much we depend on God's actions in our world?