

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 had 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 (*vss. 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 but, 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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 674, 675.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 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?
- 2 Read Revelation 21:27. What do you understand about this exclusion from the New Jerusalem? What other exclusions are there, and why?
- 3 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?

God Prepares a Way

Moïse drove a taxi in Cameroon to earn a living. He was single and lived with his mother. A Seventh-day Adventist friend often talked about the Bible. As Moïse began to understand the importance of the Sabbath, he quit driving his taxi on Saturdays.

Moïse's Aunt Paulette saw Moïse's interest in God and invited him to church and evangelistic meetings, sitting with him to help him to find the Bible texts. Moïse gave his life to Christ.

"Nonsense," Moïse's mother said when she learned her son wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist. But he was determined. When he was baptized, his mother ordered him to leave her house. Moïse moved out, gave up driving a taxi, and became a literature evangelist.

His passion to share God's literature with others was contagious. When his mother saw how God was changing his life, she began attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She has since been baptized.

Moïse was sent to another town to hold evangelistic meetings. There eight people took their stand for Christ. Church members urged him to prepare for the ministry. *What greater joy can there be than to win souls to Christ?* Moïse thought. He prayed about it, and the call grew stronger.

One day Moïse received a text message from Marlyce, a school friend who was facing school exams. As Moïse prayed for her, he felt impressed that one day they would marry. He told the pastor, who urged him to surrender the future to God.

Marlyce lived far away, so the two talked and prayed by telephone. Moïse was concerned that Marlyce might not want to be a pastor's wife. But before he could ask her, Marlyce told him that she felt he should become a pastor. The two knew then that God had brought them together. A few months later they were married.

But other obstacles stood in their path. Marlyce was teaching school five hours from Cosendai Adventist University, where Moïse would study. But God had prepared a place for them. Moïse's in-laws moved to the town near the university. He could live with them while he studied.

During vacations Moïse and Marlyce canvass and give Bible studies together. The money Moïse earns from colporteurship helps to pay his school fees. "I'm convinced that this is God's plan for us," Moïse says. "It won't be easy, but with God all things are possible."

Our mission offerings support evangelism and education in Cameroon and around the world. Recently a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering raised funds to help Cosendai Adventist University to grow so that more young people can prepare for service to God.

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Creation is the foundational truth of Scripture. All other biblical teachings—the Incarnation, the Cross, the Second Coming (and every other one, as well)—are founded upon the truth that our world was created by the Lord. The first quarter lesson study, entitled *Origins*, by James Gibson, delves into the doctrine of creation as depicted in Genesis 1 and 2 and explores its implications for a number of our beliefs—including morality, sin, marriage, stewardship, and more. Although working on the assumption that the story is literal, the quarter will show again and again why it must be taken literally or else many of our most basic teachings would be fatally compromised. In fact, our name Seventh-day Adventist itself bears direct witness to a six-day creation. As this quarter progresses, we'll see even more reasons why a literal six-day creation is essential to all that we believe and why to compromise on Creation is to compromise on all that makes us what we are.

Lesson 1—Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **In the Beginning** (*Genesis 1:1, Hebrews 11:3*)

MONDAY: **The Heavens Declare** (*Psalms 19:1–3*)

TUESDAY: **The Power of His Word** (*Jeremiah 51:15, 16; Psalm 33:6, 9*)

WEDNESDAY: **Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth** (*John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:15, 16*)

THURSDAY: **The Creator Among Us** (*John 2:7–11*)

Memory Text—*Genesis 1:1, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Only a being greater than the universe could have created it. And that is the God revealed in the Bible, the God whom we worship and serve because, among other things, He is our Creator.

Lesson 2—Creation: Forming the World

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Without Form and Void** (*Genesis 1:1, 2; Isaiah 45:18, NKJV*)

MONDAY: **Let There Be Light** (*1 John 1:5, Revelation 22:5*)

TUESDAY: **The Heaven Created** (*Genesis 1:6–8, NKJV*)

WEDNESDAY: **Space for Living** (*Genesis 1:9–13*)

THURSDAY: **God's All-Powerful Word** (*2 Corinthians 4:6*)

Memory Text—*Isaiah 45:18, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The universe has no inherent will of its own. The creation is not an entity independent of God, but is instead God's chosen arena in which to express His love to the creatures He has made.

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