



THE SPIRITUAL REALM

NOW, THEN & FOREVER



A BIBLICAL OVERVIEW
& DISCUSSION GUIDE

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IN VIEW OF ETERNITY

GOD'S ETERNAL LOVE (Psalm 103:7-19)

“The Lord made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel.
The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him;
as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.
As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him.

For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.
As for man, His days are like grass; He flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep His covenant and remember to do His commandments.
The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all.”

.....
DISCUSSION: What does this say about God? About people?
If this is true, what significance does it hold?
If this is true, how are people often distracted from believing it?
.....

*“The church is constantly being tempted to accept this world as her home,
and sometimes she has listened to the blandishments of those
who would woo her away and use her for their own ends.
But if she is wise she will consider that she stands in the valley
between the mountain peaks of eternity past and eternity to come.
The past is gone forever and the present is passing
as swift as the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz.
Even if the earth should continue a million years, not one of us could stay to enjoy it.
We do well to think of the long tomorrow.”*

- A.W. Tozer -

DISCUSSION:

- 1) If this world were our permanent or only home, how should we live? What would be our priorities if that were true?
- 2) How might it be helpful to see ourselves as people “living between two mountain peaks?”

LIVING IN THIS WORLD NOW

1) We can SEE with an eternal perspective (Colossians 3:1-4)

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

2) We can SEEK authentic living (Mathew 10:26b-28)

“Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

3) We can SPEAK with a holy boldness (2 Timothy 1:8-9, 12)

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began...I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.”

4) We can SACRIFICE with reckless abandonment (Philippians 3:8)

“I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.”

“When you know the truth about what happens to you after you die, and you believe it, and you are satisfied with all that God will be for you in the ages to come, that truth makes you free indeed.

Free from the short, shallow, suicidal pleasures of sin, and free for the sacrifices of mission and ministry that cause people to give glory to our Father in heaven.”

- John Piper -

THE CURSE

OUR REBELLION FROM GOD (Genesis 2:15-17, 3:6-7)

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” ...So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

RESULTS OF THE CURSE

1) Death is our universal ENEMY (Romans 5:17)

“Because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man,”

2) Everyone first experiences SPIRITUAL death (Ephesians 2:1-3)

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

3) Everyone eventually experiences PHYSICAL death (1 Corinthians 15:22a)

“For as in Adam all die...”

4) Everyone deserves ETERNAL death (Romans 6:23a)

“For the wages of sin is death...”

DISCUSSION:

- 1) How have you experienced the curse of death?
- 2) What are some ways which people try to cope with, ward off, or ignore the universal curse of death?
- 3) Why is it important to admit the spiritual and physical realities of death?

THE REMEDY TO THE CURSE

1) Jesus died to DEFEAT death (Hebrews 2:14-15)

“Since the children share in flesh and blood, Jesus himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

2) Jesus’ ushered in VICTORY over death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

3) Faith in Jesus REMOVES the spiritual curse of death (Colossians 2:13-15)

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

4) Death is only the BEGINNING for those who believe (John 11:25)

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live...’”

DISCUSSION:

- 1) How does a person’s view of death change as a result of believing in God’s promises?
- 2) What difference has Jesus’ victory made in your life?

UNSEEN BEINGS: ANGELS

DISCUSSION:

1) How are angels often depicted or described within broader culture?

WHAT IS AN ANGEL?

1) SPIRITUAL beings created by God (Revelation 22:8-9)

"I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

2) ...who PRE-DATE humans (Job 38:4, 7)

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth...when the morning stars sang together and all the angels of God shouted for joy?"

3) ...who are ETERNAL (Luke 20:36a)

"They cannot die anymore because they are equal to angels..."

4) ...who are WITHOUT physical bodies (Hebrews 1:14)

"Are not angels all ministering spirits?"

5) ...who do not REPRODUCE (Matthew 22:30)

"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

6) ...who will be universally VISIBLE one day (Matthew 16:27)

"For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."

HOW DO ANGELS INTERACT WITH EARTH?

1) They eagerly LOOK INTO salvation history (1 Peter 1:12)

"It was revealed to [the prophets] that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look."

"Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
Luke 15:10

2) They carry out the WILL of God (Psalm 103:20)

“Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!”

3) They SERVE the people of God (Hebrews 1:14)

“Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?”

4) They sometimes bring the MESSAGES of God (Luke 2:10)

“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’”

5) They may be used to PROTECT the people of God (Psalm 91:11)

“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.”

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 18:10

DISCUSSION:

1) What do you find interesting about the characteristics and/or function of angels?

WHAT DO ANGELS LOOK LIKE?

1) They are often associated with LIGHT (Matthew 28:2-3)

“[The angel’s] appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.”

2) Some look similar to PEOPLE (Daniel 10:5-6)

“A man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, and his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.”

3) Some look like WINGED creatures (Isaiah 6:2)

“Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.”

“The cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings.”

Ezekiel 10:8

VARIOUS KINDS OF ANGELIC BEINGS

ARCHANGELS: Serve as a PRINCE among angels (Jude 1:9a)

‘But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil...’

MESSENGERS: Bring a MESSAGE from God (Daniel 3:16)

‘I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, ‘Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.’ So he came near where I stood.’

WARRIORS: Carry out the PLAN of God (2 Kings 19:35a)

‘That night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians’

WORSHIPPERS: Facilitate the PRAISE of GOD (Revelation 5:11-12)

‘Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’’

CHERUBIM: Protect the GLORY of God (Genesis 3:24)

‘He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.’

SERAPHIM: ‘On Fire’ for the HOLINESS of God (Isaiah 6:2-3)

‘Above [the Lord and His throne] stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’’

DISCUSSION:

- 1) How is the Biblical account of angels different from what you have heard or thought?
 - 2) Why do you think such beings exist?
 - 3) How does believing in their existence increase your love for God’s nature, purpose or supernatural work?
-

UNSEEN BEINGS: DEMONS

THE EXPELLED ONES (Revelation 12:4, 9)

“[The Great Dragon’s] tail swept down a *third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth...The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

**this ‘third’ has traditionally been understood as the amount who rebelled with Satan*

WHAT ARE DEMONS?

1) Spiritual beings CHAINED to hell (2 Peter 2:4)

“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgement.”

2) Spiritual beings who are PRAISED through idol worship (Deuteronomy 32:17)

“They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known...”

3) Spiritual beings who participate in DECEPTION (1 Timothy 4:1)

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons”

4) Spiritual beings who can INFLICT harm to people (Mark 1:32)

“They brought to [Jesus] all who were sick or oppressed by demons.”

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first”

Luke 11:24-26

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What observations or questions do you have about these spiritual beings?
- 2) How might understanding angels & demons impact your faith?
- 3) What dangers might there be in focusing on their existence more than developing a love for Jesus?

THE UNSEEN ENEMY: SATAN

SATAN'S DISPOSITION (Ezekiel 48:16-17a)

"In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor."

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit."

Isaiah 14:12-15

SOME OTHER NAMES FOR SATAN (not exhaustive)

- Accuser of the Brethren (Zechariah 3:1)
- Angel of Light (2 Corinthians 11:14)
- Beelzebul (Lord of the Flies) (Matthew 12:24)
- The Deceiver of the whole world (Revelation 12:9)
- The Devil (Slanderer) (Matthew 4:1)
- The Father of Lies (Matthew 8:44)
- The Ruler of Demons (Matthew 9:34)
- The Old Serpent (Revelation 12:9)
- The Roaring Lion (1 Peter 5:8)
- The Ruler of this world (John 14:30)
- The Tempter (Matthew 4:3)

SATAN'S DOMINION (John 14:30)

"I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me."

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, 'From where have you come?' Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.'"

Job 1:6-7

WHAT DOES SATAN DO?

1) Satan DISGUISES himself and his work (2 Corinthians 11:14)

“Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

2) Satan BLINDS eyes of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4)

“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

“...to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins...”

Acts 26:18a

3) Satan WAGES WAR against God’s people (Ephesians 6:12)

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”

Luke 22:31-32a

“We would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”

2 Corinthians 2:11b

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils.

One is to disbelieve in their existence.

The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

*They themselves are equally pleased by both errors
and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”*

- C.S. Lewis, from ‘The Screwtape Letters’

.....

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What observations or questions do you have about Satan?
 - 2) How have you understood his work or nature in the past?
 - 3) What warning does C.S. Lewis give? How does it apply to us now?
-

WHAT IS SATAN'S STRATEGY?

1) He seeks to DECEIVE (Genesis 3:1b-4)

“He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ’⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die.’”

2) He seeks to DIVIDE (Genesis 3:5)

“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

3) He seeks to DESTROY (John 8:44b)

“He was a murderer from the beginning...”

HOW DOES HE EMPLOY HIS STRATEGIES?

1) Satan EXPLOITS human desires (Ephesians 2:1-3)

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

2) He ENCOURAGES false teaching (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”

*“Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good
- above all, that we are better than someone else –
I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God, but by the devil.”
- C.S. Lewis, from ‘Mere Christianity’ -*

DISCUSSION:

- 1) How have you experienced or observed Satan’s strategies?
- 2) Why is it so important to abide in Jesus and dwell in His written word?

SOULS: NOW AND LATER

1) All people possess both a BODY and a SOUL (Genesis 2:7)

“Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”

“May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23b

2) When we die, our bodies return to DUST (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

“And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

3) When we die, our SOULS persist (Luke 23:46)

“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.”

“You are obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

1 Peter 1:9

4) One day, bodies will be RESURRECTED and REUNITED with souls (John 5:28-29).

“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life...”

“God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another...Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”

1 Corinthians 15:38-40, 51-53

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What do you find interesting about bodies and souls?
- 2) How does our culture tend to understand ‘souls?’
- 3) What do you find comforting about these Scriptural truths?

THE CURRENT 'LOCATION' OF THE DECEASED

1) Souls of believers immediately ENTER the presence of God (Luke 23:39-43)

"[The thief on the cross] said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

"So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

2) Souls of believers find their HOME with God (John 14:2-3)

"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

3) The souls of unbelievers immediately experience PUNISHMENT (Luke 16:19-31)

"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Luke 13:5

PURGATORY: UNDERSTANDING THE MYTH

According to Roman Catholicism ...

Purgatory is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. (Whoever comes into God's presence must be 'perfectly pure.')

Those on earth are still in communion with the souls in purgatory and the living aid the dead by their prayers and works of satisfaction. Yet purgatory is 'temporary' and will cease, at least, with the Last Judgement. (SOURCE: catholic.com/encyclopedia/purgatory)

"[Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the Jewish forces] also took a collection, man by man, to the amount of 2,000 drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking into account the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin."

2 Maccabees 12:42-45 (not a book in the Biblical cannon)

The penalty of venial sins can be removed by:

- Unconditional forgiveness from God
- Contrition
- Works of penance

Souls in purgatory can be helped in the process of purification by saints on earth through their participation in:

- Attending Mass
- Prayers
- Giving
- Good Works

"Souls are cleansed by purgatorial pains after death, and in order that they may be rescued from these pains, they are benefitted by the suffrages of the living faith, viz: the sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, alms, and other works of piety."

Decree of Union, Council of Florence (1439)

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What do you find interested or challenging about this idea?
- 2) What is the hope for those who believe this unbiblical doctrine?

THE CERTAIN HOPE OF SALVATION

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Ephesians 2:8-9

THE STATUS OF BELIEVERS IN PARADISE

1) They are WORSHIPING (Hebrews 12:22-24)

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

2) They are WATCHING & WAITING (Luke 15:7)

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

Revelation 6:9-11

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Revelation 7:9-10

DISCUSSION:

- 1) We still study heaven more later in this study, but for now, how are you encouraged by the hope of heaven?
- 2) Is there anyone in your life who could benefit from studying this subject with you?

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

JOYFUL PROMISES

1) Jesus WILL return (John 14:3)

“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

Matthew 24:35

2) His return will be VISIBLE (Acts 1:11)

“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

“For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.”

Luke 17:24

“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”

Revelation 1:7

“The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, 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 out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Matthew 24:29b-31

3) The exact moment of His return will be UNEXPECTED (Matthew 24:44)

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

.....

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What do you find interesting about these promises of Jesus’ return?
 - 2) How would you describe Jesus’ second coming?
 - 3) What do you think it will be like?
-

LOOKING AHEAD

1) We don't know the DAY or HOUR of Jesus' return (Mark 13:32-33)

"Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come."

2) There will be a noticeable PRELUDE with various 'SIGNS' (Matthew 24:6b, 8)

"This must take place, but the end is not yet...All these are but the beginning of the birth pains."

- **SIGN: Global DISTRESS – often referred to as TRIBULATION (Mark 13:8, 19-20)**

"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains...For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days."

- **SIGN: Pervasive DECEIT and HATRED (Matthew 24:10, 12)**

"Many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another...because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold."

"People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power."

2 Timothy 3:2-5a

- **SIGN: Pervasive false MIRACLES and TEACHING (Mark 13:22-23)**

"For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand."

DISCUSSION:

- 1) Before we look at other 'signs,' how would you summarize these three?
- 2) What is your reaction to these 'signs?'
- 3) What do you think the spiritual climate will be during this 'tribulation?'

OTHER 'SIGNS'

- **SIGN: An ABOMINABLE action (Matthew 24:15-16)**

“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains!”

“Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce will flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action”

Daniel 11:31-32

- **SIGN: COSMIC changes (Luke 21:25-27)**

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

- **SIGN: A LAWLESS one (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 9-10)**

“Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God...The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”

- **SIGN: The global REACH of the gospel (Matthew 24:14)**

“This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

“I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”

Romans 11:25

DISCUSSION:

- 1) Next week, we will study the ‘lawless one’ or ‘anti-christ’ more in depth. What do you notice about these other ‘signs?’
- 2) What mission are Christians called into, even during this specific time of tribulation?

CHRIST & THE ANTI-CHRIST

1) The SPIRIT OF CHRIST is already in those who believe in Jesus (Ephesians 1:13-14)

“In him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.”

2) The spirit of the ANTI-CHRIST rejects truth about Jesus (1 John 2:22)

“This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.”

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”

2 John 1:7

3) The spirit of the ANTI-CHRIST is already at work (1 John 4:2-3)

“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.”

“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

1 John 2:18

DISCUSSION:

- 1) How do you know the Holy Spirit is in you?
 - 2) Why is it important to know the spirit of the anti-Christ is already at work?
-

As we look into THE anti-Christ, it is important to note that this will be a person - not a demon, animal or grotesque creature. Such a person has already been described as a *“man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). He will be self-exalted and known in the world. Yet, his spiritual core is often described as a ‘beast’ in the book of Revelation. Likewise, Satan is described as a ‘dragon’ (Rev. 12:9). We must consider these descriptions as poetic language which depict a profound spiritual truth. As we study these passages, remember that ‘beast’ is symbolic for the ‘man of lawlessness.’

CONTRASTING CHRIST & ANTI-CHRIST

1) Jesus, the Christ, speaks TRUTH (John 8:31-32)

“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

- **The antichrist will spread DECEPTION and IDOLATRY (2 John 7).**

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”

“For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”

Matthew 24:24

“They did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

Revelation 9:20b-21

2) Jesus, the true Christ, was preceded by a TRUE PROPHET (Matthew 3:1-3)

“John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord.’”

- **The antichrist will be preceded by a FALSE PROPHET (Revelation 13:11-15)**

“Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.”

DISCUSSION:

1) Based upon what we’ve read so far, why is knowing truth so important?

2) Jesus, the true Christ, offers FREEDOM (John 8:36)

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

- **The antichrist will be lead people into SLAVERY (Revelation 13:7b-8, 16-18)**

“Authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain...Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.”

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

“Many believe that the “mark” of the beast is a literal tattoo, or a chip implant, or an imprint of sorts, or perhaps some other physiological branding by which his/its followers are visually identified...We should understand the “mark” of the beast on the right hand or forehead of his/its followers to be a Satanic parody (a religious rip-off, so to speak) of the “seal” placed on the foreheads of God’s people (Rev. 7:3–8; 14:1; cf. 22:4)...No one I know believes all Christians will literally and physically have the names of Jesus and the Father tattooed on their foreheads. This is simply a way of describing that those born again and redeemed by Christ’s blood belong to him and are preserved in faith by the indwelling Holy Spirit. So when we read that the false prophet causes everyone who isn’t a Christian to have the mark of the beast written on their forehead, we should understand this as a sign that they belong to the beast and are loyal to him. This “mark” on their foreheads or on their right hand is simply Satan’s way of mimicking the seal of God on God’s people. If you have the name of Jesus and God the Father written on your forehead, it simply means that they own you, that you belong to them, that you are loyal to the Lord God Almighty. But if you have “the name of the beast” (Rev. 13:17) written on your forehead, it signifies that he owns you, that you belong to him, that you are loyal to the Antichrist.”

- Dr. Sam Storms

3) Jesus, the Christ, BUILDS the church (Ephesians 2:19-22).

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

- **The antichrist will seek to DIVERT and DESTROY the church (Revelation 13:2b-11)**
 “To [the beast], the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.”

4) Jesus, the Christ, is already ENTHRONED forever (Hebrews 10:12-13)

“When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.”

- **The antichrist will try to STEAL his seat (2 Thessalonians 2:3b-4)**
 “For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.”

SITTING IN THE TEMPLE

“We do not need to know precisely what Paul means when he says in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 that the man of lawlessness “takes his seat in the temple of God.” We may be sure that it is not a reference to the desecration of the Jewish temple which was coming in AD 70. This rebellion and this man of lawlessness are at the climactic end of the age. They are ended and undone by the glorious appearing of the coming of the Lord. Where the man of lawlessness takes his seat — whether in the Vatican, or Geneva, or Salt Lake City, or Colorado Springs, or Jerusalem — is not of the essence. It will be in the place of the global focus of Christian worship, which has become anti-Christian. (There is more than one meaning of “temple of God” in Paul.) And it will be with the claim to be above all law, and to be God.”

- John Piper

DISCUSSION:

- 1) How has this study brought you clarity about either Jesus or the anti-Christ?
- 2) Why is a daily love for Jesus so important, especially in light of these verses?
- 3) How are you remaining connected to Jesus?

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1) Jesus declared an 'END' to this age (Matthew 24:10-14)

"Many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

2) The end includes a FINAL judgment (Revelation 20:11-13)

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done."

3) God has already given PREVIEWS to His judgment (2 Peter 2:4-10b)

"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority."

4) Judgment is temporarily DELAYED, making room for the gospel (Acts 17:30-31)

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

DISCUSSION:

1) What is your response to these promises from the LORD?

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1) ...is UNAVOIDABLE (Romans 4:10-12)

“Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”

Ecclesiastes 11:9

2) ...will EXPOSE ‘secrets’ (Luke 12:2)

“Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”

3) ... will REVEAL hearts (Matthew 7:21-23)

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

4) ...will be directed by CHRIST (John 5:22-23)

“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.”

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

Matthew 25:31-32

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What is intimidating about this coming day?
- 2) What is reassuring about this coming day?
- 3) Is there anything described here which is surprising to you?

BEFORE THE THRONE

1) He will FORGIVE every sin by grace through faith (John 3:18a)

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned.”

“He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.”

Psalm 103:9-13

2) He will condemn everyone who has TURNED AWAY from Him (John 3:16-18)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done...If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 20:12-15

3) Varying REWARDS for faithfulness will be distributed (Luke 19:17-19)

“And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’”

“If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

4) Varying degrees of PUNISHMENT will be enforced (Matthew 11:22-24)

“But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

“And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating.”

Luke 12:47

“And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’”

Luke 20:45-47

5) There will be TWO destinations (Revelation 21:6-8)

“And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.’”

6) God will be GLORIFIED for His justice (Revelation 15:2-4)

“And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What do you observe about the coming justice of God?
- 2) What do you find either fascinating or challenging?
- 3) How are you seeking refuge in mercy of Jesus now?

THE HORROR OF HELL

“If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth.”

- Timothy Keller

*“Hell is not in the Bible for us to debate it or to reject it.
It is there so that we might escape from it!”*

- Richard Brooks

GOD’S PERFECT JUSTICE

1) HOLINESS radiates from the presence of God (Isaiah 6:1-5)

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim...one called to another and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’ ...And I said; ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.!”

“When Simon Peter saw [the nets filled with fish], he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”

Luke 5:8

2) No one DESERVES God’s mercy (Exodus 33:19)

“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

3) God would be JUST to condemn all people to hell (Psalm 13:2-3)

“The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.”

“The wages of sin is death.”

Romans 6:23a

DISCUSSION:

1) Why are these truths essential to understanding and believing in the reality of hell?

DESCRIBING HELL

1) Hell is a place of ultimate JUSTICE (Revelation 20:12)

“I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”

2) The agony of hell is depicted with FIRE (Matthew 13:40-42)

“Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace.”

“And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

Jude 6-7

3) Hell is a place of conscious TORTURE (Revelation 14:9-11a)

“And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night”

“The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’”

Luke 16:22-28

4) Hell is a place of complete SEPARATION (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

“They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might ...”

5) Hell is a place of ETERNAL duration (Daniel 12:2)

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

“And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

Isaiah 66:24

“The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were. They will be tormented day and night forever.”

Revelation 20:10

DISCUSSION:

- 1) How did you used to perceive hell?
- 2) What comments or questions do you have about the reality of hell?

*“Ye cannot, in your present state, understand eternity...
that is what mortals misunderstand.*

They say of some temporal suffering, ‘No future bliss can make up for it,’ not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.

And of some sinful pleasure, they say, ‘Let me have but this and I’ll take the consequences:’ little dreaming how damnation will spread back and back into their past and contaminate the pleasure of the sin.

Both processes begin even before death. The good man’s past begins to change so that his forgiven sins and remembered sorrows take on the quality of Heaven; the bad man’s past already conforms to his badness and is filled only with dreariness. And that is why...the Blessed will say ‘We have never lived anywhere except in Heaven,’ and the Lost ‘We were always in Hell.’ And both will speak truly.

- C.S. Lewis, from ‘The Great Divorce’

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What is the author’s point?
- 2) Why might it be helpful to see human souls as one continuous existence, rather than in two parts: earthly life and life after death?

THE HOPE OF HEAVEN (PART 1)

“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

- C.S. Lewis

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT HEAVEN

1. We will spend eternity in the clouds.
2. The Bible says very little about heaven.
3. How heaven is *now* will be heaven forever.
4. We’ll live forever *without* a body.
5. Heaven will be boring.
6. We won’t be us anymore or remember our former lives.
7. Heaven will be a spiritual realm with no human culture.
8. We should learn about heaven from those who have claimed to have visited there.

“Too often, people view accounts of visiting heaven as gospel. Obviously, God can show someone the afterlife if he so chooses.

But “it is appointed for man to die once” (Hebrews 9:27). Since these stories are told by people who will “die twice,” it seems likely that they did not truly die the first time, even if vital signs weren’t measurable.

A person’s memories under heavy sedation — and his or her ability to distinguish dreams from reality — aren’t reliable, but God’s word is (John 17:17).

The apostle Paul, who had been to heaven, said, “This man was caught up into paradise . . . and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Corinthians 12:3–4).

Many books, however, claim to divulge secrets that, sadly, some readers believe instead of Scripture.”

- Randy Alcorn, author of *Heaven* -

DISCUSSION:

- 1) Which of these myths most resonate with your experience?
- 2) What is your response to Randy Alcorn’s words of caution?

DESCRIBING HEAVEN

1) Heaven is beyond description...yet the Holy Spirit has revealed SOME (1 Cor. 2:9-10)

“As it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.”

2) Heaven is the place where God DWELLS (Isaiah 66:1)

“Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?”

“I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’”

Revelation 21:3

3) Heaven is the place where Jesus REIGNS (Acts 7:55-56)

“But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’”

4) Heaven will come DOWN TO EARTH eventually (Revelation 21:1-4)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”

“We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

2 Peter 3:13

“This does not have to mean that [heaven or earth] go out of existence, but it may mean that there will be such a change in them that their present condition passes away.

We might say, ‘The caterpillar passes away, and the butterfly emerges.’

There is a real passing away, and there is a real continuity, a real connection.”

- John Piper

5) Heaven will be the place where God, angels & people will experience COMMUNITY AND JOY forever (Isaiah 65:17-19)

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.”

“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

Revelation 19:6-8

“In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Psalms 16:11b

6) Some elements will be SIMILAR to those found on earth (Revelation 22:1-3)

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.”

“And he said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

Ezekiel 47:8-12

“The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.”

Revelation 21:19-20

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms...”

John 14:1-2a

““They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,’ says the LORD.”

Isaiah 65:21-25

7) We will RECONCILED to God in heaven (Revelation 21:3)

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’”

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”

Job 19:25-27

*“Heaven is not a place where we have nothing to do
but float on the clouds,
but a new earth where we have everything to do:
a God to worship, a kingdom to rule, a universe to explore,
work to accomplish, and friends to enjoy.”*

- David Platt

DISCUSSION:

- 1) What observations about heaven stand out to you?
 - 2) How might a Biblical theology about heaven be helpful in our life and witness?
-

THE HOPE OF HEAVEN (PART 2)

*“What we love about this life
are the things that resonate with the life we were made for.
The things we love are not merely the best this life has to offer—
they are previews of the greater life to come...
For the Christian, death is not the end of adventure
but a doorway from a world where dreams and adventures shrink,
to a world where dreams and adventures forever expand.”*

- Randy Alcorn, Heaven

8) There will be BANQUETS in heaven (Luke 22:28-30)

“You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.”

Isaiah 25:6

“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ...”

Matthew 8:11

9) We will WORSHIP like never before in heaven (Revelation 22:3)

“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.”

Revelation 22:3

“I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.’”

Revelation 15:2-4

“After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” Once more they cried out, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.” Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Revelation 19:1-8

“And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Revelation 5:8-14

10) We will REIGN in heaven with Jesus (Daniel 7:27)

““And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.””

DISCUSSION:

1) What is surprising about what we’ve studied so far?

11) We will have RESURRECTED bodies in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:40-44)

“There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

1 John 3:2-3

12) There will not be NEW marriages in heaven (Luke 20:34-36)

“And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”

13) In heaven, believers will see YOUNG CHILDREN who died (2 Samuel 12:19-23)

“But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” They said, “He is dead.” Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped...He said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, ‘Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.”

14) ANIMALS will be included in the restoration of the New Earth (Isaiah 11:6-9)

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

15) The galaxy WILL change (Isaiah 60:19-20)

“The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

“The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.”

Revelation 21:23-25

16) Heaven will be BEYOND our expectations (1 Corinthians 2:9)

“But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

“Skydiving without a parachute? Maybe, maybe not.

Scuba diving without an air tank? I hope so.

We know that our resurrection bodies will be superior.

Won't it be fantastic to test their limits and to invent new technologies that extend our ability to explore and enjoy God in the mighty realms he makes?

Those who know God and believe his promise of bodily resurrection can dream great dreams. One day we will live those dreams.”

- Randy Alcorn -

17) Anticipating heaven should change our lives NOW (Acts 20:22-24)

“And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

“The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

...Come further up, come further in!”

- C.S. Lewis, from ‘The Last Battle’

DISCUSSION:

- 1) How would you describe heaven to someone else?
- 2) Why do you think God has given us this preview?
- 3) How might knowing about heaven impact your life now?

'SPIRITUAL REALM' CONCLUSION

THEMES FROM THE BOOK OF REVELATION

1) God is SOVEREIGN (Revelation 1:5b, 7-8)

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'"

2) Satan is SUBORDINATE (Revelation 12:12b)

"But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

3) DECEPTION and immorality will spread (Revelation 13:11-12, 15-17)

"Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast...It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name."

"Babylon has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

Revelation 18:2b-3

4) Terrible TRIBULATION will come upon all people (Revelation 9:15, 20-21)

"The four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind...The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

“The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. It was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.”

Revelation 13:5-8

5) Jesus’ GLORY will be revealed (Revelation 1:12-18)

“Then I [John] turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

“Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’

Revelation 5:11-12

6) God’s people will be redeemed and presented as BEAUTIFUL (Revelation 19:7-8)

“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

“Here is the call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”

Revelation 14:12

.....
DISCUSSION:

- 1) What is either troubling or comforting about these truths?
 - 2) Why might it be good to remember the main themes of from the book of Revelation?
-

FINAL OVERVIEW

1) ANGELS are God's unseen, spiritual assistants (Psalm 103:20)

"Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!"

2) SATAN'S presence and strategy are prevalent upon earth (2 Corinthians 4:4)

"The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Ephesians 6:12

3) DEMONS participate in Satan's deception (1 Timothy 4:1)

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons"

4) The spirit of ANTI-CHRIST is already at work (2 John 1:7)

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist."

5) Both spiritual and physical DEATH are human realities (Ephesians 2:1-3)

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

"For as in Adam, all die..."

1 Corinthians 15:22a

6) DEATH is not the end (Luke 23:39-43)

"[The thief on the cross] said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

"The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment..."

Luke 16:22b-23a

7) People in Heaven are now WORSHIPPING & WAITING (Luke 15:7)

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven....”

Hebrews 12:22-23a

8) Jesus will RETURN to earth (Matthew 24:29b-31)

“Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, 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 out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

9) Jesus will bring FINAL JUDGEMENT (Matthew 25:31-32)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

10) Jesus will make all things NEW (2 Peter 3:13)

“We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

11) Heaven will be a RICH eternity (Isaiah 25:6)

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.”

12) Christians need an eternal PERSPECTIVE (Colossians 3:1-4)

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

DISCUSSION:

- 1) Which spiritual realities do you tend to overlook or forget?
- 2) How might remembering these spiritual realities affect our lives now?
- 3) What outstanding questions do you have about the spiritual realm?
- 4) Who could you share this study with?