

**Lesson 12**  
**“The Future”**  
**Rev. 1:1-3, 19**

**Purpose:**

Your students will see the wonder of the nature of biblical prophecy and understand what its predictions about the future should mean for our lives.

**In a Nutshell:**

Have you ever read the book of Revelation? If you have, what percentage of its material do you think you understood? All agree that Revelation is a difficult book of the Bible to interpret correctly. Four major approaches have disagreed on how to go about doing so. The preterist approach adopts the view that the book of Revelation is largely an apocalyptic description of events that were in the past from John’s perspective, who wrote it at the end of the first century. The view relies heavily on the Olivet Discourse. Christ tells His disciples that they would see Daniel’s abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15), which the preterist sees as the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, and that their generation would not pass away until all was fulfilled (v. 34). However, accounting for all of Revelation’s prophecy, as well as that of the Olivet Discourse (the Second Coming for example), in terms of first century history is simply impossible. It also fails to take John’s explicit description about the content of his book seriously (“things which must shortly come to pass” [Rev. 1:1]; “the things which shall be hereafter” [v. 19]). The disciples saw an abomination of desolation in A.D. 70 that Daniel called the destruction of the sanctuary (Dan. 9:26), but that was but a type of the future one he prophesies (v. 27). The generation Christ mentions is the Jewish lineage (Matt. 23:37-39); Israel has a future in the plan of God. The symbolical approach to interpreting Revelation stops short of finding history that corresponds to the content of the book. The idea is that the symbols, events, and characters of Revelation have only spiritual significance, which of course they do, but not any historical significance. Here again, John speaks of writing about events that happen. The historical approach is less popular today than it was in previous generations. It says that John wrote about the future from his perspective, but the past from ours. This idea has the advantage of taking John’s description of his book seriously, and it provides more history from which to find parallels with the content of the book. But the approach is still difficult to accomplish, and it fosters multiple changes of interpretation as history shifts over time. The futurist approach believes that Revelation’s content is about historical events that are in the future from our perspective. It is the only approach that can (1) read Revelation simply and chronologically, (2) treat it as normal prophecy, (3) account for the Bible doctrine of Israel’s future, and (4) avoid the square-peg-in-round-hole problem of the other views.

***To the Testimony!***

***Interpreting Bible prophecy.***

Ezek. 37:15-28 1. In order to understand what the Bible says about the future, we have to know how to interpret passages of Scripture that seem to be making predictions about the future. This prediction of Ezekiel's prophecy utilizes a symbol of two sticks. Mormonism teaches that the two sticks are the Bible and the Book of Mormon becoming one authoritative revelation for God's people. Matthew Henry wrote that the two sticks are the Jew and Gentile becoming one in the church. What did the author Ezekiel think the sticks were? How are the Mormon and Mathew Henry methods of interpretation the same, and how are they different?

**Answer:** Ezekiel would have said (and did say) that the two sticks are the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah becoming one again in a future kingdom of Israel ruled by the eschatological David and at rest from all its enemies and past sins under God's covenant of peace with them. The Mormon and Mathew Henry interpretations are similar in that they allegorize the symbol of the sticks. Matthew Henry has as much support for his conclusion from the passage itself as the Mormons do for theirs – which is not much. Matthew Henry's approach to allegorical interpretation of prophecy is very different from the Mormon approach, however, in that it also utilizes the principle of the analogy of faith. In other words, Matthew Henry's allegorical interpretations are bounded by the parameters of orthodoxy laid down by didactic passages of Scripture. It is taught elsewhere in Scripture apart from allegory that the Jew and Gentile are now one in the church; it is nowhere taught elsewhere in Scripture apart from allegory that the Bible has a sister in the Book of Mormon.

**Application:** The similarity of Matthew Henry's interpretive approach to the Mormon approach exposes its basic weakness. Instead of allegorizing prophetic passages, the careful interpreter of Bible prophecy must come to understand authorial intent, just as he must in other passages of Scripture. Ultimately, that author is the Holy Spirit who understood things the human author did not (1 Pet. 1:9-12), but He communicated those things through the human language and understanding of the human author. So the Holy Spirit could use Ezekiel to speak of north and south becoming one Israel again because these were categories of which this prophet had some knowledge.

When the Holy Spirit wanted to prophesy that Gentiles would be saved together with the Jews, He did so without requiring of us an allegorical interpretation (Isa. 9:1-7; Joel 2:28-32a; Amos 9:11-12). Daniel saw future kingdoms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but he could not name them (except the first, of course) the way Ezekiel names northern Israel and southern Judah (Dan. 2:37-45).

Sometimes futurists are charged with a hyper-literalism that is unable to appreciate the symbolical nature of Bible prophecy. That charge is a caricature of the futurist's approach. Like the allegorist, the futurist recognizes that Ezekiel is using the two sticks as symbols of something else. No futurist claims that the future in any way involves two literal sticks. Unlike the allegorist, the futurist allows Ezekiel's interpretation of the symbols to stand.

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Isa. 61:1-11  
Luke 4:14-30

2. Christmas season is a great time to think of the nature of Bible prophecy. Messianic prophecies told us that Christ would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), that He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), that He would suffer Roman execution (Psalm 22), and that He would do so for our sins (Isaiah 53). The words *Messiah* and *Christ* refer to His anointing by the Holy Spirit, which began especially at His baptism (Matt. 3:16-17) and continued on through His public ministry (Luke 4:1). Filled with the Spirit, Jesus was an amazing teacher, and in Luke 4 He gave a lesson on the nature of prophecy and its fulfillment. In verse 21 He says, "this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." What Scripture was He referring to, and how had it been fulfilled that day?

**Answer:** The Scripture referred to by our Lord as fulfilled is Isa. 61:1-2a (Luke 4:18-19). It is significant that Jesus does not go past the first part of Isa. 61:2 when He says that He was fulfilling that Scripture in their presence on that day. It was fulfilled before them because He was the Christ proclaiming to them the favorable year of the Lord, the age of salvation that would come prior to the day of vengeance also mentioned in Isa. 61:2. So the fulfillment of Isaiah 61 was happening on that day only up to verse 2a.

**Application:** It is the nature of Bible prophecy to be fulfilled literally, but also to combine predictions that can be ages apart in their fulfillment. Jesus taught us that one of the keys to understanding Bible prophecy correctly is to recognize that it speaks of His two comings, not one, which He will fulfill, and that there is an "acceptable year" between His first coming and the day of vengeance when He comes again. Peter mentions this distinction when he speaks of prophecies relating to the sufferings of Christ on the one hand and to the glories to follow on the other (1 Pet. 1:11). So when we think of the fulfillment of OT Bible prophecy, we have to know when to stop in the OT passage when referring to the first advent. Peter did this in Joel 2. He stopped at Joel 2:32a for the same reason. It is as though God has inserted a long parenthesis between Old Testament predictions of the first and second comings of Christ.

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Dan. 9:20-27

3. The literal nature of interpreting the symbols of Bible prophecy is perhaps best seen in Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks. The *week* in this passage is the number seven, a symbol that represents seven years, but the literal specificity of the prediction is nevertheless truly amazing. In summary, the prophecy states that 70 weeks of years have been ordained for Daniel's people, Israel, and his holy city, Jerusalem, a total of 490 years. Ezra received the command to restore and build Jerusalem in 457 B.C.. 49 years later (7 weeks), Nehemiah put the finishing touches on the rebuild. A total of 483 years later (7 + 62 weeks), Jesus Christ began His public ministry in 27 A.D., the last year the Jews celebrated the Year of Jubilee in Palestine. Three and a half years later, He was crucified on a Wednesday, the preparation day for the Passover in A.D. 31. What would the 490 weeks accomplish, and how do we know that the last 70th week is still future?

**Answer:** The Lord told Daniel that He would do six things for the Jewish people through these 490 years: (1) finish the transgression; (2) make an end of sins; (3) make reconciliation or atonement (כִּפּוּר) for iniquity; (4) bring in everlasting righteousness; (5) seal up or fulfill the vision and prophecy; and (6) anoint the most Holy (One or place). Very simply, we know that the fulfillment of the last 70th week is still future because many of these blessings have not yet come to Israel and Jerusalem. They require the 70th week to be fulfilled.

**Application:** Bible prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ are truly amazing. They should bolster our conviction that the Bible is no ordinary book. It is the very Word of the God who knows the end from the beginning and whose providential plan for the world is unstoppable. God can tell us the future because He sees the future, and He sees the future because He has planned the future. He is in complete control of all that we will encounter.

In addition, the same Bible passages that told us that Jesus would come the first time tell us that He is coming again in power and great glory. This is the blessed hope of the believer, and it teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, zealous of good works (Titus 2:11-15).

**Notes:** Most Bible scholars begin the 70-week prophecy fulfillment with the decree given to Nehemiah in 445 B.C. to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, but I am indebted to the fine study done by Dr. David Reagan for the conclusions reflected in this lesson. His study is available online at <http://christinprophecy.org/articles/daniels-70-weeks-of-years>.

The A. D. 31 date for the crucifixion of Christ requires that He was crucified on a Wednesday. Reagan sees a reconciliation of Mark 16:1 with Luke 23:56 here. Thursday was the high Sabbath of the Passover celebration, and Saturday the normal Sabbath, so the tomb visit was on Friday between them. The weakness of Reagan's Wednesday conclusion is normally cited as Jesus' referral to His time in the tomb as "three days and three nights" (Matt. 12:20). The question arises as to how this chronology can be considered 3 days and 3 nights in the tomb. It seems to require four.

The difficulty is less than insurmountable, however. It may be that the Lord's phrase tells us to begin with the first day in our counting of days and nights in the tomb, not the first night (not "three nights and three days"). If we do that, the first day would be 6 am Thursday morning to 6 pm Thursday night, and then would come the first night; the second the same for Friday, and the third the same for Saturday. When that third night ended, Christ came out of the tomb on Sunday morning. The other particulars noted by Dr. Reagan regarding the Passover week indicate that this is the best understanding.

#### ***Things to come for everyone—the future of the world.***

John 14:1-6    4. Now that we have come to understand the role of a parenthesis in Bible  
1 Thess.        prophecy, finding ourselves between the two predicted comings of the Lord, it  
4:13-18        is important for us to consider how the parenthesis we are in comes to an end.  
2 Thess.        Clearly, that end is the day of the Lord's judgment and vengeance (Isa. 61:2;  
2:1-17         Zeph. 1:18). Will believers of this age have to endure that end? Why or why not?

**Answer:** Believers will not have to endure the wrathful day of the Lord on earth because they will be raptured prior to the Great Tribulation, Daniel’s 70th week. The promise of this return in the clouds to the disciples is so that their hearts might be comforted (John 14:1, 1 Thess. 4:18, 2 Thess. 2:17). The passages communicate deliverance from the Great Tribulation (Zeph. 2:3, Rev. 3:10). At the beginning of his description of this period in Revelation 4, John hears the command we shall hear some day, “Come up here!” (Rev. 4:1). The contrast between the Jewish lineage of God’s people on earth and the every-nation variety of God’s people in heaven during the Great Tribulation period indicates that the church has been raptured out of or away from the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:14; the language denotes an escape).

**Application:** Notice that when Paul said *we* in 1 Thess. 4:15, he put himself in the category of “we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord.” He evidently felt that he had every reason to anticipate experiencing the rapture while still alive. While certain prophecies had yet to be fulfilled (the destruction of the Jerusalem temple mentioned in Dan. 9:26 and Matt. 24:2; the preaching of the gospel throughout the known world in Matt. 24:14), Paul must have believed that these too would be fulfilled in his lifetime. Actually, they were fulfilled shortly after his death. Surely if Paul viewed the rapture as possible in his lifetime, we must live as though it could happen at any moment in ours. This is the doctrine of imminence, and it applies to the Day of the Lord as a whole (Matt. 24:36-51; 2 Thess. 2:1-3).

So we must be ready. The best way to do this is to do what is right, to be faithful, to never quit, and to know that our labor is never in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:33-34, 51-58).

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5. Significant future events are listed in chronological order in the chart below. Match each event with the Bible prophecy passage that predicts it will happen and with what God’s purpose may be in planning this event by drawing connecting arrows between the columns.

Event:	Passage:	Purpose:
The Rapture of the dead and living in Christ.	Daniel 9:27	Satan marshals the enemies of Christ from our age against Him.
The 7-year Great Tribulation period—Daniel’s 70th week.	2 Thess. 2:3-4	Initiate the antichrist’s attack on Israel ultimately resulting in their salvation.
The rise of the antichrist and his kingdom.	Matt. 25:14-30	Rescue Israel; destroy antichrist; bind Satan; begin to reign on earth.
The antichrist makes and breaks the covenant—abomination of desolation.	1 Thess. 4:13-18	Reward faithful saints of the previous ages with kingdom privileges.
The second coming of Christ to earth and Armageddon.	Zeph. 1:14-18	Resurrect believers of this age to escape the Great Tribulation judgment.
The millennium 1000 year reign of Christ on earth.	Rev. 20:7-21:8	Separate millennial mortals as sheep and goats; new heaven and earth.
The rebellion of the nations, judgment of sheep and goats (GWT), eternity.	Rev. 19:11-21	Judge the earth for its sin, while accomplishing the salvation of Israel.

**Answer:** While reading the passages and discussing the purpose of each of the coming events of eschatology, the following the timeline below on a whiteboard may prove helpful:

Today (Age of local church)	Rapture 1 Thess. 4:13-18		2nd coming Rev. 19:11-21	Final Judgment Rev. 20:7- 21:8
7 year great tribulation – Zeph. 1:14-18/Dan. 9:27		1000 yr reign/Mt. 25:14-30		New h & e*
	Rise of Anitchrist 2 Thess. 2:3-4	Antichrist breaks covenant; abomination of desolation Dan. 9:27	Armageddon	Satan Loosed
				*New heaven and earth Revelation 21-22

**Application:** The nihilistic philosopher Frederick Nietzsche wrote in a letter to George Brandes on May 23, 1888 about his loss of faith in a future. He wrote “that one of life’s most basic concepts has been blotted out of my consciousness: that of the ‘future’” (quoted by Rolf-Dieter Herrmann, “Art, Technology, and Nietzsche,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Autumn 1973), p. 98). Early the next year, Nietzsche became hopelessly insane, and he died the year after that. The Lord gives us eschatology to give us hope for the future.

The epilogue of the Book of Revelation tells us how to rightly apply our hope in this plan of God for the future (Rev. 22:16-17). Today, it is the work of the Spirit and the Bride, through her knowledge of these things, to say to thirsty men and women, “Come, drink of the water of life freely!” They too may have hope. Whom have we told this week to come for a drink?

**Notes:** The philosophy of *nihilism* teaches that nothing has true meaning, a conclusion that Nietzsche said results from the “God is dead” consequence of the Enlightenment.

**Things to come for each one—the believer’s future.**

1 John 3:1-3      6. We see the doctrine of imminence in John’s expectation of seeing Christ again. As a very old man, he did not write of seeing Him after his own death, but rather “when He appears” (1 John 3:2). But even more important than 2 Cor. 5:1-10      John’s faith in imminence was the effect that seeing Christ again had on him as an individual believer (v. 3). Describe that effect, and then explain how Paul’s teaching on seeing Christ again encourages the same effect in us.

**Answer:** The effect that the hope of seeing Christ again had on John was the desire to be made as pure as Christ is. His hope was that this purity would be his when He saw Christ. It was his hopeful anticipation because he was striving for it in this life. Paul’s doctrine tells us that believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of the things we have done in our body, whether they be good or bad. It was the laboring to be pleasing to Him in that day that caused Paul, like John, to say that to depart and to be with Christ was far better than remaining on in this life (Phil. 1:22-24; 2 Cor. 5:8).

**Application:** Have we learned yet to live with that desire for purity and that labor to be pleasing? All that the Bible tells us about the future should help make the things of this world grow strangely dim. Our senior saints understand how dim they are better than the rest of us, often. But we all together can have that hope and confidence of John and Paul, each of whom enjoys again today the glories of what they wrote of many days ago.

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