

# The Last Things

## 1 Introduction

The last things - the end times, the second coming of Jesus, judgement, heaven and hell - are the subject of many parts of the Bible, particularly the New Testament and, within that, of Jesus' teaching. They are also the subject of some of the most confusing parts of the Bible, principally the book of Revelation. Much has been written over the centuries and in modern times many speculative (often unhelpful) books have been written. Many Christians have been side-tracked from the gospel and from the pursuit of godliness by such 'idle speculation' (1 Tim 4:1,7, 2Tim3:6,7).

This is a brief survey of everything written in the New Testament concerning the last things.

## 2 The Gospels and Acts

### Jesus' charge to the 12 (Matt 10:17-42)

When Jesus sent out the 12 he gave them instructions for the present but also went on to give instructions and warnings for the future. He described a future time of difficulty for Christians when they would be arrested on his account (v19), betrayed (v21) and persecuted (v23). This obviously started with Peter and John's arrest (Acts 4:1-22) and has continued on and off ever since.

### Parable of the weeds (Matt 13:24-30. 36-43)

Jesus' explanation of this parable speaks for itself- the 'sons of the kingdom' and the 'sons of the evil one' will coexist on earth until the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels to harvest both and evil will be 'thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'. There will be a final, irrevocable separation (judgement) of those who have followed Christ and those who have not at the end of the age, ie when Jesus comes again. 'Weeping', etc refer to the regret at the loss of God's presence (See discussion of heaven and hell in section 5).

### Parable of the net (Matt 13:47-50)

This is very similar to the parable of the weeds in the same chapter and again describes the gathering in of all men and separation (judgement) at the end of the age.

### Jesus' coming (Matt 16:27-28. Mk 8:38)

The Son of Man will come in his Father's glory with the angels and reward each person for what he has done - judgement. (v28 may refer to the transfiguration which follows in the next few verses). Mark adds that we should not be ashamed of him.

### Little children (Matt 18:8-9. Mk 9:45-47)

Last Things - SFH June 1996 Page 1 This is a difficult passage but, like the parables in Matthew 13, likens the final state of the wicked to fire. (Mk just says 'hell' [Greek *Gehenna* - Jerusalem's rubbish tip where fires continually burnt to destroy the city's rubbish])

Rich young man, parable of workers in the vineyard (Matt 19:16-20:16, Mk 10:17-40, Lk 18:18-30)

Matt 19:28 talks about all things being made new 'when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne' and talks about the reward for those who have followed him and their sharing in his judgement (see also 1 Cor 6:3). Jesus' reign, of course, started at the resurrection and he makes all things new for those who follow him now (see 2 Cor 5:17). The theme of rewards is taken up in the parable of the workers in the vineyard - each gets the same reward irrespective of when they started work, ie each person who repents gets the same 'reward' of salvation irrespective of when in their lives they came to the Lord (see Lk 23:42-43) because it depends on grace not works. In v23 Jesus says that there will be different rewards for Christians but that will be decided by the Father.

Parables of the tenants and wedding banquet (Matt 22:1-14, Mk 12:1-12, Lk 14:15-24)

Again these parables talk about separation - many are invited (Jn 3:16) but few respond to the invitation or to the provision of 'wedding clothes' (see Rev 3:18). Here the final state of the wicked is described as 'darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth', again referring to regret and loss of God's presence.

Signs of the end of the age and the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt 24:1-25:13, Mk 13:1-37, Lk 12:1-11, 35-40, 54-56, 17:22-37, 21:1-36)

Jesus predicts that the temple would be 'thrown down' (v1,2) - this happened in 70AD under the Roman emperor Titus when Jerusalem and the temple were completely destroyed. The stones of the temple were even prised apart to retrieve gold leaf melted when the temple was set on fire. When he was asked 'when will this (destruction of temple) happen and what will be the signs of your coming and the end of the age?' [potentially 3 distinct questions had they but known it], Jesus answered, '**Watch out that no-one deceives you**' (v3,4) He then answers the last question and list various signs (v5-14):

1. False Christs will come (see also v23-27) - many have come over the centuries and we hear of many today, particularly in some way-out sects (Waco, etc)
2. Wars and rumours of wars - it has been estimated that in the last 2000 years there have been something like 20 days when the world has been completely at peace. The longest period was the 4 day Christmas armistice in 1914!
3. Famine and earthquakes - both have caused misery and death throughout the ages
4. Persecution and hatred of Christians - this also has continued throughout the history of the church beginning with the arrest of Peter and John recorded in Acts 4. In particular, under the emperor Nero and others, Christians were systematically sought out, imprisoned and killed, they were made the scapegoats for other political problems. More recently, this has happened under Nazi, Communist and Muslim regimes, and is happening still.
5. A great falling away from faith - comes and goes. In England, the established churches are declining at the rate of about half a million a year at the moment. Charismatic churches, on the other hand, are growing at a great rate.
6. False prophets - see 1.
7. Increase in wickedness - we all know how crime is on the increase, particularly crimes of

violence.

8. Love of most will grow cold because of increase in wickedness - one of the outcomes of this is that loneliness is one of the biggest problems in our society.
9. The gospel will be preached to all nations (despite 5). There has been a great upsurge in evangelism and missions since the middle of last century, particularly since 1900. Because of the large numbers of evangelists and missionaries coming from churches in the 2/3 world, people involved in missions are beginning to say that they can see a real possibility of evangelising the whole world in one generation.

The 'abomination that makes desolate' in v15 refers initially to the prophecy of Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11 which was fulfilled in 168 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes (which means 'god made manifest') erected a pagan altar to Zeus in place of God's altar in the temple in Jerusalem and sacrificed a pig! These events led to the Maccabean revolt (166 - 142BC). The Hasmonean dynasty founded then was overthrown by the Romans in 63BC when the temple was destroyed. (If you look at its history since Solomon first built it, the temple has spent more time lying in ruins than it has being used. King Herod began rebuilding it in 20BC and it was completed in 64AD, just 6 years before the Romans destroyed it again, this time for good, as a response to the Jewish rebellion of 66AD).

Jesus is comparing the coming destruction of the temple to the events of 168BC [answer to the first question] and advises that for those in Jerusalem, flight to the hills is the most appropriate thing. In 70AD, Christians fled Jerusalem and went to Pella in the Trans-Jordan Mountains.

However, 2 Thes.2:4 and Rev.13:14-15 indicate that there may be a future fulfilment of this prophecy concerning the 'abomination that makes desolate' in that a 'man of lawlessness', 'the beast' will 'set himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God' (2 Thes 2:4). He will lead a rebellion against God and cause a time of great distress, shortened by Jesus coming, for the sake of those Christians who remain. These prophecies may also refer to 70 AD in that emperor worship began throughout the Roman empire around this time (referred to obliquely in Rev 2:13 - Pergamum was a centre for the worship of the emperor). Some people believe that all this means that the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt before the end of the age and that, as part of the last epic sequence of events, Satan will set up an idol to himself (or his agent - the antichrist) in the temple. This interpretation is not necessarily correct - if there is to be a future fulfilment, it could very well be that this idolatrous worship could happen in the church, which is the new 'temple'.

Jesus then describes his coming as 'like lightning' (v27), sudden, cataclysmic, visible to all. That is how we know that someone out in the desert (or on the local housing estate, or in a Tokyo commune) is not him! His coming will be as obvious as vultures gathering around a carcass.

He then goes on to describe his coming in more detail. He quotes Is. 13:10 and 34:4 (see also Joel 2:30,31) - 'the sign of the Son of Man ..... in the sky'. Everyone will see him coming 'on the clouds' (see Acts 1:11), 'with power and great glory'. 'He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call' and gather in the righteous as in the parables of the weeds (Matt 13:24-30) and the net (Matt 13:47-50).

**BUT**, even though the signs may point to its imminence (v33), no-one knows the day or the hour (v36) when he will come [the answer to the second question] except the Father, and he is not telling! Right up until the second he comes it will be 'business as usual' (v37-39), just as it was in the time of Noah. It will happen very suddenly (v40,41) and the separation talked about

in the parables of Matthew 13 will be instantaneous. (Some people think that this refers to 'the rapture' - a hypothetical event where Christians are suddenly, secretly and miraculously removed from the scene before 'the great tribulation' [Rev 7:14]. This theory derives almost exclusively from these verses but has little support elsewhere. v22 indicates that Christians will be around until the end, as does 1 Thes.4:17 which describes the righteous who are alive when Jesus comes being swept up into the host of Christians coming with Jesus).

The remainder of the passage and the parable of the 10 virgins applies to this life, now. We should be ready, doing what he wants us to be doing, when he comes (see also Lk 12:35-51). Luke adds that we should watch and pray (21:36) so that we may escape.

These passages can be summed up as:

**Be wary!** (there are many deceivers about)

**Be ready!** (even though his coming appears to be delayed)

#### Parable of the sheep and goats (Matt 25:31-46)

This takes up the theme of the parables of the weeds and net. Righteousness will bear fruit in good deeds (looking after the poor and oppressed) but does not indicate that the deeds themselves make someone righteous. The righteous will go to eternal life but the unrighteous to eternal punishment. ('Eternal' does not necessarily equate to 'for all time' since time is part of creation which will cease. 'Eternal' refers to quality rather than quantity).

#### Sending out of the 70 (Lk 10:1-20)

After they returned rejoicing that evens demons were subject to them, Jesus told the 70 that they should rejoice that their names were written in heaven - assurance of eternal life.

#### Rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)

This parable tells of a rich man and a poor man, both of whom died. The poor man (Lazarus) was at 'Abraham's side' whilst the rich man was in hell (*Hades* - the place of the dead rather than the place of punishment, although it is described as a place of agony, thirst and torment). The main teaching is that there is a chasm between the two which no-one can cross either way. The final state - righteous or unrighteous - is fixed before death and thereafter is irrevocable.

#### Judgement (Jn 3:17-21)

This verse supports the thrust of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Choices made on earth about Christ have eternal ramifications. Those that believe will not be judged, those that choose not to believe judge themselves, and indeed have judged themselves already.

#### The ascension (Acts 1:6-11)

After the resurrection the disciples again ask whether Jesus is going to restore the kingdom, that is set up a political kingdom. Jesus says that only the Father knows that but brings them back to the job in hand, 'you will be witnesses .... to the ends of the earth' (see Matt 24:14) and he was taken away. The dramatic way he was taken was to indicate that this was his last appearance - he had been coming and going for 40 days. The angel said that he would 'come back in the same way' (see Rev 1:7).

### 3 The Epistles

#### Rom 8:18-25 Creation and Sons of God

The glory to come outweighs any temporary suffering now. God's sons, hidden at the moment, will be revealed [when Jesus comes] and all creation waits with baited breath. After the fall, creation itself fell and was subject to frustration (unfruitfulness?), bondage and decay. When God's children are set free, then creation will be too. This is our hope.

#### Rom 11:25-29 Israel

Superficially this appears to teach that Israel has been hardened in heart and sidelined until the Gentile church is complete. Once this has happened, all Israel will be saved. It seems to uphold the view of Israel continuing to hold a special place (or at least coming back to hold a special place once again). This hardening of heart does not apply to all Israel nor for all time (v25). At first, the major growth of the church was among Jews (Acts 2:47) but later this stopped and these verses may refer to the fact that many Jews found it difficult to become Christians once Gentiles came into the church (see Acts 22:21-22). We know that the 'Judaizers' (those that wanted to insist that Gentile converted to Judaism before they became Christians) were a perennial problem in the early church.

Verse 26 says that 'all Israel will be saved', however, it is clear from Rom 10:1-4 that Jews are saved in the same way as anyone else - by faith in Christ - and Paul prays that they might all be saved (Rom 10:1). No-one obtains salvation by virtue of being a Jew, only by repentance and faith in Jesus. The word 'all' in verse 26 is to be compared to the 'full number' of the Gentiles earlier and means that, although they have currently hardened their hearts, ultimately all those who would respond to the gospel will do so (Jn 3:16), whether Gentile or Jew.

Verses 28-29 ('they are loved on account of the Patriarchs, for God's ..... call [is] irrevocable') also appears to maintain a special place for the Jews. Many think that, although it appears (now and over the centuries) that the Gentile church has superseded the Jewish nation as God's people, in fact it is the CHURCH (Jew and Gentile together) that now constitutes God's people (Rom 3:1-4, 27-30). God's promise to the Patriarchs (Abraham -Gen 17:6-8, 12:23, Isaac, and Jacob [Israel] - Gen 35:11) that from them would come nations and kings and through them all nations would be blessed is fulfilled firstly in Jesus (a Jew) and secondly through the church. God's promise to the Patriarchs is kept in that Israel is not cut off from grace completely for her disobedience and rejection of the Messiah (Lk 19:41-44).

#### 1 Cor 15:1-58 Resurrection

Jesus died and is risen! Many witnesses attest to this. He is the first fruits (v23) and must reign until all his enemies are destroyed, ending with the destruction of death itself (see Rev 20:1-6 the 1000 years reign of Christ) and the resurrection of all the dead for judgement or eternal life. Paul then talks about the nature of this resurrection, particularly of the resurrection body. This will not be like an earthly body (v40, 42-44), it will not be physical (ie flesh and blood, v50) and it will not be subject to disease or death (v53). We will receive it in a flash at the last trumpet (see Matt 24:31,40,41). Death and sin will be no more, the victory of Christ will be complete and seen to be complete.

#### 2 Cor 4:13-5:10 Guarantee and rewards

Verse 14 says we will be raised and presented in Christ's presence (see Col 1:22), therefore we

don't loose heart, even though there are difficulties the hope of eternal glory far outweighs the difficulties (v17). Our bodies are mortal and subject to decay and death but God has prepared an eternal dwelling for us (see ICor 15:40ff) and given us the Spirit as a guarantee or deposit that we will receive it (5:5).

We will all be presented before Christ, not for judgement (Rom 8:1) but to receive what is due for the things we have done in this life (vIO). The implication is that we will have to give an account of how we have used our time, gifts, opportunities, etc. This is discussed in ICor 3:10-15. Our work for Christ will be evaluated and shown for what it is, although our salvation will not be affected, (see Matt 20:1-16). See also 1 Tim 6:19 about laying up treasure for the coming age.

#### Eph 1:9-10 Unity under Christ

God's purpose 'when times will have reached their fulfilment' (end of the age - Matt 13:39) is to bring all things together under Christ. This speaks of unity of creation when it will be liberated from frustration and bondage as we will be (Rom 8:20-21).

#### Eph 1:19-23 Millennial rule of Christ

This passage talks about Christ's rule after the resurrection and ascension, 'far above all rule and authority, power and dominion' (see Phil 2:9, Col 3:1) in the present age and the age to come. All things are under his feet. (see also Eph 3:10,11)

#### Eph 2:6-7. 3:10-11 Millennial rule of the saints

God has seated us in the heavenly realms with Christ now in order to show his grace in the coming ages. Through the church. God's manifold wisdom is made known to rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (ie to the angels and to Satan and his armies).

#### Phil 2:9-10 Christ's rule 2:9-10 Christ's

This takes up the theme of Eph 1:19-23. Jesus is exalted, his name is above every other name. He is Lord of all and every knee should bow to him in heaven, on earth and in hell.

#### Phil 3:20-21 Christ's power in the church

Our citizenship is in heaven - we belong there (Eph 2:6-7) - and we eagerly wait for Jesus to come. He has power now to bring everything under his control.

#### Col 1:22

Promise to present us holy and without blemish in his sight (see 2 Cor 4:13)

#### Col 3:1-6 We will appear with him

Christ is seated at the right hand of God - sign of victory and authority - and our life is hidden with him. When he appears (ie comes back and is seen) we will no longer be hidden but will appear with him (IThe 4:13). There is also a warning that God's wrath (judgement) is coming on all sin (see Zech 1:2) - Gods attitude to sin never changes - he has purer eyes than to look on wrong (Hab 1:13).

#### 1 Thes 4:13 - 5:11 The coming of Christ

(see Col 3:4) 'Dead' Christians will appear when Jesus returns, they will come with him, its as if they are asleep now. The Thessalonians expected Jesus to come back at any time and were concerned that those who had died would miss out on the great event! Paul reassures them that they won't - they will be there. They will awaken when they hear the trumpet (Matt 24:31) and rise first. Those who are alive at the time will be 'caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air'. This is the rapture (see Matt 24:37-41, 2 Thes 2:1) and occurs at the same time (same instant) that Jesus comes (not a long time before as some people believe).

This should be an encouragement to us. Paul then reiterates what Jesus said - no-one knows when this will be. It will be like a thief in the night (Matt 24:43) - be ready. It will be 'business as usual', people will think that all is well, 'Peace and security', they think. Destruction will come suddenly. (Some people think that 'peace and security' refers to a period of peace under a future earthly dictator, empowered by Satan himself (the antichrist or 'the man of lawlessness' of 2 Thes 2:1-12), who will appear to bring apparent peace just before Jesus comes. This is only conjecture and belongs to the premillennialist structure of future history which has little real basis in scripture).

Paul goes on, as in other places, to say that we belong to the light and should live accordingly - this is part of being ready and waiting for Jesus. God's wrath is coming (v9 and Col 3:6) but we will escape it because we have his salvation as a helmet (see Eph 6:17). Christ's death is sufficient for our salvation whether we are alive or dead when he comes. Either way we will live with him.

#### 2 Thes 2:1-12 The man of lawlessness

When Jesus comes we will all be gathered to him (1Thes 4:16,17). We should not become unsettled or alarmed by prophecy, reports or letters (eg 'Prophecy Today', 'Prophetic Vision', 'The Late, great planet earth', etc) - this applies not just to the specific case mentioned in v2. A particular sign of the end must come first - the 'rebellion' and the appearing of 'the man of lawlessness'. He will proclaim himself God. This seems to be a particular case of the false Christs Jesus spoke about in Matt 24:5 and may, in fact refer to the emperors Titus and following who instituted emperor worship in the Roman empire after 70AD although some of the later parts of the passage referring to him being unleashed and to counterfeit miracles don't really fit this interpretation.

In any event he will oppose everything of God and set himself up to be worshipped as God - in the temple. (The word 'temple' could very well refer to the church as Paul and others describe the church as the temple in several places (eg 1 Cor 3:16). Some people think that these verses mean that the temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt before these events can take place as they choose a literalist interpretation of these verse). These verse obviously tie in with the 'abomination that makes desolate' referred to by Jesus (Matt 24:15 quoting Daniel 9:27).

The 'man of lawlessness' is evidently held back (v6) (bound) and, although his power is at work, it is severely restrained. One day (v8) this restraint will be taken away and he will be revealed for what he is. Jesus will then destroy him once and for all (v3). Before this he will dazzle people with counterfeit miracles and signs and those who are perishing (the unsaved) will be greatly deceived. They are deceived because they have chosen to believe a lie rather than the truth - they are already judged (Jn 3:18). This all fits in with Christ's rule now (Eph 1:19-23, Phil 2:9-10) where Satan is bound (ie his activities are curtailed) - Rev 20:1-3. Immediately before Christ's return he will be released for a short time to deceive the nations (Rev 20:7) and instigate a rebellion against God. Jesus' return will put this down and seal his doom once and for all. (Rev 20:9). The rebellion is limited in length for the sake of Christians

who are suffering during it.

#### 1 Tim 4:12 Deceitful teaching

This ties in with Matt 24:4, 2 Thes 2:10 and Rev20:7 - in later times there will be deceitful teaching and it will tempt some to leave the faith.

#### 2 Tim 3:1-9 Tribulation

There will be terrible times in the last days. All the things mentioned have happened continuously down the ages - perhaps they will be worse in the 'rebellion' (2 Thes 2:3) when Satan is loosed for a short time. Religion will appear godly but have no power - such churches will be dominated by women who are loaded down with guilt and 'swayed by all kinds of evil desires'.

#### 2 Tim 4:1-4 Christ's judgement

Christ will judge the living and the dead - the fact that he is coming should affect how we live and give as urgency to our outreach and teaching. Men will turn away from truth and invent theology that suits them better, surrounding themselves with teachers whose teaching is more palatable.

#### Titus 2:12-13 Glorious appearing

We should live godly lives as we await his glorious appearing.

#### Heb 2:8-9 Not yet

God put everything under Jesus' feet [when he died and rose again] but we don't yet see it. We do, however, see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. Promise that his kingdom will one day be seen.

#### Jas 5:8 Patience

Be patient in suffering because the Lord's coming is near.

#### 1 Pet 1:4-6.13 Hope in inheritance

There is an inheritance kept in heaven for us and we should rejoice even though there is suffering at present. We should set our hope on the grace (salvation) to be received when he comes.

#### 1 Pet 4:7.13 The end is near

The end is near so we should live and pray accordingly. Rejoice now in suffering - you will be overjoyed when he comes.

#### 2 Pet 1:11 A rich welcome awaits us in heaven

#### 2 Pet 3:3. 8-15 Scoffers will come

In the last days scoffers will come following evil rather than the truth. Jesus is not slow in coming - 1 day to him is like 1000 years (and *vice versa*) and he doesn't want anyone to perish but wants to give a chance to everyone to repent.

### 1 Jn 2:18.19.28 Antichrist will come

This is the last hour and antichrist is coming (Matt 24:15, 2 Thes 2:3) and in fact many antichrists have already come (Matt 24:5). Live for [the true] Christ so that you will be unashamed when he comes.

### 1 Jn 4:1-3 Spirit of antichrist

Test for the spirit of antichrist - it will not acknowledge that Jesus (God's son) has come in the flesh - ie the spirit of antichrist denies the incarnation.

## **4 The book of Revelation**

### Interpreting Revelation

There are 3 views of the book of revelation:

1. Everything in it happened in the first few centuries of the church, that is between Pentecost and the reign of the Emperor Constantine, when the whole empire became 'Christian'.
2. Everything in it will happen in the future, that is it describes the cataclysmic events in the time immediately leading up to Jesus' coming again.
3. The book describes the grand sweep of church history from Pentecost to the second advent of Jesus.

The first of these views cannot be true since there are parts of Revelation which are obviously in the future such as the new heavens and the new earth described in the last two chapters and, in any case, there is a general *crescendo* in the book which is hard to reconcile with the events all having happened in the first 3-4 centuries of the church.

The second view is usually associated with premillennialism (see section on the millennium) and postpones the real importance of the book to a short period of time at the end-time. As such, it would be of little practical benefit or encouragement to us or to its readers through the ages except for academic interest.

The third view itself comprises 3 schools:

- a) The church historical school which takes the book as setting out the main phases of the church and that the things foretold are in the making now and do not merely belong to the end of the age.
- b) The continuous historical school which interprets the book as history *without a break*, that is there is no overlapping of any of the visions, etc. but they follow each other in chronological sequence. To understand the book in this way demands a great knowledge of 19 centuries of church history and there are some major omissions, such as the reformation. In any case, there are obvious breaks such as at the end of chapter 11, where it goes back to the incarnation.
- c) The kingdom historical school which doesn't take the book as a continuous, unbroken record of church history nor even as a summary of church history. Rather it takes the

book as a series of pictures, sometimes overlapping, sometimes recapitulating, sometimes concentrating on specific issues, which build to a climax in Jesus' coming and the final establishment of his reign.

The kingdom historical view is the one (in my view) which is most in keeping with the rest of the New Testament. The NT as a whole has an eschatological outlook culminating in Jesus' second coming. In this view we have been (and still are) in the 'end-times' since Pentecost. The first century church certainly believed this as has the church at various times of renewal. In what follows, I assume the kingdom historical view of the book. I assume that it describes in various ways the broad sweep of history through the 'church age' which is synonymous with 'the last days' and 'the end times'. Implicit in this view is that these terms are also synonymous with 'the millennium' - the 1000 years reign of Christ.

The book is in the form of a series of visions or dreams and should be interpreted as such - see the section on interpreting dreams and visions below.

Numbers are used symbolically a great deal in Revelation.

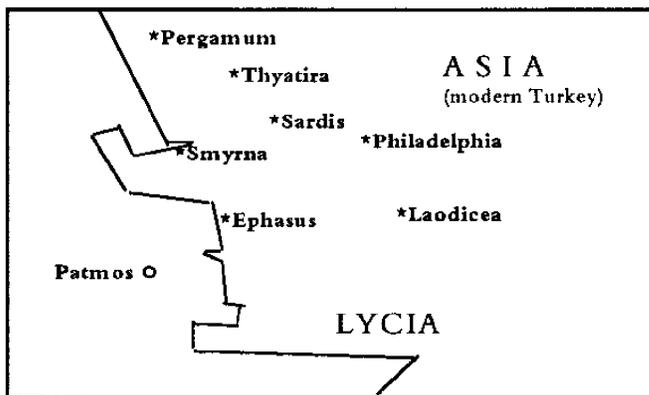
The number 7 in particular is used a lot - 7 churches, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 plagues, 7 bowls of God's wrath - to indicate completeness or perfection.

The number 4 is often used to signify the earth (4 corners of the earth) as in the 4 angels bound at or beyond the Euphrates (Rev 9:14, 16:12). 3 is the number of God - the trinity and 6 the number of man (slightly short of perfection!). Hence 666 (three 6's) is the man who makes himself God - the antichrist (or the false witness). Large numbers like 144,000 are used to denote the full number or a great yet undefined number (1000 years - 20:2, 200 million mounted troops - 9:16).

In summary. Revelation should be interpreted as a series of visions or dreams sometimes overlapping, sometimes recapitulating, sometimes with superfluous detail, that describe the grand sweep of church history from Pentecost onwards and the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. It builds to a climax in Jesus' coming and the final establishment of his reign

#### Introduction (1:1-11)

John introduces his visions in the form of a letter to the seven churches of Asia. He was exiled on the Greek island of Patmos. If you imagine standing on that island (look on the map below) the seven churches mentioned form an arc in front of you:



He says the book describes 'what must soon take place' (v1) and echoes Acts 1:9-11 - 'He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him...'

#### Jesus' lordship over the church (1:12-3:22)

The churches are described as lampstands (see Matt 5:14-16) - lights to the world. He has the right to commend, discipline and ultimately judge the church. The 7 letters to the 7 churches refer to the historical situation of each but the churches named also stand for the church through the ages and throughout the world. The interpretation for any modern church is 'if the cap fits, wear it'.

#### The seven seals (4:1-8:5)

4:1-11 The vision of God's throne is very reminiscent of Isaiah 6:1-4 - he is holy, he is worthy to receive praise and worship

5:1-14 The scroll, maybe containing a record of men's deeds sealed with 7 seals which only the Lamb (Jn 1:29) could open. The Lamb is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:9) and is also the sacrificial lamb of the Passover (Ex 12:1-13). The Lamb is worthy to receive worship in the exactly the same way as God is.

6:1-17 The first 6 seals - many parallels with Matt 24.

- Seals 1-4 - four horsemen (see Zech 1:8-17,6:1-8) bringing conquest, bloodshed, famine and death. All spoken of by Jesus in Matt 24:6-8.
- Seal 5 - Christians who have been persecuted (see Matt 24:7)
- Seal 6 - Various signs: earthquake (Matt24:7), sun turns black (Matt24:29, Joel2:30-31), people hid in caves and mountains for the day of wrath has come (Matt24:16)

The next three sections may be a digression or may be contained within the 6th seal.

7:1-9 All the saved stand before the throne of the Lamb. 144,000 - the complete number of those being saved (Matt24:14,31). The 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel probably means the full number of all Jews being saved as v9 refers to the full number from every tribe and nation (compare the discussion on Rom 11:25-29 above). Also mentioned specifically are the believers who 'came through the great tribulation' (v14)

7:10-12 Perfect worship in heaven as evidenced by its 7-fold attributes - Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honour, power and strength

7:15-17 God's presence ('temple' = inner sanctuary where Jesus made a way for us - Heb 10:19-22) brings freedom from all suffering and the Lamb becomes the shepherd! God will wipe away all tears.

8:1-2 - Seal 7 - Silence (awe?)

Angels with 7 **trumpets** (Matt 24:31, 1Cor15:52) may be contained within the discourse on the 7th seal but more probably begins a new section, a new picture of the same events.

8:3-5 Another angel had a golden censer - the smoke of the incense is the prayers of the saints (the church). Filled with fire from the altar and hurled back to earth. Prayers have mighty effects (James 5:16)

#### The seven trumpets (8:6-11:19)

8:6-13 Trumpets 1-4 bring various calamities and plagues affecting earth, sea, rivers (reversing the miracle at Marah - Ex 15:22-25) and the heavens.

9:1-12 Trumpet 5 ushers in the first of 3 'woes' for the unrighteous - locusts (Ex 10:1-20, Joel 1:2-2:11) foreshadow day of Lord's coming, part of God's judgement. Their king is named 'Destroyer'. This first woe only affects the wicked (those without the seal of God [Holy Spirit - Eph 4:30])

9:13-21 Trumpet 6 ushers in the second 'woe' - 4 angels lead innumerable (demonic) host against sinful men. Even so, they would not repent (see Ex 10:20, eg) of magic arts (Greek *pharmakon* - drugs), sexual immorality and theft

The next two sections form part of the second 'woe'.

10:1-11:2 Angel with little scroll - John had to eat it - digest its contents. It was sour - bad news - the temple (church?) was measured (see Ezek 40:3ff, Zech 2:1-2) (and found wanting as in Dan 5:26,27?)

11:3-13 Two witnesses raised up - Moses and Elijah (see Matt 7:12, 22:40) - representing the law and the prophets (ie the scriptures). Satan tries to attack them and sinful men rejoice that they were apparently overthrown (and therefore could not condemn them - see 2 Tim 4:1-4). Unfortunately for them. God reinstated the two witnesses.

11:14-19 Trumpet 7 - third 'woe'- The kingdom appears and Christ's reign is fully here. This is the event that the demons and sinners fear most. The trumpet ushers in great worship in heaven and the temple and ark of the covenant are revealed - that is God's presence, God's glory and God's promise are fully revealed.

#### The woman, the dragon, the beast and the harvest (12:1-14:20)

12:1-17 This is another view of the same events and starts with a picture of the incarnation (12:2,5). The dragon (Satan) wanted to kill the child but God prevented him (Matt 2:13-23). Satan was thrown out of heaven (Lk 10:18) and the reign of the Christ begun. Verse 13 recapitulates and describes the flight from Herod (Matt 2:13-23), Satan turns his attention to Christ's followers.

13:1-10 The beast out of the sea appears. This is the anti-christ, the 'man of lawlessness' (2 Thes. 2:1-12) who wages war against the saints (the great tribulation) and is worshipped along with Satan himself (the dragon). He is given the authority of the dragon and has a fatal wound that was healed (He is the counterfeit Christ: he has the father's (Satan's) authority, he is worshipped with Satan, he was apparently resurrected).

13:11-18 The beast out of the earth appears. He performs miracles and signs and causes people to worship the first beast and the dragon. He is the false prophet of Rev 16. He marked everyone who worshipped the beast and the dragon (compare Eph 1:13) (He is

the counterfeit Holy Spirit: he causes the 'father' and 'son' to be worshipped, he has power of the 'father' to perform miracles and he marks the 'believers') (His number - 666 - represents a man (6) making himself God (3x).

These three: the dragon, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth are the diabolical analogue to the trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit

14:1-20 jumps to the judgement and eternal state. It starts with worship in heaven - a song that only the 144,000 (complete number of the redeemed) could learn. They are blameless (Eph 1:4). The 3 angels pronounce the judgement based on the gospel (v6). Babylon (worship of the beast - false religion) is fallen and the wicked (worshippers of the beast) subject to God's wrath. The smoke (evidence? smoke sometimes indicates God's glory) of their punishment lasts forever. This is repeated in the description of the harvest - the Son with his angels (Matt 16:27-28, etc) - coming to reap the wicked

#### Seven plagues (15:1-8)

This may be part of the same sequence as the above. The seven plagues are not named, unless they are the same as the seven bowls of God's wrath in chapter 16. This section also speaks of the glory of those who 'had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name' - that is the diabolical trinity. They 'sang the song of Moses (Ex 15:1-18 - sung after the deliverance at the Red sea) and of the Lamb' The tabernacle of the testimony was opened - see 11:19.

#### Seven bowls (vials) of God's wrath (16:1-21)

This seems to go over the events leading up to Jesus' coming yet again. The first 4 bowls bring judgement on the worshipers of the beast by affecting the land, the sea, the rivers and the sky (see 8:6-13). The fifth bowl brings judgement to the kingdom of the beast but his followers refused to repent (see 9:20). The sixth prepares the way for the demonic army from the east (see 9:14 - the sixth trumpet). This demonic army performs signs and wonders to draw men to the great showdown at Armageddon (probably not a geographical place but a type of a great victory of God over his enemies - see Judges 5:19). There is a warning (v15) that Jesus comes like a thief, that is when no-one expects it (perhaps when it appears that evil has triumphed). The seventh bowl is poured into the air - from where come Jesus and his saintly army - final victory is won, Babylon is subject to God's wrath.

#### The prostitute (17:1-19:10)

God often referred to idolatry and spiritism as prostitution (eg Lev 17:7, Lev 20:6). Here the great prostitute is the organised idolatrous worship of the beast and the dragon (13:4), possibly based on the apostate church. She is 'carried' by the beast and is 'drunk with the blood of the saints' - she persecutes the true saints. Verse 8 again refers to the apparent resurrection of the beast. Verse 9 talks of 7 hills and 7 kings, perhaps symbolising the totality of earthly power and rule. The beast is apparently an eighth - that is a continuation of earthly rule - but is in reality part of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. When the beast gains power on the earth he will raise up several (short lived) vassal kingdoms (v12). Their purpose is to fight against the Lamb - they are the counterfeit church of the counterfeit trinity - but the Lamb will overcome them. The beast however turns against the prostitute (16) and brings about her destruction.

An angel announces her destruction and calls God's true people to come out other, the

apostate church which forms the basis for worship of the beast. The kings who drew their power from her and the merchants who gained their riches from her will mourn her passing (compare Acts 19:24ff).

The multitude in heaven rejoice that the prostitute is no more and that God is victorious. Again, the evidence of her destruction (v3) and of God's victory and justice lasts forever. The destruction of the prostitute (illegitimate lover of Satan) is compared to the purity of the bride of the Lamb. 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'

'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (v10).

#### The rider on the white horse (19:11-21)

Another picture of Jesus, the bridegroom, who 'makes war with justice' and who is 'dressed in a robe dipped in blood'. His name is 'the Word of God' (Jn 1:1) and he leads the army of the righteous against the beast and his army and the false prophet (I Thes 4:13ff). He is the 'King of kings and the Lord of lords' His word is like a sword (Eph 6:17) and he uses it to kill the host of the enemy. The beast and the prophet are thrown into the 'fiery lake'. Jesus will rule with an iron sceptre (v15) and is the agent of God's wrath and justice.

#### The Millennium (20:1-15)

The millennium or the 1000 years' reign of Christ is discussed in verses 1-6. During this time Satan is bound and at the end of this period he will be loosed for a short time to create havoc and rebellion against God (v7-9) culminating in the final showdown between God and Satan (v8). This will be terminated by direct divine intervention (v9) and Satan is also thrown into the fiery lake with the beast and the false prophet (see 19:20): the satanic trinity is destroyed. After this the dead are judged according to whether or not their names are in the book of life (Lk 10:20, Phil 4:3, Heb 12:23, Rev 3:5). Those whose names are not written in the book are also thrown into the fiery lake and so is death itself. The sting of death was destroyed at Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15:55-56), now death itself is destroyed.

For a discussion of the various views about the millennium see section 5

#### The New Jerusalem (21:1 - 22:5)

After the final battle and the destruction of all that is evil the new creation is revealed. The holy city, the New Jerusalem is the bride of Christ. God's age-old purpose is fulfilled and his dwelling is made with men. All suffering, crying and pain will be gone for ever - he will wipe away every tear.

Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning (Jn 1:1) and the End, is seated on the throne for ever. He will satisfy every longing (v6) and reward everyone who is faithful.

The bride, the city is glorious and complete (12 of everything!). The city has no temple because it does not need one because it has God and the Lamb - God, who does not dwell in temples made with human hands (2 Chron 6:18) now dwells with man for ever. The city does not need the sun because it has the Son. Nothing impure will ever enter it.

The river of life flows from the throne and the Tree of Life (Gen 2:9) is planted on either side and bears fruit continually. Its leaves are for the healing of the nations. God's original plan - that man should eat of the Tree of Life (Jesus) is fulfilled - Eden is restored. Most glorious of

all, we will see his face (2 Cor 4:6) and we will reign with him.

### Epilogue 22:6-21

This is written to 'show what must soon take place' (see 1:1). The words must not be sealed up but promulgated. He is coming soon. He will reward the saints according to their deeds (2 Cor 4:15-5:10). He is the First and the Last, the Root *and* offspring of David, the bright Morning Star (2 Pet 1:19).

'Blessed are those who wash their robes' - that is accept the salvation bought through Jesus' blood - 'whoever is thirsty, let him come, whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life'.

'Amen, Come, Lord Jesus'.

## **5 General**

### The last days

It is quite clear that the apostles and the early church considered that they were living in the last days. In Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14f) he says as much, quoting Joel's prophecy, 'In the last days .....'. Hebrews 1:2 implies that the last days started with the incarnation.

In other words, we are living in the last days now. They are characterised by a general increase in wickedness and persecution of the church (whose light will shine brightest in the darkest times) interspersed with renewal and revival. There will also be a general increase in wars, suffering and natural disasters. The wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest.

### The end of the age

Towards the end of the last days we enter a time which Jesus called 'the end of the age' (Matt 28:20, Matt 13:39, etc) which culminates in Jesus' return. Widespread wickedness will increase alongside apostasy of religion (2 Tim 3:5 - although there may be times of revival as well) leading to the appearance of the 'anti-christ' or 'man of lawlessness'. He will reign at least in the apostate church and be worshipped as god. He may also have political power. He will lead a rebellion against God.

Suddenly, at the height of this rebellion, Jesus will appear with the angels and the departed saints. This mighty army will be instantaneously augmented by the living saints, and Jesus will lead them into a tremendous battle with the forces of evil (Armageddon) and to complete victory. Satan will be overthrown and judged.

The separation of the righteous and unrighteous is the final judgement. Satan (and the demonic trinity) will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10) along with death (Rev 20:13) and those whose names are not written in the 'Lamb's Book of Life' (Rev 20:15).

### The millennium

The millennial reign of Christ (the millennium) is discussed mainly in Rev 20:1-6 but is also referred to in Eph 1:19-23 and Phil 2:9-10. There are three views about when this will happen:

*Post-millennialism* teaches that the second coming of Christ will follow the millennium. The kingdom of Christ will gradually increase until Christianity prevails in the whole world. This state will last 1000 years and then there will be an outbreak of terrible wickedness and rebellion which will be terminated by Christ's second coming, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement. There is a basic contradiction within this view - the prevalence of Christianity and the final outbreak of wickedness and rebellion. Not many Christians hold this view. The main group holding this view are the Jehovah's Witnesses.

*Pre-millennialism* teaches that Jesus' coming will introduce the millennium. The order of events according to the most common view is that:

1. A period of great apostasy will precede Jesus' coming
2. Jesus will come in secret raising the dead saints and snatching away those that are alive (the 'rapture' 1 Thes 4:13-5:11, Matt 24:37-41)
3. There will be a seven year reign of the anti-christ and great tribulation. There will be a turning to Christ during this time, particularly amongst the Jews
4. Christ will appear openly to fight the forces of evil at the battle of Armageddon. Satan will be overthrown, imprisoned and Jesus will begin a 1000 year reign *in Jerusalem*. The temple and temple worship will be restored. All nations will be subject to Jesus' rule, although for many this will be reluctantly, leading to .....
5. At the end of the 1000 years Satan will be loosed for a short time and will stir up rebellion against God. His crushing final defeat will be followed by the resurrection of the wicked and the final judgement.

This view is traditionally held by Pentecostal groups and the Christian (Plymouth) Brethren. *A-millennialism* (non-millennialism) believes that the millennium does not refer to 1000 years of earthly blessedness but to the reign of Christ (and the church Eph 1:19-23, 2:6-7, 3:10-11, Phil 2:9-10) in the heavenly realms *now* - that is to the church age. A-millennialism agrees with pre-millennialism that the world will not all be converted before Jesus comes and with post-millennialism that Jesus' coming ushers in the end of the world, the last judgement and the eternal state of men.

According to this view, the sequence of events will be:

1. Widespread apostasy culminating in the appearance and reign of the anti-christ will precede Jesus' coming
2. The final rebellion will be overthrown by Jesus when he appears, bringing dead believers with him and changing those still alive 'in the twinkling of an eye' (1 Thes 4:13-5:11, Matt 24:37-41, 1 Cor 15:51-52)
3. At the same time, the wicked dead will also be raised for judgement. The earth will be destroyed and new heaven and a new earth will appear in which only righteousness dwells

This view is held by most evangelical Christians as the one that conforms most to the rest of scripture. I agree with this.

## Judgement

Judgement (condemnation) is a constant theme of Jesus' and the Apostles' teaching. There are several aspects:

1. Judgement occurs finally at the end of the age (Parable of the weeds Matt13:24f, etc) although this is just a making permanent of choices already made. John 3:18 teaches that those who do not believe in Jesus have **chosen** condemnation (already). The Bible makes no allowance for people to come to repentance and to chose life after death (Lk 16:19-31).
2. The same passage in Jn 3 makes it very clear that judgement is based only on whether people believe in Jesus or not. The word 'believe' indicates absolute trust in Jesus for salvation rather than intellectual assent to the facts of Jesus' life. We are either 'Sons of the Kingdom' or 'Sons of the evil one' - when we become Christians we pass from one to the other.
3. The parables of Matthew 13 and elsewhere make it clear that judgement consists of a separation of the wicked ('Sons of the evil one' - those that do not trust in Jesus for salvation) from the righteous ('Sons of the Kingdom') and that this separation will be final and irrevocable.
4. The judgement of God is completely just (Gen 18:25 - 'will not the Judge of all the earth do right?') and is because God is completely pure, holy and righteous. He cannot tolerate sin and, since we are all sinners (Rom 3:23) and deserve judgement (Rom 6:23), we have only two choices: to bear judgement (condemnation) ourselves or to put ourselves under the cover of Jesus' condemnation (2 Cor 5:21, Rom 8:1-4).

Christians (those who have accepted Jesus' righteousness in exchange for their sin (2 Cor 5:21) will not face judgement (Rom 8:1, 1 Thess 4:17) but *will* have to give an account of what they have done in this life. They will be rewarded accordingly (1 Cor 3:12-15, Matt 20:1-6, 1Tim6:19).

## Heaven

In Jesus' teaching he doesn't talk too much of heaven. He tells us that he is goes to prepare a place for us so that we will be with him for ever (Jn 14:1-4). He talks of reward for faithful servants - 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world' (Parable of the sheep and goats - Matt 25:34) and 'Come and share your master's happiness (Parable of the talents - Matt 25:14-30) - but it is **being with him** that is the reward that we hope for.

The main picture Jesus uses for heaven is that of a wedding feast (His wedding!). The picture speaks of celebration, rejoicing, happiness, jollity, plenty - a party!

The other main picture used in the New Testament is the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22 - again compared to a bride. In these last two chapters we see that in heaven:

- God will dwell with man (fulfilling original intention of Genesis 2,3)
- We will be his people and he will be our God
- God will wipe away every tear
- There will be no more death, crying, pain, darkness
- Everything will be made new
- Every longing (thirst) will be satisfied

- God's glory will be seen by all, it will be the light of the city
- Nothing impure will be there
- The river of life (Holy Spirit) will flow to bring life to everything
- The 'Tree of Life' (Jesus) will bring healing to everything

## Hell

There are two words translated 'hell' in the New Testament (the Old Testament doesn't really have the concept) - *Gehenna* and *Hades*.

*Gehenna* - 'Valley of Hinnom' - a valley to the south of the city of Jerusalem, reached via the 'Dung Gate'. In earlier times it had been used for the worship of the vile Baal, Molech; worship involving the burning of human sacrifices, particularly children. In Jesus' day it was used as the city rubbish tip and fires burnt there continually to destroy the dumped rubbish. It provides a very vivid picture and Jesus uses this term in many places, eg Matthew 5:22, 5:29,30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:5, 23:33 (and corresponding passages in Mk), Lk 12:5. It is also used by the apostle James in Jas 3:6.

*Hades* is the place of the dead (the underworld) from traditional Greek thought. It corresponds almost exactly to the Hebrew idea expressed by the word *Sheol* in the Old Testament. In both Greek and Hebrew thought *Hades/Sheol* is morally neutral. In most places in the New Testament it is translated as 'death' meaning the (temporary?) place of the dead but in the 4 occurrences in the gospels (Matt 11:23, 16:18, Lk 10:15, Lk 16:23) it does have some of the attributes of *Gehenna*, in particular in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:23). In Revelation 20:14, *Hades* (along with Satan, etc) is thrown into the 'lake of fire which is the second death', the righteous dead having been raised at Jesus' return. The word 'death' is more usually the translation of the Greek word *thanatos*. In several places in Revelation, the two words occur together - Death and Hades (Rev 1:18, 6:8, 20:13 & 14). In Matt 11:23 *Hades* is translated 'depths' taking the idea of the underworld and meaning being cut off from God.

Sometimes the fate of the wicked is expressed in other words - fire, darkness, destruction. In the latter case this is coupled with being 'shut out from the presence of the Lord' (2 Thess 1:8-9).

The use of the various words in the New Testament is given in Appendix B.

Various pictures come out which graphically describe the state of the lost (unrighteous):

1. There will be 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' - depicting deep regret for what has been lost and perhaps remorse (but not repentance - it is too late for that)
2. It will be like fire - sometimes in the Bible fire is the means of cleansing (eg Is 6) but here it speaks of destruction - probably referring to the inner torment of regret, desire for revenge, blame
3. They will be destroyed - again probably referring to the inner torment of regret, desire for revenge, blame
4. There will be complete darkness (always linked with 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' in the gospels) - this speaks of being cut off from the light (that is shut out from God's presence - 2 Thess 1:8-9).

Those who are now dead and 'without hope and without God in the world' (Eph 2:12) still benefit from God's general grace and support of life (Matt 5:45, Col 1:17). Everyone has something of God's image in them for we are all made in God's image (Gen 1:27). To be shut

out from God's light and God's presence is to be removed from the source of life (Jn 1:4), the source of everything that makes life possible; all creativity, joy, friendship, compassion, humour because all these things have their root in God. Hell is a continuation of the current state, it begins now and is a state which is **chosen** by the unrighteous - see Col 1:13, Jn 3:19 and 2 Pet 2:17.

Hell is everything heaven isn't (or rather isn't everything heaven is - it is THE thing defined by what it is not!) - it is wholly cut off from God - see the corresponding list under 'heaven' above.

- God will not dwell there
- They will not be his people (or any other people - 1 Pet 2:10)
- It will be a place of tears
- It is the 'second death', a place of crying, pain, darkness
- Everything will be subject to decay
- Every longing (thirst) will remain unsatisfied
- God's glory will not be seen.
- Everything impure will be there
- The river of life (Holy Spirit) will not flow to bring life
- The 'Tree of Life' (Jesus) will not be there to bring healing

The concept of hell being eternal has always posed difficulties to many Christians - it seems inconsistent with God's love. In Matt 18:8, 25:41 and Jude 7 the Greek word used in 'eternal fire' is *aionion* and the same applies to 'eternal punishment' in Matt 25:46, 'eternal judgement' in Heb 6:2 and 'everlasting destruction' in 2 Thes 1:9. This same word *aionion* is also used for 'eternal life', for example in Matt 19:6 and elsewhere. It seems therefore that the punishment of the unrighteous is 'eternal' in the same way as eternal life is 'eternal'. The root of the word is the Greek word *aion* which means an 'age' (aeon) or a period of time of significant character and so it could possibly refer to the quality of the time rather than the quantity, but this is really stretching things.

In Rev 14:11 and 19:3 it talks about the 'smoke of their torment' rising 'for ever and ever'. This phrase is based on the same word - *eis aionas [ton] aionon* - 'to ages of ages', literally, which may in fact mean 'for ever and ever' or just its literal translation. However, the same phrase is used, for example, in Eph 3:21 ('to him be glory ... for ever and ever'), 2 Tim :18 ('to him be glory for ever and ever'). Rev 7:12 ('... power and strength be to our God for ever and ever') and many other places.

On this basis it does seem that the New Testament teaches that the punishment of the unrighteous is equivalent in this sense to the reward of the righteous, as difficult as we might find it to accept this. The New Testament also teaches that both eternal life and eternal destruction are continuations (taking to extremes) of choices made now. The prospect of eternal destruction is indeed terrible but God's love is such that it is possible to choose to avoid it. He has made a way for everyone to eternal life (Jn 3:16-21).

### Israel

Opinion amongst Christians is divided about the status of the nation of Israel today in God's plans and in particular its role in the events of the last days. This is for two reasons:

1. Much Old Testament prophecy seems to indicate this, and
2. Passages like Rom 11:25-29 seem to indicate that Israel as a nation still has a special place

in God's plan and even that the Jews, as a nation, will be saved.

The New Testament writers quite frequently quote from the Old Testament, after all it was the only scripture they had. Whenever they quote a passage which, in the literalist view, refers to the nation of Israel they always apply it to the universal (that is Jewish and Gentile) church. For example, in Rom 9:24-26 Paul applies the 'my people' of Hos 1:10 and 2:23 to the church and later (v27-33) does the same with Is 10:22-23, Is 1:9, Is 8:14 and Is 28:16.

Hebrews 8:8-12 applies Jer 31:31-34, a prophecy concerning the nation of Israel, to the whole church. In Acts 15:16-18 'David's fallen tent' (Amos 9:11-12) is rebuilt with *Gentile* Christians and, to turn the whole thing round, Stephen (Acts 7:38) talks about the church in Moses' time.

Finally, various Old Testament prophecies refer to the salvation of the Gentiles: Is 11:10 (quoted in Rom 15:12), Is 52:15 (Rom 15:21), Ps 18:49 (Rom 15:9), Ps 117:1 (Rom 15:11) and Deut 32:21 (Rom 10:19).

At first, the major growth of the church was among Jews (Acts 2:47) but later this stopped and many Jews found it difficult to become Christians once Gentiles came into the church (see Acts 22:21-22). We know that the 'Judaisers' (those that wanted to insist that Gentile converted to Judaism before they became Christians) were a perennial problem in the early church and were spoken against by the Apostles.

It is clear from Rom 10:1-4 that Jews are saved in the same way as anyone else - by faith in Christ - and Paul prays that they might all be saved (Rom 10:1). No-one can or will be able to obtain salvation by virtue of being a Jew, only by repentance and faith in Jesus. Rom 11:25-29 says that 'all' Jews and the 'full number' of the Gentiles will be saved, that is all those who would respond to the gospel will do so (Jn 3:16), whether Gentile or Jew.

The end of the passage in Romans 11 ('they are loved on account of the Patriarchs, for God's ..... call [is] irrevocable') means that God's promise to the Patriarchs (Abraham -Gen 17:6-8,12:23, Isaac, and Jacob [Israel] - Gen 35:11) that from them would come nations and kings and through them all nations would be blessed is fulfilled firstly in Jesus (a Jew) and secondly through the church.

Significantly, the New Testament has no prophecy at all about the nation of Israel and, in particular, no prophecy about their return to their traditional land.

In other words, the Bible sees the church as a continuum from Moses through to the end of time; as a single people, firstly Jews and those who joined the Jewish nations and then those who turned to Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul confirms this (Rom 11:17-21) when he talks of the Old testament and New Testament churches as 'one olive tree'. He says that the promise to Abraham that he would be the 'father of many nations' is fulfilled in the church (Rom 4:16, Gal 3:7,14).

This is not consistent with teaching that Israel will again be special in God's plan for salvation. A sensible, consistent interpretation of the Bible as a whole does not allow for the detailed end-time 'future histories' involving a special place for a political, Jewish Israel that are so beloved by some premillennialists.

## Appendix A

### Interpretation of Dreams and Visions in the Bible

There are various examples of dreams and visions in the Bible where the interpretation is also given:

1. Pharaoh's cupbearer's dream (Gen 40:9-11)
2. Pharaoh's baker's dream (Gen 40:16-17)
3. Pharaoh's dreams (Gen 41:1-7)
4. Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10-15)
5. Midianite Soldier's dream (Judges 7:13)
6. Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2:31-35)
7. Daniel's dream (Daniel 7:1-14)
8. Daniel's vision (Daniel 8:1-14)
9. Paul's vision of man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10)

1. Pharaoh's cupbearer saw a vine with 3 branches with buds which became grapes. He squeezed the grapes into Pharaoh's cup. The interpretation was that the branches were 3 days and in 3 days he would be restored to his position.

2. The baker's dream was that he had 3 baskets of bread on his head and birds came and ate the contents of the baskets, the interpretation was that the baskets were 3 days and in 3 days he would be executed.

3. Pharaoh had two dreams. In the first, 7 fat cows came out of the river followed by 7 scrawny cows. The 7 scrawny cows ate the 7 fat cows. In the second, 7 healthy ears of corn were eaten up by 7 wind-scorched ears of corn. The interpretation of both dreams was the same: 7 good harvests (ie 7 years) would be followed by 7 years of famine in the land of Egypt and neighbouring countries.

4. In Jacob's dream at Bethel he saw ladders reaching to heaven, angels going up and down and the glory of God. He interpreted it as God's presence and named the place accordingly.

5. The Midianite soldier saw a barley loaf rolling down and knocking over tents in their camp. **His** friend knew this referred to Gideon.

6. Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a statue with a golden head, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze and legs of iron. Its feet were a mixture of iron and clay. A rock came and smashed the statue to pieces. The interpretation was that there would be 4 kingdoms: Nebuchadnezzar's, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. God would then set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed but would bring all those kingdoms to an end. It would last for ever.

7. Daniel dreamed of 4 beasts - a lion, a bear, a leopard and a 'terrifying beast' with iron teeth, bronze claws and 10 horns. 'One like a son of man' came with the clouds of heaven. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power, all nations worshipped him. The interpretation of this dream was the same as for Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

8. Daniel's vision was of a ram and a goat. The goat attacked the ram and shattered its 2 horns. The goat's single large horn was broken and replaced by 4 horns. Out of one of these grew another which grew until it 'reached the host of heaven' and it set itself up to be worshipped and to be as great as a prince. The interpretation specifically says that the ram is Medo-Persia and the goat is Greece. 4 kingdoms would emerge and a stern king would arise, strong (but not with his own power). He would cause devastation and destroy both mighty and holy people. He would be destroyed but not by earthly power. This refers to the events of 168BC.

9. Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia has a very simple, direct interpretation: Paul

didn't know where to go next - God gave him specific instructions.

There are several general principles:

1. Not all features in a dream are relevant (eg some of the details in the baker's dream are ignored by Joseph)
2. Some parts of the interpretation do not correspond to features in the dream (eg Joseph saying that the 7 years of famine would include neighbouring countries, in Daniel's vision the interpretation says that the stern king would be a 'master of intrigue', etc)
3. Several dreams in the same period have the same interpretation even though the symbolism is very different (eg Pharaoh's 2 dreams, Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's dream)
4. Two apparently similar dreams have opposite meanings (eg Cupbearer's and baker's dreams)
5. Some dreams have almost immediate relevance, others longer term
6. Some indicate general things, like God's great glory, others give specific information or instructions to be followed immediately.
7. What really matters is the interpretation the Spirit gives - the meaning cannot be discerned by human reason, meanings of dreams do not obey logic.

All of these features can be seen in the book of Revelation,

## **Appendix B**

### **The use of different words to describe the fate of the unrighteous**

#### Gehenna (Jerusalem's rubbish tip)

Matt 5:22, 5:29,30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 23:33

Mk 9:43,45,47

Lk 12:5

Jas3:6

#### Hades (The Greek underworld)

Matt 11:23, 16:18 ('Gates of Hades' = power of evil)

Lk 10:15, 16:23

Acts 2:27,31 (here used to translate 'Sheol' from Psalm 16 - not necessarily 'hell')

1 Cor 15:55 (here used to mean 'death' whose sting is sin)

**Rev** 1:18, 6:8, 20:13,14 (in each case 'Death and Hades' - prejudgement)

#### Tararo (abyss)

2 Pet 2:4 (translated 'hell')

Thmiatos (death)

Jn 5:24 (believers cross from death to life and will not be condemned)

Rom 6:21,23 (wages of sin is death)

2 Tim 1:10 (Jesus destroyed death and brought life)

Jas 5:20 (Death the final state of sinners)

Rev 1:18, 2:11, 6:8, 20:6,13,14, 21:8 (often with 'Hades' eg'Death and Hades gave up their dead')

Pur (fire. eternal fire. lake of fire)

Matt 18:8, 25:41 (fire of hell (*gehennnd*) eternal fire prepared for devil...)

Mk 9:43,48

Lk 16:24 (in this *case phlox*, flame - rich man and Lazarus)

Heb 10:27 ('fearful expectation of judgement and raging fire')

2 Pet 3:7, 12 (judgement and destruction of earth and heaven by fire)

Jude 7, 23 (Sodom and Gomorrah examples of those who are punished through fire)

**Rev** 14:18, 18:8,20:14,15

Olethros (destruction)

1 Thess 5:3 (sudden destruction comes)

2 Thess 1:8-9 (everlasting destruction, shutout from the presence of the Lord)

Skotos (darkness)

Matt 8:12, 22:13, 25:30 (parables - cast into outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth)

Jn 3:19 (verdict - 'men preferred darkness to light')

Col 1:13 ('He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness')

2 Pet 2:17 ('Darkness reserved for those who follow corrupt desires')

**Rev** 16:10 (beast's kingdom plunged into darkness)

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