

LESSON XII

A STUDY IN FINAL THINGS

INTRODUCTION

It is important to have an understanding of what the Scriptures tell us concerning the end of all things. A realization of what will happen at the end of time will help to strengthen our present day living. Further, as we study more about these final things, we can better understand God's purpose in history, and how that purpose will be completely fulfilled. The special branch of Theology that deals with such a study of last, or final things is called Eschatology. Of course, in this lesson, we will simply be giving a brief survey of Eschatological studies.

The Bible is our sole guide as to what would happen at the end of the world, or at the consummation of all things. There is some teaching on this from the Old Testament itself, but the New Testament is where we find most of it. In the Old Testament there are sections in the book of Daniel that are very relevant towards the end of time. Together with Daniel, and other references in the Old Testament, we find, in the New Testament, Christ Himself giving us various lessons on what would happen at the end times. In the Gospel of Matthew and in the Epistle of Paul there are many teachings about events that would take place at that particular time. The teachings of Christ, in general, indicate that it isn't going to be a time of fearful agony and its going to be a very happy time. Jesus said its going to be a time of anguish, its going to be a time of fearful agony and its going to be a time of sorrow for all those who do not know God. The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Thessalonians spoke about great apostasy that would arise prior to the coming of Jesus Christ. He spoke about anti-Christian activity. And he spoke about great tribulation that might occur. But, by and large, the greatest extent of teachings on these end times is found in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is a book of prophecy, and was written by the Apostle John. It is the last book of the New Testament to be written. It was written by John while he was in exile on the island of Patmos. The book itself is John's vision of these events as shown to him by God. Much of the book is written in figurative language, or in other words symbolic language. Therefore, interpretation is dependent on an understanding of language and symbols and circumstances existent in the day of the Apostle John. There is some relation to Old Testament prophecy on the same subject such as found in the book of Daniel.

Much confusion has arisen by failing to realize that most of these writings are in highly symbolical language. We need to try and understand what the symbols refer to, and to keep away from a completely literal analysis of the sections that deal with subjects concerning the end. Also, it should be realized that there are many things of which man may not get a full understanding at present. God still has His mysteries and we are, still mortal in our understanding.

Keeping these things in mind we can approach the study of final things with the right perspective, and come away with enough understanding to know the purposes of God, to know

basically what would happen at the end of time, and to know what part we have to play in the present so that at that end we would be acceptable in the sight of God.

CHAPTER I

A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF HISTORY

There are various views as to the purpose of life and the meaning of history. Also, there are various goals assigned to history itself and to the role of man in the world. These views are an answer to the questions: Is man on earth for a purpose? Is history going anywhere? Is nature going anywhere? And so on.

The Greeks were fond of thinking of history as a cycle. Time marches on without any goal. And time is a cycle without any purpose. Therefore history has no real purpose. However, the Greeks believed that man could escape this endless circle. But time itself marches on without him. There are a lot of modern day philosophers and theologians who follow this view.

In comparison to this cyclical view of history is the linear view, which simply means that history has a goal and a purpose and is moving towards that. It follows that history has a beginning and the beginning is bound up with the purpose. Therefore, history is purposeful and the end of history or the goal of history will fulfill that purpose.

Now this is the basic Biblical view. History has a goal and is moving towards that particular goal. We read in the Scriptures that time itself did have a beginning. In the book of Genesis chapter 1 we read that time and nature were created by God. Time, without a beginning, can have no purpose. And there can be no purpose in time in history, apart from the beginning of creation, as we see it in the Bible. The Bible tells us that the world itself was created for a purpose. Hence creation according to the Scriptures has a purpose and has a goal. The central portion of creation is man. Man was created in God's image to have fellowship with Him. Man incorporates both the physical and the spiritual and man has a vital role to fulfilling the purpose and goal of history.

But according to the Bible man fell into sin and thwarted somewhat that goal. Without man's fall, man and creation would have moved on to God's original goal or end for history. But due to the entrance of sin into the world, this original purpose was changed. And for man and nature to reach the goal or purpose God had in store for it, there had to be a restoration, back to the right path of the Divine purposes of God. This was accomplished through the giving of God's Son for the removal of man's sins. Christ came to restore His creation through His death and resurrection. Man once more is enabled, by the work of Christ, to resume the original goal and purpose of history.

All of time and history will be consummated at the end of all things. This study concerns that end, and is taken from what God has revealed to man in the Scriptures. God has a purpose for this world of ours and how that purpose will finally be consummated is given to us in His Word.

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The Certainty of His Coming: The Bible teaches very plainly that one day the Son of God is going to come down to earth again. We say He will come to earth “again” because He did come at one time as a little baby born in a manger; in the town of Bethlehem. He lived on earth and died but rose again from the dead, and later ascended bodily into heaven. He promised He would come back. But the purpose of His Second Coming would be different.

When Christ returns to the earth He will fulfill all of God’s original plan and purpose for this earth. It would be a conclusion to this world, and the end of this world order. Read Matthew chapter 24 verse 3, 29, 31 and also verses 35-44. As a conclusion there will be a consummation of all things. It will be an end to the regeneration process in man. It would be a time for the restoration of all things. Ephesians 1:10 tells us that when Christ returns He will bring together all things under one head again.

But we must remember that one very important purpose of the return of Christ is to gather all people together and to judge them. Matthew 16:27 says, “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works.” The judgment is going to mean, not just punishment extended to the wicked, but also rewards to the righteous. So we could say that, when Christ comes again, He is coming as the Supreme Ruler, the King of Kings, the Mighty Judge and Almighty God.

However, even though we do know that He is coming as a Judge, yet we are not sure of the time of His coming. We are certain of His return. We have the assurance from the Word of God of His return and of a day of judgment (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 17:31; Rev. 1:7; 22:20). There is absolutely no doubt as to the fact of His return.

But when we read passages like Matthew 24:35-51, Mark 13:31-37; II Thess. 2:1-3ff, etc., we realize that we do not know the day nor do we know the hour. There are passages of Scripture that indicate the nearness of His coming. Some of these passages are Heb. 10:25 & 37; James 5:9; II Peter 3:8, etc. Nevertheless, we cannot determine the time in days and hours concerning His return. Jesus Himself taught that He cometh, “like a thief in the night.”

But we know, from the Scripture, that the return of Christ is going to be a **personal and visible return**. Acts 1:11; I Thess. 4:16; Heb. 9:28, etc. Every eye is going to see Him. All mankind will acknowledge Him as the returning Lord and God. And it would be a **glorious** and

triumphant return. (II Thess. 1:7; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 11:25, etc.). Though it is going to be sudden and unexpected; though it would be at an unknown time; yet, when the Son of God appears in the cloud and every eye shall see Him and when He is preceded by the sound of the trumpet, and when all the heavens are shaken, the glory and the triumph attending His return is beyond man's imagination.

Events preceding the return of Christ: Christians differ from each other quite extensively, as to the events that would precede the return of Christ, or that would take place at the time of the return of Christ. It should be pointed out that though some of these differences may appear vast, they need not affect, too drastically, the type of life that should be lived in preparation for the return of Christ. In other words, our salvation is certain and final. The pattern for our salvation is non-debatable. God expects every man who wants to accept of His salvation, to place his trust in His Son Jesus Christ, accept Him as Saviour, and obey Him to gain the forgiveness of sins and the gift of God's Spirit (Acts 2:38). When a man does this he is preparing for the coming of Christ. Even though he might have a view concerning the return of Christ different from his brother, yet because his brother has gone through the same process of salvation, they are one in the Lord. Similarly, when Christ comes, regardless of whose view is right or wrong, all of us will stand in the judgment and be judged according to our life on earth.

There are however a few indications in the Word of God as to what would precede the coming of Christ. Some of these general indications are:

- (1) A world-wide proclamation of the Gospel. We read in Mark 13:10, "And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come." Together with this will be the increased turning of people to God. Another general indication would be in opposition to the previous indication.
- (2) There will be a great wide-spread apostasy of the faith, a tremendous falling away from the truth, and consequently, a lot of deception regarding Christ and His coming. Some of it has been described as the appearance of false Christs and false teachers who would deceive great numbers of people. What would appear to be religious really would not be so. What would appear to be Christian would not be Christian. What would appear to be in favour of Christ will really not be. We can see signs of this kind of apostasy even in our midst today, in the midst of Churches and people who claim to follow God.
- (3) Yet another indication of the return of Christ is what is referred to in the Scripture as the "loosing of Satan." This has been brought out in Revelation chapter 20 and in other passages of Scripture. The Bible talks of this in terms of an anti-Christ or a man of sin (II Thess. 2:1-12; I John 2:18, 21, 22; 4:3; II John 7; Rev. 13). By the very name of this person, or these persons, we could understand that they would be opposed to Godliness and the Christianity. Lawlessness would prevail. And under Satan's guidance the man of sin would oppose the Lord and bring out great acts of deceit.

Naturally this would be a time of great tribulation and suffering. All people will suffer. The wicked will be led by anti-Christ and oppose the righteous. The Church will be greatly buffeted by the forces of evil at this time.

The Bible tells us that many will believe and follow anti-Christ. Many people will not be able to identify anti-Christ and would be deceived. The only way we could avoid being deceived is to strictly and closely follow the Word of God and to be aware of the power and the force of evil. We could see all this lawlessness as the one last effort of Satan to win as many people to His side as possible. It would be the one last great revolt of Satan and will be put down at the coming of Jesus Christ Himself.

The Millennium: Millennium is a Latin word meaning “thousand years”. We find this reference to a thousand years in Revelation chapter 20 verses 1-15. When we read this passage of Scripture we find a reference to a period of time of a thousand years when Christ would reign. (Rev. 21:6 etc.) According to this passage of Scripture, if we were to take it literally, Christ would reign on earth, Satan would be bound, and Saints who have been martyrs would reign with Christ. Therefore, Christ would appear, reign on earth for a thousand years, and then there would be the judgment.

This would be a literal explanation of those particular verses. However, we should realize that the book of Revelation cannot be taken entirely in a literal manner. So much of the book is symbolic that while interpreting it we should try to understand its form of writing. In accordance with this there are many views as to the period of time called the millennium. In general these views could be divided into three separate divisions. They are the **pre-millennial** view, **post-millennial** view and the **amillennial view**. We must remember, that since the book of Revelation is very symbolic, any of these views could propagate without hurting a person’s faith in Christ, or his acceptance of Jesus as Saviour. These views refer to a future possible event and one common fact is prevalent amongst all the views. And that is this: That in the future, **Jesus Christ is coming again**. Views might vary as to what would precede His coming or what might happen immediately after He comes. But the fact that we all need to believe in is that Christ is coming back to judge all of mankind.

The Pre-millennial View: People who accept this view believe that Christ would return to earth and institute His own rule. All the righteous dead would be raised and they will reign with Christ personally on earth for one thousand years. Following His reign there would be a final rebellion by Satan and his forces, during which the forces of evil will be suppressed and the final judgment of the wicked will take place, followed by the state of eternity.

The Post-millennial View: Post millennialists believe that Christ will come after a period of a thousand years during which there will be peace on earth and a great triumph of the Gospel. Some believe that these thousand years are figurative, but still believe that there will be a period of great victories for the cause of Christ, and peace all over the earth.

The Amillennial View: People who accept this view believe that the millennial itself cannot be taken literally. Christ may return at any time. And would judge both the living and the dead, and separate the righteous from the wicked. The millennial is taken figuratively and

refers to the period of time starting from the death of Christ and the institution of God's saving grace through Jesus Christ, and ending at His return. During this time the Gospel has an opportunity to be preached even in the face of the opposition of evil.

In all these views, a person must accept the fact of Christ's return as Judge. As to what precedes or follows that event should not make him deviate from what the Gospel says that all men are sinners today, and all men need Jesus Christ, because He is coming back someday as Judge.

The Judgment: There is going to be a judgment for all mankind. This is another definite teaching of Scripture. There will be a day when the world will be judged and when all of mankind will stand in the presence of God. One fact which we should never forget is that all will be judged, both the righteous and the wicked. Again, when we say all will be judged we mean both the living and the dead. Furthermore, II Peter 2:4; Jude 6; etc., indicate that even the angels will be judged.

We will be judged on the basis of the way we lived on earth. We will be judged by our work. We will be judged as to our basic righteousness. As the Scripture itself says, we will be judged as to whether we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ or whether we will have tried to have put on our own righteousness, our own religiousness, etc. All our works will be brought into judgment and the way we are judged will declare our inner character and our real being.

The Judge will be the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, He who is now our Saviour Jesus Christ. The purpose of the judgment is to vindicate God's justice and to glorify God's mercy. It will be the culmination of history and the separation of mankind into the groups of the righteous and the wicked. It will be a public proclamation of the eternal state to which we will be assigned. And the Bible indicates that there will be rewards allotted to those who have lived for Christ.

Everyone will stand before God in the judgment. All of our life on earth will be brought into public. The record book will be opened and our thoughts and our words and our deeds would come up for judgment. When Christ comes again He will not be a Saviour any more, but a Judge. Will you stand in the presence of Christ and be judged willingly? Or will you fear Him? The time to decide where you will be at the judgment is **now**. For now Christ is our Saviour and you could accept His salvation today.

CHAPTER III

THE FUTURE LIFE

We have studied that man is made up of a duality of body and spirit. A human being is one who possesses both a spiritual body and a spiritual side. For every man there comes a time when the physical body dies. The only people who would not taste physical death would be those who would be alive at the coming of Jesus Christ back to earth. Physical death is that which separates the body from the spirit or the soul. The Bible tells us that it is appointed for men to die once and after that comes that judgment. (Hebrews 9:27).

After death the spirit lives on. The spiritual side of man does not die. The spiritual side of man will be taken into a hereafter that is conditioned by the type of life the person lives on earth in the flesh. It could be either a time of extreme bliss, or extreme suffering.

We have already read that after death comes the judgment. The Scripture teaches very clearly that all of mankind would be judged when Christ comes. But before the coming of Christ all those who have died will have their spirits in a place that would be conditioned by their life on earth. By that we mean that those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour on earth, and have lived their life for Him would be in a temporary place of bliss awaiting the judgment. And those who have disobeyed God on earth will be in a temporary place of suffering awaiting the judgment too. Both these places are places of which the departed soul would be fully conscious.

The Intermediate State: The intermediate state is sometimes called the temporary state. This is the place where the soul or the spirits of those who physically died are in waiting for the judgment at the coming of Christ. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament use words that refer to this. In the Old Testament a Hebrew word used for the abode of the dead is **'sheol'**. The word **'sheol'** has more than one meaning, but all pertaining to the same thought, that is, a place after death, or the abode of the dead. It is always a place that is somewhat feared and somewhat considered an enemy. In a sense this is right. We could see this in man's wanting to avoid death. Sometimes the word **'sheol'** is used to refer to the abode of all the dead, the abode of the righteous and the wicked dead. In the New Testament there is a similar word. It is the Greek word called **'Hades'**. Sometimes this word too is used in the general way as the abode of the dead, but more often it is considered the place of the wicked dead.

But the Scriptures make it clear that there is a temporary abode for those who die where their spirits would await the judgment. It will be a place of separation where the righteous will be separated from the wicked. For the righteous it will be a place of bliss and joy in the presence of Christ. In fact we get the idea of a place where we enjoy the presence of Christ. This is brought out in Phil. 1:23; II Cor. 5:11 and ff; Heb. 12:22, etc. On the other hand the temporary abode of the wicked dead would be absent of the presence of God and it would be a place of conscious suffering. It would be a place of turmoil and torment. In the Gospel of Luke chapter 16, we read the account of the rich man and Lazarus and the picture of the dead, is brought out very clearly by Jesus. We could see that paradise is where the righteous dead are in joy and bliss, whereas the place of the wicked dead is already a place of torment.

The Eternal State: At the coming of Jesus Christ, and after the judgment, all of mankind would be divided into two groups. Both those who are alive at this time, and those who have died, would be judged by God and then separated into two groups. Those who have belonged to Christ and obeyed Him, those who have been accepted by Him on earth, would be given the privilege of dwelling in heaven. The wicked would go to hell.

Heaven is a place of eternal joy and bliss. It is a prepared place for us. We could read descriptions of heaven in Revelation 22:1-5; John 14:1-3; Matt. 6:19-21; etc. It is a place where the renewed bodies of man together with their spirit would dwell in eternity, in the presence of God and in the absence of all kinds of suffering. Heaven will have no tears, no sorrow, no sickness, and above all no more death. It is the eternity for which we live this life on earth.

Hell is the eternal place of abode for those who have refused Christ on earth. Those who have been judged by God, and declared separated from the righteous, are sent into hell. Hell is also the place where the resurrected bodies of the wicked would be joined to their spirits and placed in eternal suffering. It is a place of torment, and a place of banishment from God's presence. It will be a place of anguish and misery and it will be forever. We could read Matthew 13:41 & 42; 18:9; 22:12 and other passages of Scripture together with Revelation 20:14 & 15, to understand the type of torment and suffering that would be held. Hell is a state worse than physical death. Matthew 26:24 indicates that it is even worse than non-existence. Those who deny the existence of hell would have to contend with Scriptures which make the teaching clear. The most important aspects of hell would be its eternal state and its suffering. The Scripture uses terms like everlasting fire, everlasting damnation, eternal fire, etc., to describe hell. The most vivid and common description of hell is a "lake of fire and brimstone."

Realizing that all of mankind would be judged and that death comes to everybody, we who are on earth should be aware that we are passing through a time of probation. What we are really striving after is eternity and we could make it an eternity with God or we could make it an eternity without God. An eternity without God will be an eternity of suffering and punishment. An eternity with God would mean an eternity of eternal joy and bliss in the presence of Christ. What's it going to be for you?

Name:.....

Student No.....

Grade.....

QUESTIONS ON LESSON XII

A STUDY IN FINAL THINGS

Note: Answers to the questions below are found in the lesson material. Read the lesson carefully before answering. Try to answer in your own words, as much as possible. Wherever necessary, just fill in the blanks, or choose the correct word. Print out this page if you like. If you wish to send in the answers or to write further comments, or ask any questions yourself, do so on a separate sheet of paper and put your name and student number in a prominent place.

CHAPTER I

A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF HISTORY

1. Will this world come to an end? If you say YES, tell us WHY you believe it will come to an end.

2. Do you know when this world will end?

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

1. Christ is coming back to earth again. Tell us why we know He will come back.
2. In what manner will Christ come down to earth again?
3. What are some of the events that would take place around the time of Christ's coming? (Are some of these things happening today?)
4. Christ will be our judge when He comes back again. On what basis will He judge us?

