

CHAPTER 10.

ESCHATOLOGY: AN INITIAL STEP INTO AN ULTIMATE TOPIC

A six-year-old girl lies in her hospital bed. She is thin, pale, and weak. Recently the doctors explained that she has terminal cancer and there is nothing more that they can do. She is not expected to live more than two months.

With searching eyes she looks up at her parents, “Daddy . . . Mommy . . . what will happen to me after I die?” It is a heart-wrenching question. What should her parents answer? Can they comfort their dying child? If so, how? Is there any solid hope for them, as parents? If so, what?

Turning to another situation, an elderly widow in a nursing care home spends quite a bit of time watching television. It is not the most productive thing to do. But there is not always a lot to do in the home. Besides, this widow does not have much physical energy anymore to move around and do things. Still, her mind is sharp enough. During a visit from her daughter she asks, “When are things ever going to get better? I probably shouldn’t watch the news on television so much because it’s starting to get me down. War, murder, crime, abuse, tornados, flooding, famine . . . it never seems to end. Will it always be like this?”

Both the dying young girl and the depressed elderly lady are asking real and relevant questions. How would you answer these questions?

Questions like these bring us into the topic of eschatology. Literally, eschatology means *the study of the last things*. It concerns itself with the truth of what will happen after death and after this present world comes to an end. That time period is called the *eschaton*. Popularly it is also referred to as the afterlife, the hereafter, eternity, the other side, the next world, or the consummation of all things. Although each term has its place, eschatology is a helpful name because it reflects certain phrases in Scripture, such as “the latter days” (Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1), “the last times” (1 Pet 1:5, 20), and “the last hour” (1 John 2:18). Similarly, we read of “this age” in contrast with “the age to come” (Matt 12:32; 24:3; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Eph 1:21; 2:7; Heb 6:5). These verses already indicate that there are two distinct periods of time which we need to reckon with: this present time, and that which follows, namely, the age to come. The one is not the same as the other.

Most questions concerning eschatology tend to fall into two main categories. In the first place, there are questions that probe the matter that was on the mind of the six-year-old girl with cancer: What will happen to me when I die? Where will I go? What will it be like there? This is a matter of what is sometimes called personal, or individual, eschatology. What it refers to is also called the intermediate state because it deals with our situation after we die and before Christ returns. We will look at it in more detail in chapter 11.

There is also a broader set of questions, more along the lines of those that were on the mind of the elderly widow. These questions deal with the ultimate destiny of world history, the globe we live on, and indeed the entire universe. Where is it all going? Will the many injustices of this present age be rectified by God at some future point? Will we all spend eternity floating on clouds and playing harps, as some comic books suggest, or will the final chapter of world history contain something radically different? We will deal with these broader questions about the age to come in chapter 12. Here in this chapter we will first explore some more general questions concerning eschatology and our approach to it. One basic theme will be this: do we prepare for the last things full of anxiety because we do not know what will happen, or full of comfort

because we know that there is a glorious inheritance in store for us (1 Pet 1:4, 5)?

ESCHATOLOGY: EGOCENTRIC, COSMOCENTRIC, OR THEOCENTRIC?

When it comes to the future, it is natural for us to be concerned about ourselves. A child in grade school is anxious to learn whether she will pass to the next grade. A teenager is eager to discover which career suits him best. Retirees wonder whether they will have sufficient health to enjoy the autumn of their life. Regardless of what stage we may be at, there is always some kind of tomorrow to worry about, even though our Saviour taught us to avoid such anxiety (Matt 6:34). Beyond that, when death casts its sombre shadow over our tomorrows, we may still be understandably curious, even if, by the grace of God, we are not anxious. The six-year-old girl's questions are valid: What *exactly* will happen to me when I die? Where will I go? What will it be like? Similarly, the questions of the elderly widow are entirely legitimate.

Still, are these legitimate questions also primary inquiries? After all, just because a question is legitimate, that does not mean it is ultimate. There may be other, more pressing questions about the last things. In fact, whether we are looking at the past, the present, or the future, the same truth applies to all tenses: God is before all and above all.

Another way of saying this is that particularly in eschatology we must be diligent to maintain a theocentric focus. As we contemplate the age to come, it is easy to become egocentric and focus our attention on *my* future. It is equally easy to become so wrapped up in the sad state of affairs in our present world that all our eschatological energy is centred on this world, the cosmos, and *its* future. Yet surely the Revelation to John sends us in the right direction when it describes every creature in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, all singing together: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!" (Rev 5:13). If all creatures will be so intensely theocentric in the eschaton, then we should be the same in our study of eschatology. After all, we are creatures too.

This focus can be worked out further by looking briefly at the connection between the age to come and each person of our triune God.

In the Nicene Creed we confess God the Father to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth, of all things visible and invisible. In the beginning the Father saw all that he had made, and it was good, yes, very good (Gen 1:31). How things have changed! Even to our own sinful, unholy eyes it is obvious that there is so much in this world, both in human beings and in creation itself, which is dreadfully bad. From first-degree murders to category-five hurricanes, many things in our Father's world are simply not good at all. Of course, the cause of this evil is the fall into sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, tempted as they were by Satan. Yet all of this gives rise to some pressing questions: Will humanity's sin and the devil's temptation have the final word? Does our Creator simply have to acquiesce to the new order of wickedness and misery? Is he unable to right what has become wrong, and once again restore things to the original state of being "very good"?

Eschatology answers these questions in a poignant way. Under God's direction, the groaning of this present age is, in fact, the birthing pain of the age to come (Matt 24:8; Rom 8:22). In the last times, God the Father will be vindicated, and sin and Satan will certainly not have the final word. Perhaps the early church had an eye for this truth as it formulated the Nicene Creed. Not only does this creed begin with God the Father and his creation of all things, but it also ends with our eager expectation of "the life of the world to come." These two truths are confessed in counterpoint—one at the beginning and one at the end of the creed—like the opening and closing movements of a well-constructed sonata.

The Son of God certainly had his eye on the eschaton as he came closer to the end of his earthly sojourn and suffering. At the Last Supper he reached forward and taught his disciples about the Ultimate Home. He said, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2–3). Later during that same meal

he also looked forward to the Final Festival when he announced, “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt 26:29).

Yet when would all of this occur? These announcements will be fulfilled when Christ returns on the clouds of heaven. In this way it is clear that although Christ’s atoning sacrifice is most certainly complete (John 19:30), the full scope of his work of salvation is not yet finished. Yes, he arose and he ascended. Those actions have been completed. Furthermore, now he is sitting at God’s right hand, ruling over all peoples and all events. Still, as we confess in the Apostles’ Creed, “he *will* come to judge the living and the dead.” Obviously there is still more to come. The Athanasian Creed goes into even more detail when it not only says that “he will come to judge the living and the dead” but adds “at whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies, and will render an account of their deeds; and those who have done good will go to eternal life, those who have done evil to eternal fire” (39–41). In short, then, the entire redemptive work of Christ is not yet finished. There is still one more, cosmically extensive, step to go: the return of Christ and every glorious event that will accompany his return. In this way eschatology is as intensely Christ-centred as soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation.

Finally, the Holy Spirit plays an equally substantial role in the last times. More than once the Word of God describes the Holy Spirit as the “first-fruits” or the deposit, guaranteeing what is yet to come (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). Where there are *firstfruits*, there should also be further and final fruits. Where there is a deposit, or down-payment, there should also be a full payment in due time. Accordingly, Pentecost was a new beginning, but the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church of Christ makes her yearn for the fullness of the Spirit (Eph 5:18) when the final harvest will be gathered in at the end of the age (Matt 13:39) and the Spirit himself will no longer need to say “Come!” (Rev 22:17). Furthermore, we confess that the Holy Spirit speaks through the prophets, yet there are many prophecies in Scripture that have been partially, but not completely, fulfilled (e.g., Isa 11 and Ezek 40–48). Not surprisingly

then, the Spirit is hard at work bringing every Word of the Lord to completion.

This Trinitarian, theocentric perspective on eschatology realigns us with our original created purpose. In the Heidelberg Catechism there is a striking parallel between Lord's Day 3, which describes our original, created state, and Lord's Day 22, which attempts to put into words what our final, glorified state will be. In the beginning we were created to "live with him [God] in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify him" (Q&A 6). In the end, we will possess an indescribably perfect blessedness—"a blessedness in which to praise God forever" (Q&A 58). The wording in both phrases is similar enough to make us pause and take note. Whether at the start or the finish, whether at alpha or omega, this is the whole purpose of our existence: to praise God in a blessedness that lasts forever! So, if that is the ultimate goal of our entire existence, then surely our study of the last things, eschatology, should have a similar theocentric, rather than egocentric or cosmocentric, focus.

An added theological bonus to this approach is that we begin to see the multi-dimensional links between other areas of doctrine and this one. In our study of God, we explored the attributes of God, including his glory.¹ Since God is so immeasurably magnificent and so inexpressibly splendid, why do so few people seem to pay any attention to him, let alone devote their lives to him? That is a valid question. The age to come will answer it in a rather resounding fashion when every knee in heaven and on earth and even under the earth will bow down before the Son of God (Phil 2:10).

In our study of human beings we discovered that male and female are created in the image and likeness of God so that they may also rule over creation under God's ultimate oversight.² Yet, even among us who are regenerated, our likeness unto God remains so minimal and our rule over creation is still so haphazard. In the last times, though, human beings will

1. *Growing in the Gospel*, Volume 1, Chapter 5.

2. *Growing in the Gospel*, Volume 1, Chapter 9.

finally be brought into the fullness of their created potential when they will be invited to sit with Christ on his throne (Rev 3:21).

In Christology we learn that the atoning work of Christ not only forgives sins but also reconciles to himself “all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). Many sins are forgiven today, but the reconciliation of all things will have to wait until the age to come.

Soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation, includes justification and sanctification, which are present blessings, but glorification is yet in store for us (Rom 8:30). And finally, the doctrine of the church, which Christ is busy *gathering*, *defending*, and *increasing* in our day (LD 21, Q&A 54), will reach a state of consummation on the coming Day of the Lord, when all the *-ings* will become *-eds*. On that great day, at long last, the church will be *gathered*, *defended*, and *increased* without a need for anything or anyone else to be added.

ONLY A LONG LIST OF QUESTIONS MARKS?

Whenever a Bible study group tackles the topic of eschatology, there is no shortage of questions. What will be busy doing for an eternity? Will I recognize my spouse and my children? Will we remember what happened to us here on earth? How can I be eternally happy if I realize that one of my family members is not in heaven due to unbelief? The list of queries stretches on and on. Many of these questions cannot be answered to the full satisfaction of those asking. We can only say as much as God has revealed. In this respect the warning of the Belgic Confession, though admittedly in a different context, is fitting here as well: “We will not curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us . . . and we content ourselves that we are pupils of Christ, who have only to learn those things which he teaches us in his Word, without transgressing these limits” (Art. 13). After all, if we knew every detail about our life hereafter, would we still yearn for it as strongly? As the apostle says, “Hope that is seen is not hope” (Rom 8:24). Some element of sovereign surprise is still a healthy thing for the heart of faith!

At the same time, we should not be so agnostic about eschatology as to think that we know next to nothing about what the future holds for those who are in Christ. Certainly, the eternal Bridegroom has not left his Bride, the church, completely in the dark about his future plans for their mutual relationship. In fact, in Revelation, to mention just one book of the Bible, Christ appears in radiant glory (Rev 1:12–16) and instructs his Bride in what “must soon take place” (Rev 1:1). The visions that follow are challenging to interpret, but they never fail to leave a lasting impression. Some impressions are rather disconcerting as well. The opening of the seals leads to inflationary pressure on the economy (Rev 6:6), widespread death by sword, famine, and plague (Rev 6:8), giant earthquakes, and even a permanent eclipse (Rev 6:12). Yet, as unsettling as all of this may be, the truth remains that Christ, our beloved Saviour, is the one—and is the only one—who can open the seals of the scroll (Rev 5:1–5). Since our precious Redeemer is in charge, ultimately we need not be afraid.

In many ways, this brief glance at the book of Revelation captures the manner in which we should prepare for the last things. On the one hand, we must be sober and alert (1 Thess 5:6, 8). Any honest reading of the book of Revelation should convince the reader to avoid all optimistically distorted, rose-coloured notions about the last days. The tribulation through which we must come will be great (Rev 7:14). Furthermore, we all have to prepare to appear before our Judge, seated on the white throne, to give an account of our life and conduct (Rev 20:11–15), including all of our idle, careless chatter (Matt 12:36). That prospect alone should be enough to sober up any sinner, whether famous or anonymous.

On the other hand, those who put their trust in Christ will never be put to shame (Rom 9:33) and so can look forward to the future without paralyzing terror and with eager expectation instead. God’s people should not forget that for them this present age ends not only with Judgment Day but also with a Wedding Feast. In this respect it is noteworthy that Revelation 20, concerning the judgment, is surrounded on both sides by splendid visions of the wedding day (Rev 19:6–9; 21:1–4), and a wed-

ding calls for celebration. Both groom and bride can hardly wait, and this is exactly the way it is in the last chapter of Scripture. The Groom eagerly says, “Behold, I am coming soon!” To which his Bride responds with equal enthusiasm, “Come!” (Rev 22:7, 12, 17, 20) Mindful of this, we should let the enthusiasm of the betrothed Couple also pervade our eschatology.

When we pull these thoughts together, it becomes clear that eschatology is not a less-than-fulfilling exercise in which we ask many questions, only to receive few, if any, answers. Far from it! There is much to be studied, much to be learned. Although we are called to be sober and alert, we are also encouraged and comforted by the Word of God. Indeed, it is remarkable that when the Heidelberg Catechism touches on matters of eschatology it consistently uses the word *comfort*. Comfort figures prominently in the famous first question of this catechism: “What is your only comfort in life and death?” At the same time, it reappears at strategic places throughout the document, including places where it refers to judgment day (“What comfort is it to you that Christ *will come to judge the living and the dead?*” Q&A 52), the resurrection of the body (“What comfort does *the resurrection of the body* offer you?” Q&A 57), and eternal life (“What comfort do you receive from the article about *the life everlasting?*” Q&A 58). May that emphasis on comfort be found not only on the pages of this catechism, but also in the hearts of God’s people as they contemplate the end of this age and the age to come.

VIEWS OF THIS WORLD AND THE WORLD TO COME

They say that a worldview is a set of presuppositions, deeply held within a person’s psyche, which shapes how he answers basic questions about life such as: where did we come from, and where are we going? Consequently, since a worldview shapes how we think about things, it will also determine how we think about the last things. That is to say, worldview affects eschatology. What follows is a selective list of some worldviews and how they impact people’s perspectives on the life hereafter. Please note that this list is an illustrative, not an exhaustive, survey.

Belief in Reincarnation

This view understands life and death to be part of a large, never-ending cycle. It is really a circular worldview. After death, the soul, or spirit, of a human being leaves behind the body but shortly thereafter re-enters this world, taking up residence in another body. Also, a person's conduct in one cycle of life determines, to a large degree, what kind of life and what type of body he receives in the next turn of the cycle. An immoral man in one life may reappear in an animal body in the next life; he has thus been chastised. By contrast, a kind-hearted but poor woman in one life may reappear as someone who has a higher social standing in the next life. Reincarnation is an integral part of the Hindu religion as well as of Jainism. It can also be found, to one degree or another, in Buddhism, Taoism, and many native religions in the Americas and Africa.

The Theory of Evolution

Although generally regarded as a scientific theory about the biological origin of life, the theory of evolution also has an inevitable effect on how people think about the end of life. This theory is driven by the twin motors of adaptation and natural selection. Simply put, in order to survive the challenges of environmental conditions and aggressive predators, all living beings need to adapt. Over time, those that adapt more successfully survive and produce more offspring, while those who do not adapt as well produce fewer offspring and perhaps even die off entirely. In the end the fittest survive and there is evolutionary progress.

Integral to this entire theory is the reality of death. If both strong and weak survive, alike and in equal number, then there will be no evolutionary progress; instead, the status quo would be maintained indefinitely. According to the evolutionary worldview, death and life are therefore two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other.

This also means that eschatology becomes rather empty. For those who combine the evolutionary theory with atheism, there is no afterlife whatsoever. Once any living being, including any human being, dies, there is nothing more to talk about, nothing more to anticipate. Death is the end,

and that particular, momentary flash of life—located somewhere on the unimaginably large timescale of billions of years—has served its fleeting purpose, never to be resumed or repeated again. For those who attempt to combine the evolutionary theory with the Christian faith, the age to come does not look substantially different, or better, than this present age. If death were integral to life, as the theory demands, then there would still be death in the new world, which makes it sound very much like this present world.

Belief in Deification

This view of the world, also called *theosis* or *apotheosis*, holds that human beings in essence, or at least in part, are divine. However, due to the limitations of this present age, they do not realize the full potential of their divinity. Through meditation or other cultic practices human beings may begin to experience their divine nature, but it is not until the age to come that their inner deity comes out into full blossom. In the hereafter humans become gods or demi-gods. This line of thinking tends to be found in the more mystical strands of many world religions, but it is also prominent in the teachings of the Mormons, or Latter-Day Saints, who “consider every person divine in origin, nature, and potential.”³

Evaluation of Worldviews

Concerning the life hereafter and the world to come, the Word of God gives a fundamentally different perspective than these worldviews. Here are some key considerations. First, according to Scripture the timeline of history is a straight line, pointing ever forward—not a circle, cycling back on itself repeatedly. It is true that the Preacher in Ecclesiastes observes various cycles. The sun rises and sets, and then rises and sets again. The wind blows in one direction, changes, and then comes back to the first direction again. However, these are limited cycles within creation and under the sun (Eccl 1:3–11). They do not describe the entire span of God’s work with his creation. Even the Preacher realizes that

3. See the following Internet resource: <https://www.lds.org/topics/becoming-like-god?lang=eng>. Accessed July 15, 2014.

God's actions have a beginning and an end, even if we cannot always comprehend it all (Eccl 3:11). In fact, God does not describe himself, or his work, as a big cycle, but rather as one who begins his work at a certain point and then systematically carries that work forward to the point of completion. He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:13). At an unmistakably fundamental level, God's revelation is therefore opposed to the notion of reincarnation.

Second, one of the most astonishing announcements in Scripture is found in Revelation 21:4 when a loud voice from the throne of heaven declares, "Death shall be no more." It almost sounds too good to be true. Death is such a pervasive part of our lives. Every day, even every minute, people are dying. Who can conceive of life without death? Yet God did not create people to die. When God first created everything, death was a punishment for possible disobedience, not a regular part of daily life (Gen 2:17). Sadly, Adam and Eve did sin, and so death entered the world (Rom 5:12). Nevertheless, what sin introduced the Saviour can remove. Not only can he remove the sting of death but, as the loud voice assures us, he can also remove death from creation entirely; there will be no more death, period (1 Cor 15:55; Rev 21:4). This truth strikes at the heart of the evolutionary worldview. According to God, death is *not* the other side of a coin called life.

Third, Holy Scripture does not blur the line between divinity and humanity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So begins the Gospel of John. Only after God's existence has been clearly and unequivocally established does the gospel writer move on to the creation of all things, including all living things (John 1:3–5). In other words, there is the Creator and there are creatures, but the two are not the same, and they do not overlap either. This is underlined emphatically when the LORD himself, through his prophet Isaiah, asks, "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?" (Isa 40:25). Again, through the apostle Paul, the God of heaven confirms that there is one who is the Potter and another who is the clay (Rom 9:19–21), but there is no Potter-clay hybrid.

This Creator-creature distinction will not diminish in the eschaton. To begin with, every creature in heaven and on earth will acknowledge God as God and give equal glory to his Lamb, but they will not claim any kind of divine status for themselves (Rev 5:13). Furthermore, when John attempts to worship an angel, thereby treating him as a god, he is sharply rebuked by that angel, for the latter rightly recognizes the Creator-creature distinction (Rev 19:10). Finally, the same loud voice that eradicates death also proclaims, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man . . . they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3). Clearly, people are not gods, and they do not become gods, neither in the present nor in the future.

ESCHATOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS

As mentioned earlier, there is a limit to what has been revealed to us concerning the world to come. In part this may be because it is hard to describe full glory within the constraints of merely human language. The apostle Paul certainly hinted at this when he spoke of a man caught up to paradise who “heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Cor 12:4). The Heidelberg Catechism also goes in this direction when it speaks of a perfect blessedness “such as no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (LD 22, Q&A 58). Perhaps it comes down to this: we need to be glorified first before we can truly comprehend glory.

This may also explain why so much of the biblical revelation concerning the end times is presented to us in the form of visions. To be sure, there is teaching about the last days in songs (Ps 73:23–24) and letters (2 Pet 3), but much of it comes in visions, especially in books such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation. These books are often called apocalyptic books, and they require special attention as we endeavour to understand them. An apocalypse is generally regarded as a genre, or kind of literature, in which a heavenly messenger gives someone a vision, often filled with highly symbolic imagery, in order to unveil things that we would otherwise never see or know because they are either presently invisible to us

(such as God's throne room, Rev 4) or they have not yet happened (such as the descent of the New Jerusalem, Rev 21).

Since apocalyptic literature is a special genre, it must be interpreted accordingly. In this respect the whole matter of hermeneutics, or properly interpreting the Word of God, becomes so important. For example, let us take the matter of numbers. In one of the historical books of the Bible, the Holy Spirit records that the angel of the LORD put to death 185,000 soldiers in the Assyrian camp (2 Kgs 19:35). That is a statement of fact. If you had been there and counted the number of dead soldiers, the total would have been 185,000. However, when a similar number appears in the book of Revelation we must interpret it differently. According to Revelation 7:4, the number of those standing before the throne of God is 144,000. Since this is apocalyptic literature, which is rich in symbolism, we need to treat this number as an indication that the number of God's people will be perfect and complete in every way. Just as the all of God's people in the Old Testament were divided among twelve tribes, so the final number of God's people will be $12 \times 12 \times 1000$, which is another way of saying: all the tribes of God's people will be complete; not one redeemed person will be missing.

Yet how do we decide what all the symbols in the apocalyptic books mean? Are all these fascinating visions completely open to the reader's imagination for their interpretation? If that were the case, these valuable books of the Bible would become like so many wax noses, bent in whichever directions the reader wishes. Actually, though, the previous example gives an indication of the direction in which we should go. Much of the symbolism in the book of Revelation is solidly rooted in the Old Testament. Most of the numbers, colours, animals, and other striking images in the last book of the Bible are also found in earlier books, especially in the Old Testament. Thus, if we interpret the New Testament apocalypse by making ample use of Old Testament history, laws, and prophecies, then we can be assured that what is unveiled before our eyes is not our own imagination but rather God's revelation.

To be sure, dealing with the topic of eschatology is challenging. Some passages of Scripture are hard to interpret, and it is not easy to put all the pieces of the end-times puzzle together into the proper, God-ordained picture. Still, it is worth the effort, for in taking up the challenge we will discover that our comfort in life, in death, and in life eternal is inexpressibly rich.

Suggested Reading: Revelation 22:6–21

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Are we overly curious about the last days, prying into things that God has not revealed, or do we avoid the subject too much, opting to live for the moment and not for the future? How do we strike the right balance?
2. Soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation, and eschatology are connected by many golden gospel threads. Here is a brief list of some aspects of our salvation: regeneration, repentance, faith, justification, adoption, and sanctification. Choose three of the six and discuss how God fulfils each one in the age to come, bringing to completion what he began in us during this present age (Phil 1:6).
3. Why do so many different world religions embrace the idea of reincarnation? What is so attractive about it? Is there a certain logical appeal to it? Ecclesiastes 3:11 may provide part of the answer, but you will need to broaden your discussion beyond that.
4. Dealing with the topic of deification above, we asserted that people are not gods and that they do not become gods. However, in John 10:34 Jesus cites Psalm 82:6, where God says concerning (some) people, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.” How do we square the one truth with the other?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Imagine that a member in your congregation talks to you about being scared of the end times. She has heard descriptions from various other Christians about Judgment Day and some of the disturbing events that will precede that great day. How can you

show her that God's people can look forward to a future that is full of hope and comfort, not anxiety and terror?

2. This chapter described three worldviews that compromise the future glory that is to be revealed to us. Another, somewhat distinct, worldview is that of the Baha'i faith. Do some online research about this religion and its view of the afterlife. In general, how does it differ from what Scripture teaches? How are both the comfort and glory of the age to come compromised by the Baha'i teachings?
3. The apostle John describes the New Jerusalem as a city that is as high as it is long and wide. It measures 12,000 stadia, or about 2200 kilometres, in each direction (Rev 21:16). Surely, a cubical city of such enormous proportions is hard to imagine. Should we take these measurements literally? Or, if they are symbolic, what truth do they portray? 1 Kings 6:20 may help your discussion.

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