

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

A TRAVELER'S GUIDE THROUGH
THE END OF THIS AGE

A SIX-SESSION BIBLE STUDY ON THE END TIMES

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WITH SAM O'NEAL



HarperChristian
Resources

What Happens Next Bible Study Guide

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A NOTE FROM MAX

This is a study on the end times. Now, when I say this, I know it will cause different reactions among different people. Some will likely dive into this study with excitement, hoping to learn more about future events. But others will approach this study with reluctance, wondering why they need to dedicate the next six weeks of their lives to poking into what the Bible says about the future. After all, aren't there more pressing issues to deal with in the present?

Not surprisingly, I'm a member of the first camp. I'm genuinely interested in what happens next. Maybe because I'm getting older. My hourglass has more sand on the bottom than on the top. Consequently, eschatology (the study of end times) has become a fascination for me. I really want to know what's around the corner.

I also find that understanding the future empowers me to face the present. Paul had this same opinion. He wrote, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize" (Philippians 3:13-14). The best of life is yet to be. Got challenges in the here-and-now? Then ponder what is to come.

This is why I'm delighted that the Bible offers so much relevant information on the topic. So much to discover and to ponder. Yet I offer this word of advice to myself and others who are fascinated about the end times: *Don't ignore the Giver by focusing on the gift. Or, to put it another way: Don't ignore the Planner by focusing on the plan.* Yes, the Bible has much to say about the future of our world, the end of history, and the glorious span of eternity that lies beyond. But God didn't give us those glimpses just so that we could better understand the future. He helps us see the plan to invite us to spend eternity with him.

Now, to those in the second camp—those who are more hesitant to study the end times for any reason—let me offer this advice: *Setting your eyes on the future is good for you.* In fact, it's necessary. Don't just take my word for it. Listen again to Paul:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:1-2).

Set your minds on things above. Your soul needs hourly gazes into the life to come. You need to know what your departed loved ones are doing. You need to envision the rapture and the millennium. You need to picture your eternal home and the face of God. Why? Because heaven is the green vegetable in the spiritual diet. It makes us whole. It keeps us healthy.

So read on. Study on. Ponder on. And be consumed with the things above.

— MAX LUCADO

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The world today feels fragile. So much uncertainty and unrest. Wars. Natural disasters. Polarization. Addiction. Anxiety. Loneliness. Epidemics. Pandemics. All these troubles that you are experiencing in the present can cause you to look toward the future with concern. *Why is this happening right now? What does it all mean?*

What will happen next?

The world often seems as if it is spiraling out of control. But rest assured that *nothing* is happening on this planet that is a surprise to God. “He knows everything” (1 John 3:20). What’s more, he hasn’t left you in the dark about his plans. He has given you a map to follow. A divine itinerary in the pages of his Word. The more familiar you become with that itinerary, the more you will be able to face the problems of this life by focusing on the promises of the next.

This is the purpose of this study—to help you understand what God said would happen next as the end times approach and how to view those events through the eyes of faith rather than fear. Before you begin, know that there are a few ways you can go through this material. You can experience this study with others in a group (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or other gathering), or you can go through the content on your own. Either way, the videos are available to view at any time by following the instructions provided with this study guide.

GROUP STUDY

Each of the sessions in this study is divided into two parts: (1) a group study section, and (2) a personal study section. The group study section provides a basic

framework on how to open your time together, get the most out of the video content, and discuss the key ideas that were presented in the teaching. Each session includes the following:

- **Welcome:** A short opening note about the topic of the session for you to read on your own before you meet as a group.
- **Connect:** A few icebreaker questions to get you and your group members thinking about the topic and interacting with each other.
- **Watch:** An outline of the key points covered in each video teaching along with space for you to take notes as you watch each session.
- **Discuss:** Questions to help you and your group reflect on the teaching material presented and apply it to your lives.
- **Respond:** A short personal exercise to help reinforce the key ideas.
- **Pray:** A place for you to record prayer requests and praises for the week.

If you are doing this study in a group, make sure you have your own copy of the study guide so you can write down your thoughts, responses, and reflections in the space provided—and so you have access to the videos via streaming. You will also want to have a copy of the *What Happens Next* book, as reading it alongside this guide will provide you with deeper insights. (See the notes at the beginning of each group session and personal study section on which chapters of the book you should read before the next group session.)

Finally, keep these points in mind:

- **Facilitation:** If you are doing this study in a group, you will want to appoint someone to serve as a facilitator. This person will be responsible for starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions and activities. If *you* have been chosen for this role, there are some resources in the back of this guide that can help you lead your group through the study.
- **Faithfulness:** Your group is a place where tremendous growth can happen as you reflect on the Bible, ask questions, and learn what God is doing in other people's lives. For this reason, be fully committed and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members.
- **Friendship:** The goal of any small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build friendships. So seek to make

your group a “safe place.” Be honest about your thoughts and feelings, but also listen carefully to everyone else’s thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Keep anything personal that your group members share in confidence so that you can create a community where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

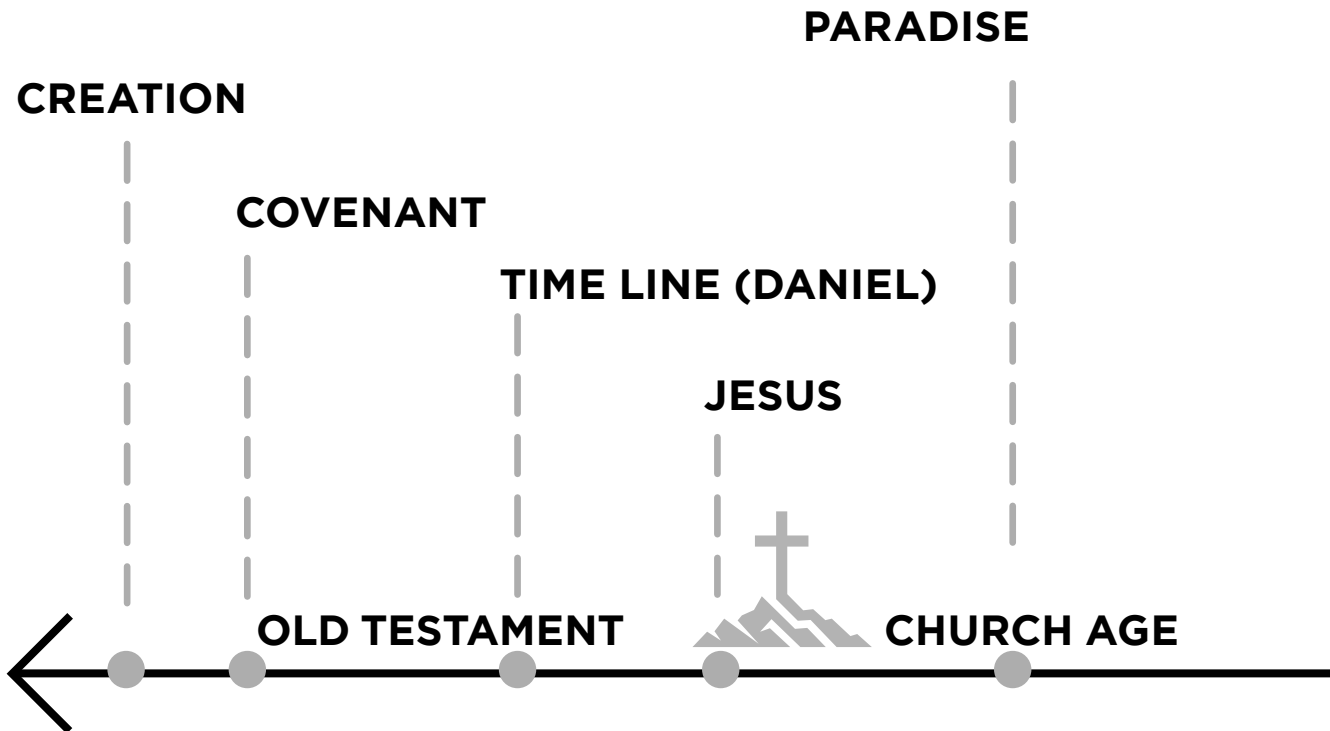
If you are going through this study on your own, read the opening Welcome section and reflect on the questions in the Connect section. Watch the video and use the outline provided to help you take notes. Finally, personalize the questions and exercises in the Discuss and Respond sections. Close by recording any requests you want to pray about during the week.

PERSONAL STUDY

The personal study is for you to work through on your own during the week. Each exercise is designed to help you explore the key ideas you uncovered during your group time and delve into passages of Scripture that will help you apply those principles to your life. Go at your own pace, doing a little each day—or tackle the material all at once. Remember to spend a few moments in silence to listen to whatever God might be saying to you.

Note that if you are doing this study as part of a group, and you are unable to finish (or even start) these personal studies for the week, you should still attend the group time. Be assured that you are still wanted and welcome even if you don’t have your “homework” done. The group studies and personal studies are intended to help you hear what God wants you to hear and apply what he is saying to your life. So . . . as you go through this study, be listening for him to speak to you about what will happen next for you and for those you love.

HEAVEN'S TIME LINE

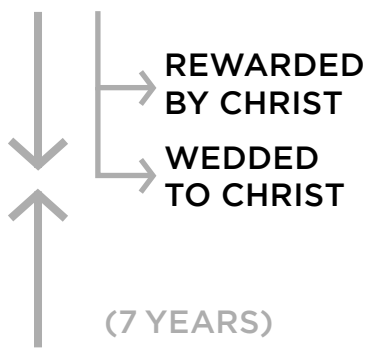


NOT TO SCALE

RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

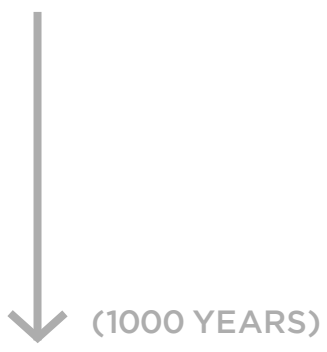
RETURN OF CHRIST

GREAT WHITE THRONE



(7 YEARS)

TRIBULATION



(1000 YEARS)

MILLENNIUM

ETERNAL LIFE OR DEATH



WEEK 1

BEFORE GROUP MEETING	Read chapters 1-3 in <i>What Happens Next</i> Read the Welcome section (page 3)
GROUP MEETING	Discuss the Connect questions Watch the video teaching for session 1 Discuss the questions that follow as a group Do the closing exercise and pray (pages 3-8)
STUDY 1	Complete the personal study (pages 10-12)
STUDY 2	Complete the personal study (pages 13-15)
STUDY 3	Complete the personal study (pages 16-18)
CATCH UP AND READ AHEAD (BEFORE WEEK 2 GROUP MEETING)	Read chapters 4-5 in <i>What Happens Next</i> Complete any unfinished personal studies (page 19)



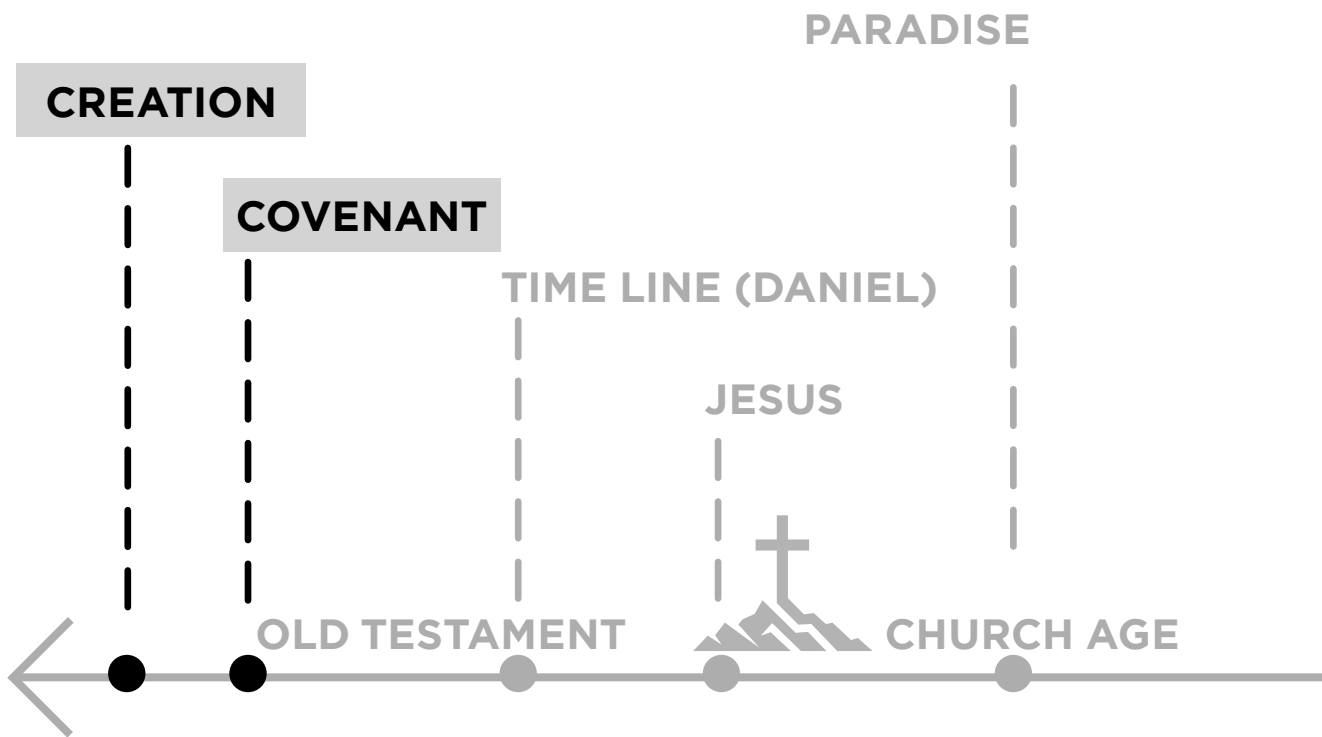
SESSION ONE

MADE TO REIGN

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

ACTS 3:19-21

HEAVEN'S TIMELINE



NOT TO SCALE

WELCOME | READ ON YOUR OWN

Theologians call it a “super sign.” It took place on May 14, 1948. On that day in history, Jewish leaders gathered in the city of Tel Aviv to declare that Israel would now be a sovereign nation. Obviously, the moment was a big deal for the Jewish people. For the first time in two thousand years, they had their own Jewish state. Yet the moment was also a big deal for those who follow biblical prophecy, for the reestablishment of Israel as a nation is a major prophetic theme in God’s Word.

The restoration of Israel opened the door for key events of the end times to occur: the rapture, rise of the Antichrist, tribulation, millennium, final judgment, our eternal home in heaven. We are going to explore each of those events in this study. However, we are going to start not by looking at the events of the end but by going back to the beginning. *Eschatology*, the study of end things, begins with *protology*, the study of first things.

Why is this important? The reason is because we need to have a foundation of what God has done in the past if we want to understand what he is going to do in the future. We need to have a correct understanding of his character, as revealed by his words and actions in the past, before we look at the end-times events that will occur in the future. When we do this, four convictions about God arise in the pages of his Word.

The first is that God created human beings to reign with him. His original intent for humanity was to rule as his regents over creation. The second is that God made covenants (or promises) with his people. The covenants reveal his intentions for us in the past, the present, and the future. We will explore these two themes in this session.

CONNECT | 15 MINUTES

If you or any of your group members don’t know each other, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then discuss one or both of the following questions:

- Why did you decide to join this study? What do you hope to learn?

— or —

- On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), how would you rate your interest in biblical prophecy and the end times? Explain your response.

WATCH | 20 MINUTES

Watch the video for this session, which you can access by playing the DVD or through streaming (see the instructions that have been provided with this study guide). Below is an outline of the key points covered during the teaching. Record any key concepts that stand out to you.

OUTLINE

- I. We can think of our journey toward eternity in terms of moving from *known* to *known*.
 - A. The Bible tells us that we started our trip in the garden of Eden.
 - B. The Bible tells us that we will end our trip with Jesus in the New Jerusalem.
 - C. But there are a lot of questions and confusion about what will happen in between.
 - D. Fortunately, God has given us an itinerary of *what happens next* in his Word.

- II. Our story begins with God instructing Adam and Eve to have dominion over creation.
 - A. Unfortunately, the first humans sinned and gave up their authority to Satan.
 - B. So God suspended his garden-of-Eden plan—but he did not abandon it.
 - C. God’s storyline concludes with us ruling with him in a perfect world.

- III. We will not only experience a renewal of Eden in eternity but also a renewal of authority.
 - A. God has not only promised that we will reign but has also provided us with a number of covenants in his Word.
 - B. God’s first covenant, as we have already seen, was with Adam and Eve.
 - C. God’s Edenic covenant is still leading us to a future time when we will rule and reign over a perfected earth.

- IV. God’s covenant with Abraham consisted of a *seed* and *soil* promise.
 - A. The *seed* promise refers to God making Abraham’s descendants into a great nation.
 - B. The *soil* promise refers to specific borders the Jews will occupy in the land of Israel.
 - C. God has fulfilled the seed promise, so we can expect him to fulfill the soil promise.

- V. God also made a covenant with David and to his people through Jeremiah.
 - A. God promised David that one of his descendants would rule over his kingdom forever.
 - B. God revealed through the prophet Jeremiah that there would be a spiritual revival of the Jewish people.
 - C. God’s plan for the future includes the fulfillment of each of these promises.

DISCUSS | 35 MINUTES

Discuss what you just watched by answering the following questions.

1. When it comes to considering what the Bible says about what will happen as we approach the end times, it often seems that different denominations, churches, ministry leaders, and believers all have a different vision of “what happens next.” What have you been taught about the next steps in God’s plan for the future?
2. In this week’s teaching, four covenants were mentioned that have governed God’s plan for the past, present, and future—covenants with Adam and Eve, with Abraham, with David, and through the prophet Jeremiah. Which of those covenants feels most relevant to your life? Why?
3. Ask someone to read aloud Hebrews 2:6–8. The covenant that God established with Adam and Eve included a promise of *dominion*—a call for them to reign and rule over creation. What does the author of Hebrews say about the current status of this promise? Where do you see humanity attempting to exercise dominion over the world today?
4. Invite someone to read aloud Genesis 12:1–3 and Genesis 15:18–21. God promised that he would make Abraham’s *seed* (or descendants) into a great nation, which he has fulfilled. God also promised that Abraham’s descendants would occupy a certain amount of *soil* or land (all of modern-day Israel as well as parts of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq), which has not yet been fulfilled. What does this reveal about God’s plans for Israel in the future?
5. Ask someone to read Luke 1:32–33. God’s covenant with David included a promise that someone from his “house” would sit on his throne and rule over his kingdom forever. What did Gabriel say to Mary to indicate this would be Jesus? How has this session added to your understanding of Jesus’ role as the Messiah?

RESPOND | 10 MINUTES

It is important to emphasize that God’s plans for the future are not new. Rather, they are based on the foundation of the days that have already passed. In particular, what we will experience at the end of history is strongly connected to what Adam and Eve first experienced at the beginning of history. Take a few minutes on your own to review God’s original design for humanity as expressed in the following passage and then answer the questions that follow.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

GENESIS 1:26–28

Circle any words that speak directly to God’s original plan for humanity. How would you summarize that original plan? In other words, based on what you read in this passage, what role did God intend for human beings to carry out within his creation?

In your own words, what does it mean to be created “in the image of God” (verse 27)? How should that reality impact both your present and your future?



SESSION ONE

PERSONAL STUDY

You are on a journey with your fellow group members toward a better understanding of “what happens next” as it relates to the end times. As a reminder, the only reason you can know anything at all about this subject is because God has revealed a great deal about his plans in his Word. For that reason, the personal study portion of each session will help you take a deeper look at certain passages and principles that are the most critical to an understanding of the end times. As you work through each of these exercises, be sure to write down your responses to the questions. (If you are engaging this study as part of a group, you will be given a few minutes to share your insights at the start of the next session.) If you are reading *What Happens Next* alongside this study, first review the introduction and chapters 1-3 of the book.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Did you know that the Bible makes almost seven hundred references to heaven?¹ It's true. Where you spend eternity is a critical priority to God. And when you study what those Scriptures say, you come across two major themes that keep resurfacing.

The first is that the future God has in store for his people should fill them with hope. Thank God this is true! But have you noticed how little hope is present in the present—even among Christians? People today seem miserable, confused, lonely, and without peace. A necessary ingredient for emotional and spiritual well-being seems to be missing in our world today: *hope*.

God reminds you again and again in his Word to fix your mind on the hope of the future as a tonic to overcome the hopelessness of today. We see this in Jesus' interactions with his disciples on the night of his arrest shortly before he went to the cross. During the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:1-3). In what could have been a moment of fear and dread, Jesus lifted the disciples' thoughts not to the persecution in their immediate future but to the reality of their eternal home.

A second theme is that the future is all about *Jesus*. The most consequential moment in human history occurred when Jesus stepped into our world as a living, breathing human being—and then died on the cross for our sins. Likewise, the most consequential moment in our future will be the day when Jesus returns to this world. We call this the second coming of Christ, and the Bible speaks of it as a guarantee (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Consider what the angels told the disciples after Jesus ascended into heaven: "Men of Galilee . . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). You can count on Christ's return, which is why the future is all about him.

1. To what degree do you currently feel hopeful about the future?



2. What are the biggest factors currently contributing to your level of hope? (In other words, what are the biggest factors responsible for the score you gave?)

The Christian lives life on tiptoe, ever searching the skies. We awaken with the thought, *Perhaps today!* Our hope is centered on the bodily return of Christ. We are looking to a new age in which Jesus will be crowned as the rightful King and we will serve as his grateful servants. All of history is headed to the great day that will inaugurate an endless era of justice, joy, and glory.

In one of his earliest sermons, Peter declared: “The Lord will . . . send Jesus, the One he chose to be the Christ. But Jesus must stay in heaven until the time comes when all things will be made right again” (Acts 3:19–21 NCV).

Things will be made right again. Does that assurance not speak to the heavy heart? Weary of racism? *Things will be made right.* Weary of child abuse? *Things will be made right.* Weary of terrorists wreaking terror? Rulers pillaging the poor? Scandal infecting the church? *Things . . . will . . . be . . . made . . . right.*²

3. When have you recently felt weary about the state of our present world? How does the promise found in Acts 3:21 give you hope for the future?

Maybe you are a bit leery about this discussion. End-times studies have left you confused, perhaps cynical. I understand. Prophecy is to the Bible what the Serengeti is to Africa—vast, expansive, and intimidating. It’s a world of numbers and symbols, bears and tigers. Most students prefer the domesticated, well-traveled streets of Scripture: the teachings of Jesus, the doctrines of Paul, the biographies of the Patriarchs. Prophecy intimidates many Bible students.

It infatuates others. If Bible prophecy is the Serengeti, some Christians are big-game hunters. They never leave the bush. They find prophecy on every page, symbolism in every story, and clues in every verse. They can be a great source of help, but they can also be stubbornly opinionated. Prophetic experts tend to be very confident; they walk with a game-hunter swagger. They always seem to know (and enjoy knowing) what others don’t.

Somewhere in between these two positions is a healthy posture. Believers who avoid utter ignorance on one hand and total arrogance on the other. Who seek what God intends: a deep-seated confidence that our tomorrow is in our Lord’s hands. The purpose of prophecy is to empower the saint with a sense of God’s sovereignty.³

4. Read Romans 10:9 and Ephesians 2:8. Part of preparing for the future is making sure you are certain of your destination. Based on these verses, what is necessary to make certain you are “good to go” in terms of eternal life?

5. Where do you stand when it comes to considering the end times? What are your personal goals for participating in this study? In what specific areas would you like to grow—or what specific information do you hope to glean as you work through these pages?

EDEN FULFILLED

As you discussed during this week's group time, God created human beings to reign and rule over creation. He gave Adam and Eve dominion over the garden of Eden and told them to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). God's intent was for their progeny to expand over the earth—and expand human dominion over all the earth.

Humanity was created to reign. Not by ourselves, of course. We were created to reign as regents of God. His plan was for those who had been created in his image to exercise his authority over his world. As God declared, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (verse 26).

Sadly, that plan was disrupted and distorted by the fall. When Adam and Eve chose to believe the enemy's lies, they allowed the serpent to usurp their authority. They lost the ability to reign as perfect representatives of their perfect Creator. They became separated from him—literally cast out of the garden and banished from his presence (see 3:23)—and thus separated from their ability to "rule over" the world in a life-giving way. (More on that below.) Yet that doesn't mean God's original plan has been invalidated or abandoned. Far from it!

The painful truth for us as human beings is that our past and our present have been stained by sin. This cannot be denied. Just look at the daily news! Our world is a place of violence, fear, hopelessness, anxiety, greed, laziness, lust, and pride—to name just a few such vices. These things are not just "out there" in the general mill of humanity. We find them "in here"—we deal with them each and every day inside of our own hearts.

Yet the truth is that our past and our present have also been touched by God's redemptive plan. He has opened the door for forgiveness and salvation. In doing so, he has recreated a pathway for us to rule once more. There is a forecast of "reign" in our future!

1. Review Genesis 1:26–30. Summarize the idea of God giving human beings “dominion” over the created world. What should that look like on a practical level?

2. This concept of having dominion doesn’t exist only on a grand scale. We were also created to have dominion and be stewards over our families and in our communities. When have you recently felt the desire to set things in order or make things right in your corner of the world? What happened as a result?

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

⁴ “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

GENESIS 3:1–7

3. Circle any words or phrases in that passage that strike you as important or interesting. What were the temptations that led Adam and Eve to disobey God?

4. Sin has affected humanity in a broad way—in a *cosmic* way. But it also touches our lives as individuals each day. What causes you to feel especially frustrated or undermined by the reality of sin as you look at the state of the world today?

Instead of ruling the world, we feel ruled by the world. We see creation in a state of corruption, eruption, and pollution. Heat waves. Wildfires. Hurricanes. Earthquakes. Famines. “The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22). Something is awry. What’s more, we don’t see male and female behaving as partners, but often as rivals.

What happened? Sin happened. Rebellion happened. Satan happened. Greed happened. A villain infiltrated the garden. He convinced the couple that the garden, resplendent and abundant, was inadequate. Eden was not enough for the couple. They wanted to be like God. And God, who knows what is best for creation, said, “No.” He temporarily suspended the garden-of-Eden plan. But he did not cancel it. He did not abandon it. He certainly did not abandon us.⁴

5. The person you were created to be still matches (or at least points to) God’s original plan for you to rule and reign as his representative on this earth. What qualities, abilities, and talents do you possess that allow you to be a force for good in your corner of the world?

EDEN RECLAIMED

The pages of the Bible are filled with the story of salvation. You may have heard of the four “movements” defining that story: (1) creation, (2) fall, (3) redemption, and (4) restoration (or glorification). These are critical themes that drive history forward in ways that have concrete implications for your life as an individual.

You have already looked at the first and second movement. At *creation*, God set up human beings to rule and reign over creation. This was our high calling—but we blew it. The subsequent *fall* introduced sin into the world, which has thrown everything into chaos ever since—chaos for the plants, and the animals, and all the earth . . . and chaos for humanity. Chaos not just for our morality and our relationships but also for that high calling. We lost the chance to do what we were created to do. But thankfully, we did not lose it forever.

This is where the third movement, *redemption*, comes into the story. We talk often about God’s redemption and incredible gift of grace toward us—and rightfully so! The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone not only of your faith but also of your future. In the words of the apostle Paul, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:17–19).

But let’s not forget about the fourth movement. Let’s not forget about *restoration*. God’s plan for our eternal future involves much more than sitting on a cloud strumming harps, as the cartoonists would want us to believe. No, God’s plan involves a restoration (and even an expansion) of his original design for Eden. “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,” sang the elders in John’s vision of the end times, “because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.” That’s us. That’s the church. And notice what comes next: “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9–10).

What awaits us in the next phase of human history is a version of Eden reclaimed in which we once again rule and reign as regents of Christ.

1. Imagine you are back in the garden of Eden. Specifically, try to place yourself in a world that is untainted by the corruption of sin. What are some ways the world would be different than everything you've experienced in life up to this point?

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ROMANS 5:18-21

2. The apostle Paul refers to the actions of both Adam and Jesus in this passage. Where do you see similarities between Adam and Jesus? What are the major differences between them?

3. The story of the Bible includes not just God's offer of redemption (movement 3) but also his relentless pursuit of his people. God refused to give up on his creation, including human beings, and promised to restore them (movement 4). What are some ways that you have experienced God's pursuit of you? How has he called you and called out to you?

God's dream has never changed. Consider his invitation: "Look! I have been standing at the door, and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears me calling him and opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him and he with me. I will let everyone who conquers sit beside me on my throne, just as I took my place with my Father on his throne when I had conquered" (Revelation 3:20-21 TLB). God's storyline concludes with you, me, all his children living, ruling, dining, and serving with him in a perfect world.⁵

4. Read Revelation 3:20-21. What is God's invitation to you today? What emotions do you experience when you think about the future reality of reigning with Christ?

5. In the same way that God formed Adam, so he has formed you. He has hand-crafted you to have an important role in his kingdom. What obstacles are currently hindering or preventing you from accepting the reality that you are unique, special, and wonderful?

CATCH UP AND READ AHEAD

Connect with a fellow group member and discuss some of the key insights from this session. Use any of the following prompts to help guide your discussion.

- What did you like best from the content in this session, including both the group study and personal study? Why?
- Where do you see a loss of hope causing problems in today's culture? How have you experienced hopelessness in your own life?
- One of the central claims of this session is that human beings were created *to* reign with God and we *will* reign with God in the future. God's original plan will be reclaimed. How do you respond to that premise?
- What do you remember about the four covenants that have guided God's plans for the past, present, and future? (These would be covenants with Adam and Eve, with Abraham, with David, and through Jeremiah.)
- What do you feel most excited to explore in the sessions ahead? Why?

Use this time to go back and complete any of the study and reflection questions from previous days that you weren't able to finish. Make a note below of any revelations you've had and reflect on any growth or personal insights you've gained.

Read chapters 4-5 in *What Happens Next* before the next group gathering. Use the space below to make note of anything that stands out to you or encourages you.