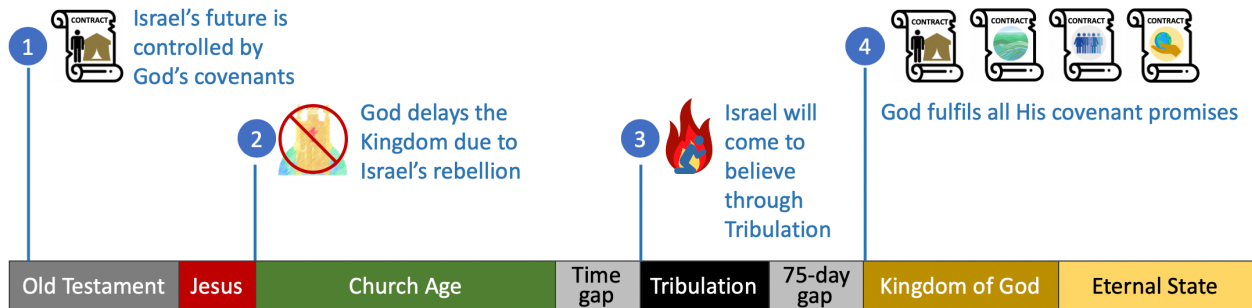


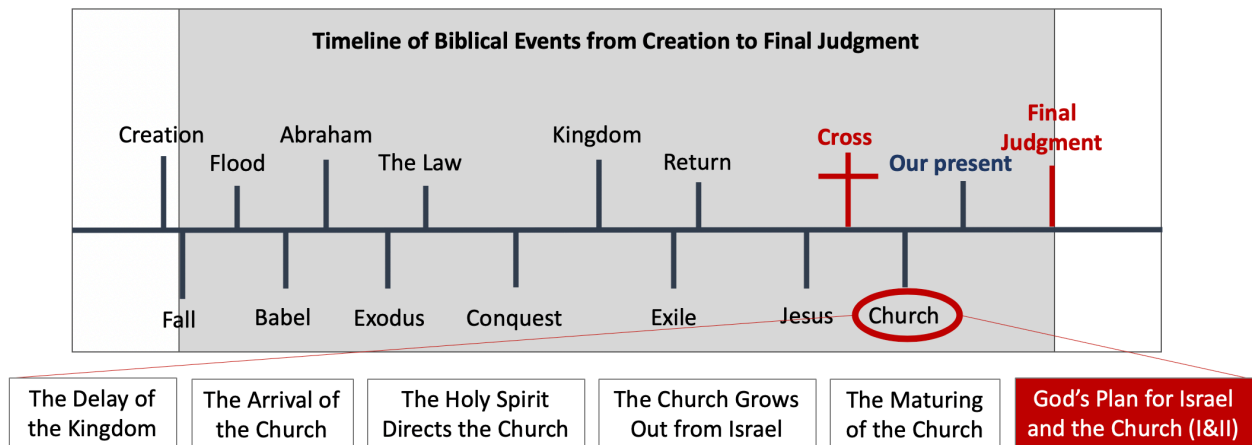
# Lesson 46: God's Plan for Israel and the Church (II)

## Previously...

Yahweh gave very specific Scripture, prophecies and apocalyptic literature to tell us about His purpose and plan for Israel.



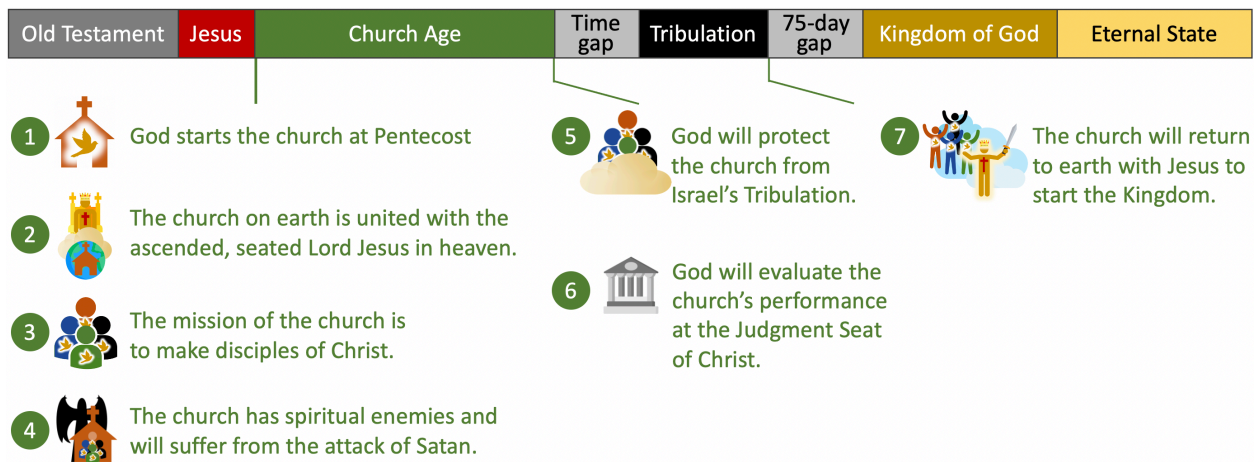
But He also gave clear Scripture to tell us His plan and purpose for the church which we will study in this second part.



At Jesus' first coming, He offered to restart the Kingdom of God on earth if the Jews would repent of their sins and accept Him, their Messiah. However, the Jews as a nation, rejected Him.

Their rejection led Jesus to die on the cross. So Jesus started a programme with another group of people that was not mentioned in the Old Testament. He started the church.

# God's Plan for the Church





## 1. God starts the church at Pentecost

What is the church? How is it different from the nation of Israel? We need to be very clear that Israel and the church are two entirely different groups. How do we know this? The Bible describes them very differently. Here is a summary of what we have learnt.

### Differences between Israel and the Church

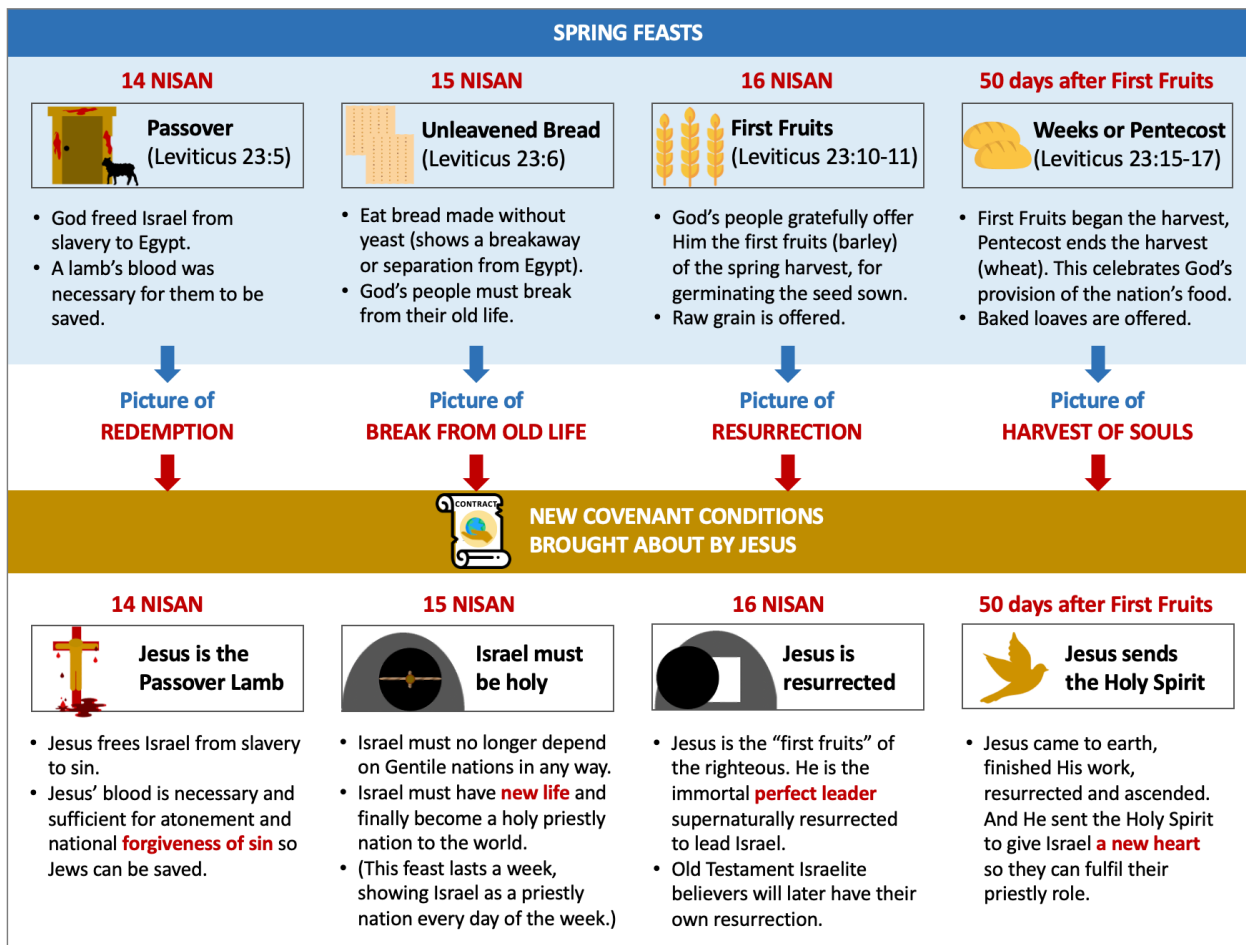
Israel	The Church
It is a political entity.	It is not a state nor a country.
It has a king and a government.	There is no king and no central government. Christ is the head and believers are His body and bride.
It owns actual, physical land in the Middle East.	God did not give the church any land.
It has a specific people group, the Jews.	It is not defined by ethnicity, language, family group nor location.
It has God-given laws for its economy, labour, welfare, finance, crime and punishment, hygiene and sanitation, land use, warfare and more.	It has no laws governing how it should run politically.
It is centred in Jerusalem with its citizens living in the land.	It is scattered all over the world.

In addition to these important differences, we see that Yahweh’s plan for Israel is controlled by a prophetic calendar. God gave Israel their calendar of feasts and festivals at the time of nation building in Sinai. The feasts were designed and given by God to predict and trace the course of Israel’s history. The feasts do not include the church.

Israel	The Church
 <p>God’s plan for them is controlled by a God-created calendar. (The seven feasts in the Jewish calendar.)</p>	<p>The plan for the church is not controlled by any God-created calendar.</p> 

In an earlier lesson (#36), we saw that the spring calendar used feasts to remind Israel of their birth as a nation as well as remind them to thank God for His yearly provision of food.

However, these feasts also looked forward to God’s provision for Israel with regards to the New Covenant. God made it such that all the preparation that was necessary for the Kingdom of God to return to the earth was finished at Pentecost! Specifically, God had put in place everything that was needed for Him to fulfil all the New Covenant promises for Israel.



Just as the spring calendar was fulfilled at Jesus' first coming, we expect the fall calendar to be fulfilled by God in the future.

FALL FEASTS		
<b>1 TISHREI</b>  <b>Trumpets</b> (Leviticus 23:24-25)	<b>10 TISHREI</b>  <b>Day of Atonement</b> (Leviticus 23:27-32)	<b>15 TISHREI</b>  <b>Tabernacles or Festival of Shelters</b> (Leviticus 23:34-43)

In addition, God also gave Israel more calendar timings such as:

- how long their time in Egypt would be (Genesis 15:13)
- how long their exile in Babylon would be (Jeremiah 25:11–12, 29:10)
- how long they would have to wait for their Messiah and the final Kingdom of God on earth (Daniel 9:24–27).

In contrast, nowhere in the Bible does God give the church any “calendar”.

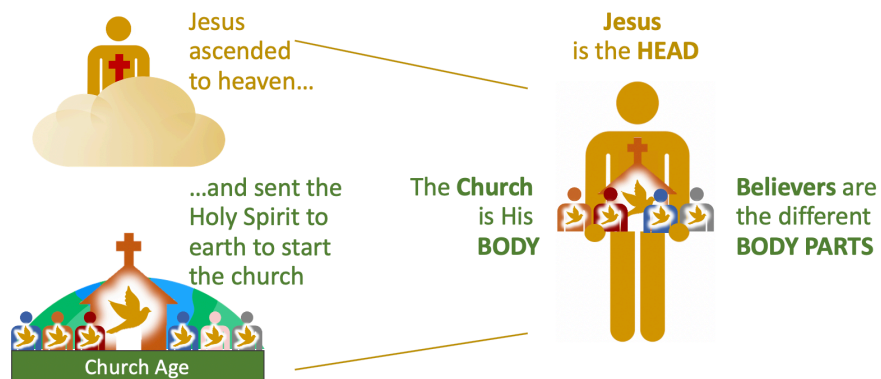


## 2. The church on earth is united with the ascended, seated Lord Jesus in heaven.

Another difference between Israel and the church is that God made covenants with Israel. Their destiny is controlled by God's covenants. God did not make covenants with the church.

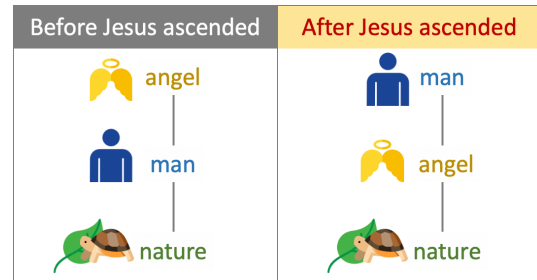
Israel	The Church
 <p>The people were made into a nation by God and joined to Him by covenants.</p>	<p>God does not have any covenants with the church. Believers are joined to each other, and together all are joined to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.</p> 

The church is said to be the body of Christ. The Bible never used this description for Israel.





One very important thing to note is that with Jesus and the church, God did something amazing that was not previously mentioned in the Old Testament. For all of history, mankind has lived under the influence of the invisible realm of the angels (Psalm 8:4–6; Hebrews 2:5–9). But after Jesus' resurrection, God caused Jesus to ascend all the way up to a position at His right hand, above all spirit beings. Through Jesus, the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), a human is now in charge of the universe. God has completely changed mankind's position (Ephesians 1:19–22)!



In fact, even though the church lives on earth now, the Bible says that believers' real citizenship is in heaven, joined to Jesus.

### Philippians 3:20

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

### Ephesians 2:4–6

<sup>4</sup> But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, <sup>5</sup> that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) <sup>6</sup> For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

Because being joined to Christ is so real, Paul sternly warns believers not to commit sexual immorality, because if we do, we are exposing Jesus to such sin!

### 1 Corinthians 6:15

Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never!

And being joined to other believers means we need to cooperate and play our part in the body of Christ. Participating in God's universal church is not optional.

### Romans 12:4–5

<sup>4</sup> Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, <sup>5</sup> so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

Another difference between Israel and the church is that for Israel, God's presence met with them at a physical location He chose. For example, God met them at Mount Sinai, then at the Tabernacle, and finally at the Temple.

Israel	The Church
<p>It has a Temple in Jerusalem for the worship of Yahweh.</p>	<p>The body of believers is the Temple of God the Holy Spirit.</p>

God “met” with Israel at the Temple.



People who want to “meet” God can go to the Temple.

God gave no physical location for church-age believers to “meet” with Him.



Believers are the new “Temple”. People “meet” with God in the person of the believer.

But God gave no physical location for “the church” to meet with Him. Actually, the “church” is not a physical location at all but is made up of believers who have God the Holy Spirit in them.

**1 Corinthians 6:19–20**

<sup>19</sup> Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, <sup>20</sup> for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

(See also 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21–22.)

As a group of believers, the church functions like the Temple. Believers are the “place” where unbelievers seeking God can meet with Him! In this church age, unbelievers can meet with God through direct contact with a believer or indirect contact through the books, videos, audio recordings, internet content and other gospel presentations produced by believers.



**3. The mission of the church is to make disciples of Christ.**

Israel was given a very specific mission and job by God. They were responsible to give the world the following.



**A Jewish book:**  
The Holy Bible





**The Jewish Messiah:**  
who is the global Leader and Priest and who offers sacrifice for sin.



**A kingdom of Jewish priests:**  
that will draw the world to God.

They were to be a worldwide blessing in these ways. The church was not given the same mission.

Israel	The Church
 <p>Mission: Record Scripture and share it with the world. Be a worldwide blessing.</p>	<p>Mission: Make disciples of Christ.</p> 

Jesus said that the focus of the church was to make disciples and teach them God’s Word.

**Matthew 28:18–20**

<sup>18</sup> Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

But how would the church be able to do this? The New Testament gives clear instructions on what the church needs to focus on to be able to accomplish their mission well. Here are some examples.

**a. Believers must grow in their understanding of God’s Word.**

Why is this important? It is because God does not want believers to be tricked by the false teachings of fake Christian teachers and then turn rebellious.

In reading the New Testament, we see that false teaching is the biggest problem that the church faces. All the apostles spend a lot of time writing against false teaching. They warn believers to be aware of it and to guard against it because many churchgoers will be fooled by these teachings.

This is what Peter said:

**2 Peter 2:1–2**

<sup>1</sup> But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup> Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.



Paul also scolded the church when they believed false teachers. Here is one example:

**Galatians 5:7–10**

<sup>7</sup> You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? <sup>8</sup> It certainly isn’t God, for he is the one who called you to freedom. <sup>9</sup> This false teaching is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough! <sup>10</sup> I am trusting the Lord to keep you from believing false teachings. God will judge that person, whoever he is, who has been confusing you.

Even Jude, who planned to write about salvation, had to change his topic to address false teaching from within the church itself. This is what he said:

**Jude 3–4**

<sup>3</sup> Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people. <sup>4</sup> I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God’s marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

In fact, Paul wrote to pastor Timothy to tell him how to recognise some of these false teachers: many are motivated by money and so they intentionally cause trouble to attract people to follow them.

**1 Timothy 6:3–5**

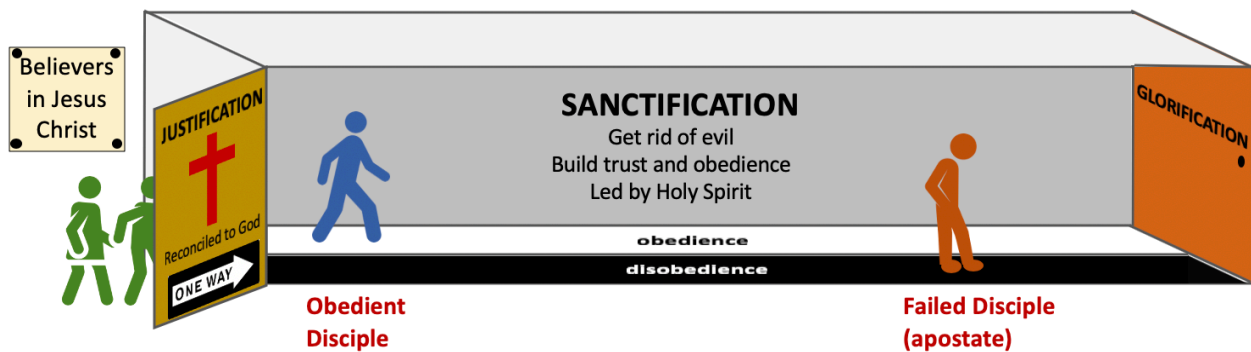
<sup>3</sup> Some people may contradict our teaching, but these are the wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. These teachings promote a godly life. <sup>4</sup> Anyone who teaches something different is arrogant and lacks understanding. Such a person has an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words. This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, division, slander, and evil suspicions. <sup>5</sup> These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they have turned their backs on the truth. To them, a show of godliness is just a way to become wealthy.

But why were the apostles so concerned about false teaching?



It is because it leads to apostasy. Christians who believe lies, or later end up rejecting God’s truth, are known as apostates.

Note: Only believers who later reject God are called apostates. Unbelievers are never called apostates. However, it’s important to understand that apostates remain justified but are considered as failed disciples by God. They will often face discipline by God in this life, but will also be evaluated harshly at the Judgment Seat of Christ.



This is why Paul encouraged Titus to focus on teaching correctly from the Bible. Paul said that right teaching is what will lead believers to live godly, productive and fruitful lives.



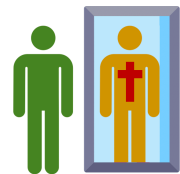
**Titus 2:1, 3:4–8**

<sup>1</sup> As for you, Titus, promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome teaching.

<sup>4</sup> ...When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. <sup>6</sup> He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. <sup>7</sup> Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. <sup>8</sup> This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on these teachings so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone.

**b. Believers must grow spiritually to be useful to God.**

To be useful to God in His mission for the church, believers must be intentional about modelling their lives after Jesus.



This is what Peter encouraged the church to do.

**2 Peter 1:5–9**

<sup>5</sup> In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. <sup>8</sup> The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.

**c. Believers must strengthen and encourage each other.**

Importantly, growing as the church is not just about numbers, but about growing in fellowship. Believers must strengthen and encourage each other.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11**

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

**Hebrews 10:25**

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

**4. The church has spiritual enemies and will suffer from the attack of Satan.**

Another difference between Israel and the church is who their enemies are. Israel constantly struggled against their earthly enemies in the surrounding nations like Egypt, Moab, Syria, Assyria, etc. In fact, because Israel was given the Promised Land, many of the writings of the prophets were concerned with Israel's enemy nations and lands (for example, Isaiah 18, 19).

And many of the Old Testament instructions to Abraham and his descendants were about being a counterculture. The focus was on the pagan human cultural conflict.

However, the church was never given any land by God. And God never names other nations as the enemies of the church. Instead, the Bible says that the enemies of the church are mainly evil spirits. This is what Paul said to the church.



**Ephesians 6:10–18**

<sup>10</sup> A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. <sup>15</sup> For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. <sup>17</sup> Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

The New Testament uses military terms to describe church-age believers.

- We are called soldiers
- Our battle gear comes from Jesus and
- The church is on the defensive, fighting the evil spiritual forces led by Satan.

Israel	The Church
 <p style="color: #0056b3;">It has earthly enemies in the form of surrounding nations.</p>	<p style="color: #4f7942;">It has spiritual enemies.</p> 



Jesus also warned that the church will suffer from the attacks of Satan himself and those motivated by him. As they had attacked Jesus, they will also attack the church. Why? The church is the only available part of Christ’s body that Satan can attack! He can’t attack the ascended Jesus. And he can’t attack the believers who have died and are now in heaven. So he attacks the church on earth.



**John 15:20**

Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you.

But God also recorded in the Bible what will happen to the enemies of Israel and the church. God told the nation of Israel that He will make their enemy nations submit to them. This promise was not made to the church. God never said that the church would be a global political power. Instead, God said that the church will defeat Satan (Matthew 16:18).

Israel	The Church
 <p>God will make the nations submit to Israel, His elected nation.</p>	<p>God will crush Satan under the feet of the church, His elected people. The church will judge angels.</p> 

In the garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve that He would send a Saviour who would defeat Satan. Jesus did indeed do that with His life, death and resurrection.

And the Bible also says that God's plan is to crush Satan under the feet of the church. This is what Paul said to the church in Rome.

**Romans 16:20**

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.



In fact, God's plan is for the church to be given the job of judging angels.

**1 Corinthians 6:3**

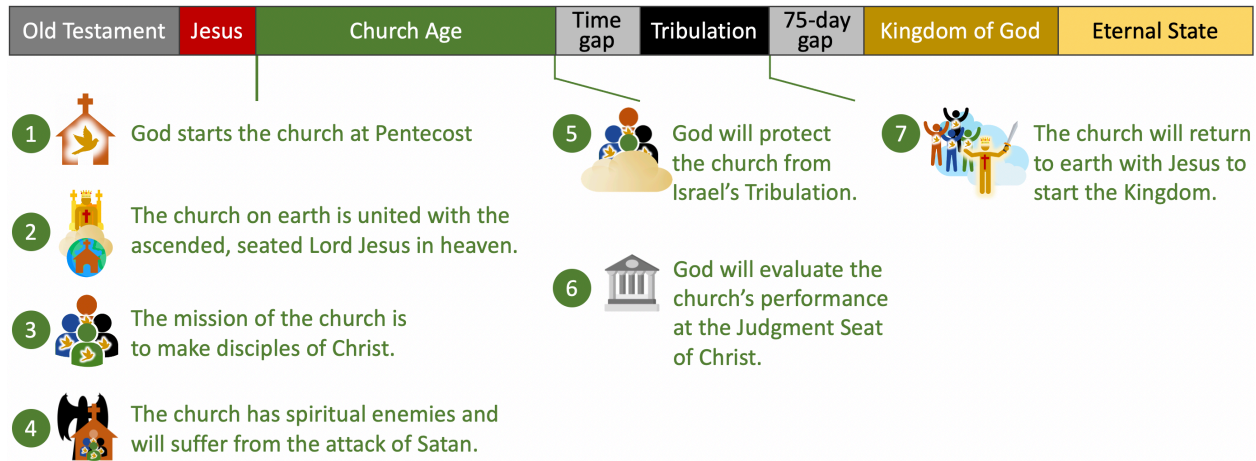
Don't you realize that we will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disputes in this life.

Clearly, there are very important and unmistakable differences between the nation of Israel and the church. Each has their own mission and purpose; each has their own destiny and end. While it is true that both benefit from what the Messiah did on the cross for all mankind, nevertheless, they are not one and the same.

They are two separate peoples of God:

- the earthly people based in Israel (Jewish)
- the heavenly people united with Jesus in heaven (Gentile and Jew).

Aside from God sharing His plan for His church during the church age, God also told the church what would happen after that.



## 5. God will protect the church from Israel's Tribulation.

During the church age, the Bible says that:

- All believers will be disciplined by God as part of our spiritual growth journey, for our own good (Hebrews 12:5–11).
- The church will suffer all kinds of persecution and many will be killed for believing in Jesus. (In fact, in the 20th century alone, more believers have been killed than in all the centuries before it.)

However, the church will not go through the Tribulation, which God means for Israel.

The church is Christ's body and Jesus will protect the church from this Tribulation. How do we know this? In the book of Revelation, Jesus says to the church in Philadelphia that He will rescue them from the "time of testing", meaning the Tribulation.

### Revelation 3:10

"Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world.

Jesus didn't say that they will be saved from the midst of the Tribulation but from the whole "time" of the Tribulation itself. The church will be rescued before Tribulation starts.

And this promise is not meant just for the church in Philadelphia, but for all churches during the church age. This is what Jesus said following this.

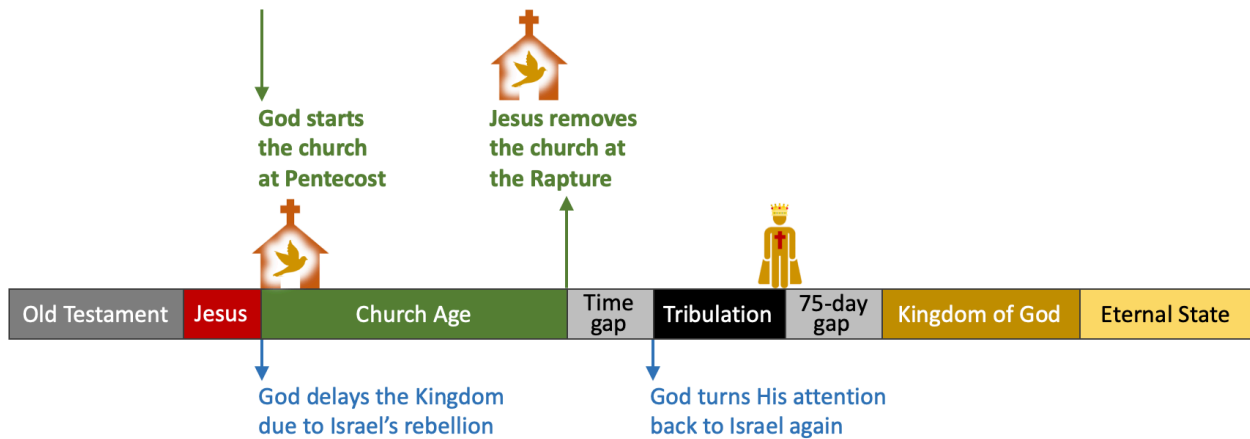
### Revelation 3:13

Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.

Jesus says anyone with ears to hear, meaning believers, should understand that this message is not just for one church but for the churches (plural). In addition, all the comfort and promises

Jesus gives at the end of His message for each of the seven churches is true for all church-age believers (for example: eternal life, eternal rewards and ruling with Jesus, which is found in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 21).

God started the church at Pentecost and we believe He will remove the church from the earth before He turns His attention back to deal with Israel.



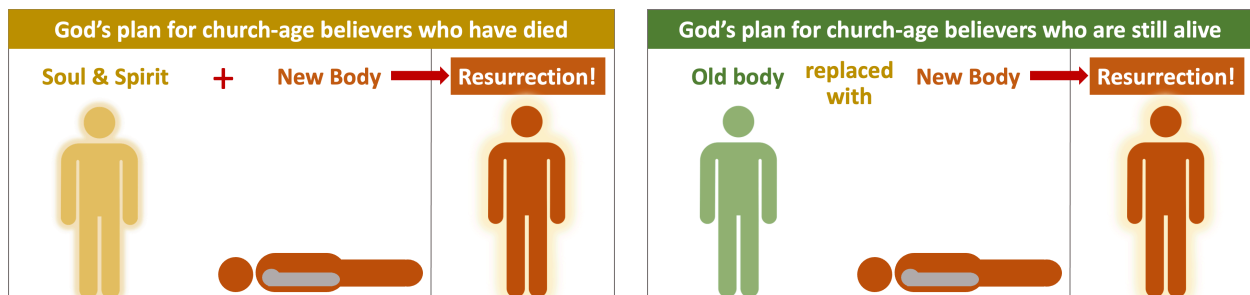
In Old Testament times, the sound of the horn or trumpet was a sign that God was going to appear (Exodus 19:16).

Similarly, the moment before Jesus comes to save His church from the Tribulation, there will be the sound of the trumpet. Then the church will be with Jesus forever after that!

**1 Corinthians 15:51–52**

<sup>51</sup> But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! <sup>52</sup> It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.

At the rapture, God will give all church-age believers resurrection bodies!



The return of Jesus for His church is said to be “imminent”. This means it will definitely happen. There is no chance that it will not happen. But Jesus can come for His church at any time. This is why the Bible tells church-age believers to watch the way that we live while looking forward to being taken away, or raptured, by Jesus.

### Philippians 4:5

Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

### James 5:7–9

<sup>7</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord’s return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. <sup>8</sup> You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup> Don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!



## 6. God will evaluate the church’s performance at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

After the church is raptured and gathered before the Lord Jesus in heaven, He will then review each believer’s life to see if each one has been a successful or failed disciple. This happens at the Bema (Greek word) or the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Every believer will then be rewarded with roles and responsibilities in the returning Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 3:10–15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).



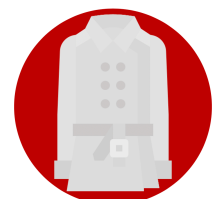
This is possibly also the time when God will give believers clean white garments. This is because when the Bible next mentions the church, it will be right before Jesus’ return to earth at the second coming. At that point, the church or the bride, will already be dressed in white garments, ready to return to earth with Jesus.

### Revelation 19:7b–8

<sup>7</sup> For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself.

<sup>8</sup> She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.”

For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God’s holy people.



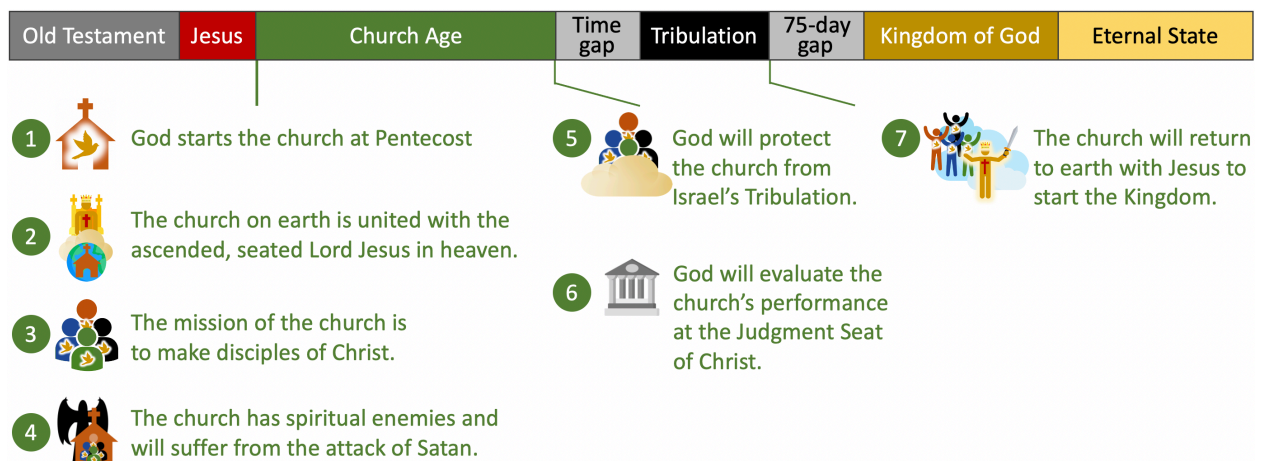
We believe that during this time in heaven is when church-age Christians will also get to stay in the rooms that Jesus has prepared. This is because all church-age believers will have received glorified resurrection bodies. And physical bodies need physical rooms. This is what Jesus told His disciples.

### John 14:1–3

<sup>1</sup> “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me.  
<sup>2</sup> There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?  
<sup>3</sup> When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.



While the Tribulation is happening on earth, the church will be safely in heaven with Jesus, waiting to return to earth with Him.



## 7. The church will return to earth with Jesus to start the Kingdom.

At the end of the Tribulation, the resurrected church will return to earth with Jesus at His second coming. And the resurrected church will be with Him as He finally sets up the Kingdom of God on earth! Satan will also be bound up and unable to influence the world for a thousand years. We will study more details of these events in upcoming lessons.

Importantly, the Bible tells us how human history on earth will be like during this time: it will have the perfect human leader, the God-King Jesus, running the entire world. Living as citizens in this new Kingdom will be resurrected and glorified believers from all of history, who are now perfect and who will never fall again.

It is only at this time that human beings will finally experience an ideal society run by a perfect leader and supported by a faultless government. At no other point in human history will there ever be an era like this.

## Isn't there a form of government that can produce a peaceful and prosperous society?

Through the different ages of human history, mankind has been striving to create the best type of government that can give people freedom, prosperity and happiness. History is filled with empires and nations trying different ways to build the perfect society. Even today, each country tries to build a society free from crime, poverty and other social problems. Why can't any of them succeed?

The Bible records why. It has examples of mankind trying to build the perfect society. For example, during the time of the Judges, the people rebelled against God's rule over them and each person did whatever they thought was right.

### Judges 21:25

In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

With no central government and maximum personal freedom, this idea of a "democratic" society where everyone had the right to do whatever they wanted failed. Why? Because mankind is fallen and sinful. The Bible records how perverted, corrupted and wicked Jewish society became (Judges 17–21). It was so bad that the Israelites themselves grew sick and tired of the chaos.



However, instead of turning back to Yahweh and living under His righteous laws and gracious guidance, they rebelled against Him further. They went to the last judge, the prophet Samuel, and demanded to have a human king, a leader who would have centralised power to direct society. This was the exact opposite of the freedom they had.

### 1 Samuel 8:4–8a

<sup>4</sup> Finally, all the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel.

<sup>5</sup> "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

<sup>6</sup> Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the LORD for guidance. <sup>7</sup> "Do everything they say to you," the LORD replied, "for they are rejecting me, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer." <sup>8</sup> Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned me and followed other gods.

As the Bible records, their idea of having centralised power or a "totalitarian" government also failed. Why? Because the leaders were also fallen and sinful. One bad king after another made the kingdom worse and worse till God exiled the people from their own land.





## Can sinful leaders and sinful citizens ever form a good or ideal society?

The Bible tells us “no”. Only with the perfect leader and perfect citizens can there be an ideal society. And this will only happen at the coming of the Kingdom of God when there will be a perfectly righteous Leader (King Jesus) leading a government and society made up of perfectly righteous people who will never fall again (resurrected believers). This will be how God will create the ideal society.


But evil and arrogant mankind have not stopped trying to leave God out of their society as they promote their own anti-God ideas of building a nation. Let’s examine one example.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German philosopher, economist, historian, sociologist, political theorist, journalist and socialist revolutionary. He promoted the idea of “**global social salvation**”. He believed that mankind could bring in the perfect society. How? This was what he thought:

- **Creation:** He believed that man evolved from nature.
- **The “bad” state of society:** He was convinced that the Industrial Revolution (1760–1840) was to be blamed for the problems of society. For example, in the factories, workers were each given a certain limited task to do (the division of labour). He felt this took away their independence. In addition, the workers were isolated from others as they focused on their own tasks. On the other hand, the rich factory owners (capitalists) benefited much more from the earnings of the factory than the factory workers did.
- **What happened next:** Karl Marx taught that these isolated people started organising themselves into different classes of society. Each of these classes had their own concerns and wants which were different from the other classes. In this way, each class of people developed their own “truth” and competed with other classes. This messy mix pushed history forward in some form of progress.
- **How the present society would end:** Marx said there would be a violent revolution that would end all class conflicts in society. And this revolution would also cause a change in mankind’s human nature. He believed that the rich could only be overthrown through a revolution. And he believed that the common person, in the act of being part of the revolution, would evolve into better human beings.
- **“Paradise”:** Marx’s final paradise was communism. He believed that when there was no longer any private property, when people were no longer isolated from each other, then mankind would become better people. At that point, man and nature would be at peace; people would be at peace with each other; and man would be glorified.



Where did Karl Marx get his ideas from? As a young man, he shared what was on his mind.

<b>Pagan Kingdom of Man</b> Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	<b>Kingdom of God</b> Based on GRACE God would save man
<div style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 5px;">           "I wish to avenge myself against the One who rules above."         </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Karl Marx</p> </div>	

Karl Marx built his ideas of his perfect society out of rebellion against God. His thinking came from the anti-God pagan Kingdom of Man and it continues to influence many fields of study today, including sociology and politics.

As Bible-believing, God-trusting Christians, we need to be careful and aware of the many pagan ideas that surround us. Even if the ideas take on new “creative” forms, we need to learn to recognise Satan’s inspiration behind many of them. His tactics have not changed since the garden of Eden. For example:

- **Rejecting God’s revelation.** In the garden of Eden, Satan questioned Eve by challenging what she knew to be true: “Did God really say...?” (Genesis 3:1). Satan rejected God’s revelation and truth. In fact, he was saying there is no such thing as absolute truth.
- **Promoting mankind to be god.** In Eden, Satan told Eve, “You will be like God.” (Genesis 3:5). Satan was saying that humans can be their own ultimate authority. Humans can make up their own ideas, ethics and beliefs.

Today, politicians and scholars keep proposing “new” ideas on how to fix the problems of society. But at the root of these ideas is mankind’s arrogant thinking that people are inherently good and smart enough. And with the right mix of incentives and punishments, mankind would be able to build the ideal society.

These ways of thinking ignore the biblical view that mankind is sinful and in rebellion against their Creator-God. As the One who designed mankind and created human society, God knows best how things work. We need to submit to His Word as our ultimate authority or we ourselves might end up believing and promoting anti-God ideas.

## Do all Christians have the same understanding about the future with regards to the Kingdom of God?



No, not all believers share the same understanding. There are three main views. Here is how they came about.

### View 1: What the early church believed—a real physical Kingdom of God

The early church believed there was going to be a physical return of the Kingdom of God that would last a thousand years. They believed that during this time, God would tie up Satan for the duration of the Kingdom.

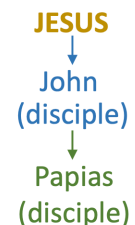
#### Revelation 20:1–3

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and a heavy chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup> He seized the dragon—that old serpent, who is the devil, Satan—and bound him in chains for a thousand years. <sup>3</sup> The angel threw him into the bottomless pit, which he then shut and locked so Satan could not deceive the nations anymore until the thousand years were finished. Afterward he must be released for a little while.

Later on, Latin-speaking believers called this thousand-year Kingdom the “millennium”, from the Latin words “mille” (thousand) and “annum” (years).

Many early church leaders taught and wrote about this thousand-year Kingdom of God.

**Example 1:** Papias (AD 60–130) was a disciple of the apostle John who later became the bishop of Hierapolis (a city in Turkey). He taught that the Kingdom would be one thousand years long.



**Example 2:** Another early church leader, Justin Martyr (AD 100–165), wrote the following in his book, “Dialogue with Trypho”:

But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declared.

And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would  dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place.

Justin was writing about Revelation 20:1–6 where the apostle John said that Jesus and His followers would rule the earth from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. Justin wrote that John meant an actual 1,000 years. He stated that “right-minded Christians” believed this. By right-minded, he meant those who understood the Scriptures correctly.

**Example 3:** Irenaeus (AD 130–200) was a student of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John. He was a well-known early church leader who wrote the book “Against Heresies”.

In his book, he said that Jesus used to teach that after the resurrection of the righteous, they would enjoy the Kingdom of God where the earth would be dramatically different. Plants, crops, fruit trees, fields would be very productive.

The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food, from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth: as the elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, related that they had heard from him how the Lord used to teach in regard to these times.



These are just three examples of what believers in the early church understood and taught about the Kingdom of God. They believed:

- Jesus will return physically to the earth at His second coming.
- Through a series of judgments, Jesus will start the Kingdom of God.
- There will be a thousand-year, physical Kingdom on a transformed earth with King Jesus as the global ruler.

Because Jesus returns before the start of the thousand-year Kingdom, this view is known as Premillennialism (“Pre” meaning “before”).

**PREMILLENNIAL VIEW**



## View 2: Some believers stopped believing in the physical Kingdom of God

Later on, some Christians started believing something different. How did this happen?

The early church was small and faced persecution. But after more than 300 years, the Roman Empire officially chose Christianity as the state religion! This is what happened:

- In AD 312, the Roman Emperor Constantine prayed to “the true god” before a major battle to gain full control of the entire Roman Empire. He said he saw a vision of Jesus and that’s why he won the battle. So, he became a believer (as far as we know) and passed laws that stopped the persecution of Christians.
- Then in AD 392, Emperor Theodosius banned all pagan worship and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire!



From being persecuted for hundreds of years, **Christianity now became the main religion!** The church was relieved. But now the church began to wonder:

- Was this the start of the Kingdom?
- Was the Roman Emperor God’s representative on earth?
- Was the church actually the Kingdom?

Later on, the Roman Empire started to crumble. At the same time, **the church grew richer, more powerful and had greater influence.** This led many in the church to think that God’s Kingdom was actually slowly coming at that time.



Also, there were some in the church who had **started hating Jews.** They called the Jews the “Christ-killers”. And because many Jews continued to reject Jesus, these believers felt that God must not care about them anymore. And so, they rejected the teaching that the returning Kingdom of God would be based in physical Jerusalem with Israel as the superpower of the world.



Not only that, around this time, the church began to accept a new way of understanding Scripture. Important church leaders like Origen (AD 185–254) were **influenced by ideas from Greek philosophy.** For example, Greek philosophers believed that anything material or physical was evil. The body was evil; food was evil; the earth was evil. Only spiritual or non-physical things were good. Believers started to accept this idea as true. So they started to believe that God’s Kingdom must be spiritual only and not physical.



Because of this thinking, they **changed their way of interpreting and understanding Scripture.** They rejected a plain, normal understanding of God’s Word. They instead used an allegorical or spiritualising interpretation of Scripture. In other words, they gave spiritual meanings to many parts of the Bible.



So, from around AD 400 onwards, many in the church stopped believing in the actual, physical, thousand-year Kingdom of God. To them, the Bible was talking about a spiritual Kingdom.

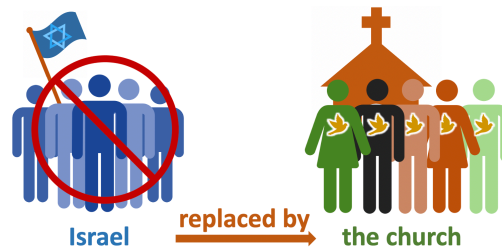
This thinking is called “Amillennialism”. It comes from Greek where the prefix “a” (pronounced “Ah”), which means “no”, is placed in front of “millennialism”. And so we get “Amillennialism” which means “No millennium”.

#### AMILLENNIAL VIEW



### View 3: Other Christians believe that the church must bring in the Kingdom of God

When Christianity first became the official religion of the Roman Empire and the church became stronger and more powerful, some believers began to think that the church had replaced Israel as the Kingdom.



So they started to think that it was the job of the church to change the world. The church had to get rid of poverty, provide justice to all people, and make the world live by Christian values.

This thinking became really popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Why? Because during this time, there were more so-called “Christian” countries that were rich, powerful and influential.

Many believers started to think that it was the responsibility of Christians and the church to bring in the peace and righteousness that Bible prophecies talked about.





These believers thought:

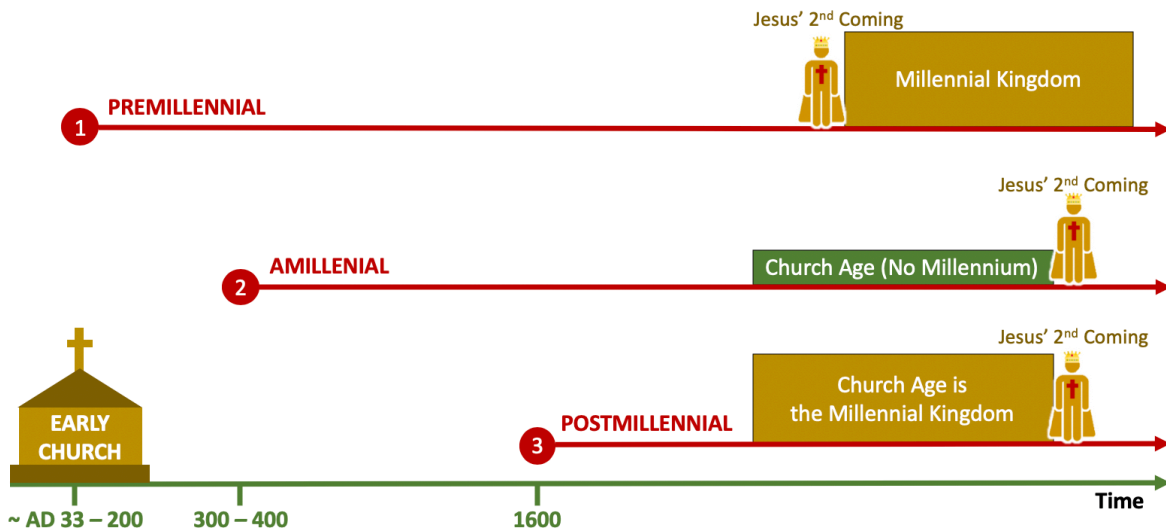
- As history went on, things would get better and better and man’s knowledge and hard work would make the world become more and more like the Kingdom of God. They believed that when the Bible talks about a thousand years, it just meant a very long time and not actually one thousand years.
- When the world was sufficiently “christianised”, meaning there were many Christians and the world looked like the Kingdom of God, then Jesus would return to the earth.
- It was the responsibility of the church to build the Kingdom of God on earth.

In this view, Jesus comes after the “thousand years”, so it became known as “Postmillennialism” (“Post” means “after”).

**POSTMILLENNIAL VIEW**



This is a very brief history of how and when the three main ideas about the coming Kingdom of God began.



## Does it really matter what we believe about the Kingdom of God or how everything ends? Isn't it just enough to know that God wins?

Some people feel that it is not necessary to understand the end times. However, each of these views have their own beliefs about the purpose of the church and Israel. And this affects how Christians live. Here are examples of the impact of these different views.

### PREMILLENNIALISM

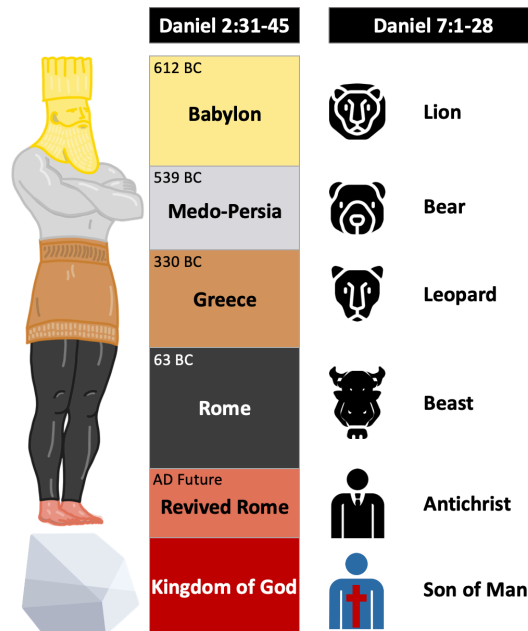
Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming



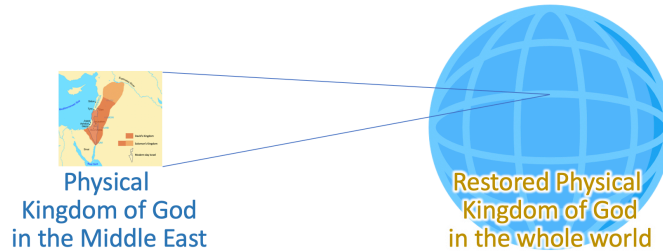
**Main goal of the church:** These Christians believe that the main goal of the church is to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18–20). This was Jesus’ final command to the apostles before He ascended into heaven. And this has not changed.

Even though the world is getting more evil, these Christians believe:

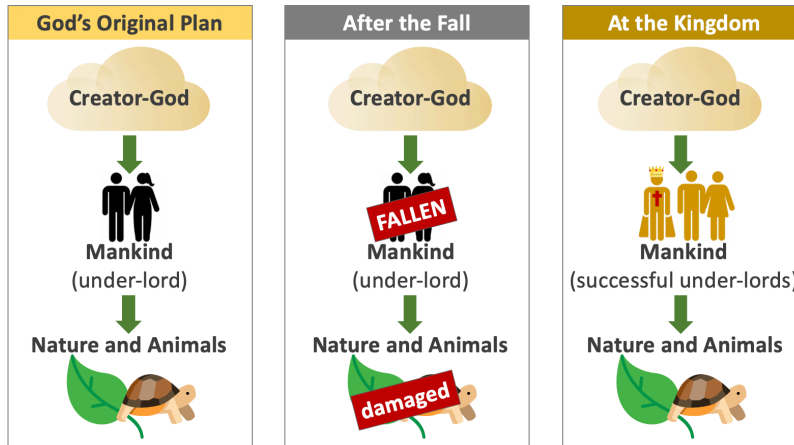
- **Jesus is the Saviour:** Following the prophecies in Daniel, Jesus will return to crush evil mankind before He restarts the Kingdom of God physically on earth.



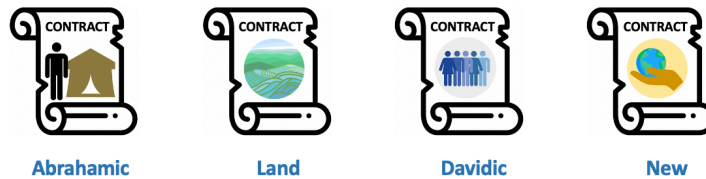
- **Physical Kingdom:** Israel lived in the first Kingdom of God in the physical Promised Land. God promised to restore that Kingdom with a perfect King. Therefore, the returning Kingdom must also be physical because God is consistent in the way He treats the Kingdom.



- **Responsible Dominion:** Mankind was given responsible dominion over creation. Even though mankind fell, God’s plans are never thwarted. So God will ensure that His plan is fulfilled in the coming Kingdom when He reverses the curse significantly, and mankind can be successful under-lords of creation under the perfect, fully human, second Adam—Christ Jesus.



- **Israel:** Yahweh is not done with His chosen people Israel. God made unconditional contracts with Israel and He will honour and fulfil all the contracts.



Because of all this, Christians who believe in premillennialism are supportive of Israel.

*For example, In 1917, the British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour released the Balfour Declaration, that stated that the United Kingdom was in favour of creating a "national home" for the Jews in Palestine.*

*Balfour was premillennial in his thinking. For him, Israel was important. What he believed guided his decisions and how he lived.*

Foreign Office,

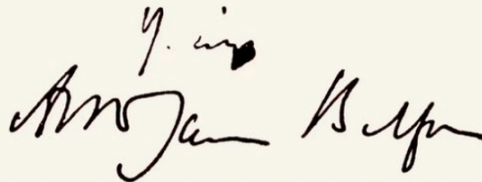
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Balfour', with a small flourish above the first name.

## AMILLENNIALISM

Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming

Church Age (No Millennium)



- **Israel:** These Christians believe there is no future for Israel because God is done with rebellious Israel. Only the church is important now.



- **“Kingdom”:** They believe there is no thousand-year Kingdom of God on earth. “The Kingdom of God” is just another name (synonym) for the Eternal State.

Kingdom of God

=

Eternal State

- **The end:** They believe that history will continue and not get any better or worse. Then suddenly without warning, Jesus will return to bring believers into the Eternal State and send off unbelievers into eternal punishment.

These beliefs cause such Christians to have a poor attitude towards Jews. Sometimes, it grows into a hatred towards them known as anti-Semitism.

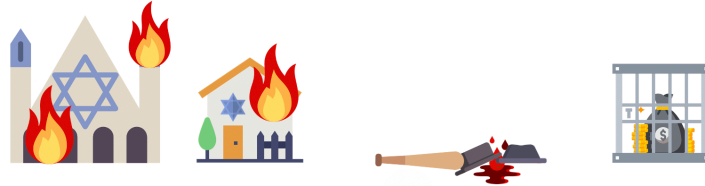
*For example, the famous reformer, Martin Luther (1483–1546) had amillennial thinking. He tried to make the Jews believe in Jesus, but failed. So he grew to hate them and wanted to get rid of them. He wrote in his book “On the Jews and Their Lies”:*

On the Jews  
and Their Lies

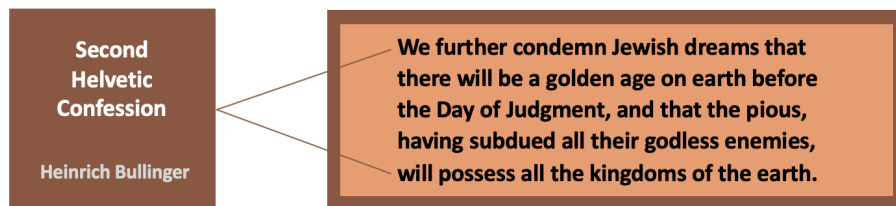
By Martin Luther

What shall we Christians do  
with this rejected and  
condemned people, the Jews?

*In his later years, Luther encouraged arson attacks against synagogues and Jewish homes, physical attacks against rabbis (Jewish teachers), and the confiscation of Jewish silver and gold. That was what his beliefs led him to do.*



*This anti-Jew and anti-Kingdom ideas began spreading to other churches as well. In 1566, many reformed (Protestant) churches in Switzerland chose as their statement of faith what is known as the “Second Helvetic Confession”. Chapter 11 of that document states:*

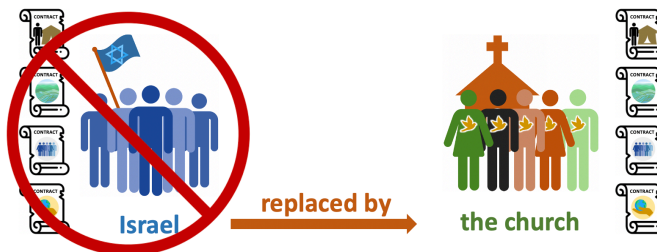


*What these Christians believed impacted their choices on how they lived their lives.*

## POSTMILLENNIALISM

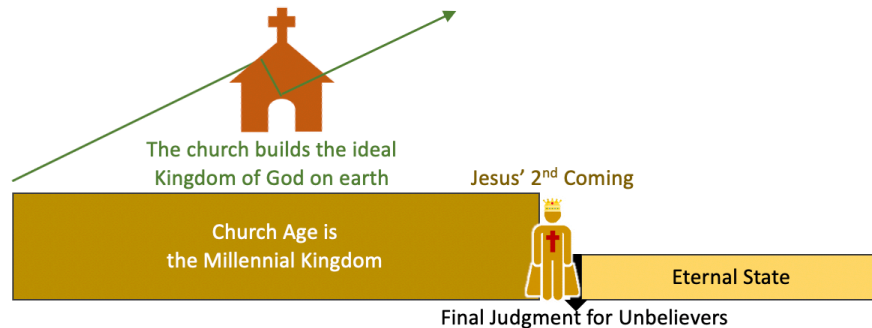


- **Israel:** These Christians believe the church has replaced Israel. The church would now receive the promises that God had originally made to Israel.





- **Main goal of the church:** The church is responsible for improving the world. Christians must help build the type of Kingdom the Bible describes. This means Christians have to keep improving society, science, education, charitable work, welfare, justice and more.





Believers who think this way are very focused on:

- social justice
- church programmes to solve poverty
- solving environmental issues
- lobbying governments to put in place laws based on Christian principles
- organising protests and rallies to try to influence government policies and
- running for office so as to be part of the government.

These Christians believe that the church has to save the world. Only after they do that, then Jesus will return and bring in the Eternal State.

*One example of the results of this thinking is with a German preacher named Thomas Munster (German: Müntzer) (who lived about 1489–1524).*

- *Munster did not agree with Martin Luther's amillennial ideas. Instead, he believed it was the responsibility of the church to bring in the Kingdom. His writings later influenced other Germans.* 
- *Karl Marx read and agreed with Munster's ideas about mankind needing to bring in the Kingdom. He began dreaming of a "kingdom" where everyone was equal and everyone shared in the wealth of the nation. This led to the development of marxism and communism.* 
- *Another German influenced by (i) Luther's ideas about the Jews and (ii) Munster's ideas of the kingdom was Adolf Hitler. He used the Bible's Kingdom words and ideas and came up with the "Third Reich", or "Third Kingdom". Part of his plan was to get rid of all Jews.*



Third Reich

=

Third Kingdom

*What's more shocking is that the German national church (which had a weak understanding of the Kingdom) went along with his plans. (Note: The Nazis considered the "First Reich" to be Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, and the "Second Reich" was Otto von Bismarck's Hohenzollern Dynasty. The Nazis envisioned a third glorious age for Germany, a thousand-year kingdom headed by a leader called the "Führer".)*

- *But German Christians who had premillennial views understood that it would be God alone who brings back the Kingdom, not mankind and not the church. And so they rejected Hitler's programme and fled from Germany.*

(Note: Amillennialism and postmillennialism are similar. Both views see no role for Israel and both see the Kingdom of God as something spiritual rather than a physical kingdom reigning for an actual 1,000 years on earth. The difference is that in postmillennialism, Christians have to bring about Kingdom conditions.)

**So we see from these examples that how we believe history will end does affect the way we live today.**

These are some of the things it will affect.



**In this series, this is how we have approached our study of the Bible.**

1. We believe that the **Old Testament is a record of real history** and we believe that God means for us to read the Bible in an ordinary way, like a newspaper or history report.
2. We believe that the **end goal of God is for mankind to worship and glorify Him.**



3. We believe **God takes contracts very seriously** and will faithfully and actually fulfil all the terms of the contracts that He had made with the nation of Israel.



4. We believe in the Daniel prophecies that it is **God who will save man and nature in all ways**. Jesus is the One who will crush the Kingdoms of Man. He is the only Saviour—not man, not the Christian, and not the church.



As we move ahead into the final lessons of this series, we will continue in the same way, reading the Bible in a normal, ordinary sense. What we will find is that this way of studying Scripture will lead to a premillennial view of the apocalyptic teachings of the Bible.

### If we take the premillennial view, how should we live as Christians today?

1. We should focus on our **sanctification**, actively cooperating with the Holy Spirit as He helps push out our sin and helps us grow more loyal to God. We would allow God to lead and guide our choices on what to do and how to live. If we live this way, we would be able to **worship and glorify God** more and more each day.
2. We should be very careful of how we treat God's people, the Jews. When God made a covenant with Abraham, this is what He told Abraham.



#### Genesis 12:1–3

<sup>1</sup> The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

Even though the nation of Israel is currently in rebellion against God, nevertheless, God has not forgotten the promises He made to Abraham. In the course of history, we have seen how God continues to protect and care for Israel. And as a nation, they have given the world the Jewish Scriptures: our Holy Bible.

Just as we obey Jesus’ command for the church to **make disciples of all nations**, we also need to **love the Jews and evangelise to them**: share with them the Good News about their own Messiah.



3. While it is impossible for fallen mankind to bring back the Kingdom of God and we know God has not given us that job, it does not mean that we cannot **live the righteous lives that God has called us to**. Just as God told Israel to obey His laws so that the pagan nations will be drawn to Him (Deuteronomy 4:5–8), we can **influence society positively** when we live in obedience to God’s wise words and be a light to the world as well.



**All this talk about the future and how different Christians think is very confusing and uncomfortable. Is it okay to only focus on my Christian walk and leave the future alone?**

Once, Jesus' disciples asked Him about what will happen at the end of the world.

**Matthew 24:3**

Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives. His disciples came to him privately and said, "Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?"



Jesus didn't tell them:

- "Don't worry about it",
- "Just focus on your Christian life now", or
- "Why are you asking about such difficult things, you won't understand anyway".

Instead, Jesus patiently told them what the end will be like. Matthew 24–25 contains Jesus' response to them.

Jesus wants believers to know. He wants us to be interested in how history ends. He wants us to have hope. He wants us to be ready. And He wants us to warn believers and unbelievers to take Him seriously.

God included apocalyptic literature in the Bible so that we will read, learn and understand. The books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Revelation and other passages were not put in the Bible just so we could ignore them. God means for us to study all of His Word, not selectively read some parts only.

To encourage us to pay attention to the book of Revelation, God put in special blessings!

**Revelation 1:3**

God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near.

So, in the upcoming lessons, we will study what God recorded for us in the book of Revelation.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. We have seen that Israel and the church are very distinct and have separate destinies. How does this distinction help us when we study Scripture? How should we understand passages that talk about Israel's future compared with passages about the church's future?
2. Believers are said to be the body of Christ and each believer has a role to play in the church's mission. What is your role? Have you been faithful in doing the tasks that God has set before you? Or have you been half-hearted and noncommittal? Knowing that Jesus will evaluate each one of us, what can you do differently for God?
3. What is your view of the coming Kingdom and how human history will end? Is this a view that you've studied out and are firmly convinced about? If not, how can you go about understanding the information God has left for us to study? Remember, how you think history will end will influence how you live your life.



Pre-reading for next lesson: Ephesians 1; Colossians 3; Revelation 1–3. (All are complete chapters.)

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### Endnote

Page 26: The photograph “Balfour declaration” by The British Library. 1917. Public domain work.  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Balfour\\_declaration\\_unmarked.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Balfour_declaration_unmarked.jpg) (Accessed 22 Jun 2020.)