BEHOLD OUR GOD!

Prophecy reminds us that we are on the very cusp of eternity. In just a short while, we will finally go home. Few things are as hopeful and moving as thinking of the exhilarating moment Jesus returns to earth. Unimaginable joy will flood the hearts of the redeemed when the sky finally breaks open and Christ appears in the glory of His Father, accompanied by millions of angels. Seeing the brightness of God’s throne pierce the dark clouds, God’s children will shout, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us” (Isa. 25:9). His mighty lifegiving voice will thunder across the planet; the graves will open and release the redeemed to eternal life. Those who are alive will be transformed and glorified in an instant, and the wicked will perish in the light of Christ’s presence. Then, the moment for which all believers have waited will finally arrive: gravity will let go, and we will be lovingly lifted off this dark and broken planet. We will move through the air toward our beloved Savior, and we will be welcomed by the angels onto the cloud with Christ Jesus. Shouts of joy will swell into songs of praise, joining the ecstatic choir of angels. Filled with perfect joy, love, peace, and gratitude, we will know that we are forever safe, for “thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). Eternity with Christ awaits us.

What unadulterated joy that day will bring! No words can capture it; no art can properly portray it. While the Second Coming marks the physical separation of the redeemed from the wicked, it’s not quite the end of the great controversy. This week, we will focus on the final destruction of the wicked and the dawn of an eternity without sin.
Write out Revelation 20–22 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Revelation 21:1–8. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
THE GREAT CONTROVERSY IS OVER

The brightness of Jesus’ second coming will destroy the wicked (2 Thess. 2:8) and leave Satan and his demons stuck on a desolate, broken planet (Rev. 20:3). The redeemed will be taken to heaven, where, as “priests of God,” they will “reign with Him a thousand years” (v. 6). It’s during this time that the millennial judgment takes place (see Lesson 11). We can only imagine what experiences and insights the redeemed will gain during this time as they grow in their knowledge and appreciation of God and His judgments.

After the millennium in heaven, the redeemed will join God in the New Jerusalem and return to earth to execute judgment on Satan and the lost, finally putting the great controversy to an end. After the city descends, the wicked will be resurrected and Satan “will go out to deceive the nations” (Rev. 20:8) once more. He will lead the lost to trust in their massive numbers and attack God’s city in an attempt to kill Jesus and His people, but they will instead be met with their final judgment. As their lives of unrepented wickedness are on full display, they will be sentenced to the second, final death.

In this second death, the wicked will have to bear their guilt in the visible and piercing presence of our holy God and His holy law. They will be fully aware of all the sins they have ever committed and will have to stand without an intercessor, for they will have repeatedly rejected God’s offers of mercy, grace, restoration, and love. In that moment of seeing the perfected redeemed in the city, they will realize exactly what they’ve lost. They will suffer horrific regrets of all the years on earth they wasted clinging to sin and all the times they traded eternal life for fleeting moments of empty pleasure. Even so, they will not experience a sudden desire to be righteous. In that moment, divine fire “from God out of heaven” (Rev. 20:9) will devour them, cleansing the entire planet. The anguish, emotional pain, and awareness of their sin, guilt, and shame combined with the hopelessness of knowing there is no way back will likely outweigh the physical torture of the flames. The wicked may even welcome the consuming flames, for their miserable existence will finally be put to an end. Satan and his legions of fallen angels, who for thousands of years have terrorized and deceived humanity, will finally receive their punishment. God’s wrath and justice will be poured out in full measure, making an everlasting end to the horrific rebellion. Then, at long last, the battle will be over. Sin and Satan will be no more, justice will be served, and after thousands of years, the great controversy will be finished.
ALL THINGS NEW

Revelation 21 and 22 describe how God created humanity’s new home after the earth is destroyed by fire. We can hardly imagine what it will be like to see that God’s fire of justice has erased every trace of sin and He has finished His “strange work” (Isa. 28:21, KJV). The earth will once again be without form and void. But then, God’s powerful voice will call out, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). For the first time in history, humans will witness God making the world a paradise. Being the ultimate designer and master artist, God will fashion a beautiful new earth for His beloved children. What a sight to see; what a moment to experience! All things new!

Creating a perfect and exceedingly beautiful world for us is only the beginning of a new story, as indicated in Revelation 21:3: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.” The once rebellious planet will become the headquarters of the universe, and the New Jerusalem will be its glorious capital. From then on, God will dwell there. Heaven will literally come to earth: “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light” (Rev. 21:23).

The redeemed will spend the millennium understanding, processing, and grieving the fate of unsaved family members and friends, but the final destruction of the wicked, though just, will bring fresh heartache. After one thousand years of holiness, peace, and sinlessness, their purified hearts must witness thousands of years of sin along with its destruction. There will understandably be tears and pain to deal with, even in the New Jerusalem. However, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). God cares about healing our hearts. To make all things new, all things old must be healed.

God will create for us a new and perfect world. He will make sure every last bit of pain and trauma is recognized, addressed, and healed. He Himself will wipe our tears and provide the tree of life whose “leaves... were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). All wounds and hurts will be gone forever.
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What relationship do the following verses have with Revelation 20–22?

1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17  
Matthew 24:30, 31  
Isaiah 65:17–25  
Isaiah 66:22, 23  
1 Corinthians 15:26  
Isaiah 25:8, 9  
John 14:1–3  
2 Peter 3:9–14  
Titus 2:13  
2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

(Cont. from inSight, p. 111):

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [1911], 677, 678.)
GOD IS LOVE

God is all about relationships. The triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is a perfect unity of three equal Persons. God doesn't just show and give love, He is love. Everything God thinks, says, does, and creates springs from love. He defines love by His eternal existence. Jesus gave up all to show the world what love is, who God is: selfless, benevolent, other-centered.

Throughout Scripture, God refers to us as His children. From Eden to the New Jerusalem, all His interactions with humanity reflect His desire for companionship with us. To Moses, He said, “Let them [the Israelites] make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8). He told Isaiah (7:14) that when His Son came to earth, His name would be “‘Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23). Speaking of the moment His holy city descends to earth, He said, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3). God's love is the thread that holds His universe together. It's the tune of life's symphony, the frequency of happiness, the harmony of joy, and the force that makes life thrive and eternity worth experiencing.

The Bible promises us a hopeful future in which Love again reigns supreme after the disruption the great controversy caused. Total peace will again pervade the universe. Every potential and talent will be explored, cultivated, and unleashed for God's glory. All creatures will grow infinitely in their knowledge of God and their love for Him as well as for each other. It will be a harmonious eternity of ever-increasing appreciation for our Creator, exploring His mighty wonders and works, and building ever-deepening friendships. Nothing on earth could ever compare! The great web of love will bind all created species from every galaxy together.

Unfortunately, the great controversy is not yet over, but knowing what you know now, after exploring its dynamics over the last thirteen weeks, you have a choice to make: Which side will you be on in this cosmic conflict? Will you take Jesus' hand and walk from the shadows of sin into His light of love?

Our hearts are the battlefield of this war. Only surrendering to Jesus will provide us with victory. “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Rev. 21:7). God loves you. He desperately desires that you be His child and live with Him forever.

What do you say?
"We shall stand in His presence and behold the glory of His countenance."

"There the redeemed shall know, even as also they are known. The loves and sympathies which God Himself has planted in the soul shall there find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the sacred ties that bind together ‘the whole family in heaven and earth’ (Ephesians 3:15)—these help to constitute the happiness of the redeemed.

"There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.

“All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar—worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God's handiwork. With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator's name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed.

“And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.

“‘And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.’” Revelation 5:13.

(Cont. on p. 109.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What excites you when you think about eternity with God?

Why is it significant that God is love, and how should it impact our spiritual activities and outreach?

How can you share our hope with people you know who are lost?

What kinds of things do you feel when studying the end of the great controversy?

What difference should the Second Coming effect in young people’s lives?

What insights do you think the redeemed might gain during the millennial judgment?

Why is it essential that the wicked are not only destroyed but also judged?

What have you learned about trusting God in the past thirteen lessons?

What has your study of the great controversy taught you about God’s love?