

PART 1. THE KINGDOM OF GOD
PART 2. THE SIGNS FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST
PART 3. THE SHORT PERIOD OF SATAN BEFORE THE SECOND COMING
PART 4. THE SUDDEN, UNEXPECTED AWE-INSPIRING SECOND COMING OF CHRIST
PART 5. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD
PART 6. THE FINAL JUDGEMENT
PART 7. THE RENEWAL OF ALL THINGS
PART 8. HOW CHRISTIANS OUGHT TO LIVE BEFORE CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

PART 1. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

What did Jesus teach about the kingdom¹?
Study all the parables of Jesus.

1. The earthly expectations about the kingdom

Just like all believing Jews, the disciples of Christ initially hoped that Christ would restore the earlier (theocratic) kingdom of Israel (Ezekiel 37:20-28). And they hoped that they would receive the important positions in that kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 22:24-30). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit would be the sign of the kingdom (Ezekiel 36:27; 39:29). Thus, when Jesus said that the disciples would be baptised with the Holy Spirit after a few days, the disciples thought that Jesus was going to restore that earthly kingdom (the theocratic kingdom of Israel) (Acts 1:5-6).

But Jesus did not respond to their earthly expectations and said, "It is not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by his own authority." That is, God has not revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29) to us "the long periods of time"² and "the set times"³ in God's history of salvation, especially with respect to his second coming (1 Thessalonians 5:1)(and the establishment of the kingdom of God in its final phase thereafter)! While the disciples hoped to receive political power on earth, Jesus was going to give them much greater power by which they would fulfil the task of being his witnesses. This task was initially entrusted to Israel (Isaiah 43:10; 49:6), but was fulfilled by the (Jewish) apostles of Christ (Acts 1:7-8; 13:47; John 15:26-27).

2. The biblical teaching about the kingdom

a. Definition of the kingdom.

In all his parables and teachings Jesus speaks 112 times about the kingdom and made clear that the kingdom of God had come with his first coming (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 12:28-29; 21:41-44). The kingdom is not a territorial kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom: God's kingship in them (Luke 17:20-21). The kingdom is not of this world, but in this world (John 18:36; cf. John 17:11,14). 'The kingdom of heaven' is the same as 'the kingdom of God' (compare Matthew 13:31-33 with Mark 4:30-32). The kingdom of God dwarfs all other earthly allegiances (tribal, national, political, ideological, theological, cultural, etc)(Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1-4) and must be sought above all endeavours (Matthew 6:33). The kingdom would include people from every natural nation on earth (Matthew 8:11-12; 13:38). The kingdom would grow continually (Mark 4:26-32; cf. Matthew 6:10a). And the kingdom would receive its final and perfect phase at his second coming (Matthew 13:36-43; 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Revelation 11:15).

In general, the kingdom of God is the kingship, sovereign rule (reign) and complete power of God over everyone and everything, from eternity to eternity (Psalm 93:1-2; 145:13; 146:10; 1 Timothy 6:15).

In particular, the kingdom of God is the realm in which the rule (kingship or lordship) of God through Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18; John 13:3; Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Revelation 1:5; 17:14; 19:16) is recognised in the hearts (Luke 17:20-21), obeyed (operative) in the lives (Matthew 25:34-40; Romans 14:17) and in which the grace of God prevails. The kingship or rule of God through Jesus

¹ βασιλεια

² χρονοι

³ καιροι

Christ is based on the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ for his people (Matthew 21:39,42-43; Acts 2:36) and the application of that work by the Holy Spirit in his people (Romans 14:17).

b. The kingdom of God expresses itself in four visible areas:

The kingdom of God expresses itself in the complete salvation of believers (Mark 10:24-27) from the beginning when they are born again (John 3:3-8) to the end when their bodies are resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:26). It expresses itself in the reign of God in the hearts (Luke 17:20-21) and lives (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) of believers.

The kingdom of God expresses itself in the constitution and growth of believers as the Church on this present earth (Matthew 16:18-19; Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Peter 2:4-5,9-10).

The kingdom of God expresses itself in the good works (influence) of believers in every aspect of human society (Matthew 3:5-16; 25:34-36; Romans 14:17): intellectual-, physical-, emotional-, social- and spiritual. The kingdom of God finally expresses itself in a redeemed universe. At Christ's second coming the destroyers of the earth will be destroyed and God through Jesus Christ will reign for ever in the new heaven and new earth (Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Hebrews 12:22-24; 2 Peter 1:11; 3:10-13; Revelation 11:15,18).

c. The kingdom of God has five characteristics:

The kingdom of God was established at the first coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:28; 21:43).

The kingdom of God is in the present world, but not of the present world (Luke 17:21; John 18:36).

The kingdom of God is at the same time a revelation for believers and a riddle for unbelievers (Matthew 13:11-17).

The kingdom of God begins small, develops gradually and finally pervades all (Matthew 13:31-33; Daniel 2:34-35,44-45).

The kingdom of God has a present form on this earth (Matthew 12:28; 13:24-30,36-43) and a future form on the new earth (1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Revelation 11:15).

PART 2. THE SIGNS FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

What would be the signs for the one and only second coming⁴ (singular) of Christ?
Read Matthew 23:37 to 24:51.

The disciples posed two questions:

“When will this happen?” That is: “When would Jerusalem and the temple be destroyed?” (Matthew 23:37 - 24:3a). The answer of Jesus is given in Matthew 24:15-20 (cf. Luke 21:7,20-24a).

“What will be the sign of your coming, that is (and), of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3b)

The word ‘and’⁵ has either a connective (the word: ‘and’) or an explicative (the word: ‘that is’) function⁶. Here it has an explicative function: “that is”. The end of the age is at the one and only second coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22-26)! The answer of Jesus is given in Matthew 24:4-14,21-51. In his teaching about “the last things” (eschatology) Jesus answers these two questions of his disciples.

1. There will be many signs that point to the coming end of this present age (Matthew 24:4-14)

Before the second coming of Jesus Christ there will be many signs that point to the definite end of this present age: false Christs (messiahs) and false prophets (teachers), wars, famines, earthquakes, oppression and persecutions of genuine Christian believers, the turning away of people from the Christian faith, and the love of many that will grow cold (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

However, these signs must not alarm the Christians! These signs must happen first (Matthew 24:6), but do not mark the end of the age! They are only “the beginning of birth pains” (Matthew 24:8). These trials will take place from “the destruction of Jerusalem” in 70 A.D. “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:20;24b). That is, from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming.

⁴ παρουσία

⁵ και

⁶ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich 1957

2. There are only three very clear and definite signs for the end of the age (Matthew 24:14,21-31)

a. First there is a long period of proclaiming the gospel (Matthew 24:14).

The proclamation of ‘the gospel of the kingdom’ as a testimony to all the nations in the world is the proclamation of ‘the gospel of grace’ (Acts 20:24-25), a proclamation of God’s grace shown in Christ, and a proclamation of the royal reign of Christ in the hearts and lives of believers (Matthew 12:28-30; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36). The period of proclaiming the gospel will be a very long period. The completion of this task cannot be calculated by anyone on earth and therefore the moment of Christ’s second coming cannot be predicted (Matthew 24:36).

b. Then there is a short period of the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21-29a).

Although Christians will suffer oppression and persecutions by various antichrists and their allies (1 John 2:18) throughout the long period in which the gospel is proclaimed (2 Timothy 3:12), there will be a final short period in which the great tribulation under the final antichrist and his allies will take place (Matthew 24:21-29a). The great tribulation will be a short period (Matthew 24:22). Also the beginning and duration of this period cannot be calculated or predicted. Therefore the moment of Christ’s second coming can also not be predicted.

c. Finally there is the sudden and unexpected sign of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:30-31).

‘The sign’ is not one or another preliminary sign preceding the second coming, but consists of the sudden, unexpected and awe-inspiring return of Jesus Christ himself on the clouds. This will be the absolute end of this present world in a physical and historical sense!

The first two signs cannot be used to determine the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:36,42)! Only the third sign is final and decisive. It will come as a surprise for everyone!

3. The parable of the fig tree (Matthew 24: 32-35).

A parable consists of an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, set in a particular context and sometimes the explanation or application is given. A parable has one important message.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

[Step 1] Understand the story of the parable.

What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

This parable is ‘an illustrative comparison’ rather than ‘an illustrative story’.

Jesus makes a comparison with a fig tree.

a. One comparison is with a fig tree in Isaiah 34:4.

Jesus probably thought of the end-time events depicted in Isaiah 34:4. The stars that will fall in the end-time are compared to withered leaves and shrivelled figs that fall from a tree during a windstorm. When the leaves and figs begin to fall all people know that the end (cf. judgement) is near.

b. Another comparison is with a fig tree in Matthew 24:32.

The story of the parable is written in Matthew 24:32. What Jesus said about the fig tree he could also have said about other trees that shed their leaves (Luke 21:29)! When the leaves of trees begin to sprout all people know that summer (cf. salvation) is near.

[Step 2] Study the context of the parable and determine the elements of the parable.

a. The background of the parable.

The background or frame of this parable is Christ’s teaching about the events in Matthew chapter 24 and 25. The message of both chapters is that Christians should be watchful with regard to the second coming of Christ as Judge and Rewarder! The prophecies in these chapters refer to *the events in the near future of the*

disciples on the one hand and to *the end-time events* on the other hand. The approaching judgement of Jerusalem in the time of the disciples points to the final judgement of the whole world in the end-time. It serves as an illustration (a type) of the final catastrophe that will come on the whole world in the end-time.

Matthew 23:37 – 24:3. The occasion for the instruction about the last things is the lament of Jesus about Jerusalem and the two questions of the disciples.

Matthew 24:4-14. The beginning of birth pangs. Many kinds of tribulations as wars, famines and earthquakes would accompany the proclamation of the gospel (of God's grace and kingship or reign) to all the nations in the world. All these things 'must happen', but they are no indication of the end, but an indication that all things will come to an end.

Matthew 24:15-28. The great tribulation is fore-shadowed by the tribulation of Jerusalem.

Jesus first speaks of the tribulation of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-20), which took place in 70 A.D. This tribulation of Jerusalem fore-shadows the many similar tribulations in the history of the world thereafter (cf. Matthew 24:5-14). Jesus then speaks of the great tribulation shortly before his second coming (Matthew 24:21-29a). This final tribulation will be the conclusion of all the previous tribulations in history (cf. John 16:33; Revelation 7:14). Jesus said that the tribulation of Jerusalem would take place when the disciples would see "the abomination that causes desolation stand in the holy place" (the temple) (Matthew 24:15). Also Daniel spoke about such an abomination (Daniel 9:27).

The prophecy of Daniel (about another tribulation) was fulfilled in 167 B.C. when the Seleucid king Antiochus IV ordered the plundering and desecration of the temple in Jerusalem. The Seleucid dynasty was a Greek-Syrian continuation of the Greek Empire started by Alexander the Great. The apocryphal book 1 Maccabees 1:41-57 described the events as follows: "Then the king issued a decree in his entire kingdom that all nations had to become one, and that each person had to abandon his own religious doctrines. All nations submitted themselves to the king's decree. Even among the Israelites (Jews) there were many who gladly accepted the religion of the king, sacrificed to the idols and desecrated the Sabbath. The king also sent messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah with the written command that all Israelites had to accept the doctrines and stop bringing sacrifices to the temple. They had to desecrate the Sabbath, the temple and the holy persons (priests). They had to erect altars, temples and chapels for the idols. They had to sacrifice pigs and all other unclean animals. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons. They were compelled to pollute themselves by all kinds of impure and unholy practices. In this way they were to forget their teachings and violate all their religious regulations. Everyone who did not comply to the king's commands would be killed. He made similar decrees in every part of his kingdom. At the same time he appointed officials that had to enforce these decrees in every city of Judah. Many of the people submitted to these regulations and cared nothing for (God's) teaching. They caused so much evil in the country that the (believing) Israelites were forced to hide in every possible hiding-place. On the fifteenth kislew of the hundred-forty-fifth year (calculated from the beginning of the dynasty of the Seleucids in 312 B.C., thus in 167 B.C.) the king ordered the erection of the abomination that causes desolation on top of the altar of burnt offerings of the temple. In the cities of Judah altars for the idols were erected and incense was burned at the entrances of houses and on the plains. All (Bible and religious) scrolls that could be found were torn and burned. Everyone found to possess a Book of the Law or keeping the Law was executed according to royal decree."

Jesus said that the prophecy of Daniel (about the tribulation) would again be fulfilled in the future. Then it would affect the temple of Jerusalem and the people of Judah (Jews) living at that time. This prophecy of Jesus (and Daniel) was again fulfilled in 70 A.D. by the Roman conqueror, Titus, who besieged Jerusalem and finally took it. The heathen Roman soldiers carried their military standards with Roman idols on it (an abomination) into Jerusalem and its temple and destroyed both Jerusalem and the temple (Luke 21:20-24).

Jesus said that this destruction of Jerusalem and its temple would not yet be the end of this present age (that is, the end of the whole New Testament period), because Jerusalem would be trampled by the heathen until the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled (Luke 21:24). The oppression and persecution of Christians would continue from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. That is why the whole period between Christ's first and second coming is also called 'the great tribulation'⁷ in Revelation 7:9,14. This whole New

⁷ η θλιψις της μεγαλης

Testament period of tribulation would end with ‘the great tribulation’⁸ at the end of history (Matthew 24:21). It would be the worst tribulation of all times shortly before Christ’s second coming. Christ’s second coming terminates the whole New Testament period during which Christians would be persecuted and terminates all persecution of Christians in history! Genuine Christians should not allow themselves to be deceived by false Christs (messiahs), false prophets and false teachers, even when they perform miracles in order to mislead the believers. Christ clearly says that it is impossible that genuine (born-again) Christians can be misled (Matthew 24:24; cf. John 17:12)!

Matthew 24:29-31. The appearance of Christ. Christ’s second coming at the end of the great tribulation in the end-time (Matthew 14:21) will terminate the great tribulation throughout the whole New Testament period (Revelation 7:14). His second coming will be sudden and unexpected for everyone. His second coming will be *visible* as the lightning in the East lights up in the West (Matthew 24:27). And his second coming will be *audible* to everyone as the sounding of loud trumpet calls (Matteüs 24:31). There will be no so-called ‘secret rapture’ as some people falsely teach! The second coming of Christ will be majestic. The angels will gather the elect (the genuine Christians) and catch them up into the clouds to meet and welcome Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10)!

Matthew 24:32-35. The parable of the fig tree. When the disciples of Jesus see the events that lead up to the appearance of the abomination that causes desolation, then they will know that the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple has arrived. This is Christ’s answer to their first question in Matthew 24:3a (“When will this happen?”).

Matthew 24:36-44. The need to be watchful and ready at all times. The flood during the days of Noah was sudden and unexpected. The second coming of Christ will also be sudden, unexpected and unpredictable! No one knows when it will take place!

At Christ’s second coming not everyone will be included in welcoming Christ in the clouds. One man or one woman will be taken, but another man or woman will be left (Matthew 24:40-41).

Matthew 24:45-51. The parable of the faithful and wise servant. Christians must be watchful and ready for Christ’s second coming. This means that they should be faithful and eager in the task that Christ has entrusted to them in God’s kingdom.

Matthew 25:1-13. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Christians must be watchful and ready at all times, because no one knows when Christ’s second coming is going to take place!

Matthew 25:14-30. The parable of the talents. Before Christ’s second coming and the last judgement all Christians must eagerly make use of the gifts and opportunities (talents) that Christ has entrusted to them.

Matthew 25:31-46. The parable of the sheep and the goats. The final judgement will take place at the second coming of Christ in the sky. Christ will judge the genuine Christians (the sheep) and the unbelievers (the goats) at the same time (cf. John 5:28-29; Revelation 21:11-15).

b. The story of the parable of the fig tree is contained in Matthew 24:32b.

c. The explanation or the application of the parable of the fig tree is contained in Matthew 24:33-35. How is this parable being explained or applied?

The two questions of the disciples and the two answers of Christ.

In Matthew 23:37 to 24:3 Christ speaks about the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. His disciples asked him two questions:

The first question: “When will this happen?” That is: “When will Jerusalem and its temple be destroyed?”

This is an event in *the near future* of the disciples of Jesus.

The second question: “And what will be the sign of your coming, *that is (and)*, of the end of the age?”

This is an event in *the end-time*. The second coming of Christ would coincide with the end of this age. The one and only second coming of Christ will mark the end of the age!

⁸ η θλιψις μεγαλη

The explanation of the parable is related to these two questions.

The first part of the explanation (Matthew 24:33) relates to the first question.

The second part of the explanation (Matthew 24:34-35) relates to the second question.

The disciples' first question: "When will this happen?" That is: "When will Jerusalem and its temple be destroyed" (Matthew 24:3a)?

Christ's first answer: "When you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door" (Matthew 24:33).

Jesus was speaking to his own disciples. The words, "When you (his own disciples and not Christians living today) see all these things" must refer to the fulfilment of the predictions made by Jesus in this context *insofar the fulfilment thereof could be observed by his own disciples!*

Jesus predicted that Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed. Not one stone would be left on another. Everything would be broken down. His disciples would see and hear about many tribulations: the false Christs and false prophets, wars and rumours of wars, famines and earthquakes, etc. Jesus called all these events "the beginning of birth pangs" (Matthew 24:4-8).

Such events had already happened before the fall of Jerusalem and would happen during the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Even the prediction concerning "the abomination that causes desolation in the holy place" happened before their time (in 167 B.C. 1 Maccabees 1:41-57) and would happen again in their own time (70 A.D. Matthew 24:15-20). The Roman soldiers entered the temple with their idolatrous military standards on which the idols of Rome were depicted. Finally in 70 A.D. Jerusalem was taken and destroyed (Luke 21:20). That is why it is natural to explain verse 33 as follows: When the disciples of Jesus (and thus not us Christians living today) would see all these events coming, they would know that the fall of Jerusalem and its temple was about to happen!

The disciples' second question: "And what will be the sign of your coming, that is (and) of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3b)

Christ's second answer: "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Matthew 24:34).

The Greek word 'sign' means an event that take place in the sphere of the creation that points away from this event to another event in the sphere of redemption (just as the 'signs' in the gospel of John)(John 2:11; 6:14,30; 20:30-31). The disciples asked Jesus which events in the history of the world pointed away from themselves to events at the second coming and the final redemption of the believers in Christ. The disciples of Jesus had taken the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as something that was going to happen at the end of the age. Their assumption was partly wrong. Jesus said that there would be a long period between the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple on the one hand and his second coming and the end of the age on the other hand.

Jesus taught that during this long period between his first and second coming Christians would be hated by all nations because they believed in Christ (and the necessity of rebirth, repentance and transformation). They would be persecuted and even killed.

Many false prophets would arise and deceive many people in the world. Many Christians who are Christians in name only would turn away from the Christian faith and betray other Christians. The laws of God would be spurned and people would turn away from the teachings of the Bible. The love of many people would grow cold. But before the end comes, the gospel of the kingdom would be proclaimed to all nations in the world (Matthew 24:4-14)!

It is clear that all these events from Christ's first to his second coming could not have been seen by a small group of his disciples. The words, "When you (the disciples) see all these things" (verse 33) are not the same as the words, "until all these things have happened" (verse 34)! While the words in verse 33 refer to the events the disciples of Jesus would see, the words in verse 34 refer to the events which would happen throughout all the ages until the second coming of Christ!

'The generation' that would certainly not pass away.

Verse 35 refer to the end of this present world and its history. Also Matthew 24:36 to 25:46 refer to the events around the second coming of Christ.

Thus also this section of the context show that the words: "all these things have happened" (verse 34) refer to events that would happen between the first and second coming of Christ!

The words 'this generation' (Matthew 24:34) should not necessarily be limited to a group of contemporaries of one another. The phrase also means 'this kind of people', for example, the Jews in any period of time

(Deuteronomy 32:5,20; Psalm 12:8; 78:8; Acts 2:40; Philippians 2:15; Hebrews 3:10). Therefore the words 'this generation' in Matthew 24:34 can also have this meaning.

Jesus declares that *the Jewish race* (and thus not us who are living today) would certainly not pass away until all the events between Christ's first and second coming have happened. "The descendants of Israel would never cease to be a nation before God's eyes" (Jeremiah 31:36)! The natural nation of Israel had crucified her Messiah in spite of all her privileges. Therefore it would seem natural that the natural nation of Israel should be wiped out. But both Jesus and the apostle Paul (in Romans 11) taught that the Jews as a natural nation would continue to exist until the second coming of Christ. Paul taught that in every generation until the second coming there would be 'a remnant' of the natural nation of Israel that would be saved by faith, just as there would be people from all the natural nations of non-Jews (the Gentiles) in every generation that would be saved by faith (Romans 1:16; 3:30; 11:1-32).

Although the disciples of Jesus would *not see* all these events, these events *would certainly come to pass!* As certain as this present heaven and earth would one day pass away, so certain would these words of Jesus Christ never pass away (Matthew 24:35)! That is why the words of Jesus Christ are the foundation on which all genuine Christians build their faith!

Conclusion: Matthew 24:33 is Christ's answer to the first question of the disciples in Matthew 24:3a. And Matthew 24:34 is Christ's answer to the second question of the disciples in Matthew 24:3b.

'Seeing' the great tribulation is applied differently by Matthew and Mark on the one hand and by Luke on the other hand.

This parable is applied differently by Matthew and Mark than by Luke (Luke 21:29-33). While Mark and Matthew speak about the fall of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-20) as an illustration (type) of the fall of the whole world in the end-time (Matthew 24:21-29), Luke distinguishes between the fall of Jerusalem on the one hand (Luke 21:20-24) and the fall of the world in the end-time on the other hand (Luke 21:25-28). The words: 'the great tribulation' in Mark 13:19,24 and in Matthew 24:21,29 have a double meaning, namely, what would happen at the fall of Jerusalem (Mark 13:14-18; Matthew 24:15-20) and what would happen in the end-time shortly before Christ's second coming (Mark 13:19-27; Matthew 24:21-31). But the tribulation ('the time of punishment') described in Luke 21:20-24a only refers to what would happen at the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. And the signs (the things that would happen in the world) described in Luke 21:25-28 refer only to what would happen in the end-time at the second coming of Christ. That is why the words: "*when you see these things happening*" in Luke 21:31 refer only to the events that would happen in relationship to the second coming of Christ as predicted by Christ in Luke 21:25-28 and would only be seen by people who live during the second coming of Christ. *When those Christians see these things happening*, they would know that the kingdom of God is near, that is, that the kingdom of God in its final perfect phase as the new heaven on the new earth is at the point of happening! Nevertheless, all three Gospels say that 'this generation', namely the Jews as a natural nation, would not stop to exist until these events have taken place (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32).

[Step 3] Identify the relevant details of the story of the parable.

The fig tree can be any kind of tree that loses its leaves in the autumn and is therefore not a relevant detail. What is important though is that the sprouting of new leaves represent a special period (the spring). It is a sign that something is at the point of happening.

[Step 4] Identify the message of the parable.

The most important message of the parable of the fig tree is that the events which Jesus prophesied would happen between his first and second coming would certainly take place! *These events should stimulate Christians to be watchful and ready for the second coming of Christ!*"

PART 3. THE SHORT PERIOD OF SATAN BEFORE THE SECOND COMING

What may we expect during the great tribulation?

Read Matthew 24:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Revelation 20:7-10.

1. The release of Satan

The final tribulation period is also called the short season of Satan. It consists of the short period before the second coming of Christ in which Satan would be released in order to allow him to deceive the nations of the world and to gather them for the final battle against Christ and Christians (Revelation 20:3b,7-10; Matthew 24:22).

a. Satan has been ‘bound’ at Christ’s first coming (Revelation 20:3a).

The purpose of Jesus Christ at his first coming was the following:

By his incarnation he *revealed God and God’s words* to people (Matthew 11:27-30; Hebrews 1:1-2)

By his life and teaching he *established the foundation of his Church* (Matthew 16:18-19; Ephesians 2:20)

By his death he *made atonement that saves his people from their sins* (John 1:29; 3:17; Hebrews 9:14-15)

By his life, death and resurrection he *bound*⁹ Satan (Matthew 12:28-30; Revelation 20:3)¹⁰.

By his death and resurrection he *set his people free from the fear of death* (Hebrews 2:14-15)

The reason Jesus Christ appeared at his first coming was *to destroy* the devil’s work (1 John 3:8). He *bound* the strong man (Satan) so that he and his followers could carry off Satan’s ‘possessions’ (Matthew 12:28-30), namely, people that are held in slavery of lies (2 Corinthians 4:2-4), their sinful nature (Ephesians 2:1-5) and fear (Hebrews 2:14-15). The proof that Satan had been bound from Christ’s first coming onwards is that Christ described the effect of the ministry of his disciples as “Satan falling like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:17-20). The *fall* of Satan was for Satan sudden, unexpected and completely shattering. By Christ’s death on the cross Satan and his demons were *disarmed* (Colossians 2:15) so that believers are rescued from the dominion of darkness and are brought into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). By “being lifted up from the earth”, that is, by his death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement, Christ *cast Satan out* of his kingdom (John 12:31; Revelation 12:7-10). The *casting out* of Satan is continually effected by *drawing* people from all nations in the world to Christ (John 12:32). Satan had lost his grip of power over the nations (cf. Daniel 10:13,20) in the sense that he can no longer hinder Christ and his gospel from reaching the nations. Satan can *no longer deceive* the nations (Revelation 20:3). Although Satan still exercises much power by his lies and murders (cf. John 8:44) in the world that opposes Christ and Christians (1 John 5:19), very many people are rescued from his dominion of darkness, are brought into Christ’s kingdom (Colossians 1:13) and are able to resist Satan (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9; 1 John 4:4; 5:18). It is in this sense that Satan remains *bound* during the symbolic period of 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).

The number 1000 (Revelation 20:1-7) is not intended to be a literal number. It is the number of divinely determined completeness. It is a symbol for *the absolute complete period God has determined for the fulfilment of his plan*. It represents the demarcated New Testament period – the long period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming. See supplement 3, the symbolism of numbers.

b. Satan is released for a short period just before the second coming of Christ (Revelation 20:3b).

By God’s unfathomable decree (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9) Satan will be released shortly before Christ’s second coming in order to deceive those who are still unbelievers in all the nations and to gather them for the final battle against Christ and Christians (Revelation 20:3,7-8). During this short period the following events will take place: the reign of the final antichrist in history; the final great tribulation in history; and the final battle between Christ and Satan.

⁹ δεω: εδησεν (viaa)(Revelation 20:2), εαν μη πρωτον δηση (vsaa) τον ισχυρον (Matthew 12:29)

¹⁰ The same word ‘bind’ in the original Greek text is used in both passages! Satan bound means that his power has been curbed, curtailed, restrained, limited.

2. The reign of the final antichrist in history

a. Throughout history there are many antichrists (1 John 2:18; 4:3).

Throughout the history of the world there have been and there will be many antichrists! Nevertheless, the final antichrist in history will reign just before the second coming of Christ and he will be a lawless man (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

b. The final antichrist is still held back (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7).

The coming of the final antichrist is still held back by something (verse 6) and someone (verse 7). Probably this refers to “the law and order” and “those who enforce the law and order” in the world today. For example, God uses law and order to bind Satan (Romans 13:1-7). But law and order is crumbling in every society in the world. It seems more and more that laws and lawyers protect the rights of criminals instead of law-abiding citizens. Lawyers, judges and those who should enforce the law (the police) are more and more bribed or threatened to disregard the law. When law and order is finally removed, the final antichrist will reveal himself. God also uses the faithful proclamation of the truth of the Bible to bind Satan (John 8:31-44; Revelation 3:8-9). But the systematic destruction of the Church as an institute of proclaiming the gospel paves the way for the appearance of the final antichrist (cf. Revelation 11:7).

c. The reign of the final antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

After a prolonged infiltration of the Church the final antichrist will set himself up in God’s temple, that is, within the organised Church (2 Corinthians 6:16) and proclaim himself as ‘God’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4; cf. Revelation 13:14-15). He will spread his lies, counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders and deceive those who are perishing. Of course, those who are perishing are responsible for their own choices and decisions: they refused to love the truth and to be saved. By hardening their hearts again and again against the Holy Spirit, God finally gives them over to their hardened hearts and delusions (Matthew 13:11-15; Romans 1:24,26,28; Galatians 6:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

The refusal of all genuine Christians to worship and serve the antichrist will lead to the final great tribulation (Matthew 24:21-25). Finally by God’s unfathomable decree and divine permission this final antichrist will be given power to reign over every nation in the world, to make war against the genuine Christians and even to “conquer” them in a particular sense (Revelation 11:7-10; 13:7-18). This “conquering” of the saints may not be interpreted in violation of the other promises made to the saints in the Bible (e.g. Matthew 24:24; John 10:28; 17:12; 18:9).

3. The final great tribulation of Christians

a. All Christians face tribulations.

Throughout the long period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming Christians face tribulations¹¹ (John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12; Revelation 7:14). But the final great tribulation¹² or the tribulation of those days¹³ is connected to the coming of the final antichrist at the end of world history. There is *no Biblical evidence* that Christians who live at that time will not pass through the great tribulation as some people falsely teach!

b. The characteristics that mark the last days.

“The last days”¹⁴ will be characterised by the following: The last days will be a time of seeming safety, unconcern and materialism in general. People will eat and drink, marry and give in marriage, buy and sell, plant and build right up to the end (Matthew 24:37-39). The last days will be a time of social degeneration and demoralization (2 Timothy 3:1-5). The last days will be a time of spiritual degeneration and perversion (1 Timothy 4:1-2). And the last days will be a time when many nominal Christians will turn away from their intellectual and historical faith in Christ. This is called “the rebellion or apostasy (fall away)”¹⁵ in the last days.

¹¹ θλιψιν

¹² θλιψις μεγαλη (Matthew 24:21)

¹³ την θλιψιν των ημερων εκεινων (Matthew 24:29)

¹⁴ εσχαις ημεραις

¹⁵ η αποστασια (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

c. The promises to genuine Christians.

Only Christians that persevere in their faith in Christ and remain obedient to the Bible will remain standing (Matthew 24:13). Genuine (born-again) Christians *WANT, CAN and WILL persevere* and remain standing, not because of their own power, but because of God's grace and promises. Christians may hold on to Christ's promise that all the tribulations and all the fake wonders of the antichrist **CANNOT** deceive genuine Christians (Matthew 24:24)! God who began a good work in Christians will carry it on to completion until the second coming of Christ (Philippians 1:6)! No one can snatch them out of Christ's hand (John 10:28)! Nothing and no one will be able to separate them from the love of God that is in Christ (Romans 8:37-39)! Christians may be oppressed, persecuted and even killed (2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 11:23-28), but nothing and no one can make their souls perish (Matthew 10:28)!

4. The final battle

a. The godless nations and God's people (Revelation 20:7-8).

The final great tribulation or short period of Satan is also described as the period in which Satan is released and during which Satan goes out to deceive the godless nations and gather them for the final battle against Christ and Christians (Revelation 20:7-8). In the Old Testament 'the nations' (the non-Jews), often serve as a symbol for the enemies of God and God's people (cf. Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39). But here "the nations in the four corners of the earth, the Gog and the Magog" are a symbol for the enemies of Christ and Christians (literally: "saints"). Note that the text does not mention specific identifiable nations on earth, but nevertheless speaks of literal enemies and literal Christians!

b. The final battle.

The following passages in the book of Revelation do not follow one another in a linear chronological sense, but are rather *parallel to one another*. The words 'the battle'¹⁶ in these passages therefore refer to one and the same final battle, which terminates the period of the great tribulation at the end of world history just before Christ's second coming.

Revelation 11:1-19 depicts the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. *The emphasis lies on the proclamation of the gospel throughout the whole New Testament period* by the two witnesses. The two witnesses (cf. Luke 10:1) are a symbol of the world-wide Militant Church on earth as Christ's institute that proclaims the good news right up to the end-time (Revelation 11:3-6).

During the great tribulation the beast coming out of the Abyss (*a symbol* for the final antichrist) makes war¹⁷ against the Church and is allowed to destroy the Church as an institute that proclaims the gospel. This does not mean that there will be no more Christians on earth at Christ's second coming (Matthew 24:31; Revelation 14:14-16).

The New Testament period ends with this great tribulation (Revelation 11:7-10), the physical resurrection from the dead (Revelation 11:11-12) and with the final judgement (Revelation 11:13-19).

Revelation 12:5 to 14:20 depicts the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. Here *the emphasis lies on the persecution of the Church and Christians throughout the whole New Testament period* by Satan (Revelation 12:6-17), by the beast (Revelation 13:1-10) and by the false prophet (Revelation 13:11-18). The beast (*a symbol* of Satan's antichristian governments, the antichrists) out of the sea (*a symbol* of the nations in the world, Revelation 17:15) receives his power and throne from the dragon (*a symbol* of Satan).

The New Testament period ends with the final battle at the end of the great tribulation (Revelation 13:7-10) and the final judgement at Christ's second coming (Revelation 14:14-20). By God's unfathomable decree and divine permission the final antichrist will be given the power to make war¹⁸ against the saints (the Christians) and to conquer them in a particular sense (Revelation 13:7).

Revelation 15:1 to 16:21 depicts the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. Here *the emphasis lies on God's final judgements on the godless and wicked world throughout the whole New Testament period*, with which God's wrath is completed (Revelation 15:1).

¹⁶ τον πολεμον

¹⁷ το θυριον ... ποιησει (vifa) μετ αυτων πολεμον και νικησει (vifa) αυτους και αποκτενει (vifa) αυτους

¹⁸ και εδοθη (vifar) αυτω ποιησαι (vnaa) πολεμον μετα των αγιων και νικησαι (vnaa) αυτους

The New Testament period ends with the final battle at the end of the great tribulation (Revelation 16:12-16) and the final judgement (Revelation 16:17-21). The evil spirits coming out of the mouths of the dragon (Satan), the beast (the antichrist) and the false prophet go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the final battle¹⁹ on the great day of God Almighty, also called the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-16).

Revelation 17:1 to 19:21 depicts the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. Here *the emphasis lies on the fall of Satan's antichristian powers throughout the whole New Testament period and especially at Christ's second coming*. They are the great prostitute, the beast and the false prophet. "The beast that was, and is not, and is on the point of coming (verse 8a) or is present (verse 8b)" is a *symbol* of Satan's antichristian governments or antichrists in all their manifestations between Christ first coming and Christ's second coming. They are all destined to go to their destruction (Revelation 17:11)! The ten horns of the beast are ten kings ... who will make war²⁰ against the Lamb and his called, chosen and faithful followers (Revelation 17:14) throughout the whole New Testament period.

The New Testament period ends with the second coming of Christ (Revelation 19:11-16), the final battle at the end of the great tribulation (Revelation 19:17-19; cf. Ezekiel 39:17-20) and the final judgement (Revelation 19:20-21). The final antichrist and the kings of the earth and their armies will gather to make war²¹ against the Rider on the horse (*a symbol* of Christ at his second coming) (Revelation 19:19) and his armies of heaven (Revelation 19:14). They will be captured and thrown in the fiery lake of burning sulphur (*a symbol* of hell).

Revelation 20:1-15 depicts the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. Here *the emphasis lies on Satan being bound throughout the whole New Testament period* so that the gospel can spread to all nations *on earth* (Revelation 20:1-3). *And the emphasis lies on the intermediate state of Christians between their physical death and physical resurrection throughout the whole New Testament period* (Revelation 20:4-6). Although their bodies die and remain as dust on the earth, their *souls* are translated into heaven (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7; Psalm 73:24-25; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Philippians 1:23) where they reign with Christ *in heaven* during that same period. Some of them will die as martyrs, but all of them remained faithful to Christ and his Word and refused to accept the mark of the beast.

The New Testament period ends with the final battle at the end of the great tribulation (Revelation 20:7-10; Ezekiel 38:18-23; 39:4-6) and the resurrection, the final judgement and the renewal of the universe (Revelation 20:11-15; 21:1).

During a short period Satan is released in order to deceive the godless and wicked nations (here also called "the Gog and Magog", cf. Ezekiel 38:2; 39:1) and to gather them for battle²² against Christ and Christians (Revelation 20:7-9a).

Summary. At the end of the short period of the great tribulation Satan and his allies will gather the godless and wicked nations for the final battle against Christians. The second coming of Christ makes an abrupt end to this battle!

PART 4. THE SUDDEN, UNEXPECTED AWE-INSPIRING SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

How will the second coming of Christ be?

Read Matthew 24:27-44.

1. The second coming of Christ is "the sign"

The final sign (Matthew 24:3,30) before the second coming of Christ will not be one or another outward sign, but the sudden, unexpected and awe-inspiring coming of Christ himself on the clouds in the sky (2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 14:14).

¹⁹ συναγαγειν (vnaa) αυτους εις τον πολεμον της ημερας της μεγαλης

²⁰ ουτοι μετα του αρνιου πολεμησουσιν (vifa) και το αρνιον νικησει (vifa) αυτους

²¹ ποιησαι (vnaa) τον πολεμον μετα του καθημενου (vrrh) επι του ιππου

²² συναγαγειν (vnaa) αυτους ει τον πολεμον

2. There will be only one second coming of Christ

The words second 'coming or presence'²³ and 'appearance or revelation'²⁴ both refer to the one and only second coming of Jesus Christ. The word 'coming' (parousia) is found in Matthew 24:3,27,37,39; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1,8; James 5:7-9; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4 and 1 John 2:28. The word 'appearance' (apocalypsis) is found in 1 Corinthians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7,13 and 4:13. In Matthew 24:39 (coming) and in Luke 17:30 (appearance as a verb) both words refer to the one and only second coming which will be as sudden and unexpected as the judgement in the days of Noah and Lot.

First there will be the rebellion or the apostasy and the appearance of the final antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Nobody knows for how long. It will be a very short time (Matthew 24:21-22). Then 'the coming' (2 Thessalonians 2:1,8) or 'the appearance (revelation)' (2 Thessalonians 1:7), that is also called 'the day of the Lord' (2 Thessalonians 2:2) will happen.

Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:3-31) and the apostles Paul (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2:1-8), Peter (2 Peter 3:3-13; cf. 1 Peter 1:6-7) and John (Revelation 13:5-10,15-18; 14:14-19) teach that *Christians that live during that time will definitely pass through the great tribulation* before the one and only second coming of Jesus Christ will take place!

There is no Biblical evidence that the second coming of Christ will take place *in two phases* as some people falsely teach, namely, a so-called first future return, also called 'the coming' of Christ *for the saints before* or in the *middle* of the period of the great tribulation; and a so-called second future return, also called 'the revelation' or the coming of Christ *with the saints* at the end of the period of the great tribulation before the so-called millennium²⁵.

In the parables (Matthew 13:36-43; 25:10-13; 25:19) and in all the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31-32) his second coming is *one single and decisive historical event!*

There will be only one final harvest that will take place at the end of the age. Christ and his angels will gather the believers and the unbelievers in short succession of one another (Mark 4:29; Matthew 3:10-12; 13:30,37-43; 24:40-41; Revelation 14:14-20)!

3. The second coming of Christ will be visible and audible to all people

The second coming of Christ will not be a secret, invisible or inaudible rapture of Christians (the Church). A sudden disappearance of a part of humanity (the Christians) from this earth will not take place as is taught by some popular false teachers!

The second coming of Christ will be as *visible* as the lightning in the East is seen in the West (Matthew 24:27-28). The eyes of believers and unbelievers will see Christ coming on the clouds. They will all immediately recognize him and there will be no doubt that he is Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7; 6:12-17)! The second coming of Christ will be as *audible* (loud) as the trumpet calls of angels (Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The second coming of Christ will be an event that all people on earth will see, hear and experience! The ears of all human beings that still live or have already died will hear the voice of Christ (John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

4. The second coming of Christ will be sudden and unexpected for all people

It is impossible to know the times and dates God has set by his own authority (Acts 1:7). The second coming of Christ will be sudden and unexpected like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). It is also impossible to predict the times and circumstances of the second coming. No one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36,42). All unbelievers will definitely not be ready at Christ's second coming (Matthew 24:37-41). All believers ought to be ready, but Christ will nevertheless come at a moment no one expects (Matthew 24:43-44)! That is the reason why believers should not follow the example and life-style of unbelievers.

²³ Greek: parousia, παρουσία

²⁴ Greek: apocalypsis, αποκαλυψις

²⁵ The meaning of the Millennium: four views, edited by Robert G. Clouse, IVP, 1977
and The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribunational? by Richard R. Reiter, Zondervan, 1984

5. The events at the second coming of Christ

At the second coming of Christ the final battle against Christians is terminated.

Then the following three final events will take place: ALL ON THE LAST DAY: the resurrection of the dead; the final judgement; and the renewal of the universe

PART 5. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

What will happen at the resurrection of the dead?

Read John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11; Revelation 20:11-15.

1. There will be only one physical resurrection from the dead

a. The Bible teaches only one physical resurrection from the dead.

There will be only one physical resurrection from the dead. Both believers and non-believers will be resurrected and judged at one and the same time. This will happen at the one and only second coming of Christ (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:12-13). The bodies of all people that have ever died will be resurrected. At the same time the bodies of all believers that are still alive at the second coming will be changed in a twinkling of the eye (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

There is *no Biblical evidence* that there will be more than one physical resurrection from the dead at different times as some people falsely teach. They falsely teach that there would be a first physical resurrection at the so-called first future return of Christ, a second physical resurrection at the so-called second future return of Christ seven or three-and-a-half years later and a third physical resurrection at the end of the so-called future millennial kingdom.

The physical resuscitation from the dead (Matthew 27:52; Luke 7:11-15; John 11:38-44; Acts 9:40; 20:10) is not the same as the physical resurrection from the dead, because the resuscitated people died again, but the resurrected people will never die again (Revelation 21:4)! The first letter to the Corinthians clearly teaches that only Jesus Christ was physically resurrected at his first coming. He is *the first-fruit* of those who have died! And all those who belong to him will only be physically resurrected at his second coming (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)!

b. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 does not teach two physical resurrections.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 does *not teach two physical resurrections* that are chronologically separated from one another. The words “the dead in Christ will rise *first*” do not imply that there would be a *later or second* physical resurrection. The Christians who have died are here not contrasted with non-Christians who have died. But the Christians who have died are here contrasted with the Christians who will not have died by the second coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16b-17a)! At the second coming of Christ the Christians who are still alive will have no advantage over those Christians who have already died. At the second coming of Christ the bodies of Christians who have died are *first* resurrected from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16) and the bodies of Christians who are still alive will be changed so that they become the same as the other resurrected bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). *After that* all Christians will be caught up together in the clouds to meet and welcome Jesus Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

c. Revelation 20:4-6 also does not teach two physical resurrections.

Revelation 20:4-6 also does *not teach two physical resurrections* that are chronologically separated from one another. It does imply *two different kinds of ‘resurrections’* that are chronologically separated from one another: ‘the first resurrection’ is a *spiritual resurrection* and the second implied resurrection is the one and only *physical resurrection* of all the dead.

Revelation 20:4-5 says: “The souls ... lived²⁶ and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not²⁷ until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection²⁸” This first resurrection refers to the *spiritual translation or transfer of souls* from the earth into heaven when *the physical body dies* (cf.

²⁶ NIV: “came to life”; Greek: ἐζησαν (viaa) < ζωα

²⁷ NIV: “did not come to life”; Greek: οὐκ ἐζησαν (viaa) < ζωα

²⁸ ἡ ἀναστασις ἡ πρώτη

Ecclesiastes 12:7; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Philippians 1:23). The second resurrection is not mentioned, but is implied and will take place at the end of the symbolic thousand years. This second resurrection refers to the one and only physical resurrection of all the dead at one and the same time, namely, at the second coming of Christ (cf. John 5:28-29; Acts 14:15; Revelation 20:12-13).

The word “to live” in the book of Revelation.

See the introduction to Revelation chapter 20 (background).

In Revelation 20:5-6 the word ‘to live’ has the same meaning as in Luke 20:38 and John 11:25. Like all non-Christians, the bodies of Christians will die in a physical sense, but unlike non-Christians, the souls or spirits of Christians will immediately be spiritually resurrected in the sense of spiritually translated or transferred from the earth into God’s presence in heaven. There in heaven with Christ they will reign for a symbolic thousand years. That is what is meant by “the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:5-6; cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 16:22; 2 Corinthians 5:1,4,8; Philippians 1:23).

The words ‘the first resurrection’ (Revelation 20:6) therefore does not imply that there exists a second physical resurrection from the dead. In the book of Revelation ‘the first resurrection’²⁹ is contrasted with ‘the second death’³⁰ and both expressions are *figurative expressions* that form a paradox. ‘The first death’ and ‘the second resurrection’ that are implied are both physical realities. But ‘the first resurrection’ and ‘the second death’ are both spiritual (eternal) realities.

The paradox is that while all believers and unbelievers alike participate in ‘the first death’ (the physical death), only believers will have a share in ‘the first resurrection’ (the translation or transfer of their spirits or souls into heaven)! And the paradox is that while all believers and unbelievers alike participate in ‘the second resurrection’ (the physical resurrection of their bodies), only unbelievers will have a share in ‘the second death’ (the transfer of their spirits or souls and bodies into hell).

‘The first death’ and ‘the second resurrection’ are *general events* in which all people that have ever lived will participate. But ‘the first resurrection’ is *a unique event* for only believers and ‘the second death’ is *a unique event* for only unbelievers! The paradox consists of the contrast between the general physical death of the bodies of all people with the unique spiritual resurrection of the spirits or souls of only the believers on the one hand; and the contrast between the general physical resurrection of the bodies of all people with the unique eternal death of the spirits or souls and bodies of only the unbelievers on the other hand!

Just as the physical resurrection of the unrighteous (unbelievers) is paradoxically identified with the doom of their spirits or souls and bodies in hell, so the physical death of the righteous (believers) is paradoxically identified with the translation or transfer (resurrection) of their spirits or souls into heaven!

Compare the paradox in Revelation 20:5-6 with the paradox in John 5:24-29.

The hour for *the spiritual resurrection of dead spirits or souls* has come with the proclamation of the gospel from the first coming of Christ onwards. While the voice of Christ is heard in the proclamation of the gospel to all the nations on earth, only the spirits or souls of believers who listen to the voice of Christ will be made spiritually alive! Only believers receive eternal life and will never be doomed in hell. But the spirits or souls of unbelievers remain spiritually dead (John 5:24-25).

The hour for *the physical resurrection of the dead bodies* and final judgement will come at the second coming of Christ. While at the second coming the voice of Christ will be heard by all the physical dead and still physical living people on earth, only the bodies of believers in the gospel will also receive a share in the eternal life! The bodies of believers will never be doomed in hell, but the bodies of unbelievers will like their spirits or souls be doomed in hell (John 5:28-29).

²⁹ η αναστασις η πρωτη

³⁰ ο δευτερος θανατος

2. 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 teaches the physical resurrection of the dead and the physical transformation of the living

In the Bible ‘man’ does not consist of two parts or of three parts. The neo-Platonic philosophy teaches that man has a body and a soul (two parts). The philosophy of Philo teaches that man has a body, a soul and a spirit (three parts). In the Bible ‘man’ is a unity: he is created “a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). His soul is expressed in *a visible physical reality* (the body) and in *an invisible spiritual reality* (the spirit or soul). At physical death, the *spirit* (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 8:55; Hebrews 12:23c) or the *soul* (Revelation 6:9) of a man is separated from his body. But at the physical resurrection from the dead his spirit or soul is again united with his resurrected body.

When the hour of the second coming arrives, Christ will command the dead bodies of all people that have ever lived to be resurrected. All people in the graves will obey his voice and will be physically resurrected. The bodies of both the righteous (believers) and the unrighteous (unbelievers) will be resurrected *at the same moment* (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:12-13)!

The spirits or souls of believers who had died physically before the second coming are now in heaven with Christ (Philippians 1:23; Hebrews 12:23). At Christ’s second coming these spirits or souls will come with Christ from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:14). The bodies of believers who had died physically before the second coming will be resurrected first and their spirits or souls will be united to their resurrected bodies. The bodies of believers who still live on earth at Christ’s second coming will be immediately changed or transformed to become like the other resurrected bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

The moment believers see Jesus (when they die) their spirits or souls will be changed or transformed to be perfectly like that of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:1-3). And the moment of the second coming the bodies of all resurrected and transformed believers will be like the glorious resurrected body of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:21): imperishable, glorious, powerful and completely controlled by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)!

3. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 teaches that Christians will be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ in the air

a. The ‘rapture’ of Christians (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

At his second coming on the clouds Christ will send his angels to gather his elect from every place on the whole earth (Matthew 24:31). Thus, after the resurrection of the already dead bodies and the transformation of the still living bodies of believers, all these believers will “be caught up”³¹ (by these angels) in the clouds to meet Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is popularly called: ‘the rapture’. The words: ‘to catch up’ is used in the Bible in the sense of to forcefully lay hold of (Matthew 11:12), to take or snatch away (Acts 8:39; 2 Corinthians 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 12:5) and even to take away by force (Acts 23:10).

b. The meeting with Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

The words: ‘to meet’³² is a standard expression used when the governing authorities, soldiers and citizens of a city go out to meet a highly ranked person in order to welcome him and *then to accompany him back* to the city (Acts 28:15)! In the same way, after their resurrection, all Christians will be caught up in the clouds in the air to meet and welcome Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:17), to marvel at him and glorify him (2 Thessalonians 1:10) and to be judged in the final judgement (Revelation 20:10-15) before they all as the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-2,9-10) *return to the renewed earth* together with Jesus Christ! “And so we (believers) will be with the Lord Jesus Christ (on the new earth) forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17; cf. Revelation 21:3)!

c. Christians are first taken along, while non-Christians are left abandoned (Matthew 24:39-41).

Although believers and non-believers are physically resurrected at the same time from the dead, they are not brought before Christ’s judgement throne in the air at the same time. At Christ’s second coming there will be two men in the field: one will be taken along (by the angels), but the other will be left behind. There will be

³¹ αρπαγησομεθα < αρπαζω (vifp)

³² εις απαντησιν

two woman grinding with a hand mill: one will be taken along (by the angels), but the other will be left behind (Matthew 24:39-41; Luke 17:30,33-34). The words: 'taken along'³³ means to be taken to be with Christ (John 14:3; cf. to take a wife into his house, Matthew 1:20,24). The words 'left behind'³⁴ means to abandon, to give up (cf. the devil left Jesus, Matthew 4:11). According to both Gospels these people will be taken along or abandoned on *one and the same day*, namely, at Christ's second coming³⁵ (Matthew 24:39).

On *the day* (Matthew 24:38) the flood came, Noah and his family entered the ark, but all the other people on earth were swept away by the flood. While Noah and his family were taken along in the ark, all other people were left behind, abandoned to perish.

In the same way on *the day* (Matthew 24:36) Christ will come, all genuine Christians will be taken along (by the angels) – they will be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, but all other people will be left behind and not participate in the meeting and welcoming of Christ.

The parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins teaches the same truth in the form of a true-to-life story (Matthew 25:10-13). At Christ's second coming all genuine Christians will enter the wedding banquet, but all the other people will be shut out.

Likewise Christians will be present at the great welcome of Jesus in the air and at the eternal marriage feast on the new earth (cf. Revelation 19:7; 21:2,9-10). All other people will not be present at the great welcome of Jesus in the air and also not at the eternal wedding feast on the new earth. The message of this parable is that every person should be ready for the sudden and unexpected second coming of Christ!

d. Christians and non-Christians are brought before Christ as two distinct groups.

The day of Christ's second coming is also called 'the harvest' (Matthew 13:30) or 'the end of the age' (Matthew 13:39). Two distinct events will take place on the last day:

First the Christians will be harvested.

The angels will 'weed out'³⁶ the unbelievers out of God's present kingdom on earth (Matthew 13:30,41), that is, they will separate the unbelievers on earth from the believers. They will separate the wheat from the chaff (Matthew 3:10-12) or the wheat from the weeds (Matthew 13:30,36-43). Then the angels will 'gather or bring together'³⁷ the believers into God's kingdom in its final phase, but cast the unbelievers into hell. They will gather the wheat into the barn, but burn the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12; 13:30). Paul's letters to the Thessalonians depict this event as Christians being caught up in the air to meet Christ.

Then the non-Christians will be harvested.

Later on that very same day of Christ's second coming the angels will 'gather or bring together'³⁸ the unbelievers before Christ's judgement throne in order that they may hear with horror the public announcement of their doom (Matthew 3:12b; 13:30a; 25:31-33,41,46).

PART 6. THE FINAL JUDGEMENT

How will the final judgement be?

Read Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15.

1. There will be only one final judgement

a. The Bible teaches only one final judgement of all people.

There is *no Biblical evidence* that there are more than one final judgement as some people falsely teach. There is *no Biblical evidence* that there will be a separate final judgement for believers only at the so-called first future return of Jesus (the rapture); a second separate final judgement of the Gentile nations only at the so-called second future return of Jesus (the revelation) 7 or 3½ years later, or a third separate final judgement of unbelievers only at the end of the so-called future millennial kingdom, 1000 years later!

³³ παραλαμβάνεται (vippp)

³⁴ αφίεται < αφιημι (vippp)

³⁵ παρουσια

³⁶ συλλεξατε < συλλεγω (vmaa)

³⁷ συναξει < συναγω (vifa); συναγαγετε < συναγω (vmaa)

³⁸ συναχθησονται < συναγω (vifp)

At the one and only second coming of Christ, the one and only physical resurrection of all the dead and the one and only final judgement of all people that have ever lived in history will take place. Those who have done good will rise (from the dead) to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise (from the dead) to be condemned (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:11-15).

b. The final judgement before the one throne.

The Bible gives different names to one and the same Jesus Christ: the Seed, the Prophet, the High Priest, the King, the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, Immanuel, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Word, the Lamb of God, the Good Shepherd, the True Vine, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, etc. Likewise the Bible gives different names to the one and same final judgement at the second coming of Christ: the judgement of all the nations (including Israel) before Christ's throne in heavenly glory (Matthew 25:31), the judgement of believers and unbelievers before the judgement seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10), or the judgement of all people before the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-12).

The final judgement of all people that have ever lived will take place before Christ the Judge (John 5:22) sitting on his throne in heavenly glory (cf. Matthew 25:31) in the air (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17). At the same time the present heavenly bodies (sun, moon and stars) and earth will be judged by fire and completely renewed (Romans 8:19-21; 2 Peter 3:7-13; Revelation 6:14; 20:11).

2. The unbelievers will be eternally separated from the believers

a. The final judgement will be the great excommunication (Matthew 25:32).

After the angels have brought all the believers and later on that same last day all the unbelievers that have ever lived from all the nations in the world before the judgement throne of Christ (Matthew 25:32), Christ himself will have the final word. Because God the Father has entrusted all judgement to Jesus Christ (John 5:22), the One sitting on the great white throne will be Jesus Christ (Revelation 20:11). Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:13) and he will separate, excommunicate or exclude the unbelievers from the believers (Matthew 25:32).

b. The final judgement will be according to the books (Revelation 20:12,15).

Jesus Christ himself will reveal everything believers and unbelievers have done in their bodies (2 Corinthians 5:10; cf. Ecclesiastes 12:14) and they will have to give an account to Christ (Hebrews 4:13). Christ himself will judge everyone according to what has been written in the books. Every person will be judged on the basis of the following facts: whether he belongs to Christ and whether he lived in accordance to Christ's teachings. Only believers, whose names are recorded in the book of life of Christ, will enter the kingdom of God in its final phase.

c. The final judgement will be perfectly just (Revelation 15:1-4).

But because God is a perfect holy and righteous God he will judge and punish every human being in accordance with how much that person knew of God and of God's commands. No one will have an excuse, because God has revealed himself to everyone: he revealed his existence and power through his creation (Romans 1:18-20) and he has written some of his moral laws in their hearts (Romans 2:10-16). Those who do wrong will continue to do wrong and those who do right will continue to do right, and Christ will give to everyone according to what he has done (Revelation 22:11-12). Those who do not believe (in Jesus Christ) will perish even though they did not know the written law, because no one will be justified on the basis of keeping the law (Romans 2:12-16; 3:19-20).

But just as there are different rewards in heaven for believers (1 Corinthians 3:8,12-15), there are different punishments for unbelievers (Luke 12:47-48). After the final judgement at Christ's second coming all Christians will sing and proclaim that all God's ways are just and true (Revelation 15:1-4)!

3. Christ's verdict about unbelievers will be announced publicly

a. The unbelievers are already condemned (doomed) in this life (John 3:18,36).

Unbelievers will not be condemned for the first time on the judgement day. Before they die they already stand condemned³⁹ because of their unbelief (John 3:18,36). Before they die they are already doomed⁴⁰, because they are slaves of the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1). At their death their spirit or soul is cast into hell (cf. Luke 16:23-26). On the last judgement day their condemnation will be publicly announced (Matthew 25:41-46) so that all in the whole universe will know that God has been perfectly righteous in his judgement (Luke 12:47-48; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; cf. Revelation 15:3). Then they will be cast body and soul into hell (Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:47-48; Revelation 21:8).

b. The unbelievers are condemned for their unrighteousness.

God will bring the evil or incomplete works of people into remembrance (Matthew 25:35-36). The unbelievers will be condemned for their *unbelief* (John 3:18,36), for their *negligence* (Matthew 25:41-46) and for their *wickedness* (2 Thessalonians 1:8; Revelation 21:8).

c. The unbelievers are condemned to hell.

The unbelievers will be condemned (John 5:29) to go away to eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46). The angels of Christ will weed them out of Christ's present kingdom and throw them into the fiery furnace or the lake of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:41-42; Revelation 20:15). Hell is the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels where the unbelievers or the unrighteous will have to associate with the devil and his demons forever (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10,15). Hell is the place where they will be burned with unquenchable fire and where their worm does not die (Matthew 3:12; Mark 9:47-48). Hell is the place where they will be punished with everlasting destruction, shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power, away from his loving care and glory (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 20:10,15).

4. Christ's reward for believers will be announced publicly

a. The believers are already justified in this life (John 5:24; 10:28).

Also the believers will not be justified for the first time on the judgement day. Before they die, they are already justified by their faith in Christ! 'To be justified' means that God has forgiven all their sins, has declared them completely just in God's eyes and will henceforth regard and treat them as perfectly just in God's eyes. At their death their spirit or soul is translated or transferred to heaven to be with Christ (Revelation 20:5-6). On the last judgement day their justification and righteousness will be publicly announced (Matthew 25:34-40) so that all in the whole universe will know that God has been perfectly just and gracious in his judgement (2 Thessalonians 1:5-7; cf. Revelation 15:3). Then they will in body and soul be a part of the Heavenly Jerusalem that will descend as the New Jerusalem onto the new earth (Revelation 21:1-2,9-10).

Genuine Christians possess eternal life, will never be condemned, will never perish and will never be separated from Christ (John 5:24; 10:28; Romans 8:38-39). Because Christ made atonement for their sins, they shall be saved from God's righteous wrath (Romans 5:9-11). God will never bring their sins into remembrance (Hebrews 8:12)!

b. The believers will be rewarded for their righteous works.

In stead, God will bring the good works of Christians, as the fruit of their salvation, into remembrance (Matthew 25:35-36). Every Christian will be rewarded according to the quality of his life and works of earth (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10).

c. The believers will receive an eternal inheritance.

The believers will inherit God's kingdom in its final perfect phase, that consists of the new heaven on the new earth (Matthew 25:34,46; cf. John 5:29).

³⁹ ηδη κερταται < κρινω (vnp)

⁴⁰ κατακριμα < κατακρινω

PART 7. THE RENEWAL OF ALL THINGS

How will the renewal of all things be?

Read Isaiah 65:17,25; Revelation 20:11; 21:1; Matthew 25:34; Romans 8:18-22; 2 Peter 3:3-14.

1. The renewal of all things takes place at the second coming of Christ

a. At the second coming the present heaven and earth will pass away.

Jesus teaches that at his second coming⁴¹ the functions of the sun, moon and stars in the universe will cease and the heavenly bodies will be shaken⁴² (Matthew 24:27-31). Jesus thus teaches that the day of his second coming will not only be the day on which he terminates the great tribulation and gathers his elect, but also the day on which the physical universe will be shaken and the great renewal of the universe will take place.

Peter teaches that ‘the last days’⁴³ (2 Peter 3:3) ends with the second coming⁴⁴ of Christ (2 Peter 3:4). The second coming of Christ will at the same time be the day of the Lord⁴⁵ (2 Peter 3:10) and the day of judgement and (consequent) destruction (eternal death) of ungodly men⁴⁶ (2 Peter 3:7; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). On that day the heavens will disappear (pass away) with a roar and the elements will be destroyed (not annihilated, but their structure will disintegrate) by fire. On that day the earth and everything in it (man’s achievements) will be laid bare (found out, discovered, exposed to divine judgement)(2 Peter 3:10,12), that is, all the concealed deeds of humankind will become disclosed (Matthew 10:26). The apostle Peter thus teaches that the day of Christ’s second coming is at the same time the day of the final judgement of people and the day on which the universe will be renewed.

Note that the New Testament period (the last days) ends with Christ’s second coming, the final judgement and punishment of unbelievers, the disintegration of the present universe and the bringing of the new universe and new earth. There will be no 1000 year period between Christ's second coming and the judgement of unbelievers or the renewal of the earth.

b. At the second coming the new heaven and earth will come into being.

Jesus Christ teaches that at his second coming the final judgement will take place and the final perfect phase of his kingdom⁴⁷ will come into being (Matthew 25:31-34).

Luke teaches that Jesus Christ will remain in heaven until the re-erection or restoration⁴⁸ of everything to perfection (Acts 3:21)! Christ will only descend onto the new earth together with the New Jerusalem after the final judgement!

Paul teaches that the second coming of Jesus will be the end⁴⁹ (of this present age), when he will hand (the present) kingdom⁵⁰ over to God the Father after he has destroyed all evil powers on the present earth and has raised the dead (1 Corinthians 15:23-28).

Peter teaches that the second coming of Jesus Christ will be on the day a new heaven and a new earth – the home of righteousness - will become a reality (2 Peter 3:13). The old earth will not be annihilated, but will be renewed in a similar sense that believers become new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old earth will be restored to perfection (Acts 3:21). He teaches that the salvation and inheritance that will be revealed from heaven in the last time can never perish, spoil or fade⁵¹ (1 Peter 1:4-5).

⁴¹ παρουσια

⁴² σαλευω

⁴³ επ εσχατων των ημερων

⁴⁴ παρουσια

⁴⁵ ημερα κυριου

⁴⁶ εις ημεραν κρισεως και απωλειας των ασεβων ανθρωπων

⁴⁷ βασιλεια

⁴⁸ αποκαταστασις

⁴⁹ το τελος

⁵⁰ βασιλεια

⁵¹ εις κληρονομιαν αφθαρτον και αμιαντον και αμαραντον, τετερημενην εν ουρανοις εις υμας
Ξ... σωτηριαν ετομην αποκαλυφθηναι εν καιρω εσχατω

John teaches that the second coming of Jesus Christ will be when he terminates the final battle of Armageddon or Gog and Magog, raises all the dead, judges all people that have ever lived and *brings the new heaven and new earth into being* (Revelation 16:14-21; 20:7 - 21:5).

c. At the second coming the history of this world comes to an end.

The day of the second coming will be the final day of the history of this present world. There is no Biblical evidence that the history of this present world will continue for another seven years after the so-called first future return of Jesus and for another 1000 years after the so-called second future return of Jesus, as some people falsely teach! Christ's first coming is the most central and most important event in history! Likewise Christ's second coming is the absolute climax and end of history! After Christ's second coming the eternal state begins (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)!

At Christ's second coming or thereafter there will be no more opportunity to repent and be saved (Matthew 25:10-13; cf. Proverbs 27:1; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2)!

2. The present condition of the heavens and the earth will come to an end

The present creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay⁵² (corruption, decadence, deterioration, decline), from being transitory (the state of being perishable) and from fruitlessness (its lack of lasting effectiveness)(Romans 8:19-21). Everything that causes sin (e.g. corrupt political, military and monetary institutions, casino's, porn shops, terrorist groups, secret societies, gangs, etc.) and all who do evil will be weeded out of Christ's present kingdom (Matthew 13:41) in order to become the final perfect kingdom. Everything above this present earth (the sun, moon and stars) and everything on this present earth (mountains, islands, cities) will change (Revelation 6:12-14; 16:17-21; 20:11; 21:1b) in order to become the new universe and the new earth. All elements on earth will be purified by melting fire and the present earth with all the works of people, however hidden or concealed they may have been, "will be found"⁵³. That is, they will be uncovered or disclosed and judged (2 Peter 3:10-14; Hebrews 4:13; Matthew 10:26).

3. The original creation will be completely renewed

a. The book of Revelation describes the ideal and the final perfect reality.

Revelation 21:1 to 22:5 reveals *the present ideal reality* before Christ's second coming in terms of *the future final and perfect reality* after Christ's second coming.

The Heavenly Jerusalem is *a symbol* and represents all believers in the Old Testament period and the New Testament period and consists of the believers who have already passed away and are in heaven and the believers who still live on earth *before Christ's second coming* (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-24).

The New Jerusalem is also *a symbol* and represents especially the Bride of Christ (Revelation 21:1-2; 9-10; cf. Ephesians 5:25-32) and thus the full number of believers in the Old Testament period (Revelation 21:12) and the full number of believers in the New Testament period (Revelation 21:14) *after Christ's second coming* (Revelation 21:1-2,9-10; Romans 11:25-26).

The Heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem are one and the same reality. The Heavenly Jerusalem is *before* Christ second coming and still incomplete. The New Jerusalem is *the ideal reality of the Heavenly Jerusalem before Christ's second coming* and *the final perfect reality of the Heavenly Jerusalem after Christ's second coming*.

The New Jerusalem as the ideal reality.

When Jesus says, "I am *making* all things new" and not, "I have made all things new" (Revelation 21:5), he is speaking of the present reality between his first and his second coming (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17)! When Jesus says, "He who *overcomes* will inherit all this" and not, "He who has overcome", then he is speaking of the present time (cf. Romans 8:31-39)! When Jesus says, "On no day its gates will be shut (Revelation 21:25), he is referring to the present time of grace in which people from every nation in the world can enter Christ's kingdom (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2)! And when Jesus says, "The leaves of the tree of life are for the

⁵² φθορα

⁵³ εὑρεθῆσεται < εὐρισκω (vifp)

healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2), he is referring to the present time when the nations and its people still need healing (cf. Matthew 8:16-17)!

The New Jerusalem as the final perfect reality.

Nevertheless, after the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement, the great renewal of all things will take place (Revelation 19:11-21; 20:11-15; 21:1). Christ will renew the whole universe including the earth (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). Then “making everything new” (Revelation 21:5) “is done or has come to pass”⁵⁴ (Revelation 21:6). Then the renewal of the earth will be a completed fact and will continue in that state for ever!

b. The Heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Jerusalem.

Before the second coming of Christ “the New Jerusalem” is still “the Heavenly Jerusalem”. “The Heavenly Jerusalem”, “Mount Zion” and “the city of the living God” (Hebrews 12:22-24) and “the Bride or the Wife of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:9-10) are all *symbols* of the community of believers in heaven and on earth throughout all ages.

The Heavenly Jerusalem is a symbol for God’s Old Testament community.

God’s Old Testament community is called the Church⁵⁵ in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Judges 20:2; 2 Chronicles 29:28; Psalm 22:22). The Heavenly Jerusalem is *a symbol* of this Old Testament community (Isaiah 54:1-5,11-12). It is the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. It is better than the foreign country (Palestine) and better than any earthly country: it is the heavenly country for every believer who during the Old Testament period believed as Abraham did (Hebrews 11:9-10,13-16,39-40).

The Heavenly Jerusalem is a symbol for God’s New Testament community.

Also God’s New Testament community is called the Church (Matthew 16:18; 18:17). The Heavenly Jerusalem is also *the symbol* of this New Testament community (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-24). It is the real identity of all Christians on earth (Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1-2) and the mother of all believers who through faith in Christ have been justified and are consequently free!

In contrast, the present city of Jerusalem has become the symbol of all Jews and other people who endeavour to be justified by keeping the law and consequently are still slaves (Galatians 4:24-27; cf. Galatians 3:8-11; Revelation 11:2).

The Heavenly Jerusalem consists of the Triune God and his angels in joyful assembly, the Church of the firstborn on earth whose names are registered in heaven⁵⁶ and all the spirits of believers that have already died⁵⁷ (Hebrews 12:22-24). The word ‘firstborn’ means those who have priority and occupy the first place, those who are the lawful or legitimate heirs. Compare Christ’s highest rank in the whole creation and re-creation (Colossians 1:15-16,18). The expression ‘firstborn, registered in heaven’ refers to all Christians still living on the earth. Their names are already written in the book of life of the Lamb in heaven (Luke 10:20; Revelation 21:27). The spirits of righteous men made perfect refers to all believers who have already died and are in heaven with Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1; Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:14).

c. The New Jerusalem on the new earth.

“The Heavenly Jerusalem” *before* Christ’s second coming becomes “the New Jerusalem” *after* Christ’s second coming! She is prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband and is called the Bride or the Wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:1-2,9-10). All these are *symbols* of the triumphant community of believers which belongs to Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-27,32). The New Jerusalem is *a symbol* of the absolute full number of believers from the beginning of the creation to the renewal of all things (cf. Matthew 24:22,24,31; Romans 8:28-30,33; 11:4-6,25-26).

⁵⁴ γεγοναν < γίνομαι (vira). The perfect tense emphasises that this condition continues for ever!

⁵⁵ εκκλησια

⁵⁶ εκκλησια πρωτοτοκων απογεγραμμενων < απογραφω (vrrp) εν ουρανοις

⁵⁷ πνευμασι δικαιων τετελειωμενων < τελειωω (vrrp)

d. The new earth.

On the new earth God's covenant reaches its perfection.

Christians from all the nations in the world will live in the presence of God on the new earth (Revelation 21:3). The covenant: "I will be your God and you will be my people", which God made with his Old Testament people (Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6:2-7; Leviticus 26:12) and continued with his New Testament people (2 Corinthians 6:16), reaches here its perfection. God's people (all believers in the Messiah or Christ) from all the nations will be his people and God will be with them and be their God.

On the new earth the earth and all people reach their perfection.

God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, because the old order of things will have passed away" (Revelation 21:4-5). Everything that survives God's test of fire will be brought into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24-26). Nothing unclean will ever enter it (Revelation 21:27)! The new earth will blossom and bear much fruit (Revelation 22:1-2). The former wild animals will live in peace together with everyone else. No one will harm another or destroy anything. The earth will be full of knowing God and walking with God (Isaiah 11:6-9). The new earth will be a place where only righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13)!

On the new earth God's kingdom will reach its perfection.

The new earth will be God's kingdom in its final perfect phase after Christ's second coming (Matthew 25:34; John 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:23-28; Revelation 11:15-18).

The expression: "the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28) means that the work of Jesus Christ as Mediator within salvation history on earth has been completed and he will hand his entrusted task as Mediator back to God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11 denotes the beginning and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 the end of the kingdom or kingship or lordship of Jesus Christ on this present earth. At his second coming Jesus Christ has completed his reign as Mediator. The eternal kingdom or kingship of God begins beyond Christ's second coming. However, Jesus Christ continues to reign together with God the Father on his throne for all eternity (2 Samuel 7:13; Isaiah 9:7; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 22:1,3)!

Only *the distinction between the functions* of God the Father and God the Son has then come to an end. From then on the Bible speaks only of their complete unity: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22). "God and the Lamb is its light" (Revelation 21:23). "And the throne of God and of the Lamb" will be in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:1,3).

PART 8. HOW CHRISTIANS OUGHT TO LIVE BEFORE CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

How should Christians live before Christ's second coming?

Read Luke 21:8-19,34-36; 2 Peter 3:11-15a; Matthew 24:45-47; Luke 12:42-48.

1. Christians should be patient and stand firm (James 5:8)

Christians should practise being patient as they face other imperfect Christians and the persecution of non-Christians and suffering. The word 'patience' means to take a long time before getting irritated, angry or discouraged. Christians ought to strengthen their hearts, because the Lord as Judge is standing at the door.

2. Christians should be watchful in trials and temptations (Luke 21:8-19,34-36)

Christians should not burden themselves with excess in eating, drinking and working for their livelihood. They must always remain watchful and pray that they may be able to remain standing in their temptations and trials.

3. Christians should live holy and godly lives (2 Peter 3:11,14-15)

Christians should grow in love and increase their capacity to love others so that they may be blameless and holy when Christ returns (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13). That is why Paul closes his letter with a blessing: "May the God of peace himself sanctify *you* wholly (through and through). And (may) *your spirit* (be) in every part complete (in tact, undamaged, sound). And may *the soul and the body* be kept blameless at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The words 'you', 'your spirit' and 'the soul and

body' are parallel! Christians ought to look forward with expectation to the second coming of Christ and in the mean time live holy and godly lives (2 Peter 3:11,14-15a).

4. Christians should be faithful in their tasks (Matthew 24:45-47)

Christians should be faithful and wise as they fulfil their God-given tasks (Lucas 12:42-48).

Christ has assigned to each Christian a different task (Mark 13:34; 1 Corinthians 3:5-10). In Christ's wisdom every Christian may have a part in bringing a person to Christ, but no-one can take credit for being the only person that brought him to Christ. Christ uses one Christian to sow, but another to reap (John 4:35-38). He uses one Christian to lay the foundation, but another to build on that foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10). He uses one Christian to plant, but another to water. Nevertheless, the growth and lasting result comes only from God (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

The goal of every Christian should be to fulfil his God-given task. The goal of Jesus was to do the will of God and to finish his work (John 4:34). And at the end of his earthly life he could say that he brought glory to God by completing the work God gave him to do (John 17:4). The goal of the apostle Paul was to finish the race and to complete the task the Lord Jesus Christ gave to him (Acts 20:24). And at the end of his life on earth he could say that he had fought the good fight, had finished he race and had kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). Therefore the Bible urges every Christians to see to it that he completes the work he has received from the Lord (Colossians 4:17).