DESTINY AND ETERNITY

Lesson 9.1 – The Destiny of the Human Race

At the end of this life, what happens to us? This is one of the most important questions a thinking person can ask. The Bible supplies the necessary information about our existence beyond time. Although the details are not given, sufficient light has been provided by the inspired writers of Holy Scripture so that believers need not dread the unknown.

I. Time and Eternity

The revelation in Scripture shows that God is eternal and not limited to time (from everlasting to everlasting you are God). Man, however, is subject to time. He is finite and limited by time and space. Though man is a creature of time, he is made for eternity. Man has a beginning, but exists eternally. Man will be rewarded by God according to his works during his life whether they be good or bad.

A. TIME – THE PROBATION OF MAN

When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them on a period of probation in the Garden of Eden, the earthly paradise. They were placed under the one commandment of God and this was a test of their freewill, as to whether they would obey God or not (Gen 2:17; 3:1-6). They failed in this probationary period. God extended grace to them and gave them space to repent and be restored to His fellowship by the atoning sacrifice. God pronounced the death penalty on man’s sin of disobedience. However, there was a period of probation given to Adam as well as the entire human race. As far as man is concerned, this period of probation is called time.

Between the birth and death of every man, there is a life-span. It is during this period of time only known to God that man is on probation. This is the “space to repent” given to all men. The grace of God comes to man during this time seeking to lead him to repentance (2 Pet 3:8,9). Once this time is over, mortal man dies and his period of probation is ended forever. After this, his eternal state and destiny are settled and unchangeable. It is this period or probation called time that man settles his destiny for eternity.

B. THE REWARDING OF MAN

The time of eternity is a time of reward. All men will be rewarded according to their works, whether good or evil. All will be judged according to the deeds done in the body (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10). As a person’s eternal destiny is settle in time, according to character, a person’s eternal rewards are settled here also in time according to works. Character and works cannot be separated. What a person is determines what a person does and both settle his eternal state.

II. The Dispensation of Time

God exemplified in time that which He will do in eternity. As God meted out certain judgments and rewards in time to both the righteous and the unrighteous, so He will do in eternity. The various dispensations are related to covenants God made with man – each a particular arrangement between God and man, having its own distinctive emphasis.
Dispensation of Innocence – The Edenic Covenant
Adam was placed in a perfect environment and was in covenant relationship with God. This dispensation was characterized by innocence. Man was subject to a simple test of obedience under a period of probation. By exercising his free-will, he ate the forbidden fruit and brought himself and the human race under the power of sin, satan and death. God’s judgment was exclusion from Eden. God’s reward is the tree of life to the one who overcomes (Rev 22:2,14).

Dispensation of Conscience – The Adamic Covenant
When man sinned, conscience came into operation – by conscience, man was able to distinguish between good and evil. Man’s dealings with man were according to conscience (Rom 2:14,15). Conscience defines good and evil, but leaves man powerless to overcome evil. God’s judgment was destruction of the world with the flood. God’s reward for the righteous was preservation on the ark.

Dispensation of Human Government – The Noahic Covenant
God entrusts man with governmental authority. He puts in man’s hands the authority of capital punishment. This was the institution of human government regarding all violation of human rights. God’s judgment was dispersion of the races upon the tower of Babel. God’s promise was a reward of a city to Abraham that He Himself would build. Abraham came out of Ur of the Chaldees.

Dispensation of Promise – The Abrahamic Covenant
God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be the fathers of a new nation. The promises include seed, land and blessings, both natural and spiritual. It was in Egypt that Israel became a nation. God’s judgment was upon Egypt through the plagues. God’s reward was the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in fulfillment to the promises made to the patriarchs.

Dispensation of the Law – The Mosaic Covenant
This covenant was made with the nation of Israel and included the Tabernacle, Priesthood, Sacrifices, Feasts and the Law. This arrangement continued from Moses to the first coming of Christ. God’s judgment was on the city of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. The reward for the believing was escape from the terrible judgments and destruction which came upon Jews as a Nation.

Dispensation of Grace – The New Covenant
Cancelled out the Mosaic Covenant and brought in the dispensation of God’s grace, which is still in operation today. It is the grace of God which accomplishes the eternal purposes of God in relation to man for all who receive and believe. God’s judgment is against those who reject His grace. God’s reward is the sealing unto salvation for the believers. The Second Coming of Christ will usher in both judgments on the wicked and rewards for the righteous.

Dispensation of the Kingdom – The Everlasting Covenant
Man’s place of dominion in the Kingdom of God. Man is brought back to the original purpose of God though the redemption of Christ. It also ushers in eternal order. Here both eternal judgment and eternal reward are meted out.

These are the various arrangements of God’s dealings with man through time. Each has a point of commencement, without being abolished when another arrangement was ushered in. These arrangements have spiritual and eternal elements in them.
III. The Destiny of the Human Race

A. DEATH

Death is the separation of the spirit and body (John 11:11, 13; 2 Cor 5:1-9). Death is the wages of sin and all die because all have sinned (Rom 6:23; 5:12). Death is also the ultimate manifestation of sin from which we will finally be delivered. However, until the final disposition of things, all men – believer and unbeliever – are subject to death.

- **Believers**: Have everlasting life and have “passed from death into life” (John 5:24). The triumph is that death is not final for the believer.
- **Unbelievers**: Although there is a resurrection of the wicked it is for the purpose of judgment. Their ultimate state is eternal separation from God, which is the second death.

B. THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

The Bible is not specific about our state of existence between death and the resurrection. It is more concerned that we look ahead to the inheritance and fulfillment what will be ours when Jesus comes again. However, Scripture gives us enough information to comfort us.

Some have taught a **soul sleep**, where the whole person dies and the soul and spirit go out of existence until called back into existence at the resurrection. However, the Bible teaches a conscious existence.

- At the transfiguration, both Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus and they knew what was going on concerning what Jesus would accomplish (Luke 8:28-31)
- Jesus retained His identity after his resurrection (this same Jesus – Acts 1:11)
- The account of the rich man and Lazarus confirm a state of consciousness (Luke 16:19-31)
- Jesus promised the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)
- 2 Cor 5:6-8 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Paul knew he would be immediately with Christ at the time of death. So much so that his desire was to die and be with Christ (Philippians 1:23).

C. THE RAPTURE

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

**1 Corinthians 15:51-53** Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

This is not the Second Coming of Christ, where His coming will be as evident as lightning that flashes from the east to the west (Matt 24:27).
The Lord will come and snatch away powerfully His bride to meet Him in the clouds. It is at this point that believers in Christ will receive their glorified bodies. Jesus further emphasizes that when the Rapture takes place, everything in the world will still on as usual, like in the days of Noah where they married and given away in marriage. Jesus says, “Two men will be in the field, one will be taken and the other one left. Two women will be grinding with at the mill, one will be taken and the other one left” (Matt 24:40-41). Life will be business usual, then without any special warning, one is snatched away to meet the Lord in the air, while the other person is left to suffer the wrath of God that will be poured out on earth.

There are three main beliefs concerning when the Rapture of the Church will occur:

1. **Pre-Tribulation Rapture**: Occurs before the tribulation begins. When God’s dispensation of grace lifts, He who now restrains is taken out of the way and then the lawless one (anti-Christ) is revealed. It is commonly believed that this refers to the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit is taken away, so too are the believers. “For God did not appoint us for wrath” (1 Thess 5:9). The Marriage Supper of the Lamb takes place during the Tribulation, so the Church must have been raptured prior to this event.

2. **Mid-Tribulation Rapture**: As the first part of the Tribulation is peaceful while the antichrist is establishing his rule, it is believed that the Church will be raptured at the mid way point before the Great Tribulation. Mid Tribers believe that the Rapture will take place at the sounding of the seventh trumpet which they identify with the last trumpet of 1 Cor 15:52.

3. **Post-Tribulation Rapture**: Most Post Tribers interpret the wrath we are to escape (1 Thess 5:9) to be the final state of the wicked, the lake of fire. They expect that all living believers will go through the Great Tribulation, supposing that many will become martyrs, others supposing that God will protect them in some special way, as God protected the Israelites from the plagues of Egypt. They argue that the N.T. does not promise that believers will escape tribulation and suffering.

While others teach a partial Rapture or multiple Raptures, the important thing is not to get hung up in debate and divisions over these. We are to be prepared and expecting as we do not know when He will return.

D. **THE TRIBULATION**

When the antichrist brings into effect a Peace Treaty between Israel and her enemies, the seven year Tribulation period begins. God pours out His wrath over the world in various stages:

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<th>THE SEVEN SEALS</th>
<th>THE SEVEN TRUMPETS</th>
<th>THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. White Horse – Antichrist</td>
<td>1. 1/3 earth burned up, hail, fire, blood</td>
<td>1. Loathsome boils</td>
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<td>2. Red Horse – War</td>
<td>2. Mountain cast in sea - 1/3 to blood</td>
<td>2. Sea to blood – all sea creatures die</td>
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<td>3. Black Horse – Famine &amp; Pestilence</td>
<td>3. Meteor poisons fresh water-death</td>
<td>3. All fresh water turned to blood</td>
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<td>4. Green Horse – Death (¼ man die)</td>
<td>4. 1/3 sun, moon, stars struck-darkness</td>
<td>4. Sun scorches men with fire</td>
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<td>7. Silence in Heaven - Trumpets</td>
<td>7. Christ’s reign foreseen</td>
<td>7. It is done! Wrath on Babylon</td>
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