Thirty-four hundred years ago in what is present-day northwestern Saudi Arabia, the people of Israel led by Moses camped before the mountain of God known as Sinai or Horeb. They had seen the God of heaven and earth lead them out of slavery in Egypt while shattering Egypt’s economy with ten plagues and shattering Egypt’s military might at the Red Sea crossing.

Now at Sinai, the glorious presence of Yahweh – the Creator of everything who’s great Name means I AM WHO I AM – rested upon Mount Sinai in what the Israelites described as a consuming fire. God called Moses up to Him and Moses was privileged to speak face to face with the living God. There at Sinai Moses received the Law of God for all generations of Israel.

The Law of Moses has two divisions or tables. The first table described what was necessary for sinners to have a relationship with their holy God. The second table describes Yahweh’s continuing will for human life and relationships on earth.

Jesus Christ fulfilled the first table and established a new way of relating with God, not only for Israel but also for all nations. That way is by a new birth enabling people to see and believe that Jesus Christ is the righteousness of God come down to us, and that He is the righteousness of God for us. Jesus established a new covenant of grace not only with Israel, but with all humanity.

But Jesus did not change the second table of the Law. It remains God’s will for human life on this earth, and it will until the Day of Judgment.

Now, in the first table of the Law, Yahweh described festivals that Israel is to observe. Chief among these are what we call Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. In Exodus 23 Yahweh commanded every Israelite male to appear before Him three times a year on these three particular festivals.

Therefore, when Yahweh sent Jesus to accomplish the salvation of the human race, He used two of His great festivals to accomplish His will. Because of the command to appear before Yahweh, Jews from all over the world were assembled in Jerusalem on Passover 33A.D. to witness the crucifixion and death of God’s Messiah, and then to hear the news of His resurrection. Fifty days later on Pentecost 33A.D., Jews from all over the world were again gathered in Jerusalem to witness the coming of Yahweh’s Holy Spirit upon all flesh, so that they and all peoples could finally understand the suffering Messiah and thereby be born again into a new relationship with Yahweh.

For Christians, Easter has supplanted Passover. Therefore, starting on Easter we count off the fifty days to Pentecost. Pentecost remains a great festival because on Pentecost 33A.D. Yahweh set into motion his great plan of salvation in which we find ourselves. Therefore, in this time between Easter and Pentecost our Sunday lessons are all from the New Testament. They describe what Yahweh did in 33A.D. as well as
what He is doing and what He will do. This Word is a great comfort to Messiah’s friends. It is likewise a great discomfit to His enemies. We need to know what is going on in the present time.

We’ve spoken of Yahweh’s use of His two great festivals of Passover and Pentecost. But, what of the third festival? Forty days after Passover 33 A.D., Jesus ascended into heaven. From there, in union with the Father He poured out upon all flesh Lord Holy Spirit on Pentecost 33 A.D. However, on Tabernacles 33 A.D. He did not return to Jerusalem to reveal Himself once and for all as the victorious Messiah. Therefore, on some future Tabernacle celebration when Jews from all over the world are gathered in Jerusalem, Jesus will return in glory and reveal Himself as the victorious Messiah, coming to reward His friends, punish His enemies and bring the present sinful world age to an abrupt end.

In the history of the world, we are therefore in that time between Pentecost 33 A.D. and the yet unknown year of the final Tabernacles celebration. It’s called the church age. The task of Christ’s Church in this age is to proclaim the Kingdom of God through Word and Sacrament. Christ’s Kingdom is present but hidden in this world. It must be received by faith in the proclamation that it is here.

But the Kingdom of God will not remain hidden forever. When Jesus appears on that future Tabernacles celebration He will not only bring the present age to a close, He will also usher in the glorious eternal age of His Kingdom.

Scripture doesn’t give us much detail about the coming eternal age. However, much of the information we do have comes from the final two chapters of the Book of Revelation. Revelation is St. John’s record of an extensive vision given to him by Jesus. Unlike our normal awake experience in the world, a vision is like a dream. For that reason much of what is seen in a vision is mixed up and symbolic.

Consider what Yahweh said in Numbers 12:6-8, “‘When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. 7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles...’” This is why we hardly see any symbolic material in the Torah written by Moses. It’s all clear teaching.

On the other hand, when reading the prophets, it can be difficult to discern the jumble of visionary word pictures and what they mean. This is also true of Revelation.

However, in the final chapters of Revelation, some clear teaching is mixed in with the word pictures. This is true of this morning’s second lesson from Revelation 21:1-4, “1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Yahweh’s purpose in all of history is clearly revealed in verse three. Our Creator’s intention is to openly and intimately dwell with us forever. This is God’s endgame. Everything is working toward it.
God is present in this age, but because of sin and rebellion He hides Himself behind His created order. If He didn’t, we sinners wouldn’t be able to stand His righteous glory. Also, He would have to punish our sin on the spot.

And this points to the problem in God’s endgame. For Yahweh to dwell openly with us, we humans must be equal to our Creator in righteousness and goodness. We cannot fall short of His glory in even the tiniest matter of righteous thought, word and deed. Now, given the sinful nature we’re born with this is totally impossible for us. But with Yahweh all things are possible.

Therefore, the gospel good news tells us that on Calvary Jesus satisfied the penalty for all sin and has made us equal to God in righteousness. This is a gift from God that we don’t deserve and haven’t earned. It’s all God’s grace. It’s all God’s doing. It comes from His everlasting loving desire to openly live with us not as we are, but as He will resurrect and recreate us.

Therefore, all who long for the age when they can finally live openly as holy righteous people with their holy righteous Creator already have their desire fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And they will see it fully accomplished when Jesus comes. For Yahweh Himself will not be denied. His divine purpose is to live among those He has saved for Himself.

One other feature of the coming Kingdom is its eternal bliss. Verse four clearly states that this present age of sorrow and grief will be no more. Indeed, where there is only righteousness, there can be no evil. Where there is no evil, sorrow and grief simply do not exist.

Therefore, for our sake, the righteous Son of God became incarnate in mortal flesh so that He might suffer for all the physical death due condemned sinners, and thereby win for all a resurrection in righteousness. Jesus endured the sorrow, grief and suffering of a world ruined with evil so that He might bring us to the bliss that He Himself enjoys with the Father and Holy Spirit as a being of pure righteousness. This is His endgame. What incredible love.

There is one other interesting feature of Yahweh’s endgame that we have already seen in the Easter lessons and will see all the way to Pentecost. We first saw it on the third Sunday of Easter, April 10th this year. Revelation 5:9-10, “9… [to Jesus] they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.’”

Purchased from every what? Tribe. Language. People. Nation. Out of these Jesus has purchased humans for God so that He might dwell with them as one people. Jesus has made one new people out of many peoples. He has purchased them for one kingdom, one priesthood. This is the church in the present age.

So, this raises a very important question. Does tribe, language, people or nation mean anything in Christ’s Church on earth? It shouldn’t. There is but one priesthood of believers. Period.

We will see on the Day of Pentecost that the pouring out of Lord Holy Spirit was and is Yahweh’s antidote to the judgment He leveled against humanity at the tower of Babel. This is Yahweh’s plan to once again bring us together as one people, but on His terms – the terms of His Messiah – and not our own terms.
Then there’s also last week’s second lesson from Revelation 7:9, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” And we continue at Revelation 7:13-15, “13 Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?’ 14 I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple....”

What’s in this picture? John could plainly see that the people in the multitude were from every nation, tribe, people and language. There’s that list a second time. Indeed, it’s used two more times in Revelation, and then two more times with a variation.

Now, in the hands of these people John saw palm branches, and palm branches were symbols of victory in ancient Greek literature. Therefore, each person in that great multitude had attained victory in what is called the great tribulation. Each had on a white robe that ironically had been made white by dipping it in blood. The white robe stands for righteousness and purity. Each had been made righteous by the blood of the Lamb. Each was justified by Christ. Remember, pure righteousness is the necessary requirement for dwelling with the holy and righteous God.

So, we see a multitude of people wearing the same uniform. Each has come through the same suffering and trouble – the great tribulation. Each is holding the same token of victory in their hands. It’s clear that they’re one people, yet from every nation, tribe, people and language of this present earth. And because they have come out of the great tribulation in victory, it’s also clear that the great multitude is standing in the bliss of Christ’s coming kingdom.

Thus, this picture describes Yahweh’s endgame. It’s His purpose to dwell with humanity as one people unified on His terms and not our own.

When Yahweh’s purpose in Christ was made known to the gentile peoples of the Roman Empire, more and more gladly received the gospel. For it became clear that the gospel was not just for the Jews among whom it had originated. The gospel was for all nations. This news also tapped into a primitive longing that we all have – of the time before Babel when humanity was one people.

But it also challenged the Roman Empire to its foundations. Rome had taken that primitive longing, that primitive memory of one people, down the only course open to humanity after God’s judgment at the tower of Babel. The Romans had built an empire of many nations, tribes, peoples and languages by force. They preserved it by forging a new identity for the empire’s peoples and religions under the emperor. But if rebellion rose up they didn’t hesitate to use the most cruel force to put it down.

So, it was perceived as a huge threat to the empire when this new teaching appeared, drawing people from every nation, tribe, people, language and social standing into a new identity as one people, a voluntary allegiance without force as one people under one head – even Jesus Christ. Three hundred years later Constantine finally discovered that the empire could be united under this one
religion and that he could serve as emperor under Jesus Christ. Only then did the persecution cease.

This is certainly a simplified version of the history. For, we’d be here all day if all the twists and turns were told. But it is the net result.

Conflicts remain in the church to this day. But the biblical picture is clear. As Paul put it in Ephesians 4:4-6, “4 There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” The one hope Paul speaks of is the future one Kingdom described in Revelation, Yahweh dwelling with His one people in righteousness forever, one victory, world without tears. This is the bliss of the saved forever.

Jesus won it all with His suffering on the cross. God’s endgame is His purpose for His church forever and even in the present age. Satan hates God’s endgame with all his heart. Therefore, Satan will do anything to prevent it. But His opposition doesn’t ultimately matter. God’s Kingdom will come. His Will will be done here on earth as it is in heaven. And it will be done in His coming Kingdom. The cross, the resurrection, the vision given to John all tell us that. Praise and glory be unto our marvelous Creator for the love that He has shown us. As believers let us now love one another because He has made us one people in Christ. Let it be so by faith in the Word of God. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.