

**ADULT**

# Last Things

*A series by David Norris*



## **SERIES BIG IDEA**

Because God can see the end from the beginning, the Lord speaks prophetically to every generation, reminding His people to live with the end of His redemptive story in view.

*Lesson 1.1*

*Lesson 1.2*

*Lesson 1.3*

*Lesson 1.4*

*Learning How God Speaks*

*The Kingdom of God*

*Is Jesus Really Coming Soon?*

*The Hope of Heaven*



# Last Things:

## Learning How God Speaks

A series by David Norris

**Lesson Big Idea:** A single prophetic word speaks to the past, present, and future in significant and personal ways.

## Foundation

**Scripture Focus:** Hebrews 10:36–37

Tell the story of the Gettysburg cyclorama on page 10.

» *How does this understanding of God impact your faith?* ⚙️

## Frame

A. God can offer a **single** prophetic word that speaks uniquely to **multiple** generations.

» *Why do you think God's Word is able to speak uniquely to so many different people at the same time?* ⚙️

» *In what ways has God spoken to you during a church service?* ⚙️

1. The Bible was not merely a book for a single generation but for every generation.
2. In Isaiah chapter 40, God prophesied to the Jewish captives in **Babylon** that He would miraculously deliver them.
  - » Isaiah 40:3–4
  - » John 1:29
  - » *What happens to your faith when you fail to see things from God's perspective?* ⚙️
  - » *How can we train ourselves to think more like God thinks?* ⚙️
3. Almost every time Matthew used his familiar “that it might be fulfilled” to explain something prophetic about Jesus, the prophecies Matthew cited had been fulfilled at least once before.
4. Double Fulfillment


B. In order to appreciate God’s prophetic pronouncements, we have to see the **big picture**.

- » *Why is it hard for us to see the big picture at times?* ⚙️
  - » *How does God having the last word give you hope?* ⚙️
1. The term “Day of the Lord”
    - » Isaiah 13:6
  2. The judgment on ancient Babylon was only part of what He had in view.
    - » Isaiah 13:10
    - » Isaiah 13:11
    - » Jeremiah 46:10
    - » Ezekiel 30:3
    - » Obadiah 1:15
    - » Zephaniah 1:7, 14
    - » Malachi 4:5–6
  3. There is in every pronouncement of judgment a **hope**—both immediate and ultimate—that He has prepared something better.
    - » Habakkuk 2:3
    - » Hebrews 10:37
    - » *How do we find out what God is saying to us today?* ⚙️
    - » *How do we align our lives with God’s redemptive eternal purpose?* ⚙️

## Finish

Tell the story of the reporter and the Red River flood on pages 13-14.

# Foundation

**Scripture Focus:** Hebrews 10:36–37 


**G**ettysburg, Pennsylvania, is known for the famous Civil War battle that took place there in July 1863. Tourists are introduced to the battlefield via a visitor's center that stands several stories high; a building specifically designed to house one of the largest and most unusual paintings in the world. This amazing painting literally surrounds visitors, measuring over forty-feet high and stretching in a circle around them on a "canvas" longer than a football field. This artistic rendering of the battle at Gettysburg is called a cyclorama. Its presentation is a 360-degree perspective of the battlefield, integrating props and sounds that immerse the visitor in history.

People have often wondered what it would mean to have a "God's-eye" view—not simply of one time or place—of all of human history. I propose that God's perspective is analogous to this cyclorama. Yet God's vision is not limited to a single point of time, for He can at once see the beginning and end of human history. This divine perspective is not one outside of history. God Himself has created a redemptive plan that courses through all of human history; a plan that God has shared with us in the Bible.

Certainly we don't know all that God knows, but we know enough. Yet what we do know gives us confidence that when we read the biblical narrative from Creation to the onset of eternity, God's redemptive word is triumphant. It is in this way that we ought to understand "end times," not as some sort of obscure set of prophecies that we explore like a treasure map or navigate as someone would a Ouija board. Rather, future prophetic events are simply the resolution to the redemptive story that God has been telling all along. Because He can, God readily reveals events, big and small. It is no stretch for Him to do so, for He is invested in both individual struggles and those momentous happenings upon which history turns. He can at once take in the Battle of Armageddon while simultaneously being aware of the exact count of the number of hairs on our heads.

 **How does this understanding of God impact your faith?**

## Frame




**O**nce we consider God's cycloramic perspective, we are better prepared to discern something else about God—how He speaks. One of the unique things in the Bible is how **God can offer a single prophetic word that speaks uniquely to multiple generations.**  If we think about this, we understand how a human speaker's word can do such things. Think about how a good speaker can address a large room in such a way that her message can be understood variously by different individuals.

 **Why do you think God's Word is able to speak uniquely to so many different people at the same time?**


Further, you may have had times when God spoke a prophetic word into your life through the gifts of the Spirit. Have you been in a service when someone gave an interpretation to a message in tongues that uniquely addressed your situation? In that same service, could God have spoken to someone else just as specifically as He did to you? Because He is God, it would be unreasonable to disallow it. In fact, we should expect it. It is this same sort of thing that happens in the biblical text.

 **In what ways has God spoken to you during a church service?**


We need to remember that **the Bible was not merely a book for a single generation but for every generation.** Prophetic words were offered to Adam and Eve, to the patriarchs, to the children of Israel, and to the church. Because God is God and because He truly loves every person at every point of history, a single prophetic promise can divinely speak at different times and in different ways to different generations, while at the same time pointing to the ultimate resolution of God's redemptive plan.

**In Isaiah chapter 40, God prophesied to the Jewish captives in Babylon that He would miraculously deliver them.**   The prophecy was given as a “voice of one crying in the wilderness” to “prepare the way of the LORD.” God Himself would lead them from Babylon! No obstacle would stand in His way. God's prophetic word proclaimed, “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low” (Isaiah 40:3–4, NKJV).  Historically this prophecy came true in the time of Cyrus, as the people returned to rebuild the Temple and the Jewish state.

Yet we know this prophecy in another context—in a way that speaks to another fulfillment. We sometimes hear these words in a Christmas play or in song during a performance of Handel's *Messiah*. The New Testament proclaims these same prophetic words as being fulfilled in John the Baptist. He was “the voice . . . crying in the wilderness,” and when he was “preparing the way of the LORD,” he was preparing the way of the Messiah, Jesus.

Crowds came from all over the countryside to hear this voice in the wilderness. He preached repentance and told those who followed him to look for Messiah who was coming soon. The day came when Jesus was seen by John walking toward the water where John had been preaching. John humbly baptized Jesus but also declared to all who would hear him, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NKJV). 

Neither fulfillment is less important than the other. God is simply able to speak in such ways because He at once sees His redemptive story from beginning to end. God shrinks time like an accordion, blending the present and eternal perspectives, utilizing one single pronouncement to address multiple events and, ultimately, His complete redemptive victory. Our task is to think like He thinks—to understand His pronouncements as He intends.

 **What happens to your faith when you fail to see things from God's perspective?**

 **How can we train ourselves to think more like God thinks?**

**Almost every time Matthew used his familiar “that it might be fulfilled” to explain something prophetic about Jesus, the prophecies Matthew cited had been fulfilled at least once before.** Yet Matthew was not wrong, nor were Paul or Peter or any author of the New Testament who employed this understanding of God's prophetic voice.

Some call such speaking “telescoping.” Others describe such speaking as “**double fulfillment**” (when a single prophecy is fulfilled more than twice), a term which we will utilize in this lesson. I would contend this may be the single most important reason many interpreters struggle to make sense of the end times; because they do not understand the simple principle of double fulfillment, used in both the Old and New Testaments. Thus when Jesus offered His famous end-time prophecies in Matthew 24, three sets of fulfillments may be discerned. There are parts of that prophecy that have immediate fulfillment to His audience (the destruction of the Temple), other parts of the prophecy have to do with ultimate and cosmic judgment (the second coming of Christ), while other parts speak to both times (various signs offered).

**In order to appreciate God's prophetic pronouncements, we have to see the big picture.**  

 **Why is it hard for us to see the big picture at times?**





## LESSON BIG IDEA: A single prophetic word speaks to the past, present, and future in significant and personal ways.


Amazingly the theme of God's prophetic word has two elements to it, related and yet opposite, like a coin with two sides. One side of the coin speaks of judgment, and the other side speaks of hope. God is not schizophrenic to offer both of these elements prophetically. Rather in telling His people of coming judgment, God helps sustain us in adversity. And in speaking to His people of hope on the other side of judgment, He reminds us of His greater redemptive narrative—that in the end God wins. Even in the most severe of judgments, God has the last word.


### **How does God having the last word give you hope?**

The biblical phrase that captures this two-sided coin more than any other is **the term “Day of the Lord.”** In the Old Testament, God employed warnings of the Day of the Lord with a double fulfillment. That is, God would pronounce judgment on the proximate enemies of His people, and hope on the other side. Yet at the same time, God was saying something more. He was integrating the judgment that was near to them with His ultimate judgment, the hope that was at hand with the final hope that would ultimately be theirs.


For example, when God pronounced judgment upon Babylon, He used the language of ultimate victory: “Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty” (Isaiah 13:6, NKJV).  Historically, Babylon was an empire that looked indestructible. They steamrolled over the Assyrians and constructed a political and religious hierarchy that was unrivaled in the ancient Near East. Yet this empire was not beyond God's judgment. Its demise did not require hundreds of years but came as prophesied in a very brief period of time. Its ruin was sudden and complete, every bit as severe as what was divinely proclaimed. Amazing discoveries of this vast empire were accomplished by digging through layers of dirt and residue to unearth the remnants of this defunct ancient nemesis.


Yet the judgment on Babylon did not begin a new redemptive age, nor were all the cosmic judgments unleashed, nor were all the elements of His prophetic word accomplished. That is because when God pronounced the judgment on Babylon as the Day of the Lord, **the judgment on ancient Babylon was only part of what He had in view.** Certainly Isaiah's prophecy still pertains to the future: “the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine” (Isaiah 13:10, NKJV). 

Further, God's prophetic judgment delivered by Isaiah has ultimate prophetic significance: “I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible” (Isaiah 13:11, NKJV).  That divine punishment meted out on Babylon was only a part of the whole. This prophesied destruction foreshadows God's Day of Judgment on the entire world. It is important to note that such speaking is not unique. Indeed, the instances of God speaking in this way are so numerous so as to rightly call this a normative way of speaking. The Major Prophets provide dozens of examples, as do the Minor Prophets. Here are a few:

Jeremiah 46:10 

Ezekiel 30:3 

Obadiah 1:15 

Zephaniah 1:7, 14 

Malachi 4:5–6 

Now recall what we have said about a two-sided coin. When speaking of the Day of the Lord, God is not merely pronouncing judgment. **There is in every pronouncement of judgment a hope—both immediate and ultimate—that He has prepared something better.** Like prophetic words of judgment, some of those promises have been fulfilled, but some still wait for a future realization. Many promises relate to the millennium, an interim rule by the Lord. This rule is one where the whole earth is redeemed, the knowledge of God sweeps the earth, and the kingdom of God flowers in its fullness, a kind of preview of eternity.

Again, every promise of judgment also carried with it a promise of hope, all of which was designed by God to show His people how special they are. Such promises were often fulfilled more than once; unique gifts to multiple generations. While this may seem a bit confusing to us, it makes total sense to God.

A mother pulled her five-year-old daughter into an embrace and whispered into her ear, “You are the ‘specialest girl’ in the whole wide world, and I love you very much.” It was something her mother said a lot to her.

Suddenly the little girl got a quizzical look on her face as she thought about something for the very first time. “What about Katie?” she asked. “Isn’t she special?” Katie was her little sister.

The mother continued her embrace and whispered, “She’s my ‘specialest girl’ in the whole wide world.”

“But I thought you said I was!” objected the little girl.

“You are!” whispered her mother continuing to hold her with one arm while she playfully ruffled her hair. “Don’t you understand that my heart is big enough that both you and Katie—each of you—are the ‘most specialest’?” The little girl smiled, not entirely understanding, but understanding enough.

Of course, Israel was “specialist” to God. But so is the church. The church is the “specialist” people there are. Over six hundred years before Christ, Habakkuk was discouraged and asking God for answers because the people of God had been devastated by the Assyrians. God told Habakkuk a number of things in His answer, and one thing He promised was, “For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it” (Habakkuk 2:3, NKJV). Of course, God kept His word to Habakkuk. The enemies of God were ultimately defeated. Yet that same promise is also quoted in the book of Hebrews. The writer admonishes his audience to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord, citing from Habakkuk, “For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:37, NKJV).

Now such study is not mere intellectual exercise. It is to remind us that God has been uniquely speaking to this generation in which we live. We will address specific signs that have never been fulfilled before in subsequent lessons. What we must understand now is that if God is speaking, we ought to listen. Our lives have significance as they are aligned with His redemptive eternal purpose.

⚙️ **How do we find out what God is saying to us today?**

⚙️ **How do we align our lives with God’s redemptive eternal purpose?**

## Finish

The reporter went to the little South Dakota town located on the bank of the Red River. The river was well beyond flood stage, and twice before the town had been devastated by the river. In one instance, homes were actually carried away. The entire town was loading sandbags because there was a chance, just a chance, that the river would crest. But if they could add just a couple more feet to their man-made levee, their town could be saved.

## LESSON BIG IDEA: A single prophetic word speaks to the past, present, and future in significant and personal ways.

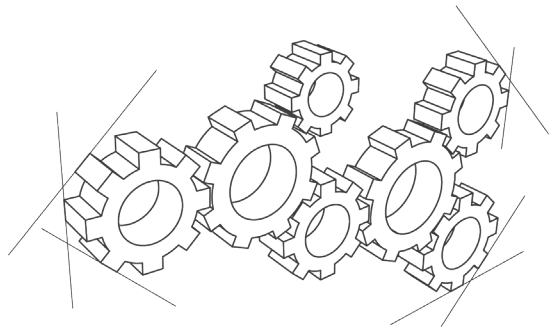
The reporter approached a woman who held open a burlap sack while her husband frantically shoveled sand into it. Their son waited to carry it to the top of the levee. They were praying, hoping, and all the while working diligently to hold back the rampaging flood.

"I'm doing a human interest story," said the reporter to the woman. "I wondered if I could ask you a few questions on the emotional impact of the flood on your family." The woman looked up from the burlap sack her husband was filling with sand. She had a few questions of her own. Most pressing was, why was this man not lending a hand? Given the circumstances, she had no use for a reporter, particularly an unbiased observer.

The time for unbiased observers is over. If we want to make a difference in the world, we need to live our lives with Heaven in view, for truly Jesus is coming soon!



# Small Group Leader's Guide



## Last Things: *Learning How God Speaks*

**Opening Question:** When you think of someone with a comforting voice, who do you think of?  
Why?

**Scripture Focus:** Hebrews 10:36–37

Tell the story of the Gettysburg cyclorama on page 10.

### **Group Discussion:**

- Why do you think God's Word is able to speak uniquely to so many different people at the same time? ⚙️
- How can we train ourselves to think more like God thinks?
- Why is it hard for us to see the big picture at times?
- How does God having the last word give you hope?
- How does God speak to you most of the time? ⚙️
- How do you know you are hearing God's voice?
- Why is it comforting to know God sees your entire existence—from beginning to end—all at once?
- Why is it humbling to know God knows everything about you and yet still loves and accepts you?
- Why do we as humans have such a strong need for hope? ⚙️
- Why do you think God offers hope alongside the prophetic warnings He gives?
- Are there some promises God has made to you that you are continuing to trust Him to bring to pass?
- Why is it important for us to continue to trust God even when things have not happened exactly like we thought they would? ⚙️
- Why do you still believe Jesus is coming soon?
- Why is it important for us to believe He is coming soon?
- How does the reality of His soon return affect the way you live from day to day? ⚙️

### **Prayer Focus**

Lord, thank You for the times You have spoken to me through others and through Your Word. It is comforting to know that You see my life from beginning to end, all at once. Though prophetic warnings are often given in Scripture, thank You for the hope You give alongside the warnings. I continue to trust You, knowing there are promises You have made that are yet to come to pass. I trust and believe You are coming soon!

To download a Small Group Leader's Guide and Participant's Guide, see the instructions on page 2.  
Questions marked with ⚙️ are included in the Small Group Participant's Guide.

# YOUTH

## Last Things

*A series by David Norris*



### **SERIES BIG IDEA**

Because God can see the end from the beginning, the Lord speaks prophetically to every generation, reminding His people to live with the end of His redemptive story in view.

*Lesson 1.1*

*Lesson 1.2*

*Lesson 1.3*

*Lesson 1.4*

*Learning How God Speaks*

*The Kingdom of God*

*Is Jesus Really Coming Soon?*

*The Hope of Heaven*

# Last Things

## Learning How God Speaks

### BLUEPRINT

#### SERIES BIG IDEA

Because God can see the end from the beginning, He speaks prophetically to every generation to remind His people of His plan for their redemption and eternity.

#### LESSON BIG IDEA

A single prophetic word speaks to the past, present, and future in significant and personal ways.

#### LEARNING TARGET

To realize that Jesus speaks to us specifically and individually about our life and calling.

#### KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Hebrews 10:36–37

#### SUPPLIES

blindfolds

# FOUNDATION

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, is known for the famous Civil War battle that took place there in July 1863. Tourists are introduced to the battlefield via a visitor's center that stands several stories high, a building specifically designed to house one of the largest and most unusual paintings in the world. This amazing painting literally surrounds visitors, measuring over forty-foot high and stretching in a circle around them on a "canvas" longer than a football field. This artistic rendering of the battle at Gettysburg is called a cyclorama. Its presentation is a 360-degree perspective of the battlefield, integrating props and sounds that immerse the visitor in history.

People have often wondered what it would mean to have a "God's-eye" view—not simply of one time or place, but of all of human history. I propose that God's perspective is like this cyclorama. Yet God's vision is not limited to a single point of time, for He can at once see the beginning and end of human history. This divine perspective is not one outside of history. God Himself has created a redemptive plan that courses through all of human history, a plan God has shared with us in the Bible.

Certainly we don't know all that God knows, but we know enough. Yet what we do know gives us confidence that when we read the biblical narrative from Creation to the onset of eternity, God's redemptive word is triumphant. It is in this way that we ought to understand "end times," not as some sort of obscure set of prophecies that we explore like a treasure map or navigate as someone would a Ouija board. Rather, future prophetic events are simply the resolution to the redemptive story that God has been telling all along. Because He can, God readily reveals events, big and small. It is no stretch for Him to do so, for He is invested in both individual struggles and those momentous happenings upon which history turns. He can at once take in the Battle of Armageddon while simultaneously being aware of the exact count of the number of hairs on our heads.

# LESSON BIG IDEA: Trusting God's Prophetic Word

## Opening Discussion


- How does this understanding of God impact your faith?
- Has God ever spoken to you prophetically, either personally or through someone else? What kinds of things were prophesied?

## Middle-School Exercise

1. Play a game of "telephone."
2. Start by whispering a phrase to one student, and have that student continue the chain by whispering it into the ear of the next person.
3. Most likely students have played this before, so be creative with the phrase, either by making it long or by using an especially tricky word play.
4. Compare this to God's directness and how He does not use many people to convey one message, as He is not a God of confusion.



## Senior-High Exercise:






1. Split the class into two teams and have each team get in a circle.
2. Blindfold one member from each team, and have the blindfolded students sit in the middle of their teams.
3. One by one have team members say a phrase to the blindfolded person in the middle, attempting to disguise their voices.
4. The blindfolded student must attempt to identify who is speaking.
5. The team with the most correct guesses wins!
6. It is important that we are familiar enough with God to recognize His voice!



 *Have a couple of students share experiences of their own when they were impacted by a prophetic word over their lives. If you have no students willing to share stories, share one of your own.*

# FRAME



## I. God's Prophetic Word

- A. God can offer a **single** prophetic word that speaks uniquely to **multiple** generations.  
  1. You may have had times when God spoke a prophetic word into your life through the gifts of the Spirit.
  2. We should expect that God not only could have, but probably did speak to someone else prophetically in the same moment He spoke to us. It is this same sort of thing that happens in the biblical text.
- B. The Bible was not merely a book for a single generation, but for hundreds of generations.
  1. Prophetic words were offered to Adam and Eve, to the patriarchs, to the children of Israel, and to the church.
  2. Because God is God and because He truly loves every person at every point of history, a single prophetic promise can speak at different times and in different ways to different generations, while at the same time pointing to God's redemptive plan.

- C. In Isaiah chapter 40, God prophesied to the Jewish captives in **Babylon** that He would miraculously deliver them.  
1. The prophecy was given as a “voice of one crying in the wilderness” to “prepare the way of the LORD” (Isaiah 40:3, NKJV). 
  2. God’s prophetic word proclaimed, “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low” (Isaiah 40:4, NKJV). 
  3. Historically, this prophecy came true in the time of Cyrus, as the people returned to rebuild the Temple and the Jewish state.
- D. We know this prophecy in another context, in a way that speaks to another fulfillment.
1. The New Testament proclaims these same prophetic words as being fulfilled in John the Baptist. He was “the voice . . . crying in the wilderness,” and when he was “preparing the way of the LORD,” he was preparing the way of the Messiah, Jesus.
  2. Crowds came from all over the countryside to hear this voice in the wilderness.
  3. He preached repentance and told those who followed him to look for the Messiah who was coming soon.
  4. The day came when Jesus was seen by John walking toward the water where John had been preaching. John humbly baptized Jesus but also declared to all who would hear him, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NKJV). 
  5. Neither fulfillment is less important than the other. God is simply able to speak in such ways because He at once sees His redemptive story from beginning to end.
- E. Almost every time Matthew used his familiar “that it might be fulfilled” to explain something prophetic about Jesus, the prophecies Matthew cited had been fulfilled at least once before.
1. Some call such speaking “telescoping.” Others describe such speaking as “**double fulfillment**” (even when a single prophecy is fulfilled more than twice), a term which we will utilize in this lesson.
  2. When Jesus offered His famous end-time prophecies in Matthew 24, three sets of fulfillments may be discerned.
  3. There are parts of that prophecy that had immediate fulfillment to His audience (the destruction of the Temple), other parts of the prophecy have to do with ultimate and cosmic judgment (the second coming of Christ), while other parts speak to both times (various signs offered).


-  *Why do you think God’s Word is able to speak uniquely to so many different people at the same time?*
-  *In what ways has God spoken to you during a church service?*


## II. What Is the Big Picture?

- A. In order to appreciate God’s prophetic pronouncements, we have to see the **big picture**.  
1. Amazingly, the theme of God’s prophetic word has two elements to it, related and yet opposite, like a coin with two sides.
  2. One side of the coin speaks of judgment, and the other side speaks of hope.
  3. Indeed, in telling His people of coming judgment, God helps sustain us in adversity. In speaking to His people of hope on the other side of judgment, such hope reminds us of God’s greater redemptive narrative—that in the end God wins.
  4. Even in the most severe of judgments, God has the last word.







## LESSON BIG IDEA: Trusting God's Prophetic Word

- B. The term "Day of the Lord"
1. God would pronounce judgment on the proximate enemies of His people, and hope on the other side.
  2. He was integrating the judgment that was near to them with His ultimate judgment, the hope that was at hand with the final hope that would ultimately be theirs.
  3. For example, when God pronounced judgment upon Babylon, He used the language of ultimate victory: "Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty" (Isaiah 13:6, NKJV). 
  4. Its ruin was sudden and complete, every bit as severe as what was divinely proclaimed.
- C. The judgment on ancient Babylon was only part of what He had in view.
1. This prophesied destruction foreshadows God's Day of Judgment on the entire world.
  2. It is important to note that such speaking is not unique.


 *What happens to your faith when you fail to see things from God's perspective?*

 *How can we train ourselves to think more like God thinks?*

- D. There is in every pronouncement of judgment a **hope**—both immediate and ultimate—that He has prepared something better.  
1. Like prophetic words of judgment, some of those promises have been fulfilled, but some still wait for a future realization.
  2. Again, every promise of judgment also carried with it a promise of hope, all of which was designed by God to show His people how special they are.
  3. Such promises were often fulfilled more than once, unique gifts to multiple generations.
- E. Of course, Israel was special to God, just as the church is today.
1. Over six hundred years before Christ, Habakkuk was discouraged and asked God for answers because the people of God had been devastated by the Assyrians.
  2. God told Habakkuk a number of things in His answer, and one thing He promised was, "For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it" (Habakkuk 2:3, NKJV). 
  3. Of course, God kept His word to Habakkuk. The enemies of God were ultimately defeated. Yet that same promise is also quoted in the Book of Hebrews.
  4. Now such study is not mere intellectual exercise. It is to remind us that God has been uniquely speaking to this generation in which we live.

 *How do we find out what God is saying to us today?*

 *How do we align our lives with God's redemptive eternal purpose?*

 *This would be an excellent time for a personal testimony. Alternatively, consider asking ahead of time for a volunteer in the class to share his or her story.*

# FINISH

The reporter went to the little South Dakota town located on the bank of the Red River. The river was well beyond flood stage, and twice before the town had been devastated by the river. In one instance, homes were actually carried away. The entire town was loading sandbags because there was a chance, just a chance, that the river would crest. But if they could add just a couple more feet to their man-made levee, their town could be saved.

The reporter approached a woman who held open a burlap sack while her husband frantically shoveled sand into it. Their son waited to carry it to the top of the levee. They were praying, hoping, and all the while working diligently to hold back the rampaging flood.

"I'm doing a human interest story," said the reporter to the woman. "I wondered if I could ask you a few questions on the emotional impact of the flood on your family." The woman looked up from the burlap sack her husband was filling with sand. She had a few questions of her own. Most pressing was, why was this man not lending a hand? Given the circumstances, she had no use for a reporter, particularly an unbiased observer.

The time for unbiased observers is over. If we want to make a difference in the world, we need to live our lives with Heaven in view, for truly Jesus is coming soon!

## Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever stood by and looked on as something that you could have helped to prevent impacted someone?
- What does it like to feel helpless?

## Middle-School Finish:

1. Discuss how negative situations or difficulty could be used by God to positively impact our lives.
2. Be creative in naming possible outcomes or blessings that could come from the following problems: getting sick, moving to a new town away from friends, dealing with the death of a loved one, being abandoned by a best friend, and having a parent lose a job.
3. Though these are not good situations in and of themselves, God is able to guide us through situations, no matter what, and we will always be in a better place than we started.

## Senior-High Finish:


1. How can God bring good out of a hard or even impossible situation?
2. Brainstorm how hard situations students face can be blessings in disguise.
3. How might God choose to lead us or someone else through these imagined scenarios?
4. Do you believe God is able to speak to us specifically and help us to navigate through difficulty that others may not be able to get out of without Him?

## The Big Picture

- God sees our every situation.
- He will either speak to you or send someone to help direct you through what you are experiencing.

## Final Reflections

- Why is it hard for us to see the big picture at times?
- How does God having the last word give you hope?
- Are there promises God has made to you that you are continuing to trust Him to bring to pass?
- Why is it important for us to believe that Jesus is coming back soon?

 Allow students time to share what they have written.

## LESSON BIG IDEA: Trusting God's Prophetic Word

# SELAH

Using the following points, take this time to guide your students in prayer.

- Jesus, continue to strengthen us as we learn to trust in You.
- We sometimes feel that You are silent. In those times, help us to choose to trust that You are working and in control.
- Lord, give us strength and courage when our faith is low.
- Thank You for using men and women of God to speak into our lives.
- Jesus, we praise You for the words and direction You have given us.

 *Allow students time to update their Personal Discipleship Guide.*

# CHILDREN

# Last Things



## SERIES BIG IDEA

Because God can see the end from the beginning, the Lord speaks prophetically to every generation, reminding His people to live with the end of His redemptive story in view.

- Lesson 1.1*
- Lesson 1.2*
- Lesson 1.3*
- Lesson 1.4*

- Learning How God Speaks*
- The Kingdom of God*
- Is Jesus Really Coming Soon?*
- The Hope of Heaven*





# Last Things:

## Learning How God Speaks

### BLUEPRINT

#### SERIES BIG IDEA

Because God can see the end from the beginning, the Lord speaks prophetically to every generation, reminding His people to live with the end of His redemptive story in view.

#### SERIES MEMORY PASSAGE

“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:7).

#### LESSON BIG IDEA

God’s Word tells the future, reveals truths about the past, and shines a light on the present.

**STUDENTS WILL** compare Isaiah’s prophecy of John the Baptist to the events in Matthew chapter 3.

### Early Elementary (Grades 1-3)

#### TOOL BOX

##### FOUNDATION

- PowerPoint 1.1
- Clear bowl with water
- Fun size candy bars: 3 Musketeers, Kit Kat, Milky Way, Snickers, Twix (1 of each)
- Envelopes, markers (1 per student)
- Magazine page
- Paper with a square cut out of center

##### FRAME

- Series 1 memory verse poster (TRP)
- Movement cards (TRP)
- *Series song*: “He’s Coming Soon”
- Construction paper (1 sheet per student), scissors, tape, glitter, glue, memory verse for crown (TRP) (1 copy per student), markers
- Mystery box with following items: toy locust (or other insect), honey, animal print cloth, leather belt, envelope, Isaiah 40:3 written on paper
- Biblical costume for John the Baptist volunteer
- *Visual*: John the Baptist (TRP)

##### FINISH

- Activity papers and crayons
- Opaque tablecloth

##### SELAH

- Series song and lyrics: “He’s Coming Soon”

### Late Elementary (Grades 4-6)

#### TOOL BOX

##### FOUNDATION

- PowerPoint 1.1
- Clear bowl with water
- Fun size candy bars: 3 Musketeers, Kit Kat, Milky Way, Snickers, Twix (1 of each)
- Envelopes, markers (1 per student)
- Puzzle pieces from different puzzles (1 piece per student)

##### FRAME

- Series 1 memory verse poster (TRP)
- Movement cards (TRP)
- 2 colors of sticky notes containing Bible passage (2–3 words per note) to create 2 complete sets
- Mystery box with following items: toy locust (or other insect), honey, animal print cloth, leather belt, envelope, Isaiah 40:3 written on paper
- Biblical costume for John the Baptist
- *Visual*: John the Baptist (TRP)

##### FINISH

- Activity papers and pencils
- *Visuals and game cards*: “Whose Voice Is It?” (TRP)
- Poem: “The Good Shepherd” by Laura Smith
- Cardstock (1 per student), markers

##### SELAH

- Series song and lyrics: “He’s Coming Soon”



# Foundation

## Early Elementary (1-3)

### Will Candy Bars Sink or Float?

Set out a clear bowl filled with water. Show the fun size candy bars: 3 Musketeers, Kit Kat, Milky Way, Snickers, and Twix (one of each).

Distribute envelopes and markers to students. Have them write "sink" on one side and "float" on the other. Students will wear this envelope like a glove and use it to share their predictions. Ask students to predict whether each candy bar will sink or float when dropped into the bowl of water, by holding up the appropriate word. Test each candy bar, one at a time.

## Late Elementary (4-6)

### Reflection

- **Were your predictions correct?**
- **Why was it difficult to make an accurate prediction?**

In this activity, we could only predict what we thought might happen. We didn't know for sure which candy would sink or float, because we can't see the future. In the Bible, we read about people who prophesied, or made accurate predictions, about future events. God uses people who tell of future events as a way of speaking to us. God's prophecies are true, because He doesn't have to guess the future. He already knows it!

### Guess the Picture

Prior to class, tear a page from a magazine. Choose a white piece of paper the same size as the magazine page. Cut a small square out of the center of the white paper and place it on top of the magazine page.

Ask students to guess the picture on the magazine page based on what is revealed in the center. After several guesses, remove the paper and show the whole picture.

### Reflection

- **Why was it difficult to guess the picture?**
- **How do you know God sees the whole picture of your life?**
- **How does God speak to us about the future?**

### The World's Largest Puzzle

Prior to class, search the Internet for a photo of the "World's Largest Puzzle."

Show pictures of the world's largest puzzle to students. Then discuss the time, effort, and details of the puzzle.

### Seeing the Whole Puzzle

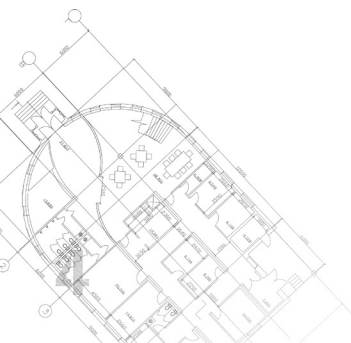
Distribute a single puzzle piece (from various puzzles) to each student. Have them predict what the completed puzzle will be.

- **Why is it difficult to make an accurate prediction?**

It is hard for us to make accurate predictions when we don't know the finished product.

God can see the end from the beginning; He knows how the pieces of our lives fit together. His Word can be trusted to predict future events.

Today we are going to examine His Word by looking at two men who prophesied about, or predicted, future events. God used these men to be His messengers.



# Frame

## Early Elementary (1-3)


## Late Elementary (4-6)


### Series Memory Passage

"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:7).


### Musical Memory Movement


Prior to class, glue movement cards (TRP) to construction paper (one card per paper, enough for one per student).

Display the memory verse (TRP) , reading it several times as a class.

Place the movement cards on the floor. Play the series song, "He's Coming Soon" , as students move around the room. Stop the music and have all students find a card. Have them demonstrate the movement on the card while saying the verse. Play several times.

### Memory Crowns

Display the memory verse (TRP) . Students read it together.

Give each student a piece of construction paper and scissors. Students fold the paper lengthwise and cut on the fold. Have them tape the papers together lengthwise to form a paper crown. Have students use markers to decorate their crowns and glue the memory verse (TRP)  to the front of the crown.

*"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:7).*


#### Reflection

- **What do you know about God's kingdom?**
- **Why does God's kingdom last forever?**

This verse tells us God has established, or created, a kingdom where He is the supreme ruler. His kingdom will never end. Through every generation, God chooses to speak to those who will be part of His kingdom. We are called to be a part of God's kingdom.

### Memory Movement Draw


Prior to class, glue movement cards (TRP) to construction paper (one card per paper, enough for one per student).

Display the memory verse (TRP) , reading it several times as a class.

Students take turns drawing a movement card. The students will demonstrate the movement on the card while reading the verse again. Continue this process of having a student draw a new movement card each time the verse is recited.

### Sticky-Note Memory Race

Prior to class, write the memory verse (two or three words per note) on sticky notes. The notes should be two different colors to create two complete sets.

Display the memory verse (TRP) . Students read it together.

Divide the class into two teams and assign each team a color. Scramble the order and color of the sticky notes, and place them on a wall. Students compete to find their colored notes and place the verse in the correct order.

#### Reflection

- **What can you conclude about the kingdom of God from reading this passage?**
- **What do you think it means for God to establish His kingdom?**

This verse tells us God has established, or created, a kingdom where He is the supreme ruler. Unlike earthly kingdoms, His will never end. Through every generation, God chooses to speak to and use men and women who will be part of His kingdom. Our ultimate goal is to be members of His kingdom.

## Early Elementary (1-3)


**Bible Lesson:** *Learning How God Speaks (Isaiah 40:1-5; Matthew 3)*

- **Do you like mystery stories? Why or why not?**
- **If so, what's your favorite mystery?** 

Before class, prepare a mystery box. Place the following items inside:

- toy locust (or another toy bug)
- honey
- animal print cloth
- leather belt
- envelope containing Isaiah 40:3

*Invite an older person to dramatize the lesson as John the Baptist in costume as you narrate.*

*(Show the mystery box.)*  This is a special mystery box with a message from the prophet Isaiah. We are going to examine the clues found in the Bible to determine to whom the mystery items belong.

*Let students discuss each item. If possible, have them taste the honey. (Be aware of food allergies.) Read the mystery note containing Isaiah 40:3.*


We are going to investigate the mystery of this prophecy by observing an account as given in Matthew, chapter 3. Listen for clues and try to solve the mystery of Isaiah's prophecy.

*Invite John the Baptist into the room.* This mysterious prophet, foretold by Isaiah, no doubt wiped honey from his beard and picked a locust wing out of his front teeth. He was a rugged outdoorsman, accustomed to the scorching, sandy wilderness around him.

## Late Elementary (4-6)

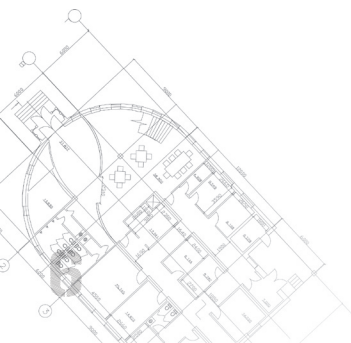
As he strode toward Jerusalem, a passion burned in his heart to speak the word of the Lord. Noisy, curious crowds ran to meet him as he stood outside the city. As he preached, his voice resonated with authority. He told the multitudes to repent and prepare the way of the Lord. He preached true repentance, insisting it required a change of actions, not just words. He told them he baptized with water, but one was coming who would baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire!

Multitudes followed him to the Jordan River. He waded into the cool, murky water and baptized them one by one. Who was this bold man? Why did Isaiah prophesy about him? *(Pause for answers.)*

*Show the John the Baptist visual (TRP)* . This mysterious prophet was John the Baptist. He was the voice crying in the wilderness. Many repented and followed Jesus because of him. Isaiah's prophecy, five hundred years earlier, had come to pass. God's voice was heard and His promise fulfilled.

*Discussion Questions:*

- **Was Isaiah's prophecy true? How do you know?**
- **Did John's prophecy about the coming of Jesus prove true? Justify your answer.**
- **How does Matthew 3 reveal a truth from the past?**
- ☆ **What can we learn about the way God spoke through each of these men in our lesson?**
- ☆ **How does God speak to us today?**



# Finish

## Early Elementary (1-3)

## Late Elementary (4-6)

### Family Connection

Review the instructions on the back of the activity paper. Give students a chance to discuss how they will carry out this assignment. If your class has consistent attendance, consider offering a reward for those who return the Family Connection, and provide time in the class to discuss the activity.

### Activity Paper: *God Speaks*

Ask students to color the picture as they think about how God spoke in the past and how He speaks to us today.

### Guess Who?

Choose two of the tallest students in class to hold up an opaque tablecloth. Choose five students to stand behind the tablecloth. The students should disguise their voices and take turns saying "Guess Who" when prompted.

The class should guess whose voice they heard. If a student guesses correctly, that student takes the place of the student whose voice was guessed. Play several times.

Discuss how Isaiah and John the Baptist heard God's voice. Explain the importance of hearing God's voice. Discuss the dangers of listening to the voice of the devil or friends who don't follow God.

### Activity Paper: *Whose Voice Is It?*

As students read each scenario, they should determine who the voice belongs to, writing the answer next to the dialogue.

### Whose Voice Is It?

Prior to class, cut apart the game cards (TRP). Post a visual (TRP) in each corner of the room:

- |           |                       |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| (1) God   | (3) Spiritual Leaders |
| (2) Devil | (4) Me                |

When God speaks, it is important that we recognize His voice. Just like He spoke through prophets of old, He speaks to us through spiritual leaders in our lives. We have other voices in our lives too. The devil tries to get us to sin with his deceptive voice. We also listen to our own voices, which can be selfish. We need to make sure we recognize God's voice and obey Him. God's Word is truth.

We are going to play a game to practice identifying whose voice is speaking.

Let a student draw a game card and read it aloud. Ask students to identify the voice speaking in the situation by standing in the corner representing that voice.

# Selah

## Early Elementary (1-3)

## Late Elementary (4-6)


### Prayer

*Jesus, we love You and we thank You for who You are. We praise You because You are all knowing and have all power. Thank You for desiring to speak to us and use us in Your kingdom. Help us to always listen for Your voice and to trust Your Word. Your Word is truth. Help us to listen to the voices of the spiritual leaders in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### Reflection

- **How does God speak to us today?**
- **How can we recognize when God is speaking to us?**

### Praying over the Word

Read John 10:27  to your students: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

Encourage students to find a prayer partner. Students should pray that their partners will hear God's voice.

### Reflection

After several minutes of prayer, have students share what they heard God speaking to them.

### The Good Shepherd

Prior to class, locate the poem, "The Good Shepherd," by Laura Smith. Suggested link:

[www.my-pastor.com/pastor-appreciation-poems.html](http://www.my-pastor.com/pastor-appreciation-poems.html)

Read the poem aloud.

One way God speaks to us now is through our pastor. We need to listen to the advice and the teachings from our pastor because he is God's messenger to us.

### Reflection

Ask students to think of ways they appreciate their pastor. Give each student a sheet of cardstock and markers. Instruct students to make cards for their pastor, showing their appreciation.

