



END OF THE WORLD - (WEEK 1)

- A Promising End (The Singularity of God's Plan)

Introduction

In our study of the end times we're going to find there are some things that simply won't take place, such as a zombie apocalypse. But some of you are going to be disappointed because you're going to discover there are some things you thought were going to take place that the Bible doesn't teach at all.

We're studying the end times because in a Christian worldview, history leads

somewhere. It is purposeful and linear. It follows a trajectory. There is a beginning and there will be an end to the world as we know it. All of history is the working out of God's eternal purpose.

"All of history is moving toward a goal: the total redemption of the universe. Though we are not always able to discern the meaning of each historical event, we know what the ultimate outcome of history will be. We eagerly look forward to the new earth as part of a renewed universe in which God's good creation will realize finally and totally the purpose for which he called it into existence: the glorification of his name." (Anthony Hoekema)

The culmination of end times history is the new earth. This is where everything leads – to a new heaven and a new earth. Heaven and earth will no longer be separated but will have merged. In the final state, believers will be both in heaven and on the new earth, since the two shall then be one.

All this to say that the Christian view of the end times is ultimately optimistic. As we study the end times, we will see that Christ rules and reigns now even as we recognize the presence of sin and evil in the world. We do not expect to see the perfect society realized during this present age.

Yet, since we know that the victory of Christ over evil was decisive and that Christ is now on the throne, the dominant mood is Christian optimism. This means that, no matter the circumstances, we live in hope with the confident assurance that Christ rules right now.

We understand all this because God has always told His people about the future. And God not only told His people about the future, but He fulfilled that future.

JOHN 13:19

19 I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

So, prophecy plays a great part in the Christian faith, and also because it is something completely unique to the Christian faith. This brings us to the question, "Why is it important to study it prophecy?"

1. Why Study Prophecy?

To answer that, let's begin with:

2 PETER 1:16

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

The Apostle Peter here is writing about the First Advent (or first coming) of the Lord Jesus Christ.

17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

He says that he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of all this. Then he says, "But don't take our word alone. Look at what has been predicted and then fulfilled in the Holy Scriptures."

That is what a prophetic word is – the prediction that such and such will happen and then the fulfillment of that prediction.

Again, prophecy is unique to Christianity. I would argue that it is unique to Christianity because the only way to accurately predict what will happen in the future and then make it come to pass (and to do this on an ongoing basis so that it can be examined afterward) is only possible if God is involved.

20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2. What Makes Future Prophecy Credible?

This is also something that started with the Judeo-Christian faith – inspired text, meaning a people claiming to have a written text that was ultimately inspired by the God of the

universe, a text that expresses His thoughts and desires.

Today, we fail to realize that this was not commonplace in the ancient world. Sacred texts have become commonly associated with all religions now, but this is because of the Judeo-Christian influence in Roman society.

Christians and Jews have long been called "people of the book."

Christianity's "emphasis on texts caused the West to assume that religions need texts. Early Christians expended time, money, and effort creating, copying, and circulating texts. Writing and publishing had been a hobby of the elites in the Roman Empire, but Christians of relatively limited means and education embraced the process."

"This focus on sacred texts was one difference that set Christianity apart from paganism. The Jews had their Scriptures, but for other religions of the ancient world

sacred texts were of relatively little importance. In the Roman Empire, ritual—not a body of knowledge—defined religion."

- Paganism rituals - you chant this and it will bring positive vibrations. Wearing certain crystals and stones will change your energy, etc.

"Today every religion must have some sacred text in order to be taken seriously. In this, Christianity has become the model for world religions." (Collin Garbarino [book review](#))

One of the greatest evidences of the Christian Scriptures being inspired by God is prophecy that has been predicted (which we can tell from the date of the writings) and fulfilled (which can be confirmed by the historical events). These fulfilled prophecies are the only thing that make end times prophecies credible. If we didn't have a body of fulfilled prophecies, why give the time of day to future prophecies? But here's where we get into trouble when we think about the end times.

3. What is the Most Common Error Regarding Future Prophecy?

When it comes to the end times, I think one of the most common errors that we find today is thinking of the end times in completely futuristic terms, meaning everything foretold about the end times is either going to happen tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. If you became a Christian in the last 40-years, this is probably the type of teaching you were most likely to encounter.

This series is designed to give you a groundwork for understanding the end times. It is my hope, with this biblical basis for understanding the end times, that you will begin to detect when a view of the end times becomes problematic.

I'm going to use the Bible to make its own case for what it teaches about the end times with as little conjecture as possible. So, this 9-week series will give us a groundwork to go deeper. (The Seven Angles of Revelation)

So, I have landed somewhere theologically and you are free to disagree with me, but I'm going to present to you what I think is the most biblical case for understanding the end times.

4. What Binds the Old Testament and the New Testament Together?

We begin our study with an overview of the Bible's story itself, because what I want to emphasize today is that God has one plan of salvation for Jews and Gentiles and everyone in between. God's program in history is mainly through related covenants.

There is no question that the Bible teaches that God made covenants with His people, thus we have the old covenant (the Old Testament) and the new covenant (the New Testament).

A covenant has simply been defined as "a relationship under sanctions." In the case of a covenant of grace, God himself meets all the sanctions or requirements (conditions). This is

why a covenant of grace is much different than a covenant of works.

Both of these covenants have to do with God's single plan of redemption for humanity in the Person of His one and only Son. In order to understand the Bible's teachings on the end times, it is imperative that we first understand what the Bible teaches about the covenants and how they relate to one another in God's plan of redemption, because we will find that these covenants are completely centered in everything that God promised to do (past) and has done (present) and will do (future) in Jesus Himself.

That is why I use the phrase "God's single plan of redemption" intentionally. There is no plan B, because Jesus has been the plan before the foundation of the world. There is no pause for the church age. There is one single plan.

What binds the Old and New Testaments together is the unity of the covenant of

grace. I don't believe that history is divided into a series of separate dispensations but there is a single covenant of grace running through all of biblical history.

5. What is the Earliest Prophecy?

The promise of the Person who would one day come and fix this mess we humans created for ourselves begins all the way back in Genesis chapter 3. It's known as the Protoevangelium or "the first gospel." Some have called it "the mother promise," because it gives birth to more promises of the One who would become our Rescuer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the Lord speaking to the serpent, otherwise known as Satan, after he deceived the man and woman who willingly believed his lie and acted upon it, thus inviting sin into the world:

GENESIS 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

The Apostle Paul alludes to this bruising of the serpent's head in Genesis 3 in his letter to the church in Rome.

ROMANS 16:20

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Scripture itself tells us that the seed of the woman is Christ who by His suffering, death and resurrection bruised the serpent's head, the serpent being Satan.

REVELATION 20:2

2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,

The Basic Storyline

This promise in Genesis 3 begins the storyline of the Bible and all the covenants that follow.

Now, if someone asked you to describe the storyline of the Bible, could you do it in 10 or 12 bullet points?

- **God creates man and woman to image (reflect) Him.**
- **Man and woman rebel (the Fall) and God's image is marred in humanity.**
- **God promises that One will come to restore His image in humanity and save them from the penalty of their rebellion.**
- **God calls a people to Himself (Israel) who will reflect Him to the world around them.**
- **God promises to bring the Redeemer through this people to bless the world and restore His image.**
- **The Redeemer comes in the form of a baby and images God perfectly during his life.**
- **He lives, dies for the penalty of our rebellion and rises from the dead.**
- **This gospel hope in Him creates the church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles who believe.**
- **The Church now reflects God to the world around them as Christ restores God's image in humanity through the new birth.**

6. Why are the Covenants Important to Understand Prophecy?

This first promise of the one to come (the Messiah) is a covenant of promise (or grace). Again, a covenant is simply “a relationship with conditions.” In the case of a covenant of grace, God himself meets all the conditions or requirements. This is why it’s much different than a covenant of works where humanity’s obedience is required for their fulfillment.

We can trace the various covenants in the Bible as displayed in the Redemptive History chart. (You can’t do a series on the end times without tables and charts.)

Because all of these promises have to do with one plan for how God would save humanity through the work of His Son, many have concluded that there is really only one covenant of grace and that all the other covenants fall under this covenant of grace. In other words, they further serve this primary covenant of God’s plan for salvation.

The point again is that God has one plan of salvation for humanity. I will stress that any view of the end times that diminishes the work of Christ as a “once and for all” work as the Bible portrays it, must simply be faulty. The cross of Christ is not just central in the history of the world, it is central in the history of the universe. There is no separate plan of salvation apart from Christ and there never will be.

Covenant with Adam

GENESIS 2:16-17

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Covenant with Abraham

GENESIS 12:1-3

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Jesus and all other New Testament writers interpret the promises of “a great nation” as the universal kingdom of Christ (1 Pet 2:9), and “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” as the salvation of a multitude from all nations through his seed, Jesus Christ. The main heir to Abraham’s covenant was Christ and spiritual Israel. Not physical land, but a spiritual kingdom.

I PETER 2:9-10

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

It is because Jesus fulfilled this promise of Abraham that Peter urges his fellow Jews in the temple that first Pentecost Sunday to “repent and be baptized.”

This promise of a land was fulfilled when Joshua led the people of Israel back into Canaan.

JOSHUA 1:2-3

2 “Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. **3** Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.

As Joshua himself later put it,

JOSHUA 21:43

43 Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there.

(cf. also 1 Kings 4: 20- 21).

Covenant with Noah

GENESIS 8:21

21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.

Covenant with Moses

DEUTERONOMY 28:1

28 “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you

today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

The Apostle Paul tells us that this covenant of works (the law) serves the covenant of grace, because it makes us aware of our sin (because we find out we can't keep the law), therefore it shows us our need for a covenant of grace, for a Savior.

Covenant with David

2 SAMUEL 7:12-13

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Now, what kind of house did Jesus build for the Father? Was it a physical house? No. It was a spiritual house.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:9

9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

The Church is the culmination of God's saving purpose for the ages.

The New Covenant

JEREMIAH 31:31-33

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

How do we get new hearts? How do we get the Spirit within us? How do we experience the new birth? By believing in what Jesus has done on the cross.

LUKE 22:20

20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

God opens the way for us to have new hearts through the cross of Jesus Christ.

7. Why Does this Mean for Us?

The point of all this is that what was promised in the Old Testament has been fulfilled in

Jesus Christ. The clear pattern of biblical history moves from type and shadow in the Old Testament to fulfillment and reality in the New Testament. Because of this, the New Testament looks forward to the completion of everything that has begun at our Lord's return. I don't think they're looking forward to a return to an earthly rule of Jesus Christ understood in terms of Old Testament types and shadows because these were destined to pass away. Christ's sacrifice was once for all.

There is one plan of salvation for all God's people, Jews and Gentiles.

What did the Apostle Paul say?

GALATIANS 3:7-10

7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. **8** Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." **9** So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

10 For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse,

No one has ever been saved by works, but only by grace. Anyone who has ever been saved has been saved by faith in Christ and Christ alone, regardless of the age they lived in.

"Thus, there are not two programs. Jews and Gentiles alike are "under a curse" and can only approach God and receive His promises by faith in Jesus Christ. To suggest God has an alternative plan is highly problematic.

"To suggest that God is fulfilling promises to national Israel apart from Christ surely borders on heresy." (Michael Horton)

ROMANS 11:1

11 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

ROMANS 11:5

5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

In this present age, God has joined Jews and Gentiles together in Christ forming one single family in which...

GALATIANS 3:28

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

JOHN 10:16

16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

There is one plan that creates one people called the Church, including both believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

Here's why this is important to our study of the end times. Once we understand that God has one singular plan from the beginning to the end, this should build our faith that God has revealed Himself to humanity, to you in particular. Look at how detailed this plan becomes over a 1,500 year period in which the Bible was written. You think you're hearing this by accident today?

JOHN 13:19

19 I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

Gospel Challenge:

The fact that God demands perfect obedience from his creatures made it necessary for the coming of a second Adam who became obedient unto death (Phil. 2: 8) and who became "sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5: 21).

The fall made it necessary for the coming of a Redeemer who fulfilled the terms of the original covenant of works, which Adam had failed to keep. In addition, the Redeemer himself would have to establish a covenant of grace whereby God would deliver Adam's fallen children. Yet he had to do so without sacrificing his justice. This is why the Redeemer had to die on a cross, something beyond the realm of imagination for Old Testament believers looking for a coming deliverer. (Kim Riddlebarger)

This is fulfilled prophecy that should instill in you faith that God wanted your salvation then and God wants your salvation now. God has demonstrated His love for you in this history that pointed to what He would finally do for you in Christ.