

Series: **The End of Time**
Today's Title: **"God's Plan All Along"**
September 10, 2023 – *Selected Passages*

Objective: To help people understand that God's plan for the end of time was in place at the beginning of time.

It's good to be back.

We spent last weekend in Flagstaff – cooling off – spending time with family.

Thanks to Pastor Scott for preaching last week.

Next week is 'Back to Church Sunday' – an opportunity for us together – inviting people to join us next Sunday.

Granddaughter – Capri – moment.

Opening prayer

Today, we're beginning a new series: **"The End of Time"** – a study of the book of Revelation.

I believe it's important for us to know that God's plan for **"The End of Time"** is not something He devised in a panic. It's not some sort of problem-solving effort God came up with when sin entered the world.

God's plan for **"The End of Time"** existed before the foundations of the world (Eph. 1). His plan has always been to redeem humanity to Himself – but also to redeem all of creation.

In Genesis we read of the original garden of Eden - Eden 1.0.

In Revelation, we read of the justice of God – His judgment on sin – His redemption of the saved – and of His creation. We read of the New Heavens and the New Earth – the new Eden - Eden 2.0.

As difficult as it is to understand... At the creation of the world, God had already decreed the end of the world.

He knew and saw the entire 'picture' before the picture came into being.

What does our culture think about Biblical prophecy and the Biblical teaching of the return of Christ?

From an article published in December 2022 –

“A fascinating new study released by Pew Research this month reveals that nearly 4-in-10 Americans believe “*we are living in the End Times.*”

And more than half of all Americans – 55%, in fact – believe that Jesus Christ is going to return to earth one day.

It should just be noted up front that this wasn't a survey solely of Evangelical Christians.

It was a study looking at the beliefs of Americans of all races, religions, and political views.”

(<https://allisrael.com/end-of-days-55-of-americans-believe-jesus-will-return-to-earth-one-day-40-believe-we-are-living-in-the-end-times-finds-new-pew-study>)

Prophecy – especially the book of Revelation – is important for us to read and study – and one of the reasons is because

“The End of Time” is a topic many people are interested in and curious about – some are frightened and anxious about. The more we, as followers of Christ, can understand what God has planned – the more we can know how to explain what will occur and why it will occur – the better we’ll be able to talk with non-believers and help them realize how important their relationship to Christ is!

They will have a better understanding of the urgency of their spiritual life – their spiritual decisions – and that the time is **NOW** for them to put their faith in Jesus as their Savior.

Today’s message is an introduction to the series.

We will begin next week by looking at chapter 1 of Revelation.

Today, I want to cover some important topics when it comes to Biblical prophecy – some ground rules you might say.

- I want to talk about our thoughts and attitudes as we study Revelation.
- I want to discuss some of the challenges to reading and understanding Biblical prophecy.
- I want to cover why studying Biblical prophecy is important.
- I want to share with you the perspective I will be teaching from as we walk through Revelation.
- I want to share the warnings Jesus gave us about His return.

Prepare your heart for our study of Revelation.

Although Jesus was rejected as the King of Israel in His first advent (John 19:14-15), He will return again as the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) and the “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 19:16). He is going to take back this world from Satan, who has had it for a long time (John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:9).

His plan of salvation is not just for us – not just for those who put their faith in Christ.

His plan has been for the elect – **and** for all of creation.

God’s plan all along has been to redeem His creation.

Romans 8:22-23

“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

When Jesus returns – the purpose of His return will be 3-fold.

1. The salvation of those who believe.
2. The judgment of those who don’t believe.
3. The redemption of the whole creation.

Revelation 10:9-10 – *the Apostle John speaking...*

So, I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, “Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”

And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.”

This passage is part of the vision the Apostle John had which the book of Revelation is based upon.

The “little scroll” represents the title deed to Earth.

The scroll is “sweet as honey” because of the salvation and justice Jesus brings at His return.

It is “bitter” due to His judgment of sin and evil upon His return.

It’s bitter because God’s judgment is difficult to witness.

When people are eternally damned, and nations are destroyed because of their rejection of Christ, when billions of people die due to their unbelief and rebellion against God, we may have a mixed reaction – sweetness and bitterness at the same time.

The O.T. prophet, Joel, spoke of this sweetness and bitterness.

Joel 3:12-16

“Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.

Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

The LORD roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to His people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.”

A mixture of judgment – and in the last verse – salvation to His people.

As we walk through the book of Revelation, don't miss the reality that is being described.

Don't miss the human lives that will be lost – and damned – because of their unbelief.

Christian... don't have a hardened heart that doesn't care about those who perish – a heart that is glad in their demise.

Pray that as we walk through this glorious, and horrific book, that our hearts will be softened for the lost and we will have a passion like never before to live out our faith and to share the gospel with those God has placed in our life – in our circle of influence.

Prophecy can be challenging, but it's crucial for us to understand.

Studying the end times as recorded in the Bible can often do a few things.

First, it can confuse people.

The prophetic and figurative language is not always easy to understand exactly what is being said. This leads to many different understandings / interpretations of the text.

3 methods of interpreting Revelation

1. Allegorical – *views the text as having a hidden moral or political meaning.*
2. Historical – *interprets the text as referring to the events of John's time – the late 1st century.*
3. Literal (Futuristic) – this is what we believe here at CDOBC and what I will teach. Literal interpretation takes into account the figurative language throughout the book, but it understands the figurative language is speaking of a literal person, place, or events.

See Revelation 1:19 – *Jesus tells John...*

“Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.”

1. “have seen” – **chapter 1** – the 1st advent of Jesus
2. “those that are” – **chapters 2-3** – the church Age
3. “and those that are to take place after this” – **chapters 4-22**

Second, talking about prophecy can be super-weird to the unbeliever / spiritual seeker – and even to new Christians.

How do you interpret these passages that speak of a:
“...eyes...like a flame of fire” (1:14)

“...feet...like burnished bronze” (1:15)

“...from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword” (1:16)

“...four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind” (4:6)

“...a sea of glass” (4:7)

“...the four living creatures, each of them with six wings are full of eyes” (4:8)

“...locusts...with the power of a scorpion sting...in appearance...like horses prepared for battle; on their heads where what looked like crowns of gold; their faces like human faces, their hair like women’s hair, and their teeth like lions’ teeth; they had breastplates of iron” (9:3-8)

“...the heads of horses were like lions’ heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths” (9:17)

“...a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” (12:1)

“a red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems” (12:3)

“...a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads”
(13:1)

You get the idea...

You have to remember this is a guy – living in the 1st century – given a vision of things centuries into the future.

How is he going to describe things like an airplane, or a bomb, or a helicopter, a missile, or a car, a flat screen TV, or a cell phone.

In the book of Revelation, John will use limited language to describe distant events.

(Sermon, Cornerstone Chapel, Pastor Gary Hamrick, "Revelation Introduction", February 19, 2020)

"It looked like...sounded like..."

"I heard" - 27x.

"I saw" - 36x.

"I looked" - 12x.

But the reality is, "All scripture is...profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..." (2 Timothy 3:16) — and prophetic books in the Bible are no exception.

So, God has included this in His Word, so it's to our benefit to know it and understand it.

9 reasons why Biblical prophecy is important to study.

Here are 9 reasons why we should study the end times — study Biblical prophecy.

1. Proves the Bible is true. — fulfilled prophecy in the past proves the Bible is true.

2. Reveals God's sovereignty — No accidents — God has decreed all things in life. Fulfilled prophecy reveals God's sovereignty over kings, nations, all things.

3. **Honors Jesus** – He is the central figure of most prophecy – especially of end times prophecy.

4. **Prophecy evangelizes the lost.**

It highlights the urgency of placing your faith in Christ.

My wife, Kim, came to faith in Christ – when she was invited by a friend to an all-night youth event at her friend’s church.

At the event, they showed 1973 “*Evangelical Christian Horror film*”: Thief in the Night.

(<https://duckduckgo.com/?q=Thief+in+the+Night+movie&t=newext&atb=v308-1&ia=web>)

This is a movie about the rapture – and the frightening events for those left on the earth.

Watching that movie at the all-night youth event – and then returned home at 7:00 or 8:00 a.m. on Saturday morning – Kim went to bed and slept for 3-4 hours.

When she woke up – her mom and dad were gone – nowhere to be found (no cell phones!).

The movie about the rapture was fresh in her mind!

She called her grandmother – knowing her grandma was a strong believer – if grandma was home, everything was OK.

But if grandma was gone...

Grandma answered the phone – and after asking Kim what was wrong – she walked Kim through the gospel and Kim put her faith in Christ at that moment.

5. Because 27% of the Bible is prophecy. For every 1 verse about Jesus’ first coming, there are 8 verses about His 2nd coming.

6. Because it protects us from heresy. Many cults and false religions use prophecy / end times to entice people to follow their teaching. *Knowing what the Bible says about the end times will protect us from believing false teachings.*

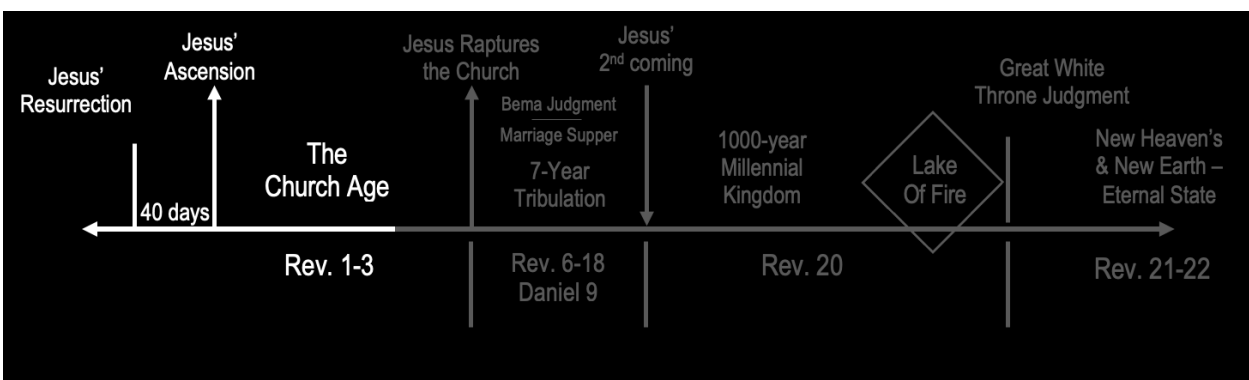
7. Brings clarity and focus to our life. Knowing “**The End of Time**” gives us a greater / bigger purpose and focus to life – a bigger direction and meaning to life.

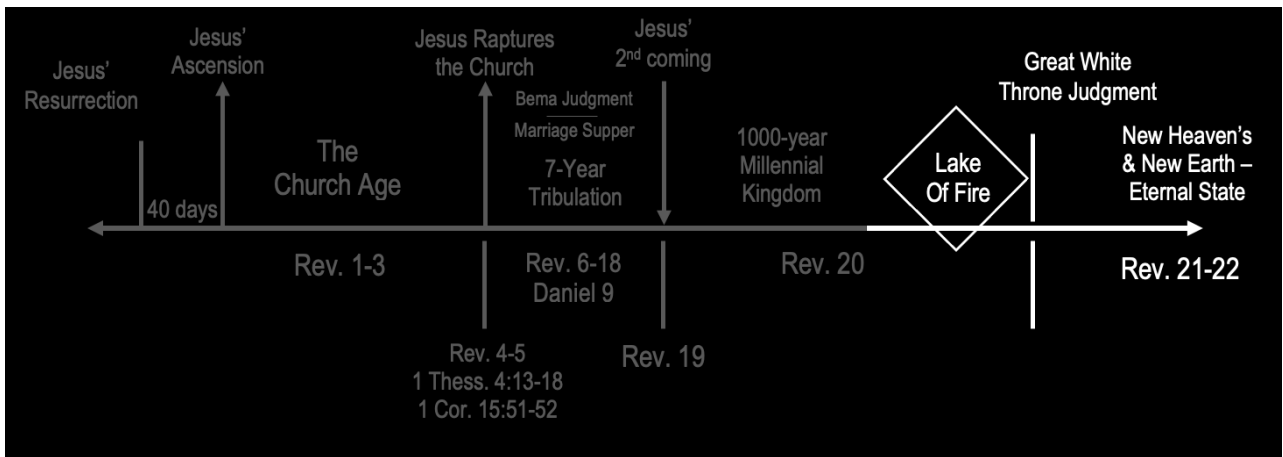
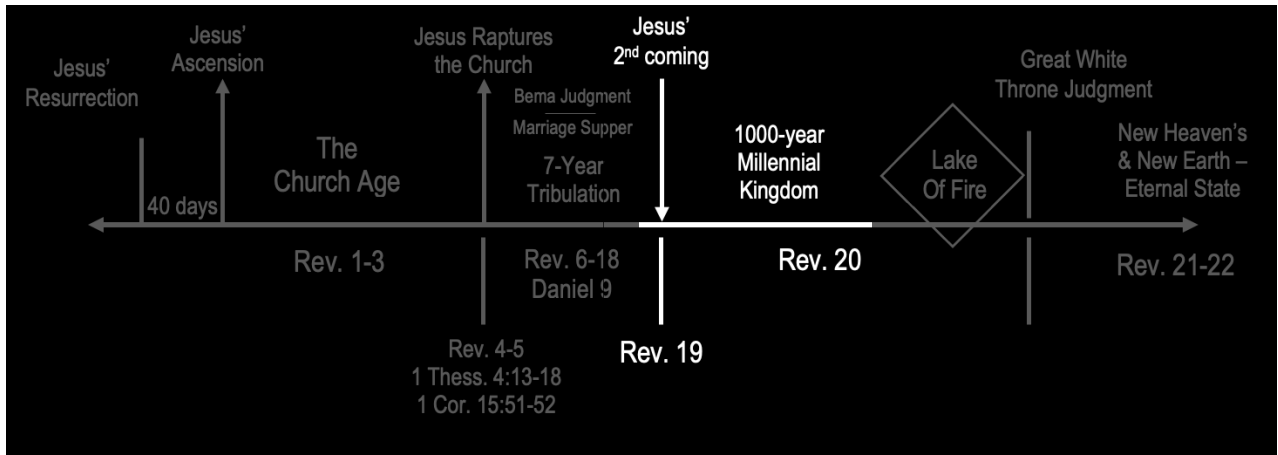
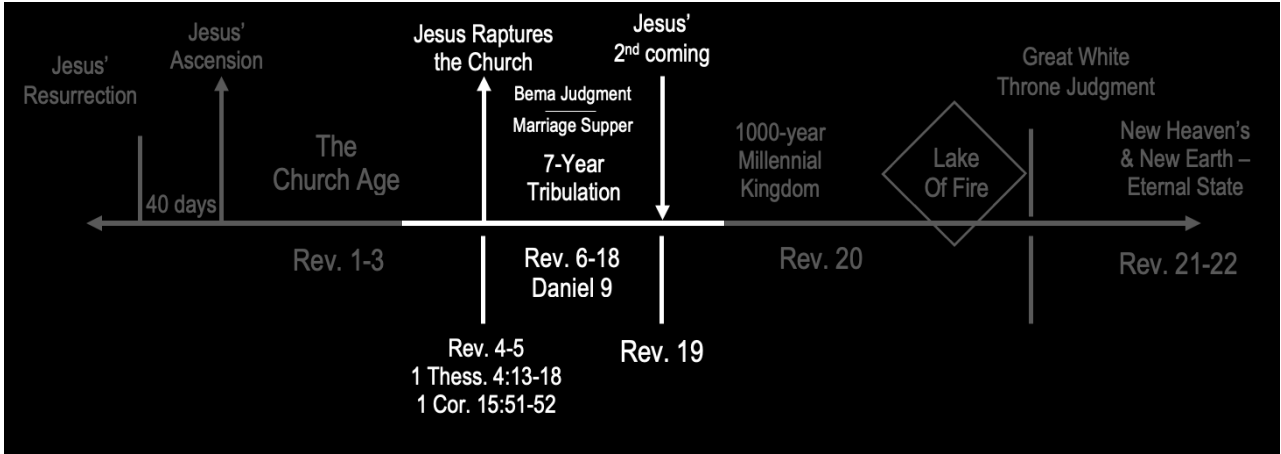
8. Motivates us to live Godly lives. (More on this in our last point.)

9. It gives us hope. Knowing the future – God wins – gives us hope today!

(Redeemer Bible Church, Gilbert, AZ – sermon: “Anticipating the Rapture”, by Jon Benzinger, June 5, 2023)

Timeline of future, end time events.





Jesus warned us to be alert for His return.

The immanence of His return shouldn't cause us to stop caring about our life here on earth and simply gaze up at the sky, waiting.

His warnings are a call for us to be faithful in this life – always – so that when He returns, He will find us faithful.

The rapture and His return should motivate us to obedient living.

His warnings are primarily for those who are enticed by the world and embrace the sinful practices of the world – thinking they can always get things 'in order' before the return of Christ.

But Jesus says He will return when they don't expect it.

Matthew 25:1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’
And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’

But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’
Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.’”

Luke 21:34-35

“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.”

1 Thessalonians 5:2-6

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

3 While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

We must be ready – and be faithful – until He returns.

Apply it...

Not everything necessarily means something.

When you read something in Revelation, it doesn't always point to something in our world today.

Don't try to connect everything you read in Revelation to some current event, nation, or leader.

Back in the 1980's – when Ronald Wilson Reagan became President, some Christians thought he was the anti-Christ – because his full name had 6 letters in each name – 666.

Barcodes...

Cell phone GPS...

I've made this mistake over the years – thinking something current event is definitely something tied to Revelation.

We must be wise – discern the times – but don't be foolish in our interpretation of the text – or of the culture.

Be ready for His return.

Revelation – and other prophetic books in the Bible – tell us God's plan for **“The End of Time”**.

They reveal the rapture of the Church.

They reveal the return of Christ to the earth.

They reveal all sorts of details and insights into God's final judgment and His justice being realized for eternity.

It also tells us that nobody knows when this will happen.

It can happen at any time – and each of us must be ready
– for when it does happen, there’s no time left to prepare!

Are you ready for His return?

Are you looking forward to His return – and the salvation
He brings those who believe in Him?

Closing prayer