

ESCHATOLOGY

The Study Of The End Times

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Understanding the End Times from a Biblical Perspective

INTRODUCTION

“Living in the Light of the Last Days” (Eschatology)

You’ve probably heard the saying, “*Everyone wants to know what’s coming next.*”

If you don’t believe that—just visit an airport gate or a doctor’s office.

We’re always checking the clock, refreshing our phones, asking, “*When will it happen?*”—whether it’s the next flight, the next report, or the next event.

But when it comes to *God’s timetable*, people often avoid the question.

The future can seem mysterious, even unsettling.

Yet God doesn’t want His people living in confusion—He wants us living in expectation.

So for the next 2 weeks, we will be looking at an overview of what theologians call Eschatology. The study of last things.

That’s what *eschatology*—the study of last things—is all about.

It’s not designed to feed our curiosity; it’s meant to fuel our confidence.

God has already revealed the end of the story so that we might live faithfully in the middle of it.

Think of it like reading the final chapter of a book before you finish the middle.

You may not know how every detail unfolds, but you already know how it ends.

The believer doesn't walk through life guessing about the future—because Jesus Christ has already declared it: *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.”* (Revelation 22:13)

Purpose / Relevance:

So as we open God's Word today, we're not studying prophecy to make charts or win debates.

We're studying it to strengthen our hope, deepen our worship, and purify our walk with Christ.

The Lord is coming again—and the question for every heart is not *when*, but *are we ready?*

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” — Matthew 24:44

Let's Pray...

Heavenly Father,

We come before You with hearts eager to know Your truth. Thank You for giving us Your Word, which not only tells us how to live today but also reveals what is to come. As we open the Scriptures, give us wisdom, humility, and clarity of understanding.

Guard us from speculation, and lead us into revelation—truth that transforms our hearts and strengthens our hope in Christ.

May the study of future things draw us closer to You in faithfulness today.

*Help us to see Your sovereign hand in all of history, to trust Your promises, and to live in readiness for the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We ask this in His holy name, **Amen.***

A couple quick things before we get started, we are recording these sessions so I'd ask you to silent your cell phones and save your questions until the end. Actually if you have questions, I'd ask you to write down your questions on the 3x5 cards and we can get to them next week. So you can turn them into Cheli today or even Wed. night or next Sun. so we can be ready to go for next Tuesday's study.

That way you have time to think about your question and present it in a efficient manner and I can be sure to answer the question correctly.

ESCHATOLOGY: The study of 'last things'—God's final plan for creation, humanity, and eternity.

Our church would fall into the Pre-trib, Pre-mill category.

Pre-millennial viewpoint - Christ will come back to earth before a thousand-year reign on the earth.

Pre-tribulational - Christ will rapture the church out before the Great Tribulation.

9 MAJOR EVENTS RELATED TO THE END TIMES

1. THE RAPTURE AND FIRST RESURRECTION

DEFINITION - The word **rapture**, which comes from a Latin word, means literally to be caught up. And it refers to the meeting in the air of believers in Jesus Christ when He returns for His church.

The **First Resurrection** then is related to it, but not identical to it, because the first resurrection refers to the raising of the bodies of those who are believers in Jesus Christ who are dead when He one, returns for His church in my judgment prior to the tribulation period and simultaneous with the rapture, and secondly,

those who are raised at the second coming prior to the millennium.

You say, well, who would that latter group be?

Those who became believers during the tribulation and who suffered the death of martyrdom.

When He comes again, they likewise will be taken up out of the ground, that is their bodies, and reunited with their spirits and radically and wonderfully transformed. And so the first resurrection takes place at various times.

Now sometimes that's brought as a criticism against those who hold to a pre-tribulational rapture, but I would already remind you that the first resurrection has already occurred at least in one instance, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the first resurrection is not limited to one particular person or persons at one particular time.

The phrase **first resurrection** is used in the Bible to talk about the body of believers being transformed and glorified into Christ likeness whenever that takes place.

I give you then some scripture passages related to these events.

The rapture in John 14 at least implied 1 Corinthians 15, Philippians 3.

The classic text which we'll look at in a moment is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Also certain portions of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8.

And then the first resurrection again in 1 Thessalonians 4 and also specifically called that in Revelation chapter 20 verse 4 through verse 6.

THE FIRST RESURRECTION WITH FOUR PARTS

1. The Resurrection Of Christ
2. The Resurrection Of The Church At The Rapture
3. The Resurrection Of The Old Testament And Tribulation Saints At The End Of The Tribulation Period
4. The resurrection of those born and dying in the kingdom at the end of the millennial period.

2. THE REWARDS OF THE BELIEVER (BEMA Seat)

Then secondly there is what is known as the rewards of the believer.

DEFINITION - The believer will be judged according to his works and will receive rewards based upon those works. This takes place sometime after the rapture, at the judgment seat of Christ.

And you say, but wait a minute, we're not judged for our works because works cannot play into our salvation. That is correct.

This judgment of works has nothing to do with your salvation.

It has to do with your faithfulness in service to Christ following your conversion.

And so anything done before your conversion has been, that slate has been wiped clean by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

But once one becomes a believer, then the Bible begins to speak of those things that we do that will be judged at the **BEMA**, the judgment seat of Christ.

Biblical Foundation

The term “**Bema**” comes from the Greek word **βῆμα (bēma)**, meaning *a raised platform or judgment seat*. It was used in Greek athletic contests where judges sat to **evaluate the competitors** and **award prizes**.

In fact the Bible goes on to say with some degree of Terror for me that not only will the acts that we do be judged but even the motive behind the acts will be judged.

So it's possible that you would do good things but you get your reward now. Why? Because you did them out of impure motive.

You did them for selfish or prideful reasons.

And so the Bible makes it clear that at the judgment seat of Christ, everything will be revealed even to the motive as to why you did what you did.

And so this judgment has nothing to do with your salvation.

It has to do with the degree of faithfulness of your service.

And the classic text in particular, I'll just note them, Romans 14:10-12, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, and also 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, where the Bible says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Key Passages:

- **Romans 14:10–12** – *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat (bēma) of Christ... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”*
- **2 Corinthians 5:10** – *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

Paul describes believers' works being tested by fire; what endures is rewarded, what burns is lost (but the believer himself is saved).

• **1 Corinthians 3:11–15** – ¹⁰ *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.* ¹¹ *For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* ¹² *Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—* ¹³ *each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.* ¹⁴ *If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.* ¹⁵ *If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*

One further word, and I'll move on.

This is a judgment for believers.

Unbelievers will not be at the judgment seat of Christ.

Unbelievers will be, unfortunately, at the great white throne judgment.

Believers will not be there.

So keep in mind, judgment seat of Christ, believers, the basis of their judgment, faithful service in Christ.

Unbelievers, great white throne, their entire life cast into the lake of fire.

Purpose of the Bema Seat

1. **To evaluate believers' works** (not to punish sin—Christ already bore that on the cross).
2. **To reward faithfulness** and service done for Christ's glory.
3. **To reveal the quality of each believer's life and motives.**

Rewards Mentioned in Scripture

These are sometimes called the “**crowns**” or “**rewards**” believers may receive:

- **Crown of righteousness** – for loving His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8)
- **Incorruptible crown** – for disciplined living (1 Cor. 9:25)
- **Crown of life** – for enduring trials (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10)
- **Crown of rejoicing** – for soul-winning (1 Thess. 2:19)
- **Crown of glory** – for faithful shepherding (1 Pet. 5:4)

What It Is Not

- **Not** a judgment for sin — that was settled at the cross (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1).
- **Not** to determine salvation — only believers appear here.
- **Not** for condemnation, but **commendation**.

3. THE RETRIBUTION OF UNBELIEVERS (Tribulation)

Number three, the retribution of unbelievers, or what the Bible refers to as the tribulation.

The Tribulation is speaking of a seven-year period, and the Great Tribulation speaking of a three and a half year period.

DEFINITION - This is a period of seven years when God's judgment on unbelieving man will be intense and fulfilled. It will be specifically related to Israel, but will include all of the earth.

And the phrase **the tribulation** is also called in the Bible Daniel's 70th week.

It is also called in the Bible the **time of Jacob's trouble** and is also called both in the Old and New Testament but especially the Old Testament **the day of the Lord**.

And so there's a parenthesis there on this phrase the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord is the future period of time when the sovereign Lord will judge Israel and the nations of the earth for their pride and He will establish His kingdom on the earth.

The day of the Lord is a time when God will judge totally and destroy all the nations who have resisted Him and who have been against Israel.

Indeed the Bible makes it clear God will, at the end of the historical time, vindicate and honor the cause of Israel.

Man's pride will be judged and idolatry will vanish. It will be done away with.

God alone will stand as Lord.

This time then is characterized by judgment, death, destruction, as well as restoration.

Just a quick footnote, I am convinced that, that the end time day of the Lord will begin shortly after the rapture.

But it also encompasses the millennial period as well.

Some people draw the conclusion that the day of the Lord is nothing but a negative, harsh, difficult time of judgment.

But when you read the totality of how the Bible refers to the day of the Lord, it will include not only the judgment of the tribulation, but it will also include, in my judgment, the blessing of the millennium.

And I will note that at the end of this particular paragraph.

However, as it begins, it will be a fearful time, worse than any other period of previous or subsequent history.

Jesus said, there has never been, nor will there ever be a time like this.

He makes that statement in Matthew 24.

Despite though the ominous nature of the period, it will also be a time of worshiping God, God's spirit will be poured out.

And many will call on the name of the Lord and will be saved.

Just for example, in Revelation 7:9 and following, John sees a great multitude that he cannot count. They're all arrayed in white robes.

And so an angel comes and John says, who are these?

And the angel says to him, these are they that have come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes white in the blood of the lamb.

And so they come out of what? The great tribulation.

John says, how many were there?

There were so many, I could not count them.

So in the midst of the day of the Lord, in the midst of Jacob's trouble, in the midst of the tribulation, not only are there going to be billions who will die. There will also be at least millions, if not several billion, who will be converted as well.

And so it will also be a time of God pouring out His Spirit and people being saved.

Thus the phrase Day of the Lord, includes the blessings of God promised and realized in the millennial kingdom as well.

And again, I give you a number of scriptures, both Old and New Testament, that relate to this.

Then a further explanation at the top of page three, if you'll note very quickly, the specific events of the period.

The period will begin with a **seven-year covenant** being made between antichrist and Israel.

The covenant will reestablish sacrifice in Israel.

That is a straightforward, natural interpretation of Daniel 9:24 and in particular, verse 27.

Secondly, the covenant will be broken at the midpoint.

An antichrist will set himself up to be worshiped as God.

This will take place at the midpoint of the seven-year period and again, there's a marvelous harmony between Daniel 9:27, 2 Thessalonians 2, 3 and 4 and Matthew chapter 24:15 and following where Jesus uses the phrase the abomination of desolation, clearly connecting this future event with the book of and the 70 weeks of Daniel.

Furthermore, if you surveyed the book of Revelation, you discover that there are three great series of judgments that are found, the **seal judgments** in **chapter 6**, the **trumpet judgments** in **chapter 8 and 9**, and the **bowl judgments** in **chapter 16**.

And again, if those passages can be taken in any kind of normal, natural understanding, more than one half of the world's population will die during the tribulation period.

That means if it were to happen in the near future, whether it does or not, I don't know, but that would mean more than three billion people would die in less than seven years.

That's unfathomable.

It's hard to even conceive of something on that magnitude.

Well, number four then, we've had the rapture of the church, we've had the reward of believers at some indefinite period, and again, I don't think you can specify on that.

We've now had the retribution of God in terms of the tribulation period.

4. THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (Second Coming)

Then comes, fourthly, the revelation of Jesus Christ or the second coming.

And here's the thing to keep in mind, and I'll show you in a chart in just a moment.

In the rapture, believers go up.

In the second coming, Christ and believers come back down.

In the rapture, believers go up into the clouds.

At the second coming, Christ comes back to the earth.

And therefore, there is a distinction to be made, even if you hold them together in terms of happening almost simultaneously, between the rapture going up and the second coming returning and coming back down.

So what does the Bible say about the second coming or the revelation of Jesus Christ?

It refers to the bodily return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

This return will be a great and glorious return in power.

It will take place at the end of the tribulation period and the millennial kingdom, the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth will immediately follow.

The enemies of Christ will be defeated at this return.

He will destroy the antichrist, the false prophet, Satan will be in fact, they will both be cast immediately into the lake of fire.

Satan will be bound for a thousand years before he eventually likewise will be cast into the lake of fire.

✚ 1. The Antichrist

Meaning of the Term

- The term “*antichrist*” (Greek *antichristos*) literally means “*against Christ*” or “*in place of Christ.*”
- John is the only writer who uses the word directly (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

1 John 2:18 — “*Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come.*”

John distinguishes between *many antichrists* (false teachers, deceivers throughout history) and *the Antichrist* — a singular, final world figure still to come.

The Antichrist in Prophecy

While John gives the title, other passages describe this same person under different names:

Title / Description	Reference	Description
<i>The Man of Sin, Son of Perdition</i>	2 Thessalonians 2:3–4	Opposes and exalts himself above God; sits in God’s temple proclaiming himself to be God.
<i>The Little Horn</i>	Daniel 7:8, 24–25	Rises from a revived world empire; blasphemes God; persecutes the saints.
<i>The Beast out of the Sea</i>	Revelation 13:1–8	A political world ruler empowered by Satan, worshiped by the nations.

His Character and Work

- **Empowered by Satan:** Revelation 13:2 — “The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.”
- **Blasphemous:** He exalts himself above all gods and speaks great things against the Most High (Dan. 7:25).
- **Deceptive:** Performs signs and wonders to deceive (2 Thess. 2:9–10).
- **Persecutor:** Wages war against the saints and overcomes them (Rev. 13:7).

- **Final Destiny:** Destroyed by the return of Christ — “whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth” (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:20).
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2. The False Prophet

Biblical Description

- The *False Prophet* appears in **Revelation 13:11–18** and is later identified by that title in **Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10**.
- He is called “*the beast out of the earth*.”

Revelation 13:11–12 — “Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence...”

His Role

- **Religious Deceiver:** Pretends to be gentle (“like a lamb”) but speaks for Satan (“like a dragon”).
 - **Promotes Worship of the Antichrist:** Leads the world to worship the first beast (Rev. 13:12).
 - **Performs Miracles:** Calls fire from heaven and deceives through signs (Rev. 13:13–14).
 - **Creates the Image of the Beast:** Orders people to make and worship an image; those who refuse are killed (Rev. 13:14–15).
 - **Enforces the Mark of the Beast:** Causes all to receive a mark on their right hand or forehead, controlling commerce (Rev. 13:16–17).
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3. Their End

Both the Antichrist and the False Prophet meet the same fate:

Revelation 19:20 — “Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence... These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

4. Summary

Aspect	Antichrist	False Prophet
Nature	Political / Military Leader	Religious / Spiritual Deceiver
Source	Empowered by Satan	Empowered by Satan
Goal	To rule the world and be worshiped	To cause the world to worship the Antichrist
Appearance	“Beast out of the sea”	“Beast out of the earth”
End	Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20)	Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20)

In summary:

The **Antichrist** will be the final world ruler who opposes Christ and deceives the nations during the Tribulation.

The **False Prophet** will be his religious partner, performing deceptive miracles to lead humanity into false worship.

Together they form an unholy trinity with Satan — the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet — opposing the true Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All the enemies of Christ are defeated at his second coming or what the Bible often refers to as his glorious appearing.

I didn't give you scriptures, the specific and precise time of the second coming. The Bible makes it crystal clear again and again, it is unknown to man. Just as an aside, **never put any stock in date setters.**

They've been on the historical scene for almost 2,000 years.

All of them have one inglorious thing in common. **They have all been wrong.** Every single one of them.

And so you play the fool, if you yourself begin to try to set dates and you play the fool, if you begin to follow those who set dates as well.

So be very cautious.

The moment I hear someone doing that, I immediately run the other way because God's already told us nobody knows except Him.

And so I will never put any stock in the predictions of any human individual.

5. THE REIGN OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIS SAINTS (The Millennial Kingdom)

Fifth event, the reign of Jesus Christ and his saints.

DEFINITION - Here we speak of the millennial kingdom, the 1,000 year period in which Jesus Christ rules over the earth as the promised Messiah, the seed of David.

This reign will follow the second coming or the revelation of Christ, and it will be, and I would understand this, an intermediate stage of of the eternal kingdom, Jerusalem will serve as his capital.

You say, what do you mean by that?

Well, the millennium is on the way to eternity, but it's not eternity.

Because eternity is not revealed until Revelation chapter 20:11, following chapters 21 and 22 where the Bible speaks of the lake of fire, the new heaven, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem.

And so there's a sense in which the millennial kingdom is a ***transition*** between this present age and the eternal state that is to come and is described in Revelation 21 and 22.

You say, well, what will happen when Jesus Christ comes back to the earth and reigns on this earth from Jerusalem for a thousand years?

Well, here's a summary of the biblical teaching.

The eschatological kingdom refers to that time, which is yet future, when God will sovereignly reign over the earth through the person of His divinely appointed and anointed mediator, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of David.

That's important because the millennial kingdom fulfills the promises of God to Abraham in Genesis 12, to David in 2 Samuel 7, to Jeremiah in the new covenant in Jeremiah chapter 31 and also Ezekiel chapter 36.

But in particular, it fulfills God's promise to David in 2 Samuel chapter 7.

Thus, the eschatological kingdom will be a time of restoration for the nation of Israel.

She will be returned to her land, and she will live there in safety, never to be removed again.

Their Messiah will reign over His people.

The extent of the eschatological kingdom will be universal.

All the nations will voluntarily submit to Messiah Jesus' authority.

Even the wildlife of earth will live in peace and tranquility, posing no threat to other animals or mankind.

This is of course going back to Isaiah chapter 11 where the Bible says the lion and the lamb will lay down and the lion won't eat the lamb and the child can play over the hole of the snake and the snake won't jump out and bite the child. And so the Bible says this is what is going to happen.

We're on our way back to the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve sinned. But it will even be better than that in the new heaven, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem.

The earth itself will be tremendously fruitful.

The reign of Messiah will be characterized by justice, righteousness, peace, safety, and wisdom.

Indeed, the Bible says the earth will be full of the knowledge of God and that people will obey the laws of God and the sovereign reign of God will last forever.

The eschatological kingdom will be a time of great rejoicing.

Thus the reign will last 1,000 years and the saints of Christ will reign with Him and wonderfully during that time Satan will be bound for that thousand year period.

6. THE RELEASE AND THE REVOLT OF SATAN

Top of page four, event number six, the release and the revolt of Satan.

In Revelation chapter 20:7-10, we are told that following the millennial kingdom, Satan will be released for a short time.

This event takes place at the end of that thousand year period.

He is released, he will deceive many on the earth, he will fight against God, and he will be defeated and thrown into the lake of fire.

Now, this is, don't chase this too far, but I'll raise a question that's often asked.

In the millennium, doesn't it start with nothing but believers? Yes.

But some of those believers have been converted during the tribulation, and they have survived through the tribulation.

They, therefore, will go into the millennium with a natural body.

You see, in a glorified body, I don't believe the Scriptures indicate that we will be able or capable of reproducing, but those with a natural body will.

So children will be born in the millennium in a wonderful, magnificent environment. They will likewise grow up.

And just like you and me, they will have the opportunity either to say yes to Christ or no to Christ.

And amazingly, in an almost perfect existence, with King Jesus ruling over all things, many people, at least secretly, will have an unconverted heart.

They may give lip service to Christ, but in their heart they will be unconverted.

And when Satan is released, at the end of the thousand years, the Bible says he is able to gather a rebellious army that is as the sand of the sea.

So it's an amazing indictment upon the propensity of the human heart toward sin and rebellion and wickedness away from God.

He will deceive many on the earth.

He will fight against God, but God will just defeat him instantaneously, and he will be thrown into the lake of fire or hell where he will spend consciously and awake all of eternity.

7. THE SECOND RESURRECTION (THE SECOND DEATH)

That then brings us, unfortunately, to number seven, the second resurrection, the second death.

Let me just point out, the phrase *second resurrection* never occurs in the Bible. It is said that there is a first resurrection.

But the second resurrection is so tragic, so horrible, so unforgettable that it is not called the second resurrection.

It is called the second death.

DEFINITION - This refers, then, to the second resurrection of the dead, dead in terms of spiritually dead. It is actually called the second death.

In the first resurrection, believers will be resurrected to life.

But here unbelievers will be resurrected to judgment and eternal damnation. And so this is really more of a resurrection to death than it is a resurrection to life.

8. THE RENOVATION OF THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH

Number eight, the renovation of the new heavens and the new earth.

DEFINITION - This is the making brand new of the present heavens and the earth. This will be the eternal abode of the saints of God.

In fact, I could even add that there's also the phrase there, the New Jerusalem. So in chapter 21 and 22, you have a magnificent description of the new heavens, the new earth, the New Jerusalem, the wonderful location and the wonderful provision for all the redeemed and all of those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

9. ETERNAL DAMNATION

But in contradistinction to that, number nine, eternal damnation are that period or that place of remorse.

DEFINITION - This refers to the eternal punishment of unbelievers.

They will indeed be cast into the lake of fire where they will be punished forever.

And if you look at chapter 20:11 through 15 of Revelation, you note that they are judged first of all out of the book of life where their name does not appear.

They're then judged out of the books, plural, of works, where their life is recorded in terms of their sin and rebellion against God.

I would indicate to you tonight that the Bible is also clear on this.

There are degrees of torment and degrees of punishment in hell.

There are, for some, a hotter place in hell than for others.

There's a biblical principle that abides eternally.

Revelation brings responsibility.

The more you know, the greater your accountability and the greater your judgment.

So hell will not be equally hot and equally terrible for everyone.

It will be terrible for everyone.

But for some, it will be even more of a place of sorrow, suffering and torment than for others.

But the tragedy of it all is one, you're not in the presence of God.

And number two, it lasts forever and ever and ever and ever.

And dear friends, forever is a long, long, long time.

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Well, go back with me now to page five and in your Bible, the text I mentioned a moment ago, and we'll just walk through this quickly.

This is actually corresponding then to the very first thing we looked at back on page number two, the rapture of the church.

Here you have the most detailed description of this event found in the Bible, though it is also referenced in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

1. The Rapture Is An Event Of Controversy

I'm going to pass over the fact that the rapture is an event of controversy, simply noting for you there that there are at least five major views out there today concerning the time of the rapture.

Partial rapturism, pre-wrath rapturism, post-tribulationism, mid-tribulationism, pre-tribulationism.

I am convinced that view number five is correct, but we'll talk about the merits of that some other time.

The Rapture Debate

- Pre-Tribulation Rapture: Church removed before tribulation (Dispensational view).
- Mid-Tribulation: Rapture occurs halfway through tribulation.
- Post-Tribulation: Rapture and Second Coming occur simultaneously.
- Amillennial/Postmillennial: Typically view the “rapture” as symbolic of believers meeting Christ at His return.

What I do want you to see, though, in terms of verse by verse instruction tonight are the latter three points.

2. The Rapture Is An Event For Christians

Secondly, the rapture is an event for Christians.

This is not not an event for everybody. It is an event for Christians.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - we find in **a promise, a privilege, and a proclamation.**

Start with me then at verse 13.

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

It's interesting to note that the word **ignorant** there is the Greek word from which we get our English word agnostic, which means, of course, without knowledge.

So Paul says of the Thessalonians, I don't want you to be without knowledge, brethren, concerning those who have what? **Fallen asleep.**

Now, this is interesting, a number of times in the Bible, the metaphor **falling asleep** is used for the death of a Christian.

Never, not even one time is the death of an unbeliever described as sleep.

It is only used as a picture of the death of a believer.

You say why?

Because for a believer to die is to fall asleep and to wake up in the presence of the Lord. It's a peaceful idea. It's a wonderful idea.

And so he says, *¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.*

People who do not know Jesus have no hope.

There's no bright future. There's no hope for tomorrow.

There's nothing for them to look forward to but the wrath and the judgment and the hell of a holy God.

And he says, Look, I don't want you to be like them, not certain as to what is the destiny and the future of those who have died in Christ.

So verse 14, here it is,

¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again,

In other words, everything for Paul is grounded in the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

No resurrection of Jesus? No hope for you and me.

¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

So there's some time out in the future when God is going to return in the person of his son Christ and he will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus.

Well, how's it going to work out, Paul? Here we go...

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord,

By the way, the word Lord occurs 5xs in verse 15 through 18.

Evidently, Paul is claiming divine revelation here.

We don't have any record of Paul getting this, for example, from Peter or James or John.

So perhaps he received this when he was in the Arabian desert, per Galatians chapter 1.

But he makes a declaration to have this by direct word from the Lord,

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming (Parousia) of the Lord, will not precede

If you have an old King James it has a very poor translation here will by no means it says prevent, it's a bad translation.

The New King James and most other translations have a much better translation we will by no means precede
will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

So his point is simply this, they have a privilege over you and me because when Christ comes again we will not precede them but they will precede us in what way Paul?

I'm glad you asked, verse 16...

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Now, I have a question for you.

How can you make sense of the last part of verse 14?

And the last part of verse 16.

Because the last part of verse 14 says that God will bring with him those who sleep in Christ.

And then in verse 16, he says the dead in Christ will rise first.

So I have a question.

At the rapture, are we going up or coming down?

And the answer, of course, is yes. Yes.

What is going up? Our body.

What is coming down? Our soul.

What does the Bible say in 2 Corinthians chapter 5?

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

So when I die, what goes to be with the Lord?

My soul, my spirit, my body, though, goes in the ground.

So at the rapture in 1 Corinthians 15 as commentary to this, we are reunited in the air, the body coming up, the soul coming down.

We are gloriously reunited and the Bible says we are transformed and changed in what?, *the twinkling of an eye*.

That's why we can both be coming with Him by means of our soul and coming up to meet Him by means of our body.

And so there is the apparent contradiction or paradox easily made clear.

So the first thing he says is the rapture is an event for Christians.

Only those who are asleep in Jesus are coming up.

Those who've died without the Lord, they remain in the ground until the second resurrection, which as we saw earlier, is actually the second death.

3. The Rapture Is Also An Event Of Celebration

All right, point number three, the rapture is also an event of celebration.

Look at what he says in verse 17,

*¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be **caught up***

It is the Greek word *harpazo*.

It comes over into Latin as the word *rapturi*.

We then get our English word rapture from it.

It means to catch up or to snatch up.

*¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

And so it's a wonderful event of celebration for the Christian.

4. The Rapture Is Also An Event Of Comfort

¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

It is also an event of comfort.

You see, the Bible makes it clear, God does not give us teaching about the end time to tantalize our imagination, to cause us to run wild in speculation, but rather, the Bible gives us this wonderful teaching as an incentive to faithful service.

The end of 1 Corinthians 15, and here as a wonderful word of comfort.

The fact of the matter is, on many an occasion, when I have preached a funeral, I have taken advantage of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, if it's a Christian.

It's a wonderful text to preach both in terms of evangelism to unbelievers, and comfort to believers, because he says, *Therefore, comfort one another with these words.*

What words, Paul?

That we shall always be with the Lord.

I would submit those are pretty good words of comfort.

And so the rapture and event for Christians, the rapture and event of celebration, the rapture and event of comfort.

I have given you a comparative chart that will let you see why I think it is best to see the rapture and the second coming as related but distinct events.

I happen to believe that they are separated not by a few seconds, not separated by three and a half years, but separated by a seven-year period of time known as Daniel's 70th week.

But clearly, they are distinct events because look at what we see quickly.

Phase one, the rapture.

Christ comes to receive his church in the air.

The second coming, though, Christ returned with his bride and angels to the earth.

Phase one, the rapture.

The seven-year tribulation begins shortly after the rapture of the church.

Christ coming again, well, it is the millennial kingdom, his thousand year reign that is established following his second coming.

The rapture, it's imminent.

It could happen any time.

It could happen before that clock strikes eight o'clock in just about four minutes.

On the other hand, there are numerous signs that precede the event of the second coming.

You say, like what?

Like the seals, the trumpets, the bowls,
like the revealing of antichrist and the false prophet.

They're not around today as best I can tell.

And if they are, they're hiding in an awful, magnificent way.

No, there are a number of signs that precede the second coming.

The rapture is a message of comfort for believers.

The second coming is a message of judgment and warning for unbelievers.

The rapture, the church is of primary importance.

The second coming, Israel takes on a greater significance.

The rapture is a mystery.

You say, what do you mean by

By that, the rapture is never mentioned in the Old Testament.

The second coming is, but the rapture is never there.

However, the second coming is predicted both in the Old and the New Testament.

The rapture, the judgment seat of Christ for believers, occurs in close proximity to it.

The second coming, well, there are different judgments, such as the sheep and goat judgment of Matthew 25 and antichrist and the world being judged when Christ returns at the battle of Armageddon.

The rapture, only believers are affected.

The second coming, everyone is affected.

The rapture, the church is taken into the Lord's presence into heaven.

The second coming, all believers are brought into the millennial kingdom to reign with Christ on the earth.

And so I again am convinced that there are good reasons for seeing the rapture as occurring seven years prior to the second coming.

But again, this is not something I would spill blood over.

I have fun engaging my friends in conversation about it.

Basically, I say to my friends like Al Mohler and my friends like James Merritt that God ought to reward all of us according to our faith.

So on the way up, I will wave at them and say, I told you so.

That is what I intend to do if God will answer that particular prayer.

Playfully, it doesn't matter.

What matters is He is Lord.

He is coming in, and He'll do so in His time and in His manner.

And in that, we certainly can rejoice and be grateful.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, may the teaching of the end times motivate us not to speculate about when.

But may it motivate us to serve you with all of our heart, knowing that the time is short, that we could be taken out today, either by rapture or by death.

And therefore, we should not presume upon opportunities to share the gospel with those we love, to live a life that is pleasing to you, and to work as Jesus says, while it is still day.

The night comes when no man works.

Lord, may we be faithful while we have the day because it will not always be with us.

Lord, you are worthy of our work.

You're worthy of our service.

May again we be inspired to increase in our fervency what we do for the glory of Jesus, looking forward, as the Bible says, to his blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

ESCHATOLOGY

The Study Of The End Times – Lesson 2

WHAT OTHERS BELIEVE

The End Times Intrigue For 2,000 years people have wondered about the events of the end times and when Jesus will return.

Terms such as millennium, tribulation, 666, and antichrist are used in the media and the supermarket tabloids, but questions remain: Will Jesus return physically and reign on earth for 1,000 years?

Will Christians go through a seven-year tribulation?

Will the second coming of Christ occur at the same time that believers meet Christ in the air (the rapture)?

Will Christians be raptured (removed from this earth) and other people “left behind”?

What does the nation of Israel have to do with the end times?

There are four different views of end-times events, but all share some key points: Jesus will come again for those who love him.

Jesus calls his followers to be ready all the time.

No one knows the day or the hour.

Jesus said, *“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* —Matthew 24:36

“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” —Matthew 24:12–13

UNDERSTANDING ESCHATOLOGY REQUIRES A PROPER HERMENEUTIC

1. You must interpret the Bible literally unless the context provides good reason to do otherwise.
2. We must understand that Israel and the church are distinct!

HERMENEUTICAL DIFFERENCES

Literal vs. Symbolic interpretation: How Revelation and prophetic passages are read.

Israel and the Church: Whether prophecies for Israel apply literally or spiritually to the Church.

View of History: Pessimistic (decline before Christ's return) vs. optimistic (progress of the Kingdom).

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE END

Jesus promised his disciples that he would come again.

Before his return there would be:

“Birth Pains” (Events before the “signs” of the end)

- Many will claim to be the Messiah.
- People will be deceived by these messiahs.
- Wars, famine, earthquakes, pestilence.
- Believers in Christ persecuted and killed.
- Believers will be witnesses of Jesus to kings.
- Many will turn away from the faith.
- Betrayals by parents, brothers, and friends. Increase in wickedness.
- Fearful events and signs from heaven.
- Betrayals by parents, brothers, and friends.
- Increase in wickedness.
- Fearful events and signs from heaven.

The Signs of the End

- Jerusalem surrounded by armies.
- The “abomination of desolation.”
- Great tribulation like never before. Jerusalem will be trampled on by Gentiles.
- False prophets perform signs, miracles.
- Sun darkens, moon doesn’t shine, stars fall.
- Severe ocean activity disturbs the nations.
- People will faint with terror.
- Jesus will appear in the sky.
- The trumpet will sound.
- Angels will gather God’s elect.

(Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21)

WHAT PAUL TAUGHT ABOUT THE END

1] The Lord will descend.

2] The dead in Christ will rise first.

3] The living will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord and be with him forever.

4] Don’t believe those who say the Day of the Lord has already come.

5] The Day of the Lord will be preceded by:

- Rebellion
- The revelation of the man of lawlessness who will:
 - Oppose and exalt himself over God
 - Set himself up in God’s temple
 - Proclaim to be God

- Be revealed when the one holding him back is taken out of the way
- Be accompanied by satanic, counterfeit miracles
- Deceive those who do not love the truth

6] When Jesus comes, the man of lawlessness will be overthrown and destroyed.

(1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 2)

Major Views on the Millennium

Conservative Christians generally fall into one of three main schools of thought:

Premillennialism

Christ returns before the millennium.

Interprets Revelation 20 literally.

Subtypes:

Dispensational Premillennialism – emphasizes Israel and the Church as distinct; expects a pre-tribulation rapture.

Historic Premillennialism – sees the Church enduring the tribulation before Christ's return.

Key proponents: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, George Eldon Ladd.

Amillennialism

No literal 1000-year reign on earth.

The “millennium” is symbolic of Christ's present reign through the Church.

The Second Coming and Final Judgment occur together.

Key proponents: Augustine, Louis Berkhof, Anthony Hoekema.

Postmillennialism

Christ returns after a “millennial” age of gospel success and worldwide Christian influence.

Emphasizes the progress of the Kingdom in history.

Key proponents: Jonathan Edwards, R.C. Sproul (partial support), Kenneth Gentry.

The Rapture Debate

Pre-Tribulation Rapture: Church removed before tribulation (Dispensational view).

Mid-Tribulation: Rapture occurs halfway through tribulation.

Post-Tribulation: Rapture and Second Coming occur simultaneously.

Amillennial/Postmillennial: Typically view the “rapture” as symbolic of believers meeting Christ at His return.

Conservative Christian Eschatological Views (with Biblical Support)

1. Shared Biblical Foundations

Across most conservative traditions, several scriptural themes are affirmed:

Doctrine	Key Scriptures
Christ’s Second Coming	Acts 1:11; Matthew 24:29–31; Revelation 19:11–16
Resurrection of the Dead	1 Corinthians 15:20–28, 51–54; John 5:28–29
Final Judgment	Revelation 20:11–15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 25:31–46
Eternal State	Revelation 21–22; 2 Peter 3:10–13
Authority of Scripture	2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:19–21

2. Premillennialism

Christ returns before a literal 1,000-year reign on earth.

Key Scriptures

- Millennium: Revelation 20:1–6
- Christ’s Return in Power: Matthew 24:29–31; Revelation 19:11–16
- Restoration of Israel: Romans 11:25–27; Zechariah 12–14
- Rapture & Resurrection: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52
- Tribulation: Daniel 9:24–27; Matthew 24:15–21; Revelation 6–19

Subtypes

A. Dispensational Premillennialism

Church Age → Rapture → 7-Year Tribulation → Second Coming → 1,000-Year Millennium → Final Judgment → New Heaven & Earth

- Distinguishes Israel and the Church (Daniel 9:24–27; Romans 11).
- Pretribulation rapture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Revelation 3:10 (“keep you from the hour of trial”).
- Literal interpretation of prophecy: Revelation 20:1–6 as a real thousand years.

Teachers: John Nelson Darby, C.I. Scofield, Charles Ryrie, John MacArthur.

PREMILLENNIAL VIEW



B. Historic Premillennialism

Sequence:

Church Age → Tribulation → Second Coming / Resurrection → 1,000-Year Millennium → Final Judgment → New Heaven & Earth

Highlights:

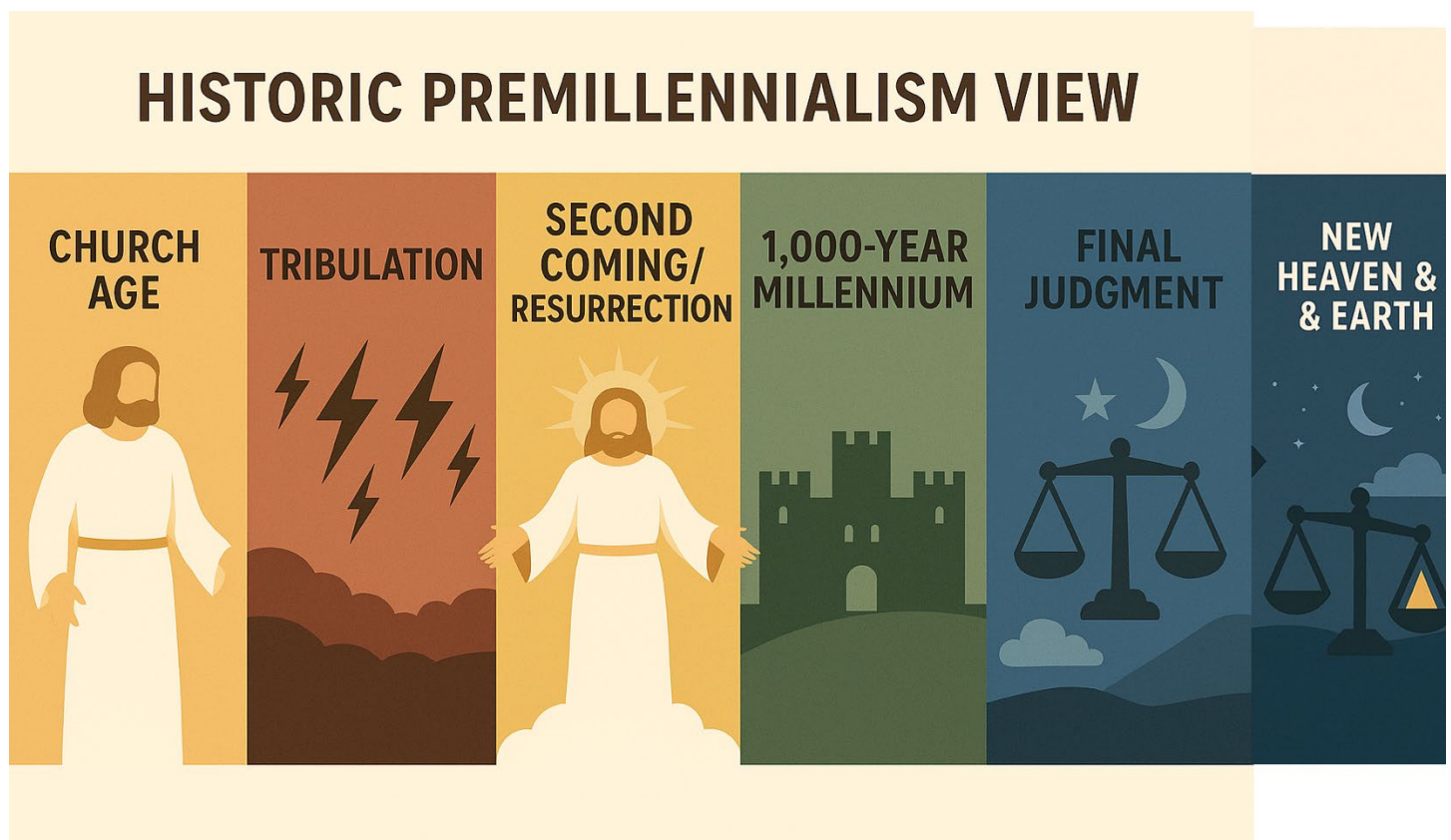
- The Church endures the Tribulation.
- Christ's return inaugurates the Millennium (Rev. 20:1–6).
- One general resurrection at the end of the Millennium.

Diagram:

[Church Age & Tribulation] → [Christ Returns] → [Millennium (1,000 yrs)] → [Final Judgment] → [Eternity]

- Church experiences tribulation (John 16:33; Revelation 13:7).
- Christ's return ends the tribulation and begins the millennium (Matthew 24:29–31).
- Millennium inaugurates final judgment and renewal (Revelation 20:1–10).

Teachers: George Eldon Ladd, Charles Spurgeon, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus.



3. Amillennialism

The millennium is symbolic of Christ's present spiritual reign; His return ends history.

Sequence:

Christ's First Coming → Symbolic Millennium (Church Age) → Second Coming / Judgment → New Heaven & Earth

Key Scriptures

- Millennium as Present Age: Revelation 20:1–6 (interpreted symbolically).
- Satan Bound at Christ's First Coming: Matthew 12:28–29; Luke 10:18; John 12:31.
- Church Age as Kingdom: Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:33–36.
- Final Judgment at Christ's Return: John 5:28–29; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10.
- New Creation: 2 Peter 3:10–13; Revelation 21–22.

Teachers: Augustine, Herman Bavinck, Louis Berkhof, Anthony Hoekema, R.C. Sproul.

Summary: The “thousand years” represent the entire church age—Christ reigns now from heaven. At His second coming, resurrection and judgment happen simultaneously.

[Church Age = Symbolic Millennium] —> [Christ Returns & Judgment] —> [Eternity]

4. Postmillennialism

Christ returns after a golden age of gospel triumph on earth.

Christ's First Coming → Progressive Triumph of Gospel (Millennial Age) → Second Coming → Final Judgment → New Heaven & Earth

POSTMILLENNIALISM VIEW



Key Scriptures

- Progress of the Gospel: Matthew 28:18–20; Isaiah 2:2–4; Habakkuk 2:14.
- Victory of Christ's Kingdom: Psalm 2; Psalm 72; Matthew 13:31–33 (leaven and mustard seed).
- Christ's Reign Now: 1 Corinthians 15:25–26; Revelation 11:15.
- Final Return & Judgment: 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; 2 Peter 3:10–13.

Teachers: Jonathan Edwards, B.B. Warfield, R.J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Douglas Wilson.

Summary: The gospel will gradually transform nations and societies before Christ's visible return.

5. Preterism

Much of biblical prophecy was fulfilled in the first century, particularly in AD 70.

A. Partial Preterism (Orthodox Form)

- Fall of Jerusalem as Fulfillment: Matthew 24:1–34; Luke 21:20–24.

- Christ's Ongoing Reign: Acts 2:33–36; Revelation 1:5–7.
- Final Judgment Still Future: 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 20:11–15.

Teachers: R.C. Sproul, Kenneth Gentry, Hank Hanegraaff.

B. Full Preterism (Heterodox)

- Claims all prophecy (including resurrection and final judgment) was fulfilled in AD 70.
- Contradicts 1 Corinthians 15:20–26 and Acts 1:11 (bodily, future return).
- Not accepted by conservative Christianity.

Slide 6 – Points of Agreement

Christ will return visibly and gloriously.

There will be a final judgment.

Resurrection of the dead and eternal life for believers.

God's ultimate triumph and establishment of a new heaven and new earth.

Slide 7 – Why These Differences Matter

Influence on mission and evangelism

Attitudes toward culture and politics

Understanding of suffering and hope

Shaping of Christian unity despite interpretive diversity

Slide 8 – Conclusion

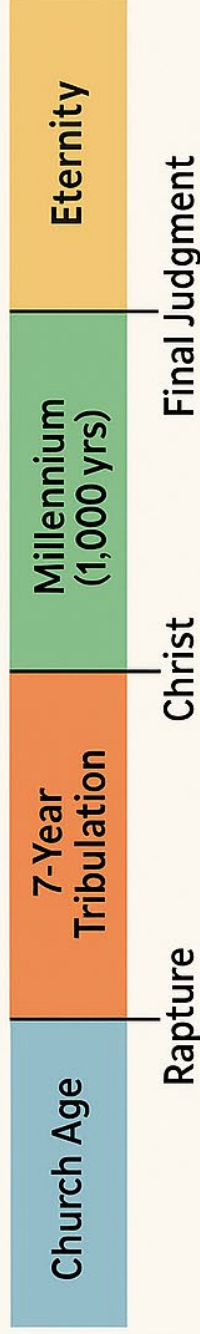
Conservative Christians agree on the certainty of Christ's return but differ on its timing and sequence of events.

These perspectives enrich the Church's understanding of God's promises.

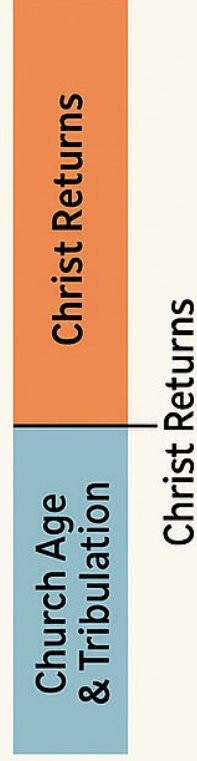
Call to live in faith, readiness, and hope.

COMPARATIVE ESCHATOLOGICAL TIMELINES

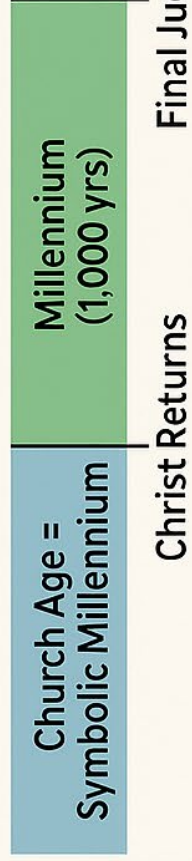
DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM



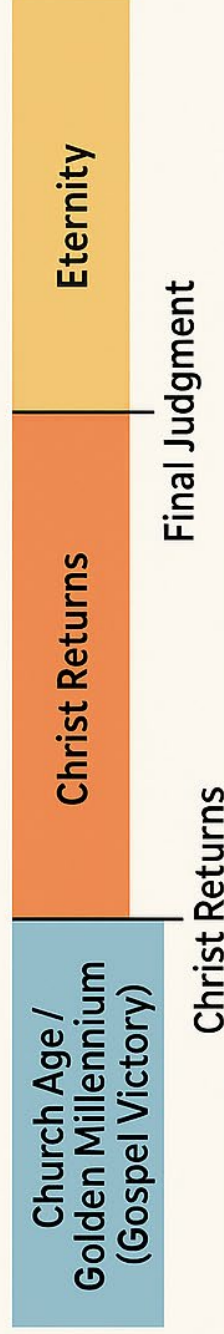
HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM



AMILLENNIALISM



POSTMILLENNIALISM



PARTIAL PRETERISM



6. The Tribulation and Rapture — Key Texts by View

Rapture Timing	Description	Key Texts
Pretribulation	Church raptured before tribulation	1 Thess 4:13–18; Rev 3:10
Midtribulation	Church raptured midway through tribulation	Daniel 9:27; Rev 11:15–19
Posttribulation	Rapture and second coming simultaneous	Matt 24:29–31; 2 Thess 2:1–4
No distinct rapture (Amill/Postmill)	“Rapture” = believers meeting Christ as He returns to reign eternally	1 Thess 4:16–17 interpreted figuratively

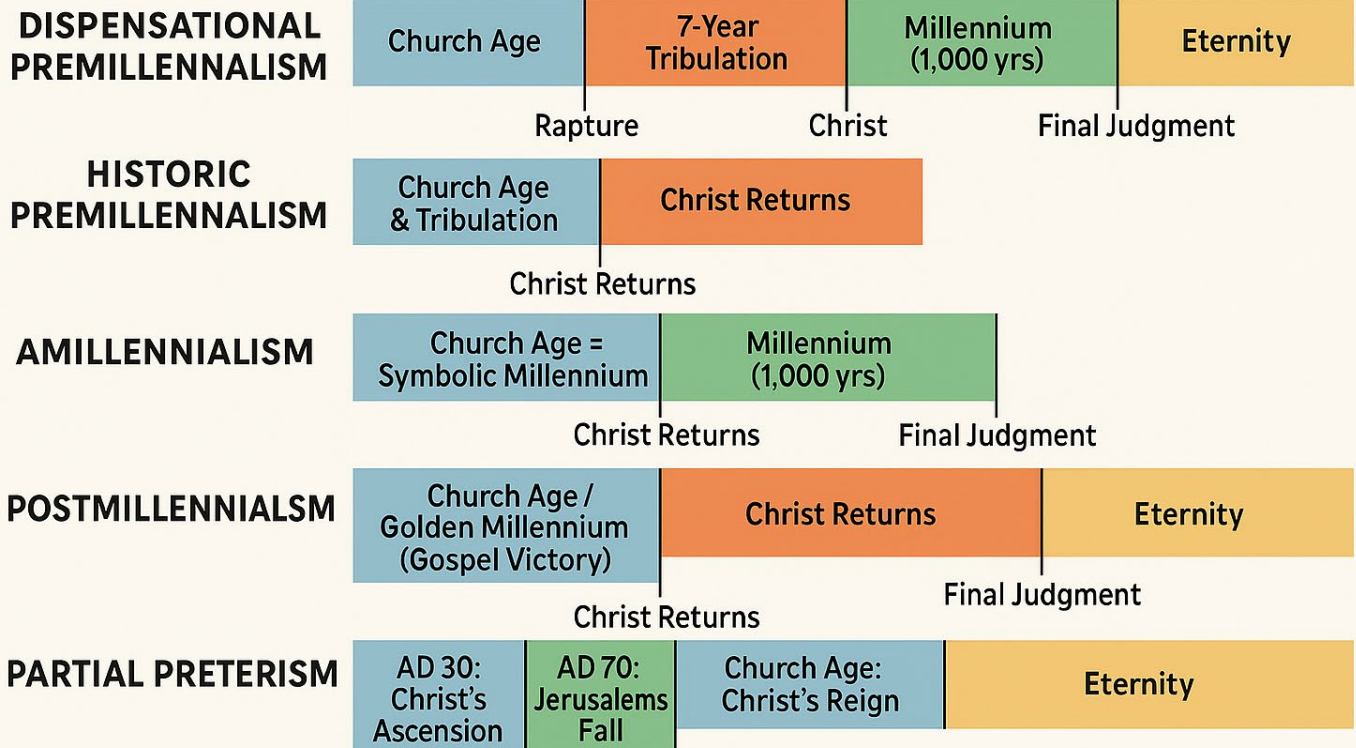
7. Eternal State

Doctrine	Key Scriptures	Shared Among
Resurrection of the Just and Unjust	John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15	All orthodox views
Final Judgment	Rev 20:11–15	All
New Heavens and New Earth	Rev21–22; Isaiah 65:17	All
Eternal Life / Eternal Punishment	Matt 25:46; Rev 14:11	All

8. Summary Comparison Table

View	Millennium	Key Texts	View of Israel	Rapture Timing	Key Figures
Dispensational Premillennialism	Literal 1,000 years	Rev 20:1–6; 1 Thess 4	Israel distinct	Pretrib (usually)	Darby, Scofield, MacArthur
Historic Premillennialism	Literal 1,000 years	Rev 19–20; Matt 24	Israel often symbolic	Posttrib	Ladd, Spurgeon
Amillennialism	Symbolic—Church Age	Rev 20; John 5	Church is new Israel	None distinct	Augustine, Sproul
Postmillennialism	Symbolic—Golden Age	Ps 72; Matt 13; 1 Cor 15:25	Church fulfills Israel	None distinct	Edwards, Bahnsen
Partial Preterism	Symbolic, fulfilled & ongoing	Matt 24; Luke 21	Church fulfills Israel	None distinct	Sproul, Gentry

COMPARATIVE ESCHATOLOGICAL TIMELINES



The Lessons

And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’ ” (16:27–31)

Several lessons may be drawn from the concluding dialogue of this compelling and frightening story.

First, this parable answers the question of why sinners end up in hell.

The rich man seemed certain to make it to heaven, yet instead found himself in hell.

The Lord’s hearers, particularly the Pharisees, would have been dumfounded, and at a loss to explain why. It was not because he was not of the right racial stock.

The Jews erroneously (cf. Matt. 8:11–12; Luke 3:8; 13:28; John 8:31–58) believed that hell was reserved for Gentiles while most Jews (except tax collectors, irreligious Jews, and those guilty of gross sins) would go to heaven.

Therefore one’s Abrahamic ancestry essentially guaranteed entrance to heaven. Before his salvation, Paul was confident that he would reach heaven because he was “circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Phil. 3:5–6); after his salvation he realized that those things were nothing but “rubbish” (v. 8).

Lazarus represented the outcasts who came to Jesus and received salvation.

The rich man is the Pharisees and all who follow their brand of works religion.

The rich man was a descendant of Abraham. He appealed to Abraham as his father, or ancestor, and Abraham acknowledged that by calling him “Child.”

But race is not a factor in determining a person’s eternal destiny. Being a Jew does not guarantee one entrance to heaven any more than being a Gentile guarantees one will be sent to hell.

Nor was it his substance that doomed the rich man to hell. It is true that, as noted earlier in this chapter, riches can make it difficult to enter the kingdom. But wealth is not an absolute barrier to salvation, because God has the power to save whomever He chooses (Matt. 19:26). Abraham himself was very rich (Gen. 13:2), as were Isaac (Gen. 26:13), Jacob (Gen. 32:5), Boaz (Ruth 2:1), Job (Job 1:3; 31:25; 42:10–12), David (1 Chron. 29:28), Solomon (2 Chron. 1:11–12; 9:22), and Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57).

The rich man was not sent to hell because he was a secular, irreligious Jew.

Like the Pharisees, he was outwardly religious by the standards of the day, so much so that he thought his riches were a reward from God; he and his brothers were familiar with **Moses and the Prophets**, and he even understood that they needed to repent **so that they would not also come to this place of torment**

where he found himself. His acknowledgment that they needed to repent also presupposes a belief in sin, the law, and God as the law giver.

While sin damns all the unredeemed to hell, there is nothing to suggest that he was guilty of any especially heinous sins. Like the Jews, he was religious and well respected and that argues for the fact that he was not in hell because he was guilty of such sins.

Some might think that he wound up in hell because he was selfish, utterly lacking compassion, love, and concern for the poor beggar who lay at his gate. It is true that his sin sent him to hell, and that selfishness is at the heart of all sin. But to say that selfishness condemned the rich man to hell is only partially true. Even if he had been generous, kind, and merciful toward Lazarus, those acts of charity and compassion would not have atoned for his sin. Salvation throughout redemptive history has always been solely by God's grace through faith (see the discussion of this truth below).

In the end, there is only one reason that the rich man (and by extension all the unredeemed) ended up in hell: failing to believe in and act on the truth of Scripture. Heaven is for those who believe in what God has revealed in His Word and act on it. Abraham affirmed Scripture's sufficiency when he said in response to the rich man's request to send Lazarus to his brothers, **They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.** Revealing his lack of belief in Scripture's sufficiency, the rich man pleaded for a supernatural sign: **No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!** This was both a complaint and a request. The implication is that he and his brothers had insufficient data; that they lacked a sufficiently convincing sign. The Pharisees did exactly that: they repeatedly demanded a sign from the Lord (Matt. 12:38; 16:1; Luke 11:16; John 2:18), which He refused to give them (Matt. 12:39; 16:4). Emphatically confirming the absolute sufficiency of Scripture to bring sinners to salvation, Abraham replied, **If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets** (i.e., the Old Testament), **they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead**, as the resurrection of a real Lazarus and the Lord Himself proves. Since unbelief is at heart a moral, not an intellectual issue, no amount of evidence alone can turn unbelief to faith. The Word of God has the power to do so (Heb. 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23).

That reply raises the question of what people before the cross needed to believe to escape hell.

First, they needed to believe the truth about God.

The Old Testament reveals Him to be the holy, sovereign Creator, Ruler, and Lawgiver who always judges sin. God judged sin at the fall, to which the repeated refrain in the genealogy recorded in Genesis 5, "and he died," testifies.

The catastrophic judgment of the flood gives further evidence that God judges sin. Because He is absolutely holy (Isa. 6:3), God's "eyes are too pure to approve evil, and [He] can not look on wickedness with favor" (Hab. 1:13).

Therefore He must punish sin, and as a result, "the soul who sins will die" (Ezek. 18:4).

Second, they needed to believe that sinners must repent.

Confronted with an overwhelming display of God's nature and acts that rebuked his inadequate view of Him Job said, "I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

Jonah proclaimed God's impending judgment on Nineveh, and its people repented (Jonah 3:4–10).

Through Ezekiel, God called for Israel to repent and turn from their sins (Ezek. 18:30–32).

"Let the wicked forsake his way," Isaiah declared, "and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

Third, they needed to believe that salvation is by God's sovereign grace (cf. Ex. 33:19; 34:6–7; Pss. 41:4; 51:1).

The New Covenant, by whose provisions all the redeemed throughout redemptive history are saved, is a gracious covenant (Jer. 31:31–34).

Thus, sinners in every age have been saved by grace alone, never by their own merit, works, sacrifices, or performance of rituals and ceremonies.

Fourth, they needed to believe that God forgives the penitent sinner because He is, by nature, a forgiving God.

In Exodus 34:6–7 God describes Himself as the Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.

David, no stranger to God's forgiveness (cf. Pss. 32:1, 5; 51:1–4), wrote,

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Ps. 103:10–12)

Micah exclaimed,

Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love.

He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. (Mic. 7:18–19)

The Pharisees, who imagined that God was less righteous than He is and that they were more righteous than they were, saw little need for genuine repentance. They approached God only to confess their sins superficially, but more to celebrate their own righteousness:

[Jesus] told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax

collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.’ ” (Luke 18:9–11)

Fifth, they needed to believe that God’s gracious salvation and forgiveness of sin is appropriated by faith alone.

Abraham “believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:3, 9, 20–22; Gal. 3:6–9).

Habakkuk wrote that “the righteous will live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4; cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

Sixth, they needed to believe that salvation occurred by the granting or imputing of an alien righteousness; that is, a righteousness from outside of them (cf. Phil. 3:9).

Righteousness was imputed to Abraham when he believed God (Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23).

Seventh, they needed to believe that God’s justice was satisfied by transferring His judgment to a substitute.

The millions of animals sacrificed throughout Israel’s history taught them that “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22). Those countless sacrifices could not, however, take away sins (Heb. 10:1–4).

Eighth, they needed to believe that Messiah would come and redeem them from their sins (Job 19:25) through His substitutionary death on their behalf.

He would be the seed of the woman, who crushed Satan’s head (Gen. 3:15), the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. He would be both human and divine; both David’s descendant and his Lord (Matt. 22:42–45); the one who would be humble (Zech 9:9), and yet the king who will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:6–9; cf. Gen. 49:10).

Finally, ninth, they needed to believe that reception of salvation requires the forsaking of all sin, or hope of salvation by any human means.

In Psalm 3:8 David wrote, “Salvation belongs to the Lord,” and He alone is the Savior (Isa. 43:11; 45:21–22). Isaiah 55:6–7, as noted above, also calls for just such a complete abandonment of any other hope of salvation.

The Old Testament, then, contained all the information necessary to lead the honest seeker to salvation. Paul exhorted Timothy to remember “that from childhood you have known the sacred writings [from his believing mother and grandmother; 2 Tim. 1:5] which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

Peter proclaimed to the people of Israel that “the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18).

Jesus indicted the Jewish leaders for understanding that the Old Testament taught the truth about eternal life, yet being unwilling to believe in Him (John 5:39–40).

Paul wrote to the Romans that “now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets” (Rom. 3:21), and testified to the Corinthians, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

Like the rich man, as noted above, the Jews demanded signs from the Lord.

But they rejected the convincing signs that they did receive (John 12:37)—including the resurrection of a dead person.

After the Lord performed the astounding miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–44), the Pharisees’ response was to plot His death (vv. 47–53) and that of Lazarus (John 12:10–11). And when the Lord Jesus Christ Himself rose from the dead, the religious leaders bribed the Roman soldiers who had been guarding the tomb to falsely claim that the disciples had stolen His body (Matt. 28:11–15).

For the rich man, Israel, and all who arrive in hell, the issue is not lack of information, but rejection of the truth: “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

IMPORTANT WORDS TO KNOW

Church age - The time period from the beginning of the church (about AD 30) until Jesus Christ returns for everyone who has trusted in him, as promised in John 14

Eschatology - Study of the Bible's teachings about events leading up to the second coming of Jesus. (from Greek *eschatos* - *final* + *logos* word or *idea* = “a word about the final things”)

First Coming of Christ - The earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ, BC-AD 30.

Millennium - The thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth, described in Revelation 20:4-6.

- **Premillennialism**

Christ returns before the millennium.

Interprets Revelation 20 literally.

Subtypes:

- **Dispensational Premillennialism** – emphasizes Israel and the Church as distinct; expects a pre-tribulation rapture.
- **Historic Premillennialism** – sees the Church enduring the tribulation before Christ's return.

Key proponents: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, George Eldon Ladd.

Amillennialism

No literal 1000-year reign on earth.

The “millennium” is symbolic of Christ's present reign through the Church.

The Second Coming and Final Judgment occur together.

Key proponents: Augustine, Louis Berkhof, Anthony Hoekema.

Postmillennialism

Christ returns after a “millennial” age of gospel success and worldwide Christian influence.

Emphasizes the progress of the Kingdom in history.

Key proponents: Jonathan Edwards, R.C. Sproul (partial support), Kenneth Gentry.