

BIBLE
PROPHECY
HANDBOOK



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INTRODUCTION

Many people consider studying the end times a curious and eccentric pursuit. Perhaps they've been disillusioned by the precise predictions of "prophecy experts" and the constantly revised interpretations that fit every political crisis. But the fact is that we can't ignore what the Bible says about the end of the world. After all, our hope and vision for the future shape our actions.

In the absence of a specific timetable, how should we live in the face of Jesus Christ's imminent return? As you might expect, the Bible has plenty to say on the subject. And as you may expect, people have many different views on the subject. Through these ninety readings, you'll look at the end times through several different prisms, along with the scriptures used to support them.

Christians throughout history have generally approached the book of Revelation from four different viewpoints. Each view has its strengths. None has been able to argue the others out of existence. We must be careful, though. Each view can also be misused. We will never know the exact time or date of Jesus' return (Mark 13:32–33). But God does expect us to be ready for his return.

Look up and read the scripture passages presented. Consider the thoughts and arguments made on each passage. Ask yourself the questions. Then, determine how you can best live in light of eternity, accountable to God through his grace.

TABLE: TYPES OF END TIMES

VIEW	EXPLANATION
<p>Futurist View (It's all in the future.)</p>	<p>Only the letters to the churches (Revelation 1–3) are directed to John's contemporaries. The rest of the book describes the end of history.</p>
<p>Historicist View (It happened in history.)</p>	<p>Revelation is a foretelling of all of history, from John's day until the end of time.</p>
<p>Preterist View (It happened in the first century.)</p>	<p>John was writing a timeless figurative description of the ebb and flow of evil in the world.</p>
<p>Symbolic View (It's all symbolic.)</p>	<p>John was writing a timeless figurative description of the ebb and flow of evil in the world.</p>

INTERPRETATIONS

REASONING

Every generation can find reason to accept the possibility of Christ's imminent return, while resisting the temptation to set dates for it.

Every generation should note how Revelation accurately portrays the battle between good and evil throughout world history.

Readers throughout the centuries have gained comfort from evidence of God's power and judgment no matter what their situation. At the same time, we may conclude that John's writing, like other biblical prophecies, contains both immediate and long-term references.

Today's readers can learn lessons from the past, readying themselves for the future and focusing their attention on Jesus Christ today.

———— Day 1 ————

THE BIG PICTURE

1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 28; Romans 8:33–34

While there is diversity among believers regarding the precise order of events in the end times, we all agree on the “big picture.” Jesus changed the destiny of human history. Though his promised future reign is not yet fully here, his life, death, and resurrection are its guarantee. Jesus’ resurrection promises his followers a future life (after death) where evil no longer exists (1 Corinthians 15:20–26).

After Jesus has defeated all of his enemies, he will return as the final Judge. He will hold all people accountable for their actions. On that day, Jesus will finally answer the cries for justice (Revelation 6:10). Believers know that when we appear before the final Judge, we won’t have to rely on our own works. Our Lord and Savior will cover our sins and accept us (Romans 8:33–34). After establishing his kingdom, Christ will control everything forevermore (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Need to Know

- Jesus was called the firstfruits. The firstfruits were the firstborn of any family or herd, or the first parts of any crop. The firstfruits were seen as holy, belonging only to God. Jesus was the first of the resurrected souls.
- God claims us righteous through our faith in Christ. This is what is referred to as justification.

Think About It

- Do you fear God's judgment, or do you feel justified in his eyes because of his grace?
- When you think of being accountable to God, what would you most like to change about your life?

————— Day 2 —————

LIVING NEAR THE END

*Hebrews 11:13; 2 Peter 3:10–11; Matthew 28:19–20;
2 Corinthians 5:18–21*

Believers should eagerly seek Christ's return, not the world's applause (Hebrews 11:13). Jesus outlined the signs of the last days precisely so that we will be watchful. Does your life exemplify Christ's love for the lost (2 Peter 3:10–11)? Are you spreading the Good News (Matthew 28:19–20)?

In this world we will continue to face struggles. Yet the fact that Christ has assured our future with him adds a unique dimension to the Christian life. Our future is already guaranteed—eternity with God. Because of that fact, we can reflect Jesus' self-sacrificial love without fear. We can spend our lives for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 5:18–21).

Christ is the basis for our hope in the future. As Christians, we eagerly look forward to Christ's future reign and seek to reflect his sacrificial love in our world today.

Need to Know

- Hebrews 11 is sometimes called the “Hall of Faith.” People such as Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, and Samuel all looked toward Christ’s coming, even though it didn’t happen in their lifetime.
- Reconciliation is actually an accounting term. It means to make both sides equal. When we take part in the ministry of reconciliation, we communicate God’s grace to others who, like us, don’t deserve it. Through that grace, God makes us righteous.

Think About It

- In what ways does your life reflect Christ?
- To whom around you would you like to spread the gospel of Jesus?

———— Day 3 —————

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Matthew 24:4–8, 29; Mark 13:7, 32, 23; Luke 21:25

False Christs, wars, and famines—these are the signs that characterize our fallen world (Matthew 24:4–8). We shouldn’t assume the end of the world is near when false messiahs, wars, and famines appear. In fact, the end may still be far off (Mark 13:7). However, these terrifying events serve as reminders to us that we cannot save ourselves. Only Christ can defeat the evil that is rampant in this world.

God's coming judgment will also be preceded by falling stars, eclipses, earthquakes, and other catastrophes (Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:25). These natural catastrophes will constitute God's final call to repentance. National leaders will be confused. People will faint in horror.

Scripture doesn't give us these signs so we can calculate the year and date when the world will end. Jesus told his disciples no one knows the date or hour (Mark 13:32). Instead, he simply warned them, "Be on your guard!" (Mark 13:23 CEV).

Need to Know

- False Christs or antichrists have appeared since the first century. John mentioned in his letters that many antichrists had already appeared. These were people who denied that Jesus was the Son of God (1 John 2:18–22).
- Jesus gives two parables in Matthew 25 regarding the judgment of people's lives. One is based on the story of servants who have been left in charge of their master's money. The other is a story about sheep and goats. In both, people face a reckoning for the way they have "spent" their lives.

Think About It

- What are some "signs" that you see around you of the natural catastrophes described in today's scripture reading?
- What do you see as the benefits or distractions of trying to pin down the time of Christ's return?

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

SIGN
• People living as if God didn't exist
• Explosion of knowledge and freedom of travel
• Wars and rumors of wars
• Widespread acceptance of immoral behavior
• Vacuum in world leadership
• Increased demonic activity
• Widespread abandonment of the Christian faith
• Evidence of breakdown in families
• Spirit of selfishness and materialism
• General disrespect for others
• Human leader declares himself to be god
• People ridiculing God's Word
• Significant shifts in political power and influence

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

REFERENCE
Genesis 6:5; Luke 17:26–27
Daniel 12:4
Mark 13:7
Luke 17:26; 2 Peter 2:5–8
Psalms 2:1–3; Revelation 13:4–9
1 Timothy 4:1
1 Timothy 4:1–3; 2 Timothy 4:3–4
2 Timothy 3:1–3
2 Timothy 3:1–2
2 Timothy 3:2–4
2 Thessalonians 2:3–4
2 Peter 3:2–4; Jude 17–18
Revelation 13:3–7

THE ANTICHRIST

Matthew 24:15–21, 30; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–8

Two decisive signs will indicate the end of the world is near. First, the antichrist will defile the temple (“the abomination of desolation”). After that, a period of wickedness and intense persecution of God’s people—the Great Tribulation—will follow (see Matthew 24:15–18). Postmillennialists believe that Christ’s prophecy of the defilement of the temple was already fulfilled when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 (Matthew 24:15). However, most Christians believe that this event merely foreshadowed the horrific events that will occur at the end times. In the last days the antichrist will desecrate the temple with a disgusting and blasphemous ritual and afterward lead a ferocious campaign against God’s people. This time will be a period of great suffering (Matthew 24:19–21). His reign of terror will only be stopped by Christ, who will return in glory (Matthew 24:30). Paul also predicted that a “man of sin. . .the son of perdition” would appear right before Jesus’ second coming (2 Thessalonians 2:3–8).

Need to Know

- From the earliest Old Testament history of the Jewish nation, God always required purity of worship from his people. This highlights the significance of the defilement of the temple, which is an

act of abandoning the most sacred requirement—to worship God alone.

- The man of sin that Paul wrote about was also referred to as the “son of perdition” and the “man doomed to destruction.” Paul noted that this person would eventually be overthrown by Jesus, but before that he would work against the cause of Christ.

Think About It

- What concerns you the most when you think about a world power—bent on working against the cause of Christ—rising in the end times?
- What efforts do you see in your world today that might represent the work of a kind of antichrist?

———— Day 5 —————

RAMPANT EVIL

*Matthew 24:9–13, 24, 37–39; 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12;
2 Timothy 3:1–5*

Wickedness will become rampant in the last days (Matthew 24:37–39). Violence, hedonism, and arrogance will lead to a breakdown of the social order (2 Timothy 3:1–5). Jesus warned his followers that they will be hated by all nations and even betrayed by their families (Matthew 24:9–10).

In the last days, many who claim to be God’s people will lose their faith (Matthew 24:11–12, 24).

Due to the increasing wickedness, “the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12). Many will be deceived by false teachers who will lead them away from God (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12; 1 John 2:22; 4:2–3; 2 John 1:7). Jesus described all these signs to his disciples so that his true followers would remain faithful in spite of these troubles and catastrophes. Only the person “that shall endure unto the end. . . shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

Need to Know

- Jesus compared the last days to the days when Noah lived. In the book of Genesis we are told that Noah found grace in God’s eyes. In terms of the rest of humanity, though, God was grieved, almost repentant of his creation (Genesis 6:6–7).
- These passages reveal the dark side of humanity that will be so evident as time grows short. As we endure these times, we should ask God to develop the fruits of the Holy Spirit in us: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22–23).

Think About It

- How would you outline the false teachings you hear around you?
- How would you describe someone who has “lost his faith”?

————— Day 6 —————

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

Matthew 10:23; Matthew 24:14; Romans 11:1, 7–12

Not all the signs of the end times are terrifying and horrific. Jesus also told his disciples that the Good News of Christ would reach all nations before he returned (Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10).

Jesus also predicted that the Good News will be preached to all Israel before he returns (Matthew 10:23). Jesus anticipated Israel's future conversion, thus fulfilling many Old Testament prophecies (for example, Ezekiel 36:22–32). Paul explained that God has allowed the non-Jews to come to Christ because of the Jews' rejection of him. Later, the Jews will also be saved (Romans 11:1, 11–12, 25–26). When Christ returns, Jew and Christian will finally be reconciled as part of the same olive tree (Romans 11:17–24). Many amillennialists reject this last sign. They see the church as fulfilling these promises, because they believe it is the true Israel.

Need to Know

- Christianity grew out of Judaism, which was both a faith and a lineage of people based on God's promise to Abraham to raise a nation from his descendants and to give them a land of their own (Genesis 17:5–8). Abraham's descendants, the Jews, have struggled throughout history to maintain their land and their very existence. As Christianity developed into a movement on its own, embracing all humanity, it

could have seemed to the Jews that their distinction as God's people was being watered down.

Think About It

- Do you believe the gospel has been preached throughout the world?
- What do you see as your responsibility on a daily basis in spreading that gospel to all people?

———— Day 7 —————

VARIOUS VIEWS ON
HOW THE WORLD
WILL END

Acts 1:11; Revelation 19:11–16

How will this world end? When will it happen? Will there be any warning signs when it's about to occur? These and many other questions have plagued diligent students of the book of Revelation. Revelation does give us some clues. It describes bloody wars, horrendous hailstorms, and ghastly plagues. In the middle of this chaos, Jesus, the King of kings, returns to the earth to save his people and pronounce judgment on his enemies (Revelation 16:17–21; 19:11–18). There's no question that Jesus will one day return to the earth (Acts 1:11). All Christians believe this. But exactly how Jesus will return and the order of events before his coming has been debated for centuries. There are

four main views about how the world will end—dispensational premillennialism, historic premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism (see chart on following six pages). Each of these views differs in the order of events surrounding Christ's return and even the existence of events. Most differ in terms of when Christ will return in light of the thousand-year (millennial) reign, and whether that reign is a literal one.

Need to Know

- Revelation 20:1–6 is the primary text for the Millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ. Some view this reign in a literal sense, one that will be experienced on earth. Others view it as a symbolic of Christ's eternal rule.
- While there are many different views on the end of the world, it will include both the gathering of believers and the reckoning of all people before God's judgment.

Think About It

- What are you most curious about in regards to the timing of the events surrounding Christ's return?
- How do you think Christians should function together in light of their many different understandings about the end of the world?

Event	Dispensational Premillennialism	Historic Premillennialism
Rapture	The church is raptured prior to the Tribulation and taken to heaven to be with Christ.	The Rapture is part of the Second Coming—when believers join Christ in the air to descend to earth with him.
Israel and the church	Israel and the church have entirely different destinies in the end times.	The church is the “spiritual Israel,” fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel, though some are reserved for Israel itself.
Antichrist	The antichrist is a person who will appear during the end times to personify satanic power. He will make a treaty with Israel and then persecute that nation.	The antichrist is a person who will appear during the end times to personify satanic power.
Tribulation	The church is raptured to heaven before the Tribulation. Israel is converted through the Tribulation.	The church goes through the Tribulation.

Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
<p>The Rapture is part of the Second Coming</p>	<p>Israel and the church have entirely different destinies in the end times.</p>
<p>The church is the “spiritual Israel,” fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel.</p>	<p>The church is the “spiritual Israel,” fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel.</p>
<p>The antichrist represents satanic power throughout this age. Perhaps a person, personifying satanic power at the end of our age, will appear.</p>	<p>The antichrist represents satanic power throughout the church age. Most biblical references to the antichrist have already been fulfilled.</p>
<p>The church goes through the Tribulation, which is a final outbreak of evil at the end of this age.</p>	<p>The Tribulation is this present age. Evil lessens towards the end of this age.</p>

Event	Dispensational Premillennialism	Historic Premillennialism
Armageddon	Armageddon is the final rebellion against God before Christ establishes the Millennium. The church is absent during this period.	Armageddon is the final rebellion against God before Christ establishes the Millennium. The church is present during this period.
Second Coming	The Second Coming will occur in two phases. First, the church will be raptured. Seven years later, Christ will return to earth to establish the Millennium.	Jesus' Second Coming will establish the Millennium.
Resurrection	The resurrection will occur in three phases: (1) the resurrection of dead believers at the Rapture, (2) the resurrection of Old Testament saints and tribulation martyrs at Jesus' Second Coming, and (3) the resurrection of the remaining dead at the end of the Millennium.	The resurrection will occur in two phases: (1) the resurrection of all dead believers at Jesus' Second Coming, and (2) the resurrection of the remaining dead at the end of the Millennium.

Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
<p>Armageddon is the final rebellion against God at the end of this age. The church is present during this period.</p>	<p>Armageddon is a picture of the heavenly Christ leading the church to victory over all its enemies through the power of the Good News.</p>
<p>Jesus' Second Coming will establish the new heaven and new earth.</p>	<p>Jesus' Second Coming after the Millennium will establish the new heaven and new earth.</p>
<p>One general resurrection of believing and unbelieving dead will occur at the Second Coming.</p>	<p>One general resurrection of believing and unbelieving dead will occur at the Second Coming.</p>

Event	Dispensational Premillennialism	Historic Premillennialism
Judgment	Three-phase judgment: (1) At Rapture, believers' works judged. (2) At Second Coming, Gentiles and living Jews judged; only believers enter Millennium. Resurrected Old Testament saints and tribulation martyrs with positions in the Millennium will be judged. (3) At end of Millennium, unbelievers face white throne judgment.	Judgment will occur in two phases. (1) At the Second Coming, believers' works will be judged. (2) At the end of the Millennium, everyone will face the final judgment.
Millennium	A thousand-year period that fulfills Old Testament promises for Israel. Jesus reigns literally in Jerusalem. Curse is removed from earth. The church is in heaven.	Jesus reigns visibly on earth. The Millennium is for both Old Testament and New Testament believers. The curse is removed from the earth.
New Heaven and New Earth	New heaven and earth unite the two peoples of God—the Jews in earthly millennium and Christians in heavenly glory.	New heaven and earth introduce new cosmos without possibility of evil; God is intimately present with his people.

Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
<p>At the Second Coming, all people will be judged.</p>	<p>At the Second Coming, occurring at the end of the Millennium, there will be one judgment of all people.</p>
<p>Jesus reigns now in the hearts of believers and through the church. There is no future literal Millennium on earth. This age ends with the Second Coming.</p>	<p>Jesus is leading the church in this present age to preach the Good News throughout the world. This preaching of the Good News will establish the Millennium on earth.</p>
<p>New heaven and earth introduce new cosmos without possibility of evil; God is intimately present with his people.</p>	<p>New heaven and earth introduce new cosmos without possibility of evil; God is intimately present with his people.</p>

DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIAL VIEW

*Zechariah 14:1–5; Revelation 11:7–8;
Revelation 16:16*

“And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel” (Revelation 7:4). The book of Revelation assigns the nation of Israel a central role in the events of the end times. In addition to describing the sealing of 144,000 Israelites, the Bible places several end-times events in the land of Israel: the two faithful witnesses will die in Jerusalem (Revelation 11:3–8), the armies of the world will gather near Israel in the last days (Zechariah 14:1–5; Revelation 16:16), and Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4).

Dispensational premillennialists take special note of Israel and its role in those final days. If Israelites are described as God’s chosen people, why shouldn’t the nation of Israel play a major role in end-times events? Dispensationalists believe the return of the Jews to Palestine, the reestablishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and its continuing prosperity in the face of on-going persecution can only be explained as miraculous. They’re signs that the end is near.

Need to Know

- A *dispensation* is a period of time. When we use

the word to describe a perspective on end times—dispensationalism—we are talking (at the most basic level) about an understanding of God dealing with man differently, progressively through different periods of time. An example would be the period of the Law of Moses, which was both affirmed and superceded by the grace that was revealed through Jesus Christ.

- A *premillennial* view is a belief that Christ will return to earth to gather believers *before* he reigns on the earth for one thousand years.

Think About It

- Do you see a distinct role between the nation of Israel and the church, or do you see Israel's role absorbed into the Christian church?
- What do you think the role of the church is in preparing for the end of the world as we know it?

———— Day 9 —————

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Daniel 9:24–27; Revelation 19:7–9

Dispensational premillennialists divide God's plan for humanity into several eras or "dispensations." God has separate plans for Israel and the church. Dispensationalists point to God's promises to Abraham, David, and others that Israel would be physically and spiritually restored in Canaan under the Messiah's rule. These