

Week 39

The Kingdom and End Times

Key Verses

Revelation 1:6-9 ...and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”

+ Introduction

The book of Revelation is a book of prophecy filled with imagery and symbols. Prophecy, by its very nature, is a mystery. We believe that God is and has been at work from Creation into the future, yet it is daunting to try to comprehend how He will accomplish His purposes. Prophecy is God’s revelation of future events, which gives us a broad understanding of His plan and purposes. For example, the people of God in the Old Testament knew a Messiah was coming. They knew He was to be the King, the offspring of David. But the details and specifics were mysterious.

If you were to take a systematic theology class, the chances are good that eschatology, the study of end times, would be the last doctrine covered. Many Christians think this is appropriate, something to dive into last, only if you have time. What if we turned the tables on things and leaned into the subject? A biblical understanding of the end times can shape our Christian walk in positive and powerful ways.

At the outset, it would be good to establish the basis for interpreting this very symbolic book. Revelation has been interpreted through the lens of allegory, symbolism, history, and multiple other viewpoints. For this lesson, we are taking the traditional, historical Christian position of a futurist approach. The outline of Revelation is as simple and complex as the following.

1. The Things Which You Have Seen (Chapter 1)
2. The Things Which Are (Chapters 2-3)
3. The Things Which Shall be Hereafter (Chapters 4-22) ¹

Simply stated, the focus of chapters 4-22 of Revelation is on the future. The book of Revelation opens with a message from Jesus to the seven churches. In Chapter 4, the book takes a turn to the future. 4:1b "... and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here and I will show you what must take place after these things." "These things" are the events described in chapters 4-22, events that are to take place in the future.

A common standard of interpretation which scholars have used over the years was concisely stated by Dr. David L. Cooper, Founder of the Biblical Research Society:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise." ²

Much of the language of Revelation is symbolic and figurative, as would be expected. Imagine if you were given a view of something that would take place 2,000 or more years into the future that you needed to describe to someone else right now. You would use terms that make sense right now but would be enigmatic to an audience reading your description thousands of years later. This is how we read Revelation.

There are four future events we will define and biblically describe to make plain sense of this wonderful book, the book of Revelation.

1. The Rapture
2. The Tribulation/Great Tribulation
3. The Millennial Reign of Christ
4. The Kingdom of God

+ The Rapture

"Rapture" is a word that means to seize or be carried away. However, the word "rapture" does not occur in the Bible specifically. The English word comes from a Latin word, *rapio*, which means to seize or snatch or the actual removal from one place to another. ³ The concept occurs 13 times in the New Testament and is associated with tangible examples of its meaning. For example, the description of Philip being "caught up" near Gaza. Philip was told to meet someone on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. There he met a man whom he led to Christ and immediately baptized. Acts 8:39 says, "When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away..." The same concept of being "caught up," is also described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:2-4 *I know a man in Christ, who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a man was caught up to the third heaven. ³ And I know how such a man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows – ⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.*

The key verse for the rapture doctrine is 1 Thessalonians 4:17 *“Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”*

Charles Ryrie, in his book, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus*, gives us five certainties we can know regarding the rapture of believers drawn from 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

1. There will be a **return** of Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself will come for His people. He will be accompanied by all the grandeur His presence deserves.
2. There will be a **resurrection** of those who are Christians but died before the Rapture.
3. There will be a **rapture** of the living believers in Jesus.
4. There will be a **reunion** with loved ones and with the Lord.
5. Christians should **reassure** one another with these words. ⁴

The Rapture will bring an end to the Church Age. This is the first of the events that launch the beginning of the Great Tribulation, which is described as a vast and terrible time for the entire earth.

✦ The Tribulation/Great Tribulation

MATTHEW 24:21 *“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”*

MATTHEW 24:29 *“But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”*

DANIEL 9:27 *“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”*

DANIEL 12:1 *“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.”*

The Great Tribulation has traditionally been separated from the Tribulation. The Tribulation is the full seven years described in the book of Daniel, with The Great Tribulation being the last 3 ½ years of

that seven year period. The timeline we regularly use starts with the rapture of the Church, which starts the clock on the seven years of the Tribulation. After 3½ years, the Antichrist is announced and takes his place of prominence in Jerusalem. This marks the beginning of the Great Tribulation, during which world events become horrific, and the wrath of God will fall heavily on the world.

There are three main views on the Tribulation, stated below but not defended here. All three views focus on the presence or absence of the Church during the Tribulation.

- **Pre-Tribulation** – The Church is raptured out of the entire seven-year Tribulation.
- **Mid-Tribulation** – The Church is raptured after 3½ years of the Tribulation and is exempted from the Great Tribulation.
- **Post-Tribulation** – The Church will endure the full seven years of the Tribulation.

Regardless of your view on the issue of the Church's participation in or exemption from the Tribulation, virtually all Bible scholars agree that the Great Tribulation is a terrible time of suffering and calamity. That is the destiny of our world. Matthew 24 describes the Tribulation as a period of time where believers are hated, martyred, ostracized, and suffer greatly. It is a time of tremendous apostasy, betrayal, deception, and lawlessness on the earth.

After the Tribulation, the Bible describes the Millennial Kingdom on earth.

✦ The Millennial Reign of Christ

REVELATION 20:2-7 *And he took hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;³ and he threw him into the abyss and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.*

⁴ *Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of [a]their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their foreheads and on their hands; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* ⁵ *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.* ⁶ *Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.*

⁷ *When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,*

The Millennial Reign of Christ is explained in the book of Revelation, verses 20:2-7. The Millennial Kingdom is the rule of Jesus Christ on earth for 1,000 years after His second coming and the conclusion of the Great Tribulation. We do not interpret that time frame allegorically due to the constant use of the term 1,000 years. If the Lord wanted to make the point that the rule of Jesus on earth would be long ago, He could have easily told us that without using specific numbers.

Theologian John Walvoord, in his book, *Major Bible Prophecies*, writes this, "The millennial kingdom is a major part of the second coming of Christ. It includes the destruction of the armies gathered against God in the Holy Land (Revelation 19:17,21), the capture of the Beast and the False Prophet and their being cast into the lake of fire (v.20), the binding of Satan (20:1-3), and the resurrection of the martyred dead of the Tribulation to reign with Christ a thousand years (20:4-6). A literal interpretation of Revelation 20:4-6 requires that Christ reign on earth for a thousand years following His second coming." ⁵

+ The Kingdom of God

REVELATION 11:15 *Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."*

REVELATION 21:1-3 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."*

REVELATION 22:1-2 *Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

Jesus said in Mark 1:15, "The time has come... the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" The Kingdom of God truly was near since the King was in their presence. His rule and reign over all were clearly revealed through His perfect life, miraculous power, and resurrection. A common phrase in teaching on the Kingdom of God is, "now and not yet." This means that the Kingdom of God has begun, the Church age is under the rule of Jesus, empowered through the Holy Spirit; but the final Kingdom of God starts in full at the second coming of Jesus. Revelation 11:15 says, "Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

Favoring either side of the "now and not yet" idea will lead us to doctrinal errors or practical mistakes. Paul wrote, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Now, things can be confusing and unclear, and we often want the King to step into the picture in a more visible way. **Then**, we will see the Lord face to face, and we will know the fullness, privilege, and promises of the Kingdom of God... personally.

Below is a simple chart providing a basic timeline of current and future events. This chart is written from a pre-tribulation, pre-millennial perspective. Again, this means that believers in Christ will be

raptured before the seven-year tribulation, (pre-tribulation). And the tribulation will occur before the 1,000-year reign of Christ, (pre-millennialism). The millennial kingdom on earth will be ruled by Jesus Christ.

The Present Church Age	The Rapture of the Church	The Tribulation/ Great Tribulation	The Return of Christ	The Millennial Reign of Christ on Earth	The Final Judgment	Eternal State
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+ Conclusion/Application

How can a biblical understanding of the end of the age and the Kingdom of God shape your Christian walk?

1. Let it humble you.

Who are we to know the mind and plans of God? Isaiah 66:1-2 says, *Thus says the Lord, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord. "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."*

That is amazing when you take the time to think about that truth. We are frail, finite creatures, and yet God would reveal His Son to us and His future plans. It is humbling. This is a remarkable act of grace and trust on His part.

Paul wrote in Colossians 3:12-13, *"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."* This is not information that creates a condescending attitude within us. Our understanding of end times must be utilized with humility and discernment. This is not knowledge that we have somehow earned or deserve. Let the truth regarding the things that are to come, and your possession of that insight encourage a spirit of humility with others.

2. Let it motivate you.

Let two truths move you forward. First, knowing that you have the map of the future, and secondly, that God has called you to be an ambassador of the good news of Christ. Let the reality of heaven move you toward loving others with a renewed passion. Let the tragedy of hell drive you to act, speak, give, love in real sorrow over the fellowship with God so many will miss.

Let the remarkable gift of heaven and the heart-stopping reality that it lasts an eternity move you to greater faith and love for the Lord and others. Let the truth of heaven and hell

move you toward a stronger walk with the Lord, a more evangelistic lifestyle, a stronger and more passionate prayer life. Let the end times motivate you!

3. Let it comfort you.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 that when someone passes on, we grieve. That is natural and expected. But the Christian does not grieve without hope like the rest of the world because we know that those who have died in Christ have gone to be with Him forever. And if we are in Christ, we will also see the Lord and our loved ones soon. When families get together over the holidays, we say, "see you soon," as we look forward to reconnecting in a few short weeks or months. Goodbye can be a terrible word that we hate to hear. "See you soon" is totally different.

Let the truth of the fully experienced Kingdom of Heaven, the joy of seeing Jesus face to face, the comfort of knowing we will be with Him forever bring great peace to our souls. Imagine how great the Garden of Eden was. Let yourself imagine how great the place Jesus has made for you will be (John 14:1-3). We all need to be comforted. God's Word is amazing in this regard. This is something that brings peace to our souls and stillness to our hearts and minds. Let the truth comfort you.

4. Let it purify you.

What encouragement toward personal holiness could have more impact than the knowledge that we will all very shortly be in the presence of the Lord? 1 John 3:3 says, *"And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."* Knowing that we are moving from this world soon, either by death or rapture, can be a great encouragement toward personal purification. What person, knowing he had registered for a triathlon and knowing he had to prepare for the race, would continue to live life as though those things were not in the future. The Kingdom of God is coming in the fullness of God. What an encouragement to take spiritual growth seriously.

5. Let it provide you with a source of joy in the midst of your suffering.

In 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, Paul gives us a wonderfully divine perspective. *"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."* We all suffer in this life at one time or another. Paul reminds us that these are only momentary, light afflictions. They are producing something beautiful and great within us. What a source of Joy!

Christ's words in Matthew 24 reveal that our suffering in this present age will get worse. Who among us could have predicted the events of the past year and a half? If those events had all been revealed to us earlier, would we have changed anything in our lives to better prepare for the challenges ahead? Perhaps, so; perhaps, not.

God has given us a glimpse of the future written in the Book of Revelation. From our perspective, some imagery is clear; some is not. We simply do not have the eyes to see everything that God has planned clearly yet. But we can know that one day, as promised in 1 Corinthians 13:12, the curtain of time will come down, and we will see all the promises of God come to light. Then, we will see clearly.

The question for all of us is, "Will I be ready for the end times in my life?" Either by death or rapture, we believe our end, as Christians, is secure. We will forever be with the Lord! That day will turn the "end times" into the "beginning times" as Christians begin a new era with God in heaven. And that is something we can all truly look forward to with great hope, assurance, and excitement through God's grace.

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¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 2007, p. 1035.

² <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/introduction/the-art-and-science-of-interpretation.html>

³ <https://bible.org/question/where-did-term-8216rapture%E2%80%99-come>

⁴ Charles Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus*, Harvest House, 1996, p. 34.

⁵ John Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, Zondervan, 1991, p.390.