

An hourglass with golden sand is shown on a wooden surface. The sand is flowing from the top bulb to the bottom bulb. The lighting is warm, creating a soft glow and a shadow on the wood.

Deeper

8. The Doctrine of the End Times

Truth



CRAWLEY
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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of Matthew chapter 24 the disciples ask Jesus an interesting question: “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” I’m not sure what answer they were expecting, but it was probably not the answer they got:

And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. [Matthew 24:4-5]

and

And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [Matthew 24:10-11]

Those are verses that we should take careful notice of. The Christian church throughout the ages, and even more so today is engaged in a battle for the truth. How do we stay true to God’s word and how do we avoid being deceived by false teaching or doctrine? The sad truth is we will all probably know people who at one point were walking strongly in the faith but now seem to have been pulled away. The why’s and wherefores of that are not really the subject of the course, but rather “How do we stay true to God’s word?” How can we do our utmost to ensure we are not deceived or distracted, or worst still become those who deceive or distract others? The simple answer is to study God’s word and to understand the truths in there, and what it says and what it does not say.

We are also more likely to be led astray by subtle twists and modifications to God’s word rather than an outright denial. Satan at no point said to Adam and Eve “God doesn’t exist, help yourself to any fruit you like.” They would have seen through that deception very quickly. Rather he asked:

“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” [Genesis 3:1b]

We also need to be aware of those truths that are fundamental to our faith and a denial of such will instantly lead us into error as opposed to other truths that can be interpreted in different ways, and for which Christians can hold different views. An absolute truth that must be defended to the uttermost is the fact that Christ will return. The means and manner of that return, and the whole are of what happens in the end times is however subject to much debate. With such subjects the various viewpoints will be presented.

Likewise, the truth that God created the whole universe out of nothing in one single act of creation is another truth we must hold to. The manner of that creation (was it over seven literal days or seven periods of time) is another area on which much has been written and different view put forth.

This course was first presented as an eight-part course at Crawley Community Church in 2012/13 and the content and accompanying notes have been expanded and revised for 2023/24.

All verses are from the from the English Standard Version (2001)

Bible verses and passages are shown in blue, other quotes are shown in red.

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7. The Doctrine of the End Times

The Bible refers to 'The End Times' as the period surrounding Jesus' second coming, when the present course of history will come to an end. The Bible declares that God will pour out His Spirit on all mankind, and His people will prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams. The Bible also warns of a time of deep darkness and tribulation, when the Antichrist will rise and deceive many. The End Times will end with the final Judgement of mankind and the complete overthrow of Satan.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever.
[1 Thessalonians 4:16-17]

All evangelical Christians are committed to a belief in the Second Coming of Christ that precedes the final judgement of mankind with an eternal separation of those who are saved from those who are not. There are many different viewpoints over the details and order of events that will occur at the end times, but all in agreement with this one essential truth; Christ will return again to judge the living and dead. Any discussion on the details should bear this fundamental point of agreement in mind.

The phase 'End Times' does not appear in the Bible although Daniel speaks of 'The time of the end.'

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. 4 But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."
[Daniel 12:1-4]

The word most commonly translated to mean this period is the Greek word **Eskhatos** meaning 'last. From this we get the word Eschatology which is the study of the End Times.

We shall seek first to define some of common terms used when discussing the End Times, and the move to looking at the different viewpoints which will prioritise and order those events differently.

7.1 End Time Events

7.1.1 The Second Coming

There are three words in the New Testament often used in reference to Christ's return, and these give us some initial idea of what it will be like:

Word	Meaning
Parousia	The arrival of a royal visitor. If the King were to visit Crawley, we could talk of his parousia.
Ephiphaneia	The appearance of a sovereign to receive praise and adoration.
Apokalupis	The revelation of a sovereign in all their power and glory

With regards to the Second Coming of Christ there are a number of points we can make which are beyond question:

Christ will come again, His appearance will draw the acclamation of the peoples of the world, and His glory and majesty will be revealed [John Hosier]

There are a number of other things we can say about Christ's return.

7.1.1.1 The Certainty of Christ's Return

Christ's return is not a matter of doubt or possibility it is an absolute certainty that is spoken of with absolute clarity in scripture. The return of Christ is mentioned over 300 times in the New Testament alone and there are only four books in the New Testament that do not refer to the second Coming.

Christ return was prophesied before the flood.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. [Jude 14-16]

And His return is mentioned in the second to last verse.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. [Revelation 22:20]

As already said, many verses mention the second coming.

"On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west..." [Zechariah 14:4a]

"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes in His Father's glory and with holy angels." [Mark 8:38]

"This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." [Acts 1:11]

"For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God." [1 Thessalonians 4:16]

7.1.1.2 The Manner of Christ's Return

A number of things can be said about the manner of Christ's return:

- **Visible:** Revelation 1:7
- **Personal:** 1 Thessalonians 4:16
- **Glorious:** Mark 8:38
- **Unexpected:** Matthew 24:44, Matthew 24:50, Matthew 25: 13, Mark 13:32-34, Luke 12:40

7.1.1.3 The Purpose of Christ's Return

- For the Church (**Union**): Revelation 19:7
- For all Mankind (**Judgement**): Revelation 20:11ff
- For Creation (**Transformation**): 2 Peter 3:13

7.1.1.4 The Time of Christ's Return

The time of Christ's return is a mystery known only to the Father. Even Christ Himself does not know the moment.

"But concerning that day or hour no-one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." [Mark 13:32]

As Christians we are called not only to be ready for Christ's return but to eagerly await and anticipate it. It should be an event we long for rather than something we fear or dread.

waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. [Titus 2:13]

However, that doesn't stop speculation, and, whilst not being specific of the time, scripture does talk clearly of certain events that will occur before Christ's return; that are signs of the 'imminence of Christ's return:

- The gospel is preached to all nations: Mark 13:10, Matthew 24:14
- Tribulation: Mark 13:7-8, Matthew 24:15-22
- False prophets working signs and wonders: Mark 13:22, Matt 24:23-24
- Signs in the Heavens: Matthew 13:24-25, Matthew 24:29-30, Luke 21:25-27

- The coming of the man of sin (antichrist): 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10
- The salvation of Israel : Rom 11:12, Rom 11:25-26

All these verses are primarily to remind of the certainty of Christ's return.

7.1.2 Rapture

The Rapture is a term used to describe that moment when the Church is snatched away from the earth to meet the Lord in the air.

“For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17]

7.1.3 Tribulation

The Tribulation is a term used to describe a period, of probably seven years of intense trial and suffering on the earth.

For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. [Mark 13:19-20]

The actual length of the Tribulation is not clearly mentioned in scripture. It is often assumed to be a seven-year period, although the only verse that can be used to support this is in Daniel 9:27, but as this is a prophecy and the message can be interpreted in many ways (some would say the prophecies in Daniel are harder to unpick than those in Revelation).

There does seem to be more evidence for a 3 ½ year period as this period is mentioned more often.

but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. [Revelation 11:2]

And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. [Revelation 11:3]

And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished. [Daniel 12:7]

N.B. a ‘time’ means one year ‘times’ means two years, and ‘half a time’ means half a year, so 3 ½ years.

We should not get too pre-occupied with the duration of the Rapture, suffice it to say it is a time of testing and persecution, that ultimately God will bring to an end.

7.1.4 Millennium

The Millennium is a term used to describe a period of 1,000 years where Christ rules on the Earth. Some views of the End Times will see this as an actual physical period of time whilst others will see it as a more symbolic representation of Christ's rule in general.

and threw him [Satan] into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

[Revelation 20:3]

The Bible make reference to a number of events that occur during the Millennium and events that occur at the end of the millennium and bring it to a conclusion.

7.1.4.1 Millennium Events

- Satan is bound and the antichrist is destroyed: Revelation 20:2-3
- The saints reign with Christ: Revelation 20:4-6
- The curse on nature is lifted: Isaiah 41:18-19
- General prosperity: Amos 9:13-14
- Peace and Righteousness prevail: Micah 4:1-3
- Christ reigns in Jerusalem: Zechariah 8:3 & 20-23
- The temple is rebuilt, and animal sacrifices are restored: Ezekiel 40-48

7.1.4.2 Millennium Conclusion

- Satan is released
- Final Rebellion
- Fire from Heaven
- Final Judgement
- New Heaven and Earth

7.1.5 Judgement

The judgement to come is the goal to which all of history is moving; it is an appointment that every person, living or dead will have to keep. Scripture speaks extensively on the theme of judgement.

because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

[Acts 17:31]

And he [God] has given him [Christ] authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.

[John 5:27]

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

[Romans 2:5]

7.1.5.1 The Time of Final Judgement

Judgment will take place after the millennial rule of Christ. The different viewpoint on the sequence of End Time events is discussed later, but regardless of the order all agree that final judgement takes place after this period.

Satan will be loosed from captivity (Revelation 20:7-8)

There is a final rebellion and God's ultimate victory over Satan ((Revelation 20:9-10)

Final Judgement of all (Revelation 20:11-15)

7.1.5.2 The Nature of the Final Judgement

Jesus Christ is the one who has been given authority by God to carry out the Final Judgement

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead,
[2 Timothy 4:1a]

And he has given him [Christ] authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. [John 5:27]

Unbelievers will be judged for the sins and for the wrongs they have done.

but for those who are self-seeking[a] and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek.
[Romans 2:8-9]

There are degrees of punishment as a result of the judgement will people dealt with according to their actions. Actions both visible and invisible will be judged as nothing will be hidden.

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.
[Luke 12:2-3]

Believers also will face judgement:

"For we must all appear before the judgement seat to Christ, so that each one of us may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."
[2 Corinthians 5:10]

It is important to note that for the believer judgement is not something to be feared. Our assurance of salvation means that we should not be in doubt as to the outcome of this judgment; there is no danger that we might be found wanting for there *'is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.'*

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.
[John 5:24]

The judgement that believers face is a judgement to evaluate and bestow various degrees of reward. As well as a judgement of believers and un-believers, the Final Judgement is also a judgement of angels, with those who had rebelled against God receiving their final punishment.

Whether there is a judgment of righteous angels, and an apportioning of rewards is unclear in scripture. The text in 1 Corinthians referring to us judging angels would normally refer to righteous angels but cannot be explicitly made to mean this, and my just mean a judgement of fallen angels.

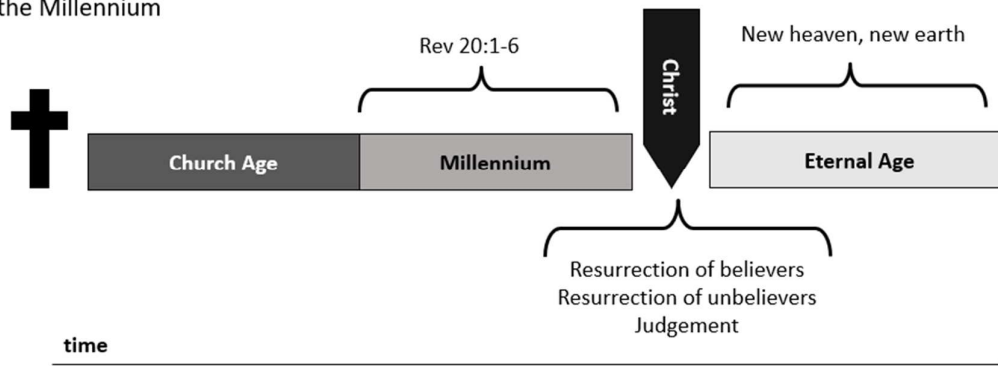
"Do you not know that we are to judge angels?"
[1 Corinthians 6:3a]

7.2 End Time Viewpoints

As has already been noted there are various views as to the sequence of these events as the End times unfold. There are three main viewpoints (all with subtle variations) but let us start with the three main different views:

7.2.1 Post-Millennialism

Christ returns after the Millennium



The Post-Millennial view would hold that Christ returns after (post) the Millennium. The church will grow, and the gospel will be spread throughout the world so that a large population of the world becomes Christian. There is a significant Christian influence on society such a 'golden age' or millennium of peace and prosperity occurs on the earth. That period does have to be a literal one thousand years, but at the end of that period Christ will return and there will be a final resurrection and judgement leading to the eternal age where believers' dwell with Christ for eternity.

The primary aspect of Post-Millennialism is its optimism regarding the gospel to change and influence a fallen world to a far greater degree than that which we see today. An absence of war and international conflict would also be a significant change to what we see around us today.

Post Millennialism was a popular view in the 19th Century, however the horrors of the First World War showed that advances in science and technology did usher in a period of prosperity and enlightenment, rather just more effective means of waging war and killing people. That trend has continued into the 21st Century and so this is probably the least held view these days.

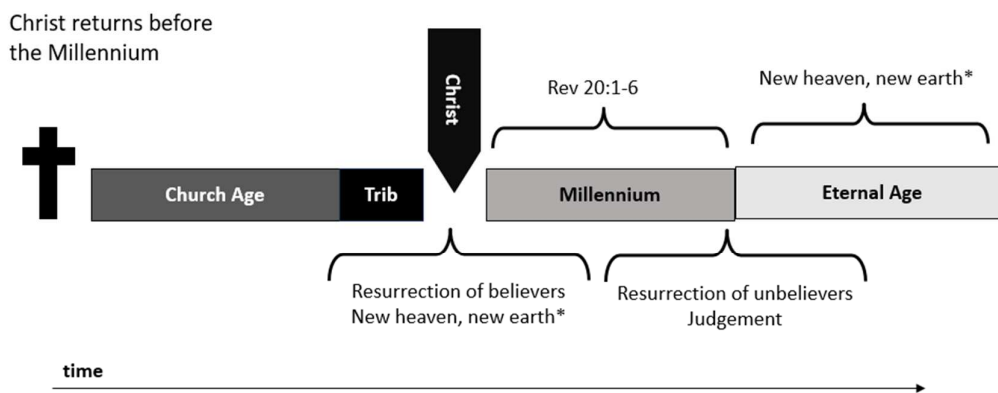
It is harder also to position the Tribulation in a Post-Millennial View as this has a generally optimistic viewpoint of society through the Church Age.

7.2.2 Pre-Millennialism

The Pre-Millennial view would hold that Christ before (pre) the Millennium and itself has a number of variations.

7.2.2.1 Classic Pre-Millennialism

In Classical (or historical) pre-millennialism the church continues until a time of great tribulation. The end of that tribulation marks the end of the church age and Christ returns to establish His millennial kingdom. There is a resurrection of believers who will reign with Christ for a thousand years (again whether this is a literal one thousand years or just a period of time is another point of debate). During that time Satan is bound and Christ is physically present on the earth. Those believers who had been raised from the dead and those believers who were alive when Christ returned receive glorified bodies and will never die. The New heavens and the New Earth will be established at this point (although others would place this later in the course of events).



*Classical Pre-Millennialists differ as to when the new heavens and earth will begin

This is a glorious age so of those unbelievers who remain on the earth, many will turn to Christ and be saved (who wouldn't) but there will still be some who resist the gospel. At the end of the Millennium, Satan will be loosed and with the unbelievers who remain on the earth will lead a final rebellion which will ultimately be defeated. At that point all the unbelievers throughout history will be raised to a final judgement and condemnation.

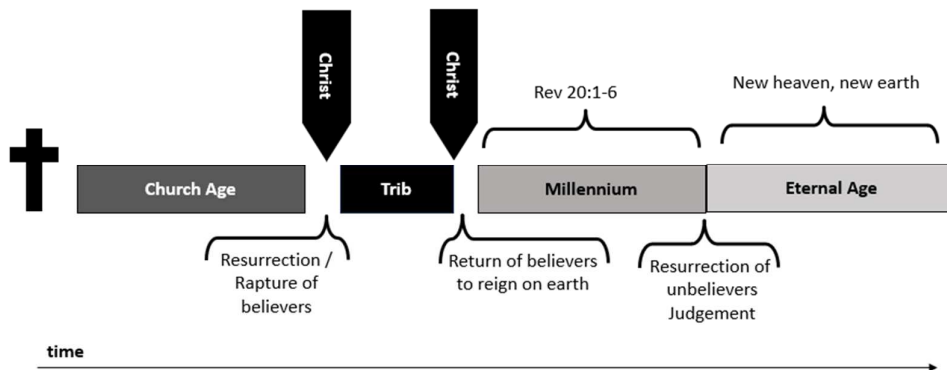
7.2.2.2 Dispensational Pre-Millennialism

Classical Pre-Millennialism put the church in line for some tough times, as they will endure the full length of the tribulation.

For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. [Mark 13:19-20]

And so, in the 19th and 20th Century another view became popular, particularly in Great Britain and the United States which was still pre-millennial in nature but had something different to say about the tribulation.

There were in fact two returns of Christ; a secret one in which the believers are raptured and caught up with Christ prior to the tribulation, and then a visible glorious return to end the tribulation and usher in the Millennium.



Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. [Matthew 24:40-41]

I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. [Luke 17:34]

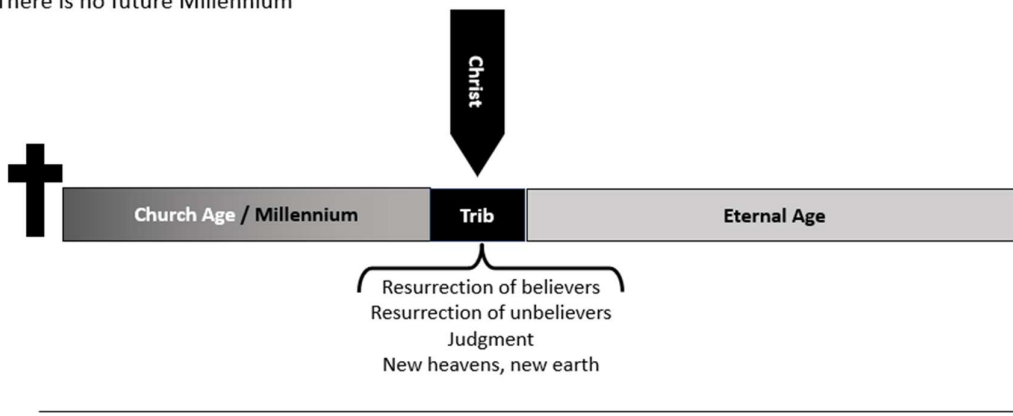
This is a viewpoint which has continued to grow since it was first proposed. Christ initially comes to take believers to be with Him. Christ and the believers return to heaven for the duration of the tribulation which has been sparked by this 'disappearance' of multitudes of believers. During the tribulation many of the signs that were predicted to occur prior to Christ's return will happen, including a further widespread preaching of the gospel.

At the end of the tribulation Christ will return again with His saints to reign for a thousand years. After that millennial period there will be a final rebellion followed by the resurrection of unbelievers to judgement.

You can even have a mid-tribulation rapture where believers endure some of the tribulation but are raptured part way through, and so escape the worst.

7.2.3 A-Millennialism

There is no future Millennium



A-Millennialism does not see the Millennium (as spoken of in Revelation chapter 20) as a distinct or future event. The millennium is encompassed within the current church age where Satan’s influence has been restrained so that the gospel can be preached to all nations. Those who are said to be reigning with Christ for a thousand years are those who have already died and are with Christ in heaven.

Christ’s reign on earth is not a physical bodily reign but rather a reigning from heaven. It is this reign that he spoke of in Matthew.

“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.”

[Matthew 28:18]

This view is called A-Millennial because it maintains there is no future Millennium to come. The present church will continue until such time as Christ returns. At that point there will be resurrection and final judgement followed immediately by the creation of the new heavens and the new earth from where believers will continue to dwell with Christ for eternity.

This viewpoint is the simplest as all the end time events happen at once immediately after Christ’s return.

Some A-Millennialists would state that Christ could return literally at any moment, whilst others argue that certain signs need to be fulfilled first.

As the Millennium, in this viewpoint, is more metaphorical it is possible to have the tribulation period prior to Christ’s return such that there is both a freedom and spread of the gospel as well as an increase in the persecution of Christians.

What conclusions can we draw so far?

- All viewpoints have some validity and in this area scripture is not clear enough to specifically rule in or rule out an option, however:
- The Millennium is only mentioned once in Revelation chapter 20 so the various end times view will depend on their interpretation of this event and the degree of reality or symbolism ascribed to it.
- A -Millennialism is an incredibly optimistic view of our current age (i.e., we are in the millennium) however there are also more pessimistic views i.e., remnant theology which sees the church in decline such that only a remnant remains

- It has to interpret certain scriptures differently i.e.; Satan is bound during the millennium. A - Millennialists would say he is bound, and was bound when Christ first came., that binding enables the gospel is preached and men and women to come into the kingdom. Scripture however speaks of Satan being thrown into a bottomless pit, the lid drawn over such that he can deceive the nations no more! There still seems to be a lot of deceiving going on effectively.
- Post Millennialists are similarly optimistic. Verses that talk of the growth of the gospel throughout the world mean with the resources we have now the Christian gospel will grow such that all come under its sway. I am a great believer in revival, but hand in hand I also see opposition to the gospel growing. A world that is growing more evil would be at odds with a post - millennial view.
- Pre-Millennialism therefore seems more plausible but with many variations, and with many questions (especially the timing of the tribulation)

Consider again the events linked to the millennium:

- Satan is bound and the antichrist is destroyed: Revelation 20:2-3
- The saints reign with Christ: Revelation 20:4-6
- The curse on nature is lifted: Isaiah 41:18-19
- General prosperity: Amos 9:13-14
- Peace and Righteousness prevail: Micah 4:1-3
- Christ reigns in Jerusalem: Zechariah 8:3 & 20-23
- The temple is rebuilt, and animal sacrifices are restored: Ezekiel 40-48

Do you believe than can all happen on earth with God pouring our His spirit on His church in ever greater measure, or do you believe these require Christ himself to return. If you believe the first you can be Post-Millennial, if the latter you can be Pre-Millennial. If you believe they can be interpreted historically or even metaphorically then you can be A-Millennial

7.2.4 Pre, Post, or Mid Tribulation Rapture

There are arguments for placing the Rapture before, after, or in the middle of the Tribulation.

7.2.4.1 Arguments for Pre-Tribulation Rapture

- The Tribulation will be a time when God's wrath is poured out on the earth and such it is not appropriate for believers to be present.
- Jesus promises to keep us from such times.

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. [Revelation 3:10]

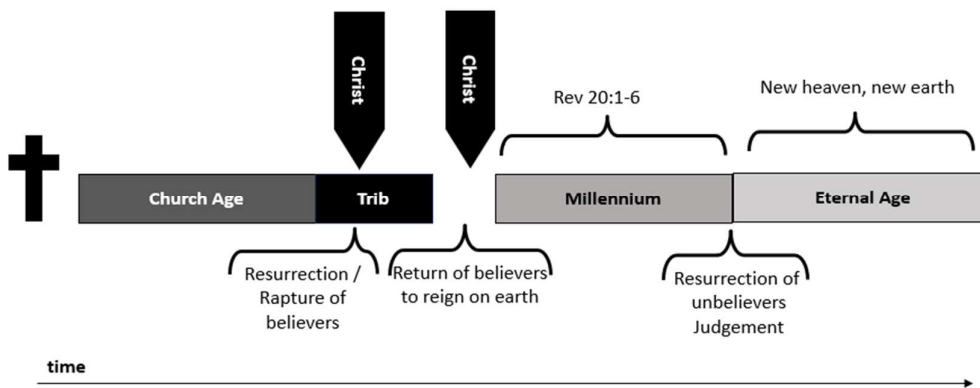
- It is way of holding both the uncertainty of his 'coming' alongside the 'signs that must be fulfilled'. Christ could come back now for his church, but the events that must occur before He returns, refer to events that happen during the tribulation and are prior only to His second coming in judgement.

7.2.4.2 Arguments for Post-Tribulation Rapture

- .We are not promised immunity from suffering and hardship now. there cannot be persecution of the church without a church to persecute.
- We are building a lot into Rev 3:10 ;which was written to a specific church at Philippi facing specific situations and make it apply to all churches everywhere.
- The rapture is not really described as secret. It is visible and glorious and more in keeping with something that happens after the tribulation.

7.2.4.3 Arguments for Mid-Tribulation Rapture

- There is an argument also that the severity of the Tribulation means that believers are raptured part way through so that whilst they endure some persecution, they do not experience the full force of it.



This is similar to Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, but just moves the Rapture forward a bit so it occurs during the Tribulation.

7.3 End Time Perspectives

Just as there are different ways of imagining the order in which the end time events unfold, there are different ways of interpreting the prophecies in Revelation, and to a lesser part, Daniel. The way in which we understand and apply those prophecies, will in part, help inform our view of the end time Events.

There are four main ways of interpreting Revelation; each looks at what is said from a different perspective. To understand how these different perspectives interpret Revelation we should start by dividing the book into some fairly large pieces:

Chapters	Topic	Notes
Chapters 1-3	The Letters to the Churches	This is easily understood as John writing in the 1 st Century to churches that he is responsible for, pointing out areas for praise and areas of concern. Whilst written to specific people at a specific point in history, there are lessons we can take from these letters of ourselves.
Chapters 4-5	Heaven's perspective	Here the perspective of the book shifts to heaven and the triumphant rule of Christ.
Chapters 6-11	Judgement – part 1	This is the first of two sections of some of the judgements that come on the earth due to man's rebellion and as signs of the end times.
Chapters 12-13	Opponents of the Kingdom	Here we are introduced to the key opponents of the God's kingdom; the Dragon (Satan), the Beast from the sea (some national opposition to God's kingdom), and the Beast from the land (some religious opposition to God's kingdom).
Chapters 14-16	Judgement – part 2	This is the second section of the judgements that come on the earth due to man's rebellion and as signs of the end times.
Chapters 17-19	Final Rebellion and final victory	Here those opposed to the gospel and to Christ stage the final rebellion, and where Christ triumphs over them.
Chapter 20	The Millennium	Here is the golden age spoken of earlier in these notes.
Chapters 21-22	New Heaven and New Earth	Here we see the eternal age where saints dwell in heaven forever in peace and harmony.

N.B. This is not meant to be an exhaustive commentary on Revelation but a way of taking some key points and seeing how different viewpoints would interpret them.

At a very broad level, most people would agree that Chapters 1-3 are based in the first Century, written to 1st Century churches facing specific issues. Most people would put Chapters 20-22 in the future, leaving most of the controversy around chapters 4-19. Are these past present, future or neither?

The natural reaction of anyone reading Revelation is to be concerned about some of the events spoken of as they sound quite frightening. What are these? When will they happen?

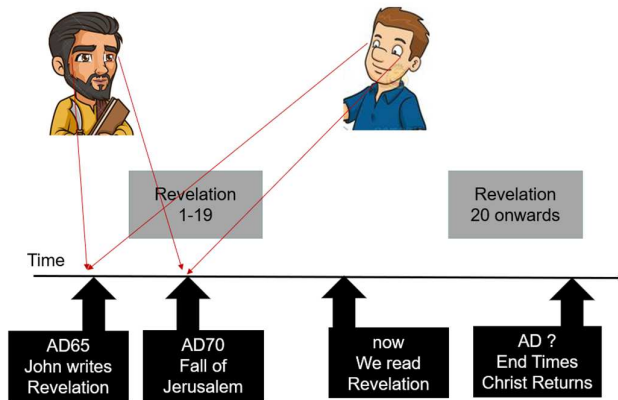
And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth. [Revelation 4:8]

The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. [Revelation 8:8-9]

The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night. [Revelation 8:12]

Each of the four perspectives we will interpret these (and all the other events and persons in Revelation) in a different way, and as with the differing views of the Millennium, each of these present clear and easy explanations for some verses yet struggle to apply other verses.

7.3.1 Preterist Perspective



With this perspective the events that John spoke of in Revelation have already happened. Most of the events are specifically related to the time when the Romans attacked and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. There are two main variations of this perspective. Under intense pressure from both pagan and Jewish persecution, the Christians of John’s day stood in great need of a sure hope that the gospel of Jesus Christ would ultimately prevail.

The enemy of the early church was an apostate Israel wielding power through the pagan power-state, the Roman Empire. In view, then, of the hostility from these quarters, the greatest thing they needed to understand was the lordship of Christ as “ruler over the kings of the earth.”

7.3.1.1 Full Preterism

Full Preterism teaches that every event normally associated with the end times—Christ’s second coming, the tribulation, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment—has already happened. (In the case of the final judgment, it still is in the process of being fulfilled.) Jesus’ return to earth was a “spiritual” return, not a physical one.

The Law was fulfilled in AD 70 and God’s covenant with Israel was ended. The “new heavens and new earth” spoken of in Chapter 21 is, to the preterist, a description of the world under the New Covenant. Just as a Christian is made a ‘new creation’,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
 [2 Corinthians 5:17]

So, the world under the New Covenant is a “new earth.” The destruction of the temple was ‘Judgement Day.’ Matthew 24 is a key passage, regardless of the particular End Time view held, and here Jesus talks of the End Times. A key text for the Preterist perspective that locks these events into the 1st Century is verse 34.

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. [Matthew 24:34]

The problem with this view is that Paul warned against those who taught falsely that the resurrection has already taken place.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. [2 Timothy 2:17-18]

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. [2 Thessalonians 2:1-2]

Also, Jesus’ mention of ‘this generation’ can be taken to mean the generation that is alive to see the beginning of the events described in Matthew, rather than those alive when Matthew 24 was written.

7.3.1.2 Partial Preterism

Some of the problems with a full preterist view are resolved with a partial preterist view. Here there is a future return of Christ to earth and a future resurrection and judgment, but no millennial kingdom. As such a preterist view more easily aligns with a A-Millennialist ordering of events, but this is not to say all who hold a Preterist view automatically also hold to a A-Millennialist ordering of events.

Other verses that Preterists would use to place the Revelation events in the 1st Century are the immediacy with which Jesus speaks of his return.

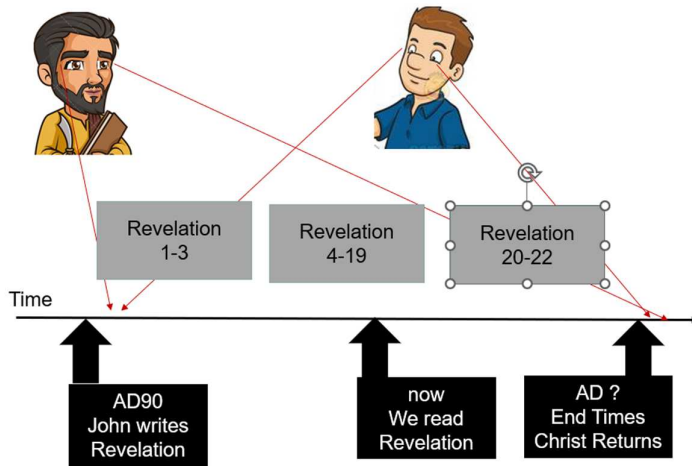
Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.
 [Revelation 2:16]

“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.
 [Revelation 22:12]

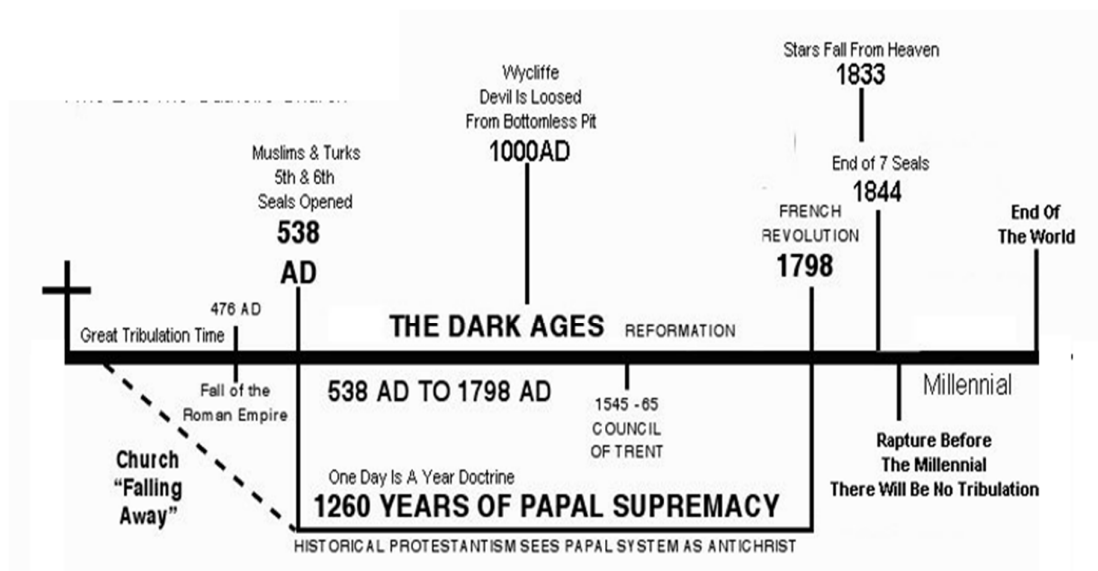
The word used here is the Greek word ‘tachus’ which refers not to a ‘soon’ event but a ‘swift’ event. Jesus was not describing *when* the events will occur, but rather the *manner* in which they will take place when they do occur. He was saying that when these events take place, they are going to unfold suddenly, quickly, with great swiftness.

Weaknesses	Strengths
Full Preterism says that Christ has already returned spiritually, rather than there being a future physical return. This is hard to support with other scriptures.	Revelation would have been instantly understood by those reading it in the 1st Century. It would not be a book of mystery or something awaiting later fulfilment.
Preterism requires Revelation to be written prior to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 (otherwise it would not be prophecy). Most scholars however put a later date (c 95AD) to the writing of the book.	The need to understand the ‘mysteries and symbols in Revelation in regard to our present or future goes away.

7.3.2 Historical Perspective



In this view everything spoken of in Revelation can be mapped to a historical event that has either occurred or will occur. The Events John wrote of were future for him, and as time progressed more and more of the events move from being future speculation to past reality. Usually, a Historical perspective will cause each generation to re-evaluate Revelation and assign different meanings to the events.

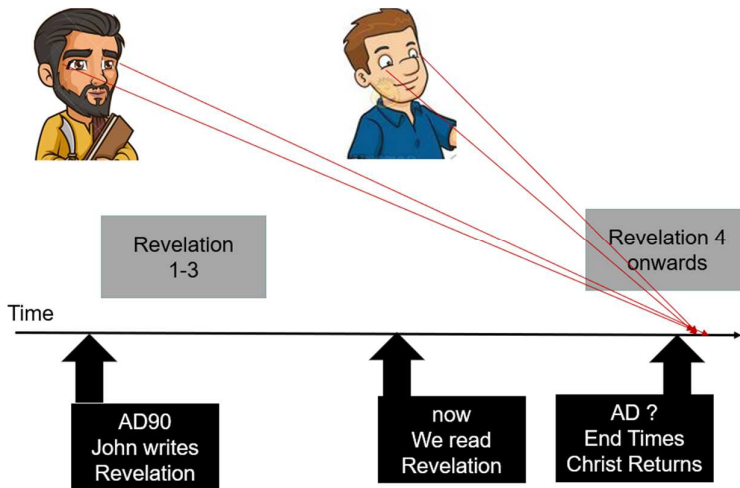


Weaknesses	Strengths
The Interpretation of events keeps changing with successive generations. The certainty of one generation is replaced with a greater potential tragedy that becomes the interpretation for the next generation . The antic Christ is simply that generations 'bad guy'.	There are not many clear benefits to this view other than it does seek to explain prophecy in term of historical events. As such this view is not widely held today.

<p>This does lead to some very complex diagrams that seek to map all the events of Revelation (and Daniel) into a historical context/</p>	
<p>It could be said there are as many interpretations of the Historical perspective as there are commentators. The great divergence within this view would, as a result, tend to discredit it.</p>	
<p>This view seems to have emerged primarily as a Protestant argument against Catholicism, with the Pope and the Papal rule as clear examples of the spirit of antichrist.</p>	

7.3.3 Futurist Perspective

With this perspective, John writes Revelation and prophecies about events that will happen in the future. Those events are still in the future for us, and so both we and John are looking forward to events that have not yet happened.



The Tribulation, the Rapture and the return of Christ and final judgement are all in the future. This is a popular view, and one that most Christians would hold to, however there are alternatives. Many books and articles can be found which look at current, unfolding events and link them to a prophecy in Revelation.

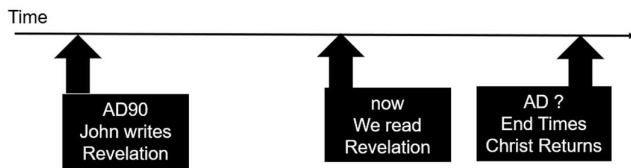
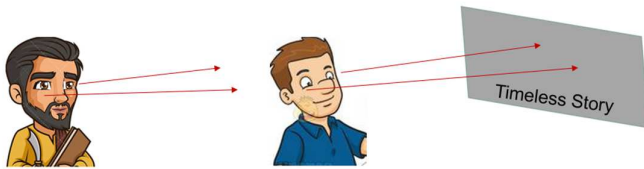
Variations of the Futurist viewpoint go as far as to include the first three chapters of Revelation as well and makes them representative of 7 phases (dispensations) of church history or link them to 7 covenantal promises God has made over time, and many templates of this nature can be found without too much searching. It might be argued it takes a lot of effort to force' the churches into these boxes, but it illustrates the principle of the futurist (and to an extent) historical view.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE END TIMES

Church	Age	Covenant
Ephesus (2:1-7)	The Apostolic Church (30-100 AD)	The Eden Covenant God's promise of creation
Smyrna (2:8-11)	The Persecuted Church (100 – 313 AD)	The Covenant with Adam God's promise of purpose
Pergamon (2:12-17)	The Imperial Church (313 – 476 AD)	The Covenant with Noah God's promise of protection
Thyatira (2:18-29)	The Medieval Church (476-1453 AD)	The Covenant with Abraham God's promise of Redemption
Sardis (3:1-6)	The Reformed Church (1453-1800 AD)	The Covenant with Moses God's promise of Instruction
Philadelphia (3:7-13)	The Modern Missionary Church (1800 AD – today)	The Covenant with David God's promise of Kingdom
Laodicea (3:14-22)	The Modern Apostate Church (1800 AD – today)	The New Covenant God's promise of Restoration

Weaknesses	Strengths
This tends to make Revelation 'meaningless' to previous generations. The book is only understood by people in the 21st Century.	This perspective does make Revelation very significant for us (although that significance can often be over-emphasised)
Virtually every generation has believed that the return of Christ is imminent and that they, therefore, are the last generation. This leads to a 'newspaper exegesis' that is highly arbitrary, searching for fulfilment in present-day events. The Historical perspective could also be said to suffer from this weakness.	

7.3.4 Idealist Perspective



Revelation is a timeless story of the conflict between good and evil that will ultimately be resolved by Christ’s return.

The tribulations, plagues, and sufferings are shown through the ages through such events as the destruction of the Temple, the division between Catholicism and Protestantism, World war I and II, the Cold war etc., but they are just examples of this timeless struggle rather than a direct mapping to history as with the Historical perspective.

All events are thus interpreted, so Origen, for example, in the twenty-four elders (in Revelation 4) sees “a symbol of the equality of Jew and Gentile within the Christian Church; 12 Jewish elders for the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 other elders for the Gentiles.

The souls of the martyrs crying out for justice represent the cry of all oppressed people throughout time.

They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” [Revelation 6:10]

I’m mostly a preterist; pretty much every symbol in the book with the exception of the new creation would originally have been read as applying to people in first century west Asia and to events occurring in the 1st century, but as soon as I become a preacher I become an idealist because I’m not only saying this is the word of God to them but it is also the word of God to us. [Andrew Wilson]

Weaknesses	Strengths
This tends to ‘rob’ Revelation of some of its power, as the events are not ‘real’ but simply symbolic of greater struggle.	Both 1st Century and 21st Century Christians can read the book through the wider lens of the struggle between good and evil rather than having to understand specific events.
	Many of the complexities of trying match passages in the prophecy to actual events goes away as those passages are symbolic rather than literal.

7.3.5 Summary

Perspective	Key points	Who is the enemies of Christ? (the beasts from the land and sea)
Preterist	The events that John wrote of in Chapters 4-19 were contemporary to his readers, but we are looking back to events that have now occurred and are in our past.	Titus (son of Emperor Vespasian) who in turn was Emperor from 79-81AD. The Jewish leaders who persecuted the 1st Century Christians
Historical	The events that John wrote about in Chapter 4-19 unfold across the whole timescale of history. We see that same unfolding history that John wrote of, and there is both a past and future element to the events although for John more would have been in the future and for us, more would now be in the past.	Various people depending on what generation is reading Revelation: Nero / Vespasian / Titus The Pope Napoleon Hitler
Futurist	The events that John wrote of in Chapters 4-19 are in the future for him as well us for us. We are both looking forward to events that are yet to happen.	An, as yet unrevealed, world dictator, and or world encompassing false religion / religious leader
Idealist	The Events written of in Chapters 4-19 do not necessarily link to specific historical events but are more symbolic of the on-going struggle between good and evil. There are no past or future events, rather a continuous retelling of the same story.	No physical person, but the anyone or anything that is in opposition to Christ and his kingdom

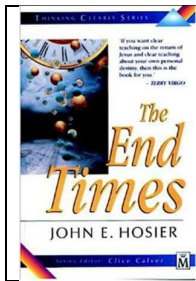
N.B. it is popular to imagine the Anti-Christ as a person that slots into the Revelation prophecy, however the word is not used by John in this book. John does use it, but only in 1 John, where it is used to describe anything or anyone that opposes Christ.

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.
[1 John 2:22]

Questions for consideration

- If you could use just three words to describe God, what words would you pick?
- How would you describe the Trinity in a couple of sentences?
- Thinking of the incommunicable attributes of God, to what extent do you think we will ‘take on’ those attributes in heaven, or are there areas in which we forever be ‘unlike’ God?
- If we should display the communicable attributes of God (to some degree or another) in which areas of your life do you see the most potential for growth?
- Who would you answer someone who says the wrath and anger of God are incompatible with a loving God?

Further Reading

	<p>The End Times John Hosier (2000)</p> <p>A helpful overview of all the topics discussed here from a writer and church leader who was involved in New Frontiers from the beginning.</p>

Deeper Truth

