

END OF THE WORLD*

Introduction

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, eschatology is the branch of religious or theological study concerning the final events in the history of the world or of humankind. There may be no other religious subject that has been studied, pondered, or written about more than the *end of the world*. Most do not understand it. Some give little or no thought to it. Many are terrified at its prospect. But for others, persons of faith embracing whatever happens in history as God's sovereign will, the events and timing of matters pertaining to the end are accepted in faith, even if they are not fully understood.

A Matter of Perspective

Everyone in history has lived in the last days because we are always in the last days. It's just that the number of days until the 'end,' whatever and whenever that may be, are fewer now than they were at any moment of time in the past. We are in the last days now, but so were the Christians of the first century. Peter believed that when he wrote, "He (Jesus) was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these *last times* for your sake" (1 Peter 1:20). And the writer to the Hebrew Christians used these opening words, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways but, in these *last days*, he has spoken to us by his Son . . ." (Hebrews 1:1). Yet first-century Christians did not experience the end of the world.

Unbelievers and some in the world today do not care about *end times* because they are only living in the present. In their way of thinking, nothing exists beyond this present life, so they discount any conclusion to history as we know it now. Others are not sure about *end times* and many of them are terribly afraid of what may come. But for people of strong, informed faith, God's clock is moving toward some potentially frightening events that are, in His mercy and providence, glorious realities to be greatly anticipated and experienced.

Hard Times Versus End Times

The focus of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, is the accomplishment of God's will for humanity in His creation. It is a record of developing a faithful body of people who acknowledge God as Creator and Sovereign, who yield their lives to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and who worship and serve God wholeheartedly. We have repeatedly referred to this faithful body as the **household of faith** or the **family of God**.

The Old Testament provides the details of God dealing first with the Hebrew family, the Israelites, working to salvage a faithful remnant from among their rebellious nation, and declaring through the prophets that a Messiah or Redeemer would need to come to save the world and bring many more into God's household of faith. The New Testament provides the details of the Messiah (Jesus) coming to the earth as God in flesh (Immanuel, God with us), teaching the will of God, then completing His work on earth through His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven.

The biblical narrative contains many passages, chapters, and books on God moving the plan of salvation forward, including times of judgment, correction, and adjustment. The Old and New Testaments contain prophecies about and records of those judgments. Here are some of the past key transitioning events to the next phase of God's plan:

The Great Flood of the earth that destroyed everything except Noah, his family, and every creature onboard the ark (**Genesis 6-9**).

Exile of the ten Northern Tribes of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., never to return (**2 Kings 17:1-23; 1 Chronicles 5:26**).

Exile of the two Southern Tribes of Israel to Babylon in 589 B.C. at the hands of the Babylonian Empire (**Jeremiah 52**).

All of these were Old Covenant events and were part of the movement in God's plan from Old Covenant Law to New Covenant grace. These times were very difficult and many perished, **but they were not the end of the world!**

In the New Testament, a cataclysmic event was foretold by Jesus that many still believe focuses on the end of the world:

The destruction of Jerusalem and the slaughter of over 1,000,000 people in 70 A.D, predicted by Jesus as the **end of the Jewish age** that would occur in the generation living at the time (**Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and Luke 17:20-37**).

But the details of the actual event are not recorded in the New Testament. It is highly probable that all of the New Testament was written before 70 A.D., including the book of **Revelation** that records John's vision on the isle of Patmos. Jesus' predictions about judgment and destruction, said to happen in the lifetime of that generation, were primarily focused on 70 A.D., **the end of the Jewish Age, not the end of the world**. This is the only plausible explanation of why the actual obliteration of Jerusalem and the death of over one

million people is not recorded in the New Testament, only the prediction of it. Anyone writing after 70 A.D., would certainly have included such a seismic event, as did Josephus, Clement, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, and others in the centuries that followed (75-400 A.D.).

This disastrous event in 70 A.D. was a very difficult and trying time. It was the next phase of the ebb and flow in the history of God's plan and people. It was a major transition planned by God, **but it was not the end of the world!**

Space does not allow us to provide all the details about 70 A.D. in this article, but they are important and need to be understood by the body of Christ. The books by Hanegraaff and Bray in the additional resources list at the end of this article provide extensive details that shed much light on **Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and Luke 17:20-37.**

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Jesus is the focal point of God's plan of salvation. He came to this earth to suffer, die, and be resurrected as Savior (the First Coming) and he is coming again to put the finishing touches on God's plan (the Second Coming). Once again, there will be hard times, the specifics of which scholars and students of the Bible debate. But like all the other key dramatic events that have occurred in God's plan to this point, **will it be the end of the world?** The Bible indicates that it will be the end of the world **as we know it now.** It will be a *new heaven and a new earth*, a clean start. John, in the opening sentence of **Revelation 21**, declares what he saw in his vision this way,

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea” (**Revelation 21:1**).

The original creation of the universe, including the earth, was perfect. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (**Genesis 1:31**). The humans God created were also perfect before they willfully sinned and brought a curse upon themselves and the creation in which they lived (**Genesis 2:4-3:24**). The perfect Creation that was lost in the Garden of Eden, however, was restored through the Cross and the Resurrection. The old heaven and earth will pass away and be replaced with new versions.

The glorious life of the Bride of Jesus Christ, the Church, in the new creation is described in **Revelation 21-22**. And the wording of these verses makes it sound as if the Redeemed will experience eternal life in the restored creation, the new heaven and earth. Most have pictured heaven as a reality somewhere in the universe with the earth being no more. But God's Word reveals both a *new heaven* and a *new earth*. Could it be that eternal life after the present one is actually lived out on the new earth in the new heavenly setting? Only God knows the true answer and it will be revealed to believers the day they close their eyes

on the old earth in the old heaven and step onto the new reality God has made possible. Randy Acorn wrote a very informative and challenging book entitled *Heaven*, that outlines a fresh and intriguing understanding of heaven. We commend it to you.

So, what are the biblically recorded events associated with the Second Coming of Christ and everything that lies beyond it?

Future Events

There are differing interpretations in the Church about prophecy and end times events. The differences center on the following key issues:

How much Old and New Testament prophecy has already been fulfilled.

Whether God is dealing with two families of faith – 1) the original Hebrew family called the Israelites, and 2) a second family of all who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (the Church), or whether the end of the Jewish Age really did occur in 70 A.D. and God only has one spiritual family comprised of Jews and Gentiles as clearly declared in **Galatians 4:26-29** and **Ephesians 2:11-22**.

Whether relatively recent end times theories, like the rapture *theory* not known before 1830, have any validity and/or factor into the actual future events that will occur.

These issues have often been the source of heated debate, with different sides sometimes accusing others of gross error or apostasy. We will not debate the differences here. God will bring about all future events **in His will, in His way, and in His timing**. We should endeavor to move toward agreeing on what we have and believe in common, regardless of the specifics of *how* they play out. So, what does the future hold for the Church? The New Testament promises the following on which we can all rely:

The Second Coming of Jesus when God's plan of salvation will be culminated. Two important passages stating this include the words of Jesus in **John 14:1-3** and the prophetic pronouncement of the Apostle Paul in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

Resurrection and judgment. Every human being will be resurrected and judgment will be made by Jesus himself (**Acts 17:30-31**). Those who have true life in Christ Jesus, whose names are recorded in the Book of Life, will meet Him and be with Him forever (**1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**). Those who are not children of God, whose names are not written in the Book of Life, will be separated from the presence of God forever (**Revelation 20:11-15, 21:8**).

New, immortal heavenly bodies are provided to every member of the family of God, and they will dwell with Him forever. Two passages that express the reality of this truth are **Romans 8:18-25** and **Revelation 21:1-7**.

God's Kingdom is completed. With every dominion, authority, and power that have opposed God defeated and judged, Jesus hands the Kingdom over to the Father (**1 Corinthians 15:24**).

The Bride of Jesus Christ dwells forever in the new heaven and earth. The Bride, also called the Holy City or the New Jerusalem (**Revelation 21:2**), experiences “no more death, mourning, or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (**Revelation 21:4**). There will be total joy and ecstasy in the presence of God forever, an existence of worshipping, talking, and walking with God, of learning and experiencing the glory of the restored universe, realities that we cannot begin to fathom (**1 Corinthians 1:6-9**).

Why can't we simply let these events play out in God's timing and in God's way? They are going to happen. Let's embrace them as God brings them about.

Pleasing God Versus Setting Dates

When are all the events related to the end of our present age going to happen? We do not know. In fact, Jesus said, speaking of the end of the Jewish Age, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. **No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father**” (**Matthew 24:35-36**). If even the angels in heaven do not know, we surely cannot determine the date. But that has not kept people from trying.

No matter what generation or millennium, many have ignored the truth Jesus spoke and guessed when they think the end will be, i.e., when the Second Coming of Christ will occur and all the transformational events that follow it. Some may have been well-intentioned. Others have tried to set dates for selfish or deceptive reasons – to increase church attendance, boost offerings, write books, or something else. Of course, they have always been wrong and some, unapologetically, have been wrong more than once. It is unwise, shameful, misleading, and unethical.

Right before his ascension into heaven, Jesus said, “**It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority**” (**Acts 1:7**). Rather than setting dates, we should be pleasing God with devotion and commitment:

Confessing with our mouths Jesus as Lord and believing in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead (**Romans 10:9-10**). This is what Jesus called being *born again* and we cannot experience the new heaven and earth without it (**John 14:6**). Make sure, above everything else, you do this and have your name inscribed in the Book of Life (**Revelation 20:11-15**).

Seeking first the kingdom and God's righteousness (**Matthew 6:33**). When we do, all the other things we want or worry about, including when the end will come, will take care of themselves.

Living by the Spirit and not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh (**Galatians 5:16**).

Witnessing and winning other souls to the Lord (**Acts 1:8**).

Encouraging one another and building each other up, something that is becoming vitally important in our present time (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**).

These things are what truly matter. These are the things that will bring true life now and forever.

The Waiting Game

We are all impatient about a lot of things. We do not like to wait. But there is a reason that more than 2,000 years have passed since Jesus made the promise of His return. Read this passage carefully:

“Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:8-9).

Time is not an issue with God. His measurement or perspective of time is different from ours. Just like God wants you to be part of the new heaven and earth, He wants *everyone* to come to repentance and be in His presence. He has extended the invitation to the *world* (**John 3:16**). Not everyone will accept the invitation, but many will. Until God's appointed time, we need to be patient. We need to redeem the time, making the most of every opportunity to be children of God (**Ephesians 5:15-16**). While we do this, others are being brought into the glorious future that lies ahead.

Closing Thoughts

Since we believe that God is loving and compassionate, and that these events will happen in His timing, do not be fearful of what lies ahead. God will faithfully shepherd and protect the Bride for whom Jesus gave His life on the Cross. Instead of fearing the future, we should be anticipating and embracing it. **“Amen. Come Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).**

***Notes:** Many scriptural passages and other statements presented in this article have emphases added, including *italicized*, underlined, or **bold** text, as well as (parenthetical) remarks.

With the complexity of this subject, we heartily recommend further research and study using various resources, including any or all of the following:

Written Works

The Apocalypse Code, Hank Hanegraaff, 2007

Matthew 24 Fulfilled, John L. Bray, 1996

A Case for Amillennialism: understanding the end times, Kim Riddlebarger, 2003

AfterLife, Hank Hanegraaff, 2013

Heaven, Randy Alcorn, 2004

Websites

[End Times & Last Days in the Bible - What Does God Say Will Happen? \(crosswalk.com\)](http://crosswalk.com)

[What Does The Bible Say About Date Setters That Predict The End Of The World? \(whatchristianswanttoknow.com\)](http://whatchristianswanttoknow.com)

[5 Ways to Detect False Prophets \(ibelieve.com\)](http://ibelieve.com)

[BIBLE VERSES ABOUT END OF THE WORLD \(kingjamesbibleonline.org\)](http://kingjamesbibleonline.org)

[End Times Bible Verses - Scripture Quotes on the Last Days \(biblestudytools.com\)](http://biblestudytools.com)

[10 Failed Doomsday Predictions | Britannica](http://Britannica)

[2000 Years of False Predictions About the End of the World | Marcusmaxis's Blog \(wordpress.com\)](#)

[What Is Our Role as Christians During the End Times? - End Times \(crosswalk.com\)](#)