

End Times 101: The Last Things

The return of Jesus Christ is the central hope of the New Testament. His second coming will be sudden, personal, bodily, and visible to the whole world. We want to be a church that is grounded in truth and ready for His return! Join us as we explore the End Times and what the Spirit of the Lord is saying to us today.

As we study prophesy and eschatology, we can have confidence that God does what He says. Every single time. Eschatology is a branch of theology that deals with the final events in history, beliefs concerning death, the end of the world, and the ultimate destiny of mankind.

The Return of Christ

- The return of Jesus Christ is the central hope of the NT.
- His second coming will be sudden (Matt. 24:44; 2 Pet. 3:10), personal, bodily (John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:16), and visible to the whole world (Rev. 1:7).
- He will come again to reign in power as the King of kings for all eternity (Phil. 2:9–11).
- While he has given signs that will indicate that the end times are near (Matt. 24:14, 23–29; Mark 13:10, 19–26; 2 Thess. 2:1–10), God has not revealed the time of Christ’s return (Matt. 24:44; Mark 13:32–33; Luke 12:40). Therefore, the setting of dates is fruitless and unbiblical speculation.
- The warnings that Christ will come unexpectedly and suddenly are intended to motivate believers to live in eager expectation and preparedness, which involves holy living and an eternal perspective.
- Followers of Christ are to *“renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:12–13).
- As good as life in this world may be at times, it can never compare to the ultimate liberation from sin and the unhindered fellowship with Christ that his return will bring (1 John 3:2).
- This does not preclude Christians from deeply investing in and appreciating this world; it only means that believers should realize that the best is yet to come and they should ultimately live for the day when Christ returns.
- Their greatest hope and the definitive solution to present suffering is to be found in the hope of Christ’s return. On that day *“the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord”* (1 Thess. 4:16–18).
- Christians are commanded to *“encourage one another with these words”* (1 Thess. 4:18), which are words of great hope.

Studying the End Times Produces:

- Worship (Revelation 19:10).
- Confidence in God’s character and leadership (Isaiah 41:4).
- Knowledge of His righteousness (Isaiah 41:26).
- Certainty of His plans (Isaiah 46:10).
- Understanding of His ways (Isaiah 48:3).
- Knowledge the devil didn’t do it (Isaiah 48:5).
- A response that will result in a victorious witness through the Church, as a Bride during the greatest shaking the world will ever witness (Daniel 12:1).
- A response and wise cooperation and partnership with God (Daniel 11:32–33).

All Evangelicals Agree on the Final Results of Christ's Return:

1. All Biblical Christians agree that the final and ultimate result of Christ's return will be the judgment of unbelievers.
2. Final reward of believers.
3. Believers will live with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth for all eternity.
4. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will reign.
5. They will be worshiped in a never-ending kingdom with no more sin or sorrow or suffering.

There Is Disagreement Over the Details of Future Events:

- Christians differ over specific details leading up to and immediately following Christ's return. They differ over the nature of the millennium and the relationship of Christ's return to the millennium, the sequence of Christ's return and the great tribulation period that will come to the earth, and the question of the salvation of the Jewish people (and the relationship between Jews who are saved and the church).
- Disclaimer: Evangelicals who hold to these various positions all agree that Scripture is inerrant, and they have a commitment to believe *whatever* is taught by Scripture. Their differences concern the interpretation of various passages relating to these events, but their differences on these matters should be seen as matters of secondary importance, not as differences over primary doctrinal matters.

Major Eschatological Views & Millennium: (Revelation 20:1-10)

What is the millennium? When does it occur? Will Christians go through the Great Tribulation?

The word *millennium* means "one thousand years" (from Lat. *millennium* "thousand years").

Revelation 20:4-5 (ESV)

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 ended. This is the first resurrection.

Throughout the history of the church there have been three major views on the time and nature of this "millennium."

The Three Major Views: 1. Amillennialism 2. Postmillennialism 3. Premillennialism (Classic/Historic & Pretribulational/Dispensational)

1. Amillennialism.



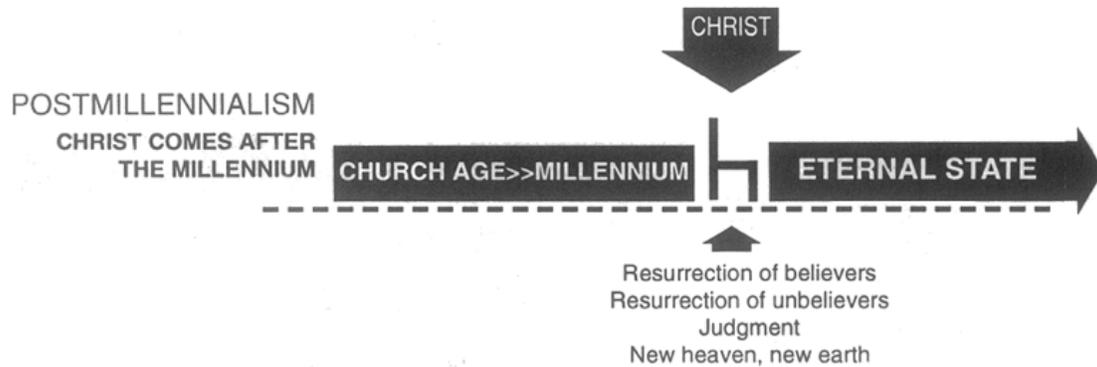
According to this position the passage in Revelation 20:1–10 describes the present church age. This is an age in which Satan’s influence over the nations has been greatly reduced so that the gospel can be preached to the whole world. Those who are said to be reigning with Christ for the thousand years are Christians who have died and are already reigning with Christ in heaven. Christ’s reign in the millennium, according to this view, is not a bodily reign here on earth but rather the heavenly reign he spoke of when he said, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”* (Matt. 28:18).

This view is called “amillennial” because it maintains that:

- There is no future millennium yet to come.
- Since amillennialists believe that Revelation 20 is now being fulfilled in the church age, they hold that the “millennium” described there is currently happening.
- The exact duration of the church age cannot be known, and the expression “thousand years” is simply a figure of speech for a long period of time in which God’s perfect purposes will be accomplished.
- The present church age will continue until the time of Christ’s return.
- When Christ returns, there will be a resurrection of both believers and unbelievers.
- The bodies of believers will rise to be reunited with their spirits and enter into full enjoyment of heaven forever.
- Unbelievers will be raised to face the final judgment and eternal condemnation.
- Believers will also stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), but this judgment will only determine degrees of reward in heaven, for only unbelievers will be condemned eternally.
- At this time also the new heavens and new earth will begin. Immediately after the final judgment, the eternal state will commence and continue forever.

This scheme is quite simple because all of the end time events happen at once, immediately after Christ’s return. Some amillennialists say that Christ could return at any time, while others argue that certain signs have yet to be fulfilled.

2. Postmillennialism. The prefix *post-* means “after.” According to this view, Christ will return *after* the millennium.

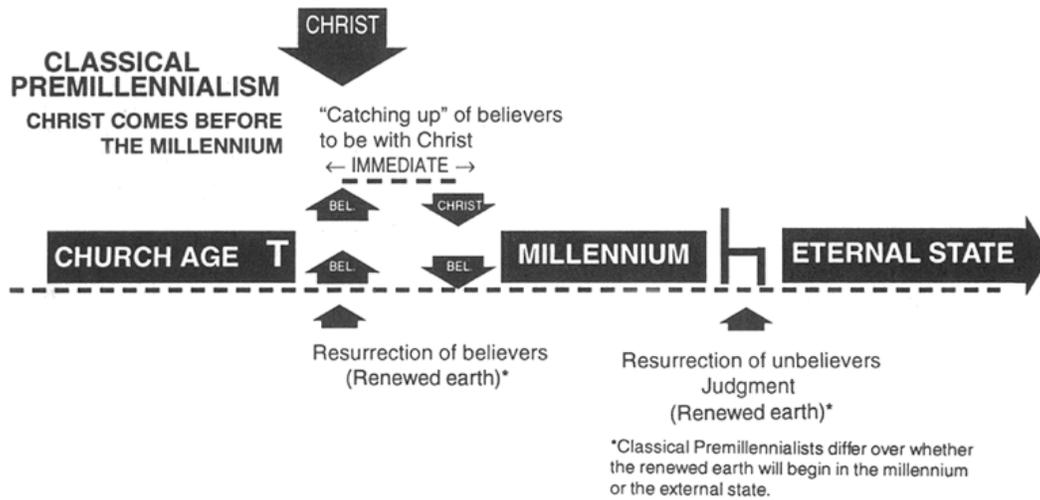


According to this view:

- The progress of the gospel and the growth of the church will gradually increase, so that a larger and larger proportion of the world's population will be Christians.
- As a result, there will be significant Christian influences on society, society will more and more function according to God's standards, and gradually a "millennial age" of peace and righteousness will occur on the earth.
- This "millennium" will last for a long period of time (not necessarily a literal one thousand years), and finally, *at the end of this period, Christ will return to earth* believers and unbelievers will be raised, the final judgment will occur, and there will be a new heaven and new earth. We will then enter into the eternal state.
- The primary characteristic of postmillennialism is that it is very optimistic about the power of the gospel to change lives and bring about much good in the world.
- Belief in postmillennialism tends to increase in times when the church is experiencing great revival, when there is an absence of war and international conflict, and when it appears that great progress is being made in overcoming the evil and suffering in the world. But postmillennialism in its most responsible form is not based simply on the observation of events in the world around us, but on arguments from various Scripture passages.

3. Premillennialism

Classic or Historic Premillennialism: The prefix “pre-” means “before,” and the “premillennial” position says that Christ will come back *before* the millennium. This viewpoint has a long history from the earliest centuries onward.



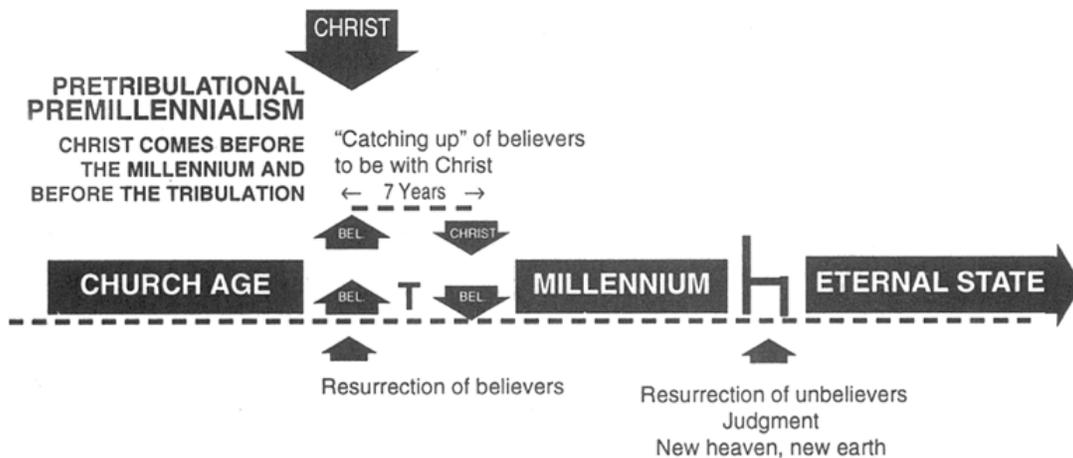
According to this view:

- The present church age will continue until, as it nears the end, a time of great tribulation and suffering comes on the earth (T in the figure above stands for tribulation).
- After that time of tribulation *at the end of the church age, Christ will return to earth to establish a millennial kingdom.*
- When he comes back, believers who have died will be raised from the dead, their bodies will be reunited with their spirits, and *these believers will reign with Christ on earth for one thousand years.* (Some premillennialists take this to be a literal one thousand years, and others understand it to be a symbolic expression for a long period of time.)
- During this time, Christ will be physically present on the earth in his resurrected body, and will reign as King over the entire earth.
- The believers who have been raised from the dead, and those who were on earth when Christ returns, will receive glorified resurrection bodies that will never die, and in these resurrection bodies they will live on the earth and reign with Christ.
- Of the unbelievers who remain on earth, many (but not all) will turn to Christ and be saved.
- Jesus will reign in perfect righteousness and there will be peace throughout the earth.
- Many premillennialists hold that the earth will be renewed and we will in fact see the new heavens and new earth at this time (but it is not essential to premillennialism to hold to this, for one could be a premillennialist and hold that the new heavens and new earth will not occur until after the final judgment).
- At the beginning of this time Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit so that he will have no influence on the earth during the millennium (Rev. 20:1–3).

- At the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed from the bottomless pit and will join forces with many unbelievers who have submitted outwardly to Christ's reign but have inwardly been seething in rebellion against him.
- Satan will gather these rebellious people for battle against Christ, but they will be decisively defeated.
- Christ will then raise from the dead all the unbelievers who have died throughout history, and they will stand before him for final judgment.
- After the final judgment has occurred, believers will enter into the eternal state.

It seems that premillennialism has tended to increase in popularity as the church has experienced persecution, and as suffering and evil have increased in the earth. But, as in the case of postmillennialism, the arguments for the premillennial position are not based on an observation of current events, but on specific passages of Scripture, especially (but not exclusively) Revelation 20:1–10.

Pretribulational Premillennialism (or Dispensational Premillennialism): Another variety of premillennialism has gained widespread popularity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. According to this position, Christ will return not only before the millennium (Christ's return is *premillennial*), but also it will occur *before* the great tribulation (Christ's return is *pretribulational*). This position is similar to the classical premillennial position mentioned above, but with one important difference: it will add another return of Christ before his return to reign on earth in the millennium. This return is thought to be a secret return of Christ to take believers out of the world.



According to this view:

- The church age will continue until, *suddenly, unexpectedly, and secretly*, Christ will return part way to earth, and then will call believers to himself:

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 (ESV)

And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...

- Christ will then return to heaven with the believers who have been removed from the earth. When that happens, there will be a great tribulation on the earth for a period of seven years.

- During this seven-year period of tribulation, many of the signs that were predicted to precede Christ's return will be fulfilled.
- The great ingathering of the fullness of the Jewish people will occur, as they trust Christ as their Messiah.
- In the midst of great suffering there will also be much effective evangelism, especially carried out by the new Jewish Christians.
- *At the end of the tribulation, Christ will then come back with his saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years.*
- After this millennial period there will be a rebellion, resulting in the final defeat of Satan and his forces, and then will come the resurrection of unbelievers, the last judgment, and the beginning of the eternal state.
- This view is found almost exclusively among dispensationalists who wish to maintain a clear distinction between the church and Israel. This pretribulational viewpoint allows the distinction to be maintained, since the church is taken out of the world before the widespread conversion of the Jewish people. These Jewish people therefore remain a distinct group from the church.
- Its insistence on interpreting biblical prophecies "literally where possible." This especially applies to prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Israel. Those who hold this view argue that those prophecies of God's future blessing to Israel will yet be fulfilled among the Jewish people themselves; they are not to be "spiritualized" by finding their fulfillment in the church.
- One attractive feature about pretribulational premillennialism is that it allows people to insist that Christ's return could occur "at any moment" and therefore does justice to the full force of the passages that encourage us to be ready for Christ's return, while it still allows for a very literal fulfillment of the signs preceding Christ's return, since it says these will come to pass in the tribulation.

Three Main Views of the Millennium Summarized: (See Revelation 20:1-6)

- (1) *Amillennialists* (those who hold an "a" [non-literal] millennial view) think these thousand years are the same period as this present church age, and that there will be no future "millennium" before Christ returns for the final judgment. Related to this is the question of whether the thousand years are to be interpreted literally (most premillennialists hold this view) or symbolically (most postmillennialists and amillennialists and some premillennialists hold this view). Those holding each view read John's millennial vision in terms of their understanding of other biblical texts and their approach to prophetic literature as a whole. Likewise, each of these views falls within the framework of historic Christian orthodoxy.
- (2) *Postmillennialists* (those who believe that Christ will return "post" [after] the millennial period) think that before Christ returns to earth the gospel will spread and triumph so powerfully that societies will be transformed and peace and justice will reign on earth for a thousand years (or for a long period of time), after which Christ will return for the final judgment.
- (3) *Premillennialists* (those who believe Christ will return "pre" [before] the millennium) think that this thousand years (Latin, *millennium*) is a future time of great peace and justice, which is usually thought to be a literal 1,000-year period that will begin when Christ returns to reign on earth as a physically present King, and which will include resurrected believers reigning with him.

The Final Judgment and Hell

God expresses both personal (Rom. 1:18–32) and national judgment (Isaiah 13–23), and his judgments have taken place throughout history and in the heavenly realm (2 Pet. 2:4). But after the millennium (or, according to amillennialists, after the present age) Christ will judge the whole world once and for all (Matt. 25:31–33; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:11–15). At this time the righteous wrath of a holy God will be unleashed on a rebellious world (Rom. 2:5; 3:19). Jesus often warned that he would usher in the day of wrath (Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; 25:31–46), and other NT writers repeated this idea (1 Cor. 4:5; Heb. 6:2; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).

Unbelievers will be judged, and the result will be punishment for even careless words that were spoken (Matt. 12:36). Those who refuse God's gracious offer of forgiveness in Christ will suffer eternal conscious punishment in hell, a condition of torment cut off from the presence of God (Matt. 25:30, 41, 46; Mark 9:43, 48; Rev. 14:9–11).

Christian believers, who understand the holiness and justice of God and the depth of human sin, should be able to relate to the martyrs in heaven who long for the day of judgment (Rev. 6:10). However, in this age, the church is primarily called to warn people everywhere to repent and flee the wrath that will come when Christ returns as Judge:

Acts 17:30–31 (ESV)

³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ 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."

Believers, as well as unbelievers, will be judged by Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Romans 14:10–12 (ESV)

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." ¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

The judgment of believers will test the worth of the way they lived. It will reveal some tragic lack of true good works in the sanctification process and will show that some were saved "but only as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). Here the testing ("fire") of God's judgment at the return of Christ will reveal the quality of a believer's works, and some will have little to show for their salvation.

On the other hand, what was done to glorify God will be rewarded (1 Cor. 4:5; Col. 3:23–24). Although God seeks to motivate his people to holy living by the rewards they will receive, ultimately, believers can stand before God only because of Christ's finished work on their behalf. The basis for justification is only the perfect righteousness imputed to believers and the diverting of sin's penalty from them to Christ, and never the false security of self-righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8–9). There is no fear of the final judgment for those who have trusted Christ for salvation because there is:

Romans 8:1 (ESV)

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

1 John 4:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

The New Heavens and New Earth

God's creation of the new heavens and earth is the final phase of his redeeming work. The restored creation will be freed from the tragic effects of sin and the curse, and perfect fellowship with God will be restored. The OT promised this wonderful reality as the culmination of the new covenant:

Isaiah 65:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ *"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.*

2 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ *But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

Revelation 21:1–2 (ESV)

¹ *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

The entire world that was subjected to futility and decay in the fall will be freed from this bondage "far as the curse is found" when God recreates everything anew (Rom. 8:19–23; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). There will be a joining together of heaven and the renewed earth (Rev. 21:1–3), and in company with Jesus Christ their Lord God's people will work, play, eat, learn, and worship in their resurrected, glorified bodies (Luke 22:18; Rev. 19:9; 22:1–2) in the place that the church down through the ages has always called heaven, but which the Bible calls "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). The very goodness of the original creation (Gen. 1:31) will here be restored and redeemed to perfection.

The knowledge of God's future restoration of all creation should deepen one's appreciation of the created order now. The created physical realm, although marred by the fall, maintains a goodness that is redeemable and is intended to be enjoyed now as God's abundant blessing: "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:4–5). However, hope for the world to come motivates the believer to live ultimately for that world rather than this one. As Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19–21).

The tremendous blessing of a restored heaven and earth will be cause for extravagant praise, but the greatest blessing will be the glorious presence of God himself, and of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Fellowship with Jesus, it has been said, is what makes heaven to be heaven, and that is something that Christian people will be proving true for all eternity.

Glossary of Terms:

- **Antichrist** – *Anti* means "against" or "in place of." The Antichrist is a demonized man who will be against Christ and seek to be worshiped by the nations in place of Jesus. He will give leadership to the most powerful and most wicked worldwide empire in history.
- **Beast** – Term used 36 times to refer to the Antichrist (Rev. 13; 14:9-11; 17:3-17; 19:19-21; 20:4, 10).
- **Dragon** – Symbolic of Satan in the book of Revelation (Rev. 12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4; 16:13; 20:2).

- **False Prophet** – The Antichrist’s minister of propaganda, who will work miracles (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). He is called “another beast” in Revelation 13:11.
- **Millennium** – The Millennium is a literal or figurative 1,000- year period in which Jesus will rule the whole world from Jerusalem in righteousness and peace. The kingdom of God will be openly manifest worldwide, affecting every sphere of life.
- **Rapture** - The “catching away” of God’s people in the air when Jesus returns. It comes from the Latin word *raptus* which means “catching away” (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- **Tribulation/Great Tribulation** – Some refer to the Tribulation as the entire seven-year period just before Jesus returns. Others see that Jesus specifically referred to the last three and a half years of that seven-year period as the Great Tribulation (Mt. 24:21, 29; Mk. 13:24; Rev. 7:14). They see the main focus of the Great Tribulation is the release of God’s judgments on the Antichrist. A secondary theme of the Great Tribulation is the Antichrist’s persecution of the saints.

(For Further Study: [Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine](#), Dr. Wayne Grudem).