

Chapter 18

# THE RETURN OF CHRIST - ESCHATOLOGY

Christ's return is our great hope of salvation and a glorious eternity with God. Consequently, the study of eschatology (end times) is critical to understanding our salvation and is a great blessing ([Revelation 1:3](#)).

# INTERPRETING PROPHECY

End times biblical literature in the New Testament includes major prophetic passages in:

## 1 Revelation

- Chapters 4-18 – The Tribulation
- Chapters 19-20 -The Second Coming of Christ
- Chapters 21-22 – Eternity

## 2 The Olive Discourse

The “Olivet discourse” Matthew 24 and 25, The tribulation, 2nd coming and judgment leaning to a Jewish perspective

- 1 Corinthians 15:51ff – The rapture
- 1 Thessalonians 4 – The rapture
- 1 Thessalonians 5 – Second coming
- 2 Thessalonians 1 – Tribulation
- 2 Thessalonians 2 – Antichrist

There is also extensive prophetic literature in the Old Testament detailing the first and second coming of Christ, Christ's kingdom reign, and prophecies fulfilled in the Old Testament itself. Many prophecies related to Christ or dealt with in the chapter on the plan of God. The kingdom reign of Christ is dealt with below. Prophecies fulfilled in the Old Testament itself are beyond the scope of this Chapter.

Although opinions vary, proper interpretation of scripture should be a normal literal meaning that includes the style of literature intended for the original text. For instance, prophecy literature should allow symbols to be symbols, as intended by the original author, to represent actual events, not to be spiritualized or the symbols taken verbatim.

The discussion and figure below, are based on a normal literal interpretation of scripture. Other traditional alternative beliefs to the end times exist but are not included in this chapter because of the lack of substantiation in scripture. Several references are included below for your convenience for deeper reading.

## KEY DEFINITIONS

- ▶ **End times** – The term ‘end times’ is derived from the scripture ‘last days’. This term and its derivatives typically mean the time of the church as well as Christ’s second return and ensuing eternity. It can indicate, however, only Christ’s return and beyond which is the case for our study in this chapter.
- ▶ **Eschatology** – This is the study of end times taken from the Greek word ‘last’ (ἔσχατος, eschatos)

## END TIMES EVENTS IN ORDER

- ▶ **The rapture** - (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Revelation 4:1; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58) – This important event includes the following:
  - It occurs at a time known only by God
  - A trumpet, shout, and announcement shall be heard and Christ will return in the clouds
  - Christ will take dead and living Christians out of the world to be with Him for eternity
  - We will be changed to be incorruptible forever
  - The rapture initiates the series of events leading to Christ’s return and begins specifically the tribulation (see below).
  - Although beliefs differ, scripture indicates the church is taken out of the world before the tribulation because it is promised to Christians that they will not know God’s wrath (Revelation 3:10; 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:9) which is the purpose of the tribulation. The church is not mentioned in tribulation passages.

► **The tribulation** - ([2 Thessalonians 1:5-2:12](#); [Revelation chapters 4-18](#); [Matthew 24:4-28](#); [Daniel 9:27](#); [Isaiah 24](#))

This is a seven-year period of God's wrath upon the world to bring final judgment before the second coming of Christ, which occurs at the end of tribulation. It is a time of terrible suffering not yet experienced prior to that time ([Matthew 24:21](#)). Yet, God will allow graciously the gospel to go forward to the world during this time still giving unbelievers an opportunity to repent ([Matthew 24:14](#)). The tribulation is covered in several important passages but can be challenging to interpret because each contains different important events which can be difficult to summarize in one timeline. However, these passages have different emphases which are important to recognize. Consequently, we will mention each separately:

- Olivet discourse ([Matthew 24-25](#)) – This is the instruction about the end times Christ gave to the disciples just before His death. It includes worldwide events but has a particularly Jewish slant.
- First half ([Matthew 24:4-14](#)) – The tribulation begins the first three and a half years with manifestations of war, rumors of war, hatred, persecution, horrifying natural events, and false prophets. We know from other scriptures that the tribulation begins with the rapture. However, this event is not mentioned in the Olivet Discourse probably because the church was not yet known when our Savior gave this instruction.
- Abomination of desolation and return of Christ ([Matthew 24:15-31](#)) – The abomination of desolation occurs at the midpoint of the tribulation when the antichrist stops the temple worship leaving the altar desolate as promised in the Old Testament ([Daniel 9:27](#)). Importantly, at this time, Christ states those in Jerusalem should immediately flee to the mountains and look and be prepared for His return.

## Revelation 5-18

The tribulation described in the Book of Revelation provides generally a more worldwide explanation regarding the nations than the Olivet Discourse. Several themes appear to run concurrently in the revelation and are chronological but how they relate to each other exactly in time can be difficult to determine:

- Worldwide judgments (chapters 5-16) – These are the seal, bowl, and trumpet judgments that appear to occur sequentially throughout the tribulation but with unknown timing. There are seven judgments under each. They describe generally natural disasters, war, and plagues as a judgment upon the earth.
- Sealing of the 144,000 (chapter 7) – These are Jewish believers from the 12 tribes of Israel that are sealed by God during the tribulation. They will go forth to the whole world to testify of God and most or all will be martyred.
- The two witnesses (chapter 11) – These are two witnesses who preach to the world during the tribulation. They are martyred in Jerusalem and are resurrected after 3 days to the consternation of the world.
- The spiritual war (chapter 12) – This passage details the efforts of Satan to destroy the Christ child and Israel to prevent salvation and his own destruction.
- The antichrist (Revelation 13; The Beast, Man of lawlessness or sin, son of perdition) – His program will be empowered by Satan and include:
  - Killing the two witnesses (Revelation 11:7) – The antichrist is first mentioned in Revelation as ascending out of the pit and destroying the two witnesses causing great joy on the earth.
  - Personal worship (chapter 13) – He will display miracles causing people to follow and worship him. A part of this program will be the abomination of desolation in the Jewish temple at the midpoint of the tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9:27).

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- Control commerce (chapter 13) – He will do this in part by the ‘mark of the beast’ which will not allow people to participate in commerce unless they have submitted to him.
- Attempted world domination – His effort to control the world will help lead to the battle of Armageddon (chapter 16).
- Babylon (chapters 17 and 18) – The organized world system, which originated from the Tower of Babel, will be destroyed. This includes commercial interests and may include a religious component as well. Babylon’s downfall represents the end of the long battle between God and the principles of the kingdom of the world as represented by ancient Babylon.

➤ **The return of Christ** - Our Savior will return, in glory, to establish His rule upon the earth (see below please). His return will:

- Occur at the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19)
- Happen rapidly like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10)
- Be accompanied by celestial signs (2 Peter 3:10-12; Matthew 24:29)
- Be to the earth (as opposed to the rapture which will be in the clouds)
- Be glorious (Revelation 19)
- Christ will gather His elect (Colossians 3:4, Matthew 24:31)

*Provide salvation to those whose names are in the book of life. Those whose names are not found will not live during the reign of Christ.*

➤ **Kingdom of Christ** - (1000-year reign, Revelation 20:1-7; Jeremiah chapters 23,31-33; Ezekiel chapters 36-38; Isaiah chapters 59-66) This period is also known as the: kingdom of God or heaven, eternal Kingdom, or thousand-year reign. The kingdom will have the following characteristics:

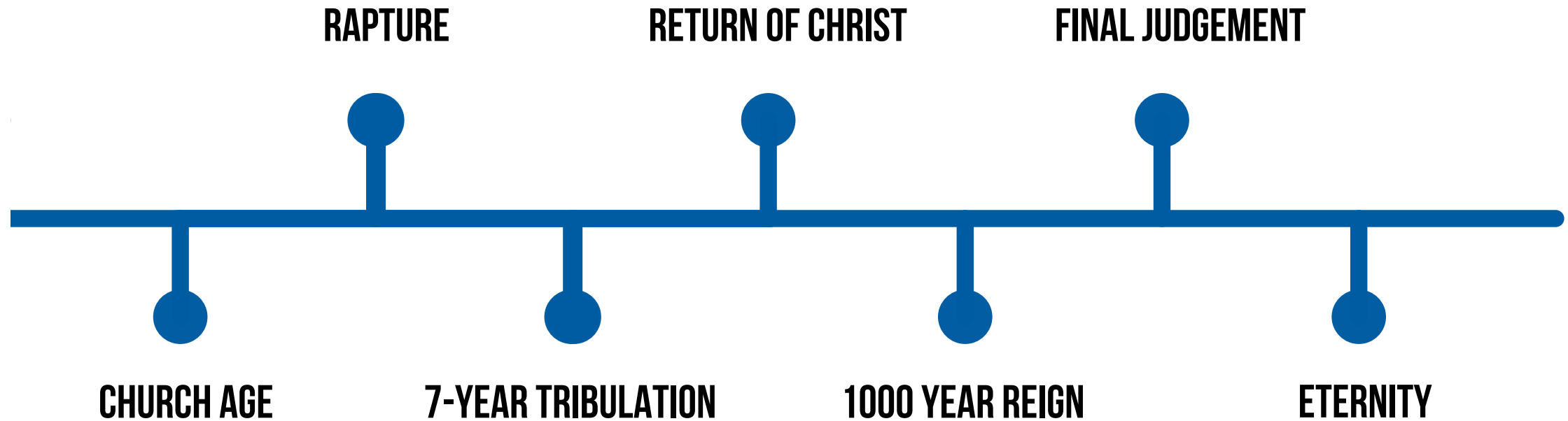
- This period of a 1,000 years is when Christ will rule over the earth as King from Jerusalem
- It will be a time of peace and prosperity upon the earth
- Satan is bound (Revelation 20:2,5)
- Christ will rule justly all nations
- This will be the promised fulfillment of the Kingdom to the Jews and their eternal rest
- The kingdom will include both Jews and gentiles.

➤ **Eternity** - (Revelation chapters 20 – 21)

This is the period after the 1,000 -year reign when Satan, the antichrist and unbelievers will be loosed and rebel again, only to be defeated. God will judge unbelievers after this battle. Satan and the antichrist will be bound in hell. Then a new glorious heaven and New Jerusalem will come down from above. Believers will live eternally with God fulfilling their great hope and promise.



# TIMELINE OF END TIMES EVENTS IN THE BIBLE



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## FURTHER READINGS

1. Ryrie CC. Basic theology: A popular systematic guide to understanding biblical truth. Moody Publishers, 1999.
2. Chafer LS. Systematic Theology. Abridged Volume II. Kregel Publications, 1947.

## GOT QUESTIONS?

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