End Times Interpretations

Last week, in our study of 2 Corinthians, we talked about judgement. And because judgement is associated with the end of our present state of the world, or at the very least the end of our lives on earth, I thought it would be prudent to consider what some of the possible interpretations of the Jesus return look like. How we live our Christian lives is very affected by our belief that Jesus will return someday and usher in a new heaven and a new earth and quite honestly a new reality. So today I would like to explore one main question.

**What are some biblically feasible interpretations of how the end of the present age on earth will occur?**

Whether we know it or not our view of Jesus return and the ushering in of realized eternal life is very connected to our interpretation and understanding of Revelation 20, which reads:

20 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ 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. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

The way you interpret this passage has a huge impact on your view of end times. I am going to read from an article that briefly explains the most common views of what theologians call the millennium.

**Article from Exploring God Website**

There are three major viewpoints when it comes to this millennium—premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism—and a fourth one—preterism—that is growing in popularity. These generally differ in regard to the timing of the millennium in relation to Jesus’ return.

1. Premillennialism (Historic)

The first and the most common viewpoint today is premillennialism. Premillennialists believe that Jesus will return before the millennium. This view holds that the time between Jesus’ ascension to heaven and his return back to earth is the age of the church. When Christ returns, the church age will come to an end and Jesus will then establish his millennial kingdom.

The Christian dead will be raised to life and reign with Christ for this thousand years in a literal kingdom that Jesus establishes on the earth. This kingdom will last for an actual period of a thousand years. With the binding of the devil, peace and righteousness will reign over all the earth.

But at the end of the thousand years, the devil will be unbound and released. He will gather those who refused to submit to Jesus and will lead one final rebellion against Christ and Christ’s kingdom. He will fail, and Jesus will finally and ultimately defeat him. Then comes the end.

God will bring about a new heavens and a new earth—a purified and restored creation. This is heaven; this is the eternal state. No more sin, no more suffering, no more death. Paradise has been regained. Believers will once again enjoy perfect, unbroken fellowship with God.

These are the basic, core beliefs of premillennialism, but there is much variety within this viewpoint. The most popular variation of premillennialism today is dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism (Different from Historic but still Premilliennial)

This position has dominated the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If you happen to live in the US and have read a book about the end times or heard a televangelist talk about the end, odds are they were dispensational.

Dispensationalists draw a sharp distinction between Israel and the church—and God’s dealings with each. They believe God has one plan for Israel and another plan for the church. In light of that, one of the major differences in dispensationalism is that it adds a second, secret return of Christ and a secret rapture.

Within the dispensationalist view, before Christ returns to establish his millennial kingdom, he will come secretly to take Christians out of the world. Afterward there will be a seven-year period of great tribulation, terrible suffering, and hardship. The removal of the church allows God to focus on Israel. During this tribulation, there will be a great conversion of Jewish people to Christ. Then, at the end of seven years, Jesus will visibly return and set up his kingdom—as in the premillennialist view.

Though there are many variations, premillennialism is defined by the belief that Jesus returns before the millennium. It generally holds that history continues on a downward spiral. Suffering generally increases as history progresses until suddenly Christ returns.

2. Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism takes the opposite stance; it maintains that Jesus will return after the millennium. Postmillennialists hold a different understanding of the nature of the millennium. In premillennialism, Christ comes down, establishes his kingdom, and reigns on the earth. In postmillennialism, Christ remains in heaven, exercising his authority on earth through the church.

Whereas premillennialism takes a negative view of the progression of history, postmillennialism takes a positive view. Through the church’s spreading of the gospel, the millennium will be gradually and progressively established on earth. As Christian influence spreads, so will peace and righteousness.

The millennium, then, is the period when universal peace reigns on the earth as a result of the work of the church in spreading the gospel. Some postmillennialists think that the period is literally a thousand years, while others maintain that is it an undefined, extended period of time.

Toward the end of the millennium, the devil will be released and lead a brief rebellion. Jesus will return to the earth to defeat his enemies, raise the dead to face the final judgment, and then bring about the new heavens and the new earth.

The key to postmillennialism is that Jesus returns after the millennium. He comes back after the church has successfully spread the gospel and established peace throughout the earth.

3. Amillennialism

The third major viewpoint is amillennialism. Amillennialists agree with postmillennialists that Jesus will return after the millennium, but they do not believe that the millennium is a yet-to-come future event. Instead, the defining characteristic of amillennialism is the belief that the millennium is a present reality.

The millennium is now. It is the church age—the entire period between the departure and return of Jesus.

While premillennialism takes a negative view of the development of history and postmillennialism a positive view, amillennialism takes both. Evil will continue to expand right alongside the spread of the gospel and its positive influences.

Jesus bound and imprisoned Satan with his death on the cross and resurrection. Thus Satan’s influence has been severely limited, making way for the spread of the gospel to all nations. Deceased Christians are currently in heaven with Christ, reigning with him.

Since the millennium is now, when Christ returns it will be the end. He brings with him the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the recreation of the new heavens and the new earth.

Amillennialists point out that the only mention of the millennium is found in the book of Revelation. Since Revelation is highly symbolic, it is perfectly acceptable to interpret the millennium as an indeterminate period of time rather than a literal thousand years.

All of these positions are held by Bible believing Christ-followers. And all of these positions have strengths and weaknesses when evaluated by scripture.

I believe that historic premillennialism and amillennialism have the best scriptural support. Today, this is really all I am going to say about the different theological views of the end times. But I would encourage you to study it, a lot, before you dogmatically decide what you believe. And even then I would encourage you to show deference and defend your views with gentleness and charity.

The one fact that I believe is important about preparing for and understanding the day of Christ’s return is that the Bible seems to teach that His return can happen at any time.

Today, the first time I looked at my phone, I was reminded that today was September 11. A day, in 2001, that we, as Americans, should never forget. A day that came like a thief in the night, a terrible day, that none of us were expecting. A day that cannot be undone.

As we engage with the people around us we should have a sense of urgency when we share the Good News of Jesus and the eternal salvation that He offers to those who believe. Because, for many, that day will be a terrible day.

I don’t believe that there will be any kind of second chance for those who have rejected God and our Lord Jesus. The scriptures speak of “the day” or “a day” or “that day,” of judgement. Let’s take a look at a few scriptures pertaining to judgement.

Matthew 12:36 ESV

I tell you, on **the day** of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,

John 12:48 ESV

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on **the last day**.

2 Peter 2:4 ESV

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until **the judgement**;

2 Peter 2:9 ESV

Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until **the day** of judgment,

Acts 17:31 ESV

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.”

Romans 2:16 ESV

On **that day** when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Matthew 11:24 ESV

But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on **the day** of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

I shared these verses to emphasize my belief that there will be only one day of judgement. And it will be on the last day. The day that Jesus returns.

I know that there are some Christians who believe that Jesus will return and snatch Christians away from troubling times or what they would define as the seven years of tribulation. I understand this interpretation of scripture, but I don’t agree with it. Even if you believe in a literal 1000 years of Jesus earthly rule after He returns, I don’t believe that we, as Christians, should think that we are going to be spared from going through the hard times that will come before Jesus returns. I say this because I want you to be prepared for hardship and maybe even persecution as you hope expectantly for Christ’s return. Jesus when predicting the 70 AD fall of Jerusalem and alluding to His future second coming supports the belief that Christians should expect to go through hard times.

24 As Jesus was leaving the Temple grounds, his disciples pointed out to him the various Temple buildings. 2 But he responded, “Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!”

3 Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives. His disciples came to him privately and said, “Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?”

4 Jesus told them, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, 5 for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They will deceive many. 6 And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately. 7 Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world. 8 But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.

9 “Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers. 10 And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. 11 And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. 12 Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come.

15 “The day is coming when you will see what Daniel the prophet spoke about—the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing in the Holy Place.” (Reader, pay attention!) 16 “Then those in Judea must flee to the hills. 17 A person out on the deck of a roof must not go down into the house to pack. 18 A person out in the field must not return even to get a coat. 19 How terrible it will be for pregnant women and for nursing mothers in those days. 20 And pray that your flight will not be in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For there will be greater anguish than at any time since the world began. And it will never be so great again. 22 In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive. But it will be shortened for the sake of God’s chosen ones.

23 “Then if anyone tells you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There he is,’ don’t believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God’s chosen ones. 25 See, I have warned you about this ahead of time.

26 “So if someone tells you, ‘Look, the Messiah is out in the desert,’ don’t bother to go and look. Or, ‘Look, he is hiding here,’ don’t believe it! 27 For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes. 28 Just as the gathering of vultures shows there is a carcass nearby, so these signs indicate that the end is near.

29 “Immediately after the anguish of those days,

the sun will be darkened,

the moon will give no light,

the stars will fall from the sky,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

30 And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.

32 “Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. 33 In the same way, when you see all these things, you can know his return is very near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things take place.

(All these things have started to take place. In fact, all of these things started to take place among the generation that Jesus was talking to. Jesus never said that all of these things would come to completion among that generation.)

35 Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

36 “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.

37 “When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah’s day. 38 In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. 39 People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.

Just as September 11, 2001 started like any other day, and turned out to be a day that no one would have expected. So will be the day of Christ’s return.

Much like Christians before the fall of Jerusalem so we should be prepared spiritually to live out our faith and share our faith with others so that they can stand on **the day** of judgement. Because Jesus is coming back to Judge all people and many won’t be prepared. As Jesus Himself said:

32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

Mark 13:32-33 NLT