

CONTENTS

Expectations	2
The Countdown Continues	4
Christ: Key To The Future	5
What We Can Know About The Endtimes	
1. <i>Christ Will Return In The Air</i>	6
2. <i>The Antichrist Will Rise To Power</i>	9
3. <i>Earth Will Have Unparalleled Trouble</i>	11
4. <i>Christ Will Return To The Earth</i>	14
5. <i>Christ Will Rule For 1,000 Years</i>	16
6. <i>Christ Will Judge Unbelievers</i>	19
7. <i>A New World Will Be Created</i>	22
What We Can't Know About The Endtimes. . .	25
The Two Phases Of Christ's Return	27
Why Study Prophecy? . .	29
"My Life Was Turned Around"	30
What Does This Mean To Me?	32

WHAT CAN WE KNOW ABOUT THE ENDTIMES?

Are the statements in the Bible about the future exact enough for us to know what lies ahead? Or are they too vague, too figurative, or too debatable to be of any real value to us today? What difference does it make whether or not we know ahead of time if it's all going to happen anyway? Let's look to the Bible for the answers to these and other important questions about the future.

Martin R. De Haan II

Managing Editor: David Sper

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 1986, 1996, 2002 RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in USA

EXPECTATIONS

A woman in her 9th month of pregnancy.

A college student the week before final exams.

A teenager before his first date.

A man and woman as they say, "I do."

A patient who has been told he has cancer.

A criminal awaiting the judge's sentence.

Do your expectations turn out to be naively optimistic, unduly pessimistic, or surprisingly realistic? In most cases, what makes the difference is whether you acted on the basis of specific knowledge or on unfounded feelings.

Opinions about the future follow the same pattern. To avoid being victimized by false hopes or unrealistic fears, we need to search out reliable information and live by it.

Many find it hard to know whom to believe. Some predict a nuclear holocaust. Others speak ominously of mass

Do your expectations turn out to be naively optimistic, unduly pessimistic, or surprisingly realistic?

starvation. Many economists are forecasting a worldwide financial collapse. Still others see a peaceful utopia just ahead.

Here are a few excerpts from actual conversations with people who expressed their hopes and fears about the endtimes.

- "I heard some guy on TV talk about the book of Revelation, and it really spooked me."

- “I believe that I will see the end of the earth in my lifetime.”
- “I don’t see why Jesus would have to come back. If He was the Messiah, He would have done it right then.”
- “If the judgment day comes, then I’m going to hell. I enjoy doing the things I’m doing wrong.”

To avoid being victimized by false hopes or unrealistic fears, we need to search out reliable information and live by it.

- “It’s kind of scary to think that the world is going to come to an end someday, but if I have faith there is nothing to be afraid of.”

- “I think everybody has the same destiny.”
- “The future kind of scares me. I’m afraid of World War 3 and things like that.”
- “I think God cares, but I don’t think He’s controlling things. I think He sees what happens and He hopes for the best.”
- “I believe that God controls the future and that Jesus Christ will return just as He promised. I believe in an actual heaven and hell.”

Who’s right? Which expectations are in line with what we *can* know for sure? In this study, we will be looking to the Bible for answers to our questions about the endtimes.

THE COUNTDOWN CONTINUES

No amount of effort can stop the clock of history. No mortal, no matter how influential, wealthy, or well-known can break the tyranny of time. Every day that passes, every flash of a digital crystal, brings us closer to the dramatic events predicted in the Bible. We can prepare for the inevitable. We can put time to good use. But we cannot stop it. Not for a moment.

That can be an unsettling thought. The prophetic passages of the Bible are filled with frightening scenes and complicated symbols. There are predictions of the sun going dark and the moon turning to blood. Four terrible horsemen are pictured as riding forth over the earth bringing war, famine, disease, and death.

A blasphemous beast will rise out of the sea to shake his fist in the face of God and to bring untold suffering to God's children. A final, cataclysmic war will be fought, and blood will flow 5 feet deep in a valley 200 miles long. Finally, peace will settle over the earth like the warm, benevolent sunshine of spring.

These are frightening, confusing images. And when we read about prophecy, we come across technical terms like the great tribulation, the abomination of desolation, the return of Jesus Christ, the great white throne judgment, and the lake of fire.

What's ahead? How much can we know about the endtimes? Well, not everything, certainly. But the Bible does give us much information. In the pages that follow, we will identify and explain the seven major events of the endtimes.

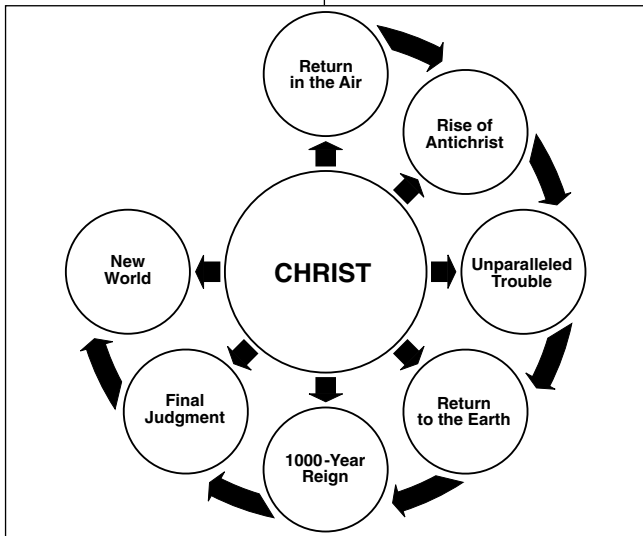
CHRIST: KEY TO THE FUTURE

Christ is the center of God's plan for the endtimes.

the nations and Israel.

4. Return To The Earth: Christ comes to rescue and judge Israel, and to judge the nations.

5. 1,000-Year Reign:



1. Return In The Air: Christ comes back for His own.

2. Rise Of The Antichrist: Christ is challenged.

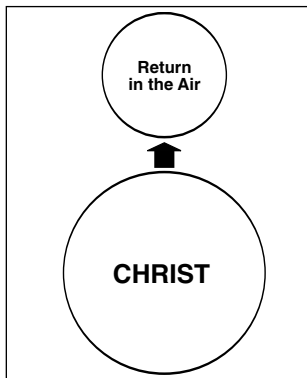
3. Unparalleled Trouble: Christ troubles

Christ rules the world from an earthly throne.

6. Final Judgment: Christ defeats His enemies and judges unbelievers.

7. New World: Christ creates a new heaven and a new earth.

WHAT WE CAN KNOW ABOUT THE ENDTIMES



FACT 1: CHRIST WILL RETURN IN THE AIR FOR HIS OWN

Because Christ can be trusted, we know that He will keep His promise to return for His own. He promised His disciples: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (Jn. 14:2-3).

What Will Happen?

This event is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (vv.16-17).

At a predetermined time, the Son of God will leave the Father's side and descend toward earth. As He does, three mighty sounds will echo across the halls of heaven and sweep over the earth: a shout, the voice of an archangel, and a blast from the trumpet of God. When these sounds are heard, all believers since the time of Christ will be resurrected. The bodies of the Christians who have died will arise,

be transformed, be reunited with their souls, and be taken to Christ's side in the air. Then every living Christian will be removed from the earth, "caught up" to join with the resurrected believers for a great and glorious meeting in the air. Christ will take them to be with Himself, and they will "always be with the Lord" (v.17).

This is also in view in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, where Paul wrote:

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

In a moment of time the earth will be emptied of Christians.

When Will It Take Place? No one really knows when this event

will occur. The time is not spelled out in prophecy. We are told instead to maintain an attitude and condition of readiness, for Christ said:

Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Mt. 24:44).

Christ taught this attitude of watchfulness in two similar parables recorded in Luke 12. In the first parable (vv.35-40), He likened His coming to the return of the master of the house from a wedding. In the second (vv.42-48), a man has left his household affairs in the hands of a servant.

The key element in both parables is that the day of the master's return could not be known. Because of that, the servants were to maintain constant readiness. The same is true of us as we wait for Christ's return.

This could occur at any moment. That's what the word *imminent* means. But that does not necessarily mean His return will occur soon. Yes, it's *imminent*—it could take place before you take your next breath, but it is not necessarily *immediate*. The Lord could delay His return another few hundred years.

We believe that this event will be the first of the endtime events. It is referred to as “the rapture of the church.” The word *rapture* comes from the Latin word *rapere*, which literally means “to seize” or “to catch away.” For an explanation of why we believe that the rapture is separate from the second coming of Christ to the earth, please read pages 27 and 28.

The Judgment Seat Of Christ. Those who are taken from the earth will meet Christ in the clouds

and go to be with Him. Then they will stand before the Lord in judgment. This event is called the judgment seat of Christ. Paul foresaw it when he wrote:

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

The issue for those at the judgment seat of Christ will not be salvation. They are all God's children—forgiven and adopted on the basis of their acceptance of Christ. The purpose is to determine the degree of reward they receive. They will be called into account and receive what is due them (2 Cor. 5:10). The primary issue will be faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2,4). This is emphasized in three of our Lord's parables: the worker in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16), the

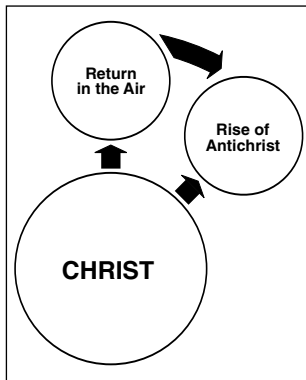
talents (Mt. 25:14-30), and the 10 minas (Lk. 19:11-27).

Some will receive reward at the judgment seat of Christ; others will suffer

Some will receive reward at the judgment seat of Christ; others will suffer loss.

loss (1 Cor. 3:11-15). We are not told just what this will involve. There will be no punishment, for Jesus Christ bore all the penalty for our sin on the cross. We may be shown our shortcomings and failures. We may be reminded of our selfishness and of the sins we did not confess. The “loss” we suffer will be in the receiving of less reward than we could have received.

FACT 2: THE ANTICHRIST WILL RISE TO POWER



According to Bible prophecy, the next event on the endtime calendar is the rise of a false christ to world prominence. He is called the Antichrist.

The apostle John said that many false christs would appear (1 Jn. 2:18; 4:3). Claiming to be the Messiah, they will seek and attract many people. Some had already appeared while John was still alive. One day, however, the ultimate

impostor will come. He will gather a huge following. He will deceive Israel into signing a false peace treaty (Dan. 9:27). And he will be the cause of untold suffering in the world, especially for the saints.

Here is what the Bible tells us about Antichrist:

- He will receive power from Satan (Rev. 13:2).
- He will receive his throne from Satan (Rev. 13:2).
- He will receive his authority from Satan (Rev. 13:2).
- He will be a ruler (Rev. 6:2).
- His purpose will be conquest (Rev. 6:2).
- He will be guilty of terrible blasphemy (Rev. 13:5).
- He will make a peace treaty with Israel and then cruelly break it (Dan. 9:27).
- He will put himself above everything and

everyone (Dan. 11:37).

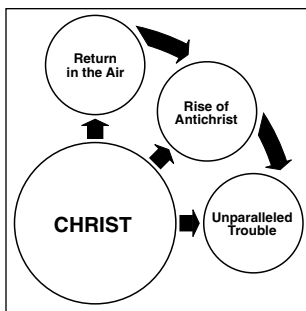
- He will proclaim himself to be God (2 Th. 2:4).
- He will stage a miraculous “resurrection” (Rev. 13:3).
- He will make war with the saints (Rev. 13:7).
- He will have authority over the nations (Rev. 13:7).
- His number is 666 (Rev. 13:18).
- He will kill millions of believers (Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9-17).
- A false prophet will serve him (Rev. 19:20).
- He will demand that his image be worshiped (Rev. 13:14).

The Antichrist is Satan’s counterfeit. As Jesus Christ was sent by the Father, so this false christ will be sent by Satan. The Antichrist is given various descriptive names in the Bible. For example, he is referred to as:

- The Little Horn (Dan. 7:7-28).

- The King Of Fierce Countenance (Dan. 8:23-25).
- The Prince Who Is To Come (Dan. 9:26-27).
- The Willful King (Dan. 11:16,36-38).
- The Man Of Sin (2 Th. 2:3-4).
- The Son Of Perdition (2 Th. 2:3-4).
- The Beast (Rev. 13:1-10).

FACT 3: THE EARTH WILL EXPERIENCE UNPARALLELED TROUBLE



When the Antichrist is revealed, the stage will be set for the terrible events of

the tribulation. After this satanically empowered leader rises to prominence, the stage will be set for the most distressing period of all history. For 3½ years he will conduct a reign of terror, bringing death to multitudes, both Jew and Gentile. But in addition to this reign of terror, the earth will experience unparalleled trouble as God's wrath is poured out on all mankind (Isa. 13:6-11).

The Nations Troubled. The nations will not go unpunished by the hand of God. They will live to hate the day they cast their lot with God's archenemy. For generations their leaders will have rejected God and mocked His Son. A just punishment will befall them in the 7-year period called "the tribulation."

Two sections of the New Testament describe the events of these 7 years:

Matthew 24 and Revelation 6–16. These prophetic details indicate how mankind will suffer during this frightening time:

Matthew 24

- false christs
- earthquakes
- wars
- killing
- rumors of war
- betrayal
- nation against nation
- flight
- famines
- pestilences

Revelation 6–16

The Seals (Rev. 6)

1. Antichrist
2. war
3. famine
4. death
5. martyrdom
6. global destruction
7. the trumpets begin

The Trumpets

(Rev. 8–9)

1. vegetation destroyed
2. death at sea
3. fresh water poisoned
4. the heavens struck

5. terrible locusts
6. death by demons
7. the bowl judgments begin

The Bowls

(Rev. 15–16)

1. ugly sores
2. death of marine life
3. fresh water contaminated
4. unbearable heat
5. darkness and pain
6. demonic hordes
7. earthquake and hail

The suffering and death that will fall on the nations during the tribulation is indescribably horrible.

Millions upon millions will die in the terrible outpouring of God's wrath. Yet the majority will not repent. Though they "gnawed their tongues" in agony, they will continue to curse the God of heaven and refuse to trust in Him (Rev. 16:10-11). There will be a great multitude of Gentiles, however, who will turn to God during the tribulation. John refers to them as "a great multitude

which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues” (Rev. 7:9).

Israel Troubled.

There are actually two purposes for the 7 years of tribulation. The first, as we have already seen, is the punishment of the nations. A second is to bring Israel to the place where she can be restored to the position of spiritual favor she once held in God’s eyes. Israel will suffer with the nations—only more intensely. This is “the time of Jacob’s trouble” prophesied by Jeremiah:

Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it (Jer. 30:7).

The tribulation will be a time of suffering and death for all mankind. But the Jews will be the hardest hit by the terror of those awful

days. Zechariah predicted that two-thirds of all Jews on earth will die during the tribulation (13:8-9). But the suffering will bring Israel to repentance.

The prophet Ezekiel described Israel’s conversion with these beautiful words:

I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall

dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God (Ezek. 36:24-28).

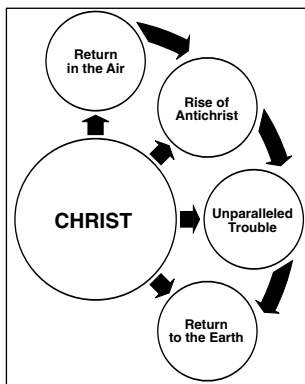
Biblical descriptions of Israel's restoration are also given in Ezekiel 37 (the valley of dry bones) and Zechariah 12:10-11.

The spiritual restoration of Israel as a nation will take place at the return of Jesus Christ to earth at the end of the tribulation. When He returns to rescue them from being annihilated by the Antichrist, they will nationally accept Him as their Messiah and Savior, even though individually a large number of Jews will already have been converted (Rev. 7:1-8).

After hundreds of generations of hardhearted disbelief, the people of Israel will trust in Jesus Christ as their true Messiah. In terrible agony, inflicted

by the Antichrist, they will turn in faith to the Lord Jesus. This brings us to the next event in God's program for the endtimes, the return of Jesus Christ to earth.

FACT 4: CHRIST WILL RETURN TO THE EARTH



As the tribulation draws to a close, the earth will be in turmoil. Millions will have died in war or its aftermath. The Antichrist's hatred of God will focus on the Jews as the 7 years reach their conclusion.

Opposed from the north and east (Dan. 11:44-45), the Antichrist will march his armies into Palestine in preparation for a vast military showdown. Evil spirits will draw the nations together for a final battle on the plains of Megiddo (Rev. 16:12-16).

The armies assembled in Palestine will be made up of bloodthirsty men who have resisted God throughout the tribulation. Both sides—the Antichrist and his opponents—will hate the people of God. They will engage in a fierce battle at Armageddon. The fighting will reach Jerusalem, and the Jews living there will suffer horribly (Zech. 14:1-2). A sense of despair will sweep over them as both armies attack them.

Suddenly, when all seems hopeless, the scene will change. Jesus Christ will appear in all His glory

and descend to the Mount of Olives. When His feet touch it, the mountain will split in half, forming a vast new valley stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea (Zech. 14:3-9). The Jewish believers will be given superhuman strength to fight the Lord's enemies (Zech. 12:6-9), God will send a plague on the enemy soldiers and their animals (Zech. 14:12,15), and panic will grip the foreign troops, causing them to attack one another (Zech. 14:13).

In Revelation 19:11-21, the apostle John provides us with a beautiful portrait of Christ's second coming. He is depicted astride a white horse, His eyes blazing. The Antichrist will rally the armies of earth to attack Him, but they will be crushed in defeat. Israel will be rescued. The armed hordes of earth will be slain. The Antichrist and

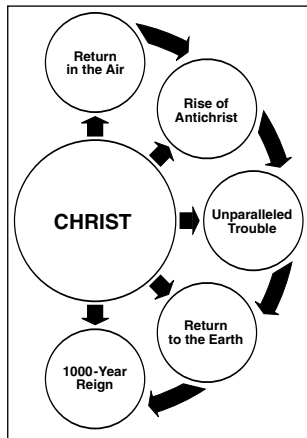
his cohort will be thrown into the lake of fire. Satan himself will be bound. And the victorious Christ will prepare to ascend His throne in Jerusalem to rule in peace for 1,000 years.

Those Who Survive The Tribulation. Jesus Christ will hold two special judgments at the close of the tribulation. The first will be for the Jews who survive those terrible days. The prophet Ezekiel described the Lord Jesus as a shepherd standing at the door of a sheepfold. The Jews who have trusted Him will be received into His kingdom; those who rejected Him will not (Ezek. 20:33-44).

A similar judgment will be held for the Gentiles who live through the tribulation. Again, a shepherd metaphor is used to describe Christ. He is pictured as separating the sheep from the goats

(Mt. 25:31-46). Believers in Christ (the sheep) will be allowed to enter the millennial kingdom; unbelievers (the goats) will die and await the great white throne judgment (see pp.20-21).

FACT 5: CHRIST WILL RULE THE EARTH FOR 1,000 YEARS



The battle is over. The armed hordes of the earth have been defeated. Just when all seemed lost, Jesus

Christ appeared in glory, leading His armies to earth. Before the day ended, the Battle of Armageddon had been won by Him. But the earth is in ruins. Death and destruction lie everywhere. What will happen?

Rather than returning to His Father in heaven, Jesus Christ will erect His throne in Jerusalem.

Rather than returning to His Father in heaven, Jesus Christ will erect His throne in Jerusalem, establish it as His capital city, reinstate the Jews as His people, and rule over the entire earth in a 1,000-year reign of peace, prosperity, and righteousness, which we call the millennium (Rev. 20:4-6).

The Old Testament

prophecies are filled with details about the new government Christ will establish when He returns. Here is what it will be like when the Lord Jesus rules the world:

1. Christ Will Be King.

- The Branch of David will rule (Jer. 23:5).
- Christ will fulfill His prophesied rule (Lk. 1:32-33).
- The believers of the church age will reign with Christ (Rev. 20:4,6).

2. Israel Will Be Prominent.

- Israel will be the favored nation (Isa. 2:1-3).
- Jerusalem will be the capital city (Isa. 60:10-14).
- David's throne will be reestablished (Lk. 1:32).

3. Christ's Rule Will Reflect His Character.

- Justice for everyone (Isa. 2:4).
- All will prosper (Mic. 4:4).
- He will reign in

righteousness (Jer. 23:5).

- The earth will be at peace (Zech. 8:4-5).
- People will be safe (Jer. 23:5-6).

4. The Natural World Will Be Transformed.

- Climate will be ideal (Isa. 30:23-26).
- Wild animals will be tame (Isa. 11:6-8).
- Fishing will be great (Ezek. 47:9-10).
- People will have good health (Isa. 35:5-6).
- Life will be lengthened (Isa. 65:19-20,22).
- Trees will provide food and medicine (Ezek. 47:12).

5. God Will Be Worshiped.

- His name will be known throughout the world (Mal. 1:11).
- The temple at Jerusalem will be the center of worship (Ezek. 40-48).
- Representatives will come from everywhere (Zech. 14:16).

- All mankind will come (Isa. 66:23).
- The Jews will lead in worship (Isa. 60:10-14).

When Christ rules in the millennial kingdom, His love, justice, mercy, righteousness, and peace will be found throughout the earth. Since people reflect their ruler, the

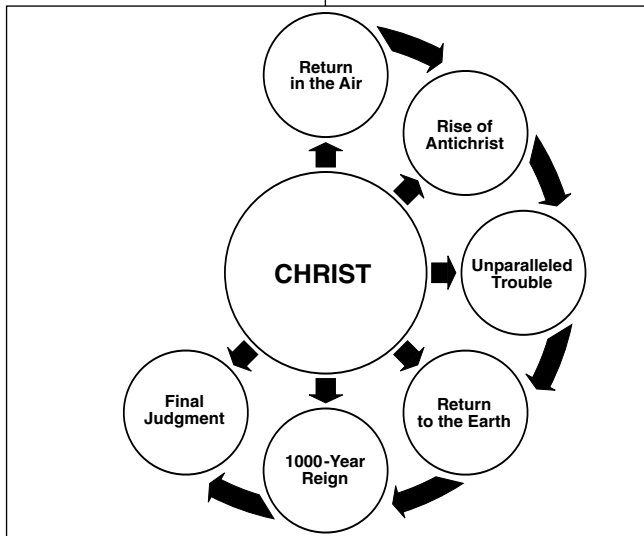
When Christ rules in the millennial kingdom, His love, justice, mercy, righteousness, and peace will be found throughout the earth.

people of the kingdom will reflect the characteristics of their King. During this golden age, the earth will be what God intended it to be.

**FACT 6:
CHRIST WILL
ABOLISH
REBELLION
AND JUDGE
UNBELIEVERS**

against the Lord. This will be Satan's final act of rebellion.

All Rebellion Abolished. John's description is in Revelation 20:7-10.



At the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth, Satan, who had been locked up during this time, will be released. Immediately gathering a gigantic army of unbelievers together, Satan will lead them in battle

When the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them

together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the Beast and the False Prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

It had all begun sometime in eternity past, when Lucifer had looked with a jealous eye at the throne of God. In pride he led a rebellion of angels against God and was cast out of heaven (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-15). From the time of his deception in the Garden until he was cast into the bottomless pit, he has brought immeasurable

suffering to mankind. Now, after 1,000 years of confinement, his hatred of God has intensified. He makes one last, desperate attempt to dethrone the Lord. But in spite of all of his power, his fate will be the same as his wicked underlings, the Antichrist and the False Prophet—everlasting torment in hell.

All Unbelievers Judged. When Satan's last rebellion is smashed, it will be time for the final judgment. A new heaven and a new earth will soon be appearing, and the last details of earth-business must be taken care of. This judgment will occur at the great white throne of God (Rev. 20:11-15).

We are told that "the dead, small and great," (v.12) will stand before the throne. Unbelievers of Old Testament days, the church age, the tribulation, and the millennium will be there as

the books are opened. No one will escape, for “the sea . . . and Death and Hades” (v.13) will give up their inhabitants. The outcome will not be in question. Those who rejected God’s offer of salvation in Christ will have sealed their own fate. Their names will not be found in the Lamb’s Book of Life. They will be cast into the lake of fire, which is already inhabited by Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet. This is the second death—eternal death.

These are not pleasant thoughts. We don’t like the idea of eternal suffering. The idea of flames and anguish appalls us. But remember, these are people who intentionally and willfully chose not to trust in Christ. They turned their backs on God’s grace, deciding to leave Him out of their lives. It was their own choice.

God is not vengeful and

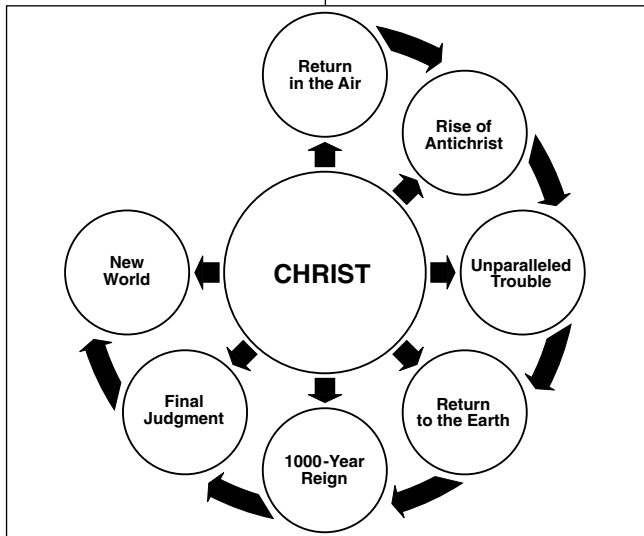
capricious. He does not cause suffering just for the sport of it. His judgment stems from His holiness, and He is absolutely righteous and holy. No one will receive one bit more or less than he deserves, because God can only judge rightly.

***God is not
vengeful and
capricious.
His judgment
stems from
His holiness.***

When questions of eternal suffering disturb us, let’s remember the words of Abraham: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Then, in faith, we can leave it squarely in His hands.

FACT 7: A NEW WORLD WILL BE CREATED

eternal new world free from evil, free from deceit, free from all the harmful,



We come now to the final event on God's prophetic timetable—which, like a commencement, is more of a beginning than an ending. That which begins with the new world will last from that point on—forever. From the ruins of the old heavens and earth, God will bring into existence an

debilitating things that have marred the earth since Adam's sin.

The prophetic books are filled with information about the millennial kingdom, but they tell us very little about the new world to come. Most of our information comes from Revelation 21–22. It begins:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away (Rev. 21:1).

What will happen to the old world-system? It will be burned to ashes in the aftermath of Satan's final attack (Rev. 20:7-10). Peter described it as follows:

The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, but the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

From these charred, smoking ruins, the Creator will bring into existence an eternal home of amazing beauty and grandeur for His own. As we consider the elements of this new world, we will be dazzled by the picture that appears in our minds.

The New Jerusalem. In his vision, John saw the holy city descend from heaven. He described it in Revelation 21 and 22 as follows:

- as beautiful as a bride dressed for her husband (21:2)
- where God dwells with men (21:3)
- immense in size (21:16)
- a jeweled foundation (21:19-20)
- a 216-foot-high wall of jasper (21:17-18)
- 12 gates of pearl, always open (21:21,25)
- buildings and streets of gold (21:18,21)
- illuminated by God's glory (21:11,23)
- a crystal river (22:1)
- trees of life for healing (22:2)
- the throne of God (22:3)

The city is also remarkable for what is *not* there. The following things will be missing from our heavenly home:

- no sea (21:1)
- no more curse (22:3)
- no tears (21:4)
- no death (21:4)
- no pain (21:4)
- no sorrow (21:4)
- no night (22:5)
- no temple (21:22)
- no sun (21:23)
- no moon (21:23)
- no impurity (21:27)
- no deceit (21:27)

What a wonderful place! There will be no night because our heavenly home will be illuminated by the glory of God, and the Lamb will be its light (21:23; 22:5). There will be no temple because Christ Himself will be the temple (21:22). We will reign there forever (22:5). We will see the face of God and bear His name on our foreheads (22:4). We will have access forever to the tree of life (22:2,14).

With this description of heaven complete, the Bible comes to an end. When we

think of the wonders of that home awaiting us, where the Lord Himself will dwell with us, we can only say with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

***“Blessed are those
who do His
commandments,
that they may
have the right
to the tree of life,
and may enter
through the
gates into the
[New Jerusalem].”
Revelation 22:14***

WHAT WE CAN'T KNOW ABOUT THE ENDTIMES

No biblical subject brings out the imagination in people more than prophecy. Some people look into the prophetic books and always seem to find things that are sensational. Often their conjectures cannot be supported—either by context or by content. We have been talking in this booklet about endtime events that we know will take place. Let's look now at four things we cannot know about the future, but that people often claim to have special knowledge about.

I. The Date Of Christ's Return. Time and again, self-proclaimed prophets have used Bible statements to support their "findings" that Jesus will return on a certain day or

in a certain year. Some of these charlatans have even persuaded their followers to sell their earthly goods, combine their financial resources, and head for the hills to await the Lord's return. But God's Word says clearly, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Mt. 24:44).

Many Christians fell into the trap of date-setting after Israel became a nation in 1948. They based their conclusion on Matthew 24:32-34, which says that the generation who sees "the fig tree" bud "will by no means pass away till all these things [the events prior to and including Christ's return] take place." Since Israel is pictured as a fig tree in the Old Testament, many believed that the Lord would return within the next generation (40 years). This would date

the coming of Christ to the earth sometime before 1988 and the rapture of the church before 1981—obviously not an accurate interpretation of the events.

2. The Identity Of Antichrist. Whenever a popular world leader with charisma, charm, and intelligence appears on the scene, he is tagged by someone as the Antichrist. In a sense, the people who make this kind of prediction are on the right track. The one who will rise to international prominence during the tribulation will indeed have those characteristics. We have no scriptural basis, however, for knowing beforehand who that man will be. That will only become evident when he is revealed to mankind during the tribulation.

3. The United States In Biblical Prophecy. Some find it exciting to think that God

may have given the United States special mention in His Book. They claim, for example, that Revelation 18 reveals the United States as commercial Babylon. Yet nothing in the passage specifically requires that conclusion. The evils it mentions are just as true of almost every other civilization on earth as they are of the United States.

4. Specific Details. When prophetic experts go beyond what is clearly revealed in the Bible, they are only speculating. In other words, we have no biblical basis for saying that the world will run out of oil, that the United States faces a dictatorship, that paper money will be abolished, or that the number 666 is a computer number. There is a danger in seeing every current event as a fulfillment of prophecy. Details like these are not revealed in the Scriptures.

THE TWO PHASES OF CHRIST'S RETURN

The endtimes are more easily understood when a distinction is made between the coming of Christ in the air to remove His church and the coming of Christ to the earth to rescue Israel and set up His kingdom. These are the two phases of Christ's return. This distinction is based on the following evidence:

1. Imminency. The Bible clearly teaches that Christ could return at any time. But it also teaches that certain catastrophic events will take place during the tribulation, prior to His return—putting the Lord's people in a state of readiness and expectation. This problem can be resolved if the coming of Christ is seen in two phases. His coming in the air will be

sudden and without warning, but His coming to the earth will be expected by those who are alive during the tribulation and who know the biblical record.

2. Israel And The Church. Israel and the church are two distinct entities, with distinct makeup, identity, and destiny. Israel is a nation; the church is made up of people of all nations (including Israel) who put their faith in Christ. Israel is promised prosperity and fulfillment on earth; the church is promised blessings in heavenly places.

3. The Removal Of The Restrainer. In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 we are told that the way will not be clear for last-day events until a "restrainer" is taken away. It seems very probable that this "restrainer" is the Holy Spirit as He indwells individual members of the church.

The removal of these persons, referred to by Christ as the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world,” would clear the way for a worldwide deception.

4. Differing Descriptions Of Christ’s Coming.

First Thessalonians 4:17 pictures Christ coming in the clouds to “catch up” His people to meet with Him in the air, but Zechariah 14:5 and Revelation 19:14 picture Him as coming to the earth with His people.

5. The Church Not Destined For God’s Wrath. Revelation 3:10 indicates that the church is not destined for “the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world.” Scripture speaks of “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7) as that future time when Israel will be brought to her knees in preparation for the coming of her Messiah. Israel will suffer before her restoration,

but 1 Thessalonians 5:9 indicates that the church will escape that day of God’s wrath.

6. The State Of The Kingdom Inhabitants.

According to 1 Corinthians 15:51, all the righteous will be changed. And Matthew 25:41-46 says that all the unrighteous will be sent into everlasting punishment. If there were no distinction between the two phases of Christ’s coming, only glorified, transformed believers would be left to inhabit the kingdom. This doesn’t seem possible, because children will be born in the millennium (Isa. 11:6-8). And more important, who does Satan lead in worldwide rebellion against Christ at the end of the millennium if not those unbelievers born during the 1,000 years? Initially, only believers will inhabit the kingdom (Ezek. 20:33-44; Mt. 25:31-46).

WHY STUDY PROPHECY?

1. It Promotes Love And Respect For God's Word.

An understanding of the Scriptures shows that God has fulfilled amazing prophecies in the past. This assures us that He will also fulfill those that predict the endtimes. Furthermore, a detailed study of the prophetic Scriptures is bound to give us a greater understanding of all Bible truth and a deeper appreciation for God's Word.

2. It Promotes Watchfulness And Purity.

It will motivate us to be ready for the any-moment return of Jesus Christ. Our Lord Himself emphasized this when He referred to Noah, to the faithful servant, to the 10 virgins, and to the talents (Mt. 24:36–25:30).

The apostle John exhorted us to be faithful, so that when our Lord appears we will be confident and unashamed (1 Jn. 2:28). He went on to say, "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (3:3).

3. It Promotes A Philosophy Of History.

Even though prophecy does not give us an exactly detailed prewritten history, it does lay out the future course for man and the earth. It tells us that the life God created on earth is worthwhile. It shows that God has specific plans for man and for our planet. He will correct the injustices; He will right the wrongs; He will rid the world of evil. The long, arduous course of human history will climax in a golden age of universal peace, prosperity, and righteousness that will exceed our fondest dreams.

“MY LIFE WAS TURNED AROUND”

Clair Hess, senior editor of RBC Ministries, tells how his fear of the second coming of Christ was changed to joyful expectation through a correct understanding of the Bible teaching about endtime events.

One of the memories of my childhood and teen years is not pleasant; in fact, it is a recollection of fear. I remember actually trembling at the thought that the “end of the world” might be near.

I don’t recall hearing much teaching as a boy about the rapture, the glorious appearing of Christ, or the millennium. Instead, the people I worshiped with placed an emphasis on the earth burning up with great heat, the sun being

darkened, and the moon turning to blood. These images seared my mind with fear, dimmed my interest in the second coming, and drained any assurance I had that Christ would protect His own from the coming tribulation.

When I did hear a message about the Lord’s return, I was afraid that I would be left behind. I came home one day after school and found no one there. I was petrified! I was sure that the Lord had come, and that I was the only one in my family who was left to face the horrors of the end of time. I had not been taught that because I had received Christ as my Savior I was really safe—for time and eternity.

Although I knew that heaven is the final home of the Christian (and surely everyone wanted to go there, not to the other place), it seemed that

only old people spoke of it. No one was really in any hurry to get there. Songs portrayed the beauties and wonders of the “home over there,” but they were sung most often at funerals.

I was secretly hoping that Jesus would not come in my lifetime. I had too much I wanted to do. Living seemed more precious, more exciting, than being with Jesus.

After high school, I became interested in the Bible teaching I heard on the radio. I began attending summer gospel tent meetings. I bought a study Bible, and I started reading it with friends. An uncle helped me to understand the sequence of coming events in prophecy. My fears vanished as I read Titus 2:13, “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

I learned to live each

day in the sure promise of John 14:1-3, where Jesus told us not to be troubled, that He is preparing a place for us, and that He will come back to take us to be with Him.

As I’ve grown older, some of my loved ones and friends have been called to their heavenly home. They have gone to be “with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). I know the Lord more intimately now, and heaven seems much closer than it did before. I would be glad if He came today.

Christ, who loved me and gave Himself for me, is coming. It may be today! Life is more exhilarating now. Each day is an adventure. Yes, an understanding of God’s program for the future has turned my life around.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

We have answered the question, “What can we know about the endtimes?” Using the Bible as our guide, we have surveyed what God has revealed about the end of this age and the ages to come. We have looked in on scenes of indescribable bloodshed, horror, and death. And we have had a glimpse of bliss and goodness that surpasses human comprehension.

If you have trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can have confidence about the future. A day is coming, perhaps soon, when the Lord will return for you. Then you will return with Christ to share in His millennial rule. And after the thousand years are over, you will live

with Him in a new world forever in a life of happiness and fulfillment that centers on the Lord Jesus.

But if you are not a Christian, the future is not so promising. The wrath of God will be poured out on the earth, and on you, in a time of terrible war, disease, and famine. And beyond that lies the second death—a fate every bit as real for the unbeliever as heaven is for the person who trusts in Christ.

The countdown continues. The time of opportunity is now. Make your decision. Trust Christ today. Believing that He died to pay the penalty for your sins, ask Him to save you. He has promised that He would. Then, when you have done so, your future will be secure—both in this life and in the ages to come.

Get your free Bible Resources catalog!



Discovery Series booklets can be valuable guides to help you learn what the Bible says about a broad range of topics. Each 32-page booklet can be used in your personal Bible study or in a small-group setting.

Your free Bible Resources catalog includes a brief

description of each Discovery Series booklet. To get your copy, write to us at the address below and ask for a catalog. Or follow the link below to request your copy today.

www.discoveryseries.org/catalog

USA: PO Box 2222, Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2222
Canada: Box 1622, Windsor, ON N9A 6Z7