

A Biblical Study of The End Times
Study Guide

Our primary reference source is God's Word, The Bible. Other references will be the CTCR study, *The End Times: a Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*, and the Lutheran Confessions.

Introduction

What thoughts and images come to your mind when you think about "The End Times"?

Read **1 Peter 2:1 – 3 (pg 1487)** and **Hebrews 5:12 – 6:3 (pg 1471)**. What level of Biblical teaching or spirituality is ascribed to the teachings about the "resurrection" and the "judgment"?

What then should be our attitude toward the teachings regarding the second coming of Christ?

Why do some people and even certain elements of society get so caught up in The End Times?

Overview of the various teachings about "The End Times"?

What is the doctrine of the Lutheran Church regarding the Millennium/End of the World?

Read **Matthew 25:31 – 33 (pg 1217)** and **1 Thessalonians 4:15 – 18 (pg 1449)**. Do you think Matthew and Paul are describing the same event? Why or why not?

Now read **Isaiah 65:17 – 25 (pg 915)** and **Revelation 20 (1524)**. Do you think these verses are describing life on earth, life in heaven, or some other future time in earth's history? Explain your answer.

Let's look at the various definitions/doctrines/theologies regarding The End Times. See handout.

- a. **Eschatology** = The study of the end times or things pertaining to the end.
- b. **Dispensational Premillennialism** *"Warning: in case of rapture this car will be unoccupied"*.
- c. **Historic Premillennialism**
- d. **Postmillennialism**
- e. **Amillennialism**

Hermeneutical Considerations (Hermeneutics = Principles of Biblical Interpretation)

A mathematical example of the importance of following the rules. ☺

1. The Bible is the Word of God and without error (i.e. the original "autographs")
2. The Bible interprets the Bible
 - a. Difficult passages are to be interpreted in light of clear passages of Scripture.
 - b. The Bible does not contradict itself. Therefore apparent contradictions need to be resolved by the clearer passage of Scripture.

"...Scripture is the sole source of doctrine and practice. Although the ability to reason, which is a gift from God, distinguishes human beings from animals, it is not to be regarded as the criterion by which questions of a religious nature are answered. Where paradoxes occur, a childlike faith must prevail over logical deductions. Scripture takes precedence over reason."

From Introduction to Concordia Self-Study Bible
3. The central figure of the Bible is Jesus. The OT points to Christ (the Messiah yet to come) and the NT points us to Christ (the Messiah that has come.) The Christological Focus of Scripture.
4. The central theme of the Bible is God's grace motivated by His love or justification by grace through faith in Christ (Another variation of the Christological Focus of Scripture)
5. Symbolic vs literal interpretation of the Bible
 - a. Symbolic language is common in the Bible, especially in apocalyptic / prophetic literature.

1. Apocalyptic literature = When used as a proper name it refers to the Books of Daniel Revelation. In a general sense it refers to a prophetic disclosure or revelation especially as it relates to end of the world.
 2. Many books and chapters of the Bible including most of the Major and Minor Prophets are written in poetry with picturesque and figurative language.
- b. *The goal of the interpreter must be to seek the one intended or literal sense of the text, and to do so with the recognition that God in some cases has chosen to convey meaning through symbolism and figures of speech (e.g. metonymy, metaphor, and simile)."* CTCR
6. Shortened Perspective

"Events in the near and the distant future are often telescoped into one picture, like mountain peaks when seen in the distance. Sometimes the prophets focus on the immediate future and at other times on the distant future; however, both are seen at the same time." CTCR

Example: Read **Matthew 24:1-2, 15 – 22 (pg 1214)**. Note that verses 16 – 20 also describe the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans as well as events in The End Times.

7. Historical times-coloring (i.e. What did the text mean in its historical situation?)
- "Procedurally, the first task in interpretation is to ascertain what the text meant in its historical situation...the prophets preached to a definite life situation..."* CTCR
8. Typological nature of the Bible
- "A type is a person, institution, or event which prefigures and foreshadows a new and greater reality (the antitype). The antitype historically and theologically corresponds to, elucidates, fulfills, and eschatologically completes the type. The antitype is no mere repetition of the type but is always greater than its prefigurement. And since the Scriptures are Christological, the Old Testament types (which are so indicated in Scripture) are related to, centered in, and fulfilled in Christ and his People, the church."* CTCR

Type = (In Biblical terms) A figure, representation, or symbol of something to come, as an event in the Old Testament that foreshadows another in the New Testament.

Anti-type = That which is foreshadowed by or identified with an earlier symbol or type, such as a figure in the New Testament who has a counterpart in the Old Testament.

"The Old Testament dare not be treated as a self contained entity to be read apart from Christ and the New Testament. This would amount to treating the Old Testament as a non-Christian Jewish book." CTCR

A significant example of Type/Antitype is that Old Testament Israel prefigures Christ and His Church as the New Israel. This is often misinterpreted by other "Bible believing" Christians producing some of the dichotomy in teachings about The End Times. See the following verses for insight into this issue.

Compare **Genesis 12: 1 – 3 (pg 12)** with **Galatians 3: 7 – 9, 14 – 16 (pg 1428)**, then compare **Amos 9: 11 – 15 (pg 1130)** with **Acts 15: 12 – 18 (pg 1357)**. Also note **Romans 11:25 – 32 (pg 1391)**.

The Second Coming of Christ

What we as Christians believe will happen at Christ's second coming is crucial to our overall understanding of The End Times and how we should be living our daily lives as servants of Christ. Trusting the Holy Spirit, and applying the basic hermeneutical principles, examine the following passages from His Word. Being as objective as possible, determine what each text states will happen when Christ returns. Do not add or subtract anything beyond the text.

1 Thessalonians 4: 13 – 18 (pg 1449) _____

Matthew 24: 30 – 31 (pg 1215) _____

Matthew 25: 31 – 34, 41 (pg 1217) _____

Revelation 1: 7 (pg 1505) _____

2 Thessalonians 1: 6 – 10 (pg 1451) _____

1 Corinthians 15: 50 – 53 (pg 1413) _____

2 Peter 3: 3 – 15 (pg 1494) _____

Look again at **1 Thessalonians 4: 13 – 18 (pg 1449)** and compare the description of this account of Christ's coming to the other passages. What similarities and differences do you see?

The Bottom Line: Do you think **1 Thessalonians 4** is describing a secret return to earth or the second and final coming of Christ?

Using hermeneutical principles, how would you explain **Matthew 24:36 – 44 (pg 1215)** which is often quoted by those who believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture as a proof text for their beliefs?

The Signs of The End Times

What do the following verses tell us about the purpose of God revealing the signs of the end times to believers? **1 Thessalonians 5:1 – 6 (pg 1449)**, **2 Peter 3:10 – 14 (pg 1494)**, and **Matthew 24: 36, 42 – 44 (pg 1215)**.

Note how the parables following **Matthew 24** relate to how we are to conduct ourselves as we await the Lord's return.

"...the signs of the end are not intended to provide Christians a means by which they may calculate the exact time of Christ's second coming. In fact, the New Testament warns against all such efforts..." CTCR

"When the Scriptures speak of future events of the end times they do so by simultaneously pointing to what has been called the great eschatological act of the past. Since Christ has won the decisive victory over Satan, sin, and death in the past, future eschatological events are but the culmination of what has already been set in motion by this pivotal event in human history." CTCR

Read **Mark 13:5 – 8 (pg 1245)**. What is the purpose of God revealing these signs to:

Unbelievers: _____

Believers: _____

How does this help interpret/understand and respond to people who blame God for when great tragedies/horrible events occur?

The Bible gives us signs that in The End Times there will be increased opposition to God, especially Jesus, and there will be a large number of people who fall away (or are led away by the Antichrist) from the faith. This is sometimes called the Great Apostasy. *Apostasy = falling away from God and the truth of His word.*

Read **Matthew 24:10 – 13 (pg1214)**. What are examples in our times of how the love of most is growing cold?

Read **2 Timothy 3:1 – 9 (pg 1460)**. What are some examples of having a “form of godliness but denying its power”?

What is meant by verses 6 – 7? _____

What are some present day examples of people gathering “around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” as mentioned in **2 Timothy 4:1 – 5 (pg 1461)**?

What is the most significant sign that the end is near? Re-read **Matthew 24:10 – 14 (pg 1214)** and in particular note verse 14. How does it relate to **Matthew 28: 18 – 20 (pg 1224)**?

How is this sign being fulfilled at the present time and what is the significance of that?

Anthony Hoekema’s (a noted Calvinist theologian) outline summarizing “the signs of the times”:

1. *The evidencing the grace of God: the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations.*
2. *The signs indicating divine judgment*
 - a. *wars*
 - b. *earthquakes*
 - c. *famines and pestilences*
 - d. *signs of the heavens*
3. *The signs indicating opposition to God*
 - a. *tribulation*
 - b. *apostasy*
 - c. *AntiChrist*

The Antichrist vs The Man of Lawlessness vs The Beast

“The term Antichrist is found only in John’s epistles (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7) and signifies both a substitute for Christ (Greek anti means ‘in place of’) and an opponent of Christ.” CTCR

As you read **1 John 2:18 – 26** and **1 John 4:1 – 3** note the characteristics of the Antichrist(s) and list them below:

“With other New Testament writers, John viewed the whole period beginning with Christ’s first coming as the last days...because neither former prophecy nor new revelation concerning the history of salvation indicated the coming of another era before the return of Christ. The word “last”...expresses a sense of urgency and imminence. The Christian is to be alert, waiting for the return of Christ...The Antichrists referred to in John’s letter were the early Gnostics...who taught that the divine Christ came upon the human Jesus at his baptism and then left him at the cross, so that it was only the man Jesus who died.” Concordia Self Study Bible NIV Text Notes

“The man of lawlessness” is usually equated with an Antichrist or the Antichrist. What additional descriptions/characteristics do we find about the final Antichrist in **2 Thessalonians 2:1 – 12**?

Read **Revelation 13:1 – 18**. “The Beast” in Revelation is also often identified as the final Antichrist. What are some of the popular ideas that you have heard or seen about the final Antichrist?

Look again at the verses. Note that there are two beasts, one from the sea and one from the earth. The one from the earth is believed to be representative of the final Antichrist. They both serve “the dragon” which is elsewhere identified as Satan. Note the commentary below.

*“Many commentators today identify the beast of **Revelation 13:1-2** with the Roman Empire. In John’s day...the beast [from the sea]...did indeed represent Rome. After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, Rome continued to serve as the type and model of tyrannical powers that would arise in the future. In light of this history, the interpretation includes Rome but also must be broadened: the beast represents and symbolizes every human authority and everything of the human nature that the dragon [Satan] can corrupt and control in use in his warfare against the woman (the church) and her seed (individual Christians): political, governmental, social, economic, philosophical, and educational systems, as well as individuals. No one entity or person at a given time will exhaust what the beast [from the sea] signifies.” From Concordia Commentary – Revelation by Brighton*

*“While the beast from the sea represents every tyranny by human power and enterprise...the beast from the earth represents religious tyranny. In brief, the first beast can be called the “political beast,” while the second is the ‘religious beast’...The religious beast is the ‘false prophet’ mentioned in **Revelation 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10** and is to be identified also with ‘the harlot’ of **Revelation 17-18**...This suggests that while the religious beast at first represents all false religions and spiritual movements...as time goes on it develops and evolves into a more deadly form, that of the apostate Christianity of the pseudo-church, the Antichrist.”*
From *Concordia Commentary – Revelation* by Brighton

What is meant by “the apostate Christianity” and what would be examples?

Revelation 16:16 – 17 describes how the beast will not allow anyone to buy or sell unless they have his mark on their right hand or forehead. In addition, those that have the mark of the beast will not be saved. Some Dispensational/Premillennial Christians warn people to be watchful about identification systems that might some how label us using an implant under our skin or invisible “bar code” on our hands or forehead. They say we might unknowingly or inadvertently take “the mark of the beast” and be lost to hell and damnation. What do you think of this concern? How would you answer them?

What comfort do we have in **Revelation 3:10 – 11**? _____

The Papacy and the Antichrist

The Lutheran Confessions express the opinion that the Antichrist is the papacy. This is based on the following:

1. **2 Thessalonians 2** describes the Antichrist as an adversary of Christ who opposes and exalts himself over God proclaiming himself to be God. The doctrine of the pope asserts that the pope can change *“the doctrine of Christ and the worship instituted by God, and he wishes to have his own doctrine and worship observed as divine.”* From the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*
2. *“The pope not assumes for himself the power to loose and bind in this life but also the jurisdiction of souls after this life.”* From the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*
3. *“...the pope is unwilling to be judged by the church or anybody, and he exalts himself above the decisions of the councils and the whole church.”* From the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*
4. **1 Timothy 4:1 – 5** describes how in “latter times” false teachers will arise who “forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain types of foods...” These verses are consistent with the dogma of the papacy.

“...the signs of the end do not signify events which will happen only in the future. The Church of every generation can expect to witness their occurrence. Wars, famines, earthquakes, and anti-Christian forces were present already in the first century A.D., and they continue today...To be sure, these signs will become more evident and intense immediately preceding Christ’s return, but every generation was and is acting responsibly in expecting Christ’s return in its own lifetime.” CTCR

“People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward Godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward Godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.”

From *For the Love of God* by D.A. Carson.

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality...Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (NIV)