

Lessons on the End of the World

Revelation 12-13, Matthew 24, Daniel 7-12

Few theological subjects capture the imagination as much as teaching on the end of the world... the end times...

It is the unique feature of Christianity that the Bible makes predictions about the future that actually do come true... the prophecies about Christ's first coming are the clearest example. Jesus' whole life was in broad strokes outlined by the words of the prophets, and even some very specific details as well – like that he would die by crucifixion, with his hands and feet pierced, but that not a single one of his bones would be broken.

The ability of the God of the Bible to predict the future and then make it come to pass is unique in all the religions of the world... God claimed this ability back in the Book of Isaiah concerning the coming of Cyrus the Great, whom God predicted over a century before Cyrus was born... predicted him by name, that by him, the Jews would be allowed to return to their homeland from their exile to Babylon.

Isaiah 46:10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

But what about the Second Coming of Christ? Are there any specific prophecies about that? The answer, of course, is YES... and many of them are found in the Book of Revelation. But not all of them.

And people are fascinated by this topic... look at the massive sales garnered by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins in their wildly popular *Left Behind* series... the 16 volumes of which have cumulatively sold over 65 million copies, and several volumes of the series made it to number 1 on the New York Times bestseller list

But interest in Christian prophecy on the end of the world certainly didn't start with Tim LaHaye. Older Christians will remember Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*, published in 1970, which sold over 35 million copies. Lindsey linked the end of the world to the establishment of Israel as a nation in Palestine in 1948, and famously predicted the end of the world within one generation of that date... so, by December 31 of 1988. A Lindsey disciple named Edgar Whisenant published a booklet entitled "88 Reasons the Rapture will be in 1988"

One humorous pastor I know said to me, "If you want to build your church to record numbers, preach on the Book of Revelation... it'll especially help if you make a specific prediction about the end of the world!"

Well, my desire is not to be sensational, but rather to be faithful to scripture... I want to get you ready, and to have you get the next generation ready for what the Lord has said clearly will happen.

So this morning, I am going to take a sidestep from the sermon series in Revelation to range more broadly over various scriptures relevant to our imminent move from Revelation 12 to Revelation 13. The Dragon, Satan, is left standing at the shore of the sea about to call forth the Beast from the Sea... the Antichrist. Before we cover that, I want to give you effectively a crash course on the doctrine of the Antichrist and aspects of the end of the world

I. Satan: A Powerful, Defeated, Enraged Foe (Revelation 12)

A. Satan's Power

Revelation 12:3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.

Revelation 12:9 The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

1. God wants us to know of Satan and his power so that we will not underestimate him
2. But God also wants us to see his defeats... that he is consistently thwarted in his vicious and intelligent attacks on the people of God

B. Satan's Three Defeats

1. Satan Attempts to Kill Jesus Christ before His Time (Revelation 12:1-5)
2. Satan Attempts to Conquer Heaven (Revelation 12:7-9)
3. Satan Attempts to Destroy the Woman and Her Children (Revelation 12:6, 13-17)

Revelation 12:6 the woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

Revelation 12:13-17 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child... ¹⁷ Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring-- those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

II. Counting the Days 'Till the End: The Timing of the Final Phase of Satan's Attack on the People of God

- A. This last section speaks very powerfully about the devil's attempt to destroy the WOMAN and HER CHILDREN
- B. LENGTH OF TIME... a consistent recording of the same duration in various places in the Bible
 - a. Jesus speaks of a span of days so awful and devastating, it will be difficult even to survive:

Matthew 24:21-22 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-- and never to be equaled

III. Lessons from Matthew 24

A. The Context: The Seven Woes to the Leaders of Israel

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees... you hypocrites!

Culmination of Jesus’ rejection by the Jewish nation through their leaders

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

John 1:11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Jesus’ grief over Jerusalem and the Jews:

Matthew 23:37-39 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸ Behold, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

It is VITAL to note that Jesus says “Behold, your HOUSE is left to you desolate.” The house refers to the Jewish nation as a whole, but symbolically also the temple. The “desolate” or empty nature of the house is related to Jesus HIMSELF... the fact that he is leaving, effectively expelled because they officially reject him

This “desolation” of the house of Israel is essential to the phrase “abomination of desolation” that comes from Daniel and Jesus will mention in the next chapter

B. Christ Predicts the Destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem

Matthew 24:1-2 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ² “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

C. The “Olivet Discourse” or the “Little Apocalypse”

1. Very complex in some sense because it is not clear when Jesus is talking about the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem, and when he is talking about the end of the age

Matthew 24:3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

2. In some senses, there is going to be similarity between the two... the terrible circumstances of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Romans will be a foretaste of the suffering of the people of God at the end of the world

3. Key idea: dress rehearsals... shadows/types vs. final fulfillment

Matthew 24:37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

As it was... so it will be

This is especially true when it comes to the Antichrist:

1 John 2:18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come.

There is ONE antichrist coming... but many antichrists have already come:

Jesus predicted the same thing:

Matthew 24:4-5 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

So, Matthew 24 takes us through all of church history in some ways right to the events of the final phase of suffering for the people of God

D. Uncertain Signs of the End (vs. 6-14)

1. General suffering in the world: Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes in various places
2. Specific suffering for the people of God: handed over to be persecuted and put to death; betrayed and hated by many people; terrible suffering in different phases of church history, and those who stand firm to the end will be saved
3. Overall mission until the Lord returns:

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

- E. The “Abomination of Desolation”... and the Final Persecution (vs. 15-28)

Matthew 24:15-20 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel-- let the reader understand-- ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. ¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

1. First... WHEN YOU SEE!!... the book of Providence, the book of history, is essential to understanding the details of the last things; the final generation MUST COMBINE Biblical prophecy with current events... you must LOOK FOR something that you can see
2. The Command: “Run for your Lives!”
 - a. The basic idea Jesus gives is RUN!!! RUN AS FAST AS YOU CAN!!!
 - b. This is just for those in Judea... it is not true that disciples who read this and live in Ephesus or Alexandria need to run for their lives; there is a Jewish context here about praying that your flight will not take place on the Sabbath

- c. Everything about these verses speaks of terror and a deadly threat that will overtake people who run too slowly... like pregnant women and nursing mothers...
- d. The text mentions a FLIGHT (vs. 20)... Greek is “fuge” from which we get refugee... deeply yearning that it not be in the winter, for then it would be slowed down by weather
- e. The sense of urgency is so great that people don’t have time to go down into their houses to get anything out of them
- f. This terror-stricken flight lines up with what we’ve been studying in Revelation 12

Revelation 12:6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

Revelation 12:13-14 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴ The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.

- g. The human instrumentality of this flight will be the BEAST from the sea or from the abyss... the very one who as we saw fought with and killed the two witnesses in Revelation 12

Revelation 11:7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

- h. The very one we are about to study in Revelation 13

Revelation 13:1 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.

Revelation 13:5-7 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. ⁶ He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. ⁷ He was given

power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

Jesus mentions “false Christs” “false prophets” who do great signs and wonders to deceive even the elect if that were possible... but this one final Antichrist is the cause for the flight and the abomination of desolation

3. What is the “Abomination of desolation?”

a. Jesus said, “When you see it, RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!”

Matthew 24:15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel-- let the reader understand--

This is vital... it means that the Book of Daniel was not completely fulfilled in the reign of the Greek King Antiochus Epiphanes... some of Daniel’s words referred to events AFTER THE TIME OF CHRIST

b. But what is it??

c. It is mentioned three times in Daniel

Daniel 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

Daniel 11:31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

Daniel 12:11 "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.

d. It is something SET UP in the TEMPLE... the word abomination almost invariably refers to a detestable IDOL in the Old Testament

- e. The word “desolation” has to do with the spiritual emptiness of Israel, the fact that the glory of the Lord had gone out from Israel and the nation was empty of the Spirit and presence of God; in Ezekiel 10, the shekinah glory—the glory cloud—went out from the temple and left it
- f. Jesus spoke about demons being cast out of a person, going through arid places seeking rest and does not find it; so it decides to return to the house it left and find the house UNOCCUPIED, swept clean, put in order... Jesus says that is how it will be with the Jewish nation—the demons will flood back in because of the spiritual emptiness... but the worst of all will be the end of the world
- g. So it seems to be some hideously offensive idol set up in the temple
- h. Now obviously that would fit in well with the Roman destruction of the temple in A.D. 70; but there doesn't seem to have been any extreme blasphemy that went on at that time; nothing like Antiochus Epiphanes who defiled the Jewish temple with pigs blood and demanded worship
- i. And since Jesus spoke of events in connection with the end of the world, it seems like this abomination of desolation is something still to come
- j. Essential to that happening is the rebuilding of the Jewish temple... many scholars believe that will be part of the Antichrist's appeal to the Jews initially; keep in mind the temple itself will be REPUGNANT to God, in that the Jews would be faithlessly rejecting Christ's final sacrifice to reestablish the Old Covenant animal sacrificial system
- k. This seems to be exactly what Daniel 9:27 teaches about the final “week” (seven years) of Daniel's prophecy (which I will explain in a moment)

Daniel 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that

causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

To put an end to sacrifice and offering, he must first establish it... by the building of a temple; but in the MIDDLE of that final seven year period, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings...

l. Then the Antichrist will defile that final temple

m. This is confirmed by the words of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2

2 Thessalonians 2:4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

4. The Great Tribulation... Unlike Any in All of Human History

a. This time of suffering at the hands of this wicked ruler will be the greatest suffering the earth has ever seen

Matthew 24:21-22 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now— and never to be equaled again. ²² If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

b. This lines itself up to the Book of Revelation, with its horrendous level of judgments from God in the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls... as well as the persecution initiated by the Antichrist

c. Those words DO NOT LINE UP WITH the destruction of the temple by the Romans, however great the carnage was at that time

d. So, the Abomination of Desolation is STILL YET TO COME!!

e. And the flight of those who live in Judea will be as if fleeing from a deadly peril, as if running for their lives... and it lines up well with Revelation 12, with the Dragon pursuing the woman and her children

f. After that, Christ returns

F. The Second Coming

Matthew 24:27 as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Matthew 24:29-31 Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." 30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

G. Studying Current Events

Matthew 24:32-33 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

H. Overall Command: Be Ready and Active Doing the Lord's Will

Matthew 24:45-46 Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

Matthew 24:44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

IV. Essential Lessons from the Book of Daniel

A. Daniel 7: The Beasts from the Sea and the Little Horn

B. Daniel 9: the Seventy Weeks

C. Daniel 10: the Angel and His Message About the Future of Israel

D. Daniel 11: Many "Antichrists" and One Final "Antichrist"

E. Daniel 12: the Final Generation and the Counting of the Days

V. Applications

A. Believe that these Future Things Will Come True!

1. We don't see any physical evidence for them, but we need to trust the words of God
2. Study so that you can prepare both yourself and your children and grandchildren for the sufferings that will come in the time of the Antichrist
3. Paul said that he taught these things to the Thessalonians...

2 Thessalonians 2:5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

4. Be aware that God has a timetable for all this, and is secretly restraining the power of evil and of Satan until the time comes

B. Be Aware of the Suffering Essential to Salvation

1 Peter 4:17-19 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

C. Have a Right Expectation of the Suffering We Will Undergo in this World

John 16:33 have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

D. ~~Understand the Limits of Human Government~~

1. ~~Though every government is in some sense established by God (Romans 13), we are about to see in Revelation 13 the final end of human government, the reign of the Antichrist~~

2. Government restrains evil and does a good service; but in this world, Satan will finally hijack human government (as he has many times before) and bring great suffering in the world

E. See the Astonishing Marvel of the Wisdom of God in his Intricate Plan

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

F. It is NOT for us to Know... So Be Active in the Work Given Us to Do

Acts 1:7-8 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

G. To the Lost: Come to Christ, While You Can!!

