

Watch & Pray: An Overview of End-Time Events

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36).

Today’s sermon is an overview of end-time events, moving from the miraculous restoration of Israel in 1948 and 1967 to the Rapture of the church and then to the Tribulation, the second coming, and the final judgment upon sin.

My understanding of prophecy is that the Rapture of the church will occur prior to the Tribulation. After the Tribulation, Christ and His saints will return to earth to rule for a thousand years, which is the Millennium. After the Millennium, the wicked dead will be resurrected to face the final judgment and hell. Then all things will be made new, and the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven to earth. Believing in this sequence of events makes me a premillennialist who believes in a pre-Tribulation Rapture, for those of you who are interested in the theological terms.

For those looking for a more information regarding additional views of prophecy, I recommend *The Last Days Handbook*, by Robert P. Lightner. I respect those who have different (but orthodox) views of prophecy, and if you disagree with what I am about to present, then I hope we can disagree in a kind, Christian manner. The Lord is dishonored when prophetic interpreters spend more time assailing what they do NOT believe rather than positively teaching what they DO believe.

I interpret prophecy using four important keys: first, when the Bible says Israel, it means Israel—not the church. This has clarified so many Old Testament prophecies for me—prophecies which just don’t seem to fit the church.

The second key is that God’s prophecies should be interpreted as literally as possible. Obviously, some prophecies are symbolic, but Bible prophecies that have been fulfilled up to this point have been fulfilled literally. It is difficult to imagine that future prophetic events should be interpreted symbolically when already-fulfilled prophetic utterances were fulfilled literally.

Third, God’s promises for the end-time are unconditional. God will not change His mind about what should happen. End-time events are all marvelously foreordained.

Fourth, Jesus and His soon return are the heart of prophecy. Let’s keep it that way!

Before I go any further, it's important to say that there is no passage of scripture which spells out all the details of any end-time teaching. Since no passage of scripture spells out every detail of the future in chronological format, we have to piece together the events revealed by scripture. What I'm about to share represents my best understanding of how these pieces fit, garnered from several years of study on this topic. And so, while I'm certain of a number of prophetic teachings (such as the Rapture), I still have to be tentative about other things, taking a wait-and-see approach. But ultimately, God wins!

Restoration of Israel

The greatest sign that we are in the end-times is the utterly improbable restoration of the State of Israel in 1948. This was accompanied by the even more improbable victory against the Arab nations in the Six Day War of 1967, which placed all of Jerusalem under Israeli control—the Old City with the Temple Mount.

God unconditionally promised Abraham a specific land for Abraham's descendants. According to Genesis 13:14-15,

“The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. **All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.**”

The Lord instructed Abraham to cut several animals in two, making a path between the carcasses. Generally, the inferior party in a covenant would walk between the dead animals to swear that he would perform the covenant faithfully. However, God put Abraham (Abram) to sleep, and God walked through alone, swearing unconditionally to give specific lands to the descendants of Abraham:

“As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.... When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘**To your descendants I give this land**, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites’” (Gen. 15:12; 17-20).

For many years, the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the world, suffering a variety of persecutions—the worst to-date being the Holocaust. Through it all, God preserved the Jews as a people, in contrast to all other groups that have been similarly decimated and dispersed. But the Jews survived and were eventually restored as a nation in fulfillment of God's promises:

“[A]nd **I will bring my people Israel back from exile.** ‘They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. **I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,**” says the Lord your God” (Amos 9:14-15).

According to prophecy, Israel was to be restored as a nation in the land promised to Abraham, “never again to be uprooted.” This prophecy could not apply to the restoration from Babylonian captivity, as Israel was dramatically “uprooted” again by the Romans.

Ezekiel 36:22-28 is one of the most famous promises of Israel’s restoration to the land God had promised to Abraham:

“Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the **Sovereign Lord** says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that **I am** going to do these things, but for the **sake of my holy name**, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. **I will** show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the **Sovereign Lord**, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes. For **I will** take you out of the nations; **I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.** **I will** sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; **I will** cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. **I will** give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; **I will** remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will** put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God”” (Eze. 36:22-28, NIV).

God’s promise of restoration and genuine religious revival was given to a people who, as God predicted, would profane His name in all the world. Therefore, the promise was not given on condition of obedience. It was given solely on the basis of God’s sovereign, holy name, with repeated emphasis upon the divine “I will.” God’s promise of return to the land was largely fulfilled in 1948 and 1967. Can His promise of spiritual cleansing for Israel be far from fruition?

I believe that the restoration of the nation of Israel was the last definite prophecy to be fulfilled before Christ returns. Other prophecies such as wars and natural disasters are important but indefinite. But the restoration of Israel as a nation in its historic land is definite and stunning—even decades after the fact. We are living in the last days, and we should be prepared for Christ to come at any moment.

Rapture

Since the restoration of Israel was the last definite prophecy to be fulfilled before the return of Christ, what are we looking for next?

We are looking for the Rapture of the church, which is Christ's return for His bride. The church is the bride of Christ, and He loves her with an everlasting love (Rev. 19; Eph. 5:25-27; 2 Cor. 11:2).

The Rapture will come suddenly at any moment, and it will not be a secret event. It will be a painful, devastating surprise to those left behind, so it will certainly not be a secret.

“Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates **we do not need to write to you, for you know very well** that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly**, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.** You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, **let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:1-9).

We are to be awake, waiting every moment for Christ's return. It is the lost who will be caught by surprise when Christ returns like a thief in the night.

And then there is such a comforting teaching which follows in this passage: Jesus Christ did not appoint His bride to suffer wrath! How are we to avoid God's wrath? We are raptured out of this world before His wrath is poured out!

Scripture outlines two returns of Christ—the Rapture and the Second Coming (or Glorious Appearing). How do I know that there are two returns? Because at one return, Christ does not touch the ground. He calls his saints up to him and takes them to heaven. At the other coming, He comes to rule. His feet DO touch the ground, AND He brings his saints with him from heaven. Let's take a quick look.

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up together**

with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (I Thess 4:16-17).

This is the Rapture. Christ calls His saints up to Him in the air. There is no mention of Christ’s feet touching the ground.

Now, here is a depiction of another coming of the Lord:

“Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. **On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives**, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. **Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him**” (Zech. 14:3-5).

This is the Battle of Armageddon, in which Christ stands on the Mount of Olives and vanquishes the armies of Gog and Magog which are attacking Jerusalem (see Ez. 38-39), and he brings ALL his holy ones down from heaven with Him. I believe that ALL means both the angels and His previously Raptured church (see Rev. 19).

Therefore, we have a clear distinction: at the first coming—the Rapture, Christ remains in the air, calling His people up to Him (I Thess 4). At the second coming, Christ physically lands on the earth, and He brings ALL his holy ones (Zech. 14).

In the Book of Revelation, a precious promise is given to one of the seven churches—the church of Philadelphia.

“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, **I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world** to test the inhabitants of the earth” (Rev. 3:10).

Seven churches were given messages from Jesus Christ in Rev. 2-3. These were literal churches, and the messages were directed to the specific situation of each church. But it also appears that these churches are representative of the experience of the Christian church through history.

Was this prophecy ever fully fulfilled to the ancient church of Philadelphia? No. I believe there was some type of fulfillment to the literal church of Philadelphia, but there must be a further fulfillment. Notice that Philadelphia was to be kept from the hour of trial coming upon the whole world. Has the church of God ever been kept from any previous worldwide trial, test, or (dare I say) tribulation? And the church will go through persecutions and trials until the Rapture removes us – we are not

destined for wrath (I Thess. 5:9). Could it be that the promise to Philadelphia is to be ultimately fulfilled in the last days—that God will call the Philadelphian Christians of the last days out of the hour of trial? I believe so.

Wedding Supper of the Lamb

After the messages to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3, the Church isn't mentioned in the book of Revelation until Chapter 19. What happens in the midsection of Revelation? God turns His attention to the final fulfillment of His promises to the Jews. He promised to turn their hearts to Him, and this is what He will certainly accomplish. That God's focus turns to the Jews is evidenced by several things, including the identity of the 144,000 (all Jews), the identity of the woman who gives birth to the man-child destined to rule with a rod of iron (Christ was born an Israelite), and the location of the two witnesses (Jerusalem).

So, what is the Church doing when readers re-connect with her at the end of Revelation? Celebrating the Wedding Supper of the Lamb in heaven!

“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. **Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.**’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” (Rev 19:6-9).

So, the church disappears in the book of Revelation from chapters 4-18, and then we see the church celebrating its wedding to Jesus Christ in chapter 19. If there is no Rapture, then how will the church attend its own wedding? And IN heaven, while the God's wrath rains down upon the wicked, an epic celebration takes place!

The Rapture of the Church & Jewish Wedding Customs

The Rapture of the church is closely related to a number of ancient Jewish wedding customs.

After careful negotiation between fathers, and agreement would be reached. A cup of wine was poured by the bridegroom and drunk by the bride-to-be if she accepted his proposal. That is why Christ gave wine to His disciples at the last supper, and they drank a symbol of betrothal, just as we continue to do until He comes.

Once the bridal price was paid, the bride would have been considered purchased. Of course, the church was purchased by Christ's blood (Rev. 5:9).

After the betrothal, the marriage was legally binding, and that is why we have eternal security.

The bridegroom would give his bride gifts, just as Christ gave us the gifts of the Spirit.

The bride would bathe in a Mikvah ceremony, which parallels Christian baptism.

The groom would prepare a room for his bride in his father's house. Here is how Jesus described it:

“My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (Jn 14:2-3).

The bridegroom didn't know when he was coming for his bride. Only the father of the groom could determine when the time was right. As Jesus stated,

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matt 24:36).

The bride was responsible for being ready at any time, because as soon as her father-in-law gave the word, the groom and his wedding party would come to bring her to the wedding ceremony at his father's house. This is analogous to the Rapture.

In the parable of the ten virgins, the bridegroom arrives with a shout at midnight. This compares to I Thess. 4:16: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God....”

The celebration at the father's house would last for several days. Likewise, the celebration in heaven lasts for the Tribulation period.

At the conclusion of the wedding feast, the bridegroom would bring his bride to the home he had prepared for her. The parallel is that after the Tribulation, Christ brings his bride back to earth to rule with Him for the Millennium.

Who is left behind?

If you have never made a decision to follow Jesus, repent of your sins in faith, and walk as a child of the light, then I have to give you some bad news. You will not be part of the Rapture and wedding celebration just described. You, along with unrepentant Israel, the wicked world, and a group of individuals who have been

Christian in name only, will remain on this earth to suffer the Tribulation. The Tribulation will be horrible beyond imagination. I'm not trying to hurt anyone's feelings, and I'm not judging anyone. It's just that scripture is definite.

I believe the church of Laodicea symbolizes the group of so-so Christians who are left behind because they are neither hot nor cold. I believe the Laodicean Church are God's elect. They will ultimately be saved through the persecution and probable martyrdom which they will endure during the Tribulation. However, prior to the Rapture, they have not made their "calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10, KJV) by true faith and repentance. They must "buy" their white garments, whereas the church is given white linen garments (Rev. 3:18 vs. Rev. 19:8).

Tribulation Judgments

As we have mentioned, during the Tribulation, God turns His primary attention to the salvation of the Jews. This is described in Revelation 4-18. While a remnant of Israel comes to Christ as their Messiah, three series' of judgments fall upon the wicked world: 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 plagues. Those who have not accepted the call of Christ prior to the Rapture will be on earth as these judgments fall.

Seals

1st Seal (Rev. 6:1-2) rider on the white horse goes forth to conquer.

The rider on this white horse does not match the other views of Christ in Revelation. This is the Antichrist. Notice that the Antichrist cannot be released until Jesus Christ breaks the seal.

2nd Seal (6:3-4) rider on a red horse takes peace from the earth.

3rd seal (6:5-6) rider on a black horse brings famine but unable to hurt oil & wine.

Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit; wine is a symbol of Christ's atoning blood. Therefore, hope for salvation remains open during the Tribulation.

4th seal (6:7-8) rider on a pale horse given power to kill a quarter of earth's population.

5th seal (6:9-11) martyrs from the Tribulation plead for vengeance.

God hears them, but says "wait." During the 5th seal, no particular judgment falls upon earth, but judgment is promised.... See Rev. 8:3-5, where the prayers of God's people are cast down upon the earth in judgment, just prior to the blowing of the trumpets. The 5th seal is, therefore, judgment deferred.

6th seal (6:12-17) great earthquake, sun becomes black, moon turns to blood, stars fall, the heavens roll up as a scroll, every mountain and island move.

Wicked recognize that this is divine wrath and not just a series of unfortunate natural events. But they do not repent. They merely seek to hide.

7th seal (8:1) silence in heaven for half an hour.

Trumpet Judgments

1st trumpet – hail and fire mixed with blood. “A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up” (8:7).

2nd trumpet – blazing mountain thrown into the sea. “A third of the sea turned into blood,⁹ a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed” (8:8-9).

3rd trumpet – great star named Wormwood falls on a third of the fresh waters. “A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter” (8:11).

4th trumpet – lights of heaven dimmed “A third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night” (8:12).

5th trumpet – demon locusts emerge from the abyss. Their sting causes such agony that people wish for death but cannot die (9:1-11).

6th trumpet – four angels released to kill a third of mankind with three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur coming out of the mouths of demonic horses (9:13-21).

The people refuse to repent....

7th trumpet – proclamation of the triumph of Christ: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (12:15-19).

Plagues, poured out in bowls

1st plague – festering sores (16:2)

2nd plague – sea turned to blood; everything in the sea dies (16:3)

3rd plague – rivers & springs turned to blood (16:4)

4th plague – sun scorches people (16:8)

In general, the seals, trumpets, and plagues are not natural events (one could make a case that the four horsemen are natural – but allowed and controlled by God). They are not to be attributed to global warming, nuclear explosion, etc. (as some teach). The scorching sun of the 4th plague is a supernatural event because even the wicked attribute it to God: “And men were scorched with great heat, and **blasphemed the name of God**, which hath power over these plagues: and **they repented not to give him glory**” (16:9).

So, the people blaspheme God and refuse to repent.... They know the supernatural source of the plagues.

5th plague – throne of the beast plunged into darkness; people gnaw tongues in agony (16:10).

And people still refuse to repent....

6th plague – demons gather the wicked to Armageddon for the climactic battle (16:12-16).

7th plague – Greatest earthquake in history will take place; great cities collapse; islands and mountains disappear; massive hail falls (16:17-21).

And the people still curse God....

Glorious Appearing, or Second Coming

At this point, the wedding supper ends, and Christ returns to earth with His bride. He comes to rescue the remnant of Israel and to rule the nations with a rod of iron for a thousand years.

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called **Faithful and True....**” (19:11).

“Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. **“He will rule them with an iron scepter”** (19:15).

There is no doubt that this rider is Jesus Christ!

“Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf.... **The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.** The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the **birds gorged themselves on their flesh**” (Rev. 19:19-21).

Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ

Revelation 20 marks the beginning of the Millennium. This is a thousand years during which Satan is bound in the Abyss and Christ reigns in Jerusalem.

“He [an angel] threw him [Satan] 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” (Rev. 20:3).

“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**” (Rev. 20:4).

Final Events

Satan released from the Abyss and immediately deceives the nations; they attempt to attack Jerusalem, and fire devours them (Rev. 20:7-9).

The devil is thrown into the lake of fire, where he joins the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 20:10).

Then the second resurrection and Great White Throne judgment take place (Rev. 20:11-15).

“Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).

Then the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven.

“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).

“Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (Rev. 21:7-8).

Now let’s view a short video clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyzaJfRSLts>

If you have not come to Christ in faith and repentance for your sins, you have a simple choice: come to Christ now, or risk that it will be too late—that you will be left behind—that you will miss the wedding. Our Lord could come at any moment to Rapture His bride out of the hour of trial that will come upon the whole world. He has not appointed His bride to suffer wrath. But if you are not part of Christ's bride the church, then where does that leave you?

Please, do not wait! You don't have to become a better person before you come to Christ. You don't have to have all your questions answered before you come. You just have to come as you are! Jesus loves you passionately! Trust Him as your substitute, your Savior from sin. Ask Him for the faith you don't have! He will cover you with the white linen of His righteousness, if you will only come.

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.’” (Rom. 10:9-11).

Salvation is that easy. Lay down your pride, admit that you are a sinner in desperate need of a Savior. You can do nothing to elevate your status before Him. Trust that He has done it all for you. He is the author and finisher of your faith! IF you will only come in humble trust.