

END TIMES CLARITY

For 2,000 years, people have wondered about the events of the end times and when Jesus will return. It can be said that more ink has been used debating and speculating about this area of doctrine than any other. Terms such as millennium, tribulation, the number 666, and antichrist are used in the media and in supermarket tabloids, but questions remain.

- Will Jesus return physically and reign on earth for 1,000 years?
- Will Christians go through a seven-year tribulation?
- Will the Second Coming of Christ occur at the same time that believers meet Christ in the air (the rapture)?
- Will Christians be raptured (removed from this earth) and other people “left behind”?
- What does the nation of Israel have to do with the end times?

The Bible expects and encourages believers to look toward His coming with anticipation. Since Christ Himself is our great hope (1 Timothy 1:1), the study of end-time events (eschatology) is really a study about Christ and our hope in God’s plans and purposes. Many who truly love the Lord and await His return with eager anticipation possess different perspectives in dealing with the chronology and meaning of the events that surround His coming. At the same time, there are some essential beliefs that are not debated among evangelicals and are quite clear from the pages of sacred Scripture.

- Jesus will come again for those who love Him.
- There will be a resurrection of believers
- Believers and Unbelievers alike will go through judgement
- Everyone will find an eternal destiny in either in Heaven or Hell
- Jesus calls his followers to be ready all the time.
- No one knows the day or the hour of His return.

There are few things in a church that cause more disunity than the issues surrounding a discussion on end times. Most churches find themselves on the edge of two extremes. The first is for a church to establish a very tight and nuanced position that allows only a small circle of Christians to affirm or adhere. This closed-hand view can allow for two unintended consequences. It gives an impression that since a church holds to such a narrow viewpoint, any and all other viewpoints are somehow defective or devoid of scriptural basis. Next, it elevates the secondary doctrines within eschatology to the same level of importance as the essential ones. The second extreme that churches can fall into is to see the study of end times as needless and unnecessary. This leads a church to shun much of the scripture as if it is good for nothing more than bringing about quarrels and disputes within the body of Christ and, therefore, not profitable for the people of God.

Village Bible Church desires to find a middle ground when it comes to the subject of end times. While recognizing the inherent difficulties that surround a subject as polarizing as the end times, we affirm the need to teach the whole counsel of God’s Word, even when it may be difficult. It was with this heart in mind when writing our current doctrinal statement that we sought to have a robust section on eschatology, which showed our great anticipation and expectation of the Lord’s return but also reflecting the broad understanding within Evangelicalism when it came to some of the finer points of the discussion. It was to this end that we affirmed, as members, the following position on eschatology:

At a time known only to God, Jesus Christ will descend from heaven, and all believers — both those who have died in Christ and those who are still alive — will meet Him in the air. This hope produces in us a sense of constant expectancy and motivates us to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

Every human being who has ever lived will one day be raised bodily from the dead. In judgment and condemnation, unbelievers will be consigned to eternal conscious punishment in hell, while believers will enter into eternal blessedness and joy. In the new heavens and the new earth, Christ’s Kingdom will come to full fruition as the redeemed, in gloriously renewed bodies, dwell with Him forever, serving Him, reigning with Him and giving Him unending praise and glory.

It is clear that this doctrinal statement affirms the future second coming of our Lord. Yet much is omitted from that statement regarding things such as the length and events of a tribulation period, the timing of the rapture, the nature of the millennium, the person of the Antichrist, and the like. It is here that we allow each member the freedom to come to their own understanding regarding these secondary issues within eschatology. However, this freedom comes with a gentle admonition that brotherly love cautions us not to seek to convince each other regarding personal conviction. While discussion, and even debate, on these matters can be healthy within any church, we ask that great care and consideration of others be at the forefront. As we approach

any study of eschatology, we are reminded that all of us “look through a glass dimly” and recognize the need to be humble in our own understanding of such events, as well as show grace to others who may disagree or differ on the finer points. In doing so, we live out the ancient motto by Rupertus Meldenius that says, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” Moreover, it is the heart of the elders that everyone at Village Bible Church can say in one voice, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.”

What is the position of VBC when it comes to teaching about End Times?

While the elders believe it is most profitable and unifying for our members to have the freedom to come to varied conclusions when it comes to secondary elements of end-times theology, we do believe that it is imperative that the church teach in a unified way both from the pulpit and in writing. This process falls under the oversight of the Guiding elders who are given charge of Village’s preaching and teaching ministries across its many campuses. While the church respects the other opinions and beliefs of Christians both inside and outside of our local church, having a clear position regarding these matters allows the church to speak in a uniform way and creates a default position that can be taught in the various settings of the church. This helps both members and new guests to have a clear answer when asking the question: “Where Does Village Bible Church stand with regard to end-time theology?” Without a clearly stated position for our teaching, we risk causing great confusion when everyone shares their perspective on that important question.

To this end, we reference a transcript of a sermon that was preached by our Lead Pastor, Tim Badal entitled **Setting The Stage For The End Times**.¹ The text for the sermon was 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and was part of a series on 1 & 2 Thessalonians. This sermon was written with the intention to carefully and clearly articulate the teaching position of VBC regarding End Time Theology.

Setting the Stage for the End Times

I want to introduce some of my friends who are trying to understand the end times.

I’ll call my first friend Clueless Chloe. She has absolutely no idea what I’m talking about today. Quite frankly, she doesn’t understand half the stuff I say, but I’m a funny, nice-looking guy...just kidding. But she’s here. She’s not sure why, but she’s hoping to get some answers.

Then there’s Who-Cares Wilma. She’s given little thought to the promise of Scripture but is so enthralled with the things of this world she can’t imagine the Bible ever taking center stage. Wilma is content to live her life, viewing Jesus as a historical figure consigned to the past and never coming back—because no human being has ever been able to do that. She’s Who-Cares Wilma.

Then there’s Disbelieving Darla, who has been a Christian for a long time but has grown tired. The struggles of the world and its garbage are weighing heavily on her. For years, she has prayed and hoped for the coming of Christ, but it seems just as far off as it did when she started—and as a result, she’s losing hope, wondering if it will ever happen. She’s Disbelieving Darla.

Then there’s Scared Scarlett. Scarlett loves the Lord deeply, but she reads the books and sees the movies and she’s freaked out. She doesn’t want to be left behind. She’s worried about the ongoing and growing persecution in the world and can only find herself looking with fear and trepidation at anything she reads in the Scriptures that speaks of the future. She’s freaked out.

Then there’s Newspaper Ned. He’s the one who looks at Bible prophecy as the latest installment of National Treasure, a biblical and prophetic game of Clue. He utilizes present-day events to put together the pieces of a divine puzzle with the hope of doing one thing: to establish an exact timeline for the events to occur. His main focus is finding the Antichrist. Who is that great man of evil? For Ned, by the way, it usually is the leader of the opposing political party. What happens then is the Scriptures look more like the cover page of a cheap tabloid magazine than the Holy Scriptures. That’s Newspaper Ned.

Then there’s Political Polly, who learned her ways from Ned but goes one step further. She begins to use end times prophecy to determine who we should support in the world. She’s willing to give some countries passes while giving others only

¹ Sermon preached on Feb 28, 2016, by Tim Badal, *Setting The Stage For The End Times*: www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove/resources/sermons/setting-the-stage-for-the-end-times--part-8/

condemnation and punishment. She tries to understand how to vote based on what will bring forth the end times or what will cause them not to take place. This type of prophecy causes human beings to be viewed as pawns in a prophetic chess match instead of people who are loved by God.

Then there's my friend Confident Carl. Now, before we go any further, let me tell you there's a part of each of these people in your preacher. I can't tell you how many internet searches I've done on the issue of eschatology. It has sent me on a million searches. I, like you, love to speculate. I, like you, am at times mesmerized by the idea of the future. But we need more Confident Carls in our midst. Carl is one who knows as much about the Scriptures as the others, but he recognizes the allure to end times pursuit can be fleeting and can lack the fruition God requires of us. So, his is an ongoing pursuit of holiness. Carl recognizes that God is doing His job and has called us to do the same. God has said He will bring forth the end just as He brought forth the beginning, and our focus should be to love one another, to reach the lost, and to live our lives in accordance with His Word. Carl is a living example of a couple of quotes I'd like to share with you. Rather than spending all our time reading magazines and books, trying to figure out what the future might hold, maybe we should spend more time just getting to know Jesus better. Then, when the future becomes present, we'll enjoy wondrously close relationships with the Almighty, and we'll be walking with our Lord Jesus Christ no matter what happens. James Edward spells out Carl's position very well: **"The premium of our discipleship is not based on predicting the future, but on our faithfulness in the present, especially in times of trial and suffering and adversity."**

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and 5:1, Paul gives us two poles that we have to hold in tension. In verse 13 he says, *"But we do not want you to be uninformed..."* So to my friends who say, "You know what? These are too hard to understand. It's too difficult, so I'm not going to worry about it. Ignorance is bliss." Paul says, "That's not good enough for a follower of Jesus Christ." We need to know some information that the Scriptures have declared about the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But on the opposite end of the spectrum, Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:1, *"Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you..."* Paul is echoing Jesus' statement that no one but the Father in heaven will know the time or the date (Matthew 24:36). **Paul doesn't want them to be uninformed—that's the one side—but he also doesn't want them to think they'll know everything either.** So we're going to hold in tension this information he does give without understanding the full picture.

1. THE DISTINCTION WE MAKE BETWEEN VARIOUS DOCTRINES.

Theology is a part of our life every day. How we understand God, how we understand ourselves, how we understand the world is doing theology. We must put our understanding of particular doctrines in their proper place - not all doctrine is created equal.

The Bible tells us much about many things, but the Bible does not tell us about all things equally. There are things the Bible majors on; there are other things the Bible minors on. We need to focus on what the Bible majors on as well as being committed to focusing on the minor details.

First, there are doctrines or beliefs for which we would die. These are truths we hold with great fervor—non-negotiables. If someone doesn't hold to these, they aren't a true follower of Christ. One example would be the deity of Christ. You cannot be a Christ follower and not believe that Jesus Christ is God. Because if He's not God, how did He rise from the dead? If He's not God, how can He be seated at the Father's right hand in glory and majesty? If He is not God, then we have bought into a story of a martyr and not the King of Kings.

But when it comes to the issues of end times, what doctrine would we die for? The very truth is that Jesus Christ is coming back. Why? Because if Jesus Christ isn't coming back, then He told a lie to His disciples in John 14 when He said, "I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I'm going to prepare a place for you, then I will come back and bring you to be with Me." Well, if He's not coming back, He just told a bald-faced lie to His closest associates. If He's not coming back, He lied in the second to the last verse in the Bible, Revelation 22:20, when He said, *"Surely I am coming soon..."* If He's not coming back, then Jesus lies and numerous times says, "I'm coming back." He's a liar, and the truth is not in Him. As I said, all branches of Christianity say Jesus Christ is coming back. They differ on the details, but on that one truth, they agree.

Second, there are doctrines we debate. These are issues that don't reach the same level as the doctrines for which we would die. These are doctrines the Scripture seems to be clear on, but you can take more than one path in understanding them. One hotly debated issue—not just in this church but in all churches—is the process of salvation. Who plays the major part in

salvation? Is it God, or is it man? We hear words like predestination and free will, and we can debate that. There are verses on free will and predestination, and we can have an argument trying to sync them together. That's what Bible students in Bible colleges all over the place do at night instead of playing video games! They debate these things.

These debatable issues are ways we set apart churches. They make their way into doctrinal statements. They find themselves patterning how we do ministry. They're important things. But if someone disagrees with you on a debatable issue, this doesn't consider them unbelievers.

So, what do we debate about regarding the doctrine of end times? One of the things we debate is the nature of the millennium. In Revelation 20, John says Christ will have a thousand-year reign. He will come and reign on earth for a thousand years when He comes the second time. Some believe that to be a symbolic thousand-year reign. Some believe it to symbolize a reign already taking place in our hearts. Others believe that is a literal thousand-year reign that will happen here on earth. Nobody really knows, right? We haven't lived there yet. So we can debate these things—and churches do.

Third, there are doctrines we discuss. These are stated in Scripture, but there's no clear consensus on understanding them. People have strong opinions about them, but at the end of the day—if we're really honest—we can never be 100% sure about our position.

Regarding the end times, we discuss the timing of a rapture, the nature of the tribulation, or other events. Sometimes, our discussion can become debate because it's fun. It's interesting to speculate, but we can't be quite sure. We don't know what to make of it.

Fourth, there are doctrines we dump. These things were never meant to be made into beliefs or doctrines. Paul says in Titus 3:9, *"But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless."* These things only cause quarreling and fighting. When it comes to end times doctrine, we need to dump any discussion that seeks to pinpoint the date of the coming of our Lord. Why? Because Jesus specifically said no one will know the hour or the day. If Jesus says that, why would we invest time and energy to pinpoint or predict the time? If our Lord and Savior said, "Hey, only the Father in heaven knows these things," we need to dump that idea, helping people understand that it's not doing good eschatology—the study of last things.

2. THE DIVERSITY OF BELIEFS ABOUT THE END TIMES.

We need to ask: where has the church been on this issue of end times? Remember, all branches of Christianity agree on the coming of the Lord one day, but Christians differ in their understanding of how to interpret the Scriptures that talk about end times. I'm going to look at four groups very quickly with an overview of their end time beliefs. Where does each group fit on the spectrum?

Preterist view: This view sees the book of Revelation as a prophecy that was fulfilled in A.D. 70. Preterists read Revelation as saying, "Listen, there's a whole lot of bad stuff coming." They see the beasts and the judgments and people running for their lives that John describes in Revelation as being events that happened at a particular time in the first century.

Historians would say that the worst time for the Jewish nation was A.D. 70. In the years preceding that, the Jewish people had rebellion upon rebellion against the Roman Empire. Emperor Titus got so sick and tired of dealing with the Jewish people that he besieged the city of Jerusalem, starved them out, and then at their weakest point, he sent in what at the time was one of the largest armies ever assembled in human history, and absolutely decimated the city of Jerusalem. Thousands upon thousands of people were killed. People ran for their lives. To defy the God of Israel, the Romans burned a pig on the altar that was dedicated to the Lord. It was called "the abomination that causes desolation."

You might ask why they would think this happened in the past. When Jesus was talking about end times—in Mark 13 and Matthew 24–25—He said, "This generation will not pass away until the fulfillment of My words." What generation? Some future unknown generation? Or the generation He was speaking to? Again, these are hard verses we don't like to struggle with. Luke 9:27 says these things will come as a fulfillment that *"there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*

Two people who hold this view are R.C. Sproul, a great Bible teacher, and Hank Hanegraaff, who on the radio is called the “Bible Answer Man.”

Historist view: Historicism was especially popular during the Reformation. This view interprets Revelation and all the prophecies of Scripture as telling us what is going to take place in the entirety of human history, from the ascension of Jesus Christ to the second coming. However long human history is between Christ’s first coming and second coming, they believe it will be filled with these events. We cannot pinpoint with great accuracy what those events are, but they recognize these things are going to take place. At some point in the future, after all these events have taken place, Christ is going to come back.

Historicism falls between preterism and futurism in its approach: according to historicism, most of Revelation is symbolic of persons and events in world history. The book of Revelation was prophecy when John wrote it, according to historicists, but most of the book has already been fulfilled in our day.

Some people who held to this view were John Wycliffe, John Knox, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and Matthew Henry. So we have the founders of the Presbyterian church, the Methodist church, and the Lutheran church. And two men whom God used to bring the Bible to the common man: William Tyndale and John Wycliffe. Historicism remained a dominant perspective on eschatology through the 19th century. However, due to its nebulous interpretation method (no two historicists agree on what symbols go with what historical events) and the fact that John’s original readers could not have understood the book of Revelation in a historicist manner, the historicist view is not widely held today.

Idealist view. This view interprets Revelation and passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 as being imagery contained in a book of symbols. The images are not symbolic of events and persons but only of abstract ideas such as good and evil. This view would say not to pinpoint things in Revelation as being anything specific but merely symbolic. Revelation was written to tell us that in the end, good will prevail over evil, and that’s the whole story. Revelation is thus intended to remind us that we should live godly lives because in the end—even though we grow weary of the evil around us—God is going to win, and good will always prevail.

Adherents to this view include Augustine and Karl Barth.

Futurist view. This view teaches that the events of prophecy in Revelation and 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 are all going to take place sometime in the future. They have had some fulfillment in the past but will have a clearer fulfillment at some point in the future. A futurist interprets the book of Revelation in the following way: chapter one describes the past; chapters two and three describe the present; chapters 4–22 describe the future.

Adherents to this view were many of the early church fathers such as Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Tertullian—disciples of the first apostles. But this view lost its way somewhere around the third century. The idea of interpreting the book of Revelation and the Thessalonians passage in a futurist way disappeared from church writings from the third century until almost the 19th century. Only in the past 150 years has this view resurfaced, and now it is the most popular view in evangelicalism.

3. THE VIEW WE HOLD TO: HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM

The position we hold is called historic premillennialism. Historic means it’s an old view, the one held by a large majority of the early church fathers (first three centuries of the Christian era).

Historic premillennialism taught that the Antichrist would appear on earth and the seven-year tribulation would begin. Next would be the rapture, and then Jesus and His church would return to earth to rule for a literal thousand years. It’s not symbolic or allegorical. It’s a real thing that will take place at some point in the future.

This position holds that since the ascension of Jesus Christ, we have been living in the last days. So, any time you see the phrase “last days,” it’s not talking about a time in the future. It’s happening right now. We are in the last days. You might say, “Wait a minute. Days? It’s been 2,000 years since Christ lived.” Remember, to Christ, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day (2 Peter 3:8). He’s got His own timetable.

Life as we know it is going to go on. There are going to be good times and bad times. We recognize that on this earth, there will be areas of great peace and areas of great violence and persecution that will go on and on throughout the course of human

history. But then, at some point in the future—it may be tomorrow, it may be a thousand years from now—the world as we know it will endure a time of great tribulation, where evil will seem to have unprecedented power.

All the while, during that time, the church will still have major victories. How can that be? How can a church be under so much persecution and see so much growth? Well, let's remember the book of Acts. They're being thrown in prison. They're being killed. And what's happening? The church is growing and growing and growing. It will be the same during these days. Then, at some point of God's own choosing, during this time of great tribulation, Jesus Christ will come again. He will establish His Kingdom and He will usher in eternity.

The historic premillennialism position was held by most of the early church fathers (Ireneaus, Papias, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus) and a myriad of contemporary theologians (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, George Eldon Ladd, Francis Schaeffer, James Montgomery Boice, Philip Ryken, John Piper, Alistair Begg, D.A. Carson, Albert Mohler, Mark Dever, and David Platt).

Historic Premillennialism vs Dispensational Premillennialism:

- Dispensational Premillennialism places the rapture at the beginning of the tribulation, whereas historic premillennialism places the rapture at the end of the tribulation.
- Historic Premillennialism doesn't make a sharp distinction between the nation of Israel and the church, but instead, it sees the church as the fulfillment of Israel and yet not completely replacing it.

4. POSTURE & CONSISTENCY

First of all, we hold this position in a charitable posture, recognizing that at the very essence of it, it's a position. We recognize that there are great Christians, both past and present, both outside this church and within this church, who hold positions differently. We hold with great esteem and respect men and women who hold differing positions from ours. Some of our favorite friends, favorite pastors, hold stances different from what we're taking today. But thank God I will see them in heaven and they will see me. Right? We want to be charitable. It's a position.

Number two, we want to be careful to have a consistent interpretation. As a church, it is very important for us to look at Scripture in as clear and straightforward a way as possible. We do not make a sharp break between Israel and the church. We see each of them fulfilling a plan in God's vision, yet we believe there is one people of God. If we made a sharp distinction between Israel and the church, we would never have preached on the Ten Commandments. We would never have preached much of the Old Testament. We would have said that was for Israel; let's just preach about what's for the church.

While we respect the pre-tribulation rapture position, if we only preach this position, then when persecution gets hard you're not prepared for it. "The elevator's going to take us up, right? Jesus is going to come back. I don't have to worry about this great tribulation." If you're right and I'm wrong, we're both going to be blessed. I'm going to high-five you on the way up. But let's say you're wrong, and we're part of a tribulation like the world has never seen before. If our understanding of the Scripture is that without a shadow of a doubt we're going up before that tribulation takes place, we will be ill-prepared for what the Lord may have willed us to go through.

Let me illustrate it this way. When I get on a plane, I assume the plane's going to take me from one point to another without any issues. But these flight attendants get up and say, "Thank you for flying with us. While we intend that you will get to your destination safely, in the event that we lose cabin pressure, masks are going to come down. You'd better put that on, or you're going to die—especially you big men in the front row here; you don't have much oxygen already. Get that mask on. Oh, and by the way, we don't anticipate that this plane is going to careen into the ocean, but in the case that it does, your seat will become a flotation device."

Why do they do that? Because they recognize that if something happens, you need to be an informed individual, not a misinformed individual. In that moment, you need to be ready to act, not ask questions. We teach a post-trib position here as a teaching team because, pastorally, we want to prepare you so that in the event of an emergency, you're ready to serve and honor God no matter what comes. If you're right and we're wrong, then we're in heaven, and we'll be happy to concede that point.

Finally, we hold to a celebration of God's plans. End times were not written about to freak people out. Do you know that? And yet 99% of Christians are freaked out when they read this stuff. End times wasn't supposed to be written so we would go on these all-out journeys to find a Bible code to figure out times and dates. Paul says it twice in the passage we'll look at next week:

“Encourage one another. Comfort each other with these words.” Why? Because we have a God Who knows the end from the beginning and the beginning from the end. He’s got it all figured out, and He’s got it all ready. He knows exactly what’s going to happen and He knows exactly where you’re going to be—and in those moments and those times we can celebrate that God is good and He’s got a wonderful plan for our lives.

5. The description Jesus gives about end times.

In Mark 13 we find the single most concise passage of Scripture on end times from the mouth of Jesus. You’re sensible people, but let’s walk through a very natural reading of the text. Notice the description Jesus gives. If anybody knows about end times, Jesus knows it. Can we agree with that? Listen to what He says in Mark 13:1–7:

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.”

So in verses one and two, what do we see?

Seemingly it’s the events of the first century. Then what we see is the persistent ebb and flow of history. There are going to be wars. There are going to be rumors of wars. Verse eight, *“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes.”* So He’s saying, “Disciples, Christians, when you experience an earthquake, don’t think it’s My coming. There are going to be a lot of them. There are going to be famines.” *“These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”*

Then in Mark 13:9–13, He goes to the personal experience of end-time living for Christians:

“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

You say, “Wait a minute. That’s not happening here in America.” Sure it is. Some of you are ostracized right now from your family because you follow Jesus Christ. In some of your marriages, because you’re a believer and your spouse is not, are experiencing great turmoil. There are stories upon stories of Muslim converts in the Middle East whose children are turning their parents in because they bowed the knee to Jesus. And the next thing the parents see is their children in the hands of Islamic terrorists, putting them to death. This is what’s going to happen. It will be the personal experience of Christians living in the last days.

Notice what seems to be a personification of evil: *“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing...”* How can something stand? It’s got to be a person. *“...where he...”*—notice the personal pronoun—*“ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”* Jesus says someone is going to come, and in the moment when he comes, it’s going to be ugly. You’d better start running away from this guy. He’s not going to bring peace and joy. He’s going to bring terror in his wake—the personification of evil.

Then in verses 15–23 there’s a period of great emergency:

“Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he

is! do not believe it. False christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand."

So there's going to be this period of great emergency. And right when things are at their worst, He says:

"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven."

We call that the Day of the Lord. That's what Paul is going to talk about in 1 Thessalonians 5. You see, Jesus doesn't give us a whole lot of details, more than we need to understand.

6. WHAT IS GOD'S DESIGN FOR ADDRESSING THE END TIMES?

So what are we to do with the description He gives? Let me close with this. Why would God whet our appetites with some of this information and then not give us any more? So we can fight and bicker amongst ourselves? He could tell us more, but there are some things He keeps to Himself. If He declared all of Who He is, then He wouldn't be God. We would know all that God is. God says, "There are things I'm going to hold back, because I'm God and you're not."

So why does God share these things? Why does God share 1 Thessalonians 4:13 through the rest of the book and all of 2 Thessalonians? Let me give you a couple reasons.

Number one, to provide insight into the future. Paul tells us he does not want the people to be uninformed. He doesn't say, "I want you to know all the information. I just don't want you to be uninformed." This allows us to plan. This allows us to prepare. This allows us to see what it going on around us with a particular lens. God wants His people to know these things—but not all of it—to prepare for His coming at any time.

It is to promote hope amidst grief and trouble. In 1 Thessalonians 4:18 he says, *"Therefore encourage one another with these words."* Again in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, *"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."* End times remind us that God is in control and that we can have hope in that. We don't need to be filled with fear. We don't need to be filled with dread. Why? Because it points us to God's sovereignty. He's on His throne. He's got it all figured out. He's not worried about the devil. He's not worried about an antichrist. He's not worried about people fomenting with great anger against Him. He is settled, seated on His throne, and He is seeing each event play out just as He knew it would.

It puts eternity into our hearts. Natural man says eternity is a circle, but that's bad doctrine. We learn that from Simba and Mufasa, but Disney has some bad doctrine—actually, a lot of bad doctrine: Life is a circle. We live, we die, someone takes our place. Life just keeps going and going. No, the Bible speaks of life as linear. You have a beginning and an end. Man lives once, he dies and then comes judgment, Hebrews 9:27 says.

If I have a God Who says He created me at the beginning, Who knit me together in my mother's womb, and He is the same God Who will judge me in the last day, then shouldn't I think about how He wants me to live between those two dots? Shouldn't I consider that He has a plan and purpose for my life and not that I can do what I want, how I want, with whom I want, when I want, where I want? If I am to close my eyes in death and open my eyes to a righteous Judge, I'd better understand what He will judge me on. I'd better understand how I ought to live. End times teaching puts eternity into our minds so when we make temporal decisions about what we do in life, they make sense.

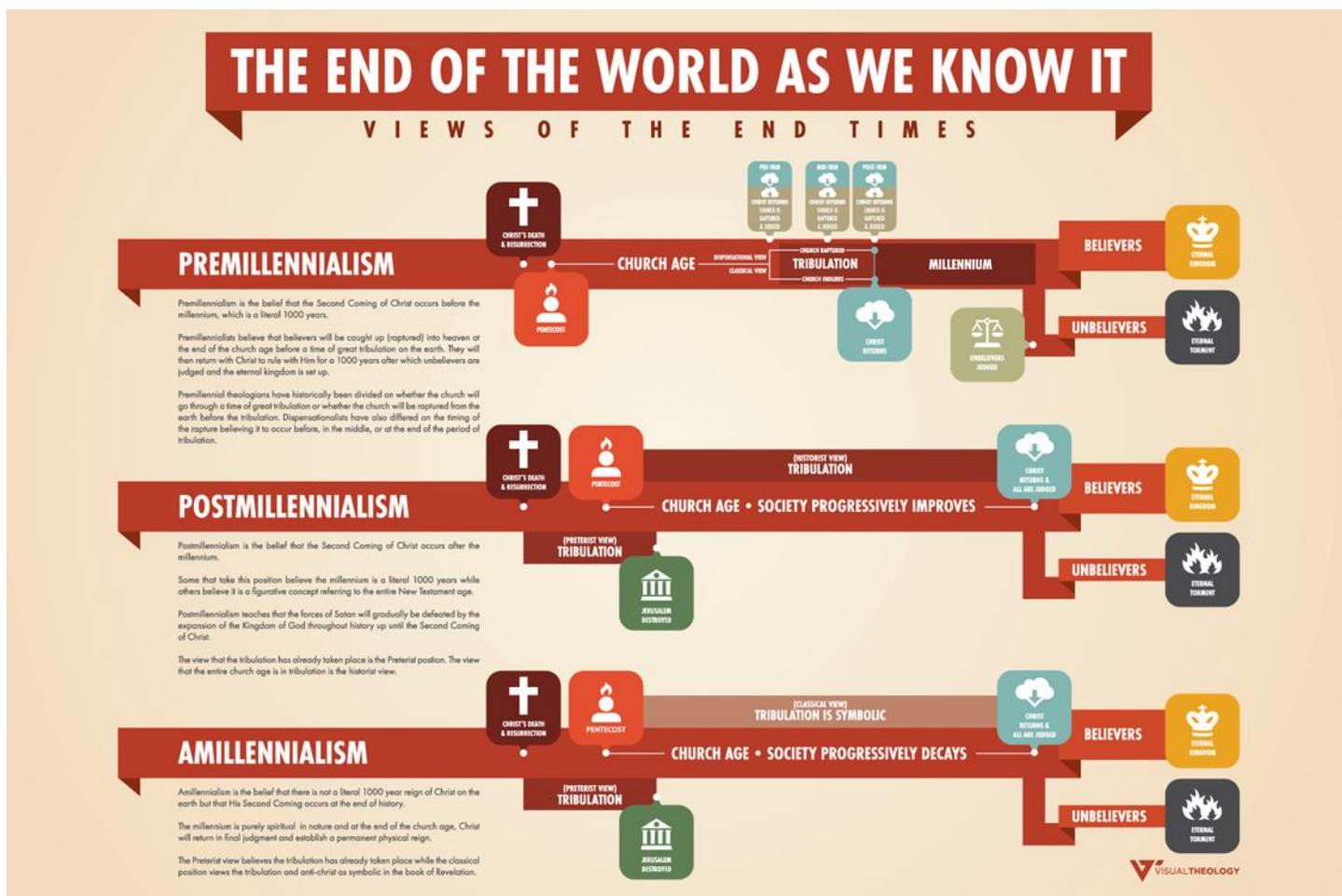
These truths should promote a heart for evangelism. We believe Jesus Christ could come back before the end of this message. Some of you think that's a thousand years from now—but it could happen at any time. And if Christ can come back at any moment, and the judgment can take place, then shouldn't we be seeking the salvation of our family and friends? Should we not seek the salvation of our communities? Should we not be bold in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ that gives sight to the blind and life to the dead? Should we not proclaim the gospel so we can help people around us be prepared for the judgment of God that is to come?

The Bible says that on that day of judgment, if your name is not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, you'll be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). I don't want that for my friends. I don't want that for my family. So that should convince me of the

realization that God has shared something with me that He says is going to happen, and it should reorganize the way I live my life, the way I spend time with my neighbors, the way I reach out to my unsaved friends and family. I am motivated to take into consideration their future, not just my own. To share the gospel of Jesus Christ is the pinnacle of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. It is to say that my eternity isn't more important than someone else's. So I'm going to do all I can to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them, so that we might spend eternity together.

I understand that this message is hard. I know some of you are saying, "Wait a minute—that was a lot of information." Be students of the Word. Study it. We need to understand this and we should not allow it to puff us up. Rather, it should motivate us to godly living. If your thinking about the end times doesn't change how you live a holy and upright life, then it is not of God. If it causes you to be afraid when Scripture says, "Do not be afraid," or it causes you to be anxious when Scripture says, "Do not be anxious," then you're misunderstanding what the Scriptures have put forth regarding the end times. End times understanding is to bring comfort, peace and joy—because God is on His throne.





NOTES

<https://albertmohler.com/2023/10/12/how-should-christians-think-about-israel>

Dr. Thomas Schreiner: 33:00 Israel is God's chosen covenant people. Even when we come to the New Testament, Paul says that the Gospel goes to the Jew first. So, there's a receptive historical priority in the new covenant for the Jews. In the New Testament (Ephesians 2), we see a covenantal change taking place where the people of God is one body - Jews and Gentiles together. The Church of Jesus Christ is not the replacement for Israel but the fulfillment of Israel. (Romans 11:26 - All Israel will be saved.) There is a promise of future end-time eschatological salvation for the Jewish people as they put their trust in Jesus near the end of history... I don't map that onto a political national future, either in the millennium or in the new creation. I see Israel becoming part of the church of Jesus Christ. In the new creation, I don't think there are nations. There will likely be different people groups, but not nations. I don't see the Jews as having any political distinction at that time. But one people of God.

Dr. Mohler 42:00: When I look at the passages in Romans, I see an ongoing promise to Israel. In one sense, that promise is to all the redeemed people of God. But the Gospel came to the Jew first and then to the gentile. There are promises to Israel that the Lord says are irrevocable. Territorial promises and historic promises in space, time, and history that have not been realized. We believe in a literal physical rule of Jesus from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. We

believe that there will be a turn of the Jewish people to Israel back to God and see an elect Israel inside Israel that will turn to Jesus in those final days.