

Eschatology

Eschatology i/ˌɛskəˈtɒlədʒi/ (from the Greek ἔσχατος/ἔσχατη/ἔσχατον, eschatos/eschatē/eschaton meaning "last" and -logy meaning "the study of", first used in English around 1550) is a part of theology, philosophy, and futurology concerned with what are believed to be the final events in history, or the ultimate destiny of humanity, commonly referred to as the end of the world or the World to Come. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "concerned with 'the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell'"

Christian eschatology is concerned with death, an intermediate state, Heaven, hell, the return of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, a rapture, a great tribulation, the Millennium, end of the world, the last judgment, a new heaven and a new earth (the World to Come), and the ultimate consummation of all of God's purposes. Eschatological passages are found in many places, esp. Isaiah, Daniel, Matthew 24, and the Book of Revelation, but Revelation often occupies a central place in Christian eschatology.

CENTRAL EVENT: The second coming of Christ is the central event in Christian eschatology. Most Christians believe that death and suffering will continue to exist until Christ's return. There are, however, various views concerning the order and significance of other eschatological events.

CENTRAL TEXT: The book of Revelation is at the core of Christian eschatology. The study of Revelation is usually divided into four approaches, largely based on a preselected hermanutic:

- a. Futurist approach, Revelation is chiefly seen as referring to events which as yet have not come to pass, but which will come to pass at the end of the age, and the end of the world. This is the approach which most applies to eschatological studies.
- b. Preterist approach, Revelation chiefly refers to the events of the first century, such as the struggle of Christianity to survive the persecutions of the Roman Empire, the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and the desecration of the temple in the same year.
- c. Historicist approach, Revelation provides us with a broad view of history, and passages in Revelation are identified with major historical people and events.
- d. Idealist (or Spiritualist or Symbolic) approach, the events of Revelation are neither past nor future, but are purely symbolic, dealing with the ongoing struggle and ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Hindu eschatology

Contemporary Hindu eschatology is linked in the Vaishnavite tradition to the figure of Kalki, or the tenth and last avatar of Vishnu before the age draws to a close, and Shiva simultaneously dissolves and regenerates the universe.

Most Hindus believe that we are living in the Kali Yuga, the last of four periods (Yuga) that make up the current age. Each period has seen a successive degeneration in the moral order and character of human beings, to the point that in the Kali Yuga quarrel and hypocrisy are prevalent. Often, the invocation of Kali Yuga denotes a certain helplessness in the face of the horrors and suffering of the human condition and a nostalgia for a golden past or a future salvation.

However, Hindu conceptions of time, like those found in other non-Western traditions, are cyclical in that one age may end but another will always begin. As such, the cycle of birth, growth, decay, death, and renewal at the individual level finds its echo in the cosmic order of all things, yet affected by the vagaries of the comings and goings of divine interventions in the Vaishnavite belief.

Most Hindus believe that Shiva will destroy the world at the end of the kalpa. Some Shaivites hold the view that he is incessantly destroying and creating the world.

Islamic eschatology

Islamic eschatology is documented in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, regarding the Signs of the Day of Judgment. The Prophet's sayings on the subject have been traditionally divided into Major and Minor Signs. He spoke about several Minor Signs of the approach of the Day of Judgment, including:

Abu Hurairah reported that Muhammad said: "If you survive for a time you would certainly see people who would have whips in their hands like the tail of an ox. They would get up in the morning under the wrath of God and they would go into the evening with the anger of God." [7] [8]

Abu Hurairah narrated that Muhammad said, "When honesty is lost, then wait for the Day of Judgment." It was asked, "How will honesty be lost, O Apostle of God?" He said, "When authority is given to those who do not deserve it, then wait for the Day of Judgment." [9]

'Umar ibn al-Khattāb, in a long narration, relating to the questions of the angel Gabriel, reported: "Inform me when the Day of Judgment will be." He [the Prophet Muhammad] remarked: "The one who is being asked knows no more than the inquirer." He [the inquirer] said: "Tell me about its indications." He [the Prophet Muhammad] said: "That the slave-girl gives birth to her mistress and master, and that you would find barefooted, destitute shepherds of goats vying with one another in the construction of magnificent buildings." [7][9]

"Before the Day of Judgment there will be great liars, so beware of them." [9]

"When the most wicked member of a tribe becomes its ruler, and the most worthless member of a community becomes its leader, and a man is respected through fear of the evil he may do, and leadership is given to people who are unworthy of it, expect the Day of Judgment." [9]

Regarding the Major Signs, a Companion of the Prophet narrated: "Once we were sitting together and talking amongst ourselves when the Prophet appeared. He asked us what it was we were discussing. We said it was the Day of Judgment. He said: 'It will not be called until ten signs have appeared: Smoke, Dajjal [the Antichrist], the creature (that will wound the people), the rising of the sun in the West, the Second Coming of Jesus, the emergence of Gog and Magog, and three sinkings (or cavings in of the earth): one in the East, another in the West and a third in the Arabian Peninsula.'" (note: the previous events were not listed in the chronological order of appearance)

Jewish eschatology

Main article: Jewish eschatology

Judaism addresses the end times in the Book of Daniel and numerous other prophetic passages in the Hebrew scriptures, and also in the Talmud, particularly Tractate Avodah Zarah.

[edit] Zoroastrian eschatology

Main article: Zoroastrian eschatology

History

Eschatology is an ancient branch of study in Christian theology, with study of the "last things" and the [Second Coming of Christ](#) first touched on by [Ignatius of Antioch](#) (c. 35–107 AD), then

given more consideration by the Christian apologist, [Justin Martyr](#) (c. 100–165)^{[[citation needed](#)]}. Treatment of eschatology continued in the [West](#) in the teachings of [Tertullian](#) (c. 160–225), and was given fuller reflection and speculation soon after by [Origen](#) (c. 185–254).^[1] It was increasingly recognized as a formal division of theological study during the 20th century.

Approaches to prophetic interpretation

The following approaches arose from the study of Christianity's most central eschatological document, the [Book of Revelation](#), but the principles embodied in them can be applied to all prophecy in the [Bible](#). They are by no means mutually exclusive and are often combined to form a more complete and coherent interpretation of prophetic passages. Most interpretations fit into one, or a combination of, these approaches.

Preterism

[Preterism](#) (from the Latin *praeteritus*, meaning "gone by") is an approach which sees prophecy as chiefly being fulfilled in the past, especially (in the case of the Book of Revelation) during the first century. Prophecies in general, therefore, have already been fulfilled. Revelation, for example, may be seen as referring to the struggle of Christianity to survive the persecutions of the Roman Empire, as many other interpretations are considered. There are two major views within preterism, [Partial preterism](#) and [Full preterism](#).

Historicism

[Historicism](#) says that Biblical prophecies provide us with a broad view of history, as well as an explanation of the religious significance of historical events. Historicists attempt to identify prophetic passages with major events in history.

Futurism

In [Futurism](#), parallels may be drawn with historical events, but most eschatological prophecies are chiefly referring to events which have not been fulfilled, but will take place at the end of the age and the [end of the world](#). Most prophecies will be fulfilled during a global time of chaos known as the [Great Tribulation](#) and afterwards.

Idealism

In [Idealism](#), also known as "spiritual" or "[symbolic](#)", the events described in prophecy are neither past, present, nor future, but are representative of larger ideals and principles. Eschatological prophecy deals with the ongoing struggle between the forces of light and darkness, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Its message is purely a spiritual one, an [allegory](#) of the spiritual path, which is equally relevant in all ages and for all people.

Death and the afterlife

Jewish beliefs at the time of Jesus

There were different schools of thought on the afterlife in Israel during the first century, AD. The Sadducees, who recognized only the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament) as authoritative, did not believe in an afterlife or a resurrection. The Pharisees, who not only accepted the Torah, but the rest of the Hebrew scriptures also, believed in a resurrection of the body, and it is known to have been a major point of contention between the two groups (see Acts 8). The Pharisees based their belief on passages such as Daniel 12:2, which says: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

The intermediate state

Main article: [Intermediate state](#)

Some traditions, notably the Seventh Day Adventists, teach that the [soul sleeps](#) after death, and will not awake again until the Resurrection, while others believe the spirit goes to an intermediate place where we will live consciously until the Resurrection.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says:

Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven -- through a purification or immediately -- or immediate and everlasting damnation. (Sect. 1022)

Purgatory

Most denominations (a notable exception being the Seventh Day Adventists) would affirm the statement from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (above), with the exception of the parenthetical phrase, "through a purification or immediately." This alludes to the Catholic belief in a spiritual state, known as Purgatory, in which those souls who are not worthy of hell, but not quite ready for heaven, go through a final process of purification before their full acceptance into heaven.

Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism do not believe in Purgatory as such, though the Orthodox Church is willing to allow for a period of continued sanctification (the process of being made pure, or holy) after death. Most Protestants reject the doctrine of Purgatory on the basis that, according to the Protestant interpretation of Scripture, Christ has already made full atonement for our sins on the cross, thereby removing all obstacles which prevent us from coming directly into the presence of God after death.

Resurrection of the dead

The Doctrine of the Resurrection Predates Christianity

The word *resurrection* comes from the Latin *resurrectus*, which is the past participle of *resurgere*, meaning *to rise again*. Although the doctrine of the resurrection comes to the forefront in the New Testament, it predates the Christian era. There is an apparent reference to the resurrection in the book of Job, where Job says, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that he will stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though... worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I will see God." [Job 19:25-27] Again, the prophet Daniel writes, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." [Dan 12:2] Isaiah says: "Your dead will live. Together with my dead body, they will arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust, for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth will cast out the dead". [Isa. 26:19]

This belief was still common among the Jews in New Testament times, as exemplified by the passage which relates the raising of Lazarus from the dead. When Jesus told Lazarus' sister, Martha, that Lazarus would rise again, she replied, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day". [Jn 11:24] Also, one of the two main branches of the Jewish religious establishment, the Pharisees, believed in and taught the future resurrection of the body. [cf Acts 23:1-8]

Two Resurrections

An important development in the New Testament is the understanding that the resurrection of the wicked will not be at the same time as that of the righteous. Revelation says: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such, the second death has no

power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years." [Rev 20:6] The rest of the dead "did not live again until the thousand years were finished." [Rev 20:5] Jesus' words concur with those of Revelation: "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth: those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." [Jn 5:26]

The Resurrection Body

The Bible teaches that our resurrection bodies will be different from those we have now. Jesus said, "In the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven." [Mt 22:30] Paul adds, "So also is the resurrection of the dead: the body... is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." [1 Co. 15:42-44]

Sectarian Views

According to the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) the body after resurrection is changed into a spiritual, imperishable body:

[999] Christ is raised with his own body: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself"; [553] but he did not return to an earthly life. So, in him, "all of them will rise again with their own bodies which they now bear," but Christ "will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body," into a "spiritual body" [554]^[2]

Although [Martin Luther](#) personally believed and taught resurrection of the dead in combination with [soul sleep](#), this is not a mainstream teaching of [Lutheranism](#) and most Lutherans traditionally believe in resurrection of the body in combination with the [immortal soul](#).^[3]

Early 20th century American preacher [Billy Sunday](#) epitomizes the Evangelical focus on "going to heaven" in his [sermon](#) "Heaven: A Wonderful Place; Where There is No More Death; Blessed Hope of the Christian." In the message Sunday characteristically explained the feelings of his audience by saying "Everybody wants to go to Heaven. We are all curious. We want to know, where Heaven is, how it looks, who are there, what they wear, and how to get there!" Sunday speaks of many aspects of the [afterlife](#) such as the nice weather and eternal health, although there is no mention of the resurrection of the dead. He ends with an illustration about a man who dies and goes to heaven exclaiming "Home, home at last!" as if he had arrived at the end of his eschatological journey.^[4]

Several churches, such as the [Anabaptists](#) and [Socinians](#) of the Reformation, then [Seventh-day Adventist Church](#), [Christadelphians](#), [Jehovah's Witnesses](#), and theologians of different traditions reject the idea of the immortality of a non-physical soul as a vestige of [Neoplatonism](#), and other [pagan](#) traditions. In this school of thought, the dead remain dead (and do not immediately progress to a [Heaven](#), [Hell](#), or [Purgatory](#)) until a physical resurrection of some or all of the dead occurs at the end of time. Some groups, [Christadelphians](#) in particular, consider that it is not a [universal resurrection](#), and that at this time of resurrection that the [Last Judgment](#) will take place.^[5]

Rapture

In his letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul writes, "The Lord himself will descend from heaven... and the dead in Christ will rise first." But he adds that "we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." [1 Th. 4:16-17] The rising of those who are still alive to join the resurrected dead is

known as the *Rapture*. This passage implies that Paul believed that the return of Jesus, the Resurrection, and the Rapture would happen simultaneously.

Rapture is used in at least two senses, in the sense of [pre-tribulation](#) views in which a group of people will be "left behind" and as a synonym for the [Resurrection](#) generally.^[6]
^{[7][8][9]}

The Great Tribulation

The end comes at an unexpected time

There are many passages in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, which speak of a time of terrible tribulation such as has never been known, a time of natural and man-made disasters on an awesome scale. Jesus said that at the time of his coming, "There will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever will be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, those days will be shortened." [Mt 24:21-22]

Furthermore, the [Messiah](#)'s return and the tribulation that accompanies it will come at a time when people are not expecting it:

Of that day and hour no-one knows; no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." [Mt 24:36-39]

Paul echoes this theme, saying, "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them." [1 Thess 5:3]

The Abomination of Desolation

The **abomination of desolation** (or **desolating sacrilege**) is a term found in the [Hebrew Bible](#), in the [book of Daniel](#). The term is used by [Jesus Christ](#) in the [Olivet discourse](#), according to both the [Gospel of Matthew](#) and the [Gospel of Mark](#). In the Matthew account, Jesus is presented as quoting Daniel explicitly.

Matthew 24:15-26 (ESV) "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

Mark 13:14 (ESV) "But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

This verse in the Olivet Discourse also occurs in the [Gospel of Luke](#).

Luke 21.20-21 (ESV) "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains..."

Many biblical scholars^[10] conclude that Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14 are [prophecies after the event](#) about the [siege of Jerusalem](#) in AD 70 by the Roman general [Titus](#)^[11] (see [Dating of the Gospel of Mark](#)).

[Preterist Christian](#) commentators believe that Jesus quoted this prophecy in Mark 13:14 as referring to an event in his "1st century disciples'" immediate future, the [siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD](#).^{[12][13]}

[Futurist Christians](#) consider the "Abomination of Desolation" prophecy of Daniel mentioned by Jesus in [Matthew 24:15](#) and [Mark 13:14](#) as referring to an event in the end time future, when a 7 year peace treaty will be signed between Israel and a world ruler called "[the man of lawlessness](#)", or the "[Antichrist](#)" affirmed by the writings of the Apostle Paul in [2 Thessalonians](#).

Other scholars conclude that the Abomination of Desolation refers to the Crucifixion,^[14] an attempt by the emperor Hadrian to erect a statue to Jupiter in the Jewish temple,^[15] or an attempt by Caligula to have a statue depicting him as Zeus built in the temple.^[16]

The Seventy Weeks Prophecy

Many interpreters calculate the length of the tribulation at seven years. The key to this understanding is the "seventy weeks prophecy" in the book of Daniel. The **Prophecy of Seventy Septets** (or literally 'seventy times seven') appears in the angel [Gabriel](#)'s reply to Daniel, beginning with verse 22 and ending with verse 27 in the ninth chapter of the [Book of Daniel](#),^[17] a work included in both the [Jewish Tanakh](#) and the [Christian Bible](#); as well as the [Septuagint](#).^[18] The [prophecy](#) is part of both the [Jewish](#) account of history and Christian eschatology.

The prophet has a vision of the angel Gabriel, who tells him, "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city (i.e., Israel and Jerusalem)."[Dan 9:24] After making a comparison with events in the history of Israel, many scholars have concluded that each day in the seventy weeks represents a year. The first sixty-nine weeks are interpreted as covering the period until Christ's first coming, but the last week is thought to represent the years of the tribulation which will come at the end of this age, directly preceding the millennial age of peace:

The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it will be with a flood, and till the end of the war, desolations are determined. Then he will confirm a covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of the week, he will bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations will be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation which is determined is poured out on the desolate.[Dan 9:26-27]

This is an obscure prophecy, but in combination with other passages, it has been interpreted to mean that the "prince who is to come" will make a seven-year covenant with Israel that will allow the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstatement of sacrifices, but "in the middle of the week," he will break the agreement and set up an idol of himself in the temple and force people to worship it—the "abomination of desolation." Paul writes:

Let no-one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.[2 Thess 2:3-4]

The Second Coming

Signs of Christ's return

The Bible states:

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." [Acts 1:9-11]

Many, but not all, Christians believe:

1. The coming of Christ will be instantaneous and worldwide.^[19] "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." ~ Matthew 24:27
2. The coming of Christ will be visible to all.^[20] "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Matthew 24:30
3. The coming of Christ will be audible.^[21] "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matthew 24:31
4. The resurrection of the righteous will occur.^[22] "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." ~ 1 Thessalonians 4:16
5. In one single event, the saved who are alive at Christ's coming will be caught up together with the resurrected to meet the Lord in the air.^[23] "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." ~ 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Last Day Counterfeits

In Matthew 24 [Jesus](#) states:

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. [Matthew 24:21, 24 NKJV]

These false Christs will perform great signs and are no ordinary people "For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." (Revelation 16:14) Satan's angels will also appear as godly clergymen, and Satan will appear as an angel of light.^[24] "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) "As his crowning miracle, Satan will claim to be Jesus"^[24] (Matthew 24:23, 24).

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. (Revelation 1:13-15). *The Great Controversy*, p. 624.^[25]

The Marriage of the Lamb

After Jesus meets his followers "in the air," the marriage of the Lamb takes place: "Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." [Rev 19:7-8] Christ is represented throughout Revelation as "the Lamb," symbolizing the giving of his life as an atoning sacrifice for the people of the world, just as lambs were sacrificed on the altar for the sins of Israel. His

“wife” appears to represent the people of God, for she is dressed in the “righteous acts of the saints.” As the marriage takes place, there is a great celebration in heaven which involves a “great multitude.” [Rev 19:6]

Armageddon

The [Book of Revelation](#) states: “I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and with righteousness he judges and makes war.” [Rev 19:11] We now see Christ, not as a lamb, but as a warrior, ready to make war against the forces of evil. There is a passage in Zechariah which is identified with this event: “I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. The city will be taken, the houses looted, and the women raped... Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations... Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with you.” [Zech 14:2-5] In Matthew, Jesus says, “The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” [Mt 24:30]

The [army of heaven](#) is described in similar terms as the resurrected and raptured believers: “The armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed him on white horses.” [Rev 19:14] Revelation continues: “I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him who sat on the horse and against his army.” [Rev 19:19] Isaiah also speaks of such a battle: “The Lord will come with fire and with his chariots, like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword the Lord will judge all flesh, and the slain of the Lord will be many.” [Is. 66:15-16]

The Millennium

In the end, according to Revelation, the Lamb and his armies are victorious and the [Beast](#), generally identified as the Antichrist, is captured and thrown into the [lake of fire](#), while his battle casualties are left as food for the birds. [Satan](#), the spiritual driving force behind the beast and his armies, is imprisoned:

I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. And he cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. [Rev 20:1-3]

While only Revelation speaks of a period of a thousand years for Christ’s rule on Earth, there are numerous other prophecies in both testaments concerning a future age of peace. Isaiah speaks of such a time and describes it in Edenic terms:

The wolf will dwell with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf, and the young lion, and the yearling together, and a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze; their young ones will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the cobra's hole; and the weaned child will put his hand in the viper's den. They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. [Is 11:5-9]

Just as the physical bodies of people are changed into spiritual bodies in the resurrection (see above), so Isaiah implies that animals will undergo a transformation which enables them to live in peace with human beings and with each other. There is no more killing, either in the human or the animal kingdoms. God reverses the covenant made with Noah in which he said, “The fear and the dread of you will be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that

moves on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea." [Gen 9:2] If the passage in Isaiah is interpreted literally, a return to the vegetarian diet of Eden seems to be a natural conclusion. [cf Gen 1:29-30] Micah expresses similarly lofty thoughts, adding that Jerusalem will be the Lord's capital in those days:

Out of Zion the word of the law will go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more. But everyone will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one will make them afraid. [Micah 4:2-4]

The End of the World and the Last Judgment

Satan released

According to the Bible, the Millennial age of peace all but closes the history of planet Earth. However, the story is not yet quite finished: "When the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea." [Rev 20:7-8]

There is continuing discussion over the identity of [Gog and Magog](#). In the context of the passage, they seem to equate to something like "east and west." There is a passage in Ezekiel, however, where God says to the prophet, "Set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him." [Ezek 38:2] Gog, in this instance, is the name of a person of the land of Magog, who is ruler ("prince") over the regions of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. Ezekiel says of him: "You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you..." [Ezek 38:2]

Despite this huge show of force, the battle will be short-lived, for Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation all say that this last desperate attempt to destroy the people and the city of God will end in disaster: "I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed. I will rain down on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him: flooding rain, great hailstones, fire and brimstone." [Ezek 38:22] Revelation concurs: "Fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them." [Rev 20:9] It may be that the images of fire raining down are an ancient vision of modern weapons, others would say a supernatural intervention by God, yet others that they refer to events in history, and some would say they are symbolic of larger ideas and should not be interpreted literally.

The Last Judgment

Following the defeat of Gog, the last judgment begins: "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." [Rev 20:10] Satan will join the Antichrist and the [False Prophet](#), who were condemned to the lake of fire at the beginning of the Millennium. Following Satan's consignment to the lake of fire, his followers come up for judgment. This is the "second resurrection," and all those who were not a part of the first resurrection at the coming of Christ now rise up for judgment:

I saw a great white throne and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged,

each one according to his works. And Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. [Rev 20:11,13-15]

John had earlier written, "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power." [Rev 20:6] Those who are included in the Resurrection and the Rapture are excluded from the final judgment, and are not subject to the [second death](#). Due to the description of the seat upon which the Lord sits, this final judgment is often referred to as the [Great White Throne Judgment](#).

New Heaven and Earth

New Jerusalem

In Isaiah, God promises a new heaven and earth: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former will not be remembered nor come to mind." [Isa 65:17] The author of Revelation has a corresponding vision: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." [Rev 21:1]

The focus turns to one city in particular, the [New Jerusalem](#). Once again, we see the imagery of the marriage: "I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." [Rev 21:2] In the New Jerusalem, God "will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." [Rev 21:4] As a result, there is "no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Nor is there a need for the sun to give its light, "for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light." [Rev 21:22-23] The city will also be a place of great peace and joy, for "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there will be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." [Rev 21:1-4]

Description

The city itself has a large wall with twelve gates in it which are never shut, and which have the names of the [twelve tribes of Israel](#) written on them. Each of the gates is made of a single pearl, and there is an angel standing in each one. The wall also has twelve foundations which are adorned with precious stones, and upon the foundations are written the names of the twelve apostles. The gates and foundations are often interpreted^{[[who?](#)]} as symbolizing the people of God before and after Christ.

The city and its streets are pure gold, but not like the gold we know, for this gold is described as being like clear glass. The city is square in shape, and is twelve thousand [furlongs](#) long and wide (fifteen hundred miles). If these are comparable to earthly measurements, the city will cover an area about half the size of the contiguous United States. The height is the same as the length and breadth, and although this has led most people to conclude that it is shaped like a cube, it could also be a [pyramid](#).

The Tree of Life

The city has a river which proceeds "out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." [Rev 22:1] Next to the river is the tree of life, which bears twelve fruits and yields its fruit every month. The last time we saw the tree of life was in the Garden of Eden. [Gen 2:9] God drove Adam and Eve away from it because it bestowed eternal life and he did not want them to have it in their degraded state. [Gen 3:22] In the New Jerusalem, the tree of life reappears, and everyone in the city has

access to it. Genesis tells us that the earth was cursed because of Adam's sin,[Gen 3:17] but the author of John writes that in the New Jerusalem, "there will be no more curse." [Rev 22:3]

The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1984) says:

The rich symbolism reaches beyond our finest imaginings, not only to the beatific vision but to a renewed, joyous, industrious, orderly, holy, loving, eternal, and abundant existence. Perhaps the most moving element in the description is what is missing: there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, 'because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.' Vastly outstripping the expectations of Judaism, this stated omission signals the ultimate reconciliation.

Major theological positions

There are diverse opinions concerning the thousand years of peace (Millennium) described in Revelation and the events associated with it. Some interpret a literal, future, thousand-year time period in which Christ will rule over the Earth, a time which will be characterized by peace and harmony. Others understand a literal age of peace, but think the "thousand years" is a figure of speech. Still others see the Millennium as symbolic of a spiritual ideal, with no corresponding earthly condition. All of these positions fall into the category of millennialism, a broad term which includes any and all ideas relating to the millennium of Biblical prophecy. The most commonly held viewpoints are usually categorized as follows:

Premillennialism

Standard premillennialism posits that Christ's second coming will inaugurate a literal thousand-year earthly kingdom. Christ's return will coincide with a time of great tribulation. At this time, there will be a resurrection of the people of God who have passed away, and a rapture of the people of God who are still living, and they will meet Christ at his coming. A thousand years of peace will follow, during which Christ will reign and Satan will be imprisoned in the Abyss. Those who hold to this view usually fall into one of the following three categories:

Pretribulation Rapture

Pretribulationists believe that the second coming will be in two stages separated by a seven-year period of tribulation. At the beginning of the tribulation, true Christians will rise to meet the Lord in the air (the Rapture). Then follows a seven-year period of suffering in which the Antichrist will conquer the world and persecute those who refuse to worship him. At the end of this period, Christ returns to defeat the Antichrist and establish the age of peace. This position is supported by a scripture which says, "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." [1 Thess 5:9]

Midtribulation Rapture

Midtribulationists believe that the Rapture will take place at the halfway point of the seven-year tribulation, i.e. after 3½ years. It coincides with the "abomination of desolation" – a desecration of the temple where the Antichrist puts an end to the Jewish sacrifices, sets up his own image in the temple, and demands that he be worshiped as God. This event begins the second, most intense part of the tribulation.

Some interpreters find support for the "midtrib" position by comparing a passage in Paul's epistles with the book of Revelation. Paul says, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:51-52). Revelation divides the great tribulation into three sets of increasingly catastrophic judgments: the Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets, and the Seven Bowls, in that order. If the "last trumpet" of Paul is

equated with the last trumpet of Revelation, the Rapture would be in the middle of the Tribulation. (Not all interpreters agree with this literal interpretation of the chronology of Revelation, however.)

Posttribulation Rapture

Posttribulationists hold that Christ will not return until the end of the tribulation. Christians, rather than being raptured at the beginning of the tribulation, or halfway through, will live through it and suffer for their faith during the ascendancy of the Antichrist. Proponents of this position believe that the presence of believers during the tribulation is necessary for a final evangelistic effort during a time when external conditions will combine with the Gospel message to bring great numbers of converts into the Church in time for the beginning of the Millennium.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism does not believe in a premillennial appearance of Christ. The postmillennial position is that the millennium began at the inauguration of Christ's kingdom reign when he ascended to his heavenly throne and happens, not as a result of the coming of Christ, but as the global population converts to Christianity as a result of evangelization. The age of peace is still a progressing work of divine grace, but without the visible presence of Christ to take the place of an Earthly ruler. Christ will appear at the end of the millennium to lead his people into the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem.

Amillennialism

Amillennialism does not believe in a literal Millennium. The "thousand years" is an expression, a way of referring to the entire period from the first coming of Christ, two thousand years ago, until the future second coming. Many amillennialists believe that during this time period, the church will continue to evangelize and grow as well as suffer declination in periods until Christ's coming. The Second Coming will be a natural culmination of the process of world evangelization, rather than a revolutionary event that brings sudden and dramatic change.

Interpretive and hermeneutical overviews of the Bible

The [hermeneutic](#) method held by an individual or church will greatly affect their interpretation of the book of Revelation, and consequently their eschatological scheme.

Supersessionist

Supersessionism is the belief that the [New Covenant](#) in Christ supersedes, or replaces, the [Old Covenant](#) with Israel. It comes in at least two forms: [covenant theology](#) and [kingdom theology](#). It was the predominant teaching of the church until the rise of [dispensationalism](#) in the 19th century.

Covenant theology

Hermeneutics

Usually [Historical-grammatical typologised](#) and [contextualised](#). There are three [covenants](#), the Covenant of Works (or Law), the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace.

Overview

Under the Covenant of Works mankind, represented ultimately in a covenantal sense under Adam beginning from the [Garden of Eden](#), failed to live as God intended and stood condemned. But beyond time the Covenant of Redemption was made between the Father and Son, to agree that Christ would live an acceptable substitutionary life on behalf of, and as a covenantal

representative for, those who would [sin](#) but would trust in [Christ](#) as their [substitutionary atonement](#), which bought them into the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace applies to all who trust Christ for their salvation, regardless of ethnicity, and thus the Covenant covers Jews and Gentiles alike with regard to [salvation](#), [sanctification](#), and [resurrection](#). The Covenant of Grace forms the basis of the later covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the New Covenant in Christ.

Adherents

Held by many [evangelical Reformed Protestant](#) Churches who take a Historical-grammatical and typological interpretation of the Bible. Adherents would include the [Reformed church](#), most of the [Presbyterian church](#), some [low church Anglicans](#), some [Baptist](#) churches, some Wesleyan/[Methodist](#) churches and certain [Lutheran](#) churches.

Kingdom-Dominion theology

Hermeneutics

Similar to the covenantal system, but emphasizes the Kingdom of God rather than the three covenants. Exemplified in works such as [Graeme Goldsworthy's Gospel and Kingdom](#). The [Old Testament](#) is interpreted using [typology](#) and the [grammatico-historical](#) method. Revelation is read according to the conventions of the [apocalyptic](#) genre.

Overview

God's purpose for all time was to redeem for himself a people through the death and resurrection of Christ. The [incarnation](#) of Christ is the centrepiece of the [Bible](#) and all history. The Old Testament is understood to contain a number of covenants and "types" which are fulfilled in the past and future work of Jesus.

Goldsworthy schematizes the [Kingdom of God](#) as the expression of *God's rule over God's people in God's place*. In the beginning, God himself ruled over [Adam and Eve](#) in the [Garden of Eden](#). After the fall, the rule of God was expressed through the [Law](#), the [Judges](#), the King of Israel and finally the promise that God would write his law on his people's hearts (Jer 31:33). "God's place" came to be the [Tabernacle](#) in the wilderness, later the [Temple in Jerusalem](#), and finally the promise of the indwelling Spirit of God (Joel 2, Ezek 37). His "people" were [Abraham](#), the people of Israel, then the faithful [remnant](#) of Israel, and finally the promised Messiah (Ps 2).

In the [New Testament](#), God's rule is exercised through Jesus Christ the King, who is also the temple of God (John 2:19-21), over his people the Church (of which Israel was a type). [Salvation](#) for all people in all times is found by trusting (explicitly or implicitly) in Jesus. Thus, Abraham, Moses, David, and all Christians today are saved by the same faith. The Jews are regarded as special in God's plan (as in Romans and Ephesians) and yet the Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel find their fulfillment in Jesus and the Church rather than in a literal restoration of Israel.^[26]

Adherents

Held by [reformed](#), [evangelical Protestants](#) (especially [Sydney Anglicans](#)).

Approaches to Revelation

Usually idealist and amillennial. Revelation describes what is happening throughout the Christian era, from [Pentecost](#) to the [second coming](#). This view acknowledges that there may be valid preteristic connections (e.g. the seven hills = Rome) but the full understanding comes through an idealistic-historicism (but without necessarily seeing the Roman Catholic Church as

the [antichrist](#)). The events of the book, while not to be tied to particular historical events, still describe the sorts of things that will happen until Christ returns. The Book of Revelation is interpreted according to apocalyptic conventions regarding numbers and colours (7 = perfection/completion, white = victory) and the enormous number of allusions to the rest of Scripture.^{[27][28]}

Dispensational

Hermeneutics

Interpretation as the literal, 'plain meaning' implies (i.e. rejection of [typological](#) and [allegorical](#) methods). Biblical references to [Israel](#) mean ancient *and* modern Israel.

Overview

History is divided into (typically seven) "dispensations" where God tests man's obedience differently. The present *Church dispensation* concerns Christians (mainly [Gentiles](#)) and is a parenthesis to God's main plan of dealing with and blessing his chosen people the [Jews](#). Because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus, Jewish sovereignty over the promised earthly kingdom of Jerusalem and [Palestine](#) was postponed from the time of Christ's first coming until prior to or just after his [Second Coming](#) when most or all Jews will embrace him.

There will be a [rapture](#) of the Gentile church followed by a [great tribulation](#) of seven (or three-and-a-half) years' duration during which Antichrist will arise and [Armageddon](#) will occur. Then Jesus will return visibly to earth and re-establish the nation of Israel; the Jewish temple will be rebuilt at [Jerusalem](#) and the [Temple mount](#), possibly in place of the [Muslim Dome of the Rock](#) (see [Christian Zionism](#)). Christ and the people of Israel will reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years, followed by [last judgment](#) and a new heavens and new earth.

Adherents

Held by groups who believe the scriptures to be [inerrant](#) and often more [Arminian](#) leaning. Held by many [Protestant](#) groups who take what they believe is a more [literal](#) interpretation of the Bible, including many, but not most, [Pentecostal Charismatic](#) and [Baptist](#) churches and Independent and '[Non-denominational](#)' churches as well as a few of the [Presbyterian Church](#) and Wesleyan/[Methodist](#) churches. Also held by most groups that are labelled [Fundamentalists](#). The more politically active sections within this eschatological view often strongly support the [Christian Zionism](#) movement and the associated political, military and economic support for [Israel](#) which comes from certain groups within American politics and parts of the [Christian right](#).

This view is also held in a modified form by groups such as the [Latter Day Saints](#), [Christadelphians](#) and [Adventist](#) splinter groups such as the [Branch Davidians](#). One of the main tenets of Dispensationalism is the strict dichotomy that dispensationalists claim exists between Israel and the New Testament Church. This is expressly denied by Covenant Theologians who claim the existence of a relationship via "Spiritual Israel." A dispensationalist would claim that none of the prophecies pertaining to Israel are or will be fulfilled in or by the New Testament Church. Covenant Theologians would claim that some of the prophecies pertaining to Israel are, will, or may be fulfilled in or by the New Testament Church. see [supersessionism](#).

Approaches to Revelation

Dispensational [Futurism](#) as opposed to Historic or Covenantal Futurism.

Dispensational [Premillennialism](#) as opposed to Historic or Covenantal Premillennialism.

Allegorical or mythical

Hermeneutics

The Bible may or may not be factually accurate but is designed to teach spiritual lessons through [allegory](#) and [myth](#). The Bible is more literary than historical. Typically, this stance is taken by churches and individuals who do not place significant emphasis upon eschatology at all.

Adherents

Held by Christian groups ranging from those who are [Biblically inerrant](#) to [liberal](#) scholars who mostly belong to [mainline Protestant](#) denominations. Supporters of this position also include [high church Anglo-Catholic](#), [Catholic-leaning Lutherans](#), [Eastern Orthodox](#) churches, and traditional [Roman Catholic](#) groups. Belief in the allegorical interpretation of the Bible does not exclude belief in praxeological or literal hermeneutics. For example, Roman Catholic hermeneutics holds that there are many senses in which the Bible is true in addition to literal truth.

The [Catholic Apostolic Church](#) believed that the Bible should be interpreted allegorically.^[29]

Some descendants of the [Catholic Apostolic Church](#) also known as [Irvingism](#), such as [Apostelamt Jesu Christi](#), [Apostelamt Juda](#), [Restored Apostolic Mission Church](#)^[30] and the [Old Apostolic Church](#)^{[31][32]} also believes in the allegorical interpretation of the Bible.

Approaches to Revelation

1. Allegorical Idealism, or
2. Catholic Partial preterism
3. Allegorical Amillennialism

Preterism v. Historicism

Expositors of the traditional Protestant interpretation of Revelation known as [Historicism](#) have often maintained that Revelation was written in AD 96 and not [AD 70](#). [Edward Bishop Elliott](#), in the [Horae Apocalypticæ](#) (1862), argues that John wrote the book in exile on [Patmos](#) "at the close of the reign of Domitian; that is near the end of the year 95 or beginning of 96". He notes that Domitian was assassinated in September of 96.^[33] Elliot begins his lengthy review of historical evidence by quoting [Irenaeus](#), a disciple of [Polycarp](#). Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John. Irenaeus mentions that the Apocalypse was seen "no very long time ago [but] almost in our own age, toward the end of the reign of Domitian".^[34]

Other historicists have seen no significance in the date that Revelation was written, and have even held to an early date^[35] while Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., makes an exegetical and historical argument for the pre-AD 70 composition of Revelation.^[36]