

The Apocalypse

Long Beach Alliance Church • August 26th, 2012 • Pastor Chris Lankford

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

~Revelation 1:3 (NASB)

1) The Critical Importance Of The “End Times”

A) Is the subject of the “End Times” really all that important?

- One out of every 30 verses in the Bible mentions the subject of Christ’s return or the end of time.
- There are well over 300 references to the return of Jesus Christ in the New Testament alone. In fact, only 4 of the 27 New Testament books fail to mention Christ’s return.
- In the Old Testament, such well-known and reliable men of God as Job, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and most of the minor prophets, fixed at least part of their attention on the Lord’s return.
- Roughly 5% of the New Testament is about the “End Times,” especially the return of Jesus Christ.
- Christ spoke of His return often, especially after He had revealed His death. He never did so in vague or uncertain terms.
- Following Jesus Christ’s “Great Commission,” the Apostles established the earliest churches and taught often in the New Testament about imminent and bodily return of Jesus Christ.

B) The book of Revelation has a lot to say about the future (it contains a lot of yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy), but is well rooted in both Old Testament and New Testament historical contexts. More than most books of the Bible, Revelation teaches us how the whole Bible connects together.

2) Why Should I Study Prophecy And The “End Times?”

A) God provides prophecy in the Bible for numerous reasons!

- Prophecy is provided to show God is in control and has a plan for the future (Daniel 2:19-22; Ephesians 1:9-11; Revelation 1:1).
- Prophecy is provided in order to clearly call Christians to lives of obedience and devotion to God (Daniel 9:2-3, 10; Jeremiah 25:12; 1st Peter 4:7; 2nd Peter 3:10-15).
- Prophecy is provided to warn Christians of persecution so they will not be surprised and remain faithful (Daniel 12:10; James 1:12; Revelation 1:9, 2:10, 3:11).
- Prophecy is provided to give encouragement of both present and future rewards (Daniel 12:3; 1st Thessalonians 2:19; 2nd Timothy 4:8; 1st Peter 5:4; Revelation 22:12-14).

B) Our culture is fascinated with the end of the world! Movies such as “2012,” “Resident Evil,” “Armageddon,” “Independence Day,” and “The Day After Tomorrow” have all packed out theaters as people feed this fascination.

C) There are end of the world/Armageddon predictions all the time. These predictions have been made throughout history, and ALL of them ALWAYS turn out WRONG!

- Many 1st-Century Christians thought Christ was going to return within their lifetime. Hippolytus of Rome, a famous priest and insightful theologian from the 3rd-Century precisely dated the return of Christ to 500 A.D.
- Many Christians believed Jesus would return on Y1K.

D) What is a follower of Christ supposed to do in a culture (both Christian and otherwise) which is so crazy about the end times? The Bible says we are to be informed (1st Thessalonians 4:13), be ready (1st Peter 4:7), be watching (1st Thessalonians 5:1-6), be faithful (Matthew 24:5-14; 1st Peter 4:7).

3) The Book Of Revelation Though? It's Freaky & Confusing!

- A) Most people avoid "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" ("Revelation" for short) because it is unlike any other book in the New Testament, and with a couple of exceptions, it is different than almost any other book in the Bible!
- B) However, like every book of the Bible, Revelation is supposed to be studied, read aloud, used for personal Bible study, puzzled over & discussed with other followers of Jesus Christ, and treated like the rest of the Scriptures.
- C) Most books of the Bible, and ESPECIALLY the New Testament, are very easy to read because they are letters written from one person to another (or a group of people) in a very easy-to-understand style.
- D) But Revelation is not composed in such an easy-to-understand style of reading. Revelation is composed in a literary genre known as Prophecy (Revelation 1:3, 22:7), it is also composed in a literary genre known as Epistolatory, the more familiar "letter form" of the New Testament (note Revelation 1-3), and it is also composed in a literary genre known as Apocalyptic (note Revelation 4-21).
- E) It is the Apocalyptic genre that almost always gives the reader a very difficult time. However, like any other genre of literature (especially genre's like poetry, satire, or allegory); we must use the rules for interpreting different genre's with care and understanding.
- F) The most important rule of understanding the Apocalyptic genre? Interpret the text symbolically, unless the text gives you good reason to interpret it literally. This is essential!

- The Shakers, a charismatic group of believers which came to America from England in 1774, were strongly anti-marriage and anti-sex for married couples. They believed that Jesus was returning immediately, so why bother.
- Famous Baptist preacher William Miller, whose 50,000 followers were known as "Millerites," predicted the world would end in 1843 or 1844. When nothing happened, Millerites broke into smaller "Adventist" (coming) movements, including the 7th-Day Adventists. Millerite teachings were very influential in the establishment of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a famous cult group known for predicting end of the world dates (most well known of which are 1914, 1925, and 1976).
- Hal Lindsay, author of "The Late Great Planet Earth," said he "felt certain the return of Christ would happen before Y2K during this 'Terminal Generation.'"
- Dr. James Dobson, President of Focus On The Family, noted 8 possible scenarios for Y2K: 1) Terrorists, 2) Civil disobedience, 3) A Saddam Hussein-type leader attacking an ill-prepared U.S. military, 4) World economic crisis, 5) US Political leaders refusing to leave office since all voter registrations are on computers, 6) Catastrophic sun-spots in November of 1999 further exacerbating Y2K, and finally, 7) God's judgement – obviously overriding the rest of them." Dr. Dobson's noted that one or all of these scenarios were strong possibilities.
- Larry Burkett, Christian economic guru stated, "I believe Y2K is going to be an economic disaster, the failure rate amongst American small businesses will be 25% and among the big companies it will be 15% as a result of Y2K."
- Remember Harold Camping, President of Family Radio? He predicted the rapture would happen on May 21st, 2011, and be followed by the total destruction of the world on October 21st, 2011. Mr. Camping's followers spent their life savings advertising impending doom, but were left with empty hearts and empty pocketbooks in the end.