

What Does the Bible Mean by the "*Time of the End*"?

During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, He promised that He would come again—the next time to establish His Kingdom on earth. But He also warned that before His return, mankind's evils and suffering would dramatically increase, ending in "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21).

Two seemingly opposite trends were to occur in the end time. On the one hand, interest in some kind of apocalypse would skyrocket. (Actually, "apocalypse" comes from a Greek word meaning revelation or unveiling, but it has come to have a popular meaning of end-time cataclysm.) On the other hand, Peter said "scoffers will come in the last days"—people who don't believe or respect the Bible (2 Peter 3:2-4).

The period leading up to and during the final tribulation is addressed many times in the Bible. It is referred to as *the time of the end*, *the end time*, *the end of the age*, *the latter days*, *the last days*, *the day of the Lord* and similar phrases. The Bible gives us a great deal of information about the end time, especially in the book of Revelation and the other prophetic books.

The phrase *end of the world* appears in several places in the King James Version of the Bible. However, modern versions correctly translate those phrases as the "end of the age" (as in Matthew 24:3).

Our merciful Creator loves all people, and that's why He mercifully gives us advance notice of what to expect. Let's now get an overview of His warnings about the end time.

First of all, just what is *this age*?

Galatians 1:3-4

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...

In the New Testament, "this age" refers to the era of man's rule from the creation of Adam and Eve to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Paul called it "this present evil age." That's because Satan is "the god of this age" and "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19). The age "which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21) begins with Christ's return to resurrect the dead and to establish His Kingdom on earth (1 Corinthians 15:21-26).

What did the disciples ask Jesus, and what was His answer?

Matthew 24:3

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Many people don't realize that Jesus was also a prophet—in fact, history's greatest Prophet, foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18! When asked about the signs of His "coming, and of the

end of the age," He answered with a lengthy prophecy of the shocking end-time trends, such as wars and unusual natural disasters (recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). We will look at details of this prophecy in future lessons.

What present world condition proves we are in the end time?

Matthew 24:21-22

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. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

The New English Bible helps clarify verse 22: "If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive..." Until the 1940s, there was no possible way, humanly speaking, for all human life to be annihilated. That became possible with the invention and proliferation of nuclear weapons. The development of modern chemical and biological weapons have added to the ways all human life can be destroyed. So it's greatly comforting to know that Christ promised to intervene to prevent worldwide destruction! (In future lessons, we'll learn additional evidence that we are in the end time.)

What will be the great climax of the end-time suffering?

Matthew 24:29

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Joel 2:31

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.

The time of "great tribulation" is followed by the "day of the Lord." Jesus' warning and Old Testament prophecies (Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7) tell us that it will be the *worst* period of disasters and suffering the world has *ever* experienced.

Bible prophecies tell us that the period leading up to the Great Tribulation will be a time of increasing religious deception, religious persecution, demonic miracles, extreme natural disasters like storms and earthquakes, economic distress, famines, disease epidemics, violence of all kinds, intense conflicts in the Middle East, localized wars plus great regional wars, and other terrifying events and threats. These events will be further explained in future lessons.

But there is real hope beyond all of this. Prophecy is gloom and doom for those who won't submit to God. But temporary fear is a healthy thing when it motivates us to put our faith in God! Keep reading, and you will learn lots of good news—the good news about how God wants to guide, protect and bless you and give you eternal life if you respond to Him.

Why will God allow humanity to bring all that suffering on itself?

Hebrews 12:5-11

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Humanity has chosen to reject God's way and to follow the way of get—the way that leads to suffering and death. Mankind is set on the way of self-destruction, and God will intervene, first to chasten, then to save humanity from itself.

When God "chastens" (punishes) mankind, He does it *out of love* to teach us humans to repent of our sins and to turn to Him willingly. God wants His children to be those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

Can we have God's blessings and protection during the end time?

Luke 21:36

Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

2 Peter 2:9

...then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment...

The Bible gives us many examples of God miraculously protecting His people or providing a way of "escape" during times of danger. We can expect to see many such miracles in the future! At other times, some of God's people have died as martyrs because of their beliefs.

Keep these two comforting scriptures in mind:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

"In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 56:11).

God's people don't need to be fearful of the conditions in the world, for God is our protector and Great Shepherd! Even the thought of death need not terrify us because we know we will be resurrected to eternal life!

For more about being "counted worthy to escape all these things," see the "Apply Now" section below.

Is there any hope for our loved ones who have not had any interest in the Bible?

1 Timothy 2:3-4

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Yes, there is! God "desires *all* men to be saved" and is "not willing that any should perish but that *all* should come to repentance" (emphasis added). Be assured that every person who has ever lived will eventually have his or her opportunity to learn and live by God's truth. God's great plan of salvation will be accomplished through the resurrections, and this will all be explained in future lessons.

Lesson 3: The Valuable Benefits and Purposes of Bible Prophecy!

Why is Bible prophecy important? Why did God reveal so much about the future through His prophets? What are God's reasons for wanting us to understand the prophecies?

A United Church of God member in Texas tells about her experiences learning about prophecy:

"When I began to understand the Bible and Bible prophecy, I thought wow—so many of my big questions are being answered!

"It was so *comforting and inspiring* to learn God's long-range plan for mankind. What a blessing that God lets us know in advance what to expect and how we can be prepared. What I had been taught in another church left me somewhat confused and fearful. Now the more I understand what the Bible teaches about the past, present and future, the more peace I feel.

"More and more I could see that God is in control, He can protect us from anything, He has a time for everything, and He knows what's best for each of us. Now that I know the great examples of faith in Bible history and God's promises and plan for the future, I have courage, peace and confidence that God is working out His will in my life."

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God's Prophets Did Much More Than Pass Along Predictions!

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore all Bible prophecies came from God. God's prophets were merely the *messengers* who spoke and wrote down the revelations from God. Some prophecies apply to nations, some to individuals and some to both. Many prophecies are *conditional*, especially those that apply to individuals. What does that mean? We will see.

People mistakenly assume that the prophets were only *predicting*. No, they had a *dual* role. God sent them to *predict* and to *preach* (for example, see Jonah 3:2-4). And what did they preach? They preached that people should repent of their sins and turn to God—"to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life" (Ezekiel 3:18).

God will bless and save all who repent of their sinful ways and turn to a life of obeying and serving Him. You see, God's prophets were sent to *motivate* people with a "carrot and stick" message. Prophecies included both *warnings* about punishments and *promises* of rewards.

In Deuteronomy 11:26-28, we read a concise summary of the kind of message God's prophets were to preach: "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God."

Let's now examine some of God's main purposes for giving us His prophecies.

Is fulfilled prophecy a proof of God?

Isaiah 46:9-11

"Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it."

God said, "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning... Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass." As we'll see in Lessons 5 and 6 in this series, we have plenty of proof of the supreme power of God. His many, many prophecies always come to pass *exactly* as He foretold *because He makes them happen!*

Is fulfilled prophecy a proof of the Bible?

2 Peter 1:20-21

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

At times, God's prophets just wrote down what they heard God say to them. At other times, they "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Every single biblical prophecy of a past event has been fulfilled perfectly, and we will examine some of them in future lessons. As future prophesied events happen, we will have even more proof of the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Does knowledge of prophecy help us to interpret world news and events?

Mark 13:28-37

"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.

"Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening,

at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

Yes, it enables us to intelligently "watch" with understanding. Because Bible prophecy is accurate and reliable, it gives us a foundational worldview and framework by which we can analyze the news. By it, we are able to sort out what has long-range significance from the flood of news that does not. Jesus told His disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see" (Luke 10:23-24).

Does advance knowledge prepare us so we will be calm and courageous when hardships come?

John 16:1, 4

"These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble...

"But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you."

"When the time [of trials] comes," Christ does not want us to "stumble"—to be shocked, to panic or to fall away. This is a major reason our loving God "reveals His secret to His servants" (Amos 3:7). When God's prophecies come to pass exactly as He foretold, that strengthens our faith to trust Him for care and protection.

Does God give people understanding and warnings before holding them accountable?

Luke 12:47-48

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

God is completely fair and merciful. He holds people accountable for what they know, being willing to overlook their "times of ignorance" (Acts 17:30). God will not finally judge anyone without first teaching and warning about the dire consequences of sin as well as the wonderful results of living God's way. See also James 4:17 and John 9:41.

What primary commission did Jesus give to His disciples and His Church?

Mark 16:15

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

The "gospel" means *good news* because it is primarily about Christ's coming to establish "the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14). But the message also includes a "witness" or warning about the end-time trials leading up to Christ's return (Matthew 24:14). As John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ's first coming (see Matthew 3:1-3; Luke 3:2-6), this preaching of the gospel prepares the way for Christ's second coming.

Christ's commission to His Church can be compared to a "watchman." What does that mean?

Ezekiel 33:1-7, 11

Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life.

"But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'

"So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me...

"Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"

A watchman was to sound a warning whenever he saw danger approaching. Today, God's Church serves in the role of spiritual "watchmen." This partly explains why prophecy is so important and why God wants His Church to teach and preach those prophecies. God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Lesson 4: How You Can Correctly Understand God's Prophecies and Promises!

God created us with a desire to look ahead and to wonder about our future. So it's exciting to study and learn Bible prophecy! We will recommend many valuable resources to guide you to a good understanding. This lesson will be a good start.

Bernita of Washington tells this story:

As a child, I faithfully attended church services every Sunday with my parents and siblings. We were taught many of God's truths and I tried to obey them and my parents.

When I was 15 years old, I developed rheumatic fever, and it required many weeks of bed rest and medication to regain my health. During this time, I read many books, one of which was the Bible. One day, as I was reading the book of Isaiah, I realized that my church never had studies or sermons to explain how these wonderful and beautiful words applied to all of us. I wondered, when would the world be such a wonderful place when all people would dwell safely together in peace and the wild animals would be tamed and all diseases would be healed? I felt I wasn't being taught the "whole story" of the Bible.

Answers to these questions did not come until I was 28 years old and married with four young children. Through much study and repentance and baptism, I finally understood that the whole Bible needs to be accepted as God's truth and that I cannot just believe and accept what I felt was convenient to me or limit the truth to what I was taught as a child.

Only then did I begin to understand the promises and prophecies of Isaiah and other prophetic books of the Bible. Finally, I knew that God has wonderful promises that He will keep, prophecies that tell of Christ's return to this earth, when He will begin a time of restoration and peace and healing and set up His Kingdom on this earth! Then, at last, I finally knew the "whole story"!

[Share Your Story](#)

Let the Bible Interpret the Bible!

One awesome proof that the Bible is divinely inspired is its perfect *harmony* and *consistency* all the way through, even though it was penned by about 40 writers over a span of 1,500 years! *The Bible never contradicts itself!* Even places that appear at first glance to be contradictions are found, through more thorough study, to not be contradictory after all.

Many people dismiss most prophecy as being merely allegorical or symbolic. An important general rule is to take everything the Bible says as literally true except where it is clearly

symbolic. And remember that everything in the Bible is important. If there is a symbol, then try to determine what it is symbolizing.

These days you can hear many people quoting Bible verses trying to support a point of view, but often they are twisting the meaning as people did even in Peter and Paul's day (2 Peter 3:15-16). Instead, when we are trying to understand a prophetic scripture, we should look for the same subject in other parts of the Bible and never accept an interpretation that is contradictory. For example, we are able to understand much about the book of Revelation by comparing it with the book of Daniel, Jesus' Olivet Prophecy and other parts of the Bible.

You've probably heard the saying, "History tends to repeat itself." That's true partly because human nature stays the same and partly because God chooses to repeat His actions in the ways He deals with mankind. Thus Bible prophecy is often *dual*. Even when a prophecy was fulfilled in *most* ways in the *past*, it often has *another* and *more complete* fulfillment in the *latter* days. Therefore, by studying the Bible and history to see how God fulfilled a prophecy in the past, we can better understand how God will likely fulfill it in the future.

Now let's take a look at some other keys for understanding Bible prophecy.

What is the number one focus of Bible prophecy?

Luke 24:44-45

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

Luke 10:22-24

"All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."

It is Jesus the Christ (the Messiah). The Bible has many prophecies of His first appearance to become our Savior and His second appearance as glorified King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15). During His earthly ministry, His example and His message also revealed what God the Father is like.

When Jesus preached about prophecy, what was His number one focus?

Mark 1:14-15

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Acts 1:3

...to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The word "gospel" means *good news*. The primary message that Jesus and the apostles preached was "the gospel of the kingdom of God." That included God's offer of eternal life so that we can "inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). Indirectly, the entire Bible is pointing toward the Kingdom of God.

Can we determine exactly *when* prophesied events will happen?

Matthew 24:3, 32-36

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"...

"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

No! Trying to predict exactly *when* prophetic events will happen is a waste of time. Focus on *what* and *why*, more than *when*. We live in a dangerous and unpredictable world, so we need to always focus on being spiritually "ready" to meet our Maker, whether at our death or at His coming (Matthew 24:44).

Do we need to learn about the origins and identities of major nations?

Acts 26:7

To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

James 1:1

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

Yes, we do. End-time Bible prophecy refers to nations by their ancient and tribal names that often are not used today. There is value in learning history, especially Bible history. We soon learn that tribes of people that are assumed to be "lost" are not really lost! Paul and James knew where "the twelve tribes" of Israel were located. Jesus even made it clear that they will have a prominent role after He returns (Matthew 19:28).

Bible prophecy is largely focused on the end time, so we should expect the Bible to have prophecies of past and present superpowers like Britain and the United States. Our well-

researched free booklet The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy traces the biblical and historical origins of these important modern nations.

Are prophecies, especially ones about individuals, often conditional?

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Yes, what happens to you and me depends on whether we choose to obey or disobey God. God said, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life*" (emphasis added). It's a matter of cause and effect. God lets us choose what to sow, but we will reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7-8).

What necessary change in the nature of man does prophecy point to?

Ezekiel 36:26-27

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

By nature we have a "heart of stone." We tend to be hard-hearted, stubborn and "stiff-necked" (Deuteronomy 9:6). That has to change. Once God has opened our minds, He helps us with His Spirit to see ourselves as we really are. He leads us to repent of our sins so He can forgive us. He helps us to become spiritually converted. After conversion, a person begins to have a "heart of flesh"—a soft, humble and teachable heart. Then God's promise is fulfilled: "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33).

What are some things to consider to have a spiritually balanced interest in prophecy?

Mark 13:23

"But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand."

Matthew 22:35-40

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Some people mostly ignore Bible prophecy and miss out on its benefits—the biblical worldview, the motivation and the comfort it can give us. Concerning His prophetic teaching, Jesus said to "take heed." Other people dwell too much on technical aspects of Bible prophecy like trying to

figure out exact dates and neglect matters much more important like loving God and loving other people.

When you are reading prophetic sections of the Bible, be sure to meditate on the spiritual lessons that go with it. For example, many people assume that the book of Revelation is all predictions. In actuality, it is full of valuable spiritual teaching.