

For 2000 years people have wondered about the events of the end times and when Jesus will return. Terms such as *millennium*, *tribulation*, *666*, and *antichrist* are used in the media and the supermarket tabloids, but questions remain:

Will Jesus return physically and reign on earth for 1000 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?

There are four different views of end-times events, but all share some key points:

- Jesus will come again for those who love him
- Jesus calls his followers to be ready all the time
- No one knows the day or the hour

What Jesus taught about the End

Jesus promised His disciples that He would come again. Before his return there would be:

“**Birth Pangs**” (Events before “the signs” of the end)

- Many will claim to be the Messiah
- People will be deceived by these messiahs
- Wars, famine, earthquakes, pestilence
- Believers in Christ persecuted and killed
- Believers will witness of Jesus to kings
- Many will turn away from the faith
- Betrayals by parents, brothers, and friends
- Increase in wickedness
- Fearful events and signs from heaven

“The Signs” of the End

- Jerusalem surrounded by armies
- The “abomination of desolation”
- Great tribulation like never before
- Jerusalem will be trampled on by Gentiles
- False prophets perform signs, miracles
- Sun darkens, moon doesn’t shine, stars fall
- Severe ocean activity disturbs the nations
- People will faint with terror
- Jesus will appear in the sky
- The trumpet will sound
- Angels will gather God’s elect

(Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21)

What Paul taught about the End

1. The Lord will descend
2. The dead in Christ will rise first
3. The living will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord and be with Him forever
4. “Don’t believe those who say the Day of the Lord has already come”
5. The Day of the Lord will be preceded by:
 - Rebellion
 - The revelation of the man of lawlessness who will:
 - ◆ Oppose and exalt himself over God
 - ◆ Set himself up in God’s Temple
 - ◆ Proclaim to be God
 - ◆ Be revealed when the one holding him back is taken out of the way
 - ◆ Be accompanied by satanic, counterfeit miracles
 - ◆ Deceive those that do not love the truth
6. When Jesus comes, the man of lawlessness will be overthrown and destroyed. (1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 2)

Jesus said, “...No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Matthew 24:36

“...Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Matthew 24:12-13

Church age The time period from the beginning of the church (about AD 30) until Jesus Christ returns for everyone who has trusted in Him, as promised in John 14.

Eschatology Study of the Bible’s teachings about the events leading up to the second coming of Jesus. (from Greek, *eschatos* [final] + *logos* [word or idea] = “a word about the final things”)

First coming of Christ The earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ, about 4 BC-AD 30.

Millennium The 1000-year reign of Jesus on earth, described in Revelation 20:4-6. (from Latin, *mille*, thousand)

- **Premillennial:** The belief that the millennium is a *future* event and Jesus will return *before* (pre-) the millennium.
- **Amillennial:** The millennium is a symbol of Christ’s present reign among his people.
- **Postmillennial:** Jesus will return *after* (post-) the millennium. The millennium is a time in which most of the world submits to Jesus, and peace and justice reign.

Preterism Preterism is the eschatological viewpoint that suggests some, if not all, biblical prophecies about the end times refer to specific events that happened in the first century. Some preterist interpretations include: the antichrist refers to Emperor Nero; the tribulation refers to the Jewish War; and the Destruction of the Temple occurred in AD 70. (from Latin, *praeter*, past)

Rapture Event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, when Jesus Christ returns for his people. Dispensational premillennialists believe that the rapture and the second coming of Jesus are *two separate events*. They place the rapture *before* the great tribulation and the second coming *after* the tribulation. Historic premillennialists, amillennialists, and postmillennialists understand the second coming of Jesus and the event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 as the same event. (from Latin, *raptus*, carry away)

Second coming of Christ The bodily return of Jesus to earth to reign as king.

Tribulation, Great Time when disasters happen on the earth and people who are faithful to Jesus suffer intense persecution, possibly lasting seven years (Rev. 7:14). Premillennialists place the great tribulation near the end.

Dispensational premillennialists typically believe that the tribulation will last exactly seven years.

Many historical premillennialists view the reference to “seven years” as a symbol of the completeness of God’s dealings with the world as the end of time approaches.

Most amillennialists and postmillennialists treat the tribulation as a symbol of calamities and persecutions that have occurred throughout church history.

Some amillennialists and postmillennialists are *preterists*—they believe that the great tribulation occurred between AD 63 and AD 70, during the Jewish-Roman conflict that ended with the destruction of the Jewish Temple.

What is dispensational premillennialism?

Dispensational premillennialism is the belief that Jesus will come back to earth after a seven-year tribulation and will rule during a 1000-year millennium of peace on earth (see "Important Words to Know" for definitions).

In addition, God will still give the nation of Israel the land described in Genesis 15:18 (from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates—the full extent of King Solomon's kingdom).

Most dispensational premillennialists are "pre-tribulationists"; they understand Revelation 4:1-2 to refer to "the rapture." The rapture is understood as the event when Christ removes Christians from the earth before the great tribulation begins.

Some dispensational premillennialists, known as mid-tribulationists, believe the rapture will occur during the great tribulation.

What do dispensational premillennialists emphasize?

Dispensational premillennialists believe the rapture and the second coming of Jesus are *two separate events*. The rapture comes *before* the great tribulation, and the second coming occurs *after* it. During the seven years of tribulation, natural disasters and wars will occur on earth, and people who are faithful to Jesus will suffer intense persecution. Dispensational premillennialists emphasize literal interpretations of Revelation.

According to dispensational premillennialists . . .

- During the great tribulation, many Jews will turn to Jesus Christ.
- God's promises to Abraham and his offspring were unconditional; therefore, the Jews will still receive the land described in Genesis 15:18. The establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 fulfilled a key end-times prophecy.
- All references to Israel in Revelation refer to the nation of Israel.

What Scriptures seem to support dispensational premillennialism?

- God will remove Christians before the outpouring of His wrath during the tribulation—1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 3:10.
- God's promises to Abraham and his offspring were unconditional—Genesis 15:7-21.
- The church is not specifically mentioned between Revelation 4 and 19.

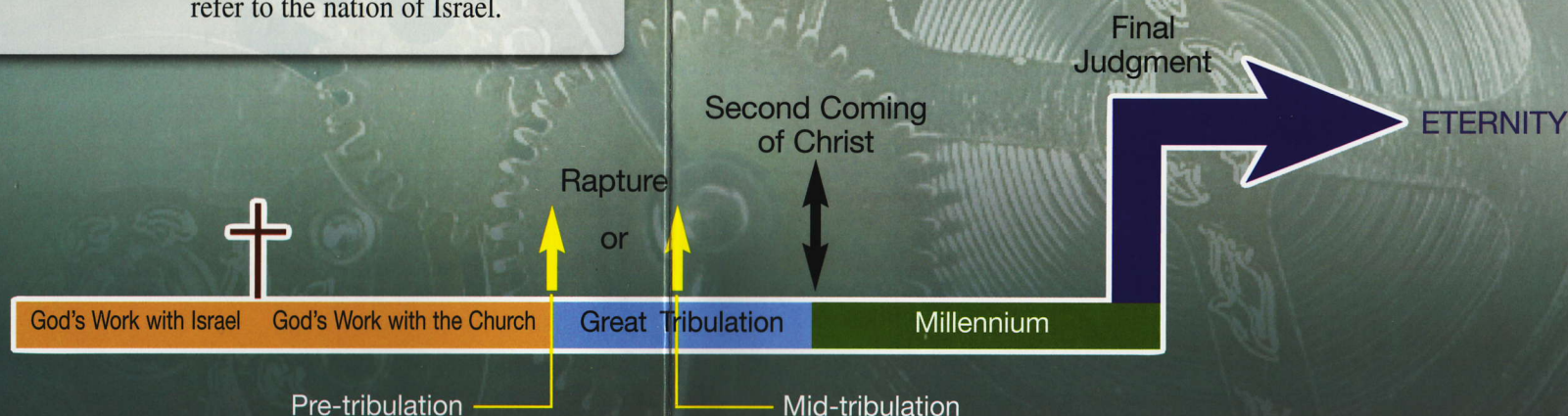
When has dispensational premillennialism been popular?

This view emerged in the 1800s among the Plymouth Brethren (group of fundamentalist Bible Churches founded in the 1820s). Dispensational premillennialism increased in popularity in the late 1800s and remains widespread today.

Prominent dispensational premillennialists include:

J. Nelson Darby, C.I. Scofield, Harry A. Ironside, Gleason Archer, Donald G. Barnhouse, Hal Lindsey, Chuck Smith, John MacArthur, Charles Ryrie, Charles Stanley, Norman L. Geisler, and Tim LaHaye.

Tim LaHaye wrote that there are "two keys to understanding the prophetic Word of God. First, one must interpret the Bible literally unless the context provides good reason to do otherwise. Second, we must understand that Israel and the church are distinct! If a person fails to acknowledge these two facts of Scripture, all discussion and argument is fruitless. The issue is not so much prophecy as it is one's view of Scripture and the church."



What is historic premillennialism?

Historic premillennialism is the belief that Christians will remain on the earth during the great tribulation. The tribulation will purify the churches by rooting out false believers, and the second coming of Christ will precede the millennium. Historic premillennialism believes that the church has replaced the nation of Israel as God's covenant people. Also known as "covenant premillennialism," historic premillennialism treats a 1000-year millennium as a literal future event.

The earliest church fathers envisioned an earthly millennium. During these first centuries of Christian faith, the church's theologians anticipated not only the physical reign of Jesus Christ following a time of testing but also the restoration of all creation to its original goodness in a millennial kingdom.

Historic premillennialism began to fade as later church fathers— influenced by Greek philosophers who said the physical world was evil—focused on the spiritual aspects of Christ's reign and downplayed the idea of an earthly millennium.

What do historic premillennialists emphasize?

Historic premillennialists try to balance symbolic and literal interpretations of Revelation, emphasizing both what the book meant to first-century readers and how it might apply for people's lives today.

The Apostle John & the End Times

Papias of Hierapolis described the millennial kingdom in this way, claiming that his words came from the apostle John himself: "The days will come in which vines will grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in each one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes. ... When any of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, 'I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me!'"

According to historic premillennialists . . .

- God's promises of land and blessings to Abraham and his offspring were conditional promises, based on their obedience. Israel's persistent disobedience violated God's covenant with them.
- God has maintained a covenant of grace throughout the Old and New Testaments with all who trusted in Him. These believers—embodied today in the Church—are the true Israel (see Romans 9:6-8; Galatians 6:16).
- Most references to "Israel" in Revelation refer symbolically to the church.

What Scriptures seem to support historic premillennialism?

- The revealing of the Antichrist precedes Christ's return— 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4.
- The tribulation will root out false members from the churches—Revelation 2:22-23.
- The saints are on earth during

the tribulation—Revelation 13:7.

- God's promises to Abraham and his offspring were conditional— Gen. 22:18; 1 Chron. 33:8; Is. 1:19-20; Jer. 7:6-7.
- The New Testament frequently uses "Israel" and "the twelve tribes" to refer to Christians—Matt. 19:28, 29; Rom. 9:6-8.

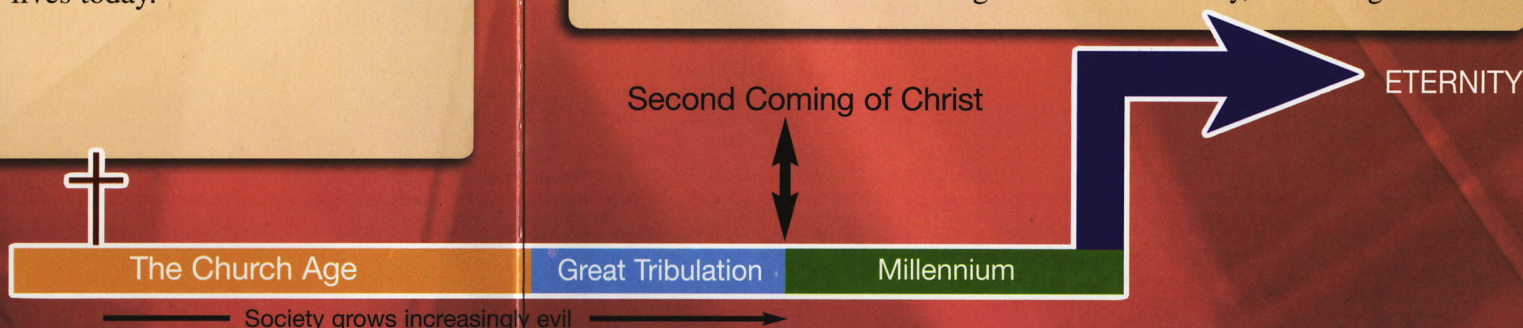
When has historic premillennialism been popular?

Historic premillennialism seems to have been the earliest view of the end-times among Christians who lived just after the apostles.

Prominent historic premillennialists include:

Many early church fathers—including Lactantius (240-320), Irenaeus (130-200), Justin Martyr (100-165), and probably Papias (60-130), a disciple of the apostle John—embraced historic premillennialism.

Modern supporters include scholars such as David Dockery, John Warwick Montgomery, George R. Beasley-Murray, Robert Gundry, and George E. Ladd.



There are many prophecies in the Bible about the end times and the events that lead up to it. These are the four major interpretations that Christians have held over the past 2000 years. For a definition of terms, see pages 2, 12, and 13.

	Dispensational Premillennialism	Historic Premillennialism	Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
Will Jesus return physically?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
When will Jesus return?	After a 7-year tribulation; before the millennium.	After a 7-year tribulation; before the millennium.	Anytime; a detailed time frame is not important.	After the millennium.
Do the rapture and second coming of Christ occur at the same time?	No, they are events separated by either 7 years (pre-tribulation rapture) or 3½ years (mid-tribulation rapture).	Yes	Yes	Yes
Will there be a Great Tribulation?	Yes	Yes	The tribulation occurs any time Christians are persecuted or wars and disasters occur.	The tribulation is the conflict between good and evil since Jesus' death and resurrection.
Will Christians suffer during the tribulation?	Christians are either raptured before the tribulation (pre-tribulation rapture) or 3½ years into the tribulation (mid-tribulation rapture).	Yes, Christians will go through the tribulation and endure suffering and persecution for the cause of Christ.	Yes, Christians will suffer and endure persecution until Jesus returns; persecution will increase in the end.	Yes, Christians are called to share the Gospel, and tribulation will occur when that Gospel is opposed.
Will there be a literal 1000-year millennium?	Yes, after the 7-year tribulation, Christ will return and reign for 1000 years.	Yes, after the tribulation, Christ will return and reign for 1000 years.	No, the millennium refers to the reign of Christ in the hearts of His believers.	No, the millennium refers to a period of peace when the Gospel reaches all people.
Who is saved?	Christians only	Christians only	Christians only	Christians only
Is the modern state of Israel relevant to the prophecies in Revelation?	Yes	No	No	No
When was this view most held?	Became popular about 1860. Has increased in popularity.	The earliest view of the end times, emerging at the end of the first century.	Popularized in AD 400. Continues to be accepted today.	May have been popular as early as AD 300. Less popular today.



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What is amillennialism?

Amillennialism is the belief that Jesus will come again some day. There is no literal 1000-year rule by Jesus on earth; rather, the millennium symbolizes Christ's reign in the lives of His people from the beginning of the church until His second coming.

Christ's triumph over Satan through His death and resurrection in AD 30 restrained the power of Satan on the earth (Revelation 20:1-3). Persecution of Christians (tribulation) will occur until Jesus comes again, as will the expansion of God's kingdom (the millennium).

When Christ returns, He will immediately defeat the powers of evil, resurrect the saved and the unsaved, judge them, and deliver them to their eternal destinies.

What do amillennialists emphasize?

Many amillennialists believe that the book of Revelation consists of seven sections. Instead of dealing with successive time-periods, these seven sections use apocalyptic language to

describe the entire time from Jesus' first coming until his second coming in seven different ways.

Amillennialists tend to emphasize the historical context of Revelation and what the book meant to first-century readers.

According to amillennialists . . .

- The great tribulation represents disasters, wars, and persecutions that have occurred throughout church history.
- Most references to "Israel" in Revelation are symbolic references to the people of God on earth (compare Romans 9:6-8 and Galatians 6:16).
- In apocalyptic literature, numbers represent concepts, not literal statistics. For example, six symbolizes incompleteness, seven represents completeness, ten indicates something that is extreme but limited, twelve represents the perfection of God's people, and 1,000 symbolizes a great amount or long period of time.

What Scriptures seem to support amillennialism?

- The Bible frequently uses the number 1,000 figuratively (Psalm 50:10; 90:4; 105:8; 2 Peter 3:8).
- The first resurrection (Revelation 20:4) could refer to the spiritual resurrection (the regeneration or new birth) of persons who trust Christ (Romans 11:13-15; Ephesians 2:1-4).
- The second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the saved and the unsaved will occur at the same time (Daniel 12:2-3; John 5:28-29).
- The saints are on earth during the tribulation—Revelation 13:7.

Augustine of Hippo wrote in *The City of God*, "During the thousand years when the devil is bound, the saints also reign for a thousand years. Without any doubt, these two time-periods are identical and point to the time between the first and second coming of Christ."²

When has amillennialism been popular?

Amillennialism became popular in the fifth century—mainly promoted by St. Augustine. Amillennialism has remained widespread throughout church history.

Prominent amillennialists include:

The Protestant reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin as well as evangelical theologians such as E.Y. Mullins, Abraham Kuyper, G.C. Berkouwer, Herschel Hobbs, Stanley Grenz, and J. I. Packer. Many students of church history believe that the church father Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was the first amillennialist.



What is postmillennialism?

Postmillennialism is the belief that the second coming of Christ will occur after the millennium. The millennial reign described in Revelation 20:1-6 represents a long time period when, through the preaching of the Gospel, most of the world will submit to Jesus Christ. During this time, Satan will have no power over the earth, and evil regimes will collapse (Rev. 19:19-20:3). A period of great tribulation may precede the millennium. Some charismatic Christians embrace *dominion postmillennialism*. This teaches that, through the contemporary charismatic movement, God has been binding Satan. When the church recognizes the fullness of its power through the Holy Spirit, the church will establish God's kingdom on earth and usher in the millennium, a golden age.

What do postmillennialists emphasize?

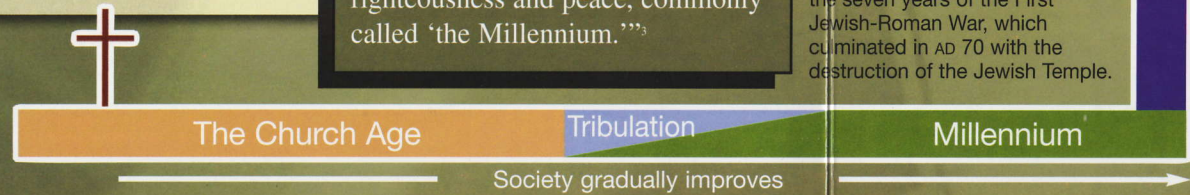
Postmillennialists place great confidence in the preaching of the Gospel; they contend that the Gospel will eventually spread in such a way that nearly everyone in the world will turn to Jesus Christ. One Scripture cited in favor of this view is Mark 3:27; Augustine understood this verse

to mean that before Jesus can claim his kingdom, those that are lost (the "possessions" of Satan, "the strong man") must come under the control of Jesus. Postmillennialists believe that this golden age is described in such Scriptures as Psalm 2:8, Isaiah 2:2-4, Jeremiah 31:34, Daniel 2:35, and Micah 4:1-4. Postmillennialists tend to emphasize the power of the Gospel to transform societies and individual lives.

According to postmillennialists...

- During the millennium, Christ will rule the earth through His Spirit and through His Church; He will not, however, be physically present on the earth.
- The resurrection depicted in Revelation 20:4 represents the spiritual regeneration of people who trust Jesus Christ.

Loraine Boettner described postmillennialism as "that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world is eventually to be Christianized, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the end of a long period of righteousness and peace, commonly called 'the Millennium.'"



- The second coming of Christ, the final conflict between good and evil, the defeat of Satan, the physical resurrection of all people, and the final judgment will occur together, immediately after the millennium (Revelation 20:7-15).

Which Scriptures seem to support postmillennialism?

- Every ethnic group will receive the Gospel before the second coming (Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10).
- The first resurrection (Revelation 20:4) could refer to the spiritual resurrection (the regeneration or new birth) of persons who trust Christ (Romans 11:13-15; Ephesians 2:1-4).
- The second coming of Christ and the resurrection of all people, saved and unsaved, will occur at the same time (Daniel 12:2-3; John 5:28-29).

When has postmillennialism been popular?

The earliest writer who was clearly postmillennialist was Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202), although many

historians believe that earlier church leaders such as Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Augustine of Hippo were also postmillennialists.

During the 1800s, postmillennialism increased in popularity. Some Christians even believed that the increased work of missionaries throughout the world represented the beginning of the millennium.

During the early 1900s, a world war and an economic depression raised questions in many people's minds about whether the world was actually becoming a better place, and postmillennialism diminished in popularity.

Prominent postmillennialists include:

Famous preachers such as Jonathan Edwards and Charles Haddon Spurgeon as well as such theologians as B.B. Warfield, Augustus H. Strong, Charles Hodge, R.L. Dabney, Loraine Boettner, and R.C. Sproul.

Some postmillennialists view the tribulation as a brief time of persecution that occurs immediately before the millennium. Others, usually known as "preterists," believe that "great tribulation" describes the seven years of the First Jewish-Roman War, which culminated in AD 70 with the destruction of the Jewish Temple.

The Book of Revelation was written by Jesus' disciple, the apostle John, and tells of a vision he was given from the Lord.

The book addressed seven churches in Asia Minor (Turkey today). It encouraged believers who were experiencing persecution.

Revelation illustrates that God is in control and that all people were created to love and worship God their creator.

Terms in the Book of Revelation

666 Number of the beast, spelled out in Revelation 13:18 as *six hundred sixty-six*.

Greek and Hebrew didn't have a written system of numbers. Instead, they would either spell out the number, or they would write out the number using the letters in the alphabet.

For example, the first letter of the alphabet might represent the number one, and so on.

Many scholars have pointed out that, in Hebrew, the number of Caesar Nero's name can be 666 if written using "Neron," the Latin spelling of the name. (Nero reigned AD 54-68. He was the first emperor to engage in specific persecution of Christians.)

Perhaps the best approach to the number is to remember that *six* is a symbol of incompleteness; 666 would, therefore, indicate complete imperfection.

144,000 Group of believers who endure the great tribulation (Revelation 7:14).

Some believe that these persons are literally 144,000 Jewish persons—12,000 from each tribe—who embrace Jesus Christ as their Lord (see Revelation 7:4-9).

Others suggest that *Israel* and *twelve tribes* often refer to Christians (Romans 9:6-8; Galatians 6:16; James 1:1). Therefore, the number would point to God's people (symbolized by twelve tribes, twelve apostles, or both) multiplied by 1,000 (a number that symbolizes an extreme multitude or length of time)—in other words, the full number of those that belong to God.

Abomination of desolation An event that desecrates the Temple in Jerusalem and is a

signal to Jesus' followers that soon Jerusalem will be ruined. Mentioned in Matthew 24:15, it may refer to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 by the Romans, or Roman plans to set up a statue of the Emperor in the Temple in AD 40, or some future event.

Antichrist (from Greek, *antichristos*, in place of Christ) Anyone who denies what the apostles taught about Jesus Christ (1 John 2:18-22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). Specifically, the antichrist is a Satanic counterfeit of Jesus Christ, described as "lawless" and as a "beast" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8; Revelation 13:1-18; 17:3-17). The antichrist could be a specific person who rises to power during a time of tribulation or a symbol of false teachers and leaders who will arise when the end of the age draws near.

Apocalyptic literature (from Greek, *apokalypsis*, revealing) Type of literature that uses extravagant, symbolic imagery to describe God's ultimate triumph over evil. Apocalyptic passages appear in Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation.

Armageddon (from Hebrew, *Har-Megiddon*, Mount Megiddo) The city of Megiddo was located between the Plain of Jezreel and Israel's western coast. Deborah, Gideon, Saul, Ahaziah, and Josiah fought decisive battles near Megiddo—largely because the area around Megiddo is broad and flat. So the valley of Megiddo became the symbol of a point of decisive conflict.

Some believe that a literal battle will occur near Megiddo near the end of time. Others view the reference to Armageddon as a symbol of an ultimate conflict between spiritual forces of good and evil.

Babylon In the book of Revelation, the name "Babylon" is symbolic, yet interpretations vary:

1. **Jerusalem:** Jewish persons assisted the Romans in their persecution of Christians after AD 64. The fall of Babylon in Revelation 18 could be a symbolic reference to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.
2. **Rome:** After AD 70, Jewish writers often referred to Rome as "Babylon." "Babylon" may symbolize the political and religious

powers in every age that attempt to defy God and to persecute His people.

3. **One-world government and church:** "Babylon" may be a reference to a one-world government and one-world church that will emerge near the end of time.

Beasts, two Symbolic creatures described in Revelation 11:7 and 13:1-18.

The first beast: This creature rises from the sea and has ten horns and seven heads. The seven heads seem to point to Rome, the city known for its seven hills. Some interpreters understand this reference to Rome as a literal reference to a power that will arise from Rome near the end of time; others view it as a symbolic reference to the powers in every age that defy God's dominion and persecute God's people. The beast claims blasphemous names for itself—much like Domitian, emperor from AD 81 until 96, who demanded that he be addressed as "Lord and God." One of the horns seemed to have died but then returned to life—much like the false rumor that emerged after the death of Nero that he had come back to life.⁵

The second beast: This creature rises from the earth with horns like a lamb and a voice like a dragon—in other words, a satanic parody of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Some interpreters understand this creature as a literal leader who will encourage people to worship the first beast. Others view the second beast as a symbol of any religion in any time period that focuses worshipers on anything other than Jesus Christ.

Final judgment The event described in Revelation 20:11-15, when God resurrects all people, judges them from the great white throne, and delivers them to their eternal destinies.

Mark of the beast Indication of a person's allegiance to the teachings of the antichrist (Revelation 13:16-17). The people of God receive a similar mark, indicating their allegiance to Jesus (Revelation 7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Some biblical students believe that the mark of the beast will be an actual mark, required by the antichrist. (Between the Old and New

Testaments, some Jews were forced to be branded with the symbol of the god Dionysius.⁶) Other interpreters of Revelation understand the mark as a reference to someone's *actions* ("hand") and *beliefs* ("forehead"). "Hand" and "forehead" seem to carry this symbolic meaning in Exodus 13:9, 16.

Witnesses, two Two beings described in Revelation 11:1-14 who speak the truth about God before being killed and then resurrected. (1) Some persons believe that these two witnesses are two people who will appear during the tribulation, near the end of time. (2) Others view them as two biblical prophets—perhaps Moses and Elijah—that have been resurrected for the purpose of proclaiming God's truth during the tribulation. (3) Other interpreters see the two witnesses as symbols of the Law and the Prophets—both of these testified about Jesus and yet, this testimony was rejected, even to the point of killing those that appealed to this testimony (for example, Stephen in Acts 7). If so, the "resurrection" of the two witnesses would point to a time of final vindication, a point at which God demonstrates that the Law and Prophets did indeed testify about Jesus Christ.

Book of Revelation Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-8)
- II. The Vision (1:9-20)
- III. The Messages to Seven Churches (2-3)
- IV. The Heavenly Throne (4)
- V. The Scroll and the Lamb (5)
- VI. The Tribulation (6-18)
 - A. The Seven Seals and Six Trumpets (6-9)
 - B. The Angel with the Little Scroll (10)
 - C. The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)
 - D. The Seventh Trumpet (11:15-19)
 - E. The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon (12)
 - F. The First Beast (13:1-10)
 - G. The Second Beast (13:11-18)
 - H. The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-5)
 - I. The Three Angels (14:6-13)
 - J. The Harvest of the Earth (14:14-20)
 - K. The Seven Bowls (15-16)
 - L. The Judgment of Babylon (17-18)
- VII. Christ's Return and the Millennium (19-20)
- VIII. The New Heaven and New Earth (21:1-8)
- IX. The New Jerusalem (21:9-22:7)
- X. The Conclusion (22:8-21)