

A Short, Biblical Overview of Future Events

Geoffrey R. Kirkland
Christ Fellowship Bible Church

A hermeneutical & presuppositional note

When studying Bible prophecy, one must remember that God progressively revealed Himself in Scripture over the course of time. This is codified in the Scriptures -- both in the Old and New Testaments. When God made eternal covenants with the ethnic nation of Israel in the Old Testament, these covenants must *still* remain in tact *with the people that God originally made the covenant with* because of God's faithful and trustworthy character. When we interpret prophecy, then, we must begin the study with the *Old Testament* and then move to the *New Testament* rather than reading the Old Testament through the lens of the fuller revelation of the New Testament. This means that Israel always refers to ethnic Israel (both in the OT and NT, in every instance). The Old Testament prophets revealed much about the future kingdom where there would be great blessing, prosperity and protection for Israel -- and the nations! -- even though some of the chronological specifics don't come till later (e.g., New Testament revelation). Thus, to interpret Bible prophecy correctly, we must start with the Old Testament and build the foundation there so as to understand the authorial intent (=meaning) of these texts and then move to the New Testament for greater light, more details, and to fill in many of the gaps regarding the end-times schema. The approach of Bible prophecy that this simple overview takes is the futuristic approach. This will be spelled out simply in what follows.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE TIMING & PROGRESSION OF FUTURE EVENTS

#1) The "Catching Up" of Church-Age Saints to Meet Christ in the Air

The Word of God clearly reveals that the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will return again (1 Thess 5:9-10). This is foundational to biblical eschatology. The NT presents two distinct aspects of this "second coming" of Christ in the eschatological schema. There is a coming when Christ comes *to the clouds to catch up* (=seize suddenly and irresistibly) His saints, that is, those who are "*in Christ*" (=NT church-age believers who are alive) to meet Christ and those who have died *in Christ* in the air (1 Thess 4:16-17). There will be a most glorious union between believers and Christ Jesus in the clouds and thus they shall be together (1 Thess 4:17). This coming of Christ will be sudden, immediate coming that is likened to a blink of an eye (1 Cor 15:51-58). It will be a glorious coming of Christ *for His church* to rescue them, as promised, from the coming time of testing that will come upon the entire inhabited earth to test those who dwell on the earth (Rev 3:10; 1 Thess 1:9-10). This is a coming that could happen *at any moment* (=it is imminent) and thus church-age saints must always live with expectancy looking for the any-moment return of Christ!

#2) The 7-Year "Tribulation" Period to Judge the World & Prepare Israel for the Kingdom

The Bible reveals that what begins the final "week" -- the 7-year period of great testing -- is the making of a firm "covenant" between AntiChrist and Israel (Dan 9:27). This is what begins the period of great testing on the earth that will come upon the world. It is a time of Jacob's distress (Jer 30:7). It is called the "Day of the LORD" that will come from the Almighty to punish the world for its evil (Isa 13:6-11). The purpose of this 7-year period is two-fold: first, it is for God to bring distress upon all those who dwell on the earth because they have sinned against the Lord (Zeph 1:14-17) and, second, to protect the Jewish people, save the Jewish people, and prepare them for the coming kingdom (Ezek 36:22-32; Dan 11:35-39; Rom 11:25-27). The NT brings clarity in showing that this time of "tribulation" will be tremendously severe, worldwide, and so supernatural that all men will know that God is bringing judgments (Rev 6-16 -- the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments).

#3) The Second-Coming of Jesus Christ in Power & Great Glory

At the conclusion of the seven-year tribulation, as Jesus puts it, "immediately after the tribulation of those days", the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and he

will come on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory (Matt 24:29-30). Revelation 19 tells more of this magnificent coming as it states that Christ will come all the way to earth to bring judgment upon the nations (Rev 19:15). He will descend to the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:1-5) and He will come with His angelic host and with the redeemed of heaven and He will execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way (Jude 15). He will gather them to the "valley of decision" where he will sit to judge the nations and he will roar from zion and tread the wine press of His wrath (Joel 3:12-16; Rev 19:11-21; 2 Thess 1:5-10). Whereas the Lord only descended to the clouds in the catching up of the NT saints that occurred seven years earlier, now He descends all the way to earth in a much slower, more visible, unmistakable coming -- akin to lightning (Matt 24:27).

#4) The 1,000 Year Earthly Millennial Kingdom

After Jesus has returned to earth and after he has judged the nations, he welcomes true believers who have come to faith in the Tribulation period to come and inherit the kingdom that has been prepared for them (Matt 25:34). The OT speaks of this time of restoration (immediately following a time of cataclysmic and divine judgment) where Israel (the ethnic, Jewish nation) will be gathered from the nations (Isa 11:11-16) and Israel as a nation will enjoy the full benefits of the New Covenant that God made with the house of Israel and Judah (Jer 31:31) as they will fear God and obey Him (Jer 32:39-42). God promised that a "Branch" will execute justice and righteousness on the entire earth (Jer 33:14-18) and Israel will dwell securely among the nations (Ezek 37:24-28). The NT specifies the specifics of the duration of this kingdom -- it will last for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-7). The saints of God will reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:6). It will be a time of blessed joy, worldwide blessing, political justice, and Christ-centered kingship (Ps 2, 72, 110; Jer 23:1-6; 33:1-26) that will bring to fruition the confluence of *all* of the wonderful, irreversible, divine covenants that God made with Abraham (the land of Israel), with David (a glorious King who would rule), and with Israel in the New Covenant (regeneration and forgiveness to God's people).

#5) The Great White Throne Judgment Upon All the Unsaved of Human History

After the 1,000 year earthly Kingdom, Satan who has been bound for the entire 1,000 year kingdom period (Rev 20:1-3, 7) will be released and will gather together his minions for one last final revolt against Christ and he will immediately be seized and thrown into the everlasting lake of fire and brimstone (Rev 20:10). Christ will sit on His glorious throne to judge the world (John 5:22). He will sit on a Great, White Throne (Rev 20:11). Scores and multitudes of nations will be sovereignly brought before this sovereign Christ and He will judge them according to their deeds -- which are written in His books (Rev 20:12). If anyone's name is not found written in the Book of Life, they will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:11-15). This is the second death (Rev 20:15). The Word of God seems to indicate that this great white throne judgment is only a judgment for the *unsaved* of all of human history as there is no indication of the righteous being at this judgment. It is a sovereign judgment sentencing all nonbelievers who have ever lived into the everlasting torments of divine wrath in the lake of fire and brimstone where they will suffer the fury of God's just judgment forever and ever (Rev 14:11; Matt 25:46).

#6) The Eternal State: The Lake of Fire & the New Heavens/the New Earth

The hope of believers is to "forever be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:16-17) and to see the face of Christ and behold His righteousness forevermore (Ps 11:7; 17:15). Every true believer longs for the day to be in the real, bodily presence of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God where there are pleasures forevermore and fullness of joy (Ps 16:11). O for the dwelling of God to be among men, and for God to dwell among them forever and ever is the sure foundation of the believer's hope (Rev 21:3-4)! Believers will see the face of God and His name will be on their foreheads (Rev 22:4-5). Indeed, these blessed and hope-filled words are "faithful and true" (Rev 22:6). But all the unsaved -- the lost -- that is, those who are cowards, unbelievers, abominable, murders, sexually immoral, sorcerers, and idolaters and all lairs will find their place in the eternal lake of fire, which is the unending second death (Rev 21:7-8). May we as believers live for eternity (1 John 3:3) and urgently plead with sinners to repent of sin and believe in Christ alone for salvation and for deliverance from divine, everlasting wrath (Acts 17:30-31). Jesus said: "I am coming quickly" (Rev 22:12). Let us say with John, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20) and with the saints: "*Maranatha*" (1 Cor 16:22).