

Thoughts on the End Times

Throughout the last 2,000 years, most true Christians have held the belief that the majority of the book of Revelation, alongside the prophecies recorded in Matthew 24 and Daniel 9, were actually fulfilled around AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem. A careful analysis of Scripture, comparing the Old and New Testaments, seems to support that conclusion.

Most other viewpoints on Revelation have only surfaced in modern times. While that doesn't necessarily mean those views are wrong, it should at least cause us to cast doubt on the newer viewpoints and to study what has been believed by most Christians throughout many centuries. This brief introduction to the topic is intended to be a starting point for doing just that.

Revelation 1-18, Matthew 23-24, and Daniel 9 were fulfilled around AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem.

1. In Matthew 20-22, Jesus gives multiple parables and prophecies indicating that salvation is coming to the Gentiles, leading up to His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 23-24. The coming of Christ's worldwide, spiritual kingdom, replacing the old earthly kingdom of Israel, was completed with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ followed by the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. This marked the end of the age of the earthly Jewish kingdom.
2. The Roman Empire, led at first by the emperor Nero, brutally attacked Jerusalem during the period from AD 66 to 73. The suffering and hunger that they endured during that time is almost unimaginable. Once we understand that part of history, it is easy to see how many of the dire prophecies given in Revelation 6-11, Matthew 23-24, and Daniel 9 were fulfilled during this time. The words recorded in Matthew 23:36 – 24:2, in particular, specifically indicate that destruction would come upon Jerusalem and the temple during that generation.
3. The abomination of desolation pictures the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70, which took place roughly in the middle of Rome's seven-year war against the Jews. (Daniel 9, Matthew 23-24) In addition, though it may be either a literal or a symbolic number, the 144,000 who were sealed were true believers who God saved out of Judaism during this same period of time. (Revelation 7)
4. The Roman Empire was the last great beast—the last of the four great kingdoms on earth—which was replaced by the kingdom of Christ, beginning during this period of time. The greatest persecutor of Christians and Jerusalem was the emperor Nero. (Daniel 7, Revelation 13)

5. If Julius Caesar is included among this group (he essentially began the Roman Empire as we know it, though he was not given the actual title of emperor), Nero was the sixth of seven emperors, and the seventh only ruled for a short time. When translated in Hebrew, using the numbers represented by the Hebrew alphabet, Nero Caesar's name adds up to 666. (Revelation 13, 17)
6. The city of Babylon, the great prostitute, must represent Jerusalem. Only Jerusalem had a covenant relationship with God that the people broke. In essence, they prostituted themselves to other gods, idols, and lusts rather than remaining faithful to God. Neither the city of Rome, nor the Roman Catholic Church, ever had such a relationship with God that they could properly be called a prostitute. (Revelation 18-19)

From this perspective, only Revelation 19-22 and Matthew 25 refer to present-day and future events.

7. Prior to this time, Satan was given much more freedom by God to deceive the world, particularly the Gentile nations. Since this time, Satan's influence is greatly diminished because the gospel has been spread around the world. Of course, sin is still rampant, and Satan is still actively at work, but the church has a worldwide influence that simply did not exist before the period of AD 0-70 (when Christ came to earth, was crucified and resurrected, and His Kingdom fully came with the complete destruction of the temple and the old Jewish system of sacrifices).
8. With this in view, it seems most reasonable that the millennium represents the current church age—a long period of time (the 1,000 years being symbolic, not a literal number) beginning with the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. It is also possible that the millennium represents some other period, such as a 1,000-year period beginning in 1517 with the Reformation, or some future period of greater church influence on the world that has not yet begun.
9. Either way, Satan will make one last attempt to deceive the world at the end of time. We do not know for certain whether that is happening now, or if it these final events are still well in the future. No matter what, Christians must remain vigilant, following Christ and awaiting His return and the final judgment. We can eagerly look forward to the complete fulfillment of Revelation 20-22 and Matthew 25 with the final, ultimate victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death!

This very brief introduction to the topic was inspired by Dr. R.C. Sproul's video series "The Last Days According to Jesus" (freely available at ligonier.org) and "A Study of Biblical Eschatology" by G.I. Williamson (freely available at reformed.org).

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