

Eschatology: Many Maps, One Landscape

Introduction: Many Maps, One Landscape—and One True Word

If you grew up in a world before GPS existed, road trips meant using paper maps.

Many of us had multiple maps. Sometimes we would use the big fold-out map that showed the whole country or province, featuring only the fastest highways. Other times we'd use those detailed road atlases that showed smaller local roads and interesting places to visit.

Both maps show the same country—but they focused on different things. Depending on which map you used, the trip might feel very different.

Studying *eschatology* (the study of the end times) is a bit like this.

All Christians read the same Bible, but we sometimes focus on different things.

Some people focus on the past. Others focus on the future. Some look for patterns that happen again and again in history or look at it more symbolically. The Bible itself never changes, but our focus can change the journey.

Even so, every Christian who trusts Scripture agrees on the destination: Jesus will return, evil will be defeated, and God will make all things new.

The book of Proverbs says, “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out” (Proverbs 25:2).

When we study the end times, it's not to solve a puzzle, but to worship God and trust that He knows the way.

Why So Many Views?

Faithful Christians sometimes disagree about the end times because books like **Daniel**, **Ezekiel**, **Zechariah**, and **Revelation** are written in a special style called *apocalyptic literature* (which means “unveiling” or “revealing”).

This kind of writing uses symbols, numbers, and visions to show heavenly truth. It doesn't always describe things directly or literally. Some Christians read these symbols as pictures of real historical events. Others read them as images of spiritual truths that repeat in every age.

Both groups believe the Bible is true—they simply understand the language of prophecy in different ways.

That's why there are different *interpretations* (ways of understanding). It's not about who believes the Bible more—it's about how we understand what kind of writing it is.

Guardrails for the Journey

Before we explore the different views, we need to agree on the boundaries—things all faithful Christians believe about the end.

For over two thousand years, the Church has confessed these truths:

1. Christ will return personally and visibly.

Jesus said, *“They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matthew 24:30).

2. The dead will be raised bodily.

Paul writes, *“The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed”* (1 Corinthians 15:52).

3. There will be a final judgment.

Revelation 20 describes every person standing before God’s throne. For believers, it will confirm our forgiveness through Christ. For those who reject Him, it will show that they chose separation from God.

4. God will make all things new.

Revelation 21:1–5 promises a new heaven and a new earth, where God wipes away every tear.

His plan ends not in destruction, but in renewal and restoration.

Different Maps, Same Destination

Christians use four main “maps” or frameworks to understand Revelation: **The Preterist, Historicist, Futurist, and Idealist views.**

Each one looks at the same book but focuses on a different part of the story. Whichever we hold, we all agree on the ending:

“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

1. The Preterist View—“It's Already Happened”

This view says that many of the prophecies in Revelation already happened in the first few centuries after Christ—especially around AD 70, when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, or in the few generations after. However, there are two distinct versions—one which is historic and orthodox, and the other which is heretical, and not okay.

Partial (Orthodox) Preterism: Many prophecies are fulfilled, but Christ’s Second Coming, resurrection, and judgment (at minimum) are still future.

Full (Hyper) Preterism: Claims all prophecy is already fulfilled, even the resurrection. This view is not accepted as Christian, and is not appropriate for us to hold today.

Strengths: Preterism reminds us Revelation was written to real people facing persecution. It also reminds us that prophecy often has layers of meaning.

Weaknesses: If pushed too far, it makes Revelation sound only historical, not hopeful. Faithful Preterists should remember that God's promises are both fulfilled and still being fulfilled.

2. The Historicist View—"It's Unfolding Through History"

Each vision in Revelation (the seals, trumpets, and bowls) represents different events or eras in Christian history—empires rising and falling, the spread of the gospel, times of persecution, and reformations in the Church.

It was the dominant view for most of the Protestant era, with many Reformers, like Luther and Calvin reading Revelation this way, seeing it as a spiritual record of the Church's journey through history.

In this view, all Christians find themselves as part of the story and should expect to find their age described in Revelation.

Strengths: Helps believers see that God is active through all of history and that Christ reigns even now.

Weaknesses: Can lead to guessing which event matches which prophecy. Each generation thinks it is the last one. It can also miss Revelation's poetic structure and be used for accusation instead of worship.

3. The Futurist View — "It's Still to Come"

The **Futurist** view looks ahead to events that have not yet happened. It teaches that most of Revelation (chapters 4–22) describes events still in our future that will unfold over a fairly short period of time in the final period before Christ returns.

Two Types:

Classical Futurism – Believes Revelation's prophecies will happen at the end of time, but without dividing history into separate "eras."

Dispensational Futurism – Divides history into different "dispensations" (time periods). It usually teaches a "rapture" (when believers are taken to heaven before a seven-year tribulation) and then Christ's thousand-year reign on earth.

Unlike with Preterism, both views fall within the bounds of orthodox historic Christianity, and are acceptable for Christians to believe today.

Strengths: Keeps the Church watchful and hopeful. Reminds us Jesus will return bodily. Encourages holiness and mission.

Weaknesses: Can become speculative with dates and charts. Some versions divide Israel and the Church too sharply. Others promote escapism instead of faithful service.

4. The Idealist View—“It’s Always True”

The Idealist view sees Revelation as describing spiritual truths true in every age. Revelation pulls back the curtain to reveal the spiritual cycles behind the ongoing conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, but not necessarily specific events from a human perspective.

The symbols—like the Beast, the Dragon, and Babylon—represent *types* of evil that appear again and again in every generation. The book is not a calendar, but a window into what is always happening behind the scenes.

How It Differs from Historicism: Historicism sees a specific, chronological timeline of events; idealism sees repeating patterns of truth. Historicism says there are specific, one time fulfilments in history, while idealism says they can have many fulfilments in different eras, so Babylon represents human pride in every age, and the Beast represents rebellion against God in every form, etc.

Strengths: Reminds us that Revelation speaks to all believers in every time. Helps us see the spiritual battle behind earthly events.

Weaknesses: Can feel abstract or symbolic if not balanced by belief in a real future return of Christ.

Conclusion: The Common Hope Behind the Different Views

Each view offers a different “map” of the same story:

- **Preterism:** God has already acted.
- **Historicism:** God is still working.
- **Futurism:** God will finish His plan.
- **Idealism:** God’s truth always stands.

The destination is the same: Christ will return, the dead will rise, and God will make all things new (Revelation 21:5).

Next week, we will look at the millennial views—Premillennialism, Amillennialism, and Postmillennialism—but for now we remember that our unity is not in charts or dates, but in our shared hope in Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

Discussion Questions

1. What does the word eschatology mean, and why do Christians study it?
2. Which “guardrail” truth gives you the most hope?
3. Why should we focus on Christ more than on exact timelines?
4. How can hope in Jesus’ return change the way we live today?
5. What feelings come to your mind when you think about the end of the world?
6. How does believing that Jesus will return one day change the way you live today?
7. When life feels uncertain or chaotic, how does God’s control over history give you peace?
8. Which of the four views (*Preterist, Historicist, Futurist, Idealist*) feels most familiar to what you’ve heard before?
 - a. Which view do currently you lean towards?
 - b. Have any of the strengths or weaknesses we’ve thought about changed your perspective on any of these?
 - c. Do you think it is possible to incorporate elements of other views into your understanding?
9. Why do you think God chose to give us prophecy written in symbols and visions instead of plain instructions?
 - a. Does Jesus’ instruction that “*concerning that day and hour no one knows*” lead to hope or frustration when it comes to understanding the end times?
10. How does our hope in the “new heaven and new earth” (Revelation 21:1–5) affect the way we think about creation, justice, and suffering in this life?
11. What are some unhealthy attitudes Christians can have about the end times?
12. If Jesus returned tomorrow, what would you want Him to find you doing?

Eschatology FAQ: Understanding the Different Views of the End Times

“Behold, I am making all things new.” — Revelation 21:5

1. Why do Christians have different views about the end times?

The Bible’s end-times passages—especially in Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation—use a unique literary style called apocalyptic language. It communicates truth through symbols, visions, and images that point to real spiritual realities. Because of this, faithful Christians sometimes differ on how these symbols should be understood—whether as primarily past, present, or future. These differences don’t mean Scripture is unclear; they reflect our human limitations in understanding God’s infinite plan.

2. Which views are within the bounds of historic Christian belief?

Four major interpretive frameworks have been held by sincere believers through the centuries:

- **Preterist (partial):** Many prophecies were fulfilled in the first century, but Christ’s return and final judgment are still future.
- **Historicist:** Revelation describes the unfolding of Church history from the apostles to Christ’s return.
- **Futurist:** Most prophecies point to events still to come at the end of history.
- **Idealist:** Revelation portrays timeless spiritual truths—Christ’s victory over evil in every generation.

All four of these views can be held faithfully within orthodox Christianity as long as they affirm these core truths:

- Jesus Christ will personally and visibly return.
- The dead will be raised bodily.
- There will be a final judgment.
- God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

3. Which views fall outside biblical Christianity?

A few interpretations cross the line into heresy or serious error:

- **Full (or “Hyper”) Preterism**, which claims that all prophecy—including Christ’s return and the resurrection—has already happened. This denies the future hope of the gospel and contradicts Scripture’s clear teaching (e.g., 1 Cor 15:20–23).
- **Speculative Date-Setting**, which insists that Jesus will return on a specific date or event, or which makes specific interpretations of prophetic passages (such as the identity of the Antichrist, etc.) non-negotiable. Jesus Himself said no one knows the hour (Matt 24:36), and inspired Revelation to be written in a symbolic way.

- **Liberal or Non-Literal Symbolic Views**, which interpret the Bible's end-times language as purely metaphorical or mythological. These views deny the physical, historical realities of Jesus' return, the bodily resurrection, and the renewal of creation—reducing Christian hope to vague spiritual sentiment.
- **Overly Spiritualized or Gnostic Views**, which affirm eternal life but reject the *physical* resurrection of believers or the renewal of the material world. Scripture affirms that God's redemption includes both body and soul, heaven and earth (Romans 8:23; Revelation 21:1-5).
- **Consistent Eschatology (Albert Schweitzer)**, which argued that Jesus mistakenly expected the immediate end of the world and that His mission failed when it did not occur. This view denies both Christ's divine foreknowledge and the trustworthiness of Scripture, reducing the gospel to human idealism rather than divine revelation.
- **Extreme (Over-)Realized Eschatology**, which claims that all of God's kingdom promises were fulfilled *spiritually* in Jesus' ministry, leaving no future consummation. This view collapses the "already and not yet" tension of the New Testament and empties Christian hope of its forward-looking expectation of resurrection and renewal.

These positions move beyond interpretation into outright contradiction of the gospel message.

4. How should Christians with different eschatological views treat one another?

With humility, grace, and love. End-times theology is secondary, not salvific. While it affects how we view history and hope, it does not determine who belongs to Christ. Romans 14 reminds us not to pass judgment on disputable matters but to pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding. We can debate details vigorously while worshipping together joyfully, because the main thing—the return and reign of Jesus—is our shared hope.

5. Does Hudson's Hope Chapel hold an official position on these views?

As an evangelical church within the Baptist tradition, we affirm the full authority and trustworthiness of Scripture, and we joyfully confess the historic Christian hope: that Jesus Christ will personally, visibly, and bodily return to judge the living and the dead and to make all things new.

These are non-negotiable foundations of Christian hope. Beyond these essentials, however, we allow freedom for believers to hold differing interpretive frameworks—Preterist, Historicist, Futurist, or Idealist—while ensuring we remain within the bounds of historic orthodoxy.

With that said, it's important you know our teaching position. We teach from a platform that reflects what theologians often call an "already, but not yet" *eclectic inaugurated eschatology*. This sounds like a lot of theological language, but in simplest terms, it boils down to what is a Christ-centred, biblically balanced approach that harmonizes elements of the Preterist, Historicist, Futurist, and Idealist readings.

This is not a position of indecision or compromise but of intentional balance — a conviction that **each of the four major interpretive frameworks (Preterist, Historicist, Futurist, and Idealist)** contributes something valuable to our understanding of God’s Word, and that **each also contains weaknesses that become more apparent when treated in isolation.**

We affirm that:

- With the partial **Preterist**, we learn that Revelation and prophetic Scripture were first written to real believers in the first century, offering genuine comfort and warning in their own context.
- With the **Historist**, we see how God’s redemptive purposes continue to unfold across generations, as Christ builds His Church through history.
- With the **Idealist**, we recognize that Revelation’s symbols reveal ongoing spiritual realities—the recurring struggle between the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of the world—truths that are always relevant to believers in every age.
- With the **Futurist**, we hold firm that there remain literal, future fulfillments yet to come: the personal return of Christ, the bodily resurrection, final judgment, and the renewal of creation.

Taken together, these perspectives form a fuller picture of the same inspired Word—one that honours the past, speaks to the present, and looks forward in hope to the future.

Put simply, this view expects that many of these prophecies first found fulfillment within the lifetimes of the original believers to whom they were written (alongside the partial Preterist). At the same time, it holds that Christians in every generation should be able to recognize their own world and experience within these same passages—both as enduring spiritual realities (as the Idealist observes) and as concrete historical fulfillments that unfold throughout time (as the Historicist emphasizes). It also holds open the reality that certain prophecies may have multiple layers of fulfillment, each revealing more of God’s redemptive plan. Yet above all, it looks forward in hope to the final, ultimate fulfillment of these apocalyptic promises at the return of Christ.

This view, with multiple subsequent and progressive fulfillments of the same prophecy (each intended within God’s original design, not arbitrary re-applications), is wholly consistent with Jesus and the disciples, who often interpreted many Old Testament prophecies. Jesus regularly expanded and reapplied these prior prophecies, including some that were considered already fulfilled. For example, Hosea 1:1, 2 Samuel 7, Isaiah 53, Exodus 12, Psalm 16, 118, 22, etc. were never viewed as messianic prior to Jesus’ time, and Jesus and the disciples do not deny either the prior fulfillments or their eternal truths. However, He also demonstrates and explains that, even though they were fulfilled within prior generations, they also have subsequent, ultimate fulfillments in his own life and ministry.

On this eschatological reading, we align closely with theologians such as **G. K. Beale, Sam Storms**, and **Brian Tabb**, though with perhaps a somewhat stronger and more intentional

emphasis on future, concrete fulfillment and the climactic return of Christ, recognizing that the Kingdom of God has already been inaugurated through Christ's death and resurrection, yet awaits its full consummation at His return, though we perhaps have a slightly stronger and more explicit focus on future fulfillment than some of these men.

We therefore read Revelation and other prophetic texts as **Christ-centred, symbolically rich, historically grounded, and forward-looking.**

We see prophecy not as a puzzle to decode, but as a proclamation of Jesus' lordship over all history—a call to faithfulness in the present because of what God has done and what He will certainly do.

This approach allows us to hold conviction and humility together:

- **Conviction**, because we affirm with certainty the non-negotiable truths: Christ will return visibly, the dead will be raised bodily, the world will be judged in righteousness, and all things will be made new.
- **Humility**, because we acknowledge that sincere believers may differ on the details of timing and sequence without dividing the Body of Christ.

We therefore study the end times not to satisfy curiosity, but to strengthen confidence in the God who authored the story. Our task is not to master the map but to trust the Maker of the landscape.

Our unity is not in the precision of our charts but in the promise of our hope.

"We wait for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." — Titus 2:13

6. Why study eschatology if we can't know every detail?

Because eschatology isn't about prediction—it's about perspective.

Studying what Scripture says about the end reminds us that history has direction, purpose, and meaning. It strengthens faith, fuels worship, and gives courage to persevere. Our goal is not to map every event but to trust the One who holds the map.

7. How does this connect to next week's sermon?

This week we've looked at how believers create an interpretive framework for Revelation and other prophetic passages. Next week, we'll look at a specific event described in Revelation that happens when Christ returns—the "millennial" views that describe how He reigns and what eternity will look like. We'll use these different maps to chart how different Christians understand how we get to that same destination: When Jesus will return, evil will end, and all things will be made new.