

DVD-Based Study for individuals or groups

Four Views of *the* End Times

Compare these Christian Views:

Historical
Premillennialism

Amillennialism

Dispensational
Premillennialism

Postmillennialism

*“A truly absorbing, Jesus-focused
exploration of the book of Revelation”*

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Participant Guide



Four Views of the End Times Participant Guide

Timothy Paul Jones, PhD

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4733 Torrance Blvd., #259
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Email: info@rose-publishing.com
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Meet the Author

Thanks for picking up your copy of *Four Views of the End Times*! My name is Timothy Paul Jones, and I live in Louisville, Kentucky, with my wife Rayann and our daughter Hannah—as well as one over-energetic Siberian Husky. I'm a professor, but over the past two decades, I've had the privilege of serving as a pastor in several wonderful congregations of believers, most recently at First Baptist Church of Rolling Hills in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In these contexts, I saw over and over how theology and church history could help people to flesh out their faith in powerful ways.

Now, I serve as professor of church ministry at one of the largest seminaries in the world, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Here, I invest my time in mentoring a rising generation of God-called ministers of the gospel. I also edit the *Journal of Family Ministry* and write books in the fields of history, apologetics, and family ministry. I enjoy spending time with my family, walking along tree-lined streets, reading neglected books, drinking French-pressed coffee, and cooking for students and friends. Our family is involved in children's ministry at the east Louisville campus of Sojourn Community Church.

Thanks for your willingness to walk alongside me in this study! If you enjoy *Four Views of the End Times*, I encourage you to continue the conversation with me by aiming a tweet in my direction at <http://twitter.com/4ViewsoftheEnd> or by digging into my book *Christian History Made Easy*.

About This Study

“Tell us,” the disciples asked Jesus after their master had predicted a future calamity in Jerusalem, “when will these things happen? What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). The dodgy dozen weren’t the first or the last folk to ask such questions. In every generation since sin entered into the world, God’s people seem to have wondered, “When and how will God make things right in the world?”

Sometimes these discussions degenerate into fruitless debates about specific details—but that’s not where Dr. Timothy Paul Jones will take you in this particular study. Although you will gain much knowledge about the end times, the primary purpose of this study is not to raise your eschatological I.Q. This study focuses first and foremost on Jesus the Messiah, the One through whom God the Father will make all things new. Woven through this study of Jesus in Revelation, you will find straightforward, Scripture-centered examinations of four viewpoints that Christians throughout history have embraced as they looked toward the end of time.

**About the Complete Four Views of the End Times
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(ISBN 9781596364127)

The Kit includes everything you need to teach *Four Views of the End Times*, using professionally-produced video sessions and a PowerPoint® presentation. The Complete Kit includes:

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Quick Summary of the Four Views

Amillennialism

There will be no (a-) physical millennium. The millennium is the present, spiritual reign of Jesus with his people. Jesus may return to earth at anytime. The tribulation occurs whenever Christians are persecuted or wars and disasters happen.

Postmillennialism

Jesus will return to earth after (post-) a millennium when the overwhelming majority of people throughout the world embrace the gospel. The great tribulation occurred either in the first-century AD, or will be a brief time of persecution immediately preceding the millennium.

Dispensational Premillennialism

God will rapture Christians from the world before (or midway into) the seven-year great tribulation. Jesus will return to earth after the great tribulation, but before (pre-) the thousand-year millennium described in Revelation 20.

Historical Premillennialism

Jesus will return to earth after a time of tribulation, but before (pre-) the millennium described in Revelation 20. Christians will remain on earth through the tribulation. This tribulation may be a short, intense time of persecution that will occur near the end of time, or a long time-period which has occurred throughout church history.

SESSION ONE

The Goal of God's Plan

Get This:

Keep your eyes
on the right end.



Session 1 Outline

The Goal Of God's Plan

1. If we focus on the wrong end, the end times can be:
 - a. Confusing
 - b. Dangerous
 - c. Even violent
2. Focus on the right end—Jesus
 - a. Revelation 22:13
 - Jesus is the beginning and the end
 - Arius denied that Jesus is the beginning and end
 - b. Acts 1:6–8
 - Jesus' followers got focused on the wrong end
 - c. Matthew 28:19–20
 - Jesus provided his people with a mission
3. Jesus is the end point and goal of God's work in history

End-Times Craze

This is a dangerous study. It's a study about the end of time, after all. It's a journey to the end of the world. This is the stuff of prophetic placards, apocalyptic films, and frightening visions.

What's more, a quick glance at history shows that studying the end times has the capacity to bring out a bit of craziness from time to time.

- Not too many years after Jesus rose from the dead, a few false prophets in Thessalonica caused all sorts of consternation when they proclaimed that Jesus had already returned (2 Thessalonians 2:2).
- A century later, in the mid-100s, a man named Montanus became a believer in Jesus and developed a strong interest in prophetic themes. Before long, Montanus had predicted that the New Jerusalem would soon show up in Pepuza, a backwoods parish in the province of Phrygia. Before being disfellowshipped, Montanus even claimed that he spoke for the Holy Spirit, declaring, "I am Father, Word, and Comforter" and "I am the Lord God All-Powerful." (Didymus, *De Trinitate*, 3:41; Epiphanius, *Hereses*, 48:11)
- Almost a millennium and a half later, in 1534, a Dutch baker named Jan Matthys claimed that the New Jerusalem would soon be located in Münster, Germany. After a supposed series of apocalyptic visions, Jan and his followers subjugated the city of Münster. One of Jan's cohort married 16 wives and even declared himself a successor of the biblical King David. In the end, the New Jerusalem did not arrive in Münster, but a rival army did. The corpses of the apocalyptic revolutionaries were suspended above the city in iron cages. To this day, those cages still hang from the steeple of St. Lambert's Church, silent reminders of an apocalyptic expectation gone desperately wrong. (A. Arthur, *The Tailor King: St. Martin's*, 1999; pp. 67, 103–164)
- Three hundred years later, Joseph Smith claimed that Jesus would establish the New Jerusalem in Missouri—and, in the process, launched a worldwide religious movement that denied essential biblical truths about Jesus. To this day, members of the Mormon religion expect the return of Jesus to entail the establishment of an "American Zion" on the eastern outskirts of Kansas City, Missouri.

But, in recent years, such shenanigans have ended, haven't they? Surely postmodern people are sufficiently enlightened not to fall for these claims about the end times! If that's what you're thinking, think again.

- Fast-forward to the twentieth century: In the late 1980s, one leader in an apocalyptic sect changed his name to David Koresh and urged his disciples to think of themselves as “students of the Seven Seals” in Revelation. (J. Curl, “Davidians, friends gather in Waco to praise Koresh,” *The Washington Times*, April 20, 2003). Koresh embraced polygamy and claimed that the end-times prophecies of Daniel would be fulfilled at his communal compound near Waco, Texas. In 1993, David Koresh and 75 of his followers perished after a 51-day siege of the compound. (K.G.C. Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco*; Oxford, 2006; pp. 155–339)
- Even more recently, there have been doomsday expectations surrounding the year 2000, one prediction that Jesus would return on May 21, 2011, and several claims connected to the year 2012. (J. Berton, “Biblical scholar’s date for rapture” http://articles.sfgate.com/2010-01-01/bay-area/17466332_1_cast-bay-bay-area-first-time-camping)

See what I mean? Studying the end times can quickly turn crazy. And, sometimes, studying the end of time can even turn dangerous. But don't pitch this book back into the box quite yet! There's a crucial fact that you need to know about studying the end of time: It's only hazardous when you focus on the wrong end.

Keeping Your Eyes on the Right End

“I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”—Revelation 22:13 ESV

According to Scripture, the end of time is not the ultimate end or goal of God’s plan. In fact, the endpoint of the divine plan is not any temporal event at all. The endpoint and goal of God’s work in human history is Jesus. Jesus is the source of the created order (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). He is, in the words of the Nicene Creed, the one “by whom all things were made.” Yet Jesus is more than the source of God’s story; he is also the goal of all that God is doing. He is not only the beginning but also the end. And how should we respond to this truth? By “fixing our sight on Jesus, the captain and completer of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus is the ultimate goal of God’s plan. That’s why the biblical authors could describe the entire time between Jesus’ victory over death and the end of time as “the last days” (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2).

- When you planned to participate in this study, what did you expect to learn about the end times?

- Was this initial expectation focused on “the right end” or “the wrong end”?

- In Revelation 22:13, John described Jesus as “the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” Who did John present as “Alpha and Omega” in Revelation 1:8 and 21:1–7?



These are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. John used these terms to identify Jesus as God and to describe Jesus as both the beginning and the goal of God’s work in human history.

- Now compare the words of John with ancient prophecies found in Isaiah 41:4 and 44:6. What does this suggest to you about who John understood Jesus to be?

- Study Acts 2:14–18 and Hebrews 1:1–2. According to these passages, how long have believers in Jesus been living in “the last days”?

Look up and read Acts 1:4–8

- Read carefully the question about the kingdom that came from the followers of Jesus. What event were these early followers of Jesus eagerly anticipating?

- What event did Jesus want his followers to anticipate?

- How did the apostles want or expect Jesus to respond to their question?

- Judging from the response of Jesus, where did he want his followers to focus their concerns?

Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is the confession of faith that developed from the creeds of the Councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381). At these councils, Christian leaders agreed that the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection had understood Jesus to be fully human yet fully and uniquely God.

Focusing on the Goal of God's Plan

Whenever the precise order of events at the end of time becomes our primary focus, we are focusing on the wrong end. A few folk may respond to such a false focus by seeking an increasingly specific schedule for the termination of time. Still fewer may gravitate toward extremist cults. But, even among the most stable individuals, the results of fixing our eyes on the wrong end are far from the best. Such a focus tends to lead us toward tension, anxiety, and a desire to stockpile more and more details about the end times.

But how might our perspective change if we fix our eyes on the right end? What happens when we focus on Jesus as the goal of God’s plan? How might this refocusing reshape our studies of the end times? The apostle Paul provided a partial answer when he wrote to a church that was struggling to comprehend God’s plan for the end of time. Immediately after clarifying some issues that church members had misunderstood, Paul pointed to this hope: “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17).

It is true that, when Jesus was asked about events related to his coming in judgment, Jesus may have given his followers a few signposts. Yet the closing parable of this same discourse made it clear that his primary concern was not for them to have a detailed understanding of each event. His desire was for them to be prepared whenever the end might come (Matthew 24:3, 42–51).

Even after his resurrection, when the apostles demanded details about the end of time, Jesus replied quite curtly, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed in his own authority”—then, he immediately reminded them of their responsibility to share with others what they had seen in him (Acts 1:8).

In some cases, in-depth studies of the end times have resulted in painful divisions and quarrelsome discussions among God’s people. And yet, according to the book of Hebrews, the result ought to be precisely the opposite: “Let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Did you catch that? As believers in Jesus become more aware of the nearness of the Day of the Lord, the more they should encourage one another! If your study of the end times leaves you discouraged and divided, it’s quite likely that you have focused your attention on the wrong end.

- Have you ever become too focused on the specific events that may accompany the end of time? Or do you have a friend who became too focused on the details of end-times events? What were the results?

- During this study of the end times, what will you do to center your thinking on Jesus?

Where This Study is Going

From the words of Jesus and Paul, it seems that the result of studying the end times should not be a fleeting consolation that comes from knowing more details about the future. Instead, where our study should drive us is toward a simultaneous sense of rest and responsibility that is found only through the gospel of Jesus. The result should not be increased speculation about the end of time but an increased capacity to work for the glory of Jesus the Messiah while watching and waiting for his return.

That’s why my goal in this study is not merely for you to know more about the end times. Instead, my desire is for you to know more of the One whose arrival fulfills a divine design that is more ancient than time. If you signed up for this study looking for formulas to calculate the day when time will end, you are likely to be disappointed. If your heart is hungry for Jesus, my hope is that you will be satisfied far beyond your wildest dreams, because Jesus is the goal and endpoint of God’s plan for history. If the end of time is a puzzle, Jesus is the corner pieces. Only when Jesus stands in the most prominent places can the end-times puzzle begin to make sense.

At this point, I must warn you again, though: Increased anticipation of the glory of Jesus may end up being dangerous—but not in any way that will land you in the middle of an apocalyptic cult. It’s dangerous because, whenever Jesus becomes central, life-as-usual ends up disrupted. Where the glory of Jesus is central, the allures of consumerism and self-centered goals and the culture’s profile for success lose their luster. This is dangerous in the same way that Jesus himself was dangerous:

Messiah

(from Hebrew *Mashiakh*, “Anointed One”) He is Savior-king anticipated throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (Genesis 3:15; Deuteronomy 18:15; Isaiah 53; 61). Also known as “Christ” (from Greek *Christos*, “Anointed One”)

It's dangerous because, once Jesus truly shows up, nothing can remain the same as it was before. And so, if you want a comfortable life that places you in control, you'd be better off quitting this study now—or spending each session focused on the details of the end of time. If you want the revolution that God offers to you in Jesus, leap into this study with a focus on Jesus, whenever and however he may choose to return.

Now What?

PRAY: Jesus our Messiah and God our Father—you who grant eternal comfort and good hope through your grace—plant your gladness, your joy, and your Spirit firmly in my heart. Establish me in every good work and word as I await the return of Jesus. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen (Based on 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17).

LEARN: Study Acts 1:1–8 and Revelation 22:12–17. Memorize Revelation 1:1–2.

DO: Apply Acts 1:8 in your life this week. Write on a 3x5 card, “Because Jesus is the endpoint of history, the end is always near, and his message must be my mission.” Place the card in a prominent location in your home or vehicle. Each time you see the card, pray for an opportunity that day to live in the Holy Spirit’s power by telling someone you meet about what Jesus has done in your life.

Jesus

Jesus is the goal and the endpoint of God’s work in human history.