

**Got Questions? What happens at the “End Times?”**  
**Sunday, July 27, 2025**  
**Revelation 21:3-6**

Sometime in the late 1980s, I read the following words of Hal Lindsey, “the decade of the 1980s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it.” I was about 14 when I read these words, and they filled me with dread. I had a lot of life left to live. I wanted to attend college, get married, have kids, and fulfill my dream of being the best Christian rock guitarist of all time. And none of that would happen if what Mr. Lindsey said came true because Jesus was on the way to ruin everything! You see, despite the vague wording of the above proclamation, what my fellow readers and I understood was that Mr. Lindsey was predicting Jesus would return before the end of the 1980s. This was based on his interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew, the Book of Revelation, and the Book of Daniel, which suggested that Jesus would return by the end of one generation after the establishment of the modern nation of Israel in 1947. According to Mr. Lindsey, a generation in the Bible was forty years; thus, “maybe” 1987 was the target year for the return of Christ.

Here we are, 38 years later. Mr. Lindsey is no longer with us; he died in 2024 at the age of 95 after having sold millions of copies of books such as *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), *The 1980’s: Countdown to Armageddon* (1980), *Planet Earth 2000 A.D: Will Mankind Survive* (1994) and *Faith for Earth’s Final Hour* (2003). Lindsey’s ideas echoed throughout churches all across the world, reaching even into the administration of Ronald Reagan, where several high-ranking advisors were avid readers. These ideas sold even more books throughout the 1990s and 2000s, forming the backbone of the Left Behind series, which sold over 65 million copies.

These book series have sold so well because I believe they tap into our innate human curiosity about the future. Since Christians are usually reluctant to have their palms read, read tarot cards, or

participate in other forms of divination, speculation about the end times through Scripture becomes a way to “scratch that itch” about the future.

Christians also want to know what the Bible says. We want to be people who know the Bible well, so when we come across books like the second half of Daniel and Revelation, inquiring minds have lots of questions. Why do we have these symbolic books, such as Daniel and Revelation? Shouldn't they just be more precise about what they mean? Why do we need all the lions, tigers, bears, and beasts? Where is the answer key?

As with our other “Got Questions?” sermons, there are a lot of different answers to these questions among godly, Bible-believing Christians. I will offer my interpretations, and I want us all to be friends, even if we have different theological opinions. I suspect that I won't answer every question about the “end times” in this sermon!

In my opinion, the answer to what all of these symbols and scenes specifically mean is that “we don't know for sure, and too much speculation about the end times can be harmful.” The first problem with worrying too much about the end times is that interpretations of books like Revelation are challenging because, by design, such books are meant to be difficult to understand. These books come from a genre called apocalypse, which doesn't mean catastrophe but rather “hidden.” These texts are meant to reveal hidden information to a community using symbols that prevent outsiders from understanding. The issue is: while God inspired these books to teach about God, and they are rightly included in our biblical canon, we are not part of the original community to which these books were written. This distance always exists in biblical interpretation, but the gap becomes even larger in an apocalyptic book. For example, when it comes to a figure like the “antichrist” of the New Testament (a term that does not appear in Revelation), we don't have enough information to

definitively identify who this is, other than that they are a person—perhaps a ruler or leader of some sort—who opposes the people of God.

This ambiguity causes another problem with interpretations of “end times.” Because they are so vague, they can be exploited as weapons to vilify individuals or groups. This can lead Christians to believe and behave in ways that use Jesus's less explicit teachings to disobey His more explicit teachings. It’s easy to fall into hating people or groups we see as “anti-Christ” rather than following the call to love them.

Even if we do not fall into interpretations that lead to hate, it is very easy for Christians to become obsessed with “end time” predictions. Rather than focusing on the clear commands of Scripture to love our neighbors and do good in the world, we can become obsessed with the next teacher or preacher promising to know the details about the end times. Rather than braving the world where the Spirit of God is working and calling us to step out of our comfort zones bravely, we can retreat to our “waiting on the rapture” bubble, where we stay safe, knowing our future is safe and secure while the “bad people” get their due.

These are some issues I see with people’s obsession with the “end times.” What about the Wesleyan and Methodist traditions? The question for this week’s sermon was “What are the UMC’s teachings on the end times?” The short answer is that “end times” theology doesn’t hold a prominent place in Wesleyan theology. John Wesley was a practical man who focused more on what Christians do now than on speculating about the future. He gave only two sermons on the “end times” in his entire career.

Wesley’s sermons focused on two themes: the judgment of all people before Christ and the glory of the new creation. Wesley likely chose the theme of judgment because it is found in the Apostle’s Creed and in the Articles of Religion of the Anglican church, of which Wesley was a part.

These Articles have become part of the Methodist heritage of faith and are included in our Book of Discipline as official church doctrine. This doctrine of the final judgment comes from Christ's words in Matthew 25:31-46 (among other passages). As Methodists following in the steps of John Wesley, we are very concerned with how we treat the least of these mentioned in this passage. We believe that we are called to personal and social holiness that is reflected not just in our hearts, but in our outward actions, which we believe are so important to Jesus Christ that we are accountable for those actions to Jesus as our Lord.

Yet, as reflected in Wesley's second sermon on the end times, one thing we can be sure of about the "end times" is that the God of love is present, regardless of when or where the "end" occurs. Whether it is tomorrow or thousands of years from now, God is there. No matter how bleak the world becomes, no matter what evil forces oppose God's will, no matter what natural disasters happen, in the end, God is there. The God who walks with us from the beginning is still walking with us through the "end" and beyond. The God of love wins!

This provides the foundation for our hope—the hope we depend on to get through each day. The hope that sustains us in continuing to do good in our world, even when all hope seems lost. We believe that, in the end, God will dwell among us. We have hope that, as Wesley states, "there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God" forever. This, my friends, is good news! Amen.