

New Years 2025 Understanding the Times

We are approaching the beginning of a new year. In a certain way, the new year will probably be much like the old year. When the calendar turns over from 2024 to 2025, not much really changes at that moment, at least not in our day to day lives. We celebrate a little but then go on doing as we have been doing. Many of us will be asleep when the year changes over. Maybe we'll make some resolutions.

We don't know what the new year will hold. But it's good for us to try to understand the times in which we live and try to figure out what we should do.

1 Chron 12:32 *the sons of Issachar ... had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, ...*

Matthew 16:3 *...O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

These two verses give us two ends of the spectrum when it comes to understanding the times in which we live. On the one hand, we have the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times and knew what to do. On the other hand are the hypocrites who cannot discern the signs of the time. Some understand the times; others cannot discern the times.

As Christians, we should strive to understand the times and understand what we should do. We don't want to be ignorant of the times in which we live, and we don't want to merely react ignorantly to the events of our times. We should strive to understand our world and try to figure out what we should do in our times.

There are many ways for us to try to understand the times in which we live—media, Internet, news programs, podcasts, experts, etc. We could try to absorb lots of information from many different sources and then try to figure out what it all means.

Or we could simply consult what God has told us in the Bible. The highest authority for understanding our times and knowing what to do is the Bible. We know what to do because God has told us what he is doing and what he expects from us. We have a Christian worldview; we understand our world through biblical lenses.

Let's consider how we can be like the sons of Issachar who understand the times and know what to do.

I. How do we understand the times?

The Bible gives us several underlying truths that should help us understand the world in which we live.

A. Recognize that God is sovereign over the times.

1. How do we understand the era in which we live? Our first assumption should be that God is sovereign over everything that happens.

Isaiah 46:9–10 *Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'*

2. What we see happening around us is not mere random circumstances. God is sovereignly ruling the universe and everything in it. God is running his plan in time.

Illus.: We've recently seen an upheaval in the middle east—in Israel and in Syria. It's part of an ongoing, seemingly endless struggle in that part of the world.

If God is sovereign, then these large national upheavals are all part of God's sovereign plan for the world. Minimally, we believe that God is *allowing* these things to happen. Perhaps God is actively *causing* these events to occur. It could be that we are seeing God preparing the way for the next events in prophecy. We don't know the details of God's plan for the future, but we believe that all these national movements are part of God's sovereign plan.

3. That's true not only of world events, but even the most mundane details of our lives are under God's constant supervision. Not even a sparrow falls out of the sky without God's knowing about it. God is well aware of the circumstances of our lives.

4. God has a plan for this world. He is steadily moving history toward its ultimate goal—the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus will return and establish his kingdom, there will be a final judgment, and then God will establish a new heavens and a new earth. God is causing all things to move in that direction. When the time is right, God will cause the next thing on the schedule to happen.

Philippians 2:10–11 at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ... [and] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

5. Because God is sovereign, we can rest securely that God’s plans will come to pass. We might debate over the details of that plan, but we believe that God has a plan and is steadily moving world events toward his pre-ordained end/goal.

We understand the times in terms of God’s sovereign control of all things. We affirm that and rest in God’s sovereign plan for our times.

B. Appreciate/recognize that human actions have effects.

1. We affirm both that God is sovereign and that human actions have real results. The times in which we live are largely the result of human activity. We are living with the results of the choices and actions of people who lived before us. We believe in the law of cause and effect.

Galatians 6:7–8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

2. That’s true nationally and personally.
 - a) Nations rise and fall because of human choices and actions. Conflicts between nations happen because of human choices and actions. Conflicts cease because of human choices and actions.

E.g., When Hamas invaded Israel in Oct 2023, it set in motion a set of events that has reshaped many things in the middle east. Cf. 911, Pearl Harbor

b) And personally, we reap what we sow. We are living with the choices that we've made previously. We made our bed, and now we are lying in it.

(1) If we make consistently good and proper choices, the outcome is usually going to be positive. Life consists of choices; if we make good ones, life will go better for us. I.e., we sow to the Spirit.

(2) But if we consistently make sinful or foolish choices, the outcome is generally going to be quite bad. I.e., we sow to the flesh.

3. Sadly, much of human action is sinful and depraved. Because of human sin, we are living in perilous times.

Ephesians 5:16 ... *the days are evil.*

2 Timothy 3:1 ... *in the last days perilous times shall come.*

2 Timothy 3:13 *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

2 Peter 2:1 ... *there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, [and] bring on themselves swift destruction.*

Our times are full of sin, iniquity, peril, evil, falsehood, deceit, heresies, and denials of God. What should we expect in these evil days? Evil people make things go from bad to worse. We should not be surprised that evil people do evil things.

C. Further, we must recognize that evil supernatural forces have an influence in the world.

1. Eph 6—principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places.

2. 2 Corinthians 11:3 *But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

Satan, that great serpent, is actively trying to deceive us and the whole world through craftiness—cunning, cleverness, trickery.

3. 1Pe 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*

Satan is intent on deceiving us and devouring us. The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy (Jn 10:10). But we must resist him steadfastly in the faith (1 Pet 5:9). We must not be ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Cor 2:11).

James 4:7 *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

However, Satan is not the source of most of our problems. Satan is not directly behind most of our bad decisions. We cannot excuse ourselves by claiming, "The devil made me do it."

James 4:1 *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*

However, we are in a spiritual struggle; we wrestle against the spiritual wickedness of our world. We are engaged in a spiritual fight. Part of the strategy in winning this battle is to "put on the whole armor of God." In order to stand in the evil day, we must gird ourselves with resources God gives us—the breastplate of righteousness, feet shod with the gospel of peace, having the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

What do we understand about our times? God is in control; he is sovereign over the events of this world, and for his own purposes and in his own ways, he is moving world events toward the intended goal—Jesus will return, establish a kingdom, the earth will be renewed, and we'll enjoy the rest of eternity. Until that time arrives, because of human sin and corruption, the times will be full of chaos and conflict.

I tend to be rather pessimistic regarding the future; I expect things to go from bad to worse, especially in the moral realm. 2 Timothy 3:13 *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

But in spite of human depravity, and in spite of Satanic or demonic activity, God is still on the throne. God's plans for this world will be fulfilled. That's our understanding of the times. That's the default Christian way of looking at the world.

II. What should we do in these times?

A. Awake out of sleep.

Romans 13:11 *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*

Have you ever slept through an alarm? The alarm is going off, but you keep on sleeping.

Paul is telling us to wake up; the alarm is sounding, and we need to wake up, get out of bed, and deal with reality.

What should we do once we wake up? Read Rom 13:12-14

1. Cast off the works of darkness
2. Put on the armor of light
3. Walk/live honestly
4. Do not live in flagrant sin
5. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ
6. Make no provision for the flesh

All of this tells us to be vigilant, awake, and alert to what is happening in the world. We should not be surprised at the evil actions of wicked people.

Many are easily led astray because they are ignorant and apathetic about what is happening in our world. But Christians should be alert and awake; we should be somewhat knowledgeable about what's happening in the world today.

Matthew 10:16 ... *be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

Sadly, many Christians are ignorant and apathetic about our world and about world events. They take no interest in the times in which we live. They don't know what's going on. That should not be us.

The first thing to do in these times is to be awake and alert to the dangers of our times.

B. Persevere in the faith and in good works.

The Bible uses various images or pictures to describe Christian perseverance.

1. The Bible often describes the Christian life in terms of an athletic contest/competition.

- a) We must fight the good fight and keep the faith.
- b) We must run the race before us, looking unto Jesus.
- c) We must compete according to the rules of the game.

This athletic language shows that the Christian life requires effort and persistence. We must strive and persist like an athlete.

2. The Bible describes the Christian life in military terms.

2Ti 2:3 *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

2Ti 2:4 *No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

- a) The Christian life is sometimes hard; we endure afflictions; we suffer through trouble.
- b) We refuse to become entangled in the things of this world. We have to live in this world, but we don't have to be caught up in in the affairs of this world. Our focus is not on this world.

- c) We are striving to please the one who enlisted us into the service. Our highest goal is to please God, not ourselves.

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Cf. Mt 6:33

- 3. The Bible also describes the Christian life in agricultural terms.
2Ti 2:6 The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops.

All of this imagery—the athlete, the soldier, the farmer—shows us that the Christian life is difficult and demanding. We are running, fighting, competing, enduring hardness like soldiers, working hard like farmers. We must run the race with patience, work hard at sowing and reaping, and fight with determination.

John 16:33 ... In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Acts 14:22 ... “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

We must persevere in these perilous times.

- C. Don't compromise with the world.

- 1. The world – this ungodly, immoral system in which we live – puts great pressure on us to cave in, to capitulate, to adopt the value system and behaviors of this world. The world is trying to force us into its mold. The world wants us to convert us over to its way of thinking and behaving.

Rom 12:2 be not conformed to this world

- 2. God commands us to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. We must avoid allowing the world to shape us into its image.

3. God commands us, “Love not the world neither the things that are in the world” (1 Jn 2:15). We cannot be the friend of the world and the friend of God (James 4:4). We must choose one or the other—God or mammon (Mt 6:24). We are either for God or against him.
4. God commands us to come out from among them and be separate; touch not the unclean thing.

In some ways, our world is quickly going down the tubes; it’s swirling down into the sewer. But we must not join the world as it implodes and suffers destruction. We dare not love the world or the things that are in the world. We must love what God loves and hate what God hates.

D. We must warn others to avoid the spiritual perils of this world.

We must be like the prophets of old who proclaim stern warnings to the people to avoid the imminent disasters that will come to ungodly people.

1. Jesus tells us to be salt and light in this dark and dying world.

Mt 5:13-14 *Ye are the salt of the earth... Ye are the light of the world.*

- a) Salt is a preservative and a flavoring. We should be trying to preserve the good things in this world and in our time. We should work to uphold and defend the good, the beautiful, and the true aspects of our world and of our time.

- b) Light illuminates and displaces the darkness. We should be bearers of light—“this little light of mine.” “Brighten the corner where you are.” We should be trying to influence our world for good.

2. Jesus exhorts us to warn others to avoid the errors of this world.

What did the rich man want to do when he woke up in hell (Lk 16:23)? He wanted to send someone to warn his brothers to avoid the same fate as he was suffering. We should be warning people to avoid the wrath to come.

Like John the Baptist:

Matthew 3:7 *[John] said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”*

Col 1:28 *We preach [Christ], warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom,*

E. Redeem the time.

Ephesians 5:16 *Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

1. To “redeem” the time is to make the most of every opportunity. We use our time and talents to serve God and to do God’s will. We must use the talents God gave us—the resources, skills, and opportunities.
2. We still have many opportunities at this time. We still have freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press. So we should use our freedoms to proclaim the Gospel and to defend the Christian faith. It’s easier now than ever to publish and publicize the Christian faith.
3. In many places in the world, they don’t have these freedoms. Right now, even in places like Canada and England, the authorities are arresting people for their speech and writing. If the government does not like what you say or what you publish, they’ll come and arrest you. That could easily happen here; it probably will. We could easily lose our freedoms.
4. So while we still have opportunities, we should make the most of them. Speak your mind. Spread the Gospel. Defend the Christian faith. Teach others. Publish what you believe. Go through those open doors while they remain open. Use your talents and resources for God’s glory while you still can. The time is coming when our freedoms will be reduced if not withdrawn. The door may be closing.

5. And we should use our opportunities for God and God's people.

Esther 4:14 ... Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Galatians 6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Serve God and fellow believers while you have the energy and opportunity. When a door for service opens, go through it.

F. Be about the Father's business until Jesus returns.

1. When Joseph and Mary found Jesus in the temple, he said, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) (lit. "in the things of my father" ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου).

2. Following Jesus' example, that's what we should be all about as well—our Father's business, engaging in things pertaining to the Father.

3. Jesus told a parable in which a certain nobleman called his servants, gave them money, and said "Occupy until I return" (Luke 19:12-13). The word "occupy" (πραγματεύομαι) means "do business." In fact, it's the basis of our word "pragmatic." Something pragmatic is practical, useful, reasonable. Pragmatic things work. Our work ought to be of practical value for God. Make a difference in this world for God in practical, rubber-meets-the-road ways.

4. Our obligation, until Jesus returns, is to use the talents and resources God has given us to be about our Father's business.

5. What is God's business?

- a) That business is fulfilling the Great Commission—go into all the world, preach the Gospel, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey what Christ commanded.

Much of our time and energy should be devoted to fulfilling Jesus' last command to us—to make disciples and to help them mature in the faith. That's our business.

- b) That business is to conduct our family life in the right way. Many families are falling apart; many families are dysfunctional today. Christian families should be stable, loving, and disciplined. Having our families right will make a practical difference in our world.

- c) That business is to conduct ourselves virtuously in the world, in our careers and in our communities. We should be good citizens and good employees. That's going to make a practical difference in our times.

- d) God's business requires us to serve God and others in our family, our church, our careers, and in our communities. We do God's business by bringing honor and glory to God in every aspect of our lives.

As Christians, we are obligated to understand the times in which we live and know what we should do.

Romans 13:12 *The night is far spent, the day is at hand. ...*

We should appreciate the urgency of these words. Now is the time to act. Now is the time to make an impact on our world. Now is the time to stand up for God.

The new year is swiftly approaching. Will we understand the times in which we live? Will we know what we should do? Yes, I hope so.

We should strive to be people who both understand the times and know what we should do in light of the times in which we live. Let's approach the new year with understanding and with a commitment to serve God and his people.