

END TIMES: BACK TO THE FUTURE

Introduction w/Answers

End Times Study Overview

Before we officially begin our study of End Times, I thought that it might be helpful to provide a brief overview in preparation for the study. It is important for us to know and understand God's eternal plan for mankind, and how Christ's return fits perfectly into that plan. It is also important for us to have a working knowledge of the facts regarding this part of prophecy, so that we are not easily misled by false teaching, and so that we can teach others about this pivotal event. My prayer is that as we jointly embark on this study, God will open our eyes and our heart to all that He has in store for us when Christ returns. Furthermore, I pray that we will find others to share this good news with as we study together.

As we begin this journey, let's review some of the key precepts and questions regarding Christ's Second Coming. Just as it was with his disciples two thousand years ago, we have the same questions today – When will it happen? How will we know when that time is drawing near?

For our introductory lesson, we will be reviewing passages in Matthew (Chapters 24-25) as well as others in 1 and 2 Thessalonians as we consider and answer the following questions:

1. Read Matthew 24:1-3. List below the three specific questions that the disciples asked Jesus regarding the destruction of the Temple and his return.
 - a. ANSWER 1: When will the Temple be destroyed? (asked by the disciples in response to Jesus' prophecy in verse 2)
 - b. ANSWER 2: What will be the sign of your coming again?
 - c. ANSWER 3: What will be the sign of the end of the age?
2. The first question, "When will the Temple be destroyed?", is not answered by Jesus; however, we know that in 70 AD, it literally did occur just as Jesus said it would, i.e., "not one stone will be left". How did he answer the second question? (see Matthew 24:4-28)
 - a. ANSWER 1: He stated that wars, earthquakes, famines and so on would occur all over the world. However, these were not the signs that they were looking for, nor should we; since these are only indications of the beginnings of sorrows on the earth, not the actual signs themselves.
 - b. ANSWER 2: He also told them that they, being Jews and Christ-followers, would be hated by the world, as would all Jews and followers of Christ leading up to his return.
 - c. ANSWER 3: He added that false teaching will abound and will mislead many. Love, as we now know it, will grow cold, there will be no respect for humanity, and Jews and Christians will be hated in particular.
3. How did Jesus answer the third question? (see Matthew 24:29-35)
 - a. ANSWER: Everyone will know when he returns. It will be an event visible around the entire world as he returns with his followers and all of the saints, and establishes his earthly kingdom. This will be the sign of the end of the present age.
4. What did Jesus say about the specific time or day that marks his return? (see Matthew 24:36-44)
 - a. ANSWER 1: He said that only God knows when this will occur and that not even Jesus or the angels know when this will occur.
 - b. ANSWER 2: He also said it will be at a time when no one is expecting it. This also serves as a warning to us not to follow false teachers when they say that they know the time, because clearly Jesus teaches he will come at a time when we are not expecting it. In practicality, the time when Jesus returns will be so desperate, so awful, that all will seem completely hopeless.

5. What did Jesus say was the specific "gospel" that will be preached "in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come"? (see Matthew 24:9-14)
 - a. ANSWER: Jesus said, specifically in Matt. 24:13-14, that the gospel preached in the last days will be one of faith through acts (also mentioned in the sheep and goat judgments and the slaughter of the 144,000 last witnesses in Revelation). Only those who "stand firm to the end will be saved"; this is the "gospel" that will be preached in the last days. In the midst of unimaginable persecution, death and destruction everywhere, governments collapsing, the love of many having grown cold, an abundance of false teachers, and Satan lifting himself up as God; those who believe that Jesus is the coming Christ will have to "stand firm" in order to be saved. It will be a time like no other, and the message of the gospel will take on deeper meaning as followers face untold persecution, death, and devastation on a worldwide scale never seen before, nor ever to be seen again. This is the "gospel" that will be preached to the whole world, and "then the end will come".
6. What does the judgment of the sheep and goats represent? How are "nations" judged, and when? (see Matthew 25:31-46)
 - a. ANSWER: One of Christ's first official acts in setting up his Millennial Kingdom will be the gathering of the nations before him to be judged. They will be judged on how they treated the faithful during the time of the Great Tribulation. Those nations who persecuted and hunted them down will be cast out of Christ's kingdom; while those who protected, fed and sheltered the faithful will be allowed in Christ's kingdom. This is the judgment of the sheep and goats that will occur at the beginning of his earthly reign.
7. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul speaks of the end days and the abomination. What does this passage say about that time? What will initiate these last days when the "lawless one" is revealed?
 - a. ANSWER: The one who "holds back" will be taken out of the way; then the "lawless one" will be revealed. The one who holds back must be the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is called back to heaven, then the lawless one can be revealed as he truly is, i.e., Satan, "whom the Lord will overthrow". This event will begin the last days leading up to Christ's return.
8. One belief some Christians hold is that the Church will be "caught up", or "raptured", prior to the second coming of Christ. How is this described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and how does this passage relate to the one that we examined above in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12?
 - a. ANSWER 1: When Christ returns, he will bring with him all of the believers who have died prior to his return.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Those of us still alive will also return with Christ. We will not be on earth when he returns, as we will be "caught up together" with those who have died previously; so that we all return as one with Christ. This "caught up" condition or event is referred to as the rapture of the Christian faithful still alive on the earth when Christ returns.
 - c. ANSWER 3: The passage in 1 Thessalonians relates to the previously-examined passage in 2 Thessalonians in that many believe this rapture event will occur when the Holy Spirit is called back to heaven in order to allow the revealing of the lawless one. When the Holy Spirit is called back, the theory goes, he will take the faithful with him; and the rapture will occur.
 - d. ANSWER 4: There is much debate as to whether the "rapture" will actually occur; and if it does, when it will occur, i.e., just prior to Christ's return, at the beginning of the Tribulation Period, or at the mid-point of the Tribulation -- called the period of Great Tribulation. (These are also referred to as "pre-trib", "mid-trib", and "post-trib" views, respectively.) Some believe it will not happen at all.
 - e. ANSWER 5: This also relates to many views on Christ's kingdom itself, including the question as to whether it is an earthly kingdom or a spiritual one (i.e., millennial or amillennial views.)

One thing that all Christians, i.e., all believers in Christ, agree on is that Christ will indeed return. The difficulty in understanding this complex body of prophecy revolves around the fact that not all believers agree on how, when, or even where, it will occur. As we move ahead with our study, we will be focusing as closely as possible on actual scripture, using it as our sole guide. Each of us must allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, as we try to discern the revealing of Christ, the timing of His coming, and what those days will be like.

There is much that we can garner from this study that will strengthen our faith, and encourage us to continue in ministry and witness more strongly, as we work toward that great and glorious day.

Thanks for studying with us.

In Christ,

Wes