

END TIMES: BACK TO THE FUTURE

Lesson 1 w/Answers

The Period Before the Tribulation

Having completed our introductory lesson, we are now ready to begin an exciting study of the End Times. I've entitled this study "End Times: Back To The Future", because in order for us to fully comprehend all that God is revealing to us about the End Times in the New Testament, and in particular in the book of Revelation (the core book of our study), we must first go back and delve into the Old Testament.

Our plan is to begin by laying some general groundwork as it relates to the larger subject of Eschatology, or the study of End Times. Following this, we will be examining two Old Testament books, Ezekiel and Daniel, and what they specifically reveal to us; along with some passages from several of the minor prophets. This will give us a panoramic view of God's long-term plans for Israel and for mankind as revealed in these texts.

After establishing our foundation in the Old Testament study, we will explore some selected passages in the New Testament, as we work our way to the culmination of all End Time prophecy in the book of Revelation. You might be surprised, and moreover amazed, at the amount and level of detail regarding the information that God has provided us in His Word. In the course of our study, I am confident that your faith will grow stronger, and you will gain a deeper understanding of our role today as His Church; and, furthermore, what we should be doing with the time that remains until our Savior, Jesus, The Christ, returns again in triumph.

So as we start our first lesson, let's look at some scriptures that will provide us a good backdrop for when Christ returns. When we think about, or have studied, anything relating to end times, most of us have focused on the seven-year period referred to as the Tribulation Period, understanding what happens during that period, and the events that immediately surround the actual return of Christ. But have you ever considered what the period of time prior to the beginning of the Tribulation Period will be like? How will we know, and *can* we know, when the Tribulation Period begins — or whether we are in that time just prior to the start of the Tribulation Period? Well, it turns out that we *can* know something about that from scripture; so we will start by looking at that period, including something called The Rapture, or The Rapture of The Church.

Let's look at some New Testament scriptures and answer the following questions:

1. How do we know today that Christ has not already returned and taken his Church back to Heaven with him, e.g., maybe he came in some earlier century and we are not aware of it? (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)
 - a. ANSWER: Christ is not returning until the "man of lawlessness is revealed". In fact, the text goes on to say that not only will the man of lawlessness be revealed, but he will set himself up as God. After this occurs, Christ will return.
2. Today the Church operates within what some refer to as the "age of grace". What will change, or end, this age before the man of lawlessness is revealed? What will be different? (see 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8)
 - a. ANSWER: The one "who holds it back...will be taken out of the way". This can only refer to one being, and it is the only one capable of restraining, or "holding back ", evil; and that would be the Holy Spirit.
3. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the coming "Day of The Lord", the Day of Judgment. What did he say about this awful and dreadful day in 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5?
 - a. ANSWER: He said that it will come like a thief in the night. While people are expounding about "peace and safety", destruction will come suddenly upon them, much like judgment came on those during Noah's day with the flood.

4. What does Paul tell the Thessalonians about those who have already died with respect to the coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18?
- a. ANSWER 1: He asserts that those who have already died will return with him.
 - b. ANSWER 2: He also says that when the dead in Christ are raised, we who are still alive on the earth will be raised with them, and "caught up" to meet Him in the sky. The phrase "caught up" can be translated "rapture", and is where the doctrine of the rapture comes from.
5. In addition to the "man of lawlessness" being revealed, Paul wrote about a coming "rebellion" in 1 Thessalonians 4:3. What is the nature of this "rebellion" that Paul writes about? Identify the elements found in the passages below (see 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Peter 3:3-6; and Jude).
- a. 1 Timothy 4:1-3
 - i. ANSWER: People will abandon their faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.
 - b. 2 Timothy 3:1-5
 - i. ANSWER: People will become lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure, without love for others, without self-control, and having a form of godliness, but denying its power.
 - c. 2 Timothy 4:3-4
 - i. ANSWER: People will abandon sound doctrine, turn away from the truth, and turn to myths.
 - d. 2 Peter 3:3-6
 - i. ANSWER: There will be scoffers asking, "Where is this 'coming'?" that Jesus promised.
 - e. Jude
 - i. ANSWER: People will pervert the grace of God to be a license for immorality; they will deny that Jesus is the only Sovereign and Lord.
6. How does what we have discovered regarding the coming apostasy, i.e., the "rebellion", along with our understanding of what must happen before the "man of lawlessness" is revealed, relate to the doctrine of the rapture?
- a. ANSWER 1: Considering that the Holy Spirit will be removed from earth, i.e., called back to heaven, it is easy to then understand how rapture of the church might logically occur at this time. Furthermore, with the departure of the Holy Spirit, the "rebellion", or apostasy of the church, is virtually a foregone conclusion, as the church lapses into false teachings and follows the teachings of demons.
 - b. ANSWER 2: Correspondingly, this lays the groundwork for the Anti-Christ, who will use beguiling words and all forms of sorcery, divination and witchcraft to fool and mislead people into believing that he is God.

And so we conclude our first lesson by envisioning what it will be like prior to the beginning of the Tribulation Period. The Holy Spirit will be called back to heaven and will stop restraining evil, thereby opening the door for Satan and his followers to usher in the Tribulation Period. With the Holy Spirit called back, the Church will also be raptured, or "caught up" to meet Christ in the sky. With the Church removed, evil will have reign, and the "church" that remains on the earth will follow demonic teachings, myths, and lies disguised as truth; tailored to fit their own personal desires. The love of many will grow cold, and the darkest period in the history of God's creation will be ushered in — a period like none anyone has ever experienced. It will begin with a peace treaty with Israel, and a whole lot of other activity, all of which we will be studying in the lessons that follow.

Praising God with you for His sovereign power over His entire creation, and for His eternal plan for all those who put their faith in Jesus, His one and only Son. May we come to know Jesus in a deeper and more meaningful way, as we study about the days leading up to His Second Coming.

Thanks for studying with us.

In Christ,

Wes