

Session 7: Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

Point 1: God will end the world when He is ready and in the manner He chooses.

Matthew 24:36

36 “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Mark 13:32-33

32 “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

Point 2: Jesus Christ will return to earth visibly and judge all men; those found righteous will go to Heaven, those not found righteous will go to Hell.

Matthew 16:27

27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

John 5:28-29

28 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice

29 and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

Point 3: We must be awake, alert, and aware at all times.

Mark 13:33

33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

Matthew 24:42-44

42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.

44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Point 4: There is plenty of work to be done before the end comes.

John 4:35b

35 I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Mark 13:3-4, 10

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.



You have come to the end of the official Baptist belief statement on the “End Times”. Everything else is theory, interpretation, and speculation.



Proceed at your own risk.

The Rapture

Some end-times scholars believe that there will be an event where all Christians are removed from the Earth. First to be removed are “those who have fallen asleep”; i.e., the dead. Second, the living believers will be taken. It will be a massive disappearance of all believers in Christ. This event is known as “the Rapture”.



The focal passage for those who believe in the Rapture as described above is 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17:

1 Thessalonians 4:14-17

14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

15 According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

The “Rapture” is the defining event of the “Left Behind” book series.

How could millions of people disappear from the face of the Earth and no one notice? The authors of the Left Behind series, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, cite 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 as an explanation:

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,

10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie

12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Though we can only speculate as to the nature of the “powerful delusion”, it would serve to explain the disappearance of millions of people.

The Millennial Reign of Christ

Some end-times scholars believe that Christ will return to reign on Earth physically for one thousand years. During this time, Satan will be bound.

Revelation 20:1:3

1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain.

2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

In total, six references exist in Revelation 20 pointing toward a one thousand year Earthly reign of Christ.

The Tribulation

Some end-times scholars believe that a period of great suffering and judgment on Earth will precede the end of the world. This period will be known as the “Tribulation”. Those who believe in a future Tribulation period before the end of the world rely on a number of different scripture references as well as some math.

Probably the foremost passage used to support the Tribulation is Daniel 9:24-27:

Daniel 9:24-27

24 “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

25 Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

26 After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.

27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. “

The judgments that will be visited upon the earth during the time of tribulation can be found in Revelation 6 through 16.



This is where it gets confusing...



Now that we’ve covered the major events and terms, here’s where the real debate lies: in what order will all of these events occur? Have some of them already occurred?

What will the Tribulation be like?

NOTE: I am using Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins descriptions of the Tribulation period. They advocate a certain set of beliefs that not everyone believes. But their characterization of the Tribulation as described in Revelation is sufficient for this discussion.

LaHaye and Jenkins’ believe that a peace treaty between Israel and her neighbors will inaugurate the seven-year tribulation. This treaty will be brokered by a man who will be universally appealing in a time of confusion and chaos. The man will rise to power quickly over the entire earth. His identity is Anti-Christ, though that fact will probably be obscured by deception and lies.

The first half of the Tribulation (three and a half years) will be a terrible time on earth. God will send fourteen judgments onto the Earth. These judgments include:

- A world war that wipes out 25 percent of the world's population
- Famine
- Plague
- Great martyrdom
- An earthquake so great that "every mountain and island was moved out of its place" (Revelation 6:14)
- Ice and fire rain from the sky killing a third of all trees and all grass
- Complete darkness
- Locusts
- A demonic army that will kill one-third of the remaining population

As bad as the first half of the Tribulation was, the second half will be even worse. The Anti-Christ will break the treaty with Israel and declare all-out war on God.

Men will be required to declare their allegiance to the Anti-Christ. In doing so, they will be forced to take some sort of mark that symbolizes their loyalty. Without this mark, they will not be able to buy or sell anything, including food. Seven more judgments rain down on the Earth, worse than the ones before.

A second reminder here—What has been described is but one of the schools of thought about the end-times period. But it is necessary to have this foundation before we proceed.

The rapture...when will it happen?

The central question is this: will the church be rescued from the Tribulation?

There are two schools of thought as to the rapture: "Pre-Tribulation" and "Post-Tribulation". As the names imply, one group believes that the Rapture will be a separate event that occur before the tribulation, the other believes that the Rapture is part of the Second Coming of Christ and will occur at the end of the Tribulation period. (A third group, the "Mid-Tribulation" group, believes that the Rapture will occur at the mid-point of the Tribulation period.)

LaHaye and Jenkins follow a strict Pre-Tribulation theory. Their references include the following:

Revelation 3:10

10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

1 Thessalonians 1:10

10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

1 Thessalonians 5:9

9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Post-Tribulationists believe that the church will endure the Tribulation and be delivered by Christ at His second coming. They believe that there will be only a “single future coming of Jesus.”

In the “Post-Tribulation” there are three divisions:

- **Historic:** the view held by the church generally since the time of the Apostles. This view holds that Christ will return after the Tribulation and that He will meet His followers in the air as He returns.
- **Preterist:** the view that the Tribulation has already occurred. They point to many different events in history as fulfilling the prophecies of Revelation.
- **Dispensational:** believes that the current church of Christ must be gone from the earth before God can work with Israel again.

The Millennial Reign of Christ

Revelation 20 speaks of a thousand-year reign of Christ. Where does that fit into the picture?

Pre-Tribulationists generally believe that the millennium reign of Christ is literal and that Jesus will physically reign on Earth for one thousand years. This reign will be centered in Jerusalem. This belief is known as pre-millennialism.

Post-Tribulationists divide into separate schools of thought on the millennium:

- **Pre-millennialism:** that the millennium reign of Christ is literal and that Jesus will physically reign on Earth for one thousand years. This reign will be centered in Jerusalem.
- **Post-millennialism:** Christ will not return to Earth until the end of the thousand years. He will rule the world through His church.
- **A-millennialism:** “The amillennialist believes that the millennium is not literal but is spiritual. He believes that the “1,000 years” is a symbol for the perfect amount of time necessary for the sanctification of the believer. He believes that when one becomes a Christian, the “millennium” (spiritual, of course) begins in that Christian’s heart and continues until the believer goes to be with the Lord.” (CRI, <http://www.equip.org/free/DS320.htm>)



So what should I believe?



Pre-Tribulation, Post-Tribulation, Pre-millennial, Post-Millennial, A-Millennial...how do we make sense of it all?

Is it important to have an opinion?

I once heard someone say “I’m not a pre-millennialist, I’m not a post-millennialist, I’m a pan-millennialist. I believe it will all pan out in the end.” That’s a good attitude to take.

Jesus warns us to be aware, alert, and awake. Whether or not the Rapture occurs now or after the Tribulation, the end of our time on earth could come any second. Whether it is an individual believer or the church as a whole, God doesn’t promise us another year, another month, another day, or another hour.

I want to know more!

This is one subject on which you will find no shortage of information. Take care with what you choose to read; this is one subject that attracts its share of false teachers.

I thought long and hard about listing web sites and books that would give you more information on all of these topics. But I don’t feel comfortable doing that.

Start with the Word of God. If you need it, look for a good commentary. Decide for yourself what the Bible says. You can and will find persuasive arguments on both sides, but let the Holy Spirit be your guide and source for interpretation.

Most importantly, don’t become obsessed with this subject. We have enough work to keep us busy for a lifetime.

Words You Need to Know

Anti-Christ	A leader who will rise up during the Tribulation and persecute Christians and Jews.
eschatology	1: a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of mankind 2: a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of mankind; <i>specifically</i> : any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment
millennium	The thousand-year reign of Christ spoken of in Revelation 20.
preterism	A belief that the prophecies of Revelation have already occurred through various events in history.
rapture	The removal of Christ's followers from the Earth in the last days.
tribulation	A period of great suffering on Earth when God sends His judgments down on the people.

LIGHTS OUT

Sung by the Newsboys
Written by Steve Taylor

Last one turns the lights out,
And makes sure every curtain's drawn.
Nails the shutters shut, he's sure,
We are not of this world for long.
Who do you think you are?
Did you figure out the date?
What do you hope to do,
While you sit around and wait, wait, wait?

Last one turns the lights out,
And disconnects the answer phone.
Stuffs all sense of mission,
Says "I just can't turn the tide alone".
Who do you think you are?
Did you figure out the time?
What do you hope to do,
While you hide out and whine, whine, whine?

DON'T GO SHUTTIN' DOWN,
'TIL THE TRUMPET SOUNDS,
AND THE BATTLE IS WON.
DON'T GO PUNCHIN' OUT,
'TIL THE FINAL SHOUT,
AND THE FATHER SAYS, "WELL DONE".

Last one turns the light out,
And just keeps playing dumb.
These were his instructions,
He's not sure where he got 'em from.
Why do you wanna hide in a separate class?
Why do you buy the lie,
Of a faith under glass, glass, glass?

Last one turns the lights out,
And climbs up to the top of the roof.
He's sitting there 'til the Second Coming,
Says he's got the mathematical proof.
Who do you think you are?
Did you figure out the date?
What do you hope to do,
While you sit around and wait, wait, wait?