

**Introduction:** The world seems to be so bad, and getting worse and worse. . . . Many people feel the end is at hand (e.g., the Korean Church of 1988; Harold Camping and *1994?*; *98 Reasons Jesus Will Return in 1998* and a sequel, *99 Reasons Jesus Will Return in 1999*). Even many major, sound Christian leaders believe that we are living in the last generation. The Bible is God's word, and it tells us about the end of the world, what happens when we die, heaven, hell, etc., all the ultimate questions of life and death. This is known as eschatology, the study of the Last Things (from the Greek word, *eschatos*, "last").

### I. Death

- *What is death?*

- A. Gen 2:16-17 → A consequence of disobedience
- B. Jms 2:26 (*How would you define death from this passage?*) → Separation of body and spirit
- C. Mt 10:28 → Contrast of physical and spiritual death

*What is spiritual death?*

1. "Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body; spiritual death is the separation of the person from God" (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 1170). This involves eternal torment if sealed by physical death.
2. Death is the cessation of life in its bodily state; it is a different state of existence.

### II. The Intermediate State

- *What does "intermediate state" refer to?* → the state of people between their death and resurrection

*(So what happens to a person when he dies?)*

- A. There is some controversy over this question. Mistaken views include:
  1. Soul sleep → the soul rests in a state of unconsciousness
  2. Purgatory → a place of temporary punishment that cleanses the person of his sins
  3. Instantaneous resurrection → person immediately receives his resurrection body at death
- B. Luke 16:19-31 (especially vv. 22-23) → The wicked go to a place of misery, torment, and punishment
- C. 2 Cor 5:1-8; Phil 1:21-25 → Christians go to Heaven to be with the Lord in a state of blessedness

### III. The Second Coming of Christ

*(How will the world end?)*

- A. The Second Coming is all over the New Testament. It is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith meant to give us hope and peace.
- B. Matthew 24 (cf. Mk 13; Lk 21:5-36)
  1. Known as Jesus' eschatological/Olivet discourse. Matthew's is the most complete version.
  2. Very difficult passage because Jesus speaks of two events, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and his return.
  3. Important to recognize that Jesus is answering two questions, found in 24:3.

*(What do these various verses tell us about the Second Coming and events related to it?)*

- vv. 4-28 → A period of delay of the return of Christ characterized by persecution and tribulation
- vv.4-8 → General signs that are the beginning of birth pains
- vv.9-13 → Tribulation of the gospel/Church age → Beware of falling away!
- v. 14 → The gospel will be preached in the whole world before the End.
- vv. 15-26 → Destruction of Jerusalem as a particularly noteworthy and severe example of tribulation during this period and containing some general principles applicable to the whole period (e.g., vv. 23-24).
  - Some see both the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming described in these verses, and in a

way that is intertwined, with the former as a type of the latter and the text focusing primarily on one or the other at any given point.

- vv.23-26 → Deception will mark the Tribulation. Beware!
- vv.27-31 → The Second Coming
- vv.27-28 → The Second Coming will be visible to all. Therefore we should never believe claims that Christ has already come.
- vv.29-31 → The Second Coming comes after the Tribulation.
  - The Second Coming brings the end of the world.
  - The Second Coming will be characterized by power and great glory.
  - The Second Coming will bring the Rapture. (Some dispute this and think the rapture sometime before.)
- vv.32-33 → We are called to recognize the signs of Jesus's coming.
- v. 34 → A difficult verse for which multiple interpretations have been offered largely based on what "this generation" is taken to mean. "This generation" could mean: (1) race = mankind or the Jews; (2) end generation; (3) Jesus's generation. Number 3 is the most natural and the most likely meaning of the verse is that the events spoken of as preceding Christ's return/the end ("all these things") would take place within a generation, especially the destruction of Jerusalem, which was fulfilled. Another view is that it has a double reference—first and foremost that the destruction of Jerusalem would happen within a generation, and secondly, the fulfillment of this type in the final generation in that the events of the end would take place within a generation of beginning.
- v. 35 → The Second Coming is sure and definite.
- vv. 36-41 → The timing of the Second Coming is unknown.
  - The Second Coming will be unexpected (just like the flood of the days of Noah).
- vv. 42-51 → We should live alert, watchful, faithful, righteous Christian lives, for Christ is coming in judgment, and he will call each to account!

C. 2 Thes 2:1-12 (Note similar themes. But here we want to focus on the concept of the Antichrist.)

1. vv.1-3 (*What must happen before Jesus returns [i.e., before the Day of the Lord comes]?*)

→ The apostasy and the Man of Lawlessness must come before Jesus returns.

--*What is the apostasy?* → A great falling away from the faith (cf. Mt 24:9-13)

--*Who is the Man of Lawlessness?* → The Antichrist

• *What does this passage tell us about the Antichrist?*

2. v.4 → The Antichrist will claim to be God and set himself up in God's Temple (probably the Church, but could mean the Temple in Jerusalem, which would have to be rebuilt).

3. vv.9-10 → The Antichrist's coming will be satanic, with deception and false signs and wonders.

4. v.8 → The Second Coming will destroy the Antichrist.

D. Matthew 25:31-46

1. vv.31-32 (*What's happening here?*) → The Second Coming brings the Final Judgment.

2. v.46 (*What is the result of this judgment?*) → The wicked enter eternal punishment, and the righteous enter into eternal life.

E. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 (Note again the similar themes.)

• *What does this passage tell us about the order of events surrounding the Second Coming?*

1. 4:15-17 → Jesus will descend from heaven, the dead in Christ will rise, and then living believers will be caught up (i.e., raptured) with the raised believers in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and be with him forever.

2. 4:16 → Jesus' return will be personal, physical, and bodily.

3. 5:4-8 → The Second Coming is consistently presented as a motivation for godly living. (*Why?*)

4. 4:13, 18; 5:8-11 → The Second Coming is our hope. (*Why?*)

• The Second Coming signals the consummation of the Kingdom of God and our final and full salvation and inheritance! All will be made right! All will be superabundantly well!

#### IV. **The Millennium** (Rev 20:1-10) [*But what happens after Jesus returns? What's next?*]

- *What is the Millennium?*

- A. The Millennium is a period designated as one thousand years during which Satan is bound and some or all saints reign with Christ.
- B. There are four basic views of the millennium:
  1. Amillennialism: There will be no earthly reign of Christ. The millennium is the church age (now) in which Christ is reigning. Severe tribulation follows, and is ended by the Second Coming which begins final judgment and eternity.
  2. Classic Premillennialism: The return of Christ comes after the tribulation and begins a 1000 year earthly reign of Christ followed by final judgment and eternity.
  3. Dispensational Premillennialism: Christ raptures the Church secretly before the tribulation, and returns 7 years later to begin 1000 year earthly reign followed by final judgment etc.
  4. Postmillennialism: Christ's return will conclude a long period of expansion and spiritual prosperity for the Church as the world becomes Christianized. Then judgment and eternity.
- C. View 1 or 2 is most likely. The choice between them hinges on one's approach to Revelation, how literally you interpret it and whether you think the book has a chronological arrangement.

#### V. **The Resurrection**

- A. John 5:28-29 (*Who will be raised?*) → All will be raised bodily. (Some believe that all will be raised at once, while others believe that believers and unbelievers will be raised at 2 different times.)
  - *When will we be raised?*
- B. 1 Cor 15:20-24 → We will be raised at Christ's return.
- C. 1 Cor 15:42-55 (*What will our resurrection bodies/existence be like?*) → Believers will be "glorified," involving a moral and spiritual perfection, and a transformed physical body which is eternal, perfect, powerful, and spiritual (cf. Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2-3).

#### VI. **The Final Judgment and Final State**

- *When will the final judgment take place?*
  - A. Mt 25:31-32 → The final judgment will take place after the Second Coming.
- *Who will do the judging?*
  - B. Acts 17:30-31; 2 Tim 4:1 → God and Jesus will judge. More technically, God will judge through Jesus. So it appears that Jesus will be the main judge on behalf of the Father.
  - C. 1 Cor 6:2-3 → Christians will somehow participate in judgment of the world and the angels.
- *Who will be judged?*
  - D. Rev 20:11-13 → All people will be judged.
- *What will be the standard of judgment?*
  - E. Rev 20:13, 15; 2 Cor 5:10 → We will be judged by our works in this earthly life.
- *But how does this square with the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith?*
  1. Some believe that there will be 2 judgments: one for believers to determine rewards and one for unbelievers to condemn them to hell. But this is unlikely. It is nowhere stated explicitly.
  2. Works show faith (Jms 2). Therefore, we can be judged by works.
  3. A full biblical understanding of good works means that only works that come from faith are really good. Everything that does not come from faith is sin (Rom 14:23).
  4. Those who have true faith are written in the Book of Life, and it is they who enter heaven. Our works merely demonstrate what the Book of Life will say. Additionally, works are used to determine degrees of reward and punishment.
- F. 1 Cor 3:11-15; Rom 2:5-10 → It appears that there will be degrees of reward for the righteous, and degrees of torment for the wicked.

- *What will be the result of the judgment?*

G. 4. Rev 20:15-21:8 → The judgment is final and will seal one's eternal fate, hell for the wicked, and heaven/the new earth for the righteous.

H. 2 Pet 3:3-13 → Heaven and earth will be destroyed (essentially the universe).

I. Rev 21-22 (e.g. 21:1) → There will be a new heaven and a new earth (i.e. a new creation/universe).

## **VII. Chronological Overview**

- A. The beginning of birth pains/general signs and tokens of the end (wars, earthquakes, deception, persecution etc.). We can expect these to grow in intensity as time passes until . . .
- B. A Great Tribulation when the Antichrist arises and in which the general signs/afflictions become very intense and there is a great apostasy.
  1. One of the major disputed questions is when Jesus will rapture the Church—before, in the middle, or after the Tribulation. After is most likely.
  2. Premillennialists tend to think the tribulation will last seven years.
- C. Jesus will bring the Tribulation to an end with his coming, destroying the Antichrist and rescuing his people.
- D. At Jesus' coming the dead will be raised and believers will be changed/glorified.
  1. Technically, at least believers are raised at the Rapture, whenever that may be.
  2. Some think that unbelievers will be raised at a later time (after the Millennium).
- E. Jesus' coming brings the final judgment. (For premillennialists, the millennium should go here; it precedes the final judgment.)
- F. New heaven and new earth! The final, eternal state.