

5

Major Events Of The End Times

The countdown continues

No amount of effort can stop the clock of history. No mortal, no matter how influential, wealthy, or well-known can break the tyranny of time. Every day that passes, every flash of a digital crystal (clock), brings us closer to the dramatic events predicted in the Bible.

What's ahead? How much can we know about the end times? Well, not everything, certainly. But the Bible does give us much information. In the pages of this chapter, I will identify and explain the seven major events of the end times.

Christ is the centre of God's plan for the end times – key to the future

1. Return in the air (the Rapture): Christ comes back for His own. (His body of believers – The Church)
2. Rise of the Antichrist: Christ is challenged. (Start of the Tribulation period)
3. Unparalleled trouble: Christ troubles the nations and Israel. (Tribulation)
4. Return to the earth: Christ comes to rescue and judge Israel and the nations.
5. 1000 year reign: Christ rules the world from an earthly throne.
6. Final judgment: Christ defeats His enemies and judges unbelievers.
7. New World: God creates a new heaven and a new earth.

1. Christ will return in the air for His own – the Rapture

The Church Age is that interval between the time when Jesus came the

first time and when He will come again the second time – approximately 2000 years. Following the resurrection and ascension of Christ, we have the the descent of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers at Pentecost (Acts 2). We have the formation and building of the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23, 3:3-6; Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). So, what is the purpose of this interval or gap of some 2000 years? God is calling out an assembly of people for Himself to be known collectively as the Church (Eph. 3:1-12).

The next event in God's prophetic agenda will be the removal of the Church from planet earth. When the Church is complete, Christ will return from heaven and all believers who make up the Church will be caught up to be with Him in the air. This is called the Rapture. The Church is called His Bride in Ephesians 5:21-23. It consists only of those who are members of His body by means of the new birth, also referred to as being born again of the Spirit of God (1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Cor. 11:2).

The Old Testament prophets didn't know anything about the Rapture or for that matter the Church, so we don't find the Rapture in the Old Testament. It was a mystery revealed in the New Testament. Paul said, *"Listen! I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed (1 Cor. 15:51-52)."*

I understand that the twinkling of an eye is the fastest movement of the human body.

Let me explain: *We shall not all sleep*, that is, not all believers will experience death. Some will be alive when Christ returns in the clouds. But whether we have died or are still alive, *we shall all be changed*. The change will take place instantaneously, *in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet*. When the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. What a tremendous moment that will be, when the earth and the sea will yield up the dust of all those who have died trusting in Christ down through the centuries! It is almost impossible for the human mind to take in the magnitude of such an event but Christ Jesus is coming like a thief in the night to take His Church out of this world.

The true Church is the Body of Christ (body of believers worldwide), indwelt by the Holy Spirit. True believers, living and deceased, return to the heavenly realm in order for the Church to avoid the seven-year period of worldwide destruction, suffering and pain when God pours out His wrath upon the remaining inhabitants of earth – the Tribulation (Rev. 7:14). Scripture tells us that over one half of all life on earth will be wiped out before the Second Coming of Christ takes place.

The Rapture is also described in 1 Thessalonians 4: *"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (v. 16-17)."*

This will be the *FIRST* of the end time events. It is referred to as "the rapture of the church." The word rapture comes from the Latin word *rapere*, which literally means "to seize" or "to catch away." Christ's body of believers (the Church) are to be taken from the earth and will meet Christ in the clouds and go to be with Him. The time of this event is not spelled out in prophecy, as no one will know the day or the hour, but I believe we are very close to this event and this could probably occur within the next 16 years.

Please note that at the "rapture of the Church," Christ's feet does not touch the earth and that we meet Him in the clouds – this is not to be confused with His Second Coming as there are two phases of Christ's return. The end times are most easily understood when a distinction is made between the coming of Christ in the air to remove His church and the coming of Christ to the earth to rescue Israel and set up His kingdom. This coming in the air will be sudden and without warning, but His second coming to earth will be expected by those who are alive during the Tribulation period and to those who know the biblical record.

2. The Antichrist will rise to power

According to Bible prophecy, the next event on the end time calendar after the Rapture is the rise of a false Christ to world prominence. He is called the Antichrist (1 John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3, and 2 John 7). The Antichrist will rise to power out of obscurity. The Bible does not tell

us from what nation this sinister person will come from but it is most likely that he will rise out of the heartland of the old Roman Empire.

Bible prophecies teach that the Antichrist (world ruler) will play a crucial role in the final events of the end times. Antichrist means in place of or instead of. Antichrist is guilty of assuming the prerogatives of God. Most Bible prophecy or eschatology experts believe the Antichrist will be the ultimate embodiment of what it means to be against Christ. In the end times, a man will arise to oppose Christ and His followers more than anyone else in history. Likely claiming to be the true Messiah, the Antichrist will seek world domination and will attempt to destroy all followers of Jesus Christ and the nation of Israel.

The Antichrist (end time dictator) will be Satan personified. The Antichrist is Satan's counterfeit. The Scriptures clearly reveal Satan's sinister plans to ensnare and destroy mankind. Satan's original plan (in heaven) was to assume God's position and authority. His aim was to oust God and rule in His place. When Satan was ejected from heaven, his aim did not change, but rather intensified. Through the centuries he has endeavored (using various human agencies) to discredit God and take over His position. Satan aims to replace God in these last days by deceiving people into following the Antichrist.

Although the Bible does not specifically name who the Antichrist will be, it does give us some clues as to what he will be like. He will oppose and will exalt himself over God. Halfway through the Tribulation period he sets himself up in the newly rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, demanding to be worshipped; proclaiming himself to be God. This sinister end time ruler will preside over the whole world.

Here's more of what the Bible tells us about the Antichrist:

- He will receive power from Satan (Rev. 13:2).
- He will be a ruler (Rev. 6:2).
- He will make a peace treaty with Israel and then cruelly break it (Dan. 9:27).
- He will put himself above everything and everyone (Dan. 11:37).
- He will proclaim himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:4).
- He will stage a miraculous "resurrection" after a deadly wound (Rev. 13:3).

- He will have authority over the nations (Rev. 13:7).
- He will demand that his image be worshiped (Rev. 13:14).
- He sets up the "abomination of desolation" in Mark 13:14 (cf. Dan. 9:27).

The Antichrist will not be revealed to the world until after the Rapture when all of God's children, dead and those alive at the time, are caught up to be with the Lord in the air and taken to heaven.

3. The earth will experience unparalleled trouble – the Tribulation

The world will come to the brink of human annihilation before Jesus Christ returns to save us from ourselves. Jesus said, *"For there will be great tribulation, such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless those days be shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's (believers) sake those days will be shortened (Matt. 24:21-22)."*

After the **Rapture**, when the Antichrist is revealed, the stage will be set for the terrible events of the **Tribulation**. After this, the satanically empowered leader rises to prominence, the stage will be set for the most distressing period of all history. For seven years the Antichrist will conduct a reign of terror, bringing death to multitudes, both Jew and Gentile. But in addition to this reign of terror, the earth will experience unparalleled trouble as God's wrath will be poured out on all of mankind (Isaiah 13:6-11).

The nations will not go unpunished by the hand of God. They will live to hate the day they cast their lot with God's archenemy; Satan. For generations people have rejected God and mocked His Son. A just punishment will befall them in the seven year period called "The Tribulation." Two sections of the New Testament described the events of the seven years: Matthew 24 and Revelation 6-17. These prophetic details indicate how mankind will suffer during this frightening time. These terrible events of the end times will affect everyone in every part of the earth.

The suffering and death that will fall on the nations during the Tribulation is indescribably horrible. Millions upon millions will die

in the terrible outpouring of God's wrath and still Scripture tells us that most of the populace will continue to curse the God of heaven and refuse to trust in Him (Rev. 16:10-11). You should also know that there will be a great multitude of Jews and Gentiles, however, who will turn to God during the Tribulation (Rev. 7:9).

As you can see there are actually two purposes for the seven years of tribulation. The first, as we have already seen, is the punishment of the nations. The second is to bring Israel to the place where she can be restored to the position of spiritual favour she once held in God's eyes. Israel will suffer with the nations; only more intensely. This is "the time of Jacob's trouble" prophesied by Jeremiah. *"Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he (Israel) shall be saved out of it (Jer. 30:7).*

The Tribulation will be a time of the greatest suffering and persecution the world has ever seen. It's going to be so bad that men will seek to die to escape this horror but apparently death will not be possible: *"In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them (Rev. 9:6).*" But the Jewish people will be the hardest hit by the terror of those awful days. The prophet Zachariah predicted that two thirds of all Jews on earth will die during the Tribulation (13:8-9), but the suffering will bring Israel to repentance.

The spiritual restoration of Israel as a nation will take place at the return of Jesus Christ to earth at the end of the Tribulation. When He returns to rescue them from being annihilated by the Antichrist, they will nationally except Him as their Messiah and Saviour, even though individually a large number of Jews will already have been converted (Rev. 7:1-8). After hundreds of generations of hardhearted disbelief, the people of Israel will trust in Jesus Christ as their true Messiah. In terrible agony, inflicted by the Antichrist, they will turn in faith to the Lord Jesus. This brings us to the next event in God's program for the end times, the return of Jesus Christ to earth.

4. Christ will return to the earth – Battle of Armageddon

As the Tribulation draws to a close the earth will be in turmoil. The Antichrist's hatred of God will focus on the Jews as the seven years reach their conclusion. The Antichrist will march his armies into Israel

in preparation for a vast military showdown. The Antichrist will draw the nations together for a final battle on the plains of Megiddo (Rev. 16:12-16). *"For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem (Zech. 14:2)."* The Jewish nation will be surrounded by the Antichrist's army and will be fighting for its very own existence. The fighting will reach Jerusalem, and the Jews living there will suffer horribly (Zech. 14:1-21). A sense of despair will sweep over the Jewish nation.

Suddenly, when all seems hopeless, the scene will change. Jesus Christ will appear in all His glory and descend to the Mount of Olives. When His feet touch it, the mountain will split in half, forming a vast new valley stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea (Zech. 14:3-9). The Antichrist will rally the armies of earth to attack Him, but they will be crushed in defeat. Israel will be rescued. The armed hordes of earth will be slain. The Antichrist and his cohort (False Prophet) will be thrown into the lake of fire. Satan himself will be bound and the victorious Christ will prepare to ascend His throne in Jerusalem to rule in peace for 1000 years.

Jesus Christ will hold two special judgments at the close of the Tribulation. The first will be for the unbelieving and believing Jews who survived those terrible days (Ezekiel 20:34-44). A similar judgment will be held for the Gentiles who live through the Tribulation. Again, a shepherd metaphor is used to describe Christ. He is pictured as separating the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:31-46). Believers in Christ (the sheep) will be allowed to enter the Millennial Kingdom; unbelievers (the goats) will die and await the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

5. Christ will rule the earth for 1000 years – The Millennium

Did you know that there is coming a day when the garden of Eden will be restored? After the Battle of Armageddon, rather than returning to His Father in heaven, Jesus Christ will erect His throne in Jerusalem. He will establish it as His capital city, reinstate the Jews as His people, and rule over the earth in a 1000 year reign of peace, prosperity and righteousness, which Scripture calls the Millennium (Rev. 20:4-6).

Here's what the Bible tells us:

- Christ will be King. Christ Jesus will be glorified.

- We as believers will reign with Christ (Rev. 20:4, 6).
- David's throne will be re-established in Jerusalem (Luke 1:32).
- Climate will be ideal (Isaiah 30:23-26).
- Wild animals will be tame (Isaiah 11:6-9).
- People will have good health (Isaiah 35:5-6).
- Life will be lengthened (Isaiah 65:29-20, 22).
- Trees will provide food and medicine (Ezekiel 47:12).
- The rebuilt Temple at Jerusalem will be the centre of worship (Ezekiel 40-48).
- Representatives from all nations will come to Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16).

The reason for the Millennium is that God is going to use it to fulfil promises which He has made to His Son. God has promised Jesus that He will be glorified in history to compensate in part for His humiliation in history. The Bible says point blank that Jesus will return to manifest His glory (Isaiah 24:23; 66:18-19; 2 Thess.1:7-10). God also has promised that He will give Jesus dominion over all the world and that He will reign over the nations from Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Dan.7:13-4; Isaiah 2:2-4; Zach.14:1-9).

Psalms 2 says that God sits in the heavens and laughs and scoffs at them (rebellious world) because He has appointed a day of reckoning when He will "*terrify them in His fury(v.2).*" That will be the day when He installs Jesus as "*King upon Zion (v.6).*"

Currently Jesus is serving as our High Priest before the throne of God (Heb. 8:1). He is waiting for His Father's command to return to earth and claim all the kingdoms of this world (Heb. 2:5-9; Rev.19:11-16). This is when the unbelieving world will see His Glory displayed to everyone. The Saviour who was humiliated, taunted, and put to death in a public display of humanity's hatred of God will return as conquering Lord in view of the entire world (Luke 21:25-27). The Second Coming of Jesus, is the apex of human history, where every eye will see Him.

The Millennium is also essential for the fulfilment of all the promises that God has made to the Jews, to the Church, to the nations, and to creation. Let me explain: In the beginning, when God created man, the

devil sought to dwarf the Divine plan for the human race. Because of man's disobedience, he surrendered the sceptre to Satan, who is now the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). But Jesus Christ, "the last Adam," through His death and resurrection has regained for man the dominion over the world, and will, in the Millennium, dethrone Satan and rule as King supreme. The redeemed of the earth will be associated with Him in His reign (Rev. 5:9, 10; 20:4-6). So it would appear that the very honour of the Lord is at stake in all of this. The scene of Christ's humiliation, suffering, and crucifixion will one day witness His exultation and glory.

When Christ rules in the Millennial Kingdom, His love, justice, mercy righteousness and peace will be found throughout the earth. Since people reflect their ruler, the people of the kingdom will reflect the characteristics of their King (Christ Jesus). During this golden age, the earth will be what God intended it to be.

6. Christ will abolish rebellion and judge unbelievers

It had all begun some time in eternity past, when Lucifer (Satan) had looked with a jealous eye at the throne of God. This was the first sin created in the universe. In pride he led a rebellion of angels against God and was cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-15). From the time of his deception in the Garden of Eden until he was bound by Christ after the Battle of Armageddon, he has brought immeasurable suffering to all mankind. Now, after 1000 years of confinement, his hatred of God has intensified. He will be released from confinement and immediately makes one last, desperate attempt to dethrone the Lord. This will be Satan's final act of rebellion.

When Satan's last rebellion is smashed, it will be time for the final judgment. A new heaven and a new earth will soon be appearing, and the last details of earth business must be taken care of. This judgment will occur at the Great White Throne of God (Rev. 20:11-15).

We are told that "the dead, small and great (v. 12)" will stand before the throne. Unbelievers of Old Testament days, the Church Age, the Tribulation, and the Millennium will be there as the books are opened. Those who rejected God's offer of salvation in Christ will have sealed their own fate. Their names will not be found in the Lamb's Book of Life. They will be cast into the lake of fire, which is already inhabited

by Satan, Antichrist and the False Prophet. This is the second death – eternal death (spiritual death or separation from God).

Genesis 2:7 tells us that the *"breath of life"* (God's Spirit) was breathed into the physical man and he became a living soul, distinct from any other creature of the animal kingdom. At man's physical death, Ecclesiastics 12:7 says, *"Then the dust will return to the earth and the spirit (or the soul) will return to God who gave it."* Let me explain: when we die our physical body returns to the dust of the earth (decomposed and reduced to dust) while our spirit, which God gave us, returns to God. A believer will be with God and have an intimate relationship with Him for all eternity. In the case of a nonbeliever, they will be separated from God for all eternity in a place reserved for Satan and his fallen angels (lake of fire).

This shows that the soul is immortal and does not die with the body, nor sleeps in the grave with it; but is immediately with God upon one's death. You see man is more than dust or physical substance. Man also has a spirit component raising us above the level of the animal kingdom. So God has connected Himself to mankind in the most intimate way possible. Man is related to God and has the same breath as God, the breath of life (Spirit). When God created us He created us perfectly; the real us (the living soul or spirit) was created to live for eternity – to be with Him or to be separated from Him for all eternity.

Facing God's judgement is not a pleasant thought. God tells us in Revelation 20:10: *"And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."* We don't like the idea of eternal suffering. The idea of flames and anguish appalls us. But remember, these are people who intentionally and wilfully chose not to trust in Christ. They turned their backs on God's grace, deciding to leave Him out of their lives. It was their own choice. God is a perfect gentleman and will honour their wishes of having nothing to do with Him. They will be separated for all eternity from God just as they wish. God doesn't force anyone to come to Him.

God is not vengeful and capricious. He does not cause suffering just for the sport of it. His judgment stems from His Holiness, and He is absolutely righteous and holy. No one will receive one bit more or less than he deserves, because God can only judge rightly.

7. New Heaven and Earth – The New Jerusalem

Just to recap: The Millennium is a transitional period in God's program; it is the beginning of the eternal rule of God in the kingdom, which will pass into the eternal state. It is the consummating link between history and the eternal order. History and current events are moving toward a final era that will be the pinnacle of God's plan. The Millennium will be followed by mankind's final judgement and the eternal state – a new heaven and a new earth.

What will happen to the earth and old world system? It will be burnt to ashes in the aftermath of Satan's final attack. It tells us that *"the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10)."*

In his vision, the apostle John saw the holy city descend from heaven and he described it in Revelation 21 and 22. What a wonderful place! There will be no night because our heavenly home will be illuminated by the glory of God and the Lamb (Jesus) will be its light. There will be no temple because Christ Himself will be the temple. We will reign there forever. We will see the face of God and bear His name on our forehead. We will have access forever to the tree of life. With this description of heaven complete, the Bible comes to an end.

Recap: What does this mean to you?

Using the Bible as our guide we have surveyed what God has revealed about the end of this age and the ages to come. We have looked in on scenes of indescribable blood shed, horror, and death. And we have had a glimpse of blessedness and goodness that surpasses human comprehension.

If you have trusted in Christ as your Lord and Saviour, you can have confidence about the future. After the 1000 years of Christ's reign on earth is over, you will live with Him in a new world forever, in a life of happiness and fulfilment that centres on the Lord Jesus. But if you do not know Christ, the future is not so promising. You will miss the Rapture and the wrath of God will be poured out on the earth, and on you, in a time of terrible destruction, suffering, and pain. And beyond that lies the second death; a fate every bit as real for the unbeliever as

heaven is for the person who trusts in Christ. The countdown continues. The time of opportunity is now. Make your decision. Life is full of choices; choose wisely. Trust Christ today. Believing that He died to pay the penalty for your sins, and ask Him to save you. He has promised that He would. Then, when you have done so, your future will be secure; both in this life and in the ages to come.

[Please request my book: *God's Plan Of Salvation – What You Need To Know.*]