

When and how will Jesus return?

August 19, 2009

Today, we get into a little bit of “Eschatology.”

The word *eschatology* comes from the Greek work *eschatos* which means “last.” Eschatology, then, is the study of the “last things.”

Jesus is coming back!

Revelation 22:12

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.

Hebrews 9:28

...Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

And we know how he is coming back.

Acts 1:9-11

...As they were looking on, [Jesus] was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

However, we don’t know when he is coming back.

Matthew 24:36-37

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Mark 13:33

Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

Therefore, we must always be ready for his return.

Matthew 25:44

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Romans 13:11

...The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

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1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

Now, concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Recent failed attempts to predict the time of Christ's return.

Despite the wealth of biblical passages which lead us to conclude that it is impossible to predict the exact time of Christ's return, many church leaders have attempted to do so anyway.

Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel.

In his book *Future Survival* (1978), Chuck Smith predicted a 1981 "Welcome Home, Jesus" party. That was going to be the year that the church would be "raptured." After the rest of the world went through an awful period of tribulation for seven years, Jesus would come back with the church in 1988. Rapture theology has become a prevalent teaching of the Calvary Satellite Network (CSN), one of the most popular Christian radio stations in the country.

Hal Lindsey.

In his book *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (1970), Lindsey also predicted a 1981 rapture of the church and a 1988 date for the second coming of Christ. By 1978, he had sold over 9 million copies of the book. By 1990, he had sold over 28 million copies.

Edgar Whisenant.

Following Lindsey's lead (and perhaps just trying to cash in on the church's obsession), Whisenant published his booklet *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. He said, "Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong, and I say that to every preacher in town." He went as far as saying that Jesus would appear during Rosh Hashanah of that year, somewhere between Sept.11-13, 1988. He sold over 4.5 million copies of *his* book.

When Jesus failed to show up by Sept.15 of that year, Whisenant claimed to have miscalculated his date by one year, due to a nuance in the Gregorian calendar. He changed his prediction to 1989. Later, he changed his date to 1990, 1991, 1992...you get the picture.

Where should our focus be? (The Sign of All Signs)

Matthew 24:3-14

...The disciples came to [Jesus] privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray...you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet...

...Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death...And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

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Glossary of terms pertaining to Eschatology and the Second Coming of Christ.

Rapture.

This refers to an event in which the church is “caught up” or snatched from the earth to meet Jesus in the air. It comes from *1 Thessalonians 4:17*, “*we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up (rapio)...*”

The Tribulation.

When used in relation to the “end times,” this usually refers to a 7-year period immediately following the rapture of the church. During this time, God pours out his judgments upon the earth, resulting in the end of the world (or the present age) as we know it. The idea that this period is a 7-year period doesn’t come from the New Testament. It comes from Daniel 9:24-27.

The Great Tribulation.

This refers to the second half of the Tribulation period. According to this line of interpretation, the Great Tribulation will last for 3-1/2 years. This idea that this period will last for 3-1/2 years comes from places like Revelation 11:3, 12:6, 13:5 (where we read the phrases *1260 days, and 42 months*).

The Millennium.

This refers to a 1000-year period in which Satan is bound (Revelation 20:2-4), such that he is no longer able to deceive the nations of people, and in which Christ reigns for 1000 years with certain believers who have been raised from the dead.

A-millennialism.

This is the position which says that there is no future millennium to be expected. A-millennialists believe that the millennium is currently underway and that Christ is reigning on earth with his believers right now in and through the Church.

Pre-millennialism.

This is the position which says that Jesus will return before (pre) the Millennium and that he will exercise a personal, bodily reign on the earth during those 1000 years (which may be a literal time period or not).

Post-millennialism.

This is the position which says that Jesus will return after (post) the Millennium. He will not return until the Holy Spirit has successfully completed his mission to convert the world to faith in Christ, thereby leading to the Millennium.