

The End Times

Understanding the terms

8-2010

Some Helpful Tips

Assume that some prophetic verses—either in the Old or New Testament—have a double or multiple fulfillment. That is, some verses which were partially fulfilled in A.D. 70 may not be completely fulfilled until 3000 years later.

Understanding what will happen in the End Times is very complicated because it is based on much more Bible than just the book of Revelation. It requires intricately connecting many strands from many parts of the Bible (such as Genesis, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, the gospels, 2 Thessalonians, etc.). Do not feel like you have to understand everything to understand something (such as, Jesus is coming back!).

Because of its complexity, hold your End Times convictions with humility and tentativeness. You could be wrong. This is especially important if you have adopted a particular speaker's/teacher's (like your pastor's) positions as your own, without fully understanding scripturally why that person believes what they do.

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1. **Intermediate State:** This is the life people live when they die, prior to the resurrection.
 - a. **Heaven:** Although the bodies of those who belong to Christ deteriorate in the ground, they are with Him (2 Corinthians 5:6-8) in some sort of temporary spirit ("away from the body") existence of rest and delight. We refer to this place as "heaven" but it's really just the *introduction* to the final heaven (or "new earth").
 - b. **Hell:** The bodies of those *not* His also deteriorate but their temporary spirit existence is marked by horrific torment (Luke 16:23). We refer to this place as "hell" ("Hades" Luke 16:19-31) but it's really just an *introduction* to the lake of fire ("Gehenna"). It is dark (Jude 1:13), and fiery (Mark 9:47-48).

Bible teachers call both existences the "intermediate state" to distinguish between these temporary places for the dead and their permanent destiny. After Jesus' 1000 year earthly kingdom, resurrected believers will live in the New Jerusalem, the final New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21:1-7), while resurrected rebels will be thrown into the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 20:5, 11-15).

2. **Rapture:** Although not in the English Bible, the word comes from the Latin word for "caught up" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Jesus Christ descends from heaven—not the whole way to the earth, but hovering somewhere in the air—and calls His followers to Him. First, the bodies of Christians enjoying the intermediate state will rise to meet Christ and unite with their spirits, and then living believers will join them in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).
 - a. **Pretribulational Rapture:** This is the belief that the rapture will come right before the final 7 years during which God unleashes his judgment (what Revelation again and again calls His "wrath") on the earth ("Tribulation"). Since the Bible assures Christians that they will be exempted from God's wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9), those who are

convinced this is the Bible's teaching believe Christians will be first removed from the earth. (Some object that this is a two-stage second coming of Jesus.)

- b. Midtributational Rapture: Those convinced of this believe the rapture will occur in the *middle* of the 7 years during which God unleashes his wrath on the earth. They think the 7th trumpet (Revelation 11:15) is when the rapture occurs. This position still holds that Christians will be rescued from the coming wrath since the worst stuff doesn't start until the second half of the 7 year tribulational period. They don't think either the seals of Revelation 6 or the trumpets of Revelation 8 are part of God's wrath.
- c. Posttributational Rapture: People convinced of this don't think there will be a rapture—at least not the kind expected by the other two positions. They believe Christians must go through the Great Tribulation but in some way are protected *in* it (Jeremiah 30:7; Matthew 24:21). At the conclusion of the Tribulation the believers still alive will be gathered to Christ as he descends to earth. One problem for this position is explaining how Jesus' return will still be a surprise (Matthew 25:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3) since the Bible describes what will occur prior to it. It would seem that the person who believes this cannot honestly say she expects Jesus to come back "at any moment." On the other hand, this position fits better with Jesus' sermon on the Mount of Olives which sounds as if His followers will be around for the final horrors (Matthew 24:15-31). (FYI: Those with pre-trib beliefs would say Jesus was speaking only to those who will be converted during the Tribulation—especially Jewish people.)

3. **Resurrection:**

- a. **Christians:** At the rapture God reconstitutes the bodies of dead Christians and reunites them with their spirits. This new, glorified body (1 Corinthians 15:42-54) is without any of the old weaknesses,

but probably looks similar to the old one. Those who do *not* believe in a rapture believe the resurrection will occur at the second coming of Christ.

- b. **Rebels:** God reconstitutes the bodies of dead Rebels—likely they also look similar to how they looked on earth. Since they're bodies no longer vulnerable to deterioration or any breakdown, they are able to survive their punishment eternally without being consumed. This new body is resurrected and united with the doomed rebel spirit at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) *after* the millennial kingdom ends.
4. **Antichrist:** Several times in the Bible John used this as a generic label for someone who opposes Christ and His work. However it has become the favorite label for a future demonic global ruler *and* multinational force (likely both) which Paul calls "The Man of Lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3), and John calls "The Beast" (Revelation 13:3). He will assume power at the beginning of the Tribulation and initially be seen as a man of peace who partners with the nation of Israel. (Many believe he will do what no one else could and actually bring peace to the Middle East.) However, halfway through the Tribulation he will turn on the Jews as well as any who love Christ. He will ally himself with the devil and demand to be worshiped (Revelation 13:4-8). But at the end of the Tribulation when Christ the King appears in glory to rescue His people (Zechariah 14:3-5), He will hurl the Beast and his False Prophet into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20).
5. **Tribulation:** A 7-year period (Daniel 9:27) after the rapture (if you're pretrib) when God unleashes all of His pent-up judgment upon the earth and those who rebel against Him. It will occur prior to Christ's Second Coming and the launch of the Millennial Kingdom. The first 3 ½ years will have its problems (Revelation 6) but will be tame compared to the second half. That's when the Antichrist takes off the gloves and turns the "Great Tribulation" (Revelation 7:15) into a global killing field. Only part of the horror will be the

antichrist lashing out at God's people and others; the really awful stuff will be wrath of God as he judges the earth's inhabitants (Revelation 13-19).

- a. **Tribulation saints:** These are people who come to Christ and endure much opposition during the Tribulation (Daniel 11:32) after all the other believers vanish in the rapture. As indicated above, those who disbelieve in a rapture believe *all* living Christians will go through the Tribulation and could accurately be called "Tribulation saints".
6. **Armageddon** [*Hebrew: (h)ar magedon*]: The final battle between good and evil at the end of the Tribulation period. Military forces from around the world will converge on Israel to fight against Messiah's people (Revelation 16:16). It is widely believed that this is 60 miles north of Jerusalem where the valley of Jezeel and the plain of Esdraelon meet at the foot of Mt. Megiddo. In the last 4000 years over 34 history-changing battles have been fought here; even Napoleon left his mark. I have stood on the battlements of Megiddo's ancient fortress and looked down at a plain that stretched as far as the haze would let me see. It is so vast millions of troops could *easily* stage there. But since there are some verses that suggest the final battle may be fought nearer Jerusalem (Joel 3:2; Zechariah 14:2), some scholars think either we're not understanding the Hebrew properly—or a letter or two may have been miscopied in the transmission of the text. Since there's no other use of the Hebrew word either in the Bible or anywhere else with which to fine tune our interpretation, it's best not to be dogmatic about where this will occur.
 7. **Second Coming of Christ:** The *first* coming was when the Son of God was born in Bethlehem as the baby Jesus. The second will be when the glorified Son returns to earth (Acts 1:11) after the Tribulation period to rule the planet as its rightful king, ending the reigns of earth's pretenders.
 8. **Millennium:** After Christ returns to earth He will rule it for 1000 years (or a generally long period of time; Revelation 20:1-7) with absolute control (Isaiah 11:3-5; Revelation 2:27;

19:15). During these years Satan will be imprisoned in the Abyss (Revelation 20:2-3, 7-9). At the end of this time, he will be temporarily released for one final but futile revolt against Christ. It is an unusual time during which people live to be quite old (Isaiah 65:20), and when natural enemies live in harmony (Isaiah 11:6-9). There are divergent views of the Millennium:

- a. **Premillennialism:** "Pre" means the belief that Jesus will come back *before* the start of the millennial kingdom but after a time of great suffering.
 - b. **Postmillennialism:** "Post" means the belief that we are currently in the millennial kingdom and Jesus and the saints will come back (Revelation 2:26-27) *after* this period and inaugurate the eternal state. These optimists believe evangelism and the progress of the church will radically increase the number of world Christian converts. As a result, society will get better and better, functioning more and more in harmony with God's standards (a popular belief 100 years ago until the horror of WW I dashed their optimism).
 - c. **Amillennialism:** "A" means *against* the notion of a millennial kingdom. This belief is that Revelation 20:1-7 does not refer to a literal 1000 year kingdom, but an unspecified period of time in which we're now living; the church age in which Satan's work is greatly reduced due to Christ being enthroned in heaven and ruling earth from there.
9. **Bema Seat Judgment:** At the end of the age God will "judge" believers—not to determine their salvation (that happens upon repentance and faith), but to reward them (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:9 both speak of God "judging" the believer but instead of the typical word describing God's judgment of rebels, it's the Greek word bema. This is not the indictment of the Great White Throne judgment, but the awards judgment; the bema was a raised platform from which the judges of Olympic Games awarded champions.

10. Great White Throne Judgment: Everyone who refused to be reconciled to God through Christ will pass before God for judgment. Each person will be condemned by his/her works—since none has a Mediator to intervene on his/her behalf—and will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15)

11. Eternal State:

- a. New Heavens and Earth: The final, eternal and awesome *place* which the believer in his/her glorified body, shares with God (Revelation 21:3). After completely purging the current earth and universe (2 Peter 3:10), God will gloriously reconstruct it minus all evidence of sin and corruption (Revelation 21:1). That means in outer space there will be no dying stars, and on earth, no illness, hurricanes, crime, suffering, or hot/cold temperatures! The animals (yes, likely) will all be tame and friendly, the landscape stunning, the weather perfect, the need for food replaced by the simple *enjoyment* of food, and we'll probably be able to move about the universe freely. Neither the place—nor the believer's life here, will ever end. Never. The New Jerusalem which descends to the new earth in Revelation 21:10-27, is actually synonymous with the new earth.
- b. Lake of Fire: The final and eternal *place* where God will send every rebel after indictment at His Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15). This will also be the final destiny of Satan (Revelation 20:10), the beast and the false prophet (Revelation 19:20). Jesus depicts it as an awful place of torment (Revelation 21:8).