

26 QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ASKING!

QUESTION #24: WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE END OF TIME?

On the last day, Jesus will return in his body as all humanity watches. He will then judge the living and the dead.

1. WHY SHOULD WE STUDY THIS?

Rev 1³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

2. JESUS IS COMING BACK

1Thess 4¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Jas 5⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.

Mark 13²⁴ "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.²⁷ And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. (See also, Heb 9.28; 1 Jn 3.2.)

A. IT WILL BE A BODILY RETURN

John 14¹ "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Acts 1¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,¹¹ 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."

B. IT WILL BE A CREATION-WIDE, VISIBLE RETURN

Rev 1⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Matt 24²⁹ "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

C. IT WILL BE A SURPRISE RETURN

Matt 24 ³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

D. IT WILL BE A PREDICTABLE RETURN

Some predictions / interpretations are just plain wrong.

Mark 13 ⁵ And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

Political upheaval and "natural disasters" are the norm for the age between Jesus' ascension and return. Far from indicating His return is about to occur, they are a testimony that life is going on as normal. Some of the signs of the end are a sign the end is not yet.

Not all the signs of the end can be quantitatively measured.

Mark 13 ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.

How can any man know for sure when this has taken place? We can only measure these things to a certain level.

Time does not function the same way with God as it does with us.

2Pet 3 ⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

There does appear to be a growing persecution of the church prior to Jesus' return.

Mark 13 ²⁰ And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.

Many of the prophetic passages intimate this growing tribulation which precedes Christ's return.

The Lord will perform a unique saving work among those Jews living immediately prior to Jesus' return.

Rom 11 ²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; ²⁷ "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

3. THE PLACE OF CHRIST'S RETURN IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE TODAY

A. WAIT

1Pet 4 ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

B. ANTICIPATE

Rev 22 ²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

C. WORK HARD

Titus 2 ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

4. WHAT ABOUT THE MILLENNIUM?

The discussion of the millennium (literally, 'the thousand years') originates from the Revelation 20.

Rev 20 ¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.... ⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.

There are four basic views on the millennium that have had prominence through the history of the church.

A. POSTMILLENNIALISM

This view says that through the binding of Satan, there will be a gradual increase in the growth of the church and spread of the gospel where more and more people will become Christians. The influence of more believers will change society so that it will function as God intended gradually ushering in an age of peace and righteousness, in other words – the millennium, which is not necessarily a literal one thousand years. Christ will then return "post", or after, the millennium.

B. AMILLENNIALISM

This view is the simplest and says that Christ's reign is a heavenly one and the millennium is equivalent to the church age currently going on, without reference to a literal thousand years. During this already/not yet age of Christ's Kingdom, Satan's binding will reduce his influence over the nations so that the gospel is preached to the whole world. Near the end of this time, the affliction and persecution of Christians will increase sharply until Christ returns and judges believers and unbelievers at once.

C. CLASSIC / HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM

Although there are slight variations to this view, it basically states that Christ will come back 'pre,' or before, the millennium. The church age will go through the tribulation period. At the end of the tribulation, Satan will be bound, and Christ will come back to establish his kingdom on earth for the millennium, a literal thousand years (although some do not hold it is literal). The resurrected believers will reign with the resurrected Christ physically on earth during this time. Unbelievers will also be on earth at this time and most will become believers and be saved. At the end of the millennium, Satan is loosed and Christ decisively defeats him and his remaining followers. Then the unbelievers from all times will be judged, and the believers will enter into the eternal state.

D. DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

This more recent view states that Christ will secretly return for believers before the suffering of the tribulation period (the 'rapture'). During the tribulation, the Jewish people will be left to go through it and will be ultimately converted. Jesus will then return for a third time after the tribulation with his saints to rule the earth for one thousand years. Unbelievers will also be on earth at this time and most will become believers and be saved. At the end of the millennium, Satan is loosed and Christ decisively defeats him and his remaining followers. Then the unbelievers from all times will be judged, and the believers will enter into the eternal state.

E. WHO BELIEVES WHAT?

- Augustine, BB Warfield, and many others during the great revivals of the past have held to postmillennialism
- Louis Berkhof, John Calvin, and many other Reformers have held to amillennialism
- Don Carson, Wayne Grudem, Al Mohler, and many others hold to classic / historic premillennialism
- John MacArthur, Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye and others are dispensational premillennialists

5. WHAT DOES GRACE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH TEACH?

From the GFC Statement of Faith:

10. God, in His eternal purpose, has also appointed a day of judgment; a day in which He will judge all mankind in righteousness by Jesus Christ. Every human who has ever lived will appear before Christ to give an account of their life and to receive either everlasting life in the presence of God, or everlasting torment in hell.

Notice that a believer can agree to GFC's Statement of Faith and become a member of GFC without making a declaration about what they believe about the millennium. This is a controversial issue among many evangelicals, but it is a 'third order issue'. That is, Christians can remain in the same church and disagree over the matter. Our Statement of Faith declares only that which is a matter of fact from Scripture and is necessary to our unity as a church.