

Are We in the End Times?

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A man really enjoyed his grandfather clock until it went haywire and chimed fourteen times one midnight. He jumped up and yelled to his wife, *“Wake up, Nellie, it’s later than it’s ever been before!”* Brothers and sisters, it’s later than it’s ever been because we are living in the last hour. The question is not, *“When will Jesus return?”* The question is, *“What will we do before He gets here?”*

The short answer to the question, *“Are we in the end times?”* is, *“Yes, we are.”* Biblically speaking, the end times or “last days” began with the Ascension of Christ and will last until the Second Coming. Now that’s a short sermon, isn’t it? You know better than to expect brevity so we’ll tackle some related questions.

The Bible uses terms like, *“last days,” “later times,”* or *“the last hour”* to refer to events surrounding the return of Christ. The theological term is *eschatology*. In the Greek, *eschatos* means “last” or “latter” and *logy* is “discussion” or “doctrine.” This cartoon captures some of the confusion that can arise when talking about end times.

There are two extremes we must avoid about the end times.

- **Sensationalizing.** For some the tendency is to obsess about biblical prophecy by trying to fit every news headline into a tidy prophetic timeline. Paul cautions Christians against prophetic presumption in 2 Thessalonians 2:2: *“Not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”* Some believers in Thessalonica had stopped working and were just waiting for the return of Christ.
- **Trivializing.** Others don’t think about the return of Christ at all and even roll their eyes at this important doctrine. Jude 18-19: *“In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions. It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.”*

Preliminary Points

1. **We don't know for sure when Jesus is coming back but we're certain He is!** Did you know for every one verse in the Bible that speaks about Jesus' first coming there are eight verses which describe His second coming? David Jeremiah says there is more space given to prophecy than to almost any other subject in the Bible. For example, the book of 1 Thessalonians contains a reference to the return of Christ in every chapter! When we visited Washington, D.C. as a family many years ago, I was struck by this inscription in the Library of Congress: "*One God, one law, one element; and one far off, divine event to which the whole creation moves.*" I'm not sure it's all that far off!
2. **There are differences of interpretation regarding end time events.** I've learned over the years not to divide over disagreements related to eschatology because Bible-believing people have different views on this topic. This is what Edgewood believes: "*We believe that the end of this age is approaching and will culminate in that 'blessed hope' - the personal, imminent return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and of the unjust, the everlasting blessedness of the saved, and the everlasting punishment of the lost.*"
3. **We must avoid date setting.** For the past 2000 years undiscerning and reckless Christians have been setting dates for when Christ would return. The most recent was supposed to take place on June 9. Oops. That didn't work out so well. Jesus warned against this in Matthew 24:36: "***But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.***"
4. **History and future events are linear, not cyclical.** History is "His-story" and is headed somewhere. I believe the next big date on God's calendar is the rapture of the church and the return of Jesus Christ.
5. **The aim of prophecy is always practical.** While we want to know the "when" and "what" questions, in Luke 18:8 Jesus focuses on "who" we need to be and "how" we should live in light of His return: "***Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?***" Prophecy is not designed to satisfy our curiosity but to sanctify our character. Ultimately, the question is not *when* Jesus will return but what will we *do* before He gets here. *Let's focus on being faithful and let God handle the end of the world!*

Here then are 10 biblical signs we are in the end times.

The Beginning of the End

1. Restoration of Israel. In his latest book called, *The Book of Signs*, David Jeremiah lists the formation of Israel as a nation in 1948 as the number one sign the end is near. Isaiah 66:8 says: ***“Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?”***

All this goes back to Genesis 12:2-3 when God made a binding covenant with Abraham, who became the father of the Jewish nation: ***“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”***

While God promises to bless the world through Israel, many nations today are blasting Israel. Anti-Semitism is rapidly increasing. Check out Zechariah 12:3: ***“On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it.”*** We see this especially with Iran as it has vowed to wipe Israel off the map.

2. Increased apostasy. 2 Thessalonians 2:3 indicates there will be a great apostasy during the end times: ***“Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first.”*** The word ***“rebellion”*** is the Greek word *apostia*, from which we get apostasy. The KJV calls it the ***“falling away.”*** The end times will see a wholesale rejection and defection from God’s revelation as more and more fall away to our fallen world. We are seeing 1 Timothy 4:1 lived out in front of our eyes, ***“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.”***

A current example of apostasy is the sad news that Joshua Harris, the author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* and former megachurch pastor has publicly declared, ***“I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is ‘deconstruction,’ the biblical phrase is ‘falling away.’ By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian.”***

While this is shocking, statements like this should not surprise us. Jesus gave this warning in Matthew 24:10-12: ***“And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.”*** Each of us must keep our guard up as we’re reminded in Hebrews 3:12: ***“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”***

3. Growing godlessness. Listen to 2 Timothy 3:1-3: ***“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”*** There’s no doubt narcissism, individualism, materialism, pluralism, pantheism, occultism, relativism, universalism, humanism, paganism, skepticism, rationalism and racism are all on the rise in our country.

Barna President Dave Kinnaman just released the results of a poll, which shows how a new code of morality has replaced the code of Christianity in our culture. He discovered six tenets of this new religion.

- The best way of finding yourself is by looking within yourself.
- People should not criticize someone else’s life choices.
- To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most.
- The highest goal in life is to enjoy it as much as possible.
- People can enjoy whatever they want, as long as those beliefs don’t affect society.
- Any kind of sexual expression between two consenting adults is acceptable.

Related to this, according to another Barna survey, only 4% of America’s 75 million Millennials have a biblical worldview.

4. Spiritual apathy. After conducting more than 3,000 interviews with American adolescents, researchers reported when it came to the most crucial questions of faith, many young people simply shrugged and said, *“Whatever.”* Jesus warned in Matthew 24:37-39 how He will return when people are just doing ordinary things, going through life with a “whatever” attitude: ***“For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 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, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” While Noah preached a flood was coming, the people ate their food and built their families, living life without any thought of coming judgment. Sounds like our society today.

5. False teaching. False teachers have proliferated and will become even more popular according to 2 Timothy 4:3-4: *“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”* Jesus said it like this in Matthew 7:15: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”*

6. Natural disasters. As we get nearer to the return of Christ, we will see more and more natural disasters according to Luke 21:11: *“There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”* According to one report in 1970 there were 78 natural disasters; in 2004 this number jumped to 348. Large earthquakes have risen by 450% since 1900.

7. Sinful scoffers. 2 Peter 3:3-4 says, *“Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’”* A “scoffer” is one who mocks Christ, ridicules the things of God, laughs at the second coming and opposes the gospel. Psalm 1:1 warns about sitting in the seat of scoffers. If you don’t see much scoffing, just make a post on social media about your faith in Jesus and how it affects your morality and see what happens.

8. International conflict. In Mark 13:7-8, Jesus says, *“And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”* The word *“alarmed”* refers to being in tumult. Jesus doesn’t want us to be disconcerted or diverted from our task.

9. Rise of antichrists. Mark 13:5-6: *“And Jesus began to say to them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.’”* The word, *“see,”* means, *“to watch, take heed, keep your eyes open.”* He’s urging His followers to be on guard against spiritual

imposters. There will be *many* messiahs who will lead *many* to wander away from the faith.

A recent example occurred during the Saviour's Day keynote address in February at the United Center in Chicago when Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakahn made this statement: *"God does not love this world. God never sent Jesus to die for this world...He never was on a cross, there was no Calvary for that Jesus...The real story is what I tried to tell you from the beginning. It didn't happen back there. It's happening right while you're alive looking at it. I represent the Messiah. I represent the Jesus and I am that Jesus. If I am not, take my life."*

We can expect more people to make claims to be the Christ according to 1 John 2:18: *"Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour."* 1 John 4:1: *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."*

10. Worldwide gospel proclamation. In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said the end would not come until the gospel penetrates the ends of the earth: *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

Are you aware 1.5 billion people from 6,000 language groups are still waiting for a full Bible in their heart language?

I can't wait to share this news! A number of Bible translation agencies, including American Bible Society, Pioneer Bible Translators, Wycliffe, United Bible Societies, Biblica, and Deaf Bible Society are now collaborating to complete the task to translate the Bible into every remaining language—in this generation.

They began working several years ago to create a central digital Bible library, which was launched in 2010. They've since compiled over 1,100 portions and versions of Scripture. They've named their collaboration illumiNations, as a reference to Isaiah 60:3, which foretells the nations coming to God's light: *"Nations will come to your light, and kings to your shining brightness."*

YouVersion explains it this way: *"In the past, getting the Bible into another language...often took decades. But today, the world's leading Bible translation*

ministries collaborate...to exchange ideas, share systems, improve practices and recruit givers. Working together, they have leveraged advancements in technology, communication, and travel to shorten the translation process, in many cases to just a few years."

They now believe they can have at least the New Testament translated for 99.9% of the world's population by the year 2033!

Additional Questions

Initially I asked Pastor Brown to preach this weekend because he knows way more about this topic than I do. Unfortunately, he was not able to because of some health struggles he's having. He did prepare some answers to a number of questions you submitted which I will now share. I am so grateful for his 44 years of faithful gospel ministry in the QCA.

1. Why does the Bible say the dead in Christ will rise first? This question comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:15: ***"For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep."*** I love Pastor Brown's sense of humor: *"Because they have six feet farther to come!"* And then he says, *"It's perhaps out of deference to those saints who have endured death. Definitely for reasons known only to God, it is based upon His preferred order (1 Corinthians 15:23)."*

2. When is judgment day? There are several judgment days mentioned in Scripture. Pastor Brown describes three of them:

- **The Judgment Seat of Christ.** This is where the believer's WORKS (not sins) are judged after the rapture and we will receive reward (gold, silver and precious stone) or loss (wood hay, and stubble) based upon our works (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 4:5).
- **The Judgment of Nations.** This is where the nations of the earth are judged based upon their treatment of Israel. Judgment occurs at the end of the tribulation and before the Millennium (Matthew 25:31-46; Joel 3:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:2).
- **The Great White Throne Judgment.** This is where the wicked (those not saved) are judged at the close of the Millennium (Revelation 20:11-15).

3. When do we receive our glorified resurrected bodies? Believers will receive their resurrected bodies at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:44-48).

4. Who are the two witnesses in Revelation 11? Most probably it will be Enoch and Elijah because neither of them died. Some believe the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah since Moses' body was buried by God and its location a mystery (Deuteronomy 34:5-7). The assumption is this could be because he is to be one of the two witnesses. They also point to the appearance of Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-10.

5. What about those who are alive at the time of the Rapture? Will God spare people physical death like he did Enoch and Elijah? At the Rapture we will be taken up by the upper-taker instead of down by the undertaker. Most likely this means we will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye and technically not die in a physical sense because we will not be separated from a lifeless body but it will be transformed and translated into a glorified resurrected body.

Pastor Kyle has some first-hand experience about the rapture from something that happened during one of our team times.

Action Steps

Let's wrap up with some lessons for living in the last days. I appreciate Ray Pritchard's perspective: *"I believe the coming of the Lord must be near. Many Christians before me have said the same thing. I'm taking my stand with them. I'd rather expect Jesus to come in my lifetime and be wrong than to be so in love with the world that I'm not ready to see Him when He comes."* When we studied Mark 13 a couple years ago we said it like this: *The closeness of Christ's coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today.*

1. Live out your faith. Are you living more like the world than as a follower of the Word? The study of God's prophetic program is always meant to have a purifying effect on His people. I'm grateful for the quote Matt Baker passed along from George Eldon Ladd: *"The main purpose of prophecy is not to answer all our questions about the future but to enable God's people to live in the present in light of the future. 1 John 3:2-3: "...we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."*

2. Rearrange your priorities. I like what D.L. Moody once said: *“I have been working three times as hard since I came to understand that my Lord is coming again.”* Luke 21:28: *“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* When Jesus returns, do you want to be found being lazy? Do you want Him to hear you say, *“Whatever”*? Do you want Him to come back while you’re nursing that grudge? Do you want Him to return when friction and lack of forgiveness is tearing your marriage apart? Do you want Him to appear when you’ve not been giving of your financial resources to expand His kingdom? Would you have been OK if He had returned when you were involved in that secret sin this week? 1 John 2:28: *“And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”*

3. Encourage one another. After describing end time events, Paul concludes 1 Thessalonians 4 with verse 18: *“Therefore encourage one another with these words.”* To *“encourage”* means to come alongside to give whatever help is needed. Here are some practical ways to use the end times to encourage others:

- Talk about the return of Christ at least once a day. Dr. Horatius Bonar, a Scottish hymn writer from the 1800’s, had a custom every night and every morning. When he’d draw the curtains before going to bed, he’d say, *“Perhaps tonight, Lord!”* And in the morning, he’d open the curtains, look up and say, *“Perhaps today, Lord!”*
- Interject the second coming into conversations by using the phrase, *“Maranatha.”* This word is found at the end of the Book of Revelation and means, *“Come, Lord Jesus.”*
- Pepper your prayers with references to His return.
- Begin preparing now for communion next weekend in light of 1 Corinthians 11:26: *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”*

4. Urgently tell lost people about the Lord. Don’t get so caught up in prophecy that you forget to point people to Christ. In Acts 1:7, in response to some questions about the timing of His second coming, Jesus said: *“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”* We’re not to be focused on date setting but instead we’re called to be Spirit-empowered witnesses. Look at the very next verse: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and*

in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). Instead of worrying about timelines, we should be lining up our time for worshipping and witnessing.

As a way to keep our mission of going with the gospel in front of us, we’re asking people to write the names of people they’re praying for on the wall in the worship center. This wall is now filled with names of people who are not yet following Christ. Early Tuesday morning I had the privilege of praying for these individuals. As I prayed, I also kept count and wept when I realized these requests represent over 900 people in need of Christ! *If you’d like to add some names, you can still do so this weekend.*

5. Repent and receive Christ. Don’t delay – you could die today! Or, Jesus could come back tonight. Have you ever wondered why Christ has not returned yet? It’s because He’s giving you time to repent...before it’s too late...and it’s later than it’s ever been! Listen to 2 Peter 3:8-10: ***“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. 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. 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.”***

I don’t know how to say this any other way. If you don’t know Jesus, you have an appointment with judgment. And there is no escape being exposed unless you put your faith in Jesus Christ this very moment. It’s your choice. What will it be? Do you want to face ruin? Or, do you want to be rescued? Do you want to go to Heaven or to Hell? Do you want deliverance or destruction? Flee to Jesus now before it’s too late...so that you’re not left behind.

Jesus said these words in Matthew 24:42-44: ***“Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 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. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”***

It is later than it's ever been and the return of Christ is closer today than it was yesterday. 2 Corinthians 6:2: ***“Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”***

Invitation

“Lord Jesus, for too long I’ve kept You out of my life. I admit that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I’ve been living. I don’t want to be left behind. By faith I gratefully receive Your gift of salvation. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. With all my heart I believe You are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. Thank You for dying in my place as my substitute. I believe Your words are true. I repent and now receive You as my Lord and Savior. I surrender to Your leadership in my life. Make me into the person You want me to be. Amen.”

Closing Song: “Even So Come”

Commissioning of Teachers and Students

As a new school year begins, I’d like to have teachers, aides, helpers, administrators and staff, whether homeschool, preschool, kindergarten, primary, secondary, junior high, high school, or college to stand right now. I’d also like all students, including homeschool, private and public, to stand. If there are any college students here anyone taking masters classes, would you also stand?

It’s our practice to commission missionaries when we send them into the mission field. Every one of you is called to live on mission for the glory of God and the advance of the gospel on your campus.