

## **The End is Just The Beginning** **The Second Coming of Christ and the Future for Believers**

Two facts that Theistic Christianity and secular science agree on

- 1) The universe had a beginning
- 2) The universe as we know it will end

“Theism is the worldview that says... there is an infinite, personal God beyond the universe who created it, sustains it, and can act within it in a supernatural way. This is the view represented by traditional Judaism, Christianity, and Islam”<sup>1</sup> Theistic Christianity believes that the Supreme God offers salvation through Jesus Christ.

Before we discuss the end of the universe, we must address the humans who inhabit the universe. With 3 exceptions (Enoch, Elijah, Jesus Christ) death has claimed every human life that has existed throughout the history of the Earth. The Bible teaches that death entered the world when Adam ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:17, 3:19, Romans 5:12) and we each have an “appointment” with death.

“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” Hebrews 9:27

The hope for believers is that death is not the end; we will be resurrected one day and live forever in Christ’s eternal kingdom. But what happens during the intermediate state between death and Resurrection?

NOTE: There are Bible based beliefs that believers can disagree on. Some passages and doctrines of the Bible are unclear and open to interpretation. We can disagree on some interpretations of Scripture and still maintain Christian harmony and fellowship. There are some “non-negotiable” doctrines/ beliefs that we cannot agree on and still maintain Theistic Christianity (for example the perfections of God, the sinless life of Christ, the literal death of Christ and bodily resurrection).

There are two views at opposite ends of the spectrum on what happens at death and in the intermediate state between death and Resurrection:

- Extreme preterism- there is no intermediate state and resurrection happens instantly at death
- Soul sleep- the dead have no conscious awareness between death and resurrection

Somewhere between those views is the belief that the soul is conscious during the intermediate state. The Bible seems to support this belief.

According to the Bible, death occurs when the soul leaves the body. Death is the separation of the soul (or spirit) from the body.

“It came about as her (*Rachel*) soul was departing (for she died)”- Genesis 35:18

“The body without the spirit is dead” – James 2:26

Geisler, N. (2002). *Systematic Theology Volume One: Introduction, Bible* [Review of *Systematic Theology Volume One: Introduction, Bible*].p. 19. Bethany House.

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Several scriptures teach that the soul survives death while the body decays:

- Genesis 25:8  
Many OT passages speak of death as being “gathered to his people” which implies some sort of reunion of souls in the afterlife while the body returns to dust
- Psalm 16:10
- Ecclesiastes 12:5, 7
- Luke 16:22-24
- Acts 7:56, 59
- 2 Corinthians 5:1-2, 8
- Revelation 6:9-10

These and other scriptures refute the ideas of annihilation and Purgatory. Scripture supports the doctrine that when the soul separates from the body, it survives consciously in heaven (for believers) or in hell (for unbelievers). The Resurrection of the human body is a doctrine supported in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Bible teaches that there will be a resurrection of both believers and unbelievers:

- Daniel 12:2
- Isaiah 26:19
- John 5:28-29
- John 11:23-24

The Resurrection is a source of hope and anticipation for believers:

- 1 Corinthians 15:12-19
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The Resurrection of believers and unbelievers will take place at separate times:

The Resurrection of believers, also known as the Rapture, will occur at a time that no one knows (Matthew 24:36-41; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The Resurrection of unbelievers will occur 1000 years afterward the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming (Revelation 20:1-6, 11-15).

The doctrine of end times is known as Eschatology. The timing and sequence of end time events – the Resurrection/ Rapture, 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming and Millennium – is a source of debate within Theistic Christianity. It is possible to have differences of opinion on these matters and not violate the non-negotiables of Theism.

There are 3 major eschatological views based on the interpretation of the Second Coming and the Millennium:

- **Amillennialism:** Amillennial literally means “no millennium”; this view is based on an allegorical interpretation of Revelation 20. Amillennialism does not deny what John says about a 1000 year reign, but deny that Christ will physically and literally reign on Earth for 1000 years after His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming.
- **Postmillennialism:** This view maintains that the church will inaugurate the Millennium, not the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, and Christ will return after the 1000 years. Postmillennialism interprets the millennium as 1000 years of peace before the physical return of Christ.
- **Premillennialism:** This view interprets Revelation 20:1-6 literally and believes that Christ will physically return to set up an actual 1000 year worldwide reign.

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A Comparison of the 3 Eschatological views

	Premillennial	Amillennial	Postmillennial
Literal Millennium	Yes	No	No
Resurrection before Millennium	One	None	None
1000 years of Revelation 20	Future	Present	Present
Resurrections	Two	One	One
Distinctions between Israel and the Church	Many	None	None
Messianic Kingdom	Future	Present	Present
Rapture/ Second Coming	Separate events	Same event	Same event
Binding of Satan	In the future	In the present	In the present

Another topic of eschatological debate/ discussion is the Tribulation. The Tribulation is described as the (\*7 year) period of extreme trial and agony before Christ returns. Much of the debate centers on the rapture of believers and when it occurs.

\*Interpreting the “weeks” in Daniel 9 as periods of years lines up with actual historical events. This suggests that the 70<sup>th</sup> week is the 7 year Tribulation, with 2 halves. Revelation 11:3, 12:6, and 13:5 also mention 3 ½ year time periods, suggesting the Tribulation has 2 halves.

The “seventieth week” in Daniel 9:24-27 points toward a time of Tribulation for Israel, and Jesus refers to this passage in Matthew 24:4ff. Revelation provides extensive details not found in Daniel or Matthew. Premillennialists tend to agree that Revelation 6-18 describes the Tribulation.

“The Day of the Lord” when used in an end times context refers to the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2) and on through the Millennium (2 Peter 3:10 - 13).

There are also differing views on the Rapture and Tribulation:

**Pretribulationism**- the Rapture of the church takes place before the Tribulation. Christ will come for believers in the air before the Tribulation, and after the Tribulation Christ will come with believers and reign on Earth for 1000 years. There’s support for this view: the church is mentioned over a dozen times in the first few chapters of Revelation, but it is not mentioned at all during the Tribulation period of chapters 6-18. Also 1 Thessalonians 1:10 states that Jesus saves believers from the wrath to come.

**Midtribulationism**- the Rapture will occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation, after the beginning of sorrows of Matthew 24:8 and “the great Tribulation” of Matthew 24:21.

**Posttribulationism**- the Rapture and the Second Coming are one event at the end of the Tribulation.

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No discussion of the end times is complete without mentioning the Antichrist. This is a figure who is familiar to many people whether they believe the Bible or not.

The “Prince” in Daniel 9:25-27 seems to refer to the Antichrist. Daniel expounds on the Antichrist in 11:31-39. According to this passage, he will...

- Abolish the daily sacrifice
- Desecrate the temple and set up the “abomination of desolation” (halfway through the Tribulation)
- Be resisted by the faithful remnant
- Do as he pleases
- Speak blasphemies against God
- Worship the god of military might
- Divide the land among those who honor him

The “man of lawlessness”, the “son of destruction” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10 also seem to be references to the Antichrist. Some theologians believe that verse 7 is a reference to the church restraining the Antichrist and when the church is removed (raptured), the Antichrist will be able to unleash his evil on the world.

The Beast in Revelation 13 is also understood to be the Antichrist. According to this passage, the beast (Antichrist) will...

- Claim to be God and demand worship in the middle of the Tribulation
- Perform deceptive signs
- Persecute God’s people
- Rule the world
- Reign for 42 months (3 ½ years)

#### The Rapture vs the Second Coming

<b>Rapture</b>	<b>Second Coming</b>
Meeting them in the air 1 Thessalonians 4:17	Taking them to the earth Acts 1:11, Zechariah 14:4
Taking believers to heaven John 14:3	Bringing believers back to earth Revelation 19:14
Coming for His saints 2 Thessalonians 2:1	Coming with His saints Jude 14
Only believers see Him 1 Thessalonians 4:17	All people see Him Revelation 1:7
No signs precede it 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3	Many signs precede it Matthew 24:3-30
The Tribulation begins 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9	The Millennium begins Revelation 20:1-7