

Understanding the End Times – 2 Pet 3:1-14

Starting the final stretch of a series on the ET's titled Ready or Not, Here I Come
Just the mention of "The End Times" conjures up a variety of thoughts in people's minds
For some it's images of charts, graphs, dates
Or late night arguments with your roommate
For others, it's memories of being scared out of your wits from watching "A Thief in the Night" movie at a 1970's youth retreat
For most, it raises more questions than answers
Creates more confusion than clarity

It's likely you've read a book, watched a movie, or had a conversation about the ET's
But when it comes to knowing what God says in the Bible, you probably come up short
I hope to change that these next 4 weeks
Do so with a bit of hesitation – some people say . . .
Stay away from the subject of prophecy and last things, and let the older preachers do that – they won't be around to see their mistakes; There's some truth to that
But if the text calls for it, and it does in this case as we finish our study of Luke
Then we have to do our best to understand it

- When it comes to understanding ET's, there are things we can know and be certain of
There are things we can't
If you're not good with that, you're going to be frustrated; Or devise elaborate schemes
Let me forewarn you right now – I'll never be able to answer all your questions
A – because God doesn't give us all the answers
B – because I'm pretty sure I don't know all the answers that he does give
Consider yourself forewarned – you won't know it all when you're done

Warning #2 – obsessing on the details can be hazardous to your health
It's *not* necessary to get all the details right in order to be ready
No one who tried to interpret the predictions of the first coming of Christ got it right
There's not a single person who put all the prophecies together and nailed it
There were plenty of speculations, even by his own disciples
But nobody expected *Jesus*; He took everybody by surprise
Especially those like the Pharisees, who were obsessed with the details and largely missed him entirely

Which is why obsessing on the details can be hazardous to your health

Warning #3 – these messages will be a bit different
It's going to be like going back to school; Like auditing a college class – where you don't have to take the tests or pay tuition, but you still get to sit in and soak it up
A lot of definitions, explanations, page turning
My desire is to help you understand what the Scriptures say and give you a biblical framework to help you put it all together . . .
So that when the time comes, you're ready – because ready or not, he's coming

Warning #4 – It's not about dates
When I was a Jr High student, I went to a service where this ET's guy spoke
Don't remember much about it, except that this dude had all kinds of charts, graphs, news reports, and especially proof texts (verses that he took out of context to prove his pre-determined point) . . .

All for the purpose of predicting the year Christ was to return
I didn't know a whole lot at that time, but I knew enough to know – that was bogus
Knew that Jesus said – *concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the Son* (Mk 13:32)

Unfortunately, he was just another in a long list of people, both before and since, who think they know more than Jesus
It's been going on since St. Martin of Tours predicted that Christ would return within a few years, and he died in 397 – *oops*
There's been a slew of people since, especially in the last 100 hundred years

Read "History Lessons" [from article in Ministries Today, Mar/Apr 2006 by Dwayne Hamby; citing the 'Pocket Guide to the Apocalypse, by Jason Boyett, RelevantBooks]
So many people have falsely predicted the timing of Christ's return that entire books have been written on the subject

Stupid – if you've been sucked into that, just repent of it, don't tell anybody
It's not about dates – if that's what you're expecting, you'll be sorely disappointed
I'm not going to give you predictions, I'm going to give you the Scriptures
Do so with as much intellectual honesty as I can

Turn to **2 Pet 3:1-14** – here find first of 3 keys to understanding the ET's . . .

Know the facts

That's why Peter writes – to remind us of what we already know (read v1-2)
He's hitting the refresh button on the ET's browser of your mind
He wants you to know what to expect, and he expects that you want to know
I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder (1b)
A sincere mind cares about the things of God
Which means – "I don't really care ET's" is not an option
"What I believe isn't going to change anything, so why bother?"

For one – it's in the Bible; if God wrote it, it must be worthy of knowing
Two – understanding increases perseverance
Like when you're pregnant, knowing what to expect when you're expecting increases your perseverance when the birth pains start . . .
So too, knowing what to expect with the ET's will increase your perseverance when they start, should that happen in your lifetime
Three – understanding the ET's helps you understand rest of Bible
Four – understanding the ET's increases sense of urgency to live right and be holy

So Peter, expecting that we care, reminds us of 5 basic facts concerning the ET's . . .
1. Christ will come (read vs3-4, 8-9)
Peter makes the case that despite the scoffers, Christ will come
The delay is not God's breaking of a promise, but his patience

God's not on your timetable – sorry
Not only that, but what you think is an intolerable delay, is a mere moment from his perspective
Best of all, he's *patient* – wanting everyone to repent of their sin and own way of living, and get on his page before he comes, and it's too late

Christ *will* come, and when he does, it will be just like his going
Acts 1:11 (angels at Christ's ascension) – *This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*
Christ ascended in the flesh, and he will return in the flesh
He was visible when he left, he will be visible when he returns
Christ will come on God's timetable, the same way he left

2. His coming means judgment

Read 5-7 – this judgment is the whole idea of *the day of the Lord* in v10 (read)
His coming will be a day of judgment that destroys the earth, exposes all we've done, and results in destruction of the ungodly (7b)
That destruction is not annihilation, but eternal punishment as Jesus says in Mt 25:46

3. It could happen at any time – like a thief (10a)

Just as a thief shows up suddenly and unexpectedly . . .
So too, when God is done being patient, the end of things, *the day of the Lord*, will come very quickly, very suddenly, and very unexpectedly . . .
Even for those who are watching and praying, but especially *for those who are not*

The day of the Lord doesn't just refer to the *moment* of Christ's return
It's used throughout the Scriptures referring to the general time of judgment and deliverance associated with his return
His point is that it could start to unfold at any time
When it does, it will be so sudden and so overwhelming, that only those who are prepared will have their wits about them, and understand what's happening

4. Eventually, earth and sky will pass away

V7 – *the heavens and earth that now exist are being stored up for fire* (7; read v10, 12b)
Peter argues that just as in the past God destroyed the world with his word and water, so in the future he will destroy it with his word and fire
This concept is not new with Peter – multiple OT prophets wrote the same thing
Zeph 1:18 (referring to the day of the Lord) – *In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed*

5. In the end, new heavens and a new earth will take their place (read v13)

Rev 21:1 (John ties these last two facts together) – *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.*

Those are the big picture facts

If get those right, you'll go a long way toward understanding the ET's – know the facts

Learn the lingo

Understanding any subject that is somewhat unfamiliar, requires an understanding of the terms and words that are used to describe and explain it
Like with cars – if I tell you that the V-12 quad overhead cam sitting under the hood of my Jaguar requires a 30 weight oil viscosity for maximum torque at redline rpm's –
You don't have a clue what I just said if you don't know the lingo
Likewise – if I say that my eschatology centers around a post-tribulational, pre-millennial parousia of Christ . . .
You also don't have a clue what I mean if you don't know the lingo
So a little vocabulary lesson is in order

For you note takers – insert next week; don't have to go crazy or watch DVD 14 times

Start with . . .

Eschatology – theological term; the study of last things or the end times

Second Coming – a general reference to the final coming of Christ from heaven to earth

Millennium – 1000 years; from Rev 20:1-6 referring to the thousand year reign of Christ, during which Satan is bound, and earth marked by some measure of peace/prosperity
Re the mill, there are 3 different views, the lingo of which you should be familiar with
Pre-millennialism – the end-times view that the return of Christ *precedes* the millennium when he will rule personally and physically on earth
Post-millennialism – the millennium will be ushered in not by the return of Christ, but by the increasing success of the gospel to gradually convert the world and bring about a prolonged golden age, after which Christ will return to establish the new heavens/earth
A-millennialism – views the 1000 years of Rev 20 as symbolic of the current church age in which we live; and that following a time of both good and evil, Christ will eventually return to establish a new heavens/earth

Great Tribulation – time of intense suffering and hardship just before Christ's return
Comes from Mt 24:21 where Jesus says *there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be*
Most likely it's a 7 year time (based on Dan 9; Rev 13) of increasing hardship just before the start of the millennium

Rapture – theological term (not a biblical one) referring to the seizing, snatching away of believers from the earth to meet Christ in the air when he returns (1 Thess 4:16-17)
Pre-tribulational Rapture – the view that before Christ returns in glory, he will return secretly before the tribulation, to rapture the church and take us to heaven
Implies that we will not be on earth during the Great Tribulation
Mid-tribulational Rapture – or a pre-wrath rapture; a variation of the pre-trib view in which Christ returns in the middle of the Great Tribulation to rescue believers, and then again at the end of the trib to usher in the millennium
Post-tribulational Rapture – the view that the rapture and the glorious 2nd Coming of Christ are one simultaneous event
The saints rise to meet the Lord in the air and immediately accompany him back to earth to rule and reign with him during the millennium
Implies that the church will go through the Great Tribulation

Great White Throne Judgment – an expression used for the final judgment spoken of in Rev 20, where unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire, and believers will be ushered into the new heavens and new earth

Anti-Christ – man of lawlessness in 2 Thess 2, or the beast in Rev

Who will appear in the tribulation, exerting great persecution on the believers
And deceiving and gathering the nations for battle against the people of God
Near the end of the Great Tribulation, he will be destroyed by Christ at his 2nd Coming
Battle of Armageddon – the battle at the end of the Great Tribulation between Christ and the forces of evil led by the Anti-Christ and the False Prophet, and joined by the wicked kings and nations of the world

Incidentally, the False Prophet of Rev is usually associated with religious deception, while the Anti-christ is associated with civil/political deception

That's the main lingo; If you know those words, you're a long way toward understanding the ET's

Know the facts, learn the lingo; And the 3rd key is to . . .

Connect the dots

To put it all together – to determine what the Bible says and how it all fits

Give you what I believe the Scriptures teach when it comes to the order and sequence of the things I just defined

Before I do, it's important to understand that . . .

God has blessed the ministry of many people who have held widely differing views down through the centuries

Calvin held a different view than Wesley, who held a different view than Finney (great 19th century evangelist), who – Moody, Jonathan Edwards, and so on

Yet God blessed each of their ministries immeasurably

All that to say – if fruit in ministry depended on the “right” ET's view, God wouldn't be blessing those with the “wrong” one

I greatly respect people who hold other views

Especially those who share a common practice

If we're striving for the same things in same way, but just expecting it to unfold differently – great

Having said that, I do believe some views are stronger than others

Some are more consistent with the Scriptures

Some connect the dots better than others

- So I believe in a literal millennium – could be 1000 years or just a long time due to the symbolic nature of Rev

Either way *1000 years* is referred to explicitly 6 times in Rev 20:1-10 (foundational passage on which the belief of a literal mill is based)

Re the Great Tribulation – I believe that those believers who are alive when it begins to unfold, will go through it

Mt 24:29-31 – Jesus says, *immediately after the tribulation of those days*, he will come to gather his elect (those who are saved)

Which means that we will be raptured at the end of the tribulation, at his Second Coming–

Meeting him in the air with those believers who have previously died, and immediately returning with him to start his millennial reign (1 Thess 4:16-17)

Finally, I believe that the Bible teaches there is one people of God

That the church is true Israel

Consequently, there is one plan of God for his one people

Rom 9-11 is a foundational passage

Connect the dots of these main points, and you get a view that is referred to as . . .

Classical/Historical Premillennialism – called that because it was the dominant view of the early church in the 2-4th centuries

In a more technical sense, it would be called Post-tribulational Pre-millennialism

- When you put it on a **timeline**, it looks like this . . .

Church age extends from the cross (Pentecost) to the 2nd Coming of Christ

It will end with the Great Tribulation

At the end of which Christ will return to gather his people up in the rapture (up arrow)

And immediately return with them to earth (down arrow)

To defeat the forces of evil led by the Anti-Christ and the False Prophet at the Battle of Armageddon

And bind Satan for 1000 years so that he cannot deceive the nations any longer

And begin his peaceful and prosperous millennial reign on earth

At the end of that, Satan will be loosed for *a little while* to deceive the nations one last time, and gather them for a final battle which they will lose

Resulting in Satan being thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet are already

That will be followed by the Great White Throne Judgment where unbelievers are resurrected, judged, and also thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15)

Believers ushered into the new heavens and new earth

With their tears will be wiped away, death and pain abolished forever

It's on that new earth that we will dwell with God in the New Jerusalem, which is highly symbolic language referring to the glorious place/presence of God where he is worshipped and enjoyed for all eternity

Having laid that out, this framework is not without its problems/weaknesses; No view is

But I do believe that it best connects the dots and ties it all together into a coherent, biblical structure

If that all seems too fantastic to be true, like it's out of a Sci-Fi novel, you're in good company – if it wasn't in the Bible, I wouldn't say it

- In the meantime, the easiest thing to do is make it a head game; mental exercise

If you do, you miss the whole point

The point of *understanding* the ET's is to be holy in light of Christ's awesome return

If you miss the call to holiness in all this

I don't care how well you know the facts, or learn the lingo, or connect the dots . . .

You've missed the point – look back at 2 Pet 3:11, 14

If understanding the ET's doesn't spur you on to holiness as you wait to meet your maker, you've missed the point

Holiness honors Christ just like the beauty of a bride honors her husband

Holiness hastens his return (12a), starting with repentance

So – Know the facts; Learn the lingo; Connect the dots . . .

But not to be smart; Rather, to be holy