

WHAT WE TEACH – LAST THINGS (ESCHATOLOGY) Assorted Scriptures

INTRODUCTION

At the height of WWII, Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was imprisoned for taking a stand against Hitler. Yet, he continued to urge fellow believers to resist Nazi tyranny. A group of Christians who believed Hitler was the Antichrist, asked Bonhoeffer, “Why do you expose yourself to all this danger? Jesus will return any day, and all your work and suffering will be for nothing.”

Bonhoeffer replied, “If Jesus returns tomorrow, then tomorrow I’ll rest from my labor. But today I have work to do. I must continue the struggle until it’s finished.”

The primary points of difference in approaches to eschatology come from **hermeneutics** and **covenants**.

At STBC, we teach and approach scripture from a:

- historical-grammatical, normal literal, consistent hermeneutic perspective
- therefore, what God calls a covenant, we should call a covenant
 - Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly, Mosaic, Davidic, New –

I don’t have time in a one sermon summary to describe the different erroneous viewpoints and then tell you why they are wrong so I am just going to tell you the truth.

I contemplated how to handle this one sermon on the end times. I thought that I could do a 3-point outline. In the past when I have preached on end times, I have received questions/requests for a timeline. I tend to shy away from timelines and charts because there are so many crazy interpretations and speculations. However, God does give us a timeline in the Bible.

(Note: All references to the STBC "What We Teach" document are in italics)

Proposition: 5 Last Things in God's Biblical Timeline:

- 1. Rapture**
- 2. Tribulation**
- 3. Second Coming**
- 4. Millennium**
- 5. Eternity**

(**Note:** This week - Rapture, Tribulation and Second Coming; next week - Millennium and Eternity.)

So that: The purpose of biblical eschatology is to:

- warn
- exhort

- encourage

In **Mark 13**, in the Olivet Discourse, God gives 19 imperatives!

The purpose of eschatology is to give clarity and encouragement, not complexity and anxiety.

➔ Jesus' Purpose in His Olivet Discourse is to give:

- Practical teaching
- Relevant teaching
- Important teaching
- **Clarity!** **Dan 7:16** – “exact meaning”
 Dan 9:20-22 – “insight with understanding”
 Dan 10:10-14

1. **First Last Thing** in the Biblical Timeline... The **Rapture**

Point – When we think of what has happened in the New Testament, we see the prophetic timeline from the ministry of John the Baptist at end of OT and beginning of NT to the birth, life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and then the early church.

*We teach that physical death does not involve any loss of our immaterial consciousness, that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ, that there is a separation of soul and body ... **What's Next???***

for the redeemed in Christ, this separation will continue until the rapture, which initiates the first resurrection (Rev 20:4-6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord. Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:8).

We teach the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ before the seven year tribulation to translate His church from this earth and, between this event and His glorious return with His saints, to reward believers according to their works.

All Christians agree that Christ is coming again. There is different terminology and different understandings. With a consistent, historical-grammatical, normal literal approach to scripture, this will produce an end time understanding called Pretribulational Premillennial:

- rapture is before the Tribulation
- second coming is before the Millennium

Proof – **1 Cor 15:51-53** – “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

1 Thess 4:13-17 - clearest teaching in scripture on this topic

- Paul is writing to this mature church

- **vv. 1-12** - teaching on purity
- **v. 13** - turns his attention to doctrine
- **v. 17** - "caught up" - from the latin translation "rapturo"
- **v. 18** - "**Therefore comfort one another with these words.**" - this is a command - not to speculate and make charts but to comfort one another and fellowship around these words

Illustration – The word “maranatha” is an expression that means: “our Lord comes.” It was used as a greeting in the early church. When believers gathered or parted, they didn’t say “hello” or “goodbye” but “Maranatha!”. These word carried so much weight.

Illustration - While on a South Pole expedition, British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton left some of his men on Elephant Island, promising he would return. When he tried to go back, huge icebergs blocked the way. After repeated attempts, an opening appeared in the ice and Shackleton was able to get through. His men were ready and waiting and quickly jumped aboard. No sooner had the ship cleared the island than the ice crashed together behind them. Contemplating their narrow escape, the explorer said to his men, “It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go!” They replied, “We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, ‘The boss may come today.’”

Application – In the same way for the Christian, no matter what we are going through and what is taking place in life, we have the promise of the coming of Christ over us and He could come at any time. His promise is certain and we should be comforted by that and we should live in such a way that testifies to this truth.

Transition: While history is waiting for Jesus to return, there are false Christs, false Messiahs, false teachers, false prophets, wars, disasters, persecution, all through human history and getting worse and worse. And at the end, the explosion of these kinds of things will reach epoch proportions that are described in **Revelation 6** through **19** in a seven-year period called a time of Tribulation.

2. Second Last Thing in the Biblical Timeline ... The **Tribulation**

Point – *We teach that following the removal of the church from the earth the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world ... This period includes the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy.*

Proof – “**tribulation**” – trouble, affliction, suffering, persecution

- comes from the Greek word which literally means *pressure, pressing together*

This is a literal 7 year period beginning sometime after the rapture.
The Rapture does not begin the 7 year Tribulation.

Begins → Dan 9:27 – Antichrist signs peace treaty with Israel and from that point forward the clock is ticking on the 7 year tribulation period

Zeph 1:15 – “A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,”

Jer 30:7 – “Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s distress.”

Mal 4:5 – “the great and terrible day of the Lord”

Isa 34:8 – “a day of vengeance”

Revelation 6-16 - spells out exactly what this time will look like as God's wrath is poured out on the world

- judgment is poured out upon the world
- even in the midst of judgment, in his mercy, He gives hope → Israel is brought through tremendous suffering to receive Christ as Messiah.

Dan 12:1 – “Now at that time **Michael**, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.”

That this is a 7 year period is abundantly clear in scripture. God intentionally uses different language so there is no misunderstanding other than it being 7 years:

- **1 week** – **Dan 9:27** - we understand that English 'week' terminology that Daniel uses is 7 years (from Hebrew word "shabua" which literally means 7)
- **time, times, ½ a time** – **Dan 7:25; 11:13; 12:7; Rev 12:14** - half of this period is 3 1/2 years
- **1260 days** – **Rev 11:3; 12:6** - second half of this period - is exactly 3 1/2 years in Jewish calendar
- **42 months** – **Rev 11:2; 13:5** - also second half of this period and 3 1/2 years

70th Week of Daniel – **Dan 9:24-27; Matt 24:15-31; 25:31-46**

The Abomination of Desolation (**Matt 24:15, Mark 13:14**)

- marks the midpoint of the 7 year Tribulation period (1260 days into it)
- when the antichrist sets himself up in the temple in Jerusalem and demands worship as god. – **Dan 9:27; 11:31**
- at the beginning of the Tribulation, Israel had reinstated their temple sacrifices

Matt 24:21 – “Then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”

Rev 6-19 gives the greatest detail – seals, trumpets, bowls of God’s wrath

Illustration – when a follower of God finds himself in the fire, he remembers that God keeps His gracious hand on the thermostat!

Application – Rev 2:10 – “Do not fear (Smyrna) what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Mark 13:13 - "the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved."

“overcomers” – 1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4f - our nature is to overcome sin

The Rapture, the Tribulation....

We teach ... that these judgments will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory to the earth.

3. Third Last Thing in the Biblical Timeline ... The Second Coming

Point – The entire world marks calendar by the First Coming

Illustration – Before computers, newspapers used to have typefaces. The largest typeface ... reserved for announcements of war or Presidential assassinations was call the **Second Coming** typeface.

Proof – *We teach that, after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David*

Acts 1:10-11 – “as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”“

- Jesus is going to come from the clouds in the same way He departed in the clouds
- Don't be gazing and speculating on the future, be about the ministry of the here and now because He is, in fact, coming again

Rapture - the physical return of Christ to retrieve the Church - in the air

Second Coming - the physical coming of Christ and sets His feet on the Mount of Olives and it is split in two

Proof – **Mark 13:24-25 – “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.”**

God holds things together so that gravity doesn't fluctuate, orbits don't fluctuate. The heavenly bodies are controlled by the power of the Word of God. All of a sudden, the Lord lets go. The sun goes black. The whole universe begins to fall apart, to disintegrate.

Christ comes with

- Visible Presence
- Visible Power

Matt 24:30 – “and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn”

Mark 13:26 – “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”

Rev 1:7 – “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.”

Augustine –

“The first coming of Christ the Lord, God’s son and our God, was in obscurity, the second will be in the sight of the whole world. When he came in obscurity no one recognized him but his own servants; when he comes openly he will be known by both good people and bad. When he came in obscurity, it was to be judged; when he comes openly it will be to judge. He was silent at his trial ... he will not be silent as judge ... he will not keep silent then, because his voice will be acknowledged even by those who despise it.”

Illustration – Lightning is seen from far off distances. You can’t conceal lightning. Everyone sees the lightning and everyone hears the thunder. Only a fool could be in a thunderstorm and say he doesn’t believe in lightning.

→ In the same way, Christ’s coming cannot be concealed.

Battle of Armageddon – at the end of the Tribulation - **Rev 14:14-20; 16; 19:13; Isa 63:2-6;**

- **Joel 3:14** - calls it the “valley of decision”

Illustration – On May 19th, 1780, during a meeting of the Connecticut House of Representatives, the sky of Hartford darkened ominously, and some of the representatives were afraid and wanted to adjourn the meeting. The Speaker of the House, Colonel Davenport, rose and said, “The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought.”

In the same way, rather than fearing what is to come, we are to be faithful until Christ returns. Instead of fearing the dark, we’re to be lights as we watch and wait.

Application – **Tit 2:13** – “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus;”

Luke 21:22, 24, 25-26 - more description by Christ of the desolation and the darkness and the women and the persecution and the slaughter that will take place - a very stark place - but He tells His disciples in **v. 28** - "**lift up your head because your redemption is drawing near**"

- we don't know when He will come but God's promise is there
- we need to lift up our heads and know we are closer to our redemption

Col 3:4 – “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

Rev 19:14 – “the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses”

- We are there with Him!
- We are in the triumphant army!
- **Matt 25:31** - the angels don't fight
- We don't need to fight
- It is the victorious lion who will do all the fighting with His Word

At that time the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised and the living will be judged (Dan 12:2-3; Rev 20:4-6).

There are 75 days in between the Tribulation and the Millennium

Dan12:11 – one thousand two hundred and ninety days

- from the Abomination of Desolation, 1,290 days, including 1,260 which make up the last 3½ years of the final 7 years, then 30 days more.

Dan 12:12 one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days

- 45 more days beyond the 1,290 days

→ $30 + 45 = 75$ Days - it doesn't tell us exactly what happens then

The Sheep/Goat Judgment – Matt 25:31-34, 35-40, 41-45

- this happens at the end of the Battle of Armeggedon
- the sheep are believers - remain with Christ
- the goats are unbelievers - they are taken away to judgment
- this is not talking about an eternal future judgment but it happens at the end of the Tribulation

Millennium and Eternity - next week