



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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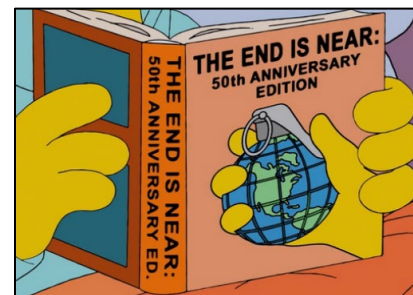
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### **Living in Light of Tomorrow**

1 Peter 4:7-11

Speaking of His Second coming and so the end of the world, Christ said, “But of that day and hour no one knows...” (Matthew 24:36a). And yet, in spite of that statement, there has been a lot of speculation about the end of the world throughout history — as the creators of the Simpson’s have humorously pointed out.



In fact, an article in Wikipedia records 190 predictions made throughout history pertaining to the end of the world.<sup>1</sup> Now if only half of the cited

references are accurate (after all, we are talking about Wikipedia), that still is a lot of speculation! And yet if asked if such a prediction was consistent with Christ's words in Matthew 24:36, many in the church would cite the text before us in which Peter says, "The end of all things is at hand..." - which in essences is saying, "The End of the World is Near!"

This raises all sorts of questions: What did Peter mean by this statement? Did Peter (as many liberal theologians have contend) believe that Christ would return in His lifetime? Did the biblical writers get it wrong when they spoke of Christ's Second Coming as being "near"?

We are going to consider Peter's teaching because he gives, what I have titled "A Primer on the End of the World."

1 Peter 4:7a, "The end of all things is at hand..."

The language in the original is rather straight forward. In fact, if there is debate as to what Peter is saying here, it could only revolve around the last word, "at hand" (ἐγγίζω (*eggizō*)) which is variously translated in the Bible as "approaching," "near," "close," "about to happen," and so, "at hand." Yet even this is so straight forward you can't get around it: Clearly, Peter believed (and for that matter, the entire New Testament witness contended) that "the end of the world was near." In fact, it was because of this teaching that some even in Peter's generation began to question the veracity of God and His word.

2 Peter 3:3-4, "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.'"

What is our answer to this? We begin by considering the biblical teaching on the end of the world and the imminency of Christ's return.

Philippians 4:4-5, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near."

Revelation 22:7, "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

1 Peter 4:7a, "The end of all things is at hand..."

The doctrine of the Imminency of Christ's return does not address the chronological date/time of Christ's return. For again as Christ said, "But of that day and hour no one knows..." (Matthew 24:36a). Accordingly, we do NOT understand the biblical teaching on Christ's return as something that will occur in our lifetime (although and again, it could happen). RATHER, we understand that the Second Coming of Christ and so the end of the world is the next event on God's redemptive timetable!

Now as one commentator suggested,<sup>2</sup> from this we get a glimpse into how New Testament men and women understood time! They did NOT think of it nor gauge it in terms of earthly kings and kingdoms — which is how the ancient world measured time (including many of the prophets)! Think of Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:1, “In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the Lord...”

As there was no zero year (like in our calendar), ancients most often measured time by the ascension of a king to his throne or the length of his regency. Some even measured it by natural phenomenon as in the case of an earthquake, an eclipse, and the like. Yet that is NOT how the New Testament writers thought about time. The New Testament authors (including Peter) thought of history in light of God’s redemptive program. And so as I mentioned last time, if at the dawn of creation, we could have asked God about the different redemptive movements/eras He had planned for the world, you would have gotten a list containing the following:

- (1) Creation,
- (2) The Fall,
- (3) The Promise,
- (4) The Flood,
- (5) The Calling of Abraham,
- (6) The Exodus,
- (7) The Theocracy,
- (8) The Fall of the Theocracy (including both the exiles and returns),
- (9) The Coming of Christ (which would include His birth, life, death, and Resurrection),
- (10) His Ascension into Heaven, and
- (11) The Out-Pouring of the Holy Spirit.

In this regard, note — and this is the key to understand what the Bible means when it says Christ is soon to return — there are no outstanding events in God’s Redemptive plan except the return of Christ and so the end of the world! That is what is meant by the imminency of Christ’s return!

That is why Peter, gauging time according to God’s redeeming grace, could say, “The end [τέλος (telos) which refers NOT to the cessation of something, BUT its completion/fulfillment!] of all things is at hand...” Accordingly, Peter here is NOT focusing on the temporal or chronological end of this world, BUT the consummation/fulfillment of its current condition! Truly, according to Hebrews 9:26, the coming of Christ marked “the consummation of the ages”!

What then what do we do with the many passages which say that Christ is coming “quickly”? The idea behind this is NOT “quick in terms of time,” BUT “quick in terms of its onset” (which is why many translate the word as “suddenly”). Describing the Second Coming of Christ, Paul wrote this:

1 Corinthians 15:51-52a, "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..."

The expression "the twinkling of an eye" referred to the time it took light to pass from the outer edge of the eye to the back of the eye. And such will be the Second Coming of Christ, it will be sudden! A moment after God the Father looks to Christ and says, "Go!" it will be over, and we will be at the Last Judgment! That means that the last battle will not be drawn out. There will be no 100-years war or a 7-year war. No sieges! Just one, quick decisive victory!

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

That's a good start. There is more. The end of the World and "the day of the Lord," "the Last Days," "the Last Day," and "that Day," S

The Day of the Lord is an expression found throughout the Bible.

Isaiah 13:6a, "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near!"

Zephaniah 1:14a: "Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly..."

1 Thessalonians 5:2, "For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."

In fact, this expression is used no less than twenty-six times in the Bible. It refers to a future period of catastrophic judgment when God vindicates His name by unveiling His character which necessarily will terrify His enemies and yet bless His people. When we consider the Biblical teaching on this "day," we note two especially important points.

- (1) The Day of the Lord in Scripture oft-times references a TEMPORAL TRIAL/STRUGGLE in which there was/is much suffering. And so, associated with this "day" is:
  - a. Seismic disturbances (e.g., Joel 2:1-11; 2:31; 3:16).
  - b. Violent weather (Ezekiel 13:5ff.).
  - c. Clouds and thick darkness (e.g., Ezekiel 2:2; Zephaniah 1:7ff.).
  - d. Cosmic upheaval (Zephaniah 2:3, 30).
  - e. Wars, rumors of war, hardship, trial, and oppression.

Think of the birth pangs of a woman in labor. That is what the trials and difficulties of life in this age truly are!

Now in theology, we don't call them "Labor Pains" but "Portents". Biblically these are said to

be part and parcel of the fallen world in which we live and as such characterize the world in which we live (cf. Matthew 24:6). They indicate to all who have eyes to see that this world has been corrupted by our sin such that each Portent is nothing less than a groaning and so a longing on the part of this world for “the revelation of the sons of God.” Paul describes it this way:

Romans 8:19-22, “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. [This is in reference to Second Coming of Christ at which time our Lord will renew the world and restore it to its original glory.] For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption [as manifested by the disasters and prominent difficulties of life] into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.”

Truly, every seismic disturbance, every brutal storm, every war, every trial, every difficulty, and every oppression are the groans of a fallen world in anticipation of its renewal! Now biblically speaking we expect that these portents will characterize life in this world but will intensify right before the end (just as with labor pains, cf. Matthew 24:21-22)! And that bring us to a second point.

The Day of the Lord ultimately references THE CLIMATIC DAY OF JUDGMENT surrounding the advent of Christ which in the Bible involves two separate and distinct comings: The First Advent of Christ and the Last Advent of Christ (His Second Coming)! And herein is the relevancy of the prophetic tool called telescoping. With a telescope there are two lenses. Both individually are important and powerful, but by themselves they are worthless in seeing distant things. It is only as we line them up and so look through the first lens at the image on the second lens that we see things we normally could not see! Along these lines, when we behold a sign of the time (seismic disturbances, violent weather, hardship, trial, difficulty, and the like), we are called to look through it at the image on the second lens (which is the coming of Christ, the Last Judgment, the destruction of this world, and the creation of the New Heavens and Earth). When we do this, then and only then do we see the trials and difficulties of life correctly. They are not there because God is the Ant Bully and is bored. Rather, they are there to remind us that this world is NOT our home AND that we have been created for a higher purpose than living in the present world in ease and wealth! This is how Christ viewed the world! We see this in His response to His disciples on account of two horrible disasters in His day.

Luke 13:1-5, “Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered this *fate*? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. [Christ here is looking through this tragedy to the Last Judgment which is the basis of His appeal here!] Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in

Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

With this, we truly are called to gauge all of life no longer by the temporal or the horizontal, BUT by Christ and His redemptive purpose in this world.

If or when we do this, the result will be a sobriety with which we will work out our salvation! For truly, Christ is near! Having considered “The Day of the Lord”, let’s move on to the distinction that is made in the Bible between the “Last Days” and “the Last Day” (which is otherwise known as “that day”).

## The Last Days, the Last Day, and That Day, Hebrews 1:1-2a; Acts 2:16-17a; 2 Timothy 3:1-2a; John 6:40; 11:24; 12:48.

The Last Days, consider the following passages:

Hebrews 1:1-2a, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in *His Son*...”

Speaking of Pentecost, Peter said this:

Acts 2:16-17a, “But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind...’”

Paul described that which would characterize the entire interadventual period:

2 Timothy 3:1-2a, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self...”

Biblically speaking, “the last days” is a reference to the interadventual period from the Resurrection of Christ up to His Second Coming. That means you and I currently are living in the last days of this creation! In contrast, consider another set of passages. Christ told His disciples this:

John 6:40, “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

In her grief over the loss of her brother, Martha told Christ this:

John 11:24, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

Christ said of the Last Judgment:

John 12:48, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day."

In contrast to the last days, we are speaking here about the literal last day of this world on which is scheduled the Final Judgment in which all mankind will stand before Christ and be judged! In this regard, it is important to note that the "Last Day" is also referenced throughout the Bible as "That Day."

Luke 21:34, "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap."

All of this brings us back to our passage this morning and the incredible statement made by Peter, "The end of all things is at hand..." What did Peter mean by this statement? Nothing less than this:

- (1) The hourglass of this world is on its last grain of sand...
- (2) That the countdown to the destruction of this world is on its final second...
- (3) That God's Redemptive time clock currently reads 11:59...
- (4) That before us is the final event in God's Redemptive Plan!

Now if you and I truly believed this, what difference would it make in our lives?

After describing the details related to the Last Judgment and so the end of this world, Christ told His disciples a Parable:

Matthew 25:1, "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom."

In Bible times marriage involved three distinct phases:

- (1) The Betrothal- where the family of the two individuals to be married arranged the marriage. Here the participants entered into a legal relationship much akin to our view of marriage today, except they did NOT live or sleep together.
- (2) The Interval- this was the time between the first and third phase in which the man and woman prepared themselves for marriage. This could last up to 10-15 years depending on the ages of the two when they were Betrothed.
- (3) The Wedding/Wedding Feast- here the man and his wedding party arrived unannounced at the house of the bride where she and her bridesmaids would be in waiting. Then together they would parade through the streets of the village announcing that the Wedding Feast was about to begin. Prior to the Wedding Feast (which could last many days) and yet at the feast, the two were united in marriage before a rabbi.

Obviously, that which is in mind in this parable is the start of the third phase of a wedding, just prior to when the bridegroom's wedding party arrived at the home of the bride. Speaking of

the bridesmaids we read this:

Matthew 25:2-4, “And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.”

This is a brutal commentary on the two types of people living today: The wise/the saved live in light of this very important future event. The foolish/the unsaved live with little thought of tomorrow.

Matthew 25:5, “Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and *began* to sleep.”

Such is an apt description of everyone in life. We are all in various stages of slumber. Hopefully our study today has roused us a bit, shaken us such that while we may still be groggy, we nevertheless are aware of where we are and what is soon coming to this world! And what is it that is coming?

Matthew 25:6-12, “But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet *him*.’ Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the prudent answered, saying, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you *too*; go instead to the dealers and buy *some* for yourselves.’ And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ But he answered and said, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’”

This is a shocking description of the Last Day, specifically the Final Judgment. Many on that day will be shown to be deficient of what is necessary to enter into the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, specifically the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit! That notwithstanding, what is the point of this parable? What must be our response to the knowledge of the End of the World? Christ gave it to us in Matthew.

Matthew 25:13, “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.”

The word for “alert” denotes the idea of being spiritually vigilant and so watchful. And what specifically does this mean? Peter here answers that question with four specific exhortations!<sup>3</sup>

For now, I will close simply with a general exhortation taken from this parable. What was Christ’s call here? That we “be on the alert” and so spiritually vigilant which involves at least the following:

- (1) Watching over our heart with all diligence, lest the seeds of idolatry are allowed to grow unchallenged in our lives!



- (2) Cultivating our walks with Christ by which we endeavor to keep a healthy balance between Bible study, prayer, and walking moment by moment with the Lord.
- (3) Endeavoring to live in the light of the Gospel in which from the moment we were saved we received the glorious forgiveness of ALL our sins. As such, we live as sons and daughters of God rather than as aliens, orphans, or beggars!
- (4) Striving to build up and so encourage the body of Christ- the “one another” passages of Scripture which involves NOT ONLY evangelism, BUT ALSO Biblical fellowship and edification!

More could be said and will be said in the coming weeks in this regard. For now, let us leave here ever mindful that as it relates to Christ and His Kingdom, “the end of the world is at hand” such that we are fast approaching the Last Day in which everyone will stand before God and be judged. For the wicked, this will be a horrible day of reckoning where they will learn of the level of misery that will be theirs for eternity! For the child of God, this will be a time of rejoicing when we “enter into the joy of the Lord” (Matthew 25:21, 23)!

## References

- Grudem, W. A. (2009). *1 Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (IVP Numbered))*. Chicago: IVP Academic.
- Schreiner, T. R. (2003). *1 & 2 Peter & Jude: New American Commentary [NAC]*. Nashville: B & H Books.

## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> “Lists of Dates Predicted for Apocalyptic Events,”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_dates\\_predicted\\_for\\_apocalyptic\\_events](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_dates_predicted_for_apocalyptic_events).

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem wrote of this, “The end of all things is at hand means that all the major events in God’s plan of redemption have occurred, and now all things are ready for Christ to return and rule. Rather than thinking of world history in terms of earthly kings and kingdoms, Peter thinks in terms of ‘redemptive history’. From that perspective all the previous acts in the drama of redemption have been completed—creation, fall, the calling of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the kingdom of Israel, the exile in Babylon and the return, the birth of Christ, his life, death and resurrection, his ascension into heaven, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit to establish the church. The great ‘last act’, the church age, had been continuing for about thirty years by the time Peter wrote. Thus the curtain could fall at any time, ushering in the return of Christ and the end of the age. All things are ready: the end of all things (the ‘goal’ to which ‘all’ these events have been leading) is at hand.” (Grudem, 2009, p. 180)

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Schreiner wrote, “All the following exhortations in this paragraph draw an inference from the coming of the end. See the ‘therefore’ (oun) in the middle of v. 7.” (Schreiner, 2003, p. 210)