

Larry Tomczak: Understanding the End-Times for Non-Dummies

The famous “For Dummies” series is a global phenomenon launched over 30 years ago, selling over 250 million copies. The appeal is helping people learn key subjects in an easy-to-understand manner.

Let’s briefly examine three critical areas: the end times, deception and progressivism, starting with installment number one in this commentary.

Can you accurately explain what the Bible teaches about the end-times? What we believe about the future affects how we live today. God wants us to grasp and communicate truth to be optimists, not pessimists, but certainly realists avoiding end times errors that have deceived Christians throughout church history.

A biblically informed view of eschatology (final events) helps us not go astray.

The End Times

During the 1960s, I was saved out of a “Lost Souls” band in Cleveland and converted to Christ during the Jesus Movement. God providentially placed me in a position across from the White House and I taught 2,000 young people gathered weekly about 10 minutes away. Because God blessed me with balanced biblical teaching, I escaped the “any moment rapture” error, but believed with multitudes that His return was approaching quickly.

In line with passages like Isaiah 60:1-3, we understood that both evil and good would escalate prior to the Second Coming; Jesus wasn’t returning for a “beat up bride” but an overcoming, glorious church; and, historically the darkest

hour often preceded the greatest revivals.

As Christians sang “Kumbaya” and Larry Norman’s “I Wish We’d All Been Ready,” I ended up on a TBN program having an interesting interview with the main proponent of the pre-tribulation perspective. Hal Lindsey, author of the 35 million best seller “Late Great Planet Earth,” also had a movie version narrated by Orson Welles, implying Henry Kissinger was the Antichrist!

Soon thereafter a book entitled “88 Reasons Christ Will Return in 1988” blasted on the scene as millions eagerly anticipated being whisked away, escaping coming trouble.

Unfortunately, the prophetic predictions and apocalyptic date settings came up woefully empty. Scores became disillusioned and those believing that Christians would avoid any persecution and suffering (which for Americans previously was the case) experienced confusion seeing those very things increasing worldwide.

Today, we need to recognize we’re no longer living in Jerusalem but Babylon, and as salt (preventing decay) we’ve got work to do in prayer, gospel proclamation and cultural engagement!

In our increasingly post-Christian culture, we desperately need a course correction and thoroughly biblical understanding of the end times. The dark is getting darker, but the light is getting brighter and the difference between the two is becoming more and more evident with each passing day. Retreat, isolation and passivity are not options!

God’s Roadmap

We need to understand that contrary to end of the world hysteria and “Save the Planet” climate change propaganda, there’s not going to be a once-and-for-all climactic end of the world, but rather an end to the world as we know it! Both

evil and good will escalate (Isa. 60:2) yet, "The light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Keep uppermost as genuine Christians, "God has not appointed us to wrath" (1 Thess. 5:9) but that doesn't mean we'll be exempt from persecution or martyrdom. "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Also, some prophetic biblical predictions have an initial fulfillment followed by an ultimate fulfillment. Jesus predicted in Mark 13:2 the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (took place in 70 A.D.) yet is there a secondary event still to come?

Billy Graham said, "History is going somewhere. And we know full well that He who does all things well will bring beauty from the ashes. A new world is being born. A new social order will emerge when Christ comes back. A fabulous future is ahead!"

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Scripture teaches that all that takes place after His ascension is called the end times. It's legitimate to wonder if we are nearing the last days of the end times. Jesus told us we would see signs of His return but not to set dates! "Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36).

Jesus pinpointed characteristics describing the end times that cannot be comfortably airbrushed away:

- distress, perplexity and men fainting from fear (Luke 21:25-26)
- serious and widespread betrayal, hatred and many falling away as lawlessness leads to lovelessness (Matt.

24:9-10)

- moral depravity, violence, and corruption (Matt. 24:37) like in the time of Noah (Gen. 6:5-13).

The Bible teaches that the end of this world as we know it will come suddenly, unexpectedly, with most sadly unprepared. As genuine Christians, we remind ourselves that dying grace doesn't come until the dying hour so we're not to be paralyzed by fear.

Make no mistake about it, a judgement day is coming for every single person and it's all based not on our good works, righteous activity or charitable giving, but what each did regarding Jesus Christ and His sacrificial, substitutionary death on the cross for our sins. Those who fail to repent and receive by faith the free gift of God's provision for our sins will suffer eternal separation from God in unimaginable suffering in the place Jesus called hell.

God's Guidance

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat. The earth also and the works that are in it will be burned up.

"Seeing then that all these things are to be destroyed, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, while you are waiting for, and desiring the coming of the day of God, in which the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements, will be consumed by intense heat? But according to His promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

A rapture of God's people is coming, but not to whisk us away to float on clouds strumming harps. We'll be united with our King in the air to return with Him to reign with Him and enjoy the new world He prepares for all eternity (Rev. 20:6)!

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an arc angel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Here's the Deal: When Jesus departed planet earth, the disciples wanted a date and time for the big event! Jesus refocused them on the Great Commission. He lovingly admonished them, “It's not for you to know the times or the dates, which the Father has fixed by His own my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

With that He left. Angels said He'd be back. We can hasten that day by all of us daily doing our part to reach the world with the gospel of the kingdom and then, as Jesus promised, “The end will come” (Matt. 24:14). {eoa}

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