

End-Time Events

What does the Chi Alpha believe concerning end-time events?

Chi Alpha understands the biblical description of end-time events to be literal, not symbolic (as do some churches). Even among scholars who hold to a literal interpretation, though, there are varieties of opinions on how individual events will happen, the sequence in which they will take place, and the identification of participants mentioned in the biblical record. As a church, we do not assert opinion beyond clear statements of Scripture about the details of what is yet to take place. This brief survey of our commonly held views about end-time events will concentrate on the basic essentials, leaving the more speculative aspects of prophecy to those who choose to suggest personal opinions on details not clearly delineated in Scripture.

The Rapture. Jesus Christ is the central figure of prophecy, just as He is the central figure of the entire Bible. The Rapture of the living saints is the first phase of what is commonly called the Second Coming. To the Christian who truly loves Jesus, the sudden appearance of Christ in the air will hold no fear, dread, or disappointment. This event is the blessed hope Paul mentions in Titus 2:13. At this time, Christ comes and snatches away His church without actually setting foot on the earth. The rapture of the saints is best described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, and 1 Corinthians 15:51,52.

The end times will be full of frightening events. Christians will be spared from suffering some of them by being snatched away in the Rapture. But we will not escape them all, and Christ gave warning and instruction on how to live in the last days (Matthew 24:4-46).

Believers who have died before the Rapture will be resurrected with incorruptible bodies at the Rapture. According to 1 Corinthians 15:52, the bodies of the living saints will be changed too as they are snatched away. The Bible does not give a complete description of the new bodies. The full revelation will be a glorious surprise. We are given a peek at what they will be like in the Gospel accounts of Jesus after His resurrection and in 1 Corinthians 15:52.

The Tribulation. With the saints removed from the earth, a time of suffering will come upon the whole world. The Tribulation is a period of 7 years, the "70th week" of Daniel (Daniel 9:27). The last half of the Tribulation period is called the Great Tribulation. *Pre-Tribulation* scholars hold that the Rapture will occur before the beginning of Daniel's 70th week. *Mid-Tribulation* scholars believe the Rapture will occur in the middle of the 70th week, or before the Great Tribulation. *Post-Tribulation* scholars teach that the Rapture will occur at the end of the 70th week, or when Christ comes to set up His eternal kingdom. The common belief in Chi Alpha is that pre-tribulation is more accurate. This view best satisfies the biblical teaching that the Rapture is always imminent-it could happen at any time and will have no immediate warning or

announcement (Matthew 24:42-44; Mark 13:33-37). One must always be prepared. The post-tribulation position does not retain the essential scriptural aspect of an imminent unannounced Rapture.

The Tribulation directly concerns Israel and is God's judgment for long apostasy (abandonment of religious faith) and neglect of the Messiah - Jesus Christ. The Tribulation also affects the whole world because of its ungodliness and ill treatment of the Jews. The first half of these 7 years will probably be a time of prosperity and acceptance of the Antichrist as the great deliverer from economic chaos. But the last half of the period will witness the plagues described in Revelation 15:1-16:21. There has been much speculation on the identity of the Antichrist, with many world leaders being named for the questionable "honor." The church has experienced embarrassment when predicted antichrists have died or otherwise passed from the world scene. People in Chi Alpha generally choose not to participate in speculating who the Antichrist might be, as well as forecasting the possibility that he is already alive.

The Second Coming. This event is different from the Rapture. The second coming of Christ is the visible, bodily appearance of Christ as He returns to the Mount of Olives from which He ascended back to heaven after His resurrection. After the marriage between the raptured saints and the Lamb in heaven (during the Tribulation), Christ, the Groom, goes forth to claim all of His kingdom. He rides on a white horse, followed by the saints, also on white horses (Revelation 19:11, 14). It will be a sight of great wonder and majesty as Christ descends with His followers to reclaim that which Satan has temporarily wrested from His hand. The ensuing conflict between the world of righteousness and the world of darkness is called the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16). At the conclusion of the battle, defeated Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (Revelation 20).

The Millennium. With Satan's influence removed from the earth and Christ's reign of righteousness unopposed, the Millennium will be a time of unsurpassed glory and perfect relationships. References to this future time of perfection are found throughout Scripture (Isaiah 2, 11, 12, 32, 35, 60, and 65; Zechariah 14).

The Millennium will last 1,000 years. Then there will be another fine tuning in God's end-time dealing with the earth and its inhabitants before the perfection of eternity begins. Satan will be released for "a little season" to test the love, faith, and loyalty of those individuals born during the Millennium and therefore still untested as to their choice between right and wrong. The rebellion of Satan and those who choose to follow him will be short-lived. Fire will come down from heaven and devour the opposition. Satan will then be permanently cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20).

The Great White Throne Judgment. After the judgment fire physically destroys those deceived by Satan at the end of the Millennium, all the wicked who have ever lived on the face of the earth will be dead. Then will follow the resurrection of the wicked dead to stand before the austere Judge "from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away" (Revelation 20:11). Books are opened and the wicked are judged according to

their works. Then, like Satan, they will be consigned to the lake of fire to be tormented day and night forever. This is the saddest scene in the entire Bible and motivates Chi Alpha to reach the lost of the world and help them escape the end of those who do not submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Holy City. Revelation 21 begins with John's view of new heavens, a new earth, and the holy city (the new Jerusalem that comes down from God out of the new heavens to rest on the new earth). Peter tells us, "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Peter 3:10), thus making way for the new heavens and earth. The glorious description of this city is found in Revelation 21 and 22. Whether symbolic or real, the description introduces us to the excitement and magnificence of eternity. The Lord God Omnipotent finally claims the full victory He purchased at Calvary.

CONCERNS: If it were only the scoffers and skeptics who raise question about the certainty of the Lord's return for His own (cf. 2 Peter 3:3,4), it would be bad enough. But for the Church of Jesus Christ to become lethargic and careless because the long-promised chain of end-time events has not yet begun is unconscionable. Chi Alpha preaches a clear message that Jesus is coming soon, and we will preach that message without apology, no matter how long the Lord delays His coming. We must never forget Peter's two explanations for what may seem like a long delay in the fulfillment of divine prophecy. First, God measures time differently than man does. "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8). Then we are told that God's delay gives opportunity for more to come to repentance through His patience (2 Peter 3:9). Chi Alpha is committed to the reality that Jesus is coming soon, no matter what we may feel about God's delays.

Another concern we have involves an inordinate fixation on prophecy and predictions about the future. If we study Scripture about end-time events merely out of curiosity, we are little better than those who seek out horoscopes and seers to learn what they can about the future. The believer's interest in prophecy is for the encouragement it provides through the unalterable promise that God has already won the victory and we simply wait for His timing as to when the events will be played out. Our focus must be on Jesus, the centerpiece of Bible prophecy, not on the events alone.

A final concern or observation must be made. The preceding outline of end-time events is not the final, indisputable statement on what lies ahead. It is simply an attempt to bring together the many biblical references to end-time events while keeping the focus on Jesus Christ and His mission to seek and save the lost (Mark 10:45). Our priorities must always be His priorities.