

**Hot Topics**  
***“The End Times”***  
**August 17, 2014**

**Video: Apocalypse (Radioactive song)**

Introduction

I want to say a big thanks to Price Horn for that video montage of apocalyptic movie clips. Did you know that since 2010 there have been no fewer than 40 “apocalyptic themed” films coming out of Hollywood? The coming apocalypse seems to be on a lot of people’s minds these days. How many of you remember the worry and stress people had just two years ago as we approached December 21st, 2012. Do you remember the reason why? Supposedly that was the last day on the ancient Mayan calendar. People were sure the end of the world was coming. Now, if you go back a few years, some of you might remember

**Harold Camping,**

the self-proclaimed prophet who twice predicted the end would come on the exact dates of Sept 6, 1994 and May 21, 2011. Now if you go back a few more years, you might remember the 80’s when we were warned about the

**“88 reasons why Christ would come in 1988”**

This was a short booklet circulated by the former NASA rocket engineer turned prophecy teacher Edgar Whisenant of the Trinity Broadcasting. I was personally affected by this end times prediction because some of our best friends in Wichita tried to get us to believe it and prepare for it. Since Norma and I didn’t agree with them, it put a wedge in our relationship for long, long time.

Now if you are REALLY old, some of you might even remember

**Hal Lindsey and his book, “The Late Great Planet Earth”**

Lindsey predicted that doomsday could occur sometime during the 1970’s. Lindsey received a lot of notoriety back then for his predictions and he is still active on the prophecy speaking circuit today. In fact, you can subscribe to the “Hal Lindsey Report” for the latest news and developments regarding the end times

The truth is that people have been warning us that the end of the world is near for quite some time. Listen to this quote:

**"Our Earth is degenerate in these later days. There are signs that the world is speedily coming to an end, bribery and corruption are common, children no longer obey their parents, every man wants to write a book and the end of the world is evidently approaching."**

Any guesses where that quote came from? Doesn’t it sound like something that was ripped from a recent newspaper headline? Well, not exactly. That warning was inscribed on a clay tablet in ancient Assyria almost 5,000 years ago.

My main point in showing all of these illustrations is to simply point out that people have been predicting the end of the world for thousands of years, with many of them predicting an exact date for their doomsday scenario. It’s human nature to want to know and even predict when the end is coming. Many of us want to know if that last day will end in fire or ice, or a call to judgment, or the dawn of a new golden age, or the complete destruction of the Earth or a shift into higher consciousness. Bottom line: people want to

know how and when this world is going to end. And if it is coming to an end, what difference does it make? These are just a few of the questions we are going to discuss today as we dive into the final topic of the “Hot Topics” series.

## Review

Before we jump into today’s topic, I just want to remind you that this is the last message in our summer series, titled “Hot Topics”. So far we have covered:

- Environmentalism
- Islam
- Diversity
- Mental Illness
- Devils & Demons
- Hell
- Today: The End Times

This has been a great series and many of us have been enlightened by the useful biblical insights that Rick has shared with us over the past 6 weeks. If you missed any of these messages, you can listen or watch them by going to the Media section of the NHCC website. Let’s get back to our topic for today.

## The Eschatology of World Religions

This topic, “the End Times”, has been referred to by many names over the years. Some people refer to it as “Armageddon”. Some prefer to call it “The Apocalypse” or “Doomsday” as the preppers like to call it. Christians often refer to it as “The Second Coming of Christ”. Now if you are a theologian, you would categorize these under a different name. If you were a theologian, you would refer to this area of study as

**“eschatology”. It’s a word that comes from the Greek work eschatos, which means “end” and it is the branch of theology that deals with the end of the world: things like death, resurrection, final judgment and the like.**

So if I use the word eschatology today, just remember it’s just a fancy way to describe the study of the end times or “last things”.

Now it shouldn’t come as a surprise to us that the various religions around the world have different views of eschatology.

For example, if you are *polytheist* (“many gods”), such as a Hindu or a Buddhist, you most likely don’t believe in an end of the world scenario like the one you find in Christianity. Hindus and Buddhists believe in a perpetual cycle of birth, life, death, and reincarnation that goes on forever and ever. They believe that it’s been that way in the forever past and it will continue that way in the forever future. The only sense in which a Buddhist or Hindu would talk about an end would be the end of an individual person. They believe in a kind of personal eschatology but no end to the world in the sense that you find in Christianity.

When you look at the *monotheistic* (“one god”) religions, such as Islam, Judaism and Christianity, you find something quite different. All three of these major world religions believe that the world had a beginning; that it was created and it will someday come to an end. Since all three teach that the world was brought into existence for a purpose, they also teach that there will be a specific and determined end brought about by the one who brought it all into existence.

Look at Islam, for example. Muslims believe there will be major signs which reveal the end times have arrived.

### **Major Signs:**

- **Gross materialism**

- **Women will outnumber men**
- **Muslims defeat Jews in battle; Muslims and Christians battle unbelievers together, then Muslims defeat Christians in battle.**
- **In the end, Allah will destroy all the nations except Islamic ones. (Sura 21:96, 27:82, 43:61)**

Now surprisingly, Judaism sees the end times quite differently.

In the end, Jews believe:

- **the Messiah will defeat the Gentile nations**
- **The Jews in exile will return and rule in an age of spiritual harmony.**
- **The kingdom of Israel will be restored.**
- **God will be recognized as the universal king (Zech 14).**

So to summarize the eschatology of major world religions, polytheist don't believe in any "end of the world" scenarios, whereas Jews and Muslims believe in end time scenarios where they come out as victors in a new age.

The Eschatology of Christianity

Now if you are saying to yourself, "I didn't come here today for a lesson on world religions.", I get that. Since you may not know that we had just recently discussed Islam as one of our "Hot Topics", I just wanted to briefly explain the differences between the eschatologies of other world religions in comparison to Christianity. Which finally brings us to our main focus of our time today: What IS the eschatology of Christianity and how does it differ from other religions?

One thing you need to know as we jump into a discussion of the end times is that there is a ton of information on this topic. If we had time, for example, we could go through an in-depth discussion of all the symbolic references found in biblical prophecy, such as meaning of the seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and the four horsemen of the apocalypse. That's one approach.

Or I could just cut to the chase and give you the short answer: Jesus is coming again. Deal with it. But since we don't have time today for the former and I don't think you'd be satisfied with the later, I'm going to try and shoot for somewhere in the middle. Okay?

So with the time we have today, I'm going to focus on the major points of Christian eschatology.

The apex of the debate about the end times centers on the discussion of what age we are in regarding God's eternal timeline. We know that when God created the world, he also created time.

### **Creation and Eternity**

We know the beginning of time started with "creation" and we know the end of time is something we call "eternity", but what about the middle? What age are we in relation to the beginning and the end? Curious minds would like to know where we are on God's timeline.

In the New Testament, Jesus sheds additional light on God's eternal timeline by adding two major divisions in middle between creation and eternity.

**"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Matthew 12:32**

We read this same thing in In Luke 18:29-30 where Jesus says,

**"No one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life." Luke 18:29-30**

Notice the two additional divisions of time Jesus refers to: this age (now) and the age to come.

### **Now and the Age to Come**

So not only is there a beginning which we call creation and an end, which we call eternity, but there's also two periods sandwiched in between; "now", and "the age to come".

In an attempt to interpret Jesus' words and make sense out of other biblical references to times and ages, scholars have come up with 4 different end time scenarios that describe how the last days will play out. Each of these scenarios differs in the way they divide up time. Before we look at each one, I want to define some terms that are referenced in some way in each scenario:

**The Tribulation – from the Old Testament to the New there is an indication that there is going to be a period of intense persecution, of signs and wonders (miraculous things from God and Satan both) that happen before the Second Coming of Christ. (see Revelation 4-18)**

**The Rapture – the lightning quick resurrection and gathering of deceased and living Christ followers. Rapture literally means "pulled away" or "caught away". (see 1 Thessalonians 4:17)**

**Second Coming – the return of Christ on this earth. Also referred to as "the glorious appearing" (see Acts 1:9-11)**

**The Millenium – the 1,000 year reign of Christ on the earth. (See Revelation 20)**

Those are terms that are referred to in all the various viewpoints.

When it comes to naming the end times scenarios, scholars have historically differentiated each scenario by how they treat The Millennium. And the names for each one are made by the use of the prefixes "pre", "post", and "a". So we have pre-millennialism (of which there are two varieties), post-millennialism, and amillennialism. The prefixes "pre", "post", and "a" indicate a certain belief about the relationship of Christ's second coming to the millennium. It's interesting to me that most of the debates in study of eschatology center around how people interpret this idea of the millennium. It's also been said that The Millennium is 1000 years of peace that Christians love to fight over.

Let's briefly take a look at these various viewpoints and see how they differ. Let's begin with Pre-millennialism. As I said a minute ago, Premillennialism actually comes in two flavors. The first flavor is known as:

### **Pre-Tribulation Premillennialism**

In this scenario, Jesus is first going to invisibly return and take away the living Christians and the deceased believers into Heaven (that's called the rapture) before 7 years of tribulation, leaving all the unbelievers behind (which is where the title of the books came from – "Left Behind.") After that, the anti-Christ will deceive the world and God will pour out warnings and judgments during the tribulation. Then Jesus will return again, this time visibly (and with those who had been raptured), and defeat the anti-Christ and his armies) and bind Satan for 1,000 years (Revelation 20), during which Jesus himself will reign on the earth. Following that, this scenario states that Satan will be freed for a short-time after which he will be permanently cast into the Lake of Fire (along with Death itself). And then, everything will be renewed, restored and regenerated.

### **Post-Tribulation Premillennialism**

This viewpoint, like the one I just mentioned, teaches that the thousand year reign of Christ will take place after his Second Coming. Now the difference in the “post trib” viewpoint is that the Anti-Christ will rise and persecute the church before Jesus returns. There will be a time of great tribulation followed by the second coming of Christ. Immediately after his return, there will be a resurrection of deceased believers and a rapture of living saints. Jews will be converted and then Jesus will usher in the 1,000 year millennium. At the end of the 1000 years reign, Satan will be set free and will lead a short-lived rebellion which Christ will put down. Then the Final Judgment will take place and the everlasting Kingdom will begin. This view is sometimes known as Historic Pre-Millennialism.

### **Postmillennialism**

Postmillennialism (“post” means “after”) teaches that the thousand year reign of Christ comes before the Second Coming. Historically, most who hold this view have believed that the preaching of the gospel and expansion of the church will take place during the present age until the whole world is evangelized. During this period of gospel preaching and evangelism, there will be a 1000 year period of peace and righteousness under God’s law. At the end of the millennium, there will be a visible and glorious return of Jesus Christ. When Christ returns, there will be a resurrection of all the dead at that time. There will also be a transformation of the living believers at that time. Israel will be converted and grafted back into the people of God at that time. The eternal state will be established with the new heavens and the new earth.

### **Amillennialism**

In Amillennialism, “a” means “non” or “no” as in “no” millennium. This view states that when Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into Heaven, he was established as King. We know he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords today even though he doesn’t have that in fullness on the earth. In this view, there will be a time of apostasy during which the Anti-Christ will persecute Christians. But then God will pour out judgment on him during a great tribulation and on the rest of the world that is aligned with him. At the end of the tribulation period, Jesus will return. And when Jesus does appear, the dead in Christ will be raised and joined by the living in the clouds. But instead of going off with Jesus to Heaven, they and Jesus will immediately return to earth where Jesus will judge the Anti-Christ, Satan and all of the living and the dead. All of this will happen simultaneously. There won’t be a 7 year or 1000 year delay in the middle of all this as some of the other views teach.

So there you have it. Four different viewpoints about how this world is going to come to an end.

### **Summary of 4 viewpoints**

Now I’m sure the question on everyone’s mind is: “Which is the correct scenario? Or which one does this best job of predicting how it’s all going to end?” That’s a very good question. And here’s my not so satisfying answer: “I don’t know.” And neither do you and neither do any of the bible scholars out there. Why? Because Jesus said so.

Ironically, when Jesus was about ready to leave this earth the first time the disciples asked him this very same question. In the final hour of his ministry, just before he was about to ascend into heaven, they were wondering the same thing that we all wondering. When will Jesus be coming back? The bible says:

**So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. Acts 1:6, 7**

You see, they wanted to know when Jesus was going to return just like we do. But Jesus told them the same thing I’m telling you. It’s not for you or I or anyone else to know when he is coming again. The only thing we can know for sure is this: Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he ascended to heaven, and he will most certainly return someday. We know this is true because Jesus said so.

Now to be fair, I will tell you that even Rick and I disagree on which end times viewpoint is more accurate. Rick leans more toward

the amillennial viewpoint and I lean toward the premillennial viewpoint. But the truth is, it doesn't really matter because the one thing we agree on is that Jesus is coming again.

I'm sure by now some of you are wondering why we went through this drill if I doesn't really matter what viewpoint you hold since no one knows for sure. If that's what you are thinking I understand. But you have to understand that when Jesus told his disciples that no one knows the times or seasons, he wasn't implying that none of this end times stuff really matters. He went on to tell them that it should matter, especially now. After telling them not to worry about the future time or the season of his return, he went on to tell them about something of extreme importance that they should be focused on in the "now". He said,

**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8 ESV**

What Jesus was telling his disciples is this: Get busy and spread the good news of the gospel to the whole world. Don't spend time sitting around and speculating about my return. There's work to do. What Jesus was saying is that the promise of his return should motivate to share the gospel and live for him "now". The Apostle Peter stressed the same thing in his charge to the local church:

**But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. 2 Peter 3:10-12**

Peter believed that a proper understanding of the future Second Coming should motivate the believer to live a holy life now.

For now, we should make every effort to be holy in our conduct and to live godly lives and spread the good news of the gospel. Why? Because Jesus told us we won't know for sure when he is coming again. While we wait for his glorious appearing, we need to make the most of our time on this earth.

But all of this talk about the end times isn't just meant to motivate us to live holy and godly lives now. It's also meant to give us hope for the future. What kind of hope? Well I think that promise of Jesus' coming gives us hope in two ways:

First, it's give us hope that someday we get rid of all the bad effects of sin, such as death, pain, sadness. Listen to what the Apostle John says about the age to come in the book of Revelation:

**He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:4**

This verse gives me hope that there are better days ahead.

For example, I look forward to the day when I will have no more emotionally draining experiences. No more fear, no more sadness, no more losing loved ones, like my Uncle Jerry who went to be with the Lord this week.

I look forward to the day when I won't have experience spiritually oppressive periods. No more guilt, no more condemnation, no more devil or demons, no more periods of spiritual darkness. But that's not all.

The promise of Jesus' coming also gives us great hope that we will finally get to claim our inheritance...all those things God has promised those who are followers of Christ.

We will get a new earth... a planet that will be renewed and no longer ravaged by tornadoes, hurricanes, or diseases. We will also get a new body...a resurrected body, very much like the one we have except one that's free from the effects of sin.

And finally, we get to be with Jesus. No more waiting to be with Him. No more praying to someone we cannot see. No, someday we

will see him just as He is. In person. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We will finally get to spend eternity with the one who rules the universe and yet cares for each of us personally.

Friends, to be honest I don't know when Jesus is coming again. But one thing I know is this: Jesus will return someday and the knowledge of his return motivates me to live for him now and gives me great hope for a better tomorrow. And because of all of that, the cry of my heart is "Marantha"...Come Lord Jesus, Come. I hope you feel the same. Let's pray.