

LESSON 11 WORKSHEET:

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR PLANET EARTH?

A complete study of what the Bible says about the end of the world can be very difficult. This kind of study will sooner or later take us to parts of the Bible that "contain some things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). For this very reason there are many false ideas and teachings being spread around. What follows gives a brief introduction to Scripture's main teaching about the end of the world and warns against the most common errors being taught about it. Read it for your understanding about an issue many Christians debate.

A Summary of the Bible's Teachings About the Last Things

1. **God has not revealed to anyone when the Last Day will come.** No one but God knows the day or the hour when Christ will return in glory. See Matthew 24:36; 24:42; Mark 13:32; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10.
2. **Christ's return could have taken place at any time since Pentecost-and can take place today.** All the "signs of the times" (see Lesson 7) have been fulfilled and are *continuous, ongoing* characteristics of this New Testament age (between Christ's first and second comings). So if we speak of the "tribulation" and turmoil of the church, or the workings of the "Antichrist" / antichristian forces (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12), or any other sign preceding the Last Day, we mark these as realities.
3. **The unbelievers in the world will still be caught by surprise and be totally unprepared for Christ's return.** See Matthew 24:37-39 and Luke 11:28-30.
4. **We are specifically instructed to remain prepared, watchful, and alert.** Relying on Christ alone and guided by Scripture alone, we await the Last Day and expect it anytime. See Matthew 24:42-44; Luke 21:36; James 5:7-9; 1 Peter 4:7.
5. **Jesus will return visibly, in glory, and everyone will see him.** He will return only *one* more time, and on that day there will be only *one* great resurrection of all the dead. This second (and last) coming of Christ is what we are pointed to: the day of the resurrection of all mankind. See John 5:28,29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17; Hebrews 9:27,28.
6. **The final judgment of all people will take place when Jesus returns.**
7. **At Christ's return the present creation will be replaced or renovated.** The "new heavens and new earth" will be established.
8. **Unbelievers will be banished forever in hell, while believers will receive eternal life in heaven.** Our citizenship is truly in heaven and we have the heavenly kingdom prepared for us!

A Summary of False Teachings About the Last Things

1. **The Last Day will be preceded by a 1,000 year period (millennium) during which Christ will rule visibly on earth.** The belief that there will be a distinct 1,000 year period before the Last Day is called "millennialism." There are many kinds of millennialism, but the most common is "premillennialism" which declares that Jesus will return visibly *before* (pre -) the millennium as well as on the Last Day. Revelation 20 is the so-called basis of this teaching.
2. **Believers will be caught up ("raptured") into heaven prior to the Last Day while unbelievers will be left on earth to await Judgment Day.** This teaching, wrongly based on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, is called "the Rapture."
3. **God has divided time into distinct periods (usually said to be seven) and deals with**

people in different ways during each period. Each so-called period is called a "dispensation" and those who hold to this teaching are called "dispensationalists." Using this kind of outline of world history, millennialists are able to fit their ideas of the "rapture," the "millennium," or the "tribulation" (see below) into a preferred dispensation. There is no special part of the Bible that supports this false concept. In fact, it has no basis in Scripture at all.

4. **A distinct period (usually said to be a seven-year period) will come before the Last Day and is called the "Great Tribulation."** Rather than referring to the ongoing tribulation of believers throughout the New Testament age (which we are now in), millennialists and dispensationalists claim this is a separate period of time, usually expected after the "rapture" but before the "millennium."
5. **All the Jews will be converted to God and will be saved before the end of the world.** This teaching insists that all references to God's "Israel" must refer to physical descendants of Abraham (the Jews), rather than accepting the Bible's own definition: the "Israel of God" refers to all people, regard less of race or nationality, who share Abraham's faith in the Savior. See Romans 4:11,12; 9:6-8;9:27;11:25-27.
6. **The Antichrist is a future political ruler who has not been made known yet.** Most millennialists believe this person will work during the short period called the "great tribulation" (see "4" above). But Scripture describes the Antichrist as a predominantly spiritual or religious leader who falsely distorts God's truth and whose workings began already at the time of the apostles. See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3; 2 John 7.

Main Contrasts Between the True and the False Teachings About the Last Things

1. **The Bible teaches that Jesus will return only one more time; millennialists and dispensationalists teach that Jesus must return two or more times.** This is an obvious contrast, and an important one. The more a person studies this subject, the more he will see that a completely different outline of world history is presented by each side of the controversy.
2. **The Bible uses words in one way; millennialists and dispensationalists use those same words and concepts in totally different ways.** This is what leads to greater confusion for the Bible student.
3. **The Bible requires that we read it and interpret it in one way; millennialists and dispensationalists read and interpret it with a different set of presuppositions and rules of interpretation.** It is not an overstatement to say that practically all errors in this subject stem from a faulty view of how to interpret the Bible, (instead of letting the Bible interpret itself. The main source of error concerning the last things is to be found in improper and inaccurate use of Bible sections (especially visions, picture language, and prophetic language). This different mindset and set of presuppositions among millennialists results in their errors.

