

Navigating the topic of the End Times is a veritable minefield.

And that's just when you're talking about it amongst believers. Try bringing up topics like the rapture and imagery like the Beast with a non-Christ follower, and you'll probably get some rather strange looks.

The fact of the matter is that the second coming of Jesus (and the subsequent upheaval of all that we know and understand) is an incredibly complex area of the faith. Scholars and theologians have debated for centuries about when the world will end, or at least be transformed and renewed by the supernatural power of God.

A quick search on Google for "End Times" yields 5,250,000,000 results. In case you missed it, that's nearly five *billion* search hits. Remember the fears over 2000 and the Y2K precautions that people took? How about the best-selling book series *Left Behind*? There's something about the End Times and Armageddon. Everyone wants to know what's going to happen.

This side of eternity, you likely won't find answers to all your questions about the End Times. But these three concepts can help guide your thoughts and discussions on this topic.

1. It is happening.

Jesus is returning one day, whether tomorrow or a thousand years from now. Luke talks about this in Acts, the "sequel" to the Gospel of Luke.

"...he [Jesus] was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

There you go. Pretty simple. In the same way that his first visit to earth was prophesied for centuries, there are multiple verses that tell of his final return (Matthew 24:30, Mark 14:62, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, Revelation 1:7). It is happening, but...

2. No one knows exactly when it's happening or how it's happening.

Check out Matthew 24:36: *"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."*

Did you catch that? The *only* one who knows when it's going to happen is God the Father. Not even Jesus knows! Now surrounding portions of this chapter do give other indicators of what life will be like as the time nears:

"For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:27-29).

“For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:37-39).

Going by these examples, the End Times will reflect the period of Noah, when people were living for themselves. Other passages mention wars, upheaval and suffering. That could describe a lot of dark periods in human history, whether we’re talking about the Inquisition, the Holocaust, or the genocide in Africa. So as much as we might try to figure out the exact timing of Jesus’ return, God is truly the only one who knows.

3. In the meantime, we need to be about the work of the Kingdom.

This next portion of Scripture is a little longer, but worth the read. It comes from 1 Thessalonians 5.

“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).

This passage from a letter to the church at Thessalonica reiterates that the time of Jesus’ return is unknown. But Paul is also quick to point other key things: this shouldn’t unnerve us as followers of Jesus and we should continue in our path of encouraging one another and living out the God-filled life.

The mention of the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation intentionally echoes his letter to the Ephesians where he instructs the brethren to put on the whole armor of God.

This is the message of the Second Coming. We are to be faithful, ever ready for Jesus’ return.

-Rev. Billy Graham