

Are We Living in the End Times?

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The tragic terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001 will cause many people to ask the question: "Are we living in the end times?" I was watching the tragedy of the awful events of destruction with another Christian and he made the comment that we must be living in the end times. In light of the current events that we are facing today, the volatile situation in the Middle East, and the many wars and overall unrest in this world, one must ask the question: "Are we living in the end times?"

The answer to this question is simple. We are not living in the end times when Bible prophecies are being literally fulfilled. Rather, we are living in the prelude to the end times called the last days. As we will see in this study, the eschatological terminology of "end times" has reference to the prophetic signs and events that Jesus said would occur during the future tribulation period and culminate with the "end of the age" (Matt. 24). This is why we cannot be living in the end times. The Tribulation Period is still in the future and those signs dealing with this time period cannot be literally fulfilled today. The Church is not in the Tribulation Period waiting and watching for signs to be fulfilled and the "end of the age" (the closing of the seven-year Tribulation Period) to occur.

The Bible actually calls the present days in which we live, prior to the Rapture of the Church, the last days – not the end times.

2 Timothy 3:1-2

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy."

You will notice that the last days are described as days of great spiritual turmoil and difficulty, which will "wax worse and worse" (2 Tim. 3:13). Certainly we can know that we are living in the last days. This is because Paul the apostle viewed himself as living in the last days or final days before Christ returns and takes His Bride (the Church) home to be with Him (John 14:1-3). If Paul was living in the

last days, then surely we are living in the last days, or those days which are plagued by love for self, money, pride, disobedience from authority and the committing of many unholy acts. This description of the “last days” can be viewed as a *general description of the conditions in the world prior to Christ’s return in the Rapture*. These descriptions are not said to be direct signs or “signs of the times” as we often hear quoted today. They are not described as specific signs that *must* occur before Jesus can come in the Rapture but are descriptive “days” and times that mark the decline in decency, within the closing history of the present dispensation, prior to Christ returns for the Church. Of course, there are many trends and developments (shadows of what lie ahead during the Tribulation Period) that indicate Christ’s coming (the Rapture) and the end times (Tribulation Period) are not far away. But we must never conclude that there are specific signs that must occur before Jesus can return.

The “last days” were already in place in Paul’s day and during the apostolic Church. Therefore, there was no need to wait for any future signs to occur, which would give us a more in-depth clue of the last days and when Jesus would return in the Rapture. The Bible teaches that the Rapture is a signless event that could occur at any moment (Phil. 3:20; Titus 2:12; Rev. 22:12). The Bible teaches that the Rapture is imminent – it could happen at any moment. We are told to look for the imminent return of the Savior (Phil. 3:20; Titus 2:13) instead of looking for particular signs that must occur before the Savior can return. None of the key Rapture passages in the New Testament mention any signs that must occur before the Rapture can take place.

I have heard prophecy students say, “There are no more prophecies that must be fulfilled for the Rapture to occur.” While this is true, it is misleading, since it implies that there were various signs or prophecies that needed to be fulfilled before Jesus could return in the Rapture. Some have said that Israel needed to be reinstated in their land so everything could be in place for Jesus to return. Others suggest that various prophetic events needed to be fulfilled such as the formation of the European Common Market before the Rapture could take place. This simply is not true. Dear friend, all that has to happen for Jesus to come is for Jesus to come!

Paul was simply saying that the “last days” prior to the coming of Christ in the Rapture would be filled with deteriorating moral conditions and the spiritual climate of the world would be very low. Paul gives the *general trends* of the world when Jesus returns for the Church. He is not giving specific signs that we must look for in the future, so that we can determine when the Rapture would take place. This is because these “last day” conditions were already in place when Paul was writing in his own day. Second Timothy 3:1-5 is a statement of general trends and conditions that were occurring in the world during Paul’s day and which would continue to prevail on planet earth before Jesus returns in the Rapture. They are not a statement of specific prophetic signs that *must* occur before Jesus can return in the Rapture.

The adjective “last” appears several times in Scripture in relationship to those events and circumstances that would precede Christ’s coming in the Rapture. All of these events and conditions within the scope of the “last days” were occurring in Paul’s own day and should not be viewed as future prophetic signs that *must* place in order for Jesus to return in the Rapture. These verses do not point to future signs that need to come to pass but to conditions already prevalent in society even while Paul wrote his letter to Timothy.

2 Peter 3:3 also states:

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.”

1 John 2:18 adds:

“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.”

The terms “last days” (2 Pet. 3:3) and the “last time” (1 John 2:18) are equivalent or comparable expressions referring to the days prior to Christ’s return in the Rapture. The term “latter” (see 1 Tim. 4:1) is also used to speak of the last or final days of earth’s history prior to Christ’s coming in the Rapture to take away His beloved bride (1 Thess. 4:13-18). This is when Jesus promises to come *for* His saints in the air and rescue them from the seven-year Tribulation Period (Rev. 3:10). In any event, we must be careful to use the right Biblical

terminology when addressing the issue of the end times. We are not living in the era called the “end times;” rather, we are living in the period of history called the “last days.” We must remember that the “last days” occur prior to Christ’s return in the air to take His bride to Heaven. The last days are not spoken of as being accompanied by direct “signs” that must occur before Jesus can come in the Rapture (John 14:1-2). As we will investigate, the “end times” is a term related to the years of the seven-year Tribulation Period, which occurs prior to Christ’s Second Coming to earth (Rev. 19:11-16).

End time events are prophetic events that have not yet been directly fulfilled. The term “end” is used in connection with the discussion of eschatological events dealing with the Tribulation Period. When Jesus began to describe the events that would transpire or take place during the seven-year Tribulation Period upon earth, He clearly marks these events as being part of this future time period that will come upon planet earth.

In Matthew 24:3 the disciples of Jesus were concerned about the end time and asked the questions, “Tell us, when shall these things be (the destruction of temple)? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (age)?” The disciples wanted to know what sign Jesus would give to indicate His return to earth. In answering their question, Jesus established an era of time (seven years) that would be filled with many cataclysmic and cosmic signs, which would precede His Second Coming to earth. In other words, Jesus spoke about specific events and signs that would take place prior to His Second Coming to planet earth.

The term “end” (Matt. 24:3,14) must contextually refer to the ending of the Tribulation Period of time, which is seven years in duration (Matt. 24:29). This is known as Daniel’s seventieth week or final seven years of the 490 years that he prophesied about (Dan. 9:24-27). The end times and prophetic events that Jesus prophesied about can only occur at a specific time, the time of the Tribulation Period, when all of these signs are going to occur. Thus, the series of end time events that Jesus described in Matthew 24:5-26 would occur during a future time period (Tribulation) and take place just prior to His return to earth, within a time span of seven years. There would be many signs and events that would transpire during this seven-year

time period. The return of Jesus Christ to earth will actually occur “after the tribulation of those days” (Matt. 24:29) and be the culminating event and sign of the end times.

It’s important to understand that in Matthew 24 Jesus was speaking about what would transpire upon planet earth just prior to His return to earth to establish His kingdom or what we know as the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-3). The term “end” (Matt. 24:3, 14), with its related end time events, looks forward to the final outcome of a certain period of time in earth’s history known as the Tribulation Period. It will be during this future timeframe when the signs, which Jesus predicted would take place, will have their actual fulfillment.

In summary, the “end times” is a prophetic term that relates to those events that will transpire or occur during the seven-year Tribulation Period, which culminates in the end of this present age (the Dispensation of Grace). It’s appropriate to conclude that “end time” events can only occur in this future seven-year Tribulation Period, the time when these specific events and signs were prophesied to occur and intensify, and a time period that will end with the Second Coming of Christ to earth. In other words, end time events and signs are those things that would transpire during the seven years, just prior to Christ’s return to earth. They would be events leading up to the end or final drama of the Tribulation Period.

When people talk about the end times they are usually referring to events that are prophesied to take place during the Tribulation Period. It’s correct to identify end-time signs with the Tribulation Period, since Jesus taught that these would be signs that would occur in relationship to God’s judgment upon planet earth. However, it is incorrect to say that they are being fulfilled in the present day in which we live. Many people who talk about the prophecies of the end times automatically relate this prophetic terminology to the present time in which we live. However, as we have seen, this is misleading and confusing from a prophetic standpoint.

It’s important to understand that all of the signs and events that Jesus prophesied about, and those events which are normally referred to as “end time” prophecies, will take place in a future time period known as the Tribulation Period. This is when the “end times” officially begin

and Biblically get under way. To read the newspaper and interpret the world headlines as fulfillment of end time events, which deal specifically with the Tribulation Period, is misleading and Biblically unsound.

End time events cannot take place until the world moves into the specific time period when these prophetic events and signs are said to occur and be fulfilled, the seven-year period of tribulation, before Christ returns to earth. This will be the Tribulation Period and final seven-year countdown of Daniel's 490-year prophecy (Dan. 9:24, 27).

It's also worthy to note that the eschatological phrase "time of the end" (Dan. 11:40; 12:4, 9) is also used in connection with the Tribulation Period and those events that will take place during this future time period. This is further evidence confirming that the end time events (the end times) occur during the Tribulation Period after the Church is raptured. The "end times" do not refer to those events that would transpire before Christ returns in the air (Rapture) for His Bride (Church). The Bible student must take great care not to mix the last days with the end times. Jesus said that the "end time" signs and events would occur during a specific future time of tribulation that would exist upon planet earth, prior to His return to earth in power and great glory.

Matthew 24:21

"For then (during the end times – not today) shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

The "end times" speak of that period of time known as the seven-year Tribulation Period, which will unfold upon planet earth following the Rapture of the Church. It's a time of unprecedented signs of judgment and earthly terror (Matt. 24:21-22) that will occur until the closing of the "end of the age" (Matt. 24:14b; Matt. 13:39-40). These verses all refer to the era of human history that will unfold in the seven years prior to Christ's return to earth. The "end of the age" refers to the termination of the period known as the "end times" (seven-year Tribulation Period). These "end times" will have to be shortened according to God's own sovereign plan and timetable or else the entire world would be destroyed or leveled by God's judgment (Matt.

24:13). In any event, the “end times,” or this eschatological period of seven years of tribulation upon planet earth, will generate specific signs and then be followed by the return of Jesus Christ to planet earth.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:32-33:

“Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”

Jesus used a common illustration from nature to prove that specific signs would occur and increase with intensity during the Tribulation Period before Jesus would return to earth. The budding of a fig tree tells the story that summer is near. The beautiful buds on the tree precede the summer season and those buds become a forerunner of the summer season. By way of comparison, when the Jews, who are living during the actual end times (Tribulation Period), see all of the signs coming to pass that Jesus predicted, then they will know that Christ’s coming is going to take place. They will know that the time of His return to earth is near (Rev. 19:11-16).

All of the signs mentioned in Matthew 24 relate to the Second Coming of Christ to earth, not the Rapture. This is a very important distinction. *Signs are for Israel during the tribulation days. Signs are not for the Church today.* The signs of Matthew 24 are tribulational signs for tribulational saints. We must stress that the signs Jesus gave were for that generation of Jews living in the final seven years. These signs would inform Israel that Christ’s return to earth is about to take place.

Now that we have established when the “end times” will occur, we might briefly look at what is going to take place in the “end times” or those seven years prior to the coming of Christ to planet earth. Jesus divides these “end time” prophetic events or signs into two categories, as seen in the chart on the following page.

<p>Category #1</p> <p>The Beginning of Birth Pangs</p> <p>The beginning of God's wrath</p> <p>Matthew 24: 4-8</p>	<p>"the beginning of sorrows"</p> <p>Matt. 24:8</p> <p>First three and one half years of the Tribulation</p>	<p>False Christ's wars and rumors of wars famines pestilences earthquakes troubles (Mark 13:8)</p>	<p>Same time period as the Seal Judgments</p> <p>Revelation 6:1-17</p>	<p>Antichrist signs the peace covenant at the beginning of this time period</p> <p>Daniel 9:27</p>
<p>Category #2</p> <p>Great Tribulation or Anguish</p> <p>Intensification of God's wrath</p> <p>Matthew 24:9-26</p>	<p>"great tribulation"</p> <p>Matt. 24:21</p> <p>Second three and one half years of the Tribulation</p>	<p>Persecution, betrayal, hatred, spiritual deception Love for sin Abomination of desolation False Christ's and false prophets Family disruption (Mk. 13:12)</p>	<p>Same time period as the seven Trumpets and seven Bowl Judgments</p> <p>Revelation 6-16</p>	<p>Christ returns to earth to end this awful time of judgment</p> <p>Revelation 19:11-17</p>

As this chart reveals, Jesus said that these specific signs would occur before He returns to earth in power and great glory. These would be signs of the "end times" or specific signs that would occur in that unprecedented future time known as the seven-year Tribulation Period. These are not specific signs given to the Church to indicate the Rapture is going to take place at some specific point in time. Rather, they are signs given to Israel during the Tribulation Period that will reveal to them, where they are at in relationship to God's prophetic calendar, prior to Christ's return to earth. Jesus said that these end-time events and signs will manifest themselves until the "end of the age" (Matt. 13:39-40; 24:14) or the closing of the Tribulation Period, which would be followed with the return of Christ to planet earth.

I have provided another chart to give a visual reminder of what we have learned in this study. It will help us to see the difference between the general conditions existing in the world during the "last

days” while the church is still upon earth, prior to the Rapture, and with the “end times” which relates to the specific prophetic signs and fulfillment of prophecies given to Israel during the future Tribulation Period.

Term	Description	Occurrence	Event	Scripture
Last Days 2 Timothy 3:1-5	General conditions seen existing in the world since the apostolic days or last 1900 years	Occurring today before the Tribulation Period <hr/> *No prophecy being fulfilled	Rapture of Church 1 Thess. 4:17 John 14:1-2	First Thessalonians 4:13-18 “caught up in a moment”
End Times Matthew 24:4-26	Specific prophetic signs leading to the end of tribulation period	Occur during seven-year Tribulation <hr/> *Prophecy being fulfilled	Return of Christ to earth Rev. 19:11-16	Matthew 24:29-33 “when ye shall see all these things”

After investigating when the end times will actually occur and the specific signs associated with the seven-year Tribulation Period, one must still ask this question. “Don’t we see many of these things taking place today even before the Tribulation Period or end times begin?” The answer is an obvious “Yes.” We see today, even in this period of time termed as the “last days,” the stage being set for the prophetic signs of the Tribulation to be literally fulfilled during the Tribulation Period or that period correctly termed as the end times. What we see and experience today is not the actual signs, which are prophesied to take place and be literally fulfilled during the Tribulation Period, but *precursor signs* before the Tribulation Period breaks upon planet earth.

The tragedy of the terrorist attacks on the United States and their many threats on society would certainly fit into the category of “wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:6). Although wars are a sign of the

“end times” as it relates to the Tribulation Period, one can readily understand that if wars are on the increase today, along with false Christ’s, false prophets, internal national conflicts, famines, pestilences, hatred for God’s people and the increase of iniquity (Matt. 24:5-12), that we are beginning to approach the commencement of that period known as the “end times” (the seven year Tribulation Period), which will run its course for seven years and end with the coming of Christ to earth.

The stage is being set for the prophetic end-time events to begin, which are actually associated with the Tribulation Period and the closing of the Dispensation of Grace, which like all other dispensations, ends in judgment. These events will occur after the Rapture but we already see the stage being set for these signs to be literally fulfilled. This can be illustrated as seeing signs of Christmas on Thanksgiving Day. It may be time to eat our Turkey but at the same time we can see in magazines and stores all kinds of advertisements for the Christmas holiday. In other words, we can see that Christmas is coming even though we are still in the Thanksgiving season. In a similar way, the Church is living in the last days, but the Church can already see the events leading up to the Tribulation Period.

While living in the last days, before the Rapture, the church can already begin to notice how the stage is being set for the “end time” prophecies to begin during the Tribulation Period, with all of their confirming signs related to Christ’s return and revelation to earth. The Church should not be looking for any prophetic signs to occur as *necessary fulfillment* for Christ to return in the Rapture. Signs are not given to the Church. There are no prophetic “signs of the times” that *must* occur or be fulfilled before Jesus can return in the Rapture, since the specific prophetic “signs of the times” are connected with the Tribulation Period and occur before Christ returns to earth in the seven-year Tribulation Period. However, the emerging preparatory events that are taking place in our own day, which indicate the Tribulation is getting closer, should reconfirm the truth in our hearts that Christ’s return is getting closer.

The point is this; if the stage is already being set for specific signs to be literally fulfilled during the future Tribulation Period, then we must

know that the Rapture of the church is not far away. We must believe with all of our heart that His coming is imminent and could take place at any moment.

God's people can see the storm clouds gathering on the horizon, even during these last days, and one day following the Rapture, the end times will actually begin. It's as if we can see the formation of this "end time" storm and hear the rumble of thunder off in the distance! It's this storm that will keep brewing until it one day strikes the world with vengeance during the Tribulation Period.

God has chosen in our present day to set many things in place for the actual "end time" prophetic scenario to begin during the Tribulation Period. We have witnessed the regathering of Israel to her land and Israel becoming a nation in 1948. We have seen the reuniting of the European Market so that the Old Roman Empire will be ready to be reunited and thriving during the Tribulation Period. We see heightened tensions in the Middle East and the unstable conditions of Russia and the Islamic nations, along with a push for global unity and a one world economy (New World Order). We see the storm gathering for what is going to be a horrible outbreak of terror and bloodshed during the Tribulation Period when the actual "end times" prophecies will be fulfilled in this world.

If Paul was looking for the Lord to return in his own day, then how much more should we be looking for Him today, especially as we see the Tribulation storm brewing? "Even so come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). Dear friend, Jesus Christ, "the bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16) will rapture His people just prior to the darkest night, the Tribulation Period (Rev. 3:10) or the commencement of the "end times." Just as the storm is about to hit God's people will be rescued from planet earth by the direct intervention of God (1 Thess. 1:10). After this, a time of darkness and judgment will prevail upon this earth for seven years until the "Sun of righteousness" comes with "healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2). The Morning Star must appear first in the Rapture. Afterward, the "Sun of righteousness" will reveal Himself in all of His splendor and glory when returning to planet earth.

Believers living in these present days of unrest and upheaval must understand how God's prophetic time clock is holding at 11:59. But

someday His prophetic clock is going to strike 12:00 and the Rapture of the Church will take place and the Tribulation Period will get underway. We are living in that era of history when God's prophetic program is about to be unfolded with the catching away of His Bride and the commencement of the Tribulation Period. The coming of Christ is termed as being "at the doors" (James 5:9). Prophecy is not being fulfilled today but will once again be fulfilled when God's people are raptured and the Tribulation begins with its prophetic signs coming to pass.

We are not living in the end times or the tribulation years (Day of the Lord), when various events and signs will come to pass, as outlined in the prophetic Scripture (2 Thess. 2:3). It's more accurate to conclude that we are living in the "last days" which can be viewed as a prelude to the end times, but not the actual fulfillment of the end time prophecies. The "end times" will only begin after the Rapture of the Church. Furthermore, this study has revealed that it will only be during the "end times" (the seven years) when prophecy will once again be fulfilled as God's drama unfolds for planet earth, which will be filled with specific prophetic signs and events. Because the Rapture is an imminent event and the Tribulation begins soon after the Rapture, John echoes the truth that "the time is at hand" for the prophecies of the book of Revelation to commence (Rev. 22:10). The last days will usher in the end times with the beginning of the Tribulation Period and the direct fulfillment of the signs and events of the specific period of time.

The events and happenings that we read about in the Newspaper today are not part of the actual "end times" prophetic scenario, as so many well meaning prophecy students seem to suggest. The events taking shape in the world today are merely a *precursor* or *prelude* to what will actually be unfolded during the Tribulation Period after the Rapture of the Church. The world events we see taking place today are the preparation stage for prophetic events to begin unfolding during the future Tribulation.

The term "end times" seems to be used rather loosely today instead of being accurately defined. It would do well for all prophetic students of the Scripture to take great care in sorting out the differences between the "last days" and "end times." In doing so, we will free

ourselves from speculative thinking about prophecies and prophetic signs being fulfilled before our very eyes, in our own present day. We will learn to not confuse the specific prophetic signs of the “end times,” which are associated with the Tribulation Period and the end of this age, with the general evil conditions and trends occurring in the world today, during the “last days”

The Church is living in the last days. She is not living in the end times and witnessing the literal fulfillment of Bible prophecies that Jesus gave for the future Tribulation Period. The “last days” is a time period when there are no direct prophecies or signs being literally fulfilled. Not until the end-times begin, which are those prophetic times connected with the Tribulation Period, will prophecy once again be literally fulfilled. Proper distinction between these time periods will deliver our minds from fanaticism and placing undue emphasis on looking for signs instead of looking for the Savior (Phil. 3:20).

Titus 2:13

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”