

# Understanding Theology in 15 Minutes A Day for 40 Days

## Day 39

### What Will Happen When Jesus Comes Back?

The end-time events according to amillennialism and postmillennialism are relatively simple. In chapter 38, we saw that premillennialism says Christ will return visibly and physically in the future and reign on earth for a thousand years. Premillennialism's flow of events is somewhat more complex.

#### Tribulation and Rapture

Within premillennialism, there are several views on the tribulation and the rapture. The tribulation is understood to be a period of seven years, based on Daniel's vision of seventy "sevens" (**Daniel 9:20–27**). This will be a time of great suffering and cataclysm on earth, including the pouring out of God's wrath upon sinful humanity. Described in **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**, the term *rapture* comes from the Latin rendering of the Greek word in **verse 17**, translated into English as "caught up." The event is the catching up of resurrected Christians, and of Christians still living on earth when Jesus returns, to meet him in the air.

There are three predominant sub-views within premillennialism. Some believe Christians will be raptured *before* the tribulation and will spend those seven years in heaven until Jesus returns to earth to reign for a thousand years; this is known as the ***pretribulation-rapture view***. Its adherents maintain that the rapture is "imminent"—it could occur at any time. The rapture and the return of Christ to reign on earth are separated by seven years.

Others believe Christians will endure the entire seven-year period of the tribulation and be raptured at its end—the ***posttribulation-rapture view***, wherein the rapture and Christ's return to reign on earth are one event.

A few others believe Christians will remain on earth for some time within the seven-year tribulation and then will be raptured for the duration. Some of these believe the rapture will occur specifically at the tribulation's midpoint—the ***midtribulation-rapture view***; others believe the rapture will occur sometime during the tribulation, but specifically preceding the outpouring of God's wrath upon sinful humanity—the *pre-wrath-rapture view*.

## Order of Events

### Pre-tribulationism

1. The church will be raptured and taken to heaven.

2. The tribulation will take place on earth.

3. Christ will return to earth with the church.

### Mid-tribulationism & Pre-Wrath Rapture

1. The tribulation will begin on earth.

2. The church will be raptured at the tribulation's midpoint *or* before God begins to pour out his wrath.

3. Christ will return to earth with the church.

### Post-tribulationism

1. The tribulation will take place on earth.

2. The church will endure the tribulation.

3. Christ will return, rapture the church, and proceed to earth.

Otherwise, premillennialists generally agree on the events as follows:

4. Christ will return from heaven with an army (**Revelation 19:11–14**). Those on earth who are gathered together to fight against him will be defeated and killed (**19:15–21**).
5. Satan will be bound for a thousand years and thrown into the abyss (**20:1–3**).
6. The righteous dead will be resurrected to inherit the kingdom. This includes, for example, Old Testament saints. (More on the end-time resurrections and judgments below.)
7. Jesus will establish his kingdom and will reign for a thousand years. The saints will reign with him (**20:4–6**).
8. At the thousand years' end, Satan will be released to lead one more futile rebellion against Jesus. God will quickly defeat him (**20:7–10**).
9. The unrighteous dead—all people of all time whom God has not accepted and forgiven—will be resurrected, judged, and sent to their eternal destiny apart from him (**20:11–15**).
10. Eternity will be ushered in with the new heaven, new earth, and New Jerusalem (**21**; we will look at these in more depth in chapter 40).

## **Resurrections and Judgments**

The Old Testament is nearly silent regarding the concept of resurrection, though **Isaiah 26:9** and **Daniel 12:2** give several clear statements. The New Testament clearly and repeatedly refers to resurrection. In contrast to the Sadducees, who denied it, Jesus affirmed its reality (**Matthew 22:29–32**) and identified the concept with himself (**John 11:25–26**).

Apostolic proclamation of the gospel often referred to Christ's resurrection (**e.g., Acts 2:31**). After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, he claimed to be on trial because of his hope in the resurrection from the dead (**23:6**). He also wrote the major New Testament statement on the resurrection in **1 Corinthians 15**, where he says, "If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (**vv. 16–17**). Truly, the resurrection is one of the believer's great hopes (**2 Corinthians 5:2–3**).

All people who have ever lived will be resurrected for the purpose of judgment (**John 5:27–30**). God has judged sin in the past (e.g., the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah), but all of these historical judgments only anticipate the future and final divine judgment of sin and sinners and of the righteous.

Jesus referred to this in his Olivet Discourse in terms of the separation of the sheep and the goats (**righteous and unrighteous; Matthew 25:31–46**). The sheep will inherit the kingdom and eternal life, but the goats will be sent away into eternal fire and punishment. Jesus specifically will be the final judge of all.

The judgment of believers will be at the "judgment seat of Christ" (**2 Corinthians 5:10; also Romans 14:10–12; 1 Corinthians 3:10–15**). Pre-tribulationism holds that this will take place in heaven after the rapture and during the tribulation on earth. Post-tribulationism maintains that this, along with the judgment of Old Testament saints, will take place at the beginning of Christ's millennial reign.

The works of believers will be judged to determine reward or loss of reward (**1 Corinthians 3:15**). These rewards are called "crowns" (**2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4**). Since judgment of believers' sin has already fallen on Jesus (**Romans 3:21–26; 8:1**), this is not an issue in the final judgment (**1 Corinthians 3:15**). One aspect to be judged is faithfulness with regard to what has been entrusted in Christ's absence (**Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27; 1 Corinthians 4:2**). Another aspect is the "heart" of the believer (**1 Corinthians 4:5**). It is important

to God not only that we do right and good things but also that we do them in right and good ways—with proper attitudes and motives.

The judgment of the unrighteous will take place at the “great white throne” **(see Revelation 20:11–15)**. The basis will be their sinful deeds generally, but specifically their unwillingness to honor and glorify God **(Romans 1:18–23)**, and, if they have heard the gospel, to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior **(John 5:22–29)**. Their fate will be the “lake of fire,” also known as the “second death” **(Revelation 20:14–15)**.

Satan and the demons will also be judged at this time **(2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6–7; Revelation 20:10)**. Interestingly, Christians will participate in this judgment **(1 Corinthians 6:3)**. Finally, the present heavens and earth will be destroyed **(2 Peter 3:10)** to prepare the way for the new heavens and earth, which will be a part of the eternal state **(Revelation 21:1)**.

#### **INTERESTING FACT**

It seems the population will grow during the millennium. Resurrected saints cannot reproduce **(Matthew 22:30)**, but believers who survive the tribulation and enter Christ’s kingdom in mortal bodies can. Their children will need to believe in King Jesus in order to be saved. Apparently many will not believe (amazingly!), and they will make up Satan’s final rebellion army **(Revelation 20:8)**.