



What About . . .

The New Millennium

As we approached the year 2001, the beginning of a new millennium, we heard more and more predictions about the end of the world. There is a great deal of confusion about the end of the world and what the new millennium might bring. What a blessing it is to have the Word of God to help us sort through the many speculations we hear about these things!

Will the world come to an end in the third millennium?

It is simply impossible to answer this question with either a definite “yes” or a definite “no.” During his earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ was asked when the end of the world would be. His answer was very clear. He said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matt. 24:36). The Bible repeatedly warns us about trying to set a date for the return of Christ (Mark 13:32-33; 1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:10). We are not to speculate when Jesus will return. Rather, we are to be ready at all times for His return (Matt. 24:33, 42-44; Luke 21:28; 1 Thess. 5:6).

What are the signs of the end times?

Every generation should expect Christ’s return as they see the signs of the end times. The most important sign of the end is the preaching of the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10). The time between Christ’s birth and His return is the great missionary age—the time that God is calling all people to be saved. It is the time that was predicted by the Old Testament prophets (see Isa. 2:1-4; 42:6-7; 49:6; 52:10; Amos 9:11-12).

Other signs that the world will come to an end include wars, earthquakes, famines and widespread diseases. These are all indications of God’s divine judgment. The Bible describes these signs in many places (see, for instance, Isa. 19:2; 2 Chron. 15:6; Matt. 24:6-8; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-11, 25-26; Joel 2:30-31). We are not to see every incident of natural disasters as a direct punishment from God (cf. Luke 13:1-5). The upheaval and troubles in the world of nature should always remind us that our present fallen world is under the curse of God on account of sin (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:19-22). These signs show us God’s wrath and are signals to us that all sinners need to repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9).

Christians especially are urged by God in His Word to regard these signs as “birth pangs” of a new and better world to come (Rom. 8:22; Matt. 24:8; Rev. 21:1-4). Believers in Christ can take comfort in God’s promise to protect and preserve us even in the midst of suffering (Rev. 3:10; 7:3-4).

Jesus warned us that trouble would lie ahead for His people (Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-20; 16:33). Because the world will continue to oppose the Kingdom of God, Christians can expect to suffer persecution in a variety of forms throughout the time between Christ’s birth and His second coming. It is for this reason that God calls on us to endure to the end, and gives us the strength to do so (Matt. 24:9; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19).

What will happen when Christ returns?

The Bible teaches that the following events will take place when Jesus returns:

1. Christ will come visibly and all people will see Him (Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:27, 30; Luke 17:22-24; 21:27, 35; Mark 13:24-26; 14:62; Rev. 1:7).
2. Christ will come in glory surrounded by His angels (Matt. 13:39-43, 49; 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 19:11-14; Titus 2:13; Jude 14, 21; 1 Pet. 4:13; Zech. 14:3).
3. When Christ returns, a bodily resurrection of all the dead will take place. Believers will be raised to salvation and unbelievers to damnation (John 5:27-29; 6:39-40, 44, 54; Rev. 20:11-15; 1 Cor. 15:12-57; Dan. 12:1-2). All believers, both the dead and the living, will be “caught up” to “meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:13-17). Death will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26, 54-57; Rev. 20:14).
4. When Christ returns, He will judge all people, both the living and the dead (Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Jude 14-15; Rev. 20:11-15). Believers will receive eternal salvation and unbelievers eternal damnation (Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Pet. 1:4-5, 7; 5:4; 1 John 3:2; Heb. 9:28; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:6-10). Satan and Antichrist will be destroyed (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 12:10-11).
5. When Christ returns, a “new heavens and a new earth” will be created (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Nowhere, however, do the Scriptures teach that at His return Christ will establish a this-worldly, political kingdom or “millennium.”

What about the New Millennium?

What is Millennialism?

Millennialism describes a variety of erroneous speculations about a supposed 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ, here on earth, during which there will be perfect peace and the complete victory of the church on earth. These views err in that they place too much emphasis on highly figurative language in certain portions of the Bible.

Dispensational Premillennialism divides God's dealings with our world into seven distinct "dispensations." From the age of innocence before the Fall, to the Millennial Kingdom, this theory holds that God is working through periods of history, culminating in a series of dramatic battles on earth, after which Christ will return in glory, destroy all His enemies, and establish a 1,000-year reign on earth of prosperity and peace, with worship centered around a rebuilt new temple in Jerusalem.

Historic *Premillennialism* is the view that the return of Christ will be a one-time event following a period of intense suffering and tribulation. Christians will be resurrected from the dead and those still living will join Christ, who will destroy the Antichrist and Satan, and will begin a 1,000-year reign on earth. During this 1,000 years, there will be perfect tranquillity and peace. After the 1,000 years is over, Satan will be let loose for a little while and then the end will come in one last great battle. After that, the judgment will begin, sending people either to heaven or hell for all eternity.

Postmillennialism is the theory that after a 1,000-year period of peace and tranquillity, Christ will return, and the resurrection of all the dead will take place. Postmillennialists do not believe that the 1,000 years will be a literal 1,000 years, but it does claim that there will be a distinct period of peace and prosperity for the church before the return of Christ.

Amillennialism, however, is the teaching that there will be no millennium of perfect peace on earth before or after Christ's second coming. The Lutheran church, on the basis of the Bible, holds to this point of view. The Bible does not teach that there will be a definite 1,000-year period of time during which Christ will reign on earth visibly. Christ Himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36); furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that we Christians are looking for "a new heaven and a new earth" (2 Pet. 3:13)—not an era of prosperity on the present earth.

What are Christians to be doing as the new millennium approaches?

God wants all people to come to believe and trust in His Son for their salvation and to lead holy lives in service to Him, eagerly awaiting with patience and perseverance His return on

the last day (Rom. 13:12-14; Titus 2:1-13; 1 Pet. 1:13-15; 2 Pet. 3:11-12; 1 John 3:2-3; 1 Tim. 6:14; Matt. 25:14-30).

Our Lord says to us: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matt. 24:42). This is a constant theme in Scripture. St. Paul writes, "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled" (1 Thess. 5:6).

The Apostle Peter describes what Christians are to be doing: "In keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (2 Pet. 3:13-14).

As the end of the world draws closer, each day the Lord gives us is one more day to serve Him and to be a part of the great effort to proclaim the Gospel. This is the great mission Christ has given His church: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Our Lord promises to be with us until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20), as we continue to tell the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35).

Finally, our Lord wants us to be watchful for His coming. We have the assurance that because of His death and resurrection for us, we have the full and free forgiveness of our sins. We may not know all the details about the end of the world, but we do not need to be anxious about them. Nor should we get all caught up in speculation about the end times. We live in the great period of the "now" and the "not yet." We have salvation in Christ right now. But we do not yet have the final blessing of our salvation: life forever with the Lord in heaven.

Though we do not know when our Lord will return, we are able to look forward to His return with confident hope and joy (Rev. 22:20): " 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"

For further study

Much of the information contained in this pamphlet is based on the excellent study from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations titled, "*The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*" [September 1989]. You may purchase a copy from Concordia Publishing House.

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