

The End Times

Over the past few weeks, we've seen the story of God's redemption culminating in Jesus. While we have certainly seen the redemptive character of YHWH in the OT, it is with Jesus that God's redemptive purposes truly coalesce. As one church father said, "If you want to see God, look at Jesus." In Jesus, we find the *better king*, better than David. In Jesus, we experience the *true redeemer*, liberating humanity not just from Egyptian slavery, but from sin and death. In Jesus, we recover *true community* and *mission*. Through his death and resurrection, he gathers people from everywhere to create local churches with a recovered mission—to make disciples and culture. To summarize, in Jesus, we have a better king, better redeemer, better community, and a better mission. Now, as the story culminates in Jesus and his mission for the world, it is natural for us to wonder what is next. Enter the so-called "End Times," our final message in the ongoing Story of God's Redemption. When we hear "end times" we often think of the doomsday prophet on 6th street who hails the end is near, judgment is coming, tribulation is upon us, or the newspaper ad taken out to list signs of the times. What are the end times? When are the end times? We'll look at them and find there's more to them than we think.

The End of Days

The "End Times" or end of the world has been a popular theme in films this year such as: *Star Trek: Into the Darkness*, *World War Z*, *Evil Dead*, the forthcoming *Thor: The Dark World & World's End*. Then there's *Pacific Rim*, where the only memorable one liner in the whole movie is "Today, we are canceling the apocalypse." Can you do that? What is the apocalypse anyway? What are the end times? I can't cover all the details, but I will give you the contours. This "end times" and variations of this phrase, is used throughout Scripture. Let's take a look. Prophet and royal counselor, Daniel, had several visions that refer to the end times. In response to these perplexing visions, he asks God for understanding. An angel replies: "[But he said to me, Understand O Son of Man, that the vision is for the time of the end. He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end \(Dan 8:17, 19,11:40; Ezek 38:16\).](#)" Daniel's prophecy unfolds describing 70 weeks, the 70th of which includes destruction, war, and desolations. Jesus gets more specific: "[See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. They will deliver you up to tribulation" \(Matt 24:4-9\).](#)" So according to Daniel and Jesus, the end times are times of tribulation, war, suffering. Revelation builds these out even further. However, the end times are not all doom and gloom. Returning to Daniel, we hear a prophecy of great deliverance: "[And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever \(12:1-3\).](#)"

Here we have a promise of deliverance and salvation, judgment and resurrection.

Jesus takes up a hopeful theme for the endtimes in his response to the Peter's question about the kingdom of God: "[Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the *new world*, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones"](#)" (Mt 19:28). Jesus signals the hope, not just of personal salvation, but of a whole new world, a new creation. Notice when he talks about the new creation, it is in association with the kingdom of God. In the context, Jesus is telling the disciples how to enter the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, then, is both saved people and a saved creation, a renovated people and renovated world. So, contrary to popular film, the end times isn't just tribulation, followed by a cancellation of the apocalypse, only to resume life as usual. Rather, the end times are *tribulation and kingdom, suffering and salvation, judgment and resurrection*. It's more hopeful. But when do the endtimes start?

When are the End Times?

In the New Testament, language of "end times" is generally replaced by "last days." For instance, Acts 2:17: "[And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.](#)" In the last days, the Spirit of God is poured out to create a renewed humanity. Hebrews 1: "[Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.](#)" **What happens in the last days?** The prophets are replaced by the Son, who speaks to us. It is also a time when the Spirit is poured out to create the church. Going back to Jesus, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines are just "the beginning" of the end times. **So, when are the end times?** *They begin with tribulation and they begin with Jesus & his Spirit. They began in 1st century and they continue until now. Inaugurated with the first coming of Jesus. There are the last days.* [CHART] Now, this doesn't settle well if your view of the endtimes is all doom and gloom. It also doesn't fit into popular scheme, which sees the endtimes as something in our future. Perhaps one of the most culture-shaping messages, the *Left Behind* novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. What do they say are the signs of the endtimes? They have articles on "Signs the End is Here." In one article, they list the emergence of one world government, one world religion, and one economy. The ultimate sign, they say, is the re-gathering of Jews into the land of Israel in 1948. I understand how they get here, but I still think they miss the most important sign of the times—Jesus. They still point to the future as the end times, but the author of Hebrews said the last days are the days of Jesus. When are the endtimes? They are now. This is how the early church saw it. What these approaches to eschatology don't grasp, is that the OT endtimes has become the NT last days. Both of the major themes of tribulation and kingdom are fulfilled, *in part and at once*, in the first coming of Christ. This is why John can begin Revelation by saying: "[I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus](#) (1:9)." All these themes of tribulation and kingdom are fulfilled, in some way, now. HOW? 2 Ways-Tribulation + Kingdom. We are meant to see that the **tribulations**, while partially fulfilled in historical events, are more profoundly fulfilled in the sufferings of Christ. Jesus takes on the sufferings of the world; he endures a tribulation like no other. **Jesus doesn't cancel the apocalypse; he swallows it, he absorbs it, he endures it on**

the cross, where he triumphs over sin, death, and evil. The greatest tribulation known to man has been suffered by Christ—separation from God—so we might not suffer life apart from him, our one true joy. Your suffering, Christian, is for purifying those things that get in the way of taking in the beauty, glory, and grace of our Lord Jesus. Sufferings are part of our Christological transformation, morphing over and over to reveal our true Jesus-shaped humanity (Col 1:24). We have witnessed in our City Groups, where couples struggle through infertility, fighting to see Christ, not children, as the true reward. Where singles fight to find true intimacy in Christ and joy in Christian community, rather than drifting into single scenes and fleeing intimacy in people who do not share their Christ. What tribulation has God appointed for you, to increase your joy, and to see Christ? *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.* The endtimes are now because Jesus initiates them with his tribulation. **Jesus doesn't just inaugurate the endtimes with his sufferings; he begins them with his resurrection.** Remember Daniel's prophecy of "those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall be brought to everlasting life"? Jesus was the first to be brought to life. The bible calls him the first fruits or the firstborn from the dead (1 Cor 15; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5). In Jesus triumphant, new resurrection body we find a whole new world tucked away. In the words of NT scholar, Greg Beale: "[Christ's life, and especially death and resurrection through the Spirit, launched the end-time new creation for God's glory.](#)" The end is now, because now is new creation: "[Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come](#)" (2 Cor 5:17). Resurrection signals the beginning of a new age, a new creation, a new kingdom. If this is true, then the depressed have every reason to hope, the sick have every reason to rejoice, and the successful have every reason to be humble. Everything pales next to Jesus. He is the bring morning sun, the blazing Savior, the shimmering king of glory who has ushered in a whole new world. If you don't believe this to be true, you should want it to be true. All the sufferings of the world—redeemed. All the hopes of the world—fulfilled. In Christ. Jesus has everything to do with the end times and the end times have already begun. Tribulation and kingdom, judgment and resurrection, started in the middle of history; we don't wait till the end. **His crucifixion is the beginning of the destruction, but his resurrection is the inauguration of new creation.** Jesus has everything to do with the endtimes and the times are the present times. Geerhardus Vos, would have us note Christ all the way through: "[All the stages in this process, the resurrection, the judgment, the life eternal, event the intermediate state receiving the impress of the absolute significance which Christian faith ascribes to Jesus Christ.](#)" (Vos, *Eschatology of the NT*, 27) The endtimes, the last days, are all impressed with the mark of Jesus. So, Christ, alone, is the fundamental building block for the new humanity and new creation. No Buddha, no Vishnu, no Allah, no Secret. Christ alone brings us a new humanity and a whole new world. Why? Because Christ alone swallows the apocalypse, Christ alone conquers death, Christ alone forgives sin, because Christ alone makes all things new. No Christ, no new creation, no purpose for your sufferings. If we don't build on Christ, we build on crumbling foundations. If you do build on Christ, you will enter the new creation. What the prophets pointed to in the end, has been rolled back, in part, into the middle of history and falls squarely on Christ. Tribulation and kingdom, judgment and salvation. What he has begun, he will finish. Jesus returns to bring final judgment and salvation. In the words of



Daniel, some are raised to shame and some are raised to salvation. What makes the difference? Exclusive love, devotion, faith in Christ. In Christ is tucked away a whole new world.