

A STUDY ON ESCATOLOGY: THE END TIMES AND THERE IMPACT UPON OUR LIFE AS BELIEVERS

INTRODUCTION

In the 70's and 80's there was a growing interest in various aspects of Biblical prophecy. Sociologist William Martin of Rice University once observed that "Judeo-Christian history has seen numerous outcroppings of interest in biblical prophecy, usually in times of social upheaval, but few, if any, have been as widespread and influential as that now flourishing in conservative Protestant circles." [1] Public awareness of such end-time topics as the millennium, rapture, and Armageddon has been heightened through the preaching of television evangelists and the publication of widely-read books such as those authored by Hal Lindsey. Few perhaps would have imagined that a book beginning with the words "This is a book about prophecy—Biblical prophecy" would sell 15 million copies and that its author would be named by The New York Times as the best-selling author of the decade of the 1970s!

There is a great need today to study eschatology (the doctrine of future things) as God's Word unfolds before our very eyes. There are many Christians today who know very little about God's plans for the here-and-now, and they know even less about God's plans for their future. Whenever I questioned people on their views about these things, I usually get an answer like, "I believe that Jesus is coming back, but when that is (when talking about their millennial view) I do not know." If I were to ask each of us do we believe in the rapture, some would know what I was talking about, others not. So there is a great need to study eschatology today to train-up disciples with an understanding of God's plans for us and the world.

WHY STUDY ESCATOLOGY?

The Scriptures give several reasons why the study of eschatology is profitable for us. Read each scripture and answer the question "why study eschatology?"

1. (1 John 3:2-3). For the purity in the believer's life
2. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). It comforts the believer in their time of bereavement
3. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Eschatology gives us a divine viewpoint in our outlook
4. (2 Timothy 4:7-8) Produces motivation for the believer's faithful service).

WHY STUDY BIBLICAL PROPHECY?

Here are some points to be considered as to why we must study and understand biblical prophecy: Read each scripture and answer the question "why study Biblical prophecy?"

1. (Titus 2:13). The return of Christ is the blessed hope of every believer
2. (Matt. 24:4-5, 23-26) We do not want to be deceived. (Jesus warned His disciples that in the last days there would be many false messiahs and false prophets, some of whom would even do great wonders to deceive people).
3. (2 Thess. 2:1-3). By studying and understanding Biblical prophecy we will guard ourselves from error and deception.
4. (Heb. 11:9-10) The consummation of God's plan is the great goal of the Church.
5. (1 Cor. 15:12-28). The resurrection and the life to come is our great hope
6. (2 Tim. 2:15), (Matt. 28:18-20). We demonstrate our obedience by studying prophecy.
8. (2 Cor. 4:16-18) Having an eternal perspective allows us to persevere under trial and stand firm until the end.

9. 1 Thess. 5:4-10, 2 Pet. 3:9-14, 1 John 2:28-29 A proper understanding of the future motivates us to godly living.

We pray that over the coming months your own understanding of biblical prophecy and the return of Christ will be enhanced and that, as a result, you will be encouraged in your faith and your relationship with God will be deepened.

Some Considerations First!

1. The Signs of the End Scripture reveals numerous signs which signal Christ's return (especially in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and 2 Thessalonians 2). Before considering these signs, it is important that their purpose be understood. First, the signs of the end do not signify events which will happen only in the future. The church of every generation can expect to witness their occurrence. Wars, famines, earthquakes, and anti-Christian forces were present already in the first century A.D., and they continue today. Even Jesus' promise that the Gospel will be preached throughout the world can be said to have been fulfilled already in the days of the apostles (Matt. 24:14; Rom. 1:8; 10:18; Col. 1:23). To be sure, these signs will become more evident and intense immediately preceding Christ's return, but every generation was and is acting responsibly in expecting Christ's return in its own lifetime. Watchfulness, not laziness or apathy fostered by the mistaken notion that Christ's return must be far off in the future, must characterize the church's constant posture (Matt. 24:33, 42-44; Luke 21:28; 1 Thess. 5:6).
2. Second, the signs of the end are not intended to provide Christians a means by which they may calculate the exact time of Christ's second coming.[24] In fact, the New

Testament warns against all such efforts at date setting (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32; 1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:10). The signs of the end presented in

Scripture assure the Christian that Christ will surely return.

3. Third, observing the signs has a positive significance for life in the present. They serve as a reminder of God's call to watchfulness, holy living, and service to Christ (Matthew 25; Rom. 13:11-14; 2 Thessalonians 2-3; James 5:7-11; 2 Pet. 3:11-18).
4. Finally, the signs of the end do not belong necessarily to the category of the extraordinary or spectacular. The exhortations to be watchful, given by Jesus and the apostles, presuppose that the signs will be a part of the ordinary course of history (such not uncommon events as wars, earthquakes, famines, apostasy, and the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel) and therefore that discernment is necessary. Such discernment is also required, of course, in the case of the extraordinary; counterfeit "signs and wonders" are indeed possible (2 Thess. 2:9; Matt. 24:24).

BASIC BELIEFS ABOUT GOD'S FUTURE PLANS

There are basically three major theological positions in regard to future things: postmillennialism, amillennialism, and premillennialism. A definition of each is given with the scriptural support given for each will be dealt with under the context of Premillennialism. This is done because the scriptures for each position are the same, just the interpretation and applications change. In postmillennialism the scriptures are taken literally, but the question of Christ's return is placed at the end of the millennium. In amillennialism, the scriptures are not taken as literal, but as figurative of what can be expected during the church age with the

Church ushering in the kingdom of God, with no visible return of Christ.

POSTMILLENNIALISM

This view took theological shape with the teachings of Daniel Whitby (1638-1726). This view teaches that the church will usher in a thousand years of peace and righteousness as Christ rules and reigns in the hearts of men. Christ's return would be after (post-) that 1000 years (millennium) of "heaven on earth." This view was widely held before World War I but the occurrence of two major wars and several major conflicts, and the rising spread of evil have brought this view into disrepute. Postmillennialism gave rise to the "social gospel" which was preached because postmillennarians see their mission as bringing about the kingdom on earth.²

AMILLENNIALISM

This view is that there is no (a-) 1000 year (millennium) reign of Christ on earth. Amillennialists take the reference to a 1000 years in Revelation 20:3-4 as being symbolic for a complete period of time. Christ will return at some point and will judge humanity state will begin. This position spiritualizes the prophecies of the Old and New Testament and sees them being fulfilled spiritually in the time between Christ's first coming and His second coming. There dangers of using this method of and the eternal interpretation (as admitted by amillennarians): The fist is when you spiritualize Scriptures you are interpreting Scripture by a method which would be utterly destructive to Christian doctrine. The second danger is they do no follow the same method in relation to prophecy in general, but only where it is necessary to deny premillennialism. The third problem is they justify the spiritualizing method as a means of eliminating problems of fulfillment of prophecy (its born of necessity rather than a natural product of exegesis). The forth problem is they do not hesitate to use spiritualization in areas other than prophecy if it is necessary to sustain their doctrine. The fifth

problem with the amillennial method of interpretation is it has been proved by history that the principle of spiritualization spread easily into all basic areas of theological truth (Christ's birth to resurrection, and coming again can be spiritualized). The sixth problem is that the amillennial method does not provide a solid basis for consistent system of theology. And finally, amillennialism has not arisen historically from a study of prophetic Scripture, but rather through its neglect.

PREMILLENNIALISM

This view sees Christ as returning at some point before (pre-) the 1000 year (millennium) reign and establishing His kingdom. At the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ there will be judgement and the eternal state. This position understands the Old and New Testament prophecies to be literal. As a result there will be a 1000 year reign of Christ on earth.

Dr. Ryrie summarizes the premillennial position as follows:

"Holding to a literal interpretation of the Scriptures, they believe that the promises made to Abraham and David are unconditional and have had or will have a literal fulfillment. In no sense have these promises made to Israel been abrogated or fulfilled by the Church, which is a distinct body in this age having promises and a destiny different from Israel's. At the close of this age, premillennialists believe that Christ will return for His Church meeting her in the air (this is not the Second Coming of Christ), which event, called the rapture or translation, will usher in a seven-year period of tribulation on the earth. After this, the Lord will return to the earth (this is the Second Coming of Christ) to establish His kingdom on the earth for a thousand years during which time the promises to Israel will be fulfilled."²

WHICH VIEW IS BEST?

I believe the premillennial view of Christ's return is the preferred view for the following reasons. First of all the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ's first coming were fulfilled literally. Here are a few examples: Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:16, 23. These Scriptures deal with the virgin birth. It was prophesied and then fulfilled exactly as it had been prophesied; Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:6 show the prophecy and fulfillment with the birthplace of the Messiah being in Bethlehem; Isaiah 11:1 and Luke 3:23, 32 show the fulfillment of the Messiah being from the offspring of Jesse; and Isaiah 53:12 and Matthew 27:23, show the fulfillment of Christ's death being among transgressors. There are many other prophecies that were literally fulfilled in Christ's first advent (some say 100's). If these Scriptures were so precisely and literally fulfilled, then it makes sense that the prophecies regarding Christ's Second Advent (Coming) must likewise be literally fulfilled. Another reason that I believe in the premillennial view is that the unconditional covenants to Abraham and David must be fulfilled by the Lord. Since God is not a liar and His Word is truth (Numbers 23:19; John 17:17) then He can be trusted to fulfill His Word. Historically, we find that it wasn't until around the third century that the other millennial views became popular, but the prior to this time the church held a premillennial view.¹ The premillennial view distinguishes between the church and Israel. By drawing this distinction protects the interpreter from "spiritualizing" prophecies that were made to Israel. Israel is not the church and the church is not Israel (Romans 11:25-32).⁵

KEY EVENTS

If we take a closer look at God's time table, we see that there several key events that will unfold.

THE RAPTURE. Look up the following scriptures and have a discussion on the

significance of them in relationship to the end times:

I Thess. 4:16-17

1 Thess. 5:9-110

1 Cor. 15:52, Rev. 11:15

Heb. 9:28

1 Thess. 1:10, 5:9; Rev. 6:17

Gen 6:7-8, 13; 19:12-13

My Interpretation:

Someone once told me that they didn't believe in the rapture because the word does not appear in the Bible. He was only partly correct. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, tells us that when the trumpet of God sounds the dead in Christ shall rise first and then those believers that are alive will be "caught up" together with the Lord Jesus in the clouds (also see 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). The word "caught up" (Grk. harpazo) means to be jerked away or raptured.⁴ We get the word "rapture" from the Latin Vulgate Bible that used the word "rapere" for "caught up," and the English word "rapture" was taken from that.⁷ So we do clearly see that the Scripture speaks of a believers rapture. There are four primary views that are held by premillennialists about the rapture. All of these views are concerned

with the relation of the rapture to the tribulation period. One view is the “posttribulation view” which sees the rapture as occurring at the end of the seven year tribulation period, as Christ returns to the earth at His second coming. This view teaches that the church will go through the tribulation and will be translated at the end of it. Another view is the “midtribulation view” which believes that the church will go through half but not all of the tribulation period. This view equates the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the 7th trumpet of Revelation 11:15. There also the “partial rapture view” that teaches that only the faithful Christians at the time of the rapture will be taken (this view is not widely held). This view is based on passages like Hebrews 9:28 which encourage watchfulness on the part of Christians. Finally, there is the “pretribulation view” which is the . This most widely held view among premillennarians teaches that before the tribulation period begins Christ will return for His church, translates them, and they will be caught up to be with the Lord. Support of this view is found in several Scriptures. In 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9, we see that believers are delivered from the coming wrath (Revelation 6:17). Also in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, points to a pretribulation rapture with the removal of the Holy Spirit (the restrainer). God’s pattern in the past has always been to deliver believers from preannounced judgment (Genesis 6:7-8, 13; 19:12-13). Finally, the church is never mentioned in any of the tribulation passages. ¹

REWARDS:

There is a concept of rewards for those who walked faithfully with Christ: Read 1 Cor. 3:9-15 and discuss the nature of these rewards and how one receives them.

My Interpretation:

After the rapture or catching up of the believers, they will now give an account (the Judgment Seat) to Christ of their activities while they lived upon this earth. 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 tells us the every man’s work is revealed of what type is was. If their work was for the Lord they shall receive a reward, but if they did this work for the wrong reason, then they shall not receive a reward. This time period is not an judgment for salvation but only for those rewards which have been earned by the Christian. This all takes place in heaven while on earth the tribulation period is going on. ⁶

TRIBULATION PERIOD.

Scriptures: Read and formulate you understanding of the tribulation:

Daniel 9:27

Romans 11:25-27; Zechariah 12:10

Jeremiah 30:7-9

Revelation 7:19, 14; 13:1; Daniel 7:8; 8:27; Matthew 24:15

Revelation 13:16-18

Revelation 6:1-21

Revelation 16:1-21

there will be seven bowl judgments which begin during the last part of the tribulation and continue to the end (Revelation 16:1-21).¹

THE SECOND COMING

Scriptures: Here are some scriptures on the Second Coming of Christ: What are the events surrounding the second coming and what will take place in the Second Coming of Christ?

Revelation 19:17-21

Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:6; Luke 14:13-14

Matthew 24:31; Amos 9:14-15

Romans 11:25; Zechariah 12:10

Matthew 25:30

Revelation 20:11-15

Matthew 25:31-46; Joel 3:1-2, 13

My Interpretation:

This period corresponds to the 70th week of Daniel and is a seven year period (Daniel 9:27). It is composed of two parts containing three and one-half years each. One of the main purposes of this period is to prepare Israel for her Messiah (who she had rejected before at Christ's first appearing). Israel will accept the Messiah at His Second Coming (advent) and thus "all of Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-27; Zechariah 12:10). The tribulation is also called the "time of Jacob's distress" (Jeremiah 30:7-9). It will be a time when God's wrath will be poured out on unbelieving Jews and Gentiles alike (Revelation 6:16). Gentile nations play a significant role in the tribulation because they are the objects of wrath and because the "beast" arises from them (Revelation 7:19, 14; 13:1; Daniel 7:8; 8:27; Matthew 24:15). During this time the "beast" will institute a system that will make it necessary to have "his mark" in order to buy or sell goods (666 - Revelation 13:16-18). The "beast," the false prophet (Revelation 13:11) and Satan make up the "unholy trinity" of the tribulation. The Gentile nations will be aligned into four primary political power blocks during the tribulation (ten nation European confederacy; the Far Eastern coalition; Northern confederacy or Russian coalition; and the king of the South). The events in Revelation 6:1-19:21 are the details of this seven year period of time. During this time there will be seven seal judgment (Revelation 6:1-21) which will begin at the first of the tribulation and goes through the entire seven years. There will be seven trumpet judgments which begin at about the middle of the tribulation and will continue to the close of the period (Revelation 8:7-11:19). And

formulate your understanding of what these scriptures are saying:

My Interpretation:

Christ's second advent initiates the millennial reign of Christ which is followed by the eternal states. This is the promised Kingdom Dispensation talked about in the Old Testament in which the Jewish promises made to Israel concerning an earthly, historic glory with the King reigning in splendor.⁴ It is at the second advent that several things happen. The battle of Armageddon will be fought (Revelation 19:17-21) and Christ will be the victor. The "battle" of Armageddon is actually a campaign which lasts for the final half of the tribulation period. It will be finished in the last great battle when Christ returns with the saints and defeats the armies of the earth. The resurrection of Old Testament saints and the saints who died in the tribulation period will occur at the time of Christ's second advent (this is called the first resurrection or the resurrection of the "Just" - Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:6; Luke 14:13-14). Israel will be regathered as a nation at this time (Matthew 24:31; Amos 9:14-15) and all the elect Israelites will be saved at the second advent (Romans 11:25; Zechariah 12:10). After Israel's regathering, they will be judged (Ezekiel 20:33-44). The unbelieving Israelites will be destroyed (physically - Matthew 25:30), and will be resurrected at the end of the millennium for the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). The believing Israelites will be a part of the ones who populate the millennial kingdom. Also during the second advent the Gentiles will be judged (Matthew 25:31-46; Joel 3:1-2, 13) on the basis of their treatment of believing Israel which reveals their attitude toward the Messiah.

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Revelation 20:2-3

Revelation 20:7-9

Isaiah 11:9

Isaiah 30:23-24; 35:1-2

Zechariah 14:3-4

Zechariah 14:10

Jeremiah 31:12; Ezekiel 34:25-27

Isaiah 33:24; 29:18

Ezekiel 40-48

Revelation 20:7-9

Revelation 20:10

Matthew 25:41

Revelation 20:11-15

John 5:22-23, 27

THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

Scriptures: Here are some scriptures traditionally associated with the Millennium Kingdom reign of Christ. Read them and

My Interpretation:

The millennial kingdom begins at Christ's second advent and continues for a 1000 years where Jesus Christ the Messiah rules over all the earth. At the beginning Satan will be bound for the 1000 year period so as not to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:2-3). During the millennium Satan will be totally inactive, but at the end of the period he will be freed for a short time (Revelation 20:7-9) and will deceive some. He will lead a revolt against Christ in which Christ will be victorious and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire.⁶ The millennium will be a time of great change socially, physically, and economically. It will be a time when all men will be saved (Isaiah 11:9). The millennial period begins with all saved individuals (Jews and Gentiles) inhabiting the earth. As their children are born they will, for the most part, trust Christ as Savior. The ones who don't will be deceived by Satan at the end of the millennium. The curse on the earth that was instituted after the fall will be partially lifted during the millennium (Isaiah 30:23-24; 35:1-2), and there will be topography changes such as the Mount of Olives will split to the north and the south when Christ returned (Zechariah 14:3-4), and Jerusalem will be exalted (Zechariah 14:10). The millennium will be a time of general prosperity such as never been seen before (Jeremiah 31:12; Ezekiel 34:25-27), and a time of health and healing (Isaiah 33:24; 29:18). Also during the millennium there will be the reinstatement of the sacrificial system (Ezekiel 40-48) that will be a "memorial" system which will remind the believers of the work of Christ on their behalf. This sacrificial system will have much of the same significance that the Lord's Supper has had in the church age. The millennial kingdom closes with the battle of Gog and Magog (Revelation 20:7-9) which Satan leads as a revolt against Christ. This rebellion is supernaturally defeated. At this point Satan is cast into the lake of fire

(Revelation 20:10).² This lake of fire, also know as the eternal fire was not originally made for unbelievers but it will become their final destination as they join Satan and his fallen angels (Matthew 25:41).⁴ The millennial kingdom closes with the Great White Throne Judgment, which is the judgment of all unbelievers of all ages (Revelation 20:11-15) will be for all unbelievers are judged and cast into the lake of fire. These unbelievers will be resurrected to stand before the Lord and each person will receive justice to determine his degree of punishment (everyone will receive perfect judgement by Christ - John 5:22-23, 27).⁵

THE NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

Scriptures associated with the New Heavens and New Earth: Read them and develop a concept of what the eternal state will be like:

Revelation 21:1; 2 Peter 3:10-13

Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:53

Revelation 22:5

Revelation 21:4

Revelation 21:5, 7; 22:4

3. The Millennial Kingdom, John E. Walvoord, Academie Books, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1993
4. God's Plan Of The Ages, Mal Chouch, Tyndale Theological Seminary, Fort Worth Texas
5. God's Plan In All The Ages, Herbert VanderLugt, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1980
6. Bible History Visualized, Ray E. Baughman, Shepherd Press, Mesquite Texas, 1981

My Interpretation:

Following the millennium, the eternal state ensues. The Scriptures describe the beginning of eternity with a New Heaven and a New Earth. The old heaven and earth will be destroyed (Revelation 21:1; 2 Peter 3:10-13). It is here on the new earth that the believes of all the times will live and serve the Lord for all eternity. We will all have new eternal bodies (Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:53) that are forever free from sin. We will have a eternal relationship with the God and Father and the Son (Revelation 22:5), and there will be no more crying or pain (Revelation 21:4). This is a new beginning for man and we will be called the sons of God, seeing Christ face to face (Revelation 21:5, 7; 22:4).⁴

CONCLUSION

By no means does this study give all the facts and nor does it try too. But what I have attempted to do was to give a brief outline of the future of mankind, Satan, and God's plan for us in the future. The study of eschatology can be rewarding because of the glimpse of hope that we see in our future with the Lord, but it should also be a motivating factor in that we know the destruction that others will face without Christ. We (Christians), above all people should see the great need to share the gospel to a lost and dying world for we have read the end of the book!

REFERENCES/END NOTES

1. Things to Come, J. Dwight Pentecost, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1981
2. The Basis Of The Premillennial Faith, Charles C. Ryrie, Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune New Jersey, 1983