

# Eschatology: Or “The End Times”

## Part 1: Introduction and Biblical Prophecy

### INTRODUCTION

- What is “Eschatology?”
  1. Etymology – ἐσχατός (*eschatos*) – “end, last”; λογός (*logos*) – “reason, message, talk”
  2. The study of the end, or “the last things” – It is particularly interested in the events immediately preceding and following Christ’s second coming.
- Two categories of eschatology:
  1. Personal eschatology – regards one’s own personal future.  
Topics considered: death, the intermediate state, resurrection, and glorification
  2. General eschatology – major events to affect the entire universe  
Topics typically considered:  
the second coming of Christ  
the Millennium  
the final judgment  
eternal punishment of unbelievers  
eternal rewards for believers  
the new Heavens and the new Earth
- What will be studied here:
  1. Interpreting biblical prophecy
  2. The Millennium – 4 Views with brief consideration of the book of Revelation
  3. Why not:  
The “second coming of Christ?” “rapture?” “tribulation?” “antichrist?” “Israel?”

### ESCHATOLOGICAL DEBATE, OR “END TIMES CONTROVERSY”

- Eschatology is controversial and debatable
  1. Disagreement abounds in the study of eschatology.
  2. Should Christians fight about eschatology?
- Is there “one right view” of eschatology/end times?
  1. Yes. But it is a difficult topic, and Christians may not have all the information.
  2. Christians should not divide over this topic. It is not a “salvation issue,” but it is an important issue for the fact that the Bible discusses it.
- There are some views and particular elements of eschatological views that must be rejected.
  1. E.g., any view that denies the literal, physical second coming of Christ must be rejected.
  2. Any view that contradicts *clear* teaching of Scripture must be rejected, e.g., any view that sets dates, times, or seasons must be rejected.
- No view should be too dogmatic about every single element/event

### ESCHATOLOGICAL AGREEMENT

(adapted from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, chapt. 54).

- Christians ought to agree on same basic ideas concerning eschatology, especially Christ’s return.

1. Christ will return personally, visibly, and bodily:
 

“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

“They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:11).

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16).

“So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him” (Heb. 9:28). See also 2 Peter 3:10; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 22:20
2. We should be waiting for Christ’s return.
 

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:11-13 ).

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”(Philippians 3:20 ).

“For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will” (Matthew 24:44 ).
3. No one know when Christ will return—the day, the hour, or even the season.
 

“For the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will” (Matt. 24:44 ).

“But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mark 13:32 ).

“Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25:13).
4. The final outcome of Christ’s return is either eternal condemnation in hell or eternal blessedness in heaven.

### **INTERPRETING BIBLICAL PROPHECY**

- There are 4 basic principles to interpreting prophecy:
  1. The OT was written for the sake of the Church.
  2. The NT often interprets OT prophecy for us.
  3. Much of prophecy is figurative, not literal.
  4. Prophecy is fulfilled at different levels of reality.
- The OT was written for the sake of the Church.
  1. That the OT was written for the sake of the Church is confirmed by several NT passages:
 

“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

History: “Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved” (1 Cor. 10:6).

Poetry: Paul quotes the book of Psalms (Rom. 3:9-18) to instruct that we are all sinners.

Law: Paul refers to Deut. 25:4 in 1 Cor. 9:9 to teach that ministers of the Word ought to be remunerated for their work.

Typology: Hebrews 9:1-18 describes how the OT included typology to teach the church about Christ and his priesthood.

“The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. . . . But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation” (Heb. 9:8-9a, 11).

Prophecy:

“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that *they were not serving themselves, but you*, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look” (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

2. That the OT was written for the sake of the Church does not mean that the *only* reason it was written was for the Church. It was certainly written for Israel:
    - a. To reveal God’s commandments and laws.
    - b. To reveal God Himself.
    - c. To call Israel to repentance.
    - d. To prepare Israel as a servant for the coming Messiah.
  3. The Church is the culmination of God’s plans foretold in the OT.
- The implication of the OT being written for the Church is at least threefold:
    1. OT prophecy concerns the first coming of Christ. Note 1 Pet. 1:10-12:
 

“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, <sup>11</sup> seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.”
    2. Some OT prophecy concerns the church; the church was in God’s plans:
 

Rom. 16:25-26—“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, <sup>26</sup> but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.”

Eph. 3:1-10—“ . . . by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. <sup>4</sup> By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; <sup>6</sup> to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, <sup>7</sup> of which I was made a

minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. <sup>8</sup> To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; <sup>10</sup> so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

3. Much of the OT prophecies that concern Christ must be interpreted as relating to the present Church age. They were, after all, written “for our instruction” and “for our sake.”
- The NT often interprets OT prophecy for us.

1. Two examples:

Luke 4:17-21 “And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup> ‘THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, <sup>19</sup> TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.’ <sup>20</sup> And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. <sup>21</sup> And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture [Isa. 61:1] has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

Malachi 4:5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.”

This prophecy was fulfilled in the following:

“And His disciples asked Him, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ <sup>11</sup> And He answered and said, ‘Elijah is coming and will restore all things; <sup>12</sup> but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ <sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist” (Matthew 17:10-13; see also Matt. 11:14; Mark 9:13).

2. The book of Hebrews explains all the typology of the OT as foreshadowing/pointing to Christ.
    - a. The temple sacrifices foreshadowed Christ’s sacrifice (8:3-5; 9:12-28; 10:1-18).
    - a. The Temple and Tabernacle were “copies” of the true one (8:1-2; 9:24).
- Much of prophecy is figurative, not literal.
    1. All language, including prophecy, may be taken in two different senses: literal or figurative.
      - a. Literal language is often based upon etymology, and the meaning of it is based upon common usage.
      - b. Figurative language is complex, and the meaning does not rely upon etymology or common usage, e.g., “the bank of a river.”
    2. God lays out a principle for the type of language used in prophecy (Numbers 12:6-8):
 

“He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. <sup>7</sup>Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; <sup>8</sup> With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?’”

Hosea 12:10 – “I have also spoken to the prophets, And I gave numerous visions, And through the prophets I gave parables.”

Rev. 1:1 – “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.”

=> “communicate” = *semaino* (σημαίνω), meaning “to signify,” as in symbols

KJV: “. . . and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.”

NKJV: “. . . And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.”

ASV: “. . . and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.”

YLT: “. . . and he did signify it, having sent through his messenger to his servant John.”

3. OT prophecy must not always be taken literally; it should mostly be taken figuratively. It stands in contrast to the dispensational premillennialism, which insists that all prophecy must be taken literally, e.g., Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHay & Jerry Jenkins.
- Prophecy is fulfilled at different levels of reality. Prophecy may be fulfilled at a physical level or a spiritual level.
  1. Physical level:
    - a. Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”
    - b. This was fulfilled in a physical reality only: Mary was a virgin and gave birth to a son—Jesus—who is called “Immanuel.”
  2. Spiritual level:
    - a. Malachi 4:5 – “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.”
    - b. This was fulfilled in John the Baptist in a spiritual manner, i.e., John was not Elijah, but he came as a prophet and in the power of Elijah.
  3. This does not mean that prophecies fulfilled at the spiritual level are not physical in any sense. John the Baptist was obviously a physical, literal person. It was fulfilled in more than just a physical way; it was fulfilled in a dramatic and significant spiritual way.