

Eschatology: An Introduction

What is Eschatology?

This morning, we begin our series on Eschatology. The word eschatology is made up of two words: *eschaton* = end; *logos* = study. Eschatology is a study of the end, or as is popularly conceived, a study of the end times.

Traditionally, eschatology has been concerned with the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, the final judgment, and the eternal state. Popularly, eschatology focuses on the rebirth of the nation of Israel, the tribulation, the rapture, and the millennium.

As there is much confusion over these issues, we will be spending the next twelve weeks sorting all of this out. We will not be able to cover every detail or look at every passage, but we do plan to focus on some of the principle eschatological texts including:

- Daniel 2, 7, 9
- The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21)
- 1 Thessalonians 4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2
- The Book of Revelation

We will also touch on other eschatological texts such as:

- Ezekiel 40-48
- Zechariah 14
- 2 Peter 3
- 1 John 2

Eschatological Extremes

As we undertake our study in eschatology, we need to avoid two extremes.

1) Eschatology is Everything

Because eschatology is such an exciting subject, some people go overboard. Eschatology becomes an obsession. Every passage of the Bible seems to be about eschatology. Every book read is about eschatology. Every conversation turns to eschatology.

They become "prophecy experts," studying eschatology to the exclusion of everything else. They follow the situation in the Middle East carefully, trying to see how every event fits into their prophetic calendar.

Obviously, this kind of an unbalanced approach to the Scriptures leads to an unbalanced approach to life.

2) Eschatology is Nothing

Perhaps as a reaction against the over-zealousness of "prophecy experts," many have adopted an agnostic approach to eschatology. Their attitude is, "Studying eschatology is pointless. It doesn't matter what I believe about the end times. Jesus wins in the end, right?"

While there is some truth to such sentiments, this is also an unbalanced approach to the Scriptures.

Eschatological Balance

Eschatology is one of the most confusing issues in the contemporary church. However, we do not solve this problem by either over-emphasizing or under-emphasizing eschatology. Our goal is to be balanced in our approach. How can we achieve such balance?

The Scriptures are our guide. We derive balance from the Scriptures. We ought to speak of eschatology as little or as often as the word of God does.

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Why Study Eschatology?

As an answer to the eschatological-agnostic, here are a few specific reasons why we should study eschatology.

1) All Scripture is Profitable

Paul gives us the first reason for us to eschatology.

2 Timothy 3: 16-17

All Scripture is profitable. As Paul says, it is all important so that we may be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. When God breathed his Scriptures, he did not waste any breath. All of the Bible is important. If God told us something, then we should seek to understand it.

We do not have the authority of picking and choosing which parts of the Bible we would like to emphasize or ignore. All of Scripture is profitable. This means that the Olivet Discourse is profitable. The book of Revelation is profitable. These are all essential for making us complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Now, most of eschatology does fall into the category of a non-essential. By this we mean that holding to a correct eschatological view will not save you. However, in no way does this mean that eschatology is unimportant. "Essentials" and "non-essentials" are man-made categories to describe the gospel. While eschatology does not save us, eschatology does affect our sanctification. The more we understand God's word, the more we have an opportunity for sanctification and glorifying God.

2) Revelation Promises a Blessing

Seven times in the book of revelation, blessing is promised. This is not surprising since the number seven plays a large roll in Revelation. Two of these promises of blessing are at the beginning and at the end of Revelation.

Revelation 1: 3

Revelation 22: 7

Revelation begins and ends with Jesus promising a blessing to those who hear and obey his book. I often hear people say that Revelation is too confusing and that we should not even try to understand it. This goes precisely against what Jesus says. Blessing awaits!

Our Approach

Eschatology is one of the most controversial subjects within the church. This does not mean that we should avoid eschatology, but only that we should approach it carefully. Our main goal is to provide a road map for you, so that as you read the Bible and study, you will be able to understand the Bible more fully.

Thus, our approach is going to be mainly positive. We are not going to spend a lot of time examining and critiquing various eschatological views. The purpose of our study is not to slam other positions. This means that we are not going to make a balanced presentation. We are not going to present all of the views and make each one sound enticing. We will not be offering an eschatological smorgasbord.

We are going to present one view and when necessary, we will briefly critique other views. For instance, when we get to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, we are going to explain why we think that the rapture and the second coming are the same event. We are also going to have to critique the popular view that the rapture and the second coming are different events.

Learning almost always involves replacing existing knowledge with new knowledge. We are constantly correcting our thinking. Very little of our learning is obtaining brand new information. Thus, it will be important to both present positive evidence for our view and negative evidence against other views. However, we will only do this as necessary.

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What If I Disagree?

It is very likely that you will disagree with some of what we are teaching. That's fine. We do not have to be monolithic. If you want to raise an objection after class, that is fine. We would love to talk through issues and deal with whatever disagreements that you may have.

However, we ask that you keep your disagreements to yourself during the class period. We have a lot to cover, and there is the possibility of a rabbit trail at every turn. We do not want to waste every else's time by dealing with your objection. So, do not attempt to argue or start a debate during class. Do not raise a counterpoint to stir the pot. Do not play devil's advocate. Save the debate for after class.

We do welcome any and all clarifying questions. If you do not understand something, then by all means, please stop us and ask. We do want things to be clear.

What is Eschatology About?

What is eschatology about? What is the center of Biblical eschatology?

Revelation 1:1

As Jesus indicates, the book of Revelation is about Jesus Christ. Eschatology is about Jesus Christ. He is the center of everything and all that we do. An eschatological scheme which focuses on the nation of Israel or current events is off-center. The center of everything is Jesus Christ. Eschatology must be primarily about Jesus Christ and what he has done or will do in the future.

Israel and the Church

One of the major issues that affects eschatology is our view of Israel and the church. The most popular view in America teaches that God will remove the church from the world and re-establish the nation of Israel on earth. Obviously, this view relies upon making a hard distinction between Israel and the church. However, this distinction is not found in the Bible.

In 2007, we spent eight weeks studying this issue and published the booklet *Jesus, Israel, and the Church* to set forth the argument that the church is the continuation of what God began with Israel. We are not going to rehash all of this here. If you have never studied this issue, pick up a copy of this booklet at the Resource Center.

Our working assumption is that Israel was the church and the church is now Israel. There is one people of God throughout history. God made promises to his people before Christ, and God will fulfill these promises to his people.

An Outline

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Four Perspectives of Eschatology
- 3) Biblical View of the Kingdom of God
- 4) Olivet Discourse (The Tribulation)
- 5) Daniel's Seventy Weeks
- 6) New Testament Epistles
- 7) Revelation 1-10
- 8) Revelation 11-19
- 9) Revelation 20
- 10) Revelation 21-22
- 11) Second Coming
- 12) Eternal State
- 13) Conclusion