

Christian Ministry Unit 1

Introduction to Theology

Week 9 – Eschatology Part 1

Introduction

“Eschatology” means “study of the last things.”

Why is eschatology so important?

Because it reveals the meaning of history.

Because fulfilled prophecy provides unique and objective verification that the God of the Bible is the only true God.

- God demonstrates that he alone is sovereign over human history by predicting historical events *before* they take place (cf. Isa. 41:21-24; 42:8,9; 43:9-13; 44:6-8,24-28; 45:11-13,20-22; 46:8-11; 48:3-7,12-16).

Isaiah 48:3–7 ³ I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. ⁴ For I knew how stubborn you were; your neck muscles were iron, your forehead was bronze. ⁵ Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, ‘My images brought them about; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.’ ⁶ You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them? ‘From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you. ⁷ They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, ‘Yes, I knew of them.’

- The fulfillment of dozens of Old Testament predictions of Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection validate the gospel as *the* message of salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-3).

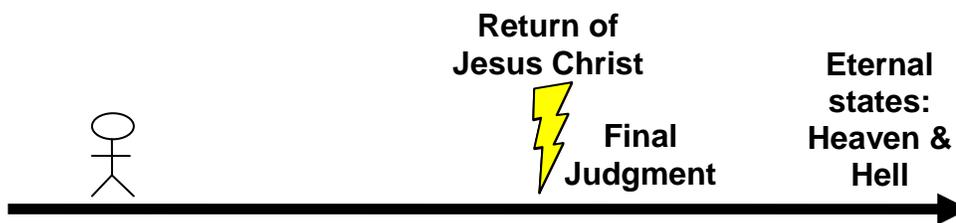
1 Corinthians 15:1–4 ¹ Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day **according to the Scriptures**,
- The Bible’s accuracy in predicting *past* events means that we can trust that God will fulfill the *future* events he has predicted.

Because the assurance that God will establish his kingdom provides believers with a unique basis and motivation for serving Jesus in this life. For example:

- 2 Cor. 4: ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ *while we look* not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
- Phil. 1: ²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.
- Rom. 8: ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ²³ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

How do we organize and interpret the biblical material on the last things?

All orthodox Christians agree on these essentials:



Within these essentials, though, orthodox Christians disagree on how to organize and interpret many eschatological passages. Perhaps the most important disagreement is on *how to interpret Old Testament unfulfilled prophecies concerning the nation of Israel*.

The Messianic Kingdom is the focal point of these prophecies. What role does Israel play in the following Messianic Kingdom prophecies?

- Ps. 2:1-12

- Isa. 11:1-12
- Zech. 14:1-11,16-19

Covenantalism and Dispensationalism are two different ways of interpreting these passages.

- **Covenantalism** teaches that God has *permanently replaced* Israel with the Church as His chosen people.



Covenantalism interprets the Old Testament unfulfilled prophecies concerning the nation of Israel *non-literally* as predictions about the Church or the new heavens and new earth. (e.g., Matthew Henry’s interpretation of Zech. 14:4,5.)

This is problematic for two reasons:

- God fulfilled the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah’s *first* coming literally, so it is reasonable to expect that he will also fulfill the Old Testament predictions of Messiah’s *second* coming and Kingdom literally.
- Many passages (both Old Testament and New Testament) insist that God will fulfill all of His promises to Israel, including:

Jer. 31:31-37** ³¹ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” ³⁵ This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD Almighty is his name: ³⁶ “Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the LORD, “will Israel ever cease being a nation before me.” ³⁷ This is what the LORD says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,” declares the LORD.

Rom. 11:29*²⁵ . . . a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;²⁶ and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."²⁷ "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."²⁸ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;^{29*} for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

NOTE: Many Old Testament prophecies have a "double-reference"—"Two events, widely separated as to the time of their fulfillment, may be brought together into the scope of one prophecy."¹

GAP (e.g., Isa. 61:1-9; see Lk. 4:17-21)

TYPE (e.g., Gen. 22)

TYPE-GAP (e.g., Joel 2:18-3:21)

UNFORESEEN PARTIAL (e.g., Jer. 31:31-37; see Heb. 8)

- **Dispensationalism** teaches that God has *temporarily* replaced Israel with the Church as His chosen people—but that He will fulfill *all* of the promises He has made to Israel.



Although this is a non-essential doctrine, we believe that Dispensationalism is superior to Covenantalism, and identify ourselves with progressive Dispensationalists.²

- Other important theological and practical implications of Covenantalism and Dispensationalism:

	COVENANTALISM	DISPENSATIONALISM
GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HUMANITY	Emphasizes UNITY in the way God has worked with humanity during the covenant of grace.	Emphasizes DIFFERENCES in the way God has worked with humanity during different dispensations.

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), pp. 46,47.

² For a description of Progressive Dispensationalism, see Darell Bock, *Christianity Today*, September 12, 1994, p. 26-29.

	COVENANTALISM	DISPENSATIONALISM
SOTERIOLOGY	As a result of this emphasis on unity, Covenantalists correctly emphasize that people have always been saved by grace through faith.	Most dispensationalists, like Covenantalists, argue that people have always been saved by grace through faith.
ECCLESIOLOGY	Covenantalists define the church as all believers during all of history. Therefore, many feel free to bring OT forms into the church (infant baptism, religious calendars, ritualism, etc.) Sometimes, Covenantalists have advocated using the state to advance the church's mission.	Because Dispensationalists see the Church Age as a distinct period in salvation history (beginning on Pentecost), they usually call for a more radical break with Old Testament worship and structures and uphold the separation of church and state.
SANCTIFICATION	Many Covenantalists place more emphasis on the Law in sanctification.	Dispensationalists tend to stress God's grace as the key dynamic in sanctification.
PNEUMATOLOGY	Some Covenantalists believe the Holy Spirit indwelt believers in the Old Covenant.	Dispensationalists say the Holy Spirit indwelt believers <i>only after</i> Jesus' death on the cross.

What is the Millennial Kingdom and when does it occur relative to Jesus' Second Coming?

The "Millennial Kingdom" is a term that comes from Rev. 20:1-10.

Rev. 19:11-21:8: notice the sequence of events . . .

Christians differ over how they understand the Millennial Kingdom.

- Covenantalists do not view the "Millennial Kingdom" as a 1000 year period or as the fulfillment of God's kingdom promises to Israel.

Some Covenantalists understand the "Millennial Kingdom" to be synonymous with the Church or the New Heavens and Earth. Therefore, they are called "**Amillennialists.**"



Other Covenantalists understand the “Millennial Kingdom” to refer to a period of world peace ushered in by the church, and that Jesus returns at the end of this period. Therefore, they are called “**Post-Millennialists.**”



- Dispensationalists equate it with the Messianic Kingdom that God promised to Israel through the Old Testament prophets (see above passages). Since they believe that Jesus will return *before* it occurs, they are called “**Premillennialists.**”



Consider what Rev. 20-22 and many Old Testament passages teach about this period:

- It begins with Satan’s binding (Rev. 20:1-3) and ends with Satan’s final rebellion and judgment (Rev. 20:7-10).
- Jesus will reign over all the earth (Rev. 20:4), establishing true social justice (Isa. 29:19-21) and lasting world peace (Isa. 2:4).

Isaiah 29:19–21 ¹⁹ The afflicted also will increase their gladness in the LORD, And the needy of mankind will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. ²⁰ For the ruthless will come to an end and the scorner will be finished, Indeed all who are intent on doing evil will be cut off; ²¹ Who cause a person to be indicted by a word, And ensnare him who adjudicates at the gate, And defraud the one in the right with meaningless arguments.

Isaiah 2:4 ⁴ And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.

- Jesus' resurrected followers reign with him (Rev. 20:4-6). True believers from other periods of history will be raised and reign with Jesus during this time (Dan. 7:22,27; Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2). They evidently reign over the mortal believers who were rescued by Jesus at his return—and over their offspring who repopulate the earth (Ezek. 47:22; Jer. 3:16).

Daniel 7:27 ²⁷ 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

Jeremiah 3:16–17 ¹⁶ "It shall be in those days when you are multiplied and increased in the land," declares the LORD, "they will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again. ¹⁷ "At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the LORD,' and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the LORD; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.

- There will be unprecedented worldwide spiritual enlightenment (Isa. 2:2,3; Isa. 11:9; Joel 2:28).

Isaiah 2:2–3 ² Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. ³ And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isaiah 11:9 ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

Joel 2:28–29 ²⁸ "It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. ²⁹ "Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

- The curse over nature will be substantially removed. The earth will be abundantly productive (Isa. 4:2; 35:1a,2a), and the destructive hostility of animals will be removed (Isa. 11:6-9a).

Isaiah 4:2 ² In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel.

Isaiah 35:1–2 ¹ The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus ² It will blossom profusely And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, The majesty of our God.

Isaiah 11:6–9 ⁶ And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. ⁷ Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

- The earth's inhabitants (except for the resurrected believers) will remain mortal, but without sickness (Isa. 33:24) and calamity (Isa. 65:19b-23).

Isaiah 33:24 ²⁴ And no resident will say, "I am sick"; The people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.

Isaiah 65:19–23 ¹⁹ "I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying. ²⁰ "No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, Or an old man who does not live out his days; For the youth will die at the age of one hundred And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred Will be thought accursed. ²¹ "They will build houses and inhabit them; They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² "They will not build and another inhabit, They will not plant and another eat; For as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people, And My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands. ²³ "They will not labor in vain, Or bear children for calamity; For they are the offspring of those blessed by the LORD, And their descendants with them.

As wonderful as the Millennial Kingdom is, it is not the final, perfect and eternal kingdom of God. The New Heavens and Earth (Rev. 21,22), will be much more wonderful!

Memory Verses

Jer. 31:31-37** - God will never revoke his kingdom promises to Israel.

Rom. 11:29* - God's calling for Israel is irrevocable.

Assignment

- 1) Read Rev. 21,22. What are the key features of the New Heavens & the New Earth? How does this fortify you to endure in your service to Christ?
- 2) Hand in *Church Visitation assignment next week*.