

Theology Matters

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12. Eschatology – Part 1 (Return of Christ)

Quote: *"The certainty of His coming should shape the urgency of our living."* – David Platt

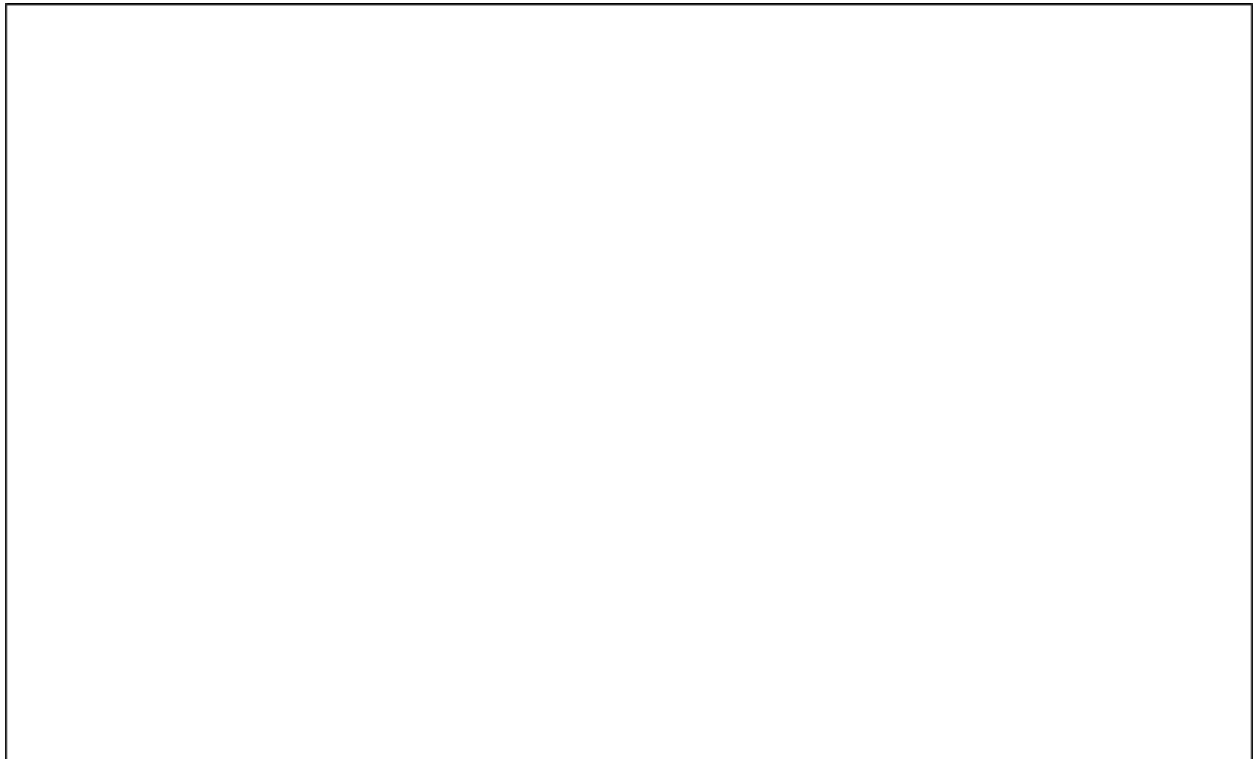
Big Idea: The end times bring a future hope to bear on the present realities of the believer.

What does "eschatology" mean?

- The study of last things. *Eschatos* in Gk, "Last" or "final"

"The Four Last Things" - common phrase in historical theology as it pertains to eschatology and the final end of humanity

1. Death/resurrection
2. Judgment
3. Heaven
4. Hell



The Return of Christ

1. Jesus is coming back again.

Acts 1:11...“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

2. Jesus will visibly gather His church.

1 Thess. 4:16-17, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

Rev. 1:5b-8, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

3. Jesus did *not* come to judge the world...the first time.

John 3:17, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that that world might be saved through him.”

John 12:47, “If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world/”

4. Jesus *will* come to judge the world...the second time.

But Scripture assigns responsibility for this final judgment to a few different sources that require some work putting the puzzle pieces together.

“God the Father judges the world through Jesus Christ, the God-man, sharing that judgment in appropriate ways with apostles and Christians and with the confirming indictments of sin and truth.” - John Piper

- a. The Father judges the world
 - i. 1 Peter 1:17, "If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile."
- b. Jesus judges the world.
 - i. 2 Timothy 4:1, "Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom"

How do we understand these two ideas working together? Who judges the world? (God the Father or God the Son?)

- c. God the Father judges the world through God the Son (Jesus)
 - i. Acts 10:42, "[Christ] is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead"
 - ii. Acts 17:31, "[God] has fixed a day on which *he* will judge the world in righteousness *by a man* whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."
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How does the end come? (3 Biblical Views)

Revelation 20:1-3, Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Revelation 20:11-15, 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

A millennial reign of Christ where Satan is bound (vv.1-3) precedes the final judgment (vv.11-15).

The Church has historically thought about this eschatological millennial reign and its relationship to the final judgment in one of three main ways.

- 1. Premillennialism** - "the doctrine stating that after the Second Coming of Christ, [Christ] will reign for a thousand years over the earth before the final consummation of God's redemptive purpose in the new heavens and the new earth of the Age to Come." - George Ladd
 - a. Premillennialism assumes the events in Revelation 19 and 20 are chronologically successive.
 - b. There are two main camps of premillennialism:
 - c. **Historic premillennialism** (one of the first ways the Church thought about the end times)
 - i. the present age will continue until a brief period of tribulation, after which Christ will return to earth to establish a millennial kingdom.
 - d. **Dispensational premillennialism** - newer idea that derives its name from the theology developed by John Nelson Darby in the nineteenth century that divides biblical history into a series of ages or dispensations.

Both forms of premillennialism follow a chronological and more literal reading of [Revelation 20:1-6](#) as subsequent to the return of Christ and final battle in [Revelation 19:11-21](#).

2. Postmillennialism

- a. Interpret the millennial reign from Rev. 20 as figurative (not a literal 1,000 year reign), "describing the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven. They understand the binding of Satan ... as being in effect during the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ, though ending shortly before Christ's return. They teach that Christ will return after this heavenly reign." - Anthony Hoekema
- b. What distinguishes postmillennialism from amillennialism (next view) is not the timing of the second coming in relation to the millennium but the nature of the millennium.

- c. Postmillennialism expects a gradual end to much of the Church's suffering before Christ returns. They expect a golden age of righteousness on earth, the millennium, in which the church experiences increasing prosperity and great influence on the culture.
- d. Postmillennialists usually point to The Great Commission, arguing that it "will be entirely successful."¹⁷ They also point to the messianic Psalms, especially [Psalm 2](#), particularly verses 7-9, "... I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." In addition, they draw attention to the parables of [Matthew 13](#), which seem to indicate the prodigious growth of the church.

3. Amillennialism

- a. Amillennialists also interpret the millennial reign figuratively (not a literal 1,000 year reign)
- b. Amillennialists believe we are *presently* living in the millennial kingdom, which is characterized by the simultaneous experiences of gospel victory and suffering for the gospel.
- c. The gospel is victorious because Satan is bound, rendering him incapable of preventing the spread of the gospel; yet he is not utterly powerless from persecuting the Church.
- d. Just before the end, Satan will again be permitted to deceive the nations and persecution will increase dramatically. Christians are awaiting the visible, bodily return of Christ, which brings an end to all their suffering.
- e. The second coming occurs concurrently with the general resurrection and a public rapture of the Church, who immediately returns to earth with Christ. Christ then judges the world, and finally ushers in the eternal state.
- f. The "already/not yet" nature of the kingdom = Christians presently live in the inaugurated kingdom, as Christ reigns from heaven; yet, they await the kingdom's full realization, when Christ will reign on Earth eternally

“When studying Revelation and eschatology it is all too easy to lose sight of the call of Christ in Revelation, which is to live victoriously as overcomers of sin, the world, and the devil and to remain faithful to him at all costs because he will make all things right in the end. Whatever view one thinks best reflects the teaching of Scripture, it must always be kept in mind that Scripture always presents the doctrine of last things as a motivation for faithful living.” - Alan Bandy