

NOTES

Session One

Of all of the subjects that we find in the Bible, the second coming of Jesus is one the most referred to in the Bible, and yet the most difficult to understand.

Often today people are either not interested in the Second Coming of Jesus or they simply don't want it to happen until they have done everything they want to do.

Yet for over 2,000 years, this has been one of the subjects that Christians have not just taught on, but actually focused their whole lives upon.

So, what has changed?

- We are far more preoccupied with the natural physical world around us, than the spiritual world.
- We are more comfortable and wealthier in life and so we like it here too much.
- The Church's focus today is about us and our comforts rather than the great commission and the eternal destiny of others.
- d. We live for the temporary rather than the eternity, which is opposite of what Paul teaches us in (2 Cor 4:18).

For 2,000 years the church through persecution, hardship, hostility and rejection has looked to the coming of Jesus as 'the hope' of something better beyond this world.

People lived their lives as witnesses of Jesus being persecuted and hated, yet acting in grace, forgiveness and love, all so they could gain a better resurrection.

The doctrine of the end times, or Eschatology, rather than being something they speculated about, was a source of hope to help them continue to trust Jesus in their challenging lives.

What does the word "Eschatology" mean?

The word "**eschatology**" comes from two Greek words, **eschatos** meaning "**last in time or place**" and logos meaning "**word or discourse.**"

It literally means **'words about the last things.'**

NOTES

Session One

From a theological point of view, “eschatology” refers to that branch of theology that deals with the last or final things. It usually refers to some of the following:

- The last days leading up to the return of Christ and the associated events.
- The second coming of Christ itself.
- The final judgment of the living and the dead.
- The millennial kingdom and the eternal states.

See appendix 1 for a list of definitions and terms.

Why should we bother with a study of Eschatology?

a .It is in the Bible.

The references in Scripture to the end times are neither scarce nor obscure.

The prophets speak about it, the apostles speak about it and Jesus himself spoke at length about the subject.

b. Understanding the Bible is useful to us.

Paul tells us in 2 Tim. 3:16 ‘Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.’

The whole Bible is ‘God breathed and useful’ to help us develop and grow in our relationship with God and one another.

Teaching from the Word helps us to understand the plan of God for our lives, so we can live effectively for Him in the world.

There are many false teachings, especially about the end times and so we need to understand the different views and come to a view for ourselves.

NOTES

Session One

c. Our understanding of Eschatology will inform other areas of our theology

What we believe impacts how we live. Even though there are variations regarding Eschatology, we need to formulate a belief we can accept in our lives.

If we live with a wrong belief about Eschatology, it can have a detrimental and negative impact on the way we see God and understand his will for our lives.

Sadly, people today live for the 'here and now' rather than eternity and so live focused only on the temporal. Eschatology helps us think differently.

d. Understanding Eschatology helps us trust God.

As we see God's plan for everything and how he has already foretold how things will be, it enables us to be strengthened in our faith, that he is in control of everything.

The Bible has a lot to say about the end times and the second coming of Jesus.

'One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's Second Coming in the Old Testament, where 17 books give it prominence.

In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are 318 references to the second advent of Christ—an amazing 1 out of every 30 verses.

Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event. For every prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's first advent, there are 8 which look forward to His second!'

Why is this subject so complicated and difficult?

How we interpret and apply the teaching of scripture is so important in our walk with Jesus. No matter what the truth, we have to understand what the writer is both saying and meaning.

It can have a major impact on our lives if we misunderstand or mistranslate what is being said, as we can see from Church history.

NOTES

Session One

For instance, what does Jesus mean in Matthew 19:12?

For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

“The early church historian Eusebius of Caesarea tells that Origen castrated himself according to the gospel of Matthew, which describes men who “make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:12). Historians have debated the veracity of Eusebius’s claim, but auto-castration in general conformed to early Christian ascetic rejection of traditional marriage and sexual union.[1]

Origen was an early church leader, who it seems, took this verse literally and applied it by castrating himself. We have to be careful how we interpret scripture.

One of the main problems that we have with any teaching on Eschatology is the different ways in which people approach the scriptures.

Many of the scripture passages that refer to the End Times, are prophetic, pictorial or allegorical (hold symbolic meaning) in nature.

This often means, different people use different methods of explaining Eschatological scriptures.[2]

Some scholars think that all Eschatological prophesies are allegorical and should not be taken literally at all, while others see different ways of looking at different scripture passages.

All of this adds to the confusion and difficulty when trying to work out what the scriptures mean and how they should be understood.

[1] [inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/feminae/DetailsPage.aspx?Feminae_ID=32094#:~:text=The%20early%20church%20historian%20Eusebius,\(Matthew%2019%3A12\).](http://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/feminae/DetailsPage.aspx?Feminae_ID=32094#:~:text=The%20early%20church%20historian%20Eusebius,(Matthew%2019%3A12).)

Literal interpretation: explanation of the meaning of events for historical purposes from a neutral perspective by trying to understand the text in the culture and time it was written, and location and language it was composed in. That is, since the 19th century, usually ascertained using the higher critical methods like source criticism and form criticism.

Anagogic interpretation: dealing with the future events of Christian history (eschatology) as well as heaven, purgatory, hell, the last judgement, the General Resurrection and second Advent of Christ, etc. (prophecies).[3].

Typological (or allegorical) interpretation: connecting the events of the Old Testament with the New Testament, particularly drawing allegorical connections between the events of Christ’s life with the stories of the Old Testament. Also, a passage speaks directly to someone such as when Francis of Assisi heard the passage to sell all he had. Tropological (or moral) interpretation: “the moral of the story,” or how one should act now. Many of Jesus’ parables and the Book of Proverbs and other wisdom books are packed with tropological meaning[5]

NOTES

Session One

An example of this is:

Daniels seventy sevens.

Daniel 9:24 Seventy “sevens” are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.

This verse and its preceding verses are understood as allegorical and not literal and are interpreted as 490 years and not just weeks, **as can be seen from the example in appendix 2.**

Overview of Eschatological events.

1. Theories on the millennial reign of Christ
2. Jesus returns for his church (the rapture).
3. Judgement of believers and wedding supper.
4. The great tribulation period.
5. Jesus returns with his church.
6. The battle of Armageddon.
7. The final white throne judgment.
8. Satan’s last revolt.
9. A new heaven and new earth.

See appendix 3 for pictorial overview of the end times.

NOTES

Session One

1. The millennium reign of Christ

When Jesus ascended to heaven and left the apostles, the angels standing by them gave them a promise to the church. We see this promise in Acts 1:11:

Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

For over 2,000 years, the church has hung on to this promise, that Jesus would one day return from heaven to set up and establish his rule on earth.

For 2,000 years people have had the hope of his coming as a comfort, whilst also having differing ideas of how this hope will be outworked.

Over the past 2,000 years people have interpreted the second coming according to what they believed the Bible said, but also through the experience of life they were having.

Major theories on the millennium.

There are three main theological views regarding the return of Christ, with an additional aspect tagged on to the first of the three that gives us our fourth theory.

The three, plus views are as follows:

- Historic pre-millennialism.
- Amillennialism
- Postmillennialism
- Pre-tribulation rapture, premillennialism.

NOTES

Session One

a. Historic pre-millennialism.

Historic premillennialism is the view that Christ will return physically to the earth to set up his earthly kingdom and will rule for 1000 years, after which the general resurrection and judgement will take place.

This is the view that was espoused and taught by the early church fathers, who would have been the closest to the original apostles, who wrote the New Testament.

This view holds that Christians in this life will suffer and persecutions, challenges and trials should be expected and embraced for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel.

The early church letters are written in times of challenge and persecution and are a call to stand for the Gospel in the face of opposition.

Over the first 300 years of the church, there were ten different persecutions that came against the church, to seek to wipe her out and destroy her witness.

Due to the different beliefs of Christianity as against other Roman religions, it stood out as being not only different, but divisive and rebellious.

Some of the things that made Christianity stand out against the backdrop of other religions and so induced persecution were:

Communion – the eating of someone's body and drinking someone's blood. This was often reported as cannibalism by those who heard of it.

Separation – believers were not encouraged to marry or do what others did and so stayed away from the normal populace. This created suspicion and misunderstanding.

Marriage – Christians would not have sex before marriage and would only marry people from within the faith, which caused others to see them as being elitist and better than others.

Deity – The Romans held that the emperor was a god, but Christians worshipped Jesus as God and would not worship the emperor and so they rejected him as a god over their lives.

NOTES

Session One

These and others like them caused continual persecution, as Rome tried to get Christians to abandon what they believed and be good citizens, by doing what others did.

Tertullian wrote 'the blood of the saints, is the seed of the church,' to encourage Christians to stand in the midst of persecution, knowing their blood will produce other followers for Jesus.

During this period there was an acceptance and even an embracing of persecution, as the necessary call of all who believed in Jesus.

The Second Coming was seen as the hope that encouraged believers as they stood their ground in these challenging times.

This view holds that things will get gradually worse until the second coming of Christ and then Jesus will come to set up his Millennial reign on earth.

Most pre-millennialists believe in the following things:

- The earthly reign of Christ after his second coming
- This will be literally for one thousand years
- The millennium will be preceded by the Great Tribulation.
- There will be two resurrections separated by the Millennium.

a. Amillennialism

For the first 300 years of the church, all it had known was persecution, then a short time of respite and then persecution again.

These persecutions would sometimes be across the Roman Empire and at other times they were more localised.

In 312AD something significant happened that changed everything. The Roman emperor Constantine became a follower of Jesus.

In 315AD Constantine legalised Christianity and made it the state religion of Rome. This saw the end of persecution for the church and a normalising of things for all Christians.

NOTES

Session One

Soon because of this edict, the church was finding favour with Rome and churches were being built, leaders being paid and everything becoming easier.

With the circumstances changed, St Augustine in the 4th century wrote 'The city of God' where he spoke about God's kingdom spreading and taking over.

Augustine's views on the "thousand years" of Revelation 20:3–6 in the Bible became the basis of amillennialism. He originally held premillennialist views, but later changed them, calling the doctrine "carnal".^[1]

Amillennialism is the view that there will be no literal millennium or millennial reign of Christ, either spiritually or physically.

There will be growth in the world of both good and evil until Christ returns, then there will be a general resurrection and judgement of all people.

Most A-millennial's believe the following things:

- The Second Coming of Christ will be immediately followed by the resurrection and judgement.
- The one thousand years of Revelation 20 are symbolic and not literal.
- Biblical descriptions of the Millennium are not literal but symbolic.
- No world-wide conversion is to take place.
- The return of Christ is immanent (can take place at any time).

c. Postmillennialism

It was during the Enlightenment in 17th century, that a new world of optimism changed the way people were seeing and understanding things.

People began to look to science as the rational, competed with the spiritual. As church and state separated, people began to think mankind was now getting better.

^[1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amillennialism>.

NOTES

Session One

Lorraine Boettner gives a definition of Postmillennialism as being

'That view of last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world is eventually to be Christianised, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium.... The second coming of Christ will be followed immediately by the general resurrection, the general judgement, and the introduction of heaven and hell in their fullness. (the millennium – N.J. Nutley)

Most postmillennialists hold the following things:

- The kingdom of God is a present reality. It is primarily the rule of Christ in the hearts of men.
- This view holds that the end time church permeates society more and more and sees the conversion of all nations prior to Christ's return
- The long period of earthly peace known as the Millennium; not necessarily a literal thousand years.
- The gradual growth of the Kingdom
- A time of apostasy at the end of the millennium.
- The millennium will end with the personal return of Christ
- The return of Christ will be followed by the resurrection and judgement of the dead.

Postmillennialists believe that Jesus will not return prior to his millennial reign, but after it, even though they believe He will reign spiritually during this period.

They believe that we are not yet in the millennium, but are preparing the groundwork for it. They point to things that indicate the world is becoming a better place, such as:

- Social conditions are improving.
- The amounts of money given to Christian causes promoting better living conditions.
- The Bible still being the world's best seller and the number of translations into other languages.
- The Gospel is now preached all around the world through literature and radio communication.
- All these things a Postmillennialist would say point to the imminent coming of the millennium.

NOTES

Session One

d. Pre-tribulation, pre-millennialism

As the enlightenment began to take a hold, things were looking good and the idea that God's Kingdom will keep on expanding was embraced by many.

As people entered the 19th century things began to look different. Science and systems was now in people's thinking, as Darwin and evolution was expoused.

Then in 1827 J.N. Derby who was a Brethren minister, began to emphasise prophecy and the coming of the Lord.

A prophecy given by Margaret McDonald at the time, spoke of Jesus coming as being, imminent and that it would take place in two parts.

Derby and others soon developed a pre-tribulation rapture theory about the second coming of Jesus, where Jesus would return for his church and then later to set up his millennial reign.

One of the greatest exponents of this view was C.I Scofield, who wrote a Bible (The Scofield Bible) that had Bible notes in it to help people understand it.

The Scofield Bible sold over a million copies world-wide.

In the early 1980's another Christian called Hal Lindsey, who was an evangelist and TV host wrote a book on the theory called 'The late Great Planet Earth.'

This book sold 35million copies 1995. After this the left behind series sold over 80million books on the same pre-tribulation, pre-millennium teaching.

Every born-again believer believes that Jesus is coming again at some point, to rule and reign over his creation, how and when is where we see the differences.