

# The Doctrine of the End Times

## WEEK 1: Introduction to the Doctrine of the End Times

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- The word “eschatology” comes from the Greek adjective ἐσχατος (“last”) and refers to the study of “last things” or “end times.”
- More specifically, it refers to the study of biblical prophecy about the future events surrounding the end of the age when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth to bring about the restoration of all things.
- The study of the end times has brought with it much debate on the timing and the means by which biblical prophecy will be fulfilled. Topics such as the timing of the rapture, the understanding of the Millennial Kingdom, Dispensationalism, and Covenant Theology are all connected to eschatology.
- Because of this, we will take time over the next six weeks to unpack some of the major end times issues, as well as the implications of those in how we approach and interpret Scripture.
- Our schedule will look like this:
  - **Week 1: Introduction to the Doctrine of the End Times**
  - Week 2: Overview of Covenant Theology
  - Week 3: Overview of Dispensationalism
  - Week 4: Views on the Millennial Kingdom
  - Week 5: Why There Needs to be a Millennial Kingdom
  - Week 6: What is the Day of the Lord?

### INTRODUCTION

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- Before looking at some of the key issues within eschatology, it would be helpful to have an overview of eschatology, including:
  - Why believers should study eschatology
  - An overview of some of the key issues
  - Some things to consider when approaching end times issues and passages relating to the end times.
- I believe this will be helpful as eschatology can be a difficult area to study. Interpreting prophetic passages in Scripture can be difficult and can take a lot of work.
- Because of that, there is a temptation to dismiss eschatology completely or perhaps to simply conform to a theological system, rather than doing the work of rightly interpreting the word of God.

- However, as we will discuss today, the dangers in delegating our study of God's word to fallible men, or being flippant in our approach to interpreting and understanding Scripture in the realms of eschatology can have massive implications in all areas of a believer's life.
  - o **2 Timothy 2:15** - *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*

## WHY SHOULD BELIEVERS STUDY ESCHATOLOGY?

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- Before we begin to look at **how** we should approach the doctrine of the end times, we need to remind ourselves, from Scripture, **why** it is important to do so.
- The life of a believer is framed around the revelation of Jesus Christ.
  - o Our hope is secured by the first coming of Christ.
  - o Our hope is directed toward the second coming of Christ.
- Because of this, God's word continually directs believers to focus on the coming of Christ, and the fulfillment of divine promises, as motivation for holy living now.
- Meditating on these truths is specifically designed to produce the following in the children of God:<sup>1</sup>

### A. Urgency in the Pursuit of Holiness

- **2 Peter 3:11-14** - *Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, **since you look for these things**, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless*
- **2 Corinthians 5:9-10** - *Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

### B. Joy in the Midst of Trials

- **1 Peter 1:3-6** - *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a **salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,*

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Matt Waymeyer. Fall 2023. The Expositor's Seminary, Theology III Class Notes.

### C. Patience in the Throes of Affliction

- **James 5:7-11** - *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.*

### D. Perseverance in the Face of Persecution

- **2 Thess 1:3-10** - *We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.*

### E. Zeal in Devotion to Discipleship

- **Hebrews 10:24-25** - *Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

### F. Faithfulness in Service to God

- **1 Timothy 6:11-15a** - *But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time.*

### G. Hope in a World of Corruption

- **2 Cor 4:16-18** - *Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 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.*

## H. Comfort in a Season of Grief

- **1 Thess 4:13-18** - *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

## I. Amazement at the Wisdom of God

- **Romans 11:33-36** - *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*

## J. Diligence in Your Ministry to Others

- **1 Peter 4:7-11** - *The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

## K. Encouragement in an Age of Darkness

- **1 Thess 5:1-11** - *Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*

## L. Steadfastness in the Work of the Lord

- **1 Cor 15:50-58** - *Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.*
- As those who are called to fix our hope completely on the grace to be given at the return of Christ (1 Pet 1:13), we need to understand what it is that we’re fixing our hope on.
- In fact, Scripture promises divine blessing to those who give attention to these things.
  - **Rev 1:3** - *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*
- In short, we need eschatology!

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAJOR END TIME ISSUES?

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- Because of the difficulty in interpreting end times prophecies, many views and theological systems have developed to try and understand how the Lord will fulfill His promises to His people.

### 1. The Millennial Kingdom

- This is one of the most highly debated topics within eschatology.
- From the timing of the millennium (Premillennial, Amillennial, Postmillennial) to the nature of it (spiritual vs. literal, earthy kingdom), much ink has been spilt in an effort to discern what this truly means.
- In fact, there have been theological systems developed to try and understand how God has been working throughout redemptive history, and how and when His promises to His people will be fulfilled. (Dispensationalism vs. Covenant Theology)
  - These systems, as we’ll discuss in greater depths over the next couple of weeks, have key distinctions that change the nature of biblical prophecy and covenants.
    - Continuity/discontinuity between the church and Israel
    - Hermeneutical approaches to prophetic passages

## 2. The Timing of the Rapture

- While none would dispute that the rapture of God’s people will happen, as God’s word speaks of believers who are asleep and those who remain being caught up in the clouds to meet Christ and be with Him forever (1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thess 4:16-17), there are varying views of when this will happen.
  - **Pre-Tribulation** - the pretribulational rapture view asserts that the church will be raptured before the seven-year tribulation. Since the entire period of tribulation is the “wrath of God,” the church must be rescued prior to the tribulation to fulfill God’s promise that the church will escape the wrath of God (1 Thess. 1:9–10; Rev. 3:10).
  - **Mid-Tribulation** - the midtribulational rapture view argues that the church will be raptured at the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation. The church goes through the first half of the tribulation but then is raptured at the midpoint to avoid the most severe wrath of God that characterizes the latter period of the tribulation.
  - **Post-Tribulation** - the posttribulational rapture view asserts that the rapture occurs at the time of the second coming and is the initial phase of Jesus’s bodily return. The church, which goes through the tribulation period, is snatched into the air to meet the returning Jesus, who then descends to earth with his people.<sup>2</sup>

## 3. The Day of the Lord

- The biblical phrase “the day of the Lord” stands as a key term in understanding God’s revelation about the future.
- The specific phrase “the day of the Lord” or a close variant appears nineteen times in the Old Testament (Obad 15; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Isa 2:12; 13:6, 9; Zeph 1:7, 14; Ezek 13:5; 30:3; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:5).
- “The day of the Lord” appears in four New Testament passages—Acts 2:20; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; and 2 Pet 3:10. Four times it is referred to as the “day of vengeance” (Isa 34:8; 61:2; 63:4; Jer 46:10). The New Testament calls it a “day of wrath” (Rom 2:5), a “day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12), and the “great day of God the Almighty” (Rev 16:14).
- The questions arise when discussing the nature and timing of the Day of the Lord.
  - Will this be a time of judgment, blessing, both?
  - When will it occur?
  - Is it describing a day or a duration of time?

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 899.

# HOW SHOULD BELIEVERS APPROACH END TIME ISSUES?

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- Before we dig into specific issues dealing with the end times, we need to know how to approach passages that discuss eschatological events, especially prophetic passages.
- In viewing the various theological systems and varying views on timing and fulfillment of prophecy, the key distinction can be summarized by one word: hermeneutics.
  - Hermeneutics: The science (principles) by which the meaning of the biblical text is determined.
- I want to take some time to lay a solid foundation to help you not only discern issues over these six weeks, but over a lifetime of being students of God's word.

## I. Interpreting Scripture with Hermeneutical Consistency

- When coming to and interpreting prophetic passages, one of the key distinctions you will find in varying theological systems is whether prophecy is interpreted the same way as other genres of Scripture (narrative, wisdom literature, epistolary, etc.)
  - When you do this, it becomes an inconsistency in rules of interpretation to fit within a theological framework, rather than letting Scripture speak for itself.
- This means we must interpret prophecy in same way interpret rest of Bible.
  - Literal-Historical-Grammatical Method of Interpretation
    - A hermeneutical method that seeks to discern a passages meaning according to the original author's intent to their intended audience.
    - The literal method of interpretation is that method that give to each word the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage... It is called the grammatical-historical method to emphasize...that the meaning is to be determined by both grammatical and historical considerations.<sup>3</sup>
- How do we apply this to prophecy?

### 1. We Must Interpret the Passage Literally

- This is the most important rule for interpreting prophecy.
  - "What I have advised elsewhere I here repeat and shall advise again: the Christian reader should devote his first effort to searching for what is called the literal sense." (Martin Luther)
  - "It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say." (John Calvin)

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<sup>3</sup> Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, 19.

- God based His revelation about prophecy on the normal rules of communication.
- One thing to note: Literal interpretation does not discard literary devices, such as figures of speech, but rather understands that in normal communication and in the Scriptures figures of speech are valuable as communication devices.
  - How we use figures of speech:
    - It is raining cats and dogs...
    - There were millions of mosquitoes in the backyard last night...
    - I'm so hungry I could eat a horse...
  - Bible uses similar figures of speech in prophecy:
    - **Isaiah 11:1** - *Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.*
    - Literally, this is talking of Christ, but Isaiah is using imagery of a tree, roots, and branches to signify that the one coming will be from the line of Jesse.
- We must be careful, when dealing with figures of speech, to interpret them scripturally, looking to their **context**.
  - A prime example of this is found in Ezekiel 37 and the valley of the dry bones.
    - **Ezek 37:2-5** - *He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.*
    - Some have taken this as representing salvation, however, if you continue reading, the passage itself explains the prophecy.
    - **Ezek 37:11** - *Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel..."*

## 2. We Must Compare Prophecy with Prophecy

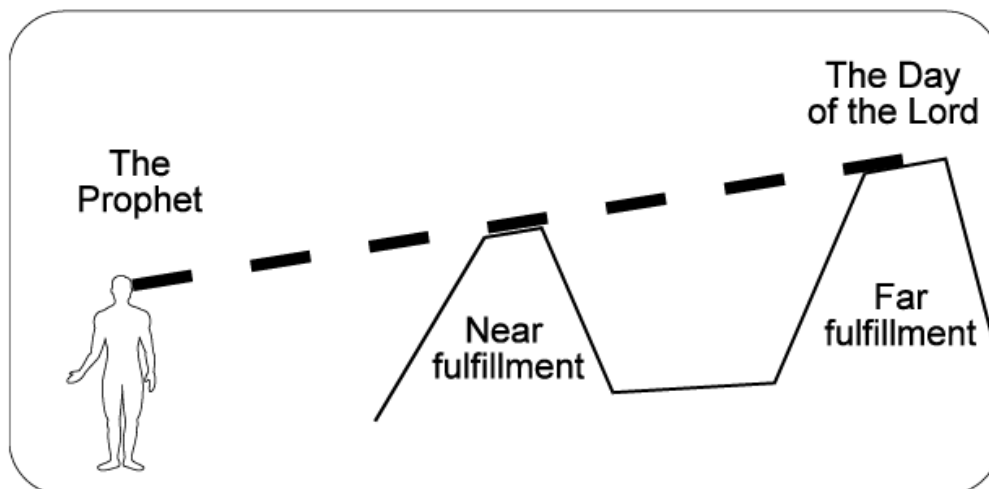
- By this, I mean that as we come to passages on end times prophecy, we want to hold them up to other passages that speak of the same events.
- This does not mean ignoring the progress of revelation (such as reading the NT into the OT)
  - We cannot disregard the statements of the Old Testament as if they are inferior to deeper, spiritual New Testament meanings.
- Rather, we must understand that God did not give all prophetic information to any individual prophet.



- Many authors over a period of centuries received God's revelation about end times.
- Since God is the author of all Scripture (2 Pet 1:20), no prophecy will contradict another prophecy.
  - For example, in our understanding of the Millennial Kingdom, it is called that because of what we read in Rev 20, which speaks of the 1000-year reign of Christ.
  - But our understanding of what will take place during that time is also informed by the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, etc.)

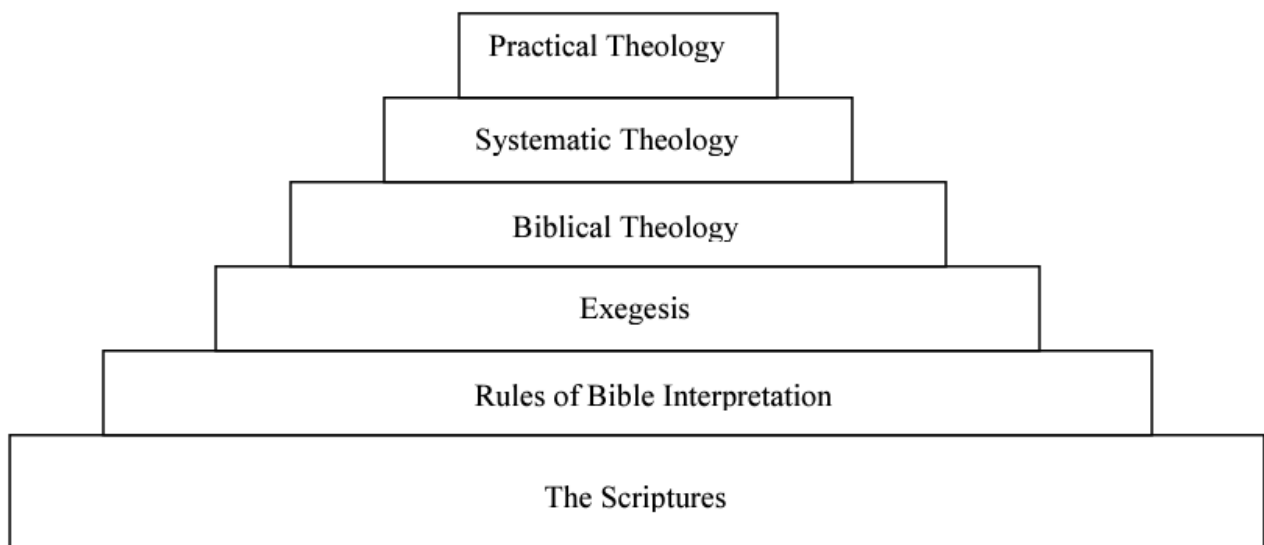
### 3. We Must Understand Near and Far Fulfillment

- When the prophets proclaimed God's message, they were frequently unaware that there was going to be an interval of time between prophetic fulfillments.
  - **Zech 9:9** - *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*
    - This was fulfilled in the first coming of Christ.
  - **Zech 9:10** - *And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, And the horse from Jerusalem; And the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; And His dominion will be from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.*
    - This will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ.
  - **Isa 61:1-2a** - *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.*
    - This was fulfilled in the first coming of Christ.
  - **Is 61:2b** - *And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn...*
    - This will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ.



## II. Interpreting Scripture With An Exegetical Foundation

- A common error in interpreting prophecy, and perhaps all Scripture, is not understanding the proper order of influence as meaning is derived from a text.
- As mentioned earlier, when starting with a theological system and using that as the lens through which you do your exegesis, it really is no longer exegesis.
  - Exegesis (lit. “to lead out of”) – deriving meaning from the text
  - Eisegesis (lit. “to lead into”) – injecting ideas into the text to derive meaning
- Stated simply, we must allow our exegesis to determine our theology, not the other way around.



- My prayer is that these will serve as guardrails for you in interpretation for any biblical text, but we will build on this foundation over the next five weeks as we survey some of the major end times issues.

### FURTHER READING:

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- *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* by Paul N. Benware
- *Grasping God's Word* by Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hayes
- *Old Testament Exegesis* by Douglas Stuart
- *Exegetical Fallacies* by D.A. Carson