



LOOKING AHEAD

What the Bible tells us about the future (eschatology)

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Eschatology is the study of what the Bible says is going to happen in the end times. Many treat Eschatology as an area of theology to be avoided. Of course, Eschatology is not as crucial as Christology or Soteriology. That does not mean, though, that it is unimportant to a Biblical worldview. How we understand Eschatology has an impact on how we should live our lives and what we are to expect to occur in God's plan.

Worldviews of the future

- The “_____” view: Life is an endless circle, spiraling back through the same things over and over again (Ancient Greeks, Hinduism, New Age).
- The “_____” view: There is no meaning to life; no ultimate goal or purpose (evolutionists, atheists). Life ceases at death.
- The _____ view: Life has a purpose and an ultimate goal. Believers will ultimately live forever in heaven with God.

What you will gain from this study

- A renewed excitement about God's future plans for believers.
- An understanding of how this life relates to the next life.
- How the return of Jesus Christ will complete our salvation.
- What eternity will be like.
- Why believers can eagerly anticipate God's future.

Five major future events

- The Tribulation
- The Rapture of the Church
- The Second Coming of Jesus Christ
- The Millennial Kingdom
- The Eternal State

Improper reactions to eschatology

- Eschatomania: An overly preoccupied with prophecy consuming all of the believer's time and study.

- Eschatophobia: The fear of prophecy due primarily to misguided teachings of this subject on TV and media.
- Close-mindedness: Holding fast to one specific view when scripture is unclear about the exact timing or nature of future events.

Methods of Interpretation

The method of interpretation used will have a significant impact on the interpretation of eschatological passages.

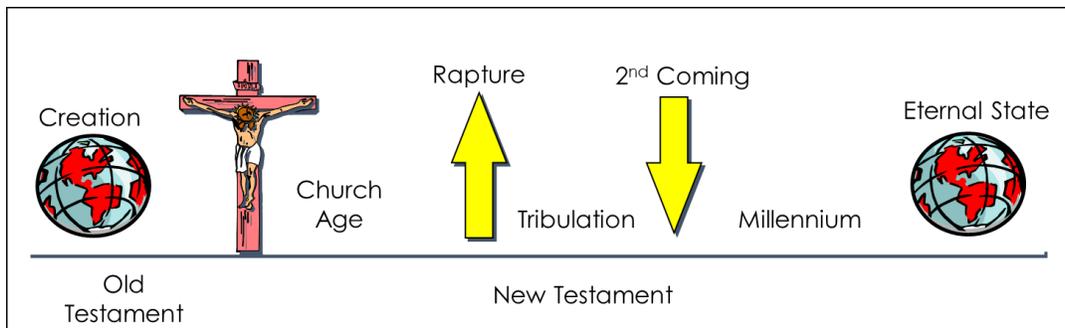
- _____ Method: An allegory is a story in which the details correspond to or reveal a "hidden," "higher," or "deeper" meaning.
- _____ Method: The literal method of interpretation gives to each word the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking.

Which method is best?

Since eschatological language in the Bible is sometimes figurative and other times literal it can become confusing as to which method of interpretation to use.

A simple rule to follow is: "If the literal meaning of any word or expression makes good sense in its connections, it is literal; but if the literal meaning does not make good sense, it is figurative" (Lockhart's Rule).

A timeline of future events¹



It is essential to remember in any discussion of eschatology that God does not intend for us to fully understand the timing of his plans. Christian scholars may not always agree on the sequence of events. But all evangelicals agree on the final results of Christ's return.

Disagreement should not cause overheated arguments or breaks in fellowship between believers. A complete consensus among Christians is not the most important goal when exploring end times. The goal of God's work is to glorify Jesus Christ.

Avoid forcing your interpretation into the Bible (eisegeting) when its meaning may not be clear. Differences in eschatological views are not considered to be differences in essential doctrines of the church.

¹ Adapted from (Walvoord, The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook, 1990, p. 385) based on the book of Revelation.