

Introduction to Eschatology

- Quotation
 - “In contrast to cyclical conceptions of history, the biblical writings understand history as a linear movement towards a goal. God is driving history towards the ultimate fulfillment of his purposes for his creation. So biblical eschatology is not limited to the destiny of the individual; it concerns the consummation of the whole history of the world, towards which all God’s redemptive acts in history are directed.” New Bible Dictionary (3rd Edition)
- Definition
 - Our English word eschatology comes from the two Greek words ἔσχατα (eschata) and λόγος (logos) meaning an account of the last things.
- Handling Prophecy
 - Strikingly, almost ¼ of Scripture was predictive prophecy when it was written.
 - While many prophecies of Scripture have already been literally fulfilled in the past, there are many more that remain unfulfilled including prophecies given in both Old and New Testament passages.
 - The New Testament writers interpreted the Old Testament scriptures using a literal hermeneutic meaning that they understood words and phrases in the normal and customary way unless the passage itself called for some other interpretation.
 - Likewise, if we are to be faithful to the text, we should interpret both Old and New Testament passages using a literal hermeneutic, recognizing the different types of text (poetic, narrative, apocalyptic, etc.) which are found in Scripture.
 - If we depart from this and begin to “spiritualize” the text, we leave ourselves open to the whims and fancies of our own imagination which will almost certainly result in an understanding of Scripture far removed from the intent of the author (God the Holy Spirit).
 - Furthermore, the Biblical record demonstrates that all prophecy which has been fulfilled has been fulfilled literally, so it is reasonable to expect that all prophecy which is yet to be fulfilled will also be fulfilled literally.
- Apocalyptic Literature
 - Daniel and Revelation are two books of the Bible that contain extensive apocalyptic writings.
 - In addition to Daniel and Revelation, apocalyptic literature is found in Ezekiel 37-48 and Zechariah 1:7-7:8.

- The English word apocalypse comes from the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις (apokalupsis) which means an unveiling or revelation.
- In order to properly interpret apocalyptic passages it is important to recognize the nature of this literary style.
- All Scripture comes from God, but passages that contain apocalyptic literature are unique in terms of the form of the message and the way it is transmitted.
- In apocalyptic literature the human author records the vision or visions that he saw.
- Apocalyptic literature is filled with symbols and/or signs.
- The central message of this literature often reveals information about the future of God's people Israel.
- Apocalyptic literature is typically in the form of prose, while most other prophecy is poetic in nature.
- When interpreting the visions, signs and symbols of an apocalyptic text, the exegete is never left to his own imagination or cleverness to discover the true meaning.
- By exploring the context or comparing the text with a parallel passage in the Bible one often finds Scripture's own interpretation of the visions, signs or symbols.
- Conclusion: Apocalyptic literature demands that Scripture be compared with Scripture in order to come to a proper understanding of the revelation being given.
- Important Terminology
 - Our study of eschatology will introduce us to certain key words or phrases of Scripture that must be properly understood.
 - As we develop this study we will come to understand terminology such as the Day of the Lord, the Abomination of Desolation, the Seventy Weeks, the Time of Jacob's Distress, the Great Tribulation, etc.
 - Evaluating these terms based upon their usage in the Scriptures is the only way to arrive at the correct scope and meaning for each word or phrase.
- How We Will Approach Our Study of Eschatology
 - Our study of eschatology will primarily be a study of Daniel and Revelation, but will include many additional passages from other books of the Bible along the way.
 - We will not be doing a verse-by-verse study, but will tackle one chapter at a time – some chapters taking more time than others.
 - As we work our way through this material it will likely become necessary to do breakout studies on particular topics in order to further our understanding of important doctrines pertaining to eschatology.