

ESCHATOLOGY
AND
BIBLICAL
HERMENEUTICS

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Bracketed comments following some scriptures assist the reader in understanding the intended meaning of these verses

We acknowledge the additional works of the various Scholars and Bible Commentaries used in conjunction with the College material. This is not to say that we agree with all their theology, but we certainly value their contribution to the Body of Christ.

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ESCHATOLOGY AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

The Book of Revelation reveals Jesus as the Prince of Peace. It tells us that Jesus, as the King of kings and Lord of lords, will triumph over all to establish this peace, and then rule over His earthly Kingdom for 1,000 years. Revelation is thus not to be viewed as a fearful and negative account of wholesale destruction, but as the means by which God deals with His wayward creation to establish peace. The major theme of Revelation is JESUS - the glorified Christ - His victories and His eternal Kingdom. With this in mind, let us consider this first study concerning the period entitled “end times.”

SOME BIBLE DESCRIPTIONS OF PROMISED FUTURE EVENTS

One event which is promised in God’s Word is the Rapture of the Church. This is the “snatching away” of all the living Saints to join the Lord Jesus in the air. We read in First Thessalonians:

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16 For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump (trumpet) of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

1 THESSALONIANS 4:17 *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them (the resurrected dead) in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

The Rapture will be followed by a time of Tribulation upon the earth, culminating in the Battle of Armageddon. There will be two parts to the seven year Tribulation period, the second part being called by many scholars “the Great Tribulation,” being much greater in intensity, suffering and affliction. This second half of the Tribulation is termed by Jeremiah “*the time of Jacob’s trouble*” (Jeremiah 30:7). This is the same time-frame referred to in Daniel 12:1 as “*a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.*” This period is spoken of by Jesus as follows:

MATTHEW 24:21 *For then shall be Great Tribulation (refers to the last three and a half years of the Tribulation), such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be (the worst that the world has ever seen).*

LUKE 21:22 *For these be the days of vengeance (judgement), that all things which are written (in the Word of God) may be fulfilled.*

REVELATION 16:16 *And He (this is God) gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue “Armageddon” (a literal place where the Battle of Armageddon will take place).*

REVELATION 19:19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him (refers to Jesus) Who sat on the horse, and against His army.

The Second Coming of Christ, and the defeat of the Antichrist and his forces at the Battle of Armageddon, will bring the period of Tribulation to an end:

ZECHARIAH 14:4 And His (Jesus') feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave (divide) in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove (move) toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

ZECHARIAH 14:5 And you (Israel) shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, you shall flee, like as you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah King of Judah: and the Lord my God shall come, and all the Saints with you (all the Saints will come with the Lord at the Second Coming - Revelation 19:14,8).

ZECHARIAH 14:12 And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people who have fought against Jerusalem (all the armies of the Antichrist); Their flesh shall consume (rot) away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth.

Satan will then be bound and locked into the Bottomless Pit, and Christ will reign upon the earth for a literal 1,000 years (known as the Millennial Kingdom).

REVELATION 20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the Bottomless Pit (the Abyss) and a great chain in his hand.

REVELATION 20:2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years (with the chain),

REVELATION 20:3 And cast him into the Bottomless Pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season (Satan is locked into the Bottomless Pit for the 1,000 years of the Millennium).

REVELATION 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them (refers to the 24 Elders who represent the entire Plan of God, which pertains to the Redeemed of all ages; we aren't told who these men are): and I saw the souls of them who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands (categorizes the Tribulation Saints Who gave their lives for the cause of Christ; the idea is that these will be included in the first Resurrection of Life, and will enjoy all its privileges); and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (This is the Kingdom Age.) (E.S.B.)

After this time, Satan is loosed for “*a little season*,” and he will again deceive the nations:

REVELATION 20:3 . . . and after that he (Satan) must be loosed a little season (released from the Bottomless Pit).

REVELATION 20:7 And when the thousand years are expired (finished), Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,

REVELATION 20:8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog (the main reason the Lord allows Satan this latitude is, it seems, to rid the Earth of all who oppose Christ; George Williams says: “The Creation Sabbath witnessed the first seduction, and the Millennial Sabbath will witness the last”; the “Gog and Magog” spoken of by John is a Hebrew term expressive of multitude and magnitude; here it embraces all nations, “the four quarters of the Earth”) to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea (proclaims the fact that virtually all of the population at that particular time, which did not accept Christ during the Kingdom Age, will throw in their lot with Satan). (E.S.B.)

REVELATION 20:9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the Saints about, and the beloved city (pictures Satan coming against Jerusalem with his army, which will be the last attack against that city): and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. (Stipulates that the Lord will make short work of this insurrection. In fact, very little information is given regarding this event, as is obvious.) (E.S.B.)

REVELATION 20:10 And the devil who deceived them was cast into the Lake of Fire and brimstone (marks the end of Satan regarding his influence in the world, and, in fact, in any part of the Creation of God). . . (E.S.B.)

Satan's ultimate and final defeat is followed by "the Resurrection of Damnation" (John 5:29) and the Great White Throne Judgement, the final judgement of all the unredeemed.

REVELATION 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) Who sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heavens fled away; and there was found no place for them.

REVELATION 20:12 And I saw the dead (the unredeemed from all the ages), small and great, stand before God (this concerns the second resurrection, the Resurrection of Damnation); and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the (Lamb's) Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works (this is the basis of the judgement).

REVELATION 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works (the judgement is just).

REVELATION 20:14 And death and hell were cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death (eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire).

After all judgement is concluded, God will establish a new heaven and a new (regenerated) earth:

2 PETER 3:10 *But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (the conclusion of the Millennium; what will happen at that time will be unexpected, and for a variety of reasons); in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. (This does not speak of Annihilation, but rather passing from one condition to another.) (E.S.B.)*

Therefore we should be:

2 PETER 3:12 *Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Day of God (concerns the Coming Eternal, Perfect Earth, which will last in that condition forever and forever), wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (“The Day of God” will be ushered in by the cataclysmic events of this Verse. There must be no sin left in the Universe.) (E.S.B.)*

2 PETER 3:13 *Nevertheless we (Christians), according to His promise, look for (look forward to this) new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness (this is what is promised - Revelation Chs. 21, 22).*

REVELATION 21:1 *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth (“New” in the Greek is “kainos,” and means “freshness with respect to age”; when it is finished, it will be new, as is obvious, but the idea is it will remain new and fresh forever and forever because there is no more sin : E.S.B.): for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away (changed not annihilated); and there was no more sea (giant oceans).*

After the earth is restored to its original perfect state, the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, will come from heaven to earth to be the eternal dwelling place of God and all His Saints from throughout the ages. Thus God's actual throne will descend to the earth and peace will reign for eternity.

REVELATION 21:2 *And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem (containing all the Saints), coming down from God out of heaven (God's throne and His headquarters will then be on the earth), prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (The city is the eternal home of the Redeemed.)*

REVELATION 21:3 *And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. (Finally proclaims that which God intended from the beginning). (E.S.B.)*

REVELATION 21:4 *And God shall wipe away all tears (every teardrop) from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (all the effects of the Fall will be no more)."*

REVELATION 21:5 *And He Who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said unto me, "Write: for these words are true and faithful." (God will bring all this to pass, as He has promised.)*

REVELATION 21:6 *And He said unto me, "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him who is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. (This relates to the present time.)*

REVELATION 21:7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son (a joint-heir with Christ - Romans 8:17). ”

This is the order in which these events will take place. When everything is concluded, there will be no more curse and no more evil, only the continuing blessing of God’s presence and glory. God’s servants, the glorified Saints, will reign with God and Christ forever. We will be with Him and serve Him and see His face:

REVELATION 22:3 And there shall be no more curse (because sin will no longer be present in any capacity): but the throne of God and of the Lamb (this term reminds us of the Cross and the price paid) shall be in it (the New Jerusalem); and His servants shall serve Him (gladly):

REVELATION 22:4 And they shall see His face; and His Name shall be in their foreheads (speaks of ownership, having been bought with a price).

REVELATION 22:5 And there shall be no night there (in the City); and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light (“the Lamb is the light thereof ” - Revelation 21:23): and they (the Saints) shall reign for ever and ever.

The order of these events is based on the futurist view of Revelation, for there are various schools of thought regarding the end-time period or apocalypse, as outlined in the Book of Revelation. Some believe the events of Revelation have already taken place, some believe

Revelation contains no literal reality (being all allegory), and some believe Revelation refers to the time when Christ will return to the earth to overthrow all the powers of evil. We believe that this last view, the futurist view, is that which the scriptures reveal, with a literal interpretation of the detail of the Book of Revelation being both appropriate and required. On this basis, Revelation Chs. 4 through to 22 deal with events which will take place after the Church Age. In fact Revelation Chs. 6 through to 19 relate to the seven year period called the Tribulation. The Rapture or “*the first resurrection*” (Revelation 20:6), signalling the end of the Church Age, will take place before the Tribulation, and will occur between the events of Revelation Ch.3 and Revelation Ch.4. The future literal 1,000 year reign of Christ, called the Millennium (the Kingdom Age), will take place after Armageddon and the casting of Satan into the Abyss. This is detailed in Revelation Ch.20.

REVELATION 20:4 and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

REVELATION 20:5 But the rest of the dead (pertains to the second resurrection - all the unredeemed, those whose souls and spirits are currently in hell) ***lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*** (The first resurrection pertains to all the Redeemed, every Saint of God who has ever lived from Adam to the end of the Tribulation. All will receive glorified bodies. Also note that these verses tell us that the Resurrection of Life and the Resurrection of Damnation will be separated by 1,000 years.)

REVELATION 20:6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection: on (over) such the second death (which refers to being cast into the Lake of Fire) has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

This is the Premillennialist world view of the interpretation of Revelation, i.e., that we are living in a time which is prior to the Millennium, the literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on the earth. After the 1,000 years, Satan will be released for “*a little season*” (Revelation 20:3), to again deceive the nations. God will destroy this last rebellion, with Satan being permanently cast into the Lake of Fire. “*The Resurrection of Damnation*” and the Great White Throne Judgement will then take place (Revelation 20:11-15), after which the New Jerusalem will descend to the earth and God will dwell with His people forever (Revelation Ch.21).

The Amillennialist world view interprets Revelation 20:1-6 figuratively, and so rejects the whole idea of Jesus reigning on the earth for 1,000 years after the Second Coming. Amillennialists major on the present rule of God within Believers and ignore the future Kingdom of God, spiritualizing the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6) while considering the second one to be literal (Revelation 20:11-15)!!

The Postmillennialist world view interprets Revelation 20:1-6 to mean the figurative purification of the world by God through the Church. They have a similar interpretation of Daniel 2:34-35 which is the stone in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The idea is that once the Church has covered the earth fully with the Gospel and changed it from glory to

glory, then the Lord will return to rule over it. Therefore a golden age of 1,000 years will precede Christ's Second Coming! Some even believe that Satan was bound when the Lord died on the cross. This view suffers when it becomes blatantly obvious that despite the presence and influence of the Church, earthly conditions seem to be worsening, not improving. However the current "**Kingdom Now**" movement is adding its doctrinal weight to this view - that the Church will be presented as a spotless, faultless Bride to Christ on His return. This is not scriptural for it denies the Rapture. The two views mentioned are erroneous because they have been derived from faulty hermeneutics, namely the spiritualizing of that which is meant to be taken literally.

Let us state from the beginning that all teaching from this college concerning end times is based on a literal interpretation of the scriptures. To be properly understood, eschatology, being the study of "last things," needs proper hermeneutics. It would be timely to briefly revisit the subject of hermeneutics before we begin to study the scriptures concerning the weighty yet intriguing topic of end times or "last things."

UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES

In seeking to understand scripture, we may need to be aware of the following definitions:

***"HERMENEUTICS:** the science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning of the biblical text is determined.*

***EXEGESIS:** the determination of the meaning of the biblical text in its historical and literary contexts.*

EXPOSITION: *the communication of the meaning of the text along with its relevance to present-day hearers.*

HOMILETICS: *the science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning and relevance of the biblical text are communicated in a preaching situation.*

PEDAGOGY: *the science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning and relevance of the biblical text are communicated in a teaching situation.”¹*

There are many methods of interpretation of scripture including the allegorical method, the mystical method, the devotional method, the rationalistic method, the literal method, etc. The two we will mention here are the allegorical method and the literal method.

“The allegorical method presumes that beneath the plain and obvious sense of scripture lies its true meaning. It believes that what the words of Scripture literally say are only external “chaff” which hides the true spiritual “wheat” of the Word.

In relation to Scripture, the literal method of interpretation is the oldest in existence. It is said to have originated with Ezra, the Father of Hermeneutics . . .

The literal method assumes that the words of Scripture in their plain evident meaning are reliable; that God intended His revelation to be understood by all who believe; that the words of Scripture communicate what God wants man to know; and that God based the communication of truth on the regular laws governing written communication, thereby intending for it to be interpreted by those same laws. This is not to deny the Holy Spirit’s involvement in both the production and the interpretation of the Bible.”²

(underlines added)

It is not our task to introduce meaning into scripture but to extract meaning from scripture. This should be primarily done according to the literal methodology whereby scripture is interpreted in terms of context. This involves plain and evident meanings which must always integrate harmoniously with the Bible as a whole. These meanings are to be understood, with the help of the Holy Spirit, by all who believe. As we interpret scripture according to the literal method, we discover that the Holy Spirit reveals not only “the letter of the law” but “the spirit of the law” as well. The interpretation of scripture must also, of necessity, allow for the use of idiom and various forms of exaggerated language - for the literal truth will be in the figurative language, e.g. Matthew 7:3-5; Matthew 23:24, 27; Mark 10:25; Luke 14:26.

There are some truths contained in the scriptures which do require the use of so called “spiritual maths” to be clearly discerned. This includes the interpretation of some prophetic, and also some symbolic material. Within this context, interpretation must always conform to that which can be described as the harmony of the scriptures. For this kind of interpretive work, we are always dependent, of course, on the Person of the Holy Spirit, for it is He Who functions as the Revealer of truth (John 14:26; John 16:13-14).

Again let us state that we are to seek, find and embrace the meaning of scripture. We are not to give meaning to scripture, but rather, with proper hermeneutics and the graces of the Holy Spirit, to find out what scripture means or is saying. This way will lead us to understand the Bible by literal interpretation. This is Biblical

“exegesis” which is the determination of the meaning of the Biblical text in its historical and literary contexts. Note that “exegesis” is the process of interpretation, otherwise known as applied hermeneutics (which supplies the principles of interpretation). Exegesis is in contrast to “eisegesis” which is to determine meaning by reading one’s own ideas into a passage. This is what takes place with, for instance, the allegorical, mystical and rationalistic methods of Biblical interpretation. We, along with many others in the Christian faith, believe, teach and practise an exegetical approach to scripture. The allegorical method of interpreting the Bible leads people into inappropriate mystical meanings concerning the scriptures, for this method assumes that what is plainly stated is not what God really meant. The literal method, on the other hand, considers, in general, that the meaning of the scriptures, when proper hermeneutics are applied, is both plain and evident, and therefore clearly understood.

“God has revealed Himself and His will in written form because humanity is comprised of intelligent beings capable of thought and reason. Assuming that God desired to reveal Himself and His will to His creation, especially humanity, in a way in which humanity would clearly understand it, does it not make sense that He would do so in a medium which could essentially be universally understood, namely, in accordance with known rules of language? In other words, is it not logical to assume that God would communicate His truth to His creation on an understandable level of that creation? If the words of God were to be understood by humanity, of necessity God would have to use language, including the universal rules of grammar applicable to and which control all language which was understandable to humanity. Therefore, it is incumbent for the interpreter to search out the plain and simple meaning of the words which the biblical”

writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write. This is what is meant, by the way, by literal interpretation. Literal interpretation is nothing more and nothing less than the grammatical understanding and interpretation of the Bible. Martin Luther once said:

'I here once more repeat, what I have so often insisted on, that the Christian should direct his efforts toward understanding the so-called literal sense of Scripture, which alone is the substance of faith and of Christian theology, which alone will sustain in the hour of trouble and temptation, and which will triumph over sin, death, and the gates of hell, to the praise and glory of God. The allegorical sense is usually uncertain, and by no means safe to build our faith upon; for it depends for the most part on human opinion only, on which if a man lean he will find it no better than an Egyptian reed.'”³

(underlines added)

Within literal interpretation, also called the grammatical and historical method, when figures or metaphors are used, the passage of scripture still teaches literal truth, e.g. John 10:1-16, 26-29; John 15:1-8. So even throughout scripture, when allegory and figurative language are occasionally used, there will be clear literal truth which is easily discerned with the help of God's graces. As stated, we cannot read into scripture what we think but rather we must allow the scripture to speak to us its own message. We believe that only through literal interpretation can we have the proper focus needed so that the scripture can reveal to us its meaning. The literal truth revealed by the figures in Luke 8:4-15, for example, is clearly understandable, and actually explained by the scriptures themselves.

When interpreting let's say the figurative language and the prophetic in books like Ezekiel and Revelation, we believe that the images and figures should be understood by a literal meaning. For example, there will truly be a future regenerated earth (Revelation 21:1), there are actually elders positioned around the throne of God (Revelation 4:4) who represent the complete work of God throughout the total span of time, and there are also seal, vial and trumpet judgements which will be poured out upon the earth: e.g. Revelation Ch.6; Revelation 8:7-13; Revelation Ch.16! Even the symbolic images of Revelation, such as the "*man-child*" of Revelation 12:5, which is Jesus, or the terrible beast seen by the Apostle John (Revelation 12:1-4) which represents all the earthly kingdoms that have oppressed Israel during Daniel's prophetic time frame, have clear literal meaning. So too the Temple illustrated in so much detail in Ezekiel Ch's 40 to 48, describes the actual Millennial Temple which will exist during Christ's 1,000 year reign on earth.

People who spiritualize scriptures presume that there are allegories when there are none and so create a meaning never intended. For example, they may say that Noah's flood was not a literal flood but a myth which exemplified the particular concepts of good, evil and judgement to which the people of the day adhered. This is to take a "liberal" approach to the interpretation of scripture and to impose meaning rather than extract meaning. A fundamentalist approach to scripture holds the view that the Word of God is true and inspired, and interprets what is there in a literal sense.

To use this method of literal interpretation of eschatology will lead one to Premillennialism, a belief that following Christ's Second Coming, He will reign on the earth for 1,000 years. Eschatology is a word derived from the Greek "eschatos" which means "last" or "last things." So eschatology is the study of "last things." Included in this are all the predictions that related to future events at the time they were written, events which have since been fulfilled. If one does not have this literal approach to interpreting these prophecies, then one will be led into error. Examples of such error are Amillennialism and Postmillennialism, as we have already mentioned.

For further information or teaching material to help you grow in the Christian faith, please visit:

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NOTES

NOTES

- 1 Dr. Larry Hunt, Biblical Exposition, pg.11.
- 2 Kevin Conner and Ken Malmin, Interpreting the Scriptures, pgs.15 and 18.
- 3 Dr. Larry Hunt, Bible Exposition, pg.46.

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to see people living
in abundant life
by the power of God
through Jesus Christ"*



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