

The Bible's Own System of Eschatology

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[0:00] Well, last week in our introduction, we tried to demonstrate that eschatology is important. It's not a subject that's left to those who have a disposition for the strange and for the exotic or for the unknown.

Rather, eschatology, the last things, deals with the present reign of Christ. Right now, His reign in heaven. It deals with His return in glory one day.

With the destruction of the wicked. With the making of a new heavens and a new earth. With the judgment. With heaven and hell. These are bread and butter issues of the Bible, of the Gospel.

You remember, I think it was Jefferson that didn't like the deity of Christ and went through and cut out of His Bible any reference to the deity of Christ.

You can imagine what the Gospel of John looked like when he got done. Well, I would say to you, if you went through your Bible and cut out anything that had to do with eschatology, you would have scraps left.

[1:11] You wouldn't have the story. Because it runs right through. It's a thread that runs right from Genesis, right through to Revelation. So intimately interwoven into every issue, every biblical doctrine.

Is this truth of the end times? The last things. I couldn't help but notice after our study last week, going into the worship hour, how many of our hymns are just drenched with references to Christ's return.

Perhaps you'll notice it again as we worship today. I don't know what hymns have been selected. But again, that's the blessed hope. The glorious appearing of our great God and Savior.

That's the perspective. That's the next thing on the calendar that we're waiting for. And that perspective should indeed be one that evokes anticipation and prayers.

Even so, come Lord Jesus. So we saw its importance, but we also made a brief overview of what the church has believed for the past 2,000 years about the end times.

[2:18] I'm going to be referring back to this sheet, and so I want you to hang on to that. Dick, were there any left? Or Max, were there any left on the table out there? Does anyone need one?

It wasn't here last week, perhaps. Are there any of the last week's sheets? There are none left. I need to make some more then, if anyone needs them. Does anyone need this week's sheet?

If you don't have a study guide this week, hold up your hand. All right, we need one over here in the back. Lou. This is this week's study guide.

Just basically, we wanted to be familiar with the landscape as we begin this study on the end times.

We want to know the basic questions, the terminology, the options to be considered.

What have people believed about the end times? And so, this sheet just very briefly sets forth the beliefs of four different viewpoints of eschatology.

[3:19] I've basically lifted these diagrams from the end times made simple by Samuel Waldron with a few changes.

And really, right now, I would like to make another change. I realize that it, and Ed pointed out last week as well, the inconsistencies of the charts.

You notice how the first two end with the eternal state. Well, you'd never get to the eternal state and the two premillennial views, and that doesn't reflect their position.

They obviously get to the eternal state and their views, too. But the chart just doesn't go far enough to show where they believe that eternal state begins. So, what I want you to do is if on those last two, here at the end of the arrow, you've got something like this.

The thousand years, and then you've got this arrow pointing on to the future. Really, that arrow shouldn't be there. There should be a line at that point rather than an arrow.

[4:28] You should have a line at that point. After the thousand years, there will be what they believe is the release of Satan, and the gathering of a multitude of enemies of Christ.

Christ returning, or not returning, I should say. He's already returned in their scheme. But Christ crushing that rebellion against him. And then the judgment of the wicked.

And then the eternal state begins. So, at the end of the thousand years is where their eternal state begins. So, on both those last two, if you just draw a line after their thousand years, and then an arrow marked eternal state, that would more faithfully show you what it is that they believe all the way to the eternal state, just as these first two have demonstrated the eternal state.

So, then on the right-hand side of your paper, you should see how each view ends in the eternal state, be it heaven or hell. So, any questions as you've had time to just look over this?

Ed? Is that true of both the historic and the dispensational? Yes, that if there is the eternal... Is it loosed at the end of the historical? Correct.

[5:46] And that that thousand years, they would strongly want to let it be known that that thousand years is not the eternal state. That is a golden age on this earth that is not the eternal state.

So, I'm not telling you anything they would not want us to know that... Don't confuse the millennium with the eternal state. That's what they would criticize others for doing. For saying, well, you're acting as if what the Bible talks about is the eternal state.

We'd rather see it as a thousand years after which the eternal state then begins. So, if you would just make that correction, we'll be returning to that issue. But any other questions over the four views?

All right. We said there's obviously differences within each view, but these are the basic four kinds. Now, it was also asked, what are the verses that these different views use to hold to their teaching? This is Aaron's book, Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond, Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, Amillennialism by Zondervan.

[6:56] And it lets each one of them, each author, state their position, and then it gives the other two authors an opportunity to interact with their position at the end of each presentation.

So, it's helpful for showing what each view believes and what they go to in terms of scriptures to support their beliefs. So, again, we just wanted to familiarize ourselves with what has been the different views and are continuing to be the views on eschatology.

Now, today we begin to look at the foundation, or I should say the Bible's presentation of the last things. This is what men have said that the Bible teaches.

Well, we want to just kind of start with a blank sheet of paper and say, okay, now let's go to the Bible and see what does it teach about the last things. Where shall we begin? With the little horn of the fourth beast in Daniel's prophetic vision in chapter 7 of Daniel.

Shall we go there and try to figure out what that little horn means? Or shall we go to Revelation 16, 13 and try to understand the meaning of the three unclean spirits that look like frogs?

[8:14] Well, you can see that to dive right into such particulars and to such passages is to ask for trouble and is to court confusion. That's not a good place to begin.

Your child comes to you wanting to know how to read. I want to learn to read, Daddy. That's never happened, has it? Well, suppose it has. Where do you start?

You don't start with the word premillennialism and say, say it after me. You start very basic, very simple, with A, B, C, the alphabet, the building blocks on which then you can later take him to a 15-letter word like premillennialism and he can sound it out and he can figure out how to read big words.

But without learning the basics, he'll be lost before difficult words. Well, the very manner in which we go about this study is not unimportant.

There's a wrong way and a right way to study eschatology. Sam Waldron is convinced that the reason there's so much general confusion on the topic is because people start in the wrong place and then proceed in the wrong manner.

[9:27] And so we're going to begin with what the Bible teaches by looking at some rules of interpretation. We had a course in Sunday school some years ago on hermeneutics, how to interpret the Bible.

I'm just going to give a basic review of three different principles that should help us on how do we interpret the Bible. They're important whatever passage we're studying.

They're especially important as we're studying the end times. So three crucial principles for interpreting the Bible and they'll point us as to where to begin this study.

The first rule is the clear before the difficult. The difficult passages do exist. You've read your Bibles, you've scratched your head, and so have I.

There are passages that are hard to understand. But this first rule says don't go there first. Don't try to figure out the little horn on the fourth beast. Go to the clear passages first and then go to the difficult.

[10 : 36] Then second rule, the literal before the figurative. Now there's much figurative language in the Bible. And the Holy Spirit does not mean for such language to be interpreted literally.

Figurative language especially abounds in the arena of eschatology. There's a whole form of literature, a genre of literature called the apocalyptic that deals with visions, that's loaded with symbols.

And we do injustice to the Holy Spirit to try to put a literal meaning upon symbolic language. For instance, Revelations talks about this woman sitting on seven hills.

Now she's either a very big woman or we're meant to interpret that symbolically. Well, which do you think it is? I think it's symbolic language.

We may differ over what that lady is, who she is, what the seven hills are. That's not my purpose at this point. All I'm saying is eschatology is loaded, especially the apocalyptic language of Revelation and the visions of Daniel loaded with symbols.

[11 : 54] And they are not always easy to figure out what they symbolize. Now thankfully, the Bible is not only made up of symbolic language, that it sometimes speaks very clear and very literal in terms of discourse and teaching and very straightforward.

And so this rule of interpretation says we should go to the literal before we go to the figurative portions of Scripture. Don't run to the book of Revelation first to come up with your view of eschatology.

Don't run to Daniel's visions first. You should get there. Any eschatology that doesn't get to Daniel in Revelation is woefully inadequate. But just don't begin there.

Let the literal passages establish the clear boundaries for you and then go to the visions and the symbolic meaning and let what you learned from the literal passages shine light on the symbolic passages.

Don't start the other way around if you don't want to end in confusion. You see, because God does not contradict himself, I know that what I learn about the end times in the straightforward literal passages will not contradict what he tells me in vision in symbolic language.

[13 : 18] So having learned this in straightforward language, I can then go with this knowledge to the symbols, to the visions, and say whatever it means, I know it doesn't mean something outside of this.

So it helps set the parameters, the boundary lines, the clear, the literal before the difficult and the figurative. I don't run first to the parables to hammer out a doctrine of justification of how I can be right with God.

Now the parables will cast light on that, but we go first just to those clear statements of the Apostle Paul, that it's by grace through faith.

And then we can go to the parables and we can see how they enhance and bring out, but whatever the parables say, you can never press on them a meaning that means anything other than by grace through faith.

And so it is as we deal with eschatology, the literal passages before the figurative. And then lastly, the general before the detailed. We'll be immensely helped if we get the big picture first, before we run to the details.

[14 : 31] If we see the overall structure of history first, the big timeline picture first, and then fill in the details with the specifics into this general scheme.

But if you study the details first, you won't know where to put that fact. So you study this little horn, but where do you plug it in? You don't have the timeline yet. You've got to get the big picture first, and then the little details will find a peg on which to hang.

And one of the purposes of this study is to give you a basic big picture of the overall scheme of the end times. So that as you're reading your Bible Monday through Monday, week by week, day by day, you'll have a framework in which to plug what you're reading.

And so I trust that our study will indeed bring light to many other Bible passages that you are reading on your own. It helps when you're reading any book of the Bible to have a general idea about what that book is about, doesn't it?

To have the big picture first. To know that John writes this gospel so that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that believing on Him, you might have life through His name.

[15 : 48] That's the big picture. And then we go into the details. Oh, that's why He records this miracle, and that's why He records these seven sayings of Jesus. He's wanting to show us that He's the Messiah and He's God and that we need to believe on Him.

Or 1 John, these things have I written unto you that you may know that you have eternal life. Oh, we get the big picture. John's writing this epistle so that Christians can know and have assurance that they have eternal life.

And then we can go to the specifics of each point that he makes. But we understand the overarching scheme, and that's what we're seeking to do this morning then to give the general lay of the land first and then to descend to the particulars.

Now, we can change the imagery, the illustration, and say this morning what we're after is a basic floor plan. If you've got a picture of a blueprint, this morning we're not going to tell you where the furniture is going to be on that floor plan.

We're not going to tell you where to put the vase and where to put the chandelier. All we've got this morning is the basic floor plan. Here's the living room. Here's the dining room.

[16 : 59] The big picture. And we need to get the big floor plan right first. And then we'll be able to put the pieces of prophetic furniture into their proper room.

Now, if we proceed along these lines then, the clear before the difficult, literal before figurative, general before the detailed, will be delivered from much of the mind-boggling complexity of certain schemes and will be reduced to a divine and biblical simplicity because, as Pastor Waldron has pointed out, the basic plan of God's Word is simple.

Its basic plan is simple. So let's begin then this morning to examine the Bible's own system of eschatology. And we start with the most basic of timelines.

You draw a line on your page. And I've done it for you in the notes. And you've got one dividing line between. That's where we're starting. And the Bible divides all of space-time history into two ages. This age and the age to come. The present state and the future eternal state. That which is yet to come.

[18 : 23] That's how the Bible divides the time of this world. And the Greek word, *ion*, is the word that is used here.

And we're going to be looking at different passages. And it refers not only to time, but also to space. And so you'll find the word translated sometimes as age and other times as world because it's talking about the age of this world.

It's talking about right here, this space of the world. And so Waldron would like a translation of world slash age. But it's this world age and the world age to come.

This age and the coming age. Now there's 16 places in the New Testament where this terminology is used. It's not a small little deal. It's huge. It's the way that God has presented to us all of time being divided.

And we want to look at some references. And what we're going to do this morning, if you can, is do more than one thing at a time. We're going to do several things at the same time at once.

[19 : 31] We're going to, first of all, demonstrate this simple basic division of time. Is that indeed what the Bible does? I trust that we can demonstrate that this morning, that that's how God divides all of time.

But at the same time, we're wanting to develop a description of those two ages. And so really, that line could go right down. I tried to keep the margins separate here so that you can see that everything after, I mean, you've got the references out here, and then we're going to cull from those references.

What does it tell us about this age? And that's stated down on this side of the paper. What does it tell us about the age to come? So we're not only seeing, yes, this is the way God divides time, but we're also at the same time going to be seeing, well, what does He say about those two different ages?

And then thirdly, I trust that we'll be drawing some truths, some biblical truths along the way, pertinent truths and applications from this study.

So this morning, it's a very basic study. We're just saying two different periods of time, this age and the age to come.

[20 : 40] Now let's look to the scripture and see if it's true. Now I've put one, two, three, four here above the references, and down at the bottom I've put the truths that those references demonstrate.

And truth number one down at the bottom is that this age and the age to come, taken together, exhaust all time, including the endless time of the eternal state.

Turn with me to Matthew 12. We're just going to have a Bible study this morning of most of these passages or as far as we can get. Matthew chapter 12, verse 32.

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Now our purposes this morning are not to discuss what this unforgivable sin is. The purpose is simply to notice the way that Jesus refers to all of time.

[21 : 45] He says here that this sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come.

Now, turn over to the parallel passage in Mark's Gospel. Mark gives his account of Jesus' words in a little bit different terminology and it shows us an important point.

Mark 10, if you want to hold your place in Matthew 12, it's a parallel passage. I'm sorry, Mark 3. Mark 3 and verse 29.

Again, verse 28 tells us, I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven.

He is guilty of an eternal sin. What does the comparison of these two passages tell us about the age to come?

[22 : 47] How big is that age? Eternal. It encompasses eternity. So, that's an important point here under the age to come.

It includes an eternity of time. Do you see that from the texts? The two texts? If it's a sin that won't be forgiven in the age to come, that it is an eternal sin, it means that it will never, ever be forgiven. It's an eternal age. This age to come. All right? Mark chapter 10 and verse 30. Mark 10 and verse 30.

Again, this is our Lord Jesus' way of dividing time. Mark 10 and verse 30 says, let me back up to verse 29 after Peter says, we've left everything to follow you.

I tell you the truth, Jesus replied, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me in the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields, and with them, persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life.

[24 : 12] life. You see how Jesus divides all of time? The present age and the age to come. And what is given in the age to come?

To Christians. Eternal life. Again, do you see that the age to come is the eternal state. It includes all future time.

Now, what do we learn from this passage about this age? What happens to Christians in this age? Along with these blessings.

Persecutions. That's a note we should put in this age. You get all these blessings in this age with persecutions. So, persecution is part and parcel of this age for the Christian.

As Paul says, if you live godly in Christ Jesus, you will suffer persecution. Whether it be insult, whether it be scoffing, mocking, or whether it be bloodletting.

[25 : 17] So, persecution of Christians marks this age. And, we can infer from that that the age to come is the absence of persecution then.

It's eternal life for Christians in the age to come, the absence of persecution. All right, then 1 Timothy chapter 6. Here's an apostle's description of time.

and, we notice that it's the very same terminology from Paul as our Savior used. 1 Timothy 6 and verses 17 through 19.

Command those who are rich in this present world, this present age, not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

[26:38] According to Paul, you have this present world, it's the word for age, this present age, world age, contrasted with the coming age, and there's also its riches and life are contrasted.

You have riches and the life below contrasted with the riches and life of the coming age. The riches and life of this age and the riches and kind of life of the coming age.

That life of the coming age is truly life. It's really life. It's life indeed. It's eternal life. So, we have this demonstration, I trust, of this first point that this age and the age to come taken together exhaust all of time and include the eternal state.

We're just looking at verses that hold this terminology in them. The second truth that we see from the next passage is that this age and the age to come are qualitatively different states of human existence and qualitatively different periods in the history of the world.

You can't blur these two states, this age and the age to come. The very way that people live in these two ages are qualitatively different and not to be confused.

[28:09] Luke chapter 20 and verses 34 through 36. The difference between this age and the age to come as we see in this passage is the difference between natural and supernatural.

You remember the context Jesus is being tricked or the Pharisees would like to try to trick him because they didn't believe in a resurrection and Jesus did.

And they're trying to make Jesus view of the resurrection to look so absurd that it can't possibly be true. And so they say well Lord suppose there was once a man who had a wife and he died before leaving any children.

And so according to the Levirate law his to her brother or to his brother and then he dies and that without children and the third and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth and seventh husband in the resurrection whose wife will she be?

Well she was all their wives on earth but that's going to be a problem if there's such a thing as a resurrection can you see how foolish this view is about believing that all who gets her that's the question they pose seeking to poke fun at Jesus view of the resurrection notice his answer verse 34 verse yes 34 Jesus replied the people of this age there's our terminology the people of this age marry and are given in marriage but those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage and they can no longer die for they are like the angels they are God's children since they are children of the resurrection all right there's at least four things that we can learn here what do we learn about this age in this age what happens people marry all right you've got marriage in the age to come no marriage write that down that's important all that is included in the age to come there's no marriage in that state what else happens in this age death what happens in the age to come no death that's important write it down no death in the age to come in this age the word that

[30:52] I've put down here is natural men because it's contrasted with the age to come they are resurrected men they're children of the resurrection so you have natural men who know natural life but in the age to come you only have resurrected men children of the resurrection and then in this age and this again by inference we have the mixture of good and evil men because in the age to come what is pointed out is that only the worthy attain to that age you see that in verse 35 but those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age you don't have the good and the bad partaking in the age to come they partake in this age side by side natural men but only the resurrected men only those considered worthy will partake of the age to come they're

God's children that's what they're called here so the Sadducees were sadly an heir weren't they as Jesus tells them elsewhere because they knew not the scriptures nor the power of God they made the silly confusing confusion of confusing the ages they thought of the age to come as this age we've got marriage in this age surely in the age to come there'll be marriage right and their story proceeds on that foundation and Jesus says wait a minute man you're all wrong that age isn't like this age the whole quality and way of life of that age is different than this age marriage here death here no marriage no death there so Jesus wants to show that these two ages are qualitatively different the whole way of life the whole period in history it's different now we don't have time to demonstrate that from the parable of the tares but it shows the same thing in that parable that you have a mixture of wheat and tares in this life good and evil now but only the sons of the kingdom entering into the age to come so this age does not evolve or change through any gradual process

into the age to come there there is a great work a supernatural work that must instigate this new age you go from two different states this is a natural state marriage and death but the age to come is one of resurrection supernatural power truth number three yes well at least in this passage he's thinking of this present world and that's where

I think that the definition of aeon the age is both space and time it's not just talking about future time but it's talking about future world time and Jesus is saying on this world in human history on this world you have a natural order now but you're going to have an age to come where it's going to be absolutely different so I think in this passage Jesus referenced to the age to come wherever he uses it bears the idea of space and place he's talking this world wherever hell will be it will not be in this world and so this world age is marked only by the children of God in Jesus mind that's that's the way he's using this terminology that's a good question I didn't emphasize the idea of place Waldron takes time to show that God is the only being that exists out of space and time that we as human finite people will always exist in space and time there's some hymns sometimes that speak of when time shall be no more there is no such thing there will always be space and time for finite human beings like you and me I think that teaching has come from the old King James translation of passage in Revelation where it says there will be no more time I don't have that right here right now but the NIV and most other translations realize that and translate that word there will be no more delay that the announcement of the angel is saying not that way and that's the way that word can be translated we are space time creatures and we will always live in space as well as time and I think Jesus is referring here to this space this world age now knows men both of the good and the evil but the coming age will not have anyone but those who are righteous the sons of God the sons of the resurrection let's take truth three as far as we can this morning and it's simply that this age is and always will be an evil age Galatians 1 and verse 4 notice how Paul refers to this age speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father the whole purpose for Christ coming was to rescue us from this present age why because it's an evil age and that's his mission to rescue us from this present evil age It's an age characterized by evil so much so that Jesus has come to rescue us from it so that's an important point this age whatever it encompasses is an evil age it's the present evil age 2nd

[37 : 13] Corinthians 4 and verse 4 again the apostle weighs in on this age and now the god of this age the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God who is the god of this age in this passage he's satan and he's the one who blinds the minds of unbelievers they can't see they don't see anything!

Christ anything in it's god and if he's it's god it can only be evil it's always an evil state it ever will be an evil age with satan as it's god and then romans 12 and verse 2 a very familiar passage to us but perhaps you didn't realize that this is the same Greek word that we've been looking at this morning do not conform any longer to the pattern or the world do not conform any longer to the age of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will don't be conformed to this age why not because it's an evil age and if you conform to this age you will be evil this age is characterized by that which you as a

Christian cannot conform yourself to 1st Corinthians chapter 1 here he uses this language in speaking about the wisdom of the world 1st Corinthians 1 20 where is the wise man where is the scholar where is the philosopher of this age has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world the philosopher of this age advocates the wisdom of this world which is folly to God this age is marked by folly not by divine wisdom you have the same thing found in chapter 2 verse 6 we do however speak a message of wisdom among the mature but not the wisdom of this age Christians don't speak the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are coming no we speak of God's secret wisdom a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began none of the rulers of this age understood it for if they had they would have not crucified the Lord of glory both the wisdom of this age and the rulers of this age are devoid of the wisdom of God this age is! by folly they're the standards of this age if you are wise by the standards of this age you need to get foolish real quick because this age is foolish and evil and not to be conformed to now when we think about wisdom of this world some of you are thinking and indeed the term philosophy was used you might be thinking well that's what the world is teaching!

in the universities that's what he's talking about well that's part of the wisdom of this world but it's also the whole thought patterns of the man who's sitting around the bar getting drunk this morning it's the wisdom of this age of the man who lives for sexual pleasure of the woman who lives for material things they're following the wisdom of this age and it's evil and it will always be evil and that's why you can't conform to it Christian that's why you must be different from the world so this age is and always will be marked as evil that is the basic character of this age remember Mark told us this age is marked by persecution Jesus said it and that gives a certain problem to post millennial and we'll have to stop there I'll let that be your homework assignment what problem does this third truth give to post millennial take your chart home and look at the first view of post millennial and what we saw of that and then look at these first three points especially truth number three and see if you can discern what problems does the post millennial have this construct of the ages being one of this age and the age to come and this age being one characteristically evil our time's gone if you've got questions give them to me and give me a week to work on an answer will you and we'll proceed from here next week we're dismissed