

Eschatology
The Study of End Times
Part 1

Introduction

1. Define eschatology: the study of the end of the world; it includes things like the return of Jesus Christ, the Millennium, the antichrist, judgment of wicked and reward of the saints, the new heavens and earth, eternity, etc.
2. The two most important questions regarding eschatology:
 - a. The first is, Are these events to be interpreted literally or symbolically/allegorically?
 - b. The second is, Are they referring to the past, present, or future...or possibly even a mixture of past, present and future events?
3. The Church has struggled with and debated these two questions for the past 2000 years and it's led to different views of eschatology

A. The Four Different Views of the Millennium

1. There are four primary views of eschatology and how these events will play out:
 - a. The first view is **HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM**:
 - 1) This was the view of the early Church (first three centuries)
 - 2) They interpreted the end time passages as literal, future events with Jesus returning before a literal, earthy 1000 year reign (thus, **PRE-** or before the millennium)
 - 3) The writings of most of the church fathers during this time indicates that they expected the Church to suffer persecution at the hands of the anti-Christ during the Great Tribulation, and that Jesus would return to rescue the Church after this, bind Satan, judge the inhabitants of the earth, and then establish His 1000 kingdom
 - 4) It doesn't appear that they believed in a separate rapture, but rather viewed the rapture as simultaneous with Jesus' second coming and return to earth
 - 5) It's referred to as historic premillennialism to differentiate it from the more modern dispensational premillennialism that we are familiar with and will discuss in a few minutes
 - b. The second is **AMILLENNIALISM**:
 - 1) This view began with Augustine in the 4th century and is the official view of the Catholic church, most Lutheran churches, and what is referred to as Reformed Christianity; this would include the Amish, some Presbyterian and Baptist denominations (but not all), and generally any denomination with "reformed" in its name
 - 2) It's kind of misnamed because the "a" in amillennial means "no" which would suggest it means no millennium, but that's not true
 - 3) Amillennialists believe that the millennium refers to the heavenly or spiritual reign of Christ which began at His first coming and ends with his second coming (IOW, the last 2000 years); they do not believe it's a future earthly kingdom of 1000 years
 - 4) Some proponents prefer the phrase "**realized millennium**" or "**millennium now**"
 - 5) As for the other end time events, some are interpreted as literal future events like the battle of Armageddon, the resurrections, Great White Throne judgment, etc.

- 6) Other events are interpreted less literally, symbolically, or allegorically like the 1000 years and the 7 years of tribulation
 - 7) When it comes to the Rapture of the Church, most amillennialists believe that it happens at the same time as Jesus' 2nd coming and we are simply caught up to meet Him as He comes down to earth immediately before the Great White Throne judgment
 - 8) Proponents of amillennialism include J.I. Packer, RC Sproul, Jay Adams, and more recently Mike Horton, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in California
- c. The third is **POSTMILLENNIUMISM**:
- 1) Postmillennialists are similar to amillennialists in that they mostly view the 1000 years as symbolic, or at least not a literal 1000-year earthly reign of Christ
 - 2) Also like the amillennialists, they see some of the other end time events as future literal events
 - 3) The main difference is that Amillennialists believe the millennium began with the 1st coming of Jesus and ends with the second; while some postmillennialists hold this same view, it's more common to view the millennium period starting sometime in this present age and extending to the 2nd coming
 - 4) They are optimists in that they believe that the preaching and teaching of the Gospel will lead to greater and greater acceptance, and ultimately a time of peace or golden age for the Church that will usher in Jesus' return (e.g. the Church prepares the world for Jesus' arrival)
 - 5) Thus, they are **POST**-millennial (Jesus returns after the millennium)
 - 6) It was most popular among protestants, including the Puritans, in the 1600-1800s
 - 7) Charles Hodge, a Reformed Presbyterian theologian from the 1800s and one of the founders of Princeton Theological Seminary was probably one of the most prominent postmillennialists
 - 8) The most popular, and controversial, form of postmillennialism today is called Christian Reconstructionism; it's also called Theonomy (Rule by God's Law) or Dominion Theology:
 - a) Reconstructionism teaches that the world should be brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas (social, moral, political, judicial, etc.) through the restoration of Old Testament civil and moral laws (partially through political means)
 - b) The goal is to reconstruct the world into a form of Old Testament Mosaic society with the Bible as the sole authority, including reinstating severe penalties like death for adulterers, idolaters, homosexuality, etc.
 - c) Modern proponents (in some form or another) include Gary North, Gary DeMar, Kenneth Gentry, and Larry Pratt
- d. The fourth is **DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIUMISM**:
- 1) Formalized in the early 1800's by John Nelson Darby and popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible when it came out in 1909
 - 2) Dispensationalism is one of the two main frameworks used to interpret the Bible; the other is Covenant Theology and most amillennialists and postmillennialist subscribe to some form of that
 - 3) Dispensational theology interprets the Bible and God's redemptive plan through a series of dispensations, or administrations, where God worked/works with different groups of

people at different times in different ways, slowly revealing more and more about His plan over time

- 4) Most dispensationalists recognize seven dispensations:
 - a) Dispensation of Innocence: Adam and Eve before the Fall (Gen 1:26-3:7)
 - b) Dispensation of Conscience: Fall through the Flood (Gen 3:7-8:19)
 - c) Dispensation of Human Government: Tower of Babel to Abraham (Gen 8:20-11:32)
 - d) Dispensation of Promise: Abraham to Moses (Gen 12 - Exo 18)
 - e) Dispensation of Law: Moses to Pentecost (Exo 19 up to Jesus)
 - f) Dispensation of Grace: Pentecost to the Rapture
 - g) End Times (Rapture through the Millennium)
 - 5) In each one of these dispensations, salvation was always by grace through faith, but faith wasn't necessarily in Jesus or the Messiah until He was revealed; for most OT saints, faith was in the promises God made to them or in what He had revealed up until that point (e.g. Abraham being justified for believing God's promise about Isaac and His promise to bless the nations through him; Moses trusting the Lord through the Exodus; David believing God's promise regarding a descendant who would reign forever, etc.)
 - 6) Dispensational Premillennialism became the prominent view over amillennialism and postmillennialism after WW1 and WW2, in part because of the realization that the world wasn't actually becoming a better place as expected by those two more optimistic views; rather, it seemed the world was becoming a more violent and wicked place, rejecting Biblical values and ideals
 - 7) It gained popular support among evangelical Christians in the mid to late 1990s with the publishing of the Left Behind Series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins
 - 8) Popular dispensationalists: Chuck Swindoll, Charles Ryrie, John MacArthur, Jim Custer
 - 9) The main tenants of dispensational premillennialism are:
 - a) A more literal interpretation of prophetic texts
 - b) It is more pessimistic than optimistic (the world will grow more rebellious and more antagonist toward the Gospel)
 - c) All of the end times events are still future
 - d) Maintains a distinction between Israel and the Church with God still planning to fulfill ALL of the earthly promises He made to Israel
 - e) Jesus will come back before the millennium and reign as a literal, earthly king for 1000 years
2. Why does this matter to us?
- a. It's important to understand where someone is coming from when they preach, teach, or write on eschatology
 - b. Dustin and I interpret the Bible through a dispensational premillennial lens
 - c. Our statement of faith for Renew Bible Church reflects this viewpoint
 - d. This doesn't mean that we agree with every tenant of dispensational theology because there are many different "flavors" of dispensationalism with disagreements over different aspects or elements, but the general framework is consistent with what the Bible reveals
 - e. So, our approach to eschatology follows this model and that will be reflected in what I'm going to share over the next few weeks

B. Outline of the End Times from Daniel

****We're going to start by looking at four passages from the book of Daniel; next week we'll look at what Jesus and the book of Revelation have to say**

1. The first passage is Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream where he saw a great statue of a man made of various materials (READ Daniel 2:31-45):
 - a. The great and awesome statue represented the remaining five earthly kingdoms that would rule the world from Daniel's time up to the kingdom of God:
 - 1) Head of gold: Babylonian and Assyrian kingdom ruled by Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar from 671 BC to 538 BC
 - 2) Arms and chest of silver: Medo-Persian empire which was ruled by Cyrus and Darius from 538 BC to 331 BC
 - 3) Belly and thighs of bronze: Greco-Macedonian empire which began with Alexander the Great and lasted from 331-160 BC
 - 4) Legs of iron: Great Roman Empire ruled by the Caesars from 160 BC to AD 395—this kingdom didn't get overthrown as the others did, but died out overtime being replaced by a variety of smaller, regional kingdoms
 - 5) Feet of iron and clay: a divided kingdom made up of 10 smaller kingdoms which will arise from a revised Roman empire during the final seven years of earth history before the Millennium
 - b. The statue was ultimately crushed and destroyed by a large stone which represents a kingdom established by God which will never be destroyed and will endure forever—this is a reference to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ and eternity
2. The second passage is Daniel 9:24-26 (READ) which is referred to as Daniel's 70 weeks:
 - a. The earthly empires described in Daniel 2 would rule the earth for a total of 490 years (70 weeks of seven years) after which six things be accomplished:
 - 1) The first three address the issue of sin:
 - a) Finish transgressions
 - b) End sin
 - c) Make atonement
 - 2) The final three address the establishment God's Kingdom and eternity:
 - a) Bring everlasting righteousness
 - b) Seal up visions and prophecy
 - c) Anoint the Holy Place
 - b. The 70 weeks (490 years) would be broken down into three periods of time: seven weeks (49 years), sixty-two weeks (434 years), and one final week (7 years):
 - 1) The first seven weeks would begin with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem—this happened in 457 BC when King Artaxerxes issued the decree that allowed Ezra and the Jews to begin rebuilding the city (Ezra 7:6-10; 9:9) and this took 49 years (457-408 BC)
 - 2) At the end of the first seven weeks, there would be another sixty-two weeks (434 years) which would take us to about AD 27; after which, two things would occur:
 - a) Messiah would be cut off (crucifixion of Jesus)
 - b) The city and temple would be destroyed in a massive and bloody war by **“the people of the prince who is to come”** (a reference linking first century Rome to the antichrist who would ultimately arise from a revised Roman empire in the end

times); this occurred between AD 66-70 when the Romans attacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and much of the city, and according to historian Josephus killed over 1.1 million

- 3) This leaves one final week of seven years which is referred to as Daniel's 70th week and it has yet to be fulfilled (there's been an extended pause known as the Church age)
3. The final two passages focus on this final 70th week (Daniel 9:27; Daniel 12:11-13)
 - a. Daniel 9:27 (READ) informs us that at the beginning of the final week (7 years), the "**prince who is to come**" (antichrist) will make a seven-year covenant with Israel (peace treaty)
 - b. However, in the middle of the week (3.5 years in), he will put an end to Israel's sacrifices and offerings and commit abominations in the temple by taking his seat and declaring Himself to be God (READ Daniel 9:27b; Daniel 11:31 & 2 Thessalonians 2:4)
 - c. Sometime after this, in the second half of the seven years, Michael the Archangel, the protector of Israel, will rise up, rescue those whose names are written in the Book of Life, and there will be an intense and terrible distress like the world has never seen;
 - d. Daniel also describes the resurrection of both the righteous and the dead taking place (presumably after the conclusion of the seven years), some to everlasting life and others to "**disgrace and everlasting contempt**" (READ Daniel 12:1-2)
 - e. Daniel concludes the description of this 70th week with two additional blocks of time that are added after the end of seven years (READ 12:11-13)
 - 1) Each half of the 7 years is 1260 days, but Daniel describes 1290 days from the Abomination of Desolation (middle of the seven years); this is because there is an extra 30 days AFTER the end of the week
 - 2) In addition to this, there's another 45 days after that ($1290 + 45 = 1335$)
 - 3) Daniel doesn't provide much in regard to details about these extra blocks of days, but we'll find some answers in the rest of our study

Conclusion

1. While Daniel didn't state it directly, we know there is an undetermined period of time between the end of the first 69 weeks and the beginning of the final 70th week
2. How do we know this? Well, two reasons:
 - a. The first reason is that the first 69 weeks have already been fulfilled but the events of the 70th week have not; and, since the first 69 weeks were fulfilled literally, the same must be true of the final week which means it's still future
 - b. The second reason is that Jesus and the book of Revelation describe the events of Daniel's 70th week as still being future
3. So, next week we are going to look at what Jesus and the book of Revelation have to say about these things and how they align with what we've learned from Daniel