

God's Planned Future

1 Study Base

Introduction:

In a world determined to exclude God from their thinking, from their plans, and from all expectations of the future, it is increasingly necessary for Christians to listen to what God says about the future.

In Christian Bible study this subject is called eschatology. In essence, eschatology looks at God's timeline throughout biblical history with a forward look towards the future. In looking to the future, we consider end time events, what does Scripture say about God's calendar. These future events, which are determined by God, include the rapture, the tribulation, Jesus' second coming, Jesus' 1000 year earthly kingdom, final judgement, the new heavens and new earth, and eternity, to name just a few.

As in all Bible study, when considering eschatology, we must be willing to deal with what the Bible says based upon its own God-given authority as His revealed Word. Scripture determines belief apart from external influence. This sounds well and good, but in the real world it's not always

easy to do. Voices from past Christian authors, historical creeds, denominational beliefs, personal preferences, church culture, family tradition, and differing theological beliefs, can poorly determine our beliefs, and sometimes without us realising it.

Therefore, a Bible student needs to take care to prevent thinking of eschatology as an abstract teaching that only has theoretical value, or as secondary to other biblical truths.

Is eschatology important?

Yes! Because eschatology is God's story. Eschatology should be important to us because it is important to God. In fact, it is reported that about 20% of the Bible speaks to the matter of eschatology in some way.

God is not confused, He is not uncertain, and He is not undecided about future events which He controls fully. In Isaiah 46:9-10, God testifies about Himself. *I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,*¹⁰ *declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.*

Eternal God is unique in His ability to manage what we perceive to be the past, present, and future. These are all equally a simple matter to God who knows everything that can be known, and He rules over all spheres of time with absolute sovereignty. *The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations* (Psalm 33:11). Therefore, God alone speaks as authoritatively of the future as He does of the past.

It is correct for us to desire to understand our past, our present existence, and our future destination. This is how we observe God in action in His created universe and in human existence.

While we read in Genesis 1:1, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*, we understand this is speaking of the universe which quickly became the beginning of human history. Genesis 1:27 continues to explain that *God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*. Just as we look backwards in history to understand where humanity came from, so we also look forward to understand where humanity is heading.

Again, asking the question, is eschatology Important? **Yes**, because biblical eschatology causes us to listen for the clarity in all of God's story. Biblical eschatology gives mankind understanding which produces confidence in God and security for believers in God.

Likewise, biblical eschatology produces hope within those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who will continue to bring to fulfilment every promise God has made for the future (Rev 1:17-19; 22:7-21).

Plus, biblical eschatology encourages Christians who are living through great difficulties. Great pain requires great encouragement to inspire the certainty of hope within the believer (1Th 4:18). And it is hope that clings to God's promises in expectation of fulfilment. This was Jesus' point when speaking with the grieving disciples. John 14:1-3, *let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*² *In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?*³ *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

Just as the apostle Paul informed the Ephesian elders that he *did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God* (Acts 20:27), so we also study and teach all of God's Word, including eschatology.

Understanding eschatology better

There are two broad categories in the study of eschatology, personal eschatology, and cosmic eschatology. Personal eschatology deals with a person's future, such as death, resurrection, judgement, and eternal destiny (heaven or hell). Cosmic eschatology deals with the larger scene of biblical covenants, the nation of Israel, the Church, the rapture, the tribulation, the second coming of Jesus, the 1000 year millennium, and the eternal state. Cosmic eschatology looks at how God administers all of creation in all spheres, through all times, and in all places.

By spheres, we mean all dimensions within God's realm. These include heaven, the universe, earth, hell, holy angels, demons, humans etc.

God's story is dictated by God's planned timeline which flows precisely as He determines. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue explain an overview of God's plan in their

systematic theology book titled “Biblical Doctrine” in chapter 10, ‘The Future.’ (Kindle edition. Location 22296). *“The Bible’s storyline has a historical flow. There is a beginning, a middle, and an end or culmination. In the beginning God creates a wonderful universe. Then there is a dark turn as a deceiving, tempting force (Satan) arrives in the form of a serpent. God’s image bearers fall for Satan’s lie and sin against their Creator, which brings sin, death, and curses into the world. Then God implements a plan through promises and covenants by which he intends to restore the creation, including mankind, through an ultimate man and Savior— Jesus Christ (Gen. 3: 15; 12: 2–3). After many centuries this promised Savior and King arrives. Jesus comes to his people, but they reject him (John 1: 11). The violent death he willingly suffers provides atonement as the foundation for the reconciliation of all things (Col. 1: 20). He then returns to heaven, and from there he pours out the Holy Spirit on believers and builds his church. In the future, this King will unleash divine wrath on the world in preparation for his personal and bodily return to earth (Rev. 19: 11– 16). When he comes again, he will resurrect dead saints and reward his followers with a kingdom reign on the earth for a thousand years (Rev. 20: 4). After this successful reign, Satan and all evildoers will*

finally be judged and sentenced to the everlasting lake of fire (Rev. 20: 11– 15). Then a perfect eternal state in a new heaven and new earth will commence (Rev. 21: 1– 22: 5). God's redeemed and glorified saints will serve him and will reign forever (Rev. 22: 5). Eschatology focuses particularly on "the end or culmination" and what events will occur around it.

End quote.

Biblical disciplines for consistent study

Following the thoughts in our introduction, the Bible reader must be careful not to read their own thinking and ideas into the biblical text. Paul highlighted this to the Corinthian Church, writing, *I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favour of one against another* (1 Corinthians 4:6). The same rules for Bible study applied to Paul, Apollos, and Church members. It is simply this, we cannot and must not *go beyond what is written*. If we add anything to what God's Word says we are placing ourselves in authority over God's Word which God the Holy Spirit authored (2Pe 1:20-21). The Holy Spirit has inspired all written prophecy in

Scripture, and it is not for us to tamper with it or manipulate it so that it conforms to our way of thinking.

Therefore, the same fundamental rules of Bible interpretation apply equally to all Scripture and all theological themes within the text of Scripture. Passages looking forward through prophecy do NOT require a different method of interpretation to any other passage. Old Testament passages are dealt with in the same way as New Testament passages.

Similarly, the New Testament NEVER reinterprets the Old Testament. The New Testament may add information to the Old Testament, and it may give a more defined and clearer explanation or application of an Old Testament passage. But the New Testament NEVER changes the meaning of the Old Testament, not contextually, not grammatically, and not eschatologically. We must allow the Old Testament to interpret itself and give the meaning. Solomon wrote of the Old Testament; *“...do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar”* (Proverbs 30:5-6; cf. Rev 22:18-19). In other words – DO NOT touch, or alter, the Old Testament in any way!

Again, John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue explain Eschatology and Bible Interpretation from “Biblical Doctrine” in chapter 10, ‘The Future.’ (Kindle edition. Location 22372).

Using correct interpretative principles is critical for understanding Bible prophecy and eschatology. This involves a consistent use of grammatical-historical interpretation to all areas of the Bible, including its prophetic sections. This approach seeks to understand the original meaning of the Bible writers and what the original readers would have understood. It views Bible texts as having a single meaning, not multiple, hidden, or allegorical meanings.

J. Dwight Pentecost adds the following.

There is one observation which seems to have been overlooked by many students of the interpretation of prophecy and that is the fact that Scripture interprets its own symbols. Feinberg says: ...some prophecy is conveyed to us by means of symbolic language. But whenever such is the case, the symbols are explained in the immediate context, in the book in which they occur, or elsewhere in the Word, no room being left to the imaginations of man to devise explanations.

(Things to Come - A STUDY IN BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY. Chapter IV, The Interpretation of Prophecy. Zondervan. Kindle Edition. Location 1109)

In other words, the Bible interprets the Bible. There is no need to look outside of the Bible for the meaning of the Bible. God the Holy Spirit is perfectly able to explain Himself through His own written revelation.

Throughout this series, “God’s Planned Future,” we shall employ the literal, grammatical-historical method of interpretation to consistently allow Scripture to speak for itself within normal language. As the adage says, if the normal sense makes sense, seek no other sense. We trust God’s Word to speak to us in this clear way because *no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation* (2 Peter 1:20).

Just as many of the prophecies of Jesus’ first coming were literally fulfilled (Isaiah 7:14; 53:2-12; Micah 5:2), so we look to see prophecies of His second coming to be literally fulfilled also. With God, we consistently see that literal promises have literal fulfillments. We want to see that it is God’s desire for the readers of His Word to understand

prophecy without needing mystical allegorical methods of reinterpreting His Word.

Daniel stated that the Lord sent Gabriel, who *made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding* (Daniel 9:22). God wants His people to understand. So, we also look to God's Word, trusting the Lord for clear understanding. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:15 when explaining the coming *abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel... let the reader understand.*

Through clarity of understanding prophecy, we want to be *those who are eagerly waiting for him* (Hebrews 9:28). We *wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,*⁸ *who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 1:7-8). Because *he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:6).

We shall explore these truths further as we progress through the "God's Planned Future" series, allowing God's Word to open to us the common sense meaning of what He has written.