

Doctrine of Last Things

The Bible begins with “In the beginning” which implies there will be an ending. The doctrine of eschatology is the study of the events of the end times. Eschatology can be divided into two broad categories: personal and cosmic. Personal eschatology - The Bible describes death as the moment the soul leaves the body (James 2:26). The soul survives death in a disembodied state (Ecc.12:5-7; Matt.17:3; Lk.16:22-24; 2Cor.5:1-3, 8; Phil. 1:21). It temporarily survives consciously apart from its body and this is neither a state of annihilation nor of soul sleeping. For the believer, the soul enjoys an eternal state of bliss in the presence of God (2 Cor. 5:8) and for the lost a conscious state of anguish (Luke 16). This intermediate state is a time of incompleteness. Humans were created in an embodied state and during the interim the soul longs for reunion with the body (2Cor.5:1-4). Scripture is clear in justifying that there will be two “bodily” resurrections: one for the just and one for the unjust (Dan.12:2; John 5:28-29; 1Cor.15:21-26). The first resurrection will be for all believers (Isa.26:19; John 5:28-29; 1Cor.15:21-26; 1Thess. 4:13-17), at which time the righteous will face the judgment seat of Christ, where they will be judged according to their works (2Cor.5:10) and given their reward to live in the presence of God for eternity (Matt. 25:46) in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev.21:1-7). The believer is spared the final white throne judgment. The timing of this event is unknown (Matt.24:36) but it is clear they will reign with Christ for one thousand years (Rev 20:4-6). The second resurrection is for the unbelievers and will occur at the conclusion of the millennium (Rev.20:5). Then the unrighteous will face the great white throne judgment, where Jesus serves as judge, and when unbelievers will have to give an account of every word spoken (Matt. 12:36-37). The ultimate criterion for judgment is the sinner’s response to Jesus himself. Is his name written in the Book of Life (Rev.20:12)? The rebellious will finally get the desire of his heart and will follow Satan to hell, the second death (Rev.21:8), where he will remain for eternity (Ps.90:1). It is God’s desire that no one should perish (2Pet. 3:9), but based

upon his character: his justice (Rom.2), his love (1John 4:16), and his sovereignty (1Cor. 15:24-28; Rev.20-22) the existence of hell is justified and necessary.

The resurrected body and soul of both the believer and the unbeliever will be immortal. The believer will spend eternity in heaven, which is a real “place” (John 14:2-4) of bliss in the very presence of God (2Cor.12:2, 4; Matt.6:9). The eternal destiny of the unbeliever, both those who have not heard the gospel and those who have but reject it, will be a place of conscious agony and regret (Matt.13:49-50), completely separated from God (2Thess. 17-9).

Cosmic Eschatology - Jesus initiated the eschatological era at his resurrection and reigns as the Messianic King. This climactic event marked the end of death’s tyranny and Satanic rule forever, offering believers a blessed hope of things to come and warning unbelievers of a death that never ends. In the present, all of creation is groaning, suffering through the “birth pains” (Matt. 24:3-14) of tribulation waiting on the Day of the Lord, in which God hands over the cosmos to it’s own iniquity and calls down judgment upon it. These birth pains will intensify and culminate in a final time of unparalleled distress called the great tribulation (Dan. 9; Matt.24; Rev.6-18). During this time there will be great wars, famines, mass death by wars, and natural disasters. Also the antichrist will rise to global prominence and power (1John 2, 4; 2John 7). He is the final personification of wickedness in the world and will eventually be defeated by the returning Messiah (2Thess.2:8).

We affirm there will be a time when Christ will come for his church at the end of the age (Matt. 24:29-31; 1Thess. 4:16-17). The timing of his return is less certain and has been heavily debated. The three predominant views are pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation. Pre-tribulationists claim that the rapture of the church will occur prior to the great tribulation and that Christ will return again with the church after the tribulation period (Rev. 19:14; Jude 14). Mid-tribulationists claim that believers will be present during the first three and one half years of the tribulation but will be removed prior to the pouring out of God’s wrath. The rapture is often associated with the seventh trumpet in

Revelation 11. Post-tribulationists claim that there will be one event, at the end of the great tribulation, in which Jesus comes, the dead are raised, living believers are translated into their glorified bodies, and the church will meet Jesus in the air to return with him in triumph and glory. The timing of the great tribulation and the rapture are unknown, therefore we are to always be prepared, for the return of Christ could happen at the twinkling of an eye (1Cor. 15:51-52), like a thief in the night (1Thess. 5:2).

Revelation 20 states that there will be a period of peace on Earth for one thousand years when Satan will be locked away in the abyss (2-3). The interpretation of this passage is highly disputed with three predominant interpretations: First, amillennialists claim that Rev.20 is to be understood symbolically and interpreted as the recapitulation of the church age from the resurrection of Christ to the end of the age. Satan is bound at the cross and resurrection of Christ. Therefore there is no literal one thousand year reign of Christ. The first resurrection (4-5) is spiritual and when Christ returns there will be a second physical resurrection of both believers and unbelievers (12-13). The promises of God to Israel are believed to be fulfilled through the Church. Second, pre-millennialists claim the second coming of Christ initiates his one thousand year reign over the universe (Rev.20:4-6). Following the tribulation, Christ will return to earth with the church, bind Satan, and establish his millennial reign (Rev 20:1-7). During the millennium Israel will experience fulfillment of God's covenant promises in which NT believers will be grafted in (Rom.11). Third, post-millennialists do not interpret the millennium as a literal thousand years, rather it is the present reality in which the nations are being converted to Christ through the Great Commission. This conversion of much of the world brings forth an era of peace and tranquility as Jesus rules through the Spirit over the nations. Christ returns at the fulfillment of the great commission. The church replaces Israel in regard to covenant promises. The fundamental truth held by all orthodox Christians is that there will be a public, physical, bodily return of Jesus. The timing of his return and the intramural debate about the Millennium is not a test of orthodoxy and should not be a divisive doctrine.

At the conclusion of the Millennium, Satan is released and initiates an insurgence of human subjects against the Kingdom of Christ (Rev. 20:7-8). This rebellion is defeated and Satan and his minions are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev.20:10) and the judgment of men, angels, and nations ensues. The final judgment results in a condemnation of sinners, both human and angelic go to hell.