

## Eschatology

Eschatology (es-ka-tology), simply defined, is the doctrine or study of future things. With a definition like this it's easy to see how broad and varied eschatological works can be. One could easily spend his entire life focusing on such doctrines. The exegete's task is further complicated by apocalyptic imagery, symbolism and analogy, not to mention the need to investigate historical backgrounds as they relate to the biblical authors' accounts. Within this study a certain eschatological foundation is assumed beforehand, namely a futuristic pre-millennial view. This will allow for a chronological examination into end time events, instead of consuming time and space on surveying the various systematic constructs within eschatology. The subjects are five in number: Israel, the Church, angels, nations, and the unsaved. The chronological stations to be implemented concerning these subjects will usually fall under 1-3 ½ years, middle, and last 3 ½ years—all referring in context to a literal 7 year tribulation. In order to provide continuity to the apocalyptic synopsis, the five subjects will be treated in three groups: 1) Israel, the Church, and nations 2) angels and 3) the unsaved.

In group one we will begin with Israel, that seemingly insignificant land surrounded by powerful enemies. Though smaller in size than most of America's states, she will be the center stage of end time events. In the beginning of the tribulation period the Antichrist will sign (or at least diplomatically arrange) a seven year peace treaty with Israel. Ah, yes, what no man has been able to do, the Antichrist does—brings peace to the Middle East. If this seems to be a mission impossible it should be noted that this same diabolical leader was also able to gain the complete allegiance of ten nations (Rev. 13: 1). Near this time, God's dynamic duo will begin their prophetic ministry (Rev. 11: 3-13). They are merely called "two witnesses." Many Bible students believe they will be Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah. These servants of the Lord will have a bold ministry, both convicting and miraculous. Moving now to the middle portion of the tribulation, we find an invasion of epic proportions recorded in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. It is the Gog and Magog (Russia) offensive. They will be aided by several nations from the Middle East and Africa. Together they will attack Israel from the north and south, only to be routed supernaturally by God. In fact, from this attack Russia loses 5/6 (83%) of its forces! Another major happening during this time is the murder of the previously named two witnesses. By now, the world is so twisted by sin and carnality that not only are these prophets denied burial but people all over the world even exchange gifts in celebration of their death (Rev. 11: 10). But all of this is of little importance, for three and a half days later they are resurrected by God and translated to heaven in full view of men (Rev. 11: 11, 12). During the last 3 1/2 years the Antichrist will begin to fully manifest his true nature. He will heighten his persecution and execution of the godly (Zech. 13: 8) and instill a monetary system that excludes the godly (Rev. 13: 16, 17). His final and most climatic action comes as he gathers the armies of the world at Armageddon to rush against Israel (Rev 16: 16). This final military/spiritual scheme is short lived, however, as the Second Coming of Christ spoils all his plans. The Antichrist and his false prophet are immediately banished to hell (Rev. 19: 20) and all his armies are instantly destroyed (Rev. 19: 21). Resulting from this amazing rescue by Jesus—the Jew, the rejected Messiah—Israel has a dynamic revival (Zech. 12: 10-12). It is a revival full of tears and remorse. They finally know that Yeshua (Hebrew for *Jesus*) is the Chosen One, the Savior of the world!

The above summary of end time events as they relate to Israel, the Church, and nations may be difficult for some to grasp in one particular matter. The question may be posed, "Wherein was the Church discussed?" Let us resolve this now. It is the author's opinion that the rapture of the Church is post-tribulation in nature. Furthermore, it should be

clarified that the author believes the terms *Second Coming* and *rapture* to be simultaneous in chronology and, for all practical purposes, interchangeable. This was the prevailing view throughout church history until the 1830's when a two phase Second Coming was introduced: an invisible rapture and then a final visible Second Coming of Christ. The strength of the historic view (pre 1830's) is weighty. First of all, common sense argues that if Christ's Second Coming is in two parts, the first invisible and secret, and the second (7 years later!) is visible and blatant, then that final coming cannot rightly be called a Second coming but, rather, a Third Coming. Second of all, passages that are often cited as evidence of a pre-tribulation rapture are, by all processes of hermeneutics, post-tribulation in context (e.g., Matthew 24). And lastly, verses that state that believers are not appointed to wrath (1 Thess. 5: 9 & Rev. 3: 10) are hardly evidence against a post-tribulation doctrine. In fact, such exegetical conclusions seem unbelievably absurd in light of the abundance of martyrdom throughout the centuries. Therefore, it is the position of this work that the Church will go through the entire seven year tribulation. They will be persecuted, tortured, and killed. They will be denied access to common purchasing methods. They will be betrayed and hated by the masses. But God will keep them eternally safe, which is the true meaning of the above mentioned verse often quoted by pre-tribulationists: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, *whether we are awake or asleep*, we may live together with him" (1 Thess. 5: 9, 10) [emphasis added].

Now we shall consider those active spectators/participants of eschatology, the angels. Judging the timing of these celestial activities is not an exact science, but the following is an accepted view among most evangelicals today. After the opening of the seventh seal, a series of two more sets of sevens transpires. In the first years of the tribulation, seven angels sound seven trumpets which produces seven cataclysmic events, bringing havoc and fear upon the ungodly (Rev. 8: 6 - 9: 21). Slightly past the middle frame of the tribulation the second set of sevens arrives. These are the seven bowls of wrath (Rev. 16) poured out by God upon his enemies. They are of even greater intensity than the seven trumpets suffered previously. At the end of the tribulation period a great and wonderful angelic announcement is proclaimed, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19: 9a). What a great day it will be to encounter these words audibly rather than as a prophecy in black and white!

The dreadful plight of rebellious sinners is the last of the three groups to be discussed. Theirs is a chain of perpetual grief and suffering. From poisoned waters (Rev. 8: 11) to strange darkness (Rev. 8: 12) to tortuous stings (Rev. 9: 5), the life of the God-hater is not a fun one in the end times; from suicidal despair (Rev. 9: 6) to plagues that kill billions (Rev. 9: 18) to stubborn unrepentance (Rev 9: 20)... and that's just the first 3 ½ years! After all of this suffering for sin and evil, they are still unyielding to God's sovereignty, for in the middle of these trying years they rejoice when the Antichrist murders God's special prophets (Rev. 11: 9, 10). They send one another gifts. They have a satanic Christmas! Their allegiance to the unholy trinity has sealed their fate. In the end they are judged (Rev. 20: 12) and doomed (Rev. 20: 15).

The end times... how exciting and mysterious their study is! Their fierceness and action make for excitement. Their imagery and panoramic scope make for mystery. Only the foolish and ignorant succumb to a hardened dogmatism when it comes to eschatological particulars. To be sure, there are many things we can know: God is in control—he's not afraid of nations, rebels, demons, sin, evil-doers, or anything else. He will see his people through to victory! Nevertheless, even after close examination, expert and layperson alike should admit there are simply some things that God is allowed to keep to himself!