
CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS ESCHATOLOGY?

DEFINITION

Eschatology is the doctrinal study of last days' events and the future destiny of humankind (death, resurrection, judgment, end of the world, etc.). It unfolds God's prophetic program for humankind, Israel, the Church and the whole created order.

The word derives from the two Greek words *Escatos* meaning *last* and *Logos* which means word. The Bible speaks of God as the Creator of the universe, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1). The beginning referred to here is a point in time in eternity past. John declares, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made"* (John 1: 1-3). Hence Jesus Christ existed as the word before the earth was formed. The Godhead is eternal!

From Gen. 1:2 we gather that the created earth at a later point became or rather was seen as formless, thus not being adequate for human habitation. So the loving God re-created the surface of the earth together with the first heavens, the atmospheric skies to make it habitable for man. It was during this time that God probably decided to introduce the concept of time, seasons and dispensations and assigned the governing of time to the effects of the starry bodies upon the earth (Gen. 1:14, 15).

So, God Himself has set the times and seasons in creation, and controls them for the habitation of people here on earth. Thus the unchanging God changes times and seasons, having set them by His own omniscience and sovereign design. Time rolls on and on until it gives way to eternity at the close of the age. While alive on earth, human kind is regulated by time, which he has to redeem. On the contrary, believers are not to fear or worry their heads about the times

and seasons, because they already have been taught to be ready at all times as the day of His returning is an unexpected one. Spiritual timing is hence an endowment of the spirit-filled not for speculative day dreaming but to receive insight, understanding and comfort, to prevent complacency, callous living and spiritual sleepwalking.

Let us read from the Holy Scriptures on these truths:

"Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; 'and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so." (Gen. 1:14-15)

"Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and raises up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.'" (Dan. 2:20-22)

"Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.'" (Acts 1:6-7)

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." (1Thess. 5:1-2)

TIMES, SEASONS AND DISPENSATIONS

The recreation of the Earth for man's habitation dates about 6,000 years. This time reckoning can be classified by times, seasons, dispensations or age.

Times (Gk: Chronos) - means chronological time, the events that follow one another and roll in and away from one another i. e. a succession of events (Acts 1:7; 1Thess. 5:1, 2).

Seasons (Gk: Kairos) - means the particular time and the nature of the events that are to take place i.e. events organized into dispensations (Acts 1:6, 7; 1Thess. 5:1, 2).

Age (Gk: Aion) - means a dispensational time period or part of it (Matt. 24:3; 28:20; Col. 1:26).

Dispensation (Gk: Oikonomia) - literally implies the dispensing or administering of truth in a time period or keeping charge of making truth (e.g. the gospel) known in an era to others (1Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10).

THE DISPENSATIONS

Dispensation shows specific time for divine activity focus. Many Bible scholars group time zones into seven major dispensations; others make it eight, adding the Tribulation as a separate dispensation. All that teaching on assignment of dispensations is for clarity of one's presentation, as they usually overlap.

For purposes of this study, I will go with eight, considering that even though the Tribulation of a seven year period seems to be a continuation of God's suspended agenda with the Jews to conclude the 70 weeks of years [490 years] of Daniel Chapter 9:23-27, its agenda is identifiable.

Of course, the focus then is God's dealing with Israel. Yet all nations of the earth will experience the Tribulation. The long period of that suspended dealing is the intercalation assigned to the Church of Jesus Christ, after God has dealt with Israel for 69 weeks [483 years]. The 70th week [7 years] also referred to, as the time of Jacob's Trouble (Jer. 30:7), will thus begin after the Rapture of the Church.

Herein unfolds the mystery of the Church and the imminence of the Rapture, for the Old Testament neither mentions these, nor gives any hints in respect of their timing! By carefully studying the Bible, we learn that there have already been five periods of truth testing, we are now almost concluding the sixth, and the seventh and the last are yet to come.

Brief Description of the dispensations

The eight dispensations are:

- a. **Dispensation of Innocence** (Gen. 1:26 - 3: 6; Creation of man to the fall)

This is when Adam and Eve were living happily in Eden before their sin. In their innocence, the test for dispensing of truth was to obey God by not eating of the fruit of the

knowledge of good and evil. Humanity fell into sin by listening to the lie of Satan. Mankind lost its innocence.

b. **Dispensation of Conscience** (Gen. 3:6 - 8:20)

Adam and Eve had now learned to know good from evil, that is, they had a conscience. They and their children were tested as to whether or not they would choose good and reject evil. Most of them chose evil, causing God to send a flood upon the earth.

c. **Dispensation of Human Government** (Gen. 8:20 - 11:32) After the flood, men were not left altogether to do as they chose. God told Noah how to form a government that would punish wrongdoing, especially murder. This lasted until the tower of Babel when men again rejected God's command.

d. **Dispensation of Promise** (Gen. 12 - Exodus 18)

God called Abraham to be His witness in a world of idolatry. He promised Abraham many great blessings. He promised Abraham a child in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. This lasted until God had delivered Abraham's children from Egypt.

e. **Dispensation of Law** (Exodus 19 - Much of the Gospels)

This began when God gave the law to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, and lasted until Christ died on the cross for our redemption. Most of the Old Testament was written during the dispensation of law. The law was good but man, including the Jew, the custodians, was powerless before it.

f. **Dispensation of Grace** (Much of the New Testament especially Acts and Epistles)

This began with the death of Christ and will last until He returns to the earth. The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Whosoever will may come and take the water of life freely. All will not come, but those who do are being prepared for a unique place in Christ's future kingdom. Most of the New Testament belongs to the dispensation of grace.

g. **Dispensation of Tribulation** (Rev. 6-19)

This will be marked as the period of God's direct judgment or wrath on sin. It will begin after the Rapture of the Church. Man's responsibility will still be to recognize the true God and to

worship Him. With regard to the Jews, it will finish off the pending seven (7) years Daniel's 70th Week, also referred to as the Time of Jacob's Trouble (Jer. 30: 7).

h. **Dispensation of Millennium** (Rev. 20:1-15)

During the thousand years, Christ will reign upon the earth just as any king reigns, except that His will be a rule of righteousness. It will end with the last great Satan-led battle and the last judgment of the wicked dead. Again sinful man will have the choice of believing and receiving salvation through total obedience to King Jesus.

MAJOR PEOPLES' TIME ZONES

Humanity is presently classified under the following categorization, namely: Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 3:9, 29; 9:24; 1 Cor. 12:13). The entire history of man offers three major peoples' time zones in the eight dispensations, namely: The Jews, all Gentile peoples (until and after Abraham and of all ages), and the composite Church saints (see 1 Cor. 10:32).

These peoples will flow together but with distinctive assignments even in the period under Christ's coming millennial rule on Earth. In every dispensation, God has a specific way of dealing with man and both Jews and Gentiles have to discover their uniqueness in God's eternal purposes during these periods.

It is important to see the context and the people groups initially addressed when God speaks through the Scriptures. For example, messages directed to the Jews may or may not apply to Gentile Christians at all. Besides, differing terminologies are used in the Bible to refer to the same eschatological events. For instance, the Tribulation is called the Time of Jacob's Trouble (Jer. 30:7) or the Seventieth week of Daniel (Dan. 9:27) to emphasize God's dealing with Israel during that period, even though all peoples living on earth at that time will be affected.

Permit me to say here that: It is only as a people group embraces the gospel of Jesus Christ can there be a turn towards the light of redemption in God's eternal plan in His Church. The unhealthy classification, which once believed that all people fall into three main races: (1) Caucasoid or 'white', (2) Negroid or 'black', and (3) Mongoloid or 'yellow' and corresponded to the geographical areas of Europe, sub-

Saharan Africa, and Asia, respectively is now without authentication. Some races have never fallen into any of these; for examples [just to cite a few], some people of southern India and Sri Lanka and some of the Aboriginal people of Australia are neither Negroid nor Caucasoid altogether.

Furthermore, ethnic and religious inclinations have over the Centuries created and deepened unhealthy social wounds and barriers. Anyway, racial prejudices perceived along Arab and Jewish anti-Semitism or African or Asia or European socio-economic and religious-political lines may have little or no authentic eschatological Time-Zones' Scriptural explanation.

THE LAST DAYS

The last days are clearly set out for us in Scripture. They are also referred to as the last hour (1 John 2:18). There are many scriptures that would help us to properly define or discover the last days (Joel 2:28-31; Acts 2:17-21; 1 Tim. 4:1f; 2 Tim. 3:1f; Heb. 1:1, 2; 2 Pet. 3:3). Joel had prophesied, *"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on my menservants and on my maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord."* (Joel 2:28-31).

We notice that the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy relates to the period called the last days. *'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord'* (Acts 2:17-20).

Even the time of Christ's crucifixion is said to be at the end of the ages. *'He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation'* (Heb. 9:26-28).

John, the apostle intimated that any antichrist or false Christ activity is indication that it is the last hour. *'Little children, it is the*

last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour' (I John 2:18).

The Last days, therefore, span Christ's First Advent the Church Age → the Second Coming (Christ Coming for His Saints/Rapture) → Tribulation or Daniel's 70th week → the beginning of the day of the Lord or Times of the End → Second Coming of Christ (Christ Returning with His Saints/Appearing) → and ends with the beginning of the Millennium.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

The future is bright and glorious for believers but bleak and hopeless for unbelievers. Future events for the last days ahead until eternity rolls with God in the New Heavens or with Satan in Hell Fire are lined up as follows:

1. The fulfillment of the Great Commission of the Lord (Matt. 28:18-20).
2. The Rapture of the Church to meet the Lord Jesus in the air (1Cor. 15:51-55; 1Thess. 4:13-18).
3. The taking of the church to heaven for at least seven (7) years.
 - a. Judgment of believers at the judgment seat (Bema) of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1Cor. 3:9-15; 2Cor. 5:10).
 - a. The Marriage of the Lamb to the Bride (2Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-10).
4. Final Return of Jews back to the promised Land (Isa. 14:1-2; Jer. 50:4, 5; Amos 9:14, 15).
5. Formation of Apostate Church (2Thess. 2:2, 3).
6. Revelation of Anti-Christ on earth as World ruler and to carry out wickedness after the Church is raptured (Rev. 6-19).
 - a. Anti-Christ makes a pact with the Jews for seven (7) years.
 - b. He uses the Apostate Church to gain political and economic influence over the world.
 - c. He has Satan's empowerment to oppose God and His Christ.
 - d. He is to be aided by the False Prophet.
7. The Tribulation for seven (7) years on earth begins with the revelation of Anti-Christ. (Rev. 6-19).

- a. Release of the four (4) apocalyptic horsemen to start the punishment of God on sinful humanity.
- b. Anti-Christ begins his 7- year satanic assignment.
- c. Ministry of the two (2) special witnesses and 144,000 Jewish evangelists selected, sealed and sent forth for ministry in the Tribulation.
- d. At mid-Tribulation, Anti-Christ breaks his peace treaty with Israel and introduces His mark, the mark of the Beast and desecrates the Tribulation Temple (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2Thess. 2:4).
- e. Satan makes war in heaven, is cast down and now fully possesses Anti-Christ and the False Prophet to cause intense persecution of the Jews and other Tribulation believers. God gives special protection to the Jews but many saints are martyred (Rev. 12:7-11, 13f).
8. The Second Coming of Christ, the 'Appearing' on earth to touch the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4, 5).
9. The battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16: 12-16; 19:11-21).
10. The Anti-Christ and False Prophet are cast into Hell Fire (Rev. 19:19, 20).
11. The judgment of the living Jews and Gentile nations (Rev. 19: 19-21).
12. The Resurrection of Old Testament and Tribulation saints (Dan. 12:2, 3; Rev. 20:1-6).
13. Satan is bound for 1,000 years in the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3).
14. The 1,000 years millennial reign of Jesus on earth (Rev. 20:1-6).
15. Satan is loosed and his wickedness comes up (Rev. 20:7-9).
16. Satan incites the last Battle of Gog and Magog at the end of Millennium (Rev. 20:8-9).
17. Satan (with his forces) is defeated and cast into Hell Fire (Rev. 20:10).
18. All unsaved dead are resurrected, condemned at the Great White Throne Judgment and cast into Hell fire (Rev. 20:11-15).
19. Death and Hades are cast into Hell Fire (Rev. 20:14).
20. The present earth is destroyed by fire (2 Pet. 3:10, 11; Rev. 21:1).
21. The new heaven and the new earth are created (Rev. 21:1).
22. The New Jerusalem descends from God (Rev. 21:2-22:5).
23. Eternity rolls (1 Cor. 15:26).

WHY STUDY LAST DAYS' EVENTS [WHY ESCHATOLOGY]?

There are extremely many good reasons for the study of events of the Last Days or Eschatology. A few are here listed:

1. The importance of All Scripture as stated in 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, indicates that every iota of the Bible is of great value to the believer in Christ. *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*
2. The generation in which we live is marked by knowledge increase i.e. information intensification. This implies that we can better understand predictive prophecy today (Dan. 12:3, 13). We only need to properly divide the word of truth to make us approved workmen of God, who would not be swayed by falsehood and deception (1Tim, 4:1; 2Tim. 2:15; 2Pet. 2:2).
3. There is the special blessing assigned to the (public) reading, hearing and keeping the message of the book of Revelation, a major source on eschatology (Rev. 1:3).
4. Since Pentecost or the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the occurrence of the last days, the mindset of the church today must be patterned after that of the early church, which clinked onto the apostles' teachings. The Church Age will always be a part of the Eschatological Age. To them the event of Pentecost (the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) was the crucial signal that the last days had then begun in their midst. What they thought to be the future ("the last days") had arrived into their present time frame, and hence ours also (Acts 2:16-17).

The Example of the Early Church

This crucial event of Pentecost consolidated the believers' conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and indeed the only such One. Their expectation was that the Lord's returning would set in motion other sequential events, which would culminate in the ending of all other earthly rule and the full establishment of the eschatological kingdom of God with Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Holy Spirit energized them to do all that they needed to do towards the revealing of the kingdom of God. The carried the

responsibility of convincing the world that the crucified Jesus was actually the only Savior of the world. By Him and through Him alone could one have forgiveness of sin and salvation (Acts 2:22-24, 32; 4:12) and expected a sure subsequent future restoration from Him (Acts 3:19-21). This gospel message had Jesus as the focal point: The crucified, buried and risen Christ, who saves, heals, empowers and rules (1Cor. 1: 23; 2:2; 15:3-5).

They were also motivated to live pure and holy lives to be worthy of the eschatological kingdom (Rom.12: 1; Phil.4: 8; 2 Tim.1: 5; 1 Pet.1: 15; 1 Jn.3: 3).

The Concern for Today's Church

Since we are already far into the Church Age, the major concern of the Church must necessarily be the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With much of the future still in unfulfilled prophecy, a proper perspective on prophecy, and especially of the study of last days' events, will thus make Christianity come alive.

Titus 2:11-15 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you." From the above and other Scriptures, we who believe are able to remain in every generation poised and focused to:

1. Purify our lives, saying a 'big no' to negative things and a 'yes' to positive ones, for the kingdom and glory of God.
2. Prepare us for what is ahead, the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Promote sharing of the gospel and zeal for God's work.
4. Place our focus on eternal things, knowing the destiny of the redeemed of the Lord.
5. Prove God's love and faithfulness in the finished work of Jesus Christ to the world.