

PREFACE TO THE CLASS

Early one Sunday morning in November of 2019, while consuming my obligatory two pieces of toast and flipping through the channels to find something more edifying than the latest sports report or a rerun of *Hazel*, I stumbled upon a program with a preacher speaking on the end times. After a while he said something regarding the sequence of events that gave me pause. “Is that correct?” I wondered. And immediately I was convicted by my ignorance. I read the Bible through almost every year; I have researched and answered questions on the topic from members of our class; I have even taught the Thessalonian letters, which required addressing at least some of the details of the *parousia*. Yet, on that particular Sunday morning, I still wasn't sure whether that TV preacher was or was not correct! My very next thought was, “Well, there is no better way to learn it than to teach it.” So here we are.

First let me point out what this class will *not* be:

- It will not be an exhaustive, verse-by-verse examination of The Revelation, Daniel, Christ's words in the gospel accounts, Thessalonians, et al.
- It will not be an exhaustive comparison of the different interpretations of what will happen in the end. These will be mentioned, but only in passing.

No doubt for every one of us there are certain subjects we must repeatedly *relearn*—we hear it or read it, we may even write it down, but inevitably the occasion will arise when we can't remember that which we thought we knew. Hence the purpose of this class, which is *to present a detailed chronology of the end times*—including, for each participant, a series of printed charts.

Similar to what we did for an earlier study of *Christ in the Old Testament*, I will be producing and handing out a number of charts and informational sheets that can be used in class, but also, if the individual so desires, be bound at the conclusion of the class. So the ultimate purpose of the class is not *just* to impart information once in the classroom, but for each person to end up with a handy reference guide for those times when he or she forgets—just as I did that Sunday morning.

This class is going to be unapologetically based on a *pretribulational* (or *dispensational*) *premillennial* interpretation of God's word regarding the end times. (See the screen for [concise definitions](#).) This is the approach I grew up with, and it is the official position of this church—a happy convergence. This is what I believe; this is what this church believes. But it is not the *only* interpretation of what the Bible has to say about such things. There are highly respected scholars, commentators, and preachers—devout men of God all—who hold to different positions. Wayne Grudem, in his *Systematic Theology*, puts well how we should consider and respond to such disagreements.

Grudem: It is important to affirm the genuine evangelical standing of those who have differing positions on these questions. Evangelicals who hold to these various positions all agree that Scripture is inerrant, and they have a commitment to believe *whatever* is taught by Scripture. Their differences concern the interpretation of various passages relating to these events, but their differences on these matters should be seen as matters of secondary importance, not as differences over primary doctrinal matters.

Wayne Grudem, by the way, does not subscribe to this position on the end times; his position is that of *classic* or *historic premillennialism*, which does not include a pretribulational rapture of the church. That is, according to his interpretation of the text, the church will still be on earth for the tribulation.

So, for example, one camp may believe that Christ will return for His church *after* the Tribulation, while another camp believes He will do so *before* the Tribulation (a few even say in the *middle* of the Tribulation, just before the *Great* Tribulation). But all agree that Christ *will* return for His church and in righteous judgment of the world. They just disagree on the order, which is usually of secondary importance. Most of the respectable differences among the various interpretations tend to center around the Tribulation and/or the Millennium.

I will be referencing, in brief outline, the differences between the various positions on the end times, but we will *not* be covering in-depth the arguments for or against all of them.

The purpose of this class—I tell you up-front—is to lay out and document for easy reference the *pretribulational premillennial* sequence of events for the end times.

No matter one's position regarding the order of the Eschaton, or whether much of it is to be understood as literal or just mystical and figurative—the books of Revelation and Daniel are *famously* difficult to interpret—it is important for us all to remember that *all* positions have weak and logically vulnerable aspects. That is, there is no one, absolutely fool-proof from beginning to end, interpretation of the Eschaton. *Each* has its “But what about...” moments.

THE ESCHATON: WHEN DOES IT BEGIN?

While it is common to mark the beginning of the “end times” with the Rapture—Christ's return in the clouds to bring home the dead in Christ as well as the living church ([1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#))—the writer to the Hebrews, for one, marks the start of the end times with the *first* advent of Christ Jesus.

Read Hebrews 1:1-2.

That word translated “last” does not mean “in these *recent* days,” or in these *current* days,” but is the key word for this study: *eschaton*, which means the furthest point, the uttermost, final. The apostles Peter ([1 Peter 1:20](#)) and John agree.

Read 1 John 2:18.

Finally, the apostle Peter began his eloquent sermon on the day of Pentecost by associating the disciples' speaking in foreign tongues with Joel's prophecy about the Eschaton.

Read Acts 2:14-17.

Peter was saying as much, *You have been waiting for Joel's prophecy to be fulfilled? Well, now it has been. We are now in the Last Days.*

We approach this study from a *heavenly* perspective, that “the beginning of the end,” as it were, actually took place in a stable in Bethlehem. Thus, we are, in a technical sense, already in the *Eschaton*. The Last Things were inaugurated by Christ's first *parousia* (coming, presence).

Beyond that, however, we begin with the perspective that *all* of God’s word, from Genesis through Revelation is about Christ Jesus, the Son of God, and His kingdom. This is an important concept. To grasp the magnitude of the Last Things we must understand that the plan for it was laid out in eternity past, and that the first mention of it to man occurs as early as the third chapter of Genesis.

Read Genesis 3:14-15.

Many refer to v15 as the “fifth gospel”—or, perhaps more accurately, the *first* gospel—for here we have the first mention of the Savior (“seed,” *zarah*, singular). Here we have the prophecy that sets up the cosmic battle (“enmity” (*eba*), hostility, hatred) between Satan and Christ Jesus. The operative verb here is more often than not translated “bruise,” which really doesn’t sound so bad. But the Hebrew word is *shuph*, which here means to break, smite in pieces, crush; to greatly injure or wound. Just as important as the verb is the *location* of each wound:

- The Son of God will receive His fatal blow at the cross, but since He will be raised from the grave, it will be as if He was only wounded “on the heel.”
- Satan, however, will have his “head” crushed, and there will be no recovery from that.

Even before his demise, the prophecy says that he will be henceforth cursed, and “dust [he] will eat all the days of [his] life.” In the OT “eating dust” carries the meaning of total defeat. Notice how the prophet Isaiah describes the serpent’s—not Satan, but snakes—status during even the glory days of the new heavens and new earth.

Read Isaiah 65:17, 25.

From the beginning days of Creation, Satan’s fate was sealed. Christ will have the ultimate victory over His ancient nemesis when Satan is destroyed forever, in the lake of fire, during the very Last Things.

The apostle Paul speaks of this flow of history focused on Christ in a slightly different way in his letter to the Ephesian church.

Read Ephesians 1:9-10.

And he [i.e., God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Ephesians 1:9-10 NIV)

One thing Paul brings out here is that the entire economy of the universe—not just religion, not just salvation, but *everything* “in heaven and on earth”—will one day be under the authority of just “one head”: Christ Jesus. From the very beginning of time itself, it has *all* been about Him.

- only *He*—the Lion of Judah, the Lamb that was slain—is worthy and able to open the seven-sealed book.
- *Christ* is the one who will sit in judgment of the nations;
- *He* is the one who will separate the goats from the sheep;

- *He* will be the one to reign for one thousand years on earth after the Tribulation;
- and *He* is the one to sit on the throne of David “forever and ever.”

The story of the Last Things is the story of the victorious Messiah coming into His own; to put it in base human terms, it is what He was born to. The story was written by the Godhead before time even began:

Read Isaiah 46:8-10.

Before Time was even created, the Last Things were already mapped out. And Christ wins.

God does not just “know” what will happen in the future; He has designed the whole thing, from beginning to end, at the outset of this earth’s history. During those earliest days when He walked the Garden path with Adam, He had already mapped out the events of the Eschaton—beginning with the Son of God being incarnated in Bethlehem so that He could die on a cross for the sins of man, because the *first* man would ultimately fall out of fellowship with his Maker.

The Son of God, second member of the Godhead, would be incarnated on earth; in humility and obedience He would take on the flesh of man, and as a man He would suffer and die as a helpless lamb. His ministry to mankind would be one of love and grace, mercy and forgiveness. Even in that, however, He did not suffer fools, offering just a glimpse of what He would one day reveal to the universe. There will come a day when Christ will no longer show Himself as the meek and humble Lamb, but now a fierce, ruling King who will go to war against unrighteousness, and the unholy ministrations of a fallen world, ruling it with a “rod of iron” (Psalm 2:9).

The beauty and poetic symmetry of God’s word is seen in that this creation begins *and ends* with dwellings that are righteous and pure: perfect and sinless. His word begins in Eden, where God lived and walked with the first man and woman. He intended the earth, from the beginning, to be an idyllic paradise for His creation. But sin entered into that perfect dwelling, and the bulk of His word is the story of God’s plan and efforts to *restore* His sinless creation—both the land and its people.

By the next to the last chapter in God’s word this is accomplished. In Revelation 21 John describes a perfect, sinless world—“a new heaven and a new earth... and no longer any sea,” that is, no longer any sin or evil. There will be a new Jerusalem, and, even better, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.’”

Even though the purpose of this class is to define and document a timeline for the Last Things, we must never get so lost in the details of sequence, the minutia of eschatology, that we miss the breathtaking wonder and glory of this story—and the clear truth that the Son of God came into this world as flesh, so that He might die for the sins of all those who would place their trust, their eternity—their Eschaton—in Him.