

# **The Doctrine of The Last Things: Eschatology**

## ***1. Introduction***

The word eschatology means the study of the last things. It derives from eschatos (adjective) meaning last and logos meaning subject or word. Strictly speaking the eschaton is the last age. However, in another sense, whatever is in the future can generally be subsumed under the word. The first prophecy, speaking of the destruction of evil (Gen. 3:15) was strictly speaking an eschatological matter since evil will be defeated at the very end, however much it has been defeated on the way. Eschatological things are generally those things which are ahead, and specifically those which are at the very end-time.

## ***2. The Background To Eschatology***

### **(i) Salvation History**

The Biblical view of history is what we call linear or teleological. We mean that the telos (end) is the actual consummation and goal of completion of that which has been along the linear line of history. Many eastern religions and philosophies do not see an end, but rather cyclic movements which may consummate but recede to repetition of the former cycles. Eschatology, then, is wholly linked with salvation history.<sup>1</sup> Salvation history (**heilsgeschichte**) means that God is the God of history, and that in fact all history relates to the salvation which God is working out. It is not only an aspect - redemption within history - but history itself is redeemed, or, to put it another way, all history is God's act of salvation, rightly understood.

History, on the whole, is often understood as the simple chronicle of events as they happen. To this interpretations of history are often added. Some even adduce certain principles or patterns from the historic events. However, creation, redemption, and the final restoration of all things is the whole event of redemption. Hence the 'end things' (eschatology) must not be seen on their own, but viewed from the perspective of salvation history.

### **(ii) Prophecy**

Prophecy<sup>2</sup> is important from many points of view. When we see that prophecy

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<sup>1</sup> See "Salvation History" (N.C.P.I. 1977) for a fuller treatment.

<sup>2</sup> See LFS 7 "Prophecy: Its Meaning, Scope, and Significance" for a wide treatment of this important subject.

is both hortatory and predictive, then we can say that its forth-telling is its primary element. The foretelling (predictive) element is never simply to satisfy the curious-minded about the future. When prophecy is seen to be the revelation of God to mankind to benefit, inform and warn him, then again prophecy puts man in the right perspective. He is able to view things from the vantage point God will have him take.

Again, we cannot view prophecy without looking back over the history of man. This involves knowledge of the nature of God, man, and the universe. It demands knowledge of the fall, and the doom which God has placed upon this world, and especially upon the forms of evil who have rebelled against him, not excluding defiant man. It involves a knowledge of covenant, of the promises made to Abraham, and of God's purposes for the nations. In other words, we must understand history, and see it as a continuum.

Prophecy must also be understood in its context. Sometimes it is a direct communication of local events about to happen within a certain situation. Other times it points to the future. Some forms of prophecy are intended to be understood as literal, whereas others are clothed in apocalyptic language. Even these may state principles which obtain not only for one period, but more. Again, much prophecy has been clearly fulfilled. This is particularly the case of O.T. predictions about Christ, as we will see. When, then, certain prophecy is fulfilled it would seem the remainder has yet to be fulfilled. It may even be being fulfilled without our particular knowledge. Much of it is eschatological, that is it pertains to the end-time.

Even here we have to be careful. In Acts 2:17ff the days commencing with Pentecost are called 'the last days'. This infers that we are now living in the last days. Yet, in addition there is 'the last day' or 'the Day of the Lord'. Yet things which are happening now (in 'the last days') can also be said to be eschatological.

### **(iii) Hope**

Paul's classic statement on hope in Romans 8:18-26 is that things that are seen now are not things we hope for. Hope\* relates to the unseen. Even faith is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'. Hope then is the fixed assurance that those things which are promised will come to pass, and that the people of God will benefit by them, and at the last enter into an inheritance of the things that are eternal.

Hope has its basis primarily in the nature of God, but then in the prophecies as they reveal God in His gracious and judgemental intentions for His creation. Hope is based upon a present experience, such as the love of God experienced in the heart (Rom. 5:5) and the possession of the earnest and first fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:19-23). God is the God of all hope in that He promises the end things to the patient and the persistent (cf. Hebrews 6:9-12). For this reason we are taken back to the prophecies. Without them hope has no basis. The end things are prophesied, and so those knowing them are encouraged to persist. Indeed they are exhorted to do so under pain of losing what might be theirs if they do not persist to the end.

We note in passing that many of the things that are at present enjoyed in faith still remain in the realm of hope. For example, Romans 5:1 speaks of a present experience and assurance of justification. Yet in Galatians 5:5 Paul speaks of waiting, through faith for the hope of justification. Justification, then, can be said to be both present and eschatological. Again in I John 3:1-3 John speaks of the hope of being like Christ. In the same breath he says the one that has the hope seeks to live in accordance with it now.

The strongest thrust of hope lies in the fact that certain prophecies are already fulfilled and so confirm the fact that the others will also be fulfilled. Prophecy is not simply a novel way of showing God has been true to His promises. Things do not come true simply because prophecy makes them inevitable. They are inevitable because God has caused them to be necessary, indeed indispensable to the whole order of His plan. In this sense hope, prophecy and salvation history are all of the one piece. Without them things eschatological have no real place or meaning.

#### **(iv) The Kingdom of God**

At this point we will only make a brief point on the Kingdom of God being part of the background of eschatology. In fact the Kingdom of God is eschatology itself. We introduce it in this manner here because it is the most powerful integrating of the Old and New Testaments. It is the theme of them both par excellence. The O.T. speaks of God as King over all the earth. Seemingly, however, His Kingdom is de jure and not de facto. Some theologians see it as de facto only at the end time. This is not true. It only appears to be de jure. It is only the goodness, kindness and forbearance of God which does not apply pressure as yet to prove it to be de facto. Its de facto nature lies in the nature of God who is the King.

In another sense the Kingdom was coming for the Jews because their Kingdom (cf. Exodus 19:5-6) seemed to be not even de jure from the time of the exile to the coming of Christ. With him it was to break in upon men, and certainly did whilst he was present. It has not come in any climactic sense by the end of the N.T. canon. It is yet to come. At the same time the decisive events of the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension have sealed the Kingdom victory, and this is being outworked through the church. Hence eschatology takes its note from the various workings and triumphs of the Kingdom.

### ***3. Christ and Eschatology: The Lord of The Future***

It goes without saying that all eschatology is in the hands of the Lord of history, Jesus Christ. However, his Lordship must be looked at from a number of angles, and this we will proceed to do. We will have to recognise these in relation to the plan of God the Father, for example, Ephesians 1:4-10. His Lordship relates to his mediation in creation, redemption, in the bringing of the sons to heirship, and to the ultimate unification of all things.

#### **(i) Christ and Creation**

N.T. passages such as Col. 1:15-17, John 1:1-3, I Cor. 8:6 (cf. Hebrews 2:10) indicate that all things were created in Christ. Some of the Scriptures show him as the mediator of creation, and others simply as creator. However, it is best to see him as creating through the power and aid of the Father (Hebrews 1:2-3, I Cor. 8:6).

For our purposes he is shown as Lord of creation. Whilst certain O.T. passages may refer to this act of creation, e.g. use of the term 'by the word of God' (cf. Psalm 33:6-9, 148:5-6), yet it is the N.T. which makes this fact explicit.

Eschatology must never be seen apart from creation, since the climax of the eschaton is the renewal of creation (cf. Isaiah 65:17ff, 66:22ff, Rev. 21:1f, etc.). Hence in Ephesians 1:9-10 the all things of creation are said to be finally headed up (or, unified) in Christ. As we will see, creation is related to redemption since Romans 8:18ff (cf. Isaiah 11:1-9) speaks of the redemption of creation into its ultimate form and liberty.

## **(ii) Christ and the People of God**

In the O.T. there are many themes which relate to the coming of the special one who will fulfil the will of God. These aspects we will look at. However, the N.T. is greatly concerned with the theme of the people of God. This is also an eschatological theme. Acts 2:14ff speaks of the people of God as the Spirit is poured upon them, and much of the Book of Acts (if not all of it) is concerned with showing that the Jew, Gentile and Samaritan, in the Spirit, form the one people of God. Linked with this is the position of Israel itself, and in Romans chs 9-11 Paul outlines the final acceptance of Israel after their rejection which has happened because they have rejected Messiah.

In the O.T. the one who is to come is hidden under veils. I Peter 1:11 speaks of the prophets speaking by 'the Spirit of Christ'. This accords with a later N.T. principle which is enunciated - 'The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy' (Rev. 19:10). In Isaiah 6 Isaiah sees the Lord in the temple, and in John 12:37-47 the writer of that Gospel makes the point that it was Christ. In I Cor. 10:1-5 Paul says that the spiritual rock that followed Israel in the wilderness was Christ, and that they drank of him. There is a further reference to Israel as the people of God in Hebrews 3:1-6 where Moses is depicted as a servant in the house which God has built. In fact Christ, it is said, has built the house. Certainly he has always been a son in it (refer John 8:35). In this sense the Son has always been linked with the people of God. If, as some scholars say, the Son is 'the angel of the Lord', then Christ is very present in the people of God.

When we come to the N.T. there are no veils in regard to Christ and the people of God. He is the Messiah of the Kingdom. He is the Son of the Father, and the Father is the King of the Kingdom. The people of the Kingdom are the people of God. From the birth of the church in Acts the people of God are, as we have pointed out, all who come to God by repentance and faith. They are the new community. The Book of Acts, as also the Epistles and the Revelation depict them as the new community, having continuity with Israel as the covenant people, but also having an element of discontinuity in that the Israel of blood descent does not wholly accept Messiah. Those who do are of the true Israel, and those who are of the Gentiles who come in repentance and faith are also of the true Israel. Paul spends much time in Ephesians showing that they are of the one 'new humanity', and fellow-heirs with those of Israel of the promise.

Our main point in developing this theme is to show that at the end-time when the people of God will be sealed, and will inhabit the new heavens and the new earth, that this will be the eschatological conclusion to the history of the people of God. Passages such as Revelation 7:9-17, and 21:1-5 deal with the totality of the people of God, whilst Rev. 6:9-11 deals with the martyred people, and Rev. 7:4-8 and 14:1-8 the specifically named 144,000. In the epistles the people of God, the community of God and the household of God are people of the new covenant. This is seen in Romans chs. 1-8, in Gal. 2:1ff, and 3:6-29, in Ephesians 2:13 - 3:12 (among others) in the Pauline corpus, whilst in the Johannine writings

the children of God are the beloved community, and must reflect God with their love (I John 4:7-5:3). In I Peter the community of Israel now passes over 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' to the redeemed by Christ (cf. Exodus 19:5-6, I Peter 2:9-10). In both Peter and Paul the community is being built as a temple and as a dwelling place for God, in which members are 'living stones That community will only be built fully 'right up to the day of Jesus Christ'. In this sense it is the eschatological community. The promise of heirship is also linked with the new heavens and the new earth.

### **(iii) Christ and Prophecy**

If we take Revelation 19:10 at face value then the substance of all prophecy is Jesus. This is clear also from Luke 24:25-27 and 44-49. I Peter 1:10-12 also confirms this, as also the statements in the Acts, that the kerugma is delivered on the basis of what the prophets have said, that is that Jesus has come in conformity with them, and bears their fulfilment in his person and acts. For example, see Acts 2:22ff, 3:18-26, 10:42ff, 15:15ff, 17:2, 11, 18:22-27, 28:23. Acts 26: 22 - 'nothing but what Moses and the prophets said would come to pass' and Acts 13:27 - '...their rulers, because they did not recognise him (Christ) nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him' - show us that Christ was indeed, and still is, the substance of the prophets.

Prophecy which is Christological and eschatological together can be seen in two ways to relate Christ and eschatology.

- (a) Christ is the substance of the O.T. prophecies.
- (b) Christ is the accomplished fulfilment of the O. T. prophecies insofar as he acted in his life and ministry and will act up to the eschaton

#### **(a) Christ the Substance of the O.T. Prophecies**

Quite apart from Christ's own claim to be so, any study of Christology<sup>3</sup> will show this fact. The 'Seed' concept of Gen. 3:15 is linked with that of the promise to Abraham, and is linked with the Emmanuel promise of Isaiah 7:14, which in turn is linked with Matthew 1:22-23. This is developed by Paul in Galatians 3.

The Messiah prophecies are varied, and in number. Likewise the King idea which is both Messianic and Davidic, the 'son of David' being the messianic King. The N.T. term 'Lord' for Christ finds its basis in the O.T., and is mentioned by Christ as such as he quotes Psalm 110. Messiah, Lord and King are ideas which cannot be truly full unless they relate to true humanity and to true deity.

In addition to these terms there are others such 'the Son of man', 'the servant' and 'the prophet'. None of these would be greatly significant for our study except that they all have eschatological connotation. The seed crushes Satan, and is 'God with us' with a view to victory over Israel's enemies. Messiah is King of the eternal Kingdom, whether it be Davidic, or the defeat of the rebellious nations and elements of this world, as we see them in Psalm Two. In Psalm 110 the Lord has victory over his enemies, and the N.T. uses this plentifully in regard to the ascended Jesus. The Servant of the latter chapters of Isaiah is the

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<sup>3</sup> See LFS 16 'The Person & Work of Christ' (N.C.P.I. 1977), or expanded notes from the B.C.S.A./N.C.T.M. Short-Term Bible Schools (1978, N.C.P.I.) under the same title. These are amongst many other treatments.

servant of Mark 10:45. He comes to suffer and give his life for others, a theme brought out strongly in Isaiah 53 (amongst other passages). The Prophet of Deuteronomy 18 is a 'greater than Moses'. Jesus not only epitomises the true prophet, but he is the substance of the prophets, and himself prophesies in a manner which is unique. Hence, later, the followers within the Kingdom of God 'have the testimony of Jesus'. Such statements are numerous in the Book of the Revelation, as well as being borne out by Pentecost which must be understood fully in the light of Acts 1:8-11 and Acts 2:14-21.

### **(b) Christ the Fulfilment of the O.T Prophecies Insofar as He Acted in His Life and Ministry, and Will Act up to the Eschaton**

Again, any comprehensive study of Christology will show that Christ was the essential fulfilment of the prophecies of the O.T. up to the point of his ascension. His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension are in conformity with these prophecies. At the same time the O.T depicts his various offices as being linked with the eschatological conclusion, the telos of God's plan. Acts 3:21 depicts him as being in heaven with a view to the restoration of all things. He himself said he would come in the 'regeneration of the world' (Matt. 19:28). Hebrews 10:12-13 (cf. 1:2-3) depicts him as expecting eschatological victory as the fruit of his Cross (cf. Isaiah 53:11-12). Certainly passages such as Phil. 2: 9-11 and I Cor. 15:24-28 (cf. Rev. 11:15), show him victorious to and at the end- time.

It is clear from Daniel 7 that the 'Son of man' will ultimately have the eternal kingdom. This is also clear from Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1f, and Jer. 23:5-6, although in this case it will be the Davidic King. As we have seen, the suffering servant will also know victory (Isaiah 53:11ff). Sometimes in the O.T it is God Himself who will come, and his will be on the Day of the Lord (Joel 3:16, Zechariah 14:5, Malachi 3:1-2). This day of the Lord in the N.T is linked with Christ, as for example the one who is to baptise with the Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:7-12). This one comes proclaiming the Kingdom and so the end is near. In the former days God has spoken to the fathers by the prophets. In the last days He has spoken by His Son (Hebrews 1:2).

Given in all of the fulfilment Christ effected by his life, death and resurrection, he is yet to complete the work at the end of the age. Meanwhile, as I Cor. 15:24-28 shows us, he is putting down all rule and authority and power, by virtue of his own authority (Ephes. 1:21), and will complete that right up to the point when he appears and subjugates all things with irreversible finality.

### **(iv) Christ the Lord of the Future**

In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples they will witness to him in the three spheres of Jew, Gentile and Samaritan. This is the Kingdom but not simply restored to Israel, as the prophets said would happen, but beyond Israel, as they also said it would happen. Hence the preaching in Acts is that of salvation, and yet is that of the Kingdom. See, for example, Acts 20:18-32, where the kerugma is also called 'preaching the Kingdom

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus says all authority is given to him. References to Psalm 110 are numerous and chiefly depict him sitting at the right hand of God, the place of authority. Likewise references to Psalm 2 depict him winning the nations of the earth. Hence in this passage Jesus commands them to make disciples of all nations. In Mark 16:14ff, he shows himself as commanding a universal preaching of the Gospel and then as going with them confirming the word.

The Acts, Epistles and the Revelation depict him as Lord. All history is now under his hand. In the Revelation he is shown as unfolding history itself from Chapter five onwards. Of course the Gospels depict him as the coming Lord and Judge. John's Gospel shows that all things are committed to him, even the resurrection of men to death or life. Judgement is in his hands (cf. John 5:19-29, 3:35, cf. Matt. 11:27). In I Corinthians 15 Paul speaks of the power of Christ's death and resurrection to effect the resurrection from the dead of those who believe in him. Hence Jesus is called 'the Prince (Author) of life' in Acts 3:15. All the end things are contingent upon him for their happening.

In passing we may note that the Lord at the right hand of God intercedes for his own, so that they need not fear the present, nor for that matter, the future. It is his present reigning which is the source of so much powerful hope for the present and the future. That the future is in his hands is powerful comfort for his people.

## ***4. Christ's View of The Future***

Christ's view of the future, which we may call his eschatology, is most important. Since he has been present in all history, and having come to earth has set the modes of the future, then to know his mind regarding the end things is both essential and profitable.

When we say we will formulate Christ's view from the Gospels then we find in practice that it is not simple. First of all we have two somewhat differing approaches, one being from the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), and the other from John's Gospel. Then again, some elements within the three synoptic accounts seem to differ somewhat. Doubtless a reconciliation can be effected, but again, not easily, since so many commentators differ in this. Finally we have the fact that Jesus sees a number of things as historical, and not as totally eschatological. We mean that whilst all things in the last days are in one sense eschatological, yet also many of them are historical since they lead to the eschaton without technically being things of the actual eschaton

### **(a) The Synoptic Gospels**

Jesus anticipated a judgement of God which would fall on Jerusalem. This can be seen in Luke 13:34ff, Matt. 23:37-39 and again in Luke 19:41-44 and 23:27-31. Mark 13:1-2 shows the temple as being razed to the ground. This evil generation would feel the impact of judgement (Matt. 11:16-19, Luke 13:1-5). The Kingdom of God would be taken away and given to another set of people. In the parable of the vineyard God was to visit Israel, and destroy the tenants, giving the vineyard to others (Mark 12:9). Matthew 23:23-35 shows that was because of the murder of the prophets, and finally, the Son of the Father.

In this context the disciples will take the Gospel to all nations. It will not be confined to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' as it was when he was in Palestine (Matt. 10:6). In Matt. 10:17 (cf. Mark 13:9, Luke 21:12) the disciples go before kings and governors. This is when the Gospel is first preached to all nations before the end comes (Mark 13:10, cf. Matt. 24:14). The statement of Matt. 10:23, 'Truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes', has been taken to mean that the eschatological Kingdom would come before they had even finished preaching in Israel, but is best understood to mean that preaching to Israel will still be happening when the Son of man comes. Romans chs. 9-11 indicates that preaching must continue, and will ultimately have its effect.

One of the problems connected with the Olivet discourses as seen in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 is that two events are discussed, and often they appear to be the one. Some commentators opt to make them either one of the two that others see. The first is the visitation of judgement on Jerusalem which in fact took place in AD. 70 under Titus, and the other is the parousia, the ultimate coming of Messiah. It is true that the threads of the two interweave, but this is primarily because the same principle of visitation obtains for both, although the modes differ.<sup>4</sup> It is evident that the disciples associate the destruction of the temple with the end events, whilst Jesus indicates it would happen at the near and impending judgement of the city. One of the elements which seems to confuse is that the Son of man will appear in glory in the clouds with his coming, and this could scarcely be said of the destruction of Jerusalem. The question then is what elements relate to (a) The destruction of Jerusalem, and (b) The parousia. This disentangling of the two threads cannot be accomplished within the scope of this paper. However, what must be understood are the signs which precede both events, and particularly what warnings would fit the first and what the second of these events. This is sometimes complicated by certain presuppositions of prophecy which readers bring to these passages such as a 'rapture', and then a 'rapture' which precedes or follows the tribulation spoken of in Matthew 24:21 and 29. These are not easy matters to solve.

It must be noted that even when the signs appear 'the end is not yet' (Mark 13:7), for this is but the 'beginning of sufferings' (Mark 13:8). What must be seen is that Jesus is not merely teaching them of the events to come so that they will have a kind of almanac, but rather that they will know what they are about. Succinctly put it means that those who are marked out as disciples will have to face great tribulations. This is because the love of many shall wax cold, men shall become worse, and the conflict between the kingdom of darkness and that of light will intensify to the point where the faithful will suffer death, although in fact they will gain life.

What is perhaps even more to the point is that Jesus teaches that it is God who triumphs, not by reason of greater strength (which is true enough), but by the fact that his purposes are being worked out, and this through the climaxing of evil. The same principle is taught even more powerfully in the Revelation where evil powers are actually given authority to work certain forms of suffering. It is out of suffering that the Kingdom comes. This last principle was well known to the prophets (Isaiah 66:8, Jer. 22:23, Hosea 13:13, Micah 4:9f) and is also used by Paul in Romans 8:18-30. Out of this suffering the true people of God will be born and matured. In all of Jesus' view of the future the great theme of the Kingdom of God is present. It conditions all we have said.

### **(b) The Gospel of John**

Some matters are clear in John. One is that of the Kingdom. A close study of John 2:23 - 3:14 shows that Jesus, in doing signs of the Kingdom could not accept Nicodemus' affirmation of him as a man come from God. Except one were born of water and Spirit one could not see nor enter the Kingdom. Presumably one did when one was born of the Spirit, which would accord greatly with John 1:11-13 where true birth is of God. This also would parallel Matthew 18:1f, where one enters the Kingdom by being a little child. In John 18:33-38 Jesus avers that the Kingdom is 'not of this world'. It is spiritual but none the less real for that.

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<sup>4</sup> For a simple but excellent treatment of this see pp.196-198 of G. E. Ladd's 'A Theology of the New Testament' (Eerdmans 1974).



Against such a kingdom is this world. Satan is the prince of this world (John 12: 31, 14:30, 16:11).

Jesus is going to come again. This is seen in John 14:1-2. Whilst doubtless he also comes with the Holy Spirit (John 14:18), yet in 16:7-15 it is evident that he is going away and leaving the Holy Spirit in his place. They will see him no more. In 21:22 Jesus indicates a coming back. His prayer of John 17 can mean nothing less than that he is going to the Father, and longs to have them there with him, one day. This is also the purport of John 14:1ff.

Whilst doubtless a man may pass from death to life now (John 5:24), yet such a statement has no significance if it does not obtain in the after-life. Likewise eternal life, even though entered into now, must also be there. This is especially so for the judgement in which Christ will be the judge. Some will be raised to life, and others to 'the resurrection of judgement' (John 5:25-29). He himself rises from the dead in one event and ascends in another. This is apparent from John 20:17. Whilst future history and the events of the eschaton as such are not told by Jesus, his going to the Father, his preparation for their coming, and his return are all indicated. The nature of the Gospel and its purpose as explained in John 20:30-31, whilst not precluding the inclusion of the nature of the Olivet discourse in the synoptics, does not call for such, by the same token.

It can then be said that nothing within the Gospel of John precludes the historical and eschatological view of Jesus as seen in the synoptics. Nor is there anything which is at variance with the synoptical view.

### **(c) Other Elements of Jesus' View**

Matters such as salvation, death, eternal life, the everlasting Kingdom, judgement, resurrection, heaven, and the future state of the redeemed and the lost are all elements which Jesus treats in his teaching. These are the real eschatological elements which we wish to know. However, we will deal with these generally since they are not so much prophetic, as they are functional to the eschaton. Nevertheless they constitute a significant part of the teaching of Jesus. Couched as they are in the terms of his day, it does not mean that his language used concerning them was necessarily an accommodation or even an adaptation to the idiom of the times.

## ***5. A General Eschatology of The New Testament***

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would (a) Lead the believers into all the truth, and (b) Show them things to come. See John 16:12-15. This was to be because he was himself to go to the Father, and they would see him no more. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost actually led them into this truth. Hence in Acts 2:42 the early believers continue in the apostolic doctrine. Paul in Romans 1:5 is quick to claim his apostleship, inferring it to be a unique gift from Christ. His long defence of his apostleship in Galatians is to show that what he taught was to be taken as the truth. Hence there must be what we may call 'an apostolic eschatology' and it must accord with the teaching of Christ.

As we have said before, all events of this age are slanted to the eschatological, since these are the last days (Acts 2:17ff and Heb. 1:2). Hence the historical as well as the wholly eschatological are of one piece. We shall proceed to deal with them under preceding events and ultimate events.

### (i) Preceding Events

The O.T. had pointed to the last days and the day of the Lord. It had also pointed to the fact and coming of the Kingdom. In this was included the person of Messiah, and the Son of Man.

Whatever may have been the Kingdom, the Kingdom is yet to come. Israel having been a rebellious people has been chastised by the exile, and then told by its prophets that a new age was coming (e.g. Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 37:1-14, 36:24-28). That age was spoken to by the prophets. Hebrews 1:1-2 speaks of another age. In fact this age is called 'this present evil age' (Gal. 1:4) and the practical facts are that the age has its prince or god who is Satan (John 12: 31, II Cor. 4:4). He has his children, and in fact has all in thrall who are not directly of God (Ephes. 2:1-3, John 8:44, I John 5:19). At the same time God is Creator, and King of all the earth, and 'King of the ages' (see Rev. 15:3). The earth and its fulness belong to God and not to Satan (I Cor. 10:26).

The tension set up by these facts arises from an unrelenting battle between the power of God and that of Satan. Into this, historically, and effectively, Messiah has come. He announced his intention to destroy evil (Luke 11:21f, John 12:31) and it was said he had come for this purpose (I John 3:8, Heb 2:14-15). With his coming came also the Kingdom in practical dynamic form. Demons were exorcised, persons healed, and all who were oppressed of the devil found release from the power of evil (Acts 10:38, Matt. 12:28). Yet in a greater way Messiah defeated evil. It was through the Cross. By this he released from sin (John 8: 44, Romans 6:17f), Satan (Heb. 2:14-15), the world (Gal. 1:4, 6:14), the world powers (Col. 2:14-15), the flesh (Gal. 5:24). This whole evil system had its essential power broken, since this power was by the law.

The practical proof of this deliverance was that God's people now possessed powers of the 'age to come' (cf. Ephes 1:21, Heb 6:5, cf. 2:5). They commanded demons, they healed, they delivered from the thrall of Satan. The key to this was the forgiveness from sins which was a sign of the new age (Jer. 31:31-34, cf. Matt. 26:28, Luke 24:44ff). The Kingdom which was yet to come eschatologically was nevertheless present in power (I Cor. 4:20, cf. Romans 14:17) for men were now transferred from the powers of darkness into the Kingdom of His Son, by forgiveness (Col. 1:13-14). These could be said to be those 'upon whom have come the ends of the ages' (I Cor. 10:11). In time they are in this; present evil age. In truth they are in the age to come, the age of newness, t w world. Hence the tension.

Because they are not of this world they are persecuted (John 15:18ff). They must expect tribulation (Matt. 24:21, John 16:33). They suffer for the Kingdom's sake, since it has not yet come in full (Acts 14:22, II Thess 1:5, cf. Matt. 5: 10). They battle continually against Satan. (See II Cor. 10:1ff, Ephes 6:10ff, I Peter 5:8, Revelation ch. 12.) On the one hand Christ is putting down the powers who have no legal hold over the people of God, but seek to threaten and seduce them. On the other hand Satan and his powers are seeking to build their kingdom and defeat God. Events are spoken of in which such endeavours will climax. Some eschatological personage will appear or emerge in regard to 'the desolation of abomination' spoken of in Matt. 24:15 and referred to in the prophecy of Daniel (11:31, 12:11). Abominations in the O.T. were generally idolatrous uncleanness. The 'man of lawlessness' will arise. He is the 'son of perdition' (II Thess. 2:3). This form of evil is related to antichrist. There are many antichrists, but they peak in this one (cf. I John 4:1). This one may be equated with or related to, the beast of the Revelation (13:1 and other places). This one will do great signs and gather the admiration of men, seeking as he will the adoration and worship of man. In fact he will demand and force allegiance, seeking to destroy those who do not bear his mark.

Those who do not submit to his power, and his lesser powers will go through great tribulation (Matt. 24:21, 29, Rev. 13:7). God will intervene to save His elect (Matt. 24:22). Even though these things will happen towards the end of time and portend its finality, yet in another sense they have always been happening in principle. This is why some schools of thought attach their fulfilment to times which have already happened in history.

On the other hand Satan and his hosts will face the judgements of God. This is seen in the Revelation. There will be tribulation for the forces of evil. In fact they are never depicted as at peace. They are compulsively seeking to destroy, but they cannot build. They receive the judgements of the seven trumpets (Revelation 8 - 9), the seven bowls (Ch. 16), that is plagues and disasters as manifestations of God's wrath (15:1, 7, 16:19). These will be felt by the beast and his adherents (14:9-10, 16:2, 10). God's people will be sealed so that the wrath will not touch them (cf. 7:1-8, 9:4). When martyred nothing can touch them (7:9-17, cf. 6:9-11). The 144,000 may appear to be a special group, and even Israel of blood descent, but Rev. 14:3 says they are from all mankind, and the list in 7:4ff has no parallel in the O.T. Whoever they are does not matter. They succeed. In all events God is triumphant, and His people, through suffering, receive a crown of life and their works do follow them.

### **(ii) The Coming of Christ**

The 'Day of the Lord' so important in the O.T prophets, is in fact the day of Christ (Phil. 1:10, 2:16). It has many names, such as, 'the day of the Lord' (Acts 2:20, I Thess 5:2, II Thess. 2:2, II Peter 3:10). It is also 'the day of the Lord Jesus', 'the day of our Lord Jesus Christ', 'the day of Jesus Christ', 'the day of God', and even 'that day'. In John's Gospel it is 'the last day

There are a number of words which relate to Christ's coming or appearing, and they each have a certain meaning. In Hebrews 9:28 the day is called his 'second coming'. This is as against his first coming which is discussed in the context. The Greek word *parousia* means 'presence' or 'arrival' (I Cor. 16:17, II Cor. 7:7) and was used in Greek to denote the arrival and appearing of a king or ruler. As he went in glory so he will appear again in glory. Glory received him out of their sight. Then it will reveal him. In this context see Acts 1:11. This appearing is to be at the end of the age (Matt. 24:3) and he is to come 'in the glory of the Father' (Matt. 24:30, 16:27). He will gather the elect from all the earth (Matt. 24:31) and catch up his true people (11 Thess 2:1, I Thess 4:13ff) because the dead will be raised (I Cor. 15:23, 51ff). I Thess. 2:19, Phil. 3:21, I Thess 3:13, 4:15, 5:23 all speak of the coming of Christ. For believers it will be very wonderful experience, but it will be judgement for the evil. Antichrist will be destroyed (II Thess 2:8).

The word *apokalypsis* means an unveiling of what has been but been veiled. Already he has been seated at the right hand of God, and interceding for his people. Then he will be revealed. I Peter 5:1 says his glory will be revealed. I Cor. 1:7 talks about 'the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ', whilst I Peter 1:7 speaks about 'the revelation of Jesus Christ', a statement repeated in the 13th verse of the chapter. In the first 'praise, glory and honour' will spring from the work of the saints, and in the second grace will come to them.

Another word which is used is *epiphaneia*, that is 'appearing'. In II Thess 2:8 this appearing will slay the lawless one. It is the equivalent of *apokalypsis* in II Thess 1:7-8 where the judgement of the unbelievers is described. 'Appearing' is also used in I Tim. 6:14, II Tim. 4:1, 8 and Titus 2:13. All of these words have very wonderful and powerful connotation.

## ***6. Things Which Are The Last Things***

For almost all human beings, especially for those who view history as being linear and the end-time as being the consummation of history, the things of the future must fascinate or repel. The enormous attraction divination, astrology and other forms of future telling, plus political and ideological futurisms all witness to the fact that man is interested in what is ahead. Even in dualistic religions and philosophies there must be something just ahead, if not far away ahead. The ideas of annihilation or conditional immortality still have a strong element of futurism, and so have their attraction. Thus death, the possibility of future life, its modes and forms all find interested inquirers.

For the Christian the present lies in the future, as the future in the present. The future conditions the present on the basis of hope. Faith itself is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things (as yet) not seen. Thus the things of hope are also the things of faith. Faith and hope are based in the revelation of the Word, whether of law or prophet, of God through His media such as Christ the Word, and the Spirit of the Word, the Holy Spirit. We may then proceed to look at some of these matters which interest us personally because they are things which pertain to us, and very especially so at the end-time.

### **(i) THE RESURRECTION**

The resurrection naturally relates to death. Christ said clearly that those who believed on him would never die (John 11:25), and also that in this life they passed from death to (eternal) life (John 5:24). He must mean that when physical death comes to a man then that man does not see death. He simply goes on into life. Also he must have meant that the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15, cf. I John 4: 17-18) and the sting of death (I Cor. 15:55-56) were removed. Hence 'he hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light' (II Tim. 1:10).

How then, does this work out at the end-time? In the O.T there was anticipation of resurrection or Peter would not have quoted Psalm 16 of Christ's resurrection on the day of Pentecost. Passages such as Isaiah 25:8, 26:19, Daniel 12: 2, as perhaps Ezekiel 37 show that there was hope for resurrection. We are not always aware, not even from Scripture, of the beliefs of those in other times. We have to search through much of what they say and sing to catch the nuances of belief. Some intimations of personal ideas concerning resurrection may be seen in Job 19:25, Psalms 16:10ff, 49:16, 73:26, 17:15. We know that at the time of Christ certain groups, such as the Pharisees, believed in the resurrection, and other groups, such as the Sadducees, did not believe in it.

Christ announced his own resurrection (cf. Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). After his resurrection he rebuked them for not hearing, and not understanding the (prophetic) scriptures. See Luke 24:25-27, 44-46. His own resurrection becomes the basis for the resurrection of believers, the true community of God. Romans 4: 25 says he was delivered for our sins and raised for our justification. Gal. 5:5 suggests that justification is eschatological. In the famous chapter of I Cor. 15 Paul states the original gospel, 'He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures.' He points out that forgiveness and eternal life are contingent upon his resurrection. In Romans 6:1-10 he again points to the power of the Cross and Resurrection to deliver men now from the penalty and power of sin. He teaches that believers are living a resurrection life now, hence they can look forward to 'a resurrection like his' (Rom. 6:5).

Jesus resurrection body was able to be handled. It could eat food. At the

same time it had properties not known to mortal bodies. In Phil. 3:21 it is called a body of glory, and in I Cor. 15 the believer is promised a body of glory or a 'spiritual body', although there is no dualism here of flesh and spirit. A spiritual body can presumably be physical in the way Christ's body was after resurrection. It will have powers of incorruptibility. Romans 8:18-30 is a helpful passage. It shows that the body shall be redeemed and implies total freedom from corruption, and liberty of a new kind. The passage concludes that Christ will be -the first born amongst many (such) brethren. I John 3:1-3 points out that we shall be like him, and this is confirmed by Phil. 3:21. Christ is the first fruits of them that slept, meaning that he represents the first of what is to come, and that which comes will be like the first fruits.

There are some difficult passages to interpret, one being that of II Cor. 4: 16 - 5:5. What we can be sure of is that the inner man being built up will be the full man in the resurrection time, and will have his own body. There is undoubtedly continuity with the body sown, but certainly not total identity. It is sown a natural body and it is raised a spiritual body. It is sown in corruption but will be raised without corruption.

The idea, too, is that just as here we are raised in Christ (see Col. 2:12- 13, 3:1-3, Rom. 6:1-10, Gal. 2:20, cf. Phil. 3:10), so in the end-time we shall also be raised with him. He is our life, and now our life is hid with Christ in God. When he appears we shall appear with him in glory, i.e. glorified form. In fact the doctrine of the resurrection presupposes the whole teaching of man's glorification, which is itself a vast subject. With it it also presupposes the doctrine of sonship and inheritance.

Whilst what we say now really relates to the state of the dead, nevertheless it also relates to the resurrection. I Cor. 15:51-57 says that at Christ's coming there will be an immediate transformation into resurrected being. This is confirmed both by Phil. 3:21 and I Thess 4:13-18. All will be raised at the appearing of Christ. The elect living at that point will be transformed without dying, and the dead will be transformed by the act of resurrection. The more delicate point of a 'rapture' which does not happen at the end of time so much as in the midst of time as a precursor to a millennial reign is a question of a different nature. Also the use of the terms 'first resurrection' (explicit) and 'second resurrection' (implicit) found in Revelation 20 may be capable of various interpretations, according to the epistemology of the interpreter. The N.T. writers speak of a first resurrection within this life, and point to a total bodily resurrection yet to happen. This could well be the explanation of these terms. It could well be also that the 'second death' (Rev. 20:6) is in fact the death of judgement. Romans 5:12f seems to imply that the death through sin is physical as well as moral.

### **(ii) The State of the Dead**

Man views death with dread (Heb. 2:14-15) because it has a sting - sin (I Cor. 15:55-56). The power of sin, both moral and penal lies in the law (cf. Rom. 6:12-14), for the law for the sinner becomes 'the law of sin and death' (Romans 8:1-2). Christ kills death (a) In the Cross and (b) In ultimate history (I Cor. 15:25-26, cf. II Tim. 1:10). What, then, happens in the state of death? How are the believers and the unbelievers? Is there such a thing as soul sleep? Are believers who die bereft of a body? These are questions which we ask timorously because they mean so much to us, and we are often afraid of the answers.

First of all, we must recognise that the whole doctrine of God as Creator, Father and Redeemer must be taken into consideration. To seek to eke out scraps

of information about the state of the dead is pitiful if we do not see Jesus' assurance that he has gone to prepare a place for us, and if we miss the import of Jesus' statement, 'This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise!' Even to scan the parable of Dives and Lazarus for information about 'the intermediate state' is pitiful. A parable is not about such information, as such. On the other hand, we are informed as far as we need to know.

Paul said in Phil. 1:21 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.' He could have meant no less than to live or to die was to be with Christ, and death would bring him closer. To depart and be with Christ was 'far better'. Hence no one need feel that to die and be with Christ would be less attractive than to live in this world with Christ. In Romans 7:24 Paul says, 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' In other places he speaks about contentment in every state, but here he is talking about the internal conflict with sin which is known to every believer. In II Cor. 4:16 - 5:5 - this passage has been strongly debated - the debate is whether Paul is clothed with a new body or not. Some conclude that this is what Paul is claiming - that no sooner will he die than he will be clothed with a new body. Some even see that body inherent in and as the inner man of 4:16. Whatever the debate, Paul is glad that what is mortal will be swallowed up in life (5:4). There is also the point of Romans 8:9- 11, where Paul speaks of the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead, dwelling in the body of mortality, the inference being that he will not cease to dwell with the believer, and will indeed raise him from the dead, which may give point to II Cor. 5:4-5 when he says that 'He who has prepared us for this very thing (i.e. swallowing up mortality in life) is God, who has given us the Spirit as a

'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living', is a principle which insists that His people are not dead as we know death. It is perhaps tenuous to point to Moses and Elijah appearing in glory with Jesus on the Mount of transfiguration, but it happened! The thief was with Christ in Paradise on the day of the crucifixion, whatever the mode of his being there may have been. II Cor. 5:8 says in regard to the state after death, of the believer, 'We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.' 'At home with the Lord' is a very beautiful state as well as a very beautiful statement. It accords with Philippians 1:21-23. Whilst the debate concerning whether we are embodied or not cannot be satisfactorily solved to the satisfaction of all, what can be said is that it will be a very beautiful and desirable state.

There are other considerations. How could we understand the modes of this state after death? Some even question whether there is an 'intermediate' state. The Scriptures do not speak of it exactly in these terms. Some see the death of a person as coincident with the resurrection day, allowing that time does not exist (anyway as we know it) in eternity. In time we will rise at the resurrection day with the new body, but in fact this will happen at death with no time lag between death and (the ultimate) resurrection. This is, of course, conjecture.

In the O.T the state after death is sheol which is sometimes translated as 'grave', 'hell' or 'pit'. It is pictured as a place beneath (Psalm 86:13, Proverbs 15:24, Ezekiel 26:20), as a region of darkness (Job 10:22), and the land of silence (Psalm 88:12, 94:17). In sheol there are the dead, gathered in tribes (Ezekiel 32:17-32). These dead receive the dying (Isaiah 14:9-10). Sheol is not so much a place as a state, not a state of living, yet not only of life, but rather of mere existence. Psalm 16 says God will not abandon His loved ones to sheol. He will bring them into His presence (Psalm 49:15, 73:24, Job 19:25). Both Enoch and Elijah were taken into the presence of God without passing through sheol. It seems that Hades, sometimes translated hell (A.V.), but better 'the

grave', is the equivalent to sheol. See Matt. 11:23, 16:18, Luke 10:15, 16:23, Acts 2:27, 31, Rev. 1:18, 6:8, 20:13, 14, I Cor. 15:55. This is the picture in the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Also Peter has a reference to the unrighteous dead as spirits in prison (I Peter 3:19).

Finally in this intermediate state (so-called) there is the mention of the term 'sleep'. Sleeping must not be taken as an actual sleeping, from the 'other side' vantage point, since Paul speaks of being with Christ, and that it is better than this side. He has also said that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ and says one of the things unable to separate is death (Rom. 8:38). Jesus said that Lazarus slept, meaning that death is not deadness. He said of the little girl, 'She is not dead but sleeps'. The realm of death has been conquered by Christ in every possible way so that it is no longer death. It now becomes a living situation. Death, from this side ' its least is a going to sleep. At its best it is not sleep on the other side but conscious life with Christ (see I Thess 5:10, Matt. 9:24f, John 11:11-14).

### **(iii) Judgement**

God's judgement is righteous. If He forgives He may only do this because 'He is faithful and just to forgive', that is He has made provision for forgiveness on the basis of His righteousness and justice, and not simply on love divorced from justice. God's wrath is related to judgement, but His wrath is never arbitrary or irrational, as is often the case with man. Abraham calls God 'the judge of all the earth', meaning that because He is creator it is His prerogative to judge. He sets the functional and governing principles. In Heb 9:27 it is said that it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgement. James 4:12 represents God as ruler, judge, and lawgiver. Christ said that the Father had authority to judge but that He had invested this in the Son (John 5:22-29). The Acts speak of Christ as the judge (Acts 10:42, 17:30-31), and in the epistles the judgement seat is both that of God and Christ (Rom. 14:10, II Cor. 5:10, 11 Tim. 4:8). The judgement seat of God as depicted in Revelation 20 is really the judgement seat of Christ.

This latter is often questioned but it is seen that the righteous already have their names written in the Book of life, whilst others are judged by their works (Rev. 20:13-15). Paul says in Romans 2:14-15 that the Gentiles will be judged according to the law written on their hearts. This is the measure of judgement. In Romans 2:4-6 he says impenitent men are building up wrath for the day of the revelation of righteous judgement. In Romans 2:14-15 he indicates that the rehabilitated conscience will in fact judge so 'accusing or else excusing'.

Judgement has already happened in this world. It is simply the pronouncement and execution of the judgement which will take place in the future. Romans 1:18 says God's wrath is upon those suppressing the truth in (acts of) unrighteousness. John's Gospel makes it clear that those refusing to believe Christ are already under condemnation and those believing will not come under condemnation. They have already passed from death unto life. In fact the believer is acquitted from condemnation by justification (Rom. 5:1, 8:1-2, etc.). At the same time there will be a judgement for believers which will be a judgement of losses and rewards. (See also I Cor. 3 for the test of the works.) Whilst the believer is acquitted in this life he looks with hope for the definitive acquittal on 'that day' (Gal. 5:5). In this sense all salvation is eschatological since the redemption of the body (the sonship) will be known on that day, in its fulness.

Jesus indicated that judgement would follow the resurrection. For the evil

it will be the resurrection to judgement (John 5:29). It is worth noting that judgement whilst based upon the moral law, has its primary thrust in the rejection of Christ, that is in unbelief in God. John 16:7-11 shows that conviction of sin is that they do not believe on Christ. II Thess 1:8 speaks of judgement on those 'who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus The principle of 'He that is not for me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth (Luke 11:23) seems to be the principle of judgement. In the Book of the Revelation those who have the mark of the beast are judged accordingly, and those who refuse it are those whose names are already written in the Lamb's book of life (cf. Rev. 19:20-21, and 20:14-15).

It is also to be noted that 'Death and Hades' are cast into the lake of fire, i.e. they are judged and their judgement executed. These two terms are synonymous, and it means that what we call 'the intermediate state' is dissolved. There remain now only two states—Heaven and Hell.

#### **(iv) Hell**

This is probably one of the most difficult of all subjects to approach, seeing those who dread judgement will reject it, and those who have ordinary human pity will find it repugnant. It is therefore a subject which must be treated with as much delicacy as firmness, and as much truth as the Scripture teaches. What it is not needs to be emphasised as much as what it is. This is needed because weird and perverse ideas have developed, over history. Hell is really the doctrine of eternal punishment.<sup>5</sup> Not all scholars see hell is eternal, even though many who deny the doctrine may agree that exegetically the fire is eternal. They would say that the fire, but not the torment is permanent. (See Rev. 20:10, 19:20, 20:15, 21:8.)

What, then, is hell? It is well-known that the Hebrew word *ge-hinnom* - 'the Valley of Hinnom' - was named from this valley which was just outside Jerusalem and where the rubbish burned' continually, hence the 'fire and worms' (fire consuming the rubbish and maggots which lived in the rotting mess). The fires of Molech worship burned there (11 Chron. 28:3, 33:6). It was thus used as prophetic word for judgement (Jer. 7:31-32) and later for final judgement (cf. Isaiah 66:24 which must be compared with 66:22-23).

In the Gospels it is Christ who makes many references to judgement and suffering, especially in terms of fire and anguish. God - and no one else - has power to cast both body and soul into hell (Luke 12:5, Matt. 10:28, Matt. 5:29-30). The fire is eternal and unquenchable (Mark 9:43, Matt. 18:8). We have seen in the above references that hell is a lake of fire and brimstone. Into this will be cast the beast, the devil, and the rebellious. Death and Hades are also cast into it, and on any score this must mean the fire is not, primarily anyway, literal. That does not mean it is not actual. It is called 'the second death' which means 'the death after death', i.e. the final judgement and its executed sentence. For the justified there is no sting to death, that is there is no second death. Other references which relate to this judgement are seen in Matt. 13:42, 50, 25:30, 41, II Peter 3:7, Jude 13. See also Matt. 7:23, II Thess 1:9. Within them we find the principle that men are banished from the presence of God, live in utter darkness, suffer alienation, and are deprived of the creational and redemptional blessings man may know on this earth through repentance and faith and in the state of heaven (to come).

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<sup>5</sup> An extended treatment of this may be found in H. Buis's 'The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co. 1957)



Some see the fire as the fire of love, and the light as the light of truth and God. God is a 'consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29) and 'God is love' (I John 4:8, 16). They see the anguish of man as he is eternally enveloped in the love he hates in his irreversible impenitence. They see the light which such see as darkness (Isaiah 5:20-21, Matt. 6:23) being the eternal judgement upon deliberate perversity. However this may be, two elements must be considered, as against the doctrines of annihilation and conditional immortality. The first denies that man has anything about him which is immortal, and the second that his immortality is conditional upon him being united to Christ. Man is not innately immortal, but because God has created him, and gives him continued being, this means he cannot be annihilated. To claim that he can be annihilated is to misunderstand the doctrine of creation. What can be said is that he will not live in the sense that he has lost life, and in fact eternal punishment, if it is anything, is the existence without true life (cf. John 10:10).

It is only when we contrast hell with heaven that we understand the difference between eternal life and the second death. Even so, we do not fully understand the term 'eternal'<sup>6</sup>, and until we do we may not dogmatise on what eternal punishment is essentially. We simply know enough to wish to evade it, and to warn others from it.

### (v) HEAVEN

Heaven is obviously to be resurrected in the body of glory and be with the Father, and with the Son, to say nothing of the Spirit. This would be a most acceptable state. The term 'heaven' in the O.T and N.T refers of course to the physical heavens (Gen. 1:1, Matt. 5:18), however it is not thought of literally as the eternal dwelling place of the righteous but rather a symbol of that beautiful reality. The Hebrews were not wooden literalists and did not really have a three- tiered idea literally. Most persons have the three-tiered imagery but understand it to be simply symbolical.

Hence when the Israelite prayed, 'Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven', or spoke of God as 'The God of heaven', or 'the Lord God in heaven' (Deut. 26:15, Jonah 1:9, Ezra 1:2) they were speaking as in the N.T. 'Our Father.. in heaven' (Matt. 5:45, 6:9). Solomon had said, 'The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee' meaning that heaven is not merely spatial. This unseen heaven is filled with many creatures, celestial and glorified terrestrial (such as man) by the end of the Scriptures. There are the hosts of heaven, the angels of heaven, and the Revelation gives us many glimpses of living creatures, elders, and so on. In II Cor. 12:1-4 Paul speaks of a man caught up into the third heaven and says simultaneously that he was caught up into Paradise. Paradise is the place Jesus promised the thief would enter on his death. The word Paradise actually means 'a garden' and it has been surmised that man who was banished from the garden (Eden) is restored to it.

However, many of these elements are speculative. The Book of the Revelation speaks of the heavens and the earth as we know them, or know of them, being displaced or replaced by new heavens and a new earth, and thus it would appear from other Scriptures (e.g. II Peter 3:10-13) that they will be the old renewed, reprinted, freshened, purified and cleansed. This seems to be the import of Revelation 21:1. In Ephesians 1:9-10 we are told that Christ will head up or unify all things, and that these will be 'things in heaven and things on earth' of

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example A. H. Strong's 'Systematic Theology' p.1035 and context.

which Col. 1:15-17 tells us he was creator. Col. 1:20 tells us that these things will be reconciled by the blood of his Cross. Also Ephes 4:10 tells us Christ ascended that he might fill all things. It seems from the 21st chapter of Revelation that the holy city is heavenly for it descends from heaven, yet it descends to the earth. The description in the 21st and 22nd chapters make the city so vast that the nations walk by its light, and God Himself dwells in it, and is its light and its temple.

Such language cannot be spatial as such, for God to be contained even by the eternal city, which itself is spoken of as descending to earth, is inadmissible. We take it then that there will be division between what we call the heaven and the earth. In one sense they will be distinguishable, but in another sense will be of one, the unity of which we have just spoken, effected by Christ and his Cross.

There are many elements we can trace from various Scriptures. Primarily, heaven will be where God is, and where he is constantly adored and served. Jesus in telling many of his Kingdom parables spoke of future authority, and exercise of it. Since 'eternal' (Gk. *aiwnos*) means 'the ages upon the ages' there is no harm in thinking that heaven will not be in any sense static. We note that all the redeemed will be in the full likeness of Christ. The seven 'He who conquers' of Rev. chs 2 and 3 tell us that there will be special rewards, and these will mean individual attainments, useful in the eternal realm. We are told that this realm is a place of constant worship and service, and the two are the one. 'They serve him day and night in the temple'. To be like the Son will mean being sons, with a great inheritance. Thus the household of God will surely be dynamic in nature and operations. They will use their inheritance wisely and effectively. All of these things ensure a rich and positive experience in the eternal realm.

### **(vi) The Rapture and Millennial Views**

The term 'rapture' as such, is not found in Scripture. However, the idea of rapture, that is 'caught up' does appear, and so in that sense we have mention of a rapture or raptures. In II Cor. 12:2 Paul speaks of a man who was raptured, i.e. caught up into heaven. In a similar sense John is caught up into heaven through an open door, in Revelation 4:1-2. These, however, were two persons, and was not the rapture often referred to by those who make much of the event. In I Thess 4:17 Paul says at the coming of the Lord 'We who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them (the dead in Christ who have risen first) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air'. Paul seems to refer to this event in I Cor. 15:51-56 when again he says we shall be changed. The question that is raised by some is whether this rapture takes place before the great tribulation or following it. All agree that at the end of tribulation there will be the final rapture, but others posit a secret rapture of the church before the tribulation, and so before the setting up of a Davidic millennial Kingdom. These see tribulation of a kind following the millennium Kingdom, when Satan will be loosed, and the final coming of Christ, but this is not so much called the rapture as the second coming. There are also variations of belief, but in the ultimate they are related to the matter of the millennial Kingdom.

That there is a millennial Kingdom is without doubt. It is spoken of in Revelation 20 and nowhere else. Some have found hints of it in the Olivet discourse, and in the passages of Paul to which we have just referred. We look at various views of the millennium in the following survey:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> These details are discussed at great length in C. E. Ladd's various books, 'The Blessed Hope', 'Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God', and 'The Presence of the Future' (Eerdman's 1956, 1952, and 1974 respectively).

**(1) Postmillennialism**

This is the view that Christ will come after the millennium. The gospel, from the time of Pentecost will gradually increase throughout the world so that the golden age of the church will be ushered in, the spirit of the martyrs being strong again in the church, and the members of the church becoming victorious over and against the powers of evil. Following this golden age there will be a brief apostasy, great conflict with Satan and his forces, but defeat of them in the coming of Christ with which shall happen the resurrection and the judgement.

**(2) Premillennialism**

The 1,000 years is to be a definite period when Christ will reign over the earth in righteousness. The period will be one when Satan and his hosts will be bound, and so the reign of Christ will demonstrate the material, moral and spiritual blessing of God for His people. Finally, there will be a brief period of conflict with Satan and his forces as they are loosed from bondage, but there will be the intervention of God which will destroy the power of evil and usher in the ultimate and eternal Kingdom. This will be preceded by the judgement before the great white throne.

**(3) A-Millennialism**

This is often thought to be a complete denial of the millennium, as the term suggests. Doubtless there are those who reject the idea that there is a millennium since Revelation 20 seems to be the one passage there is, and is obviously open to many interpretations. The a-millennialist believes in a millennium but simply takes it to be the present age in which the Gospel is preached, believing that through the death of Christ Satan has been bound for the believer. At the end of this age Satan will undoubtedly prove powerful but be defeated, at which time there will be the one and only judgement history will know. The first resurrection is spiritual, the second, bodily.

There are many variants of all these views. For example, Dispensationalism. This is a variant of premillennialism. In fact it sees the millennium happening following a secret rapture of the saints (the church) and the reign as that of Israel, who will be restored to Palestine, and will have a literal Davidic King, a literal temple with sacrifices (Ezekiel's temple).

What, then, is the true view? The answer must come from careful study of the whole of Scripture. Few people can handle debate on various theories, and so come to a right conclusion, since debate is not the atmosphere in which to discover truth itself. All who debate feel they have already come to the truth! It is doubtful whether any theory has to be held. What is one of the conditioning factors in millennial beliefs is the millennium! It is generally studied in relation to the theory held, and rarely is the theory studied in relation to a clear view of the millennium. One thing is very clear:- There is nothing spoken of the coming of Christ, either before, during, or after the millennium. This should be enough to make us wary of espousing any view without deep thought. The whole church believes in -

- (a) The tribulation of the saints.
- (b) A millennium as described within the 20th chapter of the Revelation.
- (c) The ultimate coming or appearing of Christ.
- (d) The rapture which will happen when the saints will come with

Christ, and Christ will come for the present saints, so that those living will be transformed.

(e) There will be the final judgement at the time when there will be a resurrection to life and one to judgement.

(f) The redeemed elect of God will know eternal bliss, and the finally impenitent will know eternal judgement and suffering.

These points are to be known, understood, and anticipated.

### **(vii) THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

We have already touched in our notes upon this subject.<sup>8</sup> It must be seen that there are three aspects to the Kingdom:

- (a) Its universal nature by virtue of creation. That is God is King of His whole creation.
- (b) The Kingdom in which rebels exist. That is Satan and his hosts, as also human beings have rebelled but they are still under the sovereign rule of God. In the ultimate they cannot go beyond what God allows.
- (c) The Kingdom of God being the deliberate reign and rule of God which sets out to destroy the opposing powers of evil - and does. The Kingdom is limited as the realm of God to those who believe and obey.

In turn this triumphant Kingdom of God has its own epochal aspects. They are as follows:-

In the O.T Israel is God's Kingdom (Exodus 19:5-6). Israel is a priest nation amongst all the nations. This Kingdom, in one sense fails to be true. Hence the prophets speak (a) Of the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (b) Of the coming (eschatological) Kingdom. This will not be limited to Israel although it will include Israel. John the Baptist quotes the prophets in this regard. Jesus teaches also 'the Gospel of the Kingdom'. With the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit the Kingdom is expected, by the apostles, to come to Israel (Acts 1:6). Jesus points to its wider operations - Jew, Samaritan and Gentile. The Kingdom has come in one sense for believers in that they are now in it (Col. 1:13, cf. John 3:3f, Romans 14:17, I Cor. 4:20). At the same time, the Kingdom has yet to come in its fulness. With the operations of Messiah and the church this will happen (I Cor. 15:24-28, cf. Rev. 11:15, Rev. 12:10f). The Kingdom then will have happened, or come in its fulness, when evil is finally defeated. Doubtless evil was defeated at the Cross (Heb. 2:14-15, I John 3:8, John 12:31). However, the sealing of this defeat in history is seen in II Thess 2 and the latter chapters of the Revelation.

When heaven has come to all God's people, then the Kingdom has come. The King of kings and Lord of lords has defeated evil for ever. Every knee then will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord - to the glory of the Father!

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<sup>8</sup> For a wide treatment see LFS 14, 'The King: The Kingdom of God: The Kingship'. (N.C.P.I. 1977)

## ***7. Conclusion***

Doubtless, in one sense, we have but skimmed the elements which are called eschatological. These need to be absorbed by constant reading and understanding of Scripture. In our interest to know, and endeavour to gain information concerning things we have missed the basic, indeed the entire, point of it all. It is this:-

God is the Alpha and Omega. His Son is also called the Alpha and the Omega. God is Lord of heaven and earth. His Son is also Lord of all. The Holy Spirit is Lord. This is the thrust of Scripture. Christ is the pioneer in bringing many sons to glory and he is the pioneer and completer of their faith.

All of this means that the end is not merely a subject for man's curiosity. It is not merely that we study Scripture like some almanac to see it as a celestial Pandora's Box. It is the story of God. It is the story of His love for His created humanity and indeed for His whole creation. The plan of God is contained within the Scriptures and reveals that before the foundation of the world God had planned the glory of His people and that His glory should cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

It is into that context the last things fit. They are in perspective with all that God has done. In other words, when in the O.T we have certain revelations of God then these revelations are not complete. We have progressive revelation of God, and in the N.T certain things, partly concealed in the O.T., blaze into light. His Fatherhood and Christ's Sonship become two brilliant and guiding factors. The people of God (or, the community of God) now becomes a paramount theme. Also there is a revelation of God's love which is brilliant because without the incarnation, life and acts of Christ, God's love could never have been seen so largely and clearly. The end-things, then, are to complete this revelation, and make the plan of God come to fulfilment.

Take, for example, the truth in Proverbs that the meek shall inherit the earth, and even a similar promise to Abraham. The N.T makes this truth and fact shine with new glory. The making of sinners into saints, and into the brethren of Christ and the sons of God is breathtaking, and no less than utterly stunning. Hence 'to be like Him' and to 'see Him face to face', and to 'inherit all things, these are wonders. Hence when we talk about the Father's house, and prepared places for us in it, and when we talk about reigning upon the earth, all of these things transcend mere curiosity about 'What is it like on the other side?'!!! The doctrine of hell must be seen in the light of the loss of these greater glories of the elect, and the loss of the unspeakable love of God and the fellowship with Him. The doctrine of the resurrection must be seen in the light of the body of glory.

Most of all the end-things tell us of the high and lofty Godhead, also being the Father of all who come to Him through His Son. The nature of the elect being given the inheritance of bodies of glory, and the habitation of the new heavens and earth cannot be truly told. Hence hope remains the brilliant incentive of all believers who look to 'the hope of His appearing' and 'the blessed hope laid up in heaven'. Faith, being the substance of these things hoped for and the evidence of things (as yet) unseen, is present rich and enriching experience of the children of God. Yet towering above these is love, subserved by faith and hope. It prepares the people of God - the children of the Father - for the day when love shall be known as the very life they will live. This will be the fulfilment of the deepest prayer of Jesus, to the Father, *'Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. O righteous*

Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

This is the grand finale to all time-history, and the beginning and basis for all eternal life and action. Only in the light of this should we examine, understand and explore the end-things. In the light of this we will feel the rivers of praise and adoration flow from us, and move towards our most adorable, personal, and ineffable God.

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