

## **A New Way of Seeing the End**

### *Biblical Eschatology*

March-April 2008

In my classes at seminary and at church, I am constantly dealing this semester with the ideas of the end times, what is called Eschatology (the last things). Some people have long, drawn out plans of what happens in the end of time. They get these charts and systems from two areas of biblical study. The first is hermeneutics (Bible interpretation) and the other comes out of Systematics (such as Systematic Theology, where someone combines the entire counsel of Scripture on a subject, like Salvation).

I have always had problems with the way these are used to provide information about the end times. It's not these two disciplines that are the problem at all. In fact, they are absolute necessities. I am not attacking the people who use them because they are useful tools that I use every day I look at the Bible. But I do have issues with how these two disciplines are used to justify the end product of charting out the end times.

Let's begin with hermeneutics. This is the study of the different genres of the Bible, such as poetry, narrative (story), apocalypse, prophecy, epistle (letter), etc. The basic idea is that we read a poem much differently than we read a these paper. It is the study of how we get to where we go when we open our Bibles and discover the past (the world of the authors of the Bible), the present (where we are today and how does it apply to us), and the future (where we are headed and how to get there and still please God).

Hermeneutics is used in every situation where we do more than just read the Bible. Anytime that we attempt to apply it to ourselves through understanding the author's experiences or worldviews to finding a principle we can live by today, we are doing hermeneutics. Some methods are better than others as we will see.

The other discipline, Systematics, is wrapped up in getting a whole view of Scripture that is communicated to others in a logical format. My problems come when these two disciplines are combined with some other strange animals to produce the harry beast of what is termed "Dispensationalism" (the oversimplification that God saves humanity through different means through different eras of time). This dispensationalism has fueled Eschatology for some time now.

If you don't know what I'm talking about, remember those big charts that people love to drag out when they go through a literal reading of Revelation. Try on one of those Dake Bibles for size. Better yet, let's take the Old Testament book of Daniel and glue it together with Revelation, do some fuzzy math and interpretation, and come out with a complete chart that totally explains every minute detail of the end of time.

Sounds great until we see not only how unbiblical this method is, but also how against Christ it has become. Jesus told his disciples about the end of time in Matthew 24:36 that no one knows the day or hour of

His return. Again in Acts 1:7, Jesus reiterates this principle.

Paul speaks of the day coming upon the world like a "thief in the night" (1 Thess 5:2). So why do we try to take a book like Daniel or Revelation and turn it into a map of the end times, the specific events and days that this and that will happen? We have such a need to know the future that we don't do our job in the present!

What, then, should our understanding of Eschatology be? Well, mine is very short. Time is short and life is short. The end times started at the day of Pentecost when Peter, quoting Joel, added "In the last days, Joel says, 'I will pour out my Spirit...'" (Acts 2:17) When you look up the reference to Joel 2:28-32, you will find that "in the last days" is not there at all because Peter saw the day of Pentecost as the beginning of the end. So we have been living in the end times for over 2,000 years.

We are to wait on the Lord to return, and He will return. The New Testament is replete with passages making reference to Christ's return. He will even rule the world for a millenium and still humanity will turn from Him to the devil. But waiting is not just sitting on our hands. In fact, it's the opposite!

Eschatology should teach us not to fight over interpretations of Revelation and Daniel but to focus on actively seeking God's return. We have a lot of work to do for God until the time He returns. We expect his return - this is hope in action. We put our actions where our hope is - that is faith. We live our faith by letting others know, in whatever manner we must, about this great news of a great God who gave Himself up just for us and for them. That's what eschatology is all about.

Christ could come back at any time and we won't be surprised by His return, but the

world of lost people will be surprised. Do you have friends or family that would be surprised in that moment? Let's not allow the people we care about to be taken aback by this event. Let's let them in on what should never be called "the best kept secret of history."