



Worth checking out... today's study is based on Section 3 of Evangelical Theology by Michael F. Bird

Introduction to Eschatology

- **Eschatology:** the study of the “last things”
- **Kingdom of God** is an important biblical motif, and especially in Jesus’ teaching
- Eschatology is both the framework of Christian theology and the nucleus of the gospel
- All theology is based on the outworking of God's promise to put the world to right
- Moltmann: all Christianity and theology is eschatology

Competing Meta-narratives

- During the NT age, the dominant eschatology was a **Roman imperial-ism**; the Roman army would keep the nations free from barbarian invasion and civil unrest
- **Enlightenment and Modernity**: “reason” will lead to progress in science, knowledge and human civilization, without the need for religion
- **Postmodernism**: an exaltation of pluralism and tolerance; salvation is through secularism and political ideologies

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- Christianity claims that history is about God working out his purposes in the world
- The gospel gives us a vision of the new world that God is creating
- God's kingdom has two key moments: a fulfilment of OT promises in Jesus, and a future consummation

- The kingdom is **already** and **yet to come**
- The kingdom is intimately bound up with Jesus
- Eschatology tells of how God's final purposes have already invaded this age

Why Eschatology Matters

The future shapes how we live in the present

Eschatology...

- ...proves God's faithfulness to his promises to Israel
- ...shows that the cross achieved the salvation of the world
- ...gives the church a critique of non-Christian politics
- ...helps us resist complacency and triumphalism
- ...allows us to affirm the body and material world, which God will redeem
- ...grounds our mission
- ...allows us to speak about suffering and death with integrity

- Eschatology affects everything: how we do evangelism, justice, ecology, pastoral care, economics and ethics
- Barth: Eschatology is the most practical thing that can be thought

Biblical Eschatology

- OT expectation- Davidic deliverer, freedom from oppressors or exile, bringing back together the 12 tribes of Israel, a new covenant and temple, judgment for the wicked (common phrase- 'The Day of the Lord')
- OT- presupposes God's kingship
- NT- the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel has been set in motion in Jesus
- NT writers saw themselves as living in the "last days"

Synoptic Gospels

- Jesus began his ministry by announcing the arrival of the kingdom
- Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come"
- Looks forward to the eschatological banquet and future judgment

John's Gospel

- Favors the realized part of Jesus' work: eternal life is a present possession, obtained through faith in Jesus
- Refers to a future judgment and resurrection
- Strong dualism

Writings of Paul

- In Jesus is “the culmination of the ages”
- Jesus’ resurrection and the gift of the Spirit are the inbreaking of the age to come into the present
- This age and the age to come now overlap

Revelation

- Both forward-looking and describing present experience
- An encoded and symbolic description of God's triumph over evil
- The consummation is where evil is defeated, judgment happens, and the new heavens and earth appear

Over- and Under-Realized Eschatologies

- **Over-realized eschatology:** believing that we have received the fullness of God's promises now
- Believing the day of the Lord has already happened

- **Under-realized eschatology:** doubting that the future hope will ever be realized
- Not appreciating that part of the age to come which overlaps with this age

The Second Coming

OT and the Second Coming

- The Messianic elements of the OT point only to Christ's first coming
- The OT does tell of God's everlasting kingdom covering the earth
- OT texts thought to refer to the second coming most probably do not

NT and the Second Coming

- The Gospels' references to Jesus' *parousia* likely refer to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 which vindicated Jesus' and his followers' attitude towards the temple
- Olivet discourse (and AD 70)
 - Speech given in the context of the destruction of the temple
 - Stars falling symbolic of political upheaval
 - Describes judgment of the temple and its leaders

NT and the Second Coming

- Enthronement of the Son of Man refers to the ascension, not the second coming
- Matthew arguably combines the destruction of Jerusalem with the second coming in his account of the Olivet discourse
- Jesus and the early church still have a focus beyond AD 70
- Expectation of judgment and the renewal of all things, which would take place at Christ's return
- Christ will return in glory and will cause the union of heaven and earth

Jesus' Return...

- Jesus' return will be personal and bodily, and thus unmistakable
- Accompanied by angels
- Trumpets indicate the royal nature of the event
- "All Israel" will be saved
- Jesus' return will involve the bodily resurrection of believers
- Jesus will judge and subjugate all his enemies

Implications for us...

- We wait eagerly for the completion of our salvation
- Evangelize: announce the gospel and Christ's imminent return
- Endure: The Spirit who guarantees our future gives us the strength to endure trials
- Encourage: Spur each other on with the certainty of our hope

The Millennium

- *Millennium*: one thousand years
- The belief that Christ will create his kingdom and reign on earth for a period of time before the consummation/judgment (Rev 20:4-8)
- Are the thousand years literal or metaphorical?
- 4 views- postmillennialism, amillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, historical premillennialism

Postmillennialism

- “Post”: Christ will return *after* the millennium
- The kingdom is currently being extended through the gospel and Spirit
- After the gospel is shared with the world Christ will return
- The millennium is a golden age of evangelization and social progress (includes aspects that are religious, political, and social)
- Sin won't be entirely eliminated, and life will function normally, but the world will be predominantly Christian

Postmillennialism

Arguments for

- Great Commission seen as describing the millennial spread of the gospel (Matt 28:18-20)
- The parables of growth say that the kingdom will spread throughout and eventually dominate the world (Mark 13:31-32)
- The spread of the gospel throughout the world is evidence of the millennium
- Based on the present reality of the kingdom and an optimism towards God's work in the world through the church

Postmillennialism

Arguments against

- Christ's authority over the earth does not mean the majority of people will respond to it in this age
- The parables of growth do not describe how prevalent the kingdom will be before the consummation
- Society is not getting more Christian
- The reading of Rev 20:4-8 is unconvincing
- In their optimism they ignore the scriptural teaching on the tribulation and the certainty of suffering

Amillennialism

- “a”: no
- Does not deny a millennium, but sees it as a present reality with a future consummation
- The church age is the millennium, where Christ reigns over his people as Lord

Amillennialism- Arguments for

- The eschatological events in Scripture are regarded as a unity; the *parousia*, resurrection, and judgment happen at the same time
- OT promises of earthly bliss refer to the new creation, not the millennium
- The binding of Satan (Rev 20:2) happened during Jesus' ministry (Luke 10-11)
- The resurrection of believers (Rev 20:6) refers to regeneration or the souls of martyred believers entering God's presence
- Rev 20 should be taken symbolically like the rest of the book

Amillennialism – Arguments against

- Does amillennialism deal adequately with Rev 20?
- Satan does not appear to be bound as Rev 20 describes
- Seems to spiritualize and stretch the interpretation of “reigning” and “resurrection”

Premillennialism

- Christ will return *before* the millennium
- Two varieties:
 - Dispensational premillennialism
 - Historical or classical premillennialism
- Dispensational premillennial
 - Sharp contrast between Israel and the church
 - A rapture of believers before Christ returns
- Historic premillennial
 - Continuity between Israel and the church
 - Christ returns after the tribulation

Premillennialism

- The second coming will usher in Christ's reign on the earth, before the final consummation
- Based on exegesis of Rev 20, and prophecies of a time of blessing on the earth
- Prophecies of God's reign on the earth, an age of peace, blessing and prosperity (Isa 11:1-10)
- 1 Cor 15:23-27 may suggest a millennium, giving three stages: Christ's resurrection, his return, and the end

Premillennialism

A possible timeline from Paul

- Jesus' second coming
- The resurrection of believers
- A messianic interregnum, with a final struggle against evil at the end
- A general resurrection
- A final judgment
- The transformation of creation

- Paul does not describe a millennium, but what he tells us can easily fit with a premillennial view of Rev 20

The Tribulation

- Before the consummation/ judgment, God's people will endure a time of suffering
- Many historical examples of tribulation
- The NT promises the advance of the kingdom alongside tribulation and persecution
- It also promises a great tribulation that will precede the second coming
- Some amillennial schemes do not have a final tribulation, but rather see tribulation occurring throughout the church age

Pretribulationism

- Reads prophecy such as Dan 9 and Rev 6-18 as literal rather than symbolic
- Christ will come secretly and remove the church from the world at the beginning of the tribulation (the *rapture*)
- After the tribulation, Christ will come again to establish the millennial kingdom
- Three resurrections:
 - Dead believers at the rapture
 - Believers who died during the tribulation at the tribulation's end
 - Unbelievers at the end of the millennium

Pretribulationism

- Said that the church is saved from God's wrath; the elect that endures the tribulation is Israel
- The promise of deliverance from God's wrath applies to judgment of sin, not a tribulation or suffering
- This view unnecessarily reads promises of general tribulation as referring to the great tribulation
- Christians are promised to be preserved within suffering, not removed from it

The Rapture

- When Jesus suddenly comes and takes believers away to be with him
- Matt 24:40-41 describes “one being taken and the other left behind” - this is believed to describe the rapture (this is a wrong reading of this passage!)
- 1 Thess 4:14-17 describes believers meeting Christ in the air
- There is no biblical justification for the doctrine of the rapture

Posttribulationism

- The church will undergo a great persecution (tribulation) that will end with the second coming
- Many exhortations for believers to endure suffering as part of the end time affliction
- Rev 7 describes Christians who have been killed in the great tribulation

- Pretribulationism did not appear until the 19th Century
- Posttribulationism is the historic view of the church, and is more biblical

Judgment and the Cross

- Jesus Christ is both Saviour and Judge
- Salvation is a deliverance from divine judgment
- On the cross God poured out his wrath on human evil
- Jesus carried sin and was judged in our place
- No punishment for sin remains for believers, because Jesus has born it, and the penalty cannot be applied again

Judgment and the Judged

- Unbelievers will be judged; they will receive just punishment for their sin
- Their good deeds will be universally acknowledged and praised
- Believers will also face judgment, but will not receive condemnation for our sin
- God assigns degrees of reward based on how Christians have lived for him

Judgment and the Angels

- Angels will be judged
- The angels that rebelled against God are being held for judgment on the last day
- Paul: believers will participate in judging angels

Eternal Judgment and the Present

- The theme of Revelation is “God wins” - we will win with him - God's victory at the cross will be completely realized, and we will reign with God forever
- We are looking forward to the new creation, but we are meant to showcase it now; through our good deeds the church is the advertisement for the new creation

The Intermediate State

- What happens between a person's death and the final judgment?
- That period of time is called the “intermediate state”
- There are many options for what that state consists of

Immortality of the Soul

- First-century Jews had many different views on what happened after death
- The idea that the soul is immortal came to Judaism through Hellenistic influences
- Platonic thought: the pre-existent soul is imprisoned in the body, and upon death, returns to an immaterial realm
- Christians believe that the soul is immortal, but a disembodied eternity is not the biblical view
- Christians hope in a bodily resurrection, and if the soul departs the body, it is only temporary

Soul Sleep

- The view that the soul is unconscious between death and resurrection
- A minority view, but occurs throughout church history
- Rests on the argument that if humanity is a unity of body and soul, if the body ceases to function the soul does as well
- Scripture uses “sleep” as a euphemism for death, which implies unconsciousness

Purgatory

- Roman Catholic view that while saints go to heaven, other Christians must be cleansed in purgatory before entering heaven
- Purgatory is where one is cleansed of venial, not mortal sins
- The view is supported by 2 Maccabees 12:43-45, where Judas takes a collection to benefit the dead (notice this is from the apocrypha)
- The OT and NT give no evidence that the intermediate state is a place of purging of sin
- Sin is atoned for, once for all, through Christ

Intermediate State in Scripture

- The place of the dead is called *Sheol* (OT) or *Hades* (NT)- This place is different from hell, and is the waiting place of the dead
- Hades was the Greek god of the underworld, and that word is used to translate the Hebrew word *Sheol*
- In Jewish thought, the dead awaited resurrection in Sheol/Hades, which had a separation between the righteous and the wicked
- The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) may depict the intermediate state

Intermediate State in Scripture

- The thief on the cross is promised “paradise”
- Stephen's vision of heaven during his stoning
- Paul mainly focuses on Christ's second coming and the resurrection, but does contrast being in the body with “being with Christ” (Phil 1:20-24)
- 2 Cor 5:1-10: Paul contrasts this life in the body with a heavenly dwelling
- Revelation refers to the existence of martyrs between their death and the resurrection
- Revelation describes death and Hades as being thrown into the lake of fire at the final judgment

Intermediate State in Scripture

The intermediate state- putting it together

1. Before Christ's ascension the dead were all held in Hades
2. Christ took all in the paradise part of Hades to heaven with him at his ascension
3. Now, believers go to heaven with Christ after they die, and non-believers go to Hades to await judgment

Heaven and *then* the New Creation

- Heaven is above and beyond earth; it is a spiritual dimension of reality
- God intends to remake heaven and earth, and unite them together
- Heaven is where believers go in the intermediate state; it is wonderful because Christ is there
- It is a place of worship, but a glorious interlude rather than the final destination

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- We first hear about the new creation in Isaiah 65–66
- God reigns over a place characterized by joy and peace
- The new creation centres around a remade Jerusalem with a new temple (Ezek 40-48, Rev)... it is also a return to Eden
- The city imagery evokes security and community, and God again dwelling with his people

Hell

- We should approach this topic with God's goodness, mercy and justice in mind
- The name "hell" (*Gehenna*) comes from a valley near Jerusalem, where rubbish was burned and child sacrifices had been made
- Distinction between *hades* and *Gehenna*
 - *Hades* is temporary and for the soul
 - *Gehenna* is permanent and for the reunited body and soul
- Judgment by hell was a common theme in Jesus' teaching

- The teaching on hell is there to call people to repent... although it was most often used by Jesus against those who were religious
- Hell is described as an abyss, a place of torment, and fire or burning sulphur
- This is both a reality and a metaphor; hell is the place where the full force of God's justice is known
- Hell is about justice, not torture, where evil is quarantined

- The **traditional view** is that people in hell will be punished for eternity
- **Annihilationism:** the view that those who are not saved will cease to exist
 - Supported through scriptural language that describes judgment as “destruction”
- Scripture contrasts eternal life with eternal punishment or death, so it appears that there is an eternal or final dimension to hell
- We should warn of final judgment when we proclaim the gospel
