

Eschatology 101

Omega Letter

In Defense of the Faith

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Many Christians have told me that the study of prophecy is irrelevant to the here and now. I would counter, by quoting the famed comedian George Burns, “I look to the future, because that is where I’m going to spend the rest of my life”.

Several years ago, an Omega Letter member named Ron Maurno delivered to us the ‘[Bible Prophecy 101](#)’ letter, which I for one, was tremendously blessed by. He gives a summation of all the major points in the prophetic Scriptures. In a similar manner, what I would like to do now is focus in on one section of that summation, eschatology.

While the days darken, and our world seemingly becomes more unhinged each day, we know according to Scripture, that God has a grand plan for us, and a future beyond compare. I hope this helps you in your journey.

Definition

Bible Prophecy: God’s foretelling of what’s to come. Since God exists outside of time, He is able to see the end from the beginning, and all therein. ([Isaiah 46:9-10](#)) 28% of the Bible is prophetic in nature, beginning with [Genesis 3:15](#) (protoevangelium). There were ‘near’ and ‘far’ prophecies. Near being fulfilled in the lifetime of the person delivering the message, and far, would be any of which would come to pass beyond that prophets life.

Eschatology: the word being a compound of two Greek words, *Eschatos*, meaning last or final things; and *ology*, meaning the study of, so it is a part of theology concerned primarily with the ***study of last things*** or final events.

So while all Eschatology fits into the concept of Bible prophecy, not all Bible prophecy is eschatological in nature. For instance, Bible prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming were prophetic when they were given, but are not considered eschatological.

Purpose of

Probably the most maligned, and misunderstood theological doctrine in all of Christianity, is that of Bible prophecy. Granted, every major doctrine within Christendom has been abused and/or perverted to some extent, but none as much as Bible prophecy. So why would God give us something that has the potential to receive so much negative attraction?

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Bible Prophecy...

- **Defends the authoritative power, truth, inerrancy, and divine inspiration of the Bible** ([Isaiah 46:9-10](#); [Jeremiah 30, 31](#); [Ezekiel 36-39](#), etc.) “Thus saith the Lord”
 - No other book, religious or otherwise contains the same claims, nor the perfect prophetic track record of the Holy Bible. ([Isaiah 55:11](#))
 - Ex: Christ fulfilled **109 specific prophecies** concerning His birth, life, death, and resurrection.
- **Jesus used prophecy to confirm that His message was true**, and did so by telling His disciples ahead of time, so when it happened, they knew it was supposed to happen. ([John 14:29](#); [16:4](#), [Luke 24:25-27](#))
- **Gives hope in dark days** ([2 Peter 1:19-21](#), [1 Thess. 4:13-18](#))
- **We are commanded to watch and understand the times we live in.** ([Mark 13:35-37](#); [Luke 12:37](#); [1 Thess. 5:1-8](#))
- **Gives a practical purpose for everyday life:**
 - Prophecy is not meant to tickle the ear, but to turn our feet toward God.
 - Meant to provoke us to holy living. ([1 John 3:2-3](#); [2 Peter 3:11](#); [Titus 2:13](#))
 - A powerful tool for evangelism. ([1 Tim. 2:4](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#))
 - Serves as warning that time had a starting point, and likewise, has an end.
 - Revives a sense of urgency in our lives concerning the coming of Christ ([Matt. 24:42](#))
 - Is all about Christ (either directly, or indirectly). ([Rev. 19:10](#); [Luke 24:25-27](#))

Hermeneutics

Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation concerning the books of the Bible. It is part of the broader field of hermeneutics, which involves the study of principles for the text and includes all forms of communication: verbal and nonverbal. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

Understanding that Bible prophecy has a ‘value added’ to the Christian walk, we now turn to the differing viewpoints within eschatology. All of these viewpoints come about, by either one of two methods of biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics.

- *Literal*: means the literal, grammatical, historical, and contextual reading of a passage is taken at face value, unless the surrounding passages convey otherwise.
- *Non-Literal*: means the passage is not taken in the above manner, but either a spiritual metaphor or simile, or allegorical approach is applied to the text at hand.

Now, two common misconceptions are at play here:

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Taking a passage literally, does not imply 'wooden literalism', as some would have it. When Jesus says, "I am the door..." ([John 10:9](#)), we know that Jesus isn't literally a 'door'. He is using a metaphor to convey a deeper meaning that one must enter through Him, in order to receive salvation.

Also, in [Isaiah 55:12](#), when it states that "all the trees of the field will clap their hands", we understand that to be a personification of a non-human object. It is meant to convey a deeper, poetical meaning to the fact that nature itself will rejoice in God. Having a literal interpretation just means we take the text at face value, unless by doing so, makes the passage nonsensical. From Dr. D.L. Cooper:

"When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word as its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise."

Secondly, a person who takes the non-literal position is not to say that they take the whole bible in non-literal fashion. Rather, they take the non-prophetic passages literally, but then apply a non-literalism (allegorical, metaphorical, etc.) approach in varying degrees, to prophetic passages. So for the most part, they would think they have a literal understanding of the Bible (i.e....Creation, Noah's ark, Moses, David and Goliath, and even prophetic passages that pertain to Christ's first coming), usually are taken in a literal manner. Non-literal interpretation is usually only reserved for passages pertaining to events that have yet to take place.

Three main branches of hermeneutical thought within Orthodox Christianity based off the framework in which one develops an eschatological viewpoint, is derived usually, from one of three main views:

- **Dispensationalism**
- **Covenant Theology**
- **Catholic**

Dispensationalism (DISP)

Dispensationalism; comes from the Greek compound word, oikonomia, which simply means 'house rules'. It is used some 20 times in the NT and represents the following words; Steward or stewardship, administration, dispensation, or manager. The definition, according to Dr. Charles Ryrie is as follows:

Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. In His household world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the passage of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these different economies constitute the dispensations. The understanding of God's differing economies is essential to a proper interpretation of His revelation within those various economies.

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It is based on three simple premises:

1. A plain, normal, literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of **all** Scriptures.
2. A recognition that Israel is **not** the Church and the Church is **not** Israel.
3. The overarching plan is God's glory.

A Dispensational viewpoint is a natural consequence of a consistent, normal, literal interpretation of scripture. Two points up front to consider: the first is that God never changes. The second is that although the entire Bible is for the Christian, the entire Bible is not to the Christian. Anyone who goes to Church on Sunday with clothes on, doesn't sacrifice small animals, and doesn't consider themselves under the thumb of the Mosaic Law would have to agree.

We see in the Bible that there are three primary groups of people; the Gentiles, the Jews (Hebrews/Israelites), and the Church (born again believers). Genesis 1-12 deals exclusively with mankind as singular group. Then, in Genesis 12, God separates one man (Abraham) and is set aside to become a new group. From Genesis 12-Malachi, the focus is exclusively on the Jewish people. Gentiles are only mentioned in so much as in how they interact with the Jews.

The New Testament makes mention of a new class of people...the Church; with [Matt. 16:16-19](#) as the first mention. [Acts 2](#) then is what is normally accepted as the birth of the Church, with the giving of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost. So from Acts 2 through Revelation 3:22, the focus is exclusively on the Church. Jews and Gentiles are only mentioned, as far as how they interact with the Church. (See [1 Cor. 10:32](#)). Also, in 70+ times of mention in the NT, Israel is never recognized as the Church, or vice versa.

The last piece is on God's glory being the overarching plan for God. This glory supersedes even that of salvation. For example, the fallen angels (of which Lucifer is chief) have no manner or mechanism for redemption, yet, their condemnation, judgment, and damnation, serve to fulfill the purpose of God's glory. True, God knew from before the foundation of the world how this would all play out, but God's glory trumps every other purpose or plan that exists.

A Dispensationalist recognizes that God has interacted in differing ways with mankind through the ages. Not everyone has a forbidden tree to eat from. Not everyone has an ark to build. Not everyone has a burning bush, or a giant to slay. He/she also recognizes that the entire Bible wasn't given to Adam...it was given in varying measures to His chosen spokesmen over a period of 1,600 years. This is known as 'progressive revelation'. [Middletown Bible Church](#) gives a good demonstration of this below:

- **Adam:** "I had no Bible at all, but I walked with God in the cool of the garden."
- **Abraham:** "I had no Bible at all, but at different times God would appear to me and speak to me" (see [Genesis 17:1](#); [18:1](#); etc.)

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- **Moses:** "My Bible contained 5 books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy"
- **David:** "My Bible contained the same 5 books that Moses had as well as Joshua and Judges and many of the Psalms which I wrote, etc."
- **Ezra:** "My Bible contained most of the Old Testament books but not all of them"
- **John the Baptist:** "My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books but none of the New Testament books"
- **Paul:** "My Bible contained the Old Testament books and most of the New Testament books but not all of them"
- **John:** "My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books and all of the New Testament books. Shortly before I died God used me to write the last New Testament book."

So simply based off the idea that not everyone had a complete Bible (Old and New Testament), how could Moses know all that would be revealed to Paul? He didn't. He only knew what God had revealed to him at that moment in time, or over the course of his life. To assume anything beyond that is to insert an idea into the text, that simply isn't there.

Two charges often laid at the feet of Dispensationalism, is that it is a new system (Johnny Come-Lately theology), and that it promotes multiple ways of salvation. Neither is true.

1. Dispensationalism is as old as the Bible itself...because it is the normal understanding one comes to, if you take the literal, grammatical, historical interpretative method. Going back to the early church, men like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus understood that God has worked differently, in different ages. Jonathan Edwards (1646-1719), published 2 vol. work—entitled "*A Complete History or Survey of All the Dispensations*" Isaac Watts (1674-1748) which recognized the dispensations as conditional ages wherein God had certain expectations of men and made conditional promises and prohibitions to them.

It was systematized by John N. Darby in the 1800's, but that is not the same as it being 'invented'. No one accuses Martin Luther of inventing 'sola fide' in the 1500's. He simply rediscovered what the scriptures have said all along. Similarly, men like John N. Darby (and others) were rediscovering the plain, normative, understanding of all Scripture, to include Bible prophecy. Charles Ryrie sums it up like this;

The fact that something was taught in the first century does not make it right (unless taught in the canonical Scriptures), and the fact that something was not taught until the nineteenth century does not make it wrong unless, of course, it is unscriptural.

Infant baptism and Replacement theology began back as early as the 1st century, and neither are biblical, yet because they've been around as long as they have, does that give them credence to persist as mainstream Christian teaching? Clearly, no. So longevity is not an accurate standard in which we measure our orthodoxy on.

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2. Dispensationalism has never promoted multiple ways of salvation. Certain statements by Dispensationalists, when taken in isolation and/or out of context, have been used as fodder to feed this argument. (See a detailed response [here](#)). Adherence to the Law never saved anyone, ([Gal. 3:24](#))

Question: Since salvation is by grace through faith, how could the OT saints be 'saved' prior to Christ's coming?

Answer: Salvation is the wrong way to frame the question. Salvation is through Christ alone. ([John 10:9, 14:6](#)) One has to come to Christ in order to be baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)), sealing the believer into Christ forever. ([2 Cor. 1:21-22](#); [Eph. 1:11-14](#)) Since 4,000 years of human history had transpired prior to Christ's physical manifestation here on earth as the promised Redeemer, salvation was not yet possible. If it were, Christ need not come.

One was not 'saved' before Christ came, in the same sense that we are today (post-Calvary), but they were justified by their faith in God, and when they died, they went to Abraham's bosom, which is in Sheol (or Hades in the Greek), but separated from 'Torments' in a place known as Paradise, awaiting their redemption by the Redeemer. ([Luke 16:22-26](#); [23:43](#); [Eph. 4:8-10](#); [1 Peter 3:18-20](#))

In conclusion, on the Dispensational view, it is the most accurate attempt by fallen men, to corroborate what Holy Scriptures tell us about God's outworking in the human race over the course of our common history. It is not perfect, because we simply don't know certain things, either due to silence in the Word, or because events have not yet played out. We hold that all *Progressive Revelation* ended with the Apocalypse, as given to John the Beloved on Patmos, in AD95. What we have now, is *Progressive Illumination*, which continues to open our understanding of the how, in God's plan unfolds according to His time, and His purpose.

Next Week: *Eschatology 101: Views and Theology*

[About Pete Garcia](#)

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