

Introduction to Eschatology

Definition of Eschatology

Eschatology means the study of last things, from the Greek word *eschata* meaning "last". It deals with the study of what is future from the time of the writing or from our present point of view. It encompasses both the future from individuals and the future of the world.

Development of Eschatology

As with all doctrines, eschatology has developed over the centuries. Until the last couple of centuries the study of the future was not given serious attention.

The early church was consumed with defending other doctrines such as the person of Christ. The church during the reformation was concerned with issues surrounding salvation and the work of Christ.

This is not to imply that doctrines were not taught concerning prophecy throughout church history. However, this doctrine was debated much less than other doctrines.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen a much greater interest in eschatology than was seen before. As a result, there is less historical background and more contemporary discussion over the study of eschatology.

The Study of Eschatology

There are various approaches that have been taken to study what the Bible teaches about the last things. Some separate the study of the future of individuals from the study of the future of the world. Some separate the teachings of Jesus from the teachings of Paul from the teachings of John, etc. Some compare and contrast what different perspectives teach on each specific eschatological doctrine.

Our approach will first look at what are necessary presuppositions for studying the Bible in general. Then we will overview the divergent systems of belief concerning the future. Finally, we will progress chronologically through what the Bible teaches about the future.

Importance of Eschatology

Some conservatives tend to consider the study of prophecy in the Bible as unimportant. In a day when the authority of the Bible is disputed and when many have denied the infallibility of the Scripture, some feel there is little to be gained in debating the future. In other words, why improve the building if the foundation is not sure?

However, everyone has a belief in what the future holds. The issue is not whether to think about the future but rather how developed and how accurate our thinking can become.

The Bible speaks often about the future. In fact, nearly a quarter of the Bible is prophetic. It is very difficult to study the Bible for very long without encountering teachings which relate to the future.

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Why should we then study Biblical prophecy?

- It comforts (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
- It calms (Titus 2:13)
- It converts (Acts 3:12-36; 17:31-34; 28:31)
- It cleanses (1 John 3:2-3)
- It compels (1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11)
- It corrects (2 Timothy 3:16-17)