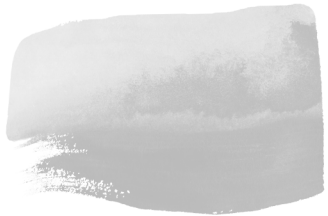
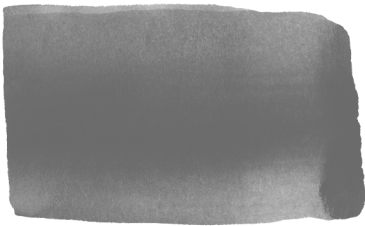
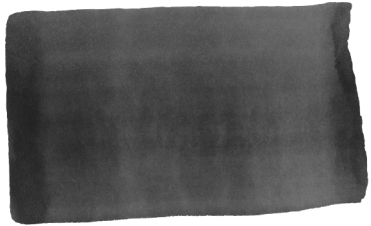
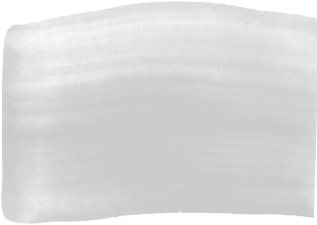


QUICK THEOLOGY

Four Views of End Times



PHYLICIA MASONHEIMER

Copyright © 2022 by Phylicia Masonheimer

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of quotations in book review. For more information, address:

josh@phyliciamasonheimer.com

First paperback edition June 2022

Book design by Eric Novak

phyliciamasonheimer.com



Introduction

Let's talk about something that has been on a lot of our minds: End times theology, also known as eschatology. Eschatology is the fancy word for “the final things,” and it comes from the two Greek words *éschatos*, which means “final,” and *logos*, which means “word” or “idea.”

When we talk about eschatology, we are really talking about when God brings all things to reconciliation or justice. Your first thought is probably the book of Revelation—that crazy book at the end of the Bible with all the visions, bowls, and seals. But we also see a lot of these same themes in the book of Daniel, and there are other glimpses of apocalyptic literature like this elsewhere in the Bible, such as in John 14 where Jesus talks about the end times.

As we form our understanding of what the end times are all about, it is important to look at these narratives all

together.

Now, I want to get some preconceptions out of the way right at the beginning. A lot of us grew up in the Left Behind generation, and Left Behind really messed us up. A lot of us do not actually know the difference between the biblical account of what to expect during the end times versus the fictional Left Behind books movies. It is very important that we take the time to study this for ourselves instead of allowing our lens to be a fictional account written by two well-meaning people. We want to correct that Left Behind viewpoint and instead focus on what Scripture itself tells us.

Here is the other thing: There are four main theological views on the end times. If you grew up in a church that only taught the premillennial view—which we will get to in a second—then you are probably going to be a little surprised that not only is the premillennial view the most complicated, but it is also not the only view. There are orthodox views of the end times that do not even believe in the rapture.

I know for some of you that is a huge shock. But the reality is that a lot of what is said about the final days is in very nuanced language. These passages use a lot of symbolism, imagery, and numbers—many of which in other contexts in the Bible, we take symbolically.

And yet, if we have been raised in churches that are interpreting these things literally, it completely changes how we think about the final things.

With the recent Covid pandemic, it became clear that we often tend to look at our current circumstances through our eschatological lens. If you are a premillennial person—who believes that the rapture is coming, that there is going to be a tribulation, that there will then be a second coming, and it is all extremely literal, as if all those numbers mean exactly what they said—then you are going to have a very different view of global circumstances and maybe even fear surrounding those circumstances.

So, let's do a light overview of the four primary views, starting with some terminology. As we talk about each of these views, we will use some consistent themes and words, and I want to make sure we understand what those are.

The Church Age: This is the era (or span of time) from the beginning of the Church when Jesus ascended (around AD 30-33) right up to the final things (or end times), which Jesus predicts in John 14.

The First Coming of Christ: This was when Jesus initially came, was born of a virgin, and lived on earth from about 4 BC to AD 30.

The Second Coming of Christ: This is the bodily return of Jesus as King. This is agreed across all of the views. With the second coming, Jesus will actually be returning to earth to rule and reign and conquer evil for good.

Now, we see some differences regarding the millennium—or the millennial thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth—which is described in Revelation 20.

FOUR PRIMARY VIEWS

Premillennial: Christians who believe the premillennial viewpoint believe that the millennium written about in Scripture is a future event and Jesus will return before it happens.

Amillennial: Amillennial means no millenia. Christians who believe this viewpoint believe the millennium is just a symbol of Christ's present reign among His people—there is no physical thousand years, it is merely representative of Christ's reign.

Postmillennial: Postmillennial refers to the belief that Jesus will return after the millennium. According to this viewpoint, the millennium (or thousand years) is a time in which most of the world submits to Jesus. We

will get into this more in depth in a moment.

Preterism: The word “preterism” refers to biblical prophecies about the end times applying to past events. At the time of the writing of Revelation, these events would have been in the future. But for us today, these events are now in the past.

For example, the preterist would see references to the antichrist as references to Emperor Nero, or the tribulation would be the Jewish war. You would also see things like the destruction of the temple predicted, but that happened in AD 70. A preterist would see these prophecies as being fulfilled in the first century of the church.

Amillennial and postmillennial Christians both tend to be preterists, but not always. A good way to say this is that all preterists are either amillennial or postmillennial, but not all amillennial and postmillennial Christians are preterists.

Lots of fancy words! As I always tell my theology basic students, you can use these at parties and impress people!



Historical Premillennialism

Now that you have the terminology down, we are going to talk about our first viewpoint of the end times: Historical premillennialism. This was the original view of the early church fathers. We need to look at what the early church fathers taught because it gives us an idea of the general view held by the church in those first few centuries.

This does not mean that every church father was completely correct. If you have listened to the Canon series on my podcast or if you have listened to any of my work on church history, you know that some church fathers went off the deep end. Origen, for example, became a heretic in his latter years.

An original view of the early church fathers does not mean that a view is on the same level as Scripture. But it does give us an idea of how the church was understanding these concepts historically. That in turn gives us something to work with and a bit more

perspective on how Scripture was being interpreted in those early years.

Another term for historical premillennialism is “covenant premillennialism.” This viewpoint asserts that the thousand-year reign is a literal future event and that Jesus Christ would come and reign on the earth. But as the church fathers died and as Greek philosophy began to influence the church, people began to view the physical world as less desirable. The idea of an actual millennium and an actual reign of Jesus on earth began to fade.

I would like to mention a few other characteristics of the historical premillennial viewpoint. It does not view Israel as the centerpiece or as still receiving God’s promises. The early church fathers were supersessionists for the most part. (If you want to know more about supersessionism, we have a free eBook on the 10 Commandments, supersessionism, and dispensationalism).

What supersessionism teaches—and this was primarily held by the early church fathers—is that because of their disobedience, Israel is no longer the inheritor of God’s promises. Of course there is a spectrum of different views within the supersessionist camp, but the early church fathers especially held this more extreme view, which is also called penal