

# INTRODUCTION

Biblical Eschatology is the capstone of systematic theology. You cannot have a systematic theology and exclude from that system the entire field of eschatology.

Eschatology is that division of theology which deals with last things. The term is derived from two Greek words, "εσχατος" (eschatos) meaning furthest or last, and "λογία" (logia) meaning saying or doctrine. Eschatology is therefore the "doctrines of last things". Eschatology is inevitable. Every world view has its own eschatology. Eschatology is not confined to religion, science and philosophy have their eschatology. Wherever man is found, he is asking questions as to his destiny. These questions pertain not only to the destiny of the individual, but to that of the universe. The age-old question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14), is still pressing for an answer. The rational mind persists in asking such questions as "Does death end all?", "Does man at death enter upon another form of existence?", "Are the conditions of that existence better or worse?"

Many aspects of theology have been attacked by those who are unbelievers, but I am not aware of any phase of theology that has suffered so much at the hands of its "friends." To be doctrinally sound and Biblically knowledgeable we must deal with that major segment of the Scriptures known as Prophecy. Since the "Last Things" are yet to come what we may know of them is recorded within the sacred lines of Biblical prophecy. Paul in writing the Thessalonians said, "I would not have you to be ignorant." God does not want his people to be ignorant about what he is going to do and has recorded His plans within the pages of sacred writ.

Many, because of confusion created by the few, have decided that the study of this portion of God's Word is without profit. They believe that it has no real benefit to the believer. John in his first epistle wrote, "Beloved now are we the sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is, and he that hath this hope in him shall purify himself even as He is pure." I know of no better call upon the life of the believer than to live in the expectancy of soon being in the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A proper study and understanding of eschatology is the primary motivating force in evangelism. The work of the Holy Spirit in this world among the unbeliever is, "to convict the World of Sin, of Righteousness and of Judgment to come." Jesus said, in John 6:39, "And this is the Father's will which sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Nothing rings louder in the heart of the hearer than the last words of a loved one, and Jesus' last words to his disciples and to us was, "and lo I am with you alway even unto the end of this age." If the end of this age was important to our Lord Jesus, it therefore must be important to each one of us as well. May God bless you as you undertake this study of Bible Prophecy.

## CHAPTER ONE

### I. INTERPRETATION

#### A. Methods

No question facing the student of Eschatology is more important than the question of the method to be employed in the interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures. The basic differences between the premillennial and amillennial schools and between the pretribulation and posttribulation rapturists are hermeneutical, arising from the adoption of divergent and irreconcilable methods of interpretation.

The basic issue between premillennialists and amillennialists is clearly drawn by Oswald T. Allis, a proponent of the amillennialists' position, he writes:

One of the most marked features of Premillennialism in all its forms is the emphasis which it places on the literal interpretation of Scripture. It is the insistent claim of its advocates that only when interpreted literally is the Bible interpreted truly; and they denounce as "spiritualizers" or "allegorizers" those who do not interpret the Bible with the same degree of literalness as they do.

Charles L. Feinberg states:

...it can be shown that the reason the early Church was premillennial was traceable to its interpretation of the Word in a literal manner, whereas the cause of departure from this view in later centuries of the history of the Church is directly attributable to a change in method of interpretation beginning with Origen in particular.

## **B. THE PROBLEM**

As stated above, the interpretation of Scripture is the fundamental difference in these two positions. We are brought face to face with the "Problem." If we are to have a proper understanding of Scripture, there must be some basic rules of interpretation. It is not sufficient to say that these divergent methods are simply different concepts, but if language is to have any meaning at all, and, if the words I am writing are to convey thoughts and teachings, they must convey the meanings to you that they mean to me; otherwise, we cannot communicate..

## **C. THE IMPORTANCE:**

When dealing with the prophetic utterances of Scripture, we are not dealing with the thoughts or concepts of fallible man, but the specific declarations of a sovereign God who desires to communicate these things to man.

(2 Tim 2:15 NNAS)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

(2 Tim 3:16 NNAS)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

## **II THE ALLEGORICAL METHOD**

### **A. DEFINITION**

Joseph Angus and Samuel G. Green, in *The Bible Handbook* give this definition :

“Any statement of supposed facts which admits of a literal interpretation, and yet requires or justly admits a moral or figurative one, is called an *Allegory*. It is to narrative or story what trope is to single words, adding to the literal meaning of the terms employed a moral or spiritual one. Sometimes the allegory is pure, that is

contains no direct reference to the application of it, as in the story of the Prodigal Son. Sometimes it is mixed, as in Ps. 80, where it is plainly intimated (verse 17) that the Jews are the people whom the vine is intended to represent.”

Bernard Ramm, in *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* defines the allegorical method this way:

“Allegorism is the method of interpreting a literary text that regards the literal sense as the vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual and more profound *sense*.”

In this method the historical and literal import is either denied or ignored, and the emphasis is placed entirely on a secondary sense so that the original words or events have little or no significance. Charles T. Fritsch, in *Biblical Typology* expresses it this way:

“According to this method the literal and historical sense of Scripture is completely ignored, and every word and event is made an allegory of some kind either to escape theological difficulties or to maintain certain religious views...”

I think it is quite clear that the purpose of the allegorical method is not to interpret Scripture, but to pervert the true meaning of Scripture. This is done under the guise of seeking a deeper or more spiritual meaning.

## **B. THE DANGERS**

The allegorical method is fraught with many dangers which render it useless and unacceptable for Biblical interpretation.

### **1. It does not interpret Scripture.**

Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* states:

“... it will be noticed at once that its habit is to disregard the common signification of words and give wing to all manner of fanciful speculation. It does not draw out the legitimate meaning of an author's language, but foists into it whatever the whim or fancy of an interpreter may desire. As a system, therefore, it puts itself beyond all well-defined principles and laws.”

Angus-Green express the same danger:

“There is...unlimited scope for fancy, if once the principle be admitted, and the only basis of the exposition is found in the mind of the expositor. The scheme can yield no *interpretation*, properly so called, although possibly some valuable truths may be illustrated.”

Let me state the first danger again very simply, the allegorical method does not interpret scripture, but becomes the expression of the mind of the "*expositor*."

### **2. The allegorical method misplaces the authority for interpretations.**

The second great danger in the allegorical method is the basic authority in interpretation ceases to be, the Scriptures, but the mind of the interpreter. The interpretation may then be twisted by the interpreter's doctrinal positions, the authority of the church to which the interpreter adheres, his social or educational background or a host of other factors.

Jerome...complains that,"The faultiest style of teaching is to corrupt the meaning of Scripture, and to drag its reluctant utterances to our own will, making Scriptural mysteries out of our own imaginations."

F. W. Farrar, in *History of Interpretation* adds:

“...When once the principle of allegory is admitted, when once we start with the rule that whole passages and books of Scripture say one thing when they mean another, the reader is delivered bound hand and foot to the caprice of the interpreter.”

### **3. In the allegorical method one is left without any means by which the conclusions of the interpreter may be tested.**

F.W.Farrar states it like this:

"He can be sure of absolutely nothing except what is dictated to him by the Church, and in all ages the authority of "the Church" has been falsely claimed for the presumptuous tyranny of false prevalent opinions."

Ramm adds:

“...to state that the principle meaning of the Bible is a second-sense meaning, and that the principal method of interpreting is "spiritualizing," is to open the door to almost uncontrolled speculation and imagination. For this reason we have insisted that the control in interpretation is the literal method.

The great dangers inherent in this system are that it takes away the authority of Scripture, leaves us without any basis on which interpretations may be tested, reduces Scripture to what seems reasonable to the interpreter, and as a result, makes true interpretation of Scripture impossible.

### **4. The New Testament use of allegory.**

In order to justify the use of the allegorical method it is often argued the New Testament itself employs this method and thus it must be a justifiable method of interpretation.

First, I know of only one use of allegory as a means of interpretation in the New Testament. That instance is Galatians 4:21-31, where Paul himself is said to use the allegorical method.

F. W. Farrar concludes:

“The better Jewish theory, purified in Christianity, takes the teachings of the Old Dispensation literally, but sees in them, as did St. Paul, the shadow and germ of future developments. Allegory, though used by St. Paul by way of passing illustration, is unknown to the other Apostles, and is never sanctioned by Christ.”

J. Dwight Pentecost, in *Things To Come* makes this distinction:

“It must be carefully observed that in Galatians 4:21-31 Paul is not using an allegorical method of interpreting the Old Testament, but was explaining an allegory. These are two entirely different things. Scripture abounds in allegories, whether types, symbols or parables. These are accepted and legitimate media of communication of thought. They do not call for an allegorical method of interpretation, which would deny the literal or historical antecedent and use the allegory simply as a springboard for the interpreter's imagination . . . but the use of allegories is not a justification for the allegorical method of interpretation.”

Second, some argue for justification of the allegorical method of interpretation because of the use of types and symbols in the New Testament.

It is recognized that the New Testament uses types and symbols. It is recognized that the New Testament makes typical application of the Old. This is not the allegorical method of interpretation. In reply to the accusation that because one interprets types he is using the allegorical method,

J. Dwight Pentecost writes,

"It must be emphasized that the interpretation of types is not the same as allegorical interpretation of the literal antecedent. In order to convey truth concerning the spiritual realm, with which realm we are not familiar, so that, by a transference of what is literally true in one realm, we may learn what is true in the other realm. There must be a literal parallelism between the type and the antitype for the type to be of any value. The person who allegorizes a type will never arrive at a true interpretation. The only way to discern the meaning of the type is through a transference of literal ideas from the natural to the spiritual realm."

Rollin T. Chafer, in *The Science of Biblical Hermeneutics*, writes:

"In the study of allegories of various kinds, namely, parables, types and symbols, the interpreter must be careful not to treat plain statements of Scripture as if demanded of language couched in figurative expressions. A truth already expressed will bear repetition at this point: There is all the difference possible in interpreting a Scripture Allegory, on one hand, and the allegorizing of a plain Scripture on the other hand."

### **III THE LITERAL METHOD**

#### **A. The definition**

"The literal method of interpretation is that method that gives to each word the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking. It is called the grammatical-historical method to emphasize the fact that the meaning is to be determined by both grammatical and historical considerations." J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come*

Ramm defines the method this way:

"The customary, socially-acknowledged designation of a word is the literal meaning of that word."

The "Literal" meaning of a word is the basis, customary, social designation of that word. The spiritual or mystical meaning of a word or expression is one that arises after the literal designation and is dependent upon it for its existence.

To interpret literally means nothing more or less than to interpret in terms of normal, usual designation. When the manuscript alters its designation, the interpreter immediately shifts his method of interpreting.

#### **B. THE ADVANTAGES OF THE LITERAL METHOD**

a. It grounds interpretation in fact. It seeks to establish itself in objective data -- grammar, logic, etymology, history, geography, archaeology, theology.....

b. It exercises a control over interpretation that experimentation does for the scientific method...justification is the control of interpretations. All that do not measure up to the canons of the literal-cultural-critical method are to be rejected or placed under suspect. In addition to this the method offers the only reliable check on the constant threat to place double-sense interpretation upon the Scripture.

c. It has had the greatest success in opening up the Word of God. *Exegesis did not start in earnest till the church was a millennium and a half old.* With the literalism of Luther and Calvin the light of Scripture literal-

ly flamed up...This method is the honored method of the highest scholastic tradition in conservative Protestantism. It is the method of Bruce Lightfoot, Zahn, A.T. Robertson, Elliott, Machen, Cremer, Terry, Farrar, Lange, Green, Oehler, Schaff, Sampey, Moule, Perowne, Henderson Broadus, Stuart- to name but a few typical exegetes.

### C. THE LITERAL METHOD AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

It is recognized by all that the Bible abounds in figurative language. On this basis it is often argued that the use of figurative language demands a figurative interpretation. However, figures of speech are used as means of revealing literal truth. What is literally true in one realm, with which we are familiar, is brought over, literally, into another realm, with which we are not familiar, in order to teach us truths in that unfamiliar realm.

## IV. THE LITERAL METHOD DEMONSTRATED

### Prophecies Literally Fulfilled

God, in giving us His Word, desired that we might understand. The rules of understanding and interpretation are contained within the pages of "*The Book*." Man was never intended to be judge over what the Scriptures were teaching, but man was to be receptive and obedient to the Word of God. The Book we call *The Bible* is God breathed or literally the breath of God. It is, therefore, not for man to say God did not really mean that or that means something else. If we simply follow the pattern that God uses within His Word we will not be led astray. Below I have listed a few prophetic scriptures concerning the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ. As you consider these verses you will see the care God has taken to literally fulfill the prophecies of His Word.

#### PROPHECIES

#### FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 7:14 (NIV)

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Luke 1:34 - 35 (NIV)

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Micah 5:2 (NIV)

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Luke 2:11 (NIV)

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:15 (NIV)

This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more."

Hosea 11:1 (NIV)

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Isaiah 11:2 (NIV)

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--

Zechariah 9:9 (NIV)

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Psalms 41:9 (NIV)

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

Zechariah 13:7 (NIV)

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.

Isaiah 50:6 (NIV)

I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.

Psalms 34:20 (NIV)

He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

Psalms 69:21 (NIV)

They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

Mat 2:17-18 (NIV)

"Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 18 "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.""

Matthew 2:19 (NIV)

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt

Matthew 3:16 (NIV)

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

Matthew 21:9 (NIV)

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

Matthew 26:25 (NIV)

Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

Matthew 26:56 (NIV)

But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Matthew 27:29 - 30 (NIV)

and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

John 19:32 (NIV)

The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

John 19:28 (NIV)

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."