

Unraveling the End

A Biblical Synthesis of Four Competing and Conflicting End-time Views

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by

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This paper presents an overview of a synthesis solution to the problems associated with the four major eschatological views in the evangelical Christian church. To this writer's knowledge, an approach of this nature, breadth, and depth has never been presented in Church history. It is based on my doctoral dissertation, a 13-week church seminar series, and excerpts from my recent book by the same title as this paper.

Major Problems with Eschatology

Time and again, over and over, for nineteen centuries and counting, the Church has been made to look like a joke in the eyes of the world as predictions of Christ's Second Coming or Return and other related end-time events have supposedly come and gone without fulfillment.¹ Adding to this humiliation is the reality that the biblical field of study of end-time views is termed . . .

"One of the most divisive elements in recent Christian history . . . few doctrines unite and separate Christians as much as eschatology."²

¹ For listing of prominent examples, see the first chapter, "Clearly, Something Is Wrong," in my book: John Noë, *The Perfect Ending for the World* (Indianapolis, IN.: East2West Press, 2011), 21-47; also see cartoons, 56-62, 72-74.

² Kenneth S. Kantzer, ed., "Our Future Hope: Eschatology and Its Role in the Church," *Christianity Today*, 6 February 1987, 1-14 (1).

The field of eschatology has also been . . .

. . . declared a òwar zoneö³ thatø comprised of four òarmed camps.ö⁴

. . . lamented as òa highly complex subjectö thatø filled with òdisagreementö⁵ and òa variety of . . . theories.ö⁶

. . . and dismissed by many as òa complex spectrum of beliefsö upon which òno labeling system will capture everythingö since òthe boundary lines here . . . are vague.ö⁷

Others have characterized this divisive arena as a mine fieldö one false step and you can get blown away by your opposition.

Perhaps Jerry Newcombe best captures this present state of hostility by summarizing: òWhen we consider the various views on the Second Coming within the evangelical camp, we see such division we almost wonder whether anybody agrees on anything.ö⁸

Over the course of Church history the arena of eschatology has become a complex maze of four confusing, conflicting, and competing views in which everything is contested, often hotly so. Each camp has its experts who are armed to the teeth and prepared to defend their position against all others. Consequently, no consensus has ever existed.

This lack of consensus has led to major disarray and widespread division. Premillennialists say the amillennialists are wrong. Amillennialists say the premillennialists are wrong. Postmillennials say they are right and everybody else is wrong. Few scholars are familiar with and even fewer lay people are aware that there is another comprehensive end-time view that claims all prophetic fulfillment is past and over; behind us and not ahead of us. Itø called the preterist view. Shockingly for some, itø a legitimate and scripturally grounded view that needs to be heard and considered.

Ironically, at different times and places in Church history, each of the first three views has held sway as the dominant view. Yet each has also taken its turn as the chief recipient of heresy charges. Not surprising, many Christians

³ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1992), 531.

⁴ Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of Interpretation of the Bible* (n.c.: Fortress Press, 1963. 1984), 165.

⁵ Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1981), 190.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁷ Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R Publishing, 2d ed., 1994), 13.

⁸ Jerry Newcombe, *Coming Again But When?* (Colorado Springs, CO.: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1999), 275.

avoid end-time prophecies like the proverbial plague, thinking, ðwhen you experts get it all figured out let me know, then I ðl consider it.ð

Scholars Recognizing the Need for a Synthesis

One of my tasks during my dissertation process was to conduct an extensive literature review to convince my committee that no comprehensive synthesizing work of the type or magnitude I was proposing had ever been conducted in Church history. After several months of researching, I was unable to locate any book, study, article, paper, or dissertation which offered such a comprehensive evaluation or synthesis ð i.e., one that spanned the entire spectrum of the four, major, evangelical, and eschatological views. I found only a few scant books, journal articles, theological papers, and dissertations which even hinted at or made a partial attempt ð i.e., they only compared and/or contrasted selected aspects of two or three of the four views and left the other view(s) and issues untouched.

But I did uncover credible documentation from several well-know scholars supporting my premise that no comprehensive works of synthesis are known to exist.

Back in 1937, Louis Berkhof in his book, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, viewed ðthe doctrine of the last things . . . [as] one of the least developed doctrines.ð He further believed that ðit may be . . . we have now reached that point in the history of dogma in which the doctrine of the last things will receive greater attention and be brought to further development.ð⁹ Berkhof also concluded that ðeschatology is even now the least developed of all the loci of dogmatics.ð¹⁰

In 1973, in the preface of J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, Payne quotes J. Dwight Pentecost in noting that ðthere has been little attempt to synthesize the whole field of prophecy . . . and there is a great need for a synthetic study and presentation of Biblical prophecy.ð¹¹

In 1984, Frances A. Schaeffer chimed in with these words in his book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*:

⁹ Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, c1937, 1959), 267.

¹⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1939), 664.

¹¹ J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1973), vi. From J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Findlay, OH.: Dunham Pub. Co. , 1958), viii.

The history of theology is all too often a long exhibition of a desire to win. But we should understand that what we are working for in the midst of our difference is a solution— a solution that will give God the glory, that will be true to the Bible, but will exhibit the love of God simultaneously with his holiness.¹²

Such a solution was exactly what I was proposing and would be pursuing. I was also encouraged by comments from more recent scholars. Below are a few examples.

In 1998, Millard Erickson in his book, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology*, was still recognizing that eschatology is “the one remaining undeveloped topic of theology.”¹³ He also referred to J. Barton Payne’s previous attempt “to synthesize the major strengths of the three methods of prophetic interpretation: historical, futurist, and preterist.”¹⁴ Payne’s treatment, nevertheless, was cursory and shallow. Even Payne himself admitted:

... any of the three methods if used rigorously . . . is productive of confusion. Actually, there are not a few alleged antecedents to Christ’s return that may better be understood as having attained their fulfillment in the ancient past and hence as of no continuing prophetic significance whatsoever. Space forbids an exhaustive treatment of Biblical prophecy in reference to these three methods of approach.¹⁵

Unfortunately, Payne’s book did not accomplish much of a synthesis. Hence eschatology remains “an object of criticism.”¹⁶ But in my dissertation, and now subsequent book, “space” has not “forbid” doing what Payne proclaimed but fell far short of accomplishing.

Conspicuously, I also discovered that no creedal council during the early centuries of Christianity ever debated or discussed eschatology. Even the 16th-century Reformers spent little time with it and paid it scant attention.

Nowadays, growing numbers of theologians are feeling that the embarrassing and perplexing arena of end-time biblical prophecy, or eschatology, is the next major area of Christianity ripe for reform. For instance, the renowned theologian George Eldon Ladd maintained: “the easiest approach . . . is to follow one’s own particular tradition as the true view and ignore all others, but intelligent interpreters must familiarize themselves with

¹² Frances A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 1984), 176-177.

¹³ Millard J. Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1998), 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁵ J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1962), 106.

¹⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth, 1948, 1975), 287.

the various methods of interpretation that they may criticize their own views.¹⁷ John Warwick Montgomery further and wisely advised that “the search for truth can never be limited to the categories of a single modern school of thought.”¹⁸

I have simply taken Montgomery’s and Ladd’s advice one step further into a solution of synthesis.

Even the chairperson of my dissertation committee, David L. Turner, a progressive dispensationalist, in a 1989 article in the *Grace Theological Journal* titled, “The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41,” advocated that “some combination of the two (preterist-futurist views)” offers “the most promising solution to the exegetical difficulties of this passage.”¹⁹

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In a 1999 *Christianity Today* magazine article titled, “Is Revelation Prophecy or History?”, Dr. David S. Dockery, President of Union University in Jackson, TN, recommended that the Book of Revelation be approached on a synthesis basis. Here’s how he put it:

Both the futurist and preterist views have their strengths and weaknesses. Instead of choosing only one or the other, a “both/and” approach that applies the strengths of each is a better option. . . . Combining the preterist and futurist views allows us to understand both that the message of Revelation spoke directly to John’s own age and that it represents the consummation of redemptive history. . . . The preterist position by itself fails to understand that Revelation confronts the modern reader with promises, challenges, and choices that are similar, if not identical to those faced by the book’s original readers. The futurist position by itself is prone to see Revelation as a crystal ball with a literal timetable of events that will happen in the future.²⁰

Stanley J. Grenz, in another *Christianity Today* article certainly grasped the validity of a synthesis concept. Although he did not mention the preterist

¹⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1974, revised ed.), 670.

¹⁸ John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Newburgh, IN.: Trinity Press, 1970), 177.

¹⁹ David L. Turner, “The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments,” *Grace Theological Journal* 10.1 (1989): 3, 26.

²⁰ David S. Dockery, “Is Revelation Prophecy or History?” *Christianity Today*, 25 October 1999, 86.

view, he did discern that ōwe would be mistaken if we merely weighed the evidence, chose one, and ignored the other two. The Spirit has something important to tell us in each of the three traditional views of the millennium.ö²¹

While I have basic agreements and disagreements with each of the above synthesis suggestions, they are, indeed, steps in the right direction. For that I applaud them. But they all are too limited in scope.

It is toward such a solution that my dissertation, this paper, and latest book are directed. At the least, I believe the solution of synthesis presented therein can be an effective catalyst for discussion. At the most, I believe it has massive potential for reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18b). Flawed views of eschatology have menaced the world and discredited the Church long enough.

My Committee’s Response

What do you think my dissertation committee thought of my proposed topic and synthesis approach? After mandating three revisions, they found it interesting, felt it had possibilities, and finally approved my topic and proposal. But they were highly skeptical that I could pull it off and develop it into a full-blown, approvable, and defensible dissertation.

Two years later, I completed and defended that dissertation, and they signed off on it. In actuality, the solution of synthesis I presented and defended was and is not my solution. For it was clearly in God’s Word all along. It only awaited our discovery and humbly receiving it. Now, it serves as the basis for this paper and subsequent book.

With all my heart, I believe that the presentations and approach contained therein is *that* all-encompassing, longed-for, and bold step of synthesis these above scholars have been awaiting. But you be the judge.

A Caveat

I am also well aware that the issues of eschatology are deeply embedded and their traditions fiercely defended. Moreover, I realize that my proposed synthesis solution for unifying of this field of knowledge has far-reaching implications, consequences, and ramifications that will be resisted. Perhaps, Basil Mitchell hit the proverbial nail on the head when he pointed out: ōIn politics, as in religion, men become committed to positions which they will not readily give up and which involve their entire personalities. On neither of these

²¹ Stanley J. Grenz, ōThe 1,000-year Question: Timeless truths behind the debates over Christ’s return,ö *Christianity Today*, 8 March 1993, 35.

subjects are differences easily resolved by argument²² especially for those professionally tied to their view. But I am willing to take this risk of argument and offer a solution of synthesis in order to face what others have chosen to ignore or avoid. I further accept the necessity to offend in order to break us out of our complacency. However, my overriding desire is not to be controversial. It's for this paper and book to be therapeutic, healing, and capable of making a meaningful contribution toward advancing discussions, resolving differences, and ending this divisive end-time dilemma and perplexing stalemate.

Re-exploring Some Basics Terms

Definitions

Eschatology is not an appendix to Christianity, a divisive afterthought in the mind of God, or a defeatist mentality for the current future of humankind and destiny of planet Earth. Here are two better and more scholarly definitions:

1). Technical: A subset of Theology (Gr. *theos* ≡ God + Latin suffix- *logy* ≡ study of God and his relations with man and the universe)

Eschatology ≡ (Gr. *eschatos* ≡ last + *logy* ≡ study of last things)

2). Practical, less technical, easier to grasp and remember:

Eschatology ≡ is the study of the progressive completion or fulfillment of God's plan of redemption (salvation)

Hence, the whole Bible can be contextualized as eschatological and characterized as the story of man's problem and God's solution. After all, isn't that the ultimate context for everything in the Bible?

Four Chief Moments

Eschatology's four chief moments,²³ or four end-time events are:

- 1) The Second Coming/Return of Christ
- 2) The Judgment
- 3) The Resurrection of the Dead
- 4) The Consummation or end of the world

²² Basil Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (New York, NY.: A Crossroad Book, 1973), 1.

²³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, NY.: Harper & Row, 1959), 462.

- 5) Some also include the afterlife⁶ what happens to you after you die.

The pivotal event is #1. It is the most anticipated event in all of history. Everything else is tied to its occurrence. Therefore, the so-called "Second Coming" or "Return" of Christ is absolutely the first event that must be analyzed and reassessed.

The Four Views

Three of these views are futurist⁶ i.e., the fulfillment of eschatology's four chief moments, or four key end-time events, are still in the future. Each of these views is defined and differentiated by when the central and pivotal chief moment/event of the Second Coming/Return of Christ, which will be personal, physical, and visible worldwide, occurs in relationship with to the 1,000-year time period mentioned only in Revelation 20:1-10. The fulfillments of the other three chief moments or events are attached to its occurrence. The fourth view stands in dramatic contrast to the other three. It is not futurist but preterist⁶ i.e., fulfillment of all four chief moments/events is in the past.

The four major competing and conflicting end-time views we shall present for synthesis are (in order of their popularity and prominence in America, and perhaps the rest of the world as well):²⁴

#1 – Dispensational Premillennial View of soon-coming fulfillment – Christ has not come again or returned, nor have any of the other associated end-time events taken place. But his Second Coming/Return is very near and will occur before his literal 1,000-year reign on earth⁶ i.e., *pre – millennial*.

#2 – Amillennial View of partial fulfillment and an unknowable, future, final fulfillment – Christ's Second Coming/Return is future. It will happen within human history and during the symbolic/figurative 1,000-year millennium, which lasts longer than a literal thousand years and in which we are currently living. But no one can know when this pivotal and climactic event will occur. Other comings of Jesus, however, have already occurred, and some associated end-time events have been partially fulfilled, in some sense, but await a final future fulfillment⁶ i.e., *a – millennial*.

²⁴ These four are not Preterism, Historicism, Futurism, and Idealism as some have suggested.

#3 – Postmillennial view of partial fulfillment and distant-future, final fulfillment – This was the view of our forefathers in the faith who came to and founded America. Postmillennialists believed that Christ's Second Coming/Return is a long way away, perhaps a 100, a 1,000 or even 5,000 years away. But first, the world must become more Christianized. Then, after a future golden age of special blessings, which will last a thousand or more years, Christ will return i.e., *post – millennial*. In the meantime, many but not all end-time events already have been fulfilled and/or partially fulfilled. Also, they acknowledge many comings of Jesus Christ throughout history. But his future return will be his *final* coming.

#4 – Preterist view of precise past fulfillment – This view is the least known of the four views. But it is the view creating the most conversation and controversy nowadays. The term preterist is derived from the Latin word *praeter*, which means *past*. Hence, Christ's Second Coming/Return is past and occurred circa A.D. 70. He came again exactly *as* and *when* He said He would and was expected. It was a coming in judgment, in a day of the Lord, and in association with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The fulfillment of all other end-times events, including his millennial reign, also happened at or before that time. Therefore, all fulfillments are behind us and not ahead of us; are past and not future. Many preterists also believe that there are no more comings of Christ after A.D. 70 i.e., He came in finality.

Before presenting a synthesis, however, we must address the all-too-common question or retort: So what? Who cares? Why does it matter to me?

7 Reasons Why Your End-time View (or non-view) Is So Important

If asked, many Christians would say your eschatological view is not important. After all, we are saved by grace through faith, and not by works or one's eschatological view (Eph. 2:8-9). So they've come up with terms like: Pan-millennialist – "However it pans out that's fine with me." Pro-millennialist – "Whatever happens, I'm for it." Actually, these labels are copouts from people who simply do not want to follow scriptural injunctions, such as 1 Thessalonians 5:21: "Test everything, hold on to the good."

Others are simply confused by the current complexity and contradictions of views. Or they are turned off by the arguing. Hence, they dismiss the importance of eschatology, claiming:

- If the experts cannot agree, why should I bother trying to figure it out?

- It is a non-essential for salvation.
- It is only an appendix to the Christian faith and, therefore . . .
- It is not significant for my daily life.
- It is majoring on minors, etc.

These sentiments are why I will include in this paper (in condensed form) seven key reasons and pertinent issues for why your eschatological view or non-view is so important. As you will see, eschatology's influence and impact is vast. It touches, encompasses, and has implications for many other significant areas of theology, practical living, and the nature and mission of the church. And there are broad differences of understanding and opinion within Christianity in each of these areas. See if you agree or disagree. Perhaps, you can think of more reasons? (Underlines are mine.)

1. How much of the Bible is involved? It has been argued that no less than two thirds of the content of the New Testament is concerned directly or indirectly with eschatology.²⁵ Some experts estimate that 25 to 30 percent of the whole Bible is so concerned. So, we are not dealing with a fringe issue.

Fact is, your view or non-view of eschatology dramatically affects your understanding, misunderstanding, or lack of understanding of many other important aspects of the Christian faith. For instance, it impacts on points 2 through 7.

2. How much salvation do we currently have? The whole of the Bible is concerned with man's problem and God's solution.

The final outworking of that redemptive solution for those alive and those dead is what salvation and eschatology are both all about. But depending upon your end-time view, your answer to this question will vary from some to most to all.

3. How much of the kingdom do we currently have? According to your eschatological view, your answer will vary from: none, to some, to most, to all, to all minus some major parts.

Fact is, *the kingdom of God was the central teaching of our Lord and at the heart of his earthly ministry.* It was also the very essence of New Testament Christianity.

²⁵ R.C. Sproul, "A Journey Back in Time," *Tabletalk*, January 1999, 5.

Today, however, *the kingdom is no longer the central teaching of his Church*, at the heart of its ministry, nor Christianity's very essence—an automatic red flag. *What has happened? What has changed?*

4. What do you do with the modern-day nation of Israel? Many believe that Israel has a biblical entitlement to possess the land promised them by God. What say you? Do they or don't they? *Your answer depends on your eschatological view.*

They further believe that if we don't support Israel, we'll be biblically cursed, individually and nationally (Gen. 12:3; Zech. 2:8-9). Will we or won't we? Others believe that biblical Israel has been replaced by the Church. Most simply don't know what to think, believe, or do. Or, they don't care.

5. It's the focal point of the liberal-skeptic attack on the Bible and Deity of Christ. In seminary I was exposed daily to critical theories espoused by my professors regarding the Scriptures. What stands out in my memory of those days is the heavy emphasis on biblical texts regarding the return of Christ, which were constantly cited as examples of errors in the New Testament and proof that the text had been edited to accommodate the crisis in the early church caused by the so-called parousia-delay of Jesus. . .
²⁶

It is called the “battle for the Bible.” And liberals and critics, alike, have hit Christianity at its weakest point—the embarrassing statements of Jesus to return within the lifetime of his contemporaries and the “failed,” Holy-Spirit-guided expectations of the New Testament writers that He would (John 16:13).

Consequently, in America over the past 50 to 100 years, we have lost half of our faith as seminary after seminary, denomination after denomination, church after church, and believer after believer have departed from the conservative faith.

6. It makes a difference in your worldview. Our forefathers in the faith came to this country under a particular, and a historically optimistic, eschatological view to expand the kingdom of God.

They believed the world would become a better and better place as it became more Christianized, and as each Christian took responsibility to do his or her part to help make this happen. Hence, they came and founded the great

²⁶ R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 14-15.

institutions of our country—the government, the schools, the universities—under Judeo-Christian principles—and Christianity became the moral influencer in America.

But 50 to 75 years ago all this began to change. Now, we've almost given it all away, and without a fight. And we didn't get pushed out by a more powerful force. We simply withdrew. Into the vacuum gladly came the ungodly forces. *Why did this happen? What can we now do about it?*

7. It makes a difference in your life and family. If you have bought into the popular ideas that the Christ will soon return and the world is going to end, these beliefs affect how you and your family think, pray, work, save, plan, invest, and commit or don't commit to do things in the present—especially things that have long-term payouts.

As someone once put it, "Your view of the future determines your philosophy of life." And "*if there's no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.*" Eschatological ideas do have consequences. And for most evangelicals, their worldview is this: "We are living in the last days." So, why fuss, why fight?

My Fourfold Premise

1. **God is not the author of our confusion in eschatology (1 Cor. 14:33, KJV)—we are.** I assumed that it was not and is not God's character or nature to have included in his Word any content that would create the amount of confusion, conflict, divisiveness, and/or ambivalence we see among Christians in this arena of eschatology. Personal interpretations have "muddied the waters" for everyone. I further assumed that we are the ones who have misconstrued the whole thing, and that this impasse could be resolved scripturally.

2. **Each of the four major views focuses on the Second Coming/Return of Christ as the central, pivotal and controlling end-time event.** So get this one right and the other events will fall readily into place. The four views in order of their prominence today are: dispensational premillennialism, amillennialism, postmillennialism, and preterism.²⁷

3. **Each view has principal strengths and weaknesses that can be identified through a scripturally disciplined approach grounded upon what**

²⁷ They are not Preterism, Historicism, Futurism, and Idealism, as some suggest.

the text actually says and does not say. Eschatology is an area filled with problems caused by both additions and subtractions to the text. These are necessitated by the traditions of men and will not stand up to an honest and objective test of Scripture. Yet more often than not, we are unaware of the weaknesses inherent in our own view, until someone points them out to us. They are blind spots. *And unlearning is the hardest form of learning.* I also knew IØd have to be both objective and gracious in exposing these weaknesses for each view.

4. The solution would be a solution of synthesis—discarding the weaknesses, keeping the strengths, and synthesizing the strengths into one meaningful, coherent, and cogent view that is more Christ-honoring, Scripture-authenticating, and faith-validating than any one view in and of itself. Since each view has grasped a portion of the biblical truth regarding the end times, I proposed a synthesis treatment that would meet all hermeneutical and exegetical demands, and not contradict itself. This was significant because no one had ever done this before to the degree and scope I was proposing and none of the four views themselves meet this criterion.

Recap of Strengths and Weaknesses by View

Dispensational Premillennial View

Strengths:

- Strong interest in end-time prophecy.
- Emphasis on the dynamic role of Christ in the present and future affairs of humankind.
- Recognizes that eschatology is connected to Israel and pertains to the end of the Jewish age.
- Realization that at least one coming of Christ is not visible.

Weaknesses:

- Positing the time of ChristØs ØSecond ComingØ and ØReturnØ as being very soon.
- Interrupting divine time frames without clear textual justification.
- Arbitrary use of gaps of time.
- Bifurcating passages of Scripture, including the Book of Revelation.
- Interpreting by exception and specialized meanings—i.e., ignoring or changing the meaning of commonly used and normally understood words in the time statements.
- Postulating postponement of the kingdom of God.
- Postulating delay theory.
- Advocating a future 7-year period of tribulation.
- Inventing the ØRaptureØ idea in direct contradiction of Scripture.
- Identifying DanielØs 70th week with JesusØ Olivet Discourse.
- Advocating separate redemptive plans for Israel and the Church.
- Denigrating the Church as unforeseen and a parenthesis in GodØs redemptive plan.
- Advocating a future restoration of the old and inferior Judaic order.
- A dichotomizing hermeneutic based upon a false paradigmØ i.e., the Israel-Church distinctive.

- Advocating an incomplete salvation and resurrection reality.
- Positing a negative worldview and short-term outlook for our present time.

Amillennial View

Strengths:

- Idealist interpretation of the Book of Revelation.
- Emphasis on the literal/unseen realities behind symbolic fulfillment.
- Recognition that the *ōlast daysō* existed in the first century.
- The present reality of the kingdom of Christ.
- Rejection of the idea of a future kingdom.
- Attempts to honor both literal and figurative language.

Weaknesses:

- Positing the time of Christ's *ōSecond Comingō* and *ōReturnō* as being unknowable.
- Advocating ambiguity and uncertainty re: the understanding of eschatological prophecies.
- Insistence that the time of fulfillment cannot be known.
- Little interest in end-time prophecy.
- Reliance on delay theory.
- Adherence to an unscriptural *ōend-of-timeō* paradigm.
- Use of a dichotomizing hermeneutic based upon that paradigm.
- Bifurcating passages of Scripture, including the Book of Revelation.
- Advocating a final return, final consummation (how many are there?).
- Advocating an incomplete salvation and resurrection reality.
- Numerous partial-preterist inconsistencies from failure to fully honor the time statements.
- Belief that the Jewish age, the Old Covenant order, and the law were completely fulfilled and removed, and that all Old Testament promises/prophecies were fulfilled, accomplished, and completed at the Cross.
- The New Covenant began and was fully in force at Pentecost—i.e., the full establishment of the kingdom/Church/New Covenant order was given, perfected, and fulfilled.
- The Church as the replacement of Israel.
- Claim that eschatology pertains to the end of the Christian age and to a split fulfillment in time and disposition (Jewish age/Christian age) with a gap of thousands of years in between.
- Advocating a current intermediate state of disembodied existence in heaven.
- Advocating a future evil-less, utopian, and eternal state on earth for believers and not in heaven.
- Equating the *ōage* to come to being heaven or yet future.
- A mixed positive-negative worldview.

Postmillennial View

Strengths:

- Strong kingdom-society orientation.
- Positive emphasis and motivation for human effort to expand God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.
- Positive worldview, long-term outlook.
- Recognition of many comings of Christ.
- Many valid preterist understandings.

Weaknesses:

- Positing the time of Christ's *ōSecond Comingō* and *ōReturnō* as being far away.
- Insistence the world must be *ōChristianizedō* to a significant degree before Christ can return.
- Adherence to an unscriptural *ōend-of-timeō* paradigm.

- Use of a dichotomizing hermeneutic based on that paradigm.
- Claim that eschatology pertains to the end of the Christian age.
- Postulating two or more *parousia* returns of Christ.
- Postulating a final coming and last judgment, after which no more.
- Numerous partial-preterist inconsistencies from failure to fully honor the time statements.
- Bifurcating passages of Scripture, including the Book of Revelation.
- Reliance on delay theory.
- Insistence that the time of fulfillment cannot be known.
- Advocating an incomplete salvation and resurrection reality.
- Advocating a future evil-less, utopian, and eternal state on earth.
- Overdependence on creedal authority.
- The *ōage to comeō* is yet future

Preterist View

Strengths:

- Fully accepts the natural reading and understanding of eschatological timeframes and NT time and imminency statements, including those bracketing the entire prophecy of Revelation.
- Supports the 1st-century Holy-Spirit-guided expectations as the correct ones.
- Balances literal and figurative language for nature of fulfillment.
- Uses biblical precedent to explain the nature of fulfillment.
- Harmonizes time convergence of OT time prophecies with NT time statements and Holy-Spirit-led expectations.
- Recognizes that eschatology is connected to Israel and pertains to the end of the Jewish age.
- Affirms that God has always had only one, continuous, by-faith people.
- Posits a positive worldview, long-term outlook.
- Acknowledges that God's material creation is without end.
- Answers the liberal/skeptic attack on the Bible and on Christ, effectively.

Weaknesses:

- Positing A.D. 70 as the time of Christ's *ōSecond Comingō* and *ōReturnō*.
- A finality paradigm that limits the comings of Jesus to only two.
- Thus, A.D. 70 was Christ's final coming.
- Overly spiritualizes and diminishes the kingdom and resurrection.
- Enormous exegetical and historical burden for documenting fulfillment.
- Lack of attention in writings to the nature of post-A.D. 70 reality and implications for Christian living.
- Gross cessationismō some preterists advocate the annihilation of Satan, his kingdom, and of demons, and/or the cessation of the operation of angels, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the miraculous charismatic gifts, water baptism, the Lord's Supper, and even the Church itself in A.D. 70.

Synthesis Overview

First and foremost, the central, pivotal, and controlling end-time event contained in each of the four viewsō the *ōsecond comingō* or *ōreturnō* of Christō is taken off the table of synthesis. It is a weakness to be discarded for the following reasons:

- The words “return” and “second coming” are not properly speaking Biblical words in that the two words do not represent any equivalent Greek words.²⁸
- These two non-scriptural expressions are also unscriptural concepts that will not stand up to an honest and sincere test of Scripture.
- They are to be replaced by the many comings of Jesus and the biblical fact that He never left as He said (Matt. 28:20).
- Hence, these two traditional expressions and concepts are inappropriate and that’s why the Bible (properly translated) never uses them.

Secondly, while viewed as a threat to established futuristic paradigms, the **preterist view** is simple, profound, and superior, but not sufficient. On the positive side, it is the only view that fully accepts and honors the natural reading and understanding of Jesus’ time-restrictive words and the intensifying imminency declarations of the New Testament writers. No other view can legitimately make this claim. It also documents how Jesus came “on the clouds” in age-ending judgment exactly *as* and *when* He said He would and exactly *as* and *when* every New Testament writer and the early Church expected – as they were led into all truth and shown the things that were to come by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; 14:26). It emphasizes the harmony of this precise past fulfillment with the literal, exact, chronological, and sequential fulfillment of Daniel’s two specific time prophecies – no interruptive gaps, no exegetical devices. These prophecies frame the end times and establish its historical setting and defining characteristic (Dan. 12:7).

Thus, everything happened perfectly, “at just the *right* time” (Rom. 5:6) and “in its *proper* time” (1 Tim. 2:6) – including the individual bodily resurrection of the dead ones. This amazing harmony and perfection of timely past fulfillment is God’s stamp or fingerprint of divinity. Or as I have chosen to call it, divine perfection – not only in creation and in Bible times – but also in the end times. Hence, the proverb is true. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12). To believe in a “hope deferred” is also to concede to a sick heart of discouragement and incompleteness that Jesus, his predictions, and the Holy-Spirit-guide expectations of the New Testament writers and the early Church proved false. No more.

Thirdly, the **preterist view**, however, was found to be insufficient with two major weaknesses. These are: 1) the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

²⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1956), 69.

was the ðfinal comingö of Christ. 2) The prophecy of the Book of Revelation was exhausted in the events of A.D. 70. Therefore. . .

Fourthly, the strengths of the other three views must also be incorporated with the strengths of the preterist view.

From the **amillennial view** was kept the idealist interpretation of the Book of Revelation, with its ongoing and timeless relevancy and countless applications in human history. But these now follow, rather than precede, Christ's historic and literal coming in judgment and consummation circa A.D. 70.

From the **postmillennial view** was incorporated but reapplied its strong kingdom-society orientation, positive worldview, long-term outlook, and many comings of Christ—past, present, and future.

From the **dispensational premillennial view** was retained its strong interest in prophecy and the current dynamic role of Christ in the present and future affairs of humankind (although this must now be reapplied per this synthesis).

Discarded were the identified weaknesses from each of the four views that did not stand up to an honest, sincere, and objective test of Scripture.

In sum, my dissertation, this paper, and subsequent book have presented a new foundation, groundwork, and break-through initiative for eschatological reform, consensus, and unity. Others can now build on these findings as we more readily come together to build a fuller and deeper understanding of our ðonce for all delivered faithö (Jude 3) and God's once-again demonstrated attribute of divine perfection in *foretelling* and *fulfilling* his plan of redemption.

What Shall We Call It?

ðYour view has to have a name,ö several colleagues over the years have insisted. So what shall we call it?

Ïm open and welcome your suggestions. Perhaps, something generic like ðsynthesis viewö might work?

Whatever name may or may not become attached, here is what one of my mentors thinks of its potential significance:

“Noë’s book just could be the spark that ignites the next reformation of Christianity.”

James Earl Massey,
Former Sr. Editor, *Christianity Today*
Dean Emeritus, School of Theology,
Anderson University

But what do you think?

For More

- “Look Inside” the 465-page book (same title as this paper), on Amazon.com.
- Listen to the 13-week church seminar series (same title) on the Prophecy Reformation Institute’s website: www.prophecyrefi.org and click on “Podcasts.”
- Check out some of my other “next reformation” books at www.prophecyref.org.
- Contact me: jnoe@prophecyrefi.org

Appendix A

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In the book you will discover more about . . .

- 7 reasons your end-time view is so important.
- Why God is not the author of our confusion.
- The great end-time fiasco.
- Divine perfection in two creations.
- The strengths and weaknesses of each view.
- A more comprehensive approach and disciplined methodology.
- Four false paradigms that drive dichotomizing hermeneutics.
- The key hermeneutical question.
- Ten special hermeneutical guidelines for eschatology.
- God's divinely determined timeline.
- The many comings of Jesus (OT, NT, future).
- A unification of the divisive field of eschatology.
- And more.