

ESCHATOLOGY

Non-Biblical and Biblical—A Brief

By Paul T. Butler — OBC Convention, 1977

INTRODUCTION

I. DEFINITIONS

- A. Eschatology is from Greek, *eschatos*, last, and *logia*, knowledge or study. Eschatology is: a study of last things, i.e., studying what the Bible says about the end of this world and the 2nd Advent of Christ, judgment, etc.
- B. There are many differing eschatological theories in the religious world today. Postmillennialism; Premillennialism; Dispensationalism; Amillennialism; each one of these having different theories.
- C. We are going to deal with the general subject rather than with any specific theory.

II. IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT

- A. A man's eschatology inevitably affects his:
 1. Hermeneutics
 2. Politics
 3. Evangelism
 4. Fellowship (Unity)
 5. And, as a result of the above, his Ethics
 6. We shall amplify this later in the study.
- B. The Bible says a great deal about eschatology.
 1. The eschatology of the Old Testament ("last things") refers mainly to the last of the Old Testament dispensation and the coming of Christ and the church.
 2. The eschatology of the New Testament refers mainly to the Second Coming of Christ.
 3. Most New Testament books have references to His Second Coming/Judgment.

DISCUSSION

I. ERRONEOUS ESCHATOLOGY

- A. The Late Great Planet Earth
 1. "The nation of Israel cannot be ignored; we see the Jews as a miracle of history . . . have survived as a distinct race . . . can trace their continuous unity back nearly 4000 years" pg. 45, etc.
Answer: Who is a Jew? (Rom. 2:28-29). Who is Israel? (Gal. 6:15-16). Jacob Gartenhaus, president of International Board of Jewish Missions, born in Austria and educated in rabbinical schools there, says: "No Jew today can trace his ancestry back beyond two or three hundred years" *Christianity Today*, 3-13-70.

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There are only 3 million people in Israel today and 12% of those are Arabs; 3% are Christians. There are more Jews in New York city than in Israel.

The government of Israel today cannot even decide who a legal Jew is. Is Sammy Davis, Jr. a Jew? Will Jerry Lewis take up residence in Israel? Unlikely they will do so willingly!

2. Hal Lindsey predicts the return of the Messiah in 1988. “. . . within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place . . .” pg. 54. He says in his booklet *Homo Sapiens, Extinction or Evacuation*, pg. 20, “You are the generation seeing these things; you are the generation which is not going to see physical death. I expect one day in my life to be physically called to see the Lord in the air, without seeing death.”

Answer: I would like to have that assurance but I hesitate to jeopardize my credibility with such absolute predictions in view of so many other absolute predictions missed.

3. By 1988 the Jewish Temple and reinstitution of Jewish sacrifices will have to be accomplished (pgs. 54-57).

Answer: This contradicts the teachings of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews as to the abrogation of the Jewish system of sacrifices and the finality of the Christian system.

4. In his attempt to make Russia and Egypt the object of Daniel 11 (kings of north and kings of south) he says Cush means “black man” in Hebrew (pg. 13-14 of *Homo Sapiens*). One Hebrew lexicon (Young’s) out of scores of others gives “black” as a meaning of the Hebrew word Cush. All other lexicons give another Hebrew word as the word used for “black.”

Answer: Daniel 11 very evidently refers to the history of the Seleucids prior to the First Coming of the Messiah.

5. On page 112 Lindsey talks of the False Prophet he says is predicted in Rev. 13:11-18 and thinks the False Prophet will be from the tribe of Dan.

Answer: The 12 tribes of Jews in Revelation 7 which so many think apply to the restored Jews in Israel do not even include the tribe of Dan!

6. On page 139 Lindsey says I Cor. 15:50 teaches that Christians cannot inherit the Kingdom of God in the type of bodies we now have—flesh and blood. However, he says, the gospels and the Old Testament teach there will be certain people who *will* inherit for a time the Kingdom of God in bodies of flesh and blood. And this is going to be the millennial kingdom ruled over by Christ here on earth!

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Answer: Does God contradict Himself? Is His Spirit the author of a confusing revelation?

7. There are *many* more exegetical and hermeneutical errors in this book and his other books. We cannot deal with them all in this study.

B. Seventh-Day Adventists (*Signs of the Times*)

1. Following Ussher's chronology William Miller interpreted the 2300 days of Daniel as 2300 years and predicted Christ would return to earth in 1843. That didn't happen so they set Oct. 22, 1844. That didn't happen, so they said Christ passed from one section of heaven to another in 1844 to perform a work known as the "investigative judgment."
2. Their view of the 1000 years of Rev. 20: "During the one thousand years the earth lies desolate; Satan and his angels are confined here; and the saints, with Christ, sit in judgment on the wicked preparatory to their final punishment."

C. Jehovah's Witnesses (*Watchtower*)

1. "There is another way that helps confirm the fact that we are living in the final few years of this 'time of the end.'" (Dan. 12:9). The Bible shows that we are nearing the end of a full 6000 years of human history. . . . According to reliable Bible chronology, Adam and Eve were created in 4026 B.C.E.

4026 B.C.E. to 1 B.C.E.....	4025 years
1 B.C.E. to 1 C.E.	1 year
1 C.E. to 1968 C.E.....	<u>1967 years</u>

Total to autumn 1968 5993 years

2. "This would leave only seven more years from the autumn of 1968 to complete 6000 full years of human history. That seven-year period will evidently finish in the autumn of the year 1975." Quoted from *Awake* dated Oct. 1968.
3. They predicted Christ came to earth in 1914, *invisibly!*

C. Oswald J. Smith, in his book, *Is the Antichrist at Hand?* said:

1. "I have been studying with interest . . . the prophetic writings of . . . diligent students of the Bible. . . . Of all . . . those who have undertaken to work out the chronological forecast, there is not one who sets any date beyond 1934. The earliest suggested by these writers is 1928."
2. "If our chronology is correct, it means that all these things, including the Great Tribulation, the revival of the Roman Empire, the reign of the Antichrist and the Battle of Armageddon, must take place before the year 1933."

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D. Some Other Date setters:

1. Augustine calculated the end of human history would be about 650 A.D.
2. Then eschatology buffs focused on the year 1000 A.D.
3. Then the Second Coming was predicted for 1044, 1065, and other dates.
4. I. M. Holdeman, pastor First Baptist Church of New York, said in 1911, “. . . the hour is ripe for the moment when the Lord shall descend and gather His Church to Himself.”
5. W. E. Blackstone, in his book, *Jesus Is Coming*, printed in 1898, said, “. . . His coming, the rapture, is near.”
6. In January, 1963, a well-known Bible teacher in So. California entitled an article “Jesus Will Come in 1968!”
7. On April 17, 1971, the Minneapolis Star carried a review of a book, *God, History and the End of the World*, in which Kenneth Aune, the author, claims that in March, 1990, will come the battle of Jerusalem, the return of Jesus Christ, and the battle of Armageddon.
8. May 10, 1974—an Israeli tour guide (see *Christian Standard*, Ed. 8-18-74)

II. EFFECT OF ERRONEOUS ESCHATOLOGY

A. Confusion and Ridicule

1. The non-christian world looks at the multitude of different predictions.
 - a. It scorns and ridicules Christianity and the Bible and the Church because every date set in the past (set by apparently sincerely convinced prophecy scholars) has been wrong!
 - b. It asks, Is there any truth to the Bible at all; if so, which religious group has the truth—they all differ on one of the most important doctrines of the Bibles, the end of time.
2. Even Christians are prompted to become disillusioned and suspicious of their Bible teachers when faced with the errors and confusion.

B. Erroneous Hermeneutics and Wresting the Scriptures

1. The theory of Premillennialism and Dispensationalism asserts that Christ came to earth for the purpose of setting up His kingdom. Quite by surprise, He was rejected by the Jews, however, and established the church instead. When He returns, He will allegedly raise only the righteous dead, after which He will restore national Israel, sit upon David's literal throne in Jerusalem and subsequently reign for 1000 years. After this, the resurrection of the wicked dead and the final judgment are supposed to occur.

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2. This violates proper hermeneutics because:
 - a. It reflects upon the integrity of Bible prophecy by implying that the Jewish rejection of Christ was a miscarriage in God's plan. However, the Old Testament clearly foretold that rejection (Isa. 53:1ff.; Jn. 12:37-38; Psa. 118:22-23; Mt. 21:46, etc.).
 - b. It denies plain Bible teaching concerning the establishment of the kingdom in the first century (Dan. 2:44; Isa. 2:2-4; Acts 2:16-17; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:4, 6, 9).
 - c. It suggests that the church was not a part of God's eternal purpose, but only an interim (parenthesis) emergency measure (Eph. 3:10; Rev. 13:8; Acts 20:28).
 - d. It denies that Christ is now seated on David's throne (Zech. 6:12-13; Heb. 8:1; Lk. 1:32-33; Acts 2:30; Rev. 3:21).
 - e. It denies that we are in the last days (Acts 2:16-17), and that Christ's next coming will end this world . . . (I Cor. 15:24; Lk. 17:26-30).
 - f. It teaches, contrary to the Bible, that Christ will come again to deal with sin through a Jewish economy (Heb. 9:28).
 - g. It affirms, contrary to Scripture, that there will be two literal resurrections from the dead, 1000 years apart (Jn. 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).
 - h. It denies the *expressed* symbolic nature of the book of Revelation by literalizing its figures (Rev. 1:1; 20:1-6).
 - i. It denies that through the redemptive work of the First Coming of Christ *only*, must Jew and Gentile become "one" (Gal. 3:1ff.; Eph. 2:11-22, etc.).
 - j. It denies that "Zion" of the Old Testament Prophets had its fulfillment in the New Testament church (cf. Heb. 12:22).

C. Unjust Politics

1. Oswald T. Allis in an article in *Christianity Today*, entitled, "Israel's Transgression in Palestine," Dec. 24, 1956, made an ethical evaluation of the Zionist/U.N. partitioning of Palestine.
2. The Zionists appeal to Gen. 18:18 to prove the Jews should claim sovereignty of Palestine. BUT DOES THIS SCRIPTURE GIVE THE ISRAELI A CLEAR TITLE TO PALESTINE? *NO!*
 - a. This promise was conditioned upon obedience. The Jews have disobeyed God from the days of Moses even to the rejection of the Messiah.
 - b. Any restoration of the Jews was conditioned upon repentance (Deut. 30:1-10).

Any return to a Jewish economy to seek the Lord would place them in a position "impossible to repent" (cf. Heb. 6 & 10).

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- c. The dispersion of the Jews and the taking of their place from them was a punishment from God (Mt. 21:43; 24:2; Lk. 21:24).
- d. Jesus and His apostles predicted the end of the Jewish economy and nationalism (Jn. 4:23; Lk. 4:23-29; Eph. 3:1-13, etc.).
- e. There is little spiritual difference between the Jews of America and the Jews of Palestine. A believing Jew is today as near heaven in the U.S., where 5 million of his fellow Israelites now live and apparently expect to continue to live, as if he were in Jerusalem. An unbelieving Jew is just as far from Heaven in Jerusalem as he would be in New York or London.
- e. The attempt to restore the Jews to Palestine has proved to be unjust in itself and highly dangerous to the peace of the world. Palestine did not belong to the British. It did not and does not belong to the U.N. The persecution of the Jews by the Nazis and now by the Russians is unjust. But allowing the Jews to take possession of a large part of Palestine and to force hundreds of thousands of Arabs out of it is an equally grievous wrong.

D. Division and Schism

1. Christians may have widely divergent views in regard to the Second Coming of Christ.
2. All views must be submitted to the crucible of proper hermeneutics.
3. But division comes when the particular view is overemphasized to such an extent that it becomes a "test of fellowship."
4. And this continues to be made such a test of fellowship by churches, colleges, and individuals.
5. It also becomes a heresy when it draws people away from the church (Armstrongism, J.W.s, etc.).

E. Evangelism

1. It tends to stifle evangelism because it majors in prophecy dates, charts, signs, etc., and minors in the plan of salvation given in the New Testament.
2. It tends to unethical, scare-tactic, pressure evangelism.
3. Many use the "signs of the times" (the phrase is used only once in the Bible, Mt. 16:3, and referred to His *first* coming, not His 2nd) *to bring believers into line, and convert hard-case unbelievers.*
4. This approach seems to say that what is really important is to be in good shape at that particular point in time when Christ appears about to return. It's the old I-don't-want-to-be-caught-in-there-when-Jesus-returns syndrome. It suggests in a veiled way

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that the mark we get on our ethical report card is the mark we happen to receive on the pop quiz given at the Parousia rather than the cumulative grade for the entire course.

Jesus said, “. . . occupy till I come” (Lk. 19:13). He did not say, “Only be found occupying when I come.”

F. Some very extreme views connected with eschatology:

1. “Russia with all of her current satellites and all she might acquire in the future, will not be able to successfully invade Israel. ISRAEL IS INVINCIBLE UNLESS GOD IS VULNERABLE,” *Maranatha Trumpet*.
2. “Christ will not come back to the earth until the Jewish people ask Him to come back. . . . This is the basis of the Second Coming of Christ. . . . Satan knows that once Christ returns his career will be finished. . . . He also understands that Christ will not come back until the Jews ask Him to come back. If Satan can succeed in destroying all the Jews before they have a chance to ask Christ to come back, Christ will not come back and Satan will be safe. That is why Satan is in an all-out campaign to destroy the Jews. . . . The power of the Second Coming of Christ is very much in the hands of Israel.” *The Chosen People*, May 1975.
3. “This false Messiah will fool the Jews by doing miracles through the devil who will have entered his body in the middle of the 7 years. At this point in time, the Jews will look in the Bible to see if this man comes out of the predicted blood line of David. The Jews will find that this line or family tree ends with Christ (since he was killed and had no children). The Jews will also discover that the prophecies about the true Messiah fit only Christ. When the Jews have finally repented of their misconception about Christ, the world will see the appearance of Jesus Christ in person who will come in power and force to establish a Kingdom of Peace to last 1000 years on this present earth. The Jews will finally have their promised kingdom which in the final analysis, fulfills Old Testament promises to the Jews.” An unsigned paper in the author’s files.

III. ESSENTIAL ESCHATOLOGY

A. Certainty of His Coming

1. The most important thing about biblical eschatology is its emphasis on the certainty of the end of this world order, the Coming of Christ, and judgment.
2. “The Coming Judge,” by Seth Wilson, pub. *Christian Standard*, 4-12-58: “He (Jesus) is far more than a prophet in the past.

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He is a power in the present. And He is the most certain and significant of all the prospects for the future!"

3. There is only one way to be certain Jesus is Coming Again—that is to take His word for it. He promised it and His promises are *authenticated* by His resurrection from the dead.

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given *assurance* to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

THE ONLY SIGN OR ASSURANCE WE NEED THAT HE IS COMING AGAIN IS HIS RESURRECTION. THAT ASSURANCE WILL CALL MEN TO REPENTANCE.

The eyewitnessed, empirically verified, historically authenticated resurrection is *all-sufficient* testimony to His Second Coming. Human predictions about "signs of the times" are subject to all the enigma and vagary of speculation.

4. Jesus promised His return: Matt. 16:27; 24:30b; 24:37-42; 24:43-51; 25:1-13; 25:14-31; 26:64; Lk. 17:26-30; 19:11-27.
5. The angels promised His Return: Acts 1:11.
6. The apostles promised His Return: I Thess. 4:16; Acts 3:20-21; I Pet. 1:7; 5:4; II Pet. 3:3-4; James 5:7; Heb. 9:28; I Jn. 2:28; Rev. 1:7; I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; 11:26; 15:23; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:4; I Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:16-18; 5:1-4, 23; II Thess. 1:7-10; 2:1-8; I Tim. 6:14-15; II Tim. 4:1-8; Titus 2:13.

B. The Time of His Coming

1. "But of that day and hour *no one knows*, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Mt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32-33). THE TRUTH OF THAT STATEMENT HAS ALREADY BEEN VERIFIED BY THE SPECULATORS OF THE PAST WHO WERE SURE THEY KNEW FROM THE "SIGNS OF THEIR TIMES."
2. He will come "as a thief in the night" (I Thess. 5:2-3; Mt. 24:27-51; 25:1-13; II Pet. 3:8-10). There will be no preliminary announcements ahead of His coming! He will come unexpectedly—suddenly!
3. *No one will miss knowing* when He comes—there will be *no secret* coming or rapture. The next time Jesus comes it will be with a shout and trumpet blast to be heard by all the living and the dead—*every eye* shall see Him (cf. Rev. 1:7; Mt. 24:26-31; I Cor. 15:52; I Thess. 4:16).
4. THE EMPHASIS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT IS THE NEED TO *BE READY AT ALL TIMES*! Setting dates; making lists of "signs of the end"; speculative and divisive dogmas devitalize and weaken this readiness!

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5. He is coming when people will be doing the normal things of life, "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (Mt. 24:37-38).
6. There will be no abnormal, extra-ordinary "signs" pointing to His "soon" coming. "The Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Mt. 24:44).

C. Particulars Concerning His Coming

1. Seth Wilson, *ibid.*: "The Lord has revealed only a few particulars . . . of the great events which will take place when He comes. No doubt there are many things in store for us that we have not been told because we could not grasp and appreciate them now. Very likely some of the things predicted will not happen as we imagine them."
2. The dead will be raised (I Thess. 4:16; Jn. 5:28-29).
3. Those alive will be changed into bodies fitting them for their eternal destiny (Phil. 3:21; I Cor. 15:52-54; Rom. 8:23-25).
4. The redeemed will (the resurrected and changed—all together) be with the Lord (I Thess. 4:17).
5. The world and its carnal works will be burned up, melted, (II Pet. 3:11-13).
6. A crown of glory will be given to the faithful (II Tim. 4:8; I Pet. 5:4).
7. Christ, with His angels, will execute judgment upon all men (II Tim. 4:1; Jude 14-15; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Jn. 5:22-29; II Cor. 5:10, etc.).
8. Many will be rejected who thought they were saved (Mt. 7:21-23; 22:13-14; Lk. 13:25-27, etc.).
9. The opportunity for salvation will be forever closed (Lk. 13:25-28).
10. There will be grief and terror in the hearts of many because they are unprepared to meet Him (Mt. 24:30, 50, 51; 25:30, etc.).

IV. EFFECT OF ESSENTIAL ESCHATOLOGY

A. Purity of Living

1. "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting . . . for the coming of the day of God . . ." (II Pet. 3:11-12).
2. ". . . we know that when he appears we shall be like him, . . . and every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (I Jn. 3:2-3).
3. MORE EMPHASIS ON THE CERTAINTY OF HIS COMING AND ON THE IMMINENT URGENCY OF IT (DAILY, HOURLY URGENCY) WOULD PROMOTE MORE GODLINESS THAN ALL THE PROMOTIONAL GIMMICKS AND ENTERTAINMENT SESSIONS OF ALL THE CHURCHES PUT TOGETHER!

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4. *More sermons are needed on Judgment, The End of the World, The Second Coming.*

B. Encouragement For Endurance of Trials and Tests

1. “. . . we who are alive . . . shall be caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. . . . Therefore comfort one another with these words” (I Thess. 4:17-18).
2. “But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (I Pet. 4:13).
3. CHRISTIANS WHO TRUST THAT CHRIST IS COMING AGAIN TO RIGHT ALL WRONGS, TO VINDICATE ALL COMMITMENTS, TO JUDGE ALL SECRETS . . . TAKE COURAGE AND ENDURE, CONFIDENT THAT CHRIST WILL VINDICATE THEM *PERFECTLY!*

C. Evangelism

1. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body. Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men . . .” (II Cor. 5:10-11).

THE REMAINDER OF THAT CHAPTER SPEAKS OF BEING AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST.

2. “He has commanded all men everywhere to repent, in that he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world . . .” (Acts 17:31).
3. JESUS MAY COME TODAY! WE MUST PREACH THE WORD WITH ALL URGENCY IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON.
EVERY MAN AND WOMAN MUST AT LEAST HEAR AND BE GIVEN OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND!
4. “It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, *each with his work . . .*” (Mk. 13:34).

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master *when he comes shall find so doing*” (Mt. 24:45-46).

D. Contemporaneity

1. Michael Green in an article in *Christianity Today*, 1-1-65 says: “I believe that in this biblical doctrine of the Christian hope (the Second Coming) we have an intelligible answer to the modern quest for purpose in the world.”
2. Quest for Personal Identity: Man is in quest of personal identity. What is he worth? What does he matter? What is his destiny? That God is Coming Again in His Son to consummate His great redemptive work for *man* (the end of God’s whole cosmic

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scheme) in a *personal* appearance is a message that is relevant in our depersonalized age!

3. Quest for Realism: Man is skeptical in our age of any theory of regeneration or redemption of society or the cosmos which is unsupported by hard facts.

Is the Christian doctrine of a returning, redeeming Christ realistic in the 20th century? . . . Is the Christian optimism that "all will be well in the end" justifiable? Or is it a fantasy, a fairy tale like all the schemes of men?

4. The Christ who came and who will come, just because of this, IS COMING TO US DAY BY DAY, CHALLENGING US CONSTANTLY FOR AN ENTRANCE INTO OUR LIVES. . . . SEEKING OUR FELLOWSHIP!
5. God's purpose is to demonstrate NOW, in this world, this transitory world, the beauty, power, holiness, and permanence of the age to come. He who has called us out of this world is Holy. He who will come for us is Holy. In the meantime, He has given us His Holy Spirit to work out in our lives something of the character of the age to come.

CONCLUSION

- I. ERRONEOUS ESCHATOLOGY BRINGS REPROACH UPON GOD'S WORD AND HIS CHURCH: IT CREATES DIVISION: IT DISCOURAGES: IT HINDERS PRODUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY.
- II. ESSENTIAL ESCHATOLOGY DOES NOT CREATE DIVISION: PROMOTES PURITY OF LIVING: GIVES ENCOURAGEMENT: URGES EVANGELISM: FILLS THE NEEDS OF CONTEMPORARY MAN.
- III. THE LORD DOES WANT US TO KNOW SOME THINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE .

He wants us to know that Christ is coming personally to this world of time and space again just as certainly as He came forth from the the dead in a time-space event.

He wants us to know there is a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" beyond this world which will be destroyed completely.

Therefore let us be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord . . . for we know our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

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A LIMITED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES HELPFUL IN THE AREA OF ESCHATOLOGY

BOOKS

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2. *The Time Is at Hand*, by Jay Adams, The Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co. (a commentary on Revelation proposing "Realized Millennialism")
3. *Worthy Is The Lamb*, by Ray Summers, Broadman Pub. (a commentary on Revelation from amillennial viewpoint)
4. *The Meaning and Message of The Book of Revelation*, by E. A. McDowell, Broadman Pub. (a commentary on Revelation - amillennial)
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6. *Thinking Through Thessalonians*, by Wilbur Fields, College Press, pub. (see all the Special Studies in this book) (a commentary)
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