

Jason Upchurch - Q & A Part 3 - August 2022 - Eschatology

So we are again covering some questions that people have brought forward over the last few weeks. This week is entirely about eschatology. These are 3 questions related to views on end times probably stemming from my sermons in **1 Cor. 15**.

Now, a few things before we get going. First, it is good for us to study all of the Bible because all of it is profitable. John Calvin has said that, “for the Lord, when he gave us the Scriptures, did not intend either to gratify our curiosity, or to encourage ostentation (people showing off their knowledge), or to give occasion for chatting and talking, but to do us good; and, therefore, the right use of Scripture must always tend to what is profitable.” Every ounce of every jot and tittle of Scripture is profitable. That’s why it’s in there.

Even eschatology. God has revealed certain things and he hasn’t revealed certain things for our good. He’s revealed it so that we would live lives of purity and holiness waiting for Jesus to return.

Second, these things really do have a practical impact. I remember in high school holding to the pre tribulation rapture view and people were encouraged to leave rapture notes for their unbelieving friends. I mean, if the scenario of the Left Behind books was true then there would be a lot of chaos. So we should leave notes to our friends and parents and relatives explaining why we had disappeared in the night. There were even video tapes you could buy and leave near your TV with a note about playing it when people disappeared. The cool kids put bumper stickers on their cars that said “In case of rapture vehicle will be unmanned.” You end times view really does affect your outlook on life and how you live life.

I’ve known some mid Trib and Pre Wrath people who get into some really weird pepper, hoarding all kinds of stuff because if you’re going to go through the tribulation you better be stocked up for the worst.

Now, I’ve tipped my hand before, but my answers are coming from an amillennial perspective. Meaning that I believe Jesus will come back, and burn up the cosmos, and the NHNE starts immediately. I believe the description of the 1,000 year reign of the saints in **Rev. 20** is actually a description of believers who have died and now reign with Christ until he returns. But I’m optimistic because the spread of the gospel is a certainty - the gospel will have success. And I believe **Habakkuk 2:14 (ESV)**: For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea - is true. But is it going to be heaven on earth when Jesus comes back? No, I don’t think so.

So I’m kind of eschatologically homeless. Here are the questions:

1. What is the purpose of the Millennium?
2. Are Jews and Gentiles two distinct people in God’s plan of redemption?
3. 1 Corinthians 3:16 & 6:19 refer to God’s Temple being his people and he resides there. Why is there a need for a Temple to be built?

So here in **Rev. 20** we have the only place in the whole Bible where a concept of the Millennium is described.

The main eschatological views are based on how one views the millennium in this one passage. If you are Pre-Millennial you believe that Jesus will return before this time period of the Millennium. So you believe that Jesus will come back, then there will be this thousand year reign of Jesus over the earth, then after that the NHNE will begin.

If you are Amillennial or Post Millennial you believe Jesus will return after this time period. The difference between Amillennials and Post Millennials is just how successful someone thinks the preaching of the Gospel will be.

Sam Storms: “The central distinguishing feature of postmillennialism which sets it apart from both amillennialism and premillennialism is its belief in the success of the Great Commission in the present age.”

So when someone asks the question: what is the purpose of the Millennium the answer is that it depends on who you're asking. If you're asking a Pre-Millennialist they would say that it's the fulfillment of God's promises to reign on the earth in a season of unparalleled bounty similar to the Garden of Eden.

In the **Gen 15:18-20** God promised to give the people of Israel the entire land of Canaan and although they possessed some of it, they've never had all of it. So the Millennium must be the time that is fulfilled all that is geographically described.

There's also the promise that Jesus will rule over all the nations of the earth in **Isa. 9:1-9** is the promise of Messiah who will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace *and of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end.* And he will reign with justice and peace over the whole world.

Well, we don't see that now, so what they would say is that must be part of the Millennium.

Ezekiel 40-48 is a grand vision of a Temple that exists. It's absolutely amazing in every way. That Temple has never been created. And what Pre Millennialists would say is that that Temple is the Millennial Temple that will be recreated during the future Millennium.

There are also places in the OT where we almost a return to the Garden of Eden where the wolf lies down with the lamb and there is crazy long life. That's not happening now so that must be in the Millennium.

Have you ever read a really good novel there's all these loose ends throughout the book and you're getting to the last chapter and you're thinking the author better tie it all together soon? And then he does all in the last chapter and everything is worked out?

That's the Millennium in the Pre Millennial view. It ties together all these promises.

What if you're Amillennial? Well, if you're amillennial - and I am so I'm biased, we're all biased - you'd say that no where in this passage are any of those things described. There's no discussion here of land or a temple or Jesus reigning on the earth or even peace.

The amillennial view is that the millennium is just a description of heaven right now. There's no purpose, per se, just a description of eternal life that dead saints are enjoying right now in the presence of Jesus. Why would they say that?

Thrones in Revelation, which is what the saints are sitting on, are always in heaven. There might be one exception talking about Satan's throne. But otherwise the 47 times the word throne is used in Revelation, it's either in heaven or on the New Earth in the new creation. So these thrones are a description of reigning with Jesus.

Through the first death - which is physical death - the saints have been brought to life in heaven in an eternal sense right now and are waiting the second resurrection where they don't fear the second death which is hell.

Satan is bound only in one sense: that he doesn't deceive the nations. And you say "Well have you watched the news? The nations seem pretty deceived." Well maybe, but did you ever wonder why the Worship of Yahweh was confined to just one nation - Israel - for over a thousand years and now literally on the other side of the planet are tens of millions of believers?

The nations are hearing the gospel and believing the gospel. Slowly, slowly Jesus is building his church.

But what about all those promises in the OT?

Well, the promise of land for Israel in the OT has been fulfilled.

Twice the book of Joshua says that God completely fulfilled his promise to give Israel the land:

Josh 21:43: Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it and settled there.

Josh 23:14-16: All that the Lord has promised has come to pass...this good land that the Lord your God has given to you." God gave Israel the land. That promise is fulfilled.

Well what about Jesus reigning over the nations? Well, that's what he's doing right now. **Matt. 28:** all authority in heaven and where? On earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations.

He has authority now, he's reigning now. That's what Peter says in **Acts 2**. And one day he will reign visibly over the New Earth forever and ever.

Now, to be fair, that's just one amillennial interpretation. There are several amillennial views, but I think that's the most plausible. So that's the amillennial answer to the question of what is the purpose of the millennium.

What Post Millennialism? Well, same thing, not every Post Millennial person is the same. I would say the majority of Post Millennial folks would view the millennium as described here as a time when the gospel has gone forward so much that Christianity is a very influential part of society on the earth.

Usually Post Millennial folks are mischaracterized as those who believe that the world is going to be great, everyone is a Christian, no sin, no war, no problems. It's like the liberal progressive utopia and all is well. Well, there might be some people who believe that, but not most Post Millennial folks.

Many Post Millennial folks believe that this description here is a picture of the saints reigning here on earth as ambassadors of Christ. We are said to rule with Christ even now and **Eph. 2** says we are seated with him in the heavenly places. And we operate under Christ's authority. For Post Millennialists this, too, is a description but not primarily of heaven, but of the visibly success of the gospel and the saints reigning.

2. Are Jews and Gentiles two distinct people in God's plan of redemption?

So the answer is: sort of.

Those who believe there is a very distinct line to be drawn between Jew and Gentile are usually called dispensationalists. A dispensation is basically a way in which something is managed. Every presidential administration is a new dispensation in American Government. There are different management styles.

Dispensationalism rose to prominence in the 1800s and basically said that God has managed history in 7 different dispensations. From creation to the fall was the dispensation of innocence. There was no sin so God could interact freely with Adam and Eve.

From the fall to the flood is usually called the dispensation of conscience. From the flood to Abraham is the dispensation of government. The church age is a dispensation, the tribulation is a dispensation, the future millennium is a dispensation, the new heavens and new earth is a dispensation. On and on and the Bible absolutely does recognize any of these dispensations.

But you have understand this was taught as undeniable truth for 150 years and is still the bedrock of the pre tribulation rapture view. Because there is literally no passage that actually teaches a pretrib rapture, you have to come to it through a very complicated theology known as dispensationalism where God deals with Israel one way, the church a different way, and Israel again.

Well, what has happened over the last 40 years or so is that dispensationalism has evolved. Very few people hold to 7 dispensations or 9 or 38 or however many some people had. Most people in the dispensational camp have simply hold to 2 dispensations: the OC and the NC. Israel and the Jewish/Gentile Church.

Again, most of us are missed this nonsense but it has had such a massive impact on American evangelicalism it's all over the place.

Now, I am not a dispensationalist. Not even close. I think it's a huge misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches concerns Jews and Gentiles and the saving purpose of God through Jesus.

But here's basically what the Bible teaches. In the OC God did work primarily with those of Jewish descent. God chose Israel by his grace out of all the other nations. Not because they were more righteous. **Joshua 24:2** says that Abraham worshipped idols when God called him out of Ur. And used Abraham's physical offspring which were later known as the Hebrews and the Jews. But all throughout the OT you see these hints of God included Gentiles into his plan for salvation.

When God promises Abraham a blessing he says in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Gentile nations. You and I.

We see Rahab the Canaanite get the blessing. We see Ruth the Moabite get the blessing. Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian seems to get the blessing. And we see Jesus over and over condemn the Jews he's talking to for their unbelief and commend over and over the Gentiles for their amazing faith.

So in one sense, God did focus primarily on ethnic the Jews in the OC but there were Gentile exceptions. In NC God has poured out his amazing grace on all nations. And if you look at the make up of the people of God, it's mainly Gentile.

Look at Gal. 3:7-9 for a minute. Here we have Paul telling us that anyone who has faith in Jesus - Jew or Gentile - is now a son of Abraham. You know what a son of Abraham is usually called in the Bible? A Jew. **Read 7-9**

So anyone, Jew or Gentile, who has faith in Jesus has the same blessing that Abraham does. If you are a Gentile and yet have faith in Jesus you have become a child of Abraham. You've become a Jew.

This is a monumental shift in biblical theology because of Jesus. It's hard for us 2,000 years removed from Jesus to understand just how absolutely amazing this is.

But you have to understand that for thousands of years from Abraham forward the Jews looked at themselves as the special, chosen people of God. And now comes along Jesus and we Gentiles, through faith in Jesus, are actually on the same exact plane as the Jews.

In fact, the Bible says that we are now grafted into the promises of God. We are grafted into Israel. Paul is going to keep building his case for the unity we have with believing Jews throughout the book. **Read 3:10-14**

So Jews who rely on the law are under a curse. They're not chosen, they're not blessed. But Jews and Gentiles who have faith in Jesus who took our curse are together the people of God. **Read 3:28-29**

He's not saying genetic differences no longer exist. This passage isn't saying there are no biological distinctions between men and women or that slavery is a figment of our imagination. What he's saying is that these categories have no bearing on our standing with God. The only thing that now matters to receive the eternal blessing of salvation and Sonship with the Father is faith in Jesus. If we have faith in Jesus, we inherit the blessing that God promised to Abraham all those millenia ago and we are God's children.

Paul will continue to make this case throughout the book. That there is no more division between Jews and Gentiles who have faith in Jesus. And he keeps ramping up his language until the end of the book where he drops this massive bomb. **Read 6:11-16**

And you say, what's the massive bomb here? In **Vs. 15** he says it doesn't matter if you're circumcised or not. It doesn't matter if you're Jewish or not. That's huge. But what counts before God is a new creation - has God

done a work in you through the Holy Spirit bringing you to life as a new creation in Christ? If your answer is yes, if that's the rule you live by, the command you live by then you are part of the Israel of God. **Read 16**

What he's saying is that if you follow this rule - the rule that your circumcision status doesn't matter but what matters is Jesus - you have the mercy and peace of God because you are the Israel of God.

It could sound like 2 groups. Peace and mercy to these people, and also to the Jews. The problem with that interpretation is that it undermines literally everything else he's said in the letter.

In the original the word "and" is "kai" and it could mean even, also, or namely. And I think that's what he means: peace and mercy to these people who follow Jesus, namely the Israel of God.

Listen to the NIV: Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule-to the Israel of God.

NLT: May God's peace and mercy be upon all who live by this principle, they are the new people of God. (They are the Israel of God)

Now, I'll be honest, the ESV completely drops the ball here. Like fumble on your own 1 yard line drop the ball.

The ESV Study Bible picks up the pieces a little: Galatians 6:16 (ESV Study Bible): and upon. "And" (Gk. kai) can also mean "even," in which case Paul would be equating the church with "the Israel of God." Other translations I think do a much better job.

What's the point? The point is that God has now completely redefined who "Israel" is. Israel is not ethnic Jews. True Israel is everyone who has faith in Jesus. God has completely changed the definition of who his people are. And, get this, the "Gentiles" are all those who reject Jesus. Even the Word Gentile has been redefined.

Turn to Eph. 2. By the way, this new understanding of who the people of God are is literally all over the NT. You almost have to have some kind of theological agenda to miss this or stuff it away.

Here in Ephesians 2 Paul just got done talking about the gospel message. Now he's describing how non-Jewish people were separated from God. But through Christ we've now been brought near. Notice how he's actually redefining things for us. I think the ESV actually does a really good job here. **Read 11-22**

All the problems we had in **Vs. 12** are solved by Jesus. We were separated from the commonwealth of Israel. We were not part of Israel. Now we are because we are in Christ and we are the Temple.

By the way, there's no future Temple coming. Or if it is, it will be a shrine to idolatry. God has completely abandoned the OC Law and sacrificial system. There is no going back to the Temple or the Sacrifices. All the people who are like "Man did you know they've got parts of the Temple already made and just need to build it - isn't that amazing."

No, it's not amazing. It's pagan. If they were to build the Temple again and fire up the altar and start doing sacrifices it would be an absolute abomination to God because it would be an absolute rejection of Jesus. We are the Temple. Believing Jews and believing Gentiles individually house the Triune God but corporately we do as well. This is a massive shift from the OC.

And then Paul doubles down. **Read 3:1-6**

So here's what he's saying ethnic Gentiles who have faith in Christ are exactly the same as ethnic Jews who have faith in Christ. There is no difference between us. None.

Turn to Phil. 3. Paul is warning the Philippians about those who say you must be circumcised to be saved. You must convert to Judaism in order to convert to Christianity.

By the way, when I was a young Christian I really had no idea why circumcision was a big deal. Why is the Bible even talking about this? It talks about this because when God gave Abraham the covenant promising to bless him and his offspring the sign that Abraham believed was circumcision. And Abraham was told to circumcise all his offspring. And the Jews, in the Law, were also commanded to circumcise themselves and their offspring.

If you didn't cut off your foreskin - as a boy - then you were cut off from the people of God. It was just that simple. Circumcision was before the Law and commanded by the Law. And now in Christ, the people of God are no longer defined by this sign that had defined the people of God for thousands of years. So this is a huge transition theologically.

But here Paul again inverts who the people of God are. The true circumcision - the true Jews - are not those who have been physically circumcised. They're the ones who have faith in Jesus. **Read 2-11**

So those who mutilate the flesh - those who still say you have to be circumcised to be saved - are dogs. They are unclean filthy animals who are despised by the Jews. And those who cling to Jesus are the true circumcision.

In fact what Paul says that the only way to follow Jesus is to absolutely renounce any good spiritual thing you think gives you favor in God's sight. Your religious upbringing, baptism or circumcision, your parents, your status, your personal religious achievements. Anything the world would consider a good spiritual contribution, a spiritual asset - the gospel says you have to count those things as an utter loss to God; you have to count those as rubbish, as skubulon in **Vs. 8**. Literally excrement, manure.

NET Bible Note: The word here translated "dung" was often used in Greek as a vulgar term for fecal matter. As such it would most likely have had a certain shock value for the readers. This may well be Paul's meaning here, especially since the context is about what the flesh produces.

Circumcision isn't a thing that helps you. You have to count it as excrement in God's sight and fully cling to Jesus who died and rose again. If you do that, then you're part of the real circumcision.

One more: **Turn to 1 Pet. 2:9-12**. Peter makes this same distinction. Peter, if you look at the introduction, is writing to Gentiles. Elect exiles scattered all over the Roman world. And notice what he calls these ethnically-Gentile believers. **Read 9-10**

These are all descriptions of the people of Israel throughout the OT. And he applies them to the Gentiles. How do we know he's talking about the Gentiles? Because he says "once you were not a people." Well, that's not talking about ethnic Jewish people because they were historically God's people. He's talking about the Gentiles. He's using this very exclusive language, reserved only for Israel and applying it to Gentile believers. He's saying "You're Israel!"

And get this he's also calling all unbelievers "Gentiles" **Read 11-12**

If you're in Christ you are a spiritual Jew. You are part of spiritual Israel. As Paul says in Romans 9 that is grafted in to the people of God. In fact, I'd encourage you to read Romans 9-11 on your own because Paul takes up 3 chapters to discuss this very issue.

These really are some of the most amazing truths in the Bible. Most of us are Gentiles and would have been considered second class citizens in the Kingdom in the OT. If we were to marry a Jewish person and have kids, our family would have had to wait 10 generations in order to be admitted into the Temple to worship God. Ten.

But in Christ, we are given free and full access to the Father instantaneously where we can call on him with all boldness. And we don't need to wait for access to the Temple, we are the Temple and the Triune God dwells in us.

And we are part of the grand scheme of God's redemptive grace. All those people in the OT? Those are our ancestors. Our spiritual ancestors. Grandpa David and Grandpa Samson and Grandpa Asaph, Grandma Ruth and Grandma Hannah and Grandma Sarah. Those are not random weird people who lived long ago in a galaxy far away. They are our family, they are our story because they looked forward in faith to the Christ, whom we look back on in faith because has saved us.

There is no distinction. And never will be again. If you have faith in Jesus you are a full fledged, blood bought, child of the infinite Triune God, who will see his face, enjoy his presence and proclaim his glory forever and ever. Amen.

Pray