FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ESCHATOLOGY

The Doctrine of Last Things

He Who Was, and Who Is, and Who Is to Come

UNIT 1: PROLEGOMENA — WHY ESCHATOLOGY MATTERS

Lessons 1–3: Setting the Foundation for the Doctrine of Last Things

Lesson 3

ESCHATOLOGY IN THE HISTORY OF DOCTRINE

From the Early Church to the Modern Debate

Historical Theology as a Safeguard and a School for Eschatological Wisdom

"He who does not know history is condemned to repeat its errors — and in theology, those errors cost the church dearly."

Key Texts: Augustine, City of God XX; Geerhardus Vos, The Pauline Eschatology; Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future; Revelation 20:1–10

> *"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."*
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> **Titus 2:13, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

The church does not interpret Scripture in a vacuum. Every generation of believers reads the Bible as the inheritor of an interpretive tradition, a living stream of theological reflection, debate, correction, and confession that stretches from the apostolic age to the present moment. This is not a deficiency to be overcome by the sufficiently independent-minded reader; it is a gift to be received with gratitude and engaged with critical discernment. The doctrine of last things is no exception. The history of eschatological doctrine is one of the most instructive, most contentious, and most practically consequential chapters in the history of Christian thought. To understand where the church stands today, and why so many evangelical Christians hold such divergent eschatological positions, one must understand how the church arrived at this point.

Lessons 1 and 2 established the what and the how of eschatological study: what eschatology is, why it matters, and how Scripture's prophetic and apocalyptic literature is to be interpreted. This lesson turns to the who and the when: who has interpreted these texts before us, in what historical contexts, under what pressures, with what resources, and with what results? The answer to these questions is not merely of academic interest. Historical theology is one of the primary safeguards against the repetition of ancient errors, one of the most powerful arguments against novelty dressed in the robes of biblical fidelity, and one of the most humbling reminders that the church has always needed the ongoing work of the Spirit to read its own Scriptures faithfully. When a new eschatological system presents itself as the recovery of plain biblical truth against centuries of distortion, the historically informed reader is in a position to ask the most important of all critical questions: is that actually so?

This lesson surveys the history of eschatological doctrine in eight movements: the early church and its generally premillennial expectation; the rise of amillennialism in Origen and its mature articulation in Augustine's City of God; the medieval consolidation of Augustinian eschatology; the Reformation and its retrieval of that tradition with significant modifications; the rise of postmillennialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the emergence of dispensational premillennialism in the nineteenth century and its explosive popularization in the twentieth; the resurgence of historic premillennialism and the rehabilitation of amillennialism in the twentieth century; and the contemporary landscape of the evangelical eschatological debate. Throughout, the aim is not merely to narrate but to evaluate, to identify the exegetical and theological instincts that produced each position, to note where those instincts were sound and where they went astray, and to bring the reader to a deeper appreciation of why the amillennial position commends itself as the most exegetically grounded and historically rooted option within the spectrum of evangelical eschatology.

A word about the spirit in which this historical survey should be received. The men and women whose eschatological convictions we will examine were, in the vast majority of cases, serious students of Scripture, devoted pastors and theologians, and genuine servants of the church of Jesus Christ. Augustine and Irenaeus disagreed sharply; Darby and Warfield could not both be right. But each was, in his own way, attempting to be faithful to the Word of God as he understood it. Historical theology invites us neither to uncritical reverence nor to condescending dismissal. It invites us to learn, from the insights that endure, from the errors that must be named, and from the humbling recognition that we, too, are reading the Bible in a historical moment that we cannot fully transcend, and that future generations may find our own blind spots more visible than we do.

I. THE EARLY CHURCH

Premillennial Expectation Without Systematic Precision

A. The Character of Early Christian Eschatology

The eschatology of the ante-Nicene church, the first three centuries of Christian theological reflection, was characterized by an intense, vivid, and often unsystematized expectation of the imminent return of Christ. This expectation was not merely an intellectual conviction; it was the animating spiritual reality of communities that lived under the constant threat of Roman persecution and that understood themselves to be standing at the threshold of the age to come. The earliest Christian literature outside the New Testament, the Didache, the letters of Ignatius, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, all breathe with a forward-looking urgency that is unmistakably eschatological in character. The church prayed Maranatha because it meant what it prayed.

The eschatological framework that dominated the ante-Nicene period, where it was articulated with any precision, was broadly premillennial: the expectation that Christ would return to establish a visible, earthly, thousand-year reign before the final judgment and the eternal state. This position drew upon both the Jewish apocalyptic tradition and a relatively literal reading of Revelation 20:1–10, and it found its most prominent early advocates in Papias of Hierapolis (c. 60–130), Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), and Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130–202). Papias, who claimed to have received traditions directly from those who knew the apostles, described the coming millennial kingdom in extravagantly fertile terms, envisioning a restored earth of extraordinary abundance. Justin, in his Dialogue with Trypho, acknowledged that not all orthodox Christians shared the premillennial expectation, but expressed his own confidence in it as a position he held along with "many others." Irenaeus developed the most theologically sophisticated early premillennialism in Book V of Against Heresies, grounding the millennium in a theology of the recapitulation of all things in Christ.

Yet even within the ante-Nicene period, the premillennial consensus was neither universal nor without significant qualification. Clement of Alexandria and Origen, the theological giants of the Alexandrian school, resisted the millenarian tendency from an early date, reading the eschatological promises of the Old Testament allegorically and situating the believer's hope in the spiritual realities of the heavenly world rather than in the material renewal of the earth. Caius of Rome explicitly rejected Papias's millennial speculations. And the Alexandrian tradition's discomfort with materialist eschatology would prove enormously influential on the theological tradition that followed. The ante-Nicene period was, in short, a period of genuine eschatological diversity under a broadly shared premillennial umbrella, a diversity that would be clarified, and in some respects resolved, by the theological work of the fourth and fifth centuries.

B. Evaluating Ante-Nicene Premillennialism

Historical fairness requires that we acknowledge what was genuinely commendable in the eschatological instincts of the early church, and what was less so. On the positive side, the ante-Nicene premillennialists were correct in their insistence that the hope of the Christian faith is irreducibly bodily and material, that the resurrection involves the transformation of the physical body, that the new creation involves the renewal of the material world, and that salvation is not the escape of a disembodied soul into a purely spiritual heaven but the redemption of the whole person in a renewed creation. This instinct, rooted in the Jewish heritage of Christianity and in the apostolic

proclamation of the bodily resurrection, was sound, and the later Augustinian tradition would need to be carefully interpreted to prevent it from sliding toward a Platonizing diminishment of the physical dimensions of eschatological hope.

On the negative side, the premillennialism of the ante-Nicene period suffered from several serious weaknesses. First, it frequently exhibited a crudely literalistic reading of the symbolic and figurative language of apocalyptic and prophetic texts, the very hermeneutical problem Lesson 2 identified as the single most common source of eschatological error. The extravagant material fertility of Papias's millennial description, drawing on a tradition he attributed to apostolic authority, is a case study in the consequences of reading Jewish apocalyptic metaphor as straightforward prediction. Second, ante-Nicene premillennialism was, in many cases, insufficiently attentive to the New Testament's own two-stage eschatological framework, the recognition that the kingdom has already been inaugurated in Christ and that the present age is itself an eschatological age. The tendency was to locate the entire eschatological fulfillment in the future millennium, rather than recognizing that the "already" of the kingdom's inauguration qualifies and constrains what one expects from the "not yet" of its consummation.

II. THE RISE OF AMILLENNIALISM

Origen's Instinct and Augustine's Mature Articulation

A. Origen and the Allegorical Turn

The transition from the broadly premillennial eschatology of the ante-Nicene period to the amillennialism that would dominate the Western church for over a millennium is associated, in its first stage, with the towering Alexandrian theologian Origen (c. 185–254). Origen's eschatological instincts were shaped by his thoroughgoing allegorical hermeneutic, the conviction that the spiritual sense of Scripture, hidden beneath the literal, is the true and primary meaning of the text. Applied to eschatology, this hermeneutical principle led Origen to read the millennial kingdom not as a future period of earthly renewal but as a present spiritual reality, and to interpret the Old Testament's physical and material eschatological imagery as allegories of purely spiritual conditions.

Origen's influence on the subsequent eschatological tradition was immense but double-edged. On the one hand, he correctly identified that the crude literalism of the millenarians was a hermeneutical error, and his insistence that prophetic and apocalyptic texts must be read with attention to their spiritual and figurative dimensions was, in principle, sound. On the other hand, his allegorizing tendency frequently dissolved the genuine historical and material dimensions of biblical eschatology into a Platonic spiritualism that the apostolic proclamation does not support. The resurrection of the body, the renewal of the created order, and the visible return of Christ are not allegories to be decoded but promises to be awaited. Origen's instinct was right on the hermeneutical question but wrong in its application, and the tradition that drew upon him would need to recover the material and historical dimensions of eschatological hope that his allegorism tended to obscure.

It is essential, therefore, to distinguish carefully between the amillennialism that the Reformed tradition affirms and the allegorizing eschatology that Origen represents. The amillennial position, as we hold it in this series, does not interpret the millennial kingdom as a spiritual allegory. It interprets it as a genuine redemptive-historical reality, the present reign of Christ at the right hand of the Father, exercised through His Word and Spirit during the inter-advent period. The "binding of Satan" in Revelation 20 is not a metaphor for an inward spiritual

condition; it is a description of the real restriction of Satan's power to deceive the nations that was accomplished by Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. The "first resurrection" is not a poetic figure for general spiritual improvement; it is the regeneration and spiritual vivification of the believer who shares in Christ's resurrection life. The amillennial reading is not Origen's allegorism, it is a historically grounded, exegetically disciplined reading of Revelation 20 within the canonical and theological context the entire New Testament provides.

B. *Augustine's City of God and the Mature Amillennial Position*

The mature and theologically sophisticated articulation of amillennialism that would shape Western Christianity for a millennium was the work of Augustine of Hippo (354–430), particularly in Book XX of his monumental City of God. Augustine had himself held a form of premillennialism in his early years, but he came to abandon it, explicitly and on exegetical grounds, in favor of the interpretation of Revelation 20 that identifies the thousand years with the present age of the church. His conversion on this point was not a capitulation to Origen's allegorism but a genuinely exegetical development, driven by his recognition that the New Testament's presentation of Christ's present reign and the nature of the "first resurrection" could not be coherently reconciled with a premillennial reading of Revelation 20.

Augustine's argument in City of God XX rests on several interconnected exegetical and theological pillars. First, he identifies the "binding of Satan" in Revelation 20:1–3 with Christ's victory over the devil accomplished in His incarnation and atoning death, a connection supported by John 12:31 ("Now the ruler of this world will be cast out") and Colossians 2:15 ("Having disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him"). The devil is bound in the sense that he can no longer prevent the worldwide proclamation of the gospel and the ingathering of the elect from all nations, the very mission that characterizes the inter-advent period. Second, Augustine identifies the "first resurrection" of Revelation 20:4–6 with the spiritual resurrection of the believer, the new birth by which the soul that was dead in trespasses and sins is made alive together with Christ (Ephesians 2:5). Those who share in the first (spiritual) resurrection have no part in the second death (eternal condemnation).

The influence of Augustine's amillennial eschatology on the subsequent history of the church cannot be overstated. It became, effectively, the eschatological consensus of Western Christianity from the fifth century through the Reformation, a period of more than a thousand years. The medieval scholastics, the monastic tradition, and the cathedral schools all worked within a broadly Augustinian eschatological framework. This does not, of course, settle the exegetical question by an appeal to tradition, the Reformers themselves were willing to depart from the medieval tradition on the most fundamental doctrinal questions when the exegetical evidence demanded it. But it does establish that amillennialism is not a modern novelty, not a recent compromise, and not an interpretive approach imposed upon the text by academics who are embarrassed by the Bible's eschatological realism. It is the eschatological reading that dominated the church's most productive theological centuries, and that found its most rigorous articulation in one of the greatest theological minds the church has ever produced.

III. THE REFORMATION AND ITS ESCHATOLOGICAL INHERITANCE

Luther, Calvin, and the Confessional Tradition

A. *The Reformers' Broadly Amillennial Framework*

When the Protestant Reformation erupted in the sixteenth century, it brought with it a thoroughgoing reassessment of nearly every major area of Christian doctrine, with one significant exception. Eschatology was not, by and large, a point of contention between the Reformers and the medieval tradition they were reforming. The Reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Bucer, and their successors, inherited the broadly Augustinian amillennial framework and, with certain significant modifications and emphases, retained it. The return of Christ, the general resurrection, the final judgment, and the eternal state were affirmed with full confessional seriousness; the thousand years of Revelation 20 was understood as referring to the present age of the church, not a future earthly kingdom; and the premillennianism of certain ante-Nicene writers was regarded as a departure from the sounder exegetical tradition.

Luther's eschatological thought was shaped in significant measure by his identification of the papacy with the Antichrist, a reading he derived partly from the Augustinian tradition's identification of the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians 2 with a historical institution rather than a single future individual, and partly from the very specific historical circumstances of his conflict with Rome. Whatever one makes of that identification, and the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 retains it, a matter we addressed in our confessional adoption process at Crosspoint Fellowship, Luther's basic amillennial framework was sound. He understood the present age as the age of the church's conflict with the powers of darkness, the millennium as the period of gospel proclamation between Christ's first and second comings, and the return of Christ as the one final eschatological event that would terminate history and inaugurate the eternal state.

Calvin's eschatology was more carefully developed than Luther's, and it reflects his characteristic exegetical sobriety. In his commentaries on the relevant passages, Daniel, the Thessalonian letters, 1 Corinthians 15, and Revelation (which Calvin commented on only partially, with characteristic caution about the book's difficulty), Calvin consistently resists the millenarian readings and grounds his eschatological conclusions in a careful reading of the apostolic texts. His treatment of 1 Corinthians 15 is a masterwork of eschatological exegesis, anchoring the resurrection hope firmly in the bodily resurrection of Christ as the firstfruits and pattern of the believer's own resurrection. Calvin was also notably restrained in his application of eschatological texts to contemporary historical events, a restraint that stands in sharp contrast to the sensationalism that has plagued popular eschatology in every subsequent century.

B. *The Confessional Tradition and Its Eschatological Commitments*

The confessional documents of the Reformed tradition reflect, in their eschatological articles, the broadly amillennial framework of the Reformation. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), in its final chapter on the last judgment (Chapter 33), confesses a single return of Christ, a general resurrection of the dead (both just and unjust), and a final judgment that concludes history and inaugurates the eternal state. It makes no provision for an intermediate earthly millennium and shows no awareness of the later dispensational category of a pretribulational rapture. The Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Second London Baptist Confession (1689) follow the Westminster eschatology in all its essentials, with the only significant variations being matters of emphasis rather than of structural eschatological framework.

The Second London Baptist Confession, which Crosspoint Fellowship has recently adopted as its confessional standard, addresses eschatology primarily in Chapter 31 (Of the State of Man After Death and of the Resurrection

of the Dead) and Chapter 32 (Of the Last Judgment). These chapters confess the intermediate state, the general resurrection, and the final judgment with full Reformed precision. The Confession does not, notably, require a specific millennial position, leaving room for the intra-Reformed debate that has characterized the tradition, but its structural framework, with its affirmation of one return of Christ followed immediately by the resurrection and judgment, is most naturally read in an amillennial key. The confessional tradition is not a substitute for exegetical argument, and we hold it not because the Confession says so but because the Confession's exegetical conclusions appear to us to be correct. Nevertheless, the weight of the confessional tradition is itself a significant piece of evidence that the amillennial reading has commended itself to the most careful theological minds of the Protestant heritage.

It is also worth noting that the Reformation's eschatological sobriety was not purchased at the cost of eschatological urgency. The Reformers preached and wrote with the vivid awareness that they were living in the last days, that the return of Christ could not be indefinitely delayed, and that the task of gospel proclamation and church reform was a matter of eschatological urgency. Luther's sense of standing at the hinge of history, of living in the final conflict between the gospel and its adversaries before the Lord's return, animated his extraordinary energy and courageous confrontation with powers that would have silenced a less eschatologically motivated man. Eschatological conviction and eschatological sobriety are not opposites; in the Reformation tradition, they are inseparable partners.

IV. THE RISE OF POSTMILLENNIALISM AND DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

Two Modern Alternatives and Their Origins

A. The Rise of Postmillennialism

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the emergence of a new eschatological option within the Reformed tradition: postmillennialism. The postmillennial position, in its classical form, holds that through the preaching of the gospel and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, the majority of the world's population will be converted to Christ during the present age, producing a golden era of gospel triumph, the "millennium", within history, after which Christ will return. The English Puritan theologian Daniel Whitby (1638–1726) is often credited with giving the postmillennial position its most systematic early formulation, though elements of postmillennial optimism can be found in earlier Reformed thought.

Postmillennialism found a remarkably distinguished roster of advocates in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), arguably the greatest theological mind in American history, held postmillennial convictions and integrated them into his theology of revival and mission: the extraordinary works of the Spirit he witnessed in the Great Awakening were, in his reading, harbingers of the coming worldwide triumph of the gospel. Charles Hodge (1797–1878) of Princeton Seminary was broadly postmillennial. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851–1921), one of the most formidable defenders of biblical inerrancy in the history of American Protestantism, held postmillennial convictions rooted in a high view of the Spirit's power in and through the preached Word. The fact that men of such theological stature held the postmillennial position should

command the respect of any student of eschatology, even those who, like this series, are ultimately persuaded by the amillennial reading.

The strengths of the postmillennial position are real and deserve acknowledgment: a high view of the gospel's transforming power, a robust theology of cultural engagement, a confidence in the Spirit's sovereign ability to accomplish His purposes through human proclamation, and a missionary vision that takes seriously the universal scope of the Great Commission. The concerns that the amillennial position raises against it, particularly the New Testament's consistent expectation of ongoing tribulation and apostasy until Christ's return (Matthew 24:9–14; 2 Timothy 3:1–5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4; Luke 18:8), and the historical catastrophes of the twentieth century that tested postmillennial optimism to its breaking point, will be examined in detail in Lesson 13. For now, it is sufficient to note that postmillennialism represents a serious, exegetically engaged, confessionally Reformed option in the eschatological debate, one that shares the amillennial conviction that Christ reigns now and that the church is the primary agent of His kingdom during the inter-advent period.

B. *The Emergence of Dispensational Premillennialism*

The most consequential development in the history of modern Protestant eschatology was the emergence of dispensational premillennialism in the nineteenth century. The system's foundational architect was John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), an Irish lawyer turned Plymouth Brethren minister whose tireless teaching and writing over more than five decades produced the most comprehensive and influential eschatological system in the history of popular Protestant Christianity. Darby's eschatology was built on several interconnected convictions: a sharp distinction between Israel and the church as two distinct peoples of God with distinct destinies; the pretribulational rapture of the church as a secret removal of believers before a seven-year tribulation period; the subsequent return of Christ to establish a literal thousand-year earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, with a restored Israelite nation at its center; and the organization of all of redemptive history into a series of distinct "dispensations" in which God relates to humanity according to different principles.

Dispensationalism's penetration of American evangelical Christianity was accomplished primarily through two channels: the Niagara Bible Conference movement (1876–1897), which spread Darby's system through a network of influential evangelical leaders, and the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909, which embedded dispensational annotations directly into the text of Scripture and thus gave the system an authority in popular evangelical minds that approached the canonical. The twentieth century brought further popularization through Hal Lindsey's The Late Great Planet Earth (1970), which sold tens of millions of copies and made dispensational eschatology a cultural phenomenon, and through the Left Behind novel series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins (1995–2007), which reached an even wider audience with a fictionalized presentation of the pretribulational rapture scenario.

It must be stated plainly, and with appropriate pastoral charity: the rapid and widespread acceptance of dispensational eschatology in American evangelicalism was not primarily the result of careful exegetical persuasion. It was the result of popular dissemination, institutional embedding, and the culturally powerful combination of novelty, narrative excitement, and prophetic sensationalism. This is not to say that no serious exegetes have been dispensationalists, many have been, and some of the most learned biblical scholars of the twentieth century argued for dispensational conclusions on exegetical grounds. But the system's popular triumph owed far more to the Scofield Bible and the Left Behind series than to careful engagement with the exegetical arguments on all sides. The historically informed student of eschatology is in a position to recognize this, and to

insist, charitably but firmly, that the question of which eschatological position is correct must be answered by exegesis, not by the weight of popular acceptance.

V. THE RESURGENCE OF HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM AND AMILLENNIALISM

The Twentieth-Century Rehabilitation

A. George Eldon Ladd and the Recovery of Historic Premillennialism

The twentieth century witnessed not only the explosive growth of dispensational premillennialism but also a significant scholarly reaction against it from within the premillennial camp. The most important figure in this reaction was George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982), professor of New Testament theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and the author of a series of landmark works, including The Gospel of the Kingdom (1959), Jesus and the Kingdom (1964), A Theology of the New Testament (1974), and The Presence of the Future (1974), that mounted a sustained and largely successful exegetical case for the recovery of historic premillennialism over against the dispensational form.

Ladd's contribution to twentieth-century eschatology was transformative in several respects. First, he brought the category of inaugurated eschatology, the "already / not yet" framework he derived from his engagement with Geerhardus Vos and the continental biblical theology tradition, to bear on the exegesis of the New Testament eschatological texts, demonstrating that the New Testament consistently presents the kingdom as both present and future, already inaugurated and not yet consummated. Second, he mounted a searching critique of the dispensational hermeneutic, particularly its sharp distinction between Israel and the church and its resistance to the typological and fulfillment-oriented apostolic reading of the Old Testament. Third, he demonstrated that historic premillennialism, the expectation of a future earthly millennium without the dispensational framework of the rapture, the two-peoples-of-God scheme, and the multi-stage return, has far more exegetical support than the dispensational alternative and avoids many of its most serious difficulties.

The amillennialist will gratefully acknowledge the genuine contributions of Ladd's work while maintaining that he did not ultimately push his exegetical insights far enough. If the New Testament's apostolic hermeneutic leads us to read Old Testament promises Christologically and typologically; if the kingdom is genuinely present now in Christ's reign; if the church is the eschatological community of the new covenant in which Jew and Gentile are one body; and if the New Testament's two-stage eschatological framework (present age / age to come) does not require a third intermediate stage between the parousia and the eternal state, then the exegetical trajectory that Ladd charted leads, on consistent application, to amillennial rather than premillennial conclusions. The quarrel between Ladd and the amillennialists is a family dispute between those who share far more than they divide, and it is one of the most theologically productive debates in twentieth-century eschatology.

B. Vos, Hoekema, and the Scholarly Rehabilitation of Amillennialism

The figure whose work did most to establish the theological and exegetical credibility of amillennialism in the twentieth century was Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), the Dutch-American Reformed theologian who taught biblical theology at Princeton Seminary from 1893 to 1932 and whose major works, Biblical Theology (1948), The

Pauline Eschatology (1930), and The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews (1956), laid the foundations for the recovery of a rigorously exegetical, biblically theological amillennialism. Vos's contribution was not primarily the construction of a new eschatological system; it was the recovery of the eschatological structure that the New Testament itself presents, the "already / not yet" framework of inaugurated eschatology that makes sense of the entire sweep of apostolic eschatological teaching.

Vos's work was carried forward and developed by a distinguished line of Reformed scholars in the second half of the twentieth century. Herman Ridderbos (1909–2007), the Dutch New Testament theologian whose Paul: An Outline of His Theology (1975) remains one of the most comprehensive treatments of Pauline eschatology in the scholarly literature, deepened and extended Vos's framework with remarkable exegetical precision. Oscar Cullmann (1902–1999), the Swiss theologian of the University of Basel, contributed the D-Day/V-Day framework we encountered in Lesson 1 and provided a compelling account of the relation between history and eschatology in the New Testament. Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988) of Calvin Theological Seminary provided the most accessible and comprehensive defense of amillennialism in his major work The Bible and the Future (1979), which remains the indispensable starting point for serious engagement with the amillennial position. Kim Riddlebarger of Christ Reformed Church provided a further popularization and defense in A Case for Amillennialism (2003), which brought Hoekema's arguments into conversation with the contemporary eschatological debate.

What the amillennial revival of the twentieth century accomplished, in sum, was the demonstration that amillennialism is not an inferior or defeatist eschatology but a rigorously exegetical, canonically attentive, theologically coherent, and historically grounded reading of the biblical eschatological witness. It is not the eschatology of those who have given up on the promises of God, it is the eschatology of those who believe that the God who promised has already begun to fulfill those promises in the most unexpected and glorious of all ways: in the death, resurrection, and exaltation of His Son, and in the ongoing work of the Spirit through the Word and the church until the day when Christ returns to consummate what He has already accomplished.

VI. THE CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE

Where the Debate Stands Today

A. The Current State of Evangelical Eschatology

The contemporary evangelical eschatological landscape is more diverse and more theologically sophisticated than at any previous point in the history of the tradition. The dominance that dispensational premillennialism enjoyed in American evangelical culture through most of the twentieth century has been significantly eroded, not by any single decisive argument, but by the cumulative weight of biblical-theological scholarship, by the growth of Reformed evangelicalism through movements such as Together for the Gospel and the Gospel Coalition, by the resurgence of confessional Presbyterianism and confessional Baptist churches, and by a broader recovery of interest in historical theology and the Reformation tradition. A generation of evangelical scholars who were raised on the Scofield Bible and the Left Behind series have, through serious engagement with the exegetical literature, arrived at very different eschatological conclusions, and they have not been silent about the journey.

The contemporary evangelical eschatological debate is characterized by at least three distinct positions, each with serious exegetical representation. Dispensational premillennialism, in its progressive form (which has significantly

revised the classical Darby-Scofield system in the direction of greater continuity between Israel and the church), continues to command the allegiance of a significant proportion of evangelical scholars, particularly in institutions associated with the Dallas Theological Seminary tradition. Historic premillennialism, following the trajectory Ladd established, has found a home in numerous confessionally evangelical institutions and continues to produce serious exegetical defenses. Amillennialism has experienced a significant resurgence, particularly in Reformed Baptist and confessional Presbyterian circles, and has found increasingly sophisticated defenses at the scholarly and popular levels alike. Postmillennialism, while a minority position overall, has enjoyed a notable revival among theonomic and Christian nationalist movements, as well as among some who describe their position as "optimistic amillennialism."

What is most encouraging about the contemporary state of the debate is the increasing willingness of serious evangelicals to engage the exegetical arguments across eschatological lines, rather than simply defending inherited positions. The works of G. K. Beale on Revelation and biblical theology, of D. A. Carson on the New Testament's use of the Old, of Thomas Schreiner and Sam Storms on the spectrum of evangelical millennial positions, and of many others have raised the level of exegetical and theological engagement significantly. The eschatological conversation within confessional evangelicalism is, at its best, a model of how Christians who share a commitment to biblical authority can disagree with both conviction and charity, pressing the exegetical arguments with rigor, acknowledging the genuine difficulties of the relevant texts, and maintaining the fellowship of the gospel that transcends all eschatological divisions.

B. *Why Amillennialism Deserves a Fresh Hearing*

This survey of the history of eschatological doctrine leads to a conclusion that this series will defend in detail through the twenty-five lessons that follow: amillennialism deserves a fresh and serious hearing as the most exegetically grounded and historically rooted position within the evangelical eschatological spectrum. The grounds for this claim are multiple. Historically, amillennialism is the dominant eschatological position of the church's most productive theological centuries, and it has the weight of the confessional tradition of the Reformation behind it. Exegetically, its reading of Revelation 20 within the canonical and literary context of the entire book, and its understanding of the "already / not yet" framework that governs New Testament eschatology, is more consistent with the apostolic hermeneutic we examined in Lesson 2 than either premillennial alternative. Theologically, its account of the relationship between Israel and the church, of the fulfillment of Old Testament promise in Christ, and of the nature of the present reign of Christ is more coherent with the full range of New Testament testimony than the dispensational bifurcation of the two peoples of God.

At the same time, this series holds the amillennial conviction with the confessional humility that the history of doctrine demands. The history we have surveyed in this lesson is a history of genuine theological wrestling with difficult texts, by men and women of genuine faith and intellectual seriousness. No single generation has had the final word on these questions, and it would be the height of historical arrogance to suppose that the Reformed Baptist tradition of the twenty-first century has resolved every difficulty that has exercised the church's greatest minds for twenty centuries. What we can say, with the confidence that careful exegesis and a weighty historical tradition afford, is that the amillennial reading of the eschatological texts is not a novelty, not a compromise, and not a capitulation to the spirit of the age. It is the theological conviction of a great cloud of witnesses stretching from Augustine to Calvin to Vos to Hoekema, all of whom read the same Scripture we read, under the same Spirit who inspired it, and arrived at the same fundamental conclusion: Christ is reigning now, His kingdom is advancing

now, and when He returns, it will not be to begin His reign but to consummate the reign He has never ceased to exercise.

The implications of this historical survey for our study of eschatology are substantial. We bring to the remaining twenty-five lessons a hermeneutical framework (Lesson 2) and a historical awareness (this lesson) that together equip us to engage the specific texts and questions of eschatology with both exegetical rigor and theological wisdom. We know what the church has believed and why. We know which errors have been tried and found wanting. We know which instincts have proven sound and which have led the church astray. We are not beginning from zero. We are continuing a conversation that has been underway for twenty centuries, and we enter it as grateful heirs of a tradition that, for all its imperfections, has been kept by the Spirit of God in the fundamental eschatological conviction that is the anchor of the soul: Jesus Christ is Lord, He is coming again, and the gates of hell will not prevail.

VII. LESSONS FROM THE HISTORY OF ESCHATOLOGY

What the Past Teaches the Present

A. The Recurrence of Error and the Patience of the Spirit

The history of eschatological doctrine teaches several lessons with particular force, and it would be imprudent to complete this unit's prolegomena without naming them explicitly. The first and most humbling lesson is this: error in eschatology recurs in patterns that are recognizable across very different historical contexts. The crude literalism that produced Papias's extravagant millennial descriptions in the second century recurs in a more sophisticated but structurally similar form in the dispensational insistence on literal geo-political fulfillment of the Old Testament's covenantal promises in the twenty-first. The eschatological date-setting that embarrassed William Miller's followers in the 1840s recurs in every generation of popularist prophecy interpreters who cannot resist the temptation to name the year. The allegorizing tendency that made Origen's eschatology theologically unstable recurs whenever a preacher or theologian, uncomfortable with the Bible's material and historical eschatological claims, dissolves them into purely spiritual categories that the apostolic proclamation of the bodily resurrection will not support.

The recurrence of these errors is not a counsel of despair, it is a call to vigilance. The student who has read this history is not immune to the errors it documents; no one is. But the student who has read it is at least in a position to recognize the patterns when they appear, to name them for what they are, and to bring the corrective resources of the biblical text and the interpretive tradition to bear upon them. The Spirit who has preserved the church's fundamental eschatological conviction through twenty centuries of often vigorous and sometimes bitter debate has not abandoned His church to the eschatological confusions of the present age. He is still at work, illuminating the Word, raising up teachers and scholars, correcting error with truth, and bringing the church progressively toward a more faithful and coherent understanding of the last things. The history of eschatology is, among other things, a history of the Spirit's patient fidelity to the community He indwells.

A second lesson is the importance of the distinction between the primary and secondary ranks of Christian doctrine. The eschatological debates we have surveyed, between premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism, are debates within the circle of orthodox Christianity. They are serious debates, with significant

exegetical and theological stakes, and this series engages them with the conviction that some answers are more faithful to Scripture than others. But they are not debates about the deity of Christ, the nature of the atonement, justification by faith, or the authority of Scripture. Christians who hold the bodily resurrection, the personal return of Christ, the general judgment, and the eternal state, who confess Christ as Lord and Savior and live under His lordship by the power of His Spirit, are brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of their millennial position. This is not a plea for theological indifferentism; it is a plea for the confessional catholicity that the history of the church at its best has always modeled.

B. *The Contemporary Church and the Eschatological Moment*

The church of the twenty-first century stands in a specific eschatological moment, a moment characterized by the unprecedented global advance of the gospel through missions and digital technology, by the intensification of cultural pressure against Christian faith and ethics in the post-Christian West, by the growing awareness of global suffering and the groaning of creation, and by the widespread sense that historical change is accelerating in ways that are difficult to process within any stable interpretive framework. In this moment, the temptation to reach for eschatological simplifications is acute: to retreat into a rapture theology that promises escape from a world that is too complex and painful to engage, or to embrace a postmillennial triumphalism that promises inevitable gospel victory without adequate attention to the New Testament's expectation of ongoing tribulation, or to sink into an eschatological indifference that treats the whole subject as too contested and too complicated to engage seriously.

The remedy for all three temptations is the same thing this unit has been commending from its opening lesson: a careful, historically informed, exegetically grounded, pastorally applied, and doxologically oriented engagement with the eschatological witness of the New Testament. The church that knows its eschatological history, that reads its prophetic texts through the apostolic hermeneutic, and that holds its conclusions with both conviction and humility is the church that is best equipped to navigate the eschatological pressures of its own historical moment with faithfulness, wisdom, and hope. It is a church that can say, with the confidence that twenty centuries of faithful witness afford: Christ is Lord. He is coming again. The gates of hell will not prevail. And until He comes, we preach, we pray, we suffer, we persevere, and we worship the Lamb who was slain and who lives forevermore.

With this lesson, the prolegomena of our eschatological study is complete. Lessons 1 through 3 have established the foundation upon which all subsequent teaching will build: the definition and pastoral urgency of eschatology (Lesson 1), the hermeneutical principles that govern its interpretation (Lesson 2), and the historical tradition within which our interpretation takes its place (Lesson 3). Beginning in Lesson 4, we turn from the foundations to the content, from the prolegomena to the doctrine itself, starting where every human being eventually must start: with death. What happens when we die? What is the condition of the soul between death and resurrection? These are the questions of Unit 2, and they are questions that the gospel of Jesus Christ addresses with a clarity, a tenderness, and a power that no other voice in the history of the world has ever matched.

> *"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."*
> **Revelation 22:20, NASB 1995**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Ante-Nicene	The period of Christian theological development prior to the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), roughly the first three centuries of the church. Ante-Nicene eschatology is characterized by intense eschatological expectation, broadly premillennial leanings, and significant diversity of specific positions.
Chiliasm	From the Greek chilioi (thousand): the belief in a literal thousand-year earthly reign of Christ following His return, corresponding to what is now more commonly called premillennialism. The term was used throughout the ante-Nicene and patristic periods; its modern equivalent is premillennialism.
Millenarianism	A general term for eschatological expectations centered on a coming golden age or period of transformed earthly existence, often but not always associated with a literal thousand-year reign. In Christian usage, often synonymous with chiliasm or premillennialism, with connotations of popular or enthusiastic expectation.
Patristic Period	The era of the early church fathers (patres), generally understood to extend from the end of the apostolic age (late first century) through the eighth century. Patristic eschatology is defined by the gradual displacement of chiliasm by Augustinian amillennialism as the dominant theological framework.
City of God	Augustine's monumental theological and apologetic work (De Civitate Dei, 413–426 AD), written in the aftermath of the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410 AD. Book XX contains Augustine's fullest and most exegetically careful articulation of the amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, which became the eschatological consensus of Western Christianity for over a millennium.
Dispensationalism	An eschatological system developed primarily by John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) and popularized in the twentieth century through the Scofield Reference Bible, the Niagara Bible Conference movement, and popular prophecy literature. Its defining features include: (1) a sharp distinction between Israel and the church; (2) the pretribulational rapture of the church; (3) a seven-year tribulation period; (4) a literal earthly millennium centered in a restored Israelite nation; and (5) the organization of redemptive history into distinct "dispensations."
Pretribulational Rapture	The dispensational doctrine, unknown in church history before John Nelson Darby in the 1830s, that the church will be secretly removed from the earth before a seven-year period of divine wrath (the great tribulation), after which Christ will return visibly to establish the millennial kingdom. The amillennial and historic premillennial positions both reject this doctrine as exegetically unwarranted.
Historic Premillennialism	The premillennial position that affirms a future earthly millennium following the visible return of Christ, without the distinctive dispensational features of the pretribulational rapture, the sharp Israel-church distinction, and the multi-stage return. Associated in the twentieth century particularly with George Eldon Ladd. Holds more in common exegetically with amillennialism than with dispensational premillennialism.
Postmillennialism	The eschatological position holding that through the sovereign work of the Spirit in the preaching of the gospel, the majority of humanity will be converted to Christ during the present age, producing a golden era of gospel triumph, the millennium, within history, after which Christ will return. Associated in the Reformed tradition with Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, and B. B. Warfield.

Inaugurated Eschatology	The conviction, central to the eschatology of Geerhardus Vos and the biblical theology tradition he established, that the eschatological age has already been inaugurated in the first coming of Christ, though it awaits consummation at His return. The framework within which the Reformed amillennial tradition reads the New Testament's eschatological testimony, governing the "already / not yet" tension that characterizes the present age.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the history of doctrine is a genuine theological resource, not merely an antiquarian curiosity. The church has been reading these texts for twenty centuries, and the cumulative wisdom of that reading, including both its insights and its errors, is a precious inheritance that we are not at liberty to ignore. The student who comes to Revelation 20 as though no one has read it before, as though the question of its interpretation is being raised for the first time, is not displaying admirable independence of mind; they are displaying an arrogance that is both historically naive and theologically dangerous. We stand on the shoulders of twenty centuries of theological reflection, and we read the eschatological texts best when we do so in conscious dialogue with those who have read them before us.

We must believe that the novelty of an eschatological position is, in itself, a mark against it rather than in its favor. Darby's pretribulational rapture doctrine had no precedent in church history before the 1830s. This does not prove it is false, the history of doctrine contains genuine recoveries of neglected biblical truth, and the Reformation itself was, in significant respects, a recovery of convictions that had been obscured for centuries. But the novelty of a doctrine is a presumption against it, and the burden of proof lies with the innovator to demonstrate that the tradition has been wrong for all these centuries, and to demonstrate it from the exegetical evidence rather than from the rhetorical force of its narrative appeal or the popularity of its fictional representations.

We must believe that the millennial question, while genuinely important, is not the most important question in eschatology, and that Christians who differ on this question can and should maintain the fellowship of the gospel. The history of eschatology is, at its best, a history of serious people disagreeing seriously but charitably about difficult texts, a model this series aspires to follow. The amillennial conviction of this series is held with exegetical confidence, but it is not held with the kind of dogmatic certainty that treats all premillennialists and postmillennialists as having departed from the faith. They have not. They are reading the same Bible, seeking the same Christ, and waiting for the same return. The disagreement is real; so is the fellowship.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

We should feel a profound gratitude for the community of believers through the centuries who have wrestled with the eschatological texts with such seriousness and devotion. Augustine poring over Revelation 20 in the aftermath of the sack of Rome, seeking to make sense of the apparent failure of the city that had sheltered the church for a century. Calvin working through 1 Corinthians 15 verse by verse, anchoring the resurrection hope firmly in the bodily resurrection of Christ against every Platonizing dissolution. Geerhardus Vos tracing the eschatological structure of Paul's letters with a precision that opened the New Testament's theological architecture to a new generation of readers. These are not distant academic figures; they are fellow travelers in the same pilgrimage, fellow students of the same Word, fellow members of the same body. We owe them the debt of serious engagement with their work.

We should also feel an appropriate humility about our own eschatological conclusions. The history we have surveyed in this lesson is a history that includes men of great learning and genuine faith who were nevertheless wrong about significant eschatological questions, and who were often confident in their errors. The Reformers were wrong to identify the papacy with the Antichrist in the way they did, however understandable that

identification was in their historical context. The postmillennialists of the nineteenth century were wrong to anticipate a progressive Christianization of the world that the twentieth century would catastrophically refute. Darby was wrong about the pretribulational rapture, on the evidence both of Scripture and of the silence of twenty previous centuries of biblical interpretation. If they could be wrong, in some cases, spectacularly wrong, so can we. This is not a counsel of skepticism; it is a call to the ongoing, humble, Spirit-dependent engagement with Scripture that faithful eschatological interpretation always requires.

We should desire to be theological bridge-builders, people who can hold our eschatological convictions with integrity and engage the eschatological convictions of others with genuine curiosity and respect. The contemporary evangelical eschatological debate, at its best, is exactly the kind of community of serious, charitable, text-focused theological dialogue that the church needs on every doctrinal question. Let this series contribute to that kind of dialogue, rather than to the eschatological tribalism that has too often characterized this area of doctrine.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read one primary source from the history of eschatological doctrine this week. The most accessible options are: Augustine, City of God, Book XX (available online in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series); Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, Chapter 1 (“The Return of Christ”); or G. E. Ladd, The Gospel of the Kingdom, Chapter 1 (“The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament”). Read it slowly, note what you find compelling, and identify one question it raises for you that this series should address.
- Write a brief personal eschatological autobiography: where did you get your current eschatological convictions? From what church tradition, what teachers, what books? What has changed in your eschatological thinking over the years, and what prompted those changes? Bring this to the next class session as a resource for discussion. The goal is not to expose or embarrass, but to cultivate the historical self-awareness that good theological reflection requires.
- Identify a Christian in your life who holds a different millennial position than the one this series defends, and commit to a conversation with them about their eschatological convictions this week. Do not debate; ask questions. What draws them to their position? What texts or arguments do they find most compelling? What pastoral or devotional significance does their eschatological framework hold for them? Practice the confessional catholicity this lesson commends.
- Research the origin of the pretribulational rapture doctrine: when did it first appear, who developed it, and how did it spread? The historical record here is relatively clear, and the exercise of tracing it will be a concrete illustration of the principle that novelty is a presumption against a doctrine. Bring your findings to the next class session for discussion.
- Memorize Revelation 22:20: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” This is the eschatological heartbeat of the entire canon of Scripture. As you memorize it, reflect on what it means that the last prayer of the Bible is not a doctrinal formulation but a personal address to a returning Person. Let that reflection shape your posture for the remaining lessons of this series.

Key Texts: *Augustine, City of God XX; Geerhardus Vos, The Pauline Eschatology; Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future; Revelation 20:1–10*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before this lesson, were you aware of the historical diversity of eschatological positions within orthodox Christianity? Did you assume that your current eschatological framework was the "natural" or "default" reading of Scripture? How does the historical survey of this lesson challenge or complicate that assumption?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- The lesson describes the ante-Nicene period as broadly premillennial but without systematic precision. What were the specific premillennial arguments of Irenaeus and Justin Martyr, and on what exegetical and theological grounds did they rest? What were the weaknesses the lesson identifies in ante-Nicene premillennialism, and do you find those criticisms convincing?
- Summarize Augustine's amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:1–10 as presented in this lesson. What are the two main exegetical moves Augustine makes (the binding of Satan and the first resurrection), and what New Testament texts does he appeal to in support of each? Does his reading strike you as exegetically plausible?
- What were the key features of John Nelson Darby's dispensational system, and how did it spread through American evangelical Christianity? What does the lesson identify as the primary vehicle of dispensationalism's popular success, and why is that relevant to the question of whether the system is exegetically warranted?
- Who was George Eldon Ladd, and what was his contribution to twentieth-century eschatology? How does the lesson describe the relationship between Ladd's historic premillennialism and the amillennial position? What does it mean to say that Ladd's exegetical trajectory, followed consistently, leads to amillennial rather than premillennial conclusions?
- Summarize the contributions of Geerhardus Vos and Anthony Hoekema to the rehabilitation of amillennialism in the twentieth century. What specific works did each produce, and what were the distinctive contributions of each to the amillennial tradition?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the novelty of a doctrinal position is a presumption against it, though not a definitive refutation of it. Do you agree with this principle? How should it be balanced against the Reformation's own willingness to depart from a centuries-old tradition when the exegetical evidence demanded it? What distinguishes a legitimate recovery of neglected biblical truth from a mere innovation?
- The lesson distinguishes between Augustine's mature amillennialism and Origen's allegorizing eschatology, insisting that the amillennial position is not a form of Origen's spiritualism. Do you find this distinction convincing? On what grounds does the lesson make it, and what are the exegetical characteristics that distinguish the two approaches?
- The lesson maintains that the millennial question, while important, is not the most important question in eschatology, and that Christians who differ on it can maintain the fellowship of the gospel. What are the specific eschatological convictions that the lesson treats as genuinely defining and non-negotiable? Where does the millennial question sit in relation to those convictions?

- The postmillennial position was held by Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, and B. B. Warfield, men of exceptional theological seriousness. The lesson acknowledges the genuine strengths of their position while ultimately affirming the amillennial framework. What are those acknowledged strengths, and what are the amillennial concerns that the lesson registers against the postmillennial position?
- The lesson closes with the observation that the church of the twenty-first century stands in a specific eschatological moment. What are the temptations specific to that moment that the lesson identifies? Which of those temptations do you find most acute in the contemporary church you inhabit, and what resources does this lesson provide for resisting it?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson commends confessional catholicity, the maintenance of gospel fellowship across eschatological lines, as a mark of theological maturity. What does this look like concretely in a local church that is composed of people with different eschatological backgrounds? How do you maintain conviction without fostering division?
- The lesson closes by transitioning from the prolegomena (Lessons 1–3) to the substance of eschatology (Lessons 4–28). As we move into the doctrinal content of the series beginning with Unit 2, what is the single most important methodological commitment you are taking from the prolegomena into the rest of the study? Name it, and explain why you regard it as foundational.
- The lesson suggests that the student who has read the history of eschatological doctrine is in a position to recognize recurring patterns of error when they appear. Can you identify a specific contemporary eschatological claim, in a book, a sermon, a media figure, or a popular teaching, that exhibits one of the recurring patterns of error the lesson identifies? Name the pattern and the example, with appropriate charity toward those who hold the position.
- Unit 1 of this series is now complete. Looking back across all three lessons, the definition and urgency of eschatology, the hermeneutical principles that govern it, and the historical tradition within which we interpret it, what is the single most important insight you are carrying into the rest of the series? And what is the single most important question you are bringing with you, unsatisfied, into Unit 2?

Prayer Focus

Open this prayer time by reading Hebrews 12:1–2 aloud: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith." Pause. The cloud of witnesses is not merely an abstract theological category, it is Augustine, who wrote City of God while the ancient world collapsed around him. It is Calvin, who shaped the eschatological convictions of a Reformation church under constant threat of persecution. It is Vos and Hoekema, who labored in the study to give the church the exegetical tools it needed to read the last things faithfully. We are surrounded by their witness. We are running in a race they have already finished. And we are fixing our eyes on the same Jesus they fixed theirs upon.

Pray for theological humility across the eschatological spectrum, that God would grant the members of this congregation the grace to hold their eschatological convictions with integrity and their eschatological disagreements with charity. Pray specifically for those in the congregation who have been deeply formed by eschatological traditions different from the one this series teaches, those who grew up dispensational, or who have held postmillennial convictions, or who have simply never had the opportunity to think carefully about these questions at all. Pray that this study would be a school of growth for all of them, not a source of division or disillusionment.

Pray for the global church in its eschatological witness, for the persecuted churches in contexts of acute suffering, for whom the promise of Christ's return is not an academic proposition but an urgent pastoral lifeline. Pray for the churches of the post-Christian West, where eschatological indifference and cultural accommodation have robbed many congregations of the forward-looking urgency that once characterized apostolic Christianity. Pray that the Spirit of God would renew the eschatological imagination of the church worldwide, restoring to her the blessed hope that is her birthright as the eschatological community of the new covenant.

Pray for those who will teach the remaining lessons of this series, for clarity of mind, faithfulness to the text, pastoral sensitivity to the congregation's varied eschatological backgrounds, and the courage to press the exegetical arguments where the evidence leads, even when the conclusions are unfamiliar or challenging. Pray that the teaching of eschatology in this congregation would produce what teaching of eschatology is meant to produce: not eschatological anxiety or eschatological pride, but eschatological hope, the living, shaping, perseverance-producing, holiness-motivating hope of those who have fixed their eyes on the returning King.

Close by reading together the last two verses of the New Testament: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen" (Revelation 22:20–21). These are the last words of Scripture, a promise, a prayer, and a benediction. The church that prays "Come, Lord Jesus" with genuine longing is the church that has understood what eschatology is for. May we be that church. Amen.

> *"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith."*
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> **Hebrews 12:1–2, NASB 1995**

Key Texts: *Augustine, City of God XX; Geerhardus Vos, The Pauline Eschatology; Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future; Revelation 20:1–10*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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