

ESCATOLOGY LECTURE NOTES

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THE OLIVET DISCOURSE—Matthew 24:1-25:46
Study Notes by Ralph A. Pontier
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INTRODUCTION: Bertrand Russell (a British philosopher and mathematician, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950, a pacifist and humanitarian) published in 1957, *Why I Am Not A Christian*. He believed Jesus was a false prophet by the Bible's own definition of a false prophet, that is, one who says something is going to happen and then it does not. He pointed to four of Jesus' sayings: Matthew 10:23; 16:28; 26:64 and especially 24:34. If Jesus was wrong in these predictions, then Jesus could be wrong on anything (cf. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, p. 12). Russell is not alone in so thinking. Many Biblical scholars (before and since) agree, not only because of these verses, but also because it appears that several New Testament writers seem to have expected that Christ would come in judgment in their near future. See for example **1 Corinthians 7:26-31** ²⁶ *I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is.* ²⁷ *Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife.* ²⁸ *But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.* ²⁹ *This is what I mean, brothers: **the appointed time has grown very short.** From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,* ³⁰ *and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,* ³¹ *and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. **For the present form of this world is passing away.***.. How do we answer such critics?

I. DEALING WITH THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

A. The occasion of the Olivet discourse was a question from the disciples.

1. The question was prompted by Jesus' prediction concerning the destruction of the Temple, that not one stone would be left on another. This comes immediately after Matthew 23:35 where Jesus says Jerusalem will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets. See also Matthew 27:25, "Let his blood be on us . . ."
2. The disciples then ask, "*when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?*"
 - a. The assumption in the disciple's mind is that the destruction of the Temple must coincide with Christ's return at the completion of the present age, i.e. that the destruction of the Temple and the *parousia* are simultaneous.
 - b. Christ's answer carefully distinguishes the two things which they assumed would occur at the same time: 1. when will the destruction of the Temple happen? and, 2. what will be the sign of your coming (*parousia*) at the close of the age?"
 - c. The phrase "close of the age" comes from Jesus' teaching in Matthew 13:39,40,49 where he speaks of the judgment of the wicked happening at the "close of the age."
 - d. Jesus distinguishes two ages. In Matthew 12:32 he speaks of "either in this age or the age to come." In Mark 10:30 and Luke 18:30 he distinguishes between "this time" and the "age to come." This two age view of time is taken up by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:21 *not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

B. Jesus' answer describes several future events, three of which, in particular, are problematic because Jesus concludes by saying "*This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place.*" The three are:

1. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world.
 2. The “*abomination of desolation*” will stand in the holy place, accompanied by dreadful events and great distress—often understood to refer to a future tribulation and an antichrist yet to come.
 3. The Son of Man will be seen “*coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*”
- C. How can it be that all these things will happen before that first century generation passes away? Four possible approaches to the problem of the Olivet discourse are:
1. Accept the interpretation that these events have not yet happened and conclude that since they didn't happen, Jesus was wrong.
 - a. This is what higher Biblical criticism has done.
 - b. But we believe and confess that the Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God so this option is not open to us.
 2. Change the time frame by reinterpreting the word "generation" to mean a race of people—such as the wicked Jews, cf. Matthew 23:26. Thus the meaning becomes "the race of wicked Jews will not cease until all these things are fulfilled."
 - a. This does not work because the Greek word *genea* does not mean "race".
 - b. The disciples had asked "When?" and "race" does not answer, "when".
 3. Say that this prophecy has a partial fulfillment in the generation of the Apostles and a complete fulfillment at Christ's return.
 - a. Jesus said “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” If “all these things” were only partially fulfilled or only some of the things were fulfilled in the generation of the Apostles, Jesus is a false prophet.
 - b. The idea of a partial fulfillment then and a complete fulfillment later, does not take into account Jesus' statement in verse 24:21 concerning a “*great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.*”
 - c. The view of double fulfillment also usually misses the transition from "days" at verses 24:19,22,23, & 29 to "day and hour" at verse 24:36. The transition at verse 36 points to a different event, not a continuation of the same events but with greater intensity.
 - d. It also misses the transition from describing an event that has many identifiable warning signs and will occur soon, in that generation, to an event that will come suddenly, unexpectedly, without warning and after a "delay" 24:48 & 25:4, or "after a long time" 25:19.
 - e. (However, this does not preclude the idea that the fulfillment of the prophecy (the event itself) can foreshadow a future event. The destruction of Jerusalem foreshadows the Last Judgment.)
 4. Examine closely all the predicted events, especially the three, and see if in the light of the rest of Scripture, they can be understood in a way we have not previously considered so that we can see that Jesus was right with respect to the

time – all happened in that generation. Jesus underscores his prediction twice, by introducing it with the word "truly" and following it with the affirmation that his words are more enduring, and therefore more reliable, than the creation itself. If "all these things" did not occur in that generation, then Jesus was a false prophet.

- D. What Matthew 24:3-35 is all about is directly related to Genesis 18:22-33. The Judge of all the earth will not sweep away the righteous with the wicked. Just as God made provision for Lot to escape the judgment that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah, so God made provision for the Christian church of the first century to escape his wrath on Jerusalem in AD 70. He gave them signs they could clearly identify so they could take flight in time to escape God's punishment on that city and on the unbelieving Jews.

II. SIGNS LEADING UP TO THE END (Vss. 3-14)

- A. The first set of signs is described as the beginning of a very difficult time.
1. False Christ's and false prophets deceiving many. See 1 John 2:18.
 2. Wars and rumors of wars, nations and kingdoms rising against each other. Josephus describes many prior to AD 70, both internal rebellions and external wars.
 3. Earthquakes and famine. See Acts 16:26. Josephus describes at least three famines.
 4. Persecutions and martyrdom. See Acts 8:1-3.
 5. The Gospel of the kingdom preached in the whole world.
 - a. The word for "world" is not *cosmo* but *oikomene* (inhabited world) from *oikos* meaning house. In Luke 2:1 *oikomene*, in the NIV, is "Roman world".
 - b. The following references show that both the Apostles and their enemies thought the gospel of the kingdom was preached to the whole *oikomene* in their generation: Acts 2:5-11; Acts 17:6; 24:5; Romans 1:8; 10:18; Colossians 1:6,23.
 - c. We need to guard against reading this prophecy in light of the Arminian error that everyone has to have a chance to hear the gospel before Christ can return.
 - d. The fulfillment of Christ's prophecy that the gospel will be preached to the entire Roman world in the generations of the disciples does not mean it will stop spreading to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) after that generation. Rather, the spreading of the gospel during that generation foreshadows the spreading of the gospel to the whole world in later generations.
- B. The first set of signs tell Christians that the years leading up to the destruction of the Temple and God's vengeance on Jerusalem and on the unbelieving Jews would be times of great religious, political and cultural turmoil. It would be a time of confusion and upheaval, but during that time the gospel will spread throughout the whole Roman Empire. So great was the turmoil and distress of those days throughout the Roman Empire that the Apostle Paul recommended that Christians not complicate their lives by getting married, although he did not forbid marriage. See 1 Corinthians 7:25-31.

III. THE DESECRATION OF THE TEMPLE – TIME TO FLEE (Vss. 15-28)

A. What Daniel wrote sheds light on what Jesus is referring to.

1. The vision Daniel interpreted for the king and the other visions given to Daniel revealed the future of four kingdoms. Successive visions were like a zoom lens.
 - a. Four kingdoms: Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman.
 - b. Daniel 8:19-25, the goat is Greece divided into four parts, and then a terribly wicked king arises in one of the four parts. Daniel 11:31-32 tells us he set up an abomination that causes desolation in the Temple. This refers to Antiochus Epiphanies who put an altar to Zeus on top of God's altar.
 - c. Daniel also gave a prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 which spoke of “the end” referring to the destruction of “the city and the sanctuary” and the “end of sacrifice and offering” which shall be accompanied by “desolations.” When Jesus refers to the “end” in Matthew 24:6,13,14, in the context of not one stone left on another and the “abomination of desolation,” we should understand that the “end” he is referring to is not the end of the world (not the “close of the age”) but the end of the Jewish era.
2. Jesus' reference to Daniel means that something like what Antiochus Epiphanies did is going to happen again, and when you see it, whether on the house top or in the field, flee to the hills.
 - a. Luke 21:20-24 also refers to the need to flee but says it should be done when they see armies surrounding Jerusalem.
 - b. Historians confirm that in AD 70, as Roman soldiers approached, Christians fled to a place called Pella.
3. What was the abomination that they saw?
 - a. It could have been the blood shed by the Zealots in the Temple. The Zealots were predicting victory over Rome and put to death many fellow Jews in Jerusalem who wanted to surrender during the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman army.
 - b. It could have been an idol of a Caesar carried for worship by the Romans to Jerusalem.
4. Jesus is telling them that when they see the Temple profaned by some kind of abomination similar in nature or effect to what had happened in the days of Antiochus Epiphanies, or when they see armies surrounding Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24), then they will know it is time to flee the city and surrounding countryside.
5. What about the “*great tribulation . . . such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never shall be.*”
 - a. Historians tell us that the suffering of the Jews between AD 68-70 and especially in the destruction of Jerusalem at the end of that time was indeed awful. Josephus was an eyewitness of the destruction of Jerusalem and his lengthy account contains many horrific descriptions of suffering and death on a grand scale. Josephus says that 97,000 Jews

were taken as prisoners during the entire war and 1,100,000 died in the siege and defense of Jerusalem (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, Chapter 9.3).

b. Since this time of distress is contrasted to future suffering, it is not a prediction of any suffering that will occur later in history or just before Christ ushers in the end of the world.

6. The “corpse” of verse 28 is the unbelieving Jewish nation which was preyed upon by vultures. The vultures are the false messiah’s and false prophets who misled them, with signs and wonders, into believing they could defeat the Romans.

B. These AD 67-70 events fulfill the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:49-64 and Lev. 18:24-28.

IV. THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN IN HEAVEN (Vss. 29-35)

A. The darkening of the sun and moon and the falling of the stars, verse 29.

1. The darkening of heavenly lights is symbolic of the bringing down of earthly rulers and governments. See Isaiah 13:1-10; Ezekiel 32:1-8; and Joel 2:10.

2. This imagery goes back to Genesis. 1:14-18 where the heavenly lights are set to “rule” the day and night. Therefore they can represent rulers. This is confirmed in Psalm 89:36,37, Daniel 8:9-10 and Hebrews 12.26-29. This language is appropriate anytime God judges and brings down rulers or kingdoms.

B. The appearing of the sign of the Son of Man in heaven (not "sky") verse 30a.

1. The Greek word order is: "then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" as in KJV. Thus "in heaven" describes the locality of the Son of Man, not the locality of the sign.

2. This is not the second coming of Christ because the return of Christ will be sudden and unexpected, not preceded by a sign.

3. This sign will cause the "tribes of the land" (not "earth") to mourn. The mourning is restricted to the tribes of Israel.

4. The sign is a sign that Christ is in heaven, i.e., that he has ascended to the Father's right hand and been given authority to rule.

C. Seeing the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, verse 30b.

1. In Daniel 7:13-14 "coming with the clouds" describes an entrance into heaven, not a departure from heaven to earth.

2. As in 1 Corinthians 10:16, through the sign, we experience the reality. Seeing with the “eye” in Scripture often means understanding with the mind. See Isaiah 6:10, Acts 28:27, Romans 11:8-10 and Revelation 3:18.

3. Thus, by means of the sign, they would see (understand and experience) the reality of Christ at the right hand of the Father, putting all his enemies under his feet, the first being the Jews. See also Psalm 2:6,9.

4. The sign that is seen is the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This is the sign that enables the Jews to see that Christ is in heaven and has ascended to His throne. See Matthew 26:64.
 5. Compare Matthew 16:28 (“*some standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*”) with Mark 9:1 (“*not taste death before they see the kingdom of God has come with power*”) and Luke 9:27 (“*not taste death before they see the kingdom of God*”). Thus seeing a manifestation of Kingdom power is “seeing” the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.
 6. Jesus carefully distinguishes between his “*coming on the clouds*”, using the Greek word **ερχομενον** - *erko menon* (Matthew 16:28, 24:30, 26:64; Mark 9:1) and the “*coming of the Son of Man*” using the Greek word **παρουσιαν** - *parousia* (Matthew 24:3, 34 & 37). The first refers to his *traveling* to heaven on the clouds to be seated on the throne as in Daniel 7:13. The second refers to his *appearance* to the whole world at the end of the world (or “the close of the age”).
- D. Sending the angels to gather the elect from the four winds.
1. Matthew 25:31 says that when the Son of Man comes at the end of the world, all the angels will come *with* him. But here he *sends* his angels out to gather the elect.
 2. This is a reference to the work of missions, especially to gathering in the elect from among the Gentiles. Angels are messengers, sometimes heavenly beings, sometimes humans. In this case they are men and the sounding of the trumpet is the preaching of the gospel.
 3. Jerusalem is about to be trampled and the age of the Gentiles is about to begin, Luke 21:24. Since the elect will no longer come predominantly from among the Jews, the angels will gather them “*from the four winds, from one end of the heaven to the other.*”
- E. There is nothing in verses 29-31 that requires us to say that this refers to the second coming of the Lord at the end of the world. Three strong points against that are:
1. A sign, not Christ, appears. The sign indicates (enables us to see with the eyes of faith) that Christ has ascended on the clouds to his throne in heaven.
 2. The sending of the angels to gather *follows* the appearing of the sign.
 3. Jesus said “this generation” will not pass away until all these things have happened, and the rest Matthew 24:1-35 agrees with the idea that Jesus is predicting a judgment on Jerusalem.
- F. Thus we should understand that the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was a sign that Jesus had ascended to his kingly throne in heaven. From that throne he demonstrates his power and judgment on the wicked. In the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, that generation saw a sign of (and experienced the reality of) Christ seated at the Father's right hand in glory. They saw the beginning of Christ the king putting all his enemies under his feet. The destruction of Jerusalem is the sign (and the proof) that Christ is on the throne in heaven and wielding his rod of iron against those who will not “kiss the Son” (Psalm 2).

- G. What happened to Jerusalem in AD 70 points to the reality of what will happen to the whole earth when Christ physically returns to the earth at the end of this present age. All judgments in history testify to the reality of the Last Judgment (cf. 2 Peter 2:4-9; 3:5-7).
- V. WHAT IS THE SUBJECT OF THE REST OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE? (Vss. 24:36-25:46)
- A. Two possibilities:
1. Jesus continues to talk about His coming in judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70 and is warning his disciples to be ready for he is going to come unexpectedly.
 2. Jesus shifts the focus from AD 70 to the end of the world and the Last Judgment.
- B. Evidence that Jesus shifts the focus to the Last Judgment beginning at Matthew 24:36.
1. It seems clear at Matthew 25:31 that the focus has shifted to the Last Judgment, but where does that shift begin?
 2. Verse 36 begins with a transitional statement which literally reads, “*But concerning that day . . .*”
 3. The antecedent of "that day" is not the "days" of distress described in verses 24:4-31 but the time when "heaven and earth will pass away" in the verse immediately preceding.
 4. Jesus shifts from talking about signs that will enable them to know when an event is about to happen to an event for which there is no warning. Contrast 24:33, “*When you see all these things, know that it is near,*” with 24:44, *The Son of man will come . . . when you do not expect him.*”
 5. Jesus shifts from an imminent event to one that he hints will be delayed for a "long time." See Matthew 24:48 *But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed;* Matthew 25:5 ⁵ *As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.,* and Matthew 25:19 *Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.*
 6. Jesus shifts from describing how Christians can avoid judgment (by fleeing to the hills) to how they should prepare to face it.
 7. It is a natural transition because the subject matters are related. Christ’s judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70 points to the certainty of his coming again to judge the living and the dead. The transition is also necessary to answer the second question of the disciples and to teach them that the destruction of the temple and the parousia do not occur at the same time.

CONCLUSION

Much of the New Testament reflects the expectation that Christ would come in judgment soon to fulfill the prophecy of Matthew 24:34. For example, note the emphasis on “soon” in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 1:1 *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.*

Revelation 2:16 ¹⁶ *Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Revelation 3:11 ¹¹ *I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*

Revelation 22:6 ⁶ *And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."*

Revelation 22:20 ²⁰ *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

He did come in judgment in AD 70, demonstrating to that generation, and to us, that he is now on the throne in heaven and is putting all his enemies under his feet. The fact that Matthew 24:4-35 has been completely and perfectly fulfilled assures us that Matthew 24:36-25:46 will also be perfectly fulfilled when Christ comes again, without warning, at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead.

WHEN IS THE MILLENNIUM?

Lecture notes by R. A. Pontier

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(A good source for further study is R. C. Sproul's, *The Last Days According To Jesus* and Loraine Boettner's *The Millennium*.)

INTRODUCTION: One brief passage in the book of Revelation has given rise to a host of literature and speculation concerning the future of Christ's kingdom. Various names have been given to the views that have developed. They include historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, amillennialism, postmillennialism, and full preterism (or realized eschatology). What follows is an overview of the different positions (except for full preterism).

I. BASIC SUMMARIES

- A. Three basic positions (summaries quoted from R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According To Jesus*, pp. 194-195.)
1. "Premillennialism teaches that there will be a future literal, earthly millennial (one thousand year) kingdom, and that it will begin when Christ returns. The *pre-* indicates that Christ will return *before* the millennial kingdom is established." The final judgment comes after the millennial kingdom.
 2. "Amillennialism teaches that there will be no literal, earthly millennial kingdom. The prefix *a-* indicates a simple negation." Rather, the millennium is the entire time of Christ's heavenly rule from his ascension until his second coming.
 3. "Postmillennialism teaches that Christ will return *after (post)* the earthly, millennial kingdom concludes."
- B. Although the *pre*, *post* and *a* prefixes help describe the when of the millennium in relation to the return of Christ, they do not portray the differences in the character of the kingdom as described in the three views. In understanding the millennium the nature of the kingdom is as important, or more so, than the chronology of the kingdom.

II. AMILLENNIALISM

- A. *Amillennialism is that view of the Last Things which holds that the Bible does not predict a 'Millennium' or period of world-wide peace and righteousness on this earth before the end of the world.* J. G. Vos
1. Anthony Hoekema describes amillennialism this way:
Amillennialists interpret the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20:4-6 as describing the present reign of the souls of the deceased believers with Christ in heaven. They understand the binding of Satan mentioned in the first three verses of this chapter as being in effect during the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ. Amillennialists further hold that the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ is ruling his people by his Word and Spirit, though they also look forward to a future glorious and perfect kingdom on the new earth in the life to come. . . . the kingdom of evil will continue to exist alongside of the kingdom of God until the end of the world. . . . The so-called "signs of the times" have been present in the world from the time of Christ's first coming, but they will come to a more intensified, final manifestation just before his Second Coming. The amillennialist therefore expects the bringing of the gospel to all nations and the conversion of the fullness of Israel to be completed before Christ's return. He also looks for an intensified form of tribulation and apostasy as well as for the appearance of a personal antichrist before the Second Coming. (Quoted in Sproul, p.195.)
 2. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. cites the following features of amillennialism:
 - *The church age is the kingdom era prophesied in the Old Testament, as the New Testament church becomes the Israel of God.*
 - *Satan was bound during Jesus' earthly ministry, restraining him while the gospel is being preached in the world.*

- *Insofar as Christ presently rules in the hearts of believers they will have some influence on culture while living out their faith.*
 - *Toward the end evil's growth will accelerate, culminating in the great tribulation and a personal antichrist.*
 - *"Christ will return to end history, resurrect and judge all men, and establish the eternal order. The eternal destiny of the redeemed may be either in heaven or in a totally renovated new earth." (Quoted in Sproul, p. 196.)*
3. Some amillennialist apply the term "millennium" broadly to the entire church age between the first and second coming of Christ. Others apply it more narrowly to the intermediate state and to the reign of the saints with Christ in heaven between the first and second coming of Christ.
 4. Amillennialism and postmillennialism share in common the idea that the millennium is before the return of Christ. They differ in that the amillennialists characterize the millenium as spiritual and heavenly while the postmillennialists characterize the millennium as an earthly kingdom of peace and righteousness.
- B. The majority of American Reformed theologians in this century have tended to be amillennial. Some amillennialists are: Jay Adams, G. C. Berkouwer, Louis Berkhof, William Hendriksen, Anthony A. Hoekema, Bruce Waltke, and Edward J. Young.

III. DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

- A. Dispensationalism's distinct views were first effectively set forth by John N. Darby of the Plymouth Brethren in the early 19th century in England, though it has roots which go back further. It has been made popular by the *Scofield Reference Bible*, first published in 1909, and by the influence of Dallas Theological Seminary. Dispensationalism has become the majority view of most evangelicals. Dispensationalism concerns far more than just a view of the millennium. It offers a comprehensive system of interpreting the whole Bible, dividing it into seven different epochs or dispensations, each of which are governed by God employing a different principle.
1. Charles Caldwell Ryrie gives the following synopsis of dispensationalism *Premillennialism believes that theirs is the historic faith of the Church. Holding to a literal interpretation of the Scriptures, they believe that the promises made to Abraham and David are unconditional and have had or will have a literal fulfillment. In no sense have these promises made to Israel been abrogated or fulfilled by the Church, which is a distinct body in this age having promises and a destiny different from Israel's. At the close of this age, premillennialists believe that Christ will return for His Church, meeting her in the air (this is not the Second Coming of Christ), which event, called the rapture or translation, will usher in a seven-year period of tribulation on the earth. After this, the Lord will return to earth (this is the Second Coming of Christ) to establish His kingdom on the earth for a thousand years, during which the promises to Israel will be fulfilled.* (Sproul p. 197)
 2. Gentry summarizes the key tenets of dispensationalism this way:
 - *Christ offered to the Jews the Davidic kingdom in the first century. They rejected it, and it was postponed until the future.*
 - *The current church age is a "parentheses" unknown to the Old Testament prophets.*
 - *God has separate programs for the church and Israel.*
 - *The church will ultimately lose influence in the world and become corrupted or apostate toward the end of the church age.*
 - *Christ will return secretly to rapture his saints before the great tribulation.*
 - *After the tribulation Christ will return to administer a Jewish political kingdom based in Jerusalem for one thousand years. Satan will be bound, and the temple will be rebuilt and the sacrificial system reinstated.*
 - *Near the end of the millennium, Satan will be released and Christ will be attacked at Jerusalem.*

- *Christ will call down judgment from heaven and destroy his enemies. The (second) resurrection and the judgment of the wicked will occur, initiating the eternal order.* (Sproul p. 197.)

- B. Some advocates of dispensational premillennialism are Gleason Archer, Donald G. Barnhouse, Lewis Sperry Chafer, J. N. Darby, M. R. De Haan, Charles Feinberg, Norman L Geisler, Harry A. Ironside, Walter Kaiser, Hal Lindsey, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Caldwell Ryrie, and John F. Walvoord.

IV. HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM

- A. Historic premillennialism rejects the idea of two comings of Christ, one secret (the rapture) and the other public (the Second Coming). It also rejects the sharp division made by dispensationalists between the church and Israel. In early church history this view was known as Chiliasm and its advocates as Chiliasts.
- B. Gentry provides the following summary:
1. *The New Testament era Church is the initial phase of Christ's kingdom, as prophesied by the Old Testament prophets.*
 2. *The New Testament Church may win occasional victories in history, but ultimately she will fail in her mission, lose influence, and become corrupted as worldwide evil increases toward the end of the Church Age.*
 3. *The Church will pass through a future, worldwide, unprecedented time of travail. This era is known as the great tribulation, which will punctuate the end of contemporary history. . .*
 4. *Christ will return at the end of the Tribulation to rapture the Church, resurrect deceased saints, and conduct the judgment of the righteous in the "twinkling of an eye."*
 5. *Christ will then descend to the earth with His glorified saints, fight the battle of Armageddon, bind Satan, and establish a worldwide, political kingdom, which will be personally administered by Him for 1000 years from Jerusalem.*
 6. *At the end of the millennial reign, Satan will be loosed and a massive rebellion against the kingdom and a fierce assault against Christ and His saints will occur.*
 7. *God will intervene with fiery judgment to rescue Christ and the saints. The resurrection and the judgment of the wicked will occur and the eternal order will begin.* (Sproul, pp. 199-200.)
- C. Advocates include W. J Erdman, Frederic L. Godet, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, George Eldon Ladd, Papias, J. Barton Payne, Tertullian, R. A. Torrey, and Theodor Zahn.

V. POSTMILLENNIALISM

- A. *Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which hold that the Kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit, that the world eventually will be Christianized, and that the return of Christ will occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the Millennium.* Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, p. 4
1. Postmillennialism is not to be confused with modernism and liberals who see a gradual development of society for the better by natural or evolutionary means.
 2. Postmillennialism sees the Kingdom of God coming supernaturally by the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.
 3. The backbone of postmillennialism is the Old Testament prophesies of the universal and glorious extent of Christ's coming kingdom, e.g. PH 135.
- B. Gentry's summary includes these points: (the following is not a direct quote from Gentry)
1. The messianic kingdom of Christ begins on earth with the first coming of Christ. The New Testament church becomes the Israel of God, Gal. 6:16.
 2. The kingdom is essentially redemptive and spiritual, not political or physical.
 3. The kingdom will exercise a transforming effect on human culture so that it becomes increasingly a culture of righteousness and peace.
 4. The kingdom will expand over all the earth by the power of Christ's rule, though without His physical presence.

5. The Great Commission will succeed so that the nations of the earth will become predominately Christian.
 6. The period of prosperity for the church and the gospel will endure for a millennium after which history will draw to a close with the personal, visible, bodily return of Christ, the resurrection and the last judgment, ushering in the kingdom in its final and eternal form.
 7. Postmillennialists are divided by what means or to what extent the world will be transformed into a society of righteous and peace.
 - a. Pietistic postmillennialists reject the idea that society will be transformed by the reintroduction of the law codes of ancient Israel into contemporary civil law, such as the reintroduction of the death penalty for adultery, homosexuality, blasphemy and incorrigible youths.
 - b. Theonomic postmillennialists affirm the transformation of culture through the reintroduction of Old Testament civil law codes, though there are as many understandings of how that will happen and to what extent as there are theonomists.
- C. Postmillennialists include: Oswald T. Allis, Athanasius, Augustine, Greg L. Bahnsen, John Calvin, Robert Lewis Dabney, John Jefferson Davis, Jonathan Edwards, Eusebius, A. A. Hodge, Charles Hodge, J. Marcellus Kik, J. Gresham Machen, George C. Miladin, Ian Murray, John Murray, Gary North, John Owen, R. J. Rushdoony, W. G. T. Shedd, Augustus H. Strong, J. H. Thornwell, and B. B. Warfield.

Revelation 20
Study Notes by R. A. Pontier
AD 2013

(A good source for further study is David Chilton's commentary on Revelation, *Days Of Vengeance*.)

INTRODUCTION: This passage refers several times to a period of 1000 years—a millennium. It is the period during which Satan is bound, and it is the period during which Christ reigns with those who participate in the first resurrection. After that period, Satan is loosed; there is a brief great battle and then the final judgment. From the earliest centuries of Christendom there have been varying understandings of the millennium though the diversity is not as great as some make it to be. The whole matter rests on the Kingdom of Christ and the question of when it will or did begin. When put that way, there is great unity among Christians down through the centuries. Nearly all agree that Christ's Kingdom began with His first coming, especially His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father, and that it continues until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The millennium is the Kingdom of Christ and it begins with His first advent and ends with His second advent. This is the understanding of most amillennialists and postmillennialists. Premillennialists believe that Christ must return before He initiates a literal thousand-year reign in Jerusalem. Premillennialism is tied to Dispensationalism, both of which fall into error regarding the millenium by rejecting the Bible's teaching that the promises to Abraham are fulfilled in the church.

I. THE BINDING OF SATAN (1-3)

- A. When did or will this binding take place? The message of the New Testament is that Satan was definitively beaten in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
1. See Matthew 12:28. Jesus is the one who binds the strong man and plunders his house.
 2. A great Angel who has the key to the abyss does the binding. Revelation 1:18 says that Jesus has that key. He has the power to bind Satan as no other angel or human can.
 3. In 1 John 3:8 we read that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. This fulfills the promise of Genesis 3:15 that He would crush the serpent's head.
 4. In Ephesians 4:8 it says Christ led captives in His train. Colossians 2:15 speaks of Christ as having disarmed the powers. Hebrews 2:14 says Christ destroys him who holds the power of death.
 5. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 both speak of fallen angels being kept chained in dark dungeons until the judgment.
 6. In Luke 10:18 Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I give you authority and power to overcome the enemy."
- B. What is the nature of Satan's binding? It is a binding with respect to his ability to deceive the nations.
1. The temptations in the wilderness reveal the conflict between Jesus and Satan is over all the kingdoms of this world.

2. In Revelation 12:9 Satan is the “deceiver of the whole world.” Eve described her experience with the serpent as “The serpent deceived me” Genesis 3:13.
 3. His binding is “so that he should not deceive the nations any longer.”
 - a. Prior to this, the nations lived in ignorance and superstition. Acts 14:16 “to walk in their own ways.”
 - b. Only Israel had been entrusted with the oracles of God, which required them to walk in God's ways.
 4. The binding of Satan means he cannot hinder the success of the gospel as it goes to the nations (“make disciples of all nations”). No longer are the nations left in the shadows of superstition. Jesus is a light to all the nations, Luke 2:30-32.
 5. In Acts 26:18 Paul's commission regarding the Gentiles is, “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.” When Jesus sent the disciples out two by two, they received power to overcome demons, Luke 10:17-19.
 6. In Luke 24:49 Jesus told His disciples to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” By that power they were able to free people from the control of demons and bring the light of the Gospel to the nations. Acts 5:16, 8:7 & 19:12.
 7. This does not mean Satan and his demons will be inactive. Ephesians 6:12 shows we still must wrestle with spiritual enemies. However, they are now greatly limited considering their former power to enslave the nations.
- C. How long will the millenium last? One thousand years?
1. Revelation is the most symbolic book in the Bible. Much of it is not to be taken literally.
 - a. The number 7 represents fullness of quality (perfection). The number 10 represents fullness of quantity.
 - b. Multiplication intensifies the meaning. Ten cubed (10x10x10) equals a vast quantity of time of unknown length.
 2. Psalm 50:10 says God owns “the cattle on a *thousand* hills.” That means all the hills of an unknown large number.
 3. Since the thousand years is the same length of time as Jesus' reign, it refers to the whole time his kingdom is coming.
 4. We don't know how long the millennium or Gospel age will be, but we know that the period preparing for it was over 4,000 years. It is not unreasonable to assume that the period of preparation will be shorter than the period of fulfillment.
 5. Note that verse 3 ends by saying that after the 1000 years Satan “must” be set free for a period whose length is already determined as “a little while”. In other words, everything is under God's control. Satan is never able to break free of God's sovereignty. He is always under God’s almighty power and control.

II. THE RESULT OF THE BINDING OF SATAN

- A. Because Satan can no longer deceive the nations, Christianity has been and still is spreading all over the globe.
 - 1. Jesus is now plundering or robbing Satan's house, Matthew 12:29.
 - 2. It is still a battle. The forces of evil fight back. They appear to win some encounters. However, the last 2000 years show a continual advance, involving ever increasing numbers.

- B. This should make us optimistic about the cause of the gospel in our own day.
 - 1. We are often easily discouraged by the seeming power of the forces of evil.
 - 2. We are timid and afraid, but that is not the Spirit He gave us: 2 Timothy 1:7-8 *“for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.”*
 - 3. We need the courage of St. Boniface who did not despair when the Friesians rioted and kicked him out of the Netherlands in AD 716. He went on to Germany and burned Thor's sacred tree and made it a chapel and the Germans converted by the thousands.
 - 4. God has a plan for the fullness of time “to unite all things” in Christ, Ephesians 1:10. The mission of the church moves that plan forward.

- C. Thus, the coming of Christ, who is “the light of the world,” combined with the binding of Satan, the deceiver of the nations, enables us to make disciples of all nations and look forward in faith to that day when “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” Isaiah 9:11.

III. THE FIRST RESURRECTION (4-6)

- A. To understand first resurrection, we have to take note of who it does and does not involve and what blessing they receive.
 - 1. First, it involves those whom John sees seated on thrones and to whom judgment is given. Who is seated on those thrones?
 - a. In Revelation 4:4, John saw 24 thrones and elders sitting on the thrones. They are representatives of the Church of the old and new covenants.
 - b. In Matthew 19:28 Jesus promised His disciples that when He sits on His throne, the disciples would also sit on thrones and judge.
 - c. In Revelation 3:21 Jesus extends the promise to sit on thrones to all the “over comers.” They will sit with Him on His throne.
 - d. Ephesians 2:6 and Colossians 3 state that all Christians have been raised and seated with Christ in heavenly realms (past tense).
 - e. Thus those whom John sees in Revelation 20:4 are representative of the whole church. This is confirmed by whom else he sees there, as described below.

 - 2. Secondly, John sees the souls of those beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God.

- a. Scripture records only one martyr who was beheaded: John the Baptist, but he was the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets and his violent death is representative of all the violent deaths of those who have been slain because of the Word.
 - b. The Old Testament prophets did speak of Jesus: Luke 24:25-27; John 5:45-46; Acts 10:43; Romans 1:1-3; 3:21-22. Therefore those beheaded can refer to all the Old Testament martyrs.

- 3. Thirdly, John sees the souls of those who had not worshipped the beast or received his mark. This represents the faithful of the New Testament era.

- 4. Now all these came to life and reigned with Jesus for a thousand years and that coming to life is the first resurrection.

- 5. The blessing that they receive is that the second death has no power over them. The second death is the lake of fire reserved for Satan and all who served him.

- 6. What then is the first resurrection? It is the first resurrection! It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ together with all those who are raised up with him by union with him through faith.
 - a. Everyone who is in heaven reigning with Christ, is there because of Christ's resurrection. Read Romans 6:1-11, Ephesians 2:6 and Colossians 3:1. These verses teach that not only have we died with Christ, we have been made alive with Christ and we have been raised with Christ.
 - b. Those not united to Christ are left in death until the physical resurrection of all, John 5:28; Daniel 12:2; Acts 24:15.
 - c. The second death does has power over those who do not participate in the first resurrection.

- 7. The idea of two resurrections (or two aspects to resurrection) is hinted at in Numbers 19:11-12, which requires that those who have touched a dead body be cleansed on the third day and the seventh day after being made unclean by contact with death.
 - a. The two ceremonial washings for those who had touched a dead body were "baptism for the dead" which Paul refers to as proof for the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:29.
 - b. Paul understood that God was teaching the Jews (through baptism for the dead) that His grace is able to overcome and remove the defilement of death. The two baptisms show that overcoming death happens in two stages.

- 8. John 5:24-25 speaks of two hours coming: one where the dead hear and live (the first resurrection by which believers share in the benefits of Christ's resurrection) and one where all in the tomb come forth (the completion of the resurrection when our bodies also are rescued from the grave).
 - B. This is how we should view our status now. We have already begun to reign with Christ. We are Christians, that is, we share in His anointing to be prophets, priests and kings. We have heard His voice in the Gospel and been made alive. We are already raised with

Him (Colossians 3:1) and seated with him now (Ephesians 2:6). The power of Christ's resurrection, which is the first resurrection, is already bearing real fruit in our lives.

IV. THE LAST BATTLE (7-10)

- A. When the 1,000 years are complete there will be a final battle.
 - 1. The parable of wheat and weeds shows that while Christ's kingdom grows and matures on earth, wickedness will also grow, Matthew 13:24-30.
 - 2. When Christ's elect are fully gathered in and His kingdom complete, Satan will be released to marshal what forces remain and will launch a great assault on the church.
 - a. This is called Gog and Magog to tell us it will be something like the vision in Ezekiel 38 and 39 where nations gathered against Israel but were thoroughly defeated. (Ezekiel 38-39 was fulfilled in the Maccabees' defeat of the Syrians in second century BC.)
 - b. As in the second century BC, so at the at the end of the millenium, the enemies of Christ will all be gathered together and will be destroyed.
 - c. All opposition to the kingdom of God will be eliminated. Letting Satan out is a "trick" to bring all the opposition out into the open where it can be done away with completely, once and for all.
 - 3. This last battle is described in apocalyptic or symbolic language. Therefore it is impossible to say what it will actually be like.
 - a. Since evil will be growing all through the time that Satan is bound (the parable of the wheat and the weeds—both grow until the harvest) this battle may appear to be just one more of many conflicts between good and evil that have continued down through history.
 - b. Since Christ said His second coming will take the world by surprise, it is likely that we will not know we have witnessed the last battle until after it is over and Christ has returned.
- B. God's purpose in telling us now of this battle is not to make us look for it as a sign that Christ is about to return, but to comfort and assure us that no matter how much wickedness we may see in the world, it will all be overthrown. This helps us to wait patiently while we endure hardship.

V. THE FINAL JUDGMENT (11-15)

- A. With history over, the final assessment of every human being must now take place before God's throne of perfect justice.
 - 1. Judgment is the work of the Triune God, but especially of the Son. See Matthew 25:31-32; Jn. 5:27 and Acts 17:31.
 - 2. The dead who are here brought forward are those who did not participate in the first resurrection.
 - a. This describes the final fate of the wicked. They will be judged according to their works, condemned and punished.

- b. The righteous will be there (Matthew 25:31) on Christ's right, watching the condemnation of those on His left.
 - 3. Death also is thrown into the lake of fire: 1 Corinthians 15 “the last enemy to be destroyed is death.”
- B. This too is revealed for the comfort of believers. It is their day of vindication—when their life shall appear. But it is also revealed to expose the lie of universalism and warn the unrepentant to turn from their wickedness and turn to Christ in faith while they still have time.

ANTICHRISTS
1 & 2 John
Lecture Notes by Ralph A. Pontier
AD 2013

1. The word “antichrist” is found only in John’s epistles. It is found nowhere else in the Bible. There are four passages that mention “antichrist.” They are
 - a. 1 John 2:18 *Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.*
 - b. 1 John 2:22 *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.*
 - c. 1 John 4:1-3 *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*
 - d. 2 John 7 *Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.*
2. The popular interpretation of these texts is to understand the antichrist as a future superman of evil who will persecute the church. This great antichrist, who is yet to come, is usually identified with the “man of sin” (also called “the lawless one”) of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. It is also believed that when this great antichrist comes, Christ will come soon after to destroy him. Those who believe this are afraid of how the antichrist might persecute them, but they are eager for him to come anyway because the coming of the antichrist means Christ will follow soon after. I hope to show that this popular interpretation is mistaken in several ways.
3. John first says that the Christians had “heard” that the antichrist is coming. In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43, Jesus used the same expression, “you have heard.” Jesus used the phrase to introduce a correction of something the crowds had heard and believed. It was Jesus’ way of saying “you have heard one thing but I’m going to tell you what you should think.” There was some truth in what the people had heard but also error. The error made people misunderstand the will of God. A little error in a lot of truth is like a little yeast in a big batch of dough. The little error changes everything. John also seems to be correcting something his readers had heard. The truth about the antichrist had become distorted by error and he wants to correct their thinking.
4. John makes three major corrections.
 - a. There is not just one antichrist, there are many: 1 John 2:19 *even now **many antichrists** have come.* Jesus had also spoken of “false prophets” and “false christs” both in the plural (Matthew 24:11, 24).

- b. The antichrists are not just a future possibility; they are also a present reality. 1 John 2:19 ***even now many antichrists have come.***
 - c. The antichrist is not first of all a person, it is a spirit of error that can infect the thinking of many. Therefore it is not limited to any one period of time. 1 John 4:3: ***but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist,***
5. John describes the antichrists so that they can be recognized. The antichrists are those who deny that Christ has come in the flesh: 2 John 7 ***Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.*** 1 John 2:22 ***Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist.***
- a. In the second century after Christ, a false religion called Gnosticism became popular. Gnosticism taught that our bodies are the source of all evil in the world. They thought that evil comes from all the lusts and desires of the flesh—the human body. For the spirit to be free of the body would mean freedom from sin. Because they believed Jesus was divine they believed He would never dirty Himself with a real human body. They denied that Jesus had come in the flesh. They said He only appeared to be human but He really was not. Although Gnosticism did not become popular until the second century, the seeds of it were present in the first century. John is probably dealing with Gnostic ideas already present in the church in his time.
 - b. John could also be dealing with those who denied the deity of Christ and thought of Jesus only as a man and not the divine Son of God who had come down from heaven to be born a man. The believing Jews before Christ knew that God was their Savior and that God would come down and save them. The faithful Jews looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, as coming from God and being God (for example: Isaiah 7:14 the child to be born will be called “Immanuel,” which means “God with us” and Isaiah 9:6 the child to be born will be called “mighty God.”) If anyone denied that Jesus was divine, they would be denying that the Messiah (the Christ) had “come.”
 - c. So the antichrist is anyone that denies either the full humanity of Christ or the full deity of Christ. If they deny the deity of Christ, they deny that God has come to rescue His people. If they deny the humanity of Christ, they deny that He was “made like his brothers in every respect” (Hebrews 2:17). Christians are called to confess that Jesus Christ is both human and divine. If anyone denies either truth, they are of the spirit of the antichrist.
 - d. John defines the antichrist as any and all false teachers and false prophets who do not hold to the doctrine of Christ. 1 John 4:1-3 ***Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*** Jesus had told them that before the destruction of Jerusalem many false prophets

would come. John now shows that Jesus was correct. They had come already in his generation, just as Jesus said, and they are the antichrists.

- e. For John, the antichrist was not some future superman of evil who would persecute the church. John saw the antichrist as a spirit infecting many false teachers of his day.
 - f. That same spirit of error is present in the Church today among those who corrupt the doctrine of Christ's full divinity or His full humanity. John warns his readers (including us) to be alert to their presence so we will not be misled by their teaching.
6. John says that at the time of his writing it is the "last hour." What does he mean by the "last hour"?
- a. Does he mean it is just before the second coming of Jesus Christ, the parousia? How could he know that if Jesus himself said He did not know (Matthew 24:36)?
 - b. John says "this is how we know that it is the last hour," that is, John bases his knowledge that it is the last hour on the presence of many antichrists already in the world. The presence of antichrists in the generation of the apostles was the sign by which John could identify that period of history as the "last hour."
 - c. Jesus had told the apostles that in the time leading up to the destruction of the Jerusalem and the Temple many false prophets would appear (Matthew 24:11 *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray*, and Matthew 24:24 *For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*) John sees many false prophets (whom he calls "antichrists" and rightly concludes that the end of Jerusalem and the Temple is very near. Jesus had told them that when they see the signs, they can know that the event is near. John sees one of the signs – the false prophets – and so he knows the end is near, that is, it is the "last hour."
 - d. If it is not the end of the world and not the second coming of Christ but "only" the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, why does he call it the "last hour"? He calls it the last hour because it is the end of an era, the end of a way of life, the end of the world as they had always known it. God was now doing a new thing. The world was changing dramatically. God's dealing with humanity was undergoing a major change. The wall of division between Jew and Gentile in God's plan of salvation was being removed. The special status of the Jews as the people of God was ending. The kingdom of God is no longer tied to a piece of Middle East real estate (John 4:21). The Kingdom now begins to fill the whole world as the Gospel is believed by some from every tribe, language, people and nation.
 - e. The official end of the old era, and the sure sign that the new era had begun, would be the destruction of the Temple. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was God's punishment on unbelieving Israel for the blood of all the prophets who were murdered in the service of God. The destruction of the Temple also means the end of sacrifice and offering which was the heart of the Jewish religion, going back even to Cain and Able. The Temple ceremonies have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. No blood sacrifices will ever be needed again.

- f. In Matthew 24:4-8, Jesus calls false Christs, wars, rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes the “beginning of birth pains.” That implies something brand new is about to be born. It is the New Testament church made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. Not just a few Gentiles but a multitude like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. The church is changing radically. Its like a second birth for the church. But as in regeneration, when we receive the new nature and become new creatures in Christ, we must then put to death the old nature. John sees the signs Jesus had given (Matthew 24:4-33) and knows it’s the last hour for the old form of the people of God and the beginning of something new and wonderful, like the birth of a new baby.
 - g. Jesus had told the Apostles that they could know when the destruction of the Temple was going to take place. One of the signs was false christs and false prophets. John sees many false prophets and knows the time of the end of Jerusalem is near. He knows it is the last hour for unbelieving Israel. He knows that much of what the Jews hold dear will come to an end and disappear. That is why he says it is the last hour.
7. Why is this teaching about the antichrist important? What difference does it make? It makes a big difference.
- a. If we think the antichrist is some future superman of evil, someone who has not yet come and is a long way off, we will think, “Well at least I don’t have to worry about that!” Then we let down our guard. When we let down our guard, we may easily become victims to the spirit of the antichrist that is already here. But if we know there are many antichrists, and that they are already present in the world, and that they deny the doctrine of Christ, then we will be alert and on guard against false teachings about Christ.
 - b. The fact that the first century was the “last hour” for unbelieving Israel helps us understand that the Church of Jesus Christ is part of God’s great plan of redemption. The Church is not just an after thought when Jesus supposedly discovered that the Jews did not want the kingdom. Dispensational, pre-millennialism takes the view that Jesus came to restore the kingdom of Israel in Jerusalem but since the Jews rejected Him, Jesus changed His plan and introduced the “Church Age,” with a promise to come back and try again, after the Church Age, to restore the kingdom of Israel in Jerusalem. The Church is then seen as Christ’s “plan B” after “plan A” did not work. We should reject this thinking and see that the promises to Abraham and the Jews are fulfilled in Christ and through the Church. The Church is the new Israel. Galatians 3:29 *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.* See also Romans 4:1-11 which teaches that Abraham is equally the father of Gentile believers as well as believers from among the Jews.

THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Study Notes by Ralph A. Pontier
AD 2013

I. THE POPULAR VIEW

- A. The popular view of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 is that it refers to a future superman of evil or a great antichrist who will come just before the end of the world. It is thought that he will dominate the world, persecute the church and be overthrown suddenly by the Lord's second coming.
- B. I hope to show by a careful examination of the text that such an explanation is not consistent with Paul's purpose for writing and that the words of the text point instead to a "man of lawlessness" who was already present in the world at the time Paul wrote and was about to be revealed in that generation.

II. THE CONTEXT OF 2 THESSALONIANS

- A. Paul and Silas had established the church in Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey, Acts 17:1-10.
 - 1. The church included both Jews and God fearing Gentiles, that is, Gentiles who before hearing the Gospel had already believed in Israel's God.
 - 2. Paul and Silas were forced to leave Thessalonica after only three weeks, before the congregation was well established and mature in the faith.
- B. Paul's first letter to them was from Corinth around AD 51 after hearing reports from Timothy about problems in the church at Thessalonica. The letter was written about 20 years *after* Jesus had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and about 20 years *before* it happen.
 - 1. The believers in Thessalonica were eagerly expecting the return of Christ but were deeply grieved that some of their members had died and so would miss out on the glorious return of Christ.
 - 2. In Paul's first letter (chapter 4) he writes to them not to be overly grieved about those who have died because they will participate in the return of Christ. Christ will bring their souls with him and raise up their bodies when he returns. They will not miss anything.
- C. Paul's second letter was also prompted by reports of problems concerning the Lord's return. The second letter was written within a year or so of the first letter for it also was written from Corinth where Paul spent 18 months, Acts 18:11.
 - 1. It was evident from the first letter that the church was eagerly looking forward to the return of Christ.
 - 2. Their eagerness and excitement about the Lord's return made them believe false reports that the "Day of the Lord" was immanent and therefore Christ was about to appear very soon, so soon that some, in anticipation, had quit their jobs and stopped working, 2 Thes. 3:6-12.
 - 3. Paul had written in his first letter to them that Christ would come suddenly, 1 Thes. 5:2-3. Some must have interpreted that to mean "immediately" and false reports were circulating that Paul had said Christ was about to return soon. The church was shaken up and disturbed by these reports. It was to assure them that Christ had not already come that Paul wrote the second letter.
 - 4. Paul did not write to tell them when Christ would return or what signs to look for regarding Christ's return. He knew that no one knows the time of Christ's return. What Paul did know was that Christ's second coming would not come until after the prophecy of Matt. 24:4-35 had been fulfilled.
 - 5. He did not say that Christ will come immediately after the prophecy of Matt. 24:4-35 is fulfilled. He only knew that it must come first. Since it had not happened, Christ could not yet have returned.

6. It is wrong to read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 as if Paul were telling people he knows what will happen just before the Lord returns, as if what he describes are signs of the Lord's return. Matt. 24:36-25:46 make clear that there are no signs for the Lord's return.
7. Paul writes that two things must happen first before the Lord will return. Whether the Lord will return immediately after these two things happen or a long time after these two things happen, Paul does not know. All he knows is they must happen first and until they happen, reports of Christ having already returned must be false.

III. WHAT MUST COME FIRST?

- A. The first thing that must happen is "*the rebellion*."
 1. The Greek work used here is "apostasia" from which we get the English word "apostasy."
 - a. In this verse some English translations have translated it as "falling away." The Greek word means "to depart from." In both the Greek Old Testament and in the New Testament it is frequently translated "divorce."
 - b. If someone *departs from* believing the truth, they are guilty of apostasy. Likewise, one way to *depart from* a marriage is by divorce.
 - c. The two ideas are sometimes combined in Scripture. When Israel departs from the truth, God divorces Israel. See Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8.
 2. In light of the Bible's use of "apostasia" and Paul's purpose in pointing out that Christ cannot return until the prophecies of Matt. 24:4-35 are fulfilled, it seems most likely that what Paul is referring to is God's divorce of the unbelieving Jewish people because of their departing from the truth proclaimed by the prophets and confirmed in the Gospel.
 - a. The devastation of the Jewish people from AD 68-70 and especially the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 are clear signs that God was breaking off relations with the Jewish nation and people.
 - b. Jesus said in John 15:6 "*If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*"
 - c. Rom. 11:17-20 speaks of the Jewish people as branches that have been broken off the olive tree. The olive tree is the covenant in Jesus Christ. Israel was broken off because of "*unbelief*."
 - d. Luke 21:24 "*They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*"
 - e. Luke 21:22 calls the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 "days of vengeance." God repaid unbelieving Israel for the blood of all the prophets and for the blood of the Son of God about whom all the prophets had spoken.
 3. The tenses of the verbs used by Paul confirm that he is describing events taking place at the time of his writing.
 - a. 2 Thes. 2:9-10 speaks of those who "*are perishing*" (present tense) because they "*refused to love the truth*" (past tense) and "*had pleasure in unrighteousness*" (past tense). The use of the present and past tense indicates that Paul is speaking about a current situation unfolding – a situation going on at that time.
 - b. Jesus had predicted in Matt. 24:10,12 that in the days leading up to the destruction of the Temple "*many will fall away*" and "*the love of many will grow cold.*" Jesus confidently affirmed that this falling away, and the punishment for it, would happen in the generation of the Apostles.

Although the falling away had started, it had not reached its conclusion in the destruction of the Temple. Therefore reports of Christ's return must be false. Those events must be completed before we can look for Christ to return, whether soon or after a long time.

4. Up until AD 70 it could still be said that the Jews were God's people and the Temple was God's house. God was still reaching out to them through the witness of the whole church. But with the destruction of the Temple and the devastation of Jerusalem, God divorced unbelieving Israel because of their refusal to hold to the truth. Now is the time of the Gentiles where God gathers his people from every tongue, tribe and nation. The promises to Israel are fulfilled in the Church. All who believe in Jesus are the heirs of Abraham. See Galatians 3:7-9,29.
- B. The second thing that must happen before we can begin to look for Christ's return is the revealing of the "*man of lawlessness*."
1. Some Bibles follow an alternate Greek text reading, "*man of sin*."
 - a. Either way his name means that his chief characteristic is that he is opposed to God, opposed to God's law and opposed to God's people. A man seemingly with no good qualities.
 - b. He is also described as a "*son of destruction*" or "*son of perdition*." The phrase is used only one other time in the New Testament, in John 17:12, to describe Judas Iscariot. It refers to one destined for destruction or destined for hell.
 - c. He is said to exalt himself over everything called god (other rulers, as in Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34-36). He will exalt himself over everything that is worshipped, take a seat in the Temple and declare himself to be God.
 2. This description would make every Jew (and God-fearing Gentile who knew Jewish history) think of Antiochus Epiphanies IV, the same man to whom Jesus alluded to in Matt. 24:15 when he spoke of the "*abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel*."
 - a. In Daniel 8:8-12; 9:27 and 11:29-32, Daniel had spoken of a coming evil king.
 - b. These prophecies had been fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanies IV who thought of himself as a physical manifestation of the god, Zeus. Antiochus became king of Syria in 175 BC and ruled the Seleucid Kingdom from 175-164 BC. After losing a war in Egypt he returned north through Canaan and took out his anger on the Jews in December 168 BC. He tried to stamp out their religion. He set up a statue of Zeus (to represent himself) in the Temple and forced the Jews to sacrifice unclean animals (pigs) on God's altar. He did not allow the Jews to observe any of their sacrifices, festivals or any other religious practice he could control. He took all the gold and silver vessels from the temple. He tried to force Greek culture and religion on the Jews. He corrupted many Jews with bribes and threats, although many also remained faithful. One of the main reasons for the later prophecies of Daniel was to warn the Jews of the coming persecution by this king and encourage them to remain faithful. Some of the history of Antiochus Epiphanies can be read in the book of First Maccabees.
 - c. When Jesus warned Christians to flee Jerusalem when they see the "*abomination that causes desolation*" He was lifting a phrase from Daniel's prophecy about Antiochus Epiphanies (Daniel 9:27). Jesus was telling them that something like what happened in 168 BC was going to happen again, only this time it would be much worse. An evil ruler, angry at Jerusalem and the Jewish religion will come and not only

desecrate the Temple, he will destroy it. Daniel made a final prediction of an “abomination that causes desolation” in Daniel 12:11 which may be a prophecy that looks beyond Antiochus Epiphanies to the very same event Jesus warned against. When Jesus said, “Let the reader understand” He is saying that the reader must be careful because the matter is difficult and could be easily misunderstood.

3. Now Paul writes in 2 Thes. 2 of a “man of lawlessness” who sets himself up to be worshipped in the Temple. The description is very similar to what Antiochus Epiphanies IV had done. It seems clear that Paul is referring to the same man and the same event that Jesus was referring to in Matt. 24:15. The reasons for that are:
 - a. Paul’s purpose in writing is to prove that reports of Christ’s return can not be true because certain events had not yet occurred, events which must happen before Christ’s return (his *parousia*).
 - b. Jesus made clear in Matt. 24-25 that his second coming (his *parousia*) would not happen until after (perhaps a long time after) the destruction of the Temple. Jesus indicated that the destruction of the Temple would occur in the apostles’ generation. Only after the destruction of the Temple should they begin to expect Christ’s second coming.
 - c. Paul’s use of the present tense indicates that he is writing about something that is going on already, not something thousands of years away. In verse 7, Paul speaks of a secret power of lawlessness already at work. In verse 7, Paul says the lawless one is presently being held back. In verse 11, Paul says God “is sending” a delusion (present tense, not future as some translations have it). Paul writes in verse 11 that those who will be condemned when the lawless one comes are those who are already guilty of not believing the truth and have already delighted in evil.
 - d. Paul says in verse 5 when he was with them he had told them “these things.” Paul is lifting a phrase that Jesus also used (“these things” Matt. 23:36 and 24:34) when describing events that would happen in the apostles’ generation.
 - e. Jesus had said in Matt. 24:4-5 and 24:23-25 there would be false reports of His return. Paul says in verse 2 that the Thessalonians have heard such reports and should not believe them. Jesus had said that false reports of His second coming would occur in that generation and now about 20 years later Paul confirms that Jesus was right.
 - f. Jesus warned in Matt. 24:24 that false Christ’s and false prophets would appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. Paul says that the lawless one’s work will be with Satan’s power to perform counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders designed to deceive.
 - g. Jesus warned in Matt. 24:10-12 that as a result of false prophets and their false signs many would turn away from the faith and the love of most would grow cold. Paul writes in verses 9-12 that many are perishing because they refuse to believe the truth and because they are being deceived by lies and counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders.
 - h. Jesus warned in Matt. 24:15 of an “abomination that causes desolation” of which Daniel had spoken. Daniel’s prophecy was fulfilled by an evil man who exalted himself in the Temple and believed he was divine. Paul warns in verse 4 of a man of lawlessness or sin who will exalt himself over the true God, set himself up in the Temple and declare himself to be God.

- i. In Matt. 24:12 Jesus said “lawlessness would abound.” Paul writes in verse 7 that the “mystery of lawlessness” is already at work and that the “lawless one” will be revealed when the one restraining him is removed.
 - j. In Matt. 24:13 Jesus said that “he who endures to the end will be saved.” Paul writes in verse 13 that “God chose you to be saved” and he urges them in verse 15 to “stand firm.”
4. The popular understanding of this text is that it predicts some future superman of evil who will dominate the world and attempt to destroy the church. But there is nothing in the text that indicates he will dominate the world. Although the man of lawlessness is said to exalt himself above God, so did Antiochus Epiphanies and he did not dominate the whole world or even most of the world of his day.
 5. Since the man of lawlessness is said to “set himself up in God’s Temple” there must be a Temple for him to do that in. That means that either this had to have happened before Titus tore down the stones of the Temple or the Temple must be rebuilt before the man of lawlessness can show himself to the world. Unfortunately there are Christians who are taking offerings to rebuild the Jewish Temple just so their supposed future antichrist can appear and then be overcome by the second coming of Jesus. Such Christians ignore the teaching of the New Testament (especially the book of Hebrews) that Temple worship is finished. All the Temple ceremonies have been fulfilled in Christ and to rebuild the Temple is to go back to “shadows” as if Christ has never come.
 6. Some have thought that the man of lawlessness will set himself up as a ruler of the visible church which is the new temple of God. The word used for “temple” refers to the “inner sanctuary.” When the term is used in the New Testament of the church it is used only to describe true believers who are a spiritual house in which God dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19; and 2 Corinthians 6:16). God makes our bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit and the church is a spiritual temple in which God dwells. It is inconceivable that a man of lawlessness could set himself up in a spiritual temple made up of true believers. He could make himself the head of a false church but that would not be the temple of God.

IV. THE IDENTITY OF THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

A. Who was this man of lawlessness?

1. It is my opinion that the man of lawlessness was Titus, the ruler of the Roman army and son of Emperor Vespasian. Titus succeeded his father as Emperor when his father died in AD 79. Titus died mysteriously two years later, perhaps poisoned by his brother, Domitian who succeeded him. Titus’ two year reign was plagued with three terrible tragedies: the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, a fire in Rome that lasted three days and three nights and one of the worst epidemics of plague known up to that time.
2. Before becoming Emperor, Vespasian had been in charge of crushing the Jewish rebellion but when he ascended the throne in July AD 69, he left his son, Titus, in Judea in command of the troops to finish the job. Titus was similar in many ways to Antiochus Epiphanies IV in wanting to stamp out the Jewish religion. The major difference between them was that Titus’ destruction of the Jews and Jerusalem was far worse than what Antiochus did. Titus’ destruction of Jerusalem was in keeping with the history of Israel in which God used pagan kings and armies to punish Israel for their sins. Historians of the time described Titus as ruthless and brutal.
3. Although we have no historical record (that I am aware of) that Titus made claims to being a god, we do know that such claims were common by earthly rulers in ancient times. In Ezekiel 28:2 the Prince of Tyre, who was hardly a great world leader, said, “I am God, I sit in the seat of God.” Isaiah 14:14 describes the king of Babylon making such a claim, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” Daniel 11:36

speaks of the king who will “exalt and magnify himself above every god.” See also Daniel 7:8 and 8:8-11. Therefore Titus may very well have made similar claims. His triumphant and boastful manner after the conquest of the Jews was so great that many thought he would attempt to overthrow his father. After the burning of the Temple his troops declared Titus “imperator” (the royal title given to the Caesars) “with the greatest acclamations of joy” says Josephus. Perhaps to prevent a coup, his father made him co-regent in the east in AD 71, gave him several other honors and responsibilities and named him as his heir. Emperor worship was official policy at this time and one of the main reasons for the Jewish rebellion. If Titus was indeed the “man of lawlessness,” then we should believe Paul that such claims of deity were made.

B. Who held him back?

1. Paul writes in verse 7 of the secret power of lawlessness being held back by someone who will be “taken out of the way” so that the lawless one can be revealed. Who is holding back the lawless one?
2. The text does not say. But something similar is found in Daniel 10:12-14 where an angel of the Lord speaks of himself and the angel Michael restraining or controlling the Prince of Persia who resisted but was not able to overcome the angel or angels who controlled his actions. Since the angels are servants of the Lord, it is the Lord who restrained the Prince of Persia using angels as the instruments of his will.
3. By analogy, it was the Lord, through his angels, who was restraining the lawlessness against the Jews. When the Lord removes his restraining angel, then a particular Roman ruler – the lawless one – will be free to carry out the plan to crush the Jewish rebellion against Rome.
 - a. The spirit of lawlessness against the Jews was already at work in AD 39 when Emperor Caligula declared himself a god and ordered his statue to be set up at every temple. In the whole empire, the Jews were the only ones to refuse and they prepared for armed revolt. Only Caligula's death in AD 43 ended the disturbance.
 - b. But then the theft of a large amount of money from the Temple treasury by a procurator named Gessius Florus gave greater popularity to the cause of the Zealots (Jewish patriots) many of whom thought that any means were justified in order to attain political and religious independence from Rome.
 - c. The desecration of synagogues by Hellenists and other acts of provocation finally lead to armed revolt by the Jews in AD 68 and then their crushing defeat in AD 70.
 - d. In AD 51, when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he could see that the Roman government was bent on destroying the Jews. But Paul knew, by the Spirit, that it was being held back until God's appointed time when one Roman ruler would come, someone like Antiochus Epiphanes, to punish Jerusalem and destroy the Temple.

C. What will happen to the man of lawlessness?

1. Paul says in verse 8 that the lawless one will be killed (literally to “do away with,” “destroy” or “condemn to death”) by the breath of the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The phrase “breath of his mouth” refers to the spoken word of the Lord or His commands, as in Psalm 33:6,9-10 “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth . . . He spoke and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.” In Isaiah 11:4, the rod of Christ's mouth and the breath of his lips is what he uses to kill his enemies. This means that Jesus will speak a command and the man of lawlessness will be done away with.

2. Paul also says in verse 8 that the man of lawlessness will be brought to nothing by the splendor or brightness of the Lord's coming (his *parousia*). This is perhaps the most difficult part of the text in attempting to refute the popular understanding that the man of lawlessness will appear just before the second coming of Jesus Christ. The text demands close attention.
 - a. This is the only place where the second coming of the Lord (the *parousia*) is modified by the word which can be translated "appearance," "splendor" or "brightness." The use of this modifier may mean that Paul is referring to something associated with the Lord's second coming, but not identical to it.
 - b. Or, similar to what John Calvin suggests, Paul's meaning may be that, having been destroyed by the command of Christ at a specific point in history, the man of lawlessness will be gone at Christ's return, or, like all the wicked, sent to his final reward at Christ's return.
 3. In his commentary on 2 Thessalonians, John Calvin writes, "*He [Paul] had predicted the destruction of the reign of Antichrist, and now describes the manner of his destruction—he will be annihilated by the word of the Lord. It is uncertain, however, whether he is speaking of the final appearing of Christ, when He will be revealed as Judge. The word, it is true, appears to have this meaning, but Paul does not think that Christ will accomplish this in a single moment. We must therefore understand the passage in this sense, that Antichrist would be completely and utterly destroyed when that last day of restoration of all things will come. Paul indicates, however, that in the meantime Christ will scatter the darkness in which Antichrist will reign by the rays which He will emit before His coming, just as the sun, before becoming visible to us, chases away the darkness of the night with its bright light.*"
- D. Does God send delusions?
1. Paul writes in verse 11 that God was sending (at that time) a powerful delusion so that the wicked will believe a lie.
 2. It should be remembered that God had previously used Satan's lies to bring about the destruction of the wicked. See 1 Kings 22:19-23 where God puts a lying spirit in the mouths of the false prophets to lure wicked Ahab to his death. God does this as a judgment on those who have already rejected the truth and embraced evil.
 3. Just as murderers forfeit the right to life (Genesis 9:6), so covenant breakers who reject God's Word forfeit their right to the truth (Isaiah 6:10 and Amos 8:11).

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. The popular view that this chapter refers to a future superman of evil or a great antichrist yet to come who will dominate the world, persecute the church and be overthrown by the Lord's second coming, has very little foundation in the text.
- B. Although there may be some unanswered questions about the text, the above interpretation is the only one that does justice to the purpose for which Paul wrote. The words and grammar of the text and the historical situation all point to a man of lawlessness already existing at the time of Paul's writing but one who is then being held back and not yet revealed. Such a reading also agrees with the teaching of Jesus as we have seen it in Matthew 24.