

Eschatology -- the Doctrine of the Last Things

This is all about the end of the story, the eternal end of the drama of redemption.

Individual Eschatology

1. The Nature of Physical Death – Matthew 10:28
 1. Termination of physical life by the separation of body and soul.
 2. Not annihilation or cessation of existence, but cutting off of the natural relations of life.
2. The Connection Between Sin and Death
 1. Sin introduced death into the world -- Romans 5:12
 2. Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death -- Romans 5:17
3. The Significance of the Death of Believers
 1. Not a punishment -- Romans 8:1
 2. Rather: puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life
 3. Also works for the sanctification of God's people in this life. The anticipation and observation of death has a beneficial effect: humbles the proud, puts to death the flesh, checks worldliness, fosters spiritual-mindedness.

The Intermediate State

1. Sheol and Hades
 1. Sometimes the place of punishment for the wicked (hell) – Deut. 32:22
 2. Sometimes the condition or state of death – Psalm 89:48
 3. Sometimes the literal grave – Psalm 16:10
2. Roman Catholic Concepts of the Intermediate State
 1. Purgatory
 2. Limbus Patrum
 3. Limbus Infantum
3. Soul sleep
 1. Jehovah's Witnesses and others
 2. But see Matthew 17:3, Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus.
4. Annihilationism
 1. Those who continue in sin are deprived of immortality and destroyed.
 2. But see Luke 16:19-31 and many other passages which speak of a hell of eternal, conscious torment for those who do not believe.

The Second Coming of Christ

1. Events Preceding the Second Coming
 1. The Drawing in of the Fullness of the Elect – Mt. 24:14, Mk.13:10
 2. The Conversion of Israel (?) – Rom. 11:25-32
 3. The Coming of Antichrist – 1 John 2:18
 4. Various signs and wonders – Mt. 24:29-30, Mk. 13:24-25, Lk.21:25-26
 - i. Wars
 - ii. Famines
 - iii. Earthquakes
 - iv. False prophets, etc.
2. The Second Coming Itself
 1. Personal – Acts 1:11, 3:20-21, Mt. 24:44
 2. Physical – Acts 1:11, Heb. 9:28, Rev. 1:7
 3. Visible – Mt. 24:30, Mk. 13:26, Titus 2:13
 4. Sudden – 1 Thess. 5:2-3, Mt. 25:1-12, Rev. 16:15
 5. Glorious and Triumphant – Heb. 9:28, Mt. 24:30, Rev. 19:11-16
3. The Purpose of the Second Coming
 1. To inaugurate the age to come in which God will be all in all.

The Millennium

1. The Issue
 1. How do we interpret Revelation 20:1-6? Is there a literal 1000 year kingdom of Jesus Christ and if so, when does it take place?
2. Postmillennialism
 1. Some Reformed people have held this position.
 2. The second coming of Christ will follow the millennium
 3. Christianity expands and the world gradually becomes Christianized.
 4. But: what about the theology of the cross? Cf. Mark 10:21, etc.
 5. What about the sufferings mentioned in Matthew 24?
3. Premillennialism
 1. Very popular today in broader Christian circles. Theology of “Left Behind” books and films.
 2. A number of varieties. One looks like this:
 - i. Christ wanted to establish his kingdom among the Jews, but failed.
 - ii. The Church was plan B, a distinct entity separate from Israel.
 - iii. Rapture occurs
 - iv. Period of tribulation, during which Israel is converted
 - v. Christ returns to earth to judge the nations and rules for 1000 years. The tribulation saints are resurrected.

- vi. Antichrist is destroyed
 - vii. Christ and his saints rule in Jerusalem, the temple is restored and so is the sacrificial worship.
 - viii. The world is converted.
 - ix. After 1000 years, there is a final battle with Satan. Satan is cast into the bottomless pit.
 - x. Resurrection of unbelievers and final judgement.
3. But: how do we understand apocalyptic literature? Literal or symbolic?
 4. What about those Scriptures which portray the kingdom as a present reality? Cf. Matthew 11:12, 12:28, Luke 17:21, John 18:36,37, Col. 1:13
 5. What about those passages which speak about the resurrection of the righteous taking place at the last day? John 6:39,40,44,54; 11:24
4. Amillennialism
 1. Most Reformed people today hold this view.
 2. The millennium is a present reality. Christ reigns now.
 3. The Church is the continuation of Israel, not its (temporary) replacement.
 4. The rapture takes place when Christ returns, it is another way of expressing the resurrection of believers.

The Resurrection

1. Definition
 1. At the return of Christ, the dead will be raised (cf. 1 Cor. 15)
2. Character
 1. Bodily – Rom. 8:23, 1 Cor. 6:13-20, Rom. 8:11, 1 Cor. 15
 2. Involves both the Just and the Unjust – John 5:28,29
 3. Unequal for the Just and the Unjust
 - i. The just → deliverance and glorification
 - ii. The unjust → shame and the extreme penalty of eternal death.
3. Time
 1. At the return of Christ, at the last day – 1 Cor. 15:23, 1 Thess. 4:16
 2. Immediately preceding the final judgement – John 5:27-29, Rev. 20:11-15

The Last Judgment

1. The Judge and his assistants
 1. Christ is the judge – Matthew 25:31,32, John 5:27
 2. The angels will assist – Matthew 13:41, Matthew 24:31
 3. The saints will also have a role – 1 Cor. 6:2-3, Rev. 20:4
2. The Parties that will be judged

1. Every individual of the human race – 2 Cor. 5:10, Rev. 20:12
2. Satan and his demons – Matt. 8:29, 1 Cor. 6:3, Jude 6
3. Time of the judgment
 1. At the end of the age
 2. Immediately after the resurrection of the dead – John 5:28-29
4. The Standard of Judgment
 1. The revealed will of God
 - i. Law of nature (written on the hearts of all)
 - ii. Old Testament Revelation (Jews)
 - iii. New and Old Testament Revelation (Christians)
 2. Degrees of punishment and reward – Mt. 11:22,24, Luke 12:47-48, Luke 20:47, 2 Cor. 9:7,

The Final State

1. The Wicked
 1. A hell of eternal, conscious torment – Rev. 20:7-15.
 2. The state in which they will exist: totally deprived of divine favour, recipients of divine wrath. Degrees of punishment commensurate with their sinning against the light they had received.
 3. Duration will be eternal – Mark 9:43,48.
2. The Righteous
 1. The New Creation
 1. The present world will pass away – Heb. 12:27, 2 Pet. 3:13
 2. A new creation established – Rev. 21:1
 2. The Eternal Abode of the Righteous
 1. A place called heaven – the house of the Father (John 14:2)
 2. Not only heaven, but the entire new creation – Mt. 5:5, Rev. 21:1-3
 3. In this abode, the righteous will enjoy perfect communion with God and eternal bliss – 1 Cor. 2:9
 4. There will be degrees in the blessedness of heaven (2 Cor.9:6), but there will be no discontent.

The above is based on Louis Berkhof's *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 333-361.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times, Kim Riddlebarger, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.

The Man of Sin: Uncovering the Truth About the Antichrist, Kim Riddlebarger, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006.

(Also see Kim Riddlebarger's website/blog: www.kimriddlebarger.com)

The Bible and the Future, Anthony Hoekema, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.