



## End-times fascination

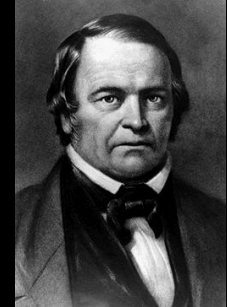
### ❖ Second century AD

- Montanus and his followers withdraw from the world to await the imminent advent of the New Jerusalem – what we would call the second coming. They saw themselves as the “spiritual elite” – purified and fit to be Christ’s bride.

### ❖ October 22, 1844

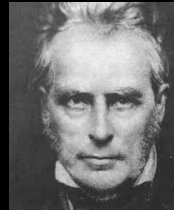
- Led by William Miller, thousands of Americans eagerly anticipate Jesus’ return on Oct 22. They are disappointed, but the movement gave rise to Seventh-day Adventism.

### ❖ Rise of premillennial dispensationalism



## Premillennial dispensationalism

- ❖ An interpretive scheme developed by John Darby in the early 1830’s and popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible and later the Ryrie Study Bible.



### ❖ Key characteristics:

- Prophecy is history written in advance. Prophetic passages become akin to a script that will be played out to the letter.
- No single book contains the whole script, so various portions (fragments!) of the Bible are pulled together like a jigsaw puzzle.
- We live in a parenthesis! Using Daniel 9:20-27 as the central guide, “p-d’s” claim that God has stopped the prophecy clock (at Jesus’ death and resurrection) with “seven seconds left in the game.” All eyes, like the *Left Behind* series, are then focused on understanding when God will restart the clock, beginning with the rapture.

## The rapture – a surprise

- ❖ The popularity of the “rapture” (Jesus returning to take up believers before a time of tribulation) is both recent and largely restricted to America.

- First suggested by a Jesuit priest about 1600 – as part of the “counter-reformation”! But the idea lay dormant until it was picked up and popularized by Darby and then Scofield.

### ❖ This is a misreading of Scripture, esp. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

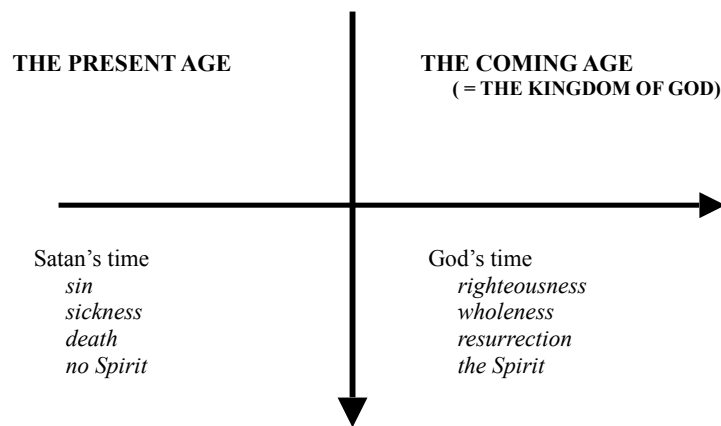
## Where are we headed in this series?

- ❖ Our subject is John's Revelation, his apocalypse
- ❖ We will strive to see how Revelation is not some bizarre appendage to the Bible, but is an integral part of the biblical story.
- ❖ We will look for links between the Old Testament and Revelation.
- ❖ We will discover that Revelation was written as a message of hope and encouragement for Christians – not to terrify them or us!!
  - Ask yourself: Could you truly scare someone into loving you?

## The Apocalyptic "worldview"

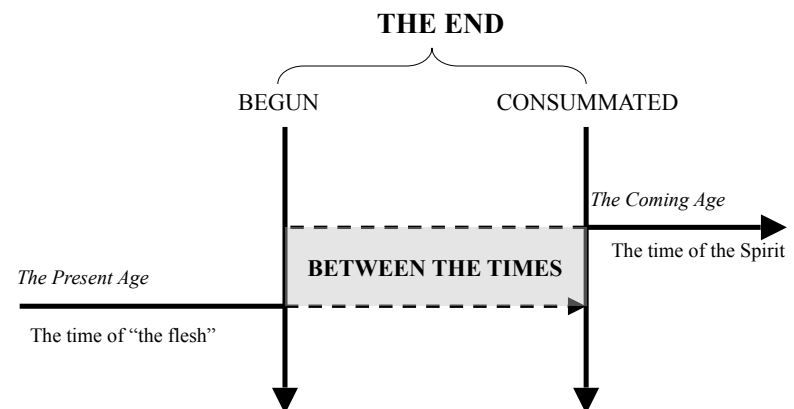
- ❖ An apocalyptic "world-view" is central to Christianity!
  - God's kingdom will come in all its fullness!
  - Jesus will return!
  - Evil will be defeated!
  - There will be a "new heavens and new earth"
- ❖ Jesus spoke more about the coming of God's kingdom than about anything else!
  - We could call Jesus an apocalyptic prophet, in addition to all else he was.

## Jewish Expectations of the End



from *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, by Gordon Fee, 1996

## Christians' New Perspective ("already/not yet")



from *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, by Gordon Fee, 1996

## What is an “apocalypse?”

- ❖ “Apocalypse” comes from the Greek for “unveiling”
- ❖ In the 200 hundred years before and after Jesus, apocalypses, as literature, were very popular!
  - Many were written; all of them shared this seemingly bizarre imagery and symbolism.
  - All of them told a story of the End! Some climactic struggle between good and evil. They shared an “apocalyptic” worldview.
  - All of them recounted visions use lots of repetition to make their points.
- ❖ But John’s Revelation is a little different
  - We have a vision of what is going on “up there” as well as “down here.”
  - No claim is made that these are visions given to Moses or Adam (no pseudonym) – but simply to “John.”

## Where else in the Bible can we find similar “apocalyptic” writing?

- ❖ The best place to turn is the second half of Daniel – chapters 7-12. At least this part of Daniel was probably written about 160 years before Jesus.
  - The same wild and violent images – bizarre beasts rising out of the sea and so on.
  - The second half of Daniel tells the same “story” as the first half – but in apocalyptic language.
    - Stay true to Yahweh, even as you face persecution, and you will be vindicated. (The fiery furnace won’t burn you and the lions won’t eat you!)
- ❖ Also some in Ezekiel

## Who wrote Revelation and when?

### Not sure and not sure!!

- ❖ Is it the same John that the early church said wrote the Gospel or John’s letters?
  - Maybe . . . maybe not . . . The grammar in Revelation is terrible!
- ❖ When?
  - Most scholars would see it in the 90’s AD, during the reign of Domitian, an ardent persecutor of Christians.
  - But some scholars hold to an earlier date – as early as the 60’s AD before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction. They place it during the reign of Nero.
- ❖ Regardless – it is in the NT canon! In the end, the early church affirmed that it is every bit as God-inspired and authoritative as Matthew or Romans.



## John's Introduction

- ❖ This is a revelation from Jesus Christ to John on the island of Patmos.
  - Jesus is referred to as the “firstborn of the dead.” Why?
- ❖ Blessed are those who hear and keep what is written.
  - It can't all be a “secret” if we are obey it!
- ❖ “I am the Alpha and the Omega” – who is and who was and who is to come
- ❖ John is to write a book for seven churches
- ❖ John turns, and in the midst of seven lampstands, John sees “one like the Son of Man.”
- ❖ John falls as if he was dead. What does Jesus do? He comforts him! Tells him to be unafraid. And then tells him what to write to the seven churches.



## The Vision of the Son of Man

- ❖ From the apocalyptic Daniel – chapter 7, esp. 7:13
- ❖ Jesus often refers to himself as the Son of Man.
  - He uses the images of Daniel 7:13 in his warnings about the coming judgment on the Temple in Mark 13 & Matt 24
  - In Jesus' day, Daniel's "Son of Man" was understood to be a messianic reference – the anointed king at the center of Israel's vindication against the pagan/Roman oppressors.
- ❖ Notice that the symbols are not obscure!
  - The sword in Jesus' mouth: directly from Hebrew 4:12, "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword"
  - The stars are the angels of the churches
  - The lampstands are the churches themselves

## REVELATION: ROME & THE SEVEN CHURCHES

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