

O Son of God, the Only Potentate

John Grover Wilson (1810–1885)

O Son of God, the only Potentate,
Forever blessed, sovereign King of kings,
Angelic hosts thy bright attendants wait,
And fly at thy command on swiftest wings.
None may dispute thy sovereignty and power,
High above all, Maker and Ruler, thou;
They cast their crowns before thee and adore,
And to thy true and righteous sceptre bow.

O Son of God, in human form arrayed,
God manifest in flesh, o'er all supreme;
Earth's mighty Lord, by whom all things were made,
And heir of nature's royal diadem.
Thy times will show, to all earth's titled kings,
Thy right to reign, and every knee shall bend,
Of things in heaven and of all earthly things;
And of thy kingdom there shall be no end.

Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God,
The everlasting Father, Prince of peace;
The nations shall be broken to thy rod,
Thy government shall evermore increase:
On David's throne—thyselves his Lord and Son,
Thou shalt ordain perpetual truth and grace;
Justice and judgment shall support thy throne,
And guard thy realms in everlasting peace.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

I'm Changing the Way I Teach Eschatology

Kevin T. Bauder

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Good teachers will revise their notes every time they teach the same class. They're always reading new books, attending seminars, hearing lectures, listening to papers, and perusing articles. Over time these new sources of information add depth to teaching and enable teachers to address current issues within their disciplines.

Sometimes teachers make even larger modifications to their approach. That's what I've done with my course in angelology and eschatology. In the Central Seminary curriculum, the systematic theology cycle is taught in six two-hour courses. Eschatology and angelology share one of those courses. Since we teach all of our theology in modular format, I have to find a way to fit both topics into five class days of five-and-one-half hours each. That's a very limited amount of time for a very large doctrinal area.

In previous years I've spent nearly two days on angelology, about a day on personal eschatology, then a day each on millennialism and tribulationism. I've always been unhappy with the result. Today's students have trouble digesting that much of the theological system all at once. They can barely grasp how the system fits together, let alone how the system grows out of biblical revelation.

In this respect today's students probably contrast with those of my generation. Most of us grew up in churches that regularly taught eschatology. In fact, they taught the entire theology of Dispensationalism. When I was a boy, my pastor had a big dispensational chart made of canvas. It stretched from wall to wall in our church auditorium. He would teach through it every few years. He would place special emphasis on end-times prophecies. By the time we were in high school, we knew more about biblical end-times events than most seminary students do today.

It's reached the point where I feel like I'm overwhelming students with eschatology. So this year I decided to change my approach. To begin with, I try to focus much more on the question of what God was doing when He created the world. His goal was not to govern the earth directly, but to govern it mediocrally through a race of godlike creatures. This was the plan



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that Satan attacked—and the nature of that attack is fundamental for understanding spiritual warfare. This emphasis allows me to tie aspects of angelology and eschatology much more closely together than in the past. It also allows me to shrink the time required for angelology, creating more time to focus on eschatology.

Given this beginning, the core eschatological issue is what God is doing to restore His mediatorial rule over the earth. This question moves the entire course toward a discussion of the kingdom of God. It virtually demands a fairly detailed discussion of the biblical covenants as fundamental for understanding the mediatorial kingdom. As each covenant unfolds during the discussion, it permits the development of dependent ideas, e.g. the notion of messiahship in connection with the Davidic Covenant or the relationship between individual regeneration and the New Covenant.

These discussions involve some limited amount of skipping ahead into the New Testament, but in this teaching approach I am trying to stick as closely as possible to the story line of the Bible. In other words, I'm trying to teach eschatology more like a course in biblical theology than like a course in systematic theology.

The prophecies of Daniel become the pivot between the two testaments, supplying a prophetic structure for understanding the restoration of the mediatorial kingdom. In particular, Daniel 9 provides a very specific timetable that carries the discussion forward to Messiah the Prince and beyond. From that point, the discussion of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom becomes a natural sequel.

As is well known, Jesus' offer of the kingdom takes a turn after the events of Matthew 12. A rapid tracing of the subsequent kingdom parables shows the new direction. This discussion culminates with a fairly detailed examination of the Olivet Discourse. Set in this context, students can readily see that the Olivet Discourse has no direct teaching about the Rapture at all. Rather, it is mainly about the events that will culminate in Jesus' glorious return to earth to establish His kingdom rule.

Only at this point do I bring up the subject of the Rapture. In this discussion I attempt to follow the texts in chronological order, beginning with the first clear allusion to the Rapture in John 14. First Thessalonians 4 provides another look at the event, and then 1 Thessalonians 5 introduces the conjoined topics of the Day of the Lord and the wrath of God. Here we get out of chronological order, because these topics necessitate a discussion of the distinction between temporal wrath and eternal wrath, followed by an exploration of the Day of the Lord theme in the Old Testament.

Then it's time to move into the text of Revelation, asking the question, "When does the wrath of God begin?" Of course, I think that the answer to this question necessitates a pretribulational Rapture, but that conclusion is

almost secondary to the process of discovery. While in Revelation I also take time to examine Revelation 3:10, a text that one of my theology professors once said was the strongest single proof of a pretribulational Rapture in scripture (I disagree).

The course concludes with a discussion of 2 Thessalonians, which, interestingly enough, contains the strongest single proof text for a posttribulational Rapture and the strongest single text for a midtribulational Rapture. It's interesting to watch students wrestle with these texts, and it's fun to see the lights come on for them.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
