

Review: DM804

A SUMMARY CRITIQUE
**MILLENNIAL ROUNDUP:
Last Days Options**

a book review of

A Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense of the Millennium

by Millard J. Erickson

(Baker Book House, 1998)

Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond

by Darrell L. Bock, General Editor

(Zondervan, 1999)

Four Views on the Book of Revelation

by C. Marvin Pate, General Editor

(Zondervan, 1998)

Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary

by Steve Gregg, Editor

(Thomas Nelson, 1997)

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During the Jesus movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was a new Christian convinced that the Rapture was going to happen at any moment and that the Soviet Union and Communist China were going to usher in the Antichrist. At least that's the prophetic teaching best-selling Christian authors and speakers of the time said could be found right there in the Bible. We were, as one author put it, the "terminal" generation of Christians.

Thirty years later, I've learned a lot more about the Bible and what it says about the end times, which is the study of *eschatology*, the "last things." Even though some of the most popular authors and speakers are still forcing their own interpretations of newspaper headlines into the pages of Scripture, many Christians have become more thoughtful about what really can be known from the Bible about the end of all things. Four recent books offer a variety of responsible introductions to this fascinating subject. Along with the apostle Paul, we should be waiting eagerly "for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

There are two aspects of eschatology: personal and general. Personal eschatology concerns what happens to us individually when we die.¹ General eschatology concerns what happens to the world and all people — nonbelievers as well as believers, the living as well as the dead — at the end of all earthly events when Christ returns in his resurrected body, just as He had ascended (Acts 1:11), for final judgment and the reconciliation of all things (1 Cor. 15:24–28). These books deal with general eschatology.

Regarding millennial views (what one thinks about the "1,000 years" of Revelation 20:1–6), evangelicals tend to hold one of three conservative views: *premillennialists* believe that Christ's Second Coming will

occur before a fairly literal thousand-year period during which He will rule the earth personally and physically from Jerusalem; *postmillennialists* believe that Christ's Second Coming will occur after a long period (symbolized by 1,000 years) of godly influence over the world that increases over time until it can fairly be said that Christ is reigning over the earth through the church; *amillennialists* also interpret the 1,000 years as symbolic, but symbolic of Christ's reign from heaven over the earth from the *beginning* of the church until His Second Coming for final judgment — a reign exemplified in the heart of each believer.

A good place to start is Millard J. Erickson's *A Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense of the Millennium*. Erickson first published this helpful book in 1977. In this revision, he emphasizes the changes within a particular millennial view, dispensationalism. Dr. Erickson has written numerous books on many areas of theological concern, and his practical, accessible style makes this often confusing subject much easier to understand. A unique feature of Erickson's book is his treatment of liberal eschatology. He devotes the opening two chapters to views that predominated liberal theology over the past two hundred years, which dismissed the inspiration and historical and prophetic authority of the Bible.

Another book, *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond*, edited by Darrell L. Bock, explores the conservative millennial views and includes contributions from three authors who represent each of these alternatives. The book presents responses to each view by each of the other two authors.

Craig A. Blaising, who teaches theology at Southern Baptist Theological College in Louisville, Kentucky, presents the premillennial view. His review of statements from throughout church history that can be interpreted in a premillennial sense is interesting, as is his careful overview of the book of Revelation in light of premillennial theology.

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., New Testament professor at Bahnsen Theological Seminary in Southern California, represents the postmillennial view. Although he is a certain kind of postmillennialist (a *preterist*, who believes that most of the prophetic material in the New Testament had its fulfillment in the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70), he fairly represents nonpreterist postmillennialists as well. It is refreshing that he notes most of the church has never considered *any* of the views as binding doctrinal interpretation — the fact of Christ's Second Coming is essential, not the timing of it.

Robert B. Strimple, professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, presents the amillennial position. His explanation of the unity of God's redemptive plan between the Fall and Christ's resurrection and ascension gives a good foundation to his amillennial conclusion that there are no significant unfulfilled biblical prophecies between the transition from the temple to the church and Christ's Second Coming at the end of all things for final judgment and reconciliation.

Each author also does a good job of critiquing his colleagues' views, as does Bock in his concluding essay. It is difficult to choose between the books *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* and *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary*. The advantage of the first book, edited by C. Marvin Pate with contributions by Kenneth L. Gentry (preterist), Sam Hamstra, Jr. (idealist), C. Martin Pate (progressive dispensationalist), and Robert L. Thomas (classic dispensationalist), is that each viewpoint is allowed a complete presentation with an overview that provides a framework for further personal study. The advantage of the second book, edited by Steve Gregg, is that the reader can turn to any passage in Revelation and understand what each of the interpretations say about that particular point. If there's an anniversary or birthday coming up, ask someone you love to buy you both — they complement each other and are both worth the price.

Years ago, when I came to realize that studying the Bible is more valuable than studying the newspaper in order to understand God's plans for the future, I was excited about the opportunity to probe an area of theology I had neglected in the past. This is still an exciting field for me, and I am grateful to these authors and others who continue to stimulate our thinking and study as we wait for the glorious appearing of our Lord.

-- reviewed by Bob Passantino

NOTES

1. See, for example, Hank Hanegraaff's *Resurrection* (Dallas: Word, 2000).