

## ST. PAUL'S ESCHATOLOGICAL TEACHINGS

A- What is Eschatology?

B- Biblical Eschatology

C- Paul's Eschatology

D- Eschatology in Chaldean Liturgy

### C- ST. PAUL'S ESCHATOLOGY

**- Introduction:** As we saw earlier, the OT eschatology will arrive in the future, it will come "late," until the end of times. St. Paul, being a Jew himself, believed in that late coming, but because of his conversion on the way to Damascus, and his personal experience with the Lord, he believed that the second coming will be "soon." Paul's thinking is similar to the Jewish "apocalyptic tradition" (200BC – AD 200) that believed God will punish wicked people and wicked spirits at the end of times.<sup>1</sup> When Israel's moral corruption resulted in their defeat and captivity by the neighboring nations, the prophetic writers proclaimed a final day of judgment. The day of Yahweh, when God will rule over his people and the enemies will be uprooted, and when the messianic deliverer will arise out of the line of David: *"And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm"* (2 Sam 7:12).

Paul's theological thinking developed through time. The first issue that Paul discussed in his letters was: a) the question of the church of Thessalonica about the second coming of Christ. The first Christians were strongly expecting it to be very soon. They were expecting the Lord to come even in their gatherings while they were "braking the bread." That was an occasion for Paul himself to meditate more on the meaning of the "second coming." When this coming became "late," Paul started to get even more involved in the mystery of Christ. b) He acknowledged that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the first step to understanding the second coming. Thus, his letters were written to explain the meaning of resurrection. c) Paul continued to explain furthermore the death of Christ and its significance in redeeming sins. At the end, Paul focused on: d) Understanding the person of Christ as the Son of God who took flesh. In our study we will be focusing only on the first part: the second coming of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

**1 – Christ's Second Coming:** The second coming is the last step within the mystery of Jesus Christ, while the resurrection is the first step. Early Christians were waiting for the second coming as Jesus himself promised (Jn 14: 18-19), as well as the two angels when he was ascending into heaven (Acts 1:11), until the whole Christian life was built on this awaited coming.

When Christ delayed and did not come "yet," questions arose, and even doubts, until Paul was obliged to explain the "second coming status" to the church of Thessalonica. Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians are among the earliest writings of the NT, and you see the influence of this issue filling them. Before studying Paul's theological thinking, we have to consider: a) the words and expressions that Paul used, b) some important texts, c) his theology on the second coming.

**a. Terminology:** The words and expressions that Paul used in describing the second coming are so important because each one has special meaning. Paul took these terms from Hebrew or Hellenistic world, he "baptized them," to refer to and express the coming of Christ. Choosing certain words by Paul tells us about the content of his theological thinking. Paul used five words in referring to the second coming:

1- PAROUSIA: (Presence, Entrance): was a word that described the glorious entrance of the kings and emperors to their cities, in an enormous and popular celebration, after conquering in the war. The authorities used to make new coins (coining) in memory of this glorious event. On the other hand, according to the religious practice in Greece, the word "Parousia" was a reference to the presence or appearance of gods. Paul used this word especially in his letters: 1 & 2 Thes, and 1, 2 Cor, -as we said- in his early letters. He used also the meaning of "presence" as in 2 Cor 10:10, Phil 2:12. And used it in the meaning of "entrance" as in 1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 7:6+.

2- APOCALYPSIS: (Revelation, Declaration): this word belongs to the "Apocalyptic Tradition," and we see it also in the books of Daniel and Revelation. The meaning refers to whatever is hidden and secret that will be unveiled and declared; Paul used it in 1 Cor 1:7; Rom 8:18. Thus, the second coming is the revelation of Christ's mystery.

3- EPIPHANIA: (Appearance): the word refers to God's appearance to Ibrahim, Moses and some Prophets in his glory and might. Paul used it in 2 Thes 2:8, and it comes also in his "Pastoral Letters" (sent to the church pastors) where the second coming is connected with the Incarnation, like in 1 Tm 6:14; 2 Tm 4:1, 8; Ti 2:13.

<sup>1</sup> B. J. Oropeza, Paul and Apostasy: "Eschatology, perseverance, falling away in Corinthian congregation," Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> F. Seedaros S.J., "Introduction to Paul's Letters," Lebanon 1989.

4- **ESCHATOLOGIA**: (End of Times): is a special expression for the description of the end of the world and times. Paul gave a Christian dimension to it. Realizing that the end of times does not mean only the end of the world, but the beginning of the realization of God's will in Jesus Christ. Through his incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, descent of the Holy Spirit on the believers: all these events together are signs for the end of times preparing for the final and last event to happen that is the second coming (see 2 Thes 1:7; 1 Cor 1:7, Acts 1:10-11).

5- **HEMERA**: (Day): is the "Day of Yahweh" in the OT, it is an expression used by the prophets to describe God's wrath and judgment (Am 5:18; Is 2:12-22), the eternal kingdom for the good ones, and the judgment for the evil ones (Zec 14:11-15; Jl 3:14-21). Paul uses this expression as "the day of the Lord" (1 Thes 5:2; 2 Thes 2:2) or "the day of the Lord Jesus" (Phil 1:6, 10) referring to the second coming.

**b. Texts:** three essential texts that expand in describing the second coming:

*1- (1 Thes 4: 13-18) the Dead and Living at the Second Coming*

The context: doubting the resurrection of the dead.

Influence: Apocalyptic and Hellenistic. The *Apocalyptic tradition* describes the voice of the angel, the trumpet, clouds, descent of Christ from heaven, and resurrection from the dead. The *Hellenistic tradition* is reflected in the procession, quick snatching up, joy, crowning, and dignity. All these images are symbolic and not materialistic.

The meaning: the appearance of the Christ as Lord, and the necessity of depending on Christian belief in the death and resurrection of Christ, in order to believe in the resurrection of the dead, and depending on the word of God that the dead will anticipate the living in rising first from the dead, and then will join the Lord first on that day.

*2- (2 Thes 1:7-12, 2: 1-12) The Law, Community Prayer, Women in the Community*

The Context: the persecution of Christians and the obstacles in front of the evangelization i.e. against Christ and God; then the influence of the apocalyptic tradition in regard of the verdict and last judgment: (Is 66:4-16; 2:6-22; 11:1-8 see the prophecy of Jesus in regard of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of times).

Another Context: the delay of the second coming. Paul suggests that this delay will allow the spreading of the Gospel (Mt 24:14; Rv 11:7); this is the top priority of Christ's victory.

*3- (1 Cor 15: 20-28, 51-57) Resurrection of the Dead, Victory*

The Context: the Corinthians were under the influence of some Greek imaginations, so they doubted the resurrection of the dead. The second coming is the victory over death. The resurrection of Christ is the first act of victory over all the powers, the second act for his victory is the belief in the resurrection of the dead, and the third act is the submission of whole humanity to Christ and Christ to the Father, so it will be declared for all.

\* Paul uses two different Jewish expressions to describe Jesus in the second coming. The first is "Son of Man" which comes from the apocalyptic tradition. The second is the "Messiah" which is a nationalistic name. The NT preferred the "Son of Man" to the nationalistic one "Messiah," because in Christianity there was a Messianic Eschatological group who was waiting for the second coming.

**c- Theology of the second coming:** now we can identify some important theological ideas in Paul's thinking in regard to the second coming. We will be focusing our study on the person of Christ himself and the influence of his second coming on the faithful.

- Christ's Victory: we saw that the most important words describing the second coming of Christ were: joy and victory - "Parousia;" declaration and revelation of what was hidden - "Apocalypsis;" the appearance - "Epifania;" the end of times - "Eschatologia;" and the last judgment - "Hemera."

In the general understanding, the concept of the second coming refers automatically to the idea of the judgment at the end of times, when Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. Nevertheless, we have seen the meaning of joy and victory accompanying Christ's appearance, declaring his glory. This is a richness in the concept and content of the second coming.

What does the victory of Christ mean? In Christian theology, resurrection is the first step that leads to this victory, and the last one is the second coming. Christ in his death and resurrection conquered the law and the sin, because both are against him. The third enemy that Christ will conquer in the eschatology will be death (1 Cor 15).

Paul expands in describing this victory over the powers (authorities, positions, lords... these powers are two different things. First, adversary powers, that resist and fight the Christians and their evangelization for the gospel, in the period between the resurrection and the second coming (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 2:8, 5:5; 2 Cor 2:11, ... ); second, cosmic powers, that will reconcile together, depending on the event of death-resurrection of Christ (Eph 1:20-21, Col 1:16-20,

2:10). With either one, the triumphant Christ in his resurrection gives these powers a bit of space or authority -for a while- until his coming, considering them as defeated from now, actually from the day of resurrection, and they will be defeated finally at his second coming, though their power is very limited and weak even now.

Paul describing this victory of Christ uses various terms and names to describe Christ:

\* **Lord, KURIOS**: the lordship will be seen and declared at the end. It started with the resurrection (1 Cor 9:1, 2 Cor 4:14, Rom 4:42), it is ready from now, and it is working already, so that Christ will be the Lord of the living and the dead: *“For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.”* (Rom 14:9).

\* **Glory, DOXA**: *“and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* (1 Cor 2:8), (2 Cor 3:18, Col 3:4)

\* **King, BASILEUS**: *“He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son”* (Col 1:13, Eph 5:5).

\* **“On the right hand of the father”**: (Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20) *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God”* (Col 3:1).

\* **The second coming’s influence on the believers**: *the whole creation is groaning for the glory that will be revealed for the sons of God* (Rom 8: 18-25). Now the material facts are just an image for the spiritual ones, they were given already, but they will be unveiled and completed fully at the second coming, such as: the knowledge of God, receiving the Holy Spirit as a pledge for the inheritance, and the heavenly truths (Rom 8; 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5, Eph 1:14).

Early Christianity was waiting for the **second coming to be soon**, which we notice in 1 & 2 Thes, in the light of the Resurrection and Pentecost. Some Christians did not even go to work because of this waiting, because the coming of the Lord is close (2 Thes 3:6). Paul advises to correct these situations although he also believed in the “soon” coming: *“Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Thes 4:17; Rome 13:11). For this reason he was crying out calling people to stay awake because that day will come like a thief: *“For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night”* (1 Thes 5:2).

When **this coming delayed**, Paul’s advice became more in the direction of doing good deeds: *“So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith”* (Gal 6:10), to keep the commandments, so that the believer will become a son of light (Eph 5:8), and to bear difficulties and pain (1 Cor 4:8-13). Along with all these, his call was still the same: *“Marana-Tha”* (come o Lord) (1 Cor 16:22, 7:29,31; Phil 4:5; Rom 8). The Christ still, although his second coming delayed, is living already in glory.

## 2- Sample: (1 Cor) Corinthians Eschatological Journey:

**The Background**: the letter was written from Ephesus (today’s Turkey) around A.D. 56, during Paul’s third journey, as a preparation to his visit to Corinth. The city (in today’s Greece) was a commercial center on the Mediterranean Sea, was visited by tourists who enjoyed life there and visited the pagan shrines. It was a cosmopolitan city. Paul established Christianity there, but he left the city and ran because of its shameless immorality. After five years of Christianity in this city, the church was facing real problems of unity, vices, and faith apostasy. Paul was informed about the situation by some delegates who reached him from the part of a lady called Chloe (1:11, 11:18). Paul answers each case and censures their immorality, calling them back to Christian doctrine.

**Eschatology**: In this letter we see the Corinthians thinking as if they have **reached their eschatological plight**, although they were still alive! Thus, Paul describes eschatology as a reward and judgment. At the beginning of his letter he wishes that Corinthians will be ready for Christ’s coming without blame (1:7-8) and he concludes the letter with a declaration about the parousia in relation to the judgment (16: 21-22).<sup>3</sup> It seems that they used to judge Paul himself and other leaders and brothers as well. Paul **prohibits them from judging** anyone in this life, he reminds them that they themselves will judge the angels in the future “eschatologia” (6:3) but they will be judged also on the day of the Lord (6: 13). Some of their social practices were rebuked by Paul, especially what was connected with the “Lord’s Supper.” For Paul the men committing vices were considered out of the Christian community, and God will judge them (5: 8-13), the same as Satan who is living outside the kingdom of heaven, here in this world.

**The Resurrection**: In 1 Cor 15, Paul reveals the misconception of the Corinthians regarding the **resurrection of the body** (15:12, 35). Maybe because of their Hellenistic background, the body was not considered so important. This misunderstanding came to their mentality, thinking the body will not take part in the new life or in the future resurrection (6: 13-14). This reflects their unclear idea about **Christ’s resurrection**, and then our resurrection in the eschatology. Paul adds also that the kingdom of God will not reach us, until after we realize and submit all powers to Christ.

**The Kingdom**: Paul speaks ironically with the Corinthians because they thought as if they were living the eschatology in their life, because of their spirituality and wisdom (1: 18- 3:3). Paul affirms that the **kingdom of God** will not

<sup>3</sup> B. J. Oropeza, Paul and Apostasy: *“Eschatology, perseverance, falling away in Corinthian congregation,”* Tubingen, 2000, p 179.

arrive because of wisdom of words, but because of God's power (4: 20). At this moment every enemy of God will be submitted and brought to Jesus feet (15: 24).

**Problems & Vices:** The Corinthian congregation was accused of spilling over into their [autonomy \(1:12\)](#), [their pride \(2:15-3:1, 5:2\)](#), [indifference toward food and body \(6:13\)](#), [preoccupation with Christian liberty \(10:23\)](#). For them the coming of the spirit was a sign for the coming kingdom. Since the Spirit belonged to the eschatological age, the abundance of spiritual manifestations they experienced meant to them that the kingdom was now fully realized! [Overrealised eschatology](#) was at the center of the Corinthians misconception. Because of their congregation's enthusiasm and participation in the sacraments, they thought they were spiritually mature, while Paul told them just the opposite.

**Misconception:** Talking with *"tongues of angels"* (13:1) suggests two things: a strong sense of [enthusiasm](#) and [realizing of the eschatological status](#) among the strong.<sup>4</sup> If some congregation members believed they were doing so, that means they were convinced they were already living in a heavenly state. In response to this serious misconception, Paul applies a method of incompleteness between ["now" and "then"](#) for the future perfection (13:8-12).

In terms of the apocalyptic age, again the Corinthians thought that the ["not yet" is already a reality](#). Thus Paul in this letter emphasizes repeatedly on the "not yet" to correct their misconception of eschatological theology.

**Solutions: Love:** In 1 Cor 13, Paul tries to address the Corinthians a central theme. Love is what they have to work on and operate with [instead of their spiritual gifts or vices!](#) He addresses them their immaturity in associating it with their enthusiasm (13:1) and eschatology (13:7) which are related to all other things (pride, selfishness, immorality, arrogance, liturgical abuse...etc).<sup>5</sup>



### D- ESCHATOLOGY IN THE CHALDEAN LITURGY

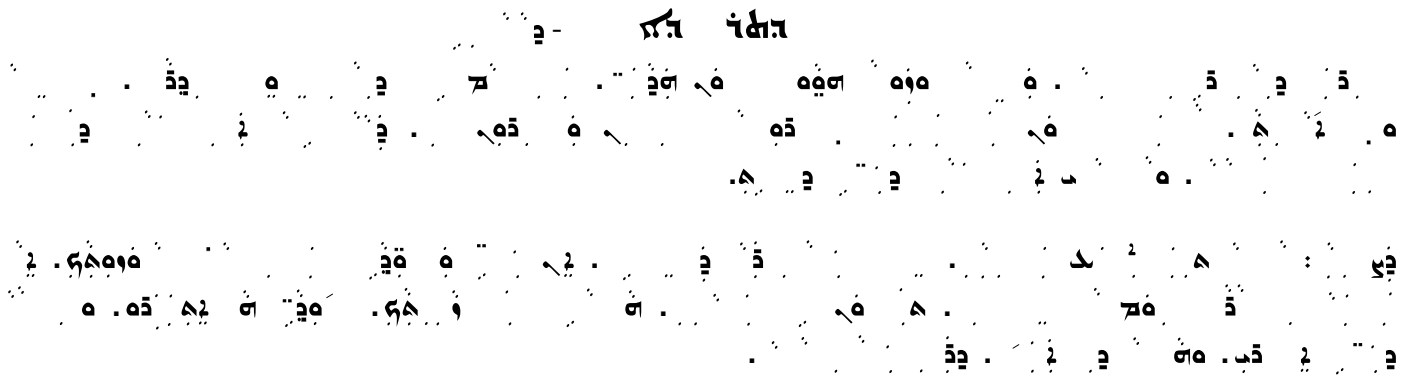
In the Chaldean liturgy we recognize easily the important terms that refers to: eschatology, death, eternal life, resurrection of the dead, new life, and glory...etc. That could be noticed in our funeral prayers, and evening prayers, first of all on "Sunday evening prayer." Why we give this importance for all these "eschatological" terms? Because of our history, our church suffered a lot of long persecutions; she had to look for something painless while living the difficulty. Calling on the "God of living and the dead" to come in her aid. Writing prayers and poems in memory of thousands of martyrs, all that let her call for the use of the eschatological expressions. One liturgical season (among other 12) is called "season of Elijah," its focus is on the eschatological dimension: (Sample from the Basilica Hymn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday):

*For the day of the Lord is great and very fearful<sup>6</sup>*

I have been considering your judgment seat, O Christ, and all my limbs have been shaking in fear. Who will be my help before your judgment seat who is from my race - from humanity? All my friends and dear ones will stand and look upon me from far away. O Just Judge, according to the greatness of your mercy, have pity on me, O Compassionate One, and not, O Lord, according to the many debts I have incurred.

*Glory...*

We are not ashamed, O Lord, of your cross, because of the great power hidden within it. If pagans and Jews mock your preaching, they cannot ever eradicate the truth. Lo, both of them together cry out for your righteousness: the Jews are scattered, and the teaching of the pagans is abolished. Behold, they witness together that great, O Lord, is your power!



<sup>4</sup> B. J. Oropeza, Paul and Apostasy: "Eschatology, perseverance, falling away in Corinthian congregation," Tübingen, 2000, p 181.

<sup>5</sup> Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, "The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians," San Francisco 2004, pp 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Translated by Fr. Andrew Younan, Chaldean Breviarium, Romae 2002, p 268.

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