

S T U D Y G U I D E



The Last Days According to Jesus

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Crisis in Eschatology

MESSAGE OVERVIEW

A. Introduction to Eschatology

1. Eschatology is the subdivision of systematic theology that is particularly concerned with the last days.
2. Among Christians there is very little consensus on the topic of eschatology.
3. The crisis in our time is the problem of understanding biblical prophecy.
4. There are a number of big eschatological issues that are debated among Christians, including: the time and nature of the Millennium, the identity of the Antichrist, the time of the Rapture, and the relationship between the church and Israel.

B. The Most Serious Crisis of Eschatology

1. The question of the credibility of the Bible and of Jesus Himself.
2. For 200 years there has been an unprecedented assault against the trustworthiness of Scripture both inside and outside the church.
3. The number one point of attack of the higher critics against inspiration focuses upon matters related to eschatology.
 - a. Two thirds of the New Testament deals with future prophecy.
 - b. If that prophecy is suspect, serious questions about the nature and credibility of the Bible are raised.
4. More serious is the attack against the credibility of Christ Himself.
 - a. The critics claim that Jesus' prophecies did not come to pass within the specific time frame that He Himself said they would.
 - b. If this criticism is true, it would reduce Jesus to a false prophet.
5. The problem illustrated — Bertrand Russell's *Why I Am Not a Christian*
 - a. Russell outlines a series of criticisms focused upon Jesus.
 - b. He claims that although the Christ of the Gospels displays a high moral character, he does not display a great deal of wisdom, especially in his teaching about the future.

- c. According to Russell, Jesus certainly thought that His second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of the people who were living at that time.
 - d. This is the chief criticism of Russell, and it has been the chief criticism of biblical critics for the last 200 years.
- 6. There are three primary texts to which critics point:
 - a. Matthew 10:23
 - b. Matthew 16:28
 - c. Mark 13:30
- 7. The manner in which evangelical scholars have handled these time texts has in many cases been far less than satisfying.
- 8. There are numerous statements in the New Testament indicating that the early church had a sense of urgency about the nearness or imminence of the coming of Christ, yet these things have not occurred even to this day.
- 9. Critics claim that as time passed the early church made certain adjustments to its expectations, which appear in the later books of the New Testament.
- 10. The primary concern of this series of messages will be to understand the scriptural time-frame references that people have used to criticize the credibility of the Bible and the credibility of our Lord Himself.

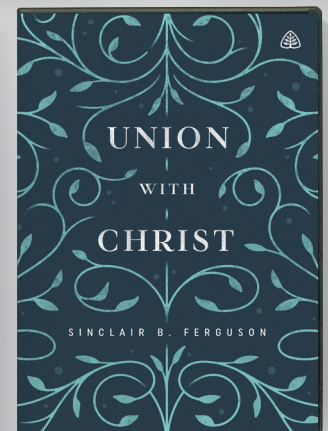
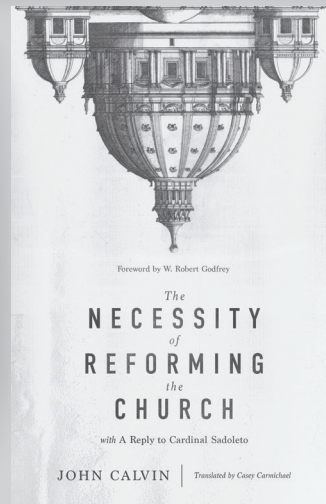
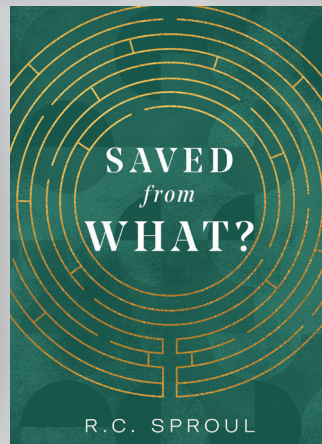
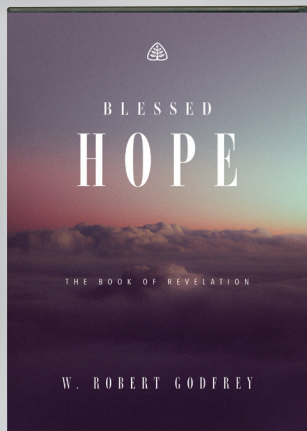
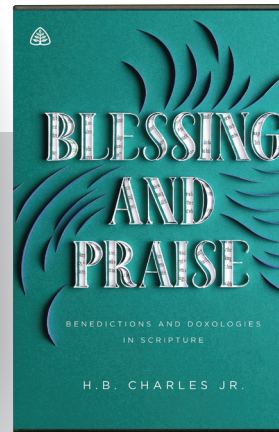
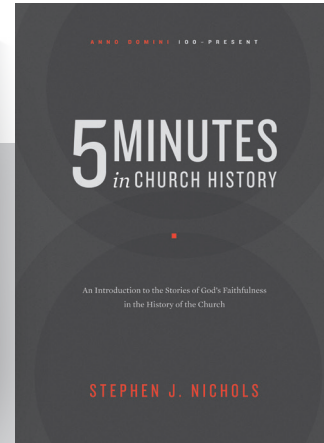
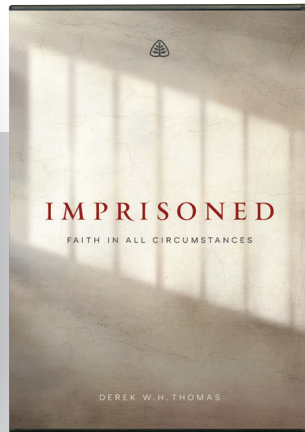
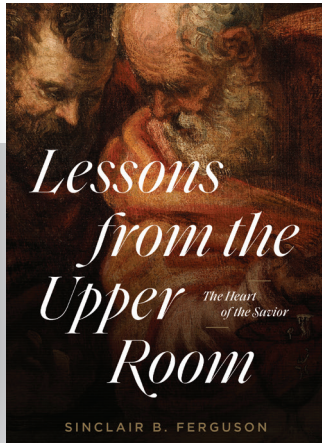
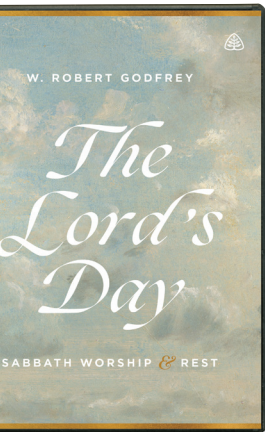
STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. What is the meaning of the term “eschatology”?
- 2. What is the most serious crisis in eschatology today?
- 3. Name the two persons or things whose credibility is challenged by higher critics.
- 4. When attacking the inspiration of Scripture, what is the number one point of attack of higher critics?
- 5. What is the specific complaint critics raise concerning the credibility of Christ?
- 6. Why is this criticism significant?
- 7. Why did Bertrand Russell claim that Christ did not display a great deal of wisdom?
- 8. What are the three main texts cited by critics to establish their attack upon the prophecies of Christ?
- 9. What is the theory of the higher critics concerning the eschatological expectation of the early church?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How important do you believe the study of eschatology to be? Why?
2. There is a large amount of disagreement among Christians on the doctrines of eschatology. Are these disagreements significant enough to justify division in the church? Why or why not?
3. Are there any eschatological doctrines or theories that would place a person outside the boundaries of orthodox Christianity? Explain.
4. Examine the three texts of Scripture cited by the higher critics to disprove the prophecies of Jesus. How have you heard these texts explained? Do you find these explanations satisfactory? Why or why not?

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