

NT 3P1300/5P1250
The Present Age and the Age to Come:
Biblical Eschatology



McMaster Divinity College
Jan 8–April 9, 2026
In-Person/Live-Stream
Thursday 2:00–3:50pm

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Office Hours:
Monday 11:00–12:50pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In Luke 11, Jesus teaches the disciples to pray by asking the heavenly Father to bring forth the kingdom, saying, “Father, ... your kingdom **come** ...” (11:2). This implies that the kingdom has not yet come. However, later in the same chapter, Jesus tells the crowd, “if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then, The kingdom of God **has come** upon you” (11:20). Similarly, in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of a time that “**is coming** and **has now come** ...” (4:23, 5:25). These statements reflect the biblical portrayal of the kingdom of God as both a present and future reality—an important yet complex theme in biblical eschatology.

Eschatology was once deemed one of the most important sub-disciplines within biblical studies. Ernst Käsemann even proclaimed a half century ago that “apocalyptic was the mother of all theology.” Unfortunately, the place of eschatology in the church today seems to be alternating between eschato-mania and eschato-phobia. Christian literature is full of fictions (and non-fictions) that spend an unhealthy amount of time and energy making end-time predictions, insisting that the drama of “the end” is going to play out according to a literal (and often atomizing) interpretation of certain eschatological passages in the Bible. However, when the biblical authors speak about the eschaton, their primary focus is not so much on the end of time *per se* but on pastoral concerns in the **here and now**. They were interested in the end because of how our hopes and fears impact the way we live our lives, knowing that there is an end to our lives and eventually to human society as we know it.

This course is primarily an **exegetical study** of the main eschatological passages in the Bible. Following a two-step hermeneutical approach, we will look at: (1) what these passages meant in their original context and (2) what they mean to us in our contemporary setting. The course consists of three learning components. First, we will examine various prophetic and apocalyptic thoughts before the times of Jesus and look at how various biblical eschatological traditions were developed from these ideas. Second, we will read through the major eschatological passages in the New Testament and discover unifying themes of biblical eschatology by carefully reading through the text in the original context. And finally, we will look at the contemporary significance of the selected texts and discuss how they help shape an **eschatological way of life**, i.e. a Christian way of life that does not lose sight of the second coming of Christ.

SPECIALIZATIONS

Biblical Studies (BS)

Students taking this as a Biblical Studies course will be encouraged to explore the historical, cultural setting and theological emphasis of various eschatological texts in the Bible, as well as scholarly debates concerning the interpretation of the contents.

Church & Culture (CC)

Students taking this as a Church and Culture course will be encouraged to explore the eschatological messages within its historical and culture setting and compare it to the many interpretations in the contemporary cultural landscape.

Advance Degree Students (MA, DPT, PhD)

Advance degree students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with their primary supervisor for approval. They should then contact the course instructor to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the program. Students are responsible for creating a syllabus for the course and submit to the student records office (divreg@mcmaster.ca) **BEFORE** the start of the course.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Knowing:

- To become familiar with the main eschatological passages in the Bible for use in teaching and preaching ministry
- To gain an understanding of problems and issues in the controversial areas of Christian eschatology and to be able to identify the text(s) that illuminate the options

Being:

- To gain a positive appreciation of theological unity and diversity in the Bible
- To allow the eschatological passages to motivate, form, and transform our faith, worship, and Christian way of life

Doing:

- To develop skills in interpreting the eschatological passages in the Bible in terms of their theological, historical, and social contexts
- To explain key topics and terms related to biblical eschatology
- To be able to evaluate apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic artwork in various media (music, films, literature, TV shows, etc.) from a biblical perspective

TEXTBOOK AND MATERIALS

1. Students are required to possess the following:

- The English Bible (modern versions such as NASB, NRSV or NIV)

- The Greek New Testament (for those with Greek competence). Students who had taken Greek are encouraged to use their Greek Bible
- Additional reading materials will be distributed on Avenue to Learn (A2L)

2. Students are recommended to have access to the following:¹

The Apocrypha (Deuterocanonical books)

Textbook Purchase: All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to complete the following assignments. All assignments should be uploaded in PDF format to the designated Avenue to Learn (A2L) course folder. No unfinished assignments are permitted. See below for late submission policy.

1. Modular Tasks (60%)

The material covered in this course are divided into modules. In each module we will go through the eschatological passages in a particular corpus (see schedule below). **Starting from Module 2**, students are required to complete THREE tasks spanning three weeks (Module 1 is optional, see “Important Note” below). Students are expected to work through the required tasks independently. These tasks are due at the end of the week (EVERY WEEK, see below). The tasks require different types of work:

1. **Preparation Task**

Students are to familiarize themselves with the main texts of the module. A list of key texts will be posted on A2L. Students need to compile (1) five exegetical issues/questions, these questions can be on a particular text or from comparing a particular topic/portrayal in related texts; and (2) five key messages from the texts. These should be **posted on A2L** to foster online group discussion.

2. **Literature Survey Task**

Pick ONE of the passages from the section and then produce a list of academic resources that discuss the passage, per the following guidelines:

- a minimum of eight suitable sources must be listed;
- a maximum of four commentaries can appear in the list;
- at least two journal articles must be included;

¹ There are a few English translation of the Apocrypha: the Brenton LXX Translation, KJV, or NRSV. You can find the NRSV version on the Bible Gateway website (<https://www.biblegateway.com>). For the Brenton and KJV, see <https://apocrypha.org/>.

- (d) one encyclopedia or dictionary article can be included;
- (e) the resources must be quickly skimmed so as to reveal the general topics discussed and the ways in which they are approached;
- (f) a short paragraph (**no more than 5 sentences**) must be supplied for each resource, noting some interesting detail and about its content.

An A2L module will offer detailed guidance on finding electronic resources (esp. in the DTL and ATLA/EBSCOhost database)

While the grading of these lists will not require strict adherence to MDC style, a bonus 5% will be added to any assignment that perfectly adheres to MDC style. These should be **posted on an A2L forum** to support a collaborative learning environment. This is due on the Sunday of the second week of the module.

3. Application Task

After finishing the first two tasks of the module, students are to (1) write a one-page report summarizing what they have learned on the topic; and (2) answer a set of questions regarding a key passage (the same as the Literature Survey Task) covered in the module. These questions will guide them to approach the eschatological passages from a variety of different perspectives. There are three types of questions: Exegetical (the function and meaning of a text); Application (what does the text mean to the contemporary church); and Embodiment (what do we do to embody/epitomize the message today in a believing community?). The same set of questions will be used throughout the term. An introductory overview of these questions will be supplied on A2L in the introductory module (see module zero below). Both papers should be uploaded to **A2L assignment folder** no later than the final Sunday of the module.

A typical three-week (modular) cycle will look like this (modules 2 to 4):

Week/Task	To Do	Evaluation	Due Date	Grade
Week 1 Reading	Read the assigned text and compile five questions and messages	Post on A2L forum	Week 1 Sunday (11:59pm)	20%
Week 2 Literature Survey	Write literature survey for ONE passage (8 entries)	Post on A2L forum	Week 2 Sunday (11:59pm)	30%
Week 3 Application	Write module summary (one-page)	Upload to A2L assignment folder	Week 3 Sunday (11:59pm)	20%
	Answer assigned questions (6 pages max)	Upload to A2L assignment folder		30%

IMPORTANT NOTE: Students only need to do this THREE times (Module 2–4). You are welcome to try it out on Module 1, but it is OPTIONAL. For module 1, students are

required to read all the required texts, watch the lecture videos, and participate in the discussion forum but you do NOT need to hand in anything for the first module.

2. Cultural Artefacts: Contemporary Significance (20%)

Students are to choose a contemporary cultural artefact that provides insight into how eschatology is portrayed and understood in society. These artefacts should be posted to the class A2L forum. A forum on A2L is set up for students to pick their presentation week. For the artefact, students can choose from any type of media (news, music, arts, literature/poetry, film/TV series, comics, blog/vlog, etc.) of any period. Examples of a cultural artefact could be a current news story, an article, a blog/vlog post, a scene from a movie/TV show, the songs of an artist/group (secular or worship), or a short story (fiction or non-fiction). The following is a list of sample topics:

- The portrayal of chaos and hope in society in post-apocalyptic film(s)
- The use of kingdom language in the songs of the Hillsong Worship ministry
- The last judgment scenes in contemporary and classical paintings
- The use of kingdom language in Christian and/or non-Christian music
- The caricature of the Rapture in films
- End time prophecies and teachings of a particular tele-evangelist/blogger
- Apocalypticism in popular music

The initial post (post a week before the presentation) should include a brief description of the artefact to provide context and a way to access the artifact. Students are expected to prepare an in-class presentation (10-15 mins, schedule will be determined in the first couple weeks of class). Presentations should focus on the portrayal of eschatology in the artefact and how it reflects an ideology and/or shared cultural values in modern society. Students should also compare the modern cultural assumptions with ancient (biblical) perspectives on various eschatological elements. The presentation should raise at least two questions for in-class discussion. The goal of this exercise is to foster a meaningful discussion of the contemporary significance and relevance of biblical eschatology.

3. A Pastoral Letter/Response (20%)

Write a short pastoral letter (1000-words, 4 pages max) assuming the following scenario: You learned that an old friend of yours was once a follower of Harold Camping or John Hagee (or some other well-known end-time prediction group).² After the latest failed prediction for the second coming of Christ, he/she lost faith not only in the leader of the group, but in Christian faith. Your friend started to question whether it makes sense to believe in the second coming of Christ and whether eschatology has any bearings in our day-to-day life. In other words, the relevance and value of eschatology in Christian theology and Christian living has been called into question.

The objective of this letter is to try to explain to him/her, in a pastoral manner, the relevance of the Parousia to a modern-day Christian and the function of apocalypticism in the Bible.

² See for example: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_dates_predicted_for_apocalyptic_events

Take note that the goal of the letter is to persuade, not to confront. There is thus no need to attack the character of the preacher. The key is to demonstrate the kind of eschatology that is formed by responsible exegesis of the biblical text and is still relevant for contemporary churches.

Due Date: Mar 8 at 11:59pm

Grading Summary and Due Date:		
Modular Tasks	60%	See schedule above
Presentation and Discussion	20%	TBD
<u>Pastoral Letter</u>	<u>20%</u>	Mar 8, 2026
Total	100%	

SCHEDULE

Class Date	Class Topics	A2L Reading Modules
Jan 8	Course Introduction/Library Resources Introduction to Biblical Eschatology: History, Trends, and Contemporary Significance	“Course Introduction” “Library Resources” “Introducing Modular Tasks”

Module 1: Eschatology Before Jesus

Jan 15	Biblical Theological Methods The Origins of Eschatological Hope: OT Covenantal Promises	“Jewish Prophetic Writings”: Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel “Jewish Apocalyptic Writings”: Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel, 1&2 Maccabees
Jan 22	The Origins of Eschatological Hope: Jewish Prophetic Traditions Jewish Apocalyptic Traditions	

Module 2: Pauline Eschatology

Jan 29	The Eschatology of the Early Church: A Chronology The Parousia (Timing and Order)	1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Corinthians Romans and Philipppians
Feb 5	Resurrection Body and the Intermediate Stage	
Feb 12	A Unifying Pauline Eschatology? Theology and Application: Body and the Eschaton	

Feb 19	READING WEEK
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Module 3: Eschatology of Jesus

Feb 26	The Signs of “the End”	“Olivet Discourse” Mark 13 and Matthew 24–25 Lukan Eschatology
Mar 5	The Fall of the Temple and the Parousia	
Mar 12	Eschatological Parables Theology and Application: A World without Second Hope	

Module 4: Eschatology of the Church

Mar 19	The Delay of Parousia Inaugurated Eschatology	“The Delay of Parousia” Hebrews Johannine Literature Revelation 20–22
Mar 26	Apocalypticism and Millennialism	
April 2	The End of the End: New Heaven and New Earth Theology and Application: Secret Rapture and Parody	
April 9	Conclusion: Major Themes in Biblical Eschatology Towards an Eschatological Lifestyle	“Conclusion”

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ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

- All thoughtful student participation is welcome. There are no “dumb questions” or “stupid answers.” Students will respect the contributions of other students, although they may disagree, and respond to them without ridicule or scorn.
- While we are not going to introduce new content during our weekly online office hours, students are encouraged to come to these meetings to ask questions, clarify concepts, discussing interpretation, and most importantly, form a supportive learning community.
- Students are to observe proper online learning etiquette and manner.

LATE SUBMISSION POLICY

All assignments must be submitted on or before the due date, unless other arrangements are made in advance. A late penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all assignments submitted after the deadline, unless an extension has been obtained from the instructor prior to the deadline. Assignments cannot be submitted after **April 7, 2026** without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (mdcreg@mcmaster.ca).

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one’s own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student’s dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

DISCLAIMER

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

Absence Due to Illness

If you must miss class due to an illness, you must contact me (via email) as soon as possible to let me know. Likewise, if I should become ill, I will communicate with you via A2L about how we will make up class sessions.

Although much of the course content will be made available via A2L, it would still be a good idea to have a friend take notes for you, if possible.

Inclement Weather

If on a class meeting day MDC closes due to inclement weather, I reserve the right to move the lessons and, where possible, class activities for the week to A2L (asynchronous format). This will help to ensure that we stay on target in the course.