

REFORMED ESCHATOLOGY  
IN THE WRITINGS OF  
GEERHARDUS VOS

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

*By Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. and Bill Boney*

### THE THEOLOGIAN

Geerhardus Vos (March 14, 1862–August 13, 1949) was a Dutch-American theologian and conservative, Reformed biblical exegete. He was born in Heerenveen, Netherlands, to Dutch Reformed pastor, Jan Vos. He moved to America at the age of 19, when his father accepted a call to a Christian Reformed Church congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

He studied at Princeton Theological Seminary during its heyday as one of the world's leading Reformed seminaries. He studied under such luminaries as A. A. Hodge, C. Wister Hodge, Francis L. Patton, and William H. Green. His impressive linguistic capabilities, exegetical prowess, and wide learning were forces to be reckoned with by all theologians, conservative and liberal alike. Even as a student at Princeton Seminary he had already mastered several modern languages (German, Dutch, French, and English) as well as two ancient languages (Hebrew and Greek). He would eventually also become expert in Latin, Syriac, and Arabic, even receiving a Ph.D. in Arabic Studies from the University of Strasbourg.

In 1892 Vos joined the faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary. There he became the institution's first professor of Biblical Theology. His closest friend, co-laborer, and neighbor at Princeton was famed theologian and exegete Benjamin B. Warfield, who once declared that Vos "was probably the best exegete Princeton ever had." One of Vos'

most prominent students, John Murray, concurred when he stated that Vos was “the most penetrating exegete it has been my privilege to know, and I believe, the most incisive exegete that has appeared in the English-speaking world in this [the twentieth] century.” Contemporary theologian John Frame has referred to Vos as a “brilliant theologian.”<sup>1</sup> Sinclair Ferguson declares Vos “a scholar *par excellence*.”<sup>2</sup>

Vos significantly influenced many of the great Reformed theologians and exegetes of his era and afterwards. Among these were five of his best-known and most influential students whom he taught at Princeton Theological Seminary: Cornelius Van Til, John Murray, J. Gresham Machen, Ned Stonehouse, H. Henry Meeter.

Unfortunately, his writings have not been as widely known and appreciated in popular Christian circles as they deserve. A broader knowledge of Vos’ genius and works, however, has been growing of late. That his writings remain in print in several forms today is largely due to the untiring labor of Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., of Westminster Theological Seminary. Gaffin is to be thanked for his determined efforts in bringing Vos into the modern theological discussion and debate. Gaffin has not only influenced contemporary scholars, but has promoted Vos’ views among hundreds of theological students over his long tenure at Westminster Theological Seminary (from 1965–2008).

Gaffin has encouraged the reprinting of Vos’ works (e.g., *The Pauline Eschatology* for which he wrote a Foreword) and edited various editions of his writings. He even translated some of Vos’ works from Dutch into English. These include most significantly Vos’ *Reformed Dogmatics* (5 vols. conveniently compacted into one volume) and *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*. He also contributed “Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul” to *Jerusalem and Athens* (a Festschrift for Cornelius Van Til ed. by E. R. Geehan). Gaffin himself is thoroughly committed, as he has said, to “the theological genius and unparalleled biblical insight of Geerhardus Vos.” Therefore, Vos’ thinking impacts all of Gaffin’s works.

We should be thankful also for Danny E. Olinger, General Secre-

1. Danny E. Olinger, “Geerhardus Vos: Appreciation, Legacy, and Posthumous Publications,” *Ordained Servant* (March 2018). See at: [https://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=680](https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=680).

2. Danny E. Olinger, *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology: Biblical and Theological Insights Alphabetically Arranged* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 5.

tary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He has edited a valuable collection of Vos quotations in his book *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology: Biblical and Theological Insights Alphabetically Arranged* (P&R Publishing, 2005). More recently he encouraged the cleaning up and reprinting of Vos' *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (2017; rep. 1903), even providing a lengthy introduction to it. He has also written an insightful and interesting biography of Vos: *Geerhardus Vos: Reformed Biblical Theologian, Confessional Presbyterian* (Reformed Forum, 2018).

Unsurprisingly for a man of his learning, Vos wrote many scholarly articles and books. But surprisingly, several of his books were published posthumously, sometimes based on Vos' handwritten manuscripts. His books that are currently available remain valuable contributions to theological discourse.

Books published while he was alive (with several of the republication dates):

- *The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes* (1886; 2013)
- *The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline* (1894; 2016)
- *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (1903; 1951; 1958; 1972; 2013; 2017)
- *Grace and Glory: Sermons Preaching in Chapel at Princeton Seminary* (1903; 1922; 2021; 2022)
- *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate about the Messianic Consciousness* (1926; 1954; 1976; 2002)
- *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; 1952; 1979; 1991; 2019)
- *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1934; 1948; 1975; 1985; 2003; 2021)
- *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1944; 1956; 1974)

To these we can add his posthumous publications, some of which were compiled from handwritten manuscripts:

- *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* (2001)
- *Reformed Dogmatics* (1896; 1910; 2012–16)
- *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology* (2012)

- *The Eschatology of the Psalter* (2015)
- *Natural Theology* (2022)

Two particularly significant recent collections of his work have been produced by Vos enthusiasts:

- Danny Olinger, ed., *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology: Biblical and Theological Insights Alphabetically Arranged* (2005)
- Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (1980)

### OUR PURPOSE

There are perhaps two leading reasons Vos has not been as widely read in popular circles in recent times.

First, the scholarly depth of Vos' exegesis and the philosophical nature of his argumentation. His books were highly technical and not written for church-growth seminars. Sadly, in most modern seminaries today practical theology (though important) has elbowed systematic and exegetical theology out of the way, despite these being foundational to the Christian faith.

Second, since Vos wrote a century ago, his grammar and style are at times antiquated and cumbersome. As with all scholarly writings of that era, he employed quite lengthy sentences organized into painfully long paragraphs. His sentences present a formidable challenge for even the ablest English grammarian to diagram (if anyone this side of hell still diagrams sentences). Many of his paragraphs stretch on for several pages. For instance, the *second* paragraph in *The Pauline Eschatology* extends for over four pages<sup>3</sup>—and he is just getting started! Almost no paragraph is less than a page in length. And embedded in these long sections are footnotes that themselves are sometimes a page or more long.<sup>4</sup> And they are only that short due to the type font being so small that many leading ophthalmologists suspect they may be a cause of the

3. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, rep. 1991 [1930]), 1–4. See also lengthy paragraphs spread over 39–41, 51–53, 54–58, 67–71, etc.

4. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, see: 27–28 (fn 36); 34–35 (fn 43); 133–34 (fn 20); 146–148 (fn 6).

growing problem of macular degeneration among Reformed scholars. I (Ken Gentry) myself have long suspected that the Library of Congress may be a footnote to one of Vos' lost books.

But now, why have we, the editors of this present work, taken the time and effort to produce this book on Vos' eschatology? Both editors have a strong interest in eschatology, and especially from a Reformed perspective. And as Vos demonstrates, eschatology is foundational to soteriology and thus to the very gospel itself (note the beginning of eschatology in the first promise of the gospel in Gen. 3:15). Gentry has written numerous books on eschatology. Boney is not only an avid student of Reformed theology but has proof-read several of Gentry's eschatological books before their going to press. And both editors are Vos enthusiasts—even though Vos is amillennial and we are postmillennial.

Because of our mutual interest in both eschatology and in Vos as a Reformed scholar, we are bringing together several of his articles and chapters that are so needful in today's theological environment. Eschatological discussions today are dominated by large-scale dispensationalism on the one hand and troubled by tiny-but-tenacious hyper-preterism on the other. These theological systems stand at opposite ends of the eschatological spectrum, hyper-preterism even standing outside of orthodoxy, though being tempting to some incautious evangelicals.

In our book we have included the most relevant chapters from Vos' 1930 book *The Pauline Eschatology* (chs. 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12). These appear in our book as chapters 1–2 and 4–9. Also incorporated within is an important article by Vos titled “The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit,” which appears as chapter 3 below. This was first published in the journal *Biblical and Theological Studies* in 1912, and more recently in Gaffin's *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* in 1980.

In Appendix A (“The New Heavens and the New Earth”) we have included several paragraphs from Vos' *Reformed Dogmatics*<sup>5</sup> as well as one of his articles from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: “Eschatology, of the New Testament” (1915). These important

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5. Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012–2016), 7. This was originally based on lectures delivered from 1888–1893 and “first published in Dutch as a hand-written manuscript in five volumes” in 1896.

studies touch on the biblical teaching of the ultimate consummation order. This doctrine is an important counter against the new Gnosticism currently impacting some in modern popular theology. This new Gnosticism is denying the physical resurrection of the body. And it even re-formulates the physical resurrection of Jesus by denying his perpetual incarnation which continues in heaven since the ascension. It also rejects a corporeal consummate order, arguing that God will do away with the material world as we live forever in heaven as spiritual beings. Appendix B presents chapter 9 from Vos' book *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (1903).

## OUR METHOD

We have included the above materials from Vos with editorial changes. We have (hopefully!) not altered any of his theological commitments or changed his arguments. Rather, our intent was to make several stylistic and grammatical modifications so that he might be read more easily today. We have also slightly modified some of Vos' original article or chapter titles either to make them a little more expressive or a little less cumbersome.

All of the materials contained in our book has already been published elsewhere. So, why are we compiling them in our book? It is not because retirement for each of us has gotten boring (though it has). We will explain the editorial alterations that we have made under five headings: (1) Modern Style Issues. (2) Publishing Convention Issues. (3) Foreign Language Issues. (4) Bible Version Issues. (5) Bibliographic Reference Issues.

### *Modern Style Issues*

**Presentation style.** At several places the editors have pulled some of Vos' long footnotes into the main body of the text. We intended this to make it easier for the reader to keep moving ahead without having to pause and look to the bottom of the page, which can be disrupting and annoying. In addition, a few of his footnotes simply provided additional verses to those already listed in the main text. This is unnecessary, so we simply inserted them into the parenthetical listing in the main text, then deleted the footnote.

Particularly archaic in today's world are Roman numerals, which Vos always used in references from Scripture and other ancient works, such as apocalyptic writings, Philo, Josephus, and others. Furthermore, as has been noted, in our day there are only II types of people: those who understand Roman numerals and those who do not. Thus, these have been replaced by less-cumbersome Arabic numerals.

**Writing style.** As noted above, scholarly writings from Vos' era involved lengthy sentences and large paragraphs. Not only so, but in Vos' case, his native language was Dutch. Though English and Dutch are related Germanic languages, structural differences between the two languages are evident. One of the biggest differences is the matter of sentence word order. We have reduced the size of his long sentences and paragraphs that we deemed too unwieldy in our modern context. Where we broke his long sentences into shorter ones, we have added appropriate transitional words to maintain the proper flow. This was most easily done when he used semi-colons, which we often replaced by periods then separated the semi-colonized (!) material into new sentences.<sup>6</sup> We also added frequent section headings to help break up the material for the reader.

As Olinger notes: "Vos was a complex man, and his writings are no different. Gaffin, who assigns major portions of Vos for his students to read at Westminster Seminary, is fond of saying that every semester a student reading Vos for the first time comes up to him and asks when Vos is going to be translated into English."<sup>7</sup>

In a number of places, antiquated or unusual words in the original were replaced with more modern or familiar terms or spellings. Such words include, for example, "whilst" (changed to "while"), "art" ("are"), "nigh" ("near"), "no wise" ("no way"), "needful" ("necessary"), "thither" ("to" or "toward"), "phantastic" ("fantastic"), "periculous" ("perilous"), and so forth. British spellings were changed to American spellings, and older style hyphenated words (such as "fountain-head," etc.) were updated.

Older verbal expressions have also been altered. For instance, "it were wrong" becomes "it was wrong", "it were foolish" becomes "it would be foolish", and so forth.

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6. This is what happens when a semicolon breaks grammatical laws: it is given two consecutive sentences.

7. Olinger, *Geerhardus Vos Anthology*, 6.

We often find Vos' word order to be contrary to contemporary expectations, causing some exasperation as the sentence has to be re-read in order to capture its point. However, we generally did not alter these since it would have involved much more extensive editing impacting virtually every sentence.

Last, but not least, we also changed Vos' capitalized grammatical notices to lower case. For instance, "Present Tense" is now "present tense"; "Imperfect Tense" ("imperfect tense"); "Niphal Participle" ("niphal participle"); and so forth.

### *Publishing Convention Issues*

We have attempted to bring greater harmony to Vos' text. Publishing conventions today are much more exacting in this respect than in the early 1900s. Sometimes the original publishers of Vos' work used italics for foreign words, sometimes regular font but in quotation marks, and at still other times they were bolded. We have replaced all of these with italics.

We have also standardized abbreviations for books of the Bible and standardized all of these since many were varied in Vos' text. For instance, we use "Matt." instead of the more antiquated "Math." Moreover, we have also dropped "Jno." in John and 1 John abbreviations, in that these were not only based on the Latin ("Johannes") but not very helpful in that they only shortened the title ("John") by one letter but then replaced that by a period ("Jno.").

Furthermore, we dropped Bible book abbreviations when appearing in the main text. Abbreviations are properly used today only in parentheses or footnotes. We also did this with the mention of "chapter(s)." In the main body, "chapter" or "chapters" is spelled out, whereas in parentheses and footnotes they are abbreviated "ch." or "chs."—and not "chap." or "chaps."

We also dropped periods from the common abbreviations OT, NT, BC, and AD.

Lastly, in Vos' original work, block quotations from the Bible were wrapped in quotation marks. These quotation marks were removed as unnecessary.

### Foreign Language Issues

**Transliteration.** We have transliterated Vos' original-language citations from the Hebrew and Greek. Even his scholarly statements sometimes needed transliteration for our purposes, such as “διά cum genitivo” (“*dia* with the genitive”).

We updated his transliterated Greek words to the modern transliteration style—and put them in italics. For instance, his “ta ethne too kosmoo” has become “*ta ethnē tou kosmou*”; “pleroma too chronoo” (“*plērōma tou chronou*”); “ho aion hootos” (“*ho aiōn houtos*”); etc.

**Translation.** To make it easier for the lay reader to follow Vos' thought, we translated Latin sentences and *unfamiliar* Latin phrases, which were often sprinkled throughout older scholarly works. For example, *via oppositionis* (has become “the way of opposition”); *pro forma* (“formality, as a matter of form”); *nihil immutans in figura eorum* (“not change their shape”); *Ecclesia triumphans in aeternum* (“church triumphant in eternity”); *articulo mortis* (“at the moment of death”); *e mente sua* (“out of his mind”); and “viz.” (“that is”); etc.

We also translated his scholarly German words and phrases. For example, “Grenzbegriff” (“boundary concept”); “Zeitlichkeit” (“time expanse”); “Gottwesen” (“deity”); *uberhaupt nicht mehr Mensch* (“no longer human at all”); *vor der Hand* (“before hand”); etc.

We changed “chiliasm” to the more familiar “premillennialism” where we could do so. If he referred to a title of a book with “Chiliasm” in it, we did not do so since that would change the book's title.

### Bible Version Issues

Vos generally used the American Revised Version, Revised Version, and the Authorized (KJV) Version of the Bible. We also removed the periods from his references to the ARV, RV, and AV. But we have not replaced his quotations with contemporary version quotations since his argument occasionally reflected on the translation he was citing. We do this even though these often use the archaic forms “thee / thou / thine / ye / art / dost.”

*Bibliographic Reference Issues*

We kept all of Vos' scholarly bibliographic references as he presented them. We did this even though many of these would be hard to find today and a good number of them were in German and Dutch.

*Editorial Comments*

We have added a few (very few) editorial footnotes. For instance, footnote 1 provides bibliographic information for Danny Olinger's book on Vos. Plus we added a few notes for historical context in the introduction to the Appendix.

## CONCLUSION

Vos was a theological genius. His works need to be more widely read and considered in our day. And especially his works on eschatological issues, which he powerfully demonstrated were soteriological issues and even foundational to the whole Bible. We hope we have helped make Vos a little more accessible to contemporary Christians. We do not want current-day Christians to suffer the loss endured by Paul's companions on the Damascus Road: when modern Christians have seen Vos mentioned today, unfortunately, they "saw the light...but did not understand the voice" (Acts 22:9).

## CHAPTER 1

# THE STRUCTURE OF PAUL'S ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatology is “the doctrine of the last things.” It deals with the teaching or belief that the world-movement, religiously considered, tends towards a definite final goal beyond which a new order of affairs will be established.<sup>1</sup> This final order frequently includes the further implication that it will not be subject to any further change, but will partake of the static character of the eternal.

### OLD TESTAMENT WORDS FOR “ESCHATOLOGY”

“Eschatology” is a term of Greek derivation, which leads us to look for its linguistic antecedents first of all to the Greek Old Testament. Here we find the two phrases: (1) *eschatai hemerai* (occurring in Gen. 49:1; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 37:24;<sup>2</sup> Ez. 38:16; Dan. 10:14; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1) and (2) *eschatou tōn hēmerōn* (occurring at Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Jer. 23:20; 25:18).<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Editors' note:* See both ch. 9 “The Eternal State” and the Appendix “The New Heavens and New Earth.”

2. In the arrangement of the Hebrew text this passage occurs Jer. 30:24.

3. The last two in the Hebrew text of Jer. 49:39. The Hebrew of Jer. 48:47 has no corresponding Greek passage in the Septuagint.

Back of these Greek phrases lies the Hebrew phrase *hymym* 'ryt.<sup>4</sup> It is important to determine the precise import of the term 'ryt, both etymologically and conceptually. *Acherith* is a derivation from *achar*, which means "hindmost, later, afterwards." *Acherith* is applied to space as well as to time in the sense of "the hindmost part." An example of the application to space is Psalm 139:9: "the uttermost [*acherith*] parts of the sea." Applied to time, as is the case in the phrase under review, it would proximately signify "the farthestmost parts of the days" (Deut. 4:30).

The question arises, however, whether this is a purely chronological designation, or whether there enters into it likewise the idea of "eventuation," "issue of a foregoing process." In ordinary untechnical usage such a sense sometimes does attach to the word. For instance, Job 8:7 draws a contrast between the small beginnings of prosperity and its abundant issue; the former is *reshith*, the latter *acherith*. Similarly, Job 42:12 and Proverbs 5:4, 11 speak of the bitterness of the end of a man's relation with "the strange woman," implying that this bitter *acherith* is the inevitable outcome of the whole course of conduct involved. In the same way it is said of wine that "it goes down smoothly," but that "at the last [*acherith*] it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder" (Prov. 23:31–32). The "reward" hoped for is an *acherith* (Prov. 23:18; 24:14).

There cannot, therefore, be drawn any objection *a priori* from the common usage of the word to its having carried a similar pregnant sense in technical eschatological language. The sole question is whether the presence of this climacteric element can be pointed out in the eschatological passages. The "Blessing of Jacob" contains an approach to this point of view in what it predicts concerning Judah (Gen. 49:10). The "Shiloh," that is "the One to whom Judah's sceptre and ruler's staff belong," appears here as the ultimate embodiment and virtually as the eternalizer of Judah's preeminence among the tribes. In other words, the One later called the Messiah is a Consummator in more than a purely chronological sense.

This is still clearer if the Ezekielian reference to this prophecy is laid by the side of it. For here a succession of acts of overturning is held in

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4. Besides *acherith hajjamim*, the combinations *acherith hazza'am* ("of the wrath") and *acherith hashshanim* ("of the years") are also found, the former in Dan. 8:19, the latter in Ez. 38:8.

prospect until shall come “He whose right it is,” and to whom Jehovah gives the final government (Ez. 21:27; v. 32 in the Hebrew text). Both in Genesis and in the reproduction of the thought by Ezekiel the idea of progression towards a fixed end is marked by the word “until.” To be sure, the term *acherith* stands in Genesis 49:1 at the head of the prophecy with general reference to what is foretold concerning all the tribes. Yet it is meant virtually so that in Judah's destiny alone it is realized to the full extent of its import: “Gather yourselves together that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the latter [*acherith*] days” (Gen. 49:1).

The same phenomenon meets us in Numbers 24:14. There Balaam says to Balak, “I will advertise thee what this people (Israel) shall do to thy people in the last days [*acherith hajjamim*].” Upon this follows the vision of the star out of Jacob and the sceptre out of Israel, projected into the dim future (“not now” and “not near”). The introduction is abrupt; no intervening events nor preparatory stages are mentioned. In the last *mashal*, however (Num. 24:20–24), there is an interconnected series of successive overthrows befalling successive powers. In this regard, the idea of historico-causal connection suggests itself. The representation of one power overtaking and replacing another reminds us strongly of the later prevision of political developments in Daniel, but with a difference. Daniel places the kingdom of God at the close of the rise and rule of the profane kingdoms as something in which the entire movement comes to rest. While with Balaam, the Messianic culmination stands in the preceding *mashal* by itself, and before the picture of the intervening destinies in verses 20–24.

The occurrence of the simple *acherith* without determination in the first of Balaam's *meshalim* ought not to be overlooked (Num. 23:10). It is here ostensibly applied to the individual, and used synonymously with “death”: “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end [*acherith*] be like his.”

Deuteronomy 4:30 reads; “When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the *latter days*, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice. . . .” It refers to the *acherith hajjamim* which denotes the time of the return of Israel to Jehovah after all the calamities described in the foregoing discourse shall have come upon them. Among these is the captivity, so that the use

is from the OT standpoint truly eschatological. In Deuteronomy 31:29, on the other hand, it marks the period of the calamities themselves. And these are placed by Moses at the end of a process of corruption beginning immediately after his death: “For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.” In this, Deuteronomy anticipates some of the prophetic representations. No mention is here made of a return, so that only the negative side of the eschatological outcome is touched upon.

Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–3 are identical prophecies with this difference only: that the idyllic picture of the new paradise in verse 4 is added by Micah. In both, the reference is to the last issue of things. Isaiah makes no direct connection between the events of the *acherith* and the preceding developments; the prophecy is introduced abruptly. In Micah, however, through the attachment to the exceedingly ominous close of chapter 3 a contrast seems to be suggested between the depth and the height in Israel’s future. The translators of the English Bible (AV, RV, ARV) express this view of it by giving the conjunction *waw* the sense of “but.”<sup>5</sup>

Of the Jeremiah passages two (Jer. 23:20; 37:24, corresponding to Hebrew and English at Jer. 30:24) link with the *acherith* (placed in or after the captivity) a new understanding of the divine judgment coming upon the people. The two others (Jer. 25:18; found in Hebrew and English at Jer. 49:39 and 48:47, lacking in the Greek) speak of the return at the end of Elam and Moab. To these may be added the interesting statement in Hebrew and English at Jeremiah 31:17,<sup>6</sup> to the effect that there is “hope” for the people’s *acherith*. This associates the latter with a state of favor. This renders it probable that the “new understanding” of the judgment, predicted for the *acherith* in the references given above, is meant to bear the same auspicious meaning. Ezekiel 38:16 represents

5. The *waw* occurs also in Isaiah. To be certain of its force as “but,” we should have to know that the prophecy was taken from Micah by Isaiah. Or that the connection of contrast found by the English versions was intended in an assumed third source lying back of both Isaiah and Micah.

6. In Jer. 38:16 (LXX), corresponding to the Hebrew above cited, the text is greatly different and the word *acherith* does not occur.

the last great attack made by Gog upon the people as taking place in the *acherith*. This attack happens when the state of security has already become an established state for Israel (Ez. 38:14).<sup>7</sup>

Hosea 3:5 fixes the *acherith* as the point after the exile, when the children of Israel return and seek Jehovah their God and David their King. They come with fear to Jehovah and to His goodness. Finally, according to Daniel 10:14, the interpreter proceeds to make the prophet understand what shall befall the people in the "latter [post-Persian] days."

### *Summarizing the Old Testament Usage*

The above survey includes all the Greek Old Testament instances of occurrence of the phrase. Certain conclusions can be drawn from it, which here may be briefly set down.

*First*, the phrase belongs strictly to the field of eschatology. It does not signify some indefinitely subsequent point or period or complication of events. The note of epochal finality is never missing in it. This should, however, not be confounded with the idea of chronological fixity. It is peculiar to the Old Testament that it makes this *acherith* a sort of movable complex, capable of being pushed forward along the line of prophetic vision. Here is not the place to treat of the principle of the philosophy of revelation underlying this phenomenon; it may suffice to point to it as a fact borne out by exegetical induction.<sup>8</sup>

*Second*, the conception relates to the *collective* aspect of eschatology: it deals with the fortunes and destinies of the people, not with the prospect and future of the individual.<sup>9</sup> This, however, does not mean

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7. Cp. Mic. 4:1, 11 where the attack of the "many nations" is mentioned after the description of the *acherith* as a state of blessedness. But the arrangement need not be strictly chronological: v. 11 says "and now."

8. Cp. Delitzsch, *Commentar uber die Genesis* (1872) 498–501.

9. A possible exception is Num. 23:10. Here "the death of the righteous" (parallel to his *acherith*) is spoken of as something devoutly to be desired. Can this refer to Israel as the connection would seem to indicate? There is nothing strange in "the righteous" as a name for Israel; "Jeshurun" occurs as a name of the people in Deut. 32:15; 33:5, 26; Isa. 44:2. For the idea of the death of Israel cp. Hos. 13:13, but there the representation is ominous. Even when individualistically interpreted, Balaam's words are eschatological. The blessedness is pronounced in view of the future after death (hence "the righteous"), not in view of things left behind (children or property). Individually interpreted the passage would yield an early instance of the eschatological conception of the state after death; Gen. 5:24 would furnish the only analogue.

that the Old Testament, as sometimes alleged, is wholly lacking in individual eschatology. It only means that whatever approach to or teaching of such a doctrine there is has not found expression through the *acherith*-concept.

*Third*, the idea is elastic as to its extent, no less than movable as to its position. It covers, as has been shown, unfavorable and favorable happenings occurring in the farthest visible plane to which the prophetic vision extends, and there is no clear marking of the sequence of these in time. This is what might be expected, taking into consideration the whole tenor of Old Testament prophecy with regard to the future. Sometimes *points* are mentioned as falling within the *acherith*, sometimes a *condensation of events* occupying apparently a certain stretch of time. The principal question is whether the static outcome, the permanent state of blessedness predicted, is actually included, sometimes at least, in the *acherith*. If so, then this would extend the latter indefinitely. In fact, this would render it synonymous with what the New Testament considers the state of eternity. Although, of course, the language of time would still be employed to describe it, the latter feature being inherent in the etymology of the phrase itself.

Deuteronomy 4:30 has been quoted as an instance of this (on the usual construction): "When thou art in tribulation and all these things are come upon thee, in the latter days thou shalt return to Jehovah thy God." Thus construe RV and ARV, but AV has: "When all these things are come upon thee (i.e., the calamities spoken of) even in the latter days," etc. This, as an alternative construction, is also offered by RV and ARV in the margin. The Greek Text is not clear; it reads: "and all these words (things) shall find thee in the "*acherith* of the days." The Hebrew represents the *acherith* as the period of adversity. But even if the construction of RV and ARV be adopted, the passage still falls short of placing the blessed age in the *acherith*. What it puts there explicitly is only the act of conversion. And no more than this can be said for the passage in Hosea 3:3: the people's coming unto Jehovah and unto His "goodness" is put in the *acherith*. Here, however, if "coming to his goodness" be taken in the pregnant sense of enjoying God's favor, it is possible to make the *acherith* cover the resulting permanent eschatological state.

The only passage which unequivocally puts consummated eschato-

logical things within the *acherith* is the duplicate prophecies in Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1. Here we read that in the *acherith* the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established (*nakhon jihjeh*) at the head (= on the top) of the mountains. The niph'al participle must be understood of an enduring condition. And the same is implied in the representation in verses 3–4 of Jehovah's teaching function, of his judging between many nations, and of the state of peace and security prevailing: "every man sitting under his vine and fig tree and none to make them afraid"—the last in Micah only.<sup>10</sup>

#### NEW TESTAMENT WORDS FOR "ESCHATOLOGY"

We come now to the New Testament, and first to the extra-Pauline New Testament material. Here we notice the fact that in the Synoptical Gospels the terminology of *eschaton* does not appear with eschatological reference. In John it occurs where we meet with *eschatē hēmera* ("last day") at 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24. On account of both the noun and the adjective being in the singular, and through the specific reference to the act of the resurrection, the Old Testament phrase has here become contracted in meaning. Acts has but one instance of the use of the phrase, Acts 2:17a where we read: "and it shall come to pass in the last days." And this is in a quotation by Peter from Joel 3:1, where the Hebrew does not contain it, but simply says "after that." But this easy substitution proves that the formula was thoroughly familiar in early-Christian circles. Apart from Paul the other New Testament references are Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Peter 1:5, 20; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:18 (2x); and Jude 18. In these passages the noun varies between *hemera* ("days") and *kairos* ("time, period"),<sup>11</sup> or *chronos* / *chronoi*, "time" / "times." In 1 John 2:18 the phrase runs, as in the Gospel, *eschatē hōra* ("last hour"),

10. Cp. Stark, *Der Gebrauch der Wendung Becherith Hazzamim im alttestamentlichen Kanon*, Z. f. A.-W. (1891), 247; Giesebrecht, *Beiträge Jesajaktitik, Anhang*, 187–220.

11. The difference between *eschatai hēmerai* ("last days") and *kairos eschatos* ("last time") can best be felt through 2 Tim. 3:1: "in the last days grievous times [*kairoi chalepoi*] shall come." The former is purely chronological; the latter carries the note of qualitatively complexed and specifically appointed seasons. The passage in 2 Tim. is the only case of technical use of *eschatai hēmerai* with Paul.

with this difference only that what figures in the saying of Jesus as a *point* of time (the point of the resurrection) becomes in the Epistle the last *stretch* of time.

There is a characteristic feature of these New Testament applications of the phrase. It consists in the idea accompanying them that the writers and readers are conscious of the last days being upon them, or at least close at hand. Indeed, this has to such an extent become inseparable from the phrase, that no longer are any particular pains taken to separate by means of precision of statement the present from the future or the semi-present from the present. Herein lies a very marked difference from the Old Testament mode of representation. Sometimes belief in the imminence of final happenings and the pervasive eschatological state of mind engendered by this, seem to lead to scrutiny of the contemporary state of things for possible symptoms of the approach of the end (2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18). At other times the observation of the symptoms leads to the conclusion, or at least the strengthening of the conclusion, that the last hour is there (1 John 2:18). Again at other times the thought has a thickly ominous coloring, as in James 5:3. It also may appear in more theoretical form, though even then never wholly detached from the present practical situation (1 Pet. 1:5, 20).

An interesting example of the combination of the two motifs appears in Hebrews 1:2: "God has spoken in the last days in a Son." To this, which is so far a merely chronological construction of the history of revelation, the writer then adds a sort of afterthought. By means of the pronoun "these" being loosely attached at the close, he reflects that these days are the present days of himself and his readers. Were it not for the subsequent supervention of that thought, the sense would have naturally been expressed by *ep' eschatōn* (pl.) *tōn hēmerōn* ("in the last days"). By all this the phrase which previously hovered in the mist of more or less remote futurity, has obtained a fixed appurtenance to the present and closely impending future. It is due to the correct perception of this that in our English Bible the Old Testament and Septuagint phrases are rendered by "the *latter* days," whereas the New Testament speaking of itself translates the identical phrases by "the *last* days."<sup>12</sup>

12. In thus rendering from the Old Testament, the AV, RV, and ARV agree with the two exceptions of Gen. 49:1 and Isa. 2:2 (Mic. 4:1). In these two passages the AV has

A feature which this extra-Pauline New Testament usage and that of the Greek Old Testament have in common is what might be called the "non-comparative" character of both. There is no conscious reflection upon the qualitatively specific complexion of "early" or "earlier" days. The attention is wholly fixed upon the future final segment of time, so as to make the contrast an almost entirely chronological one. As a result of this, the rendering "latter days" might easily create a misunderstanding. For the comparative degree invites the idea that two *sorts* of days, the earlier and the latter ones, were, at least by implication, set over against each other. But this is not necessarily implied. Nor is it allowable to draw the conclusion, that the static result of the crisis foreseen will again be made up of "days." Although that would suit the Old Testament perspective of a Messianic state in time quite well. The "eternal" as the negation of time is not envisaged here. What is envisaged is a point or stretch lying at the end of history. It forms part of what are called "days": that thereafter there shall be no more days, but something of a different nature is not implied. The *acherith*, the eschaton, have the stress, not the *yammim* ("days" in Hebrew) or the *hēmerai* ("days" in Greek). The phrase "*last days*" does not as yet carry the implication that the time-order is soon to be ended to make place for a non-diurnal state of existence.

#### PAULINE WORDS FOR ESCHATOLOGY

Now we must examine Paul with the technical phrases just discussed in mind. It is immediately apparent that his terminology is differently oriented than that attaching itself to the eschaton-idea.<sup>13</sup> To be sure,

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"the last days." So far as Isaiah and Micah are concerned, this anticipation (as it were) of the New Testament usage may be due to the static character of what is located in the *acherith*. Compare above: "the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be (and *remain*) *established*." As a permanent, non-transitory phenomenon this seemed better expressible by "last" than by "latter." Num. 23:10, where all three versions have "last end" is hardly an exception to the rule. For here the translators obviously found the death of the righteous person referred to. In 24:14, where the point of view is nationally-collective, all three versions have again "latter days."

13. If anywhere, then the phrase "the last days" might have been expected in the "Man of Sin" prophecy (2 Thess. 2). Its absence from this piece seems significant. "The day of the Lord" is here the central conception (cp. also "in his own season," v. 6).