

“A Doctrine of Time”.

Ajax Alliance Church. Sunday January 28th, 2024. 6:00 pm

As we come to the close of the first month of a new year, we've had to adjust. We've had a month to write 2024 instead of 2023. Most have taken down their Christmas trees, put away all the decorations and have got used to any new presents that you got. We've received the bills for all the Christmas expenses, and we look ahead and wonder what this year will bring. We wonder about our health, finances, relationships and look ahead to plan.

The Bible has a lot to say about plans and it revolves around concepts of the sovereignty and will of God, the nature of evil, priorities, plans and the very consideration of time itself. The biblical concept of time is unmistakably the way it uniformly presents God at work in guiding the course of history according to His saving plan. The Hebrew *·ēt, mō-ēd, ·iddan, zēmān, yôm* and Greek *kairos, chronos, aiōn* are the main biblical time words depicting this divine work.

This evening we will consider the nature of time in seven connected but distinct elements. We will consider: 1) God as *Lord over Time*, 2) Humanity as *Subject to Time*, 3) *Time as Redemptive History*, 4) *Time is meaningfully forward-moving.* 5) *The Present as the Time of Salvation* 6) *The End-Times* and finally: 7) *Time and Eternity.*

1) God as *Lord over Time.* Time is **not** fatalistic or capricious, but, according to Scripture, under God's personal direction and control. Time began at creation and becomes the agency through which God continues to unveil his divine purpose for it. God imminently expresses concern for His creation. He reveals Himself in history according to the times and dates set by his own authority (Acts 1:7) and will bring about in His own time the consummation of world history in Jesus' return (Eph. 1:9–10; 1 Tim. 6:15).

Please turn to Isaiah 41

God is transcendent over time. **He established** the cycle of days and seasons by which time is known and reckoned (**Gen. 1:14**) and moreover, he **controls** world history, **determining in advance** the times set for all nations and **bringing them to pass** (Dan. 2:21; Acts 17:26). But God is **not limited by time** (Ps. 90:4). It in **no** sense **diminishes his person or work**: the eternal God does **not grow tired** or weary (Isa. 40:28) and **his purposes prevail** (Prov. 16:4; Isa. 46:10).

The Book of Isaiah says a lot about the nature of God and His involvement in time. **Notice in Isaiah 41**

Isaiah 41:1-4. Listen to me in silence, O coastlands; let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgment. ²Who stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step? He gives up nations before him, so that he tramples kings underfoot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow. ³He pursues them and passes on

safely, by paths his feet have not trod. ⁴Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he. (ESV)

- In consideration of **His person and interaction with time**, God is “the First and Last” (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), “the Beginning and End” (Rev. 21:6), “the one who is, was, and is to come” (Rev. 1:4, 8), “King of the Ages” (1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 15:3) His lordship is over time. He **possesses the power** to **dissolve kingdoms according to his eternal purposes** (Isa. 60:19–20). **The Lord is the one and only God**, the ruler of every last bit of history (Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 1312). Crossway Bibles.)

Since we know that **the persons of the Godhead share the same divine attributes**, the New Testament presents **Jesus as Lord over time**. With the Father, **He existed prior to the beginning of time, created all things, and sustains all things** (John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16–17; Heb. 1:2–3). He is **neither limited by time, nor adversely affected by it: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”** (Heb. 13:8). Jesus the Messiah (Christ) is **eternally trustworthy** in His position as high priest and as Son of God—**yesterday** active in creation (e.g., 1:2–4), **today** offering salvation (e.g., 4:7–10), and **forever reigning in heaven** (e.g., 10:12) He too is properly called “**the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and End**” (Rev. 22:13). (Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 2385). Crossway Bibles.)

For us, consider:

2) Humanity as Subject to Time. In **contrast** to God and Jesus, **humanity** is limited by time in the cycle of birth, life, and death. **Every person** bears the marks of time in the aging process and **ultimately dies** (Job 14:5; Heb. 9:27). **The span of life is brief and passing** (Ps. 144:4; James 4:14). **Even our time on earth—the events/circumstances and length of life—are in God’s hands** (Ps. 31:15; 139:16).

Not confined to events of this life, **all people**, will experience the passage of time in life after death. **Because of sin**, all people face spiritual death, which involves eternal separation from God (Rom. 5:17–21; 6:23). **Jesus’ death and resurrection brings deliverance from sin and spiritual death, granting eternal life to all who repent and believe** (John 3:14–17, 36; 1 John 5:10–13).

Now consider:

3) Time as Redemptive History. Throughout history, **God has been carrying out his plan** for redeeming His people. **The course of time, in effect, appears as redemptive history.** It is true **that biblical writers perceive history as cyclical, in that various predictable, recurring sequence of events are inherent to it:** the ordliness and seasonal regularity of nature (Pss. 19:1–6; 104:19; Eccles. 1:4–7), **the cycle of life** (Eccles. 3:1–15) and its **wearisomeness** (Eccles. 1:8–11), **the rise and fall of kings and empires** (Dan. 2:21), and **the universal inclination toward evil** (Judg. 2:6–23; 2 Chron. 36:15–16; Neh. 9:5–37; Rom. 1:18–32).

But they do **not** perceive history as static. **Chronological time** is of greatest importance in both Testaments as a way of tracing God’s redemptive interventions

in history. The most outstanding Old Testament example of this is Israel's redemption from Egypt (Neh. 9:9–25; Ps. 78:12–55; Hos. 11:1); in the New Testament it is the coming of Jesus as Messiah, Savior, and Lord (Acts 3:12–26; 10:34–43; 13:16–41). The revelatory nature of these divine in-breakings **dispels** any notion that time is merely cyclical, **without** purpose and value.

Let's now consider a broader purpose in time considering that:

4) Time is meaningfully forward moving. The covenants God made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jeremiah illustrate that **history reveals a progressive unveiling of God's redemptive plan** for His people. Prophetic fulfillment, according to God's appointed times, does so as well. The incarnation supremely exemplifies this: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, **to redeem those under law**, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Gal. 4:4–5**; cf. Mark 1:15; Rom. 16:25–26; Eph. 1:10; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Peter 1:10–12). Jesus' death was **not accidental, but a once for all atoning sacrifice** (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27; 9:26; 1 Peter 3:18), occurring exactly when God had intended (Rom. 5:6). In the same way, Jesus' second coming, the goal and end-point of redemptive history, will come to pass at God's appointed time (Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7; 3:21; 1 Tim. 6:14–15).

What about this present time? Let's consider:

5) The Present as the Time of Salvation. The Bible unanimously declares that now is the time of salvation. In the Old Testament, on the basis of Israel's redemption from Egypt, every succeeding generation was to respond in loving obedience to the laws issued at Sinai by God their Savior (Deut. 11; Ps. 95:7–8). The injunction "it is time to seek the LORD" (**Hos. 10:12**) was to be Israel's perpetual desire.

Please turn to Acts 17

In the New Testament, Jesus' coming as the Messiah inaugurated "the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:19, 21). The time interval between the incarnation and the second coming appears symbolically as a **jubilee year** (Luke 4:19/Isa. 61:1–2; cf. Lev. 25:10), a time when salvation has been made available to all people through God's saving work in Jesus. Thus, "now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (**2 Cor. 6:2**); now is the appointed season to declare this divine mystery hidden from ages past (Col. 1:26; Titus 1:3).

The present time holds a sense of urgency for unbelievers and believers. As Paul addressed those speculating about the nature and purpose of their existence in **Acts 17**, notice how he responds:

Acts 17:24-31. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward

him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for “ ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “ ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ ²⁹ Being then **God’s offspring**, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ **The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,** ³¹ because **he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness** by a man whom he has appointed; and **of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.**” (ESV)

- **In light of the nature of God and time, Paul does not merely live his life as an example, give information about God, a suggestion or invitation to believe but explicitly directs in verses 30-31 that: God now commands all people to repent for he has set a time when he will judge the world through Jesus (Acts 17:30–31). The time for repentance, however, is growing shorter (Rev. 2:21; 10:6). Believers are encouraged to make the most of every opportunity in serving God (Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5) and to mature in faith “as long as it is called Today” to ward off encroaching apostasy (Heb. 3:13).**

In the final two sections of a consideration of time, let us consider:

6) The End-Times. **The end-time period** surrounding Jesus’ second coming is **variously called** the last times, last hour, last days, day of the Lord, day of judgment, day of Gods wrath, time of punishment, end of the ages, or end of all things. **The temporal finality of these expressions** highlights the firm New Testament belief that **the present course of history** will come to an end when Jesus returns. **The certainty of the first advent** guarantees the certainty of the second (Acts 1:7).

Please turn to 1 Timothy 4

The start of the end-times takes two forms in the New Testament. On the one hand, the **messianic age**, inaugurated with Christ’s first coming, appears as the beginning of the last days according to Peter’s use of **Joel 2:28** in explaining **the charismatic phenomena** accompanying the Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost (Acts 2:17). Here **the messianic age** is equivalent to the end-times. It is a time of great salvation as well as of **mounting evil** growing to unprecedented proportions as **the parousia** (Christ’s return) nears. For this reason, the many antichrists, false teachers, and forms of **ungodliness** that **have already appeared** **show** without contradiction that it is the last hour (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; 1 John 2:18).

How do we understand this age and what are we to expect? 1 Timothy 4 makes clear:

1 Timothy 4:1-10. Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. ⁶ If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a

good servant of Christ Jesus, being **trained in the words of the faith** and of the **good doctrine that you have followed**. ⁷Have **nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths**. Rather **train yourself for godliness**; ⁸for while **bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way**, as it holds **promise for the present life and also for the life to come**. ⁹The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰For to this end **we toil and strive**, because we have **our hope set on the living God**, who is the Savior of all people, **especially of those who believe**. (ESV)

- **As people begin the new year** with commitments for health, **it behooves us as believers** to **commit ourselves to train** for godliness. It's **not** merely **showing up**, although that **puts us in an environment of encouragement**, but as our text here says, **we need to toil and strive for godliness, setting our hope on the living God**.

We must understand that **although the end is near** (Heb. 10:37; James 5:8; Rev. 22:7, 10), it has **not yet arrived**. **Nor** has **the tumultuous period leading up to it**. Because of the unique character of the end-times, it also has **an identity not entirely the same as the messianic age**. **Its events include** the fulfillment of the signs heralding the end, **Christ's return, the setting up of his eternal kingdom, and the last judgment**. But **even here** **the time periods partially overlap: the benefits derived from salvation in Christ promised to believers in the coming age** (eternal life, perfect Christ-likeness, etc.), are, nonetheless, **the property of believers** to enjoy in part in this age.

In our final consideration of time, let us consider:

7) Time and Eternity. The Bible does **not** specify if or in what sense **time existed before creation** or **will exist after Jesus' return**. **Nor** does it specify the relation between time and eternity either as **unending time** or **timelessness**. But **how God and humanity relate to time may parallel how time differs from eternity**. On the one hand, **God** is eternal, having **no beginning or end** (Ps. 102:25–27; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 1:20); he is **Lord over time**. He is **timeless** in the sense that as **Creator and Lord** he is non- or **supratemporal**, standing outside of or above time (**Ps. 90:2, 4**). **Time** is real for God. **It becomes the means through which he makes known his enduring love to His people**. On the other, **time and humanity are immortal** in the sense that **both have a starting point and continue on indefinitely**. **God promises unending life with him** to those who believe in Jesus' redeeming work (John 3:16; 1 John 5:13) and **unending separation from him** to those who **spurn** it (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:6–8).

May we be, as **1 Chronicles 12:32**, like **the sons of Issachar**, (people) who had understanding of the times, to **know what Israel ought to do**. **May we know ourselves**, know **the urgency** of our task and know **who we are called** to reach with the **urgent message** for such a time as this.

(Format note: Some bases commentary from H. DOUGLAS BUCKWALTER Buckwalter, H. Douglas Ph.D., University of Aberdeen. Assistant Professor of New Testament, Evangelical School of Theology, Myerstown, Pennsylvania. As found in: Elwell, Walter A. ; Elwell, Walter A.: *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. electronic ed. Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, 1997, c1996 (Baker Reference Library; Logos Library System)