

Beyond the Sunset, by Perry B. Cotham, published by Publishing Designs Inc., Huntsville, AL, 2008, 403 pp. \$19.95, ISBN: 978-0-615-24390-0.

Perry B. Cotham has been preaching for more than 80 years. During this time, he has studied the area of eschatology in depth and in his book, *Beyond the Sunset*, he reveals the insights and understanding that he has gained through diligent study. This book refutes atheism, materialism, Darwinian evolution, Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, premillennialism, Zionism, Catholicism, Calvinism, spiritism, soul-sleeping, reincarnation, annihilationism, and those who do not believe in the intermediate state of the dead. It affirms theism, the dualistic nature of man (man is comprised of body and soul), life after death, the resurrection of the dead, the final Judgment, the Second Coming of Christ, immortality of the soul, eternal punishment and eternal life.

Cotham develops this eschatological treatise in 27 chapters with detailed questions given at the end of each chapter. The 28th chapter contains 43 poems and short sayings related to death which he has used in funeral sermons. The book is to be used for preaching and for Bible class study. In the last paragraph of the Preface, Cotham states, "May the reading of this book cheer and encourage the Christian, console and comfort the bereaved, awaken and warn the thoughtless, and convict and help bring sinners back to God. To this end it is now commended to the grace of God and to the favor of His people." No better statement of the intended audience of this book could be stated.

Cotham begins his work, in chapter one, with an affirmation of the existence of God. All things begin with God! He is the creator and the redeemer of mankind. In this chapter, he discusses two topics: the existence of God and the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. In this chapter, he lays the ground work for all that follows.

In chapters 2, 3, 6, and 7, he discusses the nature of man. Cotham shows that man is more than a physical/material entity. He proves from the Scriptures that man has an immortal soul. He does an excellent job of distinguishing between the different ways that the word soul is used in Scripture (p. 95-96). He also affirms the general affirmation of Scripture defining man in dualistic terms: body and soul (p. 75,81,96-97).

In chapters 4, 8, 9, and 10, he examines the meaning of death. Death is defined as *separation* in Scripture and *not non-existence or annihilation*. Death occurs whenever the spirit/soul leaves the body (James 2:26). This is illustrated in the Old Testament by the death of Rachel (Gen. 35:18) and in the New Testament by the death of Jesus (Luke 23:43, Acts 2:31-35). The Bible speaks of physical death, spiritual death (the result of sin) and eternal death (the second death or eternal damnation).

In chapters 10 and 11, Cotham discusses the intermediate state of the dead. He affirms that the Scriptures teach that when a person dies, his/her body returns to the dust of the ground, but the soul goes into the Hadean realm (place of the unseen and so the place of the disembodied spirits of human beings). In the Hadean realm, spirits are conscious, retain memory and maintain individuality. However, there is no contact between the living and the disembodied spirits of men. Spiritism is soundly refuted. Also, the Hadean realm is divided into two distinct parts: Paradise and Tartarus with a great gulf fixed between them. The spirits of the righteous dead go to Paradise and the spirits of the unrighteous dead go to Tartarus (torments). A chart depicting this configuration is given on p. 273.

Cotham takes up the theory of Purgatory in chapter 12 and then expands his thoughts to include the false notion of a second chance after death for salvation in chapter 13. Purgatory is a

Catholic doctrine that involves temporary punishment in the afterlife for those who did not adequately make restitution for sins while living. Catholics believe that the living can help limit the time a loved one spends in Purgatory by prayers and sacrifices of mass. After this temporary punishment, the soul is released and goes on to heaven (p. 171). The theory of purgatory violates Scriptural teaching that Jesus' blood remits sins during the probationary period of man's life. Once a person dies, there is no opportunity for forgiveness. Eternal destiny is sealed at the time of death. Purgatory represents a type of second chance theory. The living cannot affect the spiritual condition of the dead. Every person is responsible and accountable to God for their own sins. Each individual must act to perform repentance and reconciliation to God on their own, by their own faith and love for God. There is no forgiveness by proxy. There is no salvation by proxy.

Do people have a second chance of being saved after death? The biblical answer is no. Cotham addresses I Peter 3:18-20 where it is affirmed that Jesus went and preached to the spirits of dead men while He was in the Hadean realm. This interpretation represents a misunderstanding of this passage. Jesus preached (through Noah) to the individuals who lived at the time of Noah while the ark was being prepared (p. 186-187). He deals with the Mormon doctrine of baptism for the dead and shows that the phrase "for the dead" in I Cor. 15:29 should be interpreted to mean "with a view toward the dead." Baptism is practiced in preparation for death. But, if the dead are not raised, there is no need for preparation after death. The passage does not teach proxy baptism.

In chapter 14, Cotham tackles the subject of spiritism, i. e. the belief that the living can communicate with the dead. He addresses: divination, witchcraft, sorcery, wizardry, familiar spirits, and necromancy. He also deals with demon possession in the New Testament. He shows that these forms of spiritism are opposed to the divine revelation of God in Scripture and amount to forbidden practices.

Fundamental aspects of eschatology are taken up in chapters 15,16 and 17. Cotham deals with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the final Judgment. He demonstrates from Scripture that Jesus' Second coming will be unannounced, unexpected, visible, and audible. It will not be secretive. The rapture is not a biblical doctrine. There will only be one universal resurrection of the dead, not two or more as affirmed by some premillennialists. The Judgment will be universal and final and after the final judgment by Christ the eternal destinies of all men will be sealed. Final judgment will be necessary for several reasons: (1) the living at the time of Christ's Second Coming must be judged; (2) the works and influence of a person continue after his/her death and so final judgment by Christ will be necessary in order to deal with the fullness of a person's works, (3) judgment involves sentencing and gives finality to all involved; (4) judgment follows the resurrection and the eternal state of man involves the body and soul. The body will be different from the physical, fleshly body one had on earth, but nevertheless, it will be a spiritual body reunited with the soul and finally sentenced to either heaven or hell.

In chapters 18 and 19, the author addresses two questions relating to the after-life. When will the spirits leave Hades? and how are the righteous dead with the Lord? In answer to the first question, the spirits of dead men will leave Hades at the time of the general resurrection of all men. After this, the intermediate state will cease to exist. In answer to the second question, Cotham quotes John T. Hinds as stating, "We have no means of knowing where Hades is, or in what deep spiritual sense Christ, unappreciated by men in the flesh, is with the saved in that state" (p. 267). Cotham uses chapter 19 to answer those who believe that the righteous dead now

go directly to heaven at the time of death, since they believe that Christ emptied Paradise at the time of His resurrection. The refutation is thorough and sound!

The next three chapters discuss the subject of premillennialism. Three more questions are put forth: What about the millennium? What about the Battle of Armageddon? and What about the Jews? The theory of premillennialism is defined as the supposed reign of Christ for a thousand years on this earth before the end of time (p. 277). The theory affirms at least two distinct phases for Christ's second coming. Christ must come first, then, He will reign for a thousand years on David's throne in the city of Jerusalem. Premillennialists err in regards to the coming of the kingdom and the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom of Christ was established on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Acts 2). The kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom, not a physical kingdom!

With regard to the battle of Armageddon, Cotham affirms that this battle, as depicted in the book of Revelation (16:14-16), is a spiritual battle, not a literal, physical battle to be fought in the Valley of Megiddo. Hence, it refers symbolically to the triumph of the church over the forces of evil (p. 310).

Premillennialists also contend that the Jews will be restored to Palestine and will be converted to Christianity prior to the Lord's coming and the end of time. Paul's statement in Rom. 11:26, "and so all Israel shall be saved", does not refer to national conversion of the Jews, but to the manner in which any Jew could be saved through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chapters 23 and 24 address the nature of eternal punishment. Cotham asks, "Will hell be eternal punishment?" and "Will the wicked be annihilated?" The Greek word *aionios* is an adjective meaning unending or age-lasting and is translated "eternal" or "everlasting" in Matthew 25:46. The same word is used to describe both eternal life and everlasting punishment. If heaven is eternal, then hell is eternal (unending punishment). Cotham confidently affirms, "Punishment of the wicked is not annihilation but positive and conscious suffering which shall never end (Matthew 13:42,50; 18:8; 22:13; Mark 9:43-48)" (p. 346). In chapter 24, at least eight reasons for rejecting the annihilation theory are given.

What happens to the souls of those who die in infancy? This question forms the subject matter of chapter 25. He shows that infants do not inherit the sin of their parents. The soul of an individual comes directly from God and could not be evil (Heb. 12:9; Zech. 12:1; Eccl. 7:12). The theory of original sin is false. Each individual is responsible for his/her own sin. Consequently, infants are innocent beings until the time when they become responsible for their own behavior.

The final two chapters focus on heaven. What will heaven be like? What about future recognition? Cotham gives his own exegesis of Rev. 21:1—22:5. Heaven is a spiritual place, i.e. a place where God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, angels, infants and the redeemed of all ages will dwell. We will know one another in heaven. Cotham affirms, "Memory and personal identity, which are the essential elements for future recognition, will be retained in the future life" (p. 372). After giving the arguments for and against future recognition, Cotham concludes that the Scriptures teach future recognition in heaven and that this doctrine is a source of comfort to Christians.

The book concludes with a brief epilogue and closing appeal. The final chapter contains poems and short sayings the author has used for funeral sermons.