

3. Biblical Theology

The worldview of the Bible sets the stage for the development of its theology. Within the framework of the heavens and the earth, humanity is created in an idyllic environment for the infinite growth of life, love, and general well-being (Gen. 1–2). However, this primal condition is tested by means of choice, and humanity is found wanting (Gen. 3). This cluster of protological events sets in motion the wheels of biblical theology, which works out the tension between divine holiness and human depravity—the remediation of the alienation between God and humankind.

The Scriptures present a clear and simple answer to the predicament raised by Adam and Eve. God will vindicate his own righteousness and judge the sins of humanity. He will fix what man has broken, and he will correct what man has perverted. The deep longing for life to be *made right* is the driving force behind the Scriptures. Old Testament and New, the Bible is essentially prophetic in nature, “declaring the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:10), looking forward to the denouement of what went wrong in the garden.

OVERVIEW OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

This “end” of biblical revelation is encapsulated in a singular event referred to as “the day of the Lord” (Isa. 13:6,9; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18; Obad. 1:15; Zeph. 1:7,14; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10). This future day will humble the pride, sin, and rebellion that began in the garden—that is, “The haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day” (Isa. 2:17; cf. Isa. 13:11; Mal. 4:1).

Our history books write endlessly about the glory of humankind—our progression, our knowledge, our civilization. We press blindly toward the exaltation of humanity, crying out for “the day of man,” so to speak, with ever-increasing zeal and ambition. However, “a day is coming *for the Lord*” (Zech. 14:1), when God will be glorified and honored—for “all mankind will come to bow down before Me, says the LORD” (Isa. 66:23, NASB).

Because the effects of sin are both progressive and cumulative in nature, the day of the Lord is *essentially apocalyptic*.¹ Biblical history, from beginning to end, is a narrative in which anticipation steadily builds toward a final cataclysm with God.² Hence the emphatic cry of the prophets: “Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty” (Joel 1:15, NASB; cf. Isa. 13:6).

Isaiah outlines the apocalyptic conclusion of biblical history:

See, the day of the LORD comes,
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the earth a desolation,
and to destroy its sinners from it.
For the stars of the heavens and their constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising,
and the moon will not shed its light.
I will punish the world for its evil,
and the wicked for their iniquity;
I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant,
and lay low the insolence of tyrants. (Isa. 13:9–11, NRSV)

Blind to the horror of sin, deaf to the cry of the prophets, and ignorant of the impending judgment, people press on in their pride and arrogance toward “the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5, NASB). It will be the ultimate calamity, catastrophic beyond all human imagination: “The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again” (Isa. 24:20, NKJV). Akin to the Noachian flood, it will consume the earth violently with fire: “Neither their silver

¹ “Apocalyptic” can refer to both *theology*, a type of thought involving climactic and devastating eschatology, and *literature*, a genre of writings during second-temple Judaism and early Christianity. Hence the consensus definition: “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 5).

² Though Klaus Koch describes eight common features of apocalyptic thought (*The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* [London: SCM Press, 1972], 28–33), the day of the Lord is strangely absent in his discussion, a pervasive phenomenon in modern discussions concerning the apocalyptic.

nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth" (Zeph. 1:18).³

Therefore the totality of human and divine existence is moving toward this *single climactic moment* in history, which itself defines all prior moments and the interactions therein.⁴ Ancient cultures—such as Canaanite, Mesopotamian, Persian, Babylonian, Greek, and Roman—were apocalyptic simply because humanity is created in the image of God and history itself is apocalyptic.⁵ Though often perverted (akin to ancient perversions of worldview, creation, and the flood), apocalypticism remains a driving force throughout history and across culture, because humanity intuitively knows the ultimate end of its

³ Apocalyptic thought is characterized not only by cataclysm but by the *suddenness* of such cataclysm. This is unmistakably portrayed by the imagery of the NT. The cataclysm will be sudden and all-consuming, like the torrent of a raging storm (Matt. 7:27; Luke 6:48), esp. as in the flood of Noah (Matt. 24:37; Luke 17:26; 2 Peter 3:6), like fire and sulfur raining down on Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:28; 2 Peter 2:6), like lightning spreading across the sky (Matt. 24:27; Luke 17:24), like a thief breaking into a house in the middle of the night (Matt. 24:43; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15), and like a woman gripped by hard labor (Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8). The radical nature of apocalyptic language is designed to awaken the human heart from the stupor of familiarity with sin and unrighteousness in this age, as is evident from Jesus' injunction to "keep watch" (Matt. 24:42; cf. Mark 13:33; Luke 12:37) that we might not be "weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of this life" (Luke 21:34).

⁴ Apocalypticism is generally a hermeneutical approach which sees the broad view of redemptive history in such terms. So Jürgen Moltmann relates apocalypticism to the OT prophets: "The apocalyptic picture of history is rooted in the historic thinking of Israel and bound up with the prophetic eschatology. . . . In place of a historic theology we have a theology of history and in place of a historic eschatology comes an eschatological contemplation of history" (*Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 134–35).

⁵ Thus the controversy concerning the "origins" of apocalyptic thought seems generally tangential. Most modern studies of apocalyptic thought are built upon naturalistic assumptions—i.e., apocalypticism as a mode of thought *evolved from non-apocalypticism* over time. More conservative commentators find the source of this evolution in the OT prophets; see Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic*, 2nd ed. (London: InterVarsity, 1973); D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC – AD 100* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964); and to a large extent H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946). More liberal commentators derive apocalypticism from Persia, Babylon, and the Greco-Roman milieu (see P. D. Hanson, et al., "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism," *ABD*, 1:279–88; and David Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983]); or from even older Mesopotamian, Akkadian, and Canaanite mythology (see Frank M. Cross, *Myth and Hebrew Epic* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973]; and Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak, eds., *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and their Relationships* [New York: T & T Clark, 2003]); see an introduction in Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1–42.

unrighteousness.⁶ Thus, since the sin of Adam and Eve, God has generally related in mercy; yet the Scriptures prophesy that human life is moving unidirectionally, like a giant arrow, toward the judgment of the day of the Lord (see figure 3.1).⁷

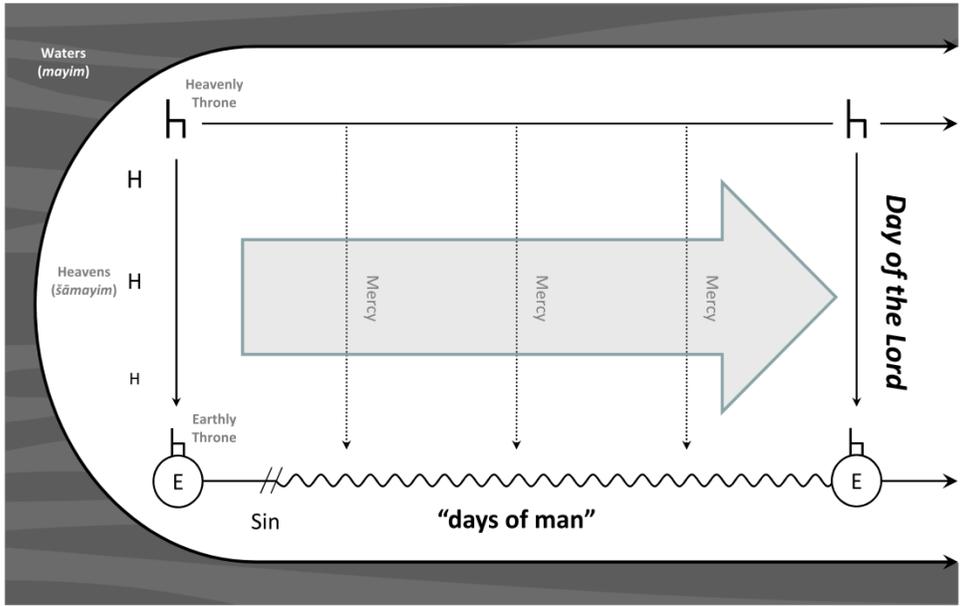


Figure 3.1 – The Cataclysmic Nature of Redemptive History

Though the day of the Lord will be “a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom” (Zeph. 1:15), it will finally overturn the order of sin and ungodliness established by Adam and Eve. A new order—an order of righteousness—will prevail, both in the heavens and on the

⁶ Even naturalists, who believe death and corruption to be constitutional to existence, project such realities to their ultimate end by extrapolating population growth in the struggle for resources, or by studying the probabilities of asteroids impacting the earth, or by pushing climatology models centuries into the future, etc. All humans seek an ultimate end to their existence, which I believe is set forth plainly in the Scriptures centered around the day of the Lord.

⁷ “Sections of both the Old and New Testaments, known as apocalyptic writings, offer a third view of history. This perspective views history to be like an arrow that moves toward a target called ‘the day of the LORD’ (Amos 5:18) or ‘the kingdom of God’ (Mark 1:15). In this view, history has direction and meaning. Caught up in the struggles of the present age, the faithful may not always be able to ‘see the big picture,’ but there is one” (Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008], 114).

earth: “In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below” (Isa. 24:21, NIV).

In this way God will create “new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isa. 65:17; cf. 66:22). The former corrupt order will be forgotten, for “The wicked shall be no more. . . . But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37:10–11, NKJV). Hence “We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13, NIV). So the Scriptures conclude with the apostle John’s summary vision:

Then I saw *a new heaven and a new earth*, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for *the old order of things has passed away.*” (Rev. 21:1–4, NIV)

John continues in the next verse, “He who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”” (Rev. 21:5). It is this “making all things new” that constitutes the ultimate purpose of the day of the Lord: *the restoration of original glory*—a new heavens and new earth without sin and death. The purpose of divine judgment is to correct the error of sin and make right that which went so grievously wrong. Consequently, Peter summarizes with the phrase “restoration of all things” the events of the return of Jesus and the day of the Lord: “Repent therefore . . . that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19–21, NKJV).

“All things” here references the heavens and the earth (cf. Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:3), for in the end God will restore the heavens and the earth to their original state.⁸ This restoration is the substantive message of all the prophets “since the world began.” Likewise, Jesus speaks of “the renewal of all things”:

Truly I tell you, at *the renewal of all things*, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve

⁸ The Greek *apokatastasis*, “restoration,” in its lone usage here in Acts 3:21, derives from *apokathistēmi*, meaning “to restore to an earlier state” (BDAG, 111). Thus *apokatastasis*—“restoring everything to perfection” (BDAG, 112)—references the former state of mankind in Eden.

thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit *eternal life*. (Matt. 19:28–29, NRSV)

Again, “all things” here refers to the present heavens and earth which will be “renewed” or “regenerated” to something akin to their original state of perfection.⁹ This approach to the Scriptures has thus been termed “the new creation model.”¹⁰ As such, biblical theology can safely be summarized as *eschatologically restored protology* (see figure 3.2).¹¹ In fact, “in the beginning” categorically anticipates “in the end.”¹²

⁹ The Greek *paliggenesia* is a compound of *palin*, “anew, again,” and *genesis*, “source, origin” (see BDAG, 752). Thus, God is going to “again-Genesis” at the day of the Lord. Jürgen Moltmann sets *paliggenesia* in context:

The word *παλιγγενεσία* derives from oriental cosmology, which was introduced into the ancient world by the Pythagoreans. . . .

In Jewish apocalyptic, however, this concept was refashioned eschatologically. There it meant the unique and final “rebirth” for the eternal kingdom of the creation which had become old, transient and mortal. . . . What Daniel and the apocalyptists who followed him expected of the coming of the Son of man and his enduring righteousness and justice was just such a universal new birth of the world (Daniel 7). We meet this cosmic, apocalyptic interpretation of “rebirth” in Matt. 19:28: “In the rebirth (*παλιγγενεσία*; RSV: ‘new world’), when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The Son of man who suffers here will there be exalted; the Son of man who is judged here will there himself be the judge, the Son of man put to death here will there live eternally. His followers will be drawn into his humiliation here and his exaltation there. (*The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 145)

¹⁰ Craig A. Blaising observes,

The *new creation model* of eternal life draws on biblical texts that speak of a future everlasting kingdom, of a new earth and the renewal of life on it, of bodily resurrection (especially of the physical nature of Christ’s resurrection body), of social and even political concourse among the redeemed. The new creation model expects that the ontological order and scope of eternal life is essentially continuous with that of present earthly life except for the absence of sin and death. Eternal life for redeemed human beings will be an embodied life on earth (whether the present earth or a wholly new earth), set within a cosmic structure such as we have presently. It is not a timeless, static existence but rather an unending sequence of life and lived experiences. It does not reject physicality or materiality, but affirms them as essential both to a holistic anthropology and to the biblical idea of a redeemed creation. (“Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999], 162)

¹¹ So Jürgen Moltmann describes, “This horizon embraces on the one hand ‘creation in the beginning’ and, on the other, ‘the creation of the End-time.’ It takes its definition from the creation of the heavens

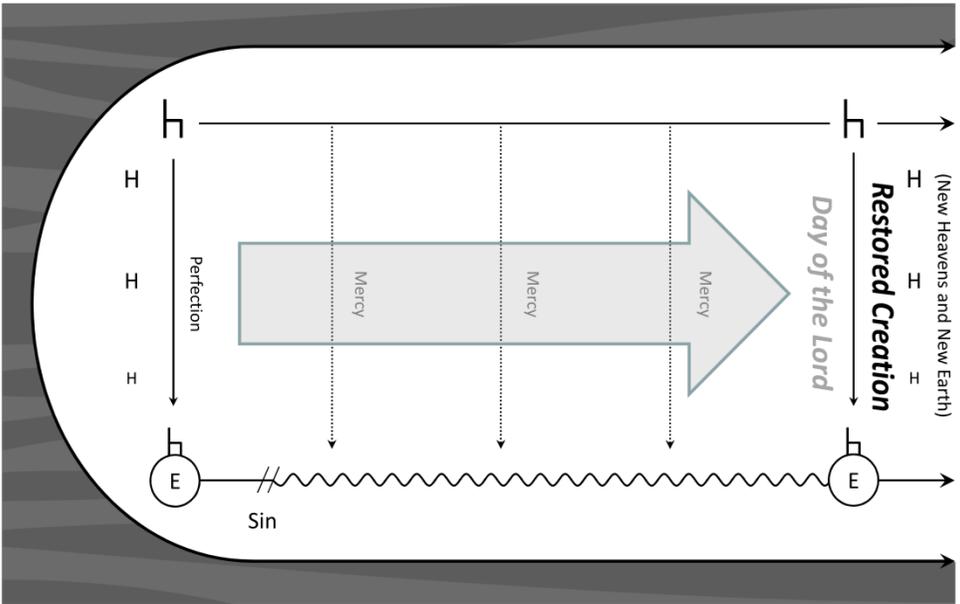


Figure 3.2 – Biblical Theology of Restored Creation

This renewal will also involve the restoration of *eternal life* to humanity. Death is antithetical to life. Human beings were not meant to die but rather to regenerate perpetually by means of the tree of life (cf. Gen. 3:22; Rev. 22:2). Death was instituted by God to humiliate sin and pride so as to bring repentance (cf. Gen. 3:19; Ps. 73:3–20; Rom. 8:20). Nevertheless, the order of death under which humanity now lives will be dramatically overturned in an event inaugurated by

and the earth ‘in the beginning’ (Gen. 1:1), and from the creation of ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ (Isa. 65:17) at the end. But this means that Israel did not merely develop a *protological* understanding of creation; in the process of so doing it also arrived at an *eschatological* view of creation. Both dimensions are necessarily present in ‘the soteriological understanding of creation’” (*God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 54).

¹² In his commentary on Genesis, John H. Sailhamer notes,

By commencing his history with a “beginning” (*rē`šīt*), a word often paired with “the end” (*`ah`rīt*), the author also prepares the way for the consummation of that history at “the end of time,” *`ah`rīt*. . . .

The growing focus within the biblical canon on the “last days” (*`ah`rīt hayyāmīm*) is an appropriate extension of the “end” (*`ah`rīt*) already anticipated in the “beginning” (*rē`šīt*) of Genesis 1:1. The fundamental principle reflected in 1:1 and the prophetic vision of the future times of the “end” in the rest of Scripture is that the “last things will be like the first things.” (“Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008], 51)

the day of the Lord called “the resurrection of the dead” (Matt. 22:31; Acts 23:6; 1 Cor. 15:21,42; Heb. 6:2).

Paul gives us the clearest outline of the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15. As death came by the sin of Adam—for “in Adam all die” (v. 22)—so life will come by the return of Jesus—for “in Christ shall all be made alive” (v. 22). At his coming he will destroy “every rule and every authority and power” (v. 24): “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (vv. 25–26). This destruction of the enemies of God—sin and its effects—constitutes the substance of the day of the Lord and a theology of new heavens and a new earth.

Paul goes on to describe the radical transformation of the resurrection:

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and *the dead will be raised imperishable*, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Cor. 15:51–54)

The biblical hope is the overcoming and “swallowing up” of even death itself. Death is neither normal nor natural.¹³ We look forward to the new order of existence when death will be enveloped, consumed, and devoured by life. Just as everything in creation continually breaks down in this life—“moth and rust destroy” (Matt. 6:19)—so all things will continually rejuvenate after the day of the Lord. Creation itself will breathe *life*. The reason people long for perpetual progress (and delude themselves with an evolutionary perversion) is because we

¹³ Oscar Cullmann aptly states,

The belief in the resurrection presupposes the Jewish connexion between death and sin. Death is not something natural, willed by God, as in the thought of the Greek philosophers; it is rather something unnatural, abnormal, opposed by God. . . . The Genesis narrative teaches us that it came into the world only by the sin of man. Death is a curse, and the whole creation has become involved in the curse. . . .

The Greek doctrine of immortality and the Christian hope in the resurrection differ so radically because Greek thought has such an entirely different interpretation of creation. (*Immortality of the Soul or the Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* [London: Epworth Press, 1958], 28–29)

were actually made for perpetual and progressive regeneration: life, which gives birth to life, which gives birth to life, *ad infinitum*.¹⁴

Consequently, the new heavens and new earth will be a *restored paradise*. As Eden was paradisaic in the beginning, so the earth will once again be paradisaic (cf. Isa. 51:3; Rev. 2:7; 22:1–5).¹⁵ From Jerusalem will flow “the river of the water of life” (Rev. 22:1), and “everything will live where the river goes” (Ezek. 47:9). It will be gloriously arboreal (cf. Ezek. 47:7,12), and the restored tree of life will bring “the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2; cf. Ezek. 47:12). A real tree of life on a real earth with real fruit will be one of the concrete mechanisms by which the old order of death will be overturned.

Moreover, the new earth will generate life holistically: morally, socially, and ecologically. It will have an atmosphere and culture in which everything is revitalized. Though the nature of this age is “predatory,” so to speak, the age to come will be peaceable and nonaggressive, as Isaiah prophesies:

¹⁴ Though the use of hyperbole is clear, the apostolic father Papias paints such a picture of the age to come:

[As the elders who saw John the disciple of the Lord remembered that they had heard from him how the Lord taught in regard to those times, and said]: “The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five-and-twenty metretres of wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, ‘I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me.’ In like manner, [He said] that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears, and that every ear would have ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds of clear, pure, fine flour; and that apples, and seeds, and grass would produce in similar proportions; and that all animals, feeding then only on the productions of the earth, would become peaceable and harmonious, and be in perfect subjection to man.” . . . These, then, are the times mentioned by the prophet Isaiah: “And the wolf shall lie down with the lamb,” etc. (Isa. 11:6ff). (*Fragments of Papias*, 14; ANF, 1:153–54)

¹⁵ So J. Jeremias,

The exclusive starting-point of all later Jewish statements about the Paradise of the first age is the Paradise story in Gn. 2f. If this alone offered rich materials for imaginative adornment, this tendency was increased even further by the combination of Paradise with the eschatological hope. . . .

The site of reopened Paradise is almost without exception the earth, or the new Jerusalem. Its most important gifts are the fruits of the tree of life, the water and bread of life, the banquet of the time of salvation, and fellowship with God. The belief in resurrection gave assurance that all the righteous, even those who were dead, would have a share in reopened Paradise. (“παράδεισος,” *TDNT*, 5:766–67)

“Behold, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind. . . .
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
but dust will be the serpent’s food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,”
says the LORD. (Isa. 65:17,25, NIV)

Because everything on the earth was put under the dominion of Adam (Gen. 1:26–28), the animals in this passage reflect the nature and character of humanity’s righteous and peaceable government in the age to come.¹⁶ Because of Adam’s sin, fear and anxiety are normative for this age (see Gen. 3:7,10); but God will judge the earth, fill it with his glory, and restore it to its original shameless condition (see Gen. 2:25). Thus it will “feel” safe, protected, and secure, for “no longer will there be anything accursed” (Rev. 22:3).¹⁷ This is the vision of the new heavens and the new earth set out in the Scriptures, as Isaiah describes:

He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;

¹⁶ Similarly, Psalm 8, a hymn of creation, is quoted messianically in reference to the age to come (cf. 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:8). Creation conforms to its leadership, both in this age and the age to come, for “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

¹⁷ Though the concept of “nature” does not correspond to the biblical terminology of “creation,” T. Desmond Alexander rightly comments, “All of these passages describing a transformed environment look forward to a time when nature and humanity will be in harmony as God originally intended. When this happens, the earth will be very different, for God’s disfavor and curses will be removed” (*From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009], 163).

and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:4-9, NIV)

When God strikes the earth, the order of sin, death, and anxiety will be overturned, thus ushering in a universal "knowledge of the LORD." Such a hope for a new creation is succinctly articulated by Paul in Romans 8:18-24:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with *the glory that is to be revealed to us*. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that *the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption* and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, *the redemption of our bodies*. For in this hope we were saved.

The day of the Lord is the delineating event between "the sufferings of this present time" and "the glory that is to be revealed to us" (v. 18).¹⁸ Though creation was subjected to death and futility because of the sin of Adam, it looks forward to being "set free from its bondage to corruption" (v. 21). Likewise, we look forward to the "redemption of our bodies" (v. 23) in the resurrection. This is

¹⁸ Rom. 8:18-25 is a quintessential apocalyptic passage, for the stark dichotomy of the two ages is punctuated by "the glory that is to be revealed [lit. "apocalypsed," Gk. *apokaluptō*] to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing [lit. "apocalypsing," Gk. *apokalupsis*] of the sons of God" (vv. 18-19).

Present suffering in light of future glory was common in second-temple Judaism (see a summary in James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1998], 468-69). For example, "And the Lord answered and said to me . . . With regard to the righteous ones, those whom you said the world has come on their account, yes, also that which is coming is on their account. For this world is to them a struggle and an effort with much trouble. And that accordingly which will come, a crown with great glory" (2 Baruch 15.7-8; *OTP*, 1:626). Such a crown of eschatological glory is assumed by all the NT authors (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Rev. 2:10), giving context to present suffering.

the biblical “hope” (v. 24) of salvation, which will come suddenly and dramatically—akin to “childbirth” (v. 22).

Based upon the character of God and the nature of redemptive history, the biblical writers naturally understood that God would restore what he made.¹⁹ Because he is faithful, he will not give up on his creation. As my son often said when he was only three years old, “Jesus is coming back, and he will fix everything like it was in the beginning.” Though exceedingly simplistic, this fundamental relationship between God and creation and redemptive history cannot be overstressed.²⁰ Its historical controversion has caused incalculable confusion, pain, and despair. Moreover, the incisive witness of the church has been blunted by a lack of emphasis on the severity of the day of the Lord concerning the punishment of all wickedness.

Biblical theology thus culminates in the day of the Lord, which exorcises sin from the heavens and from the earth, restoring to creation its original glory.²¹ As such, the Bible is symmetrical—as it begins in Genesis, so it concludes in Revelation.²² In the beginning there is the creation by the hand of God, the planting of the garden of Eden with the tree of life, the marriage of Adam and Eve, the victory of Satan through human sin, and the subsequent entrance of

¹⁹ “The Old Testament nowhere holds forth the hope of a bodiless, nonmaterial, purely ‘spiritual’ redemption as did Greek thought. The earth is the divinely ordained scene of human existence. Furthermore, the earth has been involved in the evils which sin has incurred. There is an interrelation of nature with the moral life of man; therefore the earth must also share in God’s final redemption. . . . A new universe is to be created which will replace the old. This is no new thought but is the summation of a whole aspect of prophetic theology” (George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 59–60).

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann summarizes (critically) this simple approach, “Creation was from the beginning perfect. Human sin spoils it. Grace is the divine expedient designed to remedy the predicament of sin. And at the end the goodly, primal creation will be restored as it in truth always was and will be: eschatology is the doctrine of the *restitutio in integrum*, the return to the pristine beginning” (*The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 262).

²¹ Anthony A. Hoekema summarizes, “The New Testament believer, therefore, is aware that history is moving toward the goal of this final consummation. This consummation of history, as he sees it, includes such events as the Second Coming of Christ, the general resurrection, the Day of Judgment, and the new heavens and new earth. Since the new heavens and new earth will be the culmination of history, we may say that all history is moving toward this goal” (*The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 32).

²² “So the time of the world as a whole takes the form of the *circulatio*, the circle. If the end corresponds to the beginning, and if this beginning returns again in the end, then the time of the world has a splendid symmetrical conformation. What happens at the end can then only be the ‘restoration’ of the beginning” (Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 263).

death and suffering. In the end, though, there is the new creation of God, the restoration of the garden of Eden with the tree of life, the marriage of Jesus (the “last Adam”) and his bride (the redeemed), the overcoming of Satan through the final judgment upon human sin, and the subsequent eradication of death and suffering.²³

In light of the biblical worldview of “the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), we look forward to God “making all things new” (Rev. 21:5) in hope of a “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:13).²⁴ The Judeo-Christian faith is set within this broad structure. Protology and eschatology are not parts or aspects of biblical theology; they are, rather, the framework within which all theology is built.²⁵

THE CENTRALITY OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

The day of the Lord is the principal event prophesied from Genesis to Revelation. Peter associates “the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets” (2 Peter 3:2, NRSV) with “the day of judgment” (v. 7)—that is, “the day of the

²³ See similar themes in Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984): “First, God is considered as the protological Creator and the eschatological Redeemer. Second, Adam as the first man is compared with Christ as the last Man. Third, the protological fall of man into cursing is considered in view of the prophecy of the eschatological restitution of man to blessing. Fourth, the earthly Edenic beginning is compared with the promise of Edenic Zion in the end. Fifth, the protological pattern of the Noahic judgment is considered with regard to its eschatological recurrence” (p. 5).

²⁴ “From Genesis to Revelation we feel that this book is in a real sense a unity. It is not a collection of fragments, but has, as we say, an organic character. It has one connected story to tell from beginning to end; we see something growing before our eyes; there is plan, purpose, progress; the end folds back on the beginning, and, when the whole is finished, we feel that here again, as in the primal creation, God has finished all his works, and behold, they are very good” (James Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament* [New York: Scribner’s, 1907], 32; quoted in Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God’s Plan for Humanity* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 22).

²⁵ Though lacking a protological emphasis (due to a naturalistic bias), Moltmann well articulates:

From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. . . . A proper theology would therefore have to be constructed in the light of its future goal. Eschatology should not be its end, but its beginning. (*Theology of Hope*, 16)

Lord" (v. 10). It is ultimately concerning "the time for restoring all the things" that God "spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago" (Acts 3:21). It is the day to which "all the prophets bear witness" (Acts 10:43), when Jesus will be appointed "judge of the living and the dead" (v. 42; cf. Acts 17:31).

To appreciate the centrality of the day of the Lord in the Scriptures, we must do a cursory survey of its appearance in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Day of the Lord in the Old Testament

The Old Testament goes into great detail concerning the day of the Lord. This day is described along royal, judicial, and economic lines, in accordance with the nature, character, and function of God's governance over the heavens and the earth.

The day of the Lord is characteristically *royal*, because God is "a great king over all the earth" (Ps. 47:2), "the living God and the everlasting King" (Jer. 10:10). He sits "enthroned as king forever" (Ps. 29:10), "a great King above all gods" (Ps. 95:3). The common usage of royal language throughout the Scriptures ("lord," "master," "throne," "dominion," "rule," etc.) is not metaphorical but literal. God really is a king, who truly sits enthroned over creation, with everything actually reporting to him. "For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations" (Mal. 1:14). He rules, as does an earthly king (being created in his image), yet he rules in righteousness and integrity (cf. Ps. 89:14; 97:2; 145:17).

Because God is the great King, his day is ultimately concerned with "the glory due his name" (Ps. 29:2; 96:8). He is a real king who demands real honor and respect: "If I am a master, where is my fear?" (Mal. 1:6). Moreover, he seeks the absolute allegiance and loyalty of the nations: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance" (Isa. 45:23). His name alone is to be exalted: "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Ps. 46:10). Service to other gods is considered utterly treasonous, and accordingly service to God Most High is the first commandment (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7). To violate this order breaks down the very fabric of the cosmic hierarchy that ensures the well-being of creation.

The violation of God's royal honor is the ultimate source of divine anger and wrath. Being created in God's image, humans likewise get angry as a result of dishonor and disrespect. If someone, for example, rejects my authority in the

workplace or curses me in front of others, I become angry because my dignity, honor, and value have been violated and disregarded. Similarly, God is quite displeased with the treachery of humanity's egotism and rebellion. We have broken his commands and "stirred him to jealousy with strange gods" (Deut. 32:16; cf. Ps. 78:58; Jer. 44:8). The "wrath," "fury," and "anger" of God pervade the entire corpus of the Old Testament.²⁶ For "the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies" (Nah. 1:2). Thus God says, "I will satisfy my fury" (Ezek. 21:17); and "My anger will be spent and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I will be appeased" (Ezek. 5:13, NASB).

Taken to its eschatological conclusion, the day of the Lord is therefore understood as the ultimate satisfaction of divine anger. It will be the "day of wrath" (Prov. 11:4; Zeph. 1:15), "the day of his wrath" (Ps. 110:5), and "the day of the wrath of the LORD" (Zeph. 1:18). "Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger" (Isa. 13:9). It will be "the day of the anger of the Lord" (Zeph. 2:2; cf. Lam. 2:22)—"the day of his fierce anger" (Isa. 13:13; cf. Lam. 1:12). So the day of the Lord is understood in its royal context (see figure 3.3).

²⁶ For example, "fury" (Ex. 15:7; Lev. 26:28; Deut. 29:28; Ps. 2:5; 7:6; Isa. 10:5,25; 26:20; 30:27; 66:15; Jer. 21:5; Lam. 2:4; Ezek. 5:13,15; 6:12; 19:12; 21:17; 23:25; 24:13; Hab. 3:12); "wrath" (Ex. 32:11; Lev. 10:6; Num. 16:46; Deut. 9:7f,22; 29:23,28; 1 Sam. 28:18; 2 Kings 22:13,17; 23:26; 2 Chron. 12:7,12; 19:2,10; 24:18; 28:11,13; 29:8; 32:26; 34:21,25; 36:16; Ezra 7:23; 8:22; 10:14; Neh. 13:18; Job 20:28; Ps. 6:1; 21:9; 38:1; 56:7; 59:13; 78:21,59; 89:46; 110:5; Isa. 9:19; 10:6; 13:9,13; 51:17,20,22; Jer. 4:4; 6:11; 7:20,29; 10:10; 21:12; 23:19; 25:15; 30:23; 36:7; 42:18; 50:13,25; Lam. 2:2; 4:11; Ezek. 7:19; 9:8; 13:13; 20:33; 22:22,31; 25:14; 36:6; 38:18; Dan. 9:16; Hos. 11:9; Nah. 1:2; Hab. 3:2,8; Zeph. 1:18; Zech. 8:2,14); "anger/angry" (Gen. 18:30,32; Ex. 4:14; 34:6; Num. 11:1,10,33; 12:9; 14:18; 22:22; 25:3f; 32:10,13f; Deut. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21,25; 6:15; 7:4; 9:8,18ff; 11:17; 13:17; 29:20,23f,27f; 31:17,29; 32:16,21; Josh. 7:1,26; 22:18; 23:16; Judg. 2:12,14,20; 3:8; 6:39; 10:7; 14:19; 2 Sam. 6:7; 24:1; 1 Kings 11:9; 14:9,15; 15:30; 16:7,13,26,33; 22:53; 2 Kings 13:3; 17:11,17f; 21:6; 22:17; 23:19,26; 24:20; 1 Chron. 13:10; 2 Chron. 25:15; 28:9,25; 29:10; 30:8; 33:6; 34:25; Neh. 9:17; Job 4:9; 9:13; 20:23; 21:17; 42:7; Ps. 6:1; 7:6; 27:9; 38:1; 74:1; 77:9; 78:21,31; 79:5; 80:4; 86:15; 103:8; 106:29,40; 145:8; Prov. 22:14; 24:18; Isa. 5:25; 9:17; 12:1; 13:9,13; 30:27,30; 54:8; 64:9; 66:15; Jer. 3:12; 4:8,26; 7:18,20; 8:19; 10:24; 11:17; 12:13; 18:23; 23:20; 25:6f,37; 30:24; 32:29f; 36:7; 42:18; 44:3,8; 49:37; 51:45; 52:3; Lam. 1:12; 2:1,22; 3:6,6; 4:11; Ezek. 5:13,15; 13:13; 25:14; 35:11; 38:18; Dan. 9:16; Hos. 11:9; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:9; 4:2; Mic. 7:18; Nah. 1:3; Hab. 3:8; Zeph. 2:2f; 3:8; Zech. 1:2,12; 7:12; 10:3; Mal. 1:4).

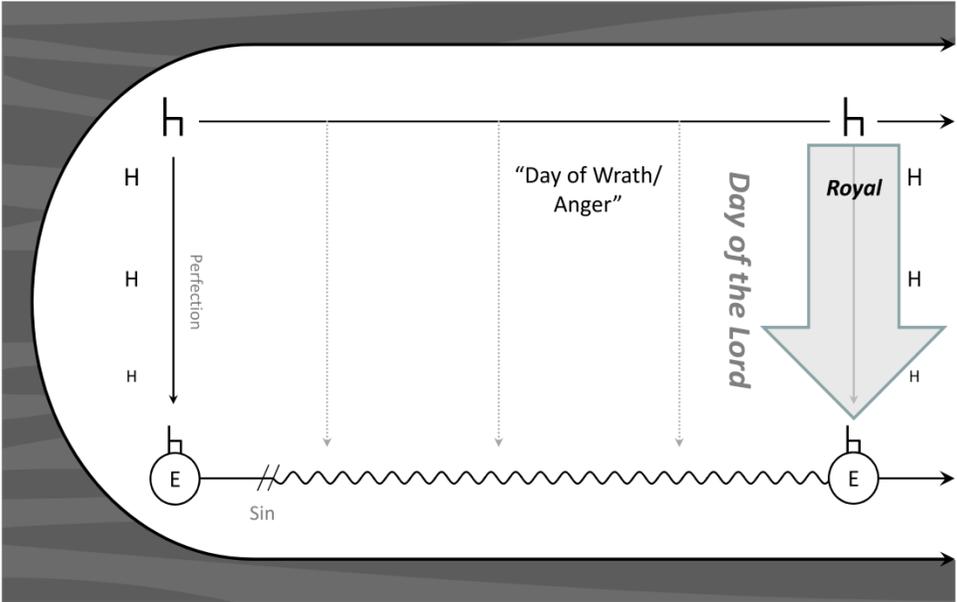


Figure 3.3 – The Royal Nature of the Day of the Lord

When the day of the Lord comes, God will “shatter kings on the day of his *wrath*” (Ps. 110:5). He will “speak to them in his *wrath*, and terrify them in his *fury*” (Ps. 2:5), for “the LORD is *enraged* against all the nations, and *furious* against all their host; he has devoted them to destruction, has given them over for slaughter” (Isa. 34:2). As the prophet Habakkuk foresaw, “You marched through the earth in *fury*; you threshed the nations in *anger*” (Hab. 3:12). So also Isaiah: “I have trodden down the peoples in my *anger*, made them drunk in my *fury*, and brought down their strength to the earth” (Isa. 63:6, NKJV). Jeremiah adds:

Behold, the storm of the LORD!

Wrath has gone forth,
a whirling tempest;
it will burst upon the head of the wicked.
The anger of the LORD will not turn back
until he has executed and accomplished
the intents of his heart.

In the latter days you will understand it clearly. (Jer. 23:19–20)

“According to what they have done, so will he repay *wrath* to his enemies and retribution to his foes” (Isa. 59:18, NIV). “For behold, the LORD will come in

fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his *anger in fury*, and his rebuke with flames of fire” (Isa. 66:15). “And in *anger and wrath* I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey” (Mic. 5:15). So Isaiah describes:

Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar,
burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke. . . .
to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction,
and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads astray. . . .

And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, *in furious anger* and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones. (Isa. 30:27–30)

Indeed the Lord holds “the cup of his *wrath*” (Isa. 51:17), and he will make all the nations drink “this cup of the wine of *wrath*” (Jer. 25:15). So the psalmist cries, “Pour out your *anger* on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name!” (Ps. 79:6). And David, “On no account let them escape; in your *anger*, O God, bring down the nations” (Ps. 56:7, NIV). Likewise, “Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you. You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear. The LORD will swallow them up in his *wrath*, and fire will consume them” (Ps. 21:8–9). Though “the nations rage” (Ps. 2:1; 46:6), “The LORD laughs at the wicked, for he sees that their day is coming” (Ps. 37:13, NRSV).

When the day of the Lord comes, the proclamation will go out, “Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns!’” (Ps. 96:10; cf. Ps. 93:1; 97:1; 99:1). And all the ends of the earth will “fear him” (Ps. 67:7), for righteous fear is the product of genuine honor. Thus, “Nations will *fear* the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will *fear* your glory” (Ps. 102:15). The nations will finally declare, “It is the LORD your God you shall *fear*” (Deut. 6:13). In this way the kingship that God instituted at creation will be restored on the day of the Lord, and God will be rightly feared and honored.

The day of the Lord in the Old Testament is also characteristically *judicial*. Not only is God Most High a king, but “God is a righteous *judge*, and a God who feels indignation every day” (Ps. 7:11; cf. Ps. 50:6; 75:7). God is a real judge, not an ethereal principle or metaphor of justice. A real person rules over the heavens and the earth, and he really executes judgments. Moreover, he is really going to

punish humanity’s unrighteousness: “At the time I have planned, I will bring *justice* against the wicked” (Ps. 75:2, NLT).

Judgment is simply the means by which a standard of righteousness is set. So also the divine Judge will establish righteousness and justice upon the earth, as Isaiah says: “When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness” (Isa. 26:9, NIV). These judgments are in reference to Isaiah 24, when God punishes the powers in the heavens and the kings on the earth. Therefore the day of the Lord is understood as the ultimate day when God judges creation and sets right the sins of humankind (see figure 3.4).

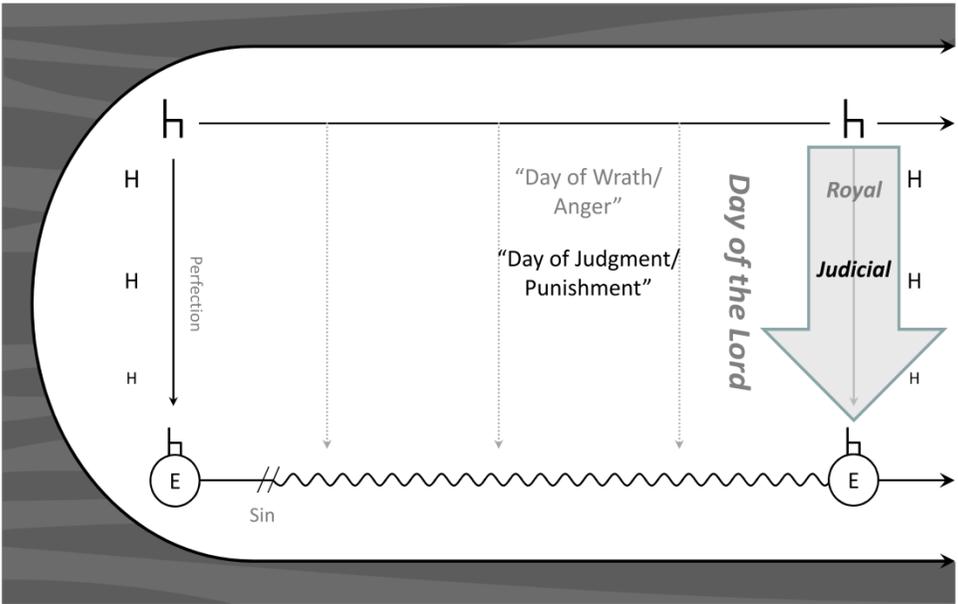


Figure 3.4 – The Judicial Nature of the Day of the Lord

God will then be vindicated in his gubernatorial role, for “he has established his throne for *judgment*” (Ps. 9:7, NRSV). “He will *judge* the world with righteousness” (Ps. 98:9). “He will *judge* the peoples with equity” (Ps. 96:10). “He will execute *judgment* among the nations” (Ps. 110:6), “for he comes to *judge* the earth” (Ps. 96:13). “By fire will the LORD enter into *judgment*, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many” (Isa. 66:16; cf. Joel 3:2). Accordingly David cries, “Arise, O LORD! Let not man prevail; let the nations be *judged* before you!” (Ps. 9:19). And another psalmist, “Arise, O God, *judge* the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!” (Ps. 82:8).

Judgment is also inherently based upon the transgression of a law, for laws are the standard by which judgment is executed. Thus God is a real lawgiver: “For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our *lawgiver*; the LORD is our king; he will save us” (Isa. 33:22; cf. James 4:12). He has a real law with real rules, precepts, and statutes by which he judges the heavens and the earth. The Mosaic law given to Israel was understood as a temporal expression of the universal and eternal “law of God” (1 Cor. 9:21; cf. Rom. 7:22; Gal. 6:2).

Just as temporal judgments point to the eternal judgment, so also the temporal law pointed to the eternal law by which the earth will be judged (cf. Isa. 2:2–4; 42:1–4; 51:4–5; Mic. 4:1–3). Though the two are different—the former being accommodated to human depravity in historical context—there is an organic continuity between them, for “every one of your righteous rules endures forever” (Ps. 119:160; cf. Matt. 5:17–18). Hence the historical law is given as a “tutor” (Gal. 3:24, NASB), so as to “cultivate” righteousness (cf. Rom. 11:24)—as the psalmist says, “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory” (Ps. 73:24; cf. Ps. 25:8; 32:8). Consequently the divine law will go forth on the day of the Lord, judging the nations and establishing righteousness upon the earth. As Isaiah saw,

In the last days . . .

Many peoples will come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the house of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,

so that we may walk in his paths.”

The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Isa. 2:2–3, NIV)

Listen to me, my people;

hear me, my nation:

The law will go out from me;

my justice will become a light to the nations.

My righteousness draws near speedily,

my salvation is on the way,

and my arm will bring justice to the nations. (Isa. 51:4–5, NIV)

Redemptive history thus has an undeniably penal aspect. The day of the Lord will be the ultimate “day of punishment” (Isa. 10:3; cf. Jer. 50:27).²⁷ “‘The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the LORD will bring *charges* against the nations; he will bring *judgment* on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword,’ declares the LORD” (Jer. 25:31, NIV). It will be the climax of the “divine lawsuit” (Heb. *rīb*) against sinful humanity (cf. Isa. 3:13; Jer. 2:9; Hos. 4:1; Mic. 6:2).²⁸ “The wickedness of the wicked will be *charged* against him” (Ezek. 18:20, NIV). The day of the Lord is thus presented as a great apocalyptic courtroom in which the divine judge will charge and punish the sins of humanity, restoring righteousness and establishing justice upon the earth.

So David prayed, “Rouse yourself to *punish* all the nations; spare none of those who treacherously plot evil” (Ps. 59:5). And “*Charge* them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation” (Ps. 69:27, NIV). Hence the punishment of wickedness is one of central facets of the day of the Lord, as Isaiah summarizes: “On that day the LORD will *punish* the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be *punished*” (Isa. 24:21–22).

Not only is the day of the Lord royal and judicial, but it is also characteristically *economic*. Humanity has done real damage to real things which have real value, and we really owe our Creator for it. The day of the Lord will dispense damages according to damages done. As such the judgment of the divine King is essentially retributive in nature (see figure 3.5).²⁹ It will be a day of recompense and retribution: “For the LORD is a God of *recompense*, He will fully *repay*” (Jer. 51:56, NASB). Therefore, “Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be *paid back* for what their hands have done” (Isa. 3:11, NIV). “For you *repay* to all according to their work” (Ps. 62:12, NRSV). Projected eschatologically,

²⁷ Again, because of the temporal nature of the Scriptures, historical events organically “point” to their protological introduction and eschatological conclusion. Thus historical judgments upon human sin inherently prophesy the eschatological judgment. This is how much of the prophetic language and imagery concerning the day of the Lord is developed (cf. Jer. 46:21; Ezek. 21:29; Hos. 5:9; Amos 3:14; Mic. 7:4; Zeph. 1:9).

²⁸ “רִיב,” HALOT, 1226; cf. John M. Bracke, “רִיב (rīb I),” NIDOTTE, 3:1105–6.

²⁹ Note the usage of Heb. *gāmal/gēmīl* (“to recompense/recompense”) (Ps. 28:4; 94:2; 103:10; 116:12; 137:8; Isa. 3:11; 35:4; 59:18; 66:6; Jer. 51:6; Lam. 3:64; Joel 3:7; Obad. 1:15); see J. P. Lewis, “360 גַּמַּל (gāmal),” TWOT, 166–67.

“The day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head” (Obad. 1:15). The earth will hear “the sound of the LORD, rendering *recompense* to his enemies!” (Isa. 66:6).

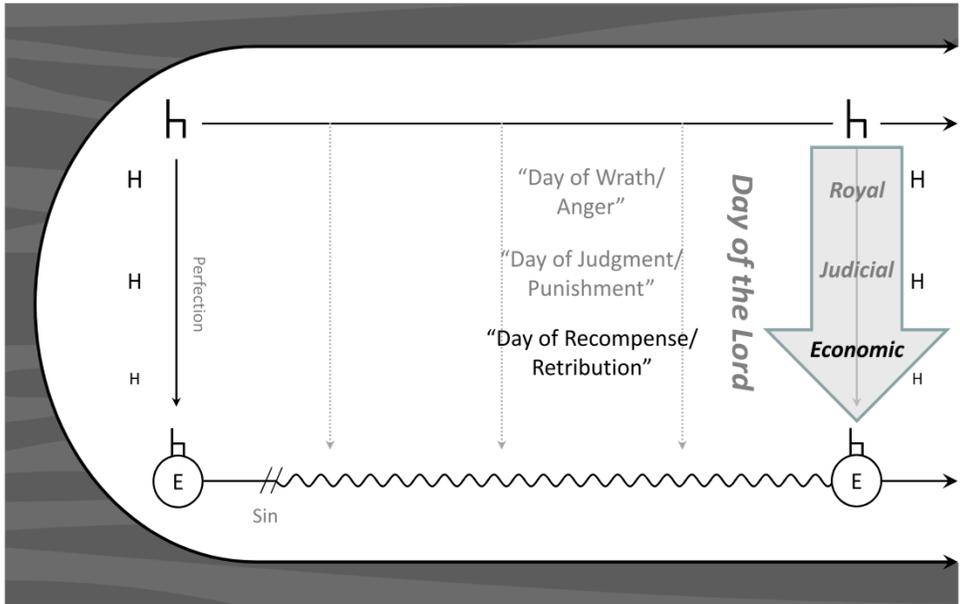


Figure 3.5 – The Economic Nature of the Day of the Lord

Considering that recompense is based upon judgment, the day of the Lord will be an eschatological application of the vengeful aspects of the law: “You shall *pay* life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Ex. 21:23–24; cf. Deut. 19:21). In other words, “As [the offender] has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him” (Lev. 24:19–20). Hence the psalmist cries, “O God of *vengeance*, shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth; *repay* to the proud what they deserve!” (Ps. 94:1–2).

Consequently the day of the Lord will be “the day of *vengeance* of our God” (Isa. 61:2). “For the LORD has a day of *vengeance*, a year of *recompense* for the cause of Zion” (Isa. 34:8). “Behold, your God will come with *vengeance*, with the *recompense* of God” (Isa. 35:4). Wearing “garments of *vengeance* for clothing,” God

will “*repay* wrath to his enemies and *retribution* to his foes” (Isa. 59:17–18, NIV). So the oracle from Isaiah:

I stomped on them in my *anger*;
I trampled them down in my *rage*. . . .
For I looked forward to the day of *vengeance*,
and then *payback* time arrived.
I looked, but there was no one to help;
I was shocked because there was no one offering support.
So my right arm accomplished deliverance;
my *raging anger* drove me on. I trampled nations in my *anger*,
I made them drunk in my *rage*,
I splashed their blood on the ground. (Isa. 63:3–6, NET)

This threefold classification of the day of the Lord is in simple accord with the nature of creation. Again, if someone smashes my car with a sledgehammer, I get *angry* because that person disrespected me and my bestowed right to own property. Then I press *charges* against him because we live in a land with laws to protect the dignity of life. And if I win the case, then he *repays* me according to the damages done to my car. So it is with God. He is angry concerning humankind’s rebellion and the damages done to his creation. Therefore he is pressing charges against humanity for their crimes, and in the end he will make them pay, even with their very lives.

This presentation of the day of the Lord is generally in regard to human depravity, and as such it is highly *negative* in tone (one reason for its neglect in the theological tradition). However, for the righteous, whose sins are atoned for, this day is a positive hope (as outlined above). It will be the final deliverance from the evils of this age. Yet this hope must always be set in context of the gravity of human sinfulness and the substantial negativity associated with the day of the Lord. Thus the exhortation, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling . . . holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain” (Phil. 2:12–16).

The Day of the Lord in the New Testament

The writers of the New Testament assume this theological framework within which history is envisioned as moving toward an apocalyptic day of the Lord,

and which will then usher in a new heavens and new earth.³⁰ While the phrase “day of the Lord” is often used in full (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10), its reality is expressed through a variety of phrases: “the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12), “the great day” (Jude 6), “the day of eternity” (2 Peter 3:18), “the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30), “the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12), “the last day” (John 6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48), “the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:30)—“the great day of God the Almighty” (Rev. 16:14).

Because “the Christ” is God’s agent or viceroy, so to speak, the day of the Lord is understood to be “the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). Thus God will bring his work “to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). He will sustain us “to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8); and we will boast in him “on the day of our Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 1:14).³¹ Because it is assumed that Jesus will initiate the day of the Lord, his “coming” (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:1), “revealing” (1 Cor. 1:7; cf. 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:5), and “appearing” (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13) are the anchor of all New Testament “hope” (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:5).

The day of the Lord is so intrinsic to New Testament thought that it is simply referred to as “the day” or “that day.”³² Accordingly, Jesus said, “On *that day* many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, . . .’” (Matt. 7:22); “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until *that day* when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29); “I tell you, it will be more bearable on *that day* for Sodom than for that town” (Luke 10:12); “But watch yourselves lest your

³⁰ Ernst Käsemann is known for stating (critically): “Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology” (*New Testament Questions of Today* [London: SCM Press, 1969], 102). I agree (though I reject Käsemann’s naturalistic bias), for the resurrection of Jesus confirmed the apocalyptic approach to the Scriptures. Apocalypticism is thus the theological framework within which the severity of God and the kindness of God are embodied in the day of the Lord and the cross, respectively. Generally speaking, the OT focuses more upon divine justice while the NT focuses more upon divine mercy, fulfilling the desire of God to atone for the sins of his people (cf. Deut. 32:43; Ps. 65:3; 79:9; Dan. 9:24).

³¹ Unfounded is the dispensational attempt to distinguish between the “day of the Lord” and the “day of Christ” (akin to its delineation between the “kingdom and God” and the “kingdom of heaven”), finding in them “two separate [salvific] programs” (J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965], 232).

³² “Sometimes it is called ‘that day’ (Matt. 7:22; 1 Thess. 5:4; 2 Tim. 4:8), and again it is called ‘the day’ without any qualification whatever, as if it were the only day worth counting in all the history of the world and of the race (1 Cor. 3:13). . . . All Pauline literature is especially suffused with this longing for the Parousia, the day of Christ’s glorious manifestation. The entire conception of that day centers therefore in Christ and points to the everlasting establishment of the kingdom of heaven, from which sin will be forever eliminated” (H. E. Dosker, “Day of the Lord,” *ISBE*, 1:879).

hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and *that day* come upon you suddenly like a trap" (Luke 21:34).

Likewise, Paul commonly refers to the day of the Lord:

Each one's work will become manifest, for *the Day* will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. (1 Cor. 3:13).

This will take place on *the day* when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (Rom. 2:16, NIV)

For you yourselves are fully aware that *the day of the Lord* will come like a thief in the night. . . . But you are not in darkness, brothers, for *that day* to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of *the day*. (1 Thess. 5:2-5)

When he comes on *that day*, he will receive glory from his holy people—praise from all who believe. (2 Thess. 1:10, NLT)

Let no one deceive you in any way; for *that day* will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. (2 Thess. 2:3, NRSV)

I am convinced that he is able to guard until *that Day* what has been entrusted to me. (2 Tim. 1:12)

May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on *that day!*" (2 Tim. 1:18, NIV)

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on *that Day*, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:8)

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see *the Day* approaching. (Heb. 10:25, NIV)

Moreover, the day of the Lord was understood as redemptive history's ultimate "appointed time" (Gk. *kairos*).³³ So the demons shouted, "Have you come here to torment us before *the time*?" (Matt. 8:29). We are called to be watchful, for "you do not know when *the time* will come" (Mark 13:33). Many false Christs will come, claiming, "*The time* is at hand!" (Luke 21:8). Jesus told his disciples, "It is not for you to know *the times or dates* the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7, NIV). Paul relates these "times and dates" (1 Thess. 5:1, NIV) directly to "the day of the Lord" (v. 2).

Hence we see Paul instructing the Corinthians, "Therefore judge nothing before *the appointed time*; wait till the Lord comes" (1 Cor. 4:5, NIV). For when "*the times* will have reached their fulfillment," God will "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10, NIV). We are to keep the good confession "without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at *the proper time*" (1 Tim. 6:14–15, NASB). So we are being guarded by God's power "for a salvation ready to be revealed in *the last time*" (1 Peter 1:5). And concerning Jesus' "coming soon" (Rev. 22:12), "*the time* is near" (v. 10, cf. 1:3).

The New Testament carries over from the Old Testament the royal, judicial, and economic characteristics of the day of the Lord. It is "the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:5); "for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury" (v. 8). The wicked will cry out, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev. 6:17).

As such, the day of the Lord was commonly understood as the final context for "the wrath of God" (John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 5:9; 12:19; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; Rev. 14:19; 15:1; 19:15). For that reason, John the Baptist threatened the crowds, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from *the wrath to come*?" (Matt. 3:7). For all people are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), destined "to suffer wrath" (1 Thess. 5:9, NIV) on that day when God will "inflict wrath on us" (Rom. 3:5). On

³³ "In spite of the attempts of OT prophets (1 Pt. 1:11), Christians cannot calculate these times (Mk. 13:33; 1 Th. 5:1f.; Ac. 1:7). God Himself will put them in an absolute schedule in accordance with the requirements of salvation history, and a prior fixing of the year or the day would be opposed to the divine sovereignty (Ac. 1:7). *καὶρός* then becomes a technical term for the last judgment or the end" (Gerhard Delling, "*καὶρός*," *TDNT*, 3:461).

account of our sins, “the wrath of God is coming” (Col. 3:6). Nevertheless, Jesus “delivers us from the wrath to come” (1Thess. 1:10). All of this was understood in its eschatological context.

Likewise, “the judgment of God” (Rom. 2:2–3; 2 Thess. 1:5) was believed to be ultimately expressed at “the day of judgment” (Matt. 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:7; 1 John 4:17). It is “the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6), for God “has set a *day* when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed” (Act 17:31, NIV). This concept was so commonly assumed that it was simply referred to as “the judgment” (Matt. 12:41–42; Luke 10:14; 11:31–32; Heb. 9:27; 2 Peter 2:4).

The day of the Lord is “the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25), or “eternal judgment” (Heb. 6:2), which will take place “on *the day* when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16, NIV). It will be “the righteous *judgment* of God” (2 Thess. 1:5), when “the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting *vengeance* on those who do not know God. . . . They will suffer the *punishment* of eternal destruction” (vv. 7–9). For the wicked are kept “unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2:9, KJV), and they will inherit “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46)—namely, “the punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 7). In this way “we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom. 14:10). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10).

As in the Old Testament, the judgment of God ends in recompense: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my *recompense* with me, to *repay* each one for what he has done” (Rev. 22:12). “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will *repay* each person according to what he has done” (Matt. 16:27). So Jesus analogizes the day of the Lord: “Call the laborers and *pay them* their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first” (Matt. 20:8). The righteous will receive their wages in eternal life (John 4:36), for “each will receive his *wages* according to his labor” (1 Cor. 3:8). The wicked receive “the *wages* of sin” (Rom. 6:23), their recompense of eternal death, destruction, and punishment (cf. Matt. 25:46; Heb. 10:27; 2 Thess. 1:9): “Their destruction is their reward for the harm they have done” (2 Peter 2:13, NLT). “For after all it is *only* just for God to *repay* with affliction those who afflict you . . . dealing out

retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:6–8, NASB).

Thus God will take vengeance on his enemies (cf. Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30), for “on the day of wrath . . . he will *repay* according to each one’s deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give *eternal life*; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be *wrath and fury* (Rom. 2:5–8, NRSV). From the unrepentant, God will demand restitution for damages done; and those who cannot pay the debt will pay with their very lives (cf. Matt. 18:25; Rev. 20:15).

The Unity of the Scriptures

The centrality of the day of the Lord is evident not only by the plethora of references, both Old Testament and New, but more importantly by the place it holds as a theological concept. It is literally *the end* of all biblical thought. The day of the Lord is that to which everything is moving toward, and it is that to which everything is building.³⁴

The most striking illustration of this belief is the use of the Greek alphabet as a metaphor describing redemptive history as a whole (cf. Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). Creation is portrayed as the first letter of the alphabet, *alpha* (α), while the day of the Lord and the restored creation is thought of as the last letter, *omega* (ω) (see figure 3.6). The Scriptures close with Jesus identifying himself as “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 21:6; 22:13), because he is the primary agent anointed by the Father to restore the heavens and earth when he returns to initiate the day of the Lord.

³⁴ “The apocalypticists believed in God, and believed that He had some purpose for the world He had made, and that His power was equal to its achievement. Their faith goes beyond the faith in the divine control of history, indeed. It is a faith in the divine initiative in history for the attainment of its final goal. Such a belief is fundamental to the Christian view of God and the world” (Rowley, *Relevance of Apocalyptic*, 152).

Indeed, “They would have smiled at the idea so widespread in our day that God is of all beings the most helpless. Few, indeed, would formulate their faith in those words, but many would appear to cherish their substance. For they believe that man is vastly powerful to influence the course of the world by his acts, or to launch ideas that will change the course of history, while God is shut outside the circle of history, a mere spectator, and powerless to intervene” (Ibid.).

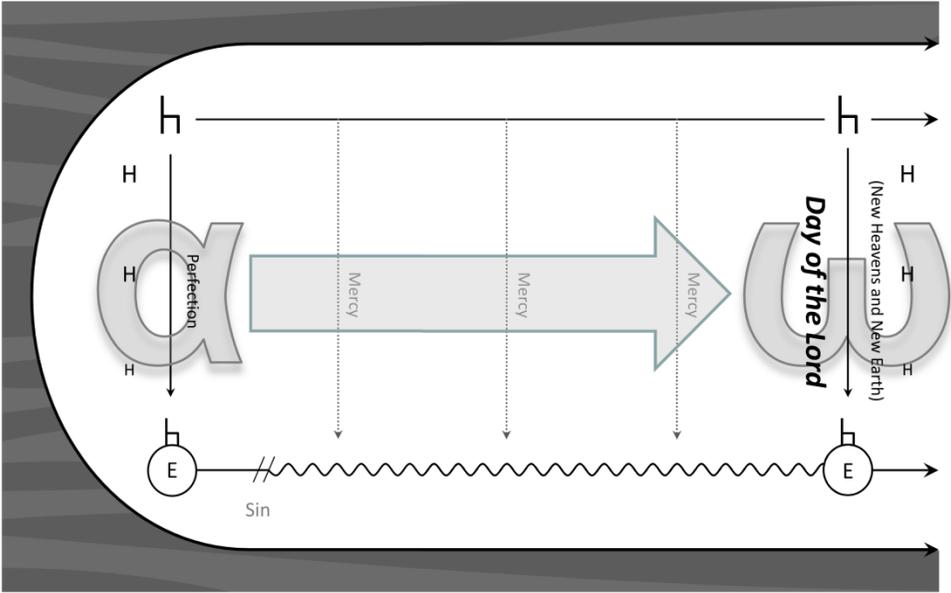


Figure 3.6 – Biblical Theology: Creation to Consummation

It is therefore “the beginning and the end” (Rev. 21:6; 22:13) that define biblical history and biblical theology.³⁵ In the analogy of the alphabet, all of the letters ultimately find their meaning and significance in relation to the α and ω . How do you understand the λ , μ , and ν , apart from the α and ω ? To marginalize the α and the ω as alphabetically secondary to the “central alphabetical letters,” so to speak, throws the whole arrangement into a shambles. It is the beginning and the end that ultimately inform the whole of our existence, without which we are doomed to be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every

³⁵ Though rejecting a literal interpretation of Genesis 1–3, J. V. Fesko well articulates,

The categories of the beginning are embedded in eschatology, the creation of the heavens and earth become the *new* heavens and earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22) and the garden of Eden reappears in the book of Revelation (2:7; cf. Isa. 51:3; Zech. 1:17). The broader category of protology enables one to consider matters of ontology, or systematic theology, but also redemptive history, or biblical theology. Under this broader rubric of protology one can see the connections between anthropology and christology, the first and second Adams, and protology and eschatology, Genesis and Revelation, the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega. (*Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1–3 with the Christ of Eschatology* [Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007], 33–34)

wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). This is why the Bible is so protologically based and eschatologically oriented.³⁶

This framework gives us an "elementary" theological foundation (Heb. 6:1). It gives context for "the basic principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12). Returning to a soccer analogy, it is imperative to establish the players on a grass field (cf. the heavens and the earth), with soccer goals (cf. the new heavens and new earth), playing in the right direction (cf. the day of the Lord).³⁷ Such things are exceedingly elementary, but error concerning these most basic concepts leads to much confusion and grievous errors in the heat of the game.³⁸

³⁶ So the assertion that Geerhardus Vos makes concerning Paul's eschatological orientation holds: "It will appear throughout that to unfold the Apostle's eschatology means to set forth his theology as a whole. Through a conceptual retroversion the end will be seen to give birth to the beginning in the emergence of truth. . . . The presence of this antithetical orientation is clearly seen in the correspondence of the two names for Christ, 'the eschatos Adam' and 'the deuterios Man,' the opposite to the former no less than to the latter being the 'protos Man'" (*The Pauline Eschatology* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930], 11). Of course, Paul's "theology as a whole" also emphasized the cross and justification by faith in light of the coming judgment—i.e., "cruciform-apocalypticism."

³⁷ Based on this apostolic foundation, the early church developed its common eschatological doctrines, as patristic scholar Brian E. Daley summarizes:

Risky though it always is to speak of a consensus among theologians, one may at least discern the outlines of a common eschatological *doctrine*, as well as these common axioms or presuppositions, emerging in the writings we have studied, despite many variations of interpretation and emphasis on the part of individual writers.

(a) Central, for instance, to the early Christian theological tradition is what has been called a "*linear*" *view of history*: the conviction that history has an origin and an end, both rooted in the plan and the power of God. . . .

(b) Equally central to Patristic eschatological thought is the insistence that the fulfillment of human history must include the *resurrection of the body*. . . .

(c) Following the expectations of both the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament, early Christian writers also agreed on the prospect of God's *universal judgment*. . . . And it is Christ, God's Word made flesh, who will embody and execute that judgment by coming to be visibly present again at the end of its history. (*The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 219–20; italics in the original)

³⁸ As N. T. Wright laments,

I have become convinced that most people, including most practicing Christians, are muddled and misguided on this topic, and that this muddle produces quite serious mistakes in our thinking, our praying, our liturgies, our practice, and perhaps particularly our mission to the world. . . . Often people assume that Christians are simply committed to a belief in 'life after death' in the most general terms and have no idea how the more specific notions of resurrection, judgment, the second coming of Jesus, and so on fit together and make any sense—let alone how they relate to the

As the ultimate subject of the oracles of Scriptures and the defining event of redemptive history, the day of the Lord is thus the *theological linchpin* for interpreting all other biblical events and their redemptive implications (see figure 3.7).³⁹ All theologies have a linchpin, whether stated explicitly or implicitly.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, when the day of the Lord is removed or decentralized from its ultimate position, great theological disorder and disarray ensues.

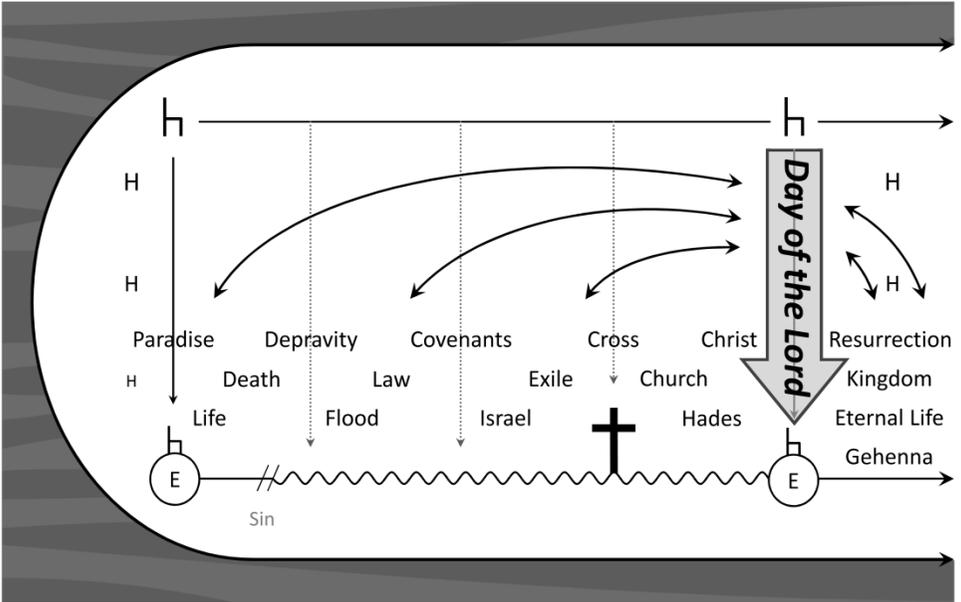


Figure 3.7 – The Day of the Lord as the Unifying Theological Linchpin

In this way, the day of the Lord is the primary *unifying reality* of the Scriptures. The Old and New Testaments speak the same message because they end in the same event. Consequently they hold to “the same hope” (Acts 24:15, NIV). They look forward to the same “new heavens and new earth.” They believe in the same “resurrection of the dead.” They expect the same “glory,” the same

urgent concerns of today’s real world. (*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* [New York: HarperOne, 2008], 6)

³⁹ Though I disagree with their incorporation of “realized eschatology” (see the introduction; to be discussed further at the end of this chap.), I am indebted to Clifford and Johnson for the “linchpin” phraseology (see Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson, *The Cross Is Not Enough: Living as Witnesses to the Resurrection* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012], chap. 1).

⁴⁰ In theological discussion, this is more commonly referred to as the “center” of biblical theology (see chap. 8, n. 2).

“salvation,” the same “inheritance,” the same “kingdom,” etc. The New Testament simply asserts that the Messiah had to suffer before entering his eschatological glory (cf. Luke 24:26; Acts 17:3; 1 Peter 1:11), bearing sin before bringing salvation (cf. Acts 3:18–21; Heb. 9:28), being set forward as a propitiation before the day of wrath (cf. Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2), providing justification in anticipation of the day of judgment (cf. Rom. 5:9; Titus 3:7), and offering redemption in light of the day of recompense (cf. Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).⁴¹

We can also observe a simple continuity with the testimony of the Law and Prophets (cf. Luke 24:27; Acts 10:43; Rom. 3:21), which foretold not only “the prize” of eternal life (1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:14) but also the means of receiving that prize—the superior sacrifice and atonement of the new covenant, “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28; cf. Acts 13:39). It is this “righteousness from God” (Phil. 3:9; cf. Rom. 10:3) that is discontinuous and sets the old covenant apart from the new (detailed in chapter 8). The eschatological hope which is “attained” by the new covenant is the same (cf. Rom. 9:30–33; Phil. 3:8–11; Heb. 9:15). The idea that the eschatology of the Old Testament was somehow spiritually fulfilled, actualized, or “realized” at the first coming finds precious little real evidence in the Scriptures.⁴²

ASPECTS OF THIS AGE VERSUS THE AGE TO COME

The reality of the day of the Lord inherently creates a *dichotomy of ages*. Because the day of the Lord radically changes so much concerning God, humanity, angels, demons, the heavens, the earth, etc., New Testament writers adopted the language of “this age” (Matt. 12:32; Luke 20:34; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6,8; 3:18; Eph. 1:21) versus “the age to come” (cf. Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Heb. 6:5).

The relationship between the day of the Lord and the two ages is seen in Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees: “Anyone who speaks a word against the

⁴¹ The incorporation of realized eschatology tends to break the simple unity of the Scriptures (i.e., communicating that the NT is talking about something fundamentally different than the OT), as seen in the works of Fuller, *Unity of the Bible*; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); and G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

⁴² Passages commonly associated with “realized eschatology” (e.g., Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21; etc.) are addressed in the appendix.

Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. . . . I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” (Matt. 12:32–36, NIV).

It is “the day of judgment” that makes it necessary to speak of two ages. Without the day of the Lord, there is no reason to implement or retain such language.⁴³

Time and Eternity

The two-age reality delineated by the day of the Lord assumes a simple *linear view of history*.⁴⁴ This age and the age to come lie on the same temporal continuum. Thus the same word is used in the New Testament (Gk. *aiōn*) concerning both this “age” and “eternity,”⁴⁵ which finds its root in the Old Testament (Heb. *’ōlām*) and is based upon creation’s perpetuity (cf. Gen. 3:22; Ps. 78:69; 148:6; Ecc. 1:4; etc.).⁴⁶ “Forever” simply assumes the plural form of “age,” and as such “eternity” is equivalent to “the coming ages” (Eph. 2:7).

Unlike the Hellenistic view of timeless eternity, we look forward to “an endless succession of ages” (see figure 3.8).⁴⁷ The ungodliness of this age will

⁴³ Thus the spiritual realization of the day of the Lord and the resurrection incurs such harsh apostolic condemnation (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:18; 1 Cor. 15:12ff). Realized eschatology breaks the basic framework of redemptive history.

⁴⁴ See Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950); and Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. S. G. Sowers (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). Though I applaud Cullmann’s emphasis on the Jewish, linear view of history (along with his spirited condemnation of Platonism), I reject his perversion of that simple timeline through realized eschatology (see esp. *Christ and Time*, 81–93; and *Salvation in History*, 166–85).

⁴⁵ “The word used to express eternity, αἰών (‘age’), is *the same word* that is also applied to a limited division of time; otherwise expressed, between what we call eternity and what we call time, that is, between everlasting continuing time and limited time, the New Testament makes absolutely no difference in terminology. Eternity is the endless succession of the ages (αἰώνες)” (Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 62).

⁴⁶ “The LXX generally translates *’ōlām* by *aiōn* which has essentially the same range of meaning. That neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word in itself contains the idea of endlessness is shown both by the fact that they sometimes refer to events or conditions that occurred at a definite point in the past, and also by the fact that sometimes it is thought desirable to repeat the word, not merely saying ‘forever,’ but ‘forever and ever’” (Allan A. Macrae, “1631a עולם [’ōlām],” *TWOT*, 673).

⁴⁷ As C. R. Schoonhoven points out,

In Platonic and Hellenistic thought eternity was often conceived of as timelessness. According to this tradition man’s final goal is to seek to escape from time into

soon come to an end, and God will establish righteousness in the heavens and on the earth “forever and ever” (Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 1 Peter 4:11; 5:11; Rev. 1:6; 14:11; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5)—literally, “for ages and ages” (Gk. *tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn*). Hence we long for the day when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign *forever and ever*” (Rev. 11:15).

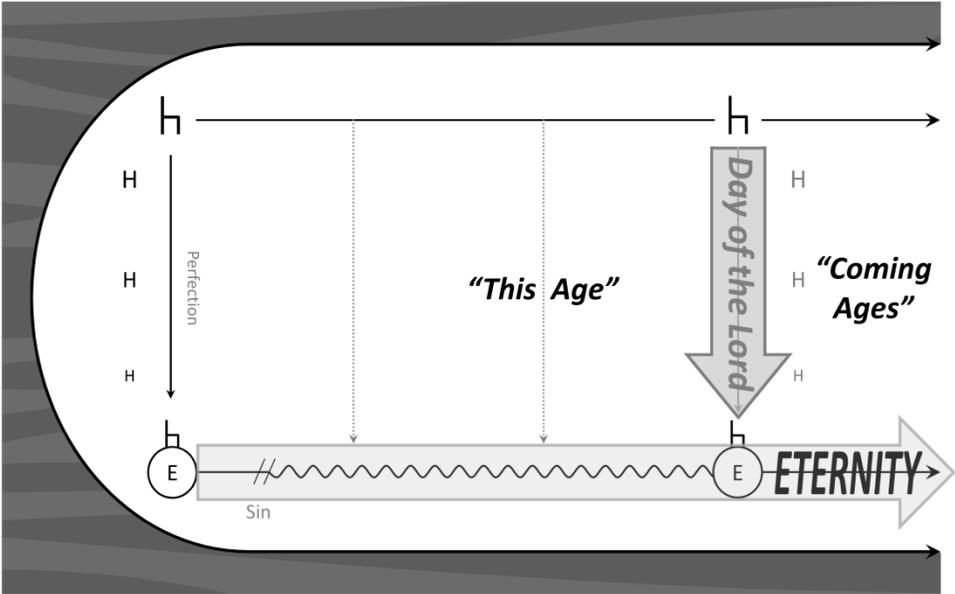


Figure 3.8 – Linear History Delineated by the Day of the Lord

This view of history is, above all, *simple*. There is no hidden meaning or agenda, perceptible only to the intellectual or spiritual elite. The biblical presentation of time and history is meant to be taken at face value. God is “patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (2

timelessness, i.e., into eternity (cf. Plato *Phaedo* 79, 106e–108a; *Symposium* 208a; *Republic* 611a–b; *Timaeus* 27d–28a [contrast 37d]). . . .

From the biblical perspective such a dualism, which posits an exclusive and qualitative difference between time and eternity, is false. In the understanding of the writers of the OT and NT, eternity is not timelessness but endless time. . . .

The NT, like the LXX, used Gk *aiōn* (translated ‘age’) for eternity. This same word is used for a long but limited duration of time. The use of identical terms for both everlastingly continuing time and limited time emphasizes the notion of eternity as an endless succession of ages. Time is not demeaned in the NT, but rather exalted. (“Eternity,” *ISBE*, 2:162–63)

Peter 3:9, NRSV). Consequently, the Scriptures—the fundamental means by which God communicates this message—must be understood easily by peasant and philosopher alike.

Though the particular elements of redemptive history (the cross, resurrection, holiness of God, depravity of man, etc.) may hold infinite depth, complexity, and mystery, redemptive history itself must remain universally apprehensible, or the very character of God in his governance is compromised. What judge seeks to punish lawlessness throughout the land yet speaks of the coming judgment only to university professors and the political elite? That would be ridiculous. The Bible speaks a simple linear history from creation to consummation that warns sinners of divine judgment and promises eternal life to the penitent.⁴⁸

Linguistic Dichotomies

In light of the coming day, the New Testament develops a host of other phrases. The “present time” (Rom. 8:18), “present age” (1 Tim. 6:17; Titus 2:12; Heb. 9:9), and “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) are all contrasted with the time and age after the day of the Lord. Moreover, “this life” (Luke 21:34; 1 Cor. 6:3; 15:19), “the present life” (1 Tim. 4:8), “this body” (Rom. 7:24; 2 Peter 1:13), “our lowly body” (Phil. 3:21), and “this perishable . . . mortal body” (1 Cor. 15:53) are contrasted with eternal life and the resurrected body given on the day of the Lord. Likewise, “this world” (Luke 16:8; John 18:36; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 3:19; 5:10; 7:31; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 4:17) and “this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10) are understood in light of “the world to come” (Heb. 2:5).⁴⁹ Hence the implied

⁴⁸ This simplicity is one of the reasons J. Christiaan Beker preferred the term *apocalyptic*: “The reader may well ask: Why use the term apocalyptic at all? My reasons for using ‘apocalyptic’ are twofold: first of all, the term ‘apocalyptic’ guards against the multivalent and often chaotic use of the concept of ‘eschatology’ in modern times. . . . The use of the term apocalyptic clarifies the future-temporal character of Paul’s gospel. Second, apocalyptic denotes an end-time occurrence that is both cosmic-universal and definitive. . . . The term ‘apocalyptic’ refers more clearly than the general term ‘eschatology’ to the specificity and extent of the end-time occurrence” (*Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 14). In other words, apocalypticism clearly emphasizes the realities of the day of the Lord and leaves no room for the unending ambiguities of existentialism and realized eschatology.

⁴⁹ There has been extensive theological debate over the interpretation and translation of “age” (Gk. *aiōn*) and “world” (Gk. *kosmos*). The reason for the linguistic overlap between *aiōn* and *kosmos* (cf. esp. Matt. 13:22; Luke 16:8; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 1:2; 11:3) is due to the fact that “this world” and “this age” hold *historical continuity* with “the world to come” and “the age to come,” and thus they hold many assumed commonalities. The introduction of

timeline behind Jesus' injunction: "Whoever loves his life [in this age] loses it [in the age to come], and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25; cf. Luke 9:24 and parallels).

Similarly, the prominence of the day of Lord and the twofold chronological view of history gave birth to a wide range of *linguistic dichotomies* in the New Testament (see table 3.1). Such a wide range of temporally dualistic descriptions argues strongly for the apostolic retention of Jewish apocalypticism.

Table 3.1 – Various Linguistic Dichotomies Based upon the Day of the Lord		
<i>This Age</i>	<i>Age to Come</i>	<i>References</i>
Night	Day	Rom. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:2–8
Evil	Righteous	Gal. 1:4; Acts 2:40; 2 Peter 3:13
Death	Life	Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:21–22
Mortality	Immortality	Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:53
Perishable	Imperishable	1 Cor. 9:25; 15:42; 1 Peter 1:23
Suffering	Glory	Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17
Not seeing	Appearing	2 Cor. 4:18; 1 Peter 1:7; 1 John 3:2
Time of exile	Time of restoring	Acts 3:21; 1 Peter 1:17
Sojourning	Ruling	1 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 11:13; Rev. 5:10
The world	The kingdom	John 18:36; James 2:5; Rev. 11:15
Things of the flesh	Things of the Spirit	Rom. 8:5; 1 Cor. 3:1
Treasures on earth	Treasures in heaven	Matt. 6:19; 19:21; Luke 16:11

The End of This Age

The two-age reality is also expressed in the phraseology of "the end of the age," referencing the end of *this age*. Consequently Jesus' disciples questioned,

metaphysical dualism (i.e., "this world" versus "the world beyond") breaks the continuum and confounds the commonalities.

“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). So also Jesus concludes their commissioning, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).⁵⁰ In explaining the parable of the weeds, Jesus likewise summarizes the close of this age, the day of the Lord, and the initiation of the age to come:

The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matt. 13:39–43)

So commonly understood was the apocalyptic framework of redemptive history that the end of this age was simply referred to as “the end.” Thus Jesus answers his disciples’ question concerning the timing of “the end of the age” (Matt. 24:3): “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then *the end* will come” (Matt. 24:14). For “the one who endures to *the end* will be saved” (v. 13; cf. Matt. 10:22). And “to him who overcomes and does my will to *the end*, I will give authority over the nations” (Rev. 2:26, NIV).

Therefore the apostles pressed toward the day of the Lord and the end of this age like “those who run in a race” (1 Cor. 9:24, NASB; cf. Heb. 12:1), pressing on “toward the goal” (Phil. 3:14) of the resurrection and eternal life. Hence Paul exhorts the Corinthians to seek the gifts of the Spirit, “as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to *the end*, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:7–8). So also Peter: “*The end* of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your

⁵⁰ By telling his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18), Jesus is simply saying that he has been entrusted with judging the living and the dead at the day of the Lord (cf. John 5:22–27; Acts 10:42). Until that day, therefore, they are to preach “repentance and forgiveness of sins . . . to all nations” (Luke 24:47), “baptizing them” (Matt. 28:19) as a confirmation of their forgiveness and salvation from the coming wrath. The complete lack of reference to the day of the Lord in modern commentaries concerning Matt. 28:18 is astonishing; cf. France (NICNT), Hagner (WBC), Turner (BECNT), Carson (EBC), Nolland (NIGTC), Davies and Allison (ICC), Luz (Hermeneia), Wilkins (NIVAC), Blomberg (NAC), Morris (PNTC), etc. Such is the product of realized eschatology.

prayers" (1 Peter 4:7).⁵¹ And the writer of Hebrews: "For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to *the end*" (Heb. 3:14). And "We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until *the end*, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:11–12).

The apocalyptic nature of the Scriptures is further exemplified in the use of *fire* as the means of ending this age. As everything was created in the beginning "out of water and by means of water" (2 Peter 3:5, NRSV), so also will everything be cleansed at the end of this age "by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of *burning*" (Isa. 4:4). Water is the medium of creation, but fire is the medium of destruction.⁵² "For behold, the day is coming, *burning* like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them *ablaze*, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. 4:1). So David foresaw,

Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies;
your right hand will seize your foes.
At the time of your appearing
you will make them like a *fiery furnace*.
In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up,
and *his fire* will consume them.
You will destroy their descendants from the earth,
their posterity from mankind. (Ps. 21:8–10, NIV)

The day of the Lord will be executed with fire because God himself is a "consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Isa. 33:14; Heb. 12:29). Accordingly the Lord will descend from heaven "in furious anger and a flame of devouring *fire*" (Isa.

⁵¹ The "all things" here refers historically, rather than metaphysically, to the things of this age. So the NET renders, "For *the culmination* of all things is near." As Peter H. Davids points out, "The phrase used here points to this linear concept of history in the NT and therefore the end of this historical age with all that is associated with it (therefore, 'the end of *all things*')" (*The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 155–56).

⁵² Note the pseudepigraphic *Life of Adam and Eve*: "Indeed, six days after Adam died, Eve, aware that she would die, gathered all her sons and daughters, Seth with thirty brothers and thirty sisters, and Eve said to (them) all, 'Listen to me, my children, and I will tell you that I and your father transgressed the command of God, and the archangel Michael said to us, "Because of your collusion, our LORD will bring over your race the wrath of his judgment, first by water and then by fire; by these two the LORD will judge the whole human race"' (49.1–3; *OTP*, 2:292).

30:30), for “*fire* goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around” (Ps. 97:3; cf. Ps. 50:3). On “the day of the LORD’S wrath . . . all the earth will be devoured in the *fire* of His jealousy” (Zeph. 1:18, NASB), for God’s “wrath is poured out like *fire*” (Nah. 1:6). Though humanity labors to build great empires in this age, “the people’s labor is only fuel for the *fire*” (Hab. 2:13, NIV). “They are like stubble; the *fire* consumes them” (Isa. 47:14). As Isaiah envisioned,

See, the LORD is coming with *fire*,
and his chariots are like a whirlwind;
he will bring down his anger with fury,
and his rebuke with flames of *fire*.
For with *fire* and with his sword
the LORD will execute judgment upon all men,
and many will be those slain by the LORD. (Isa. 66:15–16, NIV)

The New Testament amplifies the idea that God will conclude this age with fire. The Gospels introduce John the Baptist warning the people of Israel about “the wrath to come” (Luke 3:7). Those who do not repent will be “thrown into the *fire*” (v. 9), for the Messiah will come and “burn up the chaff with unquenchable *fire*” (v. 17, NASB; cf. Isa. 66:24).⁵³ Likewise Jesus warns the crowds concerning “that day” (Matt. 7:22): “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the *fire*” (v. 19). Peter proclaims that “the present heavens and earth are being reserved for *fire*, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7, NASB).⁵⁴ Paul adds, “Each one’s work

⁵³ Note the metaphor of “chaff,” which is also used extensively in the OT to refer to the wicked in relation to divine judgment and the day of the Lord (Ps. 1:4; 35:5; 83:13; Isa. 17:13; 29:5; 33:11; 40:24; 41:15; Jer. 13:24; Dan. 2:35; Hos. 13:3; Zeph. 2:2; Mal. 4:1). The scriptural context of John’s imprecation upon the Pharisees and teachers of the law would have been obvious to everyone.

⁵⁴ Many assume that 2 Peter 3 speaks of the annihilation of materiality unto a heavenly destiny. However, the “destruction,” Gk. *apoleial/apollumi* (vv. 6,7,9), described concerns sin and unrighteousness, both in the heavens and upon the earth. Just as the earth was destroyed by water in the flood (v. 6), so also will the heavens and earth be destroyed by fire on the day of the Lord (v. 7). The earth was not annihilated in the flood, but rather *cleansed*. The passing away (Gk. *parechomai*, v. 10a) of the heavens and the burning with intense heat (Gk. *kausōō*, v. 10b) of the earth and its works are simply summarized in v. 11 as “all things are to be destroyed” (NASB). The “all things” are the evil entities in the heavens and upon the earth that make them a “home of unrighteousness,” so to speak. As seen elsewhere in the NT, the “all things” are ultimately in reference to that which dwells within the heavens and the earth (cf. Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:16–18).

The “elements,” Gk. *stoicheion*, of the earth (v. 10, NASB) and of the heavens (v. 12) are generally understood in the NT as “sinful ways” or “principles” (cf. Gal. 4:3,9; Col. 2:8,20; Heb. 5:12).

will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by *fire*, and the *fire* will test what sort of work each one has done” (1 Cor. 3:13).

This age will end when Jesus appears “in flaming *fire*, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God” (2 Thess. 1:8). For “as the weeds are gathered and burned with *fire*, so will it be at the end of the age” (Matt. 13:40). The unrepentant have “only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging *fire* that will consume the enemies of God” (Heb. 10:27, NIV). Jesus warned, “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the *fire*, and burned” (John 15:6). “In the end [they] will be burned” (Heb. 6:8, NIV). Evangelism is thus pictured as “snatching [people] out of the *fire*” (Jude 23).

Gehenna and Hades

The language of fire in relation to the day of the Lord is also understood quite *literally*. Real fire will actually burn real people because of real damages done to a real creation which holds real value. Moreover, the real fire will culminate in a real place called “Gehenna,” Gk. *gehenna* (Matt. 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5). Gehenna is simply a valley outside of Jerusalem, “currently known as the Wadi er-Rababeh, running S-SW of Jerusalem and also a designation for fiery hell, the opposite of the dominion of God and eternal life.”⁵⁵ It is known in the Old Testament as the “Valley of Hinnom,” Heb. *gê hinnōm* (Josh. 15:8; 18:16; cf. 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Neh. 11:30; Jer. 7:31–32; 19:2,6; 32:35), which God will fill with fire, hence turning it into a “lake of fire” (Rev. 19:20; 20:10,14; 21:8).⁵⁶

It is the base depravity of demonic powers in the heavens and demonized human beings upon the earth that will be destroyed on the day of the Lord. The heavens and the earth will endure this destruction and become a “home of righteousness” (v. 13, NIV), just as the earth endured the destruction of ungodly people during the flood.

⁵⁵ D. F. Watson, “Gehenna (Place),” *ABD*, 2:926.

⁵⁶ As William V. Crockett explains,

Southwest of the city was the Valley of Hinnom, an area that had a long history of desecration. The steep gorge was once used to burn children in sacrifice to the Ammonite god Molech (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31; 32:35). Jeremiah denounced such practices by saying that Hinnom Valley would become the valley of God’s judgment, a place of slaughter (Jer. 7:32; 19:5–7). As the years passed, a sense of foreboding hung over the valley. People began to burn their garbage and offal there, using sulfur, the flammable substance we now use in matches and gunpowder. Eventually, the Hebrew name *ge-hinnom* (canyon of Hinnom) evolved into *geenna* (*gehenna*), the familiar Greek

Isaiah clearly prophesies this relationship:

The LORD will cause men to hear his majestic voice
and will make them see his arm coming down
with raging anger and consuming fire,
with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail. . . .

Topheth has long been prepared;
it has been made ready for the king.
Its *fire pit* has been made deep and wide,
with an abundance of fire and wood;
the breath of the LORD,
like a stream of *burning sulfur*,
sets it ablaze. (Isa. 30:30,33, NIV)

Topheth is a place within the Valley of Hinnom (cf. 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31–32; 19:6–14), which Jeremiah prophesied would become “the Valley of Slaughter” (7:32; 19:6).⁵⁷ Since these prophecies did not find fulfillment during the exile, the Jews projected them eschatologically during intertestamental times.⁵⁸ In Jesus’

word for hell (Matt. 5:22,29; 10:28; 18:9; 23:33; Mark 9:43,45; Luke 12:5). Thus when the Jews talked about punishment in the next life, what better image could they use than the smoldering valley they called *gehenna*? . . .

Some Jews, of course, took the fiery images literally, supposing that Hinnom Valley itself would become the place of hellfire and judgment (1 Enoch 27:1–2; 54:1–6; 56:3–4; 90:26–28; 4 Ezra 7:36). (“The Metaphorical View,” in *Four Views on Hell* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 58)

Though Crockett says this last view “was minor and not widely held in Judaism,” and that “the New Testament also rejects this view” (*Ibid.*), this statement is unsubstantiated. The opposite is actually true, since the burden of proof lies upon the metaphorical interpretation. Nowhere is there any direct evidence for a changing of expectation in the NT, and the intertestamental references used by Crockett for justifying a metaphorical interpretation were noncanonical to first-century Jews, who would have defaulted to the plainly understood words of the prophets (cf. Isa. 30:30–33; 66:24; Jer. 7:32; 19:5–7).

⁵⁷ Because of the linear-temporal nature of the Scriptures, historical events organically “point” to their protological introduction and eschatological conclusion. Thus historical judgments upon human sin inherently prophesy the eschatological judgment. This is how much of the prophetic language and imagery concerning the day of the Lord is developed (cf. Jer. 46:21; Ezek. 21:29; Hos. 5:9; Amos 3:14; Mic. 7:4; Zeph. 1:9).

⁵⁸ See 4 Ezra 7:35–38; *Assumption of Moses* 10:10,19; 2 *Baruch* 59:10; 1 *Enoch* 27:2f; 48:9; 54:1; 90:26f; 103:8. See a summary of intertestamental descriptions in Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 81–82. Although the second-temple Jewish belief in Gehenna is widely acknowledged by modern commentators, most go on to argue that it was reinterpreted by the apostles and the early church (akin to the reinterpretation of other Jewish apocalyptic concepts, such as the kingdom, resurrection, messianic expectation, etc.).

day it was commonly understood that the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) was to be the actual location and *embodiment* of God's final judgment. Thus tradition holds that the valley became for the city of Jerusalem the common receptacle of trash, refuse, and the bodies of dead animals and criminals—kept ever-burning as a sign of the age to come, in keeping with the oracles of God.⁵⁹ They were simply stewarding the valley according to its destiny.

Therefore Jesus always speaks of Gehenna as a future reality: "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to *hell* [Gk. *gehenna*]?" (Matt. 23:33, NIV). "And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to *hell* [Gk. *gehenna*], to the unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43). This "unquenchable fire" is a reference to the vision of Isaiah, who saw Jerusalem in the age to come. At that time the wicked will be cast outside of the city, and "their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched; and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind" (Isa. 66:24, NASB).

Gehenna will also be "the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42,50, NRSV), drawing from the furnace/oven imagery of the prophets (Isa. 31:9; Mal. 4:1; cf. Ps. 21:9). Though this furnace consists of fire, it will be completely enclosed, creating "utter darkness" (2 Peter

⁵⁹ Rabbi David Kimhi references this common tradition in his commentary on Psalm 27 (c. 1200): "Gehenna is a repugnant place, into which filth and cadavers are thrown, and in which fires perpetually burn in order to consume the filth and bones; on which account, by analogy, the judgment of the wicked is called 'Gehenna'" (quoted in Lloyd R. Bailey, "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell," *Biblical Archeologist* 49 [September 1986]: 188). Modern scholarship increasingly rejects this testimony (see Watson, "Gehenna," 2:926–28, and Bailey, "Gehenna," 189).

However, as Joachim Jeremias points out,

Road sweepers may be referred to in b.B.M. 26a (cf. b. Pes. 7a): "According to R. Shemaiah b. Zeira the streets of Jerusalem were swept every day", evidently to secure the levitical purity of the city. The fact that the Valley of Hinnom was a dump for filth and rubbish agrees with this statement. The upper end of the valley, between the tower of Hippicus and the Gate of the Essenes in the south, was called *βηθσώ* or *βησσου* (BJ 5.145); according to A. Neubauer's etymological explanation, this means "place of filth". The gate called the Dung Gate M. Eduy, i.3 (cf. p. 5), the quarter of the despised weavers, gave immediately on to the Valley of Hinnom at its debouchment into the Kidron Valley. This accords with the fact that the Valley of Hinnom was a place of abomination from ancient times, since it was connected with the worship of Moloch (II Kings 23.10; Jer. 2.23 and elsewhere), and was supposed to be the same as Gehenna (Hell), which took its name from it. It was still in modern times the place for rubbish, carrion and all kinds of refuse. (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. F. H. and C. H. Cave [London: SCM Press, 1969], 16–17)

2:17; Jude 13). This darkness will be in stark contrast to the brilliant glory of Jerusalem in the age to come (cf. Isa. 60; Rev. 21:23–26), which is understood as the backdrop to “the outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). For the righteous will “enter the city by the gates” (Rev. 22:14), but “*outside* are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (v. 15).

The fires of this furnace will also go on *forever*. As Jesus plainly said, “Then [the King] will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the *eternal* fire prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matt. 25:41; cf. Matt. 18:8). Sodom and Gomorrah “serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of *eternal* fire” (Jude 7, NIV). So the eternal fire will be in accord with eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46), eternal judgment (Heb. 6:2), eternal destruction (2 Thess. 1:9), and eternal torment (Rev. 14:11).⁶⁰ Though experiencing a “second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8), unbelievers will never cease to exist, for “they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10).⁶¹

⁶⁰ A plain reading of these texts contradicts the annihilationist arguments of Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); Clark H. Pinnock, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (Spring 1990): 243–59; and Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, 135–66. Why would the fire remain forever yet its purposes pass away? Why are eternal life and eternal judgment consistently contrasted (cf. Matt. 13:42–43; 25:46; John 3:16; 5:29; Rom. 2:7–8) if they are not functional and existential opposites? Similarly, how can *aionios* (eternal) refer to one thing in relation to *zoē* (life) and something completely different in relation to *kolasis* (punishment), *olethros* (destruction), and *krima* (judgment)? Moreover, to deny infinite divine punishment because of human finitude (thus assuming finite consequences of human sin) is illogical, since God is the referent.

For a thorough criticism of annihilationism, see Robert Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995); and Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson, eds., *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

⁶¹ Note the clear references to eternal conscious torment in the Apocrypha (Judith 16:17; Sirach 7:17; 4 Ezra 2:29; 7:26–42; 4 Maccabees 9:9; 10:10–15; 12:12; 13:15), the Pseudepigrapha (1 Enoch 10.13; 18.9–16; 26–27; 48.8–10; 54.1–6; 56.1–4; 90.24–27; 100.7–9; 103.7–8; 108.4–7; 2 Enoch 10.1–3; 40.12–13; 63.4; 2 Baruch 30.4–5; 44.12–15; 51.6; 59.2; 64.7–10; 83.8; 85.12–13; Assumption of Moses 10.10; Jubilees 36.9–11; Sibylline Oracles 1.100–103, 349–50; 2.283–312; 4.179–91), and the apostolic fathers (2 Clement 6:7; 17:7; Martyrdom of Polycarp 2:3; 11:2; Epistle to Diognetus 10:7–8; Ignatius, Ephesians 16:2; Apocalypse of Peter 20–33).

So Crockett summarizes,

Annihilationists often construct awkward scenarios where the wicked are consumed but the fire burns forever, or where the wicked suffer greatly but temporarily in an unquenchable fire. To solve a problem they construct a fire that rages endlessly, even though the wicked would have been consumed during the first moments of eternity. Is this what the second-century writers were trying to say? That the wicked will be

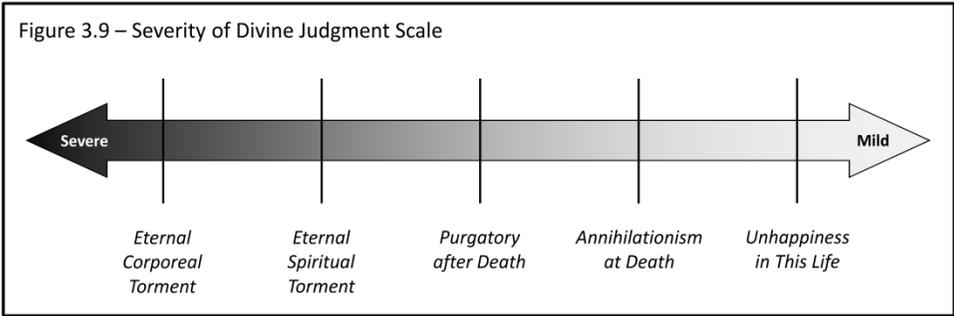
This torment will be endured eternally because the wicked, like the righteous, will be given resurrected bodies that never die. It will be “a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked” (Acts 24:15, NASB, cf. Dan. 12:2)—that is, “the resurrection of life” and “the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29). The wicked will endure eternal death in a resurrected body, while the righteous will enjoy eternal life in a resurrected body. In this way the pain, suffering, and condemnation of the wrath of God will be experienced to its fullest. Thus the fearful injunction of Jesus: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Gk. *gehenna*)” (Matt. 10:28, NRSV).⁶²

Such a corporeal torment is far more terrible than common Platonic notions of incorporeal, ethereal fire. It is *bad news* of the highest order, which consequently heightens the impact of the “good news” of salvation. The greatness of God’s severity in Gehenna must be the backdrop for the greatness of God’s kindness in the cross; otherwise both are mitigated unto mediocrity. Modern views concerning the severity of divine punishment can be depicted on a spectrum, with unhappiness in this life on one end and eternal bodily torment on the other—with annihilationism, transitional purgatory, and eternal spiritual punishment lying in between (see figure 3.9). It seems clear that only eternal corporeal punishment does justice to both human depravity and the biblical gospel.

destroyed in eternal, indestructible fires? Or were they following that line of thought that speaks of eternal, conscious punishment for the wicked? It seems to me that some annihilationists look for any straw in the wind to keep from admitting that early Christians affirmed eternal, conscious punishment. (*Four Views on Hell*, 66)

⁶² Daley continues his summary of thinking in the early church: “With judgment comes also *retribution*. Following the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, as reflected in the New Testament, early Christian writers almost universally assumed that the final state of human existence, after God’s judgment, will be permanent and perfect happiness for the good, and permanent, all-consuming misery for the wicked. Apocalyptic imagery continued to dominate the conception of both these states throughout the Patristic period, especially in the portraits drawn of the suffering of the damned” (*Hope of the Early Church*, 220–21).

Figure 3.9 – Severity of Divine Judgment Scale



The day of the Lord will come with fire—a fire that consumes the heavens and the earth and continues on eternally outside of Jerusalem in Gehenna. This is the “literal view” of hell.⁶³ In this way, God will finally “destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:18, NASB). Infinite recompense for infinite damages done.

Those who complain about the severity of the wrath of God simply misunderstand the gravity of human sin. In the beginning creation was deemed “very good” in the sight of God (Gen. 1:31). Human beings brought in every kind of death, pain, suffering, corruption, and perversion. Human beings have done infinite damage to what God created—not only environmentally, but also to the very image of God. As the pinnacle of creation, human beings are of greater worth in the sight of God than anything else (cf. Matt. 6:26; 12:12). Therefore to sin against and pervert the image of God by theft, murder, fornication, etc. is of infinite consequence *in the sight of God*.

Consider two identical cars. One was built on an assembly line in China; the other was built by my own hands in my own garage. Which has more value? To a third-party observer, they are equal. But, in my eyes, there is no comparison. The one I built, pouring my heart and soul into it, is of incomparable worth. Likewise, humanity is fundamentally delusional about the gravity of sin because it lacks a *divine perspective* of the value of human life.⁶⁴ Because we are not the

⁶³ See John F. Walvoord, “The Literal View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, 11–28. Though Walvoord argues for eternal punishment by real fire, his presentation lacks the substantiality of a real place.

⁶⁴ Naturalism is the most devaluing of belief systems, for human beings are understood to be no more than a sophisticated sack of protoplasm—as Ernst Haeckel understood the first cell, or “Monera,” to evolve from nonlife: “a shapeless, mobile, little lump of mucus or slime, consisting of albuminous combination of carbon” (*The History of Creation: Or the Development of the Earth and Its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, vol. 1 [New York: D. Appelton, 1876], 184). In practicality, this view of the constitution of life remains commonly assumed within the Western secular mind.

ones who poured our very being into creation, designing its apex in our own “image,” we have no appreciation for the incomparable worth of a human being in the sight of God and the immeasurable damage done by our sin. It is literally infinite.

So God has chosen *eternal proportionate retribution* as the means of righting the wrong of human sin—damage for damage, pain for pain, suffering for suffering. God himself, in the words of Alva J. McClain, “is the King of hell,”⁶⁵ and he will conclude his judgment upon the sin of humankind by literally embodying it forever in a lake of fire (see figure 3.10). In this way God will be eternally vindicated, and all of redeemed humanity will echo the praise of the angel in charge of the waters: “Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!” (Rev. 16:5–6).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Though conflating the realities of Hades and Gehenna, McClain articulates well the popular misconception of a cosmic struggle between God and Satan:

The strange notion that the devil is the king of hell has no basis in divine revelation. *God* is the King of hell, just as He is the King of everything else in time and space. And because this is so, that everlasting prison-house of the lost will not be the noisy and disorderly place that is sometimes imagined by the popular mind. There is no more orderly place than a well-disciplined prison, even under imperfect human government. There will be no riots in hell. For all those who reject the mercy of God in Christ and recognize no final argument but force, there will be force without stint or limit, the force of a divine government from which there can be no escape, either now or hereafter. (*The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959], 25)

⁶⁶ Moreover, Gehenna will ultimately be a source of rejoicing for the righteous. Akin to a high school next to a prison where all the drugpushers, thugs, and pedophiles are locked up, so will the righteous rejoice in the cleansing of the earth (cf. Ps. 101:8; Isa. 35:8; 52:1; Joel 3:17; Rev. 21:27). With the great multitude we will eternally resound, “*Hallelujah!* Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. . . . *Hallelujah!* The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever. . . . *Hallelujah!* For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!” (Rev. 19:1–7, NIV).

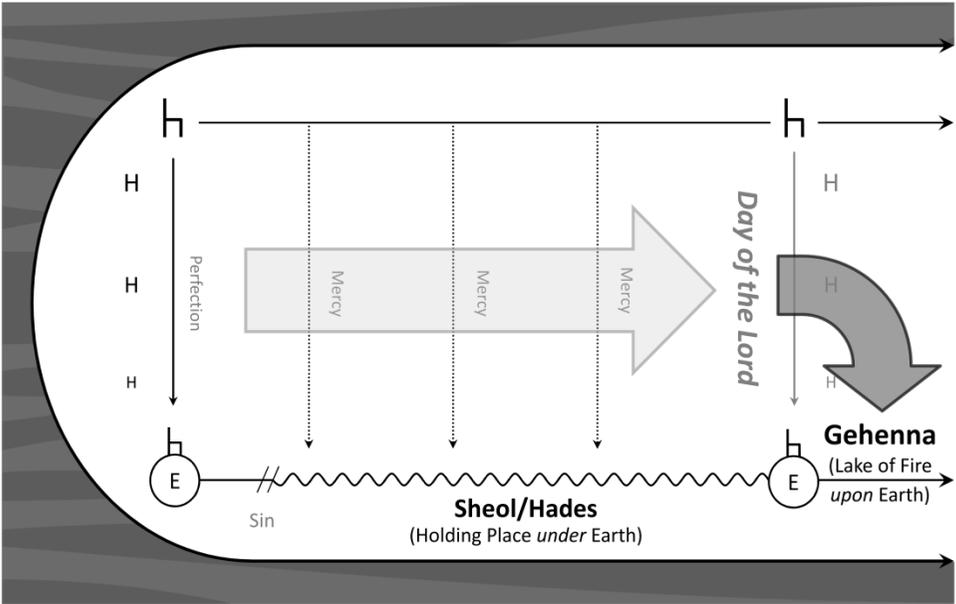


Figure 3.10 – The Conclusion of Divine Judgment in Gehenna

Consequently, in New Testament thought Gehenna “is always in the background, even when the word is not actually present.”⁶⁷ It is the concrete context of the day of the Lord and the wrath of God. You cannot hold to a theology of new creation without the day of the Lord and Gehenna as its practical *mechanism* and *outworking*, respectively. Using bodily cleansing as an analogy, we could say that it is impossible to attain to the reality of cleanliness (cf. new heavens and earth) without real defecation (cf. day of the Lord) and an actual toilet (cf. Gehenna). Perversion at any of these three points ends in malodor, which indeed permeates the halls of the modern church.

As seen in figure 3.10, a distinction must be made between Gehenna and Hades (Greek *hadēs*), which translates the Hebrew *sheol* in the Septuagint.

⁶⁷ O. Böcher states,

In other places in the NT where the eternal punishment of fire is considered, the idea of *γένενα* is always in the background, even when the word is not actually present. This is true especially for the use of *κάμινος* (Matt 13:42,50; cf. Rev 9:2) or *λίμνη τοῦ πυρός* (Rev 19:20; 20:10,14f.; 21:8; cf. 14:10); not only the goddess (cf. also Luke 16:24) but also Satan with his demons will be destroyed in it by eternal fire (Matt 25:41; Rev 19:20; 20:10,14; cf. *T. Jud.* 25:3; ἄβυσσος 2). Perhaps 1 Cor 3:10–15; 2 Pet 3:5–13 (cf. Mark 9:49; Luke 17:29f.) teach that these expressions assume the purifying power of fire. Early Christianity shares this view of eschatology with contemporary Judaism. (“Gehenna; hell,” *EDNT*, 1:240)

Unfortunately, historical English translations use the same word, “hell,” to translate both.⁶⁸ However, the two terms are mutually exclusive. Hades, or Sheol, is a *temporal* reality that exists *under* the earth as a holding place awaiting the day of the Lord.⁶⁹ Gehenna is an *eternal* reality that exists *upon* the earth after the day of the Lord. Nowhere in the Scriptures is Gehenna a present reality; it is only eschatological. Conversely, nowhere is Hades an eternal reality; it is only temporal.⁷⁰ Hades itself will be “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14; cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

As with Gehenna, the Bible describes Hades in a variety of ways. Moreover, different areas of Hades are referenced. Generally, Hades is described as the abode of the dead (e.g., Job 21:13; Ps. 9:17; 31:17; 89:48; Eccl. 9:10).⁷¹ It is “under the earth” (Gk. *hupokatō tēs gēs*, cf. Rev. 5:3,13)—that is, “subterranean” (Gk. *katachthonios*, cf. Phil. 2:10). It is in the “lower parts of the earth” (Gk. *katōteros/katōtatos tēs gēs*, cf. Ps. 63:9; 86:13; 88:6; 139:15; Eph. 4:9). It is the “deep” or “depths” (Gk. *bathos/bothros*, cf. Ps. 69:15; 130:1; Isa. 7:11; Ezek. 26:20; 31:14; 32:21–23; Rom. 8:39). Hades is also a “destruction, corruption pit” (Gk. *diaphthora*, cf. Job 33:28; Ps. 16:10; 55:23; Acts 2:27,31; 13:34–36), and it is the “death [place]”

⁶⁸ If we are going to continue to use the term “hell,” then it must be reserved for either *hadēs* or *gehenna*. I prefer the latter for evangelical consistency (most modern translations have followed this path by transliterating *sheol* and *hadēs*). This is fine as long as we actually associate “hell” with a future reality upon the earth. However, the Old English and Germanic roots (*hel*, *helle*, *hölle*, *holja*) almost universally refer to the present “underworld” or “nether world,” which corresponds to *sheol/hadēs* (see “Hell,” *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966], 435).

⁶⁹ Though not authoritative, firsthand accounts of near-death survivors who testify of the wicked being held within the earth do accord with the testimony of the Scriptures (see Bill Wiese, *23 Minutes in Hell* [Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2006]; Mary K. Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Hell* [New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1993]; and Maurice S. Rawlings, *To Hell and Back: Life After Death—Startling New Evidence* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993]).

⁷⁰ So Joachim Jeremias explains,

Fundamental for an understanding of the γέννα passages in the NT, which occur only in the Synoptists and John, is the sharp distinction made by the NT between ἄδης and γέννα. This distinction is a. that Hades receives the ungodly only for the intervening period between death and resurrection, whereas Gehenna is their place of punishment in the last judgment; the judgment of the former is thus provisional but the torment of the latter eternal (Mk. 9:43 and par.; 9:48). It is then b. that the souls of the ungodly are outside the body in Hades, whereas in Gehenna both body and soul, reunited at the resurrection, are destroyed by eternal fire (Mk. 9:43 and par., 45, 47 and par., 48; Mt. 10:28 and par.). (“γέννα,” *TDNT*, 1:658)

⁷¹ The reality of *sheol/hadēs* as a tarrying place for the dead is also reinforced by the common ancient practice of necromancy (cf. Lev. 19:26,31; 20:6; Deut. 18:10; 1 Chron. 10:13; Isa. 8:19; 29:4).

(Gk. *thanatos*, cf. Ps. 18:4–5; 116:3; Acts 2:24; Rev. 1:18; 20:13).⁷² It is so deep that it is depicted as bottomless, and thus it is referred to as an “abyss” (Gk. *abussos*, e.g., Ps. 71:20; 135:6; Ezek. 31:15; Luke 8:31; Rom. 10:7; Rev. 9:1, 20:1–3), and its lowest levels (Gk. *tartaros*, cf. 2 Peter 2:4) are reserved for Satan and his angels.⁷³ All of these references are to the same present reality under the earth, and they are clearly distinguished from the future reality of Gehenna upon the earth.⁷⁴

⁷² Because Gehenna is equated with the “second death” (Rev. 20:14; 21:8), it seems that the *deuteros thanatos*, “second death,” is primarily a reference to the first *thanatos* of Hades rather than the death of human mortality. Hence the second death is more a place than an event (cf. Rev. 20:13–15), though the latter meaning may also be implied.

⁷³ Tartaros may also be a separate area beneath Hades, but not the place of final judgment (see “ταρταρόω,” BDAG, 991).

⁷⁴ Note the dichotomy of various expressions concerning present Hades and future Gehenna:

Present Hades – Temporal <i>Under</i> the Earth	Future Gehenna – Eternal <i>Upon</i> the Earth
Gk. <i>hadēs</i> (Heb. <i>sheol</i>) – “Hades, underworld, abode of dead” (Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29,31; Num. 16:30,33; Deut. 32:22; 1 Sam. 2:6; 1 Kings 2:6,9,34; Ps. 6:5; 9:17; 16:10; 18:5; 30:3; 31:17; 49:15f; 55:15; 86:13; 88:3; 89:48; 139:8; 141:7; Prov. 1:12; 2:18; 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 14:12; 15:11,24; 27:20; 30:16; Eccl. 9:10; Isa. 5:14; 14:9,11,15,19; 28:15,18; 38:10,18; 57:9; Ezek. 31:15–17; 32:27; Hos. 13:14; Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:3; Hab. 2:5; Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13f)	Gk. <i>gehenna</i> (Heb. <i>gehinnōm</i>) – “Gehenna, hell, Valley of Hinnom” ⁱ (Matt. 5:22,29f; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5; Jas. 3:6) ⁱⁱ Gk. <i>gehennan tou puros</i> – “fire of <i>Gehenna</i> , hell fire” (Matt. 5:22; 18:9) Gk. <i>Tapheth</i> (Heb. <i>topheth</i>) – “place of fire [within <i>gehenna</i>]” (2 Kings 23:10; Isa. 30:33; Jer. 7:31f; 19:6,11–13)
Gk. <i>abussos</i> (Heb. <i>tehom</i>) – “abyss, deep, depths, bottomless pit” (Job 28:14; 38:16; Ps. 71:20; 107:26; 135:6; Ezek. 31:15; Amos 7:4; Jonah 2:6; Hab. 3:10; Luke 8:31; Rom. 10:7; Rev. 9:1f,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3)	Gk. <i>limnē tou puros</i> – “lake of fire” (Rev. 19:20; 20:10,14f; 21:8; cf. Isa. 30:33) Gk. <i>kaminos tou puros</i> – “furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:42,50; cf. Ps. 21:9; Isa. 31:9; Mal. 4:1)
Gk. <i>diaphthora</i> (Heb. <i>shachath</i>) – “pit [of <i>sheol</i>], destruction” (Job 33:28; Ps. 9:15; 16:10; 55:23; 107:20; Acts 2:27,31; 13:34–36)	Gk. <i>puri asbestos</i> – “unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12; Mark 9:43,48; Luke 3:17; cf. Isa. 34:9f; 66:24)
Gk. <i>hupokatō tēs gēs</i> – “under, underneath the earth” (Ex. 20:4; ^j Deut. 4:18; ^j 5:8; ^j Rev. 5:3,13) Gk. <i>katōteros tēs gēs</i> – “lower (parts) of the earth” (Eph. 4:9) Gk. <i>katōtatos</i> – “lowest (parts)” (Ps. 86:13; 88:6) Gk. <i>katōtatos tēs gēs</i> – “lowest (parts) of the earth” (Ps. 63:9; 139:15) Gk. <i>katachthonios</i> – “subterranean” (Phil. 2:10)	Gk. <i>pur to aiōnion</i> – “everlasting fire” (Matt. 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7; cf. Isa. 33:14) Gk. <i>kolasin aiōnion</i> – “everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46; cf. Isa. 24:21f; Dan. 12:2) Gk. <i>krimatos aiōniou</i> – “everlasting judgment” (Heb. 6:2; cf. Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:5) Gk. <i>aiōnios olethros</i> – “everlasting destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9; cf. Ps. 2:12; Isa. 11:9)

Out of this discussion immediately rises the question of temporal destiny— Where do we go when we die in this age?⁷⁵ The answer is contingent upon whether the person asking the question is righteous or unrighteous. Clearly there are unrighteous souls presently held in Hades, since they are raised up and judged in the future (cf. 2 Peter 2:9; Jude 6; Rev. 20:13).⁷⁶ The righteous are also clearly held in Hades in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 37:35; 1 Sam. 28:13–15; 1

<p>Gk. <i>bathos</i> – “deep, depth” (Ps. 69:15;ⁱⁱ 130:1;ⁱⁱ Isa. 7:11*; Rom. 8:39)</p> <p>Gk. <i>bathos tēs gēs</i> – “deep, depth of the earth” (Ezek. 26:20; 31:18; 32:24)</p> <p>Gk. <i>bothros</i> – “deep pit, grave” (Ezek. 26:20; 31:14,18; 32:21–23,* 29f)</p>	<p>Gk. <i>skotos to exōteron</i> – “outside, outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; cf. Ps. 107:14)</p> <p>Gk. <i>zophos tou skotous</i> – “utter, blackest darkness” (2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13; cf. Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15)</p>
<p>Gk. <i>tartaroō</i> – “cast into Tartaros [‘Netherworld, depths of Hades’]” (2 Peter 2:4)</p>	<p>Gk. <i>anastasin kriseōs</i> – “resurrection of judgment, damnation” (John 5:29; cf. Dan. 12:2; Acts 24:15)</p>
<p>Gk. <i>thanatos</i> (Heb. <i>maveth</i>) – “Death, realm of dead” (2 Sam. 2:26; Ps. 6:5; 18:4f; 49:14; 88:6 [LXX]; 107:14; 116:3; Prov. 5:5; 7:27; 14:12 [LXX]; 16:25 [LXX]; Isa. 28:15,18; 38:18; Hos. 13:14; Acts 2:24; Rev. 1:18; 20:13)</p>	<p>Gk. <i>deuteros thanatos</i> – “second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8)</p>
<p>ⁱ Combines with Gk. <i>hudor</i>, “water,” i.e., “water under the earth”</p> <p>ⁱⁱ Variant of <i>bathos</i></p> <p>* Translates Heb. <i>sheol</i> in LXX</p>	<p>ⁱ References to the Valley of Hinnom in this age include Josh. 15:8; 18:16; 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Neh. 11:30; Jer. 7:31f; 19:2,6; 32:35</p> <p>ⁱⁱ Intertestamental references include 4 Ezra 7:36ff; 1 Enoch 27:2f; 48:9; 54:1–6; 90:26f; 103:8; 2 Baruch 59:10; Assumption of Moses 10:19;</p>

⁷⁵ Helpful discussions on this subject are found in Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 92–108; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 597–99; and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 810–27.

⁷⁶ The doctrine of “soul sleep,” as held by Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists, deviates from the Scriptures. Jehovah’s Witnesses teach the annihilation of the soul at death and its recreation at the resurrection, while the Adventists teach that the soul is simply inert, residing in the “memory of God.” The poetic language of Ecclesiastes (cf. 9:5; 12:7) is not a reliable theological base for either of these beliefs. Human souls are clearly conscious in the intermediate state, both in Hades (cf. 1 Sam. 28:15; Isa. 14:9; Luke 16:23) as well as heaven (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 6:9; 20:4). Moreover, the killing of the body but not the soul (cf. Matt. 10:28, par.) argues for the continuance of the soul after the death of the body. The description of death as “sleep” (1 Cor. 15:16; 1 Thess. 4:13; etc.) is figurative, as Ladd explains: “Sleep was a common term for death both in Greek and Hebrew literature [cf. R. Bultmann, *TDNT*, 3:14] and need not carry any theological significance” (*Theology of the New Testament*, 599).

Kings 2:2; Ps. 16:10; 49:15).⁷⁷ In the New Testament, however, it seems the righteous are kept in the presence of the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9), where Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father in the height of the heavens until his descension, at which time the righteous will inherit eternal life in the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:16).

What then accounts for the change between the Old Testament and New Testament? Precisely the *new covenant*, which is enacted through the mediation of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 8:1–6; 9:10–12,23–26; 10:12–14). This made it possible for the righteous to tarry with the Lord until the resurrection. As the offering of blood by the priests under the Mosaic covenant made it possible for sinful humans to dwell in the presence of the Lord in the earthly sanctuary, so also did the offering of the blood of the new covenant make it possible for sinful humans to dwell in the presence of the Lord in the heavenly sanctuary.

This helps explain numerous New Testament oddities, such as when Jesus “descended into the lower parts of the earth” (Eph. 4:9, NASB), where he “preached to the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19, NIV), and where “the gospel was preached even to those who are dead” (1 Peter 4:6). Moreover, in his ascension “he led captives in his train” (Eph. 4:8, NIV), who also seem to have gone “into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matt. 27:53). Thus, after the cross believers

⁷⁷ Though a separation between the wicked and righteous within Sheol is implied in the OT, it is more clearly articulated in second-temple Judaism. In the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* (see *OTP*, 1:514–15), the prophet is taken to Hades and shown the state of humanity before “the day of the Lord” (12:6). The righteous are pictured as crossing over a river chasm: “You have escaped from the Abyss and Hades, now you will cross over the crossing place . . . to all the righteous ones, namely Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Enoch, Elijah and David” (9:2–4). Abraham is portrayed as an intercessor “beseeching the Lord” for those in the fiery area of Hades (11:1–6). In 4 Maccabees, the martyrs are also pictured as tarrying with Abraham until the judgment: “For if we so die, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will welcome us, and all the fathers will praise us” (13:17, NRSV).

Moreover, Ezra supposedly asks God directly, “O Lord, show this also to your servant: whether after death, as soon as everyone of us yields up the soul, we shall be kept in rest until those times come when you will renew the creation, or whether we shall be tormented at once?” (2 Esdras 7:75, NRSV). To which God gives a detailed answer (vv. 76–99), which boils down to the righteous receiving “rest” (v. 91) in seven ways, while the wicked “shall not enter into habitations, but shall immediately wander about in torments, always grieving and sad, in seven ways” (v. 80).

This gives some context to Jesus’ teaching on Lazarus and the rich man in Hades (Luke 16:19–31). Though the eschatological judgment is not immediately referenced, it is part of the surrounding context, i.e., “give an account” (16:2), “eternal dwellings” (16:9), “heaven and earth to pass away” (16:17). Moreover the Synoptic parallels to Luke 17:1–3 (cf. Matt. 18:1–9; Mark 9:42–50) clearly incorporate the eschatological realities of the kingdom of God, eternal life, Gehenna, and eternal fire.

will rest with the Lord while they await the resurrection, but unbelievers will be held in Hades until the day of judgment.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF THIS AGE

The events of the day of the Lord so radically change the nature and character of redemptive history that the apocalyptic language of “this age” versus “the age to come” is necessary to describe life before and after the day. This age involves a fallen order of unrighteousness. The age to come involves a new order of righteousness, both in the heavens and upon the earth. This age involves suffering, sickness, and death—the age to come involves happiness, health, and life. This age involves wickedness, corruption, and evil—the age to come involves righteousness, integrity, and goodness. This age involves divine patience, forbearance, and kindness—the age to come involves “the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom. 2:5). Hence the age to come is essentially characterized as a reversal of this age.

This Age and Divine Mercy

Such a stark dichotomy of ages ultimately derives from the radical dissimilarity between the nature of God in loving holiness and the nature of humanity in selfish depravity. These contrasting characteristics create the framework for how God relates to humanity in this age. As such, the primary theme of this age is divine “mercy” (see figure 3.11). This age is an age of mercy because God himself is “merciful and gracious” (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; 103:8)—“For the LORD your God is a merciful God” (Deut. 4:31). “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness” (Dan. 9:9), and “he exalts himself to show mercy to you” (Isa. 30:18).

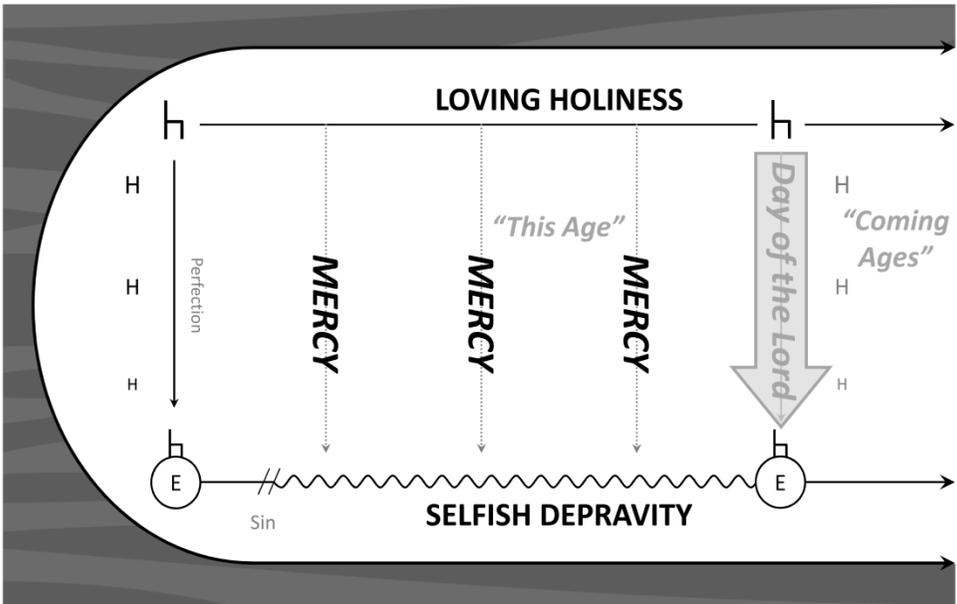


Figure 3.11 – Divine Mercy as the Defining Feature of This Age

The fundamental reason the day of the Lord has not arrived is because of divine mercy: “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, NRSV). First-century Judaism had lost touch with this ultimate divine agenda, and so Jesus corrected the Pharisees: “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:13). As such, Jesus embodied the purpose of God in this age: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Consequently Jesus exhorted his disciples to be merciful, as God is in this age, so that they might inherit the reward of eternal life in the age to come: “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35–36).

Paul described his own life in such terms: “I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life” (1 Tim. 1:16, NIV). He likewise described his ministry within the divine framework of mercy: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their

trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19, NASB).

God is forgiving people’s sins in this age because of “the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience” (Rom. 2:4). “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7).⁷⁸ This age generally entails God’s “divine forbearance” (Rom. 3:25) and the restraint of divine justice. So Paul outlines the cross in anticipation of the age to come:

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but *according to his own mercy*, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs *according to the hope of eternal life*. (Titus 3:4–7)

Thus God, “being rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4), saved us from the wrath to come, “in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7, NIV). So also Paul relates the broad movements of God in relation to both Jew and Gentile:

For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have *received mercy* because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now *receive mercy*. For God has consigned all to disobedience, *that he may have mercy on all*. (Rom. 11:30–32)

Unless we have such a “view of God’s mercy” (Rom. 12:1, NIV), we are doomed to live according to “the pattern of this age” (v. 2, AT).⁷⁹ The renewing of our minds rests upon an apocalyptic understanding of redemptive history in which the kindness of God expressed in this age will be followed by the severity of God to be expressed at the day of the Lord.

⁷⁸ “The tracing of the concept of mercy in the Eng. Bible is complicated by the fact that ‘mercy’, ‘merciful’ and ‘have mercy upon’ are translations of several different Heb. and Gk. roots, which are also variously rendered in other occurrences by other synonyms, such as ‘kindness’, ‘grace’, ‘favour’ (and cognate verbs)” (J. W. L. Hoad, “Mercy, Merciful,” *NBD*, 751).

⁷⁹ “After urging his audience to offer their bodies to God as a ‘spiritual act of worship,’ Paul adds, [and] *do not conform to the pattern of this world* (lit. ‘and do not be conformed to this age’). The NIV omits ‘and,’ adds ‘the pattern of,’ and substitutes ‘this world’ for the more literal sense, ‘this age’” (Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 463–64).

This Age Epitomized by the Cross

The event of the cross is understood as the supreme demonstration of divine love and mercy. It is the epitome of God's dealings with humanity in this age. Thus John describes, "God's love was revealed among us *in this way*: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9, NRSV). Likewise Paul, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace *by the blood of his cross*" (Col. 1:19–20).

Since the cross typifies the acts of God in this age, we might call this age "cruciform," meaning "shaped like a cross."⁸⁰ The cross substantially represents how God relates to humanity, from the sin of Adam until the day of the Lord. So Paul summarizes redemptive history, "As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (Rom. 5:18). In other words, the sin of Adam and the act of the cross ultimately define all interactions between God and humanity, from creation to the day of the Lord and the inheritance of "eternal life" (v. 21).

Such a cruciform view of this age also lies behind Peter's declaration that the sacrificing of the Messiah "was foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20), a theme echoed throughout the New Testament (cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:4; 3:9; Col. 1:26; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; Rev. 13:8). God's foreknowledge of the cross represents his merciful nature and the merciful manner in which he has always related to humanity. Of course, this cruciform foreknowledge is understood within the apocalyptic context of "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13) and "the day of visitation" (2:12).

In this way, the theology of the Bible is best summarized as *cruciform-apocalypticism* (see figure 3.12). In anticipation of the cataclysmic day of the Lord, God is relating to humanity in this age according to mercy, as exemplified by the cross. Though some argue that apocalypticism is not a suitable theological

⁸⁰ Though the "new perspective on Paul" (discussed in chap. 8) disproportionately emphasizes "participation" in Christ (a theme resurrected by E. P. Sanders and esp. Richard Hays from the "Christ-mysticism" of Albert Schweitzer, et al.), "cruciformity" is a concept that applies well to redemptive history in general (see Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001]; and Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009]).

environment for the cross,⁸¹ we find just the opposite to be true. The cross finds its cruciality in the context of the day of the Lord.⁸² (The interpretation of the cross in sacrificial and atonement terms will be discussed in detail in chapters 7 and 8). Moreover, the hope of the cross for righteousness and the day of the Lord for salvation exemplify *faith in God alone*, rejecting as anathema all forms of “confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).⁸³ God will right the wrongs of humanity, without regard to the strength of human beings.

⁸¹ Take Leon Morris, for example:

It may be doubted whether apocalyptic is a very good vehicle for the expression of the characteristic Christian message. Christianity puts its emphasis on the cross. . . .

In the apocalyptic literature, on the other hand, the emphasis is always on the last judgment and the events associated with it. . . .

We cannot have it both ways. Granted that both the incarnation and the End are important, both cannot be the really significant thing. For the apocalypses there is the concentration on the future. In Christianity there is the recognition that the incarnation, with the atonement as its high point, is the most important event of all time. That is why, as Burkitt puts it, an apocalypse is not the proper literary form for setting forth the essential Christian message. (*Apocalyptic*, 2nd ed. [London: InterVarsity, 1973], 96–97)

⁸² Morris exemplifies the bias against apocalypticism so prevalent in Reformed theology:

Apocalyptic is not a good medium for expressing “the cruciality of the cross” and in fact it does not express it. Where the New Testament writers are concerned with the last things and final judgment they can use apocalyptic vividly and forcefully. But where they deal with Christ’s saving work they use categories like justification by faith, reconciliation, the new covenant sealed with Christ’s blood, and others. Here apocalyptic is not helpful. The New Testament writers do not use it and we can see why. Apocalyptic is simply not suitable as a way of bringing out such truths. And since Christ’s atoning work is the central doctrine of New Testament Christianity, apocalyptic fails us at the heart of the faith. (*Ibid.*, 100)

⁸³ As Paul rejected the humanistic approach of the circumcision group in regards to atonement (cf. Gal. 2:12ff; Eph. 2:11ff; Titus 1:10ff), so Jesus rejected the humanistic, non-apocalyptic approach to salvation which arose out of the Maccabean tradition (cf. Matt. 16:22ff; Luke 17:20ff; John 3:3ff). As Johannes Weiss well articulated,

How can one expect even the slightest inclination on Jesus’ part towards any kind of revolutionary act? By force and insurrection men might establish a Davidic monarchy, perhaps even as glorious a kingdom as David’s had been; but God will establish the Kingdom of God without human hands, horse, or rider, with only his angels and celestial powers. To hope for the Kingdom of God in the transcendental sense that Jesus understood it and to undertake revolution are as different as fire and water. . . .

This is not to say that he did not believe in any kind of political restoration; but that only God should bring it about. (*Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. R. H. Hiers and D. L. Holland [German original, 1892; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], 102–3)

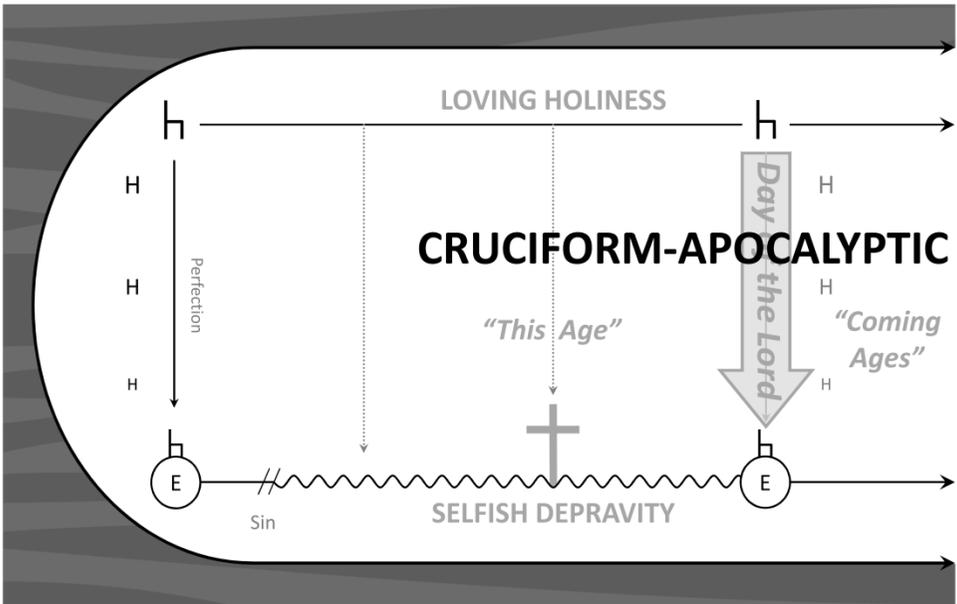


Figure 3.12 – Biblical Theology Summarized as “Cruciform-Apocalypticism”

This approach is simple and straightforward, and it best reflects the general tenor of both Old and New Testament writings. God is showing mercy to sinners before the great day of his wrath, as Paul summarizes: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, *Christ died for us*. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be *saved from the wrath of God through Him*” (Rom. 5:8–9, NASB). Likewise, we understand, as Luther put it, “the gospel in a nutshell”: “For God so loved the world, that he *gave his only Son*, that whoever believes in him should not perish but *have eternal life*” (John 3:16).⁸⁴

If we ask, What is God ultimately doing in this age? then we must answer: He is showing love and offering mercy to his enemies, in light of his coming severity and eternal recompense. Redemptive history is cruciform-apocalyptic, and consequently the mission of the church is simply to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Temporal versus Eternal Recompense

⁸⁴ See Martin Luther, “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels (1521),” *LW*, 35:113–24.

If this age is so clearly characterized by the restraint of divine justice, then how do we interpret the activity of God *before* the day of the Lord? There are clearly blessings and punishments in this age that are personally administered by God. Indeed, God does presently punish the wicked (e.g., Ex. 34:7; Deut. 28:15–68; Hos. 8:13). “God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day” (Ps. 7:11).

We might describe the divine judgments of this age as “temporal,” in contrast to the “eternal” judgment of the age to come. In this way, temporal judgments are never in true accord with what the sins of humanity deserve. “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?” (Ps. 130:3, NIV). In truth, God does keep a record, and this is the psalmist’s point. Every human being deserves proportionate retribution—an eternal, corporeal lake of fire—but in this age God’s judgment is restrained out of divine mercy. Thus all temporal judgments are actually inherently merciful by nature.

As such, those who lose their homes to fires, earthquakes, and tsunamis are *fortunate* because they are not in a lake of fire. Those who struggle under the oppression of tyrannical regimes are *fortunate* because they are not in a lake of fire. Those who know God and know their own depravity endure all kinds of trial and difficulty, interpreting them as “discipline” from the Lord (Heb. 12:7; cf. Deut. 8:5), because they know they are *fortunate* not to be in a lake of fire. In the end, mercy is the only game being played in this age. So even when bad things happen, they are ultimately designed to point us to the day of judgment and lead us to repentance. Jesus makes this point vividly when speaking about death in this age:

About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. “Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?” Jesus asked. “Is that why they suffered? Not at all! And *you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God*. And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? No, and I tell you again that *unless you repent, you will perish, too.*” (Luke 13:1–5, NLT)

The indictment of the immorality of “that woman Jezebel” also demonstrates this reality (Rev. 2:20–23). The “Son of God” (v. 18) will in this life “strike her children dead,” so that at the day of the Lord all the churches will know that he

- If the righteous are blessed in this age, *we rejoice*: “Command those who are rich in this present world . . . to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (1 Tim. 6:17–19, NIV)
- If the righteous are not blessed in this age, *we rejoice*: “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?” (James 2:5)
- If the wicked are punished in this age, *we rejoice*: “You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” (1 Cor. 5:5)
- If the wicked are not punished in this age, *we rejoice*: “God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you . . . when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.” (2 Thess. 1:6–7)

In this way God can give and take away according to his own prerogative (cf. Job 1:21; 2:10), and we can “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:18), finding “godliness with contentment” (1 Tim. 6:6) because we have “better and lasting possessions” (Heb. 10:34, NIV). Hence the exhortation: “*Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 1:13). If you know that “the Lord is coming soon” (Phil. 4:5, NLT), then “you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (v. 7, NLT). Otherwise, our hearts become “weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of *this life*” (Luke 21:34).

CHRISTOPLATONIC THEOLOGY

When the Christoplatonic worldview is pushed forward in time, it develops into various forms of Christoplatonic theologies. Like soccer players on a basketball court, multitudes of people throughout the history of the church have tried to make the game work. Though specific ideas are innumerable, we can identify four *broad patterns* of thought: 1) escapist Christoplatonism, 2) dominionistic Christoplatonism, 3) dispensational Christoplatonism, and 4) inaugurational Christoplatonism.

Regarding the varied use of the term “Christoplatonism,” I do not mean that Christians throughout the history of the church sat around reading Plato’s books

and then directly reformulated their theology (though this did indeed happen in a few cases). Rather, Plato's ideas were heavily influential on the Hellenistic milieu, which in turn shaped much of the thought of the church during its first few centuries, which in turn set the pattern of thought throughout the Middle Ages, which in turn laid a backdrop for the Reformation, which in turn got dogmatized over centuries (i.e., a series of footnotes to Plato).

The first two patterns listed above dominated throughout much of church history. Instead of a simple futurist-apocalyptic hope, the church has set its hope on an escapist heavenly destiny or a dominionistic materialization of divine sovereignty. So Princeton professor J. Christiaan Beker broadly summarized, "By and large the future apocalyptic dimension of Paul's thought has been misinterpreted in the history of the church. The interpretation of futurist eschatology in the church has been one long process of its transposition into a different key. Especially under the influence of Origen and Augustine future eschatology was made to refer either to the spiritual journey of the believer or to the church as the kingdom of God on earth."⁸⁵

The dispensational pattern was a novel innovation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, seeking to solve the Platonic problem through a bifurcation of the plan of salvation. The inaugurational pattern developed in the twentieth century as a melding of the futurist-apocalyptic hope with the present-dominionistic materialization of divine sovereignty.

This historical categorization roughly corresponds to Benedict Viviano's well-articulated, fourfold categorization in *The Kingdom of God in History* (though he conspicuously overlooked the entire dispensational movement, which has had a substantial impact on the church worldwide through the Western missions movement).⁸⁶ Let us look at each of these in more detail.

Escapist Christoplatonism

⁸⁵ Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel*, 61.

⁸⁶ Benedict T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988). Viviano's four categories (eschatological, spiritual-mystical, political, and ecclesial) are here condensed into three (eschatological, escapist, and dominionistic), since "the political stream" (pp. 45–51) and "the ecclesial stream" (pp. 51–56) basically derive from the same theology/ideology. Generally, the same streams played out in the Middle Ages (pp. 57–80) and the "early modern period" (pp. 81–122). Only in the twentieth century (pp. 123–48) was the Jewish apocalyptic vision resurrected, and so Viviano traces "the recovery or retrieval of the original eschatological kingdom proclamation of Jesus" (p. 123).

By examining Plato's theology, we can see many of the themes that are later adopted by the church. On the playing field of materiality versus immateriality, the ultimate goal is the "the journey upwards" — that is, "the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world" — for the "world of sight" is a "prison-house" that the immaterial soul seeks to escape.⁸⁷ Moreover, the visible world is "timeful," while the intelligible world is *timeless*, for time is simply a copy of the eternal state, wherein the soul ultimately finds rest.⁸⁸ Within such a framework, salvation is essentially understood as *the escape of the soul*, which is accomplished temporally through enlightenment and eternally through death (see figure 3.14).⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *The Republic*, 7:517 (DP, 3:217).

⁸⁸ As Plato stated,

Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fulness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he ["the creator"] resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity; and *this image we call time*. For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and *the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal essence*; for we say that he "was," he "is," he "will be," but the truth is that "is" alone is properly attributed to him, and that "was" and "will be" are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same cannot become older or younger by time, nor ever did or has become, or hereafter will be, older or younger, nor is subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause. These are *the forms of time, which imitates eternity* and revolves according to a law of number. (*Timaeus*, 37–38 [DP, 3:456]; italics added)

⁸⁹ George E. Ladd summarizes,

The Greeks — at least many of them who followed in the philosophical tradition of Plato — believed in a cosmic dualism. There were two worlds — the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, the phenomenal and the noumenal. The visible world was a realm of ebb and flow, flux and change, instability, having only the appearance of reality. The unseen world was the world of permanence, of ultimate reality. In the same way man was a dualism of body and soul. The body belongs to the phenomenal world, the soul to the noumenal world. . . . "Salvation" — a biblical, not a Greek concept — meant that at death the soul would be liberated from the body and take its flight to the noumenal world. (*The Last Things* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 29–30)

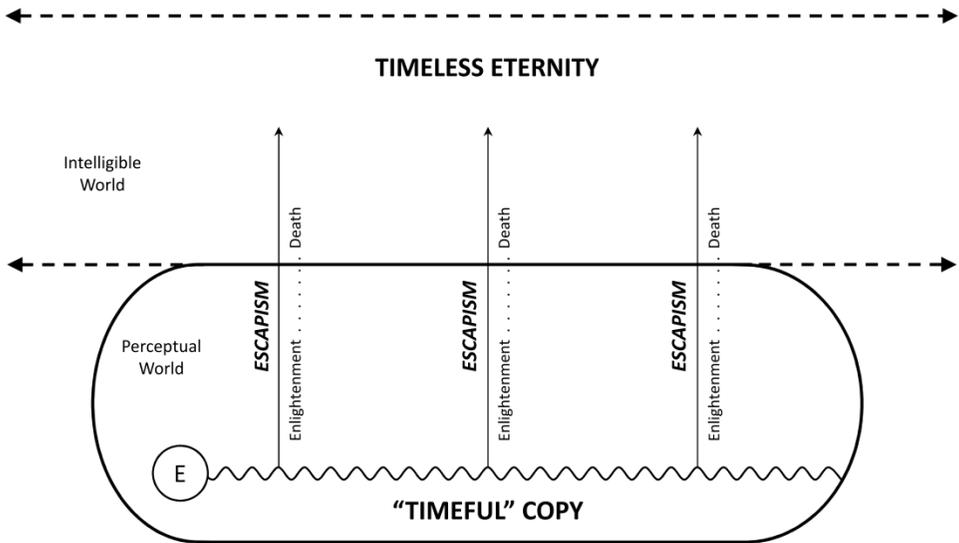


Figure 3.14 – The Redemptive Framework of Platonism

As Hellenistic thought was accommodated into the early church through the Alexandrian school, the simple linear view of history was forsaken.⁹⁰ The hope of the future was transformed into a hope for the “great beyond,” and the resurrection of the body was exchanged for the eternal existence of the soul.⁹¹ Origen (c. 182–251) thus details “an incorporeal existence” as the “the end of all things”:

⁹⁰ “For Plato, eternity is not endlessly extended time, but something quite different; it is timelessness. Time in Plato’s view is only the copy of eternity thus understood. How much the thinking of our days roots in Hellenism, and how little in Biblical Christianity, becomes clear to us when we confirm the fact that far and wide the Christian Church and Christian theology distinguish time and eternity in the Platonic-Greek manner. This then has important consequences, and when the New Testament perspective of redemptive history is thereby affected, it leads to a radical transformation of the Primitive Christian preaching” (Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 61–62).

⁹¹ Moltmann describes the transition,

The first reduction of heaven to something quite different was made in the Christian church itself. As the realistic eschatology of the kingdom of God receded, heaven was increasingly—and to the same degree—declared to be the place of salvation for the soul. The prayer for the coming of the kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven” was replaced by the longing “to go to heaven” oneself. The kingdom of God’s glory and the salvation of the whole creation was reduced to heaven; and heaven was reduced to the salvation of the soul.

This religious reduction led to the heedless neglect of the earth and to the surrender of its future. Anyone who confuses the kingdom of God with heaven transforms his hope into resignation. (*God in Creation*, 181)

Having sketched, then, so far as we could understand, these three opinions regarding *the end of all things*, and the supreme blessedness . . . we must suppose that *an incorporeal existence is possible*, after all things have become subject to Christ, and through Christ to God the Father, when God will be all and in all; or that when, notwithstanding all things have been made subject to Christ, and through Christ to God (with whom they formed also one spirit, in respect of spirits being rational natures), then the bodily substance itself also being united to most pure and excellent spirits, *and being changed into an ethereal condition* in proportion to the quality or merits of those who assume it (according to the apostle's words, "We also shall be changed"), will shine forth in splendour; or at least that when the fashion of those things which are seen passes away, and *all corruption has been shaken off and cleansed away*, and when the whole of the space occupied by this world, in which the spheres of the planets are said to be, has been left behind and beneath, then is reached *the fixed abode of the pious and the good* situated above that sphere, which is called non-wandering (*απλανής*), as in a good land, in a land of the living, which will be inherited by the meek and gentle . . . *which is called truly and chiefly "heaven," in which heaven and earth, the end and perfection of all things, may be safely and most confidently placed.*⁹²

This idea of immaterial heaven as "the end and perfection of all things" and "the fixed abode of the pious" became the normative view of the church in the centuries following.⁹³ The prize of eternal life was understood in terms of an *immaterial heavenly destiny*, due in part to eternity being equated with a realm of immateriality rather than futuristic unending time.⁹⁴ As such, timeless immateriality was naturally assumed to be the "heavenly home" of the

⁹² Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.3.7 (ANF, 4:274–75; italics added). Therefore, "It is simply assumed that the word *heaven* is the appropriate term for the ultimate destination, the final home, and that the language of resurrection, and of the new earth as well as the new heavens, must somehow be fitted into that" (Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 19).

⁹³ See an account in Blaising, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 160–74.

⁹⁴ Concerning Origen, Hans Bietenhard also observed, "The whole hope of the Christian is therefore a hope of heaven: the earth is not worthy of a Christian's hope. But this meant a complete abandonment of the Christian conception of time. A Greek dualism of above and below replaced the NT contrast between this world and the world to come" ("The Millennial Hope in the Early Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 [1953]: 21).

immaterial soul,⁹⁵ which is ultimately achieved through death.⁹⁶ So Douglas J. Davies summarizes,

Though earliest Christianity may have conceived of the eternal future in terms of a restored earth, a second Eden, over the following centuries the Christian afterlife was, largely, interpreted in terms of a heavenly domain. Christian theology, iconography, patterns of worship, the very existence of Easter and its religious celebration, and funerary rites came to speak of human life as a journey through life to the heavenly city. This journey beyond has dominated Christian cultures ever since.⁹⁷

Moreover, a negative view of materiality was also accommodated. The apocalyptic vision of the day of the Lord was changed from the restoration of all things to the annihilation of materiality.⁹⁸ The penal aspects of the day of the Lord were also extracted and universalized upon death.⁹⁹ Rather than being held for judgment until the day of the Lord (the righteous in the third heaven and the

⁹⁵ As rehearsed in Alister E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); and Peter Stanford, *Heaven: A Guide to the Undiscovered Country* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁹⁶ Unlike the biblical hope in which death is “swallowed up” by life in the resurrection (cf. Isa. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:54; 2 Cor. 5:4), the Christoplatonic hope actually glorifies and immortalizes death. Because death is the means of salvation and the practical agency of escaping material existence, Christoplatonism is in truth a “theology of death,” so to speak, as is evident by the longing for death found commonly within the monastic tradition. So Wright articulates, “Death will not simply be redefined, but defeated. God’s intention is not to let death have its way with us. If the promised final future is simply that immortal souls will have left behind their mortal bodies, why then death still rules—since that is a description, not of the *defeat* of death, but simply of death itself, seen from one angle” (*Surprised by Hope*, 15).

⁹⁷ Douglas J. Davies, *A Brief History of Death* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 7.

⁹⁸ Such a view naturally leads to the denigration of all things earthly, including Jewish thinking—as we see in Origen:

For which reason, now, we may also see of a truth that *all the doctrines of the Jews of the present day are mere trifles and fables*, since they have not the light that proceeds from the knowledge of the Scriptures; whereas those of the Christians are the truth, having power to raise and elevate the soul and understanding of man, and to persuade him to seek a citizenship, *not like the earthly Jews here below, but in heaven*. And this result shows itself among those who are able to see the grandeur of the ideas contained in the law and the prophets, and who are able to commend them to others. (*Against Celsus*, 2.5 [ANF, 4:431–32]; italics added)

⁹⁹ So Daley notes, “From the end of the second century (Tertullian), Patristic writers begin also to suggest the prospect of a *judgment* pronounced by God *at the end of each individual’s life*. . . . From Tertullian on . . . most Greek and Latin Patristic authors confidently accept Platonic philosophical arguments that the soul, as the conscious and self-determining core of the human person, is indestructible, and so anticipates its eternal fate, through a preliminary personal judgment, from the moment of death” (*Hope of the Early Church*, 220; italics in the original).

wicked in Hades), all experience judgment upon death (see figure 3.15).¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the return of Jesus lost its centrality in day-to-day thought, because it became functionally equivalent to death—that is, both end in immaterial heaven.

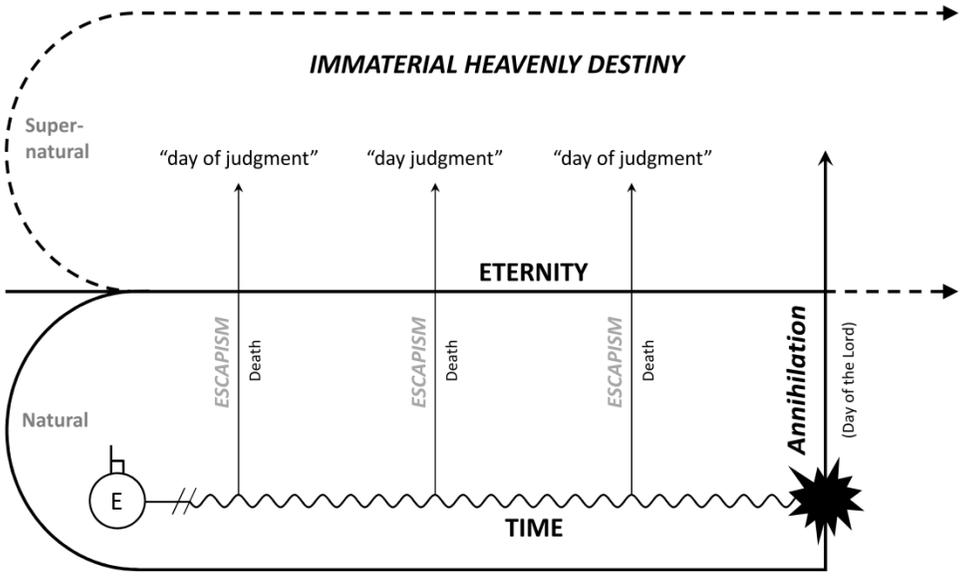


Figure 3.15 – The Modified Redemptive Framework of Christoplatonism

With the convolution of the day of the Lord also came a fundamental disunity between the Old and New Testaments. Though not as blatant as in Gnosticism,¹⁰¹ the Old Testament was commonly pitted against the New through

¹⁰⁰ Within this view, Gehenna and Hades are melded into one homogenous, static, and immaterial reality, which exists eternally and is experienced by the wicked universally upon death. Unfortunately, damages done *in the body* lose their proportionate retribution in an incorporeal hell. Why would God punish us for destroying that which he is ultimately going to destroy? If everyone’s body is going to be destroyed anyway, what is the harm of rape, murder, fornication, etc.?

By analogy, if I have a rusty antique car in my backyard that I am planning to restore to mint condition and someone comes and destroys it with a sledgehammer, then I am inclined to destroy that person with a sledgehammer. However, if I am planning on towing the car to the junkyard in a couple of months to have it crushed, then why should I seek vengeance if it is wrecked? The same logic applies to redemptive history. God created something beautiful and valuable; human beings wrecked it, and God will be vindicated when he makes them pay *corporeally* for what they have wrecked.

¹⁰¹ Marcion, for example, pushed Christoplatonism to its logical end by bifurcating not only redemptive history but also God himself, asserting that the OT presents a deity of materiality (“the Demiurge”), a god of wrath and judgment, while the NT reveals a deity of immateriality (“the Heavenly Father”), a god of compassion, mercy, and love, “alien” to this world. Though few

various supersessionist reinterpretations (i.e., the New Testament “trumps,” “supersedes,” or “takes precedence over” the Old Testament). Such “spiritual” hermeneutics became common during the Constantinian era and remain so to this day, as is evident by the many believers who continue to look forward to a *heavenly* promised land, Davidic throne, messianic kingdom, etc.¹⁰²

Because human beings inherently live according to their perceived destiny, *monasticism* grew organically out of the seeds of escapist Christoplatonic theology.¹⁰³ If materiality is bad, then asceticism and self-discipline are the means by which we separate from the material body and disassociate from the material world.¹⁰⁴ Throughout the Middle Ages, monks and nuns were known as

technically believe this in modern times, it is the practical reality of many. For an insightful reading, see Tertullian’s *Adversus Marcionem* (ANF, 3:269–475) and Adolf von Harnack’s classic, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God* (1924), trans. John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma (Jamestown, NY: Labyrinth Press, 1990).

¹⁰² So E. R. Craven (oft-quoted by dispensationalists) argued for a “normal interpretation of the prophecies”:

Normal is used instead of *literal* (the term generally employed in this connection) as more expressive of the correct idea. No terms could have been chosen more unfit to designate the two great schools of prophetic exegesis than *literal* and *spiritual*. These terms are not antithetical, nor are they in any proper sense significant of the peculiarities of the respective systems they are employed to characterize. They are positively misleading and confusing. *Literal* is opposed not to *spiritual* but to *figurative*; *spiritual* is in antithesis on the one hand to *material*, on the other to *carnal* (in a bad sense). The *Literalist* (so called) is not one who denies that *figurative* language, that *symbols*, are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great *spiritual* truths are set forth therein; his position is, simply, that the prophecies are to be *normally* interpreted (i.e. according to the received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted—that which is manifestly *literal* being regarded as *literal*, that which is manifestly *figurative* being so regarded. The position of the *Spiritualist* (so called) is not that which is properly indicated by the term. He is one who holds that whilst certain portions of the prophecies are to be *normally* interpreted, other portions are to be regarded as having a *mystical* (i.e. involving some secret meaning) sense. Thus, for instance, *Spiritualists* (so called) do not deny that when the Messiah is spoken of as “a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief,” the prophecy is to be *normally* interpreted; they affirm, however, that when He is spoken of as coming “in the clouds of heaven” the language is to be “spiritually” (mystically) interpreted. . . . The terms properly expressive of the schools are *normal* and *mystical*. (J. P. Lange, et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Revelation*, trans. E. Moore [New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1874], 98; italics in the original)

¹⁰³ For a detailed history of monastic thought and practice, see Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 5 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1991–2012).

¹⁰⁴ As Anthony, the father of monasticism, described,

We have lived *in the discipline* a long time: but rather as though making a beginning daily let us increase our earnestness. . . . Whenever, therefore, we live full fourscore

“athletes of Christ,” for they were the elites in the race to heaven. Though Luther deemed all such “monkery”¹⁰⁵ as antithetical to a “theology of the cross” (Lat. *theologia crucis*),¹⁰⁶ the Reformation did little to change the overarching heavenly destiny belief.¹⁰⁷

years, or even a hundred *in the discipline*, not for a hundred years only shall we reign, but instead of a hundred we shall reign for ever and ever. And though we fought on earth, we shall not receive our inheritance on earth, but *we have the promises in heaven*; and having *put off the body which is corrupt*, we shall receive it incorrupt. . . .

Nor let us think, as we look at the world, that we have renounced anything of much consequence, for the whole earth is very small compared *with all the heaven*. Wherefore if it even chanced that we were lords of all the earth and gave it all up, it would be nought worthy of comparison with *the kingdom of heaven*. . . .

So let us daily *abide firm in our discipline*, knowing that if we are careless for a single day the Lord will not pardon us, for the sake of the past, but will be wrath against us for our neglect. . . .

Wherefore, children, let us *hold fast our discipline*, and let us not be careless. . . . To avoid being heedless, it is good to consider the word of the Apostle, “I die daily.” For if we too *live as though dying daily*, we shall not sin. (*Life of Anthony* 16–19 [NPNF2, 4:200–201]; italics added)

¹⁰⁵ Luther incisively observed,

Quite clearly, once you think the matter over, you can see that by this kind of talk Satan has thought up this figment about counsels and the state of perfection so as to adorn this perverted monkery. When he saw that nothing is vowed or ever could be vowed in monkery which Christians had not already vowed in their baptism (with the exception of continence), he began to think up the idea of perfection and counsels to make the ordinary way despised and by a lot of make-believe make this extraordinary way very glamorous. He did this so that men would not see that the vows concerned trivialities. And he succeeded in fostering this error. (“The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows (1521),” *LW*, 44:265; cf. Luther, “Avoiding the Doctrines of Men (1522),” *LW*, 35:125–53)

¹⁰⁶ As most clearly articulated in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518; see Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ For example, Luther declared,

The outward life of the Turks [Muslims] is said to be marked by a semblance of piety. They pray, fast, give alms, establish charitable institutions, and build churches. They are ready to help others. And with this appearance of holiness they deceive many people. Thus the pope also duped us. At the time we did not know better, but we believed that monastic orders and monkeries were *the proper and correct way to heaven*. Anyone who is not well armed with this article of faith and has not pressed it deep into his heart falls easy prey to the shining external gleam of holiness as well as to the prominent names of prophets and teachers. But because they have devised such a *variety of ways to heaven*, we will tell them: “We will stick to *the one Way to heaven* and adhere to Him who descended and simultaneously remained above.” (*LW*, 22:335; italics added)

While the ascent and escape of the soul to its heavenly destiny was the primary outworking of the accommodation of Platonic thought, there remained the nettlesome issue of *divine sovereignty*. Within such a framework, how does God rule over both materiality and immateriality? This question was inconsequential to Platonism, since the forms were impersonal and their function was mechanistic. According to Judeo-Christianity, however, God personally governs creation in a dynamic and historical manner. The collision of these two worldviews produced a dominionistic theology in which God *manifests his immaterial reign* into material time and history (see figure 3:16). Rather than the eschatological messianic kingdom as portrayed in the Scriptures, or the immaterial heavenly realm as in Origenistic Christoplatonism, the “kingdom of God” was understood as the materialization of divine sovereignty through Christianized political and ecclesiastical structures.¹⁰⁸

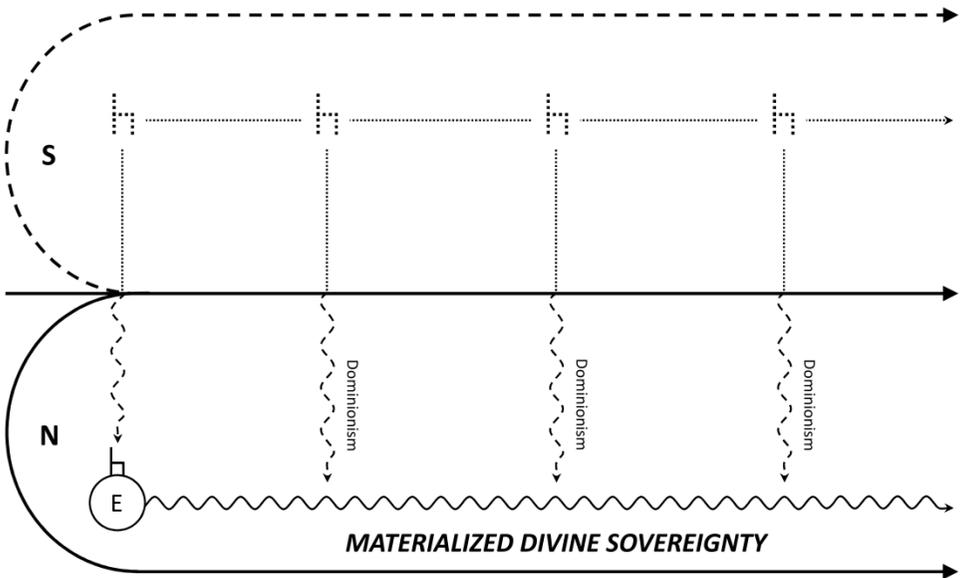


Figure 3.16 – The Manifestation of Divine Sovereignty within Christoplatonism

As such, manifest divine sovereignty was understood as *the end* (i.e., eschatology) to which the prophets spoke. After the conversion of Constantine, therefore, many began to see the Roman emperor, with the church under his

¹⁰⁸ See a history of the development of this theological pattern in Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, 45–56.

authority, as the fulfillment of divine utterance.¹⁰⁹ *Christendom* was the practical outworking of an “eschatology of dominion.”¹¹⁰ Though such thought has often been referred to as “realized eschatology,” it lacks a Jewish apocalyptic referent (unlike its twentieth-century descendant; see below), and it fails to describe the heart of the thought pattern—that is, the perpetual materialization of divine sovereignty.

When the Roman Empire began to crumble, the manifestation of divine sovereignty was transferred to the church with the pope functioning as “the Vicar of Christ,” extending the rod of divine rule.¹¹¹ As the writings of Augustine (354–430) became normative, it was generally accepted that “the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven.”¹¹² Nevertheless, with

¹⁰⁹ So Eusebius, Constantine’s court historian, described,

Our Saviour’s mighty power destroyed at once the many governments and the many gods of the powers of darkness, and proclaimed to all men, both rude and civilized, to the extremities of the earth, *the sole sovereignty of God himself*. Meantime *the Roman empire*, the causes of multiplied governments being thus removed, effected an easy conquest of those which yet remained; its object being to unite all nations in one harmonious whole; an object in great measure already secured, and destined to be still more perfectly attained, even to *the final conquest of the ends of the habitable world*, by means of the salutary doctrine, and through the aid of that Divine power which facilitates and smooths its way. . . .

In short, *the ancient oracles and predictions of the prophets were fulfilled*, more numerous than we can at present cite, and those especially which speak as follows concerning the saving Word. “He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.” And again, “In his days shall righteousness spring up; and abundance of peace.” “And they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into sickles: and nation shall not take up sword against nation, neither shall they learn to war any more.” These words, predicted ages before in the Hebrew tongue, *have received in our own day a visible fulfillment*, by which the testimonies of the ancient oracles are clearly confirmed. (*Oration in Praise of Constantine*, 16.6–8 [NPNF2, 1:606–7]; italics added)

¹¹⁰ See David Chilton, “Appendix A. The Eschatology of Dominion: A Summary,” in *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1985), 223–35. Modern dominionists thus often look to Constantine as the exemplar of the faith and the first major breakthrough of the dominionistic “kingdom of God.”

¹¹¹ “Ecclesiastically the term applies to Christ’s earthly representatives. In the Roman Church it means the pope, who (as the ‘Vicar of Christ’) claims universal jurisdiction from Christ’s words to Peter (John 21:16ff.), and until the ninth century it referred also to emperors” (C. G. Thorne Jr., “Vicar,” *NIDCC*, 1016).

¹¹² So Augustine claimed in *City of God*,

Therefore the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven. Accordingly, even now *His saints reign with Him*. . . .

Augustine we have something of a mediating position between Eusebius and Origen—the “church militant,” seeking to establish the manifest-sovereignty kingdom in this life, and the “church triumphant,” achieving the heavenly-destiny kingdom in the afterlife.¹¹³ Thus escapist Christoplatonism (see figure 3.15) and dominionistic Christoplatonism (see figure 3.16) were awkwardly harmonized (see figure 3.17)—resulting in a view that dominated the Middle Ages and Reformation, and which persists today in many popular circles of the church.¹¹⁴

It is then of *this kingdom militant*, in which conflict with the enemy is still maintained, and war carried on with warring lusts, or government laid upon them as they yield, until we come to that most peaceful kingdom in which we shall reign without an enemy, and it is of *this first resurrection in the present life*, that the Apocalypse speaks in the words just quoted. For, after saying that the devil is bound a thousand years and is afterwards loosed for a short season, it goes on to give a sketch of what the Church does or of what is done in the Church in those days, in the words, “And I saw seats and them that sat upon them, and judgment was given.” It is not to be supposed that this refers to the last judgment, but to the seats of the rulers and to the rulers themselves *by whom the Church is now governed*. (*City of God*, 20.9.1–2 [NPNF1, 2:430]; italics added)

The impact of *City of God* is difficult to calculate, as its theology became ubiquitous to Catholics and Protestants alike (see an excellent analysis in Dan Gruber, *The Church and the Jews: The Biblical Relationship* [Hanover, NH: Elijah Publishing, 1997], 213–32).

¹¹³ “The Middle Ages on the whole did not understand well the this-worldly future dimension of the kingdom of God. This was so due to three factors: a widespread ignorance of the apocalyptic Jewish background of this expectation, together with an acute Platonizing longing for the eternal, for a place outside of time and history. This is the first factor. To it we must add the Augustinian transformation of the kingdom into the church militant and triumphant, and lastly the imperial ideology of the Christian empire as the kingdom of God on earth” (Viviano, *Kingdom of God in History*, 57).

¹¹⁴ See Viviano, *Ibid.*, 57–99. Viviano describes the tensions of Augustine’s theology:

Indeed, ultimately, for Augustine, the kingdom of God consists in eternal life with God in heaven. That is the *civitas dei*, the city of God, as opposed to the *civitas terrena*. That is his basic view. But, unlike Origen, he lived in the Christian empire. He could not ignore its claims to theological attention. Again, unlike Origen, he was a Roman who shared the Latin outlook of practical administration. . . .

Henceforward Christendom would have two practical rival theories as to where the kingdom was on earth: the empire and the church. Augustine’s view would dominate and become the normal Roman Catholic view down to our own times. It would grow and develop, sometimes into exaggerated forms, especially among clergymen and those laymen interested in resisting the emperor. The imperial view would prevail in the East, but also in the West, at those times when the Western empire felt strong and sure of itself and among those circles which cherished the ideal of the Christian empire under an anointed priest-king. Whenever the papacy grew weak or disorganized the old ideal would rise up as an alternative. (pp. 53–54)

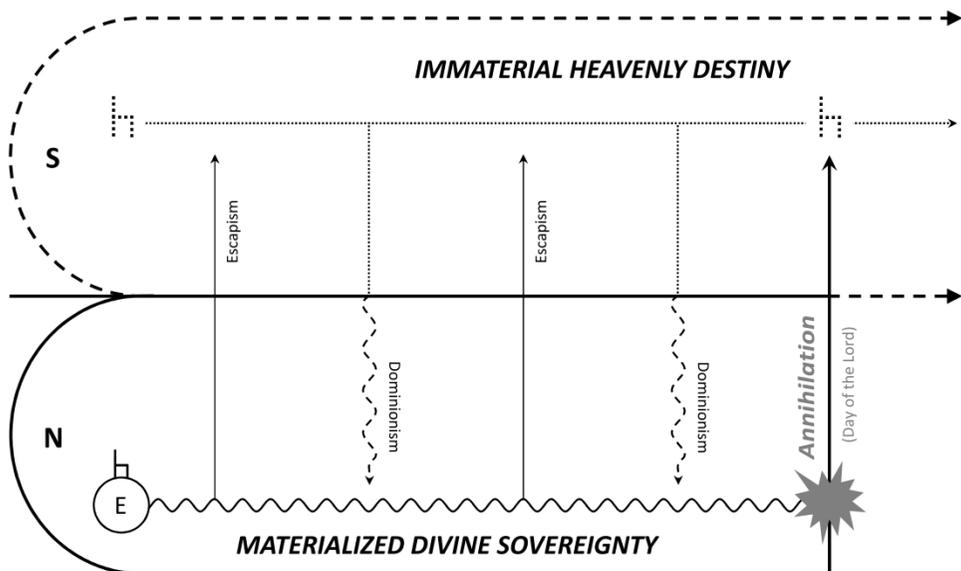


Figure 3.17 – The Augustinian Synthesis of Christoplatonic Salvation and Sovereignty

After the Enlightenment, manifest-sovereignty theology took on a new form within liberalism, wherein the spiritual rule of God produces good moral principles that transform society and hence build the kingdom of God on earth.¹¹⁵ The functional end of this “social gospel” was similar to its Christendom ancestor, though less belligerent in its mission.¹¹⁶ But the twentieth century saw the rise of more aggressive forms of dominionistic theology, which openly sought the takeover of government and society.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ As articulated by Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) and his disciple Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930); see esp. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1900), and Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (1901).

¹¹⁶ The social gospel movement of the early twentieth century was generally a practical application of liberal kingdom theology, spearheaded in America by Washington Gladden (1836–1918) and Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918); see esp. Gladden, *Social Salvation* (1902), and Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917).

¹¹⁷ Modern dominionistic theologians employ highly figurative hermeneutics, typologically reinterpreting the OT to support taking over the earth in this age — i.e., by faith “taking the land,” “sitting enthroned,” etc. — producing modern movements with labels such as “Christian reconstructionism,” “theonomy,” “Kingdom Now,” “dominionism,” “kingdom theology,” etc. These movements are split distinctly into two groups, Reformed and charismatic (see the complex interrelationships in Bruce Barron, *Heaven on Earth? The Social and Political Agendas of Dominion Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992]). The former includes R. J. Rushdoony, G. Bahnsen, G. North, K. Gentry, R. Sutton, and G. DeMar. The latter includes K. Hagin, K. Copeland, B. Mumford, J. Hayford, and C. P. Wagner. Foremost dominionist practitioner C. P. Wagner estimates that by 2025 “almost 50 percent” of the church worldwide will be dominionistic in their theology and practice (C.

Throughout the history of the church these two expressions of Christoplatonism (immaterial heavenly destiny and materialized divine sovereignty) have been the primary perversions of the simple cruciform-apocalyptic view found in the Scriptures.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, these two Christoplatonic expressions inherently set salvation (cf. immaterial heaven) and divine sovereignty (cf. materialized dominion) against one another, since God is trying to take over that which he will ultimately destroy.¹¹⁹ Within a biblical worldview, salvation (cf. new creation) and sovereignty (cf. cruciform-apocalypticism — i.e., mercy now, recompense to come) work together seamlessly, since Jesus is simply waiting at God’s right hand “until the time for

Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* [Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008], 73).

All such theological wranglings are radically naïve and nearsighted in their approach to the restoration of all things, as exemplified by Wagner:

Acts 3:21 talks of Jesus being in heaven “until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Restoration also means “transformation,” and this dates back to the beginning, when Adam and Eve were in the garden of Eden. Even though Jesus came and changed history, He is waiting for us to do our part in bringing restoration to pass in real life. Meanwhile, He is reigning through us until “He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:24–25). (*Dominion*, 73)

¹¹⁸ So Moltmann summarizes the basic twofold perversion of the early church’s eschatological hope:

Ever since Augustine, “God and the soul” have gone together and, following his lead, people have put the fate of the soul at the centre of the ultimate questions. There are two reasons for this. On the one hand, we have the well-known condemnation of the millenarian historical hope by the mainline churches. If there is no longer any historical future worth hoping for, all that is left is the vista of eternity, an eternity equally close to every time, and equally far off. But on the other hand, the Constantinian imperial churches condemned early Christian millenarianism only because they saw themselves in the Christian imperium as “the holy rule” of Christ’s Thousand Years’ empire. So every future hope for a different, alternative kingdom of Christ was feared and condemned as heresy. (*Coming of God*, xv)

¹¹⁹ Moreover, throughout the history of the church these two theological patterns have created the conflicting practices of monasticism and Christendom, which reached their height during the “golden age” of monasticism and high popery (c. 1100–1300). Modern pietists and dominionists alike ought to learn the many lessons of the High Middle Ages. At no other time was there such a refined system of monastic righteousness as seen in adherence to the Benedictine, Cistercian, Franciscan, and Dominican rules. And at no other time was there such a universal rule of the church, wherein the pope picked the kings of Europe and the church owned over 30 percent of its lands. Yet Luther rightly deemed (in his customary brash style) all such “popery and monkery” (*LW*, 41:85) to be “the true, erring, apostate, shameless whore of the devil” (*Ibid.*, 215). Those who seek to walk these roads ought to consider those who have walked them in times past.

restoring all the things” (Acts 3:21), when “his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet” (Heb. 10:13).

These two axes of Christoplatonism also pervert the nature and character of God. To those who focus on immaterial heavenly destiny, God is known in practicality as “LORD Escapist.” Conversely, to those who emphasize manifest sovereignty, he is understood as “LORD Dominionist.” Redemptive history then plays out according the perceived nature and character of God, and in this way there is little room for a cruciform theology (see figure 3.18).

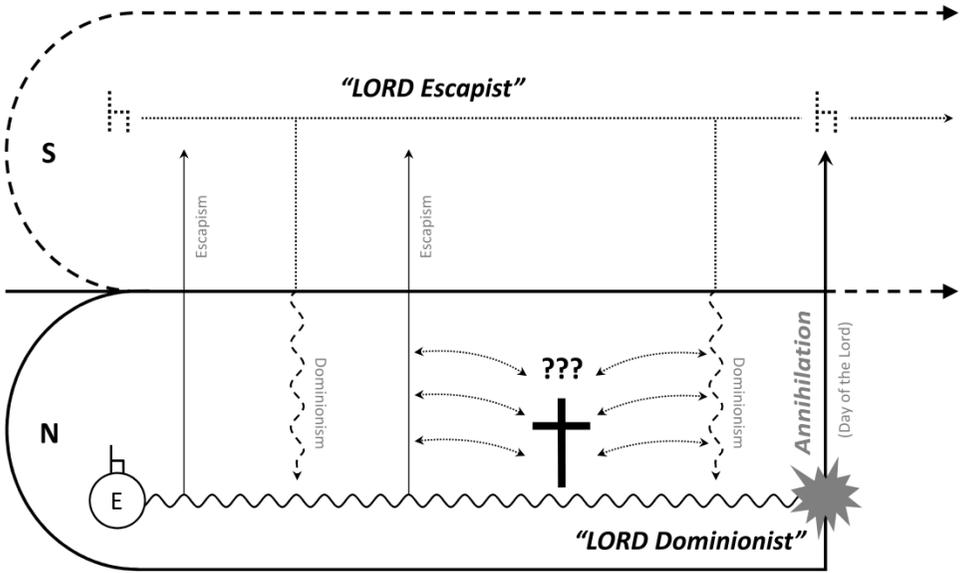


Figure 3.18 – The Perversion of God and the Cross within Christoplatonism

As such, the Bible’s commands to “be imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1) and “take up [your] cross” (Luke 9:23) are understood within *monasticism* to be fulfilled by asceticism in all its various forms.¹²⁰ Simeon Stylites (c. 390–459), who spent nearly forty years atop a desert pillar, would therefore be the ultimate heavenly destiny disciple. Conversely, bearing your cross, according to *Christendom*, is understood in terms of denying yourself for the cause of executing vengeance upon the enemies of God, as exemplified in the Crusades when banners

¹²⁰ The Bible indeed calls for meaningful asceticism (Matt. 6:17; 1 Cor. 9:27; Col. 3:5; 1 Peter 2:11), but not as an imitation or means of salvation. Akin to the snake on the pole (Num. 21:9; John 3:14), asceticism is used to crucify the flesh in order to keep our hope set fully on the return of Jesus (Rom. 13:11–14; 1 Peter 1:13–17) and to walk out this life according to the cross (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:9).

displaying the cross led the Christian armies in holy war against the infidels. Dominionists to this day continue to receive the same false vision of Constantine: in Latin, *In hoc signo vinces*—meaning, “In this sign, conquer!”¹²¹ Both perversions militate against a true expression of the cross, in both word and deed, regarding the present mercy of God in light of the coming severity of God.

In this way the primary Christoplatonic belief systems compete with the Scriptures for context and meaning. Historically, the language of the Bible (e.g., “gospel,” “kingdom,” “life,” “glory,” etc.) has generally fallen into these two patterns of thought (see figure 3.19).¹²²

¹²¹ Eusebius relates that while marching with his army Constantine looked up into the sky and saw a cross of light with the Greek words “εν τούτῳ νίκα,” which renders the common Latin phrase. The following night he had a dream. “In his sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens, and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies” (*Life of Constantine* 1.29; *NPNF2*, 1:490). Constantine’s sign of the cross, the “labarum,” has been used throughout history in various mottos, seals, and coats of arms to invoke militant imagery.

¹²² Note Wright’s “two quite different ways of looking at the future of the world” (*Surprised by Hope*, 81): divinized “evolutionary optimism” (pp. 81–87) and Platonized “souls in transit” (pp. 88–91). Thus the conclusion, “Redemption is not simply making creation a bit better, as the optimistic evolutionist would try to suggest. Nor is it rescuing spirits and souls from an evil material world, as the Gnostic would want to say. It is the remaking of creation, having dealt with the evil which is defacing and distorting it” (p. 97).

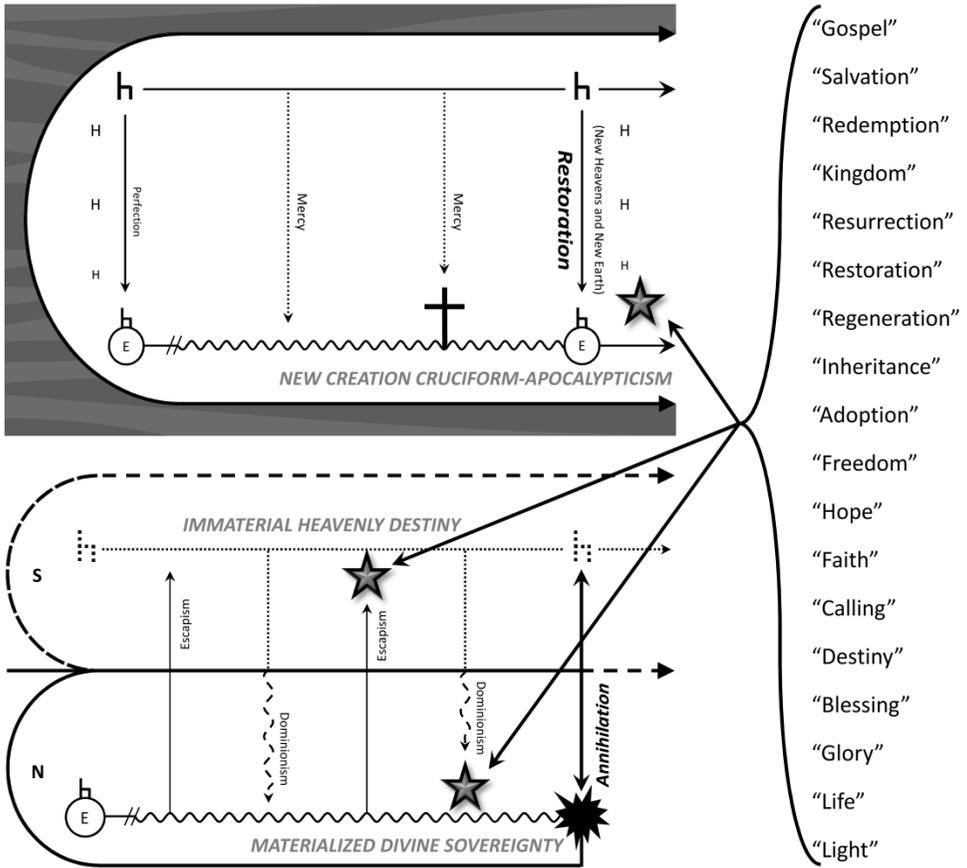


Figure 3.19 – Same Biblical Language, Different Belief Systems

For example, Paul says, “If a law had been given that could give *life*, then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (Gal. 3:21). Given the broader context of Galatians and of Pauline theology, he is simply referring to the age to come and “eternal life” (Gal. 6:8; cf. Rom. 2:7; 5:21)—that is, “the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:11; cf. Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:12). Within a Christoplatonic framework, however, such a “life” would be associated on the one hand with the eternal sing-along-in-the-sky, or on the other hand with the church’s best-life-now.¹²³

¹²³ The modern “prosperity gospel” is simply a recapitulation of Augustinianism, in which the two axes of Christoplatonism work in tandem. See David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011); and Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Dispensational Christoplatonism

From the early church through the Enlightenment, these two patterns of Christoplatonic thought have generally prevailed.¹²⁴ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, a new system of interpretation arose in Britain and America known as “dispensationalism.”¹²⁵ It offered a novel solution to the age-old Platonic problem: *two simultaneous plans of salvation*, one for materiality relating to Israel and the Jews and another for immateriality relating to the church and the Gentiles (see figure 3.20).

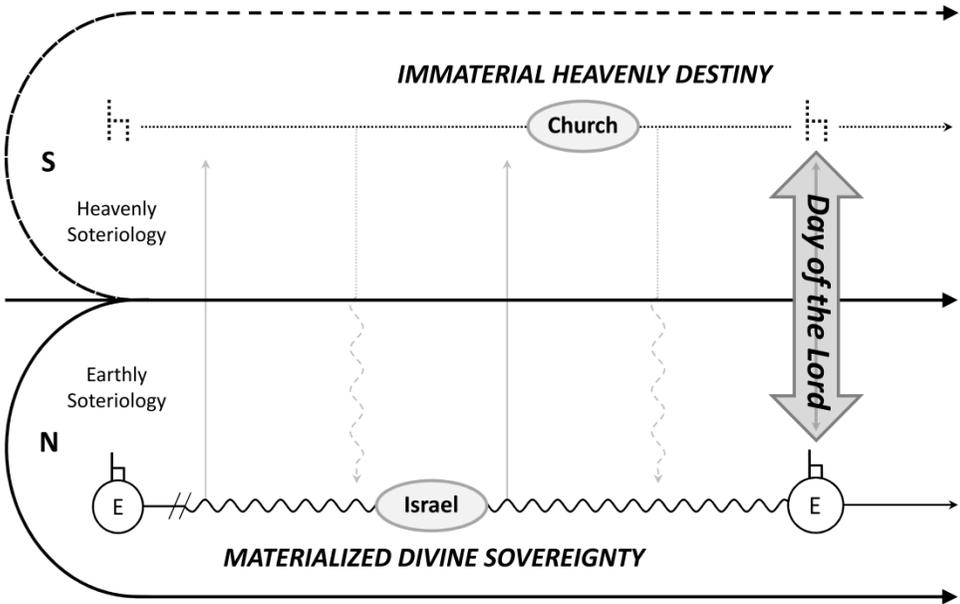


Figure 3.20 – The Modified Christoplatonic Framework of Dispensationalism

Though variously characterized, it is this soteriological dualism that essentially defined dispensationalism as a new theological system.¹²⁶ As the first

¹²⁴ Of course there have always been pockets of cruciform and apocalyptic thought, though less often held together.

¹²⁵ See esp. John N. Darby, Cyrus I. Scofield, Lewis S. Chafer, and Arno C. Gaebelein.

¹²⁶ Dispensationalist historian Larry Crutchfield summarizes,

What is it exactly that makes a person a dispensationalist? What are the indispensable ingredients of dispensational theology? As Ryrie puts it, “What is the *sine qua non* of the system?”

to systematize its theology, Lewis Chafer articulated the eternal metaphysical dualism at the heart of the schema:

The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing *two distinct purposes*: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved. Why should this belief be deemed so incredible in the light of the facts that there is a present distinction between earth and heaven *which is preserved even after both are made new*; when the Scriptures so designate an earthly people who go on as such into eternity; and an heavenly people who also abide in their heavenly calling forever? Over against this, the partial dispensationalist, though dimly observing a few obvious distinctions, bases his interpretation on the supposition that *God is doing but one thing*, namely, the general separation of the good from the bad, and, in spite of all the confusion this limited theory creates, contends that the earthly people merge into the heavenly people; that the earthly program must be given a spiritual interpretation or disregarded altogether; and *that there is nothing in eternity but heaven and hell*. The advocates of this interpretation oppose every earthly feature of the divine program. They disregard or ignore the earthly covenants and promises; they spiritualize or vaporize the vast body of Scripture bearing on the Davidic Throne and Kingdom; they present

It is not the issue of distinguishably different economies in God's governance of world affairs, for nondispensationalists frequently employ the term "dispensation" in the development of their own dispensational schemes. . . .

The number of dispensations to which one holds and the question of premillennialism—belief in Christ's return to reign over a literal thousand year earthly kingdom—are not the deciding factors either. . . .

Neither are the doctrines of the pretribulation rapture of the saints and the parenthetical nature of the church the essential ingredients of dispensational theology. . . . They are not that which reduces it to its lowest common denominator. They are not the heart of the system.

Ryrie suggests that there are three essential factors—the *sine qua non* of the system—in determining who is and is not a dispensationalist.

First, a dispensationalist makes a sharp distinction between Israel and the church. It is the dispensationalist's belief that throughout history, God has purposed two distinct purposes. One program involves the earthly people—Israel (Judaism), while the other involves a heavenly people—the church (Christianity). According to Ryrie, this distinction between Israel and the church "is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a man is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive." (*The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992], 28–29)

no specific reason as to why Christ was born as the Son of David; and they recognize no earthly glory or purpose in His second advent. According to their system, Christ comes again to end the world, but, unfortunately for these conceptions, *the world does not end then or ever.*¹²⁷

As seen in Chafer's summary, dispensationalism sought to restore to biblical interpretation not only the new creation reality but also the Jewish ethnic reality (discussed further in chapter 6). Unfortunately, instead of scrapping the whole Platonic snarl, they accommodated it; and in doing so they doubly muddled the theological issues. Not only do the Gentiles inherit a heavenly destiny, but Israel experiences a manifest sovereignty, generally termed "theocracy," meaning "a manifestation of the supernatural."¹²⁸ The manifestation of divine rule is roughly understood as beginning at Sinai, ending at the exile, and resuming (after a Gentile "intercalation") at the return of Jesus.¹²⁹ According to the two plans of

¹²⁷ Lewis S. Chafer, "Dispensationalism," *BSac* 93 (1936): 448; italics added; article reprinted as *Dispensationalism* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1936). Chafer also wrote, "The distinction between the purpose for Israel and the purpose for the Church is about as important as that which exists between the two Testaments. Every covenant, promise, and provision for Israel is earthly, and they continue as a nation with the earth when it is created new. Every covenant or promise for the church is for a heavenly reality, and she continues in heavenly citizenship when the heavens are recreated" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 4 [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993], 47).

¹²⁸ George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ*, vol. 1 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 88. Peters articulates the metaphysical framework for the theocratic kingdom: "The Word begins with the supernatural (the presence of God) and the natural in harmony. It shows how an antagonism was produced, causing the withdrawal of the supernatural from the sight of man, and yet how in mercy it at times exhibited itself to man, in and through and for man, especially in giving revelations of its will. . . . Now the kingdom being designed to restore and manifest the original concord once existing between the natural and supernatural, the Bible closes with that kingdom *in such accordance*" (*Ibid.*, 80; italics in the original).

¹²⁹ So Chafer states,

In fact, the new, hitherto unrevealed purpose of God in the outcalling of a heavenly people from Jews and Gentiles is so divergent with respect to the divine purpose toward Israel, which purpose preceded it and will yet follow it, that the term *parenthetical*, commonly employed to describe the new age-purpose, is inaccurate. A parenthetical portion sustains some direct or indirect relation to that which goes before or that which follows; but the present age-purpose is not thus related and therefore is more properly termed an *intercalation*. The appropriateness of this word will be seen in the fact that, as an interpolation is formed by inserting a word or phrase into a context, so an intercalation is formed by introducing a day or a period of time into the calendar. The present age of the Church is an intercalation into the revealed calendar or program of God as that program was foreseen by the prophets of old. Such, indeed, is the precise character of the present age. (*Systematic Theology*, 4:41; italics in the original)

salvation, therefore, we generally see dual references applied to the biblical terminology: two “kingdoms,” two “inheritances,” two “glories,” etc.

Being generally a grassroots and popular-level movement, dispensationalism received little criticism until the mid-twentieth century. At that time, criticism from Reformed circles began to mount,¹³⁰ especially concerning the dualistic interpretation of the new covenant—“a defenseless position.”¹³¹ Thus, the classical model was modified,¹³² but “revised dispensationalism” sought to keep the two plans of salvation *during the millennium* while consolidating them into one plan for eternity.¹³³ By the late twentieth century, dispensational scholars began to abandon their dualistic foundations in favor of more mainstream ideas concerning “inaugurated eschatology.”¹³⁴

Inaugurational Christoplatonism

By the turn of the twentieth century, some in European scholarship had come to the conclusion that Jesus and the apostles were thoroughly Jewish in their views of the kingdom, resurrection, salvation, etc.—as reflected in their continued use of apocalyptic language, such as the day of the Lord, the two ages,

¹³⁰ See Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945).

¹³¹ Bruce A. Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 91; cf. Craig A. Blaising, “Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 278.

¹³² See esp. Charles C. Ryrie, John F. Walvoord, Alva J. McClain, and J. Dwight Pentecost. For a history of dispensationalism and its three phases—classical, revised, and progressive—with excellent diagrams, see Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1993), 21–56; cf. Blaising, “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition,” in Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 13–34.

¹³³ Thus the common emphasis on the “millennial kingdom” (cf. esp. John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* [Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1959]), though there was disagreement as to where eternity would play out—Ryrie argued for “heaven” (*Dispensationalism Today* [Chicago: Moody, 1965], 147), while Pentecost argued for a “new earth” (*Things to Come*, 561–62).

¹³⁴ On “progressive dispensationalism,” see Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*; Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*; and Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). Bruce K. Waltke summarizes the movement as a “restructuring of dispensationalism within the framework of inaugurated eschatology” (“A Response,” in Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 347).

and the like.¹³⁵ This approach came to be known as “consistent eschatology,” as it conformed to the thought patterns of the time.¹³⁶ However, these scholars’ skepticism and lack of cruciform theology led them to conclude that Jesus was a misguided and deluded prophet whom the early church deified and memorialized by shifting the apocalyptic categories to his return.¹³⁷

In an attempt to save Jesus from such embarrassment, slightly less liberal scholars responded by saying that Jesus spiritually “realized” the Jewish-apocalyptic expectations within himself—and later through the ministry of the church. This approach has been labeled “realized eschatology.”¹³⁸ The nature of this “realization,” however, was *quite Platonic*, very much akin to the manifest-sovereignty pattern of thought which preceded it.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ See Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*; Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery, 2nd ed. (London: A. & C. Black, 1911); and Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, trans. W. Lowrie (London: A. & C. Black, 1914).

¹³⁶ This approach is fundamentally rearticulated in Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); and Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); cf. Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in a National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), esp. 70–155.

¹³⁷ Like so many before him, Schweitzer concluded by redefining the straightforward Jewish hope:

The Baptist appears, and cries: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. *Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them.* The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. *That is His victory and His reign.* (*Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 368–69; italics added)

In the final analysis, Schweitzer et al. simply recapitulated the former liberal dogma. Concerning the commonality between Schweitzer and the liberalism he so vehemently criticized, Paul Schubert observed, “Both drop Jesus’ faith in the future consummation to the bottom of the ocean of outdated mythology, while they sail on the smooth but treacherous surface of this ocean in the same boat of Jesus’ social ethics toward the promised land of a Christian civilization” (“The Synoptic Gospels and Eschatology,” *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 14, no. 3 [1946], 155).

¹³⁸ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 3rd ed. (London: Nisbet, 1936); cf. Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, trans. D. M. Kay (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902).

¹³⁹ Dodd’s work leaned heavily on Dalman, who generally rejected the Jewish hope in place of a generic and transcendental “sovereignty of heaven” (*Words of Jesus*, 92). Dodd’s realized eschatology was likewise based upon “the transcendent order beyond space and time” (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 56). Thus it is generally acknowledged that “Dodd’s thought is more platonic than biblical” (Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 56). Dodd’s revised thought falls along the same lines, with the kingdom consummating “beyond history” (*The Founder of Christianity* [London: Macmillan, 1971], 115). J. D. Crossan’s “sapiential eschatology” (*The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish*

During the mid-twentieth century, a number of scholars took a “mediating position,”¹⁴⁰ incorporating both consistent and realized eschatology—that is, “an eschatology that is in process of realization.”¹⁴¹ More conservative scholars developed this idea,¹⁴² “modifying” the simple Jewish timeline to accommodate the Platonic realized eschatology.¹⁴³ This approach was later termed “inaugurated eschatology,”¹⁴⁴ reflecting the “already fulfilled” realized eschatology and the “not yet completed” consistent eschatology.¹⁴⁵ Thus the straightforward, Jewish-eschatological hope was mixed with the Platonic notion of materialized sovereignty.¹⁴⁶

The underlying assumptions of this schema are that 1) the overarching purpose of God in redemptive history is the manifestation of divine sovereignty and 2) God was doing the same thing at the first coming of the Christ as he will

Peasant [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991]) has carried on the basic tenets of this tradition to the present day.

¹⁴⁰ C. K. Barrett, “New Testament Eschatology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6, no. 2 (June 1953): 155.

¹⁴¹ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke, rev. ed. (New York: Scribner’s, 1963), 230; cf. W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment*, trans. D. M. Barton (London: SCM Press, 1957); and Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

¹⁴² See Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950); and Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962); cf. similar lines of thought in Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1930).

¹⁴³ Note the contrasting timelines in Vos (*Pauline Eschatology*, 38) and Cullmann (*Christ and Time*, 82), upon which Ladd built (*Theology of the New Testament*, 66–67).

¹⁴⁴ See a discussion concerning the phrase in Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 1–22; and Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 41–116.

¹⁴⁵ Phrases that Oscar Cullmann coined: “The new element in the New Testament is not eschatology, but what I call the tension between the decisive ‘already fulfilled’ and the ‘not yet completed,’ between present and future” (*Salvation in History*, 172). Cullmann illustrated this view with his World War II D-day, V-day analogy: “The present period of the Church is the time between the decisive battle, which has already occurred, and the ‘Victory Day’” (*Christ and Time*, 145; cf. p. 84, where the analogy is laid out in full).

¹⁴⁶ So Jürgen Moltmann summarizes, “C. H. Dodd and Rudolf Bultmann developed different forms of what has been called presentative or realized eschatology. This is a partly Platonizing, partly existential interpretation of the early Christian message, which stresses the presence of salvation in the Spirit, in the proclamation and in faith. It attempts to eliminate early Christian apocalyptic as being a mythical view of history belonging to its own time” (*The Future of Creation: Collected Essays*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 18–19).

do at the second coming of the Christ. So George Ladd, the evangelical systematizer of inaugurationalism,¹⁴⁷ explained:

The “history” of the kingdom of God is therefore the history of redemption, *viewed from the aspect of God’s sovereign and kingly power*. Before the final and perfect establishment of God’s reign there could be a number of mediatorial stages in which *the manifestation of God’s sovereignty is realized in varying degrees*. God’s reign may be realized less perfectly, partially, but none-the-less really in various realms during the course of this age and before the perfect fulfillment in the age to come. The character of these several *mediatorial manifestations* of God’s kingdom can be determined only by careful exegesis of the Scriptural language.¹⁴⁸

Therefore the only difference between inaugurationalism and its dominionistic ancestor is *the eschatological referent*. The older manifest-sovereignty theology generally had no Jewish-eschatological hope in mind — the Scriptures simply prophesied Christendom.¹⁴⁹ The modern inaugurational message is substantially the same, yet it finds meaning and context in reference to Jewish apocalypticism.¹⁵⁰ Of course, the Bible’s eschatology was not realized at the first coming in a plain and straightforward manner — that is, the Messiah is not

¹⁴⁷ See the fascinating background of Ladd’s life (raised a Baptist dispensationalist) in John A. D’Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁴⁸ George E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 84–85; italics added. Of course this “careful exegesis” is based upon a mistaken realized interpretation of Matt. 11:12; 12:28; Luke 17:21; etc. (cf. *Ibid.*, 85–94). See the appendix for a rebuttal.

¹⁴⁹ Some equate Constantinian imperial theology with realized eschatology, but I hesitate to do so since Christendom is generally without reference to Jewish apocalypticism — i.e., the OT simply prophesies Christendom. It is the *self-awareness* of changing the Jewish eschatological hope that defines realized eschatology. It must be granted, however, that many early Christian theologians were actually conscious of this transformation (see esp. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 25–56). Whatever the degree of intentionality, all such reinterpretation must simply be deemed *Gentile arrogance* (cf. Rom. 11:18–25).

¹⁵⁰ Inaugurationalists talk out of both sides of their mouth when they insist (in an attempt to distance themselves from the atrocities of historical Christendom) that the kingdom is not equivalent to the church. However, if the kingdom is the rule of God in the hearts of believers, and the church is comprised of believers, how then can the kingdom not be equated with the church? It is therefore a short road to Christendom. As Alva J. McClain warned, “Once the Church becomes the Kingdom in any realistic theological sense, it is impossible to draw any clear line between principles and their implementation through political and social devices. For the logical implications of a present ecclesiastical kingdom are unmistakable, and historically have always led in only one direction, i.e., political control of the state by the Church” (*The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959], 438).

“already” ruling from an “already” temple in an “already” New Jerusalem with an “already” heavenly glory on an “already” new earth, etc. (to be detailed in chapter 6). Hence the use of the term “realized” is often duplicitous. Rather than simply referring to the present fulfillment of a future event, it usually refers to a semi-Platonic manifestation of divine sovereignty, which in turn actually redefines the future event. Inaugurationism is simply partially fulfilled, *Platonically reinterpreted*, Jewish eschatology.¹⁵¹

Moreover, the final state of Jewish new-creation eschatology is transformed into a semi-Platonic “final amalgamation of the earthly and heavenly spheres.”¹⁵² Inaugurationism consists of “a semi-eschatological expression incorporating the heavenly realm both in the present and future.”¹⁵³ In other words, “Final redemption will be the moment when heaven and earth are joined together at last.”¹⁵⁴ Thus the material world will be fully “supernaturalized,” or “heavenized,” so to speak, by the manifestation of divine sovereignty in the age to come, which then becomes the referent for its partial supernaturalization/heavenization in this age. So Ladd summarizes this semi-Platonic, heavenized destiny:

There is a twofold dualism in the New Testament: God’s will is done in heaven; his Kingdom brings it to earth. In the Age to Come, *heaven descends to earth* and lifts historical existence to a new level of redeemed life (Rev. 21:2–3). This is hinted at, although not elaborated on, in the Gospels. . . . This is the will of God: to conquer evil and to bring his people finally into the blessed immortality of the eternal life of the Age to Come.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Thus N. T. Wright articulates his inaugurationism (more honestly than most) as the “rethinking and reworking of traditional Jewish theology,” “redefinition of Jewish eschatology,” “reworking of the central Jewish doctrines,” and “reimagining of Jewish eschatology” (*Paul: Fresh Perspectives* [London: SPCK, 2005], 130, 136, 150, and 151, respectively).

¹⁵² Koch, *Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, 32.

¹⁵³ Bruce K. Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Wheaton: Crossway, 1988], 275.

¹⁵⁴ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 123. Wright elsewhere describes “an integrated vision of new creation in which ‘heaven’ and ‘earth,’ the twin halves of created reality, are at last united” (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* [London: SPCK, 2003], 470).

¹⁵⁵ Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 67; italics added. Of course, heaven itself does not descend to the earth, but rather the New Jerusalem descends “out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:2). The heavens and the earth endure eternally, only in a righteous state.

In this way we could speak of inaugurationalism as a *conflationary soteriology*. God is manifesting his reign both in this age and in the age to come, bringing together the material and immaterial realms (see figure 3.21).¹⁵⁶ Consequently, redemptive history is understood as a continual process of “the inbreaking of the eternal into the temporal,”¹⁵⁷ or put in military terms, “a theology of the invasion of history by the God of heaven.”¹⁵⁸

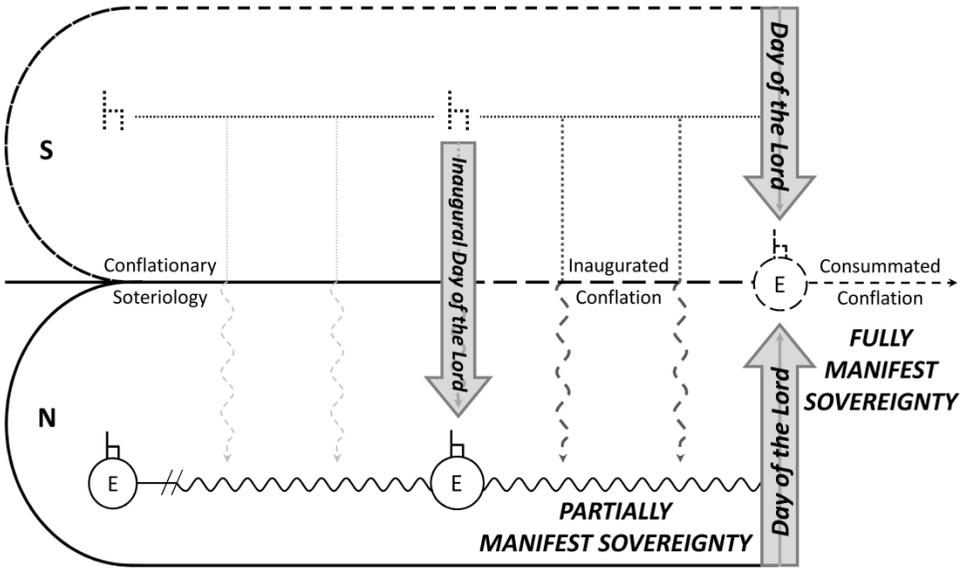


Figure 3.21 – The Modified Christoplatonic Framework of Inaugurationalism

At this point we must say clearly that to speak of the age to come being inaugurated at the first coming is *substantially equivalent* to saying that “the day

¹⁵⁶ Though worldview issues are poorly articulated, Ladd’s well-known diagram, with its two merging lines in a chronological manner, is the clearest representation of the inaugurational schema (see *Theology of the New Testament*, 67).

¹⁵⁷ “C. H. Dodd made a new kind of interpretation with his ‘realized eschatology.’ He accepted the sayings of the present as the most meaningful and interpreted eschatological language as symbolizing the inbreaking of the eternal into the temporal, the wholly other into the historical” (G. E. Ladd, “Kingdom of God,” *ISBE*, 3:24) Though common in the academy, Ladd greatly furthered the language of “inbreaking” in evangelicalism (cf. *The Presence of the Future*, 7–9, 26, 55, 89, 101, 125, 131, esp. 180–90, 256, 271, 284, 317–19, 335–37).

¹⁵⁸ “The theology of the kingdom of God is a theology of the invasion of history by the God of heaven in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to bring history to its consummation in the age to come beyond history. The age to come may be spoken of as ‘beyond history’ because heaven has invaded history and raised it to a higher level in the redeemed order” (G. E. Ladd, *Pattern of New Testament Truth* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 57).

of the Lord has come" (2 Thess. 2:2) and "the resurrection has already happened" (2 Tim. 2:18). Few seem as bold as C. H. Dodd, so as to state the obvious: "That the Christian is 'risen from the dead' follows from the 'realized eschatology' of the Gospels. The Kingdom of God has come; the 'Age to Come' has come; the 'life of the Age to Come' is realized."¹⁵⁹ Inaugurationism is thus bound to its ancient Gnostic roots when it argues for a spiritual realization of the kingdom, resurrection, and the age to come.¹⁶⁰ In the final evaluation, we must conclude that God is not "beyond history," nor does he "break into time," nor is he engaged in an "invasion," nor a "manifestation" of sovereignty—much less an "incision," "incursion," or "realization" of the age to come. All such language is an obvious imposition upon the Scriptures.¹⁶¹

Moreover, like its manifest-sovereignty predecessor, inaugurationism mars the nature and character of both God and redemptive history. By inaugurating the age to come, *the cross is set aside* as the normative reality of this age, and the purpose of God is interpreted as an ever-increasing realization of divine sovereignty. Furthermore, by spiritually realizing the Jewish-apocalyptic realities, inaugurationism *mitigates the severity of God* and the coming day of the Lord. As a result, the divine agenda of both advents is truncated, and as such those who embrace inaugurationism generally avoid apocalypticism and abandon a theology of the cross.¹⁶²

Contrary to the prime assumption of inaugurationism—that the first and second comings are of the same purpose—we must lay hold of the truth that "Christ was sacrificed once *to take away the sins* of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but *to bring salvation* to those who are

¹⁵⁹ Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 157, n. 2.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, N. T. Wright: "God had acted in Jesus the Messiah to usher in the new age, to inaugurate the new covenant, to plant the seeds of new creation. The preaching of the gospel was the means whereby the Spirit worked in the hearts and minds of both Jews and Gentiles not just to give them a new religious experience, not even just to bring them salvation, but to make them the people in whom the new age, the Age to Come of Jewish eschatological expectation, had come to birth" (*Paul: Fresh Perspectives*, 147). Or Ladd, summarily, speaks of "a present spiritual resurrection and a future bodily resurrection" ("Historic Premillennialism," *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert Clouse [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977], 32). See a systematic presentation in Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*.

¹⁶¹ The relatively few Scriptures that are superficially interpreted in an inaugurational manner (e.g., Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21; Rom. 14:17) are addressed in the appendix.

¹⁶² As reflected in *The Presence of the Future*—Ladd's "magnum opus" (D'Elia, *A Place at the Table*, 121)—which never even mentions the cross.

waiting for him” (Heb. 9:28). Such a fundamental distinction between the nature of this age and the age to come is ubiquitous to the New Testament (cf. Rom. 5:9; 8:17; 2 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 3:9–11; 2 Thess. 1:5–10; 1 Peter 1:4–7; 4:13; Rev. 6:10–11). This age generally entails an expression of the kindness of God, which anticipates the severity of God and the age to come—that is, cruciform-apocalypticism. Thus we understand the apostolic commission: “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47), resulting in the apostolic proclamation: “[Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God *to be judge* of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives *forgiveness of sins* through his name” (Acts 10:42–43).

Such a proclamation stands in stark contrast to the four broad patterns of Christoplatonic thought found throughout the history of the church: escapist, dominionistic, dispensational, and inaugural. If we remove the Platonic element inherent to each of these, we are left with a simple new-creation theology with a straightforward cruciform-apocalyptic chronology.

Millennial Classification

A concluding note should also be made concerning the deficient classification system of pre-, post-, and a-millennialism. During the early twentieth century, dispensationalists and Reformed theologians sought to distinguish their respective theologies by use of these three labels.¹⁶³ “Premillennialists” sought to define themselves according to a “literal” interpretation of the Bible, resulting in an earthly Jewish hope, in contrast to a Reformed “spiritualized” interpretation, resulting in the hopes of heavenly destiny (amillennialism) and/or Christendom (postmillennialism).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ This threefold classification is an early-twentieth century invention, as is evident by the lack of definitions in the final edition of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans, 1939) and the testimony of Louis Berkhof: “The name [amillennialism] is new indeed, but the view to which it is applied is as old as Christianity. . . . It has ever since [the early church fathers] been the view most widely accepted, is the only view that is either expressed or implied in the great historical Confessions of the Church, and has always been the prevalent view in Reformed circles” (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938], 708).

¹⁶⁴ See esp. the instrumental work of Charles L. Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1936).

Though such a trajectory of theological discussion continues today, belief in the millennium does not define one's belief system as a whole.¹⁶⁵ Millennialism, classically known as "chiliasm" (belief in a thousand-year transitional messianic reign), is an independent doctrine, which may or may not precede a final heavenly destiny, follow an age of Christendom, or pattern an inaugurational realization.¹⁶⁶ Even dispensationalism (in its classical and progressive forms) could function with or without a millennial transition into the eternal state.

Indeed, there are similarities and much overlap between the common millennial labels and the primary worldview patterns (see table 3.2). Historically, postmillennialists have generally been theologically dominionistic,¹⁶⁷ while amillennialists have generally been escapist¹⁶⁸ and premillennialists have generally been new-creationist and/or dispensationalist.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ As seen in Ladd's further delineation between "dispensational premillennialism" and "historic premillennialism" (cf. Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 17–114), which is simply chiliastic inaugurationalism.

¹⁶⁶ Thus two inaugurationalists may be virtually identical in all theological convictions yet differ in relation to a millennial transition into the age to come, as was the case with Anthony Hoekema and George Ladd (see Hoekema, "An Amillennial Response," in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 55–59).

¹⁶⁷ See Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957), Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992); David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1985); and Marcellus J. Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974).

¹⁶⁸ Since amillennialists and postmillennialists hold the same figurative view of the millennium, the terms "optimillennialism" and "pessimillennialism" have been coined to distinguish the broader framework of thought (see Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991], 136–37; David Chilton, "Optimistic Amillennialism," *The Geneva Review* 20 [July 1985]: 5–6; and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, ed. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], 197–224).

So Greg L. Bahnsen, "*In short*, postmillennialism is set apart from the other two schools of thought by its essential *optimism* for the kingdom in the *present age*. This confident attitude in the power of Christ's kingdom, the power of its gospel, the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and the progress of the great commission, sets postmillennialism apart from the essential pessimism of amillennialism and premillennialism" ("The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstructionism* 3, no. 2 [Winter 1976–77]: 66–67; italics in the original).

¹⁶⁹ Though new-creationism persisted throughout the history of the church, it was generally assimilated into the dispensational movement in America and Britain; see a history of the "new creation model" in Blaising, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 164–92.

Table 3.2 – Contrast between Millennial and Worldview Classification Systems			
<i>Millennial Label</i>	VS.	<i>Worldview Pattern</i>	<i>Millennial Transition</i>
Premillennialism	~	Apocalyptic New-Creationism	Chiliastic (Millennial) OR Non-Chiliastic (Non-Millennial)
		Dispensational Christoplatonism	
Amillennialism	~	Escapist Christoplatonism	
		Inaugurational Christoplatonism	
Postmillennialism	~	Dominionistic Christoplatonism	

However, such a characterization is increasingly inaccurate, since a consensus is arising concerning the hope of a new creation.¹⁷⁰ Hence the millennial classification system lacks the ability to describe *the basic structure and theological end* of various belief systems. The issue of realized eschatology is generally ignored, and issues of worldview are simply collapsed onto a flat timeline.¹⁷¹ As such, we find the whole the millennial classification system to be painfully inadequate and in need of immediate retirement.

Concerning chiliasm in general (to be discussed further in chapter 6), we affirm the apostolic hope.¹⁷² Obviously the Scriptures say relatively little about it,

¹⁷⁰ So Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., “Although Blaising associates the arising of the spiritual model of eternity with the birth of amillennialism and postmillennialism, both of these nonpremillennial eschatologies now strongly affirm a new creation model. . . . Indeed, amillennialist Hoekema provides a thorough presentation of the new creation model in his 1979 book, *The Bible and the Future*” (“A Postmillennial Response to Craig A. Blaising,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 231).

¹⁷¹ See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1109–13.

¹⁷² On the chiliastic beliefs of the early church, see Hans Bietenhard, “The Millennial Hope in the Early Church,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 [1953]: 12–30; and Dietrich H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church: Studies in the History of Christian Chiliasm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 17–113.

and therefore we refrain from a dogmatic declaration. We believe, however, that chiliasm was a minority belief within second-temple Judaism, which was then *confirmed as true* by the Revelation given to the apostle John (cf. Rev. 20:1–6). Thus we hold to what might be described as *chiliastic cruciform-apocalypticism*. We find such a description to represent more accurately the “historic” view of the apostles and much of the early church.¹⁷³

Though missing the mark with his dispensational approach, we conclude with Lewis Chafer: “May the number, already vast indeed, of those who believe the Bible and are subject to its plain teachings continue to increase!”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ In contrast to “dispensational premillennialism” and “historic premillennialism” (i.e., chiliastic inaugurationalism). Ladd’s use of “historic” is both presumptive and nondescriptive.

¹⁷⁴ Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” 449.