

Who Gets Left Behind?

Our Eschatological Hope

Bethel Institute

27 August 2011

- ..\..\Music\iTunes\iTunes Music\Kenny Chesney\Lucky Old Sun (Deluxe Version)\17 Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven (.m4v

1 Peter 1

- A living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead
- An inheritance kept in heaven for you
- You have not seen him but you love him. You do not see him now but you believe in him.
- The sufferings appointed for Christ and his subsequent glory
- Announced to you through the gospel

Spring 2003

Reflections

VALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

END TIMES AND END GAMES:
IS SCRIPTURE BEING LEFT BEHIND?



Trends & Traps of Today's Theology

Harold W. Attridge

- “As the year 2000 approached many of us braced for a surge in millenarian fervor. The event proved to be largely anti-climactic and the year passed with little energy spent on the end time. Since then, however, perhaps fueled by the spectacular violence of September 11, 2001, and its aftermath, interest in apocalyptic expectation has grown by leaps and bounds in various American Christian circles. . . .

Harold W. Attridge

- “Bolstering much of that interest is the phenomenon of the *Left Behind* series, a fictionalized version of a dispensationalist reading of the book of *Revelation* that has sold more than 80 million copies. Much of this eschatological fascination could be easily dismissed as misguided nonsense, but for the fact that so many people take it seriously”

Harold W. Attridge

- Attridge introduces two essays by Yale Divinity School alumni with the summary statement that they “offer theological reflections on the dispensational traditions that undergird the *Left Behind* series, arguing that there is something profoundly mistaken both about their reading of the book of Revelation and their fundamental construal of the Christian gospel.”

Paul Boyer

- His essay, “Give Me that End-Time Religion: The Politicization of Political Belief in Contemporary America,” describes the “powerful grip on many evangelicals and fundamentalists of premillennial dispensationalism.”

Paul Boyer

- “Depending on the precise question, opinion pollsters find that from 40 to 60 percent of contemporary Americans embrace key elements of Darby’s end-time scenario:

Paul Boyer

- “The imminent Rapture of the saints; the seven-year tribulation dominated by the Antichrist; the Battle of Armageddon, when Christ and the raptured saints will defeat Antichrist and his earthly armies; Christ’s thousand-year millennial reign; and the last Judgment, ending the human drama that began with Creation.”

Paul Boyer

- “A struggle is under way for the hearts and minds of American evangelicals. While [dispensationalists] peddle an eschatology that views the U.N. and Islam as literally satanic; opposes any compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and foresees an imminent eschatological crisis in which millions of human beings will perish in agony, some evangelicals resist the dispensationalist tsunami.”

Paul Boyer

- “The [evangelical] dissidents face a tough battle. The dispensationalists’ supposedly biblical eschatology appeals to a public that reveres the Bible but knows little of hermeneutics or the dismal record of failed prophecies.

Paul Boyer

- “The popularizers confidently link their end-time scenario to current events, creating the illusion of certitude in uncertain times. And the terrible simplifications of the apocalyptic mindset, with good and evil starkly opposed and no ambiguous gray areas, exert a powerful attraction.”

Paul Boyer

- “Far from being marginalized, these beliefs are pumped into the public arena by highly elected officials and pious hucksters, only loosely tethered by denominational or institutional ties, using all the techniques of today’s mass media and mass marketing.”

Our Eschatological Hope

- How should we respond to such criticism?
- Is there any validity to these criticisms or are the critics completely wrong-headed?
- Is there much to be gained in pointing out the logical fallacies and the pejorative rhetoric of these critics? Would it be helpful to respond “in like manner?”

Our Eschatological Hope

- Perhaps it would be better to take a different approach from that of the critics.
- Perhaps we should look to present a “kinder and gentler” pretribulationism. (Critics are seldom completely wrong about everything.)
- Perhaps what is needed is a reminder of what we believe and why.

Our Eschatological Hope

- What do “we” believe?
- “10. We believe in the imminent RAPTURE of the church and the physical SECOND COMING of Jesus Christ to earth to reign as King (I Thes. 1:9, 10; 4:13-18; Rev. 11:15; 20:6).”
- <http://www.bethelbible.com/about/what-we-believe/>

Our Eschatological Hope

- What is our eschatological hope?
- What is eschatology?
- Eschatology is the study of last things.
- Eschatology is the study of the culmination of God's plan for his creation.
- Eschatology is the study of the completion of God's work of redemption/recreation.

Our Eschatological Hope

- What is hope?
- 1 Cor 13; Heb 11:1-6; Rom 8:18-27
- Hope cannot be separated from faith and both are dependent upon the goodness and the promises of a loving God (cf. Rom 5:1-5).
- Hope is confidence that God will do what he promised; an expectant and patient endurance that waits.

Our Eschatological Hope

- Roland Chia, *Hope for the World* (IVP, 2005, 12)
- “Hope is essential to human life. Some have compared it with oxygen for the lungs: without oxygen, death occurs through suffocation, and in the same way, without hope, humanity plunges into despair and is overwhelmed by purposelessness and meaninglessness.

Our Eschatological Hope

- “Hopelessness is a kind of death because it opens the door to fear, and fear weakens and immobilizes. Hope energizes human life and serves as the essential fuel that empowers humankind’s intellectual and spiritual endeavors.”

Our Eschatological Hope

- What is dispensationalism?
- “Dispensationalism is characterized by a biblical hermeneutic which interprets the biblical story as the progressive revelation of God’s unified work of redemption. Although dispensationalists recognize continuity in the plan of God, they believe the Scriptures reveal discontinuity in the way God relates to his creation.

Our Eschatological Hope

- “They see in the Bible distinguishable periods of time, dispensations, in which God administers his relationship with his creation. These elements of discontinuity do not indicate different means or ways of salvation but rather recognize that God’s relationship with his people (and with all creation) is mediated differently in these periods.”

Our Eschatological Hope

- What is premillennialism?
- Premillennialism is the view that Christ's return to the earth will precede the millennium and for 1000 years Christ will reign over the earth from the earth.
- Postmillennialism
- Amillennialism

Our Eschatological Hope

- What is pretribulationism?
- Pretribulationism is the view that the rapture of the church precedes the tribulation period. Thus, the rapture is imminent, it could happen at any time and without warning.
- Posttribulationism
- Mid/pre-wrath tribulationism
- Others views

Our Eschatological Hope

- What is needed is an approach to eschatology that focuses on what the biblical story emphasizes and avoids a tendency to speculate about peripheral questions.

Our Eschatological Hope

- What is needed is an approach to eschatology that tells the biblical story of God's plan for his creation, that begins with creation and culminates in a new creation, that tells the story of hope in a way which emphasizes hope.
- The gospel is good news of hope
- Fear engenders fear, hope engenders hope.

Our Eschatological Hope

- What is the biblical story? How might it be summarized?
- The biblical story begins with God as creator. Something has happened to that creation; the world God created no longer exists as He created it. But God has not left the creation in its fallen state. He is actively working in His creation to make things better.

Our Eschatological Hope

- When God's work of redemption is finished, the creation will be made new. Sin and its effects will be removed.
- God's plan of redemption is much bigger than the salvation of individuals; rather, His plan of redemption is cosmic in scope, "as far as the curse is found."

Our Eschatological Hope

- When God's plan of redemption is completed, we will spend eternity with Him on a new earth.
- The goal or hope is not to go to heaven but to spend eternity with the triune God wherever He is.

Our Eschatological Hope

- The focus of our eschatological hope is God's eternal plan for His creation, which reaches its culmination in the fulfilled promise that we will live forever at home with the Triune God.

Our Eschatological Hope

- Our hope is that when the judgment of God is poured out on His enemies, they will be taken and we will be left behind to enjoy the blessing of His presence.
- The content of our hope is to enjoy the presence of the Triune God forever on a new earth.

Our Eschatological Hope

- Our hope is not to escape from the earth but, when His enemies are taken in judgment, to be left behind to enjoy God's blessings on the earth forever.

Our Eschatological Hope

- Our hope is not simply to be taken to heaven. Heaven is not our permanent home; it is a temporary dwelling until the redemption of the earth is completed. Those in heaven today still have an unrealized hope.
- “We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13).

Our Eschatological Hope

- Our hope is to spend eternity with the Triune God, to be where He is. Now, He is in heaven while we are on earth. Heaven is the dwelling place of God. People of faith who have died are in heaven with God. But this is only temporary.

Our Eschatological Hope

- When God's work of redemption is completed, the distinction between heaven and earth will be removed, God will make His dwelling with humanity on a new earth forever. In the final stage, the Creator will move into our neighborhood, after completing a major renovation project.

Our Eschatological Hope

- Our hope is not primarily an event, nor a point in time, but our hope is a person and the eternal blessings He gives us when His enemies are taken (forever) and we are left behind to spend eternity with Him on a recreated earth.
- In short, the answer to the question “Who will be left behind?” is

Trends & Traps of Today's Theology

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The Biblical Story

- The story of creation, fall, and recreation
- The “audience” of the first act of the story
- The Creator preexists his creation
- God’s relationship to his creation – the two poles of deism and pantheism
- God creates by powerful word and by artistic condescension

The Biblical Story

- God is good and what He creates is good
- Creation as recreation – separation, filling, order, naming, purpose
- Creation of the caretaker – in His image and likeness.
- The responsibility of the image is to reveal and represent the creator in the created order and to mediate blessing to the creation.

The Biblical Story

- The caretaker's rebellion and judgment on the serpent, the woman, and the man
- Grace and hope in midst of judgment
 - the man and woman are left behind
 - (but so is the serpent, for a time)

The Biblical Story

- The judgment of the flood (Gen 6-8)
 - The wicked are taken and the righteous are left behind.
 - The flood did not “solve the problem” because the problem is an internal one in the creature and affects all creation.
 - The solution to the problem will require a total and complete redemption of the creature and creation.

The Biblical Story

- The promise after the flood (Gen 9)
 - The covenant with the descendants of Noah, all living creatures, and the earth itself
 - The sign of the covenant
 - The promise is never to curse the earth again.
 - The flood is “as bad as it gets”

The Biblical Story

- The selection of Abram and the promises of land, seed, and blessing for all peoples forever (Gen 12-22)
 - The seed of Abraham will be left behind to live in the land of promise.
 - “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3).

The Biblical Story

- The deliverance of Lot (Gen 19)
 - when the fire came down from heaven on the cities of the plain, Lot and his family were left behind.
 - the descendants of Lot (Moab; cf. Ruth)
- Lot and his family were led out of the city, but when the judgment fell, it was the wicked who were destroyed.

The Biblical Story

- The deliverance of God's people from slavery in Egypt in the exodus (Exod 7-12)
 - The plagues result in a separation between Israel and Egypt, culminating in a final plague where the wicked/rebellious suffer judgment and the obedient are left behind.
 - Although in the Exodus the Israelites leave the land of Egypt they are spared death through the Passover; they are left behind.

The Biblical Story

- At the Red Sea, the Egyptians are taken in judgment and the Israelites are left behind (Exod 14).

The Biblical Story

- In the conquest of the promised land, God commanded the Israelites to wipe out the Canaanites (men, women, children, animals, etc.)
 - It is the Israelites who should be left behind.
 - Of course, the Israelites did not obey God completely, and the ongoing conflict with the Canaanites had serious ramifications in Israel's history. (cf. Rahab and Boaz)

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The Biblical Story

- When the Israelites sinned against God and God judged them, they were taken into exile (not in deliverance but as judgment on their sin)
 - Had they remained faithful, they would have been left behind in the land (2 Chron 36:15-23).
 - They were taken out of the land in judgment.

The Biblical Story

- When God returns the people to the land after the exile it is the living who resettle in the land and rebuild the temple and the city.
 - The goal is not to be taken from the nations but to be left behind in the land of promise.
 - The Ammonites and Moabites were exiled from the land in judgment (Neh 13).

The Biblical Story

- Malachi 4 – the conclusion of the First Testament story, which is followed by 400 years of silence (no prophet in the land)

The Biblical Story

- “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the Lord Almighty (Mal 4:1-3).

The Biblical Story

- Malachi 4 – the conclusion of the First Testament story, which is followed by 400 years of silence (no prophet in the land)
 - The goal is not to be set on fire but to be left behind in the land of promise.
 - The righteous will trample down the wicked and thus the righteous/repentant will be left behind.

The Biblical Story

- When the judgment of God comes, the wicked are judged and the righteous are left behind to “leap” and “trample.”
- But that time is not yet here so the people of faith wait
- Still no prophet
- Still no prophet
- Still no prophet
- Still no prophet

The Biblical Story

- Finally, in those days John the Baptist came, preaching (Matt 3:1)
- “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt 3:2).

The Biblical Story

- Judgment is coming (Matt 3:12)
- “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and He will clear His threshing floor, gathering the wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”
 - When this judgment comes, it would be better to be left behind.
 - When the chaff is burned up, the chaff is taken.

The Biblical Story

- Jesus' preaching – “Repent for the kingdom is near” (Matt 4:17).
- “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” (Matt 17:11-12)

The Biblical Story

- Jesus' miracles (signs of the kingdom) are “good news” for those who will be left behind to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom (Matt 4:23-25).
 - In the kingdom there will health, prosperity, justice, etc.; the curse of sin and death will be removed.
 - The signs of the kingdom are evidence of the presence of the kingdom, even though the fullness of the kingdom is yet to come.

Parables in Matt 13

- Wheat/weeds
 - Mustard seed
 - Yeast
 - » Interpretation wheat/weeds
 - Hidden treasure
 - Fine pearl
- Net

The Biblical Story

- The parables of the kingdom (Matt 13)
 - The kingdom is like a man who sowed good seed in his field and his enemy sowed weeds.
 - There will be judgment at the end of the age.
 - Judgment in this age would be indiscriminate.
 - When judgment comes the wicked will be taken and thrown into the fire.
 - The righteous will be left behind.

The Biblical Story

- The parables of the kingdom (Matt 13)
 - The kingdom is like a mustard seed and yeast in dough.
 - The kingdom starts out small and grows large.
 - The kingdom starts out in one place and grows to fill the whole earth.
 - The kingdom is eternal (cf. Dan 2).

The Biblical Story

- The parables of the kingdom (Matt 13)
 - The kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field and a pearl of great value.
 - The kingdom is valuable.
 - The kingdom is worth whatever it costs.
 - The kingdom should be our focus and goal.

The Biblical Story

- The parables of the kingdom (Matt 13)
 - The kingdom is like a net let down into the lake which caught all kinds of fish.
 - There is judgment at the end of the age.
 - The wicked and the righteous are separated then.
 - The wicked will be taken (thrown into the fiery furnace) and the righteous will be left behind.

The Biblical Story

- Jesus' teaching on the end of the age and the sign of His coming (Matt 24)
- “When will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”
 - The sign of His coming is His coming
 - No one knows when this will happen

The Biblical Story

- The sign is His coming: “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt 24:20).
- “And he will send his angels . . . and they will gather his elect” (Matt 24:31).

The Biblical Story

- As for the day and hour, no one knows (not even angels or the Son) except the Father (Matt 24:36)
- It will be like the days of Noah – the flood came and took them all (the wicked) away and the righteous were left behind (Matt 24:37-39).
- Two men will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left (Matt 24:40).

The Biblical Story

- Two women will be grinding, one will be taken and the other left (Matt 24:41).
- Stay alert because you do not know on what day your Lord will come (Matt 24:42)
- The Son of Man will come on an hour when you do not expect him (Matt 24:44)
- The doctrine of imminency – “we believe in the imminent rapture of the church”

The Biblical Story

- Jesus' teaching on the kingdom after the resurrection (Acts 1:6-11)
- “Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”
 - It is not for you to know (I don't know when)
 - (the kingdom is bigger than Israel)
 - You will be my witnesses to the nations after the Spirit comes

The Biblical Story

- Fast-forward past the ascension of Jesus and the establishment and growth of the church
- The return of Jesus (Rev 19)
- The judgment of all people (Rev 19:18-21)
 - The invitation (to the birds) to a feast of flesh of kings, generals, mighty men, horses, riders, “and the flesh of all people, small and great” (Rev 19:18).
 - The wicked are eaten; righteous are left behind.

The Biblical Story

- The beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire and “the rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh” (Rev 19:21).
 - This is the penultimate judgment
 - The wicked are taken and the righteous are left behind.

The Biblical Story

- The millennium (Rev 20) – note that the return of Christ occurs prior to the millennium (chapter 19 precedes 20).
- Thus, there is biblical/exegetical support for a premillennial return of Christ.

The Biblical Story

- The rebellion at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:7-15)
 - Fire comes down from heaven and devours the opponents of the King.
 - The righteous are left behind.

The Biblical Story

- The new heaven and new earth comes down from heaven (Rev 21).
- Only people of faith remain to participate in this new creation; the wicked have been cast into the lake of burning sulfur/fire (Rev 20:14-15; 21:8).

The Biblical Story

- “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.”

The Biblical Story

- God's plan of redemption is now complete, His work of recreation has culminated in a new heaven and earth.
- God will eternally make his dwelling with us, we will live forever on the new earth. Earth will be the place where God lives forever and ever and those who are left behind will live with Him.

The Biblical Story

- There are a number of characteristics which make this a great place to be, the fulfillment of our hope.
 - God is there; Father, Son, and Spirit.
 - The curse of sin has been lifted; no longer will there be even the possibility of sin.
 - The serpent is not there; he has been exiled permanently.
 - The wicked are not there; their eternal destiny is in a place away from the presence of God.

The Biblical Story

- When the work of redemption is completed, the wicked are removed and the righteous are left behind.
- Our hope is that when God's work of redemption is completed, we will live forever in His presence.

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But, what about the rapture?

- It doesn't seem like the rapture (pre-trib or otherwise) fits into this story.
- It would seem that a rapture of the church where the righteous are taken and the wicked are left behind would not be consistent with the pattern established in this telling of the story?
- And that would be correct.

But, what about the rapture?

- I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture and this inconsistency is one of the major reasons why.
- Note that this is both an exegetical and theological argument.
- 1 Thess 4:13-17 – Paul is reminding his readers of what Jesus had taught about the resurrection of the dead.

But, what about the rapture?

- At the coming of Christ, the living will not precede the dead to glorification. The dead in Christ will rise first and then the living will be “caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”
- In the rapture, the righteous are taken and the wicked are left behind.

But, what about the rapture?

- Note that the wicked are not in view here, but Paul does emphasize the distinction between the wicked and the righteous.
- Note that the righteous are caught up in the air – consistently throughout Scripture, when the judgment at the end is in view, the wicked and righteous are separated and that separation occurs on the earth.

But, what about the rapture?

- Here the dead are raised and the living are caught up together in the clouds to be with the Lord forever – where He goes, His people go. At the rapture, He takes believers to be where He is, and when He returns after seven years, we come back to the earth with Him.
- 1 Thess 4 is a resurrection text not a judgment text.

But, what about the rapture?

- The rapture also seems to be necessary because of Jesus' teaching that His return is imminent. "You do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch . . . So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matt 24:42-44).

But, what about the rapture?

- “You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2).
- Note the foreshadowing of this event in two OT characters.
 - Enoch (Gen 4)
 - Elijah (2 Kings 2)

Our Blessed Hope

- The hope of the church is not the rapture.
- This statement is not an attempt to be shocking, controversial, radical, cutting edge, etc. It is rather to express what we all really mean when we talk about the ultimate hope of all Christians.
- Our hope is not an event but a person. Of course, his appearance is an event . . .

Our Blessed Hope

- The rapture will take “us” to heaven to be with Christ, but heaven is not our home. We only stay there for seven years. Then, when Christ returns to the earth for a thousand years, we will come with Him. Following the millennium, there is a new heaven and a new earth – God makes His home eternally on the earth with us. God moves into our neighborhood.

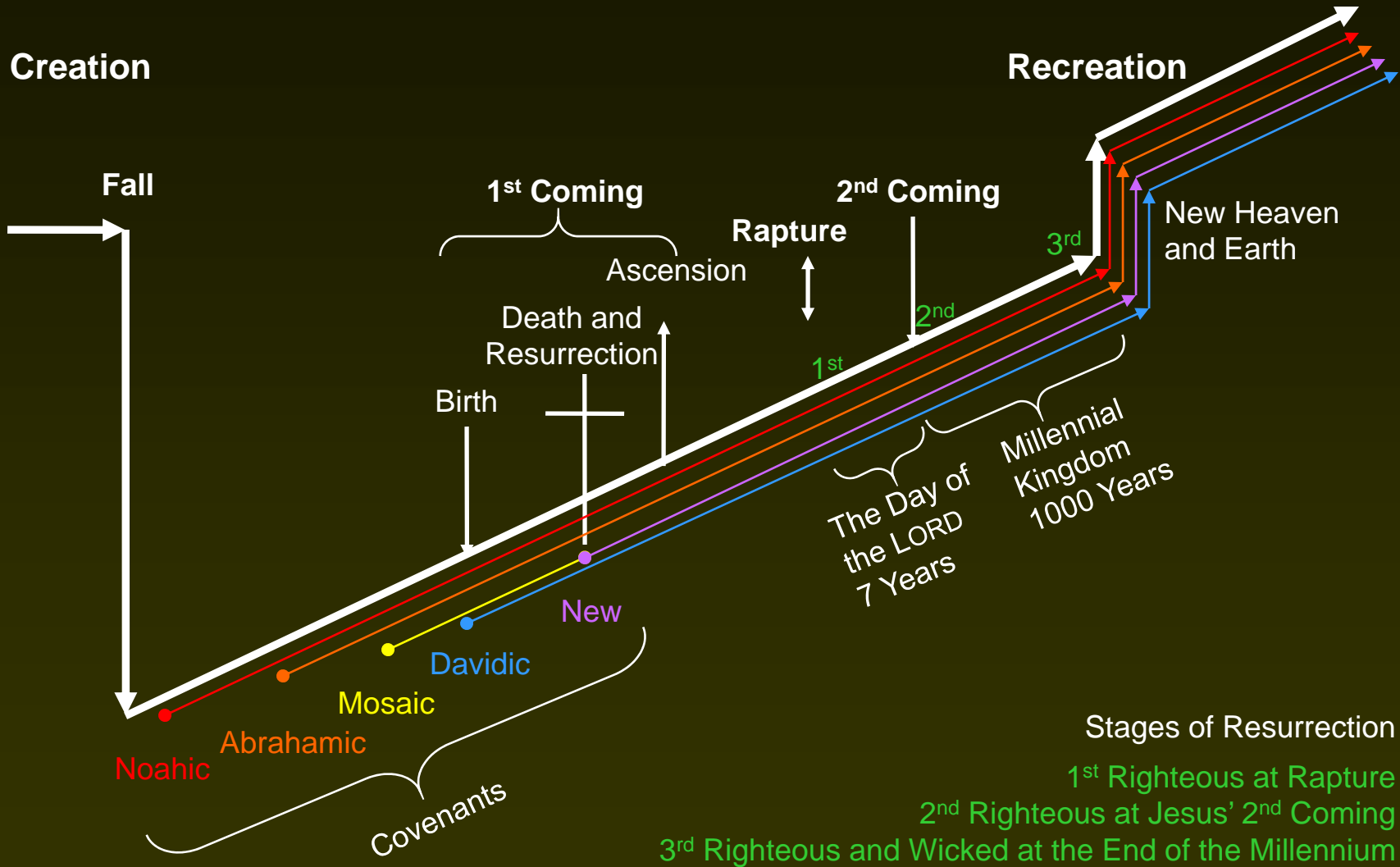
Our Blessed Hope

- Our hope is not to escape from this earth, it is for the earth to be recreated.
- Our hope is not to be homeless but to be at home in a new home, with the triune God living in our neighborhood.
- Our hope and the hope of all creation are intimately inter-connected (cf. Rom 8:18-25).

Our Blessed Hope

- Could you put all this on a chart?
- After all, every good dispensationalist has a chart or two.
- Furthermore, charts are helpful for visual learners.

Hannah Christopher's Chart*



*This chart is not to scale.

Our Blessed Hope

- Our hope is Christ.
- In Matt 24, He taught that no one knows the time of His return and the only sign of His coming is His coming.
- Christ is our hope.
- So what do we do while we wait?
- How should we wait?

Until then . . .

- “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Matt 24:42).

Until then . . .

- “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns” (Matt 24:45-46).

Until then . . .

- “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20).

Until then . . .

- For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ . . . (Titus 2:11-13).

Until then . . .

- In short, the grace of God that has appeared will appear again. He is our hope.
- Wait and work . . . in hope.
- Fear not. Do not be afraid.
- Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

