

**Eschatology - The Doctrine of Last Things**  
**The Return of Christ - When and How?**  
**Part 1 - Introduction to New Testament Eschatology**

1. Introduction - What Is Eschatology?

- 1.1. The English word eschatology comes from the Greek word ἔσχατος which means “last; the farthest boundary of an area; pertaining to being the final item in a series.”
- 1.2. Eschatology is therefore the study of the last things. It is the part of systematic theology that looks at the end of God’s works - the consummation of all things.
- 1.3. Because of this eschatology is the final section within systematic theology. This is important for two reasons:
  - 1.3.1. Eschatology is studied last because it is about the last things - the consummation of all of God’s work.
  - 1.3.2. Eschatology is studied last because the consummation is built upon all that has gone before. Consequently, in studying eschatology we will be drawing upon all of our previous studies in systematic theology.

2. New Testament Eschatology - the now and the not yet

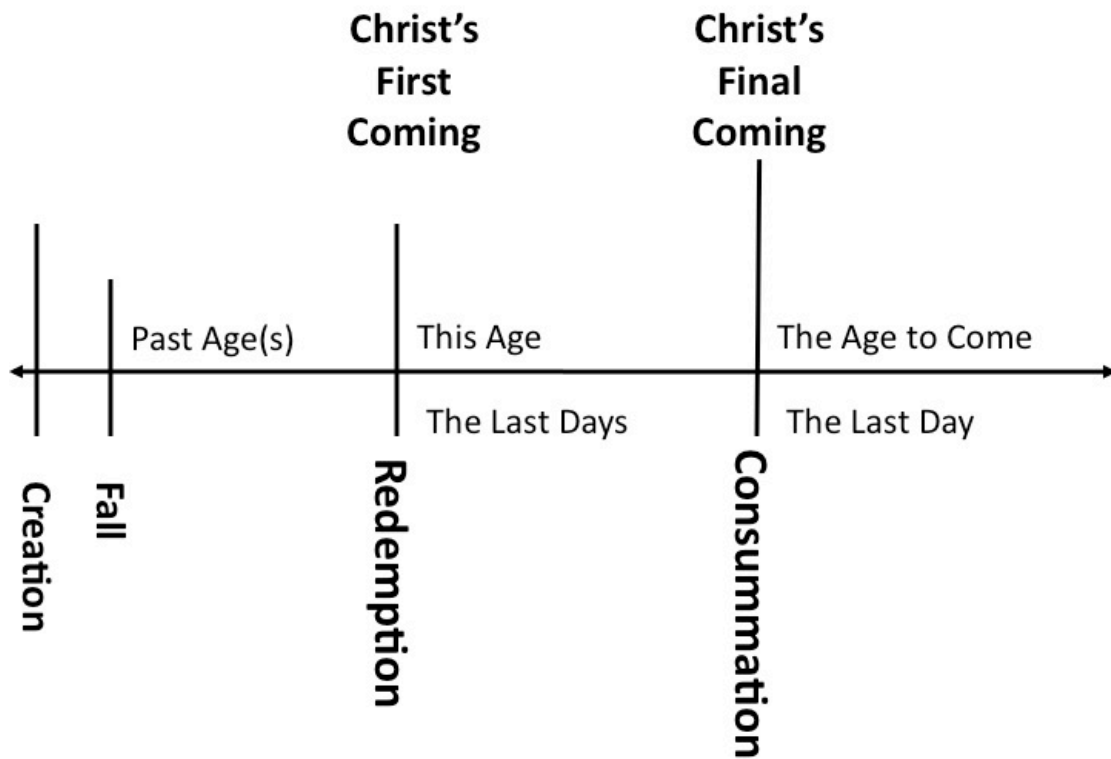
- 2.1. In the New Testament, the dominant focus in eschatology is “the **now** but **not yet**.” This phrase refers to the tension of what believers have already received by virtue of being “in Christ” and what yet awaits them at the consummation after the return of Christ. This is seen in many verses:
  - 2.1.1. 1 John 3:2 Dear friends, **now we are children of God**, and **what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**
  - 2.1.2. Romans 8:23–25 Not only so, but **we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.** <sup>24</sup> **For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?** <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.
  - 2.1.3. 2 Corinthians 5:1–5 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. <sup>2</sup> **Meanwhile we groan**, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> **For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.** <sup>5</sup> Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and **has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**

- 2.1.4. Ephesians 1:13–14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. **Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession** — to the praise of his glory.
- 2.1.5. “We must note, therefore, that what specifically characterizes New Testament eschatology is an underlying tension between the “already” and the “not yet” – between what the believer already enjoys and what he does not yet possess.” – AA Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 14
- 2.2. In the New Testament we read of two ages - this age and the age to come - and two sets of days - the last days and the last day.
  - 2.2.1. The two ages - this age and the age to come
    - 2.2.1.1. Matthew 12:32 Anyone who speaks a word against the 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.**
    - 2.2.1.2. Luke 18:29–30 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God <sup>30</sup> will fail to receive many times as much **in this age and, in the age to come**, eternal life.”
    - 2.2.1.3. Luke 20:34–35 Jesus replied, “The people of **this age** marry and are given in marriage. <sup>35</sup> But those who are considered worthy of taking part in **that age** and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage...
    - 2.2.1.4. Ephesians 1:20–21 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, **not only in the present age but also in the one to come.**
  - 2.2.2. The two sets of days - the last days (this age) and the last day (the age to come)
    - 2.2.2.1. Acts 2:17 **In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit** on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.
    - 2.2.2.2. Hebrews 1:1–2 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but **in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.
    - 2.2.2.3. James 5:3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. **You have hoarded wealth in the last days.**

2.2.2.4. John 6:39–40, 44, 54 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but **raise them up at the last day**.<sup>40</sup> For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and **I will raise him up at the last day.**” ....<sup>44</sup> “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and **I will raise him up at the last day**.....<sup>54</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and **I will raise him up at the last day.**

2.2.2.5. John 12:48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; **that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.**

2.2.3. This may be represented as in the following graphic:



2.2.4. The contrast between this age-last days and the age to come-last day is seen in the following table of verses from the Scripture:

Category	This Age	The Age To Come
Evil and sin	<p>Galatians 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from <b>the present evil age</b></p> <p>Ephesians 2:1-2 As for you, you were dead in your <b>transgressions and sins,</b> <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed <b>the ways (literally: age) of this world</b> and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in <b>those who are disobedient.</b></p> <p>Romans 12:2 <b>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world (literally: age),</b> but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.</p>	<p>Matthew 13:40–43 “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at <b>the end of the age.</b> <sup>41</sup>The Son of Man will send out his angels, and <b>they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.</b> <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. “</p>
Riches and life	<p>Matthew 13:22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but <b>the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth</b> choke it, making it unfruitful.</p> <p>1 Timothy 6:17 Command <b>those who are rich in this present world (literally: age) not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain,</b> but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.</p>	<p>1 Timothy 6:17–19 Command those who are rich in this present world (literally: age) not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup>Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. <sup>19</sup> <b>In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age,</b> so that they may take hold of <b>the life that is truly life.</b></p>

Category	This Age	The Age To Come
Nature of wisdom and knowledge	<p>1 Corinthians 1:20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? <b>Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?</b></p> <p>1 Corinthians 2:6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but <b>not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.</b></p>	<p>1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and <b>what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.</b></p> <p>1 Corinthians 13:12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.</p>
Marriage	<p>Luke 20:34–36 Jesus replied, <b>“The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. <sup>35</sup></b> But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, <sup>36</sup> and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.”</p>	<p>Luke 20:34–36 Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. <sup>35</sup> <b>But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, <sup>36</sup></b> and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.”</p>

Category	This Age	The Age To Come
Body	<p>2 Corinthians 4:16–5:1 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though <b>outwardly we are wasting away</b>, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. <sup>5:1</sup> Now we know that <b>if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven</b>, not built by human hands.</p>	<p>Philippians 3:20–21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, <b>will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.</b></p> <p>1 Corinthians 15:42–44 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. <b>The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;</b> <sup>43</sup> <b>it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;</b> <sup>44</sup> <b>it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.</b> If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.</p>

Category	This Age	The Age To Come
<p>Death and resurrection</p>	<p>Hebrews 9:27–28 <b>Just as man is destined to die once</b>, and after that to face judgment,<sup>28</sup> so 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 waiting for him.</p> <p>Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; <b>for dust you are and to dust you will return.</b></p>	<p>1 Corinthians 15:25–26 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> <b>The last enemy to be destroyed is death.</b></p> <p>Revelation 21:4 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.</p> <p>John 5:28–29 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when <b>all who are in their graves will hear his voice<sup>29</sup> and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.</b>”</p> <p>Luke 20:35–36 <b>But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead</b> will neither marry nor be given in marriage,<sup>36</sup> and <b>they can no longer die</b>; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.</p> <p>1 Corinthians 15:50–54 I declare to you, brothers, that <b>flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.</b><sup>51</sup> Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but <b>we will all be changed</b> —<sup>52</sup> in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, <b>the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.</b><sup>53</sup> For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.<sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”</p>

- 2.2.4.1. This means that the “age to come” is an age of eternal life and immortality. It is characterized by the realization of all the blessings of the resurrection and the consummation. It is not an age in which people await the consummation. – Kim Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 84.
- 2.2.5. The event that started the last days was the life, death, resurrection, and ascension. No other “events” will usher in the “last days” - they were ushered in when Christ came the first time.
- 2.2.5.1. Hebrews 1:1–2 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but **in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.
- 2.2.5.2. 1 John 2:18, 22 Dear children, this is the last hour; and **as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour...** <sup>22</sup> Who is the liar? It is **the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist** — he denies the Father and the Son.
- 2.2.5.3. Acts 2:17, 32-33 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.... <sup>32</sup>**God has raised this Jesus to life**, and we are all witnesses of the fact. <sup>33</sup> **Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.**
- 2.2.5.4. This means that we have been in the “last days” from the time of Christ. There is no question of “if we are near the last days” or if “we are in the last days.” We are in the last days, and have been for 2,000 years. In fact, we are in the last hour - and have been for 2,000 years.
- 2.2.5.4.1. 1 John 2:18 Dear children, **this is the last hour**; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. **This is how we know it is the last hour.**
- 2.2.5.5. Further, we have no biblical warrant to look for a period that is “more the last days” than what have been going on for the last 2,000 years. Since the New Testament days we have been in the last hour of the last days - and there is no such thing as the “last minutes” or “last seconds.” There are only the last days, and we have been fully in them for 2,000 years. The only thing left is the return of Christ which will usher in the last day, when this age will be ended and “that age” will come in all of its glory.



2.2.6. This entire age, the last days, will be characterized by unbelief, sin, and many antichrists.

2.2.6.1. 2 Timothy 3:1–5 But mark this: There will be **terrible times** in the **last days**. **2 People will be** lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, **3** without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, **4** treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — **5** having a form of godliness but denying its power. **Have nothing to do with them.**

2.2.6.2. 2 Peter 3:3–7 **3** First of all, you must understand that in **the last days scoffers will come**, scoffing and following their own evil desires. **4 They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?** Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” **5** But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. **6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.** **7** By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

2.2.6.3. Matthew 24:36–42 “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.** **38** For in the days before the flood, **people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.** **40** Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. **41** Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. **42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”**

2.2.6.4. 1 John 2:18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and **as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come.** This is how we know it is the last hour.

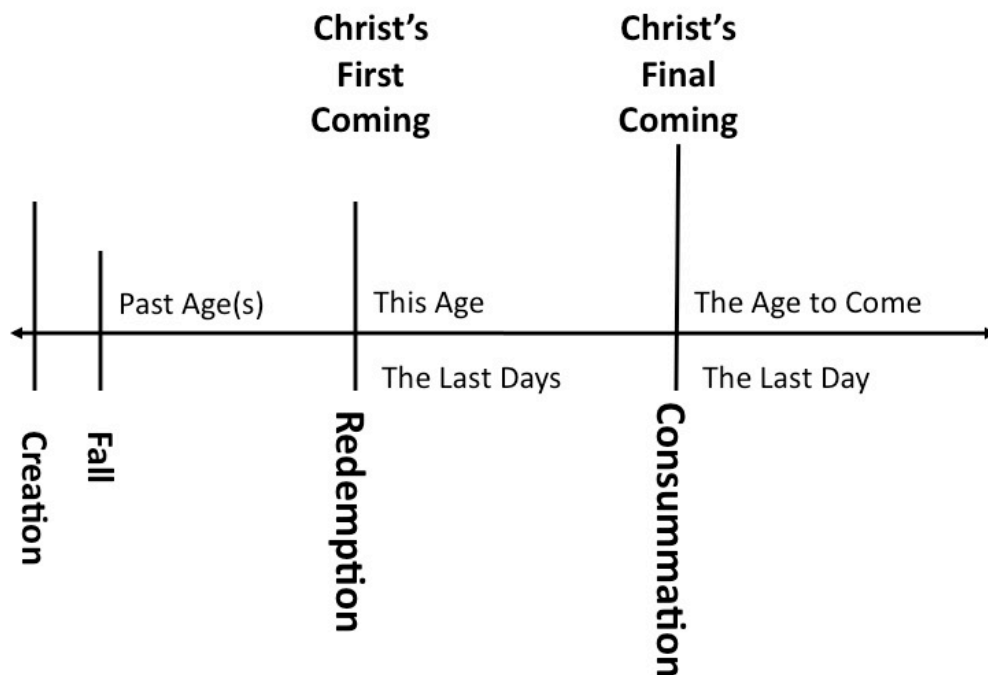
2.2.6.5. 1 John 4:1–3 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because **many false prophets have gone out into the world.** **2** This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, **3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.**

- 2.2.7. In these last days the Spirit is given to the Church, and the church will proclaim the Gospel and many people from every tribe and language will stream to the faith.
- 2.2.7.1. Micah 4:1–2 **In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains;** it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. <sup>2</sup> **Many nations 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.”**
- 2.2.7.2. Acts 2:16–21 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>“**In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.** Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. <sup>18</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. <sup>19</sup> I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. <sup>20</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. <sup>21</sup> **And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’**
- 2.2.7.3. Romans 10:13–15 for, **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** <sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? **And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?** <sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”
- 2.2.8. The event that will usher in the “last day” when “this present age” will give way to “that age” is the return of Jesus Christ.
- 2.2.8.1. This is apparent if we remember what the Scripture says characterizes “that age.” It will be a time when evil and sin are removed, righteousness reigns, we experience eternal riches and true life, we see and know Christ fully, there is no more death, and we are given our resurrection bodies. None of this belongs to this age, nor to some “intermediate age” but rather to eternity.
- 2.2.8.2. The Scripture explicitly links the events of “that age” with the return of Christ.
- 2.2.8.2.1. 1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But **we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**

- 2.2.8.2.2. Philippians 3:20–21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
- 2.2.8.2.3. Hebrews 9:27–28 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,<sup>28</sup> so 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 waiting for him.**
- 2.2.8.2.4. Matthew 13:40–43 “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, **so it will be at the end of the age.** <sup>41</sup>**The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.** <sup>42</sup> **They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** <sup>43</sup> **Then the righteous will shine like the sun** in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”
- 2.2.8.2.5. Isaiah 25:7–9 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations;<sup>8</sup> **he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces;** he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. <sup>9</sup> **In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us.** This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”
- 2.2.8.2.6. 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that **we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.** <sup>16</sup> **For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.** <sup>17</sup> **After that, we who are still alive and are left 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.**

2.2.8.2.7. Titus 2:11–13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives **in this present age,** <sup>13</sup> **while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...**

- 2.3. This means that the basic, clear teaching on eschatology is very straight forward and simple. After the first coming of Christ there are two - and only two - ages. We are now in “this age” - which is also called “the last days.” And we look forward to “that age” - which is also called “the last day.” All passages supposedly dealing with the “end times” have to be read in light of this clear, overarching teaching on eschatology in the New Testament.
- 2.4. Once again, this basic New Testament teaching on eschatology may be summarized in the following graphic, which contains the major points in which all other questions must be answered:



- 2.5. The basic points which are clear are:
- 2.5.1. All ages before the coming of Christ are lumped together as “past ages.”
- 2.5.2. The first coming of Christ - including His birth, whole life, death, resurrection, and ascension - ushered in “this age” - the last days.
- 2.5.3. When Christ returns this present age will end and the age to come, the last day, will be ushered in.