

The Fathers on the Future

Supplemental
Excurses &
Index

— Print Edition —



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Michael J. Svigel

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The main content of *The Fathers on the Future: A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the 21st-Century Church* is supplemented by numerous “Go Deeper Excurses” available free online at www.fathersonthefuture.com. Some of these excurses are of a technical nature and provide important technical support for the arguments of the book. Others are supplemental, further explaining secondary matters of interest to some readers. This print edition of the Supplemental Excurses and Index is provided for convenience to those who prefer a hardcopy of these materials.

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THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 1

Who Was Irenaeus of Lyons and Why Does He Matter?

Irenaeus's Life

Irenaeus of Lyons was born about AD 130 and likely raised in Smyrna, western Asia Minor.¹ At the time, Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, was bishop of Smyrna. About the year 156, Irenaeus was in Rome, possibly sitting at the feet of the famous teacher in Rome, Justin Martyr.² After a great persecution in Lyons and Viennes, Gaul (modern day France), Irenaeus became bishop of Lyons in the year 177. Some have even argued that Irenaeus himself penned the famous *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons to the Churches of Asia and Phrygia* recounting the persecution in Gaul and the testimonies of the martyrs.³

Shortly after that time he wrote his five books *Against Heresies*, then a shorter work that recounts the entire trinitarian creation-fall-redemption narrative, *Epideixis* or *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. Later in his ministry, in the 190s, Irenaeus also intervened in a dispute between the bishop of Rome, Victor, and Christians from Asia over the proper time of the observance of Pascha (*Hist. eccl.* 5.23–24). Not surprisingly, in that letter Irenaeus noted that the Asian Christians felt bound to follow the ancient customs, indicating that even from earlier times a diversity of opinion and practice had been held in peace among the disciples of the apostles.

¹ Paul Parvis, “Who Was Irenaeus? An Introduction to the Man and His Work,” in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Parvis (Minneapolis: FortreLLss, 2012), 14–15. Cf. Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

² James R. Payton, Jr., *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies* (Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke, 2012), 2. Steenberg writes, “While he never mentions having met him, it seems entirely unlikely that Irenaeus would not have known Justin personally during his time in Rome.... Justin’s influence is certainly apparent in Irenaeus’ writing” (Irenaeus M. C. Steenberg, “Tracing the Irenaeian Legacy,” in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Parvis [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012], 202).

³ Cf. See Pierre Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des iie et iiiie siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1961), 54–61.

Though Jerome referred to Irenaeus as a “martyr,” he most likely died of old age around the year 200.⁴

Irenaeus’s Reliance on “the Elders”

As mentioned above, as a child or adolescent, Irenaeus had been a “hearer” of the esteemed Polycarp of Smyrna (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.5). Irenaeus was certainly in a unique historical position to have known and conversed with students of the original disciples of Jesus. Payton writes that Irenaeus “received what he acknowledged to be his primary instruction in the Christian faith from someone who was himself trained by an apostle” and he “insisted on the importance of remaining faithful to the Christian message as received from Jesus Christ and the apostles and passed on by succeeding generations of the Church through its leaders. With him, that message is at only one removed [sic] from the apostolic source.”⁵

Throughout his writings, Irenaeus leans on the insights of those teachers for his own theological reflection. Thus, for example, when discussing textual variants regarding the number of the Beast in Revelation 13, Irenaeus noted that not only did the most ancient manuscripts read “666,” but “those who saw John face to face confirm it” (*Haer.* 5.30.1), indicating that he had personal discourse with such second-generation followers of John. This would have occurred while Irenaeus was growing up in Smyrna.

The fourth-century church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, evidently had access to letters and shorter works Irenaeus had written on various occasions, usually confronting those whose teachings had deviated from the apostolic doctrines. Only summaries of the content or brief excerpts of these letters are extant. The full letters are lost to us. However, Eusebius relays that in Irenaeus’s work, *On the Ogdoad*, Irenaeus “shows that he himself had been acquainted with the first successors of the apostles” (*Hist. eccl.* 5.20.1).⁶ This would have certainly included Polycarp, disciple of John, but also other second-generation leaders in the churches of Asia Minor and Rome, such as Papias of Hierapolis.

Eusebius then quotes generously from a letter from Irenaeus to an erstwhile friend, Florinus, who had wandered into false teaching. In that letter Irenaeus scolds Florinus, saying, “These doctrines, the presbyters who were before us, and who were companions of the apostles, did not deliver to thee” (*Hist. eccl.* 5.20.4). Then Irenaeus reflects on his own personal experience with Polycarp of Smyrna:

⁴ See John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14.

⁵ Payton, *Irenaeus*, 1.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* are from Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church: A New Translation*, trans. Jeremy M. Schott (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

I can describe the place where the blessed Polycarp sat as he dialogued, and his exits and entries, and the character of his life and the form of his body, and the dialogues he gave to the crowd, and the fact that he proclaimed that he lived with John, and the rest who had seen the Lord, and that he recalled their words, and what it was he had heard from them about the Lord, and about his powers, and about his teaching, and that Polycarp received [it] from eyewitnesses of the life of the Logos and proclaimed everything in accordance with the writings” (*Hist. eccl.* 5.20.6).

We have no reason to doubt the authenticity or accuracy of Eusebius’s transcription of this report of Irenaeus. Nor are we justified in challenging Irenaeus’s claim that he was an eyewitness of the famous Polycarp, who himself was an eyewitness not only of the apostle John but of others who had seen the Lord (καὶ τὴν μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τῶν ἑορακότων τὸν κύριον).

Steenberg characterizes the conservative spirit of Irenaeus in the following way:

Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp. This is a well-known, well-worn fact, yet one of essential significance in understanding Irenaeus’s whole theological and ecclesiastical framework.... He encounters the faith at the feet of his elder, who had encountered it at the feet of his, who had encountered it at the feet of Christ. This experience grounds Irenaeus’s lifelong insistence on theological creativity as a dangerous game, played primarily by heretics. Continuity is what demarcates true Christian expression.⁷

In light of this, it seems unlikely that he would have knowingly, consciously, and willfully promoted an eschatology in discord with that of his own teachers. His was an intentionally conservative approach to theology: receiving, articulating and defending, then passing forward the faith of the apostles and prophets. Novelty in theology was far from Irenaeus’s agenda. Minns writes, “Irenaeus himself would have greeted the expectation that he should produce something original with considerable indignation. Original thinking in theology was precisely the source of the problem he sought to address, not by being original himself, but by demonstrating what was the original, universal, unchanging and uncontaminated teaching handed down from the Apostles.”⁸

Did Irenaeus Botch Tradition?

At this point, it is necessary to respond to an objection often used to demonstrate the worthlessness of Irenaeus’s use of apostolic tradition. It is often pointed out that in *Haer.* 2.22.6, Irenaeus argues

⁷ Irenaeus, “Tracing the Irenaeian Legacy,” 201.

⁸ Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), xi.

that Jesus was almost fifty when he was crucified, and thus ministered for almost twenty years after his baptism at the age of thirty. He does say, “Being thirty years old when He came to be baptized, and then possessing the full age of a Master, He came to Jerusalem” (2.22.4). Irenaeus taught that Jesus’s public ministry after baptism began at thirty. For him, this pivotal year transitions a person from young man to mature man. At the end of 2.22.4, Irenaeus says Jesus “passed through every age”: infancy, childhood, youth, and old man; that is, he had to have gone beyond thirty to represent every age of humanity. He appeals to this fact against heretics who say Jesus only ministered one year and died at age thirty, not having reached full maturity. Then, in 2.22.5 Irenaeus says, “How could He have taught, unless He had reached the age of a Master? For when He came to be baptized, He had not yet completed His thirtieth year, but was beginning to be about thirty years of age.”

However, according to the false teachers, Irenaeus says, Jesus had “preached only one year reckoning from His baptism. On completing His thirtieth year He suffered, being in fact still a young man, and who had by no means attained to advanced age.” In Irenaeus’s reckoning, thirty was still the last year of being a “young man,” but earlier he said he passed all ages, from young man to old man, which means Jesus had to have lived longer than thirty. If Jesus lived until thirty-three or so, this would fulfill Irenaeus’s scheme and also refute the heretics who said he suffered in the same year as he was baptized.

Earlier, in 5.22.3, Irenaeus asserted that the heretics “have not examined the Gospels to ascertain how often after His baptism the Lord went up, at the time of the passover, to Jerusalem, in accordance with what was the practice of the Jews from every land, and every year.” Irenaeus then describes three trips to Jerusalem for Passover: “First of all, after He had made the water wine at Cana of Galilee, He went up to the festival day of the Passover.” Then, “Afterwards He went up, the second time, to observe the festival day of the Passover in Jerusalem.” And finally, “And going up from Bethany to Jerusalem, He there ate the passover, and suffered on the day following. Now, that these three occasions of the passover are not included within one year, every person whatever must acknowledge.”

The problem should be obvious. Irenaeus says Jesus celebrated three consecutive Passovers after his baptism, making him about thirty-three at his crucifixion; and because thirty was the pivotal age from youth to “old man” (2.22.4), he thus had passed through every age and had, by turning thirty-one, attained the age of a Master. If Jesus had died at age thirty, as the false teachers alleged, he would still have been a “young man” and would not have passed into the age of “old man,” a view Irenaeus rejected because Jesus celebrated three Passovers after his baptism, making him thirty-three.

In light of this, the passage in 2.22.5, starting with “Now, that the first stage of life” poses some problems. The first problematic line says, “But from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed.” The Latin text reads “*A quadragésimo et quinquagesimo anno declinat jam in aetatem seniore, quam habens Dominus noster.*” I would rather translate this as “from the fortieth and fiftieth year one declines to an older age than our

Lord had.” That is, it does not say here that Jesus had the age of forty to fifty—the age of decline—but that he had “old age,” which, earlier, he said was anything over the age of thirty-one. Irenaeus also then appeals to oral tradition from the disciples of John for the veracity of this fact that Jesus possessed maturity as a Master, having reached the age beyond thirty.

It should be observed that the phrase “and he remained among them up to the time of Trajan,” refers to the Apostle John, not to Jesus. The text does not clearly allege that Jesus advanced past forty and began to decline (*declinat*)—if *quam* is rightly read as comparative.

So, it is really 2.22.6 that poses the greatest problem. Note, however, that the text does not say that particular material was received by tradition from John. The argument in section 6 is based on a milking of the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees (John 8:56–57). That text says, “He did not then want much of being fifty years old,” suggesting Jesus was in his late forties. And he says, “He did not therefore preach only for one year, nor did He suffer in the twelfth month of the year. For the period included between the thirtieth and fiftieth year can never be regarded as one year.” This passage, then (2.22.6), contains an internal contradiction with 2.22.4, where Irenaeus clearly says Jesus observed three Passovers after his baptism, not ten or twenty.

Also, note that the author did not claim Johannine oral tradition for 2.22.6; that was only for the matter of Jesus reaching beyond 30 as a “senior” and Master. No, the argument for Jesus living almost to fifty in *Haer.* 2.22.6 depends on the author’s own conclusions based on the interaction with the Pharisees, not upon oral tradition. Ironically, this would be an example not of the tragic results of relying on oral tradition, but the results of going beyond oral tradition. To be honest, I do not know what to make of this obvious contradiction. Both cannot be true—that Jesus observed only three annual Passovers between his baptism at thirty and his crucifixion and that he lived into his late forties. I wonder, then, whether all of section 6 (and maybe even portions of section 5) are an interpolation by the translator of the Latin text or a later scribe or student of Irenaeus. In any case, the author of *Haer.* 2.22.6—whether Irenaeus or another—does not claim that interpretation of John 8:56–57 comes from oral tradition.

Irenaeus’s Eschatology

What we know of Irenaeus’s eschatology comes firsthand from two works—*Against Heresies*, which survives almost entirely in a Latin translation with some Greek manuscripts, and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, which has come down to us only in an Armenian manuscript.

Regarding the content of Irenaeus’s eschatology, Brian Daley writes, “Irenaeus sketches out a clear, distinctive picture of the eschatological future humanity can hope for.”⁹ This picture contains

⁹ Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 29–30.

some standard elements quite familiar to Christians today; but it also includes some unique and unexpected colors that may surprise us. Daley summarizes some points of Irenaeus's eschatological expectations this way: "The Antichrist will appear in Jerusalem, endowed with all the powers of the devil, and usurp the place of God, persecuting all the saints.... Then Christ will come again in glory as judge...and will cast the Antichrist and his followers into 'the lake of fire'.... Destructive as they will be for the wicked, the tribulations of the end will only refine and purify the just."¹⁰ After this judgment, there will be "a first resurrection of the just and an earthly Kingdom.... That earthly Kingdom will last a thousand years," after which the resurrection of the wicked will follow.¹¹ Daley notes, "Irenaeus supports this interpretation by referring to many biblical passages that promise salvation to Israel in typical terms of peace, prosperity and material restoration.... The purpose of such a millennial kingdom, he suggests, is to allow the just time, in the familiar setting of a renewed earth, to become gradually accustomed 'to partake of the divine nature.'"¹²

Denis Minns also provides a good introduction to Irenaeus's eschatology:

Irenaeus belonged to a body of Christians, surprisingly large even at the end of the second century, who continued to believe in the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God in a quite literal sense: they believed that at the coming of Christ the earth would be renewed and the just would rise from the dead to dwell with him in his Kingdom for a thousand years.... Half a century later, partly in consequence of the growing influence of Platonism within Christian theology, the 'spiritual' interpretation of the coming of the Kingdom had triumphed, and the views on the Kingdom of Irenaeus and other like-minded theologians were derided as naïve or outlandish.¹³

Minns even suggests some reasons why Irenaeus's vision of an earthly kingdom had fallen out of favor in subsequent generations:

The fact that Irenaeus' views on the Kingdom were so soon overtaken with in the Great Church by the Platonizing, spiritualizing interpretation may have a good deal to do with the general neglect of his writings in the later tradition of the Church. Most medieval manuscripts of *Adversus Haereses* do not contain the final chapters of Book V, where Irenaeus' eschatology is most fully presented. The desire to protect Irenaeus' reputation for orthodoxy has not been confined to medieval copyists. In 1938, V. Cremers attempted to show that these pages were not the work of Irenaeus at all, but a later interpolation. Some scholars, though not embarrassed by the realism of Irenaeus' expectations of the Kingdom have yet been at pains to urge that 'there is not a single mention of the words "thousand

¹⁰ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 30.

¹¹ Parvis, "Who Was Irenaeus?," 22.

¹² Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 31.

¹³ Minns, *Irenaeus*, 140–41.

years' reign”’, so that it cannot be said that there are any ‘misplaced chiliastic tendencies in the *Adversus Haereses*’.¹⁴ However, the Armenian version of Books IV and V of *Adversus Haereses*, first published in 1910, shows these claims to be unsupported. For from it we learn that even the one Latin manuscript that had been thought to preserve the whole of the text did, in fact, lack a small but crucial paragraph in the very heart of Irenaeus’ discussion of this subject. And in that paragraph Irenaeus speaks unequivocally of the thousand-year reign of the just.¹⁵

Irenaeus’s eschatological vision includes many details, which we will explore and fill out in due course. However, we will see that his eschatological perspective may be described as premillennial and futurist, as he believes in a seven-year tribulation period at the end of the age, climaxing in the return of Christ as king, the resurrection of a righteous as well as the remnant of mortal survivors of the Antichrist’s reign left to repopulate the earth, followed by a thousand-year intermediate kingdom, and concluded with the resurrection of the wicked and ushering in of the eternal renewed creation.

¹⁴ Minns cites “G. Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, pp.189–90, and other authors cited there” (Minns, *Irenaeus*, 143n46).

¹⁵ Minns, *Irenaeus*, 142–43.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 2 Had Adam and Eve Eaten from the Tree of Life?

Throughout the history of interpretation, positions varied on whether Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of life in paradise prior to their fall. If so, the banishment from Eden would mean they were cut off from this source of continued nourishment; if not, the exile would prevent them from taking their first bite of the tree. In the following very brief essay, I make a case that Adam and Eve had already eaten from the tree of life prior to the fall, citing historical precedence for this view among the fathers. Though this view fits best with the overall narrative of creation-fall-redemption presented in *The Fathers on the Future*, it is not essential to its eschatological framework.

But was the tree of life a literal tree and did eating from the tree somehow convey real physical or spiritual regenerative power? Besides some who mistakenly understood the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to refer to the same tree, some early church fathers often understood the trees as strictly allegorical (e.g., Origen of Alexandria) or as conferring physical or physical/spiritual immortality in a sacramental sense—God himself being the source of the power to confer life. Furthermore, Calvin’s much later comments seem to slip into a quasi-docetic direction, which we should avoid:

I know that certain writers restrict the meaning of the expression here used to corporeal life. They suppose such a power of quickening the body to have been in the tree, that it should never languish through age; but I say, they omit what is the chief thing in life, namely, the grace of intelligence; for we must always consider for what end man was formed, and what rule of living was prescribed to him. Certainly, for him to live, was not simply to have a body fresh and lively, but also to excel in the endowments of the soul.¹

¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John King (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 117–118.

Calvin's other comments on Genesis 2:9—followed by a fair number in the Reformed tradition—that the tree was strictly symbolic or sacramental and that it possessed no physical regenerative power—tends to neglect the fact that Genesis 3:22 suggests it would have been possible for Adam and Eve to continue to eat from the tree and live forever in their fallen state of sin.

In light of this, I proceed with the assumption that, in fact, the Genesis narrative points to an actual tree with actual power provided by God to impart physical incorruptibility to those who partook of its fruit and (apparently) its leaves (Ezek 47:12; Rev 22:2).

That Adam and Eve had, in fact, eaten from the tree of life prior to the fall is a view advanced by both contemporary and ancient interpreters. Redford notes, "Apparently the fruit of the *tree of life* would preserve life as long as one ate of it regularly. Man's sin, however, barred him from the tree of life (Genesis 3:22–24); for the consequences of human beings living forever as sinners would be devastating beyond imagination. Not until the perfect world of Heaven will we again have access to that tree (Revelation 22:2)."² And Kissling concludes, "The tree of life presumably ensured the ongoing life of humanity. By continuing to eat of it, humans would live forever."³ Thus, many hold that Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of life prior to succumbing to the temptation of the serpent.⁴ As a consequence of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were then banished from *continuing* to eat from the tree of life; the result, of course, was eventual death.⁵ A plausible case can be made, then, that their extraordinary long lives—and those of their descendants for several generations—was a result of the residual effects of having eaten from the tree of life.

The view that the tree of life had been given for regenerative nourishment and that the first humans had eaten from the tree prior to the fall and exile from paradise has roots in the patristic period. Theophilus of Antioch (c. AD 180) wrote:

And God having placed man in Paradise, as has been said, to till and keep it, commanded him to eat of all the trees,—manifestly of the tree of life also; but only of the tree of knowledge He commanded him not to taste. And God transferred him from the earth, out of which he had been produced, into Paradise, giving him means of advancement, in order that, maturing and becoming perfect, and being even declared a god, he might thus ascend into heaven in possession of immortality. For man had been made a middle nature, neither wholly mortal, nor altogether immortal, but capable of either; so also the place, Paradise,

² Douglas Redford, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1, Standard Reference Library: Old Testament (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 2008), 24.

³ Paul J. Kissling, *Genesis*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 159.

⁴ Cf. also Edwin Good, *Genesis 1–11: Tales of the Earliest World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 44, who notes, "Eating the fruit of the tree of life was never prohibited. Only the tree of knowledge was forbidden. In fact, trees of life are rather frequently found in mythologies of various cultures, and they are mostly not the kind of tree whose fruit eaten once conveys permanent life on the spot. One must be piecing at a tree of life all the time in order to maintain life indefinitely, and Adam and Chavah had clear access to it. But no longer."

⁵ For the alternate view that Adam and Eve had not, in fact, eaten from the tree of life, see, e.g., Jan Christian Gertz, *Genesis 1–11*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2023), 173–74;

was made in respect of beauty intermediate between earth and heaven. (*To Autolytus* 2.24 [ANF 2])

Likewise, in the fifth century, Augustine wrote:

The first man, of the earth earthy, was made a living soul, not a quickening spirit,—which rank was reserved for him as the reward of obedience. And therefore his body, which required meat and drink to satisfy hunger and thirst, and which had no absolute and indestructible immortality, but by means of the tree of life warded off the necessity of dying, and was thus maintained in the flower of youth,—this body, I say, was doubtless not spiritual, but animal; and yet it would not have died but that it provoked God’s threatened vengeance by offending. And though sustenance was not denied him even outside Paradise, yet, being forbidden the tree of life, he was delivered over to the wasting of time, at least in respect of that life which, had he not sinned, he might have retained perpetually in Paradise, though only in an animal body, till such time as it became spiritual in acknowledgment of his obedience. (Augustine, *Civ.* 13.23 [NPNF¹ 2])

Later Augustine concludes, “In Paradise, then, man lived as he desired so long as he desired what God had commanded. He lived in the enjoyment of God, and was good by God’s goodness; he lived without any want, and had it in his power so to live eternally. He had food that he might not hunger, drink that he might not thirst, the tree of life that old age might not waste him” (*Civ.* 14.26 [NPNF¹ 2]). In another text he writes:

For Enoch and Elijah were not reduced to the decrepitude of old age by their long life. But yet I do not believe that they were then changed into that spiritual kind of body, such as is promised in the resurrection, and which the Lord was the first to receive; only they probably do not need those aliments, which by their use minister refreshment to the body; but ever since their translation they so live, as to enjoy such a sufficiency as was provided during the forty days in which Elijah lived on the cruse of water and the cake, without substantial food; or else, if there be any need of such sustenance, they are, it may be, sustained in Paradise in some such way as Adam was, before he brought on himself expulsion therefrom by sinning. And he, as I suppose, was supplied with sustenance against decay from the fruit of the various trees, and from the tree of life with security against old age. (Augustine, *Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 1.3 [iii] [NPNF¹ 5])

Later in the same text Augustine argues:

When the first human beings—the one man Adam, and his wife Eve who came out of him—willed not to obey the commandment which they had received from God, a just and deserved punishment overtook them. The Lord had threatened that, on the day they ate the forbidden fruit, they should surely die. Now, inasmuch as they had received the permission of using for food every tree that grew in Paradise, among which God had planted the tree of life, but had been forbidden to partake of one only tree, which He called the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to signify by this name the consequence of their discovering whether what good they would experience if they kept the prohibition, or what evil if they transgressed it: they are no doubt rightly considered to have abstained from the forbidden food previous to the malignant persuasion of the devil, and to have used all which had been allowed them, and therefore, among all the others, and before all the others, the tree of life. For what could be more absurd than to suppose that they partook of the fruit of other trees, but not of that which had been equally with others granted to them, and which, by its especial virtue, prevented even their animal bodies from undergoing change through the decay of age, and from aging into death, applying this benefit from its own body to the man's body. (Augustine, *Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 2.35 [xxi] [NPNF¹ 5])

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 3 Bodily Resurrection in the History of the Church

False teachers have gotten the bodily resurrection wrong for nearly 2000 years.

The second-century heresy known as “Gnosticism” strongly resisted the idea of a physical resurrection—the redemption of our physical bodies—because they tended to despise the physical creation in general and exalted immaterial, spiritual substance, believing the material world had a different origin than from the one true God.¹ Along these lines, the third-century so-called *Gospel of Philip* says, “Some are afraid lest they rise naked. Because of this they wish to rise in the flesh, and [they] do not know that it is those who wear the [flesh] who are naked.”² Similarly, the second-century Gnostic *Treatise on the Resurrection* teaches that the “resurrection” occurs for believers when they are taken to heaven, not raised bodily from the dead in the future.³ On this text, Wright comments, “The writer is clearly working with the terminology which Paul uses in 1 Corinthians, but the likeness is superficial. Paul’s whole exposition is held in place by a sustained and positive exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2, but the *Treatise on Resurrection* shares with Valentinianism a deep skepticism about the value of the created world.”⁴

¹ See Michael J. Sviel, *The Center and the Source: Second Century Incarnational Christology and Early Catholic Christianity* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2016), 307–376.

² *Gospel of Philip* (Nag Hammadi Library II.3.56,26–30). Isenberg suggests *Gospel of Philip* was written as late as the second half of the third century in Syria (Wesley W. Isenberg, “The Gospel According to Philip: Introduction,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7, together with XIII,2, Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, ed. Bentley Layton, vol. 1, *Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes*, Nag Hammadi Studies, ed. Martin Krause, James M. Robinson, and Frederik Wisse, vol. 20 [Leiden: Brill, 1989], 131–35).

³ See *Treatise on the Resurrection (Epistle to Rheginos)* (Nag Hammadi Library I.4.45,14–46.2). Though the Valentinian *Treatise on the Resurrection* has occasionally been regarded as having been drafted by Valentinus himself in the 140s, most scholars hold that the book was written by a member of the Valentinian school in the late second century. See Malcolm L. Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection: Introduction,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Nag Hammadi Studies, ed. Martin Krause, James M. Robinson, and Frederik Wisse, vol. 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 145–46.

⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 540. Cf. Jacques-É. Ménard, “La notion de ‘résurrection’ dans l’*Épître à Rhèginos*,” in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. Martin Krause, Nag Hammadi Studies, ed. Martin Krause, James M.

Despite the strong philosophical, theological, and practical opposition to future, bodily resurrection in the early centuries of the church, the earliest Christians held on to this foundational apostolic teaching with a solid grip. The first-century *Didache* states that when Jesus returns in the future, “the signs of the truth shall appear: first, a sign of an opening in heaven; then a sign of the sound of a trumpet; and the third *sign*, the resurrection of the dead” (*Did.* 16.6). Wright notes, “That [*Didache*] affirms the resurrection.... is another witness to the same theology that we find in Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp and of course the New Testament itself.”⁵ In the late first-century letter from Corinth to Rome, called *1 Clement*, we see the same teaching on resurrection: “Let us consider, beloved, how the Master continually points out to us the resurrection that is coming, of which he made the first fruit by raising up the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead” (*1 Clem.* 24.1).

In the early second century, Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of John, writes, “If we please him in this present age, we will receive also that which is to come, just as he promised us, to raise us from the dead, and that if we conduct our lives in a manner worthy of him, we will also reign with him, if indeed we have faith” (*Pol. Phil.* 5.2). And Polycarp’s own disciple, Irenaeus, writes, “At the end, when the Lord utters His voice ‘by the last trumpet’ [1 Cor 15:52], the dead shall be raised, as He Himself declares: ‘The hour shall come, in which all the dead which are in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; those that have done good to the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to the resurrection of judgment’ [John 5:28]” (*Haer.* 5.13.1).⁶

Toward the end of the second century, Theophilus of Antioch placed great emphasis on the future “beatific vision” of the invisible God as the ultimate experience of our eschatological salvation. This will not occur when we are in a disembodied state, having ascended into the spiritual realm, but when we “have put off the mortal, and put on incorruption,” then we will see God. He explains, “For God will raise thy flesh immortal with thy soul; and then, having become immortal, thou shalt see the Immortal, if now you believe on Him” (*To Autolyucus* 1.7 [ANF 2]). Of course, Theophilus knew that his reader, Autolyucus—a Greek who had no interest in the redemption of the flesh—would reject the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. So,

Robinson, and Frederik Wisse, vol. 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 112; Malcolm L. Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection: Notes,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex) Notes*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Nag Hammadi Studies, ed. Martin Krause, James M. Robinson, and Frederik Wisse, vol. 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 166.

⁵ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 489.

⁶ By combining the reading of 1 Cor 15:52 and John 5:28, Irenaeus appears to conflate the resurrections of the righteous and the wicked into one event that takes place “by the last trumpet.” However, we know from elsewhere in his writings that Irenaeus most certainly believed the resurrection of the righteous dead would take place first, followed by the 1000-year Millennium, then the resurrection of the wicked. Wood notes, “Whilst Irenaeus looked for a general resurrection, when God through Christ will ‘raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race’, it does not appear that he envisaged a simultaneous resurrection. The righteous will be raised first amongst mankind, prior to the earthly reign of our Lord. The wicked will be raised, in their turn, at the close of the Millennium. The purpose of the Parousia is to separate the believing from the unbelieving, and this separation begins at the moment of the first resurrection” (A. Skevington Wood, “The Eschatology of Irenaeus,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 41.1 [1969]: 34). This passage should warn us about how Irenaeus reads these eschatological passages. Perhaps for Irenaeus “the last trumpet” was not so much a single event during which specific and discrete events occur in a strict chronology, but really the voice of Christ *by which* these events occur.

he says, “But you do not believe that the dead are raised. When the resurrection shall take place, then you will believe, whether you will or no; and your faith shall be reckoned for unbelief, unless you believe now” (1.8). This passage suggests the possibility that Theophilus expected the resurrection would be a noticeable (and notable) event.⁷ Resurrection was so central to Theophilus’s thought that even in his retelling of the biblical creation narrative, he notes, “Consider, further, their variety, and diverse beauty, and multitude, and how through them resurrection is exhibited, for a pattern of the resurrection of all men which is to be” (2.14). Likewise, with reference to the typology of the moon, he writes, “The moon wanes monthly, and in a manner dies, being a type of man; then it is born again, and is crescent, for a pattern of the future resurrection” (2.15). As to the nature of the resurrection body, Theophilus describes it as “spotless, and righteous, and immortal” (2.26).

In the latter part of the second century, Athenagoras of Athens describes the resurrection as “a species of change” of the body, “and the last of all, and a change for the better of what still remains in existence at that time” (*Res.* 12 [ANF 2]). He readily admits that the doctrine causes much confusion: “For in regard to this subject also we find some utterly disbelieving, and some others doubting, and even among those who have accepted the first principles some who are as much at a loss what to believe as those who doubt” (*Res.* 1).⁸

Later in his *Embassy on behalf of Christians*, Athenagoras expounds upon and clarifies his position on the resurrection as it relates to judgment and reward. This discussion is specifically in connection with the false charge of cannibalism among Christians: “But if to anyone it appears sheer nonsense that the body which has moldered away, and been dissolved, and reduced to nothing, should be reconstructed, we certainly cannot with any reason be accused of wickedness with reference to those that believe not, but only of folly” (*Leg.* 33 [ANF 2]). Similarly, he notes in *Resurrection* that God will “unite and gather together again bodies that are dead, or even entirely dissolved into their elements, so as to constitute the same persons” (*Res.* 2; cf. 3, 7 [ANF 2]). At the conclusion of this same work, he writes, “That the same soul should obtain the same body is impossible in any other way, and possible only by the resurrection; for if this takes place, an end befitting the nature of men follows also” (*Res.* 25). Both the wicked and the righteous will give an account and be rewarded or punished in their resurrected bodies. Earlier he noted that the nature

⁷ It may be that Theophilus had in mind a distinct resurrection of the righteous followed by a period of judgment, during which the error of Autolyclus’s unbelief would be evident. Or he had in mind a general resurrection of the righteous and wicked, the former unto blessedness and the latter unto judgment. At that time Autolyclus’s belief in the reality of the resurrection would have no effect on him. This similar thought is expressed in 1.14, where he notes, “If now you continue unbelieving, you [will] be convinced hereafter, when you are tormented with eternal punishments.” Here is not only an affirmation of eternal conscious torment but an indication that Theophilus may have had in mind a resurrection of the wicked unto judgment in this earlier context.

⁸ Those “utterly disbelieving” and “doubting” refers to outsiders. Yet Athenagoras acknowledges that even some initiates in the Christian faith are confused regarding the resurrection, despite the fact that they had apparently been taught the doctrine during initiation and have no real basis for disbelieving or doubting. It may be that the issue here is not so much a rejection of the general fact of a future resurrection but perplexity over the details related to the doctrine.

of the resurrection body would be “free from all change or suffering” and “not as flesh, even though we shall have” flesh, but as “heavenly spirit” (*Leg.* 31). Yet this language is clarified and balanced by the insistence on the general resurrection of the same bodies that died (*Leg.* 33). It is clear, though, that the “heavenly” quality free from suffering is reserved not for the wicked who will be punished, but for the redeemed who will be transformed and glorified in their bodies. In any case, there is no question that Athenagoras—in agreement with all the earliest Christians—affirmed belief that “when the dissolution of bodies takes place, they should, from the very same elements of which they were constructed at first, be constructed again” (*Leg.* 33). Yet the quality of these bodies will be incorruptible (*Res.* 3). Humans will “become immortal” and “free from want” and from “corruption and suffering” (*Res.* 10).

Athenagoras’s main argument for the reality of a future bodily resurrection rests on the purpose for which humans were created (*Res.* 12–13) and the nature of humans—that is, as integrated psychosomatic beings (*Res.* 15). He notes, “Man, therefore, who consists of the two parts, must continue forever. But it is impossible for him to continue unless he rise again. For if no resurrection were to take place, the nature of men as men would not continue” (*Res.* 15 [ANF 2]). Regarding resurrection unto judgment, he notes, “Although all human beings who die rise again, yet not all who rise again are to be judged” (*Res.* 14). Thus, Athenagoras asserts a universal resurrection of both righteous and wicked. He also asserts the resurrection even of infants and young children who have died (*Res.* 14).

At the turn of the second to third century, Tertullian offers a sharp rebuke against those who had swung the pendulum too far into a realized eschatology, that is, those who spiritualize the resurrection to make it a too-present reality while rejecting a literal, future, bodily resurrection. He expresses the absurdity of such a notion: “And is there now anybody who has risen again, except the heretic? He, of course, has already quitted the grave of his own corpse—although he is even now liable to fevers and ulcers; he, too, has already trodden down his enemies—although he has even now to struggle with the powers of the world. And as a matter of course, he is already a king—although he even now owes to Caesar the things which are Caesar’s” (Tertullian, *Res. carn.* 22 [ANF 3]). He also writes, “The whole human race shall be raised again, to have its dues meted out according as it has merited in the period of good or evil, and thereafter to have these paid out through the immeasurable ages of eternity” (*Apol.* 48 [ANF 3]).

On the basis of the clear biblical teaching as well as the early, widespread, and foundational nature of the church’s confession on the future, bodily resurrection, the Council of Constantinople in 381 affirmed unambiguously: “We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”⁹ This doctrine of bodily resurrection continued to occupy a central place in Christian theology, even when eschatological expectations and emphases turned from physical to spiritual and from earthly to heavenly. In the sixth century, philosopher and theologian, Boethius,

⁹ *The Constantinopolitan Creed* in John H. Leith, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3d ed. (Louisville: John Knox, 1982), 33.

wrote, “In the end of the age our bodies shall rise incorruptible to the kingdom of heaven, to the end that he who has lived well on earth by God’s gift should be altogether blessed in that resurrection, but he who has lived amiss should, with the gift of resurrection, enter upon misery. And this is a firm principle of our religion, to believe not only that men’s souls do not perish, but that their very bodies, which the coming of death had destroyed, recover their first state by this bliss that is to be.”¹⁰

Not only was the resurrection of the body articulated and defended in all catholic traditions from the patristic to medieval periods, but it has also been believed, confessed, and taught in all orthodox protestant traditions. In 1559, Calvin wrote concerning the resurrection of the body:

We must hold, as has already been observed, that the body in which we shall rise will be the same as at present in respect of substance, but that the quality will be different; just as the body of Christ which was raised up was the same as that which had been offered in sacrifice, and yet excelled in other qualities, as if it had been altogether different.... The corruptible body, therefore, in order that we may be raised, will not perish or vanish away, but, divested of corruption, will be clothed with incorruption.¹¹

The Mennonite Dordrecht Confession of 1632 says, “Regarding the resurrection of the dead, we confess with the mouth, and believe with the heart, that according to the Scriptures all men who shall have died or ‘fallen asleep,’ will, through the incomprehensible power of God, at the day of judgment, be ‘raised up’ and made alive.”¹² The Reformed Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) states, “At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed: and all the dead shall be raised up, with the self-same bodies, and none other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again to their souls forever.”¹³ And the 1833 New Hampshire Baptist Confession affirms that “at the last day, Christ will descend from heaven, and raise the dead from the grave to final retribution.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Boethius, *On the Catholic Faith*, in Boethius, *The Theological Tractates, The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand, *The Loeb Classical Library* (London: Heinemann, 1918), 71.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1 vol. ed., trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:271.

¹² *The Dordrecht Confession*, 18, in Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 307–308.

¹³ *Westminster Confession*, 32.2 in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with A History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations*, 4th ed. rev. and enlarged, *Bibliotheca Symbolica Ecclesiae Universalis* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 3:671.

¹⁴ *The New Hampshire Baptist Confession*, 18, in Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 339.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 4 “Your Will Be Done” as “Your Kingdom Come”

Robert Yarbrough writes, “Foundational to the Lord’s Prayer and by implication all Christian prayer is recognition of God’s reign, the yearning to see it come to pass, and an understanding of his reign as God’s very will being done on this earth precisely as we know it is in his transcendent dwelling place.”¹ In keeping with this reading, many have seen the third petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “may your will be done,” as appositional to the second petition, “may your kingdom come.” That is, God’s kingdom comes when—and to the degree that—God’s will is accomplished on earth and in heaven.

For example, Grant Osborne views the third petition as summing up the previous two—ultimately eschatological but also having a present application.² He writes, “At present we cannot introduce his perfect will and lead the people of this world to embrace it. But we can proclaim his name and guide those around us to follow his will more fully. This will prepare for its finalization in the future, when God intervenes in world history to lead his creation to his completed will.”³ Though some commentators place greater emphasis on the personal, spiritual, and realizable application of the manifestation of the kingdom in doing God’s will,⁴ even these acknowledge a full answer to the prayer awaits a future coming of the eschatological kingdom.

Andrew Mitchell’s application of an either/or approach provides a helpful corrective to readings of the Lord’s Prayer that emphasize too much the present, spiritual, and realizable facets of the kingdom petitions, but its rejection of a both/and approach is unwarranted given the

¹ Robert W. Yarbrough, “The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Matthew and Revelation,” in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *Theology in Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 114.

² Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 228.

³ Osborne, *Matthew*, 229. Cf. Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 56.

⁴ E.g., R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 246–47.

application of other petitions in the prayer to the present life and the general teaching of the realized and realizable kingdom in the present age.⁵ Though Mitchell provides a helpful survey of interpretations of the kingdom petitions, he seems to imply—perhaps unintentionally—that some commentators present a progressive manifestation of the kingdom *as opposed to* a future fulfillment; in fact, many of those he cites opt for a both/and approach. He writes, “The third petition is a prayer that God’s purposes come to pass. It is not a prayer for the increase in obedience to God’s moral will.”⁶ Mitchell does acknowledge that these are not mutually exclusive when he writes, “The gradual interpretation is not at odds with the eschatological, since obedience is an ingredient of God’s rule. The second and third petitions are believed to be co-interpretive, demonstrating the ‘already-not yet’ dynamic of the kingdom. Thus, they are considered simultaneously eschatological and ethical.”⁷

The claim by some that the aorist imperative must refer to a single event rather than iterative is tempered by the example of 2 Esdras 10:14, “As for him who has set up foreign women—let them come (ἐλθέτωσαν) at appropriate times as instructed. The petition in Psalm 35:12, that the foot of arrogance not come, is not intended to fend off such a threat once, but ongoing. Cf. also the ongoing and iterative intentions in Psalm 54:16 and 118:77. The intention of the aorist must be discerned through its context.

That the phrase “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is appositional to “your kingdom come” seems most probable for the following reasons.

Luke’s Gospel includes only the second petition of the prayer, “may your kingdom come.” If Luke is drawing on an earlier, fuller Matthean version of the Lord’s Prayer, then Luke may have regarded the single petition, “may your kingdom come,” to be sufficient without the explanatory third petition. Or, if Matthew was drawing on a shorter version similar to Luke’s, then Matthew’s third petition could have been added as an explication of the second. Understanding the phrases as appositional explains the inclusion or exclusion of the phrase in the two versions of the prayer.

Furthermore, the prayer of the second petition, that God’s kingdom would come, implies a heavenly origin. God the Father, as established in the opening address, is “in heaven.” And throughout Matthew, God’s kingdom is heavenly in origin. Thus to pray the third petition that God’s will would be done on earth and in heaven makes perfect sense as an explanation of the coming of the kingdom—an extension of God’s perfect heavenly will into the earthly realm. Robinson rightly notes, “The phrase, then, simply explains the previous words, and whether the *Reign of God* be introduced by the rending of the heavens and the bursting of the earth, or whether

⁵ See Andrew Mitchell, “Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done: A Study of Matthew 6:10,” *BBR* 30.2 (2020): 208–230.

⁶ Mitchell, “Your Kingdom Come,” 209–10.

⁷ Mitchell, “Your Kingdom Come,” 214.

it be slowly evolved by a process of moral and spiritual illumination in mankind, its nature is the same—the supreme dominance of the will of God.”⁸

Many commentators see the second and third petitions—and even the first—as all pointing in the same eschatological direction. So also, Spurgeon maintains the tension between the ultimate eschatological fulfillment and the present potential realization: “We long for the coming of King Jesus; but meanwhile we cry to our Father, ‘*Thy kingdom come.*’ We desire for the supreme will to be done in earth, with a cheerful, constant, universal obedience like that of ‘heaven.’ We would have the Lord’s will carried out, not only by the great physical forces which never fail to be obedient to God, but by lovingly active spirits; by men, once rebellious, but graciously renewed.”⁹

Scholarship has long shown that the Lord’s Prayer has some similarities with its contemporary Jewish prayers, and as such place the original sense of the Lord’s Prayer in an eschatological context: “In both the Kaddish and the Lord’s Prayer, the petitions to God have an eschatological flavor. They ask God to usher in the end-time era of salvation in which all of life will reflect God’s purposes.”¹⁰ In this sense, it is appropriate to regard the “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven” as having both eternal/heavenly and temporal/earthly aspects. In the latter form, the kingdom of heaven is manifested when God’s will is carried out in personal, corporate, social, cultural, and even political realms. Thus one can and must speak of God’s kingdom being more or less “present” as God’s will is accomplished on earth.

Ultimately, the petition for the kingdom to come and for God’s will to be done on earth as in heaven is eschatological—when the divine will for individuals, society, government, and all creation is finally realized. Yet this eschatological hope is partially realized in the past and present through individual believers submitting to God’s rule in their own lives and as this conformity to God’s will transforms families, neighborhoods, and society in general. Lenski puts it this way:

This kingdom is the heavenly reign and rule of God through Christ in the gospel of grace. Where Christ is, there this kingdom and rule is, and, of course, also those who through him participate in the blessings of this rule and kingdom, the kings and priests unto God. “Let it come” means by its own inherent power, and the aorist is effective. . . . This aorist is not a reason for thinking only of the consummation, the kingdom of glory. This consummation includes all that precedes it in the rule of grace, which finally shall become the rule of glory.¹¹

⁸ Theodore H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ed. James Moffatt, Moffatt’s New Testament Commentary (New York; London: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 50–51.

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: A Commentary on the Book of Matthew* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1893), 34.

¹⁰ Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1991), 119.

¹¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 266–67.

Gardner also notes the logical relationship of the second and third petitions and their dual application—present and future: “When God’s rule is fully established, then the request of the third petition will also be granted: The *will* of God will *be done on earth as it is in heaven*. God’s will can refer either to God’s purpose for history (cf. Isa. 46:10, 13; 1 Macc 3:60; Matt. 26:42) or to God’s will for our lives in an ethical sense (cf. Ps. 40:8; Matt. 12:50). Here again it is likely that both meanings are intended.”¹²

Stuart Weber writes, “This prayer is not only for the future coming of Christ (although this can be included), but it is also for the spreading of God’s kingdom around the world through his kingdom servants. Therefore, it is a prayer that we, his servants, would be faithfully obedient and effective in living his kingdom principles in our own lives and then spreading the kingdom through our actions and words.”¹³ On the third petition, he notes, “This request assumes that God’s will is done in heaven, but not yet on earth (in the same full way). Sin and rebellion are absent in heaven, but hindrances are present on earth. This is another request for the spreading of God’s kingdom rule on earth, primarily through the church as the agent of the kingdom.”¹⁴

The definition of the kingdom of God as “God’s will done on earth as in heaven” does not excuse us from unpacking the various ways in which this is partially accomplished in the past and present and will be fully accomplished in the future. In fact, this simple definition provokes us to embrace all the various ways in which God accomplishes his will on earth in the story of creation, fall, redemption, and ultimate restoration. This is not far from Alva McClain’s general definition of the kingdom as “*the rule of God over His creation*,”¹⁵ but the definition that takes “God’s will being done on earth as in heaven” appositionally has the benefit of reflecting a passage of Scripture that itself defines (or at least describes) God’s kingdom and allows for the dynamic of a more-or-less visible manifestation of that kingdom in the earthly realm. “God’s will being done on earth as in heaven” also accommodates Hoekema’s definition of the kingdom of God as “the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ, the purpose of which is the redemption of God’s people from sin and from demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth.”¹⁶

¹² Gardner, *Matthew*, 119.

¹³ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 82.

¹⁴ Weber, *Matthew*, 1:82. Cf. R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 139

¹⁵ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), 19.

¹⁶ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 45.

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Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 5

Ancient and Modern Challenges to Early Premillennial Testimonies

Challenges to the idea that premillennial eschatology was the earliest widespread and well-developed eschatology in the fathers of the church has come in a variety of forms. Sometimes attempts have been made to cordon off early Christian premillennialism to a particular region of Asia Minor. For example, Brian Daley writes, “Our evidence for early Asiatic theology is second-hand and fragmentary, but it suggests that at least some Christian communities in this region cherished the hope of a coming ‘millennium’ similar to that expressed in the Johannine Apocalypse.”¹ However, I have demonstrated that early witnesses to an intermediate kingdom come not from Asia Minor but from other regions—Syria (via Didache) and Egypt (via Barnabas).

Another approach is the attempt to associate millennialism with “Jewish Christianity” or with a particular Johannine community or narrow line of succession from teacher to disciple, without directly associating the view with the apostle John personally. For example, in the fifth century, Jerome writes that Papias of Hierapolis “is said to have published the Jewish opinion of one thousand years...at the Second Coming, a view shared by Irenaeus, Apollinaris, and others, who claim that after the resurrection the Lord will reign in the flesh with the saints. Tertullian also, in his work *On the Hope of the Faithful*, Victorinus of Pettau, and Lactantius are attracted by this same view” (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 18).² Yet Jerome follows Eusebius of Caesarea (fourth century) in attempting to drive a wedge between Papias and the apostle John.³ Eusebius first quotes Irenaeus’s testimony that Papias was a “hearer of John (ὁ Ἰωάννου μὲν ἀκουστής/*Joannis auditor*), and a companion of Polycarp” (*Haer.* 5.33.4; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1).

¹ Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 17–18.

² Translation from Thomas P. Halton, *Saint Jerome: On Illustrious Men*, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 100 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 37.

³ While Eusebius expressed no doubt about Polycarp’s relationship with apostles and eyewitnesses and associates of the Lord (*Hist. eccl.* 3.36.1), he is reluctant to allow a similar close relationship for Papias, though the two lived in the same generation about 100 miles apart.

Eusebius has no problems reporting that Polycarp of Smyrna had been a “disciple of the apostles (τῶν ἀποστόλων ὁμιλητής),” appointed to his office by eyewitnesses of the Lord (*Hist. eccl.* 3.36.1). Yet when it comes to Papias, Polycarp’s contemporary about 130 miles away, Eusebius labors hard to drive a wedge between Papias and the apostle John. However, in the *Chronicon* of the same Eusebius—at least as it has come down to us—the historian states that both Παππίας [*sic*] Ἱεραπολίτης καὶ Πολύκαρπος Σμύρνης... ἀκουσταὶ John, τὸν θεολόγον καὶ ἀπόστολον.⁴ It does seem rather strange, though, that Papias, the older of the two, would have had no contact with the surviving eyewitnesses of Jesus in the first century (including the apostle John), while his younger colleague Polycarp did.

Eusebius attempts to challenge Irenaeus regarding Papias’s relationship with John by what amounts to a misinterpretation of Papias’s own words: “So writes Irenaeus about this. Papias, however, in the *prooimion* of his works does not indicate that he was an eyewitness or hearer of the holy apostles at all, but teaches that he received the matters of the faith from those who had been familiar with them” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.2 [Schott]). Eusebius proceeds to quote from the passage in Papias that allegedly proves his point:

I will not hesitate to set down for you, along with my interpretations, everything I carefully learned then from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For unlike most people I did not enjoy those who have a great deal to say, but those who teach the truth. Nor did I enjoy those who recall someone else’s commandments, but those who remember the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and proceeding from the truth itself. And if by chance someone who had been a follower of the elders (τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις) should come my way, I inquired about the words of the elders (τῶν πρεσβυτέρων)—what Andrew or Peter said (εἶπεν), or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples (ἕτερος τῶν τοῦ κυρίου μαθητῶν), and whatever Aristion and the elder John (ὁ πρεσβύτερος), the Lord’s disciples (οἱ τοῦ κυρίου μαθηταί), were saying (λέγουσιν). For I did not think that information from books would profit me as much as information from a living and abiding voice. (Papias of Hierapolis, as quoted by Eusebius)⁵

Eusebius then points out the repetition of the name “John,” concluding that the first—listed with men such as Peter, James, Matthew, and the other apostles—refers to the apostle John who wrote the Gospel that bears his name. He then asserts that the second mention of “John” was someone other than one of the original disciples, “clearly naming him a presbyter” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.5). Eusebius alleges this to be proof that there were two men named John in Asia—the first, an apostle and author of the Gospel of John; the second, a mere second-generation “elder” and author of the book of Revelation (3.39.6).

⁴ See Alfred Schoene, ed., *Eusebi: Chroniconum Libri Duo*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Wiedemann, 1866), 162.

⁵ Greek text and translation from Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 734–35.

Eusebius’s reading of his own quoted material is strained, apparently intended to drive a wedge between the book of Revelation (along with its millennial theology) and the apostle John. The quote from Papias itself, for which I provided relevant Greek terms above, uses the terms *πρεσβύτερος/οι* consistently for the first-generation disciples, including John. So, pointing out that the second mention of John calls him “the elder” proves nothing; John had already been called one of the “elders” in the previous list, along with Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, and Matthew. Papias uses the term “elder” for those of the generation immediately preceding his own, not as an ecclesiastical office per se. Second, Papias calls the “second” John, along with Aristion, “the Lord’s disciples,” which is the same title given to the previous group that included Peter, James, Matthew, and the rest. These points strengthen the likelihood that the second “John” refers to the same person as the first “John.” Finally, Eusebius’s assertion that listing John second after Aristion somehow demotes him from apostle to mere elder does not follow, considering the earlier list of eyewitnesses places Peter after Andrew—a strange arrangement if “rank” or notoriety were in Papias’s mind.

But if Papias is not intending to communicate the existence of a second John distinct from the apostle, then why would he repeat the name “John”? The answer is found in the two different tenses of the verb “to say” used for the two different categories: the aorist *εἶπεν* for the first group (including John) and the present *λέγουσιν* for Aristion and John. Papias, whom Irenaeus identified as a “companion of Polycarp” (*Haer* 5.33.4), lived at a time when most of the original eyewitnesses of Jesus had died, but the apostle John and the disciple Aristion lived on toward the end of the first century. Therefore, Papias could have heard some things from those who personally rather than relying solely on secondhand testimony of what they had said about Jesus’ teaching. Yet Papias outlived both Aristion and John, so he also relayed information from John’s disciples concerning additional teachings he had not had the privilege of hearing firsthand. This explains the two different tenses of the verb *λέγω* as well as the repetition of the apostle John, who fits both categories: those about whom Papias heard (*εἶπεν*) secondhand and those from whom Papias was personally hearing (*λέγουσιν*) firsthand.⁶

Regarding Papias’s teaching concerning the millennial kingdom, Eusebius relays the following summary:

He says that a thousand-year period will occur after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up corporeally on this very earth. I think that he made these suppositions by having received the apostolic accounts incorrectly, by not having understood that they spoke mystically, and in signs. For he seems to have been quite small-

⁶ On an alternate theory see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), who argues that the author of the canonical Johannine writings was, in fact, a firsthand eyewitness and disciple of Jesus but that it was not John the son of Zebedee. While this theory definitely distinguishes the two Johns in Papias’s prologue, it still frustrates Eusebius’s (and others’) attempts at driving a wedge between the Book of Revelation, chiliasm, and the first generation of Jesus’s disciples.

minded, as is evidenced by his texts. Moreover, he shares the blame for the many ecclesiastical men after him who shared his opinion because they claimed the man's antiquity, as, for example, Irenaeus and anyone else who declared the same views. (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.12–13 [Schott])

Eusebius's antichilastic bias shines brightly here, so brightly that it seems to blind him to many problems with his characterization. Eusebius's claim that Papias misunderstood the accounts of the apostles because he failed to apply a mystical hermeneutic demonstrates how eager the historian was to judge the earliest writers by fourth-century dogmatic standards. He also fails to consider that Papias himself sought to preserve oral traditions, expressing less interest in written texts (presumably even the book of Revelation, which Eusebius suggest Papias misinterpreted by applying the wrong spiritual hermeneutic). Papias writes, "I did not consider what came from books to be of as much value as what came from a living and abiding voice" (as quoted in *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4 [Schott]). Note that Papias does not say he rejected the authority of apostolic writings but that in his specific work, *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*, his goal was to relay oral teachings of those who kept the earliest interpretations and teachings alive in the late first and early second centuries. Thus, Eusebius's claim that Papias misinterpreted apostolic accounts is really a fourth-century amillennial attempt at dismissing the early second-century testimony.⁷

When Daley mentions the early premillennialist Papias of Hierapolis, he notes that he "apparently also had had close contact with the community in which the Johannine writings were produced.... Papias' authority became the basis of Irenaeus' own millennial expectations at the end of the second century."⁸ However, Daley's critical adoption of the "Johannine school" and his rejection of the earliest Christian testimony that Papias was a personal hearer of the apostle John himself frustrates this attempt at driving a wedge between John and Papias. And claiming that chiliasm is merely a Jewish-Christian phenomenon is overstated. Even the historical-critical scholar Adolf von Harnack recognizes this when he writes:

Just as little may we designate Jewish Christian the mighty and realistic hopes of the future which were gradually repressed in the second and third centuries. They may be described as Jewish, or as Christian; but the designation Jewish Christian must be rejected; for it gives a wrong impression as to the historic right of these hopes in Christianity. The eschatological

⁷ The insulting characterization of Papias as "small-minded" gives us insight into Eusebius's deep prejudice toward the ancient view that he saw as too naïve and ignorant. This does not change the fact that the early premillennial perspective—not the later amillennial view—has the privilege of precedence. Perhaps this fact alone drive Eusebius to his disdain for and mischaracterization of Papias. Against Eusebius's eagerness to pin Irenaeus's millennial eschatology on Papias, Grant writes, "Papias was not, however, the only source of Irenaeus' doctrine. The apologist Justin had insisted on the orthodoxy of the doctrine that Jerusalem was to be restored as the capital of the saints' thousand-year kingdom" (Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 1997), 39

⁸ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 18.

ideas of Papias were not Jewish Christian, but Christian; while, on the other hand, the eschatological speculations of Origen were not Gentile Christian, but essentially Greek.⁹

Another way of countering the traditional view of the widespread and well-developed premillennialism in the earliest church is found in the thesis of Charles Hill, which has had significant influence on the historiography of those who hold to an amillennial eschatology but have had a difficult time with the apparent dominance of premillennialism in the early church.¹⁰ Hill admits that explicit, firsthand sources for amillennialism from the second century are lacking: “Important Christian writers such as, among others, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and the author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* have at times been lined up on either side of the question or have been prudently dismissed as witnesses to either view.”¹¹ This leaves us with the evidential fact that the only direct and explicit firsthand sources for any millennial view in the second century are premillennial.¹²

In the past, this dearth of primary evidence from proponents of amillennialism in the second century has been exploited by premillennialists.¹³ They often argued that the earliest disciples of the apostles were premillennial while amillennialism was a later development and a deviation from the original premillennial perspective passed down from the apostles. This narrative explains the absence of amillennial voices and presence of premillennial voices in second century.¹⁴

Hill, however, attempts to counter this narrative of the early prevalence of premillennialism by employing an ingenious and commendable approach. While admitting that when second-century fathers expressly address the millennial question, they are premillennial, Hill seeks to unlock the door to the millennial understanding of the heretofore silent witnesses (e.g., Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, etc.). He does this by linking second-century premillennialism to a doctrine of the intermediate state in which the souls of the disembodied saints do not go straight to heaven but to a subterranean realm (Hades) until the resurrection, at which time they will enter the kingdom of

⁹ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, 3d ed., trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1902), 288.

¹⁰ Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

¹¹ Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 6.

¹² These include, unambiguously, Papias of Hierapolis, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, and with some dispute, Didache and Barnabas.

¹³ For example, see H. Wayne House, “Premillennialism in the Ante-Nicene Church,” *BSac* 169.3 (2012): 271–82.

¹⁴ Better-informed and more nuanced treatments have acknowledged the possible existence of indirect testimony of a mid-second-century amillennialism from two premillennial sources, Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 80) and Irenaeus (*Haer.* 5.31.1). In a common reading of these sources, both admit that though their view of an earthly kingdom is superior, other Christians did not hold that view. Though these passages could be read as referring to heretics (see Excursus 8, pp. 2–4), they could also refer to orthodox amillennialists. Thus, the history is often amended to accommodate the secondhand, indirect evidence for amillennialism: though premillennialism was the dominant view among the earliest post-apostolic teachers, amillennialism had enough of a following to draw the gentle criticism from premillennialists like Justin and Irenaeus. Yet these amillennial voices seem to have appeared on the scene only around the mid-second century, rendering premillennialism still the earliest (and thus apostolic) view. If this reading is accurate, the issue of debate revolves around why premillennialism was so dominant and how it eventually fell out of a favor.

Christ on earth. So interconnected are the intermediate state and premillennialism, Hill argues, that when an author alleges that the disembodied saint actually goes to heaven, that author cannot at the same time hold to premillennialism. Then, by demonstrating that Ignatius, Clement, Polycarp, and others did, in fact, teach that departed spirits go to heaven, these writers must be placed on the non-premillennial side of the evidential scale. These, then, are the orthodox Christians identified by Justin and Irenaeus as those holding a different view of the millennium than they.¹⁵ The resulting narrative, then, is not necessarily that the earliest Christians were amillennial instead of premillennial, but that the earliest post-apostolic Christians had a diversity of millennial views held for a number of reasons. It is up to the modern biblical scholar and theologian to determine which early view best reflects the teaching of the Old and New Testaments.

Though Hill's thesis had gone virtually unchallenged for some time, some patristic scholars have recently countered it.¹⁶ In a 2020 article, Craig Blaising concluded that Hill "has failed to demonstrate a logical, necessary connection between chiliasm and a subterranean descent of Christian souls at death.... It is not the case that the two were so conceptually linked that the appearance of one doctrine necessarily implies the other."¹⁷ And in 2023, Paul Hartog also challenged Hill's thesis and pointed out several methodological and evidential inconsistencies:

Hill's interpretive "key" (that chiliasm and a subterranean repose of the righteous dead were integrally linked) cannot function as a golden code to decipher and differentiate all patristic eschatologies. In general, Hill has overly relied upon this over-arching "key," which we have found to treat the phenomena in a reductionistic manner. Some amillennial authors espoused an infernal intermediate state (Augustine), and some premillennial authors believed in a heavenly intermediate state (Hippolytus and Methodius). Texts by some chiliastic authors supported a celestial reward for the martyrs in particular (passages in Tertullian and Irenaeus). For patristic chiliasts, the foundational grounding of their perspective was not an alliance of millennialism with an infernal intermediate repose, but their interpretive approach to Revelation and texts such as Isaiah and Ezekiel.¹⁸

In my own years of reading and researching early patristic eschatology, I have also harbored some concerns over the viability of Hill's thesis, though space does not allow a full deconstruction of the arguments. Nevertheless, a few observations are in order. First, Hill's thesis resorts to question-begging when confronted with evidence from early premillennialists, such as Irenaeus

¹⁵ Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 6.

¹⁶ See the brief but excellent discussion in Steven D. Aguzzi, *Israel, the Church, and Millenarianism: A Way beyond Replacement Theology*, Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (New York: Routledge, 2018), 118–21.

¹⁷ Craig A. Blaising, "Early Christian Millennialism and the Intermediate State," *BSac* 177.2 (2020): 232.

¹⁸ Paul A. Hartog, "Patristic Era (AD 100–250)," in *Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing the Development of Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Cory M. Marsh and James I. Fazio (El Cajon, CA: SCS Press, 2023), 82. See the full chapter for details of Hartog's argument against Hill's thesis.

and Tertullian, that they seemed to have held to both a millennial kingdom and a heavenly intermediate state.¹⁹ Second, Hill's thesis does not adequately account for the evidence of *Didache* and *Barnabas*, which we will examine shortly.²⁰ Third, it raises important questions regarding later amillennial perspectives, especially of Roman Catholicism, in which a purgatorial existence is held alongside an amillennial eschatology; and later premillennial perspectives, especially contemporary premillennialism, in which an immediate admission to heaven is coupled with a premillennial eschatology. If later eschatological positions rendered irrelevant the indispensable second-century link between the intermediate state and premillennialism, is the link really as indispensable as it first appears?

Steven Aguzzi's estimation of Hill's thesis sums up the situation well:

Hill's argument, which rests on the assumption that those who did not believe in an intermediate state within the first few centuries C.E. were amillennialists, and those who did were chiliasts, has been shown to be untenable. Likewise, some chiliasts believed that souls went directly to heaven—a belief that Hill claims drew a stark contrast between millennial and amillennial thought in the first several centuries of the Church. Evidence from the first two centuries, by contrast, suggests that no Christians from that period held to what would now be discerned as amillennialism.... Overall, in spite of Hill's detailed research and fine contribution to the debate, his interpretive framework fails to show that amillennialism was an eschatological view that rivaled chiliasm in the early Church.²¹

¹⁹ See Brian C. Collins, "Were the Fathers Amillennial? An Evaluation of Charles Hill's *Regnum Caelorum*," *BSac* 177.2 (2020): 207–20; Hartog, "Patristic Era," 58–59.

²⁰ Hill relies heavily on the supposed "restored ending" of *Didache* reconstructed by Robert Aldridge (Robert E. Aldridge, "The Lost Ending of the *Didache*," *VigChr* 53 (1999): 1–15) and based on material from *Apostolic Constitutions* (Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 77–78). This will be challenged as methodologically irresponsible in the treatment of *Didache* 16 in Go Deeper Excursus 6. Hill also relies upon a modern trend that reverses the traditional reading of *Barn.* 15 as chiliastic, suggesting that "the *Epistle of Ps.-Barnabas* . . . is probably not chiliastic, though it is a receptacle for a certain tradition, the world-week scheme, which became important for some chiliasts, and it did apparently use Jewish apocalypses that can be called chiliastic" (Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 77). With these two hasty dismissals of first-century testimonies, Hill attempts to dislodge premillennial eschatology from its earliest patristic footing.

²¹ Aguzzi, *Israel, the Church, and Millenarianism*, 120.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 6 The Eschatology of Didache 16

After its introductory “Two Ways” catechetical section (Did. 1–6), the Didache presents instructions concerning baptism and the eucharist, fasting and prayers, and discerning between true and false teachers (Did. 7–13). Then, after a brief discussion of gathering under proper leadership (Did. 14–15), the text ends with what many call a “Mini-Apocalypse” (Did. 16). That section begins with an exhortation to “watch,” reminiscent of Matthew 24:42 and 1 Thessalonians 5:6 (Did. 16.1). The image of the foolish virgins whose lamps went out (Matt 25:1–8) appears briefly as well: “Do not let your lamps go out, and do not be unprepared, but be ready, for you do not know the hour when our Lord is coming.”¹

The church is to “gather together frequently” to ensure perseverance in the faith until the end (Did. 16.2; cf. 1 Cor 14:26; Heb 10:23–25; Ign. *Eph.* 13.1). The warning strongly urges perseverance, suggesting that only those who are faithful to the end will receive their reward. What follows is a brief but dense description of the end times. False prophets, corrupters, deceivers, and haters will abound; lawlessness will increase, and persecution will ensue (Did. 16.3–4).² In the midst of this general deterioration of society, “the deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God and will perform signs and wonders” (Did. 16.4). The similarities with 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12, Paul’s “man of lawlessness,” and Revelation 13’s two beasts should be obvious. The notion of a final “antichrist” figure empowered by Satan and claiming to be the savior of the world abounds in early Christian literature; it was a universal expectation. During the reign of this figure, “the earth will be delivered into his hands” (cf. Rev 12:9; 13:3, 7) and his abominations will be unparalleled in history (Did. 16.4; cf. Dan 12:1; Matt 24:15). At that time, “all humankind will come to the fiery test” (Did. 16.5; cf. Rev 3:10). Many will “fall away and perish” (Did. 16.4; cf. Matt 24:10).

¹ These themes are so common in the early church that one does not need to presume a written source. In fact, the language and imagery of the Didache’s portrayal of the end of the world is so unique that one ought to regard it as an independent testimony to the early church’s unified eschatological expectations.

² This general characterization of the end times is pervasive in the New Testament, See Matt 7:15; 24:11, 12, 24; 2 Tim 3:1–7; 2 Pet 2:1; 3:3, etc.

However, “those who endure in their faith” (Did. 16.4; cf. Matt 24:13) will be “saved by the accursed one himself.” The phrase “saved by (σωθήσονται ὑπό)” refers simply to being rescued or delivered by a savior (Deut 33:29; Isa 45:17). In this case, “the accursed one (τοῦ καταθέματος)” must be a reference to Christ, who will save those who await him from heaven (Phil 3:20; 1 Thess 1:10).³ It is possible that “the accursed one” refers to Galatians 3:13, where Christ is said to have become “a curse for us” by dying on the cross. It is a title of Christ never embraced by subsequent church fathers.

Finally, and relevant to our question, the Didachist presents a series of “signs of the truth”: that is, the vindication of the “accursed one” for who he really is—the Lord and Judge of the world (Did. 16.6). The three “signs” are (1) an opening in heaven (cf. Rev 4:1; 19:11); (2) the sound of a trumpet (cf. 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 4:1); and (3) the resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16); (4), at which time the Lord will come upon the clouds of heaven (Did. 16.8; cf. Dan 7:13; Matt 24:30; 1 Thess 4:17; Rev 1:7).

An interesting parenthetical statement is found in Didache 16.7. Clarifying the “resurrection of the dead,” the Didachist says, “but not of all (οὐ πάντων δέ); rather, as it has been said, ‘The Lord will come, and all his saints with him’ (ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐρρέθη”Ἡξει ὁ κύριος καὶ πάντες οἱ ἅγιοι μετ’ αὐτοῦ).” The quotation comes almost certainly from the Septuagint of Zechariah 14:5 (καὶ ἦξει κύριος ὁ θεός μου, καὶ πάντες οἱ ἅγιοι μετ’ αὐτοῦ). Note that in Zechariah, the subject is “the Lord God,” whereas in Didache 16.7, the subject is the Lord Jesus Christ, reflecting not only a high Christology but also Christ’s assumption of Yahweh’s role in a theophanic visitation in judgment—executer of the Day of the Lord (see chapters 15 and 16 of *The Fathers on the Future*). However, the peculiar part of this text is the limitation of the resurrection at the Lord’s return to only “the saints.” This apparent limitation at the coming of Christ is similar to 1 Thessalonians 4:16 where the “dead in Christ” are raised at the second coming; we also find it in 1 Corinthians 15, especially verse 23, where at Christ’s coming, “those who are of Christ” are resurrected.

The fact that “not all” are raised at Christ’s coming, according to the Didache, is rather puzzling because the overwhelming Jewish and Christian expectation was that both the righteous and the wicked would be raised for judgment at the end of the age (Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46; John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; Rev 20:12–13). It seems most implausible that the Didache would modify such a pervasive doctrine of the general resurrection without any explanation. However, the puzzle can be easily solved if one considers that the Didachist’s language represents an early millennialism, in which the resurrection of the righteous saints (those “in Christ”) occurs at the return of Christ, followed by an earthly reign, which then ends with the resurrection of the wicked to judgment. Though it is not entirely clear that the original eschatology of the Didache was a form of early premillennialism, it seems more historically responsible to opt for an explanation that was known in the early church (resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked separated by a millennial

³ Shawn J. Wilhite, *The Didache: A Commentary*, Apostolic Fathers Commentary Series, vol. 1, ed. Paul A. Hartog and Shawn J. Wilhite (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), 229.

kingdom),⁴ rather than point to this as an instance of unique teaching regarding the resurrection of the righteous only.⁵

The challenge for the interpreter of *Didache* 16 is that the ending of the text as we have it today appears to be missing. Aldridge notes that whereas the other six writings contained in the same codex as the *Didache* begin on the next line of the page following the previous writing, this is not the case with the *Didache*, “which ends in the middle of fol. 80b, with the entire remaining half-page being left blank—an extraordinary omission! The *Didache*’s ending in chapter 16 is also abrupt and unresolved. The chapter recounts the eschaton inclusively up until the point at which it breaks off (the beginning of Christ’s return) and is obviously only half-complete.”⁶ The scribe who copied the *Didache* from its exemplar also punctuated the end in such a way that suggested he was aware that the copy from which he was making his own copy was missing the original ending, which he probably hoped to locate. Thus, he left space in the manuscript to complete the book at a future time. That time obviously never came.⁷ In a 1999 article, Aldridge attempts to patch up the missing eschatological content of the first-century *Didache* by drawing from a fourth-century writing known as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which itself incorporated much material from the *Didache* in its own manual of church order. It is this reconstructed text upon which Charles Hill depends to dismiss the testimony of *Didache* as a potential witness of a premillennial eschatology.⁸

However, Aldridge himself acknowledges that “*Constitutions*’ most notable differences from the Bryennian *Didache* (other than its interpolations) are its great reduction of the rules for hosting itinerants (chs. 11–12) and significant alterations in the sections on baptism and liturgy (chs. 7, 9 and 10).”⁹ In other words, the compilers and redactors of the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* did not hesitate to amend the material of the first-century *Didache* in order to transform its primitive content to the theology and practice of the fourth century. If they edited it to conform to later ecclesiological and sacramental theology and practice, why would they have

⁴ Cf. Barn. 15.4–9; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 80–81; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.25.2–4; 5.30.4; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.12. Cf. William C. Varner, “The *Didache* ‘Apocalypse’ and Matthew 24,” *BSac* 165 (2008): 318.

⁵ I disagree with Draper’s suggestion (Jonathan A. Draper, “The *Didache*,” in *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*, edited by Wilhelm Pratscher [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010], 20) that this notion of the resurrection of the righteous only originated in the Maccabean martyr cult. This appears to be a misunderstanding of the teaching in the Maccabean writings. Second Macc 7:14 reads, “So when he was ready to die he said thus, It is good, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God to be raised up again by him: as for thee, thou shalt have no resurrection to life (ἀνάστασις εἰς ζωὴν)” (cf. 2 Macc 7:9). The “resurrection to life” is already distinguished from the “resurrection” to death or punishment, described in Dan 12:2—“And many of those who asleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life (εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον), and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Claiming to be numbered among the resurrection to life does not mean others will be excluded from the resurrection to judgment.

⁶ Aldridge, “Lost Ending,” 2–3.

⁷ Whether the exemplar of the Jerusalem Manuscript of the *Didache* had itself left the space blank or perhaps suffered from a physical defect of the page cannot be known. Nor can we speculate whether the omission of the longer ending of *Didache* was intentional or accidental.

⁸ Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 77–78.

⁹ Aldridge, “Lost Ending,” 5n11.

any qualms about amending its eschatology to fit the views of fourth-century amillennialism? In fact, we see evidence that this is precisely the case. While Didache 16.6–7 preserves the statement that implies a partial resurrection at the return of Christ—“and the third [sign] of a resurrection of the dead, but not of all (οὐ πάντων δέ), but as has been said, the Lord shall come and all the holy ones with him”—*Apostolic Constitutions* 7.32.3–4 drops out the language implying a partial resurrection (see comparison below, my translation). Clearly, the redactor(s) had no problem modifying this aspect of the apocalypse of Didache. Therefore, any dependence on Aldridge’s reconstructed ending of Didache based on the expanded ending found in *Apostolic Constitutions* must be rejected.

Comparison of Didache and *Apostolic Constitutions*¹⁰

Didache 16:6–9	<i>Apostolic Constitutions</i> 7.32.3–5
<p>⁶And then the signs of the truth will appear: first a sign of an opening in heaven, then a sign of a sound of a trumpet, and the third of a resurrection of the dead (ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν), ⁷but not of all (οὐ πάντων δέ), but as has been said, the Lord shall come and all the holy ones with him. ⁸Then the world will see the Lord coming upon the clous of heaven. . .</p>	<p>³And then the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in heaven, then there will be a sound of a trumpet from an archangel and at that time a revival to life of those who are sleeping (ἀναβίωσις τῶν κεκοιμημένων). ⁴And then the Lord will come and all the holy ones with him with a quaking upon the clouds with the angels of his power on the throne of his kingdom to condemn the world-deceiving devil and to give to each one according to his deed. ⁵Then the wicked ones will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life, inheriting those things which eye has not seen and hear has not heard and has not entered upon the heart of people, which things God has prepared for those who love him, and they shall rejoice in the kingdom of God which is in Christ Jesus.</p>

¹⁰ The translations in this chart are my own.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 7 The Chiasm of the Epistle of Barnabas

The authorship, date, and provenance of the so-called *Epistle of Barnabas* are difficult to determine with great confidence.¹ It is fairly certain that the ascription in the title was a later addition and that the author was not the apostle Barnabas.² The preponderance of scholars regard an origin or destination of Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, or Rome as unlikely, and Syria or Antioch is regarded as possible, but not probable. As a result of my own work in *Barnabas*, I have tentatively concluded that the book was probably written sometime in the late first or early second century, perhaps in Egypt or Palestine.³ If the letter was associated in some way with Alexandria,⁴ we can assume that it was either written from Alexandria to a group elsewhere in Egypt, or written to a group in a nearby region such as Palestine, or even from Palestine to Alexandria.⁵ Though he

¹ For a helpful survey on the critical issues involved, see Leslie W. Barnard, “The ‘Epistle of Barnabas’ and Its Contemporary Setting,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt Part II, Principat*, ed. Wolfgang Haase, vol. 27, 1, *Religion (Vorkonstantinische Christentum: Apostolischen Väter und Apologeten)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 172–80.

² James Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background*, WUNT, 2 Series, vol. 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 3–7. Then again, even such a conclusion against the apostle Barnabas as the author would actually go beyond what the evidence would permit. We simply do not know.

³ See discussion on the place of origin in Ferdinand-Rupert Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief*, Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern, ed. Norbert Brox, G. Kretschmar, and Kurt Niederwimmer, vol. 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 119–30. The issues are quite complex and the evidence “does not justify dogmatic statements about the origin and background of the epistle” (Robert A. Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*, vol. 3, *Barnabas and the Didache*, ed. Robert M. Grant [Camden, NJ: Nelson, 1965], 54).

⁴ This is the general scholarly consensus (Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 271–72; Janni Loman, “The Letter of Barnabas in Early Second-Century Egypt,” in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen* ed. Anthony Hilhorst and George H. van Kooten, *Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, vol. 59 [Leiden: Brill, 2005]). Prigent suggests the document arose in Syria (Pierre Prigent, *Les Testimonia dans le christianisme primitif: L’épître de Barnabé I–XVI et ses sources*, Études bibliques [Paris: Gabalda, 1961] and Wengst suggests Asia Minor (Klaus Wengst, *Tradition und Theologie des Barnabasbriefes*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 42 [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971], 113–18).

⁵ Barnard favors the view that the book was probably written from Alexandria to a group of Jewish-Christians somewhere in Middle Egypt between about 117 and 132 C.E. (Leslie W. Barnard, “The Problem of the Epistle of Barnabas,” *Church Quarterly Review* 159.2 (1958): 212). Though I lean toward an Alexandrian origin for this letter, I

denied the title “teacher” (1.8; 4.9), the author functioned in that capacity, suggesting at least an informal authority from the perspective of the remote Christian community.⁶

As far as the date is concerned, we know that something had occurred in the author’s recent memory that he believed had fulfilled prophetic Scripture. In Barnabas 1.7 he wrote, “For the Master has made known to us through the prophets things past and things present, and has given us a foretaste of things to come. Consequently, when we see these things come to pass, one thing after the other just as he predicted, we ought to make a richer and loftier offering out of reverence for him.” In 2.6 we see that God had abolished the sacrifices, suggesting that the temple had been destroyed. Lindemann and Paulsen suggest that reference is made to the construction of a new temple to Jupiter, which occurred around AD 130 (16.3–4). Yet at the same time, they note that no mention is made of the Bar Kochba revolt, between 132 and 135. Thus, they conclude, the epistle can be dated quite precisely between AD 130 and 132.⁷ However, I am not convinced that the author of this letter would have regarded a Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter as an attempt to rebuild the temple of the Old Covenant. In any case, many scholars appear to find the median date of about AD 100 most satisfying.⁸

The point of the letter was to show the true Christian interpretation and application of the Old Testament law in light of the Christ event and current events, demonstrating that God has always been interested in moral application rather than external ritual. Thus, *Barnabas* was likely an early Jewish Christian work written at a time after the destruction of the temple in an attempt to explain how the Old Testament remained relevant even after its sacrifices were incapable of being performed. In the course of the author’s attempt to explain Old Testament passages through a New Testament lens, he approaches the fourth commandment—to keep the Sabbath holy—in an allegorical sense, applying it eschatologically to a future age, in fact, to the seven-thousandth “millennium” of human history. This age would commence after Christ’s return. Thus, *Barnabas* has been traditionally understood as evidence of an early Alexandrian form of premillennialism.

think the plausibility of a Palestinian destination in the late first century may have been overlooked in scholarship. It certainly would help explain the letter’s concern over the first (or, perhaps, the second) Jewish revolt and the destruction (or reconstruction) of the temple in Jerusalem. Though by no means conclusive, the way the author refers to Syrians, Arabs, and Egyptians may suggest that he wrote to or from Judea or Samaria, situated in the midst of these surrounding nations (Barn. 9.6).

⁶ See Did. 13.1–2; 15.1–2. The teacher appears to be among the second generation Christians because he refers to the twelve apostles as past, but having preached to his own generation (*Barn.* 8.3).

⁷ Franz Xaver Funk, Andreas Lindemann, Henning Paulsen, et al., eds. *Die Apostolischen Väter: Griechisch-deutsche Parallelausgabe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 24.

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the relevant internal evidence, see Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 111–19.

The Chiliasm of Barnabas Revisited

In 1959, Albert Hermans could still refer to “l’avis presque unanime des commentateurs” that Barnabas 15 presents a version of early Christian chiliasm.⁹ Yet in the following generation, the tide had turned so decisively that in 1990 Everett Ferguson could answer the question: “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?” with a decisive “No.”¹⁰ In this chapter, I revisit the allegedly settled question, arguing that Barnabas 15 does, in fact, present a form of chiliastic eschatology.¹¹ Modern readers of *Barnabas* who have argued for a non-chiliastic interpretation of chapter 15 have exaggerated the thoroughness of Hermans’ exegesis and have assumed contradictions or conflation in the text.

Persistent interpretational missteps have led to a non-chiliastic interpretation of Barnabas 15: (1) identifying the change in “sun, moon, and stars” in 15.5 as a renewal of creation rather than as signs of cosmic judgment at the coming of Christ; (2) interpreting the banishment of lawlessness and the accompanying renewal in 15.7 as cosmic rather than personal in scope; (3) repeatedly asserting Barnabas 15 describes two sabbaths when the text itself does not; (4) misunderstanding the dative relative pronoun in 15.8 as a reference to the “eighth day” rather than to the “seventh day” as the means “by which”—or period “during which”—the “eighth day” is inaugurated; (5) generally failing to attend to the tenses of the participles and their syntactical relationships to the main verbs in 15.5, 15.7, and 15.8; (6) anachronistically interpreting *Barnabas* (late first/early second-century) in light of Clement of Alexandria’s (late-second/early-third century) complex attempt at synthesizing the earlier world-week chiliastic eschatology with a Valentinian allegorical number-symbolology of the hebdomad and ogdoad in *Stromata* 6.16; and (7) failing to account for

⁹ Albert Hermans, “Le Pseudo-Barnabé Est-il Millénariste?” *ETL* 35.4 (1959): 849. On the identification of the author of *Barnabas* as a chiliast, see Lyford Paterson Edwards, “The Transformation of Early Christianity from an Eschatological to a Socialized Movement” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1919), 5; James A. Kleist, ed. and trans., *The Didache, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Epistles and the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, The Fragments of Papias, The Epistle of Diognetus* (New York: Newman, 1948), 179.

¹⁰ Everett Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast? An Example of Hellenistic Number Symbolism in *Barnabas* and Clement of Alexandria” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). See most recently, Jonathan Lookadoo, *The Epistle of Barnabas: A Commentary*, Apostolic Father Commentary Series (Eugene: Cascade, 2022), 112. Understandably, modern apologists for amillennialism have adopted this position on the interpretation of *Barn.* 15 post-haste in an attempt to counter premillennialists who point polemically at the strong showing of early chiliastic church fathers. See, e.g., Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 77.

¹¹ That Barnabas did not actually embrace a future Millennium, believing the seventh and eighth days were merely symbolic and pointed to the same period, is argued by many today, though not by all. So influential has this interpretation become, that Paget suggests in a brief summary of the eschatology of Barnabas, “Final redemption appear to involve a return of Christ (7.9f.) and possibly a millennial kingdom (chap. 15)” (James Carleton Paget, “The Epistle of Barnabas,” in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Paul Foster [London: T. & T. Clark, 2007], 79. See Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Barton, Longman, & Todd, 1964), 396-401; D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 29-40; Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?,” 157-67. In support of the view that Barnabas was a chiliast, see J. W. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*, JSNTSup, vol. 70, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 48. Beale says Mealy’s view is merely “plausible” (G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 150).

the varieties of chiliasm in the early church and how the scheme of the seventh and eighth days in Barnabas 15 fits within that historical-theological context.

Scholars have lately questioned whether the author of *Barnabas* was a chiliast who asserted a unique thousand-year period between Christ's physical return and the establishment of the eternal condition, or the "new world."¹² That is, did the author view the coming eschatological sabbath following Christ's return—typologically equivalent to the seventh day of 1000 years—as a definite period that comes to a close, giving way to the "eighth day" of eternity? Or did the author regard the eschatological sabbath day following Christ's return as itself the eternal day, conflated with the "eighth"? The issue, then, is not really whether the author of *Barnabas* sets forth a premillennial eschatology; he does.¹³ The issue is how the author conceives of that future eschatological sabbath in terms of its character and chronology. Is it a symbol for the new creation with no distinction? Or is it a unique period of a thousand years distinct from—but related to—the establishment of the subsequent new creation?

In his attempt to reorient the interpretation of the law in keeping with its intended spiritual or moral meaning, the author of *Barnabas* attends to the sabbath by first quoting a few passages. He writes, "Moreover, concerning the sabbath it is written in the ten words, by which he spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai face to face, 'And sanctify the sabbath of the Lord with pure hands and with a pure heart (καὶ ἀγιάσατε τὸ σάββατον κυρίου χερσὶν καθααῖς καὶ καρδίᾳ καθαῖᾳ)'" (Barn. 15.1).¹⁴ He continues with another allusion: "And in another he says, 'If my sons will keep the

¹² With regard to the identification of "chiliasm" in the early church, Rordorf notes, "We shall find ourselves on sure ground only in the cases where the sources themselves suppose that *after* the expected sabbath another epoch will follow, that is to say the eternal eighth day: in these cases we are clearly dealing with the chiliastic viewpoint" (Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968], 91).

¹³ It is beyond dispute that in *Barnabas*, the eschatological "sabbath" follows—it does not precede—the return of Christ. Barrett notes, "Notwithstanding the confusion introduced by the substitution of Sunday for the Sabbath it is clear that *Barnabas*' real view was that he and his contemporaries stood within the 6000 years, still waiting for the Son of God to usher in the millennial period with heavenly signs and portents" (C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956], 371). The eschatological sabbath in *Barnabas* is not a present reality associated with Christ's current heavenly session (as in amillennialism), nor does the eschatological sabbath arrive prior to the physical return of Christ (as in postmillennialism).

¹⁴ The sources for this quotation are not easy to identify. It appears to be a very loose paraphrase (or interpretation) of the fourth commandment, which actually exhorted either to "remember" the sabbath (Exod 20:8) or to "keep" the sabbath (Exod 31:13–16; Deut 5:12). In Barn. 15:1 the imperative is to "sanctify" (ἀγιάσατε) the sabbath, which appears in Jeremiah 17:22 and Ezekiel 20:20 in reference to sanctifying "the day of the sabbaths" and "the sabbaths," respectively (Cf. Hans Windisch, *Die Apostolischen Väter*, vol. 3, *Der Barnabasbrief*, HNT (Tübingen: Mohr, 1920), 381. Cf. Ferguson, "Was *Barnabas* a Chiliast?," 160. The qualifier "with pure hands and with a pure heart" has no clear parallel in any of the iterations of the sabbath commandments in the Old Testament. It is similar to Psalm 24:4 (LXX 23:4) in answer to the question, "Who may ascend onto the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place?" (24:3): "One who has clean hands and a pure heart" (24:4) (On the sources for the *testimonia* in Barn. 15, see Prigent, *Les testimonia dans le christianisme primitif*, 65–70). Yet even in the way in which the author set up his loose paraphrase, he created some distance between the actual written words and what God was saying by means of those written words (ἐν οἷς ἐλάλησεν). Thus, the author was not necessarily claiming to have quoted directly from a written text.

sabbath, then I will place my mercy upon them (ἐὰν φυλάξουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ μου τὸ σάββατον, τότε ἐπιθήσω τὸ ἔλεός μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς)” (Barn. 15.2).¹⁵

The author then reaches back to the foundation of the sabbath in the days of creation: “He mentions the sabbath at the beginning of creation: ‘And in six days God made (καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἕξ ἡμέραις) the works of his hands, and he finished on the seventh day (καὶ συνετέλεσεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ), and he rested on it, and he sanctified it’ (καὶ κατέπαυσεν ἐν αὐτῇ, καὶ ἡγίασεν αὐτήν)” (Barn. 15.3). This inexact quotation appears to depend loosely on Genesis 2:2-3 (and perhaps Exodus 20:11)—“And God finished on the sixth day (καὶ συνετέλεσεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἕκτῃ) his works he did, and he rested on the seventh day (καὶ κατέπαυσεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ) from all his works which he did. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it (καὶ ἡγίασεν αὐτήν)” (Gen 2:2-3, LXX). And Exodus says, “For in six days the Lord made (ἐν γὰρ ἕξ ἡμέραις ἐποίησεν Κύριος) the heaven and the earth and all things in them, and he rested on the seventh day (καὶ κατέπαυσεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ); therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and sanctified it (καὶ ἡγίασεν αὐτήν)” (Exod 20:11, LXX). The author of *Barnabas* does not quite follow the LXX of Genesis 2:2, which says God finished ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἕκτῃ (“in the sixth day”) and rested τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ (“on the seventh day”). Instead, Barnabas seems to follow the sense of the Hebrew text, stating that God finished ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ (“on the seventh day”) and rested and sanctified it (Barn. 15.3).¹⁶ Then, in his interpretation of the phrase “and he finished,” Barnabas rightly corrects his own quotation: “Take care, little children, what this means: ‘he finished in six days’ (συνετέλεσεν ἐν ἕξ ἡμέραις)” (Barn. 15.4). The interpretation of the phrase reinforces the ἐν ἕξ ἡμέραις reading: “This means that in six thousand years the Lord will finish everything (ἐν ἑξακισχίλιος ἔτεσιν συντελέσει κύριος τὰ σύμπαντα)” (Barn. 15.4).

If Barnabas were to expound upon his Greek paraphrase of the Hebrew text of Genesis 2:2, with God both completing his work on the seventh day and resting on the seventh day, this would result in a seven-day workweek of sorts as well as a future seventh 1000-year period during which God both works and rests. Yet this is not the direction in which the author takes his exposition. In the author’s eschatological antitype, he concludes that “in six thousand years the Lord will finish everything (ἐν ἑξακισχίλιος ἔτεσιν συντελέσει κύριος τὰ σύμπαντα)” (Barn. 15.4). In short, though the author seems to follow the reckoning of the Hebrew text in his loose quotation, he follows instead the LXX (along with the Syriac and Samaritan Pentateuch) in his explication, thus creating a peculiar dissonance.

¹⁵ Here we have another instance of both a very loose allusion and conflation of texts. The first part is a faint echo of Exod 31:16—“The sons of Israel will keep the sabbaths (καὶ φυλάξουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ τὰ σάββατα).” The latter part of the allusion does not seem to derive from any particular text, though Ferguson suggests Isa 44:3—“I will set the spirit on you, and my blessing upon your children” (ἐπιθήσω τὸ πνεῦμα σου, καὶ τὰς εὐλογίας μου ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα σου).”

¹⁶ The MT reads: ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבת ביום השביעי (“And God finished on the seventh day the work which he did and rested on the seventh day”). This is also followed by the Vulgate (*conplevitque Deus die septimo opus suum quod fecerat et requievit die septimo*).

If the author is simply inconsistent, it is futile to seek out an explanation for his shift from the Hebrew reading to his interpretation of the Septuagint reading.¹⁷ However, the author possibly regarded both readings as valid, each teaching a distinct aspect of the eschatological plan and purpose of God—that is, while God puts to rest certain aspects of the long history of human sin and suffering, he simultaneously continues to work on his new creation plan during the eschatological sabbath to bring it to ultimate completion.

In the end, regarding the practical implications for sabbath observance (the main purpose of this passage), God’s completion of work during the seventh day would grant non-sabbath-keeping Christians an explanation for why they do not observe the seventh-day sabbath. Regarding the eschatological implications, it would allow for an eschatological scheme in which certain kinds of redemptive activity would continue during that seventh 1000-year period. In any case, the author never seems to return to the Hebrew reading of Genesis 2:2; he leaves its assertion behind in favor of the six-day completion and seventh-day rest.

The author goes on to validate his interpretational move from the type of “six days” to the antitype of “six thousand years:” “For the day to him signifies a thousand years, and he himself testifies for me, saying, ‘Behold, a day of the Lord will be as a thousand years’” (Barn. 15.4).¹⁸ He

¹⁷ Ferguson first attempts to break *Barnabas* free from its seemingly clear premillennial framework by suggesting a pragmatic inconsistency in his thought regarding the seventh and eighth days. He writes, “*Barnabas* may indeed have drawn on two different eschatological traditions, and the whole treatise shows how little the author was interested in consistency. Whatever served to make a point could be brought in. The scheme of seven ages in the early part of the chapter relativizes the weekly Sabbath for him, and the imagery of the number 8 in the latter part of the chapter connects with the Christian’s special day. The two symbolisms serve different functions in the argument, so there was no need to harmonize them. Neither serves the purpose of periodization” (Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?,” 163). In this connection he cites Jean Daniélou, “La Typologie millénariste de la semaine dans le christianisme primitive,” *VC* 2.1 (1948): 1–8 and Windisch, *Der Barnabasbrief*, 383–84). Of course, this is merely a suggestion—“*Barnabas* may indeed have.” Ferguson then alleges that “the author was not interested in chronological calculation....He drew on chiliastic traditions, but he was not interested in them for their own sake. He subordinated chiliastic thought to another purpose—to eliminate the weekly Sabbaths” (Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?,” 163). This assertion seems to beg the question. It assumes the text as we have it does not set forth a chronology of past, present, and future history, uses the seventh-day sabbath and eighth-day new creation pragmatically only to shift attention from the Jews’ Sabbath to the Christian’s Lord’s Day, and has no regard for any millennial scheme of a seven-thousand-year future era preceding the new creation. But if the text as we have it is merely a patchwork of traditions sloppily stitched together in service of his polemic, on what basis can one conclude that the author was uninterested in or not a proponent of a chiliastic eschatological framework? In short, if it is true that the author of *Barnabas* is drawing on inconsistent traditions for the purpose of his polemic against Sabbatarianism, and if Barnabas’s purpose is not to establish a consistent eschatological chronology, then it would be equally inappropriate to draw from *Barnabas* 15 either premillennial or non-premillennial eschatological conclusions. We would be left, essentially, with no clear testimony from Barnabas regarding his actual eschatological expectations.

¹⁸ Though some may point back to Ps 90:4 as the origin for this notion, the language here more closely resembles 2 Pet 3:8—μία ἡμέρα παρὰ κυρίῳ ὡς χίλια ἔτη (“one day to the Lord is like a thousand years”). The concept is not new. Sometime in the second century B.C., the *Book of Jubilees* states, with reference to Adam’s death seventy years short of 1000 years, “And he lacked seventy years of one thousand years; for one thousand years are as one day in the testimony of the heavens and therefore was it written concerning the tree of knowledge: ‘On the day that ye eat thereof ye shall die.’ For this reason he did not complete the years of this day; for he died during it” (Jub. 4.30) (R. H. Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1913], 19). Nevertheless, this aside simply serves

then returns to his original assertion: “So then, little children, in six days—in the six thousand years—everything will be brought to an end (συντελεσθήσεται τὰ σύμπαντα)” (Barn. 15.4). In this assertion the author again appears to neglect his earlier loose paraphrase of the Hebrew text of the original creation-week language and suggests that all things will be accomplished or “brought to an end” within the six thousand years of human history.

The author then continues his exposition with a partial quote: “And he rested on the seventh day (καὶ κατέπαυσεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ)” (Barn. 15.5). This is a direct quote from the LXX of Exodus 20:11. His typological interpretation follows: “This means: when his Son comes, he will abolish the season of the lawless one, he will judge the ungodly, and he will change the sun and the moon and the stars, then he will truly rest on the seventh day” (15.5).¹⁹ Some important exegetical questions arise here. First, who is the subject of the future active indicative verbs καταργήσει (“he will abolish”), κρινεῖ (“he will judge”), and ἀλλάξει (“he will change”)? Second, what constitutes the “season of the lawless one (τὸν καιρὸν τοῦ ἀνόμου)”? Third, what is the meaning of the apparent cosmic changes of the “sun, moon, and stars” (τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην καὶ τοὺς ἀστέρας)? Fourth, who is the subject of “he will truly rest” (καλῶς καταπαύσεται)—God or his Son? Finally, what is the significance of the chronological indicators “when” (ὅταν) and “then” (τότε)?

On the first issue, it seems the more natural subject is the Son: ὅταν ἐλθὼν ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ... (“When his Son arrives...”). The aorist active participle of ἔρχομαι, in conjunction with the ὅταν and the future active indicatives, functions similarly to the same form found in *2 Clement* 17.4: τοῦτο δὲ λέγει τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς ἐπιφανείας αὐτοῦ, ὅτε ἐλθὼν λυτρώσεται ἡμᾶς (“And this refers to the day of his appearance, when he will come and redeem us”) (cf. Did. 11.1). Both the aorist participle and the future indicatives, then, find their subject in ὁ υἱός. It is the Son, who, at his future coming, will “abolish,” “judge,” and “change”—all events associated with the future second advent.

Second, the abolition of the “season of the lawless one (τὸν καιρὸν τοῦ ἀνόμου)” has particular eschatological overtones. Even in *Barnabas* itself, we read the following: “Therefore, we must take heed in the last days (ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις), for the whole time of our faith will not benefit us if not now, in the lawless season (ἐν τῷ ἀνόμῳ) and in the coming stumbling blocks (τοῖς μέλλουσιν σκανδάλοις), we resist as is fitting children of God, so that the black one may not have an opportunity to sneak in” (Barn. 4.9). The “lawless season” and “season of the lawless one” likely refer to the same period, related to the “last days.” The author seems to have envisioned a future “lawless season” during which the “coming stumbling blocks” would occur, associated with a particular “lawless one” (ἄνομος) or “black one” (ὁ μέλας). The author of *Barnabas* possibly had

the purpose of justifying the author’s typological reading of the six days of creation as six thousand years of human history.

¹⁹ Barrett points out several Jewish treatments of the sabbath as a type or foreshadowing of an eschatological rest: *Tamid* 7.4; *Genesis Rabbah* 17.7; *Life of Adam and Eve* 51.2 (Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 371n1).

in mind the content of the “mini apocalypse” of Didache 16, which begins with a warning to “be ready” for the Lord’s return, because “the whole time of your faith will not benefit you if you were not made perfect in the last season (ἐν τῷ ἐσχάτῳ καιρῷ τελειωθῆτε)” (Did. 16.2). The Didachist then describes a series of hardships and trials that people will endure “in the last days (ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις)” (Did. 16.3). At the climax of those calamitous trials—including false prophets, corruptors, hatred, lawlessness, persecution, and betrayal—“then the deceiver of the world will appear (τότε φανήσεται ὁ κοσμοπλανῆς) as a son of God and will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands” (16.4). This will then be followed by a fiery ordeal, leading to many being caused to stumble and to perish (σκανδαλισθήσονται πολλοὶ καὶ ἀπολοῦνται)” (16.5). This individual “deceiver of the world” who works signs and wonders will then be confronted by the coming of the Lord (Did. 16.6–8). This, in turn, reflects much of the language and imagery from 2 Thessalonians 2. There Paul describes the future coming of a “man of lawlessness” (ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας), also called the “son of destruction” (ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας) (2 Thess 2:3), who exalts himself, claims to be divine, and sets himself up as an object of worship (2:4). Paul then calls this “man of lawlessness” the “lawless one” (ὁ ἄνομος), who will deceive people with signs and wonders (2:9–10). However, that one will be destroyed by the coming of the Lord (2:8). The language and imagery of 2 Thessalonians 2 and Didache 16 provide a compelling background to the language of Barnabas 15. It is likely the author knew at least one if not both of these texts; and he was at least familiar with the contours of the early Christian eschatology to which they testify. Thus, the “season of the lawless one” (τὸν καιρὸν τοῦ ἀνόμου) in Barnabas 15.5, which the Son will abolish by his coming, refers to the specific period of trials—the last stumbling blocks—preceding the coming of Christ as judge.

Third, what is the meaning of the apparent cosmic changes of the “sun, moon, and stars” (τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην καὶ τοὺς ἀστέρας)? Many assume the obvious interpretation would involve some kind of positive change of the actual celestial bodies, marking the epochal transition from the present “heavens and earth” to a “new heavens and earth.” Thus, for instance, Rhodes notes, “God will therefore ‘finish’ all things in six thousand years—destroying the time of the lawless one, judging the ungodly, and altering (renewing?) creation—before his sabbath rest truly begins.”²⁰ Rhodes seems to accept his own parenthetical gloss (“renewing?”) in his brief exposition, apparently conflating this changing of the sun, moon, and stars with the “cosmic renovation” of 15.7, and thus rendering the seventh day and eighth day as concurrent.²¹

²⁰ James N. Rhodes, *The Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomistic Tradition: Polemics, Paraenesis, and the Legacy of the Gold-Calf Incident*, WUNT, 2 Series, vol. 188, ed. Jörg Frey (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 70.

²¹ Rhodes, *Epistle of Barnabas*, 70. Like many modern scholars, Rhodes seems to have been misled by Ferguson’s reading of Clement of Alexandria into Barn. 15. He writes, “Earlier scholars saw Barnabas as a representative of chiliastic ideas whereby the seventh day represents a thousand year interregnum before the renewal of all things. More recent scholarship affirms instead that Barnabas collapses the seventh and eighth days into one, a conception that is found in Clement of Alexandria and linked to the fact that the seventh letter (η) of the Greek alphabet serves as the number eight (η’)” (Rhodes, *Epistle of Barnabas*, 70–71n119). Rhodes provides no additional critical evaluation of Ferguson’s arguments.

However, the renovation of creation in the changing of the sun, moon, and stars is an exegetical misstep with severe interpretive consequences.²² It is difficult to find passages in canonical Scripture or early Christian literature in which “sun,” “moon,” and “stars” are transformed positively in connection with the coming of the Son of God. Rather, the Old Testament imagery of the coming Day of the Lord as well as the New Testament imagery of the coming of Christ relay a change of the sun, moon, and stars as signs of judgment. In fact, in Barnabas 15.5, the first two verbs associated with the coming of “his Son” relate to judgment—he will abolish (καταργήσει) the season of the lawless one and judge (κρινεῖ) the ungodly. Taking “he will change the sun and moon and stars” as a reference to the cosmic phenomena related to the judgment of the Day of the Lord makes the most sense, considering these three things all occur “when he comes” (ὅταν ἔλθῶν).

Fourth, we must identify the subject of “he will truly rest” (καλῶς καταπαύσεται). Does this refer to God or to “his Son”? Given the subject of the previous future indicative verbs is the Son, and that καταπαύσεται is also in the future indicative and connected syntactically to the rest of the same sentence with the ὅταν...τότε construction, and also given that the final clause provides no change of subject, it is most reasonable that the subject of καλῶς καταπαύσεται is the Son.

The final issue relates to the relationship between ὅταν (“when”) and τότε (“then”). The ὅταν is used to indicate the series of events concurrent with the coming. That is, when the Son comes (ἐλθῶν), he will abolish, judge, and change. The τότε clause then indicates a condition that immediately follows those actions as their consequence—the time of rest. Thus, the purpose of the author is to indicate the means by which the present “season of the lawless one” will be brought to a close and the future age of the sabbath will commence.

Up to this point, the author has established that the coming of the Son will abolish the season of the lawless one, judge the wicked, change the sun, moon, and stars, and thus conclude the six-thousand-year age since creation and commence the period in which he will “truly rest.” He does not seem to deal with the apparent contradiction of God both resting and working on the seventh

²² The verb ἀλλάσσω (“change”) could refer either to a positive change from worse to better (cf. Herm. Sim. 9.4.5) or to a negative change from better to worse (cf. Barn. 10.7). The three heavenly bodies are found in the context of judgment associated with the Day of the Lord in a number of passages. For example, Isa 13:9–11 says, “Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. So I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their wrongdoing; I will also put an end to the audacity of the proud and humiliate the arrogance of the tyrants” (NASB; cf. Ezek 32:7–8; Joel 2:10; 3:15). In Jesus’s words in the Olivet Discourse, he prophesies that “immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matt 24:29; cf. Luke 21:25). And in Revelation 8:12, the fourth angel’s trumpet blast results in “a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.” The first-century apocryphal *Assumption of Moses*, too, makes the same connection: “And the earth shall tremble: to its confines shall it be shaken: and the high mountains shall be made low and the hills shall be shaken and fall. And the horns of the sun shall be broken and he shall be turned into darkness; and the moon shall not give her light, and be turned wholly into blood. And the circle of the stars shall be disturbed” (As. Mos. 10.4–5; cf. also 4 Ezra 7.39.). See Charles, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2: 421–422.

day due to his divergent allusions to Genesis 2:2 and Exodus 20:11. Thus far in his eschatological explication, it appears—at least on the surface—that the author of *Barnabas* believed everything would be brought to an end or finished in six days (Barn. 15.5), while the texts he quoted suggests God completed the work of his hands in those six days but “finished on the seventh day” (συνετέλεσεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ), “rested on it” (κατέπαυσεν ἐν αὐτῇ), and “sanctified it” (ἡγίασεν αὐτήν) (Barn. 15.3). Thus, two apparently mutually exclusive things took place in the past typological days of the creation week: God finished the works of his hands on the seventh day, and God rested on it.

Leaving this tension for a moment, we move on to the remainder of the typological interpretation of the sabbath. He begins with another quotation, “Moreover, he also says, in fact, ‘Sanctify (ἀγιάσεις) it with clean hands and a clean heart’ (Barn. 15.6).²³ Having relayed this exhortation to sanctify the sabbath, the author of *Barnabas* first explains what it cannot mean: a present fulfillment by strictly obeying the fourth commandment. He writes, “Therefore, if someone is now able to sanctify what God sanctified by being pure in heart, we have been completely deceived” (Barn. 15.6). God had “sanctified” the sabbath, the seventh day after creation, thereby extending a mandate for his people also to sanctify it by having clean hands and a pure heart. However, people now (νῦν) are unable to sanctify it as God intended, apparently because nobody is capable of being entirely pure and holy in heart and hand. The author takes the requirement of a pure heart literally, but rather than opting for its fulfillment through a rigorous perfectionism in this life, he pushes it forward into the future eschatological sabbath. The author of *Barnabas* leaves us with two alternatives: either God has deceived us by giving a command people cannot possibly keep, or the command to sanctify the sabbath is intended to be fulfilled in some future time when his people will be made capable of fulfilling it.

Not surprisingly, the second alternative is the direction in which he moves: “Then observe that (ἴδε ὅτι ἄρα) while we are truly resting (τότε καλῶς καταπαυόμενοι) we will sanctify it (ἀγιάσομεν αὐτήν), when we ourselves will be capable, having been made righteous and having received the promise (when the existence of lawlessness is no more, but when all things have been made new by the Lord) then we will be able to sanctify it, we ourselves having been sanctified first” (Barn. 15.7). The phrase τότε καλῶς καταπαυόμενοι (“while we are truly resting”) corresponds to the condition that comes upon the earth after the Son comes—“then he will truly rest on the seventh day (τότε καλῶς καταπαύσεται ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ)” (15.5). Thus, in the author’s eschatological reckoning the “seventh day” of rest comes after the coming of the Son and corresponds to a 1000-year period, just as the six days of creation corresponded to a 6000-year period.

Several conditions will prevail during that future era, constituting “resting” and “sanctifying” the seventh day as understood spiritually and eschatologically. First, the redeemed will be able to fulfill the imperative to sanctify the sabbath because they will have been made capable—ὅτε

²³ The second-person singular imperative seems to reflect the use of the second person singular throughout the ten commandments in Exodus 20 and need not concern us.

δυνησόμεθα. This implies a kind of transformation of character sufficient for perfect holiness. The future middle indicative is then modified by a string of adverbial participles of cause or attendant circumstance—explaining how it is that they will be made capable of ultimately sanctifying the sabbath. The participles support the assertion that the redeemed will be able to sanctify and thus rest on the eschatological sabbath. This is confirmed by the final τότε clause that concludes the chain of participles: “Then we will be able to sanctify it (τότε δυνησόμεθα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσαι), we ourselves having been sanctified first (αὐτοὶ ἀγιασθέντες πρῶτον)” (Barn. 15.7), returning us to his original assertion.²⁴

Therefore, the participles are best understood as relating not generally to the entire physical world but specifically to the redeemed people. To be eschatologically righteous (δικαιωθέντες) and holy (ἀγιασθέντες) are results of having received the promise (ἀπολαβόντες τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν), no longer existing in a state of lawlessness (μηκέτι οὔσης τῆς ἀνομίας) but rather all things having been made new by the Lord (καινῶν δὲ γεγονότων πάντων ὑπὸ κυρίου). Though it would be tempting to assign both the banishment of lawlessness and the renewal of all things universally to the cosmos—that is, all creation itself—this is implausible given the syntactical relationship between these participial phrases and the main verb. This is especially underscored by the emphatic use of αὐτοὶ both preceding and following the participles: “when we ourselves will be capable (ὅτε δυνησόμεθα αὐτοί)” (15.7) and “we ourselves having been sanctified first (αὐτοὶ ἀγιασθέντες πρῶτον)” (15.7). These emphatic uses of αὐτοὶ remind us that the participles refer to personal—not cosmic—conditions that enable the person to be capable of sinless and holy perfection. Specifically, the conditions involve “having received the promise” (ἀπολαβόντες τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν).

The phrase “the promise” (ἡ ἐπαγγελία), with the definite article, seems to refer to something well-known, related conceptually to the cessation of all lawlessness in a person’s life because they had been made completely new by the Lord.²⁵ Thus, most likely “the promise” relates to the realization of God’s plan of redemption when humanity is resurrected immortal and transformed into a new condition no longer subject to temptation and sin but made new by the Lord (see 1 Cor 15:51–54; Phil 3:20–21; 1 Thess 4:13–18). During the future sabbath—or seventh 1000-year period—the saints will be fully sanctified, sinless, made completely new by bodily resurrection and

²⁴ The author logically structures his argument in Barn. 15.7 as follows:

“While we are truly resting we will sanctify it, when we ourselves will be capable, having been made righteous and having received the promise, (the existence of lawlessness being no more, but all things having been made new by the Lord), then we will be able to sanctify it, we ourselves having been sanctified first.”

²⁵ Though “the promise” is associated with the promise of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:39), the promise of the second coming of Christ (2 Pet 3:4), the promise of Israel’s inheritance of the land (Rom 4:13; 9:8; Gal 3:18), and eternal life in Christ (2 Tim 1:1; 1 John 2:25), the book of Hebrews associates “the promise” of entering sabbath rest—presumably related to the promise of eternal life and future inheritance (Heb 4:1; 9:15; 10:36).

glorification, able to be pure of heart and hand, and thus made capable of truly sanctifying the eschatological sabbath.²⁶

In the preceding eschatological discussion, the author has sought to annul the Jewish and Judaizing interpretation and application of the Old Testament sabbath law by 1) showing the creation week was actually meant to be understood eschatologically, not literally; and 2) demonstrating that the command itself to keep the sabbath holy was in any case impossible to fulfill in our present sinful state; thus, it must be fulfilled in the future when we are made sinless and immortal. This, then, presents the Christian's spiritual and eschatological interpretation of the fulfillment of the sabbath. The author continues his assault on the present observance of sabbaths as holy days, contrasting it with the Christian celebration of the resurrection of Jesus not on the seventh day but on the eighth.

He writes, quoting from the LXX of Isaiah 1:13, “And finally he certainly says to them, ‘Your new moons and sabbaths I cannot endure.’ Do you get what he means? ‘Such sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but that which I have made (ἀλλὰ ὁ πεποικα), by which, after causing everything to rest (ἐν ᾧ καταπαύσας τὰ πάντα), I will make a beginning of an eighth day (ἀρχὴν ἡμέρας ογδόης ποιήσω), which is a beginning of another world (ὁ ἐστὶν ἄλλου κόσμου ἀρχήν)” (Barn. 15.8).²⁷ The tenses are important here. First, writing as from the perspective of the Lord himself, the author of *Barnabas* has God declaring that the merely human sabbaths repeated week after

²⁶ This reading is confirmed by the author's discussion in Barn. 6, in which he suggests an already/not-yet understanding of the individual believer's new creation. In explaining the fulfillment of the inheritance of the “good land” flowing with milk and honey promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Barn. 6.8, 10; cf. Exod 33:1–3, Deut. 6:18), casting Jesus as both the second Adam and the new “Joshua” (Barn. 6.9). This is spiritually fulfilled in the present: “Therefore, since he renewed us (ἐκαίνεσεν) by the release from sins, he made us [to be] another type (ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς ἄλλον τύπον), as having the soul of children, as if he were fashioning us anew (ἀναπλάσσοντος)” (Barn. 6.11). The author then applies Genesis 1:26 to Christians—not only created anew according to the image of Christ, but also given authority to rule over the birds of the sky and fish of the sea as well as to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Barn. 6.12). This passage, the author says, refers to the “a second creation” (δευτέραν πλάσιν) made “in the last days” (6.13). With the principle that he is making the last things like the first, he returns to the promise of leading his people into a land flowing with milk in honey to rule over it (6.13, Exod 33.3). At this point the author notes that Christians in the present age have already been “formed anew” (ἀναπεπλάσμεθα) through the transformation of the heart from stone to flesh (Ezek. 11.19), rendering our hearts a holy temple of the Lord (Barn. 6.14–15). Thus, the church, having been transformed spiritually in the present were “led into the good land” (6.17). Yet this spiritual renewal does not exhaust the eschatological fulfillment. Rather, he sees the present spiritual reality as but the beginning of a future fulfillment. Just as children are first nourished by honey, then milk (πρώτων...μέλιτι, εἶτα γάλακτι), Christians are presently nourished (ζωοποιούμενοι) by the faith of the promise and by the word, but will, in the future, live (ζήσομεν, future active indicative) when they will be exercising dominion over the earth (Barn. 6.17). The author sees this ultimate fulfillment as a future reality, noting that at the present we are not able to rule over the beasts, fish, or sea, that we do not presently have rule and authority over creation (Barn. 6.18). He writes, “If, then, this does not now take place (εἰ οὐκ οὐ γίνεται τοῦτο νῦν), then he has told us when: when even we ourselves have been perfected (ὅταν καὶ αὐτοὶ τελειωθῶμεν) to become heirs of the Lord's covenant” (Barn. 6.19). Similarly, in his discussion of the future sabbath age, when we ourselves have been made new—not just partially and spiritually, but entirely—we will receive the promise (15.7). Cf. similar connections made by Lookadoo, *Epistle of Barnabas*, 112.

²⁷ Prigent suggests the possibility that this first-person quotation may be a paraphrastic treatment of 2 En. 33.1–2 (Prigent, *L'Épître de Barnabé*, 69). The thoughts are similar. Considering, though, 2 En. 33 is available only in a late Slavonic translation of an earlier Greek text, it could be that *Barnabas* 15 preserves a somewhat purer form of that passage, though this is speculative.

week are not acceptable. The only acceptable “sabbath” is “that which I have made” (ὁ πεποίηκα, perfect active indicative)—the sabbath already fashioned in God’s plan and purpose. This corresponds to the sabbath rest ushered in by the return of Christ, during which the righteous will have been made perfectly new, free from all lawlessness, and holy in heart and hands. The next clause then tells us that this very sabbath will be the means by which (or the time during which) God commences a completely new world: “by which...I will make a beginning of an eighth day” (ἐν ᾧ...ἀρχὴν ἡμέρας ὀγδῶς ποιήσω). The aorist active participial phrase, καταπαύσας τὰ πάντα, as an attendant circumstance related to the main verb, ποιήσω, is vital to understanding the logical (and thus chronological) relationship between the seventh-day “sabbath” and the eighth-day “other world.”²⁸

Those exegetes who conflate the seventh and eighth days, making the sabbath rest itself the eighth day—the “other world”—have neglected the syntactical relationship between the aorist participle and its place prior to the future active verb. Had the author intended to mark these periods as coterminous, he would have had to assert a simultaneous action of the “setting everything at rest” (καταπαύσας τὰ πάντα) and making “the beginning of an eighth day” (ἀρχὴν ἡμέρας ὀγδῶς ποιήσω). To assert this, however, the author would have used not an aorist participle (καταπαύσας), but a present participle. Instead, the author used an aorist participle preceding the main verb, the normal way of indicating a circumstance that precedes the action of the main verb in the future tense. In short, the author’s grammatical and syntactical construction makes the best sense if he intended to communicate that the period of seventh-day sabbath rest indicated by καταπαύσας τὰ πάντα chronologically precedes the eighth day “other world.”²⁹

Many render ἐν ᾧ as “in which,” meaning “during which,” then claim the author actually reckoned the eighth day of the new world and the seventh day sabbath as the same day, thus swallowing up the seventh 1000-year sabbath by an eternal rest.³⁰ Even if ἐν ᾧ were meant to be

²⁸ Burton notes, “If the action of the participle is antecedent to that of the verb, the participle most commonly precedes the verb, but not invariably. Such a participle is usually in the Aorist tense..., but occasionally in the Present.... If the action of the participle is simultaneous with that of the verb, it may either precede or follow the verb, more frequently the latter. It is of course in the Present tense” (Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3d ed. [Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1898], 174).

²⁹ The modern interpretations of Barn. 15 that conflate the seventh and eighth days overlook the fact that the author presents the history of the world as consisting of six consecutive days that equal six consecutive thousand-year periods spanning the course of human history. At the end of the sixth thousand-year period, the Lord will return and destroy the times of the lawless one. Then, after that return, the world will experience the “sabbath,” the seventh day. In the author’s own typological scheme, this seventh day must last a thousand years. One may be tempted to deflect this simple fact by suggesting that the author of *Barnabas* should not be expected to interpret the “six thousand years” and thus the “seventh thousand year” literally, given his deep proclivity for allegorical and non-literal interpretation (e.g., Kraft, *Barnabas and Didache*, 128). However, the six-thousand-year scheme is already the result of the author’s allegorical interpretation of the six days of creation, and the future seventh thousand-year period is an interpretation of the seventh-day rest of the creation week. An allegory of an allegory is certainly plausible, but not likely.

³⁰ Rhodes notes: “Barnabas speaks of the sabbath ‘on which’ (ἐν ᾧ) the eighth day will be created. Earlier scholars saw Barnabas as a representative of chiliastic ideas whereby the seventh day represents a thousand year interregnum before the renewal of all things. More recent scholarship affirms instead that Barnabas collapses the seventh and eight [sic] days into one, a conception that is found in Clement of Alexandria and linked to the fact that the seventh letter

taken as a marker of the period of time—“during which”—this would still not collapse the eighth day into the seventh. Rather, the author would be asserting that the renewal of creation will occur during the future sabbath period, during which (ἐν ᾧ) God will actively and progressively make all things new, resulting in the complete renewal of creation at its conclusion. The author does not say, as is alleged by some, ἐν ᾧ ποιήσω ἡμέρας ὀγδόης (“in which I will make an eighth day”), but ἐν ᾧ ποιήσω ἀρχὴν ἡμέρας ὀγδόης, that is, “in which I am making a beginning of an eighth day.” The term ἀρχή can be understood as the source, cause, or origin of the eighth day that flows from the seventh.³¹ Nevertheless, the phrase ἐν ᾧ is often used instrumentally or as agency, better translated “by which” or “by means of which.” Thus, the eschatological sabbath would be viewed as the means by which God makes the beginning of a new world, represented by the eighth day. In either case—during which or by which—the text is not asserting that the seventh day is the eighth day but that the seventh day is the beginning or commencement of the eighth day—a new world.³²

(η) of the Greek alphabet serves as the number eight (η’)” (Rhodes, *Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomistic Tradition*, 70–71).

³¹ Windisch suggests, “Ob er in dem Stück 1—7 über das siebte Jahrtausend hinausgedacht und im Sinn von Apoc 20 1 ff. . . . dieses Jahrtausend als sein Zwischenreich sich vorgestellt hat, ist sehr fraglich: was Apokalypse 20 7 ff. auf das 1000jährige Reich noch folgt, ist nach Barn. 5 endgültig schon am Ende der 6000 Jahre geschehen” (Windisch, *Der Barnabasbrief*, 385). However, this would only be the case if one insists on reading the transformations accomplished at the coming of Christ at the end of 6000 years in cosmic rather than individual terms. Thus, the seventh period of a thousand years would not itself be regarded as the eighth day, but merely the beginning phase of that new world.

³² The use of the “world-week” scheme of 6000 years of human history followed by a “sabbath” rest is common among both Jewish and Christian writers, regardless of whether they are chiliasts (see comprehensive survey of the primary source evidence for the “world-week” scheme in Alfred Wikenhauser, “Weltwoche und tausendjähriges Reich,” *TQ* 127.4 [1947]: 399–417). Wikenhauser explains, “Da nach dem Schema der Weltwoche das Ende dieser Weltzeit in das Jahr 6000 fällt, müssen die Anhänger des Chiliasmus mit diesem Jahr das tausendjährige Reich und mit dem Jahr 7000 das ewige Gottesreich beginnen, die Gegner des Chiliasmus dagegen mit dem Jahr 6000 das definitive Weltende und den Beginn der zeitlosen Ewigkeit eintreten lassen” (Wikenhauser, *Weltwoche*, 415). In every case, though, in which the seventh thousand-year period as the “sabbath” is used in conjunction with a subsequent “eighth day,” the sabbath millennium refers to an intermediate kingdom followed by the eternal new creation. Thus, in a fragmentary commentary on Matthew, presumably from Victorinus of Pettau, we have a description of the “seventh day sabbath” millennial reign that follows Christ’s return (*Salvator ergo inpleto sexto millesimo anno venturus est, ut septimum millesimum annum hic regnet*). This is then followed by the release of Satan and his demons for a final judgment, which is then followed by the eighth day-millennium, in which all things are renewed and returned to God (*in octoadem omnia meliorabuntur reversa ad Deum*) (See Wikenhauser, *Weltwoche*, 403). In this scheme, *septimus vero, id est sabbatum, septimi millesimi umbra est, qui cessationem mundanis operibus futuram septimo millesimo anno incipiente significat* (“Indeed, the seventh, that is, the sabbath, is the shadow of the seventh millennium, which signifies the future cessation of worldly works in the beginning of the seventh thousand years”). However, *octavus autem dies, qui primus post sabbatum et ante sabbatum est, . . . hic ergo typum habet octoadis, quia omnia redeunt reformata ad Deum* (“The eighth day, which is both after and before the sabbath, . . . then, is a type of the octoad, because all things, being reformed, return to God”) (Wikenhauser, *Weltwoche*, 404). In no case is the eighth day referred to as a sabbath; only the seventh day is given this designation. In fact, not only is the eschatological “eighth day” not regarded as a fulfillment of the sabbath, when it is mentioned in an eschatological connection, it is rather regarded as the antitype of “circumcision.” Wikenhauser summarizes, “Manche [non-chiliasts] sprechen auch von der Ewigkeit als dem achten Tage und sehen in der Beschneidung am achten Tage das Vorbild” (*Weltwoche*, 416). Thus, in Jerome’s comments on Psalm 89 (*Epistle 140 Ad Cyprianum presbyterum*), we read: “*Quia mundus in sex diebus fabricatus est, sex millibus annorum tantum credatur subsistere et postea venire septenarium numerum et octonarium, in quo verus exercetur sabbatismus et circumcisionis puritas redditur*” (cited in Wikenhauser, *Weltwoche*, 410. Text available in Migne, *Patristica Latina* 22, 1172). This is important because we have been told by those who have rejected *Barnabas* 15 as

Furthermore, that the eschatological eighth day must chronologically follow the seventh day rather than concur with it is made clear by the practical implications the author draws from this eschatological scheme. The author concludes, “For this reason (διό) we also spend the eighth day in celebration (καὶ ἄγομεν τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ὀγδόην εἰς εὐφροσύνην), on which also Jesus rose from the dead and, being made manifest, ascended into heaven” (Barn. 15.9). The author is appealing to his eschatological scheme to explain why Christians celebrate (εὐφροσύνην) on Sunday rather than on the Jewish sabbath of Saturday. They do so because after the eschatological sabbath of a thousand years following the return of Christ, the world will have been renewed throughout that sabbath, resulting in an eschatological “eighth day,” which is another world—presumably an eternal day, though the text does not make this clear.

Just as the bodies of the saints had been made completely new when all lawlessness had been banished from their lives during the sabbath rest (Barn. 15.7), so also the whole world will be made new and all lawlessness utterly banished in the eighth day—the renewed world (Barn. 15.8; cf. Rom 8:19–23; Rev 21:1, 5). The author’s explanation for why Christians celebrate the eighth day (the day after the Jewish sabbath) rather than on the seventh day would fail in contradiction if his eschatological scheme collapsed the eschatological seventh and eighth days into one eternal day.³³ Thus, the author must be read as teaching an eschatological scheme in which a thousand-year period follows the second coming, which period will itself be followed by an “eighth” day of another world.³⁴

In the eschatological expectation of *Barnabas*, while the resurrected, glorified saints will have been made able fully to rest and to make the sabbath holy, the rest of the world will still require renewal through its liberation from a bondage to corruption. This work of the seventh-day sabbath,

presenting a chiliastic scheme, that the author of *Barnabas* indicates two sabbath days—the seventh and the eighth. Yet in fact he indicates no such thing. If the author of *Barnabas* were attempting to set forth an eschatology in which the seventh day was the eternal rest of the new creation, he should not have mentioned the eighth day at all. Because his polemical purpose was to demonstrate that the present sabbath observances of the Jews was a complete misunderstanding of the intention of the law, which was spiritual and eschatological, his point would have been made by simply explaining the typological nature of the sabbath as the eternal new creation. Rather, Barn. 15 presents the eighth day not as a sabbath but as the beginning of another world—the new creation, which fits comfortably in the typical premillennial and chiliastic scheme consistent with the world-week.

³³ Shea rightly observes: “The greatest reason against making the two days identical is the basic purpose of the chapter. If the future seventh and eighth days begin together (at the end of the sixth day) then so do the week days in this present age, and that leaves Christians keeping the seventh-day Sabbath which is exactly what the writer did not want, and against which he was writing. A distinction between the seventh and eighth days both present and future is vital to the author’s anti-Sabbatarian cause” (William H. Shea, “The Sabbath in the Epistle of Barnabas,” *AUSS* 4.2 [1966]: 168).

³⁴ Wikenhauser also acknowledges the problem with those who adopted the “Weltwoche” scheme without a seventh day sabbath of a thousand years: “Die Folgerichtigkeit liegt offensichtlich auf Seiten der Chiliasten. Ist die Schöpfungswoche mit sechs Arbeitstagen und einem Ruhetag der Typus der gesamten Dauer der geschaffenen Welt, so muß diese 6000 + 1000 Jahre dauern und dann ein Ende nehmen. Die Gegner des Chiliasmus gerieten beim Festhalten an der Weltwoche in gewisse Schwierigkeiten” (Wikenhauser, “Weltwoche und tausendjähriges Reich,” 415). Wikenhauser is correct that from the perspective of typology, a chiliastic scheme is a much better fit than the non-chiliastic approach, which is why non-chiliasts who still embraced the world-week chronology regarded the seventh-day sabbath as a symbol for the eternal new creation.

then, will be the beginning or starting-point for the new world, represented by the eighth day. This begins to explain why the author of *Barnabas* did not seem to have been too concerned that his quotation of the Old Testament suggested God both rested and finished his work “on the seventh day.” Instead of charging the author of *Barnabas* with inconsistency or sloppy use to traditional materials, perhaps he was actually presenting in short form a fairly well-developed eschatology of progressive cosmic renewal that would occur throughout the future millennial period, culminating in the new creation.³⁵

The Anachronistic Appeal to Clement of Alexandria

In his negative answer to the question of whether Barnabas was a chiliast, Ferguson appeals to Clement of Alexandria in order to place Barnabas in a non-chiliastic tradition rather than in the chiliastic tradition of fathers like Justin and Irenaeus.³⁶ Ferguson does not hide the fact that his reading of Clement’s treatment of the fourth commandment led him to his own conclusions regarding the conflation of the seventh and eighth days in Barnabas 15: “Indeed, it was reading Clement that led me to reexamine the passage in *Barnabas* and suggest another way of interpreting its author.”³⁷ He makes the case that in Clement of Alexandria we have early evidence of how Barnabas’s conflation of the seventh and eighth days—apparently seen clearly by Clement—were explained by the Alexandrian. Yet one could also argue that no such conflation or confusion of the seventh and eighth days in Barnabas 15 existed, but that Clement himself fashioned the conflation in order to accept the authority of Barnabas as apostolic while reinterpreting his millennialism through a clever and complicated form of exegesis. That is, Clement worked Barnabas 15 over until its millennial teachings were no longer visible under his creative interpretations. His exegesis did not uncover the true meaning of Barnabas 15; it purposely obscured it.³⁸

³⁵ Rordorf grasps the broader early Jewish and Christian theological context of Barn. 15 well when he notes that in patristic writings “there are passages which refer to the future sabbath as the time of fulfilment when God will be all in all.... On the other hand, however, perhaps even more often we find a chiliastic idea of a preliminary golden age; this age would not be the end, but would last one thousand years and lead to the dawn of the new aeon. The millennium (not naturally understood as the reign of Jesus the Messiah) in this case corresponded to the seventh period of a thousand years, that is to say, to the cosmic sabbath; after that would follow the final golden age which came to be called by Christians the ‘eighth day’” (Rordorf, *Sunday*, 90–91).

³⁶ Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?,” 165.

³⁷ Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?,” 165. He is correct that Barnabas was held in high regard by Clement of Alexandria and the Alexandrian community for some time. Clement himself quoted Barnabas as authoritative Scripture, believing it to have been written by the “Apostle Barnabas” (Clem. *Strom.* 2.6 [Barn. 1]; 2.7 [Barn. 4]; 2.15 [Barn. 10]; 2.18 [Barn. 21]; 2.20 [Barn. 16]; 5.8 [Barn. 10]; 5.10 [Barn. 6]).

³⁸ In Clement’s *Stromata* 6.16, where he discusses the spiritual interpretation of the ten commandments, he spends most of his time explaining the significance of the fourth (the sabbath) for “knowing” or “knowledgeable”—“gnostic”—Christians. Though he refers to the eschatological sabbath in this connection, he does not actually refer to or cite Barn. 15 explicitly. This reluctance to cite *Barnabas* in his spiritual interpretation of the sabbath is somewhat surprising, considering Clement’s numerous previous appeals to *Barnabas* as an authoritative apostolic source. It is beyond doubt that Clement was aware of the content of Barn. 15. That Clement does not explicitly cite *Barnabas* in

In dealing with the proper “gnostic” interpretation of the decalogue (σαφήνειαν γνωστικὴν ἢ Δεκάλογος) in *Stromata* 6.16, Clement begins by employing symbolism for the significance of the number “ten.” With regard to the fourth commandment on the sabbath, Clement slows his otherwise rapid exposition of the decalogue to a crawl, spending more than twice as much time explaining the symbolism of the numbers and their spiritual significance than he did on all the rest of the decalogue combined. Bauckham explains, “[Clement’s] concern is neither with days of the week nor with physical rest. His declared purpose in expounding the Decalogue in *Str.* 6.16 was to provide an example of gnostic as opposed to literal exposition.”³⁹ Kalvesmaki writes, “When he arrives at the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, Clement pursues a lengthy tangent, to discuss the relationship between the numbers six, seven, and eight.”⁴⁰

A close and thorough exegesis of Clement’s spiritual interpretation of the numbers is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴¹ However, a few matters must be highlighted with regard to Clement’s treatment of the sabbath commandment. First, Clement acknowledges that the command affirms that God created the world and gave humans the seventh day as a rest (ἀνάπαυσιν) because of the afflictions of this physical life (διὰ τὴν κατὰ τὸν βίον κακοπάθειαν). The “rest” has nothing to do with God himself needing rest from labor or suffering, but we “flesh-bearers” needing rest. It is clear up front that Clement first understands the command as having had—at least initially—a literal, this-worldly application. Yet in keeping with his pattern, he quickly moves from a literal interpretation to a spiritual interpretation. He notes, “The seventh day is proclaimed as a rest—an abstention from evils (ἀποχή κακῶν)—preparing for the primordial day (τὴν ἀρχέγονον ἡμέραν), which is our actual rest (τὴν τῷ ὄντι ἀνάπαυσιν ἡμῶν).” That is, because the days of the week restart after the seventh day, this “primordial day” that follows the sabbath as an abstention from evils prepares for a restart. This, then, allows Clement to draw from the first day of creation and the creation of light and the illumination of wisdom and knowledge, which then points to the “true light”—the Spirit of God and the sanctification by faith. At the conclusion of this flourish of interpretations, Clement concludes: “Therefore, following him through all of life (δι’ ὅλου τοῦ βίου) we become impassible (ἀπαθεῖς καθιστάμεθα), and this is to rest (τὸ δέ ἐστιν ἀναπαύσασθαι).” It seems, then, that at least as an initial interpretation, Clement regards the Christian application of the sabbath not as a literal day of rest, like the Jewish application, but as a present abstention from moral evils by the sanctifying power of the Spirit, all in anticipation of the eternal (heavenly?) rest when they experience impassibility. The “following him through all his

support of his conflation of the seventh and eighth days—while expounding on the concept at length—may suggest that the treatment of the seventh and eighth days in *Barnabas* were not sufficiently clear for Clement’s purposes.

³⁹ Richard J. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 276.

⁴⁰ Joel Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic: Number Symbolism in Platonism and Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013), 128.

⁴¹ See Kalvesmaki’s chapter, “The Orthodox Possibilities of the Theology of Arithmetic: Clement of Alexandria” for a detailed exposition of Clement’s fantastic use of number symbolism (Kalvesmaki, *Theology of Arithmetic*, 125–151).

life” must refer to the present earthly reality of physical existence (τοῦ βίου), which will eventually give way to eternal life in another plane of existence. This, at least, is one of Clement’s interpretations—a spiritual, moral interpretation common among Valentinianism at the time.⁴²

Yet Clement adds to this ethical application of the sabbath as a rest from wickedness the concept of eschatological rest, also common in Christian circles in the late second century, as evidenced by Barnabas and Irenaeus. Clement then launches into his long excursus on the relationship between the sixth, seventh, and eighth days of the creation week and their allegorical interpretation. At this point, Clement suggests that “the eighth may be properly the seventh, while the seventh appears as the sixth, and this is properly the sabbath, while the seventh is a [day] of work.” In other words, Clement is shifting the sabbath forward to the eighth day and regarding the seventh day as a day of labor. Clement’s complex and convoluted exposition then draws on a number of traditions regarding the numbers six, seven, and eight. He makes much of the fact that in the Greek numbering system, the character representing the number 6 is not the sixth number of the alphabet, *zeta*, but *digamma*, so the sixth letter, *zeta* represents the number 7, while the seventh letter, *eta*, represents 8. Bauckham notes, “The major theme of the complex allegorical treatment of the numbers six, seven, and eight...seems to be that through the knowledge of Christ, man, who was created on the sixth day, attains to the eschatological rest of the seventh and the divine fruition of the eighth.”⁴³ This provides Clement license to shift the eighth day to the seventh slot as the day of true rest while regarding the seventh day as a day of labor. The argument is, of course, obscure, except in the world of symbolic numbers in which Clement dwells. Yet Bauckham rightly identifies Clement’s motivation in the numerological conflation of the seventh and eighth: “The numerology is also designed to demonstrate the intimate relationship of the numbers seven and eight, for here as elsewhere (cf. *Stromata* 4:25) Clement seeks to unite the two concepts of rest, the church’s tradition of the eschatological, Sabbath rest and the Egyptian Valentinian tradition of the cosmological rest of the ogdoad.”⁴⁴ In Valentinianism, the hebdomad—the seventh heaven—is one plane of exaltation, while the ogdoad—the eighth—represents the highest plane.

Simply put, in *Stromata* 6.16, Clement of Alexandria is not providing his readers with a true exposition of Barnabas 15 in the Alexandrian tradition. Rather, Clement is attempting to harmonize three traditions regarding the sabbath by a fantastically convoluted and probably inconsistent exegesis—the eschatological interpretation of Barnabas 15, the moral/ethical interpretation of Hebrews 4:1–11, and the spiritual/heavenly interpretation of Valentinian Gnosticism.⁴⁵

Ferguson’s defense of a non-chiliastic reading of *Barnabas* by appealing to Clement of Alexandria depends on a problem that does not really exist—an inconsistency in Barnabas 15 “in

⁴² Cf. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” 276-77.

⁴³ Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” 277.

⁴⁴ Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” 277.

⁴⁵ Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” 276-277.

combining two different eschatological schemes as if they were one.”⁴⁶ I have shown that this reading of Barnabas 15 is not only unnecessary but unlikely. Clement of Alexandria—not Barnabas—is the first to conflate the seventh and eighth days eschatologically. This leads to a major methodological flaw in Ferguson’s argument—reading Clement’s attempt at reconciling the eschatology of Barnabas 15 with the eschatology of Valentinian Gnosticism backward into Barnabas 15. Another perplexing problem with using Clement of Alexandria as the interpretive key for a non-chilastic reading of Barnabas 15 presents itself. Clement quotes repeatedly from Barnabas as an authoritative apostolic writing throughout the *Stromata*, especially the author’s spiritual interpretation of the Law. Why, then, does Clement not directly refer to Barnabas 15 in *Stromata* 6.16 in his true interpretation of the sabbath for the gnostic Christian? In light of these facts, it is best to see Clement attempting to rehabilitate Barnabas 15 of its obvious chiliasm without directly engaging the text of *Barnabas* itself. The fact is, Clement of Alexandria, almost certainly a non-chilist, spends a considerable amount of time attempting to demonstrate how “seven” and “eight” can refer to the same period of time. This fanciful exegesis and argumentation fall short.

Instead of appealing to the later reinterpretation of the seventh and eighth days by Clement of Alexandria, the eschatological scheme actually presented by the author of *Barnabas* better aligns with that found in the first-century Slavonic *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, or, more commonly, 2 Enoch.⁴⁷ There we read, “And I appointed the eighth day also, that the eighth day should be the first-created after my work, and that *the first seven* revolve in the form of the seventh thousand, and that at the beginning of the eighth thousand there should be a time of not-counting, endless, with neither years nor months nor weeks nor days nor hours” (2 En. 33.1–2).⁴⁸ *Second Enoch* was likely composed in the first century, perhaps in Egypt.⁴⁹ Thus, it probably predates the comments

⁴⁶ Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?,” 167.

⁴⁷ 2 Enoch was likely composed in the first century, perhaps in Egypt. Thus, it probably predates the comments of Barn. 15 or represents a contemporary parallel to its ideas of the millennium. Angelo O’Hagan summarizes the broader Jewish eschatological thinking current during the time between the testaments: “The simplest practical solution was to postulate an interim period of national glory in the last days before the final era was really inaugurated. The older tradition had thought of the coming of the Messiah as the initiation of the ultimate age. Under the influence, however, of more individual notions of reward this position had to be altered. The tendency was towards a compromise in which the age of the Messiah was not strictly final: it was to be limited as an earthly phenomenon. The limits were naturally a matter of much dispute, but whether the figure set was forty, a thousand or seven thousand, the world to come was to break through only after this interposed period was completed. Then only was the final judgment, the Day of the Lord, to take place, and then too the ultimate changing of the cosmos” (Angelo O’Hagan, *Material Re-Creation in the Apostolic Fathers*, TUGAL, vol. 100 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1968), 31–32). O’Hagan cites examples from 2 Bar. 30, Sib.Or. 3.652–670; Rev 20; 1 En. 91.12, 16–17 as well as 4 Esd. 7.31, 75, 113, also noting *Testament of Abraham* 13. O’Hagan himself notes this is an “oversimplification,” asserting that the literature of the first century and beyond is marked by confusion and contradiction (O’Hagan, *Material Re-Creation*, 32).

⁴⁸ Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2: 451.

⁴⁹ See Charles, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2: 425. More recently, see arguments in Christfried Böttrich, “The ‘Book of the Secrets of Enoch’ (2 EN): Between Jewish Origin and Christian Transmission. An Overview,” in *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*, ed. Andrei Orlov and Gabriele Boccaccini (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 52–59. Regarding provenance, Böttrich notes, “A majority of scholars rightly tends to locate the original of Greek 2 Enoch in the important Jewish metropolis of Alexandria. There seems to be no serious alternative to such a locale” (Böttrich, “The ‘Book of the Secrets of Enoch,’” 58–59). Navtanovich concurs, adding, “The discovery of the Coptic

of Barnabas 15 or may even represent a contemporary parallel to its ideas of the millennium. It seems from a sound methodological perspective, reading Barnabas 15 in light of the near-contemporary background of 2 Enoch makes more sense that reading Barnabas 15 in light of later comments by Clement of Alexandria nearly a century later. To me, this seems self-evident, especially given Clement's motivation to reinterpret the assertions of Barnabas 15 in light of his non-chiliastic eschatology.

If we were to explore other early interpretations of Barnabas 15 (or if not interpretations of *Barnabas* itself, at least other early eschatological readings of the creation week) we would discover the fathers of the second and third centuries understood the typology in ways far different from Clement's. Following a common tradition among premillennialists before him, Hippolytus reckons the history of the world in terms of thousand-year periods, estimating that his own day was nearing the end of the six thousand years.⁵⁰ He writes, "And 6,000 years must needs be accomplished, in order that the Sabbath may come, the rest, the holy day 'on which God rested from all His works.' For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they 'shall reign with Christ,' when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse: for 'a day with the Lord is as a thousand years.' Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that 6,000 years must be fulfilled. And they are not yet fulfilled, as John says: 'five are fallen; one is,' that is, the sixth; 'the other is not yet come'" (Hippolytus, *On Daniel* 2.4 [ANF 5]). Despite what many regard as a desperate and absurd typology of the six days of creation, one thing is

fragments in the region of Egyptian Nubia appears to support this possibility" (Liudmila Navtanovich, "The Provenance of 2 Enoch: A Philological Perspective. A Response to C. Böttrich's Paper "The "Book of the Secrets of Enoch" (2 EN): Between Jewish Origin and Christian Transmission. An Overview,"" in *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*, ed. Andrei Orlov and Gabriele Boccaccini [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 80). See also Andrei A. Orlov, "The Sacerdotal Traditions of 2 Enoch and the Date of the Text," in *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*, ed. Andrei Orlov and Gabriele Boccaccini (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 116.

⁵⁰ The first step in describing the eschatology of Hippolytus of Rome is to determine Hippolytus's authentic writings from which to draw this eschatological outlook. This process is complicated by the controversy surrounding Hippolytus in contemporary scholarship. For a history of historical-critical debate surrounding Hippolytus, see David Dunbar, "The Problem of Hippolytus of Rome: A Study in Historical-Critical Reconstruction," *JETS* 25/1 (1982): 63–74. For a good overview of views on authorship of extant texts, see T. C. Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome: Commentary on Daniel and 'Chronicon'*, Gorgias Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics, vol. 67 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2017), 2–7. The fourth-century historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, provides this list of Hippolytus's works, which he himself concedes is merely a partial list: "Of his other treatises the following have reached us: *On the Hexaëmeron*, *On what followed the Hexaëmeron*, *Against Marcion*, *On the Song*, *On Parts of Esekiel*, *On the Pascha*, *Against All the Heresies*; and very many others also might be found preserved by many people" (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History* 6.22.1–2. Translation from *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake and J. E. L. Oulton, vol. 2, LCL [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926–1932], 69). In the fifth century, Jerome supplements this partial list with *On the Six Days of Creation*, *On Exodus*, *On the Song of Songs*, *On Genesis*, *On Zechariah*, *On the Psalms*, *On Isaiah*, *On Daniel*, *On the Apocalypse*, *On the Proverbs*, *On Ecclesiastes*, *On Saul*, *On the Pythonissa*, *On the Antichrist*, *On the resurrection*, *Against Marcion*, *On the Passover*, *Against all heresies*, and an exhortation *On the praise of our Lord and Saviour* (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men* 61). Though *Refutation of All Heresies* is anonymous, I regard Hippolytus as its author, along with many others (Dunbar, "The Problem of Hippolytus of Rome," 66). His commentary on Daniel, written around AD 204 in Rome, I also regard as authentic. See W. Brian Shelton, *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus: An Early Church Presbyter's Commentary on Daniel*, Paternoster Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 1–21; Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*, 8–9

certain: Hippolytus believed the seventh day Sabbath rest in Genesis 1 was a type of the coming seven-thousandth-year period of the kingdom on earth, which is the period referred to by John in the Apocalypse—obviously the millennium of Revelation 20. Thus, Hippolytus was both a futurist and premillennialist in his eschatology.

This characterization of Hippolytus’s millennialism has been challenged. After acknowledging that “the six days prior to the first Sabbath represent the time on earth before the kingdom of the saints commences,” Schmidt asserts, “Nowhere in his *Commentary on Daniel* does Hippolytus specify whether he believes in a literal millennial reign of Christ after the 6000 years are completed, but he does believe that when Jesus returns he will usher in an ‘eternal kingdom’ and ‘consume’ all of those who oppose him ‘in an eternal fire’ (4.14.3). This seems to leave little room for a millennial kingdom and a renewed battle with evil.”⁵¹ But this interpretation is based on a false choice, as if Hippolytus (and, indeed, millennialists in general) must hold *either* that the reign of Christ with his saints is only 1000 years *or* that the reign of Christ with his saints is eternal. This dichotomy is absurd. It has always been the view of classic (Irenaeus) premillennialism that the reign of Christ with his saints was eternal, but that the first 1000 years of that eternal reign had unique characteristics as a transition period between the first and second resurrection as well as the period of the redemption and transformation of the creation.⁵² It is therefore a *non sequitur* to argue that Hippolytus’s reference to an eternal kingdom leaves “little room” for a literal thousand-year kingdom as the first thousand years of an eternal kingdom of Christ and his saints. It is far more likely that Hippolytus meant to extend the literal chronological reckoning of the six thousand years of creation to the seventh thousand-year period in the future, and thus conceive of a millennial period that commences the eternal reign of Christ—as in Justin and Irenaeus. Because he took the first six thousand years since creation literally, there is no reason to assume Hippolytus would take the seventh thousand-year period as a figure for an eternal kingdom. That the future sabbath rest could refer to an eternal heavenly kingdom is an impossible interpretation of Hippolytus’s language, especially in light of both his predecessors and contemporaries who have a similar typological interpretation of the seven-thousandth year of history as the future millennial reign. What Hippolytus does not do, though, is speculate about the details of this period—merely that Christ’s kingdom will be present on earth and the saints will rule with him.

In his commentary on Genesis, Hippolytus makes the following assertion based on a rather allegorical reading of Old Testament figures: “The word of God here is the promise anew of the

⁵¹ Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*, 18, 19.

⁵² So, for example, Irenaeus writes, “Therefore the great God showed future things by Daniel, and confirmed them by His Son; and...Christ is the stone which is cut out without hands, who shall destroy temporal kingdoms, and introduce an eternal one, which is the resurrection of the just” (*Haer.* 5.26.2; cf. 5.30.4, 5.32.1). Likewise, Justin Martyr—whose millennialism is uncontested—spoke of the eternal kingdom: “He [Christ] shall raise all men from the dead, and appoint some to be incorruptible, immortal, and free from sorrow in the everlasting and imperishable kingdom; but shall send others away to the everlasting punishment of fire” (*Dial.* 117; cf. 34, 46, 76, 120). In the very same work he also refers to the thousand-year kingdom: “But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare” (*Dial.* 80).

blessing and the hope of a kingdom to come, in which the saints shall reign with Christ, and keep the true Sabbath” (Hippolytus, *Commentary on Genesis* [ANF 5]). This is in keeping with the treatment of the future millennium as a fulfillment of the Sabbath typology in Barnabas 15. In his commentary on Daniel, Hippolytus notes that those who “survive [the Antichrist’s] days”—that is, the survivors of his great persecution during the second half of the tribulation—“to him the kingdom of heaven comes....the saints shall inherit the kingdom along with Christ” (Hippolytus, *On Daniel* 2.40 [ANF 5]). This “kingdom of heaven” inherited by the saints, then, is none other than the millennial earthly kingdom that arrives with the return of Christ.

Hippolytus’s predecessor, Irenaeus also ties the fulfillment of the blessings of the kingdom to the time of the millennial reign: “For what are the hundred-fold [rewards] in this word [Matt 19:29], the entertainments given to the poor, and the suppers for which a return is made? These are [to take place] in the times of the kingdom, that is, upon the seventh day, which has been sanctified, in which God rested from all the works which He created, which is the true Sabbath of the righteous, which they shall not be engaged in any earthly occupation; but shall have a table at hand prepared for them by God, supplying them with all sorts of dishes” (*Haer.* 5.33.2).

Irenaeus interprets the six days of creation as both a historical account of the creation as well as a prophecy of the six thousand years of history, noting that all things will come to an end after six thousand years (*Haer.* 5.28.3). And that seventh thousand-year period will come after the destruction of the antichrist figure, similar to Barnabas 15: “But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that ‘many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’” (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.4).

In short, the premillennial and chiliastic reading of Barnabas 15 fits well in the context of other early fathers who saw the future seventh-day eschatological sabbath as the period during which the world would be glorified and perfected, ushering in the eternal new creation.

Evaluation of Non-Chiliastic Interpretations of *Barnabas* 15

At this point, several commentators, bucking at the notion that the author of *Barnabas* was a chiliast, make numerous rebuttable assertions regarding the passage. Ferguson suggests, “The important point for our purposes is the shift from the seventh to the eighth day to describe this eschatological rest.”⁵³ However, the text does not actually assign “sabbath” or “rest” to the eighth day. This was also the assertion by Albert Hermans. The only day of sabbath in this text is the

⁵³ Everett Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?,” 162.

seventh (Barn. 15.5). As we have shown above, *Barn.* 15.8 does not, in fact, assert that the eighth day is the sabbath which God has made, but the outcome of the conditions prevailing upon the world during the seventh day. Ferguson also asserts that the author of *Barnabas* “takes the eighth day instead of the seventh day as representative of the world to come.”⁵⁴ Again, this is a misrepresentation of what the passage actually says. The author’s logic is that the seventh day sabbath is the means by which or during which “after causing everything to rest, I will make a beginning of an eighth day, which is a beginning of another world” (Barn. 15.8).

Similarly, C. K. Barrett alleges the author of *Barnabas* presents a confusing, contradictory eschatological scheme by introducing the notion of the eighth day to an otherwise pedestrian presentation of the seventh thousand-year “sabbath.” He writes, “This leads him to include the explicit statement that the eighth day is the beginning of a new world, and if by this he means the eighth millennium what he says here is inconsistent with what he says in xv. 5–7, where the Sabbatical millennium in which sin is overcome is the seventh.”⁵⁵

Paget follows Barrett in this same estimation,⁵⁶ noting that Barnabas “claims that the eighth day is the beginning of the final end, and if by this he refers to the eighth millenium [*sic*] then this is inconsistent with what he has written in vv.3f. where it is the end of the sixth millenium that constitutes the beginning of the final end.”⁵⁷ Likewise, Prigent suggests, “Cette fois c’est le huitième et non le septième jour qui est type du monde nouveau.”⁵⁸ However, these charges of inconsistency are only sustained if the author of *Barnabas* were indicating a cosmic rather than personal transformation in 15.7. As has been argued, the author intended the language of 15.7 to refer to personal transformation through resurrection, enabling a person to keep the sabbath; thus, 15.8 refers to universal or cosmic renewal and restoration, accomplished by the activities that will take place during the eschatological sabbath. Albert Hermans even translates *καταπαύσας τὰ πάντα* not as “after causing everything to rest” but as “mettant fin à l’univers” (“putting an end to the universe”),⁵⁹ suggesting a total annihilation to make way for a new world, which misleadingly suggests a concurrence of the events of Christ’s coming at the close of the 6000-year period and the commencement of the sabbath. The confusion is not in the text itself but in the translation and interpretation. Herman’s entire arguments rests on this assertion that Barnabas 15 presents two eschatological sabbaths: “Contrairement à l’interprétation millénariste courante [i.e., in Herman’s day], nous excluons une succession de deux sabbats eschatologiques.”⁶⁰ And rightly so! Barnabas

⁵⁴ Ferguson, “Was Barnabas a Chiliast?,” 162.

⁵⁵ Barrett, “Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 370. Though Barrett points out this apparent inconsistency, he does not make much of it. Rather, he concludes, “Notwithstanding the confusion introduced by the substitution of Sunday for the Sabbath it is clear that Barnabas’ real view was that he and his contemporaries stood within the 6000 years, still waiting for the Son of God to usher in the millennial period with heavenly signs and portents” (371).

⁵⁶ And quotes Windisch, *Barnabasbrief*, 384.

⁵⁷ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 170.

⁵⁸ “This time it is the eighth and not the seventh day that is typical of the new world” (Prigent, *L’Épître de Barnabé*, 69).

⁵⁹ Hermans, “Le Pseudo-Barnabé,” 851.

⁶⁰ Hermans, “Le Pseudo-Barnabé,” 853.

15 presents only one sabbath—the seventh-thousand-year period, which accomplishes and makes way for “another world,” not “another sabbath.” Rordorf reads the text correctly: “In v. 8 the seventh millennium is unambiguously followed by the eighth day, the new aeon.”⁶¹ Frankly, Hermans and many others have been misled by a careless exegesis of the text, perhaps relying on translations rather than the grammar and syntax of the actual text.

Many have uncritically accepted Hermans’ exegetically lean treatment of Barnabas 15.⁶² Andrew Chester simply seems to assume *Barnabas* presents “two distinct eschatological sabbaths” or “the seventh and eighth days, the first and second sabbaths,” noting that the general strength of Hermans’ argument given “the introduction of the eighth day and second sabbath,” which clouds an otherwise clear chiliasm.⁶³ Yet this assumption of a “second sabbath” is simply not found in the text. The fact remains, despite repeated assertions to the contrary, Barnabas 15 only refers to the seventh day as “the sabbath” or time of “rest.” The only description given to the eighth day is “another world” (15.8). The conclusion that *Barnabas* assigns the new creation to both the commencement of the seventh day and eighth day depends entirely on the assumptions that 1) the changing of the sun, moon, and stars is a reference to their transformation in cosmic renewal rather than the cosmic signs related to the Day of the Lord judgment; and 2) “all things being made new by the Lord” refers to cosmic renewal rather than personal glorification by resurrection. Deprived of these two assumptions, which are not exegetically necessary nor even, I have argued, exegetically likely, the text remains both premillennial and chiliastic. Though Chester asserts that “Hermans provides detailed exegesis and argues the strongest conceivable case for this view,” he is himself not entirely convinced that Hermans’ reading is as clear as many seem to have taken it.⁶⁴

Similarly, simply citing Hermans, J. Webb Mealy notes: “For Barnabas, the seventh millennial day (reckoned in terms of the present creation) begins at the parousia, and is at the same time the inauguration of the eighth day of God’s new creation.”⁶⁵ Mealy suggest Hermans “builds an extremely thorough case for the identification of the sabbath and the eighth day of the new world.”⁶⁶ So, with a number of modern scholars since Hermans, Mealy accepts the conclusion that in the reckoning of the author of *Barnabas* “the seventh and eighth millennia *overlap one another*.”⁶⁷ Mealy does, however, provide a corrective to what he sees as an overstatement in Hermans, noting: “Agreed, Barnabas is no chiliast in the typical sense, for this millennium belongs completely to the new creation. But what Hermans does not appear to have considered is the concept of a distinct millennium beginning at the Parousia, set in the new creation, and bounded

⁶¹ Rordorf, *Sunday*, 93.

⁶² However, many others, perhaps equally uncritically, have retained the older interpretation of Barnabas as a chiliast. See Michael J. St. Clar, *Millenarian Movements in Historical Context*, Garland Reference Library of Social Science, vol. 763 (New York: Garland, 1992), 77.

⁶³ Andrew Chester, “The Parting of the Ways: Eschatology and Messianic Hope,” in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways AD 70-135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn, WUNT, vol. 66 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 274–275.

⁶⁴ Chester, “Parting of the Ways,” 275.

⁶⁵ Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 48n2.

⁶⁶ Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 48n2.

⁶⁷ Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 48n2.

by the resurrection and judgment of unrepentant humanity.”⁶⁸ This is, in fact, what Barnabas seems to present. I have argued that he does not conflate the seventh and eighth days, but neither does Barnabas separate them. The seventh day is distinct but not separate from the eighth. It is truly the inauguration and beginning of the new creation in the sense that it involves the work of renewing creation; the effect of this renewal, then, is the eighth day of the new world. We have with Barnabas 15 not an either/or scenario in which the seventh day is either the new creation or merely an intermediate step between the old and new; rather, it is both a step toward the new creation and—to the degree in which the new creation is progressively realized in the world throughout the thousand-year sabbath and mediation of the resurrected saints—a realization of new creation.

Bauckham also presents a reading of Barnabas 15 that alleges a conflation of the seventh and eighth days due to a superficial treatment of the language and syntax of the passage: “This present world, which is the time of the ‘lawless one’ (ὁ ἄνομος), is contrasted with the coming new world, from which ‘lawlessness’ (ἡ ἀνομία) will have been eliminated.”⁶⁹ Note that without any exegetical validation, Bauckham assumes ὁ ἄνομος refers to the whole of human history rather than to the coming lawless one (see exegesis above). He also describes the events of the second coming as themselves ushering in the “new world,” likely referring to Barnabas 15.7. However, these participles, it has been shown, are connected to the condition of the saints in their immortal state during the millennial sabbath, not directly to the cosmos itself. Bauckham then hastily concludes, “God will bring this world to an end at the Parousia (the end of its six millennia) and inaugurate the new world.”⁷⁰ Again, this is a misleading presentation of the content of Barnabas 15. While we have said that the thousand-year sabbath can be regarded as the eschatological commencement of the new world in the sense that the world will be in process of renewal during that time, a careful reading of *Barnabas* has the “other world” following the completion of this renewal. *Barnabas* does not conflate the two. Bauckham also misreads Barnabas 15.8, where God declares that the present (Jewish) sabbaths are not acceptable to him, but the one which he has made—not a reference to the eighth day, the beginning of a new world, but to the seventh day by which God, by setting everything at rest, affects the commencement of the eighth: “by which, after causing everything to rest (ἐν ᾧ καταπαύσας τὰ πάντα), I will make a beginning of an eighth day (ἀρχὴν ἡμέρας ὀγδῆς ποιήσω), which is a beginning of another world (ὃ ἐστὶν ἄλλου κόσμου ἀρχὴν)” (Barn. 15.8). Even if Barnabas were using καταπαύσας to refer to the cessation of sin during the six thousand years, the “sabbath” itself that results is described not as the eighth day, but as the ἀρχὴν ἡμέρας ὀγδῆς, that is, the beginning or origin of the eighth day. Once again, had the author of *Barnabas* intended to equate the sabbath and eighth days, he should have written, ἐν ᾧ καταπαύσας τὰ πάντα ποιήσω ἡμέραν ὀγδῆν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἄλλου κόσμου ἀρχὴν (“in which, after setting everything at rest, I will make the eighth day, which is the beginning of another world”). That would have clearly established the eighth day as conflated with the sabbath rest. Thus, it seems best to interpret καταπαύσας τὰ πάντα

⁶⁸ Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 48n2.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” 262.

⁷⁰ Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” 262.

as a reference to events that take place on the sabbath rest of the world following the return of Christ, which itself then becomes the source and origin of the ultimate new world, *a result of the sabbath*.⁷¹

In 1945, Kromminga wrote regarding Barnabas, “To my mind the claim that he was a chiliast is quite baseless.”⁷² At the end of that paragraph, he tempers his rhetoric a bit and lands on “to say the least, the evidence is insufficient.”⁷³ And later, after rejecting a postmillennial interpretation of Barnabas 15, he relents considerably, noting, “If we wish to save Barnabas for chiliasm, we shall have to try to understand him as a Premillenarian, and perhaps the Premillenarians of today are right in claiming him.”⁷⁴ The space between “quite baseless,” “insufficient,” and “perhaps...[they] are right” seems vast from an evidentiary perspective, but the real question is: upon what does Kromminga rest his strong objection to the chiliastic interpretation of Barnabas 15? Kromminga first objects to a premillennial interpretation by pointing out the elements missing from that chapter: the release of Satan at the end of the millennium, the resulting battle of Mog and Magog, and the reference to the judgment of the ungodly and cosmic changes related with the beginning of the “seventh day”; instead, Kromminga urges, premillennialists place the resurrection of the believers at the start of the millennium and judgment of the wicked at the end.⁷⁵ Importantly, he interprets the cosmic changes described in Barnabas 15.5 as the renewal of creation: “Furthermore, unless we understand the change of the sun, moon, and stars otherwise, the great cosmic change also comes after the millennium as conceived of by the Premillenarians and not at its beginning.”⁷⁶ In response to these specific grounds for a non-Premillennial reading of Barnabas 15, however, we have argued above that the acts associated with Christ’s second coming after the 6000-year period involve not the destruction of Satan but the abolition of the season of the antichrist; not the resurrection of the wicked unto judgment but the judgment of the wicked in this world who are in solidarity with the antichrist; and not the positive transformation of the cosmos through a regeneration of creation but the eschatological judgment of the sun, moon, and stars in connection with the Old Testament Day of the Lord (see above comments on Barn. 15.5).

By interpreting the language of the perfection of the resurrected saints primarily in cosmic rather than in individual terms, Kromminga conflates this resurrected glory at the beginning of the millennium with the cosmic glory of the renewed creation at the beginning of the “other world” (Barn. 15.7-8). On this basis alone, Kromminga boldly asserts, “He seems to be of the opinion, that there will be a seventh world-period all right, but that that period will be identical with the perfection of the eternal state. There can be no doubt about the identity of his seventh and his eighth day.”⁷⁷ This is certainly an overstatement of a most misleading kind, because we have shown

⁷¹ Lookadoo similarly follows Bauckham’s misreading of this passage. See Lookadoo, *Epistle of Barnabas*, 113.

⁷² Kromminga, *Millennium*, 30.

⁷³ Kromminga, *Millennium*, 30.

⁷⁴ Kromminga, *Millennium*, 32.

⁷⁵ Kromminga, *Millennium*, 32.

⁷⁶ Kromminga, *Millennium*, 32.

⁷⁷ Kromminga, *Millennium*, 35.

that there is definitely room for doubt regarding the identification of the events related to the beginning of the “seventh day” and the conditions that lead to the beginning of the “eighth day.” Taking away this questionable foundation of Kromminga’s “perfectly plain” reading of Barnabas as “what we nowadays call an Amillennialist,”⁷⁸ we must default to the classic reading of Barnabas 15 as a variety of ancient premillennialism. Kromminga also makes the peculiar argument that Barnabas could not be a premillennialist because of his anti-Judaism.⁷⁹ The fact is that had Barnabas received his eschatological orientation from first-generation Apostles or apostolic teachers, and that eschatology was premillennial in outline, his anti-Judaism would have simply shifted his millennialism away from a Jerusalem-centered chiliasm that focused on a restoration of Israel to its land to a more cosmic-oriented chiliasm that emphasized the renewal of creation in keeping with Romans 8.

Kromminga’s labored attention to Barnabas’s anti-judaism and application of Old Testament promises of Israel to Christians does nothing to derail a premillennial orientation in Barnabas 15; it only serves to change the sort of premillennial outlook the author was propounding.⁸⁰ The spiritual application of Old Testament promises to Christians in the present age was not the sole provenance of amillennialists in the early church; classic premillennialists like Justin and Irenaeus also made this hermeneutical move without necessarily ruling out a future literal fulfillment. Thus, Kromminga’s attempts at casting the author of *Barnabas* as the father of amillennialism is simply wrong.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Kromminga concludes his mistreatment of Barnabas 15 with the startling claim, “The fact remains beyond dispute, that in Barnabas we have a very early amillennial type of eschatology as early as any chiliasm can be shown to have appeared in the ancient Church.”⁸² In light of the detailed analysis of *Barnabas* 15 in this paper, such a claim sounds absurd, and Kromminga’s conclusions can only have been accepted by those already disposed to embrace any position that would advantage amillennialism and disadvantage premillennialism. The fact is—and this is in truth beyond dispute—Barnabas 15 by every reading explicitly excludes both postmillennial and amillennial interpretations, as it presents the seventh 1000-year period as following, not preceding, the Parousia that destroys the season of the lawless one. In both amillennialism and postmillennialism the Parousia follows the millennial epoch, which cannot be

⁷⁸ Kromminga, *Millennium*, 33. The problematic claim that “this is plain and pure Amillennialism” (36) seems to jettison the commonly accepted definition of amillennialism. The amillennial position has always taught that the millennial period described in Revelation 20 is a present reality either in heaven with Christ’s reign since his enthronement at the ascension or the realization of that spiritual reign in the hearts and lives of the saints in his church on earth. In any case, amillennialism has always taught that the millennial reign precedes—it *does not follow*—his return as judge. In contrast, *Barnabas* 15 teaches that the events of the future seventh and eighth days—even if we accept the interpretation that these should be regarded as coterminous—*follow* the Parousia of the Lord. Even if everything Kromminga asserts regarding the language and imagery were true, this would still not be amillennialism in any of its forms. At most it would be post-advent new creationism in which the future “millennium” is an image of the renewed creation the follows the return of Christ.

⁷⁹ Kromminga, *Millennium*, 33.

⁸⁰ See Kromminga, *Millennium*, 36. Even so, Kromminga’s treatment assumes an either/or approach

⁸¹ Kromminga, *Millennium*, 36-39.

⁸² Kromminga, *Millennium*, 40.

conflated with the eternal state but is decisively separated from it by the return of Christ. All his bluster notwithstanding, Kromminga's claims are demonstrably false.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 8

The Coming Kingdom in Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus

The following essay presents the basic contours of the eschatological expectations of the coming kingdom in Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–200), Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160–220), and Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170–235).

The Coming Kingdom in Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–200)

Irenaeus asserts that after the reign of the antichrist for “three years and six months”—which constitutes the second half of the seventieth “week” of years in Daniel 9:27 (cf. *Haer.* 5.25.4; 5.30.4), Christ will come and destroy him, then usher in the kingdom. Thus, without doubt, Irenaeus presents a premillennial return of Christ.

Irenaeus associates several things with the anticipated end-times judgment: the reign of the antichrist in the temple of Jerusalem for three and a half years; the destruction of the antichrist and his followers by the coming of Christ from heaven; the establishment of the “times of the kingdom” for the righteous, which Irenaeus calls “the hallowed seventh day”; and the restoration of the promises to Abraham (*Haer.* 5.30.4). Irenaeus’s understanding of the return of Christ is quite clearly premillennial and futurist in its orientation. He adopts the view earlier reflected in the Epistle of Barnabas (see Go Deeper Excursus 7) that following the six thousand years of human history, Christ will return to usher in the seventh thousand-year period, the “millennium,” which will precede the “eighth day” of the eternal new creation. Irenaeus’s futurist millennialism has no room for a postmillennial return, in which the church triumphs over the world’s institutions and establishes a kingdom prior to the coming of Christ.¹

¹ Ayroulet and Chaieb note, “En outre, Irénée ne reporte pas non plus son espérance sur un triomphe terrestre ou politique de l’Église, ce qui a pu être ultérieurement une des manifestations du millénarisme deviant” (Élie Ayroulet and Marie L. Chaieb, “Quelle fin des temps? L’eschatologie d’Irénée de Lyon,” *NRTTh* 143.1 [2021]: 41).

Irenaeus also places the establishment of the kingdom in the future in connection with the resurrection of the righteous: “If therefore the great God showed future things by Daniel, and confirmed them by His Son; and if Christ is the stone which is cut out without hands, who shall destroy temporal kingdoms, and introduce an eternal one, which is the resurrection of the just” (*Haer.* 5.26.2). Note that the kingdom itself is called “the resurrection of the just,” with Irenaeus focusing on the condition, not specifically the chronology.

Irenaeus interprets the six days of creation as both a historical account of the creation as well as a prophecy of the six thousand years of history, noting that all things will come to an end after six thousand years (*Haer.* 5.28.3). Like Justin Martyr before him (*Dial.* 80), Irenaeus also observes that some among the orthodox “go beyond the pre-arranged plan for the exaltation of the just, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption” (5.31.1). This statement immediately follows his discussion of the events of the end time and the millennial kingdom:

But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that “many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (*Haer.* 5.30.4)

The question is, do the “methods by which they [the just] are disciplined beforehand for incorruption” refer to a quasi-purgatorial state in paradise, the future tribulation period of purgation, or to the millennium? Irenaeus answers this in 5.32.1. However, he first contrasts it with the view of the heretics: “For the heretics, despising the handiwork of God, and not admitting the salvation of their flesh, while they also treat the promise of God contemptuously, and pass beyond God altogether in the sentiments they form, affirm that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens and the Demiurge, and go to the Mother (Achamoth) or to that Father whom they have feigned” (*Haer.* 5.31.1). The heretics, under whose influence some orthodox had fallen, taught that immediately upon death they pass above the heavens to the eternal, invisible Father or Mother—that is, they experience the fullness of their salvation, which is unfettered ascension into the heavens in a purely spiritual existence (cf. Justin, *Dial.* 80). Irenaeus gives the reason for this view of salvation as strictly spiritual and heavenly: the heretics do not admit the salvation of their flesh and therefore treat the promise of God contemptuously. We are clear on what “resurrection of the flesh” means. But is Irenaeus’s statement regarding the “promise of God” merely oppositional—the promise of God as the resurrection of the flesh? In the immediate context, the “promise of God” refers to the kingdom promised to Abraham (*Haer.* 5.30.4).

When Irenaeus switches to “those persons,” we are not clear whether he is still referring to the heretics or to those who are counted among the orthodox. The former seems to be the case, as he picks up his discourse regarding those among the orthodox again in 5.32.1. His chief complaint, therefore, regarding the heretics is that they fail to hold to a view of progressive personal salvation that aligns with the model of Christ. It seems best to interpret Irenaeus’s words as consistent with Justin Martyr’s own view of three categories: the heretics (gnostics), the orthodox premillennialists (like Irenaeus), and the orthodox who had fallen under the influence of the spiritualizing tendencies of the heretics with regard to eschatology (early amillennialists?).² He notes:

Those persons, therefore, who disallow a resurrection affecting the whole man, and as far as in them lies remove it from the midst [of the Christian scheme], how can they be wondered at, if again they know nothing as to the plan of the resurrection? For they do not choose to understand, that if these things are as they say, the Lord Himself, in whom they profess to believe, did not rise again upon the third day; but immediately upon His expiring on the cross, undoubtedly departed on high, leaving His body to the earth. But the case was, that for three days He dwelt in the place where the dead were, as the prophet says concerning Him: “And the Lord remembered His dead saints who slept formerly in the land of sepulture; and He descended to them, to rescue and save them.” And the Lord Himself says, “As Jonas remained three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth.” Then also the apostle says, “But when He ascended, what is it but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?” This, too, David says when prophesying of Him, “And thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell;” and on His rising again the third day, He said to Mary, who was the first to see and to worship Him, “Touch Me not, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to the disciples, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and unto your Father.” (*Haer.* 5.31.1)

In other words, just as Jesus first went to paradise, the place of the departed saints (Luke 23:43), before ascending to the Father, so believers must go to a place of waiting until the resurrection of the flesh. However, it is not clear that New Testament believers go to the same place as those of the

² However, Craig Blaising sees only two groups in Irenaeus and, after a thorough analysis of the passage, concludes, “As Irenaeus expressed, his so-called orthodox opponents seemed to disregard the salvation of the flesh in their construal of Christian hope. The expectation of ascension to heaven at death strongly resembled Gnostic teaching. Their so-called orthodox view of the afterlife made bodily resurrection superfluous at best, even if they did not reject it altogether” (Craig A. Blaising, “Early Christian Millennialism and the Intermediate State,” *BSac* 177.2 [2020]: 232–33). Blaising could be correct here, but I am not convinced Irenaeus’s language of “some who are reckoned among the orthodox (*quidam ex his qui putantur recte credidisse*)” (*Haer.* 5.31.1) means that outsiders reckon them as orthodox, but they are not (thus fitting Justin’s category of the heretics in *Dialogue* 80) or that Irenaeus’s associates reckon them among the orthodox even though they have faulty details of eschatology (thus fitting in Justin’s category of pious Christians who think otherwise). I have opted for a more charitable reading of Irenaeus, consistent with Justin’s three categories.

Old Testament. Irenaeus notes that Christ descended to them “to rescue and save them.” This suggests that he did, in fact, save them and led them with him to heaven. Irenaeus makes this clear:

For as the Lord “went away in the midst of the shadow of death,” where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up [into heaven], it is manifest that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event; then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come thus into the presence of God. “For no disciple is above the Master, but every one that is perfect shall be as his Master.” (*Haer.* 5.31.2)

Here the disciples “go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God.” This seems to be some sort of intermediate, heavenly place, where they remain until the resurrection. When they receive their resurrection bodies, they will rise and “come thus into the presence of God.” This is important as we try to envision Irenaeus’s eschatological scheme as it relates to the future tribulation and millennium. It seems that when the disciples are resurrected, they will go—at least for a season—into the presence of God, while prior to this they are not yet in the presence of God. In any case, they are not raised up to meet the Lord Jesus on earth and begin reigning with him. Thus, he says, “As our Master, therefore, did not at once depart, taking flight [to heaven], but awaited the time of His resurrection prescribed by the Father, which had been also shown forth through Jonas, and rising again after three days was taken up [to heaven]; so ought we also to await the time of our resurrection prescribed by God and foretold by the prophets, and so, rising, be taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this [privilege]” (*Haer.* 5.31.2). In this way, Irenaeus deals with personal salvation, including resurrection: upon the death of the just, their spirits will go to an invisible place prepared by God, where they await bodily resurrection. When the resurrection occurs and they receive their resurrected bodies, they will be taken up to the presence of God in heaven. This is not necessarily the same location as the Old Testament saints where Jesus went, but it does seem to be a lower stage in the heavenly journey. Ever-loftier heights of spiritual glory await the departed saints.

Next, Irenaeus returns to the opinions of certain orthodox people that derive from heretical discourses: “Since, therefore, they are brought over by some of the opinions from the words of heretics, and are ignorant of the dispensations of God and of the mystery of the resurrection and kingdom of the just, which is the beginning of incorruption, by which kingdom those who will be worthy, are progressively accustomed to comprehend God (*capere Deum*)” (*Haer.* 5.32.1 [my translation]). This statement gives us a hint at what Irenaeus meant by the “methods by which they [the just] are disciplined beforehand for incorruption.” It is the earthly kingdom, “which is the beginning of incorruption, by which kingdom those who will be worthy, are progressively accustomed to comprehend God” (5.32.1). So, in Irenaeus’s eschatology, the resurrection and

kingdom of the just (i.e., the millennium) is the beginning of the gradual, progressive glorification of redeemed humanity, during which they will grow deeper and deeper in their grasp of God and thus greater and greater in glory.³ Matthew Steenberg writes:

The Jerusalem of this world is one ‘in which the righteous are disciplined beforehand for imperishability’ and ‘prepared for salvation’. Thus, say Irenaeus, the new Jerusalem will be of similar function, gradually rendering the human person ‘capable of receiving the Father’s glory’.... Thus does Irenaeus take up at *AH* 5.34.4 Isaias’ descriptions of the new Jerusalem (cf. Is 32.1, 54.11–14, 65.18–23), as a description of those particular characteristics (beautiful paving, crystal gates, extreme longevity, etc.) by which humanity will be further ‘disciplined for perfection’.⁴

We also discover what Irenaeus meant by those who “treat the promise of God contemptuously”: “It is necessary to tell them respecting those things, that it behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards” (*Haer.* 5.32.1). The promised inheritance refers to the earthly kingdom promised to Abraham, which they begin to experience after their resurrection.

One purpose for a millennial reign, according to Irenaeus, is the recompense for the suffering humans experienced:

For it is just that in that very creation in which they toiled or were afflicted, being proved in every way by suffering, they should receive the reward of their suffering; and that in the creation in which they were slain because of their love to God, in that they should be revived again; and that in the creation in which they endured servitude, in that they should reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are His. It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous. (*Haer.* 5.32.1)

He then quotes Romans 8:19ff, also reaffirming the promise of God to Abraham through the millennial reign and recounting the history of the promises to the Hebrews:

Thus, then, the promise of God, which He gave to Abraham, remains steadfast.... Thus, then, they who are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham, and these are the children of Abraham. Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither

³ See Ayroulet and Chaieb, “Quelle fin des temps?,” 42–44.

⁴ Matthew Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 57, 58.

Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (*Haer.* 5.32.2)

By virtue of the church’s union with Christ, the church will inherit the promise of Abraham’s seed, as Christ is the Seed of Abraham. This means the reign of Christ must be earthly after the resurrection of the just.

However, it must be observed that while Irenaeus views this spiritual fulfillment to be taking place presently in the church—the spiritual “seed of Abraham”—this spiritual application to the church in the present does not replace a future, literal fulfillment with the physical seed of Abraham. He writes:

Now I have shown a short time ago [cf. 5.32.2] that the church is the seed of Abraham; and for this reason, that we may know that He who in the New Testament “raises up from the stones children unto Abraham” (*ex lapidibus suscitans* [present active participle] *filios Abrahae*) is He who will gather (*colliget* [third-person plural future active indicative]), according to the Old Testament, those that shall be saved (*salvabuntur*) from all the nations (*ex omnibus gentibus*), Jeremiah says: “Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord lives, who led the children of Israel from the north, and from every region where they had been driven; He will restore them to their own land which He gave to their fathers.” (*Haer.* 5.34.1)⁵

In this passage, Irenaeus clearly applies the promise of the salvation of the seed of Abraham spiritually to the church in the present; but he may also be applying the promise physically to the those that “shall be saved” from among the nations. In one reading of this exegetically challenging text (see Unger), *ex omnibus gentibus* could be understood as a reference to Gentiles saved from among the nations in the future. However, in another reading, which I adopt here, the passage he cites in Jeremiah refers to the gathering of the children of Israel from *among* the nations, literally *ex omnibus gentibus*. This company of Israel—Abraham’s physical seed—is called “those that shall be saved (*salvabuntur*),” which is the same term used in 5.30.2 where he mentions that “Dan” is left out of the tribes of Israel that are “saved” (*salvantur*) in the future tribulation. This confirms that Irenaeus envisioned a future, literal fulfillment of the restoration of the actual sons of Abraham despite the fact that the church—the spiritual seed of Abraham today—experiences a spiritual

⁵ For a different translation and interpretation (requiring different text-critical decisions as well as amending the text by inserting allegedly missing words), see St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, books 4 and 5, trans. and annotated by Dominic Unger, with introduction and rev. by Scott D. Moringiello, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, vol. 72 (New York: Newman, 2024), 304–305n3.

fulfillment of these promises in the present. For Irenaeus, fulfillment of these prophecies was not *either* present and spiritual *or* future and physical. Rather, they applied to both.

In this both/and interpretation of the passage, even though Irenaeus sees a literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in which Israel—both resurrected and regathered—will experience a literal fulfillment of earthly promises, he does not anticipate a restoration of temple sacrifices. Ayroulet and Chaieb observe:

It is necessary, however, to emphasize that in Irenaeus there is a strong pronounced originality with regard to Jewish messianic hope. He makes a selection, in light of the Good News, and he does not preserve what Jewish hope might have been political in this expectation of a kingdom in which the messiah would triumph over the Roman occupation. This dimension, illustrated in particular by the hope of the re-establishment of the Temple sacrifices, is completely missing in his work.⁶

Irenaeus also ties the fulfillment of the blessings of the kingdom to the time of the millennial reign:

For what are the hundred-fold [rewards] in this word [Matt 19:29], the entertainments given to the poor, and the suppers for which a return is made? These are [to take place] in the times of the kingdom, that is, upon the seventh day, which has been sanctified, in which God rested from all the works which He created, which is the true Sabbath of the righteous, which they shall not be engaged in any earthly occupation; but shall have a table at hand prepared for them by God, supplying them with all sorts of dishes. (*Haer.* 5.33.2)

In discussing the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the wolf and the lamb and the harmony of the animals of the earth (Isa 60), he insists on a literal interpretation:

I am quite aware that some persons endeavour to refer these words to the case of savage men, both of different nations and various habits, who come to believe, and when they have believed, act in harmony with the righteous. But although this is [true] now with regard to some men coming from various nations to the harmony of the faith, nevertheless in the resurrection of the just [the words shall also apply] to those animals mentioned. For God is rich in all things. And it is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man, and revert to the food originally given by God (for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam), that is, the productions of the earth. (*Haer.* 5.33.4)

⁶ Ayroulet and Chaieb, “Quelle fin des temps?,” 41. Translated from the original French.

Note here that the phrase “the resurrection of the just” does not refer to a momentary event in a particular chronology, but to the whole era of the millennial kingdom itself, for it is “in the resurrection of the just” that “those animals mentioned” will live in peace and harmony. Irenaeus also links numerous Old Testament prophecies with the coming millennial blessings (*Haer.* 5.34), and he notes that Christ will reign in Jerusalem: “Then again, speaking of Jerusalem, and of Him reigning there, Isaiah declares, ‘Thus saith the Lord, Happy is he who hath seed in Zion, and servants in Jerusalem. Behold, a righteous king shall reign, and princes shall rule with judgment [Isa 31:9; 32:1]’” (*Haer.* 5.34.4). Irenaeus explicitly rejects allegorizing these earthly prophecies: “If, however, any shall endeavour to allegorize [prophecies] of this kind, they shall not be found consistent with themselves in all points, and shall be confuted by the teaching of the very expressions [in question]” (*Haer.* 5.35.1). In this context, he explains in clear terms his eschatological expectations:

For all these and others [passages of Scripture] were without controversy spoken with regard to the resurrection of the just, which will happen after the advent of Antichrist and the perdition of all nations existing under him; at which time the righteous will rule in the earth, growing greater by the vision of the Lord, and through Him they will become accustomed to receive the glory of God the Father, and, with the holy angels, they shall receive in the kingdom conversation and fellowship and union with spiritual beings, and [the words of the prophecies about the Millennium were spoken with reference to] those whom the Lord shall find in the flesh, expecting him from heaven, and suffered tribulation, which also escaped the hands of the Wicked One. For it is in reference to them [those in the flesh expecting him after the reign of the antichrist] that the prophet says: “And those that remain will multiply on the earth” [Isa 6:12]. And however many of the believers God has prepared for this, to multiply those remaining on the earth, and to both be under the rule of the saints and to minister to this Jerusalem, and reigning in it, Jeremiah the prophet speaks about. (*Haer.* 5.35.1 [my translation])

The importance of this section cannot be exaggerated. Irenaeus asserts that the resurrection of the just (which refers to the period of the millennium in which the just have been raised) will take place after the coming of the antichrist and his destruction (that is, the millennial reign follows the tribulation). Then the righteous will reign over the earth, becoming “accustomed to partake in the glory of God the Father.” At the same time, the Lord at his coming will find many “in the flesh” who were awaiting Christ and who had suffered tribulation at the hands of the antichrist. These mortals—not the resurrected saints—will procreate and multiply on the earth (*Haer.* 5.35.1). Again, Irenaeus writes, “But in the times of the kingdom, the earth has been called again by Christ [to its pristine condition], and Jerusalem rebuilt after the pattern of the Jerusalem above,” and “after the times of the kingdom,” Irenaeus refers to the great white throne of judgment (5.35.2).

Irenaeus also ties the real existence of humanity to the real existence of the universe:

For since there are real men, so must there also be a real establishment (*plantationem*), that they vanish not away among non-existent things, but progress among those which have an actual existence. For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He who has established it), but “the *fashion* of the world passeth away;’ [1 Cor 7:31] that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them. (*Haer.* 5.36.1)

We see further glimpses of the eternal growth in relationship with God: “But when this [present] fashion [of things] passes away, and man has been renewed, and flourishes in an incorruptible state, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, [then] there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain [continually], always holding fresh converse with God” (5.35.1). Yet, he also notes that some of the saved will dwell in heaven, some in paradise, and others in the holy city (5.35.1). There will be a distinction of reward in eternity based on differences in faithfulness and fruitfulness (5.35.2).

In stunning terms, Irenaeus sums up the whole eschatological goal for creation and humanity through Christ:

John, therefore, did distinctly foresee the first “resurrection of the just,” and the inheritance in the kingdom of the earth; and what the prophets have prophesied concerning it harmonize [with his vision]. For the Lord also taught these things, when He promised that He would have the mixed cup new with His disciples in the kingdom. The apostle, too, has confessed that the creation shall be free from the bondage of corruption, [so as to pass] into the liberty of the sons of God. And in all these things, and by them all, the same God the Father is manifested, who fashioned man, and gave promise of the inheritance of the earth to the fathers, who brought it (the creature) forth [from bondage] at the resurrection of the just, and fulfils the promises for the kingdom of His Son; subsequently bestowing in a paternal manner those things which neither the eye has seen, nor the ear has heard, nor has [thought concerning them] arisen within the heart of man, For there is the one Son, who accomplished His Father’s will; and one human race also in which the mysteries of God are wrought, “which the angels desire to look into;” and they are not able to search out the wisdom of God, by means of which His handiwork, confirmed and incorporated with His Son, is brought to perfection; that His offspring, the First-begotten Word, should descend to the creature, that is, to what had been moulded, and that it should be contained by Him; and, on the other hand, the creature should contain the Word, and ascend to Him, passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God. (*Haer.* 5.36.3)

Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160–220)

Tertullian was born in Carthage, western north Africa, educated well, and trained in law. Converted sometime later in life, he remained in Carthage, wrote a number of apologetic and theological treatises, and famously drifted toward the Montanist sect (“the New Prophecy”) later in his life.⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan notes, “Eschatology occupies a prominent place in many of Tertullian’s writings. The eschatological theme occurs and recurs throughout the corpus of treatises which tradition has preserved for us. Nor does it occur only in isolated passages. It is, rather, set into the context of an overall world-view.”⁸ And with regard to that eschatology, Daley observes that “Tertullian drew freely on biblical eschatology and on the writings of earlier Christian writers, particularly Justin and Irenaeus.”⁹

Tertullian appears more eager than his predecessors to understand some aspects of the coming millennium more spiritually and figuratively. He writes,

We do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem, “let down from heaven,” which the apostle also calls “our mother from above;” and, while declaring that our πολιτευμα, or citizenship, is in heaven, he predicates of it that it is really a city in heaven. (*Adv. Marc.* 3.25 [ANF 3])¹⁰

Tertullian also outlines the events of the end times this way according to Revelation. Satan will be bound in the future during the millennial kingdom and then cast into the fire: “After the casting of the devil into the bottomless pit for a while, the blessed prerogative of the first resurrection may be ordained from the thrones; and then again, after the consignment of him to the fire, that the judgment of the final and universal resurrection may be determined out of the books” (*Res.* 25).

Tertullian had a fairly pessimistic view of the present world contrasted with a firm hope for the next. Pelikan writes, “Tertullian looked to the *parousia*, and perhaps only to it, as the source of his hope for the future. His pessimism about the historical process and particularly about conditions in his own time was relieved, then, not by a hope that historical process would produce its own corrective, but by the hope that the return of Christ would set it straight.”¹¹ And Eric Osborn

⁷ See S. L. Greenside, *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose and Jerome*, The Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus Edition (Louisville: Westminster, 1956), 21.

⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Eschatology of Tertullian,” *CH* 21.2 (1952): 109. For a good introduction to the life, writings, and thought of Tertullian, see Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian, The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁹ Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 34.

¹⁰ Unless noted, all quotations in this chapter from Tertullian are from the ANF series.

¹¹ Pelikan, “Eschatology of Tertullian,” 111–12.

observes, “The second advent of Christ is pivotal in Tertullian’s eschatology, but the four main elements (return of Christ in glory, resurrection of the body, universal judgement and a renewed earth) are not discussed in every place.”¹²

He calls the coming kingdom the “millennial interspace” and asserts that after that period has passed, “when even the outward fashion of the world itself...passes away, then the whole human race shall be raised again, to have its dues meted out according as it has merited in the period of good or evil” (*Apol.* 48). That is, the restoration of creation will occur during that millennial span, after which comes the general resurrection unto judgment.

However, Tertullian has a unique perspective on resurrection during the millennial intermediate period: “After its thousand years are over, within which period is completed the resurrection of the saints, who rise sooner or later according to their deserts there will ensue the destruction of the world and the conflagration of all things at the judgment” (*Adv. Marc.* 3.25). Osborn comments, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, “This is an attractive idea. Early risers will enjoy the freshness of the first hundred years. Others will emerge about the year 200; but many should not be expected before 950.”¹³

Osborn further notes, “The spectacular millenarianism of Irenaeus finds but one, albeit extended, reference in Tertullian’s writings (*Marc.* 3.24.3–6). A kingdom is promised on earth, a city let down from heaven (*Rev.* 21.2–10)... This city has been provided by God for his risen saints in order to refresh them with all spiritual blessings and to compensate them for all that they have not enjoyed in this world... Then the world will be destroyed in conflagration, all shall be changed into incorruptible, angelic substances and translated into the kingdom of heaven. The purpose of the millennium is to provide reward of joy in the presence of God.”¹⁴

Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170–235)

Before describing the eschatology of Hippolytus of Rome, the first step is to determine his authentic writings from which to draw this eschatological outlook. This process is complicated by the controversy surrounding Hippolytus in contemporary scholarship.¹⁵ Though the extant book

¹² Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 215.

¹³ Osborn, *Tertullian*, 217n17.

¹⁴ Osborn, *Tertullian*, 216–17.

¹⁵ For a history of historical-critical debate surrounding Hippolytus, see David Dunbar, “The Problem of Hippolytus of Rome: A Study in Historical-Critical Reconstruction,” *JETS* 25.1 (1982): 63–74. For a good overview of views on authorship of extant texts, see T. C. Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome: Commentary on Daniel and ‘Chronicon’*, Gorgias Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics, vol. 67 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2017), 2–7. In the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea, provided this list of Hippolytus’s works, which he himself concedes is partial list: *On the Hexaëmeron, On what followed the Hexaëmeron, Against Marcion, On the Song, On Parts of Ezeiel, On the Pascha, Against All the Heresies* (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.22.1–2). In the fifth century, Jerome supplements this partial list with the following: *On the six days of creation, On Exodus, On the Song of Songs, On Genesis, On Zechariah, On the Psalms, On Isaiah, On Daniel, On the Apocalypse, On the Proverbs, On Ecclesiastes, On Saul, On the Pythonissa, On the*

Refutation of All Heresies is anonymous, I (along with many others¹⁶) regard Hippolytus as its author. I also receive as authentic his commentary on Daniel, written around AD 204 in Rome.¹⁷

Following a common tradition among premillennialists before him, Hippolytus reckons the history of the world in terms of consecutive thousand-year periods, estimating that his own day was nearing the end of the sixth-thousand-years age. He writes, “For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they ‘shall reign with Christ,’ when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse: for ‘a day with the Lord is as a thousand years’” (*On Daniel* 2.4 [ANF 5]). Despite what many regard as a desperate and absurd typology of the six days of creation, one thing is certain: Hippolytus believed that the seventh-day Sabbath rest in Genesis 1 was a type of the coming seven-thousandth-year period of the kingdom on earth, which is the period referred to by John in the Apocalypse—obviously, the millennium of Revelation 20. Thus Hippolytus was both a futurist and premillennialist in his eschatology. He very likely received this traditional reading from the popular Epistle of Barnabas as well as from Irenaeus.

This characterization of Hippolytus’s millennialism has been challenged. After acknowledging that “the six days prior to the first Sabbath represent the time on earth before the kingdom of the saints commences,” Schmidt asserts, “Nowhere in his *Commentary on Daniel* does Hippolytus specify whether he believes in a literal millennial reign of Christ after the 6000 years are completed, but he does believe that when Jesus returns he will usher in an ‘eternal kingdom’ and ‘consume’ all of those who oppose him ‘in an eternal fire’ (4.14.3). This seems to leave little room for a millennial kingdom and a renewed battle with evil.”¹⁸ However, Schmidt’s interpretation is based on a false choice fallacy, as if Hippolytus (and, indeed, millennialists in general) must hold that *either* the reign of Christ with his saints is only a thousand years *or* the reign of Christ with his saints is eternal. It has always been the view of classic (Irenaeus) premillennialism that the reign of Christ with his saints will be eternal, but that the first thousand years of that eternal reign will have unique characteristics as a transition period between the first and second resurrection, as well as the period of the redemption and transformation of the creation.

For example, Irenaeus writes, “Therefore the great God showed future things by Daniel, and confirmed them by His Son; and...Christ is the stone which is cut out without hands, who shall destroy temporal kingdoms, and introduce an eternal one, which is the resurrection of the just” (*Haer.* 5.26.2; cf. 5.30.4, 5.32.1). Likewise, Justin Martyr—whose millennialism is uncontested (*Dial.* 80)—spoke of the eternal kingdom when Christ “raises all of us up, and makes some incorruptible, immortal, and free from pain in an everlasting and indissoluble kingdom, and banishes others into the eternal torment of fire” (*Dial.* 117 [Falls]; cf. 34, 46, 76, 120). It is therefore

Antichrist, On the resurrection, Against Marcion, On the Passover, Against all heresies, and On the praise of our Lord and Saviour (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 61).

¹⁶ Dunbar, “The Problem of Hippolytus of Rome,” 66.

¹⁷ See W. Brian Shelton, *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus: An Early Church Presbyter’s Commentary on Daniel*, Paternoster Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 1-21; Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*, 8-9.

¹⁸ Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*, 18, 19.

a non sequitur to argue that Hippolytus's reference to an eternal kingdom leaves "little room" for a literal thousand-year kingdom as the first thousand years of an eternal reign of Christ and his saints. It is far more likely that Hippolytus meant to extend the literal chronological reckoning of the six thousand years of creation to the seventh thousand-year period into the future, and thus conceive of a millennial period that commences the eternal reign of Christ—as in Barnabas, Justin, and Irenaeus. Because he took the first six thousand years from the time of creation literally, there is no reason to assume Hippolytus would take the seventh thousand-year period as a figure for an eternal kingdom. That the future Sabbath rest could refer to an eternal heavenly kingdom is highly improbable, especially in light of both his predecessors and contemporaries who had a similar typological interpretation of the seven-thousandth year of history as the future millennial reign. What Hippolytus does not do, though, is speculate about the details of this period—merely that Christ's kingdom will be present on earth and the saints will rule with him.

In his commentary on Genesis, Hippolytus makes the following assertion based on a rather allegorical reading of Old Testament figures: "The word of God here is the promise anew of the blessing and the hope of a kingdom to come, in which the saints shall reign with Christ, and keep the true Sabbath" (*On Genesis* [ANF 5]). This is in keeping with other treatments of the future millennium as a fulfillment of the Sabbath typology. In his commentary on Daniel, Hippolytus notes that those who "survive [the antichrist's] days"—that is, the survivors of his great persecution during the second half of the tribulation—"to him the kingdom of heaven comes.... The saints shall inherit the kingdom along with Christ" (*On Daniel* 2.40 [ANF 5]). This "kingdom of heaven" inherited by the saints is none other than the millennial earthly kingdom that arrives with the return of Christ.

Like others, Hippolytus's typological approach to premillennial eschatology allows for dual fulfillments: one spiritual and partial for the present church age, and one complete and literal for the future coming of Christ. He could speak of the binding of Satan as a present spiritual reality: "Whomsoever, therefore, Satan bound in chains, these did the Lord on His coming loose from the bonds of death, having bound our strong adversary and delivered humanity" (*On Daniel* 2.18). Also, he does not hesitate to interpret narrative Scriptures as having both a historical fulfillment and a future eschatological fulfillment, as is the case of the identity of Samson from the tribe of Dan as a partial fulfillment of Genesis 49:16. He writes, "Well, the prophecy had its partial fulfillment in Samson, but its complete fulfillment is reserved for Antichrist" (*On Christ and Antichrist* 16 [ANF 5]).

It is important to recall that just as Hippolytus held to a millennial reign, this was properly the first thousand years of an eternal kingdom, not one that would end. It would thus be characterized by certain unique features and punctuated by a second resurrection of the wicked, in its most common second-century form. He could also write of the eternal kingdom of heaven: "When at length the Judge of judges and the King of kings comes from heaven, who shall subvert the whole dominion and power of the adversary, and shall consume all with the eternal fire of punishment. But to His servants, and prophets, and martyrs, and to all who fear Him, He will give an everlasting

kingdom; that is, they shall possess the endless enjoyment of good” (*Scholia on Daniel 7.22* [ANF 5]). It is possible, then, that Hippolytus viewed the millennium as the period during which the kingdom from heaven—with the return of Christ—fills the whole world, as indicated in the vision of Daniel 2:34, 45.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 9 The Advent and Advance of Amillennialism

Notwithstanding efforts to push the presence of amillennialism back to the beginning of the patristic period,¹ no clear, direct evidence of an amillennial eschatology can be found in the first and second centuries. Ironically, for proof of the existence of an amillennial eschatology, we must depend on the writings of premillennialists. However, we are able to cobble together the beginnings of amillennial and antichiliastic eschatology primarily in the school of Alexandria with Clement and Origen.

Nonchiliastic Eschatology of Clement of Alexandria

The writings of the late second-century theologian Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215) likely held to a spiritual view of the kingdom and may very well fit the category of “pious Christians” to whom Justin refers when he speaks of those who hold to the true faith but think differently about eschatological events (*Dial.* 80). Clement seems to have planned a book called *On the Resurrection*, as he wrote, “Though cut down, we spring up again, as will be shown at greater length in the book *On the Resurrection*” (*Instructor* 2.11 [ANF 2]). This brief statement points to Clement’s belief that the same body that dies will in some way rise again. He notes that the full reception of “light” and “perfection” by humanity is “reserved till the resurrection of those who believe,” when believers will receive “the promise previously made” (*Instructor* 1.6). Clement reveals a realized—and thus spiritualized—eschatology when he interprets Jesus’ promise to “raise him up in the last day” as presently fulfilled: “As far as possible in this world, which is what he means by the last day, and which is preserved till the time that it shall end, we believe that we are made perfect” (*Instructor* 1.6).

¹ Hill Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

He later expounds on this tension between the already and the not-yet aspects of our eternal life: “But faith is not lame in any respect; nor after our departure from this world does it make us who have believed, and received without distinction the earnest of future good, wait; but having in anticipation grasped by faith that which is future, after the resurrection we receive it as present.... And where faith is, there is the promise; and the consummation of the promise is rest” (*Instructor* 1.6). Clement argues that although Christ promised to put an end to the works of evil desire, birth, and corruption experienced by humanity, this has only been partially fulfilled in the present age.² Clement applies a dual-interpretation hermeneutic to his prophecy. In the present age, the promise of destroying the works of desire is fulfilled spiritually. In the redeemed, the desire for vice has been replaced by the desire for virtue. The birth of vice that had led to the soul’s corruption brought spiritual death.

Ultimately for Clement, the destination of believers and the object of their hope is heavenly, not earthly: “As soon as we are regenerated, we are honoured by receiving the good news of the hope of rest, even the Jerusalem above, in which it is written that milk and honey fall in showers, receiving through what is material the pledge of the sacred food. ‘For meats are done away with,’ as the apostle himself says; but this nourishment on milk leads to the heavens, rearing up citizens of heaven, and members of the angelic choirs” (*Instructor* 1.6). In this context, the reference to “milk and honey” is certainly metaphorical or spiritual, not to actual physical milk and honey—“for we drink in the word, the nutriment of the truth” (*Instructor* 1.6). This is in keeping with the heavenly, spiritual aspiration in Clement’s soteriology. Christ’s teaching “leads to heaven” and brings the faithful child of instruction “to anchor in the haven of heaven” (*Instructor* 1.7). Indeed, the Christian life is a “journey to heaven” (*Instructor* 3.7). And in *Miscellanies*, he notes that “those who have been rightly reared in the words of truth, and received provision for eternal life, wing their way to heaven” (*Miscellanies* 1.1).

Clement interprets language and imagery from Isaiah 11:7—which premillennialists have interpreted as ultimately referring to the future messianic age—as applying to the present reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (*Miscellanies* 6.6). He also concludes that the church has inherited the promises made to Israel, quoting a passage that does not seem to exist in any extant literature: “Accordingly it is added more clearly, ‘Thou hast inherited the covenant of Israel,’ speaking to those called from among the nations” (*Miscellanies* 2.6). This seems to be a major basis of Clement’s supersessionism with regard to Israel.

In discussing the meaning of the seven days of purification after a person dies, Clement ponders whether “the time be that which through the seven periods (ἑπτὰ περιόδων) enumerated returns to the chiefest rest (ἀνάπαυσιν).” That this “rest” is a reference to the seventh day, not the eighth that follows, is clear when one recalls the statement a few lines earlier: “For on the seventh day the rest (ἡ ἀνάπαυσις) is celebrated” (*Miscellanies* 4.25). It is possible, given Clement’s high

² In this connection Clement is responding to an interpretation of false teachers using the apocryphal *Gospel of the Egyptians* (see *Miscellanies* 3.9).

regard for Barnabas, that he is referring to that earlier author's concept of a series of historical time periods of a thousand years each, with the future seventh period characterized as the "Sabbath rest." However, it is also possible that Clement interprets the seventh period of rest symbolically as eternal rest, not an intermediate period followed by the eighth eternal day, as it is in Barnabas.³

With regard to cosmic renewal, Clement sees parallels between Greek teachings and Christian theology with respect to eschatological expectations. For example, Empedocles "speaks thus physically of the renewal of all things (φυσικῶς οὕτως τῆς τῶν πάντων ἀναλήψεως μέμνηται), as consisting in a transmutation into the essence of fire (εἰς τὴν τοῦ πυρὸς οὐσίαν μεταβολῆς), which is to take place" (*Miscellanies* 5.14). Almost all traces of a future physical renewal of this earth have been lost in Clement's spiritualized eschatology. The Alexandrian school in general seems to have set a course in which cosmic eschatology is conflated with personal eschatology. In addressing birth and death, Clement notes, "By natural necessity in the divine plan death follows birth, and the coming together of soul and body is followed by their dissolution. If birth exists for the sake of learning and knowledge, dissolution leads to the final restoration" (*Miscellanies* 3.9).⁴ This "final restoration" comes after death, but only for the righteous. Clement notes that for "the good," the "hope after death" is "good hope," while for "the bad" it is the opposite (*Miscellanies* 4.22). He asserts, "If we live throughout holily and righteously, we are happy here, and shall be happier after our departure hence; not possessing happiness for a time, but enabled to rest in eternity" (*Miscellanies* 5.14).

Clement's body-soul dualism and his emphasis on the eternal blessedness of the soul lead him to occasionally regard physical death—the separation of soul and body—as a blessing.⁵ He writes, "The severance, therefore, of the soul from the body, made a life-long study, produces in the philosopher gnostic alacrity, so that he is easily able to bear natural death, which is the dissolution of the chains which bind the soul to the body" (*Miscellanies* 4.3). And more clearly, "The soul which has chosen the best life—the life that is from God and righteousness—exchanges earth for heaven" (*Miscellanies* 4.26). So, during this life, people are not "able to apprehend God clearly," but they will see God "when they arrive at the final perfection" (*Miscellanies* 5.1). It seems Clement relies greatly on the personal eschatology of Greek philosophy, especially Socrates, whose hope is in life after death, the soul separate from the body, experiencing immortal life (*Miscellanies* 5.2).

³ See discussion of the relationship between Clement of Alexandria and Barnabas in Go Deeper Excursus 7.

⁴ Translation for Book 3 of *Miscellanies* is from Henry Chadwick, ed., *Alexandrian Christianity, The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954).

⁵ Clement's body-soul dualism is seen clearly in *Miscellanies* 4.26—"The soul of man is confessedly the better part of man, and the body the inferior. But neither is the soul good by nature, nor, on the other hand, is the body bad by nature.... The constitution of man, then, which has its place among things of sense, was necessarily composed of things diverse, but not opposite—body and soul."

The Antichiliasm of Origen, Dionysius, and Eusebius

Clement's hyper-spiritualized and hyper-realized eschatology, which has no room for an earthly kingdom, makes way for Origen of Alexandria's antichiliasm of the later third century. However, his harshest words seem to have in mind a carnal chiliasm reminiscent of Cerinthus rather than the premillennialism of Irenaeus of Lyons. In *First Principles* 2.11.2, Origen writes:

Certain persons, then, refusing the labour of thinking, and adopting a superficial view of the letter of the law, and yielding rather in some measure to the indulgence of their own desires and lusts, being disciples of the letter alone, are of opinion that the fulfilment of the promises of the future are to be looked for in bodily pleasure and luxury; and therefore they especially desire to have again, after the resurrection, such bodily structures as may never be without the power of eating, and drinking, and performing all the functions of flesh and blood, not following the opinion of the Apostle Paul regarding the resurrection of a spiritual body. And consequently they say, that after the resurrection there will be marriages, and the begetting of children, imagining to themselves that the earthly city of Jerusalem is to be rebuilt.... And to speak shortly, according to the manner of things in this life in all similar matters, do they desire the fulfilment of all things looked for in the promises, viz., that what now is should exist again. Such are the views of those who, while believing in Christ, understand the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises. (*Princ.* 2.11.2 [ANF 4])

Origen's antichiliasm position clumsily conflates elements of classic Irenaean premillennialism and Cerinthian carnal chiliasm, which Irenaeus himself rejected. This "carnal chiliasm" is found in Eusebius's excerpt from a third-century work recounting a dialogue between Gaius of Rome and Proclus, a Montanist interlocutor. Gaius reported that Cerinthus taught "that after the resurrection the kingdom of Christ will be upon the earth and once again the flesh will live in Jerusalem governed by the flesh, to serve lusts and pleasures. He is an enemy of the scriptures of God, and wishing to lead people astray, he says that the 'marriage feast' will last for a period of a thousand years" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.28.2 [Schott]). Eusebius also quotes from Dionysius of Alexandria's third-century work, *On Promises*, which relays that Cerinthus taught that "the kingdom of Christ would be upon the earth, and being a lover of the body and utterly carnal, he dreamt that it would consist of the things he desired, the belly and the things that fill the belly, that is food, drink, and marriages and the 'festivals,' 'sacrifices,' and 'slaughter of holy victims'" (*Hist. eccl.* 3.28.4–5). That Eusebius also relies on Irenaeus, the premillennialist, for information about the false teacher Cerinthus (3.28.6) demonstrates that the problematic element of Cerinthus's eschatology was not the fact of an earthly millennial kingdom per se but its radically carnal character. It appears, too, that later fathers regarded the observance of Jewish festivals and sacrifices as an objectionable element belonging to carnal chiliasm.

Yet in Origen’s imprecise, polemical conflation of elements of Irenaean premillennialism and Cerinthian carnal chiliasm, Origen bequeaths upon future generations what amounts to a false choice. Uninformed readers must side with either an absurdly literal millennialism that any reasonable Christian would reject, or an extreme spiritual understanding of eschatology in which almost everything becomes an allegory or symbol for spiritual or heavenly truths. The influence of Origen of Alexandria on subsequent thinkers, especially in the East, can hardly be exaggerated. His antichilastic stance quickly became the approach of many in both the East and the West.

Origen’s disciple and successor in Alexandria, Dionysius (c. 190–265), was also an antichilast, but he took the further step of attempting to sever the relationship between the book of Revelation and the apostle John, which would place in question—for a short season—its full canonical status.⁶ Though he appealed to his own diligent critical analysis of the book in comparison with John’s other writings, the main motivation for casting doubt on Revelation was the chiliasm that resulted from a literal reading of the text by Cerinthus (see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.1–27). Dionysius, though, distanced himself from people like Gaius of Rome and the heretics known as the *Alogi*, who rejected both the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation as written by Cerinthus himself.⁷

Dionysius himself had been provoked to a deeper antichiliasm in light of the writing of one Nepos, a third-century bishop of Arsinoe and author of a lost work titled *Refutation of the Allegorists*. Nepos’ work had been directed toward what he perceived as a hyper-spiritualizing of biblical texts by Origen and the Alexandrian school, especially prophetic writings.⁸ Eusebius relays that Nepos “taught in a more Jewish manner that the promises made to the saints in the divine writings should be construed in a more Jewish manner, and supposed that there will be a period of one thousand years of corporeal luxury upon this withered earth.” Dionysius himself, praising Nepos for his faith and piety, regarding him as a true brother, complained that his writing had damaged the faith of others by persuading them “to put their hope in a kingdom of God that is meager and mortal and like things are now” (quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.24.2 [Schott]). Nepos having died, Dionysius gathered together a group of those who had followed the premillennial doctrines and successfully persuaded them to abandon their views (*Hist. eccl.* 7.24.6–9).

Certainly, if Dionysius of Alexandria had fully imbibed Origen’s antichiliasm and allegorical hermeneutic, even Irenaeus’s balanced incarnational premillennialism would have sounded like extreme literalism. Like Origen, the antichilasts present a false choice—either an excessively carnal, worldly, meager, “Jewish” kingdom or a spiritual, heavenly, glorious, “Christian” kingdom.

⁶ However, we have seen that the book of Revelation had been deemed as Johannine and canonical universally throughout the second century. Note especially its inclusion in the Muratorian fragment (c. AD 180), a description of the New Testament books received as apostolic, prophetic, and therefore canonical at least in Rome during the second century (Charles E. Hill, “The Debate over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon,” *WTJ* 57 [1997]: 437–52). Regarding the Book of Revelation, the Muratorian canon says that Paul wrote to seven churches just as the apostle John had done—that is, the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2–3; and the church explicitly received the Apocalypse of John as canonical.

⁷ But see Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2004), 172–204.

⁸ See Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 60–61.

Whether his disputants leaned toward carnal chiliasm or the more classic Irenaeian form, we cannot be sure. The report comes to us from Dionysius's own self-congratulatory report, filtered through Eusebius's excerpt; the writings of Nepos are missing. Yet Dionysius's words also reveal that even in the third century, premillennialists like Nepos and those who followed him were regarded as true Christians, simply thought to have been misled by an over-literal interpretation of prophetic texts.

We have already noted the antichiliasmic prejudice of Eusebius of Caesarea as it manifested itself in his characterization of Papias of Hierapolis. Eusebius is often associated with a view of the millennium that at times alternates between an amillennial and a postmillennial perspective. He was certainly opposed to the earlier church's premillennialism. He took great pains to try to distance Papias from any close connection to the apostle John and to drive a wedge between the apostle John and the book of Revelation. At times, Eusebius sounds conventionally amillennial in his outlook. At other times—especially as it relates to the rise of Constantine—he appears to have understood those pro-Christian political developments as a kind of realization of the kingdom in the world.

Christopher Bonura summarizes this thesis: “Eusebius suggested that the eternal kingdom of heaven really had arrived in the form of the Roman Empire itself, with Constantine replacing Christ as the herald and ruler of that kingdom.”⁹ However, Bonura rightly questions the thesis, arguing persuasively, “With the possible exception of a few marginal figures, no Byzantines identified the empire as God's eternal kingdom, nor did they believe that the emperor had replaced Christ, *christomimetic* though his office might be.”¹⁰ Rather, he argues, “Eusebius evidently held that the Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom of Daniel—a worldly and mortal empire—and repeatedly expressed an expectation that an everlasting eschatological kingdom would dawn only at Christ's second coming.”¹¹ Yet hermeneutically, Eusebius and Origen were cut from the same cloth; or, better, Origen's cloth provided the thread from which Eusebius spun his yarn. In his commentary on Isaiah, for instance, Eusebius applied the vivid imagery of 11:1–9 entirely to the present church in a spiritual sense: “Even the rapacious and greedy *wolves* among people will turn from their depravity, and their souls will flock together as tame and meek lambs in one church.... And others, whose dispositions could have been likened to *lions*, abandoned their savage-hearted and flesh-eating ways, and *they shall graze* together with the newborn in the church as *calves and*

⁹ Christopher Bonura, “Eusebius of Caesarea, the Roman Empire, and the Fulfillment of Biblical Prophecy: Reassessing Byzantine Imperial Eschatology in the Age of Constantine, *CH* 90.3 (2021): 513. He cites Stephen Shoemaker: “Eusebius [in the *Tricennial Oration*] equates Constantine with Christ, and likewise, the empire with Christ's heavenly Kingdom. In effect, the coming of the Kingdom of God that Christ promised has now been realized, according to Eusebius, in the Roman Empire” (Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018], 40).

¹⁰ Bonura, “Eusebius of Caesarea,” 514.

¹¹ Bonura, “Eusebius of Caesarea,” 514.

bulls, and they shall partake of the same nourishment of the divine Scriptures.”¹² Gone are the days of understanding these passages in the both/and manner of Irenaeus, which respected the text and honored the church.

However, by the fifth century amillennialism seems to have become the standard in most elite ecclesiastical circles.¹³ Augustine of Hippo represents what became the common amillennial view for much of the medieval and even Protestant era.¹⁴ He wrote:

Now, those who, on the strength of this passage, got the notion that the first resurrection was to be a bodily one, were influenced in this direction mainly by the matter of the thousand years. The notion was that the saints were destined to enjoy so protracted a sabbath of repose, a holy leisure, that is, after the labors of the six thousand years stretching from the creation of man, his great sin, and merited expulsion from the happiness of paradise into the unhappiness of this mortal life. The interpretation was worked out in the light of the Scripture text: “One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Thus, there was supposed to follow upon the six thousand years taken as six days a seventh day—or sabbath—taking up the last thousand, and to be given over to the resurrecting saints for celebration. One might put up with such an interpretation if it included belief in some spiritual delights accruing to the saints from the Lord’s company during that sabbath rest. In fact, I myself at one time accepted such an opinion. But when these interpreters say that the rising saints are to spend their time in limitless gormandizing with such heaps of food and drink as not only go beyond all sense of decent restraint but go utterly beyond belief, then such an interpretation becomes wholly unacceptable save to

¹² Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Jonathan J. Armstrong, ed. Joel E. Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Texts*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 64–65. Italics in original.

¹³ In the polemical and apologetic back-and-forth between primarily amillennial and premillennial perspectives, it has sometimes been suggested that the ecumenical councils of Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431) condemned premillennialism as heresy. This was allegedly done through the language of Constantinople that Christ’s kingdom “shall have no end.” However, it has been shown that classic Irenaeian premillennialism of the second century—and its close siblings—all affirmed an eternal reign of Christ; the millennium was merely the first phase in an eternal kingdom. The claim of a condemnation at Constantinople has been soundly refuted (Francis X. Gumerlock, “Millennialism and the Early Church Councils: Was Chiliasm Condemned at Constantinople?” *FH* 36.2 [2004]: 83–95). At the council of Ephesus, though some oriental bishops who supported Nestorius did make some disparaging comments in passing about chiliasm, nothing remotely close to a condemnation of premillennialism occurred at that council (Michael J. Svigel, “The Phantom Heresy: Did the Council of Ephesus (431) Condemn Chiliasm?” *TrinJ* 24.1 [2003]: 105–112). The fact is, though premillennialism did wane since its heyday in the second century, some continued to express and defend it, including Commodian (third century, though some date his writings in the fifth), Victorinus of Pettau (late third century), Methodius of Olympus, and Lactantius (late third to early fourth century). See discussions in Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, 61–63; 64; 65–68; 162–64.

¹⁴ Bredero writes, “Basing itself on the interpretations given by St. Augustine, [the medieval church] understood the thousand-year rule of the saints as the period of the church’s present existence on earth, from its founding until judgment day. History was usually divided into six periods paralleling the six days of creation. The sixth day had begun at Christ’s birth and would continue until the end of time. In this scene the antichrist was supposed to be near” (Adriaan H. Bredero, *Christendom and Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 97.

the carnal-minded. But the spiritual-minded term those who can swallow the literal interpretation of the thousand years “Chiliasts” (from the Greek, *chilias*, ‘a thousand’) or “Millenarians” (from the corresponding Latin word). To refute them point by point would take too long. My present obligation will be, rather, to show how the Scriptural passage in question ought to be understood. (*Civ.* 20.7)¹⁵

Historical evidence actually suggests not only an intentional mischaracterization of the doctrines of early premillennialists but also an attempt to suppress the testimonies themselves. Grant observes with regard to Book 5 of *Against Heresies*: “The *Sacra Parallela* ascribed to John of Damascus (eighth century) are still willing to provide an excerpt from *Heresies* 5.36, but the millenarian chapters 32–36 are entirely absent from two significant Latin manuscripts of *Heresies*. Obviously.... they were suppressed, perhaps in the fifth century—though not in the East. The principal opponents of the older view were the Gnostics and, later, the Christian Platonists of Alexandria, whose opinions Eusebius shared.”¹⁶ We could probably add to this the fact that Papias’s five books are completely lost to us today—the effect of intentional neglect. Lost, too, are writings of other known premillennialists like Justin Martyr (cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.6.2). Perhaps, too, the original ending of Didache 16 was intentionally forsaken because of its chiliastic content.

Given the fact that early premillennial testimonies were intentionally suppressed by later ecclesiastics, one is left wondering how extensive the suppression of second-century voices was carried. Are other missing works from prominent second-century fathers lost to us because of their eschatological content: that is, the missing works of Melito of Sardis (especially his lost work on the *Apocalypse of John*; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.4), Apollinaris of Hierapolis (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.27), and even Theophilus of Antioch’s *Against the Heresy of Hermogenes*, which relies on the book of Revelation (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.24)? Would it be equally absurd to wonder whether the missing material in two passages of the anonymous *Epistle to Diognetus* (7.6; 10.8) was excised for theological reasons, considering both lacunae occur at points when eschatological issues began to be discussed?¹⁷

Of course, we cannot be sure exactly how broadly represented chiliastic teachings would be if we had access to everything written during the second century. However, we can assume that the ecclesiastical thought leaders of the fourth century and beyond, who demonstrably criticized and attempted to suppress clear premillennial voices of the second century, would have simultaneously

¹⁵ Translation is from *Saint Augustine: City of God, Books XVII–XXII*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Daniel J. Honan, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 24 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 265–66.

¹⁶ Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 39.

¹⁷ *Diognetus* 7.6 says, “For he will send him as judge, and who will endure his coming?” (Brannan). Brannan notes, “The manuscript has a lacuna at this point, with a marginal note from the copyist noting the break was also in his exemplar.” *Diognetus* 10.8 breaks off after it reads, “Then you will admire those who endure the temporary fire for the sake of righteousness and will consider them blessed when you know that fire” (Brannan). The text also notes a lacuna here.

amplified any clear amillennial voices from the same time had there actually been any. The fact that a handful of premillennial voices still survived under those conditions, while no orthodox amillennial voices survived, pleads for an explanation.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 10

What Are We Seeing in Old Testament Prophecy: Fantasy, Photo, or Figure?

When approaching the poetic and figurative language of the Old Testament prophets, where do we draw the line between symbol and reality, between literal and figurative? This problem becomes acute when we consider the nature of much of the Old Testament’s prophecies of the coming kingdom. In his book, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, Sandy observes, “The very nature of prophetic language, which gives it power, makes it challenging. Prophecy is usually poetry, and it has all the features of Hebrew poetry. Rather than the straightforward language of propositions, it communicates in emotive, hyperbolic and figurative ways.”¹ Sandy provides some important correctives to over-literalizing, over-reading, and asking questions the authors may not intend to answer. However, he asserts repeatedly that the Bible contains “powerful language designed for dramatic impact on its hearers.”²

But what do we do with all the details? How should we read these symbols if not literally? In short, when we read the Old Testament prophecies of the coming kingdom, what, exactly, are we looking at? At the risk of oversimplification—but for the purpose of clarity—let me suggest three possible answers to this question, which lie on a spectrum: the *fantastic*, the *figurative*, or the *photographic*, with mediating positions between.³

FANTASTIC FIGURATIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC

¹ D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 195–196.

² Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 198.

³ These roughly correspond with Oswalt’s distinctions between “literalistic” (photographic), “spiritualistic” (fantastic), and “figurative” (figurative). See his comments on Isaiah 11:6–9 in John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 283.

Fantastic. This approach views the events and descriptions in the poetic prophetic language as having primarily an affective purpose: to stir the reader of the prophet’s day to particular feelings of hope, awe, joy, transcendence, faith, fear, sorrow, repentance, etc. The language and imagery have no actual referents to anything real on the timeline of unfolding history. To use our image of “plowshares and pruning hooks,” the “fantastic” approach would see this as presenting an ideal we should strive for, usually applied as a spiritual disposition or moral principle. For instance, Calvin comments on Isaiah 2:4, “He meant that Christ makes such a reconciliation between God and men, that a comfortable state of peace exists among themselves, by putting an end to destructive wars....When the gospel shall be published, it will be an excellent remedy for putting an end to quarrels; and not only so, but that, when resentments have been laid aside, men will be disposed to assist each other.”⁴ The purpose of the image, then, is to move people to exchange warfare for peace, to submit to the rule of God in their own lives.⁵

Regarding a vision or prophecy as “fantastic” does not mean the same thing as “false” or even “fictional.” Just as Tolkien’s epic *The Lord of the Rings* takes place in a fantasy world, the story and characters are infused with deeper meaning that reflects spiritual truths. And C. S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* present Christian themes in a world of fantasy. So, “fantastic” can be used to illustrate spiritual, moral realities in imaginative and impactful ways. Yet neither Tolkien’s Middle Earth nor Lewis’s Narnia have actual referents in the real world—past, present, or future. In this way, a “fantastic” approach to the poetic prophecies or apocalyptic visions of the Old Testament emphasizes their allegorical character—they are vehicles to illustrate spiritual or ethical truths and to move people to faith, hope, and love rather than to reveal events that will actually take place in the future.

Photographic. Swinging to the opposite end of the spectrum, this approach takes the language quite literally. This is sometimes popularly expressed with the basic rule of interpretation: “When the literal sense of Scripture makes good sense, seek no other sense.”⁶ When the text says, “The mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills” (Isa 2:2), we should expect a major geological event that causes the Temple Mount in Jerusalem to rise until its elevation exceeds the surrounding hills. In a study on the miraculous in Isaiah, Goldingay asserts, “The elevation upon which Yahweh’s house stands is

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 100–101.

⁵ This seems to be the emphasis in Sandy’s reading of Old Testament prophecy (Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 200–203). However, Sandy also insists on an actual new creation and restoration at the return of Christ, though many of the Old Testament restoration passages are not necessarily presenting details of that time of restoration except in the most general sense (Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 205).

⁶ Ron Rhodes, *The Popular Dictionary of Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2010), 16. This “golden rule of interpretation” is repeated, in various forms, quite broadly in especially popular-level publications on end-times prophecy. As a basic “rule of thumb,” it is not objectionable; the problem is determining where the line is between “good sense” and “nonsense” is not always easy. To some people, lions eating straw like an ox makes good sense; to other this is nonsense.

not impressive; it is merely the highest point on a small outcrop that is a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide.... That this so-called mountain should be established as the highest of the mountains and raised above the hills would indeed be a miracle.”⁷ Goldingay acknowledges, though, that “Isaiah need not have such a geographical transformation in mind,” but also concludes, “There is a miracle, then, in the elevation of the temple hill.”⁸ Those who do suggest the possibility of a literal fulfillment of such a passage almost always do so tentatively. For example, Constable suggests that Isaiah “may have meant that the actual mountain on which the temple stood would be thrust higher in elevation. This may happen (cf. Ezek. 40:2; Zech. 14:4, 10), but the primary meaning seems to be that Israel and Yahweh will be exalted in the world.”⁹

In the literary world, a “photographic” approach would be like a historically accurate description of people and events. Imagine if an eminent expert in the history of the Middle Ages wrote a detailed and truthful account of the rise of the Holy Roman Empire and the power of the Papacy up to the eve of the Reformation (c. AD 800–1500). Now imagine that book somehow fell backward through time to the year AD 500. The book would set forth the future history in a way that corresponds with reality in language intended to be taken at face value. In its most extreme form, this would be how a “photographic” approach to the language and imagery of vision and prophecy would function. It would be as if a window opened in the fabric of time and space. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and the other prophets simply peered forward to see the events take place, then they simply wrote down what they saw in the best language they had.

It is important to point out that almost no credentialed commentator approaches Old Testament prophets in such a woodenly literal way with complete consistency. The “photographic” approach is sometimes seen in isolated instances, often by readers inexperienced with the way prophetic language and imagery actually work in Scripture. However, “photographic” does mark the theoretical “extreme” end of the spectrum of approaches.

Figurative. Regarding the use of figurative language in apocalyptic literature, Richard Taylor notes, “Biblical writers make extensive use of symbolism and figurative language in apocalyptic literature.... However, figurative language is limited in the degree to which it corresponds to reality.... By pressing such language in an overly literal fashion it is possible to miss a writer’s point or misrepresent him entirely. The language of symbolism can lose its effectiveness and become a playground for interpretational gymnastics that wind up distorting rather than illumining the

⁷ John Goldingay, *Miracle in Isaiah: Divine Marvel and Prophetic Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022), 210–11.

⁸ Goldingay, *Miracle in Isaiah*, 211, 212. Even Goldingay, in his commentary on Isaiah acknowledges that the language of Isa 2:2 “presumably does not predict a geophysical transformation of the Judean mountain ridge. But that is what happens in this vision, which envisages a time when nations will stream to it” (John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 43.

⁹ Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Isaiah*, 2023 ed., 35. PDF available at <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>.

text.”¹⁰ Though Taylor’s warning was intended for literature in the apocalyptic genre, it also applies generally to the symbolic and figurative language employed in poetry and prophetic oracles.¹¹

Approaching the language and imagery as “figurative” acknowledges that symbolic imagery or metaphorical language is employed not merely to impress upon people lofty heavenly realities or simply to point to spiritual or moral principles (though they do also accomplish these things). Rather, the primary referents for the figurative language are events that will take place in the future. I say “primary” because this approach also allows for spiritual and moral application of the future events to the lives of believers past and present, but that application is not the primary aim of the text. The primary aim is to paint a stylized picture of the future. Just as an impressionist painting, like a scene from Monet’s garden, portrays an actual place in the real world, so also the poetic, figurative language of the prophet portrays actual events that will take place in the real world. Yet unlike a photo, the presentation is idealized, painted in broad strokes, and intended to give an accurate though imprecise picture of reality.

In this approach—by far the most common among commentators of every theological stripe—the language of the prophet is understood as “picturesque.”¹² Unlike the “photographic” approach, the “figurative” does not see a strict *one-to-one* correspondence between the picture and the reality. However, unlike the “fantastic” approach, the “figurative” does see a *meaningful* correspondence between the symbolic vision or prophetic language and reality. That is, the language and imagery of the vision or prophecy refer to real future people, events, and conditions that will occur in this world. Then, based on that prophecy of future events, the original audience—and, in fact, all readers subsequent to the prophecy but prior to its fulfillment—are intended to draw spiritual application to strengthen faith, hope, and love.

With regard to the exaltation of the mountain of the Lord’s house above all mountains (Isa 2:2), McConville writes:

In mundane reality, the Temple Mount is not very high, not even as high as the Mount of Olives on its eastern side.... But in this linguistic sphere, the language of height is used to proclaim preeminence. The point is illustrated in Ps. 48:2 [3], where the “holy mountain” is “beautiful in elevation”.... In the same psalm, Zion is located in “the far reaches of the north,” which is also not the case in a mundane sense but taps into notions of the divine dwelling place in the wider religious environment. Isaiah, like the psalms writers, adopts

¹⁰ Richard A. Taylor, *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis, ed. David M. Howard Jr. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 126–27.

¹¹ See brief discussion on the relationship between Old Testament prophetic literature and apocalyptic literature in Taylor, *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature*, 196–200.

¹² Ivan D. Friesen, *Isaiah*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2009), 39. With regard to literary figures and motifs employed in the prophets the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* notes, “Whether using strictly prose or poetry, the prophet wrote in such a heightened speech and urgency of tone and message that the result yielded a literary expressiveness that can be termed ‘poetic.’ Accordingly, one is not surprised to find the free use of many of the literary features and rich imagery common to poetry” (Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998], 669).

language about God that has kinship with the religious language in his wider world to proclaim the unique exaltation of Yahweh.¹³

Of course, the prophets sometimes do present quite literal prophecies in which the language corresponds directly with the fulfillment. When Micah 5:2 says, “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days,” the town “Bethlehem” refers to the actual town with that name; and the ruler whose origin is from of old, the Messiah, will literally come forth from that town (Matt 2:1–6).

In the end, we must take care to avoid the two extremes of uncritically viewing the language of the Old Testament prophets as an exact “photo” of future events or as a vague “fantasy” of spiritual truths unconnected to the future. Rather, what we are “seeing” in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament is most often a stylized, picturesque “figure” of real events, sometimes using poetic or abstract imagery, but always pointing to real future conditions. How literally or figuratively we take particular words and images must be determined by context, usage in Scripture, and how the language would likely have been understood at the time. Also, we must take into consideration how clearer passages address similar future events and conditions and the overarching narrative of Scripture.

Richard Taylor presents a balanced approach to “apocalyptic” literature and its interpretation—an approach that can also be applied to prophetic oracles that use figures of speech and symbolism. He summarizes these in six guidelines to embrace: 1) “Pay close attention to grammatical details found in the original language”; 2) “Give attention to issues of genre”; 3) “Isolate the explanatory clues that are often embedded in apocalyptic texts”; 4) “Focus on macrostructure of apocalyptic texts and avoid getting bogged down in microscopic details”; 5) “Avoid reading into figurative language more than was intended by the author”; 6) “Respect the silence of the text.”¹⁴

¹³ J. Gordon McConville, *Isaiah*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Prophetic Books, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023).

¹⁴ Taylor, *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature*, 131–132.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 11

The Coming Kingdom in the Old Testament: Detailed Analysis of Key Passages

In the following lengthy excursus, I provide a comprehensive survey of passages from the major and minor prophets related to the expectation of the coming kingdom. A summary of this broad exposition appears in chapter 6 of *The Fathers on the Future*, “The Collage of the Coming Kingdom in the Old Testament.” The core of the language and imagery is found in the prophet Isaiah, and later prophets complement and supplement this core.

Isaiah 2:1–4. Already in the opening chapter of Isaiah, in which “Judah and Jerusalem” (Isa 1:1) are castigated for their wickedness, unfaithfulness, and injustice and warned of severe judgment (1:2–24), God flashes a glimpse of restoration after purification: “I will turn my hand against you; I will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy. And I will restore your judges as at the first and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness” (Isa 1:25–27). Key terms and images, which will be repeated and expanded, begin to emerge: God will “restore” (שוב) them (Isa 1:26); they will be a city of righteousness (צדק) and faithfulness (אמן) (1:26). Zion will be “redeemed by justice” (פדה) when they “repent” (שוב) (1:27). Thus, as the people of Zion return (שוב) to God in righteousness—and are purified—God returns (שוב) to them in restoration.

The subject of these vision and prophecies is explicitly limited to “Judah and Jerusalem.” In fact, prior to any presentation of poetic imagery, the title informs the reader, “The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem (על־יהודה וירושלם)” (Isa 1:1). The burden of proof, then, rests on an interpreter who wants to apply these prophecies to people other than those explicitly mentioned. Is it possible that “Judah” and “Jerusalem” are allegorical—symbols for, say, the church or all believers? Certainly, anything is linguistically possible, but Isaiah 1:1 and many of the introductions to the individual visions are intended to inform the reader what

the figurative visions are “concerning” or “about” (על) (Isa 1:1, 2:1, etc.), which must govern the scope and the referent of the prophet’s subsequent discourse.

The first major prophecy concerning the coming era of restoration in Isaiah 2:1–5 is itself couched in an extended context of destruction (Isa 1:2–31; 2:6–4:1). It thus shines its light of future hope in the midst of a threat of dark judgment. Again, Isaiah introduces this as a prophecy “concerning Judah and Jerusalem (על־יהודה וירושלם)” (Isa 2:1). The fulfillment of the prophecy is cast forward to “days to come (באחרית הימים)” (2:2). This phrase alone does not determine whether the prophecy points to a post-exilic fulfillment or a distant, eschatological era,¹ though Smith notes that the phrase is “filled with eschatological significance” and suggests that Isaiah is “talking about the last events in human history, when the kingdom of God would begin.”² Isaiah and his original audience would certainly have understood the phrase to cast the following description sometime into the future—a time beyond their present evil days, preceded by purification and restoration.

What will such “latter days” entail? Most strikingly, Jerusalem—where “the mountain of the Lord’s house” is situated (Isa 2:2), will enjoy a place of exalted preeminence in the world both politically and spiritually. Webb understands the “mountain of the Lord” as “a symbol of the coming kingdom of God, in which a purified and restored Zion is destined to play a crucial role.”³ Though Jerusalem and therefore Judah will have a prominent place, “all the nations (כל־הגוים)” and “many peoples (עמים רבים)” will stream to it (Isa 2:2–3). So, from the start the scope of Isaiah’s prophecies of eschatological restoration include not only Judah and Jerusalem but all nations of the world—the gentiles. These will “go up” to the house of the Lord to learn God’s ways and to walk in his paths (2:3). That is, Israel’s God will be acknowledged and served by the whole world. Jerusalem, as the center of God’s universal rule, will be the source of instruction for all peoples. It is interesting that although the “house of the God of Jacob” is mentioned (2:3), the gentiles are not coming to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices but to receive instruction and hear the word of the Lord.

¹ See Willem A. M. Beukin, *Jesaja 1–12*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herders, 2003), 90.

² Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, The New American Commentary, vol 15A, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 129, 129n23. Sweeney argues that the phrase באחרית הימים “refers merely to a time in the future, not to the eschatological end of time” (Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature, vol. 16 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 99). Such a minimalist approach that rules out an eschatological meaning is unwarranted by the text itself. The phrase simply casts the described events into an undetermined future well beyond that of the present audience, which could indicate an ultimate eschatological fulfillment (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Jer 48:47; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Dan 10:14). On the other hand, Oswalt suggests that, based on the context, “it cannot be said that this passage can only refer to the millennial age. In a more proximate sense it can relate to the Church age when the nations stream to Zion to learn the ways of her God through his incarnation in Christ. To be sure, we await Christ’s second coming for the complete fulfillment of this promise, but the partial fulfillment began at Pentecost” (John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 116–117). While this may be the case (especially in light of a ‘both/and’ approach to prophecy), Isaiah and his original audience would only have known that the events will take place sometime in the unknown future.

³ Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles’ Wings*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1996), 45–46.

God himself will be the source of justice not only for Israel and Judah but for all the world (Isa 2:4). As a result, warfare will give way to peace and prosperity, symbolized by the famous words, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa 2:4). That such a condition has never prevailed in the world needs no evidence.⁴ That a spiritualizing of the promise to find its fulfillment among followers of Christ in the church age neglects the historical fact that Christians, riddled with strife and schism, have seldom been at peace even among themselves. Though the ideals of peace and harmony should nevertheless be sought in the present age by those who follow the God of Jacob, the ultimate fulfillment of this passage still awaits “days to come” (Isa 2:1).

Isaiah 4:2–6. The next snapshot of the days of restoration and renewal follows a description of judgments on Judah and Jerusalem (Isa 2–3), repeatedly using the phrase “in that day” (ביום ההוא) (2:11; 20; 3:7, 18) as a reference to the well-known period of judgment known as the “Day of the Lord.”⁵ Yet just as the future judgment upon Israel is sure “in that day,” so also is the future restoration. Isaiah 4:2 says that at that time “the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious” and “the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.” The “branch” (צמח) can refer to vegetation (Isa 61:11), in which case the referent would be a future flourishing of nature. But the term also has a messianic referent in Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15 and in Zechariah 3:8; 6:12. Chisholm takes the referent as “literal crops or vegetation,” noting that, “the prophets frequently included this theme in their visions of the future age.”⁶ Smith notes that, “the two clauses in 4:2 refer to two parallel acts of God that will transform Zion. God will (a) cause his messianic Branch to spring forth, and also (b) bring marvelous fertility to the produce of the field.”⁷

This passage introduces the theme of the remnant—“the survivors of Israel”—who will constitute the seeds of the restoration of the nation that will flourish in the coming age. Yet these are not merely physical survivors; they are “called holy” and “recorded for life in Jerusalem” (Isa 4:3), because they had been cleansed “by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning” (4:4). That

⁴ It is common, even among early premillennialists, to apply this language figuratively to the church. Thus, quoting Isaiah 2:3–4, Justin Martyr writes, “That this prophecy, too, was verified you can readily believe, for twelve illiterate men, unskilled in the art of speaking, went out from Jerusalem into the world, and by the power of God they announced to the men of every nation that they were sent by Christ to teach everyone the word of God; and we, who once killed one another, [now] not only do not wage war against our enemies, but, in order to avoid lying or deceiving our examiners, we even meet death cheerfully, confessing Christ” (*1 Apol.* 39 [Falls]; cf. similar interpretation in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.34.4). Yet applying such prophecy spiritually to the church does not necessarily mean the same author rejected a literal fulfillment in the future (see Irenaeus, *Epid.* 61).

⁵ The Day of the Lord will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 15 and Go Deeper Excursus 22.

⁶ See Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 21. Passages he includes are Isa 30:23–24; 32:20; Jer 31:12; Ezek 34:26–29; and Amos 9:13–14.

⁷ Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 156. Even following Williamson’s translation, “On that day the vegetation of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious,” the passage itself points to the same kinds of conditions that will prevail during the future messianic age. See H. G. M. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1–27*, vol. 1, *Commentary on Isaiah 1–5*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 301.

is, the judgments of the coming Day of the Lord described already in Isaiah 1–3 give way to a repentant, purified, and ultimately, restored nation of saints. Imagery drawn from the pillar of fire and smoke in the Exodus (Exod 13:21–22) represents God’s enduring protection and presence in Zion. Whatever we make of the vivid symbolism of the “canopy” over “all the glory” (Isa 4:5), the significance of the cluster of images is clear: “The overshadowing fiery cloud of the divine presence, the bridal canopy, will be *shelter...shade...refuge...hiding-place*. The doubling of words is deliberate, conveying the idea of ‘every possible protection’”⁸ As Gowan puts it, “It is thus the certain, never failing, all-sufficient, caring, and protecting presence of God ‘in that day’ which this text promises. Its central concern is the future existence of a holy people enjoying the presence of God in their midst.”⁹

Isaiah 9:1–7. This beautiful song of deliverance and restoration in the messianic age bursts out in joyous strains in the midst of a description of Israel in a desperate condition: “They will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish, and they will be thrust into thick darkness” (Isa 8:22). With the opening lines of Isaiah 9, that darkness is driven out by glorious light: “But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish” (Isa 9:1).¹⁰ The “former time” (בעת הראשון) of darkness is contrasted with the “latter” (האחרון) time in which even the northern regions of Zebulun and Naphtali—“Galilee of the nations”—will be made glorious.¹¹ And if such distant regions—so susceptible to pollution by idolatry and invasion by foreign powers—will be transformed from darkness to light, how much more will Jerusalem, Judah, and the rest of the nation be purified and restored to glory!

In verse 2, “the actual poetic royal birth announcement begins,”¹² climaxing in an explicit reference to the birth and eternal reign of the Davidic king (Isa 9:6–7). In fact, it is the advent and reign of the one named “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6) that the conditions described in 9:2–5 are realized. Those who had formerly stumbled in darkness (cf. 8:21–22) now see a “great light” (אור גדול). The people who had formerly dwelt in darkness God will “multiply” (הרבית) and “increase” (הגדלת), resulting in jubilation and exultation (9:3). This runs parallel to the endless “increase” (למרבה) of the coming king’s dominion and peace. The notion of “increase without end” (למרבה...אין-קץ) implies a progressive expansion of

⁸ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 20 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999), 69.

⁹ Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 13.

¹⁰ Though this is the first verse in the English translation, in the Hebrew Masoretic text, Isa 9:1 is actually Isa 8:23, highlighting the contrast between Israel’s darkness, gloom, and anguish in Isaiah’s day (8:22) with the future light, joy, and prosperity in the “latter time” (9:1).

¹¹ On the verb tenses used, Oswalt notes, “All these events are manifestly in the future from the prophet’s point of view, yet the verbs are all in the perfect tense. Apparently, these are prophetic perfects. . . . In the uncertainty of his own milieu he nonetheless can look at a future moment and describe its events with the certainty of completed actions” (Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 242–43).

¹² Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 238.

the Davidic king's domain and growth of the kingdom forever. The reign may begin on "the throne of David" in Jerusalem (9:7), but its "peace" (שלום) will eventually fill the whole earth.

With this reign, no more will Israel experience oppression from its enemies, who will be soundly defeated in battle (9:4–5). In fact, Isaiah secures the promised deliverance on the future timeline of this real world by recalling the literal historical deliverance "on the day of Midian" (cf. Judg 7:19–25; 8:10–21). Oswalt notes, "But is this prophetic dream of freedom just a dream? Or is there reason to believe that such a thing might be? With these few words Isaiah calls to mind historic events which would give credence to the eschatological hope."¹³ This theme of warfare replaced by perfect peace echoes the language of swords and spears fashioned into plowshares and pruning hooks in Isaiah 2:4. And this Davidic king will rule his kingdom "with justice (משפט) and with righteousness (צדקה)" (9:7; cf. Isa 1:26).

By casting this vision of light, joy, peace, prosperity, justice, and righteousness into the "latter time" (9:1) and connecting it with the hoped-for Davidic king who will reign forever over all the earth (9:7; cf. 2 Sam 7:16), Isaiah seems to place the fulfillment of this prophecy in the future.¹⁴ With this song of the Davidic king, then, the collage and cluster of images related to the coming kingdom include: (1) centrality of Zion as the source of instruction and peace throughout the world (Isa 2:1–4), and (2) the establishment of protection, provision, and the presence of God through the establishment of the "branch of the Lord" (4:2–6). This passage also points to the primary means and instrument by which this unending peace, justice, and righteousness is to be established: the ever-increasing dominion of the messianic king, the son of David, reigning throughout the earth (9:1–7).

Isaiah 11:1–12:6. Briley sums up the situation regarding the picture of the coming kingdom well: "Glimpses of hope appear in 2:1–4; 4:2–6; and more clearly in 9:1–7, even though the bulk of Isaiah 1–12 focuses on Judah's sin and the devastating consequences which must ensue. The messianic figure introduced in 9:6–7, however, whose reign is the key to a better future, emerges more clearly in 11:1–16. Because of the joy his rule will inspire, the entire unit is crowned with a hymn of praise in 12:1–6 to Yahweh for the salvation he alone can produce."¹⁵

The theme of a "remnant" (שאר) returning after exile is already introduced in 10:20–22, likely with a more immediate referent to those who will one day return from captivity.¹⁶ Yet when the

¹³ Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 244.

¹⁴ Smith writes, "Such strong statements imply that Isaiah is talking about the final eschatological ruler.... These descriptive parameters, titles, time frame, and interlinking references to the Davidic promises rule out any attempt to identify this son with Ahaz, Hezekiah, or Josiah." (Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 242). Over a century ago, Gray noted "Many have held that the birth is historic, and that the poet refers in particular to the birth of Hezekiah; but this view is now generally and rightly abandoned" (George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, I–XXXIX*, International Critical Commentary [New York: Scribner's, 1912], 165–166). Cf. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 248: "It becomes clear that Isaiah has an eschatological figure in mind. This person will not be a king among kings in Israel. Rather, he will be the final king, the king to end all kings."

¹⁵ Terry R. Briley, *Isaiah*, vol. 1, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College, 2000), 155.

¹⁶ Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 262.

“remnant” is mentioned again in Isaiah 11:11, the scope and scale of the return points to an ultimate restoration—“On that day the Lord will again raise his hand to recover the remnant (שאר) that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.” The phrase “in that day” (ביום ההוא) in 11:10, 11; 12:1, 3 refers back to the lyrical description of conditions in Isaiah 11:1–9, which is certainly messianic.¹⁷ Verses 1–5 present a vivid picture of the coming king “from the stump of Jesse,” David’s father (11:1), whom the Spirit of the Lord will endow with all the virtues necessary for a rule of perfect justice, righteousness, equity, faithfulness, and even retribution (11:1–5). These themes have already been established as part of the collage of images related to the coming kingdom in previous passages in Isaiah 2, 4, and 9. Here, as already suggested with reference to the “branch” in 4:2 and expressed directly in 9:6–7, the conditions of the coming kingdom are inextricably linked to the Davidic king (11:1–5). Gowan sum up well the picture of the shoot from the stump of Jesse in Isaiah 11: “His nature and work are thus no more than would be expected of the ideal king, and the message of the prophecy, in our way of putting it, is that the day is coming when God will see to it that his people have good government.”¹⁸

Motyer rightly identifies Edenic language in the description of the cosmic changes in the world at the time of the coming kingdom: “In verses 6–9 the Edenic element in Isaiah’s thought appears again (cf. 2:4). The dawning light of a new world was explained by the birth of the King in 9:1–7; here the rule of the King produces a new order.”¹⁹ And Webb concurs: “The effect of his rule will be universal peace (6–9), an ideal described here in symbolic language which recalls the paradise of Eden. It is a picture of the whole creation put back into joint.”²⁰ Stylized poetic imagery presents the harmony of nature itself in famous terms:

The wolf shall live with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (11:6–9)

In keeping with our approach to the language and imagery of poetic prophecy, the imagery here is figurative, but the referents of the figures are found in a *real* messianic era in this world. Oswalt notes, “In this approach one concludes that an extended figure of speech is being used to make a single, overarching point, namely, that in the Messiah’s reign the fears associated with insecurity, danger, and evil will be removed, not only for the individual but for the world as well

¹⁷ Gray, *Isaiah I–XXXIX*, 213.

¹⁸ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 35.

¹⁹ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 118.

²⁰ Webb, *Message of Isaiah*, 75.

(Rom. 8:19–21).²¹ This approach does not rule out a more literal realization of these promises manifested in a restoration of the harmony of the created realm, as “there seems no reason to doubt that this is to be understood literally. The whole subject raises fascinating biological and ecological questions beyond the scope of this commentary to discuss. We know something of the effects of the fall on human beings and on plant life (Ge 3:17–19); and we cannot doubt that animal life, bound with the human race and the plants in the unity of a worldwide ecosystem, must have been affected also.”²² Chisholm notes, “This startling vision may be purely figurative, with the predators symbolizing human oppressors and the prey their helpless victims (see vv. 4–5), but it is possible that it describes a literal change that mirrors the transformation in human society, where the categories ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed’ are eliminated.”²³

After explaining that when Adam transgressed, “the sin in which man was concerned brought even upon” the animals, Theophilus of Antioch (second century) anticipated a great eschatological reversal: “When, therefore, man again shall have made his way back to his natural condition, and no longer does evil, those also shall be restored to their original gentleness” (*Autol.* 2.17 [ANF 2]). We catch glimpses here of Isaiah’s millennial imagery in Isaiah 11 and 65, which portrays a new harmony between man and beasts and even among beasts themselves.

With regard to the language of Isaiah 11:6, Irenaeus of Lyons understands it to have both a literal, future interpretation as well as a spiritual, moral application for the church today, based on that future interpretation. He first assigns them a literal fulfillment in the time of the coming kingdom, then states:

I am quite aware that some persons endeavour to refer these words to the case of savage men, both of different nations and various habits, who come to believe, and when they have believed, act in harmony with the righteous. But although this is [true] now with regard to some men coming from various nations to the harmony of the faith, nevertheless in the resurrection of the just [the words shall also apply] to those animals mentioned. For God is rich in all things. And it is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man, and revert to the food originally given by God (for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam), that is, the productions of the earth. But some other occasion, and not the present, is [to be sought] for showing that the lion shall [then] feed on straw. And this indicates the large size and rich quality of the fruits. For if that animal, the lion, feeds upon straw [at that period], of what a quality must the wheat itself be whose straw shall serve as suitable food for lions? (*Haer.* 5.33.4)²⁴

²¹ Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 283.

²² Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III, Garland David E., vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 545.

²³ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 45.

²⁴ Cf. *Epid.* 61: “But concerning the concord and peace of the animals of different species, who [are] opposed by nature and enemies of one another, the elders say that it will truly be so at the advent of Christ, when He is going to

In this picture, we see young children being born at the time of the coming kingdom, indicated by reference to the “nursing child” and “weaned child” (Isa 11:8). At least in the minds of the original readers, they would have naturally understood the perfect reign of the perfect king in a perfect world to include an environment friendly toward the blessing of offspring. Ultimately, though, “the key to this transformed, renewed creation is *the knowledge of the Lord*.”²⁵

The language and imagery of Isaiah 11:12–16 pictures both the regathering of God’s people from the four corners of the earth (11:12) as well as the spreading of the Messiah’s rule through unstoppable victory.²⁶ Though in its context it looks forward to a literal expansion of the coming messianic kingdom throughout the world, it may also be understood as having application spiritually to the present form of the kingdom, in which the advance of the gospel through the Church is a sign and type of the future kingdom. Isaiah 12:1–6, then, presents a song of praise and thanksgiving in response to the establishment of the future messianic kingdom.

Isaiah 14:1–2; 16:4–5; 19:16–25. The theme of restoration of the nation of Israel is again visited briefly in 14:1–2, “a vision of a new world in which co-operation has replaced animosity.”²⁷ The hermeneutical approach of reading these prophetic passages as “figures” rather than “photos” helps us navigate the puzzling—if not disturbing—image of Israel possessing the gentiles “as male and female slaves in the Lord’s land,” pictured as the spoils of victory: “They will take captive those who were their captors and rule over those who oppressed them” (14:2; cf. Isa 61:5–6). Smith indicates the general sense of the passage: “These promises about foreigners being servants should not be misunderstood as a sign of revenge or a form of oppressive Jewish nationalism. The text describes a reversal of roles for Israel, not an evil oppressive enslavement of innocent foreign people.”²⁸ Reading all the restoration passages together as pointing to a glorious future messianic age rules out a literal enslavement of foreigners in the Messiah’s kingdom. After all, the nations will come to Jerusalem for instruction (Isa 2:3); the Davidic king will rule with justice and righteousness (9:7), not only for Israel but for the nations as well (42:1); he will judge with equity (11:4). Rather, the message of Isaiah 14:2 is that “the tables will be turned.”²⁹

reign over all. For this makes known, in a figurative manner, [how] men of different races and dissimilar customs are gathered in one place in a peaceful concord by the name of Christ.”

²⁵ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 119.

²⁶ In Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27, Jesus refers back to this and related passages of summoning the dispersed of Israel back to the land at the end of the future “tribulation.” See Motyer, *Isaiah*, 120.

²⁷ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 132–133.

²⁸ Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 307.

²⁹ Gray, *Isaiah I–XXXIX*, 246. Oswalt writes, “The language in which this reversal is stated has been troublesome to many Christian commentators. They have seen the idea of reducing Gentiles to slaves as being an unworthy sentiment. Thus, older commentators (but also Young) have tended to spiritualize the passage, saying that it referred to the Church and its dominion over all the earth. More recent scholars generally dismiss it as an unfortunate expression of late Jewish nationalism. But it is not necessary to take either position. This language can be taken as a figurative expression of the prophet’s inspired conviction that the present relationship between Israel and the nations would not always obtain” (Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 313)

The picture of the restoration of Israel and its centrality—in fact, preeminence—in the politics of the nations is a theme already introduced in Isaiah 2:1–4; 4:2–6; 9:1–7 and 11:1–12:6. And though the prophecy of Isaiah 14:1–2 is just a snapshot of these themes, “later prophecies will expand on these eschatological hopes (45:14–17; 49:22–23; 60:1–8; 61:5–7; 66:20).”³⁰ Oswalt notes, “These few verses contain the message of chs. 40–66 in a nutshell. They leap across the intervening ideas and events and remind the reader again (as in 2:1–4 and 4:2–6) of God’s ultimate purpose of blessing.”³¹

Couched in the context of a prophecy concerning Moab, Isaiah 16:4–5 anticipates a time when oppression and destruction have ceased (16:4), specifically when “a throne shall be established in steadfast love in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler who seeks justice and is swift to do what is right” (16:5). The hope-oriented imagery, Webb notes, “has a messianic ring to it, and what the Moabites do here anticipates what people of all nations will finally do, as foreseen in 2:2–4.”³² The turn of fortunes between Israel and the nations, resulting in the rule of God extended beyond a restored Israel—even over erstwhile enemies of God and his people—is seen in the vivid language of the conversion of Egypt and their submission to the Lord (Isa 19:16–25). The phrase “on that day” (ביום ההוא), repeated six times in verses 16–25, push the ultimate realization of these conditions to the future kingdom (cf. Isa 2:2–4). Thus, with Isaiah 14:1–2; 16:3–4; and 19:16–25, we see language and imagery calling back to previous passages of restoration and redemption of Israel and reconciliation between Israel and the nations (and even between the nations and God). All these images are connected to a future messianic kingdom.

Isaiah 25:6–9. Though the imagery of the coming kingdom in Isaiah 25:6–9 begins “on this mountain” (בהר הזה), its scope expands rapidly to include blessing “for all people” (לכל־העמים) (25:6). The scale of the blessing itself expands from figurative language of abundant prosperity—“a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear” (25:6)—to the destruction of death itself (25:7–8). When God will “swallow up death forever,” then “the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces” (25:8). Brueggemann notes, “The poet speaks about nothing less than radical, complete transformation.”³³ Though not explicit in this particular passage, reading all the kingdom oracles³⁴ together make it likely that the prophecy implies not only the banishment of the causes of death (as in Isa 2:4, 11:6–9), but the reversal of the curse of death through bodily resurrection.³⁵ It is extremely tempting to see the

³⁰ Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 307.

³¹ Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 312.

³² Webb, *Message of Isaiah*, 88.

³³ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, Westminster Bible Companion, ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 200.

³⁴ I have adopted (and likely adapted) the term “kingdom oracles” with reference to poetic descriptions of the coming kingdom from the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*: “The blending together of eschatological oracles of judgment and salvation oracles may well be designated ‘kingdom oracles,’ for the judgment serves to introduce earth’s final age of peace and prosperity” (Ryken, et al, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 669).

³⁵ Grogan, “Isaiah,” 628.

image of swallowing up death on “this mountain” as a reference to the death and resurrection of Christ—and it may have a secondary application to that saving event—but Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 15:54 applies the passage explicitly to the future resurrection of the body. In any case, in response to this salvation unparalleled in the history of redemption, the recipients of the blessing will burst out in jubilation (25:9).

This passage reasserts themes already introduced in previous kingdom oracles; but it also introduces something new—the ultimate banishing of death and sorrow itself. Yet the prophecy does not forsake the earthly. It does not exchange the kingdom in this world centered in Jerusalem for a heavenly, spiritual kingdom in the afterlife or a moral, ethical kingdom in one’s personal life or the life of the believing community. The restoration of Israel, blessing of the nations, and swallowing up of death are all understood as concurring during the same period. Sweeney writes, “Although the banquet is held for the nations, the defeat of death is clearly associated with the removal of the shame of YHWH’s people (v. 8). Consequently, the restoration of Israel is a central element to YHWH’s assumption of kingship in the world.”³⁶

Isaiah 26:1–27:13. These images of the coming kingdom are part of a song that will be sung in the land of Judah in light of the deliverance, restoration, and banishment of death and sorrow described in Isaiah 25. The song calls for people to trust in the Lord because of his powerful judgments against the proud (26:1–6). It praises God for his righteousness judgments, which vindicates the righteous and ultimately consumes the wicked (26:7–11). The song then expresses confidence in God’s provision of peace, rescuing them from their oppressors, who have been brought low in destruction (26:12–14).

Then begins an image of restoration: “But you have increased (יִסַּד) the nation, O Lord; you have increased the nation; you are glorified; you have enlarged (קָרַר) all the borders of the land” (Isa 26:15). The idea of progressive growth of the nation, namely enlarging the borders, is a theme already introduced in Isaiah’s kingdom oracles (Isa 9:3, 7).³⁷ Whereas the concept of resurrection may have been only implied with the swallowing up of death in 25:8, Isaiah 26:19 makes it explicit.³⁸ Interestingly, Irenaeus assigns the resurrection of the dead described in Isaiah 26:19 as referring at least in part to Christ’s first coming, when he raised some people from the dead during his earthly ministry (*Haer.* 4.33.11). However, consistent with his both/and approach to such prophecies, he also uses Isaiah 26:19 in reference to the ultimate bodily resurrection when God will confer immortality upon the dead (*Haer.* 5.15.1; 5.34.1).

The song concludes with a call for people to hide for a short period in the inner-most parts of a home until God’s wrath against the inhabitants of the earth and against the writhing serpent, Leviathan, itself has passed by (26:20–27:1). The repetition of the phrase “on that day” (Isa 27:1, 2,

³⁶ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 337.

³⁷ Grogan, “Isaiah,” 635.

³⁸ Even if one reads this as a metaphor for national restoration in terms of resurrection, the fact remains that the author and audience had to have had some kind of concept of bodily resurrection to employ as a metaphor.

12, 13) hold chapters 26 and 27 together, suggesting the entire sustained oracle pertains to the ultimate coming messianic age brought about after a period of divine judgment and purification. If Israel, the vineyard of the Lord, clings to their God for protection, he will protect it (27:2–5). In fact, its restoration is guaranteed: “In days to come Jacob shall take root; Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit” (27:6). The imagery of Paradise unleashed in the world in bounty and fruitfulness is suggested in the language of 27:2–3 and 27:6. Yet this astonishing restoration and resultant peace and prosperity will only come after their sin and guilt have been removed from them by judgment (27:7–11).

However, restoration and blessing will certainly come. After the judgment and desolation of the land, the Lord will summon the exiles from the four corners: “You will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel. And on that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem” (Isa 27:12–13).

Isaiah 30:18–26. Because the people of Israel are “rebellious” and “faithless” (Isa 30:9), rejecting God’s prophetic word (30:10–12), they will be justly judged (30:13–14). Though God promises that if they “return” (שוב) and “rest” (נחת) in him, they will be delivered (ישע); instead, they flee to find political protection from the Egyptians rather than from God (30:15–17; cf. 30:1–7). Yet in the midst of this inevitable rejection of God’s offer of deliverance, the prophecy inserts an oracle of ultimate restoration as an outworking of God’s “grace,” “mercy,” “justice,” and “blessing” (30:18)—key terms used frequently in Isaiah’s collage of language and images of the coming kingdom.

God then describes the people in Zion (עם בציון), inhabitants of Jerusalem (ישב בירושלם), as receiving his mercy when they finally call out to him (30:19). The restoration of God’s people is always conditioned on their return to him in faith; but even that return is brought about by God’s acts of grace and mercy, when God manifests himself to them not only in *negative* discipline but also in *positive* instruction, resulting in repentance (30:20–22).

The blessings that follow are similar to those already seen in previous kingdom oracles. The bounty of the earth will be “rich and plenteous” (דשן ושמן) and cattle will even the cattle will graze on the highest quality food (30:23–24). The figure suggests not only abundant fruitfulness, but—arguing from the lesser to the greater—if livestock roam so freely and eat so well, how much more will God’s people dwell securely, in peace, and enjoy the abundance of the land. Severe judgment will give way to flowing streams, presumably for ample irrigation (30:25), and the quality of life will be increased immeasurably beyond the times of darkness and gloom experienced by God’s people in judgment. This is symbolized by the image of the moon blazing like the sun and the sun shining seven times brighter (30:26). Gowan muses, “We can be thankful that this promise has never been literally fulfilled, since it would mean the end of all life on earth.... Light is undoubtedly

used in its symbolic sense here.... Perpetual light—not darkness—is in store for Israel, images of restoration and healing.”³⁹

In his discussion of the coming kingdom, Irenaeus applies these promises of Isaiah 30:18–26 to the future messianic kingdom, after the resurrection of the just, when “the whole creation shall, according to God’s will, obtain a vast increase” (*Haer.* 5.34.2). These promises fit well with the layered collage of language and images portraying the coming messianic kingdom in the remainder of Isaiah.

Isaiah 32:1–5, 15–18. Following Israel’s repentance and the judgment of their enemies by a purifying fire (Isa 31:6–9), a new order will arise in Israel centered on a righteous king: “See, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes (שרים) will rule with justice” (32:1). Here we find a plurality of rulers (שרים) reigning along with a single future king (מלך). The promise of an *ideal* Davidic king has already been repeated in Isaiah’s kingdom oracles (Isa 9:6–9; 11:1–5, 10; 16:5), as has the notion of a plurality of rulers, apparently reigning under him (Isa 1:26). Irenaeus assigns the reign of the righteous king and the princes ruling with him in justice (Isa 32:1) to the time of the future kingdom, expecting a literal reign from Jerusalem (*Haer.* 5.34.4). These righteous, just rulers will provide protection and provision (Isa 32:2), and the present blindness, deafness, folly, and sin will be reversed (32:3–5). This indicates healing and health in every realm of life: spiritual, physical, personal, social, and political.

In the midst of a reminder of coming judgment resulting in desolation (Isa 32:6–14; 19–20), the oracle focuses on God’s promise of restoration (32:15–18). The finality of the judgment described in verse 14 would leave room for little hope had the oracle ended there: “For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks.” This describes the ongoing condition of post-judgment Jerusalem, its expected destiny “forever” (עד־עולם) unless God himself intervenes, which he does in verse 32:15: “until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.” The Spirit that will be given to the coming Davidic king (Isa 11:2) will also be given to the once-forsaken people of Israel (32:15). The result will be an increase of abundance and blessing. Not only this, but “justice” (משפט) and “righteousness” (צדקה) will abound, resulting in peace (שלום), rest (שקט), and security (בטח)” (32:16–17). Finally, God’s people will dwell securely in the land in a state of peace and tranquility (32:18).

Isaiah 35:1–10. Recalling language and imagery already employed in the kingdom oracles (see Isa 27:6; 30:23–24; 32:15), Isaiah describes a renewal of the natural world reminiscent of images of paradise in Eden (35:1–2). If the wilderness and desert burst forth in abundant fruitfulness like fertile Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon, how much more will the rest of the world thrive with life. Yet

³⁹ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 116.

all these places will be glorified only because of the abiding presence of God's glory (35:2). Brueggemann reminds us that "these verses explicate the theme already noted in 29:17; 30:23–25; 32:15."⁴⁰ Isaiah 35:3–4 calls the reader to continued trust and confidence, even in the midst of trials and tribulations, because God "will come with vengeance...and save you." Like the other kingdom oracles promising restoration, the means by which deliverance and blessing come to God's people is through just judgment and purification—banishing wickedness but cleansing and restoring those who repent.

Recalling language of health and healing in 32:3–4, the present song looks forward to the day of deliverance when the blind, deaf, lame, and mute will be healed (35:5–6). Irenaeus of Lyons assigned the healing of the blind, deaf, a lame described in 35:3, 5–6 at least in part to Christ's first coming, during his earthly ministry (*Haer.* 4.33.11). Justin Martyr, in his dispute with the Jewish unbeliever, Trypho, likewise refers it to Christ's ministry; but he also casts its fullest realization into the future: "But He performed these deeds to convince His future followers, that if anyone, even though his body were in any way maimed, should be faithful to His teaching, He would raise him up at His second coming entirely sound, and make him free forever from death, corruption and pain" (*Dial.* 69 [Falls]). This double application is in keeping with a both/and approach to these kingdom oracles, allowing even for a partial realization of miraculous healing in answer to prayer even in the present age of the spiritual kingdom. Yet neither the healing ministry of Jesus nor answered prayer for healing in the church can be taken as the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 32:5–6, which awaits the coming messianic reign.

The oracle continues to describe the miraculous terraforming of the physical creation: waters in the wilderness and desert, moreover, plenty of sustenance for all God's creatures (Isa 35:6–7). Previously uninhabitable regions will be transformed into dwellings places for God's people as they apparently spread out over the face of the earth, unafraid of dangers from wild beasts or other dangers (35:8–9). This imagery is consistent with the expectation that wild animals themselves will be tamed, perhaps even domesticated, and no longer pose a threat to humans (cf. Isa 11:6–9). At this time, too, God's people—once scattered throughout the world—will return to Zion with unending jubilation (35:10; cf. 9:3; 11:11–12, 16; 12:6; 14:1; 25:9; 32:19). The song ends with a flourish of exuberant joy as the prophet foresees a time when even sadness will be banished: "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (35:10; cf. Rev 21:4).

Isaiah 40:1–5; 42:1–9. After several chapters of historical narrative pertaining to the challenges faced by King Hezekiah (Isa 36:1–39:8), the book breaks into a song of comfort (Isa 40:1), turning the readers' attention from the looming threats of judgment to hope of ultimate eschatological restoration.⁴¹ Though she has suffered for her iniquity, those days of distress are ended (40:2). Isaiah 40:3–5 paints a vivid, figurative picture of an utter transformation of topography—the low

⁴⁰ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, 275.

⁴¹ Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, The New American Commentary, vol. 15B (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 91.

being made high, the high made low—a perfecting of imperfection and an ordering of chaos (40:4). All this serves the purpose of making a straight path for the coming of the Lord, ushered into Jerusalem like a victorious king welcomed by his people (40:3). The universal scope of the reign of God is indicated in verse 5: “Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.”

Not surprisingly, this leads to an outbreak of praise and proclamation of the glory of God and his greatness, strict in his judgment, but abundant in his mercy and restoration (40:9–41:29). In the midst of this, Isaiah introduces the concept of the servant: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant; I have chosen you and not cast you off’” (Isa 41:8–9). This language anticipates an ultimate regathering of the people of Israel/Jacob, the “seed of Abraham” (זרע אברהם), calling them from the farthest reaches of the earth (cf. Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27).

Though Israel is corporately called the “servant” (עבד) in 41:8, the kingdom oracle of Isaiah 42 introduces another figure—an individual—called “the servant” (42:1). Though it may be tempting to conflate this individual “servant” with the corporate “servant,” a close exegesis of the “servant songs” does not allow this. However, there is a close association between the individual *messianic* servant and the *corporate* servant, as the individual servant mediates blessings to the nation of Israel, which in turn mediates blessings to the world.

The first “servant song” in 42:1–9 is described in terms similar to the Davidic king of Isaiah 9:6–7 and 11:1–9. Isaiah 42:1 says, “I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” Isaiah 11:2 says, “The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him” and Isaiah 9:7 declares that the ruler will establish and uphold the throne of David “with justice and with righteousness.” In that future kingdom, God “shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples” (Isa 2:4). Similarly, the coming “servant” will “faithfully bring forth justice” not only in Jerusalem, but “in the earth” and “the coastlands,” where people wait for his teaching (Isa 42:3–4; cf. 2:3–4).

Then God speaks to the servant, who will mediate his rule throughout the world: “I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people (לברית עם), a light to the nations (לאור גוים)” (42:6). That this servant is appointed as “a covenant” for the people suggests that his rule embodies a new covenant arrangement, a notion reinforced by the words of verse 9: “See, the former things have come to pass, and new things (חדשות) I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.” Smith observes, “The terminology here suggests that this servant is the personification or embodiment of the covenant; thus, he becomes the vehicle through which the peoples of the earth will establish a covenant relationship with God.”⁴² This “new covenant,” associated with a coming messianic figure, the restoration of the nation of Israel, and the illumination of the nations, will be further developed in Isaiah and other prophets. Additional effects of this servant’s righteous rule include

⁴² Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 168.

“to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (42:7), echoing similar healing and restoration promises as in Isa 9:2 and 35:5.

Isaiah 43:1–44:8. Returning to an address of corporate Jacob/Israel, God promises redemption and protection: even if they pass through water or fire, they will not be harmed, because they are precious in his eyes (43:1–4). Therefore, his people should have no fear (43:5). Because of his great love for Israel, God promises to bring the dispersed offspring (עַרְוָה) from all the places throughout the world where they had been scattered (43:5–7), from the very “end of the earth” (43:6; cf. 41:9; Mark 13:27). Though the people were spiritually blind and deaf (Isa 43:8; cf. 42:18–20), yet they are still God’s witnesses, his “servant” whom he chose (43:10). The Lord reminds Israel that he alone is God, their savior, and their deliverer, who will release them from their former captivity in a kind of second exodus (43:11–17).

Echoing language from 42:9, God emphasizes the newness of his work of redeeming Israel: “Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing (הַדָּשָׁה); now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?” (43:18–19). And the language in 43:19–20 referring to a road in the wilderness, waters in the desert, and taming wild animals recalls earlier imagery of the renewal of creation and removal of the curse of Genesis 3 (Isa 11:6–9; 35:6–7). This repetition of earlier language and imagery related to the coming kingdom reinforces the fact that the kingdom oracles are simply adding additional details that supplement earlier prophecies.

Though Israel has failed to honor God with the stipulations of their covenant of sacrifices, and rather wearied God with iniquities (Isa 43:22–24), God will forgive them: “I alone am the one who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (43:25). A contrast between their failure to offer sacrifices and God’s gracious forgiveness of their sins for his own sake may point in a subtle manner to a time when the sacrifices of old will have passed away and a new covenant takes its place.

Addressing Jacob and Israel again as “my servant...whom I have chosen,” the one “who made you, who formed you in the womb” (44:1–2; cf. 43:1, 10), the Lord also calls the nation “Jeshurun,” a name for Israel used elsewhere only in Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5, 26. The use of the name makes it unmistakable that God is addressing corporate Israel, not the individual servant-Messiah. God calls Israel/Jacob/Jeshurun to courage because restoration and blessing are coming. He echoes imagery of physical transformation with water and streams irrigating dry ground—figures that could be taken either physically in reference to the land or spiritually in reference to the people (44:2–3), though the following phrase turns the language in a more spiritual direction as God promises to pour out the blessing of his Spirit on the “descendants” (עַרְוָה) or “offspring” (צִמְצִימֵי) of Israel, resulting in their springing up like a tamarisk or willow drawing water from a stream (44:3–4). In any case, the spiritual revival of the nation is connected to physical restoration and renewal throughout the kingdom oracles.

In Isaiah 44:6–7, the Lord proclaims his uniqueness among the so-called ‘gods’ in that he alone can announce “things to come.” God alone is the king and redeemer of Israel, and his very deity

depends on the keeping of these prophetic promises (44:8). In other words, were the oracles of restoration and blessing to fail, God’s trustworthiness and divinity would be in jeopardy. Smith aptly sums up the basic message of this Isaiah 43–44 this way: “At some point in the distant future God will do a new thing by transforming nature and his people through the work of his Spirit (43:18–21; 44:1–5).”⁴³

Isaiah 45:14–25. After a lengthy oracle that seems to point primarily to the return from exile under Cyrus (44:21– 45:13; see especially 44:28; 45:1, 13), the language seems to reach beyond the first exile to the ultimate exile, of which the former is but an imperfect type of the latter. In that ultimate restoration, the wealth of Egypt, Cush, and the Sabeans along with their great men will humble themselves before Israel, acknowledging that Israel’s God alone is the one true God (44:14; cf. 14:2; 19:16–25; 61:5–6). After this ultimate deliverance by their Savior, who confounds idolaters, Israel will be saved “with everlasting salvation (תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים)” and “shall not be put to shame or confounded ever again (עַד־עוֹלָמֵי עַד)” (45:17). This language seems to place this particular section of the song beyond the scope of the original return from exile.

The Lord reminds his readers that because he is the God who created all things and fashioned the earth for order rather than chaos (Isa 45:18), he alone is God. Thus, he alone is able to “speak truth” and “declare what is right” (45:19). The purpose of such a reassurance is to encourage the readers of the prophecy to trust in what he promises. In contrast, the idols of the nations are impotent, unable to save them and to tell them the future, as the God of Israel is able to do (45:20–21). Therefore, all the nations are called to turn to God for salvation (45:22). Ultimately, the salvation which Israel will experience as God’s covenant people will open the door for all people to be saved: “By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (45:23; cf. Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10–11). Because the Lord alone is the source of righteousness and strength (45:24); therefore, “in the Lord all the offspring (עַרְוֹת) of Israel shall triumph and glory” (45:25). It is, of course, a stipulation of the new covenant described later in Jeremiah 31 that all Israel will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest (Jer 31:34), a concept similar to all the offspring of Israel enjoying vindication and glory in the Lord (Isa 45:25).

Isaiah 48:6–11; Isaiah 49:1–26; 51:3, 11. Isaiah continues the theme of God announcing “new things” (דְּשׁוּת) (48:6; cf. 42:9; 43:19)—things that had never been heard of before (48:6–8). Though Israel certainly deserves judgment for their treachery and rebellion against him (48:8), God restrains his wrath for his own name’s sake (48:9, 11). As a result, Israel will not be cut off. Their suffering is not for the purpose of utter destruction, but rather for refining and purification (48:10).

⁴³ Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 221–222.

In chapter 49, the focus shifts from Israel and their restoration and blessing to the Gentiles: “you peoples from far away” (49:1). The inclusion of the nations in God’s plan of ultimate restoration is, of course, a common theme in the kingdom oracles (Isa 2:4; 42:6; 45:22). Yet in a puzzling turn, the speaker changes from God to a first-person singular: “The Lord called me before I was born; while I was in my mother’s womb He named me” (49:1). Who is speaking these words? He has a mouth “like a sharp sword” and God hid him away like a sharp arrow, as if awaiting the perfect moment to strike (49:2). God gave the speaker the title “servant” and the name “Israel” (49:3). Yet the speaker, servant-Israel, complains that his mission has failed, the purpose for which he was sent was in vain (49:4).

That this person is not corporate Israel/Jacob, is confirmed by 49:5–6, where the servant speaking is distinct from corporate Israel: “And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel.’” It may be tempting to conclude that the first-person singular belongs to the prophet Isaiah, but the mission involves not only proclamation but actual restoration of the remnant of Israel—a feat too lofty for any mere prophet. But the final lines of 49:6 shift attention from the prophet Isaiah as a potential candidate to the servant-Messiah himself: “I will give you as a light to the nations (cf. 42:6), that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” And though this one will be “deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers” (49:7), kings and princes of the world will bow down before him (49:7). That this figure is the same as the one mentioned in 42:6 is clear by the identical language in 49:8—“I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people” (לברית עם). This same figure, also called “my servant” in 42:1, will have the Spirit upon him (as in 11:2), will bring justice to the nations, establish justice in the earth, open blind eyes, and release prisoners (42:1, 4, 6–7). Briley notes on Isaiah 49:5:

To this point Isaiah has presented a perplexing dual portrait of the servant. On the one hand, he has equated the servant with Israel, including all of Israel’s shortcomings. On the other hand, he has presented the servant as God’s faithful and capable means of accomplishing his purpose in 42:1ff. and 49:1–2. Is the contrast between Israel at present and Israel in the future? Does Isaiah distinguish between the nation as a whole and the righteous remnant? Verses 5–6 begin to reveal a solution to the paradox. God has appointed the servant in the womb with a purpose *on behalf of* the unresponsive nation. He is Israel, yet at the same time God calls him to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Briley, *Isaiah*, 2:187–188.

In the servant's mission, further detailed in 49, he will "establish the land" of Israel, release captives (cf. 42:7), and provide for and protect them (cf. 42:5–6); God will then make a straight path for the exiles of Israel to return to their land (49:9–12). In the midst of these comforting prophecies of return to the land and restoration (49:13), God swears that he would never forget or forsake his people (49:14–15). The city of Jerusalem is, as it were, inscribed on his hands (49:16). All the misfortunes they had experienced at the hands of their enemies will be reversed as the city of Jerusalem is rebuilt and its population grows beyond measure (49:17–21). To those born in Jerusalem, God will also add those of his people who return from the nations (49:22–23). By judging even the most powerful tyrants (49:24–25), God will make good on his promise to save his people so, "all flesh shall know that I am the Lord your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (49:26).

Two additional verses are worth considering; though they add nothing substantially new to the consistent picture of the coming kingdom seen thus far in Isaiah, they do reaffirm some basic elements. Isaiah 51:3 says, "For the Lord will comfort Zion (cf. 40:1); he will comfort all her waste places and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord (cf. 11:6–9; 35:6–7; 43:19–20); joy and gladness will be found in her (cf. 35:10), thanksgiving and the voice of song" (cf. 9:3). The imagery of Eden may be taken as mere metaphor, but in light of the grand arc of the narrative of the garden of Eden planted in this world, taken from this world (as humanity stands exiled from his blessing), and ultimately returning to this world, the language of Isaiah 51:3 takes on deep historical-redemptive significance. The desert wilderness around Jerusalem will be transformed like the garden of Eden as the process of *edenification* of the world—originally the responsibility of the first Adam—will ultimately be achieved through the ministry of the second Adam and his followers.

Then, Isaiah 51:11 repeats almost verbatim the promise of Isaiah 35:10: "So the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with rejoicing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." This connects the earlier kingdom oracles to the latter, confirming that Isaiah presents a consistent, coherent message of the restoration of Israel and the renewal of creation.

Isaiah 52:6–13; Isaiah 54:1–17; 55:3. This passage is not as famously quoted as the song of the suffering servant (Isa 52:13–53:12), for which it serves as a kind of preface. Yet the Christologically rich Isaiah 53 is itself nestled among passages that anticipate a glorious future for God's people, mediated by the suffering but victorious servant (Isa 52:6–13; 54:1–17). Hardly anything new—except the song of the suffering servant—is added to the picture of restoration in a future messianic age. The imagery has become well known by this point in the development of Isaiah's figurative presentation of the coming kingdom.

The passage is set in a context in which God calls the people of Jerusalem to put on strength, to awake from the dust, and to be loosed from its bondage (52:1–2). Though they have sunk low in hopeless despair, God will make himself known to Israel by fulfilling his promises to them for

restoration (52:3–5). They will know his name, and know that God himself was the one who had spoken such promises to them as they see them fulfilled “on that day” (ביום ההוא)—a reference in Isaiah to an unknown future time of restoration (52:6). At that time good news of “peace” (שלום) and “salvation” (ישועה) will be proclaimed, songs of joy will break forth because the ruins of Jerusalem have been redeemed (52:7–9). Through this restoration, God’s strong arm of salvation will be revealed—he has kept his repeated promises of deliverance (52:10). Drawing on the themes of exodus, Israel is promised a glorious return from captivity and exile—not a hasty flight as in the exodus from Egypt, but a kind of victorious parade led by God himself (52:11–12).

In this context of future deliverance of the nation of Israel and restoration of Jerusalem, the individual “servant” reappears: “See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high” (52:13). The parallels between the individual servant-messiah and the corporate servant, Israel, should be carefully noted, but not conflated. Upon close examination, the servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is carefully distinguished from Israel. Yet as goes the nation—humiliation, suffering, and death at the hands of the wicked—so goes the servant-messiah; except in the case of the individual servant, his suffering and death was not for his own sins but for the sins of others (Isa 53:1–12). Who are the others?

Some have taken the whole of Isaiah 53:1–12 as the words of the kings of the earth mentioned in 52:14. However, the text says the kings “shall shut their mouths” because of the servant. It seems strange that following this statement of their inability to testify would be followed by an entire chapter of words. Rather, the first-person plural throughout 53:1–6 seems to be Isaiah speaking on behalf of the people of Israel. The text then leaves the first-person plural and shifts again to the third person (53:7–12)—presumably God himself speaking again, as indicated by the reference to “the righteous one, my servant (עבדי)” (53:11). Thus, when the speaker says in 53:8, “He was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression (מפשע) of my people (עמי),” the term “my people” refers to the people of Israel. And because the transgressions (מפשע) of the people of Israel are atoned for by the righteous servant (53:8), the plural speakers of 53:5 must also be the people of Israel: “But he was wounded for our transgressions (מפשענו), crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” That this suffering servant is also the Davidic, messianic king is suggested by the reference in 53:2 to his origins: “He grew up before him like a young plant (יִנֵּק) and like a root (שֵׁרֶשׁ) out of dry ground.”⁴⁵ This echoes the language from Isaiah 11:1—“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots (שֵׁרֵשֵׁי)” and 11:10 says, “On that day the root (שֵׁרֶשׁ) of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples.”

Yet the suffering of the individual servant-messiah gives way to his restoration to life (53:10, 12), which itself will give way to a corporate restoration of the nation of Israel (54:1–17). The desolate, empty cities will be repopulated with an increase in children (54:1–2). In fact, the descendants (זרע) will “possess nations” (54:3). Though God had temporarily cast off the people

⁴⁵ Cf. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 444.

of Israel like a spouse deserted (54:4–7), he will gather them again because of his everlasting love and compassion (54:7–8). The language of assurance and promise is extremely strong in foreshadowing language of the “new covenant” already suggested in earlier messianic passages (Isa 42:6; 49:8): “This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace (ברית שלומי) shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you” (Isa 54:9–10). The promise of reconciliation between God and Israel as well as the nation’s restoration and blessing are as certain as God’s covenant with Noah, and in 55:3, God declares, “I will make with you an everlasting covenant (ברית עולם), my steadfast, sure love for David,” connecting the fulfillment of the everlasting covenant of peace with the establishment of the Davidic throne forever (2 Sam 7:12–13; Ps 132:11).

Isaiah 54:11–12 presents a glorious picture of the rebuilding of Jerusalem with precious stones, figures of the immense wealth and beauty Israel will experience in that future age. In reference to this imagery, Irenaeus of Lyons understood the establishment of the future city of Jerusalem and his glorious foundations (Isa 54:11–13) as occurring in the future earthly kingdom under the messiah at the time of the resurrection (*Haer.* 5.34.4). At that time, too, the nation of Israel will be established in righteousness, free from oppression and threat of any harm (54:13–17)—all language and imagery well established in the kingdom oracles throughout Isaiah.

Isaiah 59:20—62:12. As the book of Isaiah approaches its climax, a sprawling section describing the coming kingdom occupies three chapters. The great majority of the language and imagery is consistent with what has already been established through the kingdom oracles of Isaiah, which allows us to summarize the affirmations, and note any unique expressions. The promises of restoration actually begin in the end of Isaiah 59 with the promise that God himself “will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord” (59:20). In his coming to redeem Israel and turn them from their sin, he thus establishes a covenant (ברית): “This is my covenant with them, says the Lord: my spirit that is upon you and my words that I have put in your mouth shall not depart out of your mouth or out of the mouths of your children or out of the mouths of your children’s children, says the Lord, from now on and forever” (59:21). The connections between this imagery and what will be called the “new covenant” in Jeremiah 31:31 are confirmed by the New Testament reading of these passages.⁴⁶ Briley writes, “In a subtle way, this final verse [Isa 59:21] anticipates the great new covenant promises in Jeremiah

⁴⁶ In Rom 11:26–27, Paul quotes the LXX of Isa 59:20–21 in reference to the future salvation of “all Israel”—“And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.’ ‘And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’” He seems to begin with a quotation of Isa 59:20–21, but then ends the quotation with language that seems to come from Isa 27:6, 9 or Jer 31:33–34—or, perhaps, he is reading all of these texts together. In any case, Paul is drawing together the language and imagery of the New Covenant with the language of a future restoration of Israel at the coming of the redeemer (cf. also 2 Cor 3:3; Heb 8:10).

31:31ff. and Ezekiel 36:22ff. which Isaiah roots in the work of the servant (42:6; 49:8).⁴⁷ And Gowan notes, “As the new spirit makes it possible to walk in the statutes and ordinances of the Lord (in Ezekiel), and the new covenant writes the law of God on the heart (in Jeremiah), in Isa. 59:21 the effect of the gift of covenant and spirit is an internalizing of the divine word, expressed in terms of putting God’s word in their mouth forever.”⁴⁸

What follows this promised establishment of a new kind of covenant of deliverance, restoration, and unending relationship with the people of Israel is a glorious summing up of all the promises of the coming kingdom already seen in Isaiah. The darkness of judgment will give way to the light of the glory of God (Isa 60:1); all nations will be drawn to the light, bringing their wealth; the exiles of Israel will be regathered (60:2–14). God will restore joy, prosperity, peace, righteousness, and praise to the nation (60:15–18). The picturesque figurative imagery of 60:19–20 captures the contrast between the present darkness and the future glory beautifully: “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night, but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down or your moon withdraw itself, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.” In keeping with the expectation of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:34, that all Israel and Judah will know the Lord, “from the least of them to the greatest,” resulting in the restoration to their land (Jer 31:38–40), Isaiah 60:21 affirms, “Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified,” and the people will increase in great number (60:22).

Isaiah 61 also pulls together elements of previous messianic themes already established in Isaiah. In fact, Jesus himself quotes from the beginning of this passage and applies its words to himself (61:1–2; Luke 4:18–19). Yet the language also recalls the imagery from Isaiah 11:1–5 in connection with the shoot from the stump of Jesse, who will usher in a kingdom in which all creation will be in harmony (11:6–10), and the nation of Israel will be restored (11:11–16). In restoring the beauty and joy of Zion through the ministry of the coming anointed one (61:1), God himself will be glorified (61:3). With the rebuilding of the “ancient ruins” and “ruined cities” (61:4), God will bless Israel with both riches and everlasting joy (61:5–7). After just retribution, God will establish with Israel an “everlasting covenant (ברית עולם)” (61:8). The descendants (זרע) of Israel will be famously blessed among the nations of the earth (61:9), and righteousness, praise, and jubilation will fill the whole earth (61:10–11).

Chapter 62 continues the exultant flourish, noting the centrality of Jerusalem among the nations (62:1–2, 6–7) and its restored relationship with God (62:3–5). Israel will enjoy themselves the fruit of the land (62:8–9). They will be restored to their land from afar and established as a holy people redeemed of the Lord—established in a city reclaimed for his glory (62:10–12).

⁴⁷ Briley, *Isaiah*, 2:268.

⁴⁸ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 75.

Isaiah 65:17–25. Isaiah’s kingdom oracles reach their climax in Isaiah 65. Following a lengthy prophetic oracle of just judgment (65:1–7, 11–15) and salvation in the form of a restoration of a remnant—God’s “servant”—to the land of blessing (65:8–16). This condition of renewal and blessing in the land, in which “the former troubles are forgotten” (65:16), is called in this kingdom oracle, “new heavens and a new earth” (65:17). To understand the referent for this phrase, we must read it in its actual context: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating, for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight” (65:17–18). It becomes clear that “the new heavens” and “new earth” refer to the same coming kingdom Isaiah has been describing throughout the book—the coming messianic age when Jerusalem will be restored, Israel regathered, and creation itself released from its corruption. This song is not looking beyond that messianic age to some heavenly reality or a world created out of nothing beyond this one, but to the age of the son of David, when the nation of Israel is restored, blessed in the land, and itself mediating blessing to the world. Goldingay notes:

The prophecy is not referring to the creation of a new planetary system or implying that Yhwh is going back to square one of the process of creation and repeating the event described in Genesis 1 in order to improve on the results.... Neither preceding material in the book of Isaiah nor other material in the Old Testament has suggested any reason for thinking in terms of the creation of a new cosmos.... New heavens and a new earth is an image for a transformation of the way life works out for the community.... To put it another way, the ‘new things’ of Isaiah 40–55 have become more radically new, as succeeding verses will indicate.⁴⁹

The continued description of the new creation makes it clear that we are to understand this as the coming kingdom. As in previous kingdom oracles, God will remove from his people weeping and cries of distress (Isa 65:19; cf. 30:9; 35:10; 60:20). They will build their homes, plant their vineyards, and fear no foreigner invading their land, driving them from their homes, and taking the fruit of their labors (65:21–22; cf. 62:8–9). Their newborn children can expect to live long, healthy, blessed lives (65:20, 23; cf. Exod 23:26)—“they shall be offspring (עַרְוָה) blessed by the Lord and their descendants (צִמְצִימָיו) as well” (65:23; cf. 44:3–4). So intimate will their relationship be with the Lord that he will answer their prayers even before they ask (65:25). And as if to underscore the fact that this crowning oracle is not, in fact, introducing a concept different from the oracles of the coming kingdom displayed throughout the book, the song repeats language and imagery from Isaiah 11:6–7—“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, but

⁴⁹ John Goldingay, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56–66*, International Critical Commentary, ed. G. I. Davies and C. M. Tuckett (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 467–468.

the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (65:24).

Drawing from similar imagery in Isaiah, Smith paints a picture of the “newness” of this new creation this way:

People from all nations will come to learn from God at Jerusalem, and war will end (2:2–4; 14:1–2; 19:18–25); the holy survivors of Israel will come to a newly created Jerusalem (4:2–6); there will be peace between the animals and people (11:6–9), praise of God and banqueting (25:1–26:6), the end of sorrows, a time of great prosperity, a new light (30:18–26), an outpouring of the Spirit and justice and peace (32:15–20), and the transformation of nature (35:1–10). This new world will involve the coming of the glory of the Lord to Mount Zion where he will rule and care for his people (40:5–11; 60:1–3). Additionally, this new world will mean the transformation of nature and many other new things (41:17–20; 43:16–21; 44:3–5; 48:9–11; 50:1–3), the salvation of people from all nations (45:18–25; 49:22–26; 60:3–11), the repopulation of Zion with people and joy (49:14–21; 51:9–11; 54:1–10), the appearance of God’s salvation when the heavens and earth vanish (51:4–6), the enthronement of God in Zion (52:1–10), the giving of a new everlasting covenant (55:3), the transformation of Zion into something glorious (60:15; 62:7), and the appearing of the Anointed One (61:1–3).⁵⁰

One puzzling verse that presents not only translation problems but also interpretation problems is Isaiah 65:20. The Hebrew text reads:

לא־יְהִיָּה מִשָּׁם עוֹד עוֹל יָמִים
 וְזָקֵן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְלֵא אֶת־יָמָיו
 כִּי הִנֵּעַר בֶּן־מֵאָה שָׁנָה יָמוֹת
 וְהַחוּטָא בֶן־מֵאָה שָׁנָה יִקְלַל

The first line of 65:20 reads, “There will not be from there [referring to Jerusalem] any longer a suckling child of days” (לא־יְהִיָּה מִשָּׁם עוֹד עוֹל יָמִים). Most translations supply some language between עוֹל and יָמִים to make sense of the genitival relationship between the two. The NASB has “an infant *who lives only a few days*” (cf. CSB, ESV, NET, NIV, NKJV, and most). The KJV renders is quite literally: “There shall be no more thence an infant of days” (cf. ASV, AKJV, OJB, YLT, and others). The Septuagint takes a much more paraphrastic approach: “Neither will there be any longer in that place an untimely death (οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ γένηται ἔτι ἐκεῖ ἄωρος).” The idea seems to be that infant mortality—so common in the ancient world that it would have been virtually impossible

⁵⁰ Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 719–720.

to meet a family that had not been marked by it—would no longer occur. Infants simply would not die.

The second line moves to the other end of a human lifespan—the elderly. Literally, “And [there will not be] an old one who does not fill his days” (וּזְקֵן אִשׁר לֹא־יִמְלֵא אֶת־יָמָיו). The verb phrase לֹא־יִהְיֶה from the first line governs both conditions—from the youngest to the oldest. The meaning of the second line is fairly straightforward: nobody will ever say of a person, “They died too young.” Yet the third and fourth lines suggest not only the absence (לֹא־יִהְיֶה) of the bad—untimely, even tragic, death—but a remarkably long lifespan.

The third line, if rendered literally, is: “For the youth at the age of a hundred years will die (כִּי הַנַּעַר בֶּן־מֵאָה שָׁנָה יָמוּת).” Though the Hebrew itself is not difficult to translate, it still poses interpretational challenges. Immediately the reader is struck by the implausibility of calling a hundred-year-old person “a youth” (הַנַּעַר); certainly, a centenarian would be in the category of an “old man” (זָקֵן). Then the reader should be puzzled by the fate of such a youthful old man: he will die (יָמוּת). How, though, is that an explanation (כִּי) for the fact that untimely death will be a thing of the past. Surely, dying at one hundred would not be considered untimely. So confusing is this line that the Septuagint translation says nothing about death: “For the child will be a hundred years old” (ἔσται γὰρ ὁ νέος ἑκατὸν ἐτῶν). It seems most likely the meaning is that a person who dies at a hundred years old will be thought to have died as a youth (so the CSB, CJB, NIV, and others). This implies an extremely long life expectancy. In the ancient near east, a נַעַר was “a male who is available for marriage and is not yet betrothed,”⁵¹ that is, sometime between the age of fifteen and twenty. Isaiah’s words suggest that in the new creation, the נַעַר will be aptly applied to a person who is a century old; the duration of a life would therefore span hundreds of years. Just as death will be the exception, long life will be the rule.

The final line also faces some translation problems. Does the first word, הַחֹטֵא, refer to “the transgressor” or to “one who fails to reach”?⁵² The difference is seen, on the one hand, in translations that render הַחֹטֵא as “the sinner,” as in the ESV (“and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed”) or the KJV (“but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed”). Similarly, the Septuagint takes this route: “and the sinner who dies a hundred years old will be accursed” (ὁ δὲ ἀποθνήσκων ἁμαρτωλὸς ἑκατὸν ἐτῶν, καὶ ἐπικατάρτος ἔσται). On the other hand, translations that consider הַחֹטֵא in its basic sense of “missing the mark” or “failing to reach” render it as the NIV (“the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed”) or the NRSV (“and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed”). Despite its awkwardness, it seems best to take the word in its most common usage—and its only usage in Isaiah (Isa 1:4; 29:21; 42:24; 43:27; 64:4) as “the transgressor.”⁵³ In light of this, a more literal rendering of the line would be “And the transgressor at a hundred years will be made accursed”

⁵¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 707.

⁵² See Koehler et al., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 305–306.

⁵³ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 471.

(והחוטא בן-מאה שנה יקלל). In this case, the parallels between the third and fourth line produce the following general interpretation: the person who dies at a hundred years old will be regarded a mere youth—indicating the expectation of a long or even indefinite life; and that same person who dies at a hundred years old will be thought to have been accursed. That is, death will be so rare that it will be reserved only for those transgressors guilty of egregious sin worthy of a curse. Goldingay notes: “If someone dies at a hundred, he will be seen as a youth and his death assumed to be due to sin and to God’s curse.... A ‘sinner’ will be not any ordinary human being but someone who has offended in noteworthy ways; even this person will still live out a hundred years. The presupposition is that in general, however, people will live the kind of life-spans that people lived in Genesis before the flood.... Yet there is no suggestion that death will have been abolished, as 25:8 may imply.”⁵⁴

In either case, though, the idea still seems to be that the only person who will die during the coming kingdom will be one who is a חוטא and, therefore, falls under the curse. That is, one of the distinct characteristics of the coming kingdom will be a remarkably long lifespan—not decades but centuries. This may be reinforced in the next stanza of the song, in which the people will “long enjoy the work of their hands” (65:22)—their building and their planting (Isa 65:21)—because “like the days of a tree shall the days of my people (ימי עמי) be” (Isa 65:22). Just as an olive tree may live indefinitely—for even thousands of years—the lives of God’s people, with the exception of those guilty of outright rebellion—will be prolonged for centuries, or even indefinitely. Smith’s suggestion that the reference to death of a sinner is merely hypothetical because “people will not live to be just 100 years old and people will not be under a curse in God’s newly created world,”⁵⁵ operates under the unnecessary burden of understanding the referent for the “new heavens and new earth” in Isaiah 65:17 as what is often called the “eternal state” after a millennial kingdom. This is a result of reading into Isaiah 65:17 a meaning of the phrase from Revelation 21:1 (see discussion of the new heavens and new earth in chapter 15).

In the early church, Justin Martyr applied this language of the “new heavens and new earth” in Isaiah 65:17 to the future millennial kingdom. He writes, “These are the words of Isaias concerning the millennium: ‘For there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered nor come into their heart, but they shall be glad and rejoice in these things, which I create. For, behold, I make Jerusalem a rejoicing, and My people a joy; and I shall rejoice over Jerusalem, and be glad over My people’” (*Dial.* 81 [Falls]). Similarly, Irenaeus ties the reference “for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be” (Isa 65:22) to the future resurrection, indicating the length of days given to the resurrected body by conferring immortality (*Haer.* 5.15.1). And he explicitly assigns the fulfillment of Isaiah 65:18 to the future kingdom (*Haer.* 5.34.4). He even warns, “If, however, any shall endeavour to allegorize [prophecies] of this kind,

⁵⁴ Goldingay, *Isaiah* 56–66, 471.

⁵⁵ Smith, *Isaiah* 40–66, 722.

they shall not be found consistent with themselves in all points, and shall be confuted by the teaching of the very expressions [in question]” (*Haer.* 5.35.1).

Jeremiah 3:14–18. After a rather lurid metaphorical description of the unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah (Jer 3:1–11) and a call to repentance (3:12–13), the words of God through the prophet describe a future restoration (3:14–18). The vivid language and imagery are consistent with the captivating picture of the coming kingdom in the earlier book of Isaiah. Like Isaiah, the promise for restoration is contingent on their repentance (3:13; cf. Isa 55:7). If they “return” (שוב), the Lord will take them back to Zion (Jer 3:14; cf. Isa 35:10; 51:11). Their “shepherds” (רעים) will be after God’s own heart (Jer 3:15; cf. Isa 32:1). Such language evokes the idea of an ideal Davidic king (cf. 1 Sam 13:14). They will receive knowledge and understanding (Jer 3:15)—blessings associated with the coming of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2. The nation will multiply and increase in the land (בארץ) (Jer 3:16; cf. Isa 26:15).

With this language of Jeremiah 3:13–15, nothing particularly new is introduced to the depiction of the coming kingdom that had not already been introduced in Isaiah. Yet in verse 16, the Lord says, “They shall no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord.’ It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed, nor shall another one be made.” In anticipation of the clear articulation in later chapters of the “new covenant” that is different from the covenant God made when he took them out of Egypt (Jer 31:31–32), and in light of suggestions in Isaiah of such a new covenant (Isa 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8), it is reasonable to assume that Jeremiah’s oracles set forth a picture of a coming kingdom that will lack not only the ark of the (old) covenant, but also the holy of holies, and with that, perhaps even the temple itself (and its sacrifices). Thus, reference to the lack of the ark of the covenant may serve as a synecdoche for the whole sacrificial system, which also suggests the changing of the entire old covenant. This is consistent with the fact that none of the Isaianic kingdom oracles placed any emphasis on a restoration of a temple in which sacrifices would occur; in fact, such a situation is not even mentioned.

After dismissing the idea of a restored ark of the covenant, the oracle continues to paint a fairly standard picture of the coming kingdom. Jerusalem will be the throne of the Lord, in which all nations gather (Jer 3:17; cf. Isa 2:2, 4; 9:1; 11:10; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 55:5; 63:3, 5, 11). Both Judah and Israel—the kingdoms long divided—will be reunified, having returned from exile, in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would possess the land (Jer 3:18; cf. Isa 11:12).

Jeremiah 4:27; 5:10; 16:14–15. Following language of post-judgment desolation by an invading army (4:13–26), a ray of hope shines in the darkness: “Thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a desolation, yet I will not make a full end” (4:27). Similarly, in 5:10 the Lord declares, “Go up through her vine rows and destroy, but do not make a full end.” With these words, God reveals that he has a plan to preserve Israel despite their almost total destruction. And after warning repeatedly of coming judgment by famine and sword (11:22; 14:12–18; 15:2; 16:4), because of

Israel's unfaithfulness and idolatry, the Lord says, "Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor" (16:13). However, before employing even more images of capture and judgment (16:16–21), the Lord injects a powerful promise of restoration: "Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,' but 'As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors" (Jer 16:14–15). This language of restoration—and especially the imagery of a second, even greater exodus—will dominate the prophecies of Jeremiah, as the language of restoration had been repeated in Isaiah (Isa 11:11, 16; 27:13).

Jeremiah 23:3–8. Follow a pronouncement of "woe" to wicked shepherds (רעים) for destroying and scattering his sheep—the people of Israel—instead of attending to them faithfully, the Lord promises to gather (אקבץ) the remnant (שארית) "out of all the lands where I have driven them." He will bring them back (שוב) to their own place and there they will "be fruitful and multiply (פרו ורבו)" (Jer 23:3). The coupling פרו ורבו is the same as the Imago Dei mandate originally given to humanity in Genesis 1:28, and is reiterated after the flood in 9:1, 7. The command is next extended specifically to Jacob when God renames him Israel (Gen 35:10): "God said to him, 'I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply (פרו ורבו); a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land (הארץ) that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring (זרע) after you'" (Gen 35:11–12). And the command פרו ורבו is part of the blessings pronounced upon Israel if they keep his statutes and ordinances (Lev 26:9). So, when the Lord promises in Jeremiah 23:3 that the regathered remnant will be "fruitful and multiply," the language has strong connotations not only of the benefits of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 35:11–12) but also the more universal covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1, 7) and ultimately with Adam (1:28). In light of the overarching story of creation-fall-redemption, it appears that God intends the fulfillment of the original Imago Dei mission to be accomplished through the restoration of his people in the land. The process of earthly reclamation and renewal begins with the restoration of Israel, but it certainly does not end there. In addition to the restoration in the land, God's future redemption of Israel includes raising up good shepherds (רעים) who will lead them faithfully (Jer 23:4; cf. Isa 32:1; Jer 3:15).

Jeremiah 23:5–6 make clear the means by which the restoration will be mediated to Israel: "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch (צמח), and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'" The use of צמח in connection with the coming kingdom is already suggested in Isaiah 4:2, but here the term is directly identified with the king (מלך), under whose reign Israel and Judah will again be united as one nation. The terms used to describe the

reign of the Davidic Branch echo language used in Isaiah for that coming king (Isa 9:6; 16:5; 42:1, 3, 4; 52:13).

That the regathering and restoration to the land are linked to the work of the coming Branch of David is seen in the parallel phrase “days are coming” (ימים באים) in Jeremiah 23:5 and 7 and “in his days” (בימיו) in 23:6. The future regathering is cast in terms of a second, superior Exodus: “Therefore the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, ‘As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As the Lord lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them.’ Then they shall live in their own land” (Jer 23:7–8). Not surprisingly, Irenaeus of Lyons assigns the fulfillment of this regathering of Israel from the nations and their restoration in the land “which He gave to their fathers” to the future coming kingdom (*Haer.* 5.34.1).⁵⁶

Jeremiah 30:1–31:26. Jeremiah associates the contents of the following oracle (Jer 31:1–2) with a certain but undetermined future with the phrase “days are coming” (ימים באים) (30:3). At that time, Israel and Judah will be regathered, reunited, and restored to the land (30:3; cf. 23:6–8). Though they will definitely experience an unprecedented day of the Lord—“a time of distress (צרה) for Jacob” (30:4–7), “yet he shall be rescued from it” (30:7). Thus, a time of tribulation will give way to restoration.

God promises that “in that day” Israel’s foreign oppressors will be broken and “they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up (קום) for them” (Jer 30:8–9). It is certainly not absurd to take this promise as literally referring to David himself and to understand “raise up” (קום) as a reference to his future resurrection in the coming kingdom, as the term is used for resurrection in Isaiah 26:19. However, the term קום can be used for establishing somebody in a position (Deut 18:18) or for accomplishing something (1 Sam 3:12). Thus, the reference to serving “David their king (דוד מלכם)” may be messianic, using “David” as a figure for the Davidic ruler. Chisholm refers to this figure as, “the second coming of David, as it were.”⁵⁷

The Lord then reiterates standard promises related to the coming kingdom: salvation of Israel’s offspring from captivity and return to quiet and ease, despite the discipline they had endured in foreign lands (Jer 30:10–11). Though they suffered what was—left to themselves—an incurable wound for their sins (30:12–15), God will intervene to heal their wounds himself (30:16–17). The result will be restoration of Israel’s fortune, rebuilding their city, and growth of the population (30:18–20). The Lord again refers to a “prince” (אדיר) and “ruler” (משל) who will come from among them: “I will bring him near, and he shall approach me, for who would otherwise dare to approach (קרב) me?” (Jer 30:21).⁵⁸ The referent is undoubtedly to the Davidic king (30:9; cf. 5).

⁵⁶ See comments on this passage in the discussion of Ezek 28:25–26 below.

⁵⁷ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 44.

⁵⁸ The equivalent Aramaic term קרב is used in Daniel 7:13 in the vision of the ‘Son of Man’ who “came (מטה) to the Ancient One” and “was presented (קרב) before him,” and the imagery is similar.

Then Jeremiah employs a phrase that indicates the renewed relationship he will have with his people in the coming kingdom: “And you shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Jer 30:22). This language mirrors that used in connection with God’s redemption of Israel in the exodus from Egypt (Exod 6:7; cf. Jer 7:23; 11:4) and the relationship of covenant blessing they would enjoy through obedience (Lev 26:12). This is fitting, as the future regathering of Israel and Judah and their restoration under the Davidic king is seen in terms of a second exodus; and their obedience will be assured through the empowering work of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34). The language will also be employed by Ezekiel to describe God’s relationship with Israel during the coming kingdom (Ezek 36:28).

Though God will certainly send forth his wrath in judgment (Jer 30:23–24), he will nevertheless reestablish his relationship with his people as their God (Jer 31:1). The survivors of the coming judgment will find grace and continued faithfulness (31:2–3). Israel will be restored and rebuilt; they will enjoy the fruit of the land with joyful song (31:4–7). The Lord promises to regather the remnant of Israel (31:7)—a great company of those who have repented—from the farthest parts of the earth (31:8–12). They will return to a land abundant with food and drink, like a watered garden (31:12), and they will rejoice and celebrate in their prosperity (31:13–14). Probably because verse 10 addresses “the nations,” Irenaeus cites Jeremiah 31:10–14 to assert that the restoration promises of the Old Testament were, “not announced to the prophets and the fathers alone (*non solum*), but to the Churches united to these from the nations” (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.34.3). That is, in the time of the resurrection—the future messianic kingdom—these things will be fulfilled for both Israel and the nations. Though they had been forced into sorrowful exile in judgment, upon their repentance they will return from the land of their enemies, and the Lord will bless them once again (31:15–25). Verse 26 marks the end of this particular oracle begun in 30:1.

Jeremiah 31:27–40. The classic “new covenant” passage (Jer 31:31–34) has a context—the regathering and restoration of the nation of Israel in keeping with the collage of images already well established in Isaiah’s kingdom oracles. In fact, except for using the term “new covenant” in reference to Isaiah’s “everlasting covenant” (Isa 55:3; 61:8; cf. Jer 32:40; 50:5) and “covenant of peace” (Isa 54:10), Jeremiah 30:1–31:40 mostly repackages older Isaianic images of the coming kingdom.⁵⁹

Because the previous oracle concluded with Jeremiah 31:26, verse 27 starts a new prophecy with the phrase “behold, the days are coming (הנה ימים באים).” Both Israel and Judah will be, as it were, replanted, pictured with the image of God sowing seed of humans and animals (31:27). In

⁵⁹ Brueggemann presents an important warning about this passage, especially to Christian readers: “It has frequently been preempted by Christians in a supersessionist fashion, as though Jews belong to the old covenant now nullified and Christians are the sole heirs of the new covenant.... Such a supersessionist reading in fact asserts the rejection rather than the reconstruction of Israel, a point not on the horizon of these oracles” (Walter A. Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26–52*, International Theological Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 291).

the past, God had disciplined his people with destruction, but in the coming days he will rebuild and replant them (31:28). This restoration will be characterized by perfect justice, in which people will be responsible for their own sins, and nobody will suffer harm for the sins of others (31:29–30).

In Jeremiah 31:31, the Lord calls this coming restoration in those days “a new covenant (ברית חדשה)” specifically with the “house of Israel and the house of Judah”—the same people who will be regathered and replanted earlier in this same oracle (31:27) and in the previous (30:3). That the details of the “new covenant” relate specifically to Israel and Judah is reinforced by the fact that God contrasts it with the covenant made with their ancestors during the exodus: “It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord” (Jer 31:32). This new covenant will be superior to that old covenant in that God’s law (תורה) will be within them, written on their hearts (על־לבם אכתבנו) (31:33). This is language used to describe the truly righteous—those who will inherit the land forever—as David declared in Psalm 37:29–31, “The righteous shall inherit the land and live in it forever. The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak justice. The law of their God is in their hearts (תורת אלהיו בלבם); their steps do not slip” (cf. Ps 40:8; Rom 2:15).

This new covenant is tied to Jeremiah’s preceding oracle of the coming kingdom with the promise, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33; cf. 30:22). The restored nation will be characterized by universal saving knowledge of the Lord—from the least to the greatest (31:34). For the first time in its history, all Israel will be righteous, having a heart submissive to his law. The phrase “know the Lord (דעו את־יהוה)” and especially universal knowledge of the Lord has already been identified as a mark of the coming kingdom (Isa 11:9; 29:21). This saving knowledge of the Lord, the basis for an intimate relationship, will be wrought by forgiveness of sin: “For I will forgive their iniquity (סלחת לעוננו) and remember their sin no more (לא אזכר־עוד)” (Jer 31:34). The pardoning of sin is not unique to the restoration of the nation in the new covenant. Moses entreated the Lord, “Pardon our iniquity and our sin (לחטאתנו וסלחת לעוננו), and take us for your inheritance” (Exod 34:9). This is in keeping with God’s self-revelation, who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (נשא עון ופשע) (וחטאה)” (Exod 34:6–7). And in Psalm 25:7 David says, “Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions (הטאות נעורי ופשעי אל־תזכר); according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!” Thus, forgiveness of sin is not itself unique to the new covenant described in Jeremiah 31 any more than knowing the Lord or having the law in one’s heart is unheard of in the old covenant. Not the fact of forgiveness and knowledge of the Lord, but the scope and scale of the forgiveness is the hallmark of the new covenant. For the first time in its covenantal history, all Israel—from the least to the greatest—will know the Lord. All the people of Israel will be righteous from a sincere heart, and they will experience forgiveness and restoration.

That is, they will be made fit for blessing in the land, not by an external conformity to law, but by an internal regeneration of the Spirit and genuine relationship with their God.

That the context of the ultimate fulfillment of this new covenant with Israel and Judah is the future restoration of the nation is confirmed in the closing verses of the oracle. The Lord swears that if the fixed order of the heavens and earth ceased, only then would “the offspring (זרע) of Israel” cease to be a nation before him (Jer 31:35–36); and only if a person could measure the heights of the heavens or explore the depths of the earth would he “reject the offspring (זרע) of Israel” for all their sin (31:37). The intended referent of זרע is not a single individual—e.g., the Messiah alone as the זרע of Abraham (cf. Gal 3:16). Not only does the context refer the promises to the people (Jer 31:34), but the Lord also calls the זרע “a nation (גוי)” (31:36) and refers to “all” the offspring of Israel (כל־זרע ישראל), referring to “all that they have done (עשו).”⁶⁰ In keeping with the overarching context of the restoration of Israel, the oracle ends with detailed descriptions of the geographical boundaries of the rebuilt city of Jerusalem (Jer 31:38–40). From the moment of its ultimate reestablishment, “it shall never again be uprooted or overthrown (לא־לעולם ינתש ולא־יהרס עוד לעולם)”—language that can only refer to an eschatological restoration.

Jeremiah 32:36–44. In another oracle concerning the city of Jerusalem (Jer 32:36), the Lord repeats his promise to gather his people from the nations where they had been scattered; they will return and be established securely (32:37). In that condition of restoration and rest, the Lord says: “They shall be my people, and I will be their God” (32:38). Then, recalling imagery from the new covenant language in 31:31–34, he declares, “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them, and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul” (Jer 32:39–41). Despite the fact that great disaster had come upon Israel, the Lord will bring upon them all the good things he had promised and restore their fortunes (32:42–44).

Jeremiah 33:1–26. In a subsequent oracle (Jer 33:1), the Lord promises that even though the city of Jerusalem is destroyed because of their evil (33:2–5), he will later restore it with “abundance of prosperity and security” (33:6–7). Echoing language of forgiveness from the new covenant imagery (31:31–34), the Lord promises, “I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me” (33:8). The city of Jerusalem will be so glorious that all the nations will hear of their prosperity and fear the Lord (33:9). The once desolate city of Jerusalem, and other cities of Judah, will be filled with jubilation as their fortunes are restored (33:10–13). In this context we have the first instance of a possible reference among the kingdom oracles to sacrifices and a temple: “the voices of those who sing as they bring

⁶⁰ A corporate identification with the individual זרע does not relieve these exegetical difficulties.

thank offerings to the house of the Lord (מבאים תודה בית יהוה) (33:11). Some may see this as evidence that the restoration envisioned in this oracle is not the ultimate eschatological renewal but, rather, the historical return from exile after the Babylonian captivity. Others see this as evidence that the eschatological rebuilding of the house of the Lord in Jerusalem will also involve offering sacrifices (cf. discussion on Zech 14:20–21). Some may take the language as referring to the ultimate eschatological fulfillment in the coming messianic kingdom but understand the language as symbolic.

Even in a future messianic age without a temple for offering animal sacrifices, the language of Jeremiah 33:11 can be understood rather literally. The phrase מבאים תודה בית יהוה literally means “bringing thanksgiving,” which can certainly refer to a thanksgiving sacrifice, but may also refer to songs of thanksgiving.⁶¹ This latter sense is seen in other restoration passages similar to Jeremiah 33:11—“And will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving (תודה) and the voice of song” (Isa 51:3). And the earlier kingdom oracle in Jeremiah 30:18–19 has: “Thus says the Lord: I am going to restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound and the citadel set on its rightful site. Out of them shall come thanksgiving (תודה) and the sound of merrymakers.” Even if one understands תודה as referring to more than merely songs of thanksgiving (or even thanksgiving gifts), these need not be animal sacrifices. Along with an animal sacrifice for thanksgiving, Leviticus 7:12 says, “You shall offer with the thank offering unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour well soaked in oil.” In other words, animal sacrifices were not the only kinds of offerings that could be associated with תודה, and if in a future age animal sacrifices became obsolete, other kinds of gifts and offerings of thanksgiving could take their place.

The term “house of the Lord (בית יהוה)” is most naturally understood in the days of Jeremiah as the temple (Exod 23:19; 34:26; Deut 23:18; 1 Sam 1:7; 1 Kgs 6:1, etc.). Though the “house of the Lord” may imply a place in which sacrifices are offered, this is not a necessary implication. In a future messianic age, during which people will even forget the ark of the covenant (Jer 3:16), it is not unreasonable that a dwelling place for God in Jerusalem—that is, the palace of the messianic king—would be a real, physical place but without sacrifices of the old covenant. This would especially be true if the Davidic king is Jesus Christ, the incarnate God-man, in which case the king’s palace would be the literal “house of the Lord.” Such a physical palace-temple would not only be the source of instruction and just judgment from the righteous king (cf. Isa 2:2, 4), moreover, it would be the place to which offerings are brought—tribute and gifts for the king of kings (Isa 66:20).

As in previous kingdom oracles, no restoration of the nation of Israel and the land will be possible apart from the Davidic king. The Lord repeats language almost identical to that of Jeremiah 23:5–6, noting that the promises to Israel and Judah will be fulfilled through the “Branch”

⁶¹ Koehler et al., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1695–1696.

of David who will reign in justice and righteousness, and whose name will be “the Lord our righteousness” (33:15–16). Yet just as the Lord will fulfill his promise that “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel” (33:17), so also “the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings (מעלה עולה), to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time” (33:18). Here those who do not foresee a literal temple with literal animal sacrifices during the messianic age face a major hurdle. If the Davidic king’s reign is literal and future, it can be argued, then so must be the Levitical priest’s sacrifices. Alternatively, if the priest’s sacrifices are symbolic and spiritual, so must be the king’s reign. While “grain offerings” and general “sacrifices” do not require literal animal sacrifices, the עולה, or “burnt offering” would. Such offerings first appear after the flood of Noah, when he “built an altar to the Lord and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings (עלת) on the altar” (Gen 8:20). The Lord told Abraham to offer Isaac as such an עולה (Gen 22:2–3). And the burnt offering became a standard part of the entire sacrificial system (Exod 20:24; Lev 1:3, etc.). Psalm 50:8 paints the picture of a God who already has all he needs, requiring no burnt offerings but only sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise. Perhaps the expectation for the coming messianic age, then, was an actual reestablishment of sacrifices by a Levitical priesthood. Though, perhaps, the Levites refer to those of the restored nation of Israel who serve as teachers for the nations, fulfilling their ministry of offering in the house of the Lord. Jeremiah 33:18 says there will also be a man in God’s presence who is able to offer such sacrifices; however, if the need for such animal sacrifices is not present, they will not be offered. Some have understood both promises to the house of David and the Levites to be fulfilled in one person: the messianic king-priest, in which case the sacrifices would be understood as strictly spiritual.

In any case, the Lord guarantees that neither his covenant with David nor his covenant with Levi will be broken, so that a descendant of David will always endure as well as a descendant of Levi (Jer 33:19–22). This may be a key to solving the dilemma, and it represents my own position on the matter. The promise is not directly related to the messianic age per se, but to the fact that the lines of descendants and lineage will never cease in the time between the exile and the ultimate fulfillment, guaranteeing that there will one day be a descendant of David to sit on the eternal throne (and descendants of the rest of Israel to fulfill the restoration of the nation). This seems to be confirmed by the conclusion of the oracle. In response to those who falsely claim that God had rejected the two families and thus no longer regards them as a nation (33:23–24), the Lord replies: “Only if I had not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth would I reject the offspring of Jacob and of my servant David and not choose any of his descendants as rulers over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy upon them” (33:25–26).

Jeremiah 46:27–28; 50:4–5, 19–20. Though God warns of coming judgment on Egypt—a coming day of the Lord (46:10),⁶² he reveals other plans for Israel. Quoting Jeremiah 30:10–11 almost verbatim, the Lord promises that even though he will justly discipline Israel, he will ultimately rescue them from their land of captivity and return them to quiet and ease (46:27–28).

Two verses in chapter 50 rephrase promises concerning the coming kingdom already articulated earlier. The Lord promises a reunification of the people of Israel and the people of Judah upon their repentance (Jer 50:4). They will make their way back to Zion and will “join themselves to the Lord by an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten” (50:5). Finally, in verses 19–20, the Lord promises to restore Israel to his own land (50:19). In imagery that calls back to the language of the new covenant (Jer 31:33–34), the Lord proclaims, “The iniquity of Israel shall be sought, and there shall be none, and the sins of Judah, and none shall be found, for I will pardon the remnant that I have spared” (50:20).

Ezekiel 11:17–20; 16:59–63. In Ezekiel 11, language and imagery from the kingdom oracles of Isaiah and Jeremiah reappear and are repackaged. The Lord promises to gather Israel from the peoples and nations to which they had been scattered, he will give them “the land of Israel (אדמת (ישראל),” which will be cleansed of its former abominations (11:17–18). Then, recasting language reminiscent of the “new covenant” in Jeremiah 31:31–34, Ezekiel’s prophecy says, “I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19–20). The language of “one heart” and a “new spirit” that enables the restored nation to keep God’s commands from the heart is similar to Jeremiah language: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jer 31:33). In both passages, the result is the same: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33; Ezek 11:20). And in both passages the context is the restoration of the people of Israel to the land.

The next kingdom oracle uses the phrase, already seen in Isaiah and Jeremiah, of an “everlasting covenant” with reference to the restoration of the nation of Israel (see Isa 55:3; 61:8; Jer 23:40; 50:5). Though Israel is guilty of breaking their covenant with him (Ezek 16:59)—presumably the Mosaic covenant—he promises, “I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant” (16:60). This is likely a reference to the foundation of the Abrahamic covenant that established Israel as a people, which will then become the basis for keeping his covenant in the future—the new, everlasting covenant. This will lead them to shame for their past sins and repentance, when God fulfills his covenant with them (16:61–63). The meaning of the phrase ולא מבריתך is “and not from your covenant” or “not because of a covenant with you,” and it could refer to the old covenant (which they had

⁶² See chapter 15 in *The Fathers on the Future* and Go Deeper Excursus 22 for fuller discussions on the Day of the Lord concept in the Old Testament.

broken, Ezek 16:59; cf. Jer 31:31–32), which is then contrasted with בריתי אתך (“my covenant with you”), the everlasting covenant that brings restoration (Ezek 16:60, 62; cf. Jer 31:31, 33).

Ezekiel 20:33–44. Though Israel had suffered the wrath of God for their wickedness (Ezek 20:1–33), he will nevertheless “be king over” Israel (20:33). He will bring them out of the nations where they had been scattered “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out” (20:34). This passage connects the process of bringing Israel to repentance and calling them back to the land with a future period of cleansing judgment—a theme we have seen several times already in the kingdom oracles (Ezek 20:34–38; cf. Isa 4:4; 26:16; Jer 30:7). The result of this eschatological purification through judgment will be a nation restored to the land.

The focus then shifts to the “holy mountain” (בהר־קדשי), where “all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land” (Ezek 20:40). He will receive from them their contributions (תרומתיכם), choicest of their gifts (ראשית משאותיכם), and sacred things (קדשיכם). The text noticeably avoids any explicit language of sacrifices per se. In fact, they themselves will be “a pleasing odor” when God brings them out from among the nations into the land of Israel, which he had sworn to their ancestors (20:41–42). In this passage the Lord emphasizes that the basis for their restoration is not their own worthiness; in spite of their loathsome deeds and evil ways, he will restore his relationship with them for the sake of his own reputation (20:43–44). Gowan writes concerning the vision of restoration in Ezekiel 20:

Given the tone of the first part of Ezekiel 20, with its emphasis on Israel’s rebelliousness, it is not surprising that the wilderness traditions concerning judgment (e.g., the golden calf, Korah’s rebellion) are projected into the future wilderness experience, which is described as a time of purging (20:35–38). But for the people as a whole, only the act of grace—which is the new gift of the land—will produce the ultimate result of wholesale repentance (20:40–44). Jerusalem is not missing from Ezekiel’s ideal future (“on my holy mountain,” 20:40), but is de-emphasized in favor of possession of the land as the key to Israel’s future life.⁶³

Ezekiel 28:25–26. In this brief prophecy of the coming kingdom, the Lord promises again to regather the house of Israel, from among the peoples which they were scattered, in order to exhibit his holiness among the nations (Ezek 28:25). He will restore them to their own land, the land promised to Jacob. Reflecting imagery from previous kingdom oracles, the Lord promises that the restored nation will build houses, plant vineyards, and dwell securely in the land after judging the nations who had mistreated them (Ezek 28:26; cf. Isa 65:21; Jer 31:5). Nothing particularly new is introduced in this prophecy that has not already been affirmed repeatedly in previous prophecies of the coming kingdom.

⁶³ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 26.

Irenaeus quotes this passage in Ezekiel and applies it to the coming kingdom of the Messiah, which will be concurrent with the future resurrection of the just (*resurrectione justorum futurum*) (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.34.1). He explains that the salvation of Abraham’s seed has both a present spiritual fulfillment in the church as well as a future, literal fulfillment in the coming kingdom. He writes:

Now I have shown a short time ago [cf. 5.32.2] that the church is the seed of Abraham; and for this reason, that we may know that He who in the New Testament ‘raises up from the stones children unto Abraham’ (*ex lapidibus suscitans* [present active participle] *filios Abrahae*) is He who will gather (*colliget* [third person plural future active indicative]), according to the Old Testament, those that shall be saved (*salvabuntur*) from all the nations (*ex omnibus gentibus*), Jeremiah says: “Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord lives, who led the children of Israel from the north, and from every region where they had been driven; He will restore them to their own land which He gave to their fathers.” (*Haer.* 5.34.1)

In this passage, Irenaeus may be applying the promise of the salvation of the seed of Abraham both spiritually to the church in the present time as well as physically to those that “shall be saved” from among the nations. The passage he cites in Jeremiah refers to the gathering of the children of Israel from *among* the nations, literally *ex omnibus gentibus*. This company of Israel—Abraham’s physical seed—is called “those that shall be saved (*salvabuntur*),” which is the same term used in 5.30.2, where he mentions that “Dan” is left out of the tribes of Israel that are “saved” (*salvantur*) in the future tribulation. This confirms that Irenaeus envisioned a future, literal fulfillment of the restoration of the actual sons of Abraham, despite that fact that the church—the spiritual seed of Abraham—experiences a spiritual fulfillment of these promises. For Irenaeus, fulfillment of these prophecies was not *either* present and spiritual *or* future and physical. Rather, they applied to both.

Ezekiel 34:11–31. In a parabolic prophecy, the Lord castigates the “shepherds” of Israel, which is a metaphor for the rulers, for not only neglecting the sheep, the people of Israel, but for harming them. Because of their utter dereliction of duties, the sheep were scattered over the face of the earth (Ezek 34:1–6). Therefore, the Lord declares woe against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for their sins (34:7–10).

Then, the Lord encourages Israel by promising to step in and take the place of the wicked shepherds of Israel. He will search for them and sort them out (34:11). Drawing on Day of the Lord imagery, the Lord promises that “on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (34:12; cf. Joel 2:2), he will rescue them from afar and bring them back to their land to feed and nourish them (34:13–14). Thus, God himself will be their shepherd, to comfort, protect, feed, nourish, and strengthen (34:15–16).

Not only will shepherds be held accountable for how they mistreated or neglected the sheep, but the wicked sheep, rams, and goats will also be scrutinized and judged for their wicked behavior toward the innocent sheep. That is, the wicked people of Israel who had harmed the righteous will be judged by the Lord (34:17–22). Then, in the midst of this promise of just judgment, deliverance, and restoration, the Lord promises to establish over Israel “one shepherd, my servant David” (34:23)—that is, the Messiah, son of David (Ezek 34:24; cf. Isa 9:7; Jer 23:5; 30:9).

Ezekiel calls the time when the Davidic king is ruling and the nation has been restored “a covenant of peace,” and at that time, all wild animals will be banished from the land—that is, harmony of creation will be restored (34:25). The land will be blessed with showers of blessing, trees and crops will increase their yield, all Israel will dwell securely, and they will never go hungry again (34:26–29). Approximating earlier language of the intimate relationship Israel will have with the Lord in the future, the Lord promises, “They shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people” (34:30–31; cf. Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11).

Ezekiel 36:8–15, 22–38. In another prophecy of restoration, the Lord addresses the “mountains of Israel” anthropomorphically, promising that they will produce a fruitful bounty and that Israel will “soon come home” (Ezek 36:8). The population of both humans and animals will increase upon the hills, towns will be rebuilt and inhabited, and even the wilderness will be transformed and populated (36:9–11). The people of Israel will come to the mountains of Israel, possess them as their inheritance, and the former disgrace the people once experienced among the nations will be reversed (36:12–15). In applying Ezekiel 36:12 to Christians, Justin Martyr argues that those who are called “Israel” includes Christians because of their union with Christ. Thus, not only ethnic Jews but also Jewish and Gentile Christians in one body will also inherit the land (*Dial.* 123). However, understanding a present, spiritual interpretation of Israel as applying to the church does not itself negate the expectation of a future, literal fulfillment of the prophecy. It is quite possible Justin saw the future fulfillment of this passage in reference to the future coming kingdom, as did Irenaeus of Lyons after him.

The prophecy continues with the Lord lamenting the fact that when Israel was justly judged for their sin, exiled from the land of promise, and scattered among the nations, the people profaned his holy name (36:16–21). The nations among which they had been scattered challenged the goodness of God himself: “These are the people of the Lord, yet they had to go out of his land” (Ezek 36:20). For the sake of this holy name, the Lord would have to act on behalf of Israel. In the rest of the oracle, the Lord makes it clear that the coming restoration is not for their sake, and it was certainly not because they earned it or deserved it that he was going to restore them. Rather, it is for the sake of his holy name and reputation, a display of his holiness (36:22–23). The promise involves retrieving the people from the nations and restoring them to their own land. In language drawn almost verbatim from Ezekiel 11:17–20, which itself relies on earlier images from Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Lord promises to cleanse them of their sins (Ezek 36:25), put a new spirit within

them, replacing their heart hard hearts with soft hearts and thus causing them to follow his laws (36:26–27). They will dwell in the land promised to their ancestors in an intimate covenant relationship, with abundant grain, fruit trees, and other life-sustaining crops, so they will never suffer famine (36:28–30). So abundant will be the provision that all Israel will be ashamed for their past iniquities, convinced that God is acting not for their sake but for his own (36:31–32).

At the time of their cleansing from sin, the cities will be rebuilt, and the desolate lands will be tilled and become so fruitful that those who see it will declare, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined towns are now inhabited and fortified” (36:33–35). Even without explicitly mentioning the Edenic conditions of the restored and renewed land, the imagery of reversing the chaos of judgment to order through construction and cultivation was already obvious in the passage. Also, the bounty of the earth and the increase through planting and growing as well as the multiplication of the people “like sheep” (36:37–38) all point back to the original purpose of humanity in fulfilling their *Imago Dei* mission to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and to tend the garden (Gen 1:26–27; 2:15). Thus, we see hints at the concept of a progressive *edenification* of creation starting in Jerusalem and the holy land and extending outward—so obvious that eventually the surrounding nations notice the Lord’s handiwork. That these things will certainly come to pass in the future is made clear with the Lord’s words of promise: “I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it” (Ezek 36:36).

Gowan sees in Ezekiel 36:22–38 a “comprehensive picture of the ideal future,” a pattern that includes almost everything the Old Testament affirms about the coming restoration: “For God to make things right, a threefold transformation of the world as it now is will be required. God must transform the human person; give a new heart and new spirit (Ezek 36:25–27). God must transform human society; restore Israel to the promised land, rebuild cities, and make Israel’s new status a witness to the nations (36:24, 28, 33–36). And God must transform nature itself, to make the produce of the land abundant and to banish hunger forever (36:30, 35).”⁶⁴

Ezekiel 37:12–28. In the famous vision of the valley of dry bones, Ezekiel uses the resurrection of skeletal remains as an illustration of the future restoration of the nation of Israel. The Lord shows Ezekiel a valley of dry bones and tell him to prophesy to the bones that the Lord will restore their bodies and their breath so they will live again (37:1–6). Ezekiel obediently prophesies to the bones in the vision, and their physical bodies are restored, though they are not yet animated with breath. As Ezekiel prophesies again, breath from the four winds comes upon them, and they stand to their feet like a vast army (37:7–10).

The Lord then interprets the resurrection of the dry bones as “the whole house of Israel” (37:11). Even though the people in Ezekiel’s day felt as good as dead and without hope, the Lord promises, “Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am

⁶⁴ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 2.

the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord” (Ezek 37:12–14). Though the vision seems to refer primarily to the restoration of Israel as a nation, Irenaeus of Lyons applies the prophecy of resurrection in Ezekiel 37:12–14 to the future resurrection in the coming kingdom (*Haer.* 5.15.1; 5.34.1). Later revelation does tell us that the ultimate restoration of Israel would occur after the return of Christ, which will also correspond with the resurrection of the dead of all ages, so Irenaeus’s connection here is not without justification. It is possible that the prophecy has a double intention—the vision of a resurrection of individual bodies represents the spiritual resurrection of the nation of Israel; yet for all Israel ultimately to be restored and all the patriarchs and righteous Israelites to enjoy the blessings of the promised land, they will need to be resurrected.

Finally, through an object lesson of the unification of two sticks (Ezek 37:15–18), the Lord promises that he will one day reunite Israel and Judah “that they may be one in my hand” (37:19). That is, God will restore both the outcasts of the northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah “to their own land,” uniting them forever as one kingdom under one king (37:20–22). They will be cleansed from all their sins and delivered from their evils—never again to defile themselves with any sort of transgressions; then, says the Lord, “Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God (37:23).

Having briefly mentioned the “one king” who will reign over a united Israel and Judah (37:22), the Lord specifies that this future king will be God’s servant, David—that is, the Davidic king and heir of the Davidic promises (37:24). He will reign forever over the nation, which will increase with children for generations to come (37:25). This new condition will be a “covenant of peace” and “an everlasting covenant” (37:26). God’s sanctuary will be among them forever, establishing an intimate relationship between God and his people (37:27–28).

Ezekiel 39:25–29. After the prophecy against Gog and details of that eschatological battle (Ezek 38:1–39:24), and before the grand but enigmatic vision of the new temple (Ezek 40–48),⁶⁵ a brief summary of the restoration of Israel appears in Ezekiel 39:25–29. All the language and imagery in that section conforms to what has already been declared repeatedly not only in Ezekiel but also in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The fortunes of Jacob will be restored for the sake of the Lord’s holy reputation (39:25). They will dwell securely in the land when the Lord brings all of them back from the nations where they were scattered (39:26–28). The Lord will reveal himself again to Israel after a period of hiding his face from them, at which time he will pour out his Spirit upon the house of Israel (39:29; cf. Isa 32:15).

Daniel 2:44–45. While the majority of Nebuchadnezzar’s apocalyptic dream of the statue in Daniel 2 rehearses the succession of empires since Babylon and their oppression of (or at least

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the vision of Ezekiel’s temple in 40–48, see *The Fathers on the Future*, chapter 14.

control over) Israel, the climax of the dream relates to the establishment of a future kingdom in this world that will put an end to all previous kingdoms. In his interpretation of the dream, Daniel recounts that final scene: “As you looked on, a stone was cut out, not by human hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were all broken in pieces and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan 2:34–35).

The interpretation is found in verses 44–45: “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom (מלכו) that shall never be destroyed (לעלמין לא תתחבל), nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever (תקום לעלמין), just as you saw that a stone was cut from the mountain not by hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.” The prophecy that the future kingdom “will never be destroyed” (לעלמין לא תתחבל) is the same in Daniel 7:14—“His kingship is one that shall never be destroyed (מלכותה די-לא תתחבל).”

Irenaeus applies the events described here not to the progress and victory of the church in this age but to the future kingdom that will appear at the time of the resurrection: “If therefore the great God showed future things by Daniel, and confirmed them by His Son; and if Christ is the stone which is cut out without hands, who shall destroy temporal kingdoms, and introduce an eternal one, which is the resurrection of the just” (*Haer.* 5.26.2). Many today interpret the kingdom, established at the destruction of the statue, as the church’s spiritual kingdom—a view of both amillennial and postmillennial interpreters. However, Tanner makes the following counter-arguments against the view “that the kingdom spoken of in Dan 2:44 was established at Christ’s first coming (and any equation of this kingdom with the church)” and concludes, “Although there is a sense in which the kingdom is *now*, i.e., during this church age, it seems that Scripture puts the emphasis on the *formal* establishment of the kingdom that will come about at our Lord’s return in glory. It is this latter idea of the kingdom that Dan 2:44 speaks about—that formal inauguration of the kingdom at Christ’s return.”⁶⁶

Daniel 7:13–14, 26–27. Whereas the four successive empires from Babylon to Rome were symbolized in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar by a statue (Dan 2), the same series of empires are symbolized in Daniel’s vision in chapter 7 by four beasts. In the history of the fourth beast, “terrifying and dreadful” (7:7) with ten horns (7:8), a little horn appears among them, with human eyes and a mouth “speaking arrogantly” (7:8). When the Ancient One takes his throne and begins to exercise judgment (7:9–10), the beast of the little horn is slain (7:11–12). Then, in its place, “one like a human being” (literally, “like a son of man”) comes on the clouds of heaven: “And he came

⁶⁶ J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 206.

to the Ancient One and was presented before him” (7:13).⁶⁷ The image is similar to that of Jeremiah 30:21, where the Lord referred to a “prince” (אדיר) and “ruler” (משל) who will come from among the people of Israel at the time of the future restoration of the nation: “I will bring him near, and he shall approach me, for who would otherwise dare to approach (קרב) me?” (Jer 30:21). The equivalent Aramaic term קרב is used in Daniel 7:13 in the vision of the “son of man” who “came (מטה) to the Ancient One” and “was presented (קרב) before him.” Thus, the referent in Daniel’s vision in 7:13–14 is the same as the referent in Jeremiah 30:21—the Davidic king (30:9; cf. 5).

This is confirmed by the language and imagery of Daniel 7:14, which would no doubt bring to mind imagery of the coming kingdom from earlier prophets: “To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.” The language also recalls a major theme of the original Imago Dei mission, as Baldwin notes: “The original goal ‘have dominion’ (Gen. 1:28) is fulfilled in the one like a son of man who is given a kingdom that shall not be destroyed.”⁶⁸ Reference to rule over many peoples and nations reflects language from Isaiah 2:4; 11:10; 60:12. And “glory” is repeatedly associated with the coming messianic age (Isa 4:5; 60:19; Jer 33:9, etc.). Thus, it is no surprise that, “Judaism in the first century CE and later interpreted Daniel 7.13 messianically. While Jewish interpreters developed no title and no unified messianic conception from this passage, they did generally regard the ‘one like a son of man’ as the Messiah.”⁶⁹

In the interpretation of this portion of the vision (Dan 7:27), the individual who looked “like a human being (כבר אנוש)”, (the “Son of Man”), is explained not as an individual but as a plurality—“The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High (לעם קדישי עליונים); their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them” (cf. Dan 7:18). Thus, the “Son of Man” symbol in the vision is interpreted as a corporate body of rulers who will reign over the coming kingdom.⁷⁰ Casey notes, “In the foundational source, Dan. 7.13, כבר אנוש, ‘one like a son of man’, is a pure symbol of the Saints of the Most High.”⁷¹ Gowan also takes the same position

⁶⁷ For a history of interpretation on the identity of the Son of Man see Mogens Müller, *The Expression ‘Son of Man’ and the Development of Christology: A History of Interpretation* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁶⁸ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 23 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978), 166.

⁶⁹ Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 122–123.

⁷⁰ While the first clause is clearly plural—לעם קדישי עליונים—some manuscripts switch to the singular in the second clause—מלכותה (“his kingdom”)—which is the reading of the MT. However, some Aramaic manuscripts read מלכותיה (“their kingdom”), as does the second-century Greek translation by Theodotion. In any case, the interpretation certainly views the vision of the Son of Man as having a corporate fulfillment to some degree.

⁷¹ Maurice Casey, *The Solution to the ‘Son of Man’ Problem* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 114. Though correct in principle—the “Son of Man” symbol is interpreted corporately in Dan 7:18, 27—denying the possibility that the Son of Man includes both an individual messianic figure and his co-regents neglects the already-established understanding that the messiah will reign with a plurality rulers (Isa 32:1). And Casey’s narrowing of the referent of “Saints of the

that an individual identification of the Son of Man is excluded by the corporate interpretation: “As beastly figures represent the pagan nations, then, a human figure represents the people of God.”⁷² This corporate interpretation in the prophecy of Daniel itself must not be ignored. However, in light of the revelation of Jesus as the Son of Man, and the incorporation of the church as the body of Christ, it is best to avoid a false choice that forces us to interpret the passage either as an individual Messiah or as a corporate body of saints.⁷³ Rather, the imagery can accommodate both.⁷⁴ In any case, the language and imagery of Daniel 7 with regard to the coming kingdom, though brief and compact, is consistent with the picture of the coming kingdom in previous prophets. This is why, understandably, Irenaeus regards the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds in Daniel 7:13–14 as a reference to Christ’s second coming to establish his kingdom (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.11; 4.33.2).

Daniel 9. The prophecy of the “seventy weeks” has been described as “possibly . . . the most difficult passage to interpret in all the Old Testament.”⁷⁵ For our purposes in surveying passages regarding the coming kingdom, we can mostly avoid the most difficult problems related to the commencement and conclusion of the period of the “seventy weeks” and how they fit with post-exilic history and the advent of the Messiah. At this point, a brief overview of the passage and its relationship to earlier language and imagery of the coming kingdom is sufficient.⁷⁶

While reading the book of Jeremiah, the prophet Daniel learned that seventy years of exile must be accomplished before the people could return to Jerusalem (Dan 9:1–2). In response, Daniel began praying and fasting to God for his people (9:3–19). The Lord then sent his angel, Gabriel, to Daniel with a message that involved a new set of “seventies” — “Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity,

Most High” to just “a description of the people of Israel” does not allow for the later revelation of union with Christ in the corporate body of the church.

⁷² Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 38–39.

⁷³ Tanner falls into this either/or trap when he rejects the “collective or personification view” in favor of the “messianic view,” when these two views can be held together Christologically and ecclesiologically, it naturally avoids neglecting important assertions in Dan 7:18, 27 that indisputably interpret the Son of Man corporately. See Tanner, *Daniel*, 433–443.

⁷⁴ Orelli notes, “The antithesis to the earthly powers requires that this divine kingdom, now entering into visibility, should have its visible Head. And this can be no other than the long-expected *Messiah* appearing at the right time. . . . Certainly this ruler must also have a people exercising dominion in conjunction with him. In the application of the vision to present historical circumstances (vii. 18, 22, 27) only the people is spoken of, *i.e.* the saints who have remained faithful will receive dominion; for the approaching ruler is their own, the Head given them by heaven, in whom they are concentrated, and to whom they stand in reciprocal relation” (Conrad von Orelli, *The Old Testament Prophecy of the Consummation of God’s Kingdom, Traced in Its Historical Development*, trans. J. S. Banks [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892], 459–60). Ridderbos suggests the “Son of Man” in the vision is a literal individual, while the plural “saints of the Most High” in 7:18 is not an interpretation of the symbol of the Son of Man but an additional number who have a share in the reign (Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 7).

⁷⁵ Tanner, *Daniel*, 543.

⁷⁶ This issue will be revisited in chapter 17 of *The Fathers on the Future* in a discussion of the future tribulation period as conceived by Irenaeus.

to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place” (9:24). All these elements point to a period when transgression and sin are finally and utterly abolished, when real righteousness is established forever and all visions and prophecies fulfilled, as Baldwin notes: “We are being told about the final triumph of God’s kingdom and the end of human history.”⁷⁷

From the perspective of second-temple Judaism, these things can only have been partially fulfilled. They must await a future full realization. And from the perspective of Christianity, sin and transgression were “atoned for” in a spiritual sense, but to “finish” and “put an end” to them in this world awaits the second coming of Christ, as does the ushering in of everlasting righteousness. Thus, the idea that the ultimate conclusion of the seventy weeks (of years) awaits a future period became popular among early Christian readers like Irenaeus of Lyons and Hippolytus of Rome.⁷⁸

After surveying the Jewish understanding of the seventy weeks in the second temple period, Dean Ulrich concludes:

Second Temple literature demonstrates how early Judaism read the seventy sevens typologically. The Antiochene crisis and Maccabean deliverance were instances of humanity’s proclivity toward evil and God’s preservation of his redemptive plan that includes his people’s inheritance. As instances, the Antiochene crisis and Maccabean deliverance could represent and foreshadow other such moments in history. Josephus, for example, considered Rome’s destruction of the Jerusalem temple a recapitulation of Antiochus IV’s desecration of the temple.... God’s Word, especially the apocalyptic sections, has typological depth that can address new but similar situations. The Antiochene crisis was not the end of redemptive history. The prophecy of the seventy sevens may have the Antiochene crisis as its primary focus, but redemptive history has seen other challenges to God’s plan. Because the same spirit of rebellion influences the human actors in each of these instances of hostility, what God says about evil and its solution on one occasion can paradigmatically apply to another.

Therefore, it may be proposed that Jesus, Matthew, Mark, and Hippolytus were not reading Daniel’s seventy sevens in an unprecedented way. Rather, they were following the typological example of the OT and early Judaism. The prophecy of the seventy sevens assures God’s people at any time that evildoers have limits and that God’s people will inherit the earth. God has been establishing and will establish his kingdom on earth.⁷⁹

I do not rule out *a priori* the possibility that the prophecy of the seventy weeks had an initial fulfillment (or partial fulfillments) at the time of Antiochus IV, the coming of Christ, the

⁷⁷ Baldwin, *Daniel*, 188.

⁷⁸ For a brief history of the interpretation of the seventy weeks, see Baldwin, *Daniel*, 191–197.

⁷⁹ Dean R. Ulrich “How Early Judaism Read Daniel 9:24–27,” *OTE* 27.3 (2014): 1079–80.

destruction of the temple in the first century, and/or a future fulfilment at the time of a coming antichrist figure prior to the return of Christ.⁸⁰ However, such a partial fulfillment does not conform to the ultimacy of the language of Daniel 9:24.

Hosea 1:10–11; 2:14–23; 3:4–5. Immediately after a scathing pronouncement that Israel will be judged severely for their sin (Hos 1:2–5), that he will show no pity on them nor forgive them (1:6)—though Judah will be shown mercy (1:7)—he says, “You are not my people, and I am not your God” (1:9). Yet this horrifying declaration is suddenly reversed with a promise of restoration in keeping with the language and imagery of the major prophets. In that restoration, the number of the people of Israel will be greatly increased, unable to be numbered, and “in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God’” (Hos 1:10). The people of Israel and Judah will be reunited under one head (דוד)—likely a reference to the one king, the Messiah.

In chapter 2, God further describes Israel’s future restoration after their punishment (Hos 2:1–13). In their wilderness of exile, God will “speak tenderly” to Israel (2:14), and she will respond to the Lord as they did in the first exodus from Egypt (2:15). Their estranged relationship will be restored in righteousness and justice, and Israel will “know the Lord” (2:16–17, 19–20). In that restoration, God will establish a covenant that will include peace among the wild animals and a banishment of all warfare (2:18). The land will be bountiful in its grain, wine, and oil (2:21; cf. Jer 31:12), and as God says, “You are my people,” Israel will say, “You are my God” (2:22). This language reflect the picture of restoration in the coming kingdom already well established in the major prophets.

Finally, Hosea 3:4–5 prophesies that Israelites will remain “without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim” (3:4); yet afterward, “the Israelites shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; they shall come in awe to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days (באחרית הימים)” (3:5; cf. Jer 30:9). This passage predicts a long period of exile followed by restoration in the coming messianic age. It is not clear whether the initial statement that Israel will be “without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim” indicates that in the restoration these things related to the priesthood and sacrificial system will occur in a rebuilt temple, when the Davidic king rules. The affirmation of restoration in 3:5 does not indicate that positively.

Joel 2:18–3:1, 20. Joel is well known for its extended treatment of the Day of the Lord theme and its vivid imagery related to that judgment. However, arising from the fire and smoke of the Day of the Lord, we see an extended section related to restoration (2:18–3:1) as well as a final promise near the very end of the book that “Judah shall be inhabited forever and Jerusalem to all generations” (Joel 3:20). On the heels of a description of the day of judgment, the Lord calls his

⁸⁰ See discussion in Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 313–317.

people to repentance: if they will turn to him with their whole hearts, even at the very brink of disaster, he will turn his wrath away from them and turn it against their gathering enemies (2:12–14). The plea for God’s people to repent includes the blowing of a trumpet to call a sacred assembly—old and young, bride, groom, and ministering priest—all are invited to cry out to God for mercy (2:15–17).

Verse 18 begins an account of the results of a sincere repentance and turning to God. In response to their cries for salvation, the Lord “became jealous for his land (לְאֶרֶץ) and had pity on his people (עַמּוֹ)” (2:18). In response, the Lord promises to send “grain, wine, and oil” to satisfy their hunger and thirst, and they will no more be a mockery among the nations (2:19; cf. Jer 31:12; Hos 2:21). Grain, wine, and oil were associated with the blessing on the people for covenant faithfulness (Deut 7:13; 11:14); and they were therefore also associated with sacrifices and tithes for the priesthood (Lev 23:13; Deut 18:4). As part of their deliverance from their enemies, the Lord will drive away the army that had gathered to destroy them (Joel 2:20).

The Lord’s blessing will reach to the “soil” (הָאֲדָמָה) as well as the grazing animals, who will experience lush, green pastures and trees that produce abundant fruit (2:21–22). Zion is called to rejoice because of the blessing of rain that will result in over-abundance of grain, wine, and oil (2:23–24). Their years of calamity will be reversed when the Lord dwells in their midst and they are blessed with plenty (2:25).

The restoration will also include unparalleled spiritual blessings. The Lord will pour out his spirit “on all flesh” so “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28–29). The Lord warns of signs in heaven and on earth: blood, fire, columns of smoke, the sun darkening, and the moon turning blood red—classic imagery associated with the coming day of the Lord. These things will happen “before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes” (2:30–31). Gowan observes, “It is a time in which an entire community will enjoy direct access to God, and if the verses that follow are to be associated with these, Joel connects this anthropological change with great cosmic disturbances—‘portents in the heavens and on earth’—and makes the community in Mount Zion the center of his interest (2:32).”⁸¹

It is not entirely clear whether the prophecy is now “rewinding” and explaining the day of the Lord judgments that will lead to the repentance of Israel and their resulting salvation (cf. 2:1–11), or if these events of 2:30–32 are meant to follow the time of restoration described in 2:18–29. The former explanation makes sense of the entire passage—the Lord is reminding them of the signs that will precede the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (2:31); then “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls” (2:32). This, then, would correspond to the repentance and salvation that comes to Israel as a result of the future day of the Lord (cf. 2:11–18).

⁸¹ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 75.

The chronological indicators that begin Joel 3:1–2 [4:1–2 in the MT], make it clear that the Day of the Lord will involve both judgment upon the nations as well as blessing upon Israel: “For then, in those days and at that time (בַּיָּמִים הַהֵמָּה וּבַעַתְּ הַהִיא), when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations.” Here Judah and Israel are restored and judgment is poured out on their enemies in keeping with the kingdom oracles of the other major and minor prophets.

Amos 9:11–15; Obadiah 17–21. Language and imagery of the Day of the Lord theme fills page after page of Amos’s dreadful prophecy. However, in the dark background of the imminent, inevitable, and seemingly irreversible destruction of Israel, Amos 9:11–15 stands as a bright ray of hope at the conclusion of the book that reflects much of the restoration language already seen in the other major and minor prophets: restoration of the Davidic kingdom, miraculous abundance in vineyards and gardens, and rebuilding the cities of Israel, never to be uprooted again. Nel notes that the “closing verses of the book (9:11–15) transfer one to a totally different world.... One wakes up in what seems like a fairyland. The hills drip with must and the mountains flow with sweet wine. Agricultural activities depict and overabundance. In fact, Yahweh is at work. He is restoring the fallen booth of David and repairing its breaches (9:11). The sword of destruction which dangled over Israel’s head in the preceding chapters is replaced by a trowel. He is changing the lot of his people (9:14) and is planting them in the land he gives them, never again to be uprooted (9:15).”⁸² Gowan notes, “Amos indulges in a kind of hyperbole much loved by the rabbis in later times (9:13–14). The days are coming when the harvest will be so large that the work will not be finished before the next planting time.”⁸³

Even the tiny, single-chapter book of Obadiah, which focuses primarily on Edom’s judgment as well as the Day of the Lord upon the nations (Obad 15) concludes its message of woe with glorious language and imagery of ultimate restoration. Some on Mount Zion will escape the destruction of the day of the Lord, and “the house of Jacob” will be like purifying fire against Edom (Obad 17–18). What had once belonged to the enemies of Israel will be returned to the people to whom it had been promised (Obad 19–20): “Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s” (Obad 21).

Micah 4:1–8. Micah prophesied concerning “Samaria and Jerusalem”—the capitals of Israel in the north and Judah in the south—in the same generation as Isaiah (Mic 1:1), setting forth the Lord’s case against his people for breaking the covenant and warning of just judgment coming for

⁸² W. A. G. Nel, “Amos 9:11–15—An Unconditional Prophecy of Salvation during the Period of the Exile,” *Old Testament Essays* 2 (1984): 83–84. Partly because of the shocking transition from total destruction to glorious restoration, Nel did not believe Amos 9:11–15 was written by Amos himself (93).

⁸³ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 102.

their sins (Mic 1:2–3:12). The result of this judgment is described in bleak terms: “Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple a wooded height” (Mic 3:12). In stunning contrast, though, Micah 4:1 begins with a song of hope reflecting almost the exact language of Isaiah 2:2–4 in its opening lines (cf. Mic 4:1–3; Isa 2:2–4).⁸⁴ (See discussion on Isaiah 2:1–4 above for explanations of the imagery in Mic 4:1–3.)

At Micah 4:4–8, the passages diverge, but Micah still echoes familiar language and imagery from other kingdom oracles in major and minor prophets. The promise that every person will “sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees” parallels Zechariah 3:10.⁸⁵ That they will have such peace that “no one shall make them afraid” echoes language from Jeremiah 30:10; 46:27; Ezekiel 34:28; and Zephaniah 3:13. That Israel will “walk in the name of the Lord” forever will be repeated in Zephaniah 10:12.

Through Micah, God promises to assemble the lame (cf. Isa 35:6; Jer 31:8; Zeph 3:19) and gather those who had been driven away and afflicted (cf. Isa 11:12); and from that remnant he will make a strong nation and reign over them in Mount Zion forever (Mic 4:6–7; cf. Isa 24:23; Obad 21)—the former dominion will be re-established in Jerusalem (Mic 4:8).

Micah 5:2–6. The picture of a future restoration emerges again, this time directly associated with the coming descendant of David. The famous messianic prophecy in Micah 5:2 identifies “one who is to rule in Israel” (להיות מושל בישראל)—“whose origin is from of old, from ancient days” (5:2). The final line may hint at a divine origin, or it could refer to the ancient line of David; thus, the coming of this ruler will be a fulfillment of the ancient Davidic promises. In any case, drawing from imagery of the nation of Israel writhing and groaning like a woman in labor because of their exile (4:10), Micah 5:3 says the people will be given up to exile until the labor gives way to the rebirth of the remnant of Israel: “Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.” Gowan notes, “The reference to Bethlehem assures us that the subject is the son of David, that he is a ruler who will feed his flock... and that his rule will be associated with the restoration of his people, as in Ezekiel 34 and 37.”⁸⁶ The third person masculine suffix in “the rest of his brothers (יתר אחיו)” likely refers to the ruler born in Bethlehem—the Messiah. The remnant of Israel will be in exile until a future time when the woman—Israel in travail—gives birth, either to the remnant itself or to a company somehow related to that remnant (Mic 5:3).

In any case, the overall picture is clear: a ruler will ultimately re-establish Israel and gather the remnant. Verse 4 says that this future ruler will feed his flock in the Lord’s strength and majesty,

⁸⁴ Besides the inclusion or exclusion of some adjectives, the most noticeable difference between Isa 2:2–4 and Mic 4:1–3 is the transposition of “nations” (גוים) and “peoples” (עמים) in the parallel lines in Mic 4:1–2, 3.

⁸⁵ The language is also used in 1 Macc 14:12, among other imagery that suggests a kind of partial realization of the blessings of peace and security anticipated in the major and minor prophets—though that stability is short-lived even in 1 Maccabees itself (cf. 1 Macc 14–16).

⁸⁶ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 36.

and Israel will live securely as the king of peace himself “shall be great to the ends of the earth” (5:4–5). Even if Israel is invaded from the north, the rulers over the land will rescue Israel, guaranteeing deliverance (5:5–6). This hypothetical scenario illustrates the righteous might wielded not only by the Davidic ruler but by the plurality of shepherds and rulers who will reign over Israel at the time (cf. Isa 32:1; Dan 7:27).

Zephaniah 2:7, 9; Zephaniah 3:9–20. In an oracle primarily related to the Day of the Lord, the Lord promises that a remnant of the house of Judah will remain (2:7), and they will ultimately plunder and possess the enemies of Israel (2:9). Despite these brief sparks of hope, most of Zephaniah rehearses the coming judgments on Jerusalem and the nations for their obstinate sin and rebellion, employing vivid Day of the Lord imagery (2:10–3:8).

However, the book concludes with astonishing images of hope and restoration. After the day of the Lord judgments, the Lord will purify the speech of the peoples (עַמִּים) so they will call on the Lord and serve him (3:9), bringing an offering to the Lord from afar (3:10). Whether this refers to the people of Israel or to the nations as well is not clear, though עַמִּים usually refers to many peoples—i.e., nations—rather than the single nation of Israel, which is usually indicated by the singular עַם. In any case, the nation of Israel will be cleansed of its pride and delivered from its corrupt, haughty rulers, replaced by a remnant of Israel who are “humble and lowly,” who will be completely righteous, live in peace, and never be afraid (3:11–13; cf. Jer 30:10; 46:27; Ezek 34:28; and Matt 5:3–10).

At that time, Israel will rejoice because God himself will be in their midst ruling as king (Zeph 3:14–15). Because of the peace and security finally experienced under God’s rule, the weak will be strengthened (3:16; cf. Isa 35:3), the lame will be saved (Zeph 3:19; cf. Isa 35:6; Jer 31:8). Outcasts will be gathered and will no longer suffer reproach or shame throughout the world (Zeph 3:17–19). As Israel’s fortunes are restored and they are gathered together once again, the fame of Israel will spread over all the earth (3:20). In short, the experience of desolation, rejection, and judgment because of their sins will be entirely reversed as they are restored to the land under the rule of their king, the Lord God of Israel. Gowan writes, “The reversal of fortune, God’s promise to make right all that has gone wrong with this world and human life, the essence of OT eschatology, is well represented in this short collection of assurances and promises focused on Zion. God’s people will be gathered, unfortunate individuals (lame and outcast) will have shame turned into praise, and there will be no more cause to fear evil, for God will cast out their enemies.”⁸⁷

Zechariah 2:4–12; 8:1–23. The priest-prophet Zechariah prophesied after the partial return of exiles from Babylon in the sixth century BC. The specific historical context relates to the program of rebuilding the second temple in Jerusalem. The genre primarily includes symbolic apocalyptic

⁸⁷ Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 15.

visions like those of Daniel. Five scenes of restoration similar to earlier major and minor prophets contribute to the Old Testament picture of the coming kingdom.

In the vision of the man with the measuring line, the angel promises that the same Jerusalem that had languished during exile will overflow with a growing population of both people and animals (2:4), for God will protect them and dwell among them (2:5). Though this could have application to the ultimate eschatological restoration, in context it probably refers to the protection and presence of God among his people in their restoration to the land after the Babylonian exile. This is confirmed by the urgent call to return from the lands of captivity (2:6–8). The nations to which God’s people had been exiled would themselves suffer calamity and defeat (2:9). Even the rousing language in verses 10–12 likely find their fulfillment in the immediate historical context of return from exile.

This passage contains a distinction between the Lord (יהוה) who is sent (and is speaking) and the Lord (יהוה) who sends the speaker. The Christological implications are intriguing; but the passage need not refer to the incarnate son of God coming as Messiah in an ultimate fulfillment of these things, since a case can be made that in the Old Testament a distinction is made between יהוה as the Angel of the Lord/Word of the Lord and יהוה as the one who sends that personal manifestation of the presence of God. In that case, the figurative language of Zechariah 2:1–13 would be fulfilled in the post-exilic second-temple period.

The same can be said of the language of regathering, restoration, rebuilding, and blessing in Zechariah 8:1–8. Though it could have application to a far-future, eschatological kingdom, it most naturally reads as an image of what would result from a complete return to Zion by the exiles. In fact, it can be said that the historical return after the exile did reflect the language of this prophecy, understanding, of course, that the imagery uses figures of speech. Yet even if the immediate application of the passage is found in the generation of Zechariah—“in these days (בַּיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה)” (8:15)—some of the more hyperbolic or exalted descriptions of restoration may be seen as dependent upon a fully obedient response described in 8:16–19. That is, Zechariah presents a restoration that will be fulfilled his days, yet that restoration would give way to maximal blessing if Judah returns with their hearts as well.

On the glorious vision of Zion in Zechariah 8, Gowan writes, “The good life that Zechariah projects for the inhabitants of Jerusalem is a mixture of the material and the spiritual. Peace, prosperity, and security are dominant themes, but this is no secular city. What makes it all possible is God, who carries out his purpose (8:2, 6, 11, 13b-15), and the source of the good life in Zion is the presence of Yahweh in its midst.”⁸⁸

Zechariah 9:9–10:12. Unlike the promises in Zechariah 2 and 8 that could refer primarily to the post-exilic period and secondarily apply to an ultimate, eschatological fulfillment, the prophecy of Zechariah 9–10 draws on language and imagery more naturally associated with the coming

⁸⁸ Gowan, *Eschatology of the Old Testament*, 6.

messianic kingdom. It begins with the announcement of the coming of the “king” (מֶלֶךְ), who comes with humility and righteousness, riding on a donkey (9:9). After defeating all his enemies, the extent of his kingdom of peace will be “from sea to sea” and “to the ends of the earth” (9:10; cf. Isa 9:7; 11:1–5; 52:10).

In this context of the coming messianic king, the Lord makes this promise: “As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you (בְּדַם־בְּרִיתֶךָ), I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double” (Zech 9:11–12). The phrase “blood of the covenant with you” could refer back to the covenant the Lord made with Abraham (Gen 15:7–20) or to the covenant the Lord made through Moses (Exod 24:8). The latter is less likely, because the context is one of restoration under the future king despite the unfaithfulness of Israel, and this restoration is connected rather to the new covenant as opposed to the old (Jer 31:31–34). Another possibility is that this is a cryptic reference to the blood of the new covenant of the Messiah himself, which would fit Zechariah’s context of the messianic king and the imagery of the new covenant restoration. At the Passover, Christ said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου τὸ ὑπὲρ)” (Luke 22:20; cf. Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24). Hebrews even calls it the “blood of the eternal covenant (διαθήκης αἰωνίου)” (Heb 13:20). In Isaiah 55:3, the Lord promises Israel, “I will make with you an everlasting covenant (LXX, διαθήκην αἰώνιον), my steadfast, sure love for David.”

The remainder of Zechariah 9 flashes images of God waging war against his enemies, but his people will not only be restored to double honor, they will be mediators of his judgment (Zech 9:12–17; cf. Isa 61:7). Along with the restoration, the Lord will provide plenty of grain and wine (9:17) as well as rain to water the fields (10:1). Though the Lord will punish the deceptive diviners and wicked leaders (10:2–3), he will care for his flock and execute judgment through them (10:3–5). Both Judah and Joseph—reunited—will be saved from the nations to which they had been scattered and return to the land with jubilation, so they and their children will “walk in his name” (10:6–12; cf. Mic 4:5).

Zechariah 12:10–13:3. Following a passage with strong Christological implications, the Lord promises to one day pour out a “spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” with the result that, literally, “they will look on me whom they have pierced” (הִבִּיטוּ אֵלַי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־דָּקְרוּ) (Zech 12:10). The result will be mourning and weeping bitterly for him, like the loss of an only child (12:10). This mourning will result in mourning throughout all the family of Judah and Levi (12:11–14). As a result of this repentance, “On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zech 13:1; cf. Jer 33:8). The land will be cleansed of its idolatry and false prophets (Zech 13:2–3).

The repentance that comes when people regard (בָּטַט) the one whom they pierced is applied to the second coming of Christ in Revelation 1:7—“Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye

will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.” Jesus, too, appears to apply the scene from Zechariah 12:10–14, along with an allusion to Daniel 7:13 to the future coming of the Son of Man in glory: “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see ‘the Son of Man’ coming on the clouds of heaven’ with power and great glory” (Matt 24:39).

From a canonical-theological perspective, then, this connection of these passages to the future return of Christ as judge and king in the New Testament does not allow us to see the fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10–13:3 in the return of the exiles during the second temple period. Thus, its figurative language points forward to the restoration of Israel and Judah in connection with their repentance and the coming of the Davidic king to rule.

Zechariah 14:5–21. Following a great battle of judgment and a theophany in which the Lord stands on the Mount of Olives (14:4), creating a valley to form that allows the remnant to escape, “the Lord my God will come with all his holy ones with him” (14:5). This will be accompanied by astonishing, miraculous climatic and cosmic changes (14:6–7), followed by “living waters” that “flow out from Jerusalem” to the east and the west (14:8).

Verse 10 describes Jerusalem rising above all the surrounding regions, which will become like a plain, echoing imagery of Isaiah 2:1. Terblanche notes that Zechariah, “deems the transformation of the known natural order vital for the fulfilment of these expectations. Since he has also applied other texts in a similar manner, he presents a telescoped form of Ezekiel 47:1–12 in Zechariah 14:8.”⁸⁹ Such a connection to Ezekiel 47, then, might endorse a more literal reading of Ezekiel’s temple imagery in Ezekiel 40–48, and *if* the future temple is literal, *then* its sacrifices would also be literal. That is, contrary to the de-emphasis on temple and sacrifices in the kingdom oracles in Isaiah and Jeremiah, the concluding chapters of Ezekiel would present a vivid, detailed expectation of just such a temple and sacrifices. However, one may also take the vision of the temple in Ezekiel as the best possible restoration under the old covenant, had Israel fully repented and actually followed the instructions for the rebuilding of the temple in Ezekiel 40–48, while Zechariah’s image transcends the imagery in the new covenant context. Terblanche points out some important differences between the vision of Ezekiel and that of Zechariah that may point in this direction:

In Ezekiel the waters flow eastwards towards the Dead Sea since the effects of the renewed presence of Yahweh are related to the land of Israel. In Zechariah the waters flow in two directions: One half of the waters flows towards the eastern sea and the other half towards the western sea... They are the borders of the inhabited world. The blessings which will flow from manifestation of Yahweh’s kingship will be universal.... This suits the author’s message of universal salvation...

⁸⁹ M. D. Terblanche, “An Abundance of Living Waters: The Intertextual Relationship between Zechariah 14:8 and Ezekiel 47:1–12,” *Old Testament Essays* 17.1 (2004): 128.

Ezekiel sees the water coming out from under the threshold of the temple. Zechariah 14:8, on the other hand, states that the living water will flow from the city.... The author of Zechariah 14:1–15 did not simply imitate Ezekiel 47:1–12, but adopted it for his own needs...

In contrast to Ezekiel 47:1 no mention is made of the temple in Zechariah 14:8.⁹⁰

Yet, the idea that Zechariah has completely forsaken the idea of a restored temple is dampened by the explicit mention of animal sacrifices in 14:21. This may lead to the conclusion that Zechariah is not describing a new covenant restoration that outdoes the old covenant expectation in Ezekiel, but simply presents a “telescoped form” of the imagery, assuming his readers were familiar with the vision of Ezekiel 47:1–12.⁹¹ This has led many premillennialists to understand some kind of sacrificial system to be established during an intermediate millennial period, which will eventually give way to an eternal new creation without such temporary sacrifices.

Gowan summarizes the basic characteristics of Old Testament eschatology in four points, which I abbreviate here: 1) “Old Testament eschatology is a worldly hope. The OT does not scorn, ignore, or abandon the kind of life which human beings experience in this world in favor of speculation concerning some other, better place or form of existence, to be hoped for after death or achieved before death through meditation and spiritual exercises.” 2) “Old Testament eschatology understands the future to be completely in the hands of God.... The basis for hope in the OT is not faith in human progress, but the assurance of a coming divine intervention that will introduce a new thing that people have failed and will fail to accomplish.” 3) “Old Testament eschatology emphasizes human society more than personal salvation... Certainly the OT does not ignore the redemption of individuals, but it puts its strongest emphasis on the truth that full human life is life in community.” 4) “Old Testament eschatology is a comprehensive hope. The OT neither focuses on an improved social structure inhabited by the same kind of people who created the mess we are now in; nor does it promise that personal salvation will somehow make social problems go away; neither does it imagine that a healthy human society can exist without a wholesome interaction with the natural world.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Terblanche, “An Abundance of Living Waters,” 126.

⁹¹ Terblanche, “An Abundance of Living Waters,” 127.

⁹² Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 122–23.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 12

Expectation of the Coming Kingdom in the Intertestamental Period

The following survey explores some passages related to the expectation of the coming kingdom between the close of the Old Testament canon and the first century as a background for the New Testament. I make no attempt at being exhaustive; the purpose is to trace the basic contours of eschatological expectations of the messianic age and the Messiah figure himself as the New Testament era dawns.

1 Enoch 1–36 (Book of the Watchers) (Fourth—Third Century BC)

The *Book of Enoch* (1 Enoch) begins with a prophecy of the end-times, “not for this generation, but for a remote one which is for to come” (1 En. 1.2).¹ That is, while the text is fictionally situated in the pre-flood days of Enoch, the opening prophecy is intended for a distant generation, most likely referring to the *ultimate* end of the world. Enoch calls this “the day of tribulation” (1 En. 1.1). This future judgment is summarily treated as a great theophany, in which God himself treads upon the earth (1.4), which trembles, quakes, and even melts in his presence (1.4–6). While all people are judged (1.7), “with the righteous He shall make peace, and will protect the elect, and mercy shall be upon them. And they shall all belong to God, and they shall be prospered, and they shall all be blessed” (1.8). Thus, while judgment comes upon the wicked, the righteous are protected and prosper on the earth. At this point 1 Enoch 1.9 appears, which is quoted by Jude, indicating not only the familiarity with 1 Enoch and its imagery, but to some degree an agreement with its appropriateness in summing up even the early Christian expectation of judgment and blessing.²

¹ Translation from Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

² The language of 1 En. 1.9 is also similar to that of Zech 14:5, which is quoted by Did. 16.7, where the subject is the Lord Jesus Christ coming with all his saints.

With regard to the restoration of the righteous and elect, 1 Enoch describes that glorious coming age in terms quite similar to those of the Old Testament prophets and their language and imagery of the new covenant: “There shall be forgiveness of sins, and every mercy and peace and forbearance: there shall be salvation unto them, a goodly light” (1 En. 5.6); “For the elect there shall be light and joy and peace, and they shall inherit the earth” (5.7); “And then there shall be bestowed upon the elect wisdom, and they shall all live and never again sin, either through ungodliness or through pride: but they who are wise shall be humble” (5.8); “And they shall not again transgress, nor shall they sin all the days of their life, nor shall they die of (the divine) anger or wrath, but they shall complete the number of the days of their life. And their lives shall be increased in peace, and the years of their joy shall be multiplied, in eternal gladness and peace, all the days of their life” (5.9). The imagery here matches the descriptions of the messianic age in Isaiah and other Old Testament books (see Go Deeper Excursus 11), which are likely the sources for 1 Enoch.

The pronouncement of judgment related to the coming flood leaps forward to the “judgment that is for ever and ever” (1 En. 10.12), followed by a description of the ultimate and eternal period of restoration and blessing:

Destroy all wrong from the face of the earth and let every evil work come to an end: and let the plant of righteousness and truth appear: and it shall prove a blessing; the works of righteousness and truth shall be planted in truth and joy for evermore. And then shall all the righteous escape, and shall live till they beget thousands of children, and all the days of their youth and their old age shall they complete in peace. And then shall the whole earth be tilled in righteousness, and shall all be planted with trees and be full of blessing. And all desirable trees shall be planted on it, and they shall plant vines on it: and the vine which they plant thereon shall yield wine in abundance, and as for all the seed which is sown thereon each measure of it shall bear a thousand, and each measure of olives shall yield ten presses of oil. And cleanse thou the earth from all oppression, and from all unrighteousness, and from all sin, and from all godlessness: and all the uncleanness that is wrought upon the earth destroy from off the earth. And all the children of men shall become righteous, and all nations shall offer adoration and shall praise Me, and all shall worship Me. And the earth shall be cleansed from all defilement, and from all sin, and from all punishment, and from all torment, and I will never again send them upon it from generation to generation and for ever. (1 En. 10.16–22)

Later, in Enoch’s vision of the seven mountains, the archangel Michael notes, regarding a great and glorious mountain, “This high mountain which thou hast seen, whose summit is like the throne of God, is His throne, where the Holy Great One, the Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit, when He shall come down to visit the earth with goodness” (1 En. 25.3). Then, regarding the tree of unparalleled beauty and fragrance—the tree of life, he writes:

And as for this fragrant tree no mortal is permitted to touch it till the great judgement, when He shall take vengeance on all and bring everything to its consummation for ever. It shall then be given to the righteous and holy. Its fruit shall be for food to the elect: it shall be transplanted to the holy place, to the temple of the Lord, the Eternal King. Then shall they rejoice with joy and be glad, and into the holy place shall they enter; and its fragrance shall be in their bones, and they shall live a long life on earth, such as thy fathers lived: and in their days shall no «sorrow» or plague or torment or calamity touch them. (1 En. 25.4–6)

1 Enoch 85–90 (Animal Apocalypse) (Second Century BC)

The section of 1 Enoch 85–90, often called the Animal Apocalypse, presents an allegorical vision that depicts the history of the world until the coming kingdom. This section of 1 Enoch was composed sometime in the second century BC during the Maccabean period.³ Olson summarizes the eschatological outlook of the Animal Apocalypse (1 En. 85–90) in this way: “God steps onto the scene, presiding over a final judgment of angels and humans. Afterwards, a New Jerusalem is constructed, and all the wild beasts and birds (the Gentiles) submit to the flock of sheep (Israel).”⁴ He later makes the following comments on 1 Enoch 90.33–34, “The resurrection of the just, the gathering of the dispersion, the conversion of the Gentiles, the end of war, and the joyful congregation in the New Jerusalem are related in brisk fashion,” and notes that “none of these is unique” to the Animal Apocalypse,⁵ as they reflect common themes throughout the Old Testament prophets as well as other intertestamental literature.

In his commentary on 1 Enoch, Nickelsburg summarizes the eschatological outlook of the Animal Apocalypse this way: “With the great judgment indicating a conclusion to the second era, the remainder of the Vision’s narrative depicts the beginning of a third era. There are continuities with the second era, specifically the resolution of unresolved problems: the renewal of Jerusalem, the return of the dispersion, and the submission of the Gentiles. Nonetheless, vv 37–38 indicate a return to the first beginnings and hence a new creation and an entirely new era.”⁶ In sum, once the reader cuts through the confusing allegory, the general picture of the coming kingdom in 1 Enoch is consistent with the collage of images left to us in the Old Testament prophets.

³ Daniel Olson, *A New Reading of the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch: All Nations Shall Be Blessed*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 24 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1. Translation used in this section is from Olson.

⁴ Olson, *New Reading of the Animal Apocalypse*, 2.

⁵ Olson, *New Reading of the Animal Apocalypse*, 227.

⁶ George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2012), 404.

Psalms of Solomon (c. First Century BC)

Among the Psalms of Solomon, safely dated in the century prior to Christ, we see a picture of the coming kingdom consistent with the collage of images from the Old Testament prophets in all its major points. God will not reject his people Israel, but will show pity on the people, just as he promised (Ps. Sol. 7:6–10; 8:27; 11:1).⁷ The “dispersed of Israel” will be gathered together from every place where they had been driven (Ps. Sol. 8:28; 11:3)—summoned back to Zion with the sounding of a trumpet (Ps. Sol. 11:1), and they will never be removed again (Ps. Sol. 8:33; 14:4).

Of particular brilliance is the vision of the coming kingdom set forth in Psalms of Solomon 17, which includes not only the language and imagery of restoration of Israel but also the central role of the Davidic king: “Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David, at the time in the which Thou seest, O God, that he may reign over Israel Thy servant” (17:21). He will be “pure from sin, so that he may rule a great people” (17:36). Further, “Throughout his days he will not stumble; for God will make him mighty by means of (His) holy spirit, and wise by means of the spirit of understanding, with strength and righteousness. And the blessing of the Lord (will be) with him: he will be strong and stumble not” (Ps. Sol. 17:37–38).

That son of David will liberate Jerusalem from its oppressors and wicked rulers (Ps. Sol. 17:22), and all wickedness will be banished from their midst (17:27, 30, 32, 36). That king will gather together his holy people and “judge the tribes of the people that has been sanctified by the Lord” (17:26) and “divide them according to their tribes upon the land” (17:28). The psalmist sings, “Blessed be they that shall be in those days, in that they shall see the good fortune of Israel which God shall bring to pass in the gathering together of the tribes” (17:44). The king’s reign will extend far beyond the borders of Israel, though: “He shall judge peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness” (17:29) and “nations shall come from the ends of the earth to see his glory” (17:31).⁸

De Jonge sums up the picture from Psalm of Solomon 17:

The rule of the expected Son of David will be realised in Jerusalem and in Palestine, the promised land. He will cleanse Jerusalem of heathen and sinners and will drive them out and destroy them (22–25, 30, 36). A sanctified people will live in Palestine. Evildoers will no longer be found there and strangers will not live there (26–29). The rule of the King will be extended further over the whole earth and all peoples. They will serve under his yoke

⁷ References to the Psalms of Solomon (Ps. Sol) are from the versification of the Greek text; translations are from volume 2 of Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2.

⁸ Howes summarizes the picture of the coming kingdom in Ps. Sol. 17 this way: “After dispensing judgement, gathering in the Diaspora and restoring the throne of David, God will reinstate the (twelve) tribes of Israel and distribute them evenly across the Promised Land (17:26, 28, 43–44). Not only the tribes of old but also the nations throughout the world will serve the new Davidic king and come under his rule forever (17:30). Nations will visit the king from all over the world just to witness his majesty and experience the glory of God (17:31). The messianic king and all his subjects will be completely holy and righteous (17:32– 34, 36).” (Llewellyn Howes, “Judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel: Q 22:28, 30 in Light of the Psalms of Solomon and the Community Rule,” *VE* 35.1 [2014]: 4).

(30) and will come to Jerusalem to see the glory which God will give to the King and to Jerusalem. The exhausted children of Israel will be gathered from the dispersion and brought home.... Salvation would be realised here on earth, and therefore at the human level. But the King and his subjects possess superhuman attributes. There is no mention of the death and succession of the Son of David.⁹

Book of Jubilees (c. First Century BC)

The Jewish pseudepigraphic writing, Book of Jubilees, also contains language and imagery that appears to draw on the Old Testament picture of the coming kingdom. One excerpt will illustrate the general similarity not only between the Old Testament Jubilees, but also between Jubilees and other intertestamental literature:

And in those days the children shall begin to study the laws, and to seek the commandments, and to return to the path of righteousness. And the days shall begin to grow many and increase amongst those children of men till their days draw nigh to one thousand years, and to a greater number of years than (before) was the number of the days. And there shall be no old man nor one who is not satisfied with his days, for all shall be (as) children and youths. And all their days they shall complete and live in peace and in joy, and there shall be no Satan nor any evil destroyer; for all their days shall be days of blessing and healing. And at that time the Lord will heal His servants, and they shall rise up and see great peace, and drive out their adversaries. And the righteous shall see and be thankful, and rejoice with joy for ever and ever, and shall see all their judgments and all their curses on their enemies. And their bones shall rest in the earth, and their spirits shall have much joy, and they shall know that it is the Lord who executes judgment, and shows mercy to hundreds and thousands and to all that love Him (Jub. 23.26–28).¹⁰

Especially notable is what appears to be an early interpretation of Isaiah 65:20: “No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days or an old person who does not live out a lifetime, for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.” Jubilees 23.28 mirrors this language: “And there shall be no old man nor one who is not satisfied with his days, for all shall be (as) children and youths.” During this time, Satan himself will be banished along with all evil; moreover, the world will be filled with blessing, healing, peace, righteousness, joy, and prosperity.

⁹ Marinus de Jonge, “The Expectation of the Future in the Psalms of Solomon,” *Neot* 23.1 (1989): 101–102, 103.

¹⁰ Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 49.

Dead Sea Scrolls (c. Second Century BC–First Century AD)

Besides preserving the eschatological traditions from Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel as well as non-canonical texts like 1 Enoch and Jubilees,¹¹ the Qumran community exhibits teachings concerning the coming kingdom consistent with themes in biblical and extra-biblical texts. For example, the 4Q475 (*4QRenewed Earth*) fragment (likely second century BC) reads, “there will be no more guilty deeds on the earth” (4Q475, 4), “all the world will be like Eden” (4Q475, 5), and “the earth will be at peace for ever.”¹²

The second-century BC fragments known as 4QTime of Righteousness (4Q215a) describe a time in the future when all iniquity and injustice will be wiped away (4Q215a 1 II, 3–4), and “the earth is filled with knowledge and the praise of God” (4Q215a 1 II, 5).¹³ It will be a time of justice, and age of peace, (4Q215a 1 II, 5, 6), in which all people will honor and worship God (4Q215a 1 II, 8). This age will come after the earth has been destroyed in God’s anger and renewed (שׁוֹדֵד וְלִחְדָּשׁ) (4Q215a 3, 1).

Hogeterp notes, “The non-sectarian Qumran texts and traditions concerning eschatology are concerned with the ultimate destiny of Israel and the world at large (cf. *4QRenewed Earth*). This destiny is determined by the eventual victory of justice over evil.”¹⁴ He concludes, “The apocalyptic notion that heaven and earth will be renewed in the final age is common to Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism and Palestinian Judaism alike.”¹⁵

Assumption of Moses (Testament of Moses) (First Century AD)

After prophesying the events from the time of Moses to the religious and political conditions of the first century (As. Mos. 1–6), the first-century author of the apocryphal Assumption of Moses describes “a second visitation and wrath, such as has not befallen them from the beginning until that time” (As. Mos. 8.1). This language is reminiscent of Daniel 12:1: “there shall be a time of anguish such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence.”¹⁶ The author of Assumption of Moses seems to be forecasting the ultimate Day of the Lord on earth—likely the imminent fulfillment of Daniel 12. During this coming time of “visitation and wrath,” God “will

¹¹ Albert L. A. Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End: A Comparative Traditio-Historical Study of Eschatological, Apocalyptic and Messianic Ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, vol. 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 19–35.

¹² Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition (Translations)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 957.

¹³ Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 457.

¹⁴ Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End*, 42.

¹⁵ Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End*, 109.

¹⁶ Matthew mirrors this language in his report of the Olivet Discourse but adds language of ultimacy: “For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be” (Matt 24:21).

stir up against them the king of the kings of the earth and one that ruleth with great power, who shall crucify those who confess to their circumcision” (As. Mos. 8.1). This enemy of Israel, “king of the kings of the earth,” may be the author’s reference to the so-called “willful king” of Daniel 11:36–45. At the time of the persecutions under this wicked king, a Levite named Taxo, with seven sons, will arise and exhort his sons to faithfulness to the law even in the midst of this time of great trial and tribulation. He promises that even if they die for the sake of faithfulness to the commands of the Lord of lords, their blood will be avenged before God (As. Mos. 9).

Following this time of persecution, God’s kingdom “shall appear throughout all His creation” (As. Mos. 10.1). As in the general Old Testament picture, “his kingdom” or the “kingdom [of God]” is not a heavenly, but an earthly, kingdom (As. Mos. 10.1). During that kingdom, “Satan shall be no more” and with his defeat “sorrow shall depart” (10.1). Also, the mysterious “angel” or *nuntius*—who has been appointed chief—appears to avenge God’s people against their enemies (10.2).¹⁷ It seems to me that this figure is not, in fact, an *angelic* being strictly speaking, but rather this *nuntius* represents one of many messianic expectations of first-century Judaism. In any case, at the time of the kingdom, “the Heavenly One will arise from His royal throne, and He will go forth from His holy habitation with indignation and wrath on account of His sons” (As. Mos. 10.3). This heavenly figure is a theophany as God himself descends from heaven to deliver his people (10.7).

The author then utilizes common Old Testament images for the Day of the Lord (As. Mos. 10.4–7). After the coming of God as judge, Israel will finally be delivered (10.8). Though the language is corrupted in this passage, it seems to reflect the imagery of Daniel 7:13–14, 18, 27 (As. Mos. 10.9). As Israel is exalted to a high position over all the earth, they will look down upon their enemies “in Gehenna” and rejoice with thanksgiving for their victory (10.10).

Summary of the Intertestamental Picture of the Coming Kingdom

Numerous examples could be added to illustrate the perpetuation of the grand collage of images of the coming kingdom from the Old Testament prophets, but they would present the same general picture. Michael Knibb notes that the belief “common to both Jews and Christians” was that, “the prophecies [or Isaiah] remained unfulfilled or were otherwise of continuing relevance...To take one well-known example, Isa 11:1–9 was of direct importance in the formation of messianic beliefs, and the influence of this passage can be traced in a number of apocryphal and pseudepigraphic texts that are concerned with the messiah and the son of man: see *Pss. Sol.* 17:23–24, 29, 35–37;

¹⁷ Many identifications have been made of the *nuntius* figure of Test. Mos. 10.2, including the proposal that he is the glorified, vindicated Taxo who suffered death in chapter 9. See Johannes Tromp, “Taxo, the Messenger of the Lord,” *JSJ* 21.2 (1990): 200–209.

18:7–8; *1 Enoch* 46:3; 49:1–4; 62:2–3; 2 Esdras 13:10; *T. Levi* 18:7; *T. Judah* 24:5b–6a.”¹⁸ Comparing the picture of the son of David and the messianic age of Psalms of Solomon 17 and the Qumran (Dead Sea) literature, Knibb notes, “*Psalms of Solomon* 17 depicts the son of David as a military leader, whose task is to drive the enemy from Jerusalem, and as the righteous ruler of the newly purified city. What is said of the Davidic messiah in the Qumran texts is entirely consonant with this picture.”¹⁹ He summarizes the “broad lines of the interpretation” of the Qumran material this way:

Within these writings the eschatological topics familiar from other literature of the Second Temple period are all reflected: the idea of a final judgment in which the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished (e.g. 1QS III, 13–IV 26; 4QSapiential Work A); the idea of a last great battle with the forces of evil (e.g. the *War Rule*; 1QH XI [= III], 19–36); descriptions—in the form of benedictions—of the blessings of the new age (4Q285; 11Q14); the expectation of a new Jerusalem (the New Jerusalem text); rules for the ordering of life in the new age (the Rule of the Congregation); an explanation for the delay in the expected time of the end (1QpHab VII, 1–14); belief in resurrection (e.g. 4Q521 2 ii + 4 12); and messianic beliefs (e.g. the *Rule of the Community*, the *Damascus Document*).²⁰

¹⁸ Michael Knibb, *Essays on the Book of Enoch and Other Early Jewish Texts and Traditions*, SVTP, vol. 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 289.

¹⁹ Knibb, *Essays on the Book of Enoch*, 311.

²⁰ Knibb, *Essays on the Book of Enoch*, 329.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
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Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 13

Hoekema's and Merkle's Approaches to Old Testament Restoration Prophecies

A pivotal issue separating amillennialists and premillennialists is the treatment of the Old Testament collage of images of the coming kingdom by the authors of the New Testament. Not much disagreement surrounds the general contours and specific content of the Old Testament language and imagery; what is contested is whether the fulfillment of that figurative picture is applied exclusively to the present age in a spiritual sense; exclusively to the future age in a more literal sense; or both spiritually in the present and literally in the future. In the following excursus I interact with two representatives of the amillennial approach—Anthony Hoekema and Benjamin Merkle—offering some critiques of their position from my own Irenaeian both/and approach to the fulfillment of Old Testament language and imagery.¹

Hoekema's Approach

Anthony Hoekema articulates an older but classic perspective on the New Testament writers' reception of Old Testament promises. He presents the “eschatological outlook of the Old Testament” by looking at several “revelational concepts”: (1) The coming redeemer, (2) the kingdom of God, (3) the new covenant, (4) the restoration of Israel, (5) the outpouring of the Spirit, (6) the day of the Lord, and (7) the new heavens and the new earth.² We have seen in our exploration of the coming kingdom in the Old Testament that the coming kingdom, the new covenant, the restoration of Israel, and the new heavens and new earth were essential coextensive—

¹ My intention in this excursus is not to “pick on” Hoekema and Merkle, but to better clarify my “both/and” approach by contrasting it with representative amillennial alternatives. As established in chapter 3 of *The Fathers on the Future*, both Hoekema and Merkle (and all amillennialists who assume a similar approach) affirm the foundational eschatological truths of the Christian faith—the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the restoration of creation.

² Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 4–12.

that is, they all referred to the same period of time and establishment of the eschatological kingdom on earth. The coming redeemer is the key to the establishment of this kingdom, and the day of the Lord is the means by which God brings about judgment and purifies the earth in a way, allowing the kingdom to be established in its fullest sense (see chapter 15 in *The Fathers on the Future*).

While we should have no major quibbles over Hoekema's summary of the eschatological outlook of the Old Testament, we do note that it is rather abstract and generalizing, placing an emphasis on certain aspects that are prominent in the New Testament; but as a faithful, balanced description of the emphases of the Old Testament itself, they fall short. For example, while the "new covenant" is explicitly mentioned only in Jeremiah 31:31–34, the language of the reunification of Israel and Judah, the repentance and return of the tribes of Israel to the promised land, and a restoration of the kingdom centered in Jerusalem is repeated over and over again. In fact, these elements are explicitly what Jeremiah 31:31–34 means by the "new covenant." Also, the coming redeemer is inextricably linked in the Old Testament to the restoration of Israel, the establishment of a throne in and over Jerusalem, and blessing in the land itself, which then extends to the entire world and all creation. Hoekema's treatment of the Old Testament expectation, in other words, deals in broad generalities, which are really New Testament themes and emphases read back into the Old Testament expectations.³ This seems to amount to a kind of question-begging, in which the assumption (priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament) drives the selection of the Old Testament content itself, resulting in selective evidence.

Yet, this is precisely the point. Hoekema's first chapter is not really an eschatological outlook of the Old Testament, but an eschatological outlook of the New Testament superimposed upon the Old Testament to serve as its organizing framework. This is precisely his methodological and hermeneutical presupposition, as well as the presupposition of many in the same eschatological tradition that follow. For example, Kim Riddlebarger writes:

Historically, Protestant interpreters have argued that the New Testament provides the controlling interpretation of the Old Testament. The goal of the interpreter of eschatology is to determine how prophecies made in the Old Testament are treated and applied by writers of the New. If the New Testament writers spiritualize Old Testament prophecies by applying them in a nonliteral sense, then the Old Testament passage must be seen in light of that New Testament interpretation, not vice versa. Moreover, a major step toward finding an answer to the millennial question is to develop a contextual framework of interpretation from the New Testament itself.⁴

³ Some use phrases like "the NT storyline will be a transformation of the OT one in the light of how the NT is seen to be an unfolding of the OT" (G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011], 6). Or themes of the Old Testament are said to have been "transposed and transformed" (Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2012], 598).

⁴ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times*, exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 50–51. Cf. the similar approach in Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 280.

Though they may differ on the details, the general approach to the question “What becomes of all those Old Testament prophecies, promises, and prospects in the New Testament?” is similar to Hoekema’s straightforward answer: “*The Old Testament abounds with prophecies concerning future blessings for Israel. In the New Testament many, yet not all, of these prophecies are fulfilled in the person of Christ.*”⁵

Of course, things are a little more complicated than this, and Hoekema himself has to unpack his brief summary statement. The New Testament presents some of the Old Testament expectations as already realized and other expectations as not yet realized. He explains, “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.”⁶ In principle, this general approach of an “inaugurated eschatology” is sound. The coming of Christ has certainly fulfilled Old Testament prophecies; it also anticipates the fulfillment of more. And we may even agree that the New Testament believer “has both a richer experience of present blessings and a clearer understanding of future hopes than his Old Testament counterpart.”⁷ In fact, this seems to be self-evident.

As proof of the concept, Hoekema points to numerous Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled in some way by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection; thus, “in Christ the promised redeemer had indeed come” and “in Christ’s person the promised kingdom had come—although there would also be a final consummation of that kingdom in the future.”⁸ Hoekema says that “Jesus himself ushered in the kingdom of God whose coming had been foretold by the Old Testament prophets. We must therefore always see the kingdom of God as indissolubly connected with the person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ words and deeds, miracles and parables, teaching and preaching, the kingdom of God was dynamically active and present among men.”⁹

As we are living in the “last days” or “this age”—the time between Christ’s first coming and his second coming—we look forward to “the last day” or “the age to come,” and “*the blessings of the present age are the pledge and guarantee of greater blessings to come.*”¹⁰ Since the present age is the “Messianic age,” the advent of the future age will involve “the Second Coming of Christ, the general resurrection, the Day of Judgment, and the new heavens and new earth.”¹¹ This simple scheme avoids any notion of an intermediate stage between the present age of the spiritual kingdom and the full realization of the new creation, an intermediate kingdom in which the present world is progressively liberated from its bondage to corruption, humanity gradually extends the dominion

⁵ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 1 (emphasis original).

⁶ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 14.

⁷ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 15.

⁸ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 16.

⁹ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 43.

¹⁰ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 19–20 (emphasis original).

¹¹ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 32.

of paradise across the face of the earth, and all creation is ultimately renewed (see discussion in *The Fathers on the Future* chapters 2, 4, and 13).

As far as the vivid collage of images that create the picture of the coming kingdom in the Old Testament, Hoekema understands these to point to the final condition of “the new heavens and the new earth.”¹² But what of the actual details of this new creation in all these Old Testament passages—details of the centrality of Jerusalem, of the reunification of Israel and Judah, of the return of the exiles from the ends of the earth, of children being born for generations and generations, of bountiful crops and interminable lives? Relying on statements such as Galatians 6:15–16 that “clearly identifies the church as the true Israel,”¹³ Hoekema states that “promises which had been made to Israel during Old Testament times are fulfilled in the New Testament church.”¹⁴ Even if the former were true,¹⁵ it would not necessarily imply the latter any more than calling those who are in the church “a new creation” implies that there will not be an actual new creation in the future.

Commenting on Acts 13:32–34, 38–39, Hoekema says, “These promises and blessings, further, are interpreted as meaning, not a future Jewish kingdom in the millennium, but forgiveness of sins and salvation. The promises made to Israel, therefore, are fulfilled in the New Testament church.”¹⁶ Even if the latter is true, the conclusion only holds if one comes to the text with an “either/or” rather than “both/and” approach to prophecy. Can it be that just as the period of new creation/coming kingdom/new covenant is already present in a spiritual sense with the ascension of Christ and establishment of the church in a partial sense, so too these will be literally fulfilled in the future? This is a possibility many amillennial interpreters do not seem to take into consideration.

The same can be said of the passages from the Old Testament that were addressed as promises to Israel and that are applied to the New Testament church (e.g., Acts 15:14–18; Gal 3:28–29; Heb 12:22–24; 1 Pet 2:9). Even if this is the case (and I have no reason to deny them), they are not conclusive proof that a future, literal fulfillment is not also part of God’s plan. Yet the assumption that the Old Testament vision of the coming kingdom is entirely fulfilled in Christ and the church in a spiritual sense—thus ruling out a literal, future fulfillment—is the one actual argument against a future fulfillment of these promises. This works only if one adopts an either/or approach to the prophecies of the Old Testament. If one accepts a both/and approach, with the acknowledgment of a dynamic concept of the “kingdom of God,” then demonstrating that elements of the Old Testament expectation of a coming kingdom are fulfilled spiritually in the church today as the “spiritual seed of Abraham,” “spiritual Israel,” “spiritual Zion/Jerusalem,” “spiritual new

¹² Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 177–78.

¹³ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 197.

¹⁴ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 197.

¹⁵ The equation of the church as the true Israel in Gal 6:16 is not as secure as Hoekema alleges. See much more nuanced discussion in Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, SNTSMS, vol. 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 74–84.

¹⁶ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 197.

covenant,” “spiritual resurrection,” and “spiritual new creation” does nothing to preclude a future fulfillment for the literal seed of Abraham, literal Israel, literal Zion/Jerusalem, literal new covenant, literal resurrection, and literal new creation.

Regarding the numerous passages in the Old Testament that refer to an ultimate second exodus in which Israel will return to their land, Hoekema urges, “All the predictions of a restoration of the Israelites to their land so far examined have been literally fulfilled. There is no need, therefore, for anyone to say that we must still look for a literal fulfillment of these predictions in the far distant future.”¹⁷ Yet, only a surface reading of these promises without considering the permanence of the restoration, their association with other elements of the Old Testament collage like the new covenant, the reign of the son of David, and so on, could one limit the fulfillment of all these promises to the partial return of exiles from Assyria or Babylon. In sum, the argument that these passages were already fulfilled entirely in the past works only if one engages in selective evidence.

Merkle’s Approach

Merkle rightly notes, “One of the major reasons why some insist on a future millennium where Jesus will reign as king over the nation of Israel is due to the belief that many Old Testament prophecies are not yet fulfilled.... To spiritualize these promises, it is sometimes argued, does not do justice to the specific nature of these promises.”¹⁸ As an example, he cites Amos 9:11–15. Merkle asks, “Does this prophecy refer to a time in the future when God will restore the nation of Israel and grant them unprecedented peace and prosperity? A time when their cities are restored, their enemies are defeated, and their lands yield abundant crops? Or, should this prophecy be interpreted symbolically referring to a time when God will bless his covenant people in ways that words cannot really describe.”¹⁹ In response to this either/or question, Merkle maintains that “certain prophecies, especially Old Testament restoration prophecies regarding the nation of Israel, should be interpreted symbolically” because of “(1) the true nature of biblical religion, (2) the unique genre of biblical prophecy, (3) the symbolic manner in which the New Testament interprets Old Testament prophecies, and (4) the central role of Jesus’ death and resurrection in salvation history.”²⁰

Regarding Merkle’s first point, I reject the underlying assumption that “the Christian faith is a religion of the heart. It is not primarily external but internal. Mere outward, external religion is

¹⁷ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 208.

¹⁸ Benjamin L. Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies Regarding the Nation of Israel: Literal or Symbolic?” *SBJT* 14.1 (2010): 14. This is generally true, though one does not necessarily need to affirm a literal future millennium (thousand-year reign) as the stage upon such prophecies will be fulfilled. The Old Testament collage of the coming kingdom does not explicitly mention a 1000-year reign.

¹⁹ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 15.

²⁰ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 15.

never the goal of our faith. God is primarily interested in the deeper, inner faith of His people.”²¹ Not only does this sound like a gnosis-like mysticism that only concerns itself with the salvation of the individual soul (something, I am sure, Merkle would also reject), it also neglects the overarching creation-fall-redemption narrative that involves the reconciliation not only of individuals but of all creation—the internal and the external, the spiritual and the physical, the heavenly and the earthly, the invisible and visible. Merkle does briefly affirm that “God is interested in the physical aspect—even in heaven” because, for example, “the Bible clearly teaches that believers will be given a physical, resurrected body.”²² Nevertheless, he asserts that to expect a “tangible, earthly kingdom” during which Israel, under the Messiah, would ruler over the nations with an “abundance of wealth and prosperity” would be to reverse God’s plan of redemption; it would be to “go back to the shadows and images” of the old covenant.²³

Merkle then cites Colossians 2:17 and Hebrews 8:5 to argue against this supposed retrogression of God’s plan of redemption. Yet Paul and the author of Hebrews do not say that the Old Testament prophecies of the coming messianic age are “shadows” or “images” of things to come. Paul says in Colossians 2 that old covenant laws—specifically dietary laws, festivals, new moons, and sabbaths—are the shadow of things to come; Christ is the substance. This is very different from saying that the prophecies of the Old Testament—which themselves tell us that the old covenant will one day pass away—are themselves the shadow of things to come. And Hebrews 8:5 calls the Old Testament sanctuary and its priesthood a “sketch and shadow” of the heavenly sanctuary, which Moses saw on the mountain. It does not say that the words of the prophets foreseeing an era that will follow and displace the old covenant system are “sketches and shadows.” That is, the Old Testament prophecies still awaiting a future fulfillment already talk of putting away the old covenant (Jer 31:31–34)—even the Ark of the Covenant (Jer 3:16). They are not themselves shadows and images but portray with vivid figurative language a time when the shadows and images are replaced by a new glorious reality.

Merkle also points out the “unique genre of biblical prophecy,” expressing the implications of this uniqueness in a manner that has become fairly standard among interpreters who do not see an actual this-world fulfillment of these prophecies:

Prophecy concerning the end of time or the coming of God’s kingdom is often described using metaphorical language. The prophets often employed earthly imagery to describe a heavenly reality. The messianic kingdom was often pictured as a return from exile and often included a rebuilt temple (built on mount Zion which will become the highest mountain), resumed temple sacrifices, and wild animals dwelling together peacefully. The reason for this was simple. The prophets spoke and wrote in terms that both they and their audience

²¹ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 15.

²² Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 16.

²³ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 16

would understand. They described the messianic kingdom in terms of concepts and imagery that was meaningful to the people of that day.²⁴

I have already granted that the Old Testament prophets painted their collage of images of the coming kingdom with figurative language. This is hardly disputed. What is disputed is how figurative the language is and whether the figurative application of the language in the New Testament exhausts its intended meaning. Will there not be peace in creation? Will the world itself not be restored and renewed? If these do not refer to actual conditions in the future, to what do they refer? If they are merely images to move people to hope, they are not figures but fables—merely symbols with a spiritual or moral meaning, not symbols with an actual referent. Merkle says the prophets used this earthly language of bountiful crops, return from exile, peace among animals, etc. “to describe a more profound heavenly reality—a reality that finds its fulfillment in Christ.”²⁵ However, it seems to me that repeated, specific, detailed descriptions of restoration of Israel to the land—including reference to clear boundary markers (Jer 31:38–40)—are not the most intuitive, effective, and efficient symbols God could employ to point to a “heavenly reality...that finds its fulfillment in Christ.” And simply to ignore these details results, again, in selective evidence.

Like many before and after him, Merkle provides several examples in which the New Testament interprets the Old Testament prophecies symbolically—Joel 2:28–32/Acts 2:14–21; Amos 9:11–12/Acts 15:16–17; Jer 31:31–34/Heb 8:8–12; Exod 6:7; 19:5–6; Isa 43:20–21/1 Pet 2:9–19).²⁶ I do not dispute that these passages apply the Old Testament to New Testament spiritual realities. To do so would be to neglect facts. What I do reject is the a priori either/or assertion, which is an unwarranted presupposition. Because some New Testament passages apply Old Testament prophecies spiritually to the church rather than to a literal Israel in the future, Merkle concludes: “The New Testament writers do not seem to expect the Old Testament prophecies about the nation of Israel to be fulfilled literally.”²⁷ The either/or approach is hard at work in the statement, “A literal fulfillment was not expected but rather New Testament writers correctly saw fulfillment in Christ and in the gospel.” The *not... but rather* markers reveal a lot about the limits one places on the use of the Old Testament. Merkle and others establish a reasonable rule: “We must learn from how the New Testament writers themselves interpreted the Old Testament.”²⁸

Yet by approaching the biblical data with a presupposed either/or choice, the question is cast in terms of a false choice, the fallacy of bifurcation, which “occurs when the arguer presents the

²⁴ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 16. Also see similar assertions in Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 51 and Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 279.

²⁵ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 18. Cf. also Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2013), 41–42. Italics in original

²⁶ He includes others, too, in passing, some that are subject to exegetical challenge: Mal 4:5–6/Matt 17:11–13; 2 Sam 7:12–16/Acts 2:29–35; 13:29–32 (“Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 21). See also Briley, *Isaiah*, 1: 57–59.

²⁷ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 21.

²⁸ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 21

listener with only two choices (hence the prefix *bi*), when in fact there are other possibilities to choose from. In other words, the argument limits the options of choices, omitting possible alternatives.”²⁹ Essentially, this approach reads the New Testament authors with only two possibilities in mind regarding Old Testament restoration prophecies—*either* literal (and thus physical and future) *or* symbolic (and thus spiritual and present). Then, pointing to examples of the New Testament authors reading Old Testament restoration prophecies as symbolic, spiritual, and present, it is concluded, “Old Testament prophecies concerning the nation of Israel are fulfilled in Christ and in the gospel.”³⁰

Those who regard the fulfillment of Old Testament restoration prophecies as fulfilled entirely in Christ and the church often level a charge against those who see a fulfillment in the future: “One of the problems with interpreting Old Testament prophecies regarding the nation of Israel in a literal manner is that it tends to minimize the work of Christ, especially His suffering, death, and resurrection” because “the New Testament teaches that the death and resurrection of Christ are the climax of God’s work in redemptive history.”³¹ Though it is true that the resurrection of Christ is certainly the central redemptive act of God, it actually begins the final movement of redemptive history; it does not end it. It is not the finale of the symphony of creation-fall-redemption; it is the booming first note of the final movement, the thing that makes everything else possible, that establishes the triumphant melody of resurrection that will build to a crescendo and climax not with dying and going to heaven to be with Jesus, but with a glorious resurrection of the saints to reign with Christ over a new creation. That new creation, in which all sin, suffering, sickness, deception, death, and devil are banished forever—that is the climax of redemptive history. I would counter that to reduce all the detailed Old Testament restoration promises to “Christ and the church” minimizes the person and work of Christ more than seeing the glorious promises of ultimate restoration as fulfilled in the present *in* Christ and the church in a spiritual, anticipatory sense but also *through* Christ and the church in a physical, ultimate sense.

Merkle also asserts, quoting Bavinck, that “another problem with a literal interpretation is that the Old Testament consistently pictures a messianic kingdom that includes the restoration of the temple, the priesthood, and the temple sacrifices.”³² This is an inaccurate exaggeration of the actual picture. As I have demonstrated through my broad survey of Old Testament passages regarding the coming kingdom (see Go Deeper Excursus 11), it would be a great overstatement to say that the collage “consistently pictures” temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. Certainly, it consistently pictures a place—Jerusalem, Mount Zion—as the world’s spiritual and political center. And it includes a real city, with real structures, a real palace, and a real focal point of worship and instruction. Yet I also pointed out the surprising paucity of passages that could be interpreted as

²⁹ Jacob E. Van Vleet, *Information Logical Fallacies: A Brief Guide*, rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: Hamilton, 2021), 11.

³⁰ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 21.

³¹ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 21.

³² Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 21. Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 94.

suggesting a full-fledged system of animal sacrifices in a re-built temple designed for that purpose.³³ Again Merkle perpetuates a false dilemma: “If we maintain that the prophet’s picture of the future must be literal, then we must take all the aspects literally.”³⁴

I have maintained from the start that to reduce the hermeneutical approach to the Old Testament prophets to *either* “literal” or “symbolic” is not sufficient. They employ poetic, figurative language, to be sure, but the question is: to what does the figure refer? Merkle and others themselves are not consistent with this either/or approach to Old Testament prophecy when they see reference to Christ being a descendant of David, coming from Bethlehem, etc. Every word has a context in its own passage; every passage has a context in its own book; every book in its own day; and every age has its context in the broad trinitarian creation-fall-redemption narrative centered on the person and work of Christ in his first and second comings. It does not advance the understanding of eschatology to assert an either/or approach when things are far more complicated and require much more nuance. This kind of “all-or-nothing” approach—again, a false dilemma—leads to the following: “If we insist that the nation of Israel will someday return to the Promised Land, rebuild the cities of Israel, and have Christ rule as their King, then we are also forced to include the notion that the Jews will again have a priesthood and offer sacrifices in the temple.”³⁵

As evidence of this, Merkle cites Isaiah 56:6–7, which, in the context of Isaiah 56:1–8, clearly mentions keeping the covenant of the Sabbath, foreigners coming to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, etc. Yet this is a circumstance offered to Israel if they keep the stipulations of the old covenant, repent, and avoid the impending judgment and disaster—that is, what restoration and blessing would look like under full obedience of the old covenant. This is not a glorious picture of the “last days” of the messianic age seen in other passages. His second proof text, Isaiah 60:7, does form part of the restoration passages of the coming kingdom treated above under Isaiah 59:20–62:12; but it is separated from its broader context, which reveals that the offerings brought to the “altar” are not animal sacrifices of Israel, but the abundance of wealth from the nations: “A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall be acceptable on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house” (Isa 60:6–7). Yes, the text mentions an “altar,” but this is a figure of speech for offering a gift to the God of Israel, as in no case in the Old Testament do foreigners present gold and frankincense on the altar. It may also be possible to take this passage a little more literally and envision a place that stands as the center of governance and worship that may involve non-bloody “sacrifices” like the altar of incense, which is why “frankincense” alone is mentioned. However, foreigners are not bringing animal sacrifices to the temple. Finally, Merkle

³³ Besides a literal handful of passages, the grand exception, of course, is the temple of Ezekiel 40–48, which I attend to elsewhere.

³⁴ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 21.

³⁵ Merkle, “Old Testament Restoration Prophecies,” 21.

cites Isaiah 66:20–22, which envisions foreigners helping the exiles of Israel return to Jerusalem as “an offering” to the Lord, using the “grain offering” itself as a symbol for that future ingathering of people—not sacrifices. The reference to “priests and Levites” called from among the restoration does not itself demand that they would be engaged in a sacrificial system, for which there is no mention. Rather, the priests and Levites as part of the restored people of God would serve their pastoral and teaching functions in the future theocratic administration—ultimately fulfilling Israel’s original purpose of being “a light to the nations.”

Other passages argue against Merkle’s claim that Old Testament prophecies “consistently” present the restoration of Israel and all creation as inextricably linked to a temple with literal animal sacrifices. Jeremiah 3:16–17 seems to preclude the idea when it says the Ark of the Covenant—the center of the atoning bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament—will be completely forgotten. Jeremiah 30:18 and 31:21, 38 refer to rebuilding the city with no mention of a temple with sacrifices. Ezekiel 36:28–38 also paints a picture of restoration and abundance, but no sacrificial system; 37:21–28 refers to the restoration and rebuilding of a reunited Israel and Judah, but reference to God’s “sanctuary” remaining among them is an image of God himself dwelling among them, not to a sacrificial system. The same is the case of 39:25–29. Ezekiel 40–48, treated in chapter 14 of *The Fathers on the Future*, is the major exception to the rule that the Old Testament prophecies of the coming kingdom pay no attention to a restored system of animal sacrifices; but that can be reconciled by seeing it as a picture of what restoration would have looked like had Israel fully repented and fulfilled the requirements of the old covenant, as was the case in Isaiah 56:1–8.

The remaining passages cited by Merkle also do not mention animal sacrifices, though they certainly allow for a restoration of the people to the land, rebuilding of Jerusalem, and even a “temple” or “house of the Lord,” which in the messianic age would be the center of the theocratic rule of the Messiah, not a place of animal sacrifices (Amos 9:11–15; Obad 17, 21; Mic 4:1–2; 7:11; Hag 2:6–10; Zech 1:17; 2:1–5; 3:1–8; 6:9–15. Reliance on Zech 6:9–15; 8:3–23). In short, though these passages do establish Israel as the center of the world, a rebuilt and glorified Jerusalem as its capital, the coming Messiah as its king who rules from Jerusalem, and a rebuilt palace-temple as the destination for those who offer gifts and seek justice, they do not assert a restored system of animal sacrifices. It may be that Jewish readers read the reference to the house of the Lord in terms of its Old Testament function of a place for perpetual animal sacrifices, but such details are not explicitly part of these passages.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 14 The Case for Concurrent Periods in Acts 3:19–21

To determine whether the “seasons of refreshing” and “times of restoration” are concurrent or consecutive, we must first note that the second promise—the times of restoration of all things—is directly associated with the return of Christ. Lennartsson writes, “The word ἄχρι in Acts 3:20 is most naturally taken as a conjunction with the temporal sense, ‘until’, with the plain meaning that Jesus the Messiah is preserved in heaven until the appearance of *times of restoration*.... The aspect of necessity, that the Messiah ‘must remain in heaven’ (δεῖ οὐρανὸν μὲν δέξασθαι), is enhanced by the word δεῖ.”¹ If the two periods—“seasons of refreshing” and “time of restoration”—are concurrent, then the ultimate fulfillment of Peter’s promise, drawn from the Old Testament prophets, was expected to occur after the return of Christ. If that is the case, the logical structure of the promise and prophecy is as follows:

PRESENT ERA		FUTURE ERA
Μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας, <i>Repent and turn again that your sins may be blotted out,</i>	ὅπως ἂν <i>so that</i>	ἔλθωσιν καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου <i>seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord</i>
	→	καὶ <i>and</i> ἄποστείλῃ τὸν προκεχειρισμένον ὑμῖν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, <i>he may send the one appointed for you, Christ Jesus,</i>
↻	ὧν <i>whom</i>	↻
δεῖ οὐρανὸν μὲν δέξασθαι <i>it is necessary for heaven to receive</i>	ἄχρι <i>until</i>	χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων ὧν ἐλάλησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ’ αἰῶνος αὐτοῦ προφητῶν. <i>times of restoration of all things of which God spoke through the mouth of the holy prophets long ago</i>

¹ Göran Lennartsson, *Refreshing & Restoration: Two Eschatological Motifs in Acts 3:19–21* (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Center for Theology and Religious Studies, 2007), 76.

In this reading, the Messiah, having ascended to heaven, is presently seated at the right hand of the Father, necessarily received in heaven for the moment. During this time, the apostles are preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 1:8). If Israel repents, two things will happen: seasons of refreshing will come and God will send Christ—that is, the times of restoring everything spoken concerning the messianic age by the ancient prophets. In this reading, the “refreshing” and “restoration” are rightly interpreted by the language and imagery of the Old Testament prophets.

Before examining the meaning of “times of restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21), we must first sort out the question of whether the “seasons of refreshing” and “times of restoration” are concurrent or consecutive. To clarify, there are several possibilities beyond these two:

Interpretation 1. Both terms could refer to the same present period (realized or realizable) prior to the second coming. In this case, the “seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord” (3:20) refers to a spiritual awakening and revival experienced in this age, which will constitute the “times of restoration of everything” (3:21), and the sending of Christ from heaven is contingent upon the times and seasons that are fulfilled through the worldwide repentance, refreshing, and restoration:

Repentance	Contingent <i>Kairoi/Chronoi</i>	Return of Christ	Eternal New Creation
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Interpretation 2. The term *καιροι* could refer to the present age, while the term *χρονοι* refers to the age following the second coming. In this case, the “seasons of refreshing” is contingent upon the repentance and turning of the people, which will then result in the return of Christ to establish the future “times of restoration of everything,” that is, the eternal new creation:

Repentance	Contingent <i>Kairoi</i>	Return of Christ	<i>Chronoi</i> = New Creation
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Interpretation 3. Both terms could refer to the same future period after the coming of Christ. That is, if the people respond to the message in repentance and turning to God, Christ will return and establish the “seasons of refreshing” and the “times of restoration of all things,” which is the eternal new creation:

Repentance	Contingent Return of Christ	<i>Kairoi/Chronoi</i> = New Creation	
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Interpretation 4. The term *καιροι* could refer to the future messianic millennial age, while the term *χρονοι* refers to the eternal new creation following the millennial age. In this case, the coming of Christ is contingent on the repentance and turning of the people of Israel. When Christ comes, he will begin the long “seasons of refreshing,” which will involve a long process of renewal. The result will be the eternal new creation, that is, the “times of restoration of all things”:

Repentance	Contingent Return of Christ	<i>Kairoi</i> = Millennium	<i>Chronoi</i> = New Creation
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A careful exegesis of the passage can rule out some of these options. First, Peter’s message makes certain results contingent upon the repentance and turning of the people. The phrase ὅπως ἄν (“so that”) indicates that what follows is contingent upon repentance. What is that contingent result? Two things: 1) that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and 2) that he may send Jesus Christ appointed for them. It is not one or the other, but both, as indicated by the two aorist active subjunctive verb phrases linked by καί.

μετανοήσατε οὖν ἐπιστρέψατε...

ὅπως ἄν

ἔλθωσιν καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου

καὶ

ἀποστείλῃ τὸν προκεχειρισμένον ὑμῖν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν

The pre-condition of repentance is present in all four of the possible interpretations. However, are both subjunctive clauses (ἔλθωσιν...κυρίου and ἀποστείλῃ...Ἰησοῦν) referring to two distinct, consecutive stages of the unfolding results of repentance: first ἔλθωσιν...κυρίου and then, as a result, ἀποστείλῃ...Ἰησοῦν ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$)? Or do they refer to two concurrent conditions that together follow the repentance, ἔλθωσιν...κυρίου...καὶ ἀποστείλῃ...Ἰησοῦν ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$)?² If the former (consecutive stages), then the text would support interpretations 1 or 2 and could point to a present outpouring of spiritual renewal, perhaps even a long season of future global awakening, that precedes the return of Christ. This would be consistent with an amillennial or postmillennial eschatology. If the latter (concurrent results), then we are limited to interpretations 3 or 4, in which the times of refreshing are concurrent with the future coming of Jesus during the same season of refreshing. This would be consistent with a premillennial or new-creation eschatology.

Clauses with Concurrent and Consecutive Subjunctives

To arbitrate between these two different interpretations, we must examine how the “ὅπως [ἄν]+subjunctive+καί+subjunctive” functions by examining similar constructions in the Septuagint, New Testament, and Apostolic Fathers (to about AD 150). We will see that in the overwhelming majority of instances, when ὅπως (or ὅπως ἄν) is followed by two or more subjunctives connected by καί (or, occasionally καὶ ὅπως or καὶ ἵνα), as in Acts 3:20, the two subjective clauses almost always point to concurrent results of the main verb clause, not to distinct, consecutive events in which the former results in or is the cause of the latter.

² “A” represents the necessary condition (in Acts 3:20, repentance), “B” represents the first contingent result following ὅπως ἄν (in Acts 3:20, the coming times of refreshing), and “C” represents the second contingent result (in Acts 3:20, the sending of Jesus).

16 Examples of Consecutive Effects Following ὅπως (A→B→C, etc.)

Genesis 27:6. “Prepare for me victuals, such as I like, and bring them to me in order that (ἵνα) I may eat, so that (ὅπως) my soul may bless you before I die.” Here, the ἵνα...ὅπως construction indicates consecutive events (A→B→C).

Genesis 50:20. “God deliberated concerning me for good things so that (ὅπως ἄν) it might come to be (γενηθῆ) as today, so that (ἵνα) many people may be preserved (διατραφῆ)” (NETS, translation altered).³ In this example, God providentially brought the brothers to that present circumstance, with the further result that numerous lives would be preserved (A→B→C).⁴

Exodus 10:1–2. “For I made his heart and that of his attendants heavy in order that (ἵνα) one after another these signs might come (ἐπέλθῃ) upon them, that (ὅπως) you may recount (διηγῆσθε) in the ears of your children and to the children of your children how I mocked the Egyptians.” Here the subsequent ὅπως in verse 2, without a καί, refers to a subsequent consecutive result of the previous purpose clause (A→B→C).

Exodus 20:20. Two purpose clauses follow in succession, each marked by a conjunction of purpose to demonstrate that each results from the former rather than both occurring concurrently—“For in order to (ἕνεκεν) test you God has come to you in order that (ὅπως ἄν) his fear might be in you so that (ἵνα) you do not sin.” In this case the Lord’s testing results in his fear being in them, which in turn results in refraining from sin (A→B→C).

Exodus 23:20. “I am sending my angel in front of you in order (ἵνα) to guard you on the way in order to (ὅπως) bring you into the land that I prepared for you.” The second clause, lacking the καί, communicates consecutive events (A→B→C).

Deuteronomy 4:40. “And you will keep his statutes and his commandments...so that (ἵνα) it may be (γένηται) well with you and with your sons after you so that (ὅπως) you may be (γένησθε) long-lived in the land.” The second purpose clause (lacking a καί) is subsequent to, not concurrent with, the first result of the imperative (A→B→C).

Deuteronomy 17:19–20. In this construction, each distinct result leads to the next in consecutive order: “He shall read from it all the days of his life so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all these commandments and these statutes to do them so that (ἵνα) his heart may not be exalted (μὴ ὑψωθῆ) above his brothers so that (ἵνα) he not turn aside (μὴ παραβῆ) from the

³ The NETS translator reverses the ὅπως ἄν and ἵνα in the English rendering; this translation restores the Greek ordering.

⁴ At first blush, it appears that these purpose clauses point to concurrent results. However, a close examination of the language and context reinforces consecutive results—God’s intention brought about that present day (σήμερον), which then-present circumstance would lead to the long-term preservation of the many people, which is why Joseph said in the very next line: “Have no fear; it is I who will sustain you (διαθρέψω, future active indicative) and your households” (Gen 50:21). In the narrative, at the utterance of the ὅπως ἄν, Joseph and his brothers stood at the border of the realization of the present ὅπως ἄν clause and future ἵνα clause. This is further reinforced by the underlying Hebrew text: לממן עשה כיום הזה להחיות עם־רב.

commandments, right or left, in order that (ὅπως ἄν) he be long-lived (μακροχρονίση) in his rule.” In this case, keeping God’s commandments and statutes results in humility of heart, which in turn results in not turning aside from the commandments, which ultimately results in a long rule ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$).

Joshua 11:20. “For it was through the Lord to strengthen their heart to meet for war against Israel in order that (ἵνα) they might be utterly destroyed (ἐξολεθρευθῶσιν), that (ὅπως) mercy not be given to them (μὴ δοθῆ ἀυτοῖς ἔλεος), but that (ἀλλ’ ἵνα) they be utterly destroyed (ἐξολεθρευθῶσιν) just as the Lord said to Moses.” The repetition of the verb ἐξολεθρεύω complicates the logic here. It seems to be repeated to emphasize the severity of God’s actions against the army, but does the gathering against Israel result concurrently in utter destruction, failure to receive mercy, and also utter destruction? This concurrent reading of the results makes less sense than a consecutive reading, allowing the repetition of ἐξολεθρεύω follow the preceding subjunctive logically as its resultant antithesis. That is, God caused the enemies to gather against Israel for the purpose of destroying them, which destruction results in their failure to receive mercy, which lack of God’s mercy results in utter destruction ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$).

Joshua 23:6–7. This example also presents logically consecutive results: “Therefore be very steadfast to observe and to do all the things written in the book of the law of Moses so that (ἵνα) you do not turn aside (μὴ ἐκκλίνητε) to the right or the left, that (ὅπως) you not go into (μὴ εἰσέλθητε) these nations that are left.” The ὅπως clause (without a καί) occurs as a result of the previous ἵνα clause, which is itself the result of observing the commands ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$). In these cases, the distinct, consecutive results—each dependent on the previous—include an additional ὅπως ἄν or ἵνα clause without a καί.

1 Maccabees 11:40. “And [Imalkoue the Arab] was watching over him [Antiochus] so that (ὅπως) he could hand him over (παραδοῖ) to him so that he could rule (ὅπως βασιλεύση) in his father’s place” (translation altered). In this case, again, the use of the second ὅπως, without καί, indicates a consecutive relationship of the subjunctives: Imalkoue was custodian of young Antiochus in order that he might later hand him over, which handing over would result in his ruling in place of his father, Alexander ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$).

Luke 16:27–28. “Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house...so that (ὅπως) he may warn (διαμαρτύρηται) them, lest they also (ἵνα μὴ...καί) come (ἔλθωσιν) into this place of torment.” Here the purpose clause, “that he may warn” leads to a subsequent result indicated by an additional ἵνα ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$).

2 Corinthians 8:14. “Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that (ἵνα) their abundance may supply (περίσσευμα γένηται) your need, that (ὅπως) there may be (γένηται) fairness.” The ὅπως clause (without a καί) is the result not of the main verb but of the preceding ἵνα purpose clause ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$).

1 Clement 56.1. “Therefore, let us also intercede for those who have fallen into any sin so that (ὅπως) gentleness and humility may be given (δοθῆ) to them, so that they may submit (εἰς τὸ εἶξαι), not to us but to the will of God” (AFB). The second clause, with the preposition εἰς used to denote

purpose,⁵ lacks the conjunction καί. In this case the second purpose clause (“that they may submit”) is intended to follow as the result of the first (“that gentleness and humility may be given”) ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$).

1 Clement 65.1. “Send them back to us very soon in peace with joy, so that (ὅπως) they may report (ἀπαγγέλλωσιν) quickly the peace and harmony prayed for and greatly desired by us, so that we also may soon rejoice (εἰς τὸ τάχιον καὶ ἡμᾶς χαρῆναι) about your stability” (1 Clem. 65.1, AFB). The second purpose clause, lacking the conjunction καί, refers to a subsequent consecutive effect of the first purpose clause ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$).

The only clear examples of a consecutive relationship between two subjunctives connected by a simple καί are 2 Esdras 16:12–13 and Matthew 5:16. These two represent the clear counterexamples of the normal pattern of concurrent effects indicated by subjunctive verbs connected by καί or by καὶ and another conjunction of purpose (καὶ ὅπως or καὶ ἵνα).

2 Esdras 16:12–13. In this text, it appears the deception of the crowd sent against Nehemiah by Tobias and Sanballat had several purposes, each dependent upon the previous: “Tobias and Sanballat had hired a crowd against me, so (ὅπως) I might become afraid (φοβηθῶ) and do so (καὶ ποιήσω) and sin (καὶ ἀμάρτω) and become (καὶ γένωμαι) a bad name for them so (ὅπως) they could taunt me.” In this case it appears that the threat against Nehemiah would result in his intimidation, the consequence of which would be taking refuge in the tabernacle, which would be a sin, and this, in turn, would result in a bad reputation. These results, connected with a simple καί, seem to follow in consecutive (or at least logical) sequence, the one dependent upon the previous. However, the second ὅπως clause, without the καί, most certainly indicates the direct consequence of the previous clause—the bad reputation of Nehemiah would result in taunting ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow E \rightarrow F$).

Matthew 5:16. “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that (ὅπως) they may see (ἴδωσιν) your good works and give glory (καὶ δοξάσωσιν) to your Father who is in heaven.” In this case the stated purpose for letting the light of shine before others is, first, that they may see the good works and, as a result of having seen them, they will then glorify God because of them ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$).

38 Examples of Related, Concurrent Effects Following Ὅπως ($A \rightarrow [B+C, \text{etc.}]$)

Genesis 12:13. “Say, therefore, ‘I am his sister,’ so that (ὅπως ἂν) it may go well with me (εὖ μοι γένηται) because of you, and my soul will live (καὶ ζήσεται) on your account.” In this example, Sarah’s lie about being Abraham’s sister had two concurrent effects: Abraham’s welfare and his physical survival ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$). In this case, the general welfare and physical survival of Abraham

⁵ BDAG, 290.

are both concurrent results of Sarah's lie, the second results is the logical precondition for the first. That is, only by Abraham's life being preserved would he be able to enjoy general welfare.⁶

Genesis 37:22. "Rouben said to them, 'Shed no blood; throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him'—that (ὅπως) he might rescue (ἐξέληται) him out of their hands and restore (καὶ ἀποδῶ) him to his father." Here the purpose clauses explain why Reuben said those words—for the dual purpose of being able to rescue and restore Joseph ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Exodus 9:16. "And for this reason you have been spared in order that (ἵνα) I might display (ἐνδείξωμαι) in you my power and in order that (καὶ ὅπως) my name might be proclaimed (διαγγεληῖ) in all the land." In this case, the reason for the preservation of Pharaoh is twofold: to reveal God's power to him and to give God an opportunity to make his reputation known throughout the world ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Exodus 33:13. "Let me see you recognizably in order that (ὅπως ἂν) I might find favor before you and in order (καὶ ἵνα) that I might know that this nation is your people." Though the two results are linked with a second conjunction of purpose, it includes a καί, which conveys the sense that the two linked results are both concurrent effects of the same cause ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).⁷

Numbers 15:39–40. "And you shall not turn aside after your thoughts and after your eyes, in the things after which you whore, so that (ὅπως ἂν) you shall remember and do (μνησθήτε καὶ ποιήσητε) all my commands, and you shall be (καὶ ἕσεσθε) holy to your God." In this case, the two subjunctives conjoined by a simple καί—"that you may remember and that you may do" reflect two concurrent results of their steadfastness; and these two circumstances concur with another effect of their steadfastness: that they will be holy ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$).

Deuteronomy 4:10. "Assemble the people to me, and let them hear my words so that (ὅπως) they may learn (μάθωσιν) to fear me all the days as long as they live on the earth and may teach (καὶ...διδάξωσιν) their sons." Indicated with a simple καί, the command indicates two concurrent purposes or results of the command ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Deuteronomy 5:32–33. This example is not entirely clear; the string of three aorist subjunctives connected by καί could logically be taken either as concurrent effects of the main commands or as consecutive results, each the effect of the previous: "And you shall be watchful to do as the Lord your God has commanded; you shall not turn right or left, to go according to all the way that the Lord your God has commanded so that (ὅπως) he may give you rest (καταπαύση σε) and that it may go well with you (καὶ εὖ σοι ᾔ) and that you may prolong (καὶ μακροημερεύσητε) your days upon the land that you shall inherit." However, if we look at other LXX passages in which God offers to prolong days (μακροημερεύω), they come as a result of obedience, not as the result of God giving rest or things going well for them, but as a result of fearing the Lord by keeping the

⁶ That the first and second result clauses are both concurrent results of Sarah's words is reinforced by the fact that each clause is followed by a reminder that it was Sarah's action that cause the good effect: διὰ σέ and ἔνεκεν σου. These link both results back to the single cause. They are not consecutive.

⁷ Note that when the passage indicates distinct consecutive results, each dependent on the previous, the καί is absent.

commands (Deut 6:1–2); as a result of living, being multiplied, and inheriting the land (Deut 11:8–9); as a result of giving heed to and obeying all the words God commanded (Deut 32:46–47). Likewise, the promise “that it might go well with you” (εὖ σοι ᾗ), is directly dependent on Israel being careful to perform God’s commands, not on receiving rest (Deut 6:3; 10:13). In light of the other ways these promises are connected directly to obedience rather than to each other, the string of subjunctives followed by a simple καί is best seen as indicating concurrent, not consecutive results of obedience ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$).

Deuteronomy 6:3. The considerations related to Deuteronomy 5:32–33 applies to 6:3 as well: “Now hear, O Israel, and be watchful to perform so that (ὅπως) it may be well with you (εὖ σοι ᾗ) and that (καὶ ἵνα) you may multiply (πληθυνθῆτε) greatly.” As in the previous example, the καὶ ἵνα most naturally indicates two concurrent, not consecutive results of being careful to do what God commands ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Deuteronomy 8:2. “The Lord your God has led you in the wilderness so that (ὅπως ἄν) he might distress (κακωσῆ) you and test (καὶ ἐκπειράσῃ) you and discern (καὶ διαγνώσῃ) the things in your heart.” Again, the simple connection of the three subjunctives conveys three results that are concurrent, not successive ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$).

Joshua 4:23–24. “...as the Lord our God did to the Red Sea, which the Lord our God dried up before us until we passed by, so that (ὅπως) all the nations of the earth may know (γνώσιν) that the power of the Lord is mighty and in order that (καὶ ἵνα) you may worship (σέβησθε) the Lord your God for all time.” In this case the desire to worship the Lord is not a result of the nations knowing the power of the Lord; rather, both are a result of God’s miraculous deed in splitting the Red Sea ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

2 Samuel 10:3. Another series of logically concurrent effects of an action is seen in this passage (LXX 2 Kingdoms 10:3)—“But has not David sent his servants to you to (ὅπως) search (ἐρευήσωσιν) the city and to spy (καὶ κατασκοπήσωσιν) it out and in order to survey (τοῦ κατασκέψασθαι) it?” Here the three effects are concurrently the result of the single cause—David sending the spies to carry out their threefold mission of searching, spying, and surveying ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$).

2 Samuel 13:5. In LXX 2 Kingdoms 13:5, Jonadab requests his sister Tamar to feed him: “And let her prepare food in my sight so that (ὅπως) I may see and eat (ἶδω καὶ φάγω) from her hands.” These two subjunctives connected by a simple καί are concurrent results of Tamar preparing food in his sight ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

1 Kings 8:43. In LXX 1 Kings 8:43 (cf. 2 Chron 6:33) we read: “Then you shall...do according to all that the stranger calls to you for, that (ὅπως) all the peoples may know (γνώσιν) your name and fear (καὶ φοβῶνται) you like your people Israel and know (καὶ γνώσιν) that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.” Again, these subjunctive verbs are concurrent effects of God answering the prayers even of foreigners ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$).

2 Esdras 9:12. “And now do not give your daughters to their sons, and do not take some of their daughters for your sons, and never seek out their peace and their prosperity so that (ὅπως)

you may be strong (ἐνισχύσητε) and eat (καὶ φάγητε) the good of the land and distribute (καὶ κληροδοτήσητε) it to your sons forever.” In this case obedience to the command leads to three concurrent, not consecutive, effects ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$).

2 Esdras 18:14–15. This passage indicates a single event with two concurrent effects connected with καὶ ὅπως: “And they found it written in the law, which the Lord had commanded Moyses, that (ὅπως) sons of Israel should live in tents during a feast of the seventh month and that (καὶ ὅπως) they should sound with trumpets in all their cities and in Ierousalem” ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Judith 3:8. “Indeed, he had been appointed to root out all the gods of the land, that (ὅπως) every nation and every tongue should serve (λατρώσωσι) Nabouchodonosor and him alone and that their every tribe should invoke (καὶ...ἐπικαλέσωνται) him as a god.” Though the translation includes a second “that,” the original text has a simple καί; and the two results indicated by the subjunctives are concurrent ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Tobit 3:6. “So now according to what is pleasing to you do with me, and command my spirit to be taken up from me, that (ὅπως) I may be set free (ἀπολυθῶ) from the face of the earth and become (γένωμαι) earth.” In this case both being set free and becoming earth (that is, decomposing into the earth) are both concurrent results of his spirit take up from him ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

1 Maccabees 16:18. “And Ptolemy wrote about these things and sent a report to the king so that (ὅπως) he would send (ἀποστείλῃ) forces to him for assistance and would turn over (καὶ παραδῶ) the cities and the country to him.” Again, the use of a single καί indicates two concurrent effects of the one action of sending a letter ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

2 Maccabees 11:26. “You will do well, therefore, to send word to them and give them pledges of friendship so that (ὅπως) they may know (εἰδότες) our policy and be (τε ὤσιν) of good cheer and turn (καὶ...διαγίνωνται) happily to the conduct of their own affairs.” The use of the enclitic particle τε, “and,” may rarely mark a close relationship of sequential events, but its use to connect “coordinate nonsequential items” is more frequent.⁸ In this case, the two results (knowing their policy and being of good cheer)— connected by τε—seem to be each related to the two causes (sending word and pledging friendship, respectively). The final subjective, connected by καί, relates to the Judaeans returning to their own customs and way of life in light of the information shared in the message of non-hostility communicated in the letter, thus indicating three concurrent effects of the preceding verb and participles ($A [B+C] \rightarrow [D+E+F]$).

Psalm 29:12–13 LXX (30:11–12 MT). “You turned my mourning into a dance for me; you tore my sackcloth and girded me with gladness so that (ὅπως ἄν) my glory may make music (ψάλλῃ) to you and I shall not be stunned (καὶ οὐ μὴ κατανυγῶ).” Here again the two subjunctive results of the preconditions are concurrent: ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Psalm 50:6 LXX (51:4 MT). “Against you alone did I sin, and what is evil before you I did, so that (ὅπως ἄν) you may be justified (δικαιωθῆς) in your words and be victorious (νικήσης) when

⁸ BDAG, 993.

you go to law.”⁹ In this case the two lines of Hebrew poetry are parallel, reinforced by the simple καί connecting the two concurrent subjunctive results ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Psalm 104:44–45 LXX (105:44–45 MT). “And he gave them lands of nations, and labors of peoples they inherited, that (ὅπως ἄν) they might keep (φυλάξωσιν) his statutes and seek out (καὶ...ἐκζητήσωσιν) his law.” Again, both intended results are concurrent effects of the precondition ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Wisdom of Sirach 23:2–3. “Who will set whips upon my thought and discipline of wisdom upon my heart so that (ἵνα) they might not spare (μὴ φείσωνται) my faults of ignorance and he shall not let their sins go (καὶ οὐ μὴ παρῆ)?—that (ὅπως) my acts of ignorance may not be multiplied (μὴ πληθυνθῶσιν), and my sins may increase (καὶ αἱ ἁμαρτίαι μου πλεονάσωσιν).” Here the original ἵνα clause sets up the results of the discipline the author yearns for—that ignorance and sinfulness should not be spared. These effects then become the cause of the subsequent effects that follow the ὅπως conjunction: that his ignorant acts would not be multiplied and his since increased (23:3). Note the single use of μὴ, distributed to both the first and second effect of the ὅπως—concurrent results connected with a simple καί. Thus, in Sirach 23:2–3, we see the initial ὅπως used to indicate a sequential result of the ἵνα clause followed by a dual concurrent result of the ὅπως clause ($[A+B] \rightarrow [C+D] \rightarrow [E+F]$). The key to distinguishing consecutive effects versus concurrent effects is that καί (with or without ὅπως or ἵνα) is used to indicate concurrent effects while ὅπως or ἵνα alone (without καί) are used to indicate consecutive effects.

Hosea 2:4–5 LXX (2:2–3 MT). “I will put away her whoring from before me and her adultery from between her breasts, that (ὅπως ἄν) I might strip her naked (ἐκδύσω) and restore (καὶ ἀποκαταστήσω) her as the day of her birth.” Here the subjunctive and future active indicative, connected by a καί without the inclusion of a conjunction of purpose conveys a concurrent result of the single ὅπως ἄν ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Hosea 14:3 LXX (14:2, MT). “Take words with you, and return to the Lord your God; speak to him, that (ὅπως) you not receive (μὴ λάβητε) injustice and that you receive (καὶ λάβετε) good things” (translation amended). The fact that μὴ λάβητε and λάβετε are connected with a καί indicates two concurrent effects—in not receiving injustice, they receive good; in receiving good, they do not receive injustice, both effects are concurrent results of turning to God ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Jonah 1:6. In this example, the captain of the ship urges Jonah, “Get up, invoke your god in order that (ὅπως) the god might deliver (διασώσῃ) us and we not perish (καὶ μὴ ἀπολώμεθα).” This is similar in structure to Hosea 14:3, in which the positive and its inverse are connected with a καί as concurrent (not consecutive) results of the same cause and governed by a single ὅπως ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Ezekiel 6:6. “In every habitation of yours the cities shall be devastated, and the high places will be annihilated so that (ὅπως) your altars shall be utterly destroyed (ἐξελεθρευθῆ) and your idols

⁹ This verse is loosely quoted in Rom 3:4 and 1 Clem. 18.4 with the same basic construction and sense ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

broken (καὶ συντριβήσονται) and your sacred precincts razed (καὶ ἐξαρθήσεται).” Here the repeated conjunction καί connects three concurrent effects of the main clause ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$).

Ezekiel 11:19–20. This text also connects three concurrent effects of the verbs preceding the verbs: “I will draw forth the heart of stone from their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh so that (ὅπως) they might walk (πορεύωνται) by my ordinances and keep (φυλάσσωνται) my statutes and perform (ποιῶσιν) them” ($A+B \rightarrow [C+D+E]$). It certainly is not the case that the three effects are seen as consecutive, each resulting from the previous.

Ezekiel 14:10–11. “And they shall receive their injustice; like the wrongdoing of the inquirer and like the wrongdoing, so shall it be for the prophet so that (ὅπως) the house of Israel may no longer go astray (μὴ πλανᾶται) from me and so that (καὶ ἵνα) they may not defile (μὴ μιαίνωνται) themselves further in all their transgressions.” In this case the punishment of the deceptive prophets and those who seek out the false prophets serves dual concurrent purposes: to prevent Israel from going astray and to keep them from sin ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Ezekiel 16:62–63. “And I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall recognize that I am the Lord, in order that (ὅπως) you shall remember (μνησθήσῃς) and be ashamed (καὶ αἰσχυνθήσῃς) and it be impossible (καὶ μὴ ἦ) for you any longer to open your mouth from before your dishonor.” Remembrance, shame, and silence come as concurrent results of God’s covenant faithfulness and their recognition of the Lord ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$). It is not the case that God’s actions and their response leads first to remembrance, then, at a later time, that remembrance leads to shame, which, sometime later, leads to silence before God. Rather, they are concurrent effects of God’s action and their repentance. This made is particularly clear in light of the similar language of remembrance and shame that come as a direct result of God’s work of covenant restoration in the previous verses (Ezek 16:59–61).

Ezekiel 21:19–20 LXX (21:14–15, MT). “And it shall confound them, that (ὅπως) the heart might be broken (θραυσθῆ) and the weak be multiplied (καὶ πληθυνθῶσιν) upon every gate.” Here the two subjunctives indicate the concurrent, complementary, and closely related effects of God’s confounding the people with the sword of judgment: the heart is broken and the weak are multiplied ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$). The emphasis is on the negative psychological effects of death and judgment.

Ezekiel 24:10–11. This passage involves numerous and somewhat complex logical relationships with two ὅπως clauses: “And I will multiply the wood and stoke the fire so that (ὅπως) the meat may dissolve (τακῆ) and the broth be lessened (καὶ ἐλαττωθῆ) and it stand (καὶ στῆ) upon the coals so that (ὅπως) it be set on fire (προσκαυθῆ) and her copper be made hot (καὶ θερμανθῆ) and melt (καὶ τακῆ) in the midst of her uncleanness, and her rust be gone (ἐκίπη).” The first set of three subjunctives connected by καί are concurrent effects of the fire being stoked to extreme heat: meat is dissolved, broth boils away, and the pot stands unprotected upon the blazing hot coals. Once the pot is in this condition, the second ὅπως, without a καί, indicates a result of that new condition, following logically and chronologically. The four subjunctives following the second ὅπως are also concurrent effects of the previous conditions—firing, melting, and purifying of the

pot ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D] \rightarrow [E+F+G+H]$). This suggests, further, that closely associated and chronologically concurrent effects are normally connected with *καί* (either alone or with another causal conjunction), while distinct, chronologically consecutive effects are normally connected with a lone *ὅπως*.

Ezekiel 26:20. In a pronouncement of judgment against Tyre, God says, “I will force you down to those who descend into a hole, to a people of long ago, and I will make you live in the depths of the earth as an everlasting wilderness with those who descend into a hole so that (*ὅπως*) you shall not be inhabited (*μὴ κατοικηθῆς*) nor rise (*μηδὲ ἀνασταθῆς*) upon a land of life.” In this case the twofold cause (forcing them down into a pit and causing them to dwell as an everlasting wilderness) results in the twofold, concurrent effects connected by *μηδέ*—being uninhabited (corresponding to being rendered a wilderness) and not rising again (corresponding to the descent into a pit) ($[A+B] \rightarrow [C+D]$).

Ezekiel 41:7. The in-depth structural details of the temple in this passage are confusing, though what is clear is that the two subjunctives following *ὅπως* indicate the constant architectural purpose for how the temple was designed and built in Ezekiel’s vision; thus, regardless of the specific nature of the structure being described, the two subjunctives connected by *καί* are necessarily concurrent results of the design ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Ezekiel 42:14. “They shall not enter there except the priests; they shall not go out from ‘the holy’ into the outer court so that (*ὅπως*) those who approach may always be holy (*ῥοσιν*) and lest they touch (*καὶ μὴ ἄπτωνται*) their vestments, those in which they minister, because they are holy.” Here we see the concurrent effects of the regulations of entry and departure of the priests—that they always be holy and that their holy garments are not touched ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Daniel 4:15–16. “And thus he said: ‘Spare one of its roots in the ground so that (*ὅπως*) he may feed (*νέμηται*) on grass like an ox with the animals of the earth in the mountains, and his body may be changed (*καὶ...ἀλλοιωθῆ*) from the dew of heaven, and he may graze (*βοσκηθῆ*) with them for seven years.’” None of these subjunctives connected by *καί* are consecutive effects of the previous; rather, they are concurrent results of the single root being spared. In fact, the first and last (*νέμηται* and *βοσκηθῆ*) are roughly synonymous. Thus, this passage is best read as referring to concurrent effects ($A \rightarrow [B+C+D]$). In Daniel 6:18 (LXX; 6:17, MT), we read, “Then Daniel was thrown into the lions’ pit, and a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the pit, and the king sealed it with his signet and with the signets of his nobles so that (*ὅπως*) Daniel might not be removed (*μὴ...ἄρθῆ*) by them or the king pull him up (*ἢ...ἀναστάσῃ*) from the pit.” Both subjunctives connected with *ἢ* point to concurrent effects of the complete sealing of Daniel in the pit ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Acts 9:17. Ananias told Saul, “The Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that (*ὅπως*) you may regain (*ἀναβλέψης*) your sight and be filled (*καὶ πλησθῆς*) with the Holy Spirit.” In this case both the healing of blindness and filling of the Spirit are the concurrent results of the main verb ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Romans 9:17. Citing Exodus 9:16, this text reads, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that (ὅπως) I might show (ἐνδείξωμαι) my power in you, and that (καὶ ὅπως) my name might be proclaimed (διαγγεληῖ) in all the earth.” As in the example from the LXX of Exodus 33:13 above, both purpose clauses result concurrently from the same verb ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$).

Summary and Conclusions

From this thorough examination of the fifty-three examples from the Septuagint, New Testament, and Apostolic Fathers in which ὅπως [ἄν] is followed by two or more subjunctives of effect or result, thirty-eight indicate related, concurrent effects ($A \rightarrow [B+C, \text{etc.}]$). That is, the original action or condition A is equally and simultaneously the cause of B and C, which are concurrent. B is not the unique cause of C, and C is not consecutive to B and dependent upon it. In all such instances of concurrence, the subjunctives are connected with a καί, or, occasionally, with καί plus a repeated ὅπως or ἵνα ($A \text{ ὅπως} \rightarrow B \text{ καί } [\text{ὅπως}] C$).¹⁰ The sixteen remaining examples indicate not concurrent effects but consecutive ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C, \text{etc.}$). That is, the original action or condition A results in the effect B, which effect (B) itself becomes the cause of C. In all but two of these sixteen examples, the subjunctives are not connected with a καί but with a lone causal ὅπως or ἵνα: ($A \text{ ὅπως/ἵνα} \rightarrow B \text{ ὅπως/ἵνα} \rightarrow C$). Only in 2 Esdras 16:12–13 and Matthew 5:16 does a series of consecutive effects seem to be indicated with a simple καί.

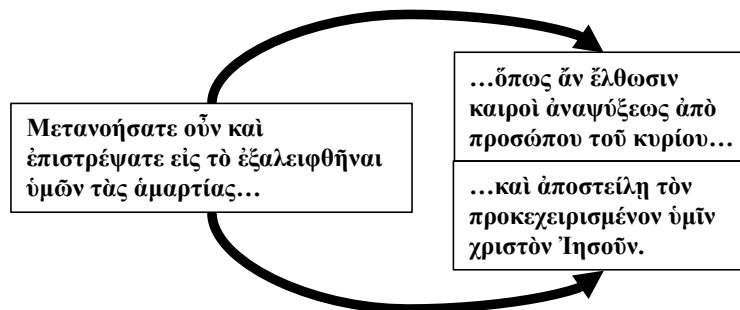
From an idiomatic perspective, we can make the general (though not inviolable) rule of thumb: when authors or speakers want to indicate multiple concurrent effects of a cause indicated by ὅπως, they seem to do so universally with the “ $A \text{ ὅπως} \rightarrow B \text{ καί } [\text{ὅπως}] C$ ” construction. When they want to indicate a train of consecutive effects each dependent on its immediately preceding effect as its own cause, they will almost always do so with the “ $A \text{ ὅπως/ἵνα} \rightarrow B \text{ ὅπως/ἵνα} \rightarrow C$ ” construction. Therefore, barring any compelling indications to the contrary, the construction “ $A \text{ ὅπως} \rightarrow B \text{ καί } [\text{ὅπως}] C$ ” is most naturally read as indicating that B and C are concurrent effects of A, not a consecutive series of effects. In any case, the burden of proof is on the interpreter who would read “B καί C” as consecutive rather than concurrent.

In light of this thorough examination, when authors intend to indicate a consecutive series of effects—each the result of the previous ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$)—a new conjunction of purpose is almost always employed without the conjunction καί (Gen 15:20; Exod 20:20; Deut 17:12–20). On the other hand, when authors intend to indicate that the multiple effects are all concurrent results of the original action ($A \rightarrow [B+C]$), they employ a καί conjunction. Sometimes the καί is followed by a second purpose conjunction, but usually not. In short, when καί connects clauses after ὅπως, those multiple clauses are more naturally understood as intending concurrent events or conditions. When καί is not used, and the text employs a subsequent conjunction of purpose or

¹⁰ Exod 9:16; 33:13; Deut 6:3; Josh 4:24; 2 Esd 18:15; Ezek 14:11; Rom 9:17.

result (e.g., ὅπως), the preceding subjunctive is seen as the cause of the following, thus rendering a consecutive occurrence.

Returning to Acts 3:20, following the single ὅπως ἄν, the text has a simple καί conjunction connecting both subjunctive clauses. Thus, the author most naturally intended to portray the coming of “times of refreshing” and the “sending of Jesus” as concurrent events resulting from the repentance and turning of the people (Acts 3:19). With the coming of Jesus, the seasons of refreshing come; with the coming of seasons of refreshing, Jesus comes. The fulfillment of the seasons of refreshing are not the cause of the coming of Jesus. Rather, both are concurrent effects of repentance:



This argues against interpretations in which the “seasons of refreshing” come prior to the return of Christ as a subsequent event—either in an amillennial sense in which the times of refreshing are present spiritual revivals which ultimately culminate in Christ’s return or in a postmillennial sense in which the seasons of refreshing are a distinct period of time in the future when the world is Christianized, after which Christ returns. Rather, the syntax of Acts 3:20, in light of the common idiomatic use of ὅπως followed by multiple subjunctives connected by καί, renders the coming of “seasons of refreshing” and the “sending of Jesus” as concurrent results of repentance and turning. This lends support to interpretations 3 or 4, in which the seasons of refreshing are concurrent with the future coming of Jesus. This would be more consistent with a premillennial or new-creation eschatology.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 15

The Case for a Three-Stage Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28

The context of 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 is Paul’s lengthy discussion in defense of future bodily resurrection and the nature of the resurrection body (see discussion on resurrection in chapter 3 of *The Fathers on the Future* as well as Go Deeper Excursus 3). In the opening verses, Paul rehearses the traditional testimony regarding the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection as proof that Jesus himself had been raised bodily (1 Cor 15:1–11). Because Christ was consistently proclaimed from the beginning as having been raised bodily from the dead, Paul marveled that certain people among the Corinthians—ἐν ὑμῖν τινες suggests a noticeable minority—claimed that there was no such thing as bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:12). If bodily resurrection were impossible, then Christ himself had not been raised, which meant the apostolic testimony was also false and the foundation of their salvation was vacuous (15:13–17). Not only this, but those who had died “in Christ”—that is, deceased Christians—were utterly lost with no hope of salvation from sin (cf. 15:17) and no hope of future resurrection (15:18). The only benefit anybody would receive from following Christ would be whatever tangible or intangible gains in this present life, in which case Christians are to be pitied above all people (15:19).

On the heels of this sobering reckoning, Paul transitions to his fundamental teaching on resurrection. He begins by stipulating as a foundational fact of the Christian faith that “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died” (1 Cor 15:20). He then draws a contrast between Adam and Christ in the form of problem and solution: just as death came through a human being (“for as all die in Adam”), the resurrection of the dead also comes through a human (“so all will be made alive in Christ”) (15:21–22). There is a real question about the scope of resurrection intended in verse 22 with the phrase “so all will be made alive in Christ (ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται).” To whom does the πάντες refer? Is it limited to those “in Christ”—that is, those in union with him in a soteriological sense (e.g., Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:17)?¹ Perhaps this

¹Gordon Fee forcefully argues “there can be *no* question that his concern is with the resurrection of *believers*,” asserting that nothing of the general resurrection of both righteous and wicked is in view at all in this passage, that the

would be more certain had Paul used the simple ἐν Χριστῷ instead of ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ. In other instances when Paul includes the article—ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ—it may have the force of a dative of agency.² This would parallel the previous phrase, in which the emphasis is the one through whom (διά) something is accomplished, not the one in union with whom it occurs (δι’ ἀνθρώπου θάνατος, καὶ δι’ ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν).³

In this case, we would understand verse 22 as “all will be made alive by the Christ.”⁴ This is Paul’s affirmation of the common Jewish and Christian expectation of a general resurrection of

problems with Paul asserting a general resurrection are “several and insuperable,” and that such a notion is really just the product of modern dispensationalism (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014], 749–50n19).

² Moulton and Turner note that the instrumental ἐν “is more used than plain dat. in Biblical Greek” (James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol 3, *Syntax* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963], 240). The instrumental use with ἐν + article + noun is fairly well-attested (see, e.g., Matt 9:34; 12:24; Mark 12:36; Luke 2:27; 4:1; Rom 1:9; 3:7; 3:25; 1 Cor 12:9). In particular, ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ probably falls in this category. In 2 Cor 2:14, God leads the believers in triumphal procession by means of Christ (ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ). In Eph 1:9, God set forth his good plan by means of Christ (ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ). In Eph 1:20, God worked his great might by means of Christ (ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ) when he raised him from the dead. And in Eph 3:11, God realized his eternal purpose by means of Christ (ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ). On dative of agency, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2023), 134–35.

³ Godet suggests that whereas the phrase δι’ ἀνθρώπου θάνατος, καὶ δι’ ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν expresses a relationship of causality, Paul’s shift to ἐν does not intend causality but the intimacy of “moral solidarity,” yet he still argues that πάντες has the same force in both cases, arguing that even the unsaved dead are raised ἐν Χριστῷ in a sense (Frédéric Louis Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol 2, trans. A Cusin, [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1893], 352–53). Vos rightly rejects this interpretation of Godet (Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], 238), but Vos himself, not considering a difference between ἐν Χριστῷ and ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, operates under a false choice—the ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ (=ἐν Χριστῷ) must be taken in its full soteriological sense, and thus the passage must refer strictly to the resurrection of the righteous *or* it must result in universalism. (Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 238; cf. Andreas Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, HNT, vol. 9/1 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000], 344). The third choice, that ἐν Χριστῷ may not actually be the same as ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, solves the exegetical and theological conundrum. On the perennial “false choice” appearing in the commentaries, see Wilber B. Wallis, “The Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28,” *JETS* 18.4 (1975): 234. Though Schenk considers the possibility that ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ means “everyone will rise because of Christ, some to everlasting life and others to everlasting judgment,” he opts for the view that it refers to those who are “in Christ” (Kenneth Schenck, *1 & 2 Corinthians: A Commentary for Bible Students* [Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2006], 217). In short, I view verses 15:21 and 15:22 to be parallel; because the genitives of 15:21 express a causal relationship, so also the datives in 15:22 do the same.

⁴ Lietzmann suggests, “Sieht Paulus bei diesem ‘Rest’ von der engeren (mystischen) Beziehung des ἐν Χριστῷ ab und meint eine durch Christi Befehl bewirkte Auferstehung der Nichtchristen zum Gericht?” (Lietzmann, *Korinther I/II*, 80). Most commentators, though, do not consider the possibility of an admittedly rare dative of agency here and point to parallels that use ἐν Χριστῷ to support his restrictive reading of the text (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 750–51; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 705–7, 775; Charles E. Hill, “Paul’s Understanding of Christ’s Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28,” *NovT* [1988]: 306; Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985], 206; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 1224–28). They then rest many of their subsequent arguments against a span of time between the second and third stage of resurrection upon this conclusion, which I suggest was hastily drawn. In any case, his conclusions do not warrant the definitiveness with which he proceeds in his argument. Garland follows Fee in this, assuming Paul is arguing for a “union with Adam” and “union with Christ” contrast rather than a “by means of Adam” and “by means of Christ” contrast. Thiselton, too, points to the Adam-Christ contrast in Rom 5:12–21 as a parallel to Paul’s “in Adam” and “in Christ” imagery in 1 Cor 15.

all—the righteous and the wicked (Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46). And it is consistent with the fact that both the righteous and wicked will be raised to life by Christ’s command (John 5:28–29). In fact, Paul himself is recorded as testifying, “I have a hope in God—a hope that they themselves also accept—that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous” (Acts 24:15).⁵ It is worth noting that much modern exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 tends to proceed on the basis of limiting this passage to an account of the resurrection of the righteous based on a soteriological understanding of ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ. This is used to narrow the sense of the ἕκαστος and τάγμα in 5:23, pushing a resurrection of the wicked outside of the scope of Paul’s treatment.⁶

Paul is most likely affirming the universal resurrection—the righteous and the wicked—by Christ (not “in Christ”) in 1 Corinthians 15:22. At this point, Paul enters into a detailed explanation concerning the order of the resurrection of “all” (πάντες) the dead. That Paul is concerned with an order of events is evident in the next verse. All will be made alive by means of Christ, “but each in its own order (ἕκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι).” The term τάγμα here can refer either to “a clearly defined group” (as in a military rank) or to “a stage in a sequence.”⁷ Either meaning makes sense

⁵ This final point needs to be emphasized and its implications drawn out, to wit, the person who wrote 1 Cor 15:20–28 and discussed the order classes of resurrection by means of Christ firmly held to the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous (Acts 24:15). By “the End” of Christ’s victorious, enemy-crushing reign (1 Cor 15:24–25)—however this is conceived—death itself will be deemed defeated (1 Cor 15:26). Therefore, in the reckoning of Paul, sometime between the parousia and the defeat of death, the resurrection of the unrighteous must take place. If this occurs at the time of parousia precisely at the same moment as the resurrection of the righteous, why does Paul restrict the category of those who are raised to “those who belong to Christ” (15:23)? Perhaps he simply does not want to discuss the resurrection of the wicked unto eternal condemnation in a hopeful context. But is it reasonable to assume that Paul’s firm belief—indeed “hope” (Acts 24:15)—of the resurrection of the wicked makes absolutely no appearance in a passage intended to clarify the order of resurrection? Would it not be more reasonable, given Paul’s belief in double resurrection as the means by which death itself is defeated, to expect Paul to accommodate the resurrection of the wicked in this passage? And if Paul were intending to focus attention on the glorious resurrection of the righteous, one would expect that the second resurrection of the wicked would appear in a subdued background, treated indirectly, most likely leaning on his readers’ previous understanding of the subject to bring it to the text. If these things are reasonable and preferable to an inexplicable silence on the matter, then Paul’s cryptic and ambiguous reference to “the End” at which time death itself is ultimately defeated suits his purposes. It accommodates the resurrection of the wicked unto condemnation without highlighting it. Hans-Alwin Wilcke, *Das Problem eines messianischen Zwischenreichs bei Paulus*, ATANT, vol. 51 (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1967), 150. Wilcke’s insistence that Paul has no room for the resurrection of the wicked in 1 Cor 15:20–28 or anywhere in his writings, ends up pitting Paul the author against Paul the speaker in Acts, a solution I will not entertain.

⁶ So, Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 241–243; For a survey of the history of interpretation of this text and a list of most modern exegetes who take this the “all” as restricted to those who are soteriologically “in Christ,” see Wilcke, *Das Problem*, 71–72. The situation has not changed significantly since Wilcke, and Kreitzer notes, “Since its publication in 1967, Wilcke’s monograph has remained the dominant authority for those who reject the idea of a messianic ‘Zwischenreich’ as derived from 1 Cor. 15.20–28. This is despite the fact that, to a certain degree, the monograph falls into the trap of circular argumentation in its rejection of the doctrine. Quite clearly, the reason why τὸ τέλος is equated with the parousia is because such an interpretation is seen to be consistent with Wilcke’s ideas about the meaning of the πάντες phrases in v. 22” (Kreitzer, *Jesus and God*, 144).

⁷ BDAG, 987–988. BDAG places this text in the former category, noting, “Acc. to 1 Cor 15:23f the gift of life is given to various ones in turn . . . , and at various times. One view is that in this connection Paul distinguishes three groups: Christ, who already possesses life, the Christians, who will receive it at his second coming, and the rest of humanity . . . , who will receive it when death, as the last of God’s enemies, is destroyed.” However, Jesus is called the “first fruits,” indicating that he is categorically a member of the group of those who belong to him at his coming. So,

in the context, but the presence of several indicators of chronology and sequence make the latter more likely: all the dead will be made alive, but each in their own turn.⁸

Paul then mentions the first stage in the resurrection of “all” the dead: “Christ the first fruits” (1 Cor 15:23). In Paul’s perspective, this has already occurred (15:20). Jesus is the “first to rise from the dead” (Acts 26:23) and the “firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5). Christ’s unique, individual resurrection from the dead in a glorified resurrection body begins the multiphase process of universal resurrection of all the dead. In a very real sense, the resurrection of the dead has already begun, and regardless of one’s eschatology, every view of resurrection has *at least* two distinct phases. No view of resurrection has a single, universal resurrection of all the righteous and all the wicked at once, because Christ—a member of the category of the righteous—has already been raised.

Paul continues his explanation of the order of the different groups of “all” who will be raised with two phrases separated by two adverbs—ἔπειτα...εἶτα followed by two clauses conjoined with two adverbial temporal conjunctions: ὅταν...ὅταν. The logical and chronological relationship between these phrases is crucial to determining whether Paul is setting forth a two-stage or three-stage resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. That the relationship is, in fact, chronological is established not simply by the use of the term τάγμα (which can also mean “group” or “rank”), but also by the use of ἔπειτα...εἶτα, which means “to being next in order of time, *then, next*.”⁹ In every use of the terms ἔπειτα or εἶτα in the New Testament in contexts indicating order, they introduce completely distinct events. In no case do they indicate concurrent events affecting the same group of people.¹⁰ When two or more are used in a series (ἔπειτα/εἶτα...ἔπειτα/εἶτα), the distinction of stages is obvious. In Mark 4:28, Jesus says, “The earth produces of itself first the stalk, then (εἶτα) the head, then (εἶτα) the full grain in the head.” In Paul’s recounting of the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection just eighteen verses earlier, he distinguishes separate encounters with the resurrected Jesus with εἶτα...ἔπειτα...ἔπειτα...εἶτα: “He appeared to Cephas, then (εἶτα) to the twelve. Then (ἔπειτα) he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then (ἔπειτα) he appeared to James, then (εἶτα) to all the apostles” (1 Cor 15:5–7). Granted, the space of time between events introduced by εἶτα/ἔπειτα is not clear;

ἕκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι is better understood as primarily indicating a distinction in the chronological order of resurrection, not merely to a distinction in the categorical grouping of resurrections.

⁸ Weiss notes, “Er kommt auch in ganz abgeschächtem Sinne von ‘Gruppe, Partei, Richtung’ vor, so daß es vielleicht richtiger ist...einen ganz neutralen Ausdruck zu wählen: »jeder an seiner Stelle«, an dem Platz, an den er gehört, zumal da Christus als ἀπαρχή ein τάγμα für sich bildet.... Bei der Auferstehung sind die τάγματα zeitlich, nicht örtlich getrennt” (Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910], 357)

⁹ BDAG, 295, 361. Louw and Nida note, “εἶτα; ἔπειτα; μετέπειτα: a point of time following another point—‘then, afterwards, later’” (L&N, 634).

¹⁰ Mark 4:17; 8:25; Luke 8:12; 16:7; John 11:7; 19:27; 20:27; 1 Cor 15:46; Gal 1:18, 21; 2:1; 1 Tim 2:13; 3:10; Heb 7:27; Jas 1:15; 4:14. Cf the LXX Prov 6:11; 7:13; Job 5:24; 11:6; 13:22; 14:15; 16:5; 21:3; 22:21; 22:25; 23:6; 22:27; Wis. Sol. 14:16, 22; 17:16; 2 Macc 4:22; 15:13; 3 Macc 6:30; 1 En 89.47. It should be noted that some of these not only indicate a chronologically consecutive event but also one that logically results from the preceding condition.

sometimes it can involve a lengthy period of time, as in Galatians 1:18 (“Then after three years”), or it can involve a very brief period of time, as in 1 Thess 4:16–17 (“the dead in Christ will rise first. Then (ἔπειτα) we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds”).¹¹ In any case, Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 15:23–26 gives every indication of a chronological timing of ordered events, not merely an order of precedence, priority, or logical sequence.¹²

To sum up, by using ἔπειτα...εἶτα, Paul describes three distinct phases of resurrection of all people by Christ, as this is the subject of the ordering (ἕκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι). The first phase was Christ’s resurrection (1 Cor 15:23); then (ἔπειτα) comes the second phase—“those who are Christ’s” (οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ), which will occur “at his coming (the parousia)” (ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ); then (εἶτα) comes the third phase at “the end” (τὸ τέλος)—presumably including those unsaved wicked dead who remain after the resurrection of those who belong to Christ. Given the normal use of ἔπειτα/εἶτα...ἔπειτα/εἶτα to indicate events separated by spans of time (whether lengthy or brief), it is certainly possible that Paul supposed a space of time between not only Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of the righteous but also between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked.

Even so, he does not indicate whether the anticipated period of time elapsed after the previous event and the event following εἶτα is a day, a year, ten years, a hundred years, a thousand years, or ten thousand years. In fact, we cannot prove that Paul himself was fully aware of the chronological details. Surely, he would not have suspected a gap of almost two millennia between the first phase—Christ’s resurrection—and the resurrection of those who are his at his parousia. Yet Paul’s language does leave wide open the possibility that an equally lengthy period of time could elapse between the second phase—the resurrection of the righteous at the parousia—and the third phase—the resurrection of the wicked at the end. But it must be clearly admitted that this text does not demand a lengthy period between the second and third phases. The use of ἔπειτα...εἶτα could accommodate both a long span of two thousand years between Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of the righteous and a short span of hours or days between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked. Therefore, based on the use of ἔπειτα...εἶτα alone, we cannot definitively argue conclusively for a millennial kingdom between the first and second

¹¹ In one case, where rank or order of importance seems to be in view, Paul uses the double ἔπειτα...ἔπειτα (1 Cor 12:28), though here the presence of earlier offices of apostles, prophets, and teachers separated by “first,” “second,” and “third,” suggests we cannot rule out the possibility that Paul had in mind an actual chronological order, not just order of precedence of authority. A similar logical rather than chronological use of the terms are found in Job 12:2; 24:20; Heb 7:2; 12:9; and Jas 3:17.

¹² Note: τάγματι (15:23)...ἔπειτα (15:23)...ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ (15:23)...εἶτα τὸ τέλος (15:24)...ὅταν (15:24)...ὅταν (15:24)...ἄχρι (15:25)...ἔσχατος (15:26)...ὅταν (15:28)...τότε (15:28). Gordon Fee summarily dismisses the idea that there could be a third event in the sequence without meaningful engagement with the use of ἔπειτα and εἶτα and by appealing to his previous assertion that Paul has only two stages of resurrection in mind, which begs the question. He writes, “Although the third item is prefaced with another ‘then,’ it is unlikely that Paul intends by this yet another event in the sequence begun by Christ’s resurrection. The ‘order’ of resurrections is only two: Christ the firstfruits; the full harvest of those who are his at his Parousia” (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 753). However, he does acknowledge that this has been “a matter of long debate” (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 753n36).

resurrections. Nevertheless, the text asserts some sort of chronological distinction between the two and certainly allows for a millennial kingdom if that can be established either elsewhere in Scripture or by further examination of this text.

But we must also consider that had the second εἶτα been missing, the text would almost certainly have disallowed a space of time between the resurrection of those who belong to Christ and the rest. Had Paul intended without ambiguity to communicate a simple two-stage resurrection—first Christ’s, then the rest of humanity at the parousia—he could easily have done so by omitting the phrase εἶτα τὸ τέλος. The text would have read: *But each in its own order: Christ the first fruits, then (ἔπειτα) at his coming those who belong to Christ [...] when (ὅταν) he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when (ὅταν) he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.*¹³ However, by including “then the end,” Paul at least distinguishes the resurrection of the righteous from the rest. Whether that distinction also involves a brief or lengthy period of time must be determined elsewhere.

A few lexical and exegetical considerations can help us move tentatively toward an answer to this question. The first is the likely meaning of τὸ τέλος, “the end.” Paul could simply be referring to “the end of the order of events” indicated by τάγματι (15:23)—that is, “then comes the end [of the process/sequence].” In that case, τὸ τέλος simply contrasts ἀπαρχή. Or the term τὸ τέλος could anticipate the content of the subsequent ὅταν clauses, which function exegetically to τὸ τέλος—“the end, [that is] when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24).¹⁴ In this case, τὸ τέλος is used in an eschatological sense, as in pop-theology references like “the end is near.” Related to this view, the article in τὸ τέλος could be indicating a well-known or technical term, signaling an established eschatological concept in the minds of Paul and his readers. The term τὸ τέλος does appear nineteen times in the New Testament. Coupled with ἀρχή, it is used as a title for deity and for Christ in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13, respectively. In the Olivet Discourse, it refers to the culmination of specific eschatological events (Matt 24:6, 14; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9), though in that context, the antecedent is probably the “end of the age (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)” about which the disciples had inquired (Matt 24:3). Peter uses it in its most absolute eschatological sense in reference to “the end of all things (πάντων...τὸ τέλος)” (1 Pet 4:7). Similarly, Paul uses the plural “the ends of the ages” to refer to the church’s penultimate place in the plan of God (1 Cor 10:11). In some cases, it simply means the end of a particular situation, circumstance, or event (Matt 26:58; 2 Cor 3:13) or the ultimate “destiny” of a person (2 Cor 11:15; Phil 3:19; Heb 6:8; 2 Pet 4:17). It can also mean the purpose, goal, or outcome of something (Jas 5:11; 1 Pet 1:9); in Romans 13:7, it refers to a revenue or tax. The Septuagint uses the term in an eschatological text only in Daniel 9:27, and

¹³ Godet rightly observes, “The εἶτα, *then*, does not allow us to identify the time of the τέλος, *the end*, with that of the Advent. Paul would have required to say in that sense τότε, *at that time*, and not εἶτα, *then* or *thereafter*. The εἶτα implies, in the mind of the apostle, a longer or shorter interval between the Advent and what he calls *the end*” (Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2: 357).

¹⁴ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 752.

in that case, it refers to the end of the period of the seven years (ἐν τῷ τέλει τῆς ἑβδομάδος). None of the writings of the apostolic fathers use τέλος with the article. Given these facts, it seems best to regard τὸ τέλος not as a technical concept but simply as Paul referring to the “the end” of the process of resurrection that began with Christ as the firstfruits (ἀπαρχή) and completing the series of events signaled with τάγμα. The entire context, might I remind us, is the resurrection; and the ordering described with τάγμα is the ordering of those resurrected.¹⁵

The next exegetical issue is to determine what will occur at the third phase of the resurrection indicated by τὸ τέλος. This is taught in the two ὅταν clauses immediately following τὸ τέλος, which indicate events concurrent with the end. It should be noted that the ὅταν clauses are not associated with the second phase of the resurrection—those who belong to Christ—which concurs with “his coming” (ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ) (1 Cor 15:23). Rather, subsequent to this, after an unspecific space of time, the end occurs and with it the following events transpire: when (ὅταν) Jesus hands over the kingdom to God the Father, and when (ὅταν) Jesus has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power (15:24).¹⁶

We have already shown that reading the two ὅταν clauses as concurring at the parousia and resurrection of those who are his is not allowed, because Paul inserts a subsequent εἶτα, thus creating a third stage in the process of resurrection. But we have also admitted that the current two-thousand-year gap between Christ’s resurrection and the second stage of those who are his at his coming does not necessarily demand a similarly long period of time between the second and third stages. Thus if an amillennial or postmillennial interpretation of this passage is to reckon responsibly with the presence of the subsequent εἶτα, the only alternative is to regard the gap between the second and third stages of resurrection—that is, between the righteous and the wicked—as one of mere moments, perhaps minutes or hours. But if there is no practical significance in the timing between the resurrection of the righteous and that of the wicked, then Paul’s second εἶτα seems unnecessary. This is further complicated by the fact that Paul asserted a gap without mentioning its purpose. It leaves the reader wondering why he even made a distinction in the first place.

¹⁵ Though essentially correct, the insistence that τὸ τέλος does not mean “the rest” with direct reference to the rest of the dead not raised at the resurrection of the righteous is beside the point, an *ignoratio elenchi* (see his discussion in Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1230; cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Harper & Row, 1968], 356; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], 271; Hill, “Paul’s Understanding,” 308; Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 207). In any case, appealing to “a huge mass of commentators” seems to me like a not-so-subtle *argumentum ad populum*. My own examination of the usage of the terms and their syntactical relationships suggests to me that the “huge mass of commentators” make a plausible case, but the alternative is not thereby ruled out. More nuance is needed in this matter.

¹⁶ Wallis reminds us that “the aorist subjunctive of the second *hotan* clause indicates that the destruction of Christ’s enemies is prior to the event of the first *hotan* clause, the delivering over of the Kingdom at the *telos*: the delivering over follows the subjugation” (Wallis, “The Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom,” 230). This is true, but it must be remembered that the condition described by the second ὅταν clause is the completion of the destruction of the enemies, which could conceivably occur very quickly immediately after the parousia or coterminous with it.

Understanding the two ὅταν clauses as referring to the period between the parousia and the end resolves the problem of having a gap of an indefinite period of time with no description or stated purpose. That is, if we propose an extended period of time between the parousia and the end rather than a brief period of time, then the two ὅταν clauses will most naturally be taken as indicating what transpired during that intervening period, thus supplying an explanation for Paul's inclusion of the subsequent εἶτα. However, if we disallow an extended period of time between the parousia and the end and affirm that, for all practical purposes, the two ὅταν clauses simply describe what had transpired between Christ's resurrection and the parousia, then we have no good explanation for why Paul added the εἶτα clause to distinguish it from the preceding event introduced by the ἔπειτα clause. If Paul intended to associate the ὅταν clauses with events that occur in conjunction with the parousia, he should have formally included them with the earlier ἔπειτα rather than with the subsequent εἶτα.

In light of these considerations, the better explanation that results in the least unresolved problems and unanswered question and best fits the form of the text, is that just as there is a lengthy period of time between Christ's resurrection and the parousia, there will also be a lengthy period of time between the parousia and the end. If so, then two events happen concurrent with the end, indicated by the two ὅταν clauses: (1) Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father, and (2) he has (previously) abolished every ruler and every authority and power (15:24).

Which kingdom is it that Christ hands over to the Father? In this reading, it would be the kingdom established by Christ at the parousia, which has been advancing progressively throughout the period between the parousia and the end. In the New Testament passages already examined, we have seen that the disciples anticipated a "restoration" of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Peter extended this same hope of a kingdom during the "times of restoration" of all things promised in the prophets at the coming of the Messiah from heaven (Acts 3:19–21). Paul advanced the same expectation of a repentance and salvation of "all Israel" in the future, after the gospel had done its full work among the Gentiles (Rom 11:25–27). Thus at Christ's parousia in the future, when those who belong to Christ (the righteous) are raised in their glorious bodies (1 Cor 15:23), the disciples who faithfully followed him will "sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28) and all who belong to Christ will fellowship with him in his kingdom (Luke 22:29). In fact, all believers who endure will "reign with him" (2 Tim 2:12). C. K. Barrett admits, "It would be possible to find room here (between the *parusia* [*sic*] and the end of all things) for the millennial kingdom which some Christian apocalypses predict (see Rev. xx. 6)... But it seems unthinkable that Paul, if he believed in such a kingdom, should pass over it without a word."¹⁷ But in this view, the "word" Barrett says is missing is, in fact, about thirty words in verses 24–25. If a span of time exists between the parousia and the end, then these verses describe precisely the kingdom Barrett thinks is missing!

¹⁷ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 356.

First Corinthians 15:25–26 makes the best sense when read in light of a future manifestation of the kingdom distinct from the present spiritual kingdom of the ascended Christ. In that future kingdom, “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet,” and “the last enemy to be destroyed is death.” The verb “to reign” (βασιλεύω), is used twenty times in the New Testament with reference to Christ. In Luke 1:33, the angel Gabriel informs Mary concerning Jesus, “The Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign (βασιλεύσει) over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom (τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ) there will be no end.” But when will this reign take place? The construction, δεῖ...αὐτὸν βασιλεύειν (“it is necessary for him to rule”), uses a present active infinitive as complement to δεῖ. Such a construction can be used in reference to something that will happen in the future from the perspective of the speaker or writer, as in Acts 9:6: “But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do (δεῖ ποιεῖν).” It can also refer to something that is already ongoing at the time of the speaker or writer, as in John 9:4, “We must work (δεῖ ἐργάζεσθαι) the works of him who sent me while it is day,” or Acts 19:16, “I myself will show him how much he must suffer (δεῖ...παθεῖν) for the sake of my name.” Whether the δεῖ phrase refers to a present or future condition cannot be determined by the use of the present or aorist infinitive complement; it must be determined by context. For example, in both cases in which δεῖ + a present infinitive refers to future events, this is clear by the use of future verbs: “you will be told (λαληθήσεται)” (Acts 9:6) and “I will show (ὑποδείξω)” (19:16). Though the more common way of expressing a yet-unrealized future necessity is δεῖ + an aorist infinitive complement, that can also refer to a circumstance that is a present reality, as in Acts 3:21: “who must remain in heaven (δεῖ οὐρααν...δέξασθαι) until the time of universal restoration.” In that case, Jesus was already present in heaven, which had to continue until a future time.

Returning to the phrase in 1 Corinthians 15:25, we have no clear language in the context to determine definitively whether Paul had in mind a future reign or a present reign, or even a present heavenly reign that becomes a future earthly reign. Any of the following interpretations fit the grammar and syntax:

1. “It is necessary for him to reign [now] until...”¹⁸
2. “It is necessary for him to reign [both now and in the future] until...”
3. “It is necessary for him to reign [in the future] until...”

So, again, Paul’s language allows for a lengthy span of time between the parousia and the end, in which a future kingdom is established that will result in the ultimate defeat of all enemies, including death (a premillennial view); but it also allows for a brief gap of time between the parousia and the end, in which all the enemies of Christ are vanquished in judgment (an amillennial or postmillennial view).¹⁹ Some may appeal to 1 Corinthians 15:54–55 as proof that

¹⁸ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 755.

¹⁹ This is the best alternative in the amillennial or postmillennial interpretations if the ἔπειτα...εἶτα construction is taken seriously. One may conclude that a brief span of time between the parousia and the End is a time during which

Paul had in mind only one event of resurrection concurrent with the resurrection of the saints at the parousia in which death is defeated—that is, swallowed up in victory. But in that place, Paul has only the resurrection of believers in mind, and the language of victory over death is applied only to them. This would fit comfortably with a view that, for the saints, death is defeated by life at the parousia, while death for the unbelievers is defeated in another sense in their eternal judgment at the end. One could also argue that Paul’s statement that mortal “flesh and blood” cannot inherit the “kingdom of God” in 15:50 means that the kingdom of God cannot begin until the parousia, when Jesus raises the saints with immortal bodies (15:51–52). But this also goes too far, because Paul could easily have had in mind an already-existing heavenly kingdom that will transition to an earthly eternal kingdom at the parousia, not necessarily to an intermediate kingdom between the parousia and a distant end. In short, only if we already know what Paul meant by “the kingdom” in 1 Corinthians 15:24 and whether he held to an earthly establishment of that kingdom prior to the final defeat of all enemies can we be certain whether this passage asserts a premillennial eschatology.

Though we cannot achieve certainty, we can make a case that tips the scale in the direction of a premillennial understanding of the text. But even this will include a both/and picture of the reign of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15 in connection with a view of the progressive spread of the kingdom of God throughout the earth after the parousia in keeping with the Old Testament promises and the theme of the gradual edenification of creation. In this text, Paul alludes to particular Old Testament passages treated elsewhere in the New Testament with eschatological import. In 1 Corinthians 15:25–26, he says it is necessary for Christ to reign “until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” Then, in verse 27, he explains, “For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’” In light of how the New Testament itself treats these passages in reference to the present and future aspects of Christ’s kingdom, a both/and approach makes the best sense.

The phrase “until he has put all his enemies under his feet (θῆ πάντας τοὺς ἐχθρούς ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ)” in verse 25 is drawn from Psalm 110:1 where the Lord promises the Davidic king, “Be seated at my right side until I set your enemies as a footstool for your feet (κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου)” (Ps 109:1 LXX). In the Synoptics, Jesus interpreted Psalm 110:1 messianically, as applied indirectly to himself (Mark 12:36), and he associated it with the vision of the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13, when he said, “From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven”

Christ “has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power”—that is, the final judgment on the wicked following the resurrection of the righteous. This approach is far superior to that of many modern commentators who simply collapse the ἔπειτα and εἶτα into one single event without distinction. However, the problem with such an approach that allows for an amillennial or postmillennial eschatology and takes the language seriously, is that it results in something like a pre-wrath or pretribulation resurrection and rapture of the church in the context of a non-premillennial eschatology, a view highly distasteful to many. Vos notes, “Of course, a brief interval in logical conception at least, must be assumed: ‘τὸ τέλος’ comes, speaking in terms of strict chronology, after the rising of οἱ τοῦ χριστοῦ” (Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 243).

(Matt 26:64; cf. Mark 14:62). Luke’s version omits the quotation from Daniel 7:13, possibly suggesting Matthew and Mark both envisioned two events: the enthronement of the Messiah at the right hand of God (Ps 110:1) and a later coming of the Son of Man on the clouds (Dan 7:13). This is consistent with the post-ascension portrayal in Acts 2:33–36: “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”’”

Thus Christ is portrayed as already sitting at the right hand, where he will remain until God makes the enemies of the Messiah his footstool—a condition that will be met at some later, unspecified time. Peter reiterates this view in his testimony before the council of leaders of Israel: “God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). In Stephen’s vision, too, Jesus is seen enthroned at the right hand of God: “[Stephen] gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” (Acts 7:55–56). Paul affirms that in his present session, Christ is “also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Rom 8:34), and that “God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come” (Eph 1:20–21; cf. Col 3:1).

Ephesians 1:20–21 is significant for two reasons. First, it implies an already/not-yet aspect to the exaltation of Christ to the Father’s right hand, where he is enthroned over all authority and all power, “not only in this age but also in the age to come (οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι) (Eph 1:21). Second, in 1:22, this image is also connected to God having placed all things under Jesus’ feet: “And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church”—a quotation of Psalm 8:7. This is the same passage Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 15:25, 27. This implies that Paul saw at least some aspect of Christ’s present enthronement after his resurrection and prior to the parousia as his reign.

Yet things get a little complicated when we look at other places where Psalm 8:7 and Christ’s exaltation above all powers are discussed. In Hebrews 2, the author contrasts the authority of angels to that of humanity in general, apparently in reference to their purpose of exercising dominion as those created according to the image of God: “What is man, that you remember him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a short time lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor; you subjected all things under his feet” (Heb 2:6–8 LEB). The original context of Psalm 8:5–7 has no direct christological referent; the psalmist is marveling at the high position humanity has in the created order, which is why the NRSV translates Hebrews 2:6–8 as “humanity” and uses a plural pronoun in reference to people, switching to the third-person singular when the general promise of exercising dominion shifts from humanity to Jesus as the representative human (Heb 2:9; cf. NIV).

Hebrews 2:6–8 follows the meaning of Psalm 8:5–7 with reference to “humanity” in general, turning attention to Jesus as the forerunner who is already exalted over all things, though not all things are yet subjected to him. Hebrews 2:8 says, “For in subjecting all things, he left nothing that was not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.” That is, all things in creation—including animals, birds, and fish (cf. Ps 8:7–8)—have been rightfully placed under the dominion of humanity when God created them in his image and likeness. Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, ‘Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’” Psalm 8:7 reflects imagery from Genesis 1:26 when it says, “You have given them dominion (תמשילוהו) over the works of your hands, you have put all things under their feet.”

Though humanity has been given this authority and dominion over all things, that dominion is not fully realized in the world today: “Now (νῦν) we do not yet see all things subjected to him” (Heb 2:8 NASB). That is, in the present, the *imago Dei* mandate by which humanity will fully rule over all creation has not been manifested in this world; God’s will has not yet been done on earth as it is in heaven. However, in heaven the situation is different. The very “image of God” incarnate—Jesus Christ, the second Adam—is exalted on high with authority over all creation. The author of Hebrews writes, “But we see Jesus, for a short time made lower than the angels, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor” (Heb 2:9 LEB). This language asserts a fully received—but not-yet-manifested—authority over all creation in the person of Christ, but it anticipates a time when all creation will be subdued by Christ and the *imago Dei* mandate fully realized in “the world to come (τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν)” (Heb 2:5). The NET Bible note for Hebrews 2:5 says, “The phrase *the world to come* means ‘the coming inhabited earth,’ using the Greek term which describes the world of people and their civilizations.”²⁰ That foresees an earthly reign that will follow the present heavenly reign.

Thus while the world is already subjected by decree and by rights to humanity, and this subjection will be fully realized in “the world to come,” at the present time, Christ alone is in the position of absolute authority over all creation because of his glorification and exaltation to the right hand of God. In the future, when Christ returns and resurrects those who belong to him, then will that glorified portion of humanity also be exalted to a position of authority over all things with Christ. At that time, they will be able to take up the dominion by which they will subject all things in creation, consistent with their decreed right as humans created according to the image of God. This seems to be the idea behind Philippians 3:20–21, which also alludes to Psalm 8:7: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.” This tension, too, makes

²⁰ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible: Full Notes Edition*, 2d ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019).

sense of Paul’s language in Ephesians 1:21: “not only in this age but also in the age to come (ὁ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι).”

In sum, all authority has been decreed and promised to all humanity in the original *imago Dei* mandate (Gen 1:26). This should have been progressively realized throughout all creation through Adam and Eve and their descendants, as they should have extended the conditions of paradise throughout the earth, gradually subduing and exercising authority over all things. However, their fall placed them in a position of exile and failure to realize this mandate, which nevertheless continued to be theirs by right and responsibility. With the coming of Christ, the second Adam and image of God par excellence, this right and responsibility has been restored to humanity. With his unique resurrection, glorification, and exaltation, the full manifestation of the *imago Dei* is presently realized in Christ alone in the heavenly realm and partially in his redeemed people; yet it will be fully manifested and realized in the earthly realm in the future. That future full realization of the right and responsibility of humanity awaits the parousia, when Christ will resurrect those who are his and begin a process of complete restoration and progressive edenification of the world. That process will eventually culminate in the full manifestation of the subjection of all creation to glorified humanity and the utter banishment of sin, suffering, death, and devil.

Returning to the question of the identification of “the kingdom” in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, it seems best to see the language of verse 24—“for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet”—not only as a reference to his present enthronement as a partial realization of this promise in a spiritual sense in heaven but also with a view toward a future fulfillment of the expectation in a physical sense in this world. Thus the end must come many generations after the parousia. Though Paul does not specify how lengthy the span of time will be between the parousia and the end, it must be enough time to allow for resurrected humanity to liberate all creation progressively from its bondage to corruption described in Romans 8:19–23, which is contrasted with the “present time” (8:18) and associated directly with time of our resurrection (8:23). The process of subduing all creation and terraforming the world will take centuries, not decades, but Paul does not specify exactly how long; in fact, it is possible that at the time he himself did not know. Nevertheless, the time between the parousia and the end will need to be sufficiently long so that at the end, Christ, along with his resurrected co-regents, will have edenified all creation, subdued all enemies, destroyed all forms of death, and handed over that new, paradise-infused creation to the Father as a *fait accompli*. I do not take the phrase “when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Cor 15:24) as indicating that the eternal kingdom comes to an end. Rather, it signals that the responsibility given to humanity to edenify creation will be fulfilled; the Son will offer up creation to the Father as a “mission accomplished”—just as all things had been handed over to the Son by the Father (Matt 11:27).

Though the language of 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 could plausibly be read in keeping with amillennial, postmillennial, or premillennial eschatologies, the amillennial and postmillennial interpretations leave Paul’s purpose in supplying the subsequent εἴτα clause without a good explanation from the text. That is, there is no reason for Paul to have included a second “then”

unless he intended for the language of victory over all enemies including death, in verses 24–26 to explain the events accomplished between the parousia and the end, during the course of the future, earthly manifestation of the coming kingdom following Christ’s return. This reading, too, is in keeping with the original *imago Dei* mandate, the picture of the coming kingdom in the Old Testament, and the reiterations of those promises of restoration in the coming age seen in the New Testament. Therefore, the premillennial interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, though not provable from that passage, is preferable simply because it makes the most sense of the εἶτα clause and its concurrent ὅταν clauses. This interpretation also alleges that Paul affirmed a present, heavenly, spiritual aspect of the kingdom embodied in Christ, which would become manifested in the world at the parousia and realized throughout the world by means of the new humanity resurrected and glorified in him.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 16

Who, What, When, and How of Revelation: Pre-interpretive Issues

Just as we set forth interpretive questions regarding prophetic and apocalyptic materials in the Old Testament prior to surveying the prophets' picture of the coming kingdom (see Go Deeper Excursus 10), we must do the same for the Book of Revelation. While I will briefly indicate my own view regarding date and authorship, of concern is the nature of the book of Revelation itself as a faithful report of revelatory visions and prophecies.

While most New Testament scholars date Revelation in the 90s, some offer an earlier date before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.¹ The evidence from the book itself seems to bifurcate, leading some to attribute the problem to later revisions of older material composed throughout the first century.² At present, I do not see any reason to challenge the most ancient testimony of the earliest Christians of the second century or the consensus of modern scholarship regarding the later date of Revelation. The first testimony concerning the book of Revelation asserted that John, the son of Zebedee, was its author. Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John, affirms that "John, in the Apocalypse, indicated to the Lord's disciples what shall happen in the last times" (*Haer.* 5.26.1; cf. 4.14.2; 4.17.6).³ However, throughout the history of biblical studies, this has not gone without challenge.⁴

¹ A comprehensive and accessible work arguing for the early date of Revelation is Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). His conclusion dating Revelation prior to AD 70 is part of a larger debate regarding the preterist and non-preterist interpretations of Revelation.

² David Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John D. W. Watts, and Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), cxxi.

³ This John was "the Lord's disciple," the one who leaned upon Jesus at the last supper (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.11). Irenaeus elsewhere implies he even had personal contact with people who had known the author. On a disagreement over an alternate reading of the number 666, he writes, "this number [666] being found in all the most approved and ancient copies [of the Apocalypse], and those men who saw John face to face bearing their testimony [to it]" (*Haer.* 5.30.1).

⁴ The three most commonly-held views regarding authorship for the Book of Revelation are 1) The Apostle John, the disciple of Jesus; 2) another John (John the elder, John the prophet, or John Mark); or 3) a pseudonym for John

Unless one uses the date and authorship question to challenge the book's canonicity and status as inspired Scripture, certainty on these matters is not necessary for exegeting Revelation 19–21. Nevertheless, it is my own view that the Fourth Gospel, the three Johannine epistles, and Revelation were all written by John, a disciple of Jesus. Although there is a noticeable divergence in grammar and syntax between the Gospels and Revelation, the difference does not necessarily indicate a difference in authorship if one defines “authorship” in a loose sense.⁵ The Apocalypse itself addresses the book to the “seven churches of Asia.”⁶ However, the book also indicates that a broader audience was always intended (Rev 1:1; 2:7; 22:7). And the fragment of the late-first-century canon discovered and published by Muratori in the eighteenth-century states, “For John too in the Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, yet speaks to all.”⁷

Having set forth my presuppositions regarding the date and authorship, I must acknowledge my belief in the book's nature as supernatural revelation of things to come. Scholars who do not share this view of the inspiration and authority of Revelation—and the resulting position that its teachings can be expected to harmonize with those of other inspired texts—are forced to seek the meaning of the Apocalypse only in human sources attainable by human means. They must also assume the author had a specific intended meaning that he communicated to his audience, that is, the theology of the book is limited to the theology of the author(s). He cannot, in that view, speak better than he knew. However, if one holds to a divine origin of the content of Revelation, the possibility exists of a meaning that transcends the author and his available sources. Such a view would allow for the prospect that not even the author fully understood the message he received and transmitted to his audience.

I maintain that a discussion of the nature of the visionary experience of the author of Revelation is both important for and preliminary to answering the question of the meaning of Revelation 3:14d. Therefore, I will attempt to sort through some of the issues regarding the nature of Revelation and will defend the perspective of this thesis.

Views on the Nature of the Book of Revelation

Depending on a person's presuppositions regarding supernaturalism and the Bible, one's position on the nature of John's visions falls along a spectrum. Among approaches to Revelation, I describe

the Apostle by an anonymous author (see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990], 932–47).

⁵ Scholars acknowledge the use of amanuenses as a common practice in the ancient Greco-Roman world (E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, WUNT, ed. Martin Hengel and Otfried Hofius, 2 Reihe, vol. 42 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991], 14–67).

⁶ Guthrie notes, “The messages [of Revelation 2–3] are so definitely linked to the historical circumstances that it is impossible to suppose that John did not intend each church to take special note of its own message” (Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 965).

⁷ Translation from Henry Melvill Gwatkin, *Selections from Early Writers Illustrative of Church History to the Time of Constantine* (London: Macmillan, 1897), 83–89.

four basic options involving three elements: form, content, and doctrine.⁸ Each of these three elements has been attributed by commentators to sources either human or divine. The following chart is a summary of these four views.⁹

	HUMAN Work	HUMAN-Divine Work	DIVINE-Human Work	DIVINE Work
FORM	Human	Human	Human	Divine
CONTENT	Human	Human	Divine	Divine
DOCTRINE	Human	Divine	Divine	Divine

Revelation as a Human Work. This view sees Revelation as strictly human with natural sources for its form, content, and doctrine.¹⁰ As such, where Revelation purports to be prophecy, it is actually history or wild speculation; where it “records” visions, the author actually composes or incorporates sources in an altered guise. The theology may be significant to the author, but it need not be true.

Revelation as a Human-Divine Work. The second view recognizes that God “inspired” the underlying theology and message of the book and perhaps even delivered some kind of supernatural vision(s) or dream(s). However, the author presented the revelations in their written form only after running them through a process of interpretation, reflection, and formatting that he felt best communicated this theology to his readers.¹¹ Farrer writes, “Spiritual experiences . . .

⁸ *Form* includes the structure and organization of the material; *content*, the selection, sources, and allusions of the material; and *doctrine*, the theological assertions underlying the Apocalypse.

⁹ Mulholland gives two opposing approaches to Revelation: “On the one hand are those who believe that the author really did receive a visionary revelation from God, which was recorded in exact detail. On the other hand are those who believe that Revelation is a human product only” (M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Revelation: Holy Living in an Unholy World*, Francis Asbury Press Commentary, ed. M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. [Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury, 1990], 13). Although this is true when one approaches the Apocalypse from the perspective of worldview (supernaturalist vs. non-supernaturalist), there is a variety of approaches within the supernaturalist position itself which Mulholland overlooks.

¹⁰ All non-supernaturalist scholars would hold this view, as the others require *some* element of divine inspiration. Although his own views on supernaturalism are unclear, Northrop Frye approaches an understanding that is somewhat typical of such scholars. He writes, “What the seer in Patmos had a vision of was primarily, as he conceived it, the true meaning of the Scriptures, and his dragons and horsemen and dissolving cosmos were what he saw in Ezekiel and Zechariah, whatever or however he saw on Patmos” (Northrop Frye, “Typology: Apocalypse,” in *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Modern Critical Interpretations, ed. Harold Bloom [New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988], 69). One can, of course, hold to supernaturalism and divine inspiration of Scripture, yet still deny that Revelation itself is to be counted among the supernatural or inspired.

¹¹ Some advocates of this view are R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1920), cvi-cvii, and John Sweet, who writes, “The ancient notion of a prophet as a mouthpiece for revelations from outside himself, a pen moved by the Holy Spirit, has given way for us to less mechanical, more personal, ideas of inspiration” (John Sweet, *Revelation*, TPI New Testament Commentaries [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990], 42). Also see Jürgen Roloff, *Die Offenbarung des*

are very real to those who receive them, but private in their nature and, in their pristine form, incommunicable. If a man is not only touched by divine realities . . . he will be obliged to translate them into symbols of common currency. So let the imaginative and intellectual complexity be the work of St. John's mind; the 'seeings' and 'hearings' which they are employed to interpret may be none the less genuine."¹²

Revelation as a Divine-Human Work. Emphasizing the divine elements while allowing for freedom in the author's organization and presentation of the material, this view allows not only for linguistic and literary liberty but also for freedom in the form of the material. However, the content of the visions is divine, and the theology is therefore infallible.¹³ By way of parallel, just as the canonical Gospels are editorialized versions of actual historical events, the author of the book of Revelation determined to a significant degree the form while faithfully relaying the content and theology of the visions.

Revelation as a Divine Work. This final position regards Revelation as a strictly divine work, understanding form, content, and doctrine as all sourced in God and communicated to John by supernatural revelation in visions that the prophet saw and heard.¹⁴ These visions were written in the order he received them. Creative liberty of the author extends only to the prologue and epilogue and perhaps to various explanatory comments throughout the work. The author also had some freedom of vocabulary and grammar, although he attempted to portray accurately what he experienced.¹⁵ Mounce thus writes that "the descriptions themselves are not John's creative attempt to portray eschatological truth in apocalyptic terminology but the faithful transmission of what he actually saw in authentic vision (1:11). If what he wrote was a product of his own literary genius, we would have to ask in what form the visions themselves were communicated to him."¹⁶

Although the last three views fall within the broader camp of evangelicalism, the last two positions are perhaps the most common among conservative evangelicals. The human-divine view is held mostly by scholars who see inspiration as the production of a document infallible only in areas of faith and practice. For those who assume an anti-supernatural worldview, the first view remains the only alternative. A Christian supernaturalist who holds to the canonicity of Revelation

Johannes, Zürcher Bibelkommentare NT, ed. Hans Heinrich Schmid and Siegfried Schulz, vol. 18 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984).

¹² Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1964), 24.

¹³ G. K. Beale would be a representative of this view (*The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 80–81).

¹⁴ Examples of this position would be George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1–7, An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 19; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966).

¹⁵ A fifth combination of the elements is theoretically possible: divine form, human content, and divine teaching. But while it is possible for God to communicate to the prophet the content of the vision and allow for the author to organize and present it with literary freedom, it seems far-fetched that the structure would be revealed without the content.

¹⁶ Mounce, *Revelation*, 30.

must hold to some divine element in the nature of the book.

For my part, I have long accepted as an article of the classic Christian faith the supernatural origin of the doctrine and content of Revelation. John actually saw and heard what he claims to have saw and heard. This is the view held by the earliest Christian recipients of Revelation. Around the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr, one of the teachers of Irenaeus of Lyons, wrote, “There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him” (*Dial.* 81).

Arguments for the Apocalypse as a Record of Prophetic Visions

As already stated in chapter 1 of *The Fathers on the Future*, I am writing from a classic Irenaean position that the book of Revelation is inspired by God and authoritative, reflecting the classic Christian view of inspiration.¹⁷ Thus, I believe various sections of the Apocalypse fall among the three supernaturalist views of human and divine contribution. For example, the epilogue and prologue are primarily human-divine works, much like the New Testament epistolary genre they emulate. Other sections reflect divine-human work in that John apparently selects which elements of the visions to present and interpret. However, it seems evident that some parts of Revelation, including the seven messages of chapters 2–3, are best viewed as somewhere between divine-human work and divine work—straightforward reports of what the author actual heard and then wrote down.¹⁸

Thus, John received visions while on the Isle of Patmos (Rev 1:9). During the course of the visions, he likely took some written notes of what he saw and heard (Rev 1:11, 19; 2:1; 10:4; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). Then, when the visions were complete, John would have recorded them more fully. In the process of writing down the visions, John would have then added an introductory prologue (1:1–8) and an epilogue (22:18–21), which function somewhat like a “transmittal letter.” Revelation

¹⁷ See 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20–21. As demonstrated from the chart of the four positions regarding the Revelation, a supernaturalist Christian perspective actually affords the scholar with a wider range of options in approaching the text, whereas a purely critical and non-supernaturalist scholar is limited to only one explanation for the material. In reality, even the supernaturalist can hold to any of the options if he or she rejects the inspiration and canonicity of Revelation.

¹⁸ Thus, I concur with Mounce, who writes, “The position of this commentary is that the descriptions themselves are not John’s creative attempt to portray eschatological truth in apocalyptic terminology but the faithful transmission of what he actually saw in authentic vision” (*Revelation*, 30). It must be stated that while my own position is held in stark opposition to a view that holds Revelation to be a purely human work, it is only in opposition to the view that Revelation *as a whole* is a human-divine work. It is readily acknowledged that the John of the Gospels seems to be rather loose in his report of dominical sayings and that such a style would be expected to appear in the Apocalypse if the two share a common author. However, nowhere in the Gospel does John purport to record dictated letters as we find in Revelation 2–3. In the case of the Apocalypse, John is clearly instructed by the risen Lord to “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches” (1:11). For a discussion on divine dictation of prophecy as it relates to inspiration, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, unabridged one-volume ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 219.

1:9–22:17 would then present the visions in John’s own descriptive words more or less in the order he received them. If John made at least one organizing revision of the material, it would have been at this time that he inserted interpretive or reflective comments to better orient his recipients. There are several reasons why this reconstruction of the composition of the Apocalypse is adopted here. The rest of this section will briefly examine these in turn.

John Claims the Revelation is from God. The opening verse of the book makes this clear: “The revelation (ἀποκάλυψις) of Jesus Christ, which God gave him (ἦν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός) to show his servants what must soon take place, and he made it known (ἔσήμανεν) by sending his angel to his servant John” (Rev 1:1). G. K. Beale points out that the term ἀποκάλυψις is a “direct allusion to Daniel 2, where the word is used of the prophetic revelation communicated from God to the prophet Daniel.”¹⁹ It can hardly be contested that John intended that his book be received as a revelation from God in visionary form. The language of Revelation 1:1 and 22:6, 8 argues against the notion that John wove revealed spiritual truths in the language of apocalyptic visions, as though God revealed the kernel and John wrapped it in its hull. The term σημαίνω in Revelation 1:1 is also relevant here. Beale suggests the “symbolic use of σημαίνω in Daniel 2 defines the use in Rev. 1:1 as referring to symbolic communication and not mere general conveyance of information.... The allusion to Dan. 2:28–30, 45 indicates that a symbolic vision and its interpretation is going to be part of the warp and woof of the means of communication throughout Revelation.”²⁰

Next, in Revelation 1:2 the author writes that he “testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw (εἶδεν),” intimating a personal experience he intended to faithfully report. The author uses the word εἶδον (“I see”) in the first person aorist forty-five times throughout Revelation. Likewise, he uses the first person of ἤκουσα (“I heard”) twenty-seven times. Thus, John consistently and repeatedly claims that he actually “saw” and “heard” the things described in Revelation. John asserts unequivocally that after Jesus gave the vision to John he “testified (ἐμαρτύρησεν) to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ.” John’s use of μαρτυρέω should not be taken lightly. This statement is *prima facie* evidence that John intended his message to be accepted as a trustworthy record of things he actually saw rather than the creative packaging of spiritual truths. He reckons himself a witness of “all that he saw (ὅσα εἶδεν).” If, in fact, he saw nothing, or if he mixed experience with creative repackaging, he condemns himself as a false witness.²¹

Thus, Revelation 1:1–3 seems a rather clear assertion of the author’s receipt of symbolic visions

¹⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 37.

²⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 51.

²¹ A possible difference between the use of these terms in the Gospel of John and the Revelation must be acknowledged. I am not alleging *ipsissima verba* in either work, but *ipsissima vox* in varying degrees. However, in both cases the accounts are based on actual historical events. On the one hand, the Gospel is based on events from the life and teachings of Christ; on the other, the Revelation is based on actual visionary experiences of the author. Yet the latter is unique in that the visions and messages were given to the author with explicit instructions to “write” what he saw and heard, and the writing was presumably much closer to—and in some instances in the course of—the events (Rev 10:4). Thus, allowing for its historicity, a narrower *ipsissima vox* would be expected in the Apocalypse than the Gospel of John.

from heaven. The complexity of the process of Revelation 1:1–3 is similar to the process of visionary revelation described by Daniel and other Old Testament reporters of apocalyptic visions. Given the author’s insistence on truth, there is good reason for a supernaturalist to accept John’s introductory claim. The visions in Revelation were not composed *ad hoc*, compiled from previous sources, or reported in a loose and paraphrastic manner. Rather, they were actual experiences of the author reported faithfully.

Distinct Styles in Revelation. Vern Poythress has shown by the distinctive uses of intersentence conjunctions that Revelation 1:1–8 and 22:18–21 use these conjunctions in a similar way as other sections of expository discourse in the Gospel and Epistles of John. In sections that Poythress calls “visionary narrative,” the use of these conjunctions differ from John’s normal style, but it is consistent within the “visionary narrative” unit from 1:9 to 22:17. Poythress writes, “To a degree, it is reminiscent of Hebrew narrative. And it tends to reinforce the impression that the scenes were simply imposed on John, one after the other, with no control on his part.... It is likely, then, that the author wanted to create a unique discourse style in this visionary material. To do so, he followed or invented a different sort of pattern than was customary for him in writing narrative.”²² Based on Poythress’s study, Robert Thomas suggests John “became more a product of his prophetic state than while writing his other NT books.”²³

Besides these stylistic considerations, linguistic features also differ greatly between certain sections of the Apocalypse, differences that seem to move beyond merely those affected by content. In her unique commentary on Revelation, J. Massyngberde Ford has demonstrated “a significant linguistic difference between Rev 1–3 and the three Christian verses of ch. 22, and chs. 4–22.”²⁴ While these linguistic differences could be attributed to different authorship or content (as Ford alleges), this type of inconsistency could also be expected if a single author experienced visions that he then attempted to report as accurately as possible. The introduction in chapter 1 would reflect a style and vocabulary closer to the author’s own than the dictated messages of 2–3. While not conclusive, this evidence is at least corroborative to the position John actually experienced visions for which the doctrine and content were of a heavenly origin while he exercised some freedom in the form and expression of the material.

Continuity with Old Testament and Discontinuity with Apocryphal Apocalyptic. If the Apocalypse is a strictly human composition relying on human sources, then we would expect the work to be in close continuity with its contemporary works of the same genre. However, if it is a

²² Vern S. Poythress, “Johannine Authorship and the Use of Intersentence Conjunctions in the Book of Revelation,” *WTJ* 47 (1985): 332.

²³ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 19.

²⁴ Josephine Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 43–46. The “Christian verses” to which she refers are 22:16a, 20b and 21 (Ford, *Revelation*, 39). At the time of the writing of her commentary, Ford believed that part of the Book of Revelation was a composition by John the Baptist (chapters 4–11), another was written later by a disciple of John the Baptist (12–22), and then the introduction, letters to the churches, and a few verses were added later by a disciple of John the Baptist who converted to Christianity (1–3; 22:16b, 20b, 21).

supernatural revelation of symbolic visions which the author experienced and reported faithfully, as his testimony indicates, we would expect some discontinuity with apocryphal apocalypses and continuity with canonical apocalypse.

Regarding the similarities between apocryphal apocalyptic writings and our own Apocalypse, Swete writes:

Here it is enough to say that while they [parallels with contemporary apocalyptic writings] shew [*sic*] the writer of the Christian Apocalypse to have been familiar with the apocalyptic ideas of his age, they afford little or no clear evidence of his dependence on Jewish sources other than the books of the Old Testament. Certainly he does not use these sources with anything like the distinctness with which he refers to Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel.... The most that can be safely affirmed is that he shared with the Jewish apocalyptists the stock of apocalyptic imagery and mystical and eschatological thought which was the common property of an age nurtured in the Old Testament and hard pressed by the troubles and dangers of the times.²⁵

Robert Thomas notes that as an apocalypse Revelation “differs distinctly from everything else in this class.”²⁶ The nineteenth century German New Testament scholar, Theodor Zahn, has noted that the Book of Revelation is “a continuation of the writings of the O.T. prophets.”²⁷ At the same time he remarks that “common sense and an uncorrupted taste rebel at placing in the same literary group [apocalyptic] the Revelation of John, although it be the one from which the group has been named.”²⁸

Is John’s Apocalypse more akin to Old Testament canonical, intertestamental, or Christian apocalypses? There are a variety of approaches to this subject.²⁹ In my study of the major non-canonical Jewish and Christian apocalypses, I have discovered a number of features that appear to set Revelation apart from the others within that “genre.”³⁰ The non-canonical apocalyptic and prophetic writings of early Christianity are unlike the New Testament Apocalypse of John in many important respects.

²⁵ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1911), clvii.

²⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 25.

²⁷ Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol 3, trans. John Moore Trout, et al. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1909), 385.

²⁸ Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 3:387.

²⁹ See Donald Guthrie, *The Relevance of John’s Apocalypse*, The Didsbury Lectures (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 19.

³⁰ The translation of Jewish apocalypses used in this survey was that of James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983). For a translation of Christian apocalypses was that of Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, *Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, trans. by R. McL. Wilson, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 542–752.

Whereas the Jewish and Christian apocryphal apocalypses attempt to gain credibility through pseudonymity,³¹ the author of the Book of Revelation simply identifies himself as “I, John, your brother who share with you the persecution and the kingdom and the endurance in Jesus” (Rev 1:9). As stated earlier, the testimony of the early church with regard to Johannine authorship is strong.

The presentation of the visions themselves also marks a difference. Some of the non-canonical apocalyptic/prophetic writings are strictly prophetic in form. Rather than presenting symbolic visions, they purport to set out in straightforward language the coming events of the end times, and these are often composed as “history in future-form.”³² When those apocryphal writings do present visions, most of the time the symbols are followed immediately by an interpretation by an *angelus interpres*, sometimes by question and answer between the prophet and the angel.³³ In contrast, the Book of Revelation records a large number of symbolic visions recorded by John but left uninterpreted.³⁴ When certain elements of the visions are finally interpreted, even those are cryptic, leaving the readers without a precise understanding (Rev 17:7–18). In apocryphal writings the visions either purport to be non-symbolic,³⁵ or the symbols are interpreted in clear language.³⁶ The reader of these non-canonical apocalypses is left with virtually no questions regarding the meaning of the supposed revelation.

Based on these contrasts, I conclude that the authors of the apocryphal apocalypses began with *doctrine* and *content* they wanted to promote in an authoritative and compelling way, which they therefore encapsulated in the apocalyptic *form* to accomplish their goal. Comprehension of the message in their details was essential. However, the author of the Book of Revelation does the opposite. The reader is left with a wide range of unexplained visions that have received a plethora of interpretations throughout history, few with an enduring consensus. In this light, the view that John accurately reported what he saw and heard gains credibility. While apocryphal writers began with an idea they dressed in vision, John began with a vision, often stopping short of interpretation.

³¹ E.g. Isaiah, Peter, Paul, Ezra, Elijah, Mary, and Thomas. Only a few authors of apocalypses are of less repute, such as the Sibyl and Elchasai (cf. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 542–752).

³² Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 547. See Book 12 of *Sibylline Oracles*, which reports historical events in prophetic form similar to Dan 11 of the Old Testament, though more extensively and with greater detail.

³³ See 1 En. 18.14–16; 21.10; 22.3–13; 23.1–4; 32.5–6; 2 En. 10.4–5; 18.2–5; 5 Ezra 2.42–47; 6 Ezra 15.28–16.1; Ascension of Isaiah 7–11; Apocalypse of Peter 11–13; 19; 21–23.

³⁴ Just a sampling of elements in the Book of Revelation that are simply reported by the author are the hidden manna and white stone (2:17), the twenty-four elders (4:4); the four living creatures (4:5–8); the riders on the horses (6:1–8); the “little book” (10:2), the “woman” (12:1), the two beasts (13), and the harlot (17:3). Mounce points out one difference between Revelation and other apocalyptic works as “its practice of simply narrating visions and leaving the interpretive task to the reader instead of supplying a heavenly tutor (17:7ff. and a few other passages are exceptions)” (Mounce, *Revelation*, 7).

³⁵ For example, Paul’s alleged journey to the third heaven includes a tour of the destination of the righteous souls as well as the wicked (see Apoc. Paul). The writer appears to present the vision as Paul seeing the way the heavenly realm actually is rather than a symbolic representation of it. Nevertheless, the interpreting angel serves as a tour guide in answering Paul’s questions about the significance of various elements and events in the vision. Cf. the detailed cosmological descriptions in 2 En. 5–6; 12–13.

³⁶ 6 Ezra, 2.42–47.

In light of these considerations, some recent scholars have moved away from the theory that Revelation is simply one of a series of Jewish apocalypses of the first century that depends heavily on its predecessors for its images. Instead, the emphasis has shifted to the author's use of the Old Testament apocalyptic and prophetic imagery.³⁷ Of course, nothing prevents a genuine divine vision from utilizing language and images of non-canonical apocalypses or other ancient literary or cultural images in communicating to an audience steeped in such a context.³⁸ Yet commentators who have seen evidence for mythical sources have sometimes overlooked more subtle and meaningful Old Testament allusions.³⁹ Beale goes so far as to say, "It is absurd to think that John is 'a copyist of ill-digested pagan myths,' since it is clear that the thrust of his whole book is a polemic against tolerance of idolatry and compromise with pagan institutions."⁴⁰

Old and New Testament Allusions with No Formal Quotations. Though the Apocalypse has many allusions both to the Old and New Testaments,⁴¹ neither is formally quoted in the Apocalypse. The previous discussion concluded that the Book of Revelation is more consistent with, and lies in the tradition of, Old Testament apocalyptic prophecies rather than non-canonical apocalypses or pagan mythologies. Yet, if John were using primarily the Old Testament as his source, we would expect to find formal quotations of those sources, even if he were drawing strictly from memory without access to written documents.⁴² Not only are there no formal quotations—merely a gradation of allusions—it is difficult to determine which Old Testament textual tradition John was using in making those allusions, since the wording frequently departs from both the Septuagint and Hebrew texts.⁴³

If we allow for a supernatural origin of the visions of the Book of Revelation, this problem of Old Testament allusions and text forms is afforded an interesting solution, for we need not answer

³⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 76–105.

³⁸ Beasley-Murray likens the use of these common images to the political cartoon. He writes: "For example the monsters in Daniel 7, which emerge from the sea as representations of world empires and culminate in the last anti-god kingdom, are variants of the evil sea-monster Tiamat which defied the gods of heaven. The earliest readers of the book will have recognized the caricature immediately.... This is the source of the portrayals of the antichristian empire and ruler in the book of Revelation" (*The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Ronald E. Clements, Matthew Black [London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 17).

³⁹ Beasley-Murray approximates this error when he suggests that for the beast of Rev 13 John "did not draw immediately on the book of Daniel for his description of the dragon with seven heads and ten horns, for not all the details are contained in Daniel's descriptions. John drew from the living tradition about the monster, and he followed in the wake of the Old Testament prophets and contemporary apocalyptists in applying the symbol to the oppressor power of his day" (*Book of Revelation*, 17). But Beale has demonstrated the association of the dragon and beast of Rev 12 and 13 with Old Testament images, especially from Daniel (Beale, *Revelation*, 632–34), specifically countering Beasley-Murray's speculations.

⁴⁰ Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 634.

⁴¹ According to Swete, at least 278 verses out of 404 have Old Testament allusions (*Apocalypse*, cxi). Though exact figures vary, all agree the number is high (Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 77).

⁴² The complexity and frequency with which John's Apocalypse alludes to Old Testament Scripture is so great that it would be difficult to conclude that a writer relying on purely human means of composition could ever construct a kaleidoscopic literary work like Revelation without multiple revisions. Yet the rough grammar and syntax and apparently disjointed sections argue against the work being the result of such revisions.

⁴³ See Beale, *Revelation*, 77–78 for his brief distillation of the debate over text form among Revelation scholars.

what form of the Hebrew Scriptures John had before him as he wove his composition. Nor must we marvel at the complexity and skill with which he assembled the various images from the Old Testament—now here, now there, drawing together multiple passages of Scripture into one loaded phrase. I concur with Beale, who holds that “the references to the OT and its various versions are the result of a mere recording of the actual visions themselves, which would have been influenced by the author’s learned tradition, and of subsequent reflection on the OT during the writing down of the vision. No doubt John would have associated some of his visions and auditions with similar OT passages and would have employed the language of those passages to record what he saw and heard.”⁴⁴

Not only do we find a plethora of Old Testament allusions in Revelation, but we also find distinctly Christian and New Testament allusions as well. Swete provides us with a number of “fairly certain” parallels with New Testament literature of the day.⁴⁵ The presence of these allusions to New Testament thought also fits well within a model of Revelation as a report of the author’s actual experiences. In such a case, John would not have required access to specific New Testament documents, nor be familiar with their content. Rather, allowing for a supernatural origin of John’s visions also allows for access to New Testament themes outside of John’s own capacities.

Independent Textual Units. Aune has pointed out at least twelve independent textual units that “have little to do with their immediate contexts or indeed with the macronarrative of Revelation.”⁴⁶ A possible explanation of the presence of such disjoined units would be that the author was the recipient of a number of successive and episodic supernatural visions, which he wrote down more or less in the order he saw them, rearranging the material very little.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 80–81.

⁴⁵ Among these are Rev 3:3 and Matt 24:43; Rev 3:5 and Matt 10:32; Rev 13:10 and Matt 26:52; and Rev 21:6; 22:17 and John 4:10; 7:37. Compare Swete, *Apocalypse*, 40.

⁴⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, cxix.

⁴⁷ I suppose this is as good (or as poor) a place as any to address very briefly and by way of mere passing comments the numerous allegations of a complex macro-chiastic structure in the book of Revelation or elsewhere in the Bible. With the vast majority of Old and New Testament scholars, I affirm the existence and helpfulness of micro-chiasms, but my feelings toward “macro-chiasms” and the identification of “chiastic structures” has waffled and waned over the last few decades. I find many of the identifications to be arbitrary, forced, or even fantastical. Whereas the identification of micro-chiasms appears to be driven by careful exegesis, the identification of macro-chiasms appears to sometimes trump careful exegesis to force parallels that are not evident in the text (see discussion in Wayne Brouwer, “Understanding Chiasm and Assessing Macro-Chiasm as a Tool of Biblical Interpretation,” *CTW* 53.1 [2018]: 99–127; and for an example of problems with identifying macro-chiasms, see Stanley E. Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed, “Philippians as a Macro-Chiasm and Its Exegetical Significance,” *NTS* 44 [1998]: 213–31). Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps chiasms are, indeed, almost everywhere. Perhaps many are hiding in the text waiting to be discovered. Or perhaps not. Regardless, because of the general unprovability of chiastic structure, I will not appeal to any alleged chiasms to defend any interpretations of Revelation, and I preemptively reject any rebuttals of my exegetical arguments that rely on chiastic structures. See, e.g., Ed Christian “A Chiasm of Seven Chiasms: The Structure of the Millennial Vision, Rev 19:1–21:8,” *AUSS* 37.2 (Autumn 1999): 209–225; Kenneth Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed (Naples, FL: Ann Arbor, 1979). While I am addressing chiasms, I might as well also note that I will not be adopting or responding to the claims of scholars who provide well-defined outlines of Revelation and use such identifications to govern the exposition or exegesis of individual passages. Cf. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 223, who adopts the outline of William Hendriksen (*More Than Conquerors: An*

However, such a view does require a supernaturalist presupposition as well as a traditional Christian view of divine revelation. Therefore, the introduction of sudden, unexpected, and apparently independent visions throughout the otherwise well-structured macro-narrative corroborates the view that John experienced authentic, supernatural prophetic visions that he faithfully reported in literary form.

To What Do the God-Given Visions of Revelation Point?

It has become commonplace to refer to a variety of “approaches” or “interpretive models” for the book of Revelation: futurism, preterism, historicism, and idealism. However, in most cases, expositors employ a kind of eclectic or integrative approach, relying on one of these basic models as the foundation of their reading of Revelation while also drawing on insights from other approaches.⁴⁸ And throughout history, many interpreters have employed a multi-level interpretation similar to the classic fourfold exegesis of biblical texts.

The *futurist* view of the book of Revelation understands the visions and prophecies primarily portraying real events that will take place mostly in the future from our present vantage point.⁴⁹ The futurist perspective enjoyed strong support in the earliest centuries of the church (e.g., Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Hippolytus), but waned in the face of more idealist approaches in the medieval period. In the wake of the Reformation, while Protestant interpreters were identifying historical figures and events as fulfillments of visions in the book of Revelation and often calculating dates for the advent of the kingdom, some Roman Catholic scholars responded by eschewing the historicist understanding of Revelation and opting for a futurist perspective.⁵⁰ Today it is a fairly popular position among conservative evangelical scholars and especially premillennialists who believe the book of Revelation describes in vivid figurative language “the final cataclysmic event that will yet transpire on the earth.”⁵¹

The *preterist* view of Revelation sees the symbolic visions of Revelation as pointing to events that were, at the time of John’s writing, yet future; but from the perspective of present readers the

Interpretation of the Book of Revelation [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967]: 22–31), which sees progressive parallelism in seven sections (Rev 1–3; 4–7; 8–11; 12–14; 15–16; 17–19; and 20–22). Demonstrable exegesis, not appeals to macro-level outlining, must determine the meaning of individual texts.

⁴⁸ Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 69; John Noë, “An Exegetical Basis for a Preterist-Idealist Understanding of the Book of Revelation,” *JETS* 49.4 (2006): 776–96. How one understands the basic thrust of the book of Revelation also tends to affect how one views the timing of the fulfillment of other portions of Scripture related to the eschatological Day of the Lord or Great Tribulation, especially Daniel, the Olivet Discourse, 2 Thessalonians 2, and even 2 Peter 3. In my own contemporary Irenaeian millennial approach, I maintain this same consistency, as did the early Christian futurists.

⁴⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 32–34.

⁵⁰ Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15.

⁵¹ John H. Sailhamer, *Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 71.

prophecies were mostly fulfilled in the past. Newport notes, “According to the preterists, most of Revelation was fulfilled within a relatively brief period following the composition of the book. What little was yet to be fulfilled would not occur until the very last stages of the world’s history.”⁵² Most forms of the preterist approach allow for certain aspects of the book to await a future fulfillment with the second coming of Christ, judgment, and resurrection. However, a minority version “sees the whole of the text as referring to events prior to the destruction of Jerusalem...and that the End is fulfilled in Jerusalem’s destruction.”⁵³

The *historicist* view of Revelation identifies events throughout the history of the church from the first century to the return of Christ as being progressively fulfilled. This approach came relatively late on the scene: “Berengaudus (840–92) was the first to suggest that Revelation described events through history to the writer’s day.”⁵⁴ Thus, as Erickson notes, “The historicist sees the apocalyptic as pertaining to events which at the time they were described (the Biblical period) were still future, but which have occurred and are occurring within the lifespan of the church.”⁵⁵ Many sixteenth-century Protestant historicist interpreters identified the Antichrist and the symbol of the Beast and/or False prophet of Revelation 13 as the Pope and the papal system, and through the nineteenth century historicists tended to approach chronological indicators in Revelation like 1,260 days as referring to 1,260 years, and they calculated the timing of future eschatological events based on that assumption. This latter approach often resulted in setting dates yet future to the interpreter, on which particular events were to occur.⁵⁶

The *idealist* view of Revelation understands the symbolic visions as pointing to theological truths or spiritual realities true in every age. Newport notes, “According to the exponents of this approach, the book of Revelation is not to be understood literally at all. Rather in its strange symbols and bizarre images one finds a general commentary on the struggle between good and evil.”⁵⁷ Mounce thus characterizes the book of Revelation as “a theological poem setting forth the ageless struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.”⁵⁸ This approach to Revelation comes on the scene sometime in the fourth to fifth centuries. It also has found eager adherents among modern interpreters.

To this list, we could also mention the *historical-critical* approach, which would see the book

⁵² Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 15.

⁵³ Ian Paul, “Introduction to the Book of Revelation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. Colin McAllister (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 53.

⁵⁴ Paul, “Introduction to the Book of Revelation,” 53.

⁵⁵ Millard Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 30.

⁵⁶ Examples of this abound from almost every theological and ecclesiastical tradition. Baptist preacher Hanserd Knollys calculated the millennium to begin in 1688. Charles Wesley calculated that the end of the world would come in 1794. Samuel Hopkins set the date for the beginning of the Millennium for 2016. And William Miller calculated the end for October 22, 1844. See Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 20, 28; Noë, “An Exegetical Basis,” 775; Samuel Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium* (Edinburgh: John Ogle, 1794), 108.

⁵⁷ Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 15.

⁵⁸ Mounce, *Revelation*, 28.

of Revelation written either soon after the time of Nero or sometime in the first century not as a genuine record of prophetic visions, but to a particular audience, reflecting the author's original circumstances. Thus, Newport notes, "In its own context it almost certainly relates to the persecution of Christianity under the Roman Empire, and perhaps under Nero in particular."⁵⁹ Because the historical-critical position regards the book of Revelation as having no quality of divine revelation, it must be interpreted only in light of the author's original context and intent; it cannot refer to anything real either in the heavenly realm or in the future.

Almost nobody holds strictly to one view; most expositors believe the Book of Revelation relates in some way to past events, to ongoing and present realities, and to future fulfillments. Thus, historicist interpreters have understood parts of Revelation to have already been fulfilled in the previous centuries of the church while other aspects refer to the future. Almost all futurists understand at least Revelation 2 and 3 to refer to historical situations of the seven churches in the first century, to spiritual/moral truths relevant to all believers in every age, and typologically to eschatological events. Preterists believe the visions in Revelation were at one time awaiting fulfillment in the future, and most expect some elements of Revelation—especially the final chapters—to be fulfilled in the future. And every view tends to acknowledge the spiritual, moral, and theological relevance of the visions to every Christian of every age, just as all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, correction, rebuke, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Thus, many have taken an "eclectic" approach to Revelation,⁶⁰ though they usually adopt one of the above models as their foundational approach and draw from other perspectives as they feel the text demands it.

As a historical example, the fourth-century amillennialist, Tyconius, understood the book of Revelation to refer primarily to "the whole time of the church" (Tyconius, *Exp. Apoc. 2* (4:1)).⁶¹ This places him more in the category of an idealist or historicist, though Tyconius is not completely consistent on this, as he also understood the "hour of trial" that is coming on the whole earth (1 [3:10]) to have both present application as well as to the "last persecution" under the future antichrist.⁶²

⁵⁹ Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 49.

⁶⁰ See Beale, *Revelation*, 48.

⁶¹ Translation from Tyconius of Carthage, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 134 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017). Cited as Gumerlock, *Tyconius*, 62.

⁶² Gumerlock, *Tyconius*, 56.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 17 Revelation 19:11–20:10 as a Single Progressive Vision¹

Over the centuries, interpreters have attempted to identify the subjects of the third-person plural verb ἐκάθισαν (“they sat”) in Revelation 20:4. The problem is, the aorist indicative verb seems to have no clear antecedent in the preceding immediate context. There it sits, a subjectless verb describing a clear action by unclear actors and providing a grammatical and syntactical puzzle. The puzzle would be nothing more than an exegetical curiosity were its theological implications not so important. Depending on how one identifies the subject of ἐκάθισαν, the result can mean the difference between an amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 or a premillennial interpretation. This pivotal passage can easily become a lightning rod for theological controversy. Therefore, the exegetical, grammatical, and syntactical issues must be addressed in order to determine whether Revelation 19 and 20 constitute a single progressive vision (premillennialism) or two separate visions (amillennialism).

To this end, I present the case that the subject of “and they sat” (καὶ ἐκάθισαν) in Revelation 20:4 is found in an anaphoric reference to Christ and the armies of heaven mentioned in Revelation 19:14, 19. The referent of the imbedded pronominal subject of ἐκάθισαν is what may be called a “remote visionary antecedent” or, to coin a shorter term, a “prohoratic” antecedent.² Though this solution is not entirely novel,³ it is often dismissed without discussion or simply ignored in

¹ For this excursus, I am indebted to the cooperative work of Alan E. Kurschner regarding the subjects of ἐκάθισαν. Our joint efforts originally resulted in co-authoring a paper entitled, “Who Sat on the Thrones in Revelation 20:4? Ἐκάθισαν and Its Implications” (Paper Presented to the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, 17 Nov, 2021, Fort Worth, Texas). The same basic argument is included in “Appendix 2: The Identity of Those Seated on Thrones in Revelation 20:4,” in Alan E. Kurschner, *A Linguistic Approach to Revelation 19:11–20:6 and the Millennium Binding of Satan*, Linguistic Biblical Studies, vol. 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2022). My adaptation of his jointly authored work will inevitably include some language from Kurschner’s work as it became part of our co-authored essay, for which he has graciously granted permission. The details presented in this essay reflect my own views, not necessary those of Dr. Kurschner.

² That is, an antecedent found earlier (“pro”) in the same vision (“horasis”).

³ Versions of this identification of the “throne-sitters” are expressed or suggested, sometimes only in passing, in Cf. T. B. Baines, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1911), Robert Govett, *Govett on*

exegetical and theological works. In the following pages, I will argue that alternative explanations of the referent to ἐκάθισαν fail to account for all the evidence, or they lead to unnecessarily complicated, improbable, and unparalleled arguments. In contrast, the solution presented here is simple, probable, and has a parallel later in the book of Revelation itself.

As far as translation goes, ἐκάθισαν itself is not difficult to parse or gloss. The aorist active indicative third-person plural from καθίζω simply means “they sat.” As a transitive, καθίζω would mean “to seat,” as an usher might seat a guest, or “to appoint,” as a church might install a leader.⁴ However, in its intransitive use—as in Revelation 20:4—it simply means “to take a seated position, sit down.”⁵

From a purely lexical, grammatical, and syntactical perspective, Revelation 20:4 poses no real problems. The opening phrase, καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, can be translated as “and I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.” Something like this is the standard rendering by numerous more literal translations.

“Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them.” (ASV)
“And I saw thrones; and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.” (DARBY)
“And I saw seats; and <i>they sat</i> upon them; and judgment was given unto them.” (DRA)
“And I saw thrones, and <i>they sat</i> upon them, and judgment was given unto them.” (KJV)
“Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them.” (NASB)
“Then I saw thrones, where <i>they took their seats</i> , and on them was conferred the power to give judgment.” (NJB)
“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.” (YLT)

Despite its success at faithfully rendering the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, a straightforward translation of Revelation 20:4 leaves a gaping interpretational hole for the average reader: who are “they” in the phrase “and they sat on them”? This has led to a number of paraphrastic or less literal translations.

“I saw thrones, and sitting on those thrones were the ones who had been given the right to judge.” (CEV)
“Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge.” (CSB)
“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.” (ESV)
“Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those who had been given authority to judge.” (NET)
“I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.” (NIV)
“Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given the authority to judge.” (NLT)
“Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge.” (NRSV)
“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed.” (RSV)

Revelation, vol. 2 (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle, 1981), 265; 232; David J. MacLeod, *Seven Last Things: An Exposition of Revelation 19–21* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 141–142; Francisco Javier Ruiz-Ortiz, “‘Battle Is Over, Raise We the Cry of Victory’ . Study of Revelation 19:11–21,” *Isidorianum* 29.2 (2020): 41; Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, vol. 3, 9th ed. (New York: Cook, 1906), 299–300; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 413–414.

⁴ BDAG, 491–92.

⁵ BDAG, 492.

These less-literal translations render the otherwise simple aorist active indicative ἐκάθισαν in a way that masks the understood third-person plural pronoun.⁶ In these imprecise translations, readers are never left to wonder “Who are ‘they’?” because “they” has disappeared. We will return to the problem of this translation strategy later. Of greater concern for now are the attempts by exegetes to make sense of the embedded pronoun lacking an immediate referent.

After dismissing the suggestion that those sitting on the thrones are the twenty-four elders from Revelation 4:4 and 11:16,⁷ Boxall argues that they are actually the souls of the beheaded martyrs mentioned in a subsequent clause later in the verse. He then takes the καὶ epexegetically and links the imagery of the passage to Daniel 7:9–27.⁸ However, granting a likely mirroring of the imagery in Daniel 7,⁹ this interpretation does not consider the natural meaning of the aorist active indicative, nor does it consider the possibility of a prohoratic antecedent.

Stephen Smalley notes, “The prophet-seer does not specify the identity of those who are ‘seated on thrones’; nor are the subjects in any part of this scene mentioned by name.”¹⁰ However, he continues to interpret this group as referring “broadly to the faithful saints of God” and views them as the ones who are “priests of God” who “reign with Christ.”¹¹ In short, with the absence of a subject for ἐκάθισαν, Smalley simply provides a reasonable theological definition of “they.”

Grant Osborne, commenting on the question of the missing subject, notes, “The text never states the answer clearly.”¹² By “text,” he is referring to the major section he marks out in his commentary, starting at the break between chapters 19 and 20. He does not give a reason why he establishes a major section starting at 20:1 in the outline of his commentary.¹³ He goes on to give

⁶ Bratcher and Hatton note, “*Seated on them*: this translates the third person plural active ‘they sat on them,’ the equivalent in the Greek of an impersonal passive. Another way to state this is ‘The ones sitting on them’” (Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series [New York: United Bible Societies, 1993], 287).

⁷ That the occupants of the thrones are the twenty-four elders is a standard view among commentators. See Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, International Theological Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018), 311; Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Pickering & Inglis, c. 1900), 400.

⁸ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2006), 283. Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Black, 1966), 252–253; Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!*, ed. and rev. by Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 646; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 579; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 222–23. Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 487 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 195–196.

⁹ There is little doubt that the imagery of Dan 7:9 and 7:22 serves as a background to Rev 20:4. See Henry Barclay Swete et al., ed., *The Apocalypse of John*, 2nd. ed., Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 258. However, the language describing the vision in Rev 20:4 must be regarded in its own context before appeal is made to Old Testament parallels.

¹⁰ Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 505.

¹¹ Smalley, *Revelation*, 505–6.

¹² Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 703.

¹³ He entitles his section in his commentary as: “C. The Thousand-Year Reign of Christ and Final Destruction of Satan (20:1–10)”, while the previous section is entitled “B. Final Victory: The End of the Evil Empire at the Parousia (19:6–21)” (Osborne, *Revelation*, 696). It is surprising that he would disconnect 20:1–10 from chapter 19, because he

three possible options for the referent to ἐκάθισαν: (1) the twenty-four elders as the heavenly tribunal, (2) victorious martyrs, and (3) all saints including the martyrs as a special subgroup.¹⁴ He does not consider a prohoratic antecedent.

Peter Williamson does not address the question, except for a footnote, stating: “Another way of translating this phrase is ‘and they sat on them.’”¹⁵ Likewise, Leon Morris notes, “John does not say how many thrones there were *nor who sat on them.*”¹⁶ Craig Koester believes the identity of those sitting on thrones must be “inferred.”¹⁷ Ultimately, he thinks it refers to all the faithful with the resurrected martyrs as a subset of the faithful; however, he likewise fails to address the problem of the active indicative of ἐκάθισαν.¹⁸

Greg Beale prefers identifying them as exalted believers with angelic judges, with a focus on the saints.¹⁹ But he fails to address the active indicative grammar of ἐκάθισαν, which is surprising, since he gives a substantial amount of attention to the question of the identity of those who sit on the thrones in 20:4.²⁰

Sam Storms, in his defense of an amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, discusses several potential identifications of what he calls “the anonymous throne-sitters.”²¹ These include: the “heavenly court” mentioned in Daniel 7:9–10, either synonymous with those given authority to judge or distinct from them; the Triune God; the twelve apostles; the twenty-four elders; saints from all ages, including the martyrs; saints distinct from the following “confessors” who suffered persecution but not martyrdom; or, his own view, a “summary or opening synopsis of the vision, with the remainder of 20:4 functioning as an elaboration or more detailed analysis of who sat on the thrones, why, and what it means for them.”²² Storms makes no mention of a possible prohoratic antecedent in Revelation 19, a view with published adherents,²³ even though he mentions they could be “the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” a view for which I have been unable to

interprets it from a premillennial framework. This may reveal how ingrained the commentary tradition has been on this assumed section break.

¹⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 703–4.

¹⁵ Peter S. Williamson, *Revelation*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 323.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 230 (emphasis mine). To be sure, Morris does rightly think that it is those who will co-reign with him in the kingdom. But with so many commentators, the glaring issue of the active indicative ἐκάθισαν is given superficial treatment or ignored altogether, let alone given a meaningful consideration of a possible anaphoric referent in Rev 19.

¹⁷ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Translation ed., The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 771.

¹⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 771.

¹⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 996.

²⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 995–1002.

²¹ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 471.

²² Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 471–74.

²³ See note 3 above.

find any published proponents.²⁴

Pivoting to more technical grammatical and syntactical considerations,²⁵ David Aune urges, “This is an example of the impersonal use of the third-person plural,” though he concedes that “the use of the finite verb ἐκάθισαν here, instead of an expected subordinate participial form, is an example of the author’s tendency to favor parataxis over hypotaxis.”²⁶ After these remarks, Aune surveys the standard interpretations: the twenty-four elders, the entire church, and the resurrected martyrs: “The solution to identifying those seated on the thrones in v4a is clear once vv4–6 are recognized as a single (though extremely difficult) textual unit that focuses on the theme of ‘the first resurrection,’ mentioned near the conclusion in v5b.”²⁷

The grammarian Gerard Mussies notes that the third-person plural “may have a more general aspect of meaning, which can best be rendered by the indefinite pronoun”; he then mentions Revelation 12:6 (τρέφωσιν), 2:24 (λέγουσιν), and 18:14 (εὐρήσουσιν), along with 20:4.²⁸ Though the third-person plural is sometimes used in Revelation in this general sense, in those instances, the context indicates that the referents are general, not particular, and that those general referents play no active role in the proceeding narrative.²⁹ The instance of the third-person plural in 20:4 is different in that the unknown referents of ἐκάθισαν stand at the center—not the periphery—of the action in John’s vision. And, as I will demonstrate, the subject of ἐκάθισαν is unknown only if one neglects a prohoratic antecedent. In light of this, ἐκάθισαν should not be rendered by the indefinite pronoun unless more plausible explanations are ruled out.

Aune also suggests that the order of the narrative “is not in proper temporal sequence, for John first sees the thrones and those seated on them, i.e., the souls of the martyrs who had been beheaded

²⁴ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 472. It seems most likely that Storms disregards the possibility of a prohoratic antecedent because he has already decided that Rev 19 and 20 are separate visions, in keeping with his amillennial eschatology.

²⁵ R. H. Charles rearranges the clauses of verse 4 and places the καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς at the end of the verse in order to “restore sanity to the text” (Robert Henry Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2 [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920], 182–183). With Mounce, I find this strategy unnecessary (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 354–355). However, Charles’ attempted emendation does demonstrate the deep problems exegetes have explaining the subject to ἐκάθισαν in a way that is consistent with John’s normal style.

²⁶ David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52c (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 1084. Aune elaborates that this impersonal use of the third-person plural instead of the passive voice “occurs in Hebrew with some frequency (GKC § 144f)” and “can also be used with third-person masculine plural verbs and masculine plural participles in Aramaic (see Dan 4:22; Rosenthal, *Aramaic*, § 181) and third-person plural verbs in Syriac (R. D. Wilson, *Elements of Syriac Grammar* [New York: Scribner, 1891] § 122)... The same impersonal use of the third-person plural is reproduced literally in the LXX (Gen 29:2; 35:5; 41:14; 49:31; Esth 2:3)” (Aune *Revelation 17–22*, 1084).

²⁷ Aune, like virtually all commentators, demarcate their analysis to 20:1 for their outline/structure of the book (Aune *Revelation 17–22*, 1076).

²⁸ Gerard Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Biligualism*, NovTSup (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 231.

²⁹ Rev 12:6 says, “The woman...has a place there prepared by God, in order that they may nourish (τρέφωσιν) her”; 2:24 says, “But to the rest of you in Thyatira...who did not come to know ‘the deep things of Satan,’ as they say (λέγουσιν)”; and 18:14 has “all the luxuries and luminous are perished from you, and never will they find them (εὐρήσουσιν).”

and who had experienced the first resurrection, an instance of *hysteron-proteron*.³⁰ That is, Aune sees this as an example of John’s “tendency to describe *where* an individual or group of people sits before describing them (Rev 4:2, 4; 14:14; 20:11 [...]).”³¹ However, there is a significant difference in comparing the instances of “sitting” that he cites with the instance in Revelation 20:4. In all those examples, the person or persons seated on the thrones are already seated when the vision opens, indicated by the middle participle καθήμενος or its plural form.³² So, while John uses this device, Aune simply assumes ἐκάθισαν is functioning as a quasi-participle in keeping with his assertion that Revelation 20:4 is an example of the impersonal use of the third-person plural. Yet, the fact that John has established a consistent pattern of employing a participle to describe scenes in which the subjects are already seated when the vision opens argues against Aune’s assertion that the active indicative ἐκάθισαν has an equivalent function. The fact is that John uses participles, not indicatives, to picture a subject already sitting on a throne (Rev 6:16; 7:10; 7:15; 19:4; 21:5).³³

Therefore—and this is a crucial point—John has demonstrated repeatedly throughout Revelation that when he intends to portray a scenario in which the subjects are already seated when the scene opens, he employs the more appropriate participle καθήμενος. This suggests that his deviation from the participle in Revelation 20:4 in favor of the active indicative ἐκάθισαν signals a different type of scenario, one in which the thrones first appear empty, and then the subjects of the verb are seen actively taking their seats rather than being already seated when the scene opens.³⁴

³⁰ Aune, Revelation 17–22, 1084.

³¹ Aune *Revelation 17–22*, 1085. James Resseguie also asserts that John uses the literary device *hysteron-proteron* (“last-first”) in Rev 20:4, where “John sees the thrones in 20:4 before he describes those who sit on the thrones” (James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009], 246). Even so, this does not explain John’s use of the active indicative ἐκάθισαν (“they sat”) instead of the participle καθήμενοι (“seated”) as in other instances of throne-sitting, which we will discuss below.

³² See Rev 4:2, “At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated (καθήμενος) on the throne”; Rev 4:4, “Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated (καθήμενους) on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads”; Rev 14:14, “Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on (καθήμενον) the cloud was one like the Son of Man”; Rev 20:11, “Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat (καθήμενον) on it.”

³³ We may also compare the visions of the first four seals, in which each rider is described with the present middle participle ὁ καθήμενος (6:2, 4, 5, 8). John saw the riders already sitting on the horses: “I looked, and behold, a white horse, and the one who sat (καθήμενος) on it...” In that vision, John uses a participle to portray a scene in which the rider is already sitting when the horse comes into view. He was not portraying a scene in which a horse first appears and then a rider mounts—which would have been more aptly portrayed with the use of an active indicative. More instances include Rev 9:17, where the substantive present middle participle τοὺς καθήμενους is used: “And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur . . .” We see the same in Rev 11:16: “Then the twenty-four elders who sit [καθήμενοι] on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God.”

³⁴ It is possible, though not provable, that the thrones are seen as vacant because they had previously been occupied by the beast and the kings of the earth, along with Satan and his demonic minions. That is, we are seeing here the eschatological regime change, in fulfillment of the declaration, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). Yet this is not in the vision, and the last we saw the beast and the kings of the earth, they were gathered to make war (Rev 19:19).

Furthermore, after examining each of the 891 uses of the indicative in Revelation,³⁵ I am prepared to make the following assertions that have some bearing on the identification of the subject of ἐκάθισαν. First, John routinely employs the simple indicative mood to describe consecutive action. This does not mean that every time he uses the indicative he must be describing consecutive action, but it does suggest that a rendering of καὶ ἐκάθισαν as “and they sat” should be our first choice unless a compelling reason forces us to seek a different sense of the indicative. Second, for instances in which indicatives are used to describe events occurring in a vision, the verbs always have antecedents within the vision—either in the immediate clause itself or in a preceding context. Of course, following normal Greek convention, the subject may immediately follow the verb within the same clause. Yet in no instance have I found an indicative verb anticipating a clear subject appearing in a later clause. Again, this does not rule out the possibility that John may be doing just that in this one instance—anticipating the martyrs later in verse 4 as the subject of ἐκάθισαν. However, such an explanation should be sought only if an antecedent is actually lacking in the context.

These considerations based on an examination of the indicators in Revelation do not, of course, rule out the possibility that John is doing something unique in Revelation 20:4. I believe, however, that it should shift the burden of proof. That is, based on John’s typical use of indicatives, one would expect the subject of the verb ἐκάθισαν in Revelation 20:4 to be found either in the clause itself, in the preceding clause, or earlier in the same vision John was describing. Only after failing to find a reasonable antecedent should one resort to translating the verb as if it were a participle, rendering the subject with the impersonal pronoun “people,” or supplying the subject of the verb from a following rather than preceding context.

To this point, I have examined previous attempts at solving the puzzle of ἐκάθισαν. I have concluded that they tend to propose solutions that are certainly within the realm of plausibility, but they tend to be more complicated, less probable, or lack demonstratable parallels. In the next section, I will offer reasons why the third-person plural subject of ἐκάθισαν is the armies of heaven previously pictured in 19:14, 19—a prohoratic antecedent. This solution is simple, fits John’s typical use of the indicative, and has a demonstrable parallel in Revelation.

The Prohoratic Antecedent of Revelation 20:4

The following considerations have led me to conclude that the referent of καὶ ἐκάθισαν (“and they sat”) in Revelation 20:4 is found in a prohoratic antecedent—that is, an antecedent found earlier in the same vision. I will demonstrate that this is the simplest explanation that accounts for all the evidence. It also enjoys an actual parallel in the book of Revelation itself.

³⁵ According to a search of the morphologically tagged Greek text of NA28 in Logos Bible Software, 891 verbs in the indicative mood are present in 369 verses.

As I explained above, John consistently uses participles to describe conditions in which the subjects of the participles are pictured as already seated at the commencement of the scene. Also, John does not routinely use indicatives in Revelation that function as if they were participles. Simply put, John repeatedly demonstrates that he knew the difference between participles that mean “to be seated” and indicatives that mean “to take a seat.” In addition, indicative active verbs in Revelation do not cataphorically anticipate their subjects. In no case must the reader search for the subject of a verb later in the context. Thus the domain of the plural referent of ἐκάθισαν is most likely found in the immediate anaphoric context.

If we look back in the preceding text of the vision, the only possible plural referent would consist of τὰ στρατεύματα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, “the armies in heaven” led by Christ, the rider on the white horse (Rev 19:14, 19).³⁶ If we disregard the chapter break between Revelation 19 and 20, “Christ and the armies of heaven” is the simplest option presented by the immediate context as the subject of the indicative plural ἐκάθισαν.

One may object that this plural subject is too remote to serve as a viable antecedent. However, in the sprawling account of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21–22, John uses a simple indicative verb with a prohoratic antecedent much more remote than the example of 20:4. The opening words of chapter 22 read καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι (“and he showed me”). If we were to open to Revelation 22 and begin reading at that point, we would face precisely the same problem that we encountered in Revelation 20:4. The natural question is, “Who is ‘he’?”: that is, who is the referent of the third-person singular embedded pronoun? To answer this question, we must work backward into chapter 21, past the obscure ὁ λαλῶν μετ’ ἐμοῦ in 21:15, all the way back to 21:9, where John’s companion is first identified as “one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls.” This antecedent is found a full thirteen verses earlier, on the other side of a chapter break, with extensive description intervening (21:10–27).³⁷ The verb ἔδειξεν in Revelation 22:1 has a prohoratic antecedent even more remote than the “armies of heaven” antecedent from ἐκάθισαν in Revelation 20:4, which is only eight verses removed from its antecedent.

Recognizing that many readers can be puzzled by the apparently subjectless verb at the

³⁶ The second instance of this referent is reduced to the singular form in 19:19: μετὰ τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ, either because (1) it is elliptical, as it also omits the deictic ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, (2) the singular neuter form is functioning as a collective noun, or (3) just as the plural form of στρατεύματα is modified by the plural pronoun αὐτῶν (the beast and kings) in 19:19, the singular στρατεύματος is modified by the singular pronoun αὐτοῦ (Christ) in 19:19.

³⁷ The account of the angelic guide begins, “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb’” (Rev 21:9). Next follows a lengthy, detailed description of John’s guided tour of the New Jerusalem, the “wife of the Lamb.” Verse 10 begins, καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με... καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι (“and he carried me away...and he showed me”)—the antecedent of the understood “he” being without doubt the interpreting angel, as he is the only figure in the vision besides John. In the following four verses, John describes the brilliance of the heavenly Jerusalem (21:11–14). Then verse 15 cuts back to the angel with a participle, καὶ ὁ λαλῶν μετ’ ἐμοῦ (“And the one speaking with me...”), describing the angel’s activity in measuring the city. What follows is a sustained, complex description of the city, including its precise measurements and the ornate materials used in its construction (21:15–21). John then observes the divine source of the city’s glorious illumination and delimits those who have access to this eschatological haven (21:22–27). This concludes the chapter, but the vision itself continues.

beginning of Revelation 22:1, several English translations supply the word *angel* in place of the imbedded third-person singular pronoun. The NIV, for instance, translates 22:1 as “Then the angel showed me.” Some translations include a footnote clarifying that the Greek simply has “he” (e.g., ESV, NRSV). The NET Bible includes an explanation: “The referent (the angel mentioned in 21:9, 15) has been specified in the translation for clarity.”³⁸ In Revelation 22:1, the distance between the original mention of the angel in the vision, as well as the arbitrary chapter break in the midst of the vision, contribute to the potential confusion about the referent to the verb ἔδειξεν. Of course, if we were to assume wrongly that Revelation 22:1 begins a completely new vision detached from the narrative description begun in 21:9, we would find ourselves in exactly the same predicament many commentators find themselves in the case of ἐκάθισαν in Revelation 20:4. Yet in both cases, the problem of the missing referent is simply and satisfactorily resolved if we recognize that the suspected subjectless verbs merely continue the narrative within a single progressive vision.

	The Second Coming (Rev 19:11—20:15)	The New Creation (Rev 21:1—22:5)
Initial Reference	Christ and the armies of heaven (19:11–16)	One of the angels with the seven vials (21:9)
Intervening Action	Destruction of the beast, false prophet, kings of the earth, their armies, and the binding of Satan (19:17–20:3)	The New Jerusalem, measurement and description of city’s materials, illumination, and residents (21:10–27)
Subsequent Reference	“And they sat (ἐκάθισαν)” (20:4)	“And he showed (ἔδειξεν)” (22:1)
Remainder of Vision	Reign of resurrected saints, release of Satan, Gog and Magog, final judgment (20:4–15)	Thrones of God and the Lamb, the river of life, the tree of life, eternal light, and eternal reign (22:1–5)

The Victory and Judgment Narrative

If we ignore the chapter break between Revelation 19 and 20, then we observe a link between τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ (“his army”) (19:19) and καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτούς (“and I saw thrones, and they sat upon them”) (20:4). It should not be missed that all the material between these two referents to victorious participants describes the defeat of the adversaries of God: the kings of the earth and their armies (19:19), the beast and the false prophet (19:20–21), and the dragon (20:1–3). Here, we see a narrative pattern that begins with (1) the glorious arrival of the victorious righteous armies (19:11–18), continues with (2) the confrontation and defeat of the wicked earthly armies and their captains (19:19–20:3), and concludes with (3) the glorious enthronement of the victorious righteous armies (20:4).

If we bracket out the judgment unit (19:10–20:3), we see that after the reference to Christ and

³⁸ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible*, 1st ed. (Biblical Studies Press, 2005). Note at Rev 22:1.

his heavenly army (19:19), the narrative picks up with those who sat on thrones (20:4): τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ...καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτούς (“And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army . . . and I saw thrones, and they sat upon them” (19:19, cf. 19:14; 20:4).

If we consider this bracketed material as a description of Christ and his army’s victory over the wicked rulers of the world, then we may view the antecedent of ἐκάθισαν as literarily remote, but conceptually adjacent, to ἐκάθισαν. In other words, when we come across ἐκάθισαν, we would not expect to look for the antecedent in the unit on the judgment of the three adversaries (19:20—20:3) who are defeated in the narrative. Rather, we find “his armies” in 19:19 as not only the closest antecedent to which ἐκάθισαν could possibly refer in a passage portraying Christ’s victory and enthronement, but also the only antecedent remaining in the vision.

“Armies of Heaven”	“Sat”
τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ (19:19; cf. 19:14)	καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτούς (20:4)

Other elements of the text hold the sequence of events in Revelation 19:11—20:15 together as a single, progressive vision. The initial reference to the beast and false prophet positioned to rouse the kings and armies of the earth against Christ is seen in Revelation 19:19: “And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army.” The scene is constructed to portray Christ and the armies of heaven descending to face the beast and his armies of the earth. In a previous vision, John described how the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet had lured the “kings from the east” across the Euphrates to assemble them at Har-Magedon for “the great day of God, the Almighty” (Rev 16:12–16). The intervening explanation mentions that the kings aligned with the beast will “wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with him are the called and chosen and faithful” (Rev 17:14).

With this background, readers are already set up to expect a dramatic showdown between these two armies, climaxing in a victory for Christ and the armies accompanying him. This is what we see in the vision of the second coming in Revelation 19. As described in Revelation 16:12–16, the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and the kings of the earth with their armies are all gathered against Christ and his armies. Then, in Revelation 19:11, heaven opens, and Christ—the King of kings and Lord of lords—descends with his army to wage a victorious war against the armies of wickedness (19:11–16). A heavenly angel summons the birds of the air to feast on the carnage, a sign of certain victory over the assembled earthly armies (19:17–19). The scene shifts to the capture of the beast and the false prophet, who are cast into the lake of fire (19:20). The rest of the kings of the earth and their armies are slain and left as carrion for the birds (19:21).

At this point, the only figures remaining in the unfolding vision are Christ and the armies of heaven and the dragon who had been giving power to the beast and false prophet (see Rev 13:1–2;

16:13). In the next scene, we see the fate of the dragon when he is seized, sentenced, and secured in the abyss (Rev 20:1–3). Without the capture and binding of Satan as part of the unfolding vision, the conquering work of Christ and his armies is left incomplete. The use of the semantically related *πιάζω* and *κρατέω* for the seizing of the beast/false prophet and dragon respectively,³⁹ as well as the same term *βάλλω* for casting them into the lake of fire (beast and false prophet) and abyss (dragon), suggest that John intended these judgment scenes to be read together, despite the misleading chapter break between 19 and 20.

The Capture of the Beast and the False Prophet	The Capture of the Dragon
And the beast was seized (<i>πιάζω</i>), and with him the false prophet. . . . These two were thrown (<i>βάλλω</i>) alive into the lake of fire. (Rev 19:20)	And he took hold of (<i>κρατέω</i>) the dragon . . . and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw (<i>βάλλω</i>) him into the abyss. (Rev 20:2–3)

Having cleared the eschatological battlefield of the beast, false prophet, wicked kings, earthly armies, and dragon, the only figures remaining in the vision are Christ with his heavenly army. Thus when Rev 20:4 begins, “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them,” the subject of the verb *ἐκάθισαν* would most naturally be understood as the only remaining group in the vision: Christ and the armies of heaven who were last mentioned in Revelation 19:19.

Yet the ultimate doom of the dragon still lingers in the background as unfinished business. Whereas the beast and false prophet were cast into the lake of fire (19:20), the dragon was merely cast into the abyss (Revelation 20:3). After Christ and his enthroned victors had reigned for some time, the dragon is briefly released and attempts another revolt, which is instantly quashed (20:7–9). The description of the devil’s ultimate doom provides corroborating evidence that Revelation 19:11–20:10 is appropriately viewed as a single vision.

When the dragon is finally cast into the lake of fire (20:10), we are reminded that the beast and false prophet are already there (*ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης*). Some interpret this *ὅπου* clause as indicating that the beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire at the same time as the dragon.⁴⁰ However, John uses this kind of *ὅπου* phrase for circumstances already in place at the time of the new action (John 11:30; 12:1; 18:1; Rev 2:13; 11:8). To describe subjects or

³⁹ Louw and Nida list *πιάζω* (18.3) and *κρατέω* (18.6) in the same semantic subdomain, “grasp, hold” (L&N, 220).

⁴⁰ For instance, Storms writes, “The text literally reads: ‘and the devil, the one who deceives them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and false prophet, and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.’ The NASB supplies the verb ‘are’ (Gk., *εἰσι*; the ESV renders it “were”), wrongly so in my opinion. The verb to be supplied should probably be ‘were cast’ (*eblethesan*) from 19:20. Thus the text would read: “and the devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also [*hopou kai*; cf. 11:8 for a similar usage] the beast and false prophet **were cast** (*eblethesan*).” He concludes, “So, when were the beast and false prophet cast in? The answer would appear to be, at the conclusion of the war, when the devil himself was cast in. The three *jointly* instigated the Armageddon/Gog-Magog revolt and are therefore *jointly* cast into the lake of fire to be *jointly* tormented forever and ever” (Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 436).

objects of an action accompanying the primary subject or object, John instead uses μετά (John 19:18; Rev 2:22; 6:8; 12:9; 14:1; 19:20). Especially compare the description of the participants of the events in Revelation 19:20, the capturing of the beast and false prophet:

καὶ ἐπιάσθη τὸ θηρίον καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης (Rev 19:10)	καὶ ὁ διάβολος...ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης (Rev 20:10)
“And captured was the beast and with him the false prophet.”	“And the devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, where also the beast and false prophet...”

Had John written καὶ ὁ διάβολος...ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου, **καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ** τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης (“and the devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, **and with him** the beast and the false prophet”), this would have clearly communicated that the beast and false prophet were also cast into the lake of fire at the same time as the devil in Revelation 20:10 (thus recapitulating the same event described in Rev 19:10). However, this is not what John wrote. The most straightforward reading of Revelation 20:10 sees the beast and false prophet already present in the lake of fire prior to the casting of the dragon to his ultimate doom. Because the beast and false prophet were described as cast into the lake of fire in 19:20, this corroborates the evidence for the connection between chapters 19 and 20, pointing to a single, unfolding vision in general chronological sequence.

The Background of Daniel 7

Understanding Revelation 19–20 also corresponds well with the image of the destruction of the beast, the enthronement of the court, and the saints’ inheritance of the kingdom in the Son of Man vision in Daniel 7. In that vision, while the career of the dreadful fourth beast of the last days was at its peak (Dan 7:8), thrones were set in place (θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν), and the ancient of days took his seat (ἐκάθητο) (Dan 7:9 LXX). Then, “the court sat in judgment” (καὶ κριτήριον ἐκάθισε) and books were opened (7:10). This results in judgment of the monstrous little horn: “As I was looking, the beast was viciously killed (ἀπετυμpanίσθη) and its body destroyed (ἀπόλετο), and it was given over to burning by fire (εἰς καῦσιν πυρός)” (Dan 7:11 LXX).⁴¹ Then after the destruction of the beast, “behold, upon the clouds of heaven, a being like a son of mankind came” (ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο)” (Dan 7:13).

This imagery of the coming of the Son of Man is used to depict Christ’s second advent in the New Testament: “Look! He is coming with the clouds (ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν)” (Rev 1:7; cf. Matt 24:30, 26:64). The Son of Man receives from the Ancient One a kingdom that will never

⁴¹ Translation from Rick Brannan, Ken M. Penner, et al., eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012).

perish (Dan 7:14). In the interpretation of this vision, we are told that the “little horn” will wage war against the saints “until the ancient of days came and rendered judgment for the saints (τὴν κρίσιν ἔδοκε τοῦς ἁγίοις) of the most high. And the appointed time arrived and the saints possessed the kingdom (τὸ βασίλειον κατέσχον οἱ ἅγιοι)” (Dan 7:22 LXX).

Daniel 7:24–25 again rehearses the career of the coming wicked “king,” who will blaspheme the most high and wear out the holy ones for a period of a time, times, and half a time. Following this, “the trial will be established, and they will abolish his authority, and . . . utterly destroy him completely forever” (7:26). Then, after the judgment of that evil king, “the kingdom and the authority and the majesty of them, and the dominion of all under the kingdoms of heaven, he gave to the holy people (ἔδωκε λαῶ ἁγίῳ) of the most high to rule an everlasting kingdom” (Dan 7:27 LXX).

Revelation’s imagery of the coming of Christ and the resulting destruction of the beast, his false prophet, and the kings of the earth, along with the binding of Satan (Rev 19:11–20:3) corresponds with Daniel’s imagery of the destruction of the little horn of the final beast, along with his fellow rulers and their wicked kingdom (Dan 7:11–12; 20–26). Revelation’s following imagery of the enthronement of those of those to whom judgment was given (κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς) (Rev 20:4–6)—if it refers to Christ and the armies of heaven from Revelation 19—corresponds with Daniel’s climactic imagery of the Son of Man and the saints receiving the kingdom (Dan 7:13–14, 18, 22, 27). The close conceptual parallels between the imagery of Daniel 7 and Revelation 19–20 require the latter to constitute a single progressive vision rather than two separate visions.

Imagery of Daniel	Imagery of Revelation
The reign of the end-times king and his allies for a time, times, and half a time, waging war against the saints. (Dan 7:8, 11–12, 20–21, 23–25)	The reign of the end-times beast and his allies for forty-two months, waging war against the saints. (Rev 13:1–18; 16:10–16; 19:19)
The Ancient of Days and heavenly court sits and renders judgment against the end-times king. (Dan 7:9–11, 22, 26)	The judgment of the beast and his kingdom at the close of his reign, including the satanic force behind them. (Rev 16:10–16; 19:17–21; 20:1–3)
The kingdom is given to the Son of Man and the saints. (Dan 7:13–14, 18, 22, 26–27)	The kingdom is given to Christ and the saints. (Rev 20:4–6)

On what basis can we identify the “saints” or “holy ones” (ἅγιοι) of the most high pictured in Daniel (7:18, 21–22, 26–27) with the armies of heaven accompanying Christ at his return?⁴² The

⁴² The argument that the armies of heaven can only be angels because saints are described as a Bride earlier in the chapter (e.g., Morris, *Revelation*, 220, and others) fails to recognize that the vision of the marriage supper of the Lamb concludes with the exchange between the angel and John in Rev 19:9–10, and a new vision begins at 19:11. The compelling lexical evidence in my mind trumps the only apparent problem with using different symbols in different visions with the same referent. After all, Jesus is described as a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes in Rev 5:6, still

armies are described as wearing “white, clean, fine linen.” This image is identical to the “white linen” of the bride of Christ described in Revelation 19:8 as “the righteous deeds of the saints (τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν). Furthermore, the armies accompanying Christ at his return are explicitly interpreted proleptically in Revelation 17:14. John’s interpreting angel describes the final battle of Armageddon and says, “They [the armies of the beast] will wage war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

This description of those accompanying Christ at his coming to destroy the armies of the beast are κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί. It is significant that the terms κλητός and ἐκλεκτός are used only here in Revelation. Elsewhere in the New Testament, they refer most commonly to believers.⁴³ The term πιστός is used eight times in Revelation: three times, it describes Christ (Rev 1:5; 3:14; 19:11); twice, it describes Christians (Rev 2:10, 13); and twice, it refers to the trustworthiness of the words of the prophecy of the revelation itself (Rev 21:5; 22:6). The other occurrence is here in Revelation 17:14. Given the lexical evidence, it seems rather clear that at least redeemed saints are in view in Revelation 17:14, accompanying Christ at his coming. Thus the host of riders in Revelation 19:11 are saints, corresponding with the saints who receive the kingdom in Daniel 7 (though this does not exclude the involvement of angels as well).⁴⁴

called the “Lamb” in 19:7–9, but appears as a rider on a white horse in 19:11ff., with no mention of the title “Lamb” again until 21:9, at which point the “bride, the wife of the Lamb” suddenly takes the form of a city (21:10ff.)!

⁴³ For κλητός (including individuals and groups), see Matt 22:14; Rom 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28; 1 Cor 1:1, 2, 24; Jude 1. For πιστός (excluding references to God or to Christ but including references in parables), see Matt 24:45; 25:21, 23; Luke 12:42; 16:10–12; 19:17; John 20:27; Acts 10:45; 16:1, 15, 1 Cor 4:2, 17; 7:25; 2 Cor 6:15; Gal 3:9; Eph 1:1; 6:21; Col 1:2; 4:7, 9; 1 Tim 1:12; 3:11; 4:3, 10, 12; 5:16; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:6; Heb 3:5; 1 Pet 1:21; 5:12; 3 John 5; Rev 2:10, 13. For ἐκλεκτός (excluding references to Christ), see Matt 22:24; 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Luke 18:7; Rom 8:33; 16:13; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:9; 2 John 1, 13. Of all these instances, only ἐκλεκτός is used once to modify “angels” (1 Tim 5:21). However, angels are never described as κλητός or πιστός.

⁴⁴ Charles writes, “Quite clearly in 17:14 it is stated that the armies of the Lamb will be ‘the called and elect and faithful,’ a description which cannot be applied to angels” (Charles, *Revelation*, 2: 135). See also the careful analysis by Beale, *Revelation*, 960.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 18 A Survey and History of Interpretations of Revelation 20:1–3

A variety of interpretations of the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1–3 have appeared throughout history, most depending on how the interpreter addresses the question of the millennial period itself (premillennial, amillennial, or postmillennial). In the following pages, I present representative interpretations of the binding of Satan from postmillennial, amillennial, and premillennial perspectives.

I begin with postmillennialism as the most recent iteration of millennialism. Because many forms of postmillennialism were often coupled with a historicist approach to the fulfillment of the book of Revelation, many interpreters saw their own days as the pivotal spiritual/social/religious crisis that would give way to the advent of the millennial golden age. For example, for some, the arrival of a Protestant king in England in 1689 and the displacement of King James II, a Catholic, was thought to have marked the beginning of the binding of Satan, which would continue with the successive victories of the gospel over the antichristian Roman Catholic forces.¹ This introduces the idea of a gradual binding of Satan resulting in a full binding in the future.

Today some postmillennial interpreters understand Revelation 19:11–21 as a symbolic vision of the victory of Christianity over the forces of Satan and view the result of that victory the complete binding of Satan, who is now partially restrained to the degree the gospel has realized the kingdom in the world. In that version of the postmillennial view, during the future millennial golden age but prior to Christ's return at the close of the millennium, Satan will be fully bound. This is expressed clearly in the nineteenth-century postmillennialist William Reid:

With regard to the time when the events shadowed forth are to take place, it may very safely be said, it is yet future. In that great moral conflict, which is called the battle of Armageddon, there are, as we have already seen, three foes of the Lord, who are in

¹ Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13.

succession to be overthrown: first, Papacy, symbolized by the beast; then Mohammedanism, symbolized by the false prophet; after all this the dragon is to be overthrown. But Papacy and Mohammedanism have not yet filled up the measure of their earthly life. It is therefore evident that the events symbolized by the binding of Satan are yet in the future.²

Other postmillennialists may understand Revelation 19:11–21 as referring to the entire church age as Christ reigns and accomplishes both victory and judgment against unbelievers in this world through the church. The millennium, then, may be a reference to the intermediate state after believers depart and reign with Christ and, regarding the departed saints, Satan is “bound”; but regarding the world of unbelievers, Satan is yet loosed.³

The amillennial interpretation of the binding of Satan usually involves a limit on its scope and scale. The imagery of the angel seizing the dragon, binding him with a chain, and casting him into the abyss for a thousand years is not a future event but a symbol for a restraint or limit on Satan’s ability to carry out specific activities to their fullest in the present age. Warfield presents this classic view:

There is, indeed, no literal “binding of Satan” to be thought of at all: what happens, happens not to Satan but to the saints, and is only represented as happening to Satan for the purposes of the symbolical picture. What actually happens is that the saints described are removed from the sphere of Satan’s assaults. The saints described are free from all access of Satan—he is bound with respect to them: outside of their charmed circle his horrid work goes on. This is indicated, indeed, in the very employment of the two symbols “a thousand years” and “a little time.” A “thousand years” is the symbol of heavenly completeness and blessedness; the “little time” of earthly turmoil and evil. Those in the “thousand years” are safe from Satan’s assaults: those outside the thousand years are still enduring his attacks.⁴

In Warfield’s view, the “thousand years” refers to the departed saints in the intermediate state between Christ’s first and second coming. Thus, they are completely out of reach of Satan, being present in heavenly paradise. In this view, the binding with respect to the saints is, indeed, total.

Spence expressed a similar view that Satan is simultaneously bound and loosed, though he applied it not to the church triumphant in heaven but to the church militant on earth:

The thousand years’ binding, and the loosing for a little time, describe two events which occur contemporaneously. While the godly need have no fear, because even in this world Satan’s power as regards them is completely limited by Christ’s act of redemption, yet in

² William J. Reid, *Lectures on the Revelation* (Pittsburgh PA: Stevenson, Foster & Co., 1878), 460.

³ See detailed discussion in Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1957), 388–410.

⁴ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 651.

another sense, as regards the ungodly, Satan is loosed and obtains power over them. The chief difficulty in this interpretation lies in the words, “after this.” But it must be remembered that the “thousand years” do not express a period of time, but the quality of completeness. Therefore the loosing of Satan must not be supposed to take place in a period subsequent to the period of the binding.⁵

On the other hand, many, if not most, modern amillennialists regard the binding of Satan to refer to the present church age but see it as limited in scope and scale—Satan is “bound” at the cross, defeated by his resurrection, and/or restrained by the work of the Spirit in the world through the church. This restraint is limited and usually applies narrowly to freeing the world from Satan’s hold on the nations outside Israel to allow the gospel to go forth. Or Satan is bound with regard to the elect, unable to blind them and prevent them from believing. Or he is bound according to his ability to fully manifest his wickedness on the earth by rousing the evil nations in the final persecution and end-times destruction of the world. A few examples of these will suffice to illustrate the way in which Revelation 20:1–3 is read in the amillennial tradition, which is sometimes also shared by some postmillennialists. Hoekema writes:

What is meant, now, by the binding of Satan? In the Old Testament times...all the nations of the world except Israel were, so to speak, under Satan’s rule. At that time the people of Israel were the recipients of God’s special revelation, so that they knew God’s truth about themselves, about their sinfulness, and about the way they could obtain forgiveness for their sins. During this same time, however, the other nations of the world did not know that truth...except for an occasional person, family or city which came into contact with God’s special revelation. One could say that during this time these nations were deceived by Satan, as our first parents had been deceived by Satan when they fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. We conclude, then, that the binding of Satan during the gospel age means that, first, he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel, and second, he cannot gather all the enemies of Christ together to attack the church.⁶

This has become a standard understanding of the referent to the binding of Satan for the amillennial view of Revelation 20.⁷ In this case the 1000 years symbolizes a long period prior to which Satan had little restraint and after which he will have freedom to deceive and destroy.

⁵ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Revelation*, The Pulpit Commentary (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909), 471.

⁶ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 228.

⁷ See, e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 984–87; Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 283; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 534–35; Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 223–225; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 500–502.

Premillennialists, however, see Revelation 20:1–3 as referring primarily to the complete banishment of Satan from the heavenly and earthly realms, confined for the duration of the millennial phase of the kingdom in the prison of the “abyss.”⁸ It should be noted that the premillennial position on the future binding of Satan allows for a partial *restraining* and *restricting* of the devil’s activities in the present age between Christ’s resurrection/ascension and his return as judge and king. As such, the premillennialist can and usually does agree completely with the amillennialist regarding Satan’s restricted power as it relates to the regenerate. Classic premillennialism may also acknowledge limits placed upon Satan and the demonic powers in the world today regarding the advancement of the gospel and the prevention of Satan’s ability to take complete control of the world powers to wage his final war against the saints (2 Thess 2:5–8).

The issue is not really whether Satan and the spirits of wickedness are presently limited in their exercise of power in the world; the question is whether the referent of the symbolic vision of Revelation 20:1–3 is this present partial restraint or a future total banishment from the world. I assert that attempts at explaining the language and imagery of the binding of Satan by appealing to passages elsewhere in the New Testament that speak of limits placed on Satan’s activities in the present age do not advance the amillennial or postmillennial case. Such restraint on Satan and demonic powers in the inter-advent period is not disputed. The issue is not whether Satan is partially restrained in the present; the issue is whether the partial binding in the present age is the referent of the symbols in Revelation 20:1–3.

Classic premillennialism allows for a spiritual, partial realization of a limited binding of Satan as regards believers today or even with reference to the restraining of full deception and wickedness that will characterize the end times. That is, the both/and approach of classic premillennialism allows for the kind of spiritual “partial binding” in the present age as the kingdom is manifested on earth as in heaven, as in amillennialism. It even allows for a progressively more evident binding of Satan’s works and ways as the church’s influence is more fully manifested in the world, as in some postmillennial views. Yet premillennialists assert that the *ultimate* referent of Revelation 20:1–3 is to the complete binding and banishment of Satan in the future millennial period. In this tradition, classic premillennialist Charles Spurgeon notes that during the millennium, Satan will be bound by Christ’s power, even though he is partially bound today:

When temptation is kept away from a Christian it is the Savior’s restraining power which holds back the arch enemy. And if the enemy comes in like a flood it is by permission of Jesus that the trial comes. Every roaming of the lion of the Pit is permitted by our Master, or he could never go forth on his devouring errands. The key that shall bind the old dragon in those blessed days of the millennial rest is in our Lord’s power—and the final triumph, when no sin shall any further be known on earth and evil shall be pent up in the grim caverns of Hell—will be achieved by Christ Jesus, the Man, the Mediator, our Lord and

⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 325.

God! To open, then, and to shut out. To shut in and to shut out—these are the works of the keys.⁹

Reaching back to the earlier centuries of the church, the binding of Satan is associated with the end-times destruction of the antichrist. Irenaeus of Lyons viewed the proper, complete fulfillment of Revelation 20:1–3 as a future reality concurrent with the future millennium. Yet, as to be expected, Irenaeus still observed his both/and approach, as he also drew spiritual application for those who are set free from sin and death today:

Of Him the prophet said, *You will tread upon the asp and the basilisk; the young lion and the serpent You will trample under foot.* By this he pointed out that sin (which had made humanity cold), which rose and spread itself out against the human race, would, together with death that held sway, be deprived of its power; and it would be trampled on (*conculcaretur*) by Him in the last times (*novissimus temporibus*), namely, when the lion, that is, the Antichrist, would rush upon (*insiliens*) the human race; and He would put in chains (*adligans*) the dragon, that ancient serpent, and make it subject (*subiciens*) to the power of the human race, which had been conquered, so that humanity could trample down all his [the dragon's] power. (*Haer.* 3.23.7)¹⁰

Though acknowledging that “the three participles (*insiliens*, *adligans*, *subiciens*) explain Christ's action in the last times, and so they depend on *conculcaretur* as temporal clauses,” Unger makes the claims that “the ‘last times’ [*novissimus temporibus*] are not the period after the second coming of Christ, as some have held” but that “in Irenaeus they are the entire period after Christ's ascension until His second coming, though the final confrontation at the eschaton is of special importance.”¹¹ The problem with this assertion is that the advent of the antichrist (*Antichristus*) in Irenaeus is always associated with the end times—the period just prior to the return of Christ and the millennial kingdom—not with the entire span of time since Christ's coming. Thus, if the time of the Antichrist is yet future, so is the time of the binding of Satan. This does not, however, prevent Irenaeus from applying these truths spiritually to the church today, which he appears to do in the remainder of the chapter. This is consistent with the both/and approach in Irenaeus premillennialism—the prophecy will be fulfilled literally and fully in the future; it is also being fulfilled spiritually and partially in the present.

Similarly, Tertullian outlines the events of the end times this way according to Revelation. Satan will be bound in the future during the millennial kingdom, then cast into the fire:

⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, “Christ with the Keys of Death and Hell” (Sermon 894, 3 October 1869) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 15 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1869), 556.

¹⁰ Translation from Dominic J. Unger, trans., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book 3*, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, vol. 64 (New York: Newman, 2012), 109.

¹¹ Unger, *Irenaeus, Book 3*, 208n34, 35.

In the Revelation of John, again, the order of these times is spread out to view, which ‘the souls of the martyrs’ are taught to wait for beneath the altar, whilst they earnestly pray to be avenged and judged: (taught, I say, to wait), in order that the world may first drink to the dregs the plagues that await it out of the vials of the angels, and that the city of fornication may receive from the ten kings its deserved doom, and that the beast Antichrist with his false prophet may wage war on the Church of God; and that, after the casting of the devil into the bottomless pit for a while, the blessed prerogative of the first resurrection may be ordained from the thrones; and then again, after the consignment of him to the fire, that the judgment of the final and universal resurrection may be determined out of the books” (*Res.* 25).

Though Irenaeus and Tertullian represent the earliest understandings of the fulfillment of the binding of Satan in the early church, the interpretation soon changes to a spiritual and partial binding in the present age, denying a future, literal fulfillment. In Tyconius’s fourth-century interpretation of Revelation 20:1–3, he sees the angel descending from heaven to bind Satan as none other than Jesus himself—“*And I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ in his first coming. Holding the key of the abyss, that is, [restraining] the power of evil people, and a large chain in his hand. God gave this power to his people*” (Tyc. *Exp. Apoc.* 7 [20:1]).¹² Then the period of the dragon’s binding is the present age: “*And he took hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and he bound him for a thousand years, surely in his first coming, as he himself says: ‘Who is able to enter into the house of a strong man and steal his vessels, unless he first binds the strong man?’ He said a thousand years as a part for the whole, that is, the remainder of the thousand years of the sixth day, in which the Lord was born and suffered*” (Tyc. *Exp. Apoc.* 7 [20:2]).¹³

It should be noted, though, that Tyconius understands this binding as occurring for the remainder of the six-thousand-year period—an extremely common reckoning of redemptive history at the time. In the normal reckoning, those six thousand years of human history would then be followed by a sabbath rest. The binding of Satan in the abyss, Tyconius understands as the casting of Satan into the hearts of evil people (7 [20:3]). However, he is unable to deceive those who are destined to life. Tyconius then understands the loosing of Satan as referring to “the time of Antichrist, when the ‘man of sin’ will have been revealed and will have received all power for persecuting, power such as he never had from the beginning” (7 [20:3]).¹⁴

In the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo follows Tyconius’s lead and presents another classic amillennial interpretation of the binding of Satan. Relying on Christ’s teaching that “no one can

¹² Tyconius of Carthage, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 134 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 173.

¹³ Gumerlock, *Tyconius*, 176–177.

¹⁴ Gumerlock, *Tyconius*, 177.

enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up (δήση) the strong man" (Mark 3:27), Augustine argued that John saw the angel descending from heaven and binding the devil—the strong man—and thus “checked and repressed his power to seduce and possess those destined to be set free” (*Civ.* 20.7).¹⁵ Augustine then describes two views on how to take the 1000-year period in his amillennial sense. First, that millennium could “take place in the sixth and last millennium (the sixth ‘day’), the latter span of which is now passing, and that when St. John spoke of the last part of this millennium as ‘a thousand years’ he was using, figuratively, the whole to indicate the part” (*Civ.* 20.7). In this case, when Christ returns, he will usher in the eschatological “sabbath”—“the endless repose of the blessed”—that is, the eternal state. In that view one can understand the number 1000 more or less literally as indicating the last thousand years of human history prior to its end. Second, it could refer to “the Christian era” between the first and second advent, the number 1000 used purely symbolically to indicate the “fulness of time” (*Civ.* 20.7).

During this present long period of time between the first and second advent, the devil is bound—“cast into the ‘abyss,’ taken in the sense of the countless number of godless men whose bitter hatred of God’s Church comes from the abysmal depths of their hearts” (*Civ.* 20.7). As far as the purpose of the binding and sealing over, Augustine writes:

The nations or men freed from the Devil’s seductions, in virtue of this restraining and disabling chaining and imprisonment, are those who he used to lead astray and hold captive, but who now belong to Christ.... With respect to other men not predestined to eternal life, the Devil continues to this very day to lead these men astray and to drag them down into eternal damnation.... The reason, therefore, why the Devil is bound and cast into the abyss is to prevent his deceiving the nations that now make up the Church as he used to deceive and possess them before they became the Church. (*Civ.* 20.7).

Satan will be set free at the end of the age, for a short period prior to the final judgment and the end of the world: “At that time the Devil will have a single objective in his deception, namely, to bring on this battle.... His secret hatred will blaze out into open persecution. For this is to be the very last of all persecutions immediately preceding the very last of all judgments” (*Civ.* 20.11).

In the sixth century, Cassiodorus, with other later fathers, understood the binding of Satan to take place during the present age as well: “Then an angel descends from heaven who, having taken hold of the dragon who is Satan, sent him into the abyss bound with a chain. And he ‘bound him for a thousand year,’ by which, through a figure of synecdoche, ‘a whole’ is indicated ‘from a part.’ When its end is, is held as altogether unknown. Nevertheless, by the consensus of the fathers they are computed from the nativity of the Lord. [Satan was bound] so that he might not, by having unchecked authority, deceive the nations who were going to believe. But he says that at the end of

¹⁵ Translation from Saint Augustine, *The City of God Books XVII–XXII*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Daniel J. Honan. The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954).

the world, Satan will be loosed; and when Antichrist comes, many martyrs and confessors will be brought forth” (Cass. *Exp. Apoc.* 20.1–3).¹⁶ The “consensus of the fathers” to which Cassiodorus refers can only mean those in the preceding centuries. We have seen that the earliest interpretation of the second century, in fact, understood the binding of Satan as occurring yet future at the start of the millennium.

Finally, Gregory the Great (died c. 604), writes concerning the binding of Satan:

The ancient serpent is bound with a chain and cast into the bottomless pit, because kept away from the hearts of the good and trapped within the minds of the reprobate, he exercises dominion over them with greater savagery. And a little afterwards he is described as being brought out of the depths of the bottomless pit, because from the hearts of the wicked, which now rage secretly, once he has gained power against the Church at that time, he will openly sally forth in the violence of persecution. (Gregory I, *Moralia* 18.42 [67] 9–22)¹⁷

¹⁶ Translation from Francis X. Gumerlock, “Cassiodorus: *Brief Explanations on the Apocalypse*,” in *Cassiodorus, St. Gregory the Great, and Anonymous Greek Scholia: Writings on the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, Mark Delcogliano, and T. C. Schmidt, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, ed. David H. Hunter et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022). All quotations from Cassiodorus’s work rely on Gumerlock’s translation and will be abbreviated as *Cass. Exp. Apoc.* 6.12, where the reference indicates the chapter and verse upon which Cassiodorus is commenting.

¹⁷ Gumerlock, et al, *Writings on the Apocalypse*, 76.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
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Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 19

A Critique of Beale's Interpretation of Revelation 20:1–3

G. K. Beale draws numerous lines of intertextuality and connections to strengthen his commitment to a recapitulation view of Revelation 20:1–3. His attempt at interpreting the binding of Satan within an eschatological framework in which the symbolic vision of Revelation 20:1–3 is being realized in the present age is commendable. However, in the following pages I offer a brief critique of Beale's framing from my own perspective as a classic Irenaean premillennialist. Beale writes:

Most commentators agree that the beast ascends from the abyss of 11:7 directly before Christ's second coming. This ascent should probably be identified with Satan's ascent from the abyss in 20:3b, 7, which further confirms that Satan's ascent is prior to the final coming of Christ. Just as the beast represents Satan's authority throughout history in 13:1–2 (cf. 12:3), so the beast's ascent at the end of history can be spoken of in 20:3, 7 as the dragon's ascent because the former again represents the latter.¹

This may sound plausible on the surface, but in the vision of the ascent of the beast in Revelation 13, the beast is able to ascend only because the dragon—Satan—has been active in warfare, destruction, and other exploits throughout Revelation 12, preceding the rising of the beast from the abyss (13:1). Thus the ascent of the beast from the sea/abyss cannot be the same as the release of the dragon from the abyss. As a rule, our interpretation of these texts must align with what the passage affirms in its context—syntactical, literary, and historical. Beale's explanation seems to fall short.

Beale also argues, "It is wrong to picture the devil being 'cast out of the earth' in some spatial sense, so that he is no longer present on earth. This would be to take 'abyss' in an overly literalistic manner. Rather, like 'heaven' throughout the Apocalypse, it represents a spiritual dimension

¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 987.

existing alongside and in the midst of the earthly, not above it or below.”² The problem, though, is that “abyss” has a particular meaning and referent in the first century that should not be overlooked. Beale’s treatment redefines the term ἄβυσσος in a way that is inconsistent with its first-century meaning: “The abyss is one of the various metaphors representing the spiritual sphere in which the devil and his accomplices operate.”³ Later, in an exegetical note, Beale acknowledges, “In addition to the implied synonymous meaning of the ‘abyss’ in 9:1–2 and 20:1 with ‘death and Hades’ in 1:18 and 6:8, ἄβυσσος is also synonymous with the realm of the ‘dead’ (νεκρός) in Rom. 10:7 (‘who will descend into the abyss, that is, to bring Christ up from the dead?’). Likewise, in Diogenes Laertius 4.5.27 ἄβυσσος connotes the place of the dead.”⁴ However, this represents a narrow selection of connotations for a term that has a much deeper, richer, and stable meaning in both canonical and extracanonical literature—a fact affirmed repeatedly and extensively in both lexica and wordbooks. Our interpretation of symbols, language, and imagery must fit the definitions of these terms in their original historical-theological contexts. Beale’s narrow redefinition of “abyss” fails to do this. Later, he does acknowledge, “The predominant idea of the abyss in the LXX and Jewish writing is that of a place of punishment where evil spirits are confined under God’s sovereignty. In the LXX this realm is also a symbol for the forces of evil (see further on 9:1).”⁵ This recasting of the first-century imagery is misleading and further reflects a selection of lexical evidence based on an amillennial theological presupposition. Rather, one would expect that the “predominant idea” should govern our understanding of the language and imagery of Revelation 20:1–3. In that case, ἄβυσσος should be properly understood as a place of confinement for wicked spirits in the spiritual realm—that is, the premillennial view.

Beale then engages the 1 Enoch background of the language and imagery. It is essential to read his engagement carefully to understand his reasons for rejecting it as exegetically determinative:

1 En. 10:4–16 portrays an angel “binding and casting” evil angels into a pit “until the day of their judgment,” when “they will be led off to the abyss of fire and to the torment and the prison, in which they will be confined forever.” The same picture is found in *1 En.* 18:11–19:3 except that the place of confinement before the final judgment is also called the “deep abyss” and “prison” (so also *Jub.* 5:6–14; *1 En.* 88:1–3; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Tob. 8:3). It is true that in all of these Jewish texts the evil spirits appear to be bound in a complete way without any exception, but that does not necessitate that the same reality in [sic] depicted in Revelation 20. Indeed, in all these texts it is never Satan but only evil spirits who are imprisoned before or at the time of the Noahic deluge or subsequently in the OT epoch. Even the NT sees demonic spirits as absolutely imprisoned but Satan and other spirits as on the loose (so 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6 in contrast to texts such as 1 Pet. 5:8). *1 En.* 54 speaks of

² Beale, *Revelation*, 987.

³ Beale, *Revelation*, 987.

⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 989.

⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 989.

the end of the age, when good angels will “cast into the abyss of complete condemnation” forever (53:2) human, and possibly demonic, subjects of Satan who were “leading astray those who dwell on the earth.”⁶

I find puzzling Beale’s reasons for rejecting the language and imagery of 1 Enoch as the governing background for the language and imagery of the binding of Satan in 20:1–3. Pointing out that the demonic objects of binding and casting are not Satan does nothing to advance a counterargument. Considering the vast number of demonic spirits, it does not advance Beale’s case to point out that Satan or demons were still active after the binding of some demonic powers. It simply means that some were bound while some were still on the loose. After all, 1 Enoch is the fictional account of antediluvian wicked spirits, and Jude and 2 Peter both tell us that only a portion of wicked angels were consigned to the spiritual prison, not all. This background should actually strengthen the interpretation that Revelation 20:1–3 refers to a complete banishing of Satan from influence in the earthly realm; he will receive in the future what that portion of fallen angels prior to the flood received in the past—consignment to the abyss.

Having dispensed with the wildly popular 1 Enoch as the background of Revelation 20:1–3, Beale then appeals to the post-New Testament *Gospel of Nicodemus* 22:2, in which Satan is bound after Christ’s death. But note that this is a fourth- or fifth-century apocryphal work intended to advance the amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 that was gaining popularity at that time (see Go Deeper Excursus 18). Thus, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is not a background to Revelation 20 useful for establishing its meaning in the original context. Beale also appeals to the apocryphal *Prayer of Manasseh* 3, which credits God with binding the sea and shutting up the deep; these are poetic references to the creation account in Genesis 1, not references to restraining or binding Satan or demons in the abyss.

Beale wrongly assumes that the demons bound during the deluge (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6) “were subsequently allowed to be active on earth (including presumably Satan), so the binding in Revelation 20 might be so qualified.”⁷ But this overlooks the fact that in both 2 Peter and Jude, and in the general understanding of these matters at the time, only a portion of the demonic spirits were (and still are) confined in the abyss and utterly incapable of interacting with this world. These will be released for a while in the future, which is probably what we see in the release of demonic hoards from the abyss in Revelation 9:1–3. And the subsequent activity of these beings does not occur during their binding in the abyss but after their release from it. This parallel comfortably fits the futurist reading of Revelation 20:1–3. Beale finally appeals to Isaiah 24:21–22 and 27:1 as backgrounds for the imagery of Revelation 20:2–3.⁸ However, the chronology set forth in that passage actually fits the premillennial futurist view quite well, as the dragon is defeated after the time of tribulation and resurrection (see Isa 26).

⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 989.

⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 990.

⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 990–91.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 20

A Detailed Examination of the Two Resurrections in Revelation 20

In this excursus, we explore the possible interpretations of the phrase “the rest of the dead” to determine which presents the least exegetical and theological problems. The larger category of “the dead ones” composed of the “beheaded souls” (Rev 20:4) and “the rest” must be in the same category of death—either physical death or spiritual death. The most defensible interpretation will reckon with the phrase οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν (“the rest of the dead”) without redefining the category of τῶν νεκρῶν mid-passage and without redefining what it means that “they lived” (ἔζησαν) mid-passage.

With this in mind, we will run through five possible scenarios for how τῶν νεκρῶν, ἔζησαν, and οἱ λοιποὶ interact with one another logically and how each position on the first and second resurrections handles these terms in the course of their interpretations.

Scenario 1

Τῶν Νεκρῶν: Physically Dead

First Resurrection: Spiritual (Going to Heaven)

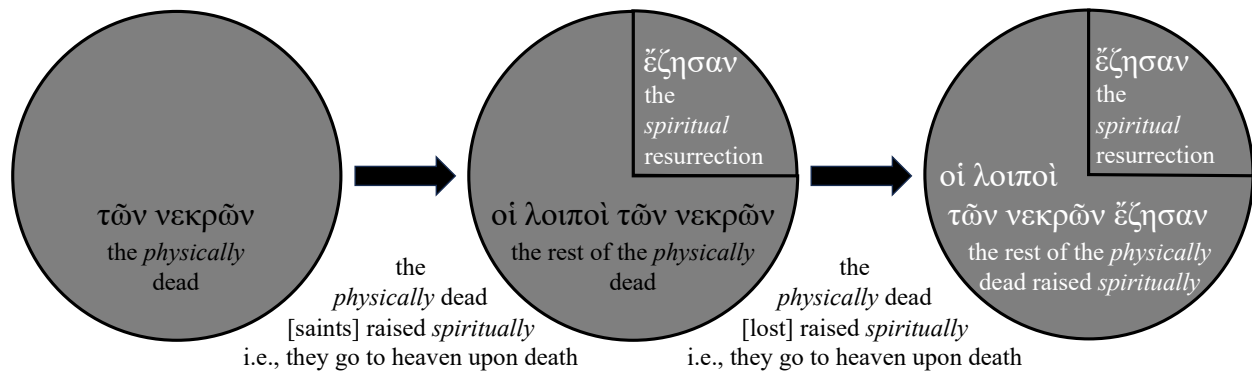
Second Resurrection: Spiritual

This first scenario understands the category of τῶν νεκρῶν as physically dead, whether saved or unsaved. Those who died physically for the sake of Christ (the saints) (Rev 20:4) are raised *spiritually* in the sense of going to heaven upon death (e.g., Warfield, Kline, Riddlebarger). That is, the “spiritual resurrection” is the intermediate state. Those who are thus “spiritually resurrected” are still physically dead in Revelation 20:4. Then, if one is to be consistent with the definition of the category τῶν νεκρῶν and the meaning of ἔζησαν in 20:5, the οἱ λοιποὶ—those who are still part of the physically dead (the lost) distinguished from the first group who were resurrected spiritually to heaven (the saints)—will be raised spiritually after the thousand years. That is, if τῶν νεκρῶν is

defined consistently as “physically dead,” and if ἔζησαν is defined consistently as “came to life spiritually in heaven,” then this consistency will result in universalism.

A possible strategy to maintain consistency in the definition of ἔζησαν as “spiritual resurrection” without resulting in universalism would be to define ἔζησαν as “spiritual resurrection to the lake of fire.” This avoids universalism but results in no account whatsoever of bodily physical resurrection of either the saved or the lost. This is plausible, but it seems almost unbelievable that the book of Revelation would be completely silent on the central focus of Christian eschatology: the bodily resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, some to everlasting life, others to everlasting condemnation. Therefore, if there is an interpretation that avoids universalism, definitional inconsistencies, and narrative gaps, it should be preferred.

Diagram of Scenario 1



Scenario 2

Τῶν Νεκρῶν: Physically Dead

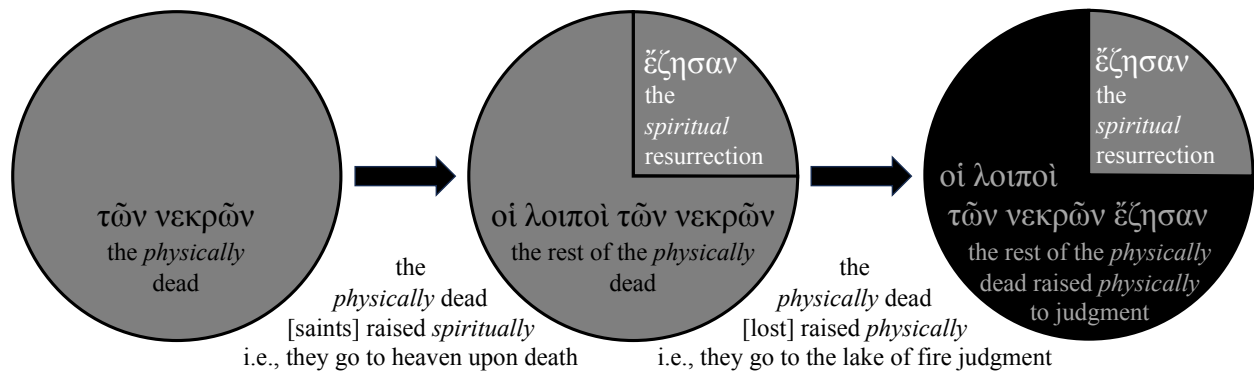
First Resurrection: Spiritual (Going to Heaven)

Second Resurrection: Physical

To avoid the universalist implications of the first scenario that results from using ἔζησαν consistently as spiritual resurrection, this scenario changes the meaning of ἔζησαν from “came to life spiritually in heaven” when applied to the saints to “came to life physically to judgment in the lake of fire” when applied to the lost.

This move certainly avoids universalism, but it requires an inconsistency in the definition of ἔζησαν and leaves us with no account of the physical resurrection of the saints. Therefore, if there is an interpretation that avoids these definitional inconsistencies and narrative gaps, it should be preferred.

Diagram of Scenario 2



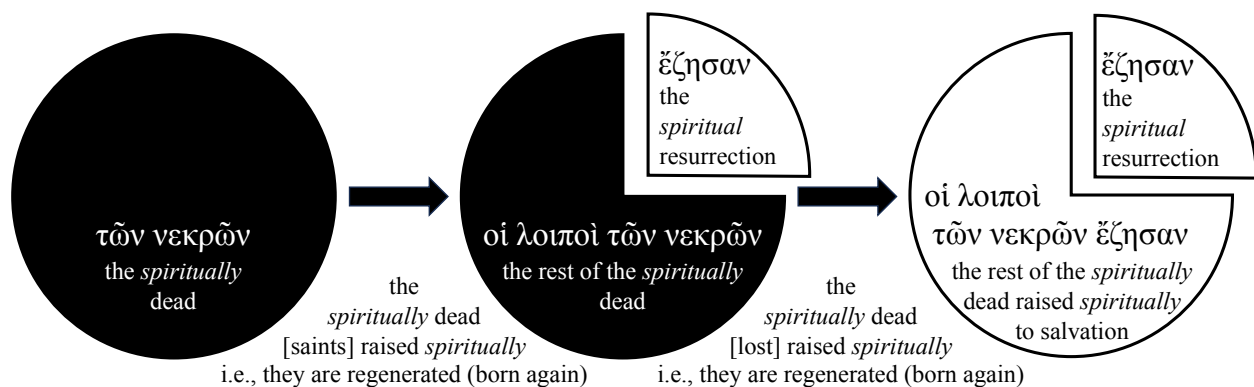
Scenario 3

Τῶν Νεκρῶν: Spiritually Dead First Resurrection: Spiritual (Regeneration) Second Resurrection: Spiritual

In this third scenario, the category τῶν νεκρῶν is defined as “spiritually dead” and used consistently throughout. Those who are raised, ἔζησαν, in Revelation 20:4 are regenerated spiritually: “born again.” At that moment, all those who are resurrected spiritually are removed from the category of τῶν νεκρῶν, the “spiritually dead.” Thus οἱ λοιποὶ refers to the “rest of the spiritually dead” who did not experience regeneration.

After the thousand-year period, those remaining “spiritually dead” are raised, and to avoid changing the definition of ἔζησαν from 20:4 to 20:5, they must be regarded as being resurrected spiritually from spiritual death. This results both in universalism and in no accounting of physical resurrection of either the saved or the lost prior to the last judgment. Therefore, if there is an interpretation that avoids universalism and narrative gaps, it should be preferred.

Diagram of Scenario 3

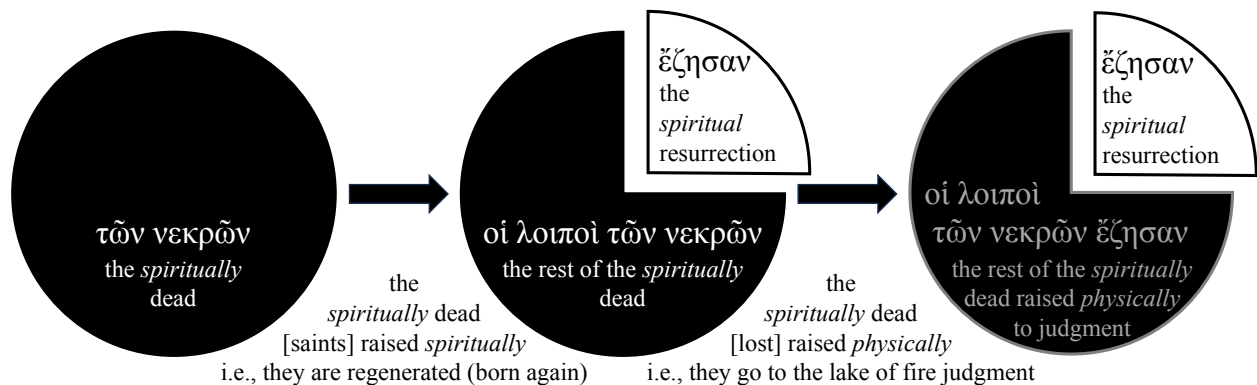


Scenario 4
τῶν Νεκρῶν: Spiritually Dead
First Resurrection: Spiritual (Regeneration)
Second Resurrection: Physical

The fourth scenario, which reflects the classic Augustinian amillennial view, also regards the category τῶν νεκρῶν as “spiritually dead” and the first resurrection as spiritual and maintains this consistently throughout. The first ἔζησαν in Revelation 20:4 refers to the spiritual resurrection of the saints in regeneration. Then, οἱ λοιποὶ of the dead also refers to the spiritually dead who were not raised to new life by regeneration. However, to avoid universalism, the definition of ἔζησαν must be changed from 20:4 to 20:5. That is, “the rest of the *spiritually* dead” are raised physically at the end of the thousand-year span. They are subsequently consigned to the lake of fire.

The problem with this interpretation is it requires a definition shift of both τῶν νεκρῶν and ἔζησαν from “spiritual death to spiritual resurrection” when applied to the saints but “physical death to physical resurrection” when applied to the lost. Or τῶν νεκρῶν retains its meaning of “spiritually dead,” but ἔζησαν shifts meaning to “physical resurrection” for the lost. This results in no narrative account of the bodily resurrection of the saints, because their “spiritual resurrection” had already occurred, and they are no longer counted among οἱ λοιποὶ of the dead that are raised later.

Diagram of Scenario 4



These first four scenarios all share the view that the first resurrection is spiritual, not physical. J. Ramsey Michaels makes an important observation that if the first resurrection is spiritual and not bodily in Revelation 20:4–6, and if the bodily resurrection—the “second”—is found at the end of the “millennial” church age in Revelation 20:11–15, this leaves an alarming narrative gap. He writes:

If the literal future resurrection of Christian believers is not what is meant by the “first resurrection,” then where in the chapter *is* this traditional New Testament hope to be found? It would be strange indeed if a work emphasizing so strongly at the outset the resurrection of Jesus (1:5, 18), and with such a pervasive concern to offer consolation to Christians facing persecution and martyrdom, were to overlook the very heart of the church’s eschatological expectation.¹

In other words, in an amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:1–15, the long-hoped-for object of the Christian faith throughout the New Testament—the resurrection of the body—is missing from the narrative.² Michaels continues: “The only possible answer to the question, it appears, is that the literal future resurrection of Christians is described in 20:11–15. But in these verses there is no emphasis at all upon this future resurrection as the positive object of Christian hope.... It seems inconceivable that the resurrection hope would appear only implicitly, and under the heading of the ‘second death.’”³

Again, if there is an interpretation available to the exegete that avoids definitional inconsistencies and narrative gaps, it should be preferred.

Scenario 5

τῶν Νεκρῶν: Physically Dead

First Resurrection: Physical

Second Resurrection: Physical

The final scenario regards the category τῶν νεκρῶν consistently as “physically dead,” which is consistent with the symbolism used to describe the saints who were beheaded (Rev 20:4). The category, though, contains all those who died physically regardless of whether they were saved or lost, because the delimiter of “souls that had been beheaded” is used not to modify τῶν νεκρῶν but the first instance of ἔζησαν.

Revelation 20:4 specifies that from this category of τῶν νεκρῶν (all physically dead—saved and lost), those who were beheaded for their faith and maintained their testimony of Jesus—clear signs of regenerate saints who died—ἔζησαν (“came to life”). In this scenario, ἔζησαν is used consistently as “physical resurrection.” Upon the physical resurrection of the saints, they no longer belong to the group of τῶν νεκρῶν. Thus οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν, “the rest of the *physically* dead,” include only

¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, “First Resurrection: A Response,” *WTJ* 39.1 (1976): 105.

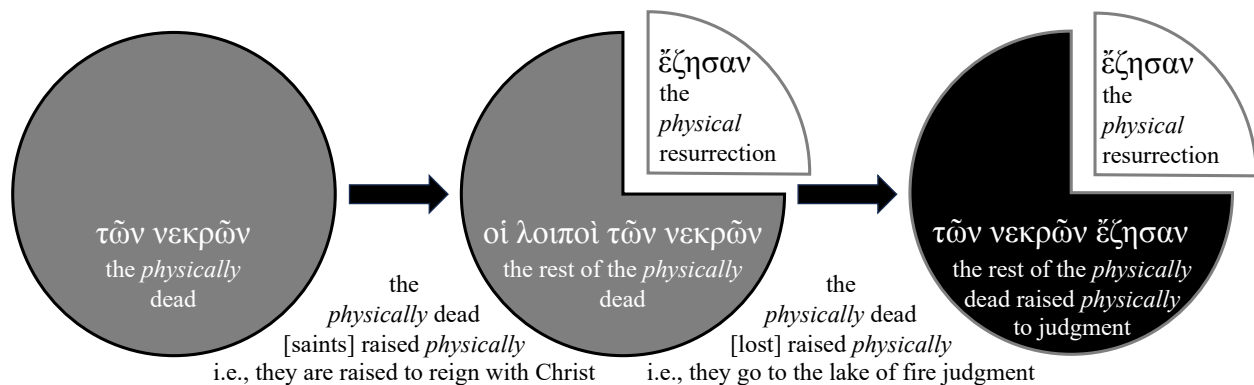
² Kline’s response that the final resurrection of the redeemed awaits Revelation 21:1–8, after the final disposition of the wicked is addressed in the previous chapter missing Michaels’ point, because Revelation 21 does not mention actual resurrection; rather, it assumes resurrection has occurred. Claiming the imagery of the bride, the new Jerusalem, and the glory of the eternal city is a picture of the resurrection of the righteous is fantastical. See Meredith G. Kline, “The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation,” *WTJ* 39.1 (1976): 115–16.

³ Michaels, “First Resurrection,” 105, 106.

the unsaved physically dead. These physically dead lost, who were not raised with the saints, will later be raised after the thousand-year period.

To maintain definitional consistency, οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν are raised (ἐξήσαν) physically unto judgment in the lake of fire. This interpretation uses τῶν νεκρῶν consistently as “physically dead”; It uses ἐξήσαν consistently as referring to “physical resurrection”; it provides a climactic narrativel account of the eschatological resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked; and it avoids universalism. In other words, this scenario avoids all the exegetical and theological weaknesses of the previous four scenarios. However, it does result in classic Irenaean premillennialism.

Diagram of Scenario 5



THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 21 The Future Restoration of Israel in the Early Church

The following survey of second- and third-century writings points to lingering vestiges of an expectation of the conversion of ethnic Israel and their resulting regathering and restoration as a nation in the land under the Messiah. Though the position was not the only view in the early church, it does seem to be part of the classic Irenaean premillennial eschatological expectation.

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (Late Second Century)

On the provenance, date, integrity, and purpose of the Testaments, Kugler notes, “The dominant view is that Jews first wrote the Testaments, and only later were they redacted to serve the interests of the early Christian movement.”¹ Most date the Christianized version as we have it today to between AD 100 and 200.² The Testaments are twelve apocryphal (that is, fictional) speeches put on the lips of the twelve sons of Jacob as heads of the tribes of Israel. Each speech rehearses each son’s life, including lessons they learned, both good and bad, exhortations to righteous living, and, finally, a prophetic conclusion, most often regarded as later Jewish-Christian additions to an earlier Jewish text.³

How are the fictional words of Israel’s patriarchs, written centuries after those twelve sons of Israel lived, helpful in answering the question of a future restoration of Israel in the early church? Because the Christianized version of the Testaments comes from sometime between the first and second centuries, the content of the prophetic portions of the speeches function like a window into the beliefs of the early Christian community that originally produced and received the Testaments.

¹ Robert Kugler, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 31.

² Kugler, *Testaments*, 31–37.

³ Kugler, *Testaments*, 11.

They introduce important themes to consider as we read the words of second-century fathers related to Israel in their historical-theological contexts.

The first clear indication of a future restoration of the nation of Israel is found in the Testament of Levi 16.4–5: “And your holy places shall be laid waste even to the ground because of him. And ye shall have no place that is clean; but ye shall be among the Gentiles a curse and a dispersion until He shall again visit you (ἕως αὐτος πάλιν ἐπισκέψηται), and in pity shall receive you [through faith and water].”⁴ The reference here is to the destruction of the temple in AD 70, their resulting dispersion, with a hope of mercy in the future.

The Testament of Judah 22.1–3 says, “Among men of another race shall my kingdom be brought to an end, until the salvation of Israel shall come, until the appearing of the God of righteousness, that Jacob and all the Gentiles may rest in peace. And he shall guard the might of my kingdom for ever: for the Lord swore to me with an oath that the kingdom should never fail from me, and from my seed for all days, even for ever.” Though the kingdom “will be brought to an end (συντελεσθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία μου),” this condition is temporary: “until (ἕως) the salvation of Israel shall come” (22.2). In Romans 11:25–26, Paul also referred to a partial hardening of Israel “until (ἄχρι) the fulness of the nations enter in, at which point “all Israel will be saved (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται).”

In the Testament of Zebulun 9.9, after a description of the coming of the Messiah as “God in the fashion of a man” (9.8), we read, “And again through the wickedness of your works shall ye provoke Him to anger, and ye shall be cast away by Him unto the time of consummation.” This rejection of Israel after the Messiah is not permanent, but it will be “unto the time of consummation” (καὶ ἀπορριφήσεσθε ἕως καιροῦ συντελείας). This implies a prolonged period of rejection that concludes with a restoration. It might very well be that Paul intended something like this in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 with his enigmatic phrase, “but wrath has come upon them [Israel] to the end” (ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος): that is, the judgment of God will remain upon them until the end, when they will be restored (cf. Rom 11:25–27).

The Testament of Dan 6.1–6 says:

Therefore is the enemy eager to destroy all that call upon the Lord. For he knoweth that upon the day on which Israel shall repent [believe] (ἐν ἣ ἡμέρᾳ πιστεύσει Ἰσραὴλ), the kingdom of the enemy shall be brought to an end. For the very angel of peace shall strengthen Israel, that it fall not (μὴ ἐμπεσεῖν αὐτόν) into the extremity of evil. And it shall be in the time of the lawlessness of Israel, that the Lord will not depart from them, but will transform them into a nation that doeth His will, for none of the angels will be equal unto him.

⁴ Translation from Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

The promise in 6.5 that Israel will not fall (μὴ ἐμπεσεῖν) into evil echoes the language of Paul in Romans 11:11—“So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall (ἵνα πέσωσιν)? By no means!” The Testament of Dan 6.4 looks forward to the day when Israel believes, which will mark the end of the enemy’s kingdom.

The Testament of Asher 7.6–7 declares, “And therefore shall ye be scattered as Gad and Dan my brethren, and ye shall know not your own lands, tribe, and tongue. But the Lord will gather you together in faith (ἐπισυνάξει ὑμᾶς Κύριος ἐν πίστει) through His tender mercy, and for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Note the use of the term ἐπισυνάγω, used also in Matthew 24:31, which we earlier identified as the eschatological regathering of the tribes of Israel after they were scattered (see *The Fathers on the Future*, chapter 7): “He will send out his messengers with a great trumpet, and they will gather (ἐπισυνάχουσιν) his elect from the four winds” (cf. Mark 13:27). This language provides an insight into how early Jewish Christians would have likely understood the promise of regathering the elect in the Olivet discourse.

Additional examples from the Testaments could be added to this sampling.⁵ Regarding their eschatological content, Kugler summarizes:

Altogether the future-oriented passages claim a number of things about what lies ahead for the patriarchs and for the early Common Era recipients of the *Testaments*. First, they predict the futures of the patriarchs’ descendants—their successes and failures, righteousness and sins—up to the coming of Jesus. Second, they foretell the tribes’ rebellion against the descendants of Levi (priests) and Judah (kings), and against the saviour who will come from those two tribes; at the same time they admonish obedience to the two tribes and to the messiah. Nonetheless, third, they predict that Israel, and most especially the tribe of Levi, will reject the messiah. After that, the messiah will turn away from Israel to the Gentiles, and Israel will sporadically keep the commandments in the period between the first advent of the messiah and his second coming. And fourth, the patriarchs announce that the messiah will come to complete God’s plan of salvation for Israel.⁶

Thus the Christianized conclusions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs demonstrate the on-the-ground reality that, at least in some circles of the second-century church, Christians expected a future repentance, regathering, and restoration of ethnic Israel to the land in accordance with Old Testament promises.

⁵ Cf. T. Reu. 6.7–12; T. Sim. 6.5; T. Iss. 6.1–4; T. Naph. 8.1–4.

⁶ Kugler, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 15.

Justin Martyr (c. 160)

Peter Richardson observes that “the word ‘Israel’ is applied to the Christian Church for the first time by Justin Martyr c. A.D. 160. It is a symptom of the developing take-over by Christians of the prerogatives and privileges of Jews.... In the creative step in which the equation is made explicit—‘Church’ = ‘true Israel’—Justin gives accurate expression to a long-standing tendency to increase the degree to which Christianity views itself as the heir of all which Israel once possessed.”⁷ Justin’s language of the church replacing rejected Israel and inheriting its promises is often cited as evidence of Justin’s stark supersessionism (cf. *Dial.* 11, 123, 135). However, in light of the second-century both/and approach to Old Testament prophecy, affirming that Christ and the church in the present constitute “spiritual Israel” does not in itself rule out the possibility that Justin also anticipated an eschatological repentance and restoration of ethnic Israel as foretold by the prophets.

In fact, Justin’s language elsewhere suggests just that when he speaks of a repentance and restoration of ethnic Israel among Old Testament prophecies that were “foretold, but are yet to happen,” that “shall with certainty come to pass” (*1 Apol.* 52). He writes:

What the tribes of the Jews will say and do when they see Him coming in glory has been thus foretold by Zacharias the Prophet: “I will order the four winds to collect together the scattered children; I will command the north wind to carry them, and the south wind not to strike against them. And then there shall be great lamentation in Jerusalem, not the lamentation of mouths or of lips, but the lamentation of the heart; and they shall tear not their clothing, but their thoughts; they shall lament tribe by tribe, and then they shall look upon the One whom they pierced, and they shall exclaim, ‘Why, O Lord, have You made us wander from Your way? The glory which our fathers blessed has for us become a shame.’” (*1 Apol.* 52 [Falls])

Falls discerns language and imagery from several Old Testament passages here: primarily, Zechariah 2:6 and 12:10–12, but also Joel 2:13, Isaiah 63:17, and 64:11.⁸ That the Zechariah passages are counted among the texts that contribute to the Old Testament collage of images of the coming kingdom suggests Justin had some concept of a future regathering and restoration of Israel upon their repentance, despite their present rejection and temporary displacement by the church.

After quoting snippets from Isaiah 55:3–13, Justin makes a similar case to his Jewish interlocutors in *Dialogue with Trypho*: “Some of these and similar passages from the Prophets refer to the first coming of Christ, in which He is described as coming in disgrace, obscurity, and

⁷ Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, SNTSMS, vol. 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1.

⁸ Falls, *Saint Justin Martyr*, 90n4.

mortality; other passages allude to His second coming when He shall appear from the clouds in glory; and your people [the Jewish people] shall see and recognize Him whom they have crucified, as Osee, one of the twelve Prophets, and Daniel have predicted” (*Dial.* 14). We have already seen that Justin’s expectation of a future millennial kingdom involved a “rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem, as was announced by the Prophets Ezechiel, Isaias and the others” (*Dial.* 80).

Thus, with a both/and approach, Justin can read these Old Testament prophecies of the repentance, regathering, and restoration of ethnic Israel rather literally while also applying promises spiritually to the church, which in the present age is the “spiritual Israel.”

Irenaeus of Lyons (Late Second Century)

At about the same time that Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs was in circulation, Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies* (c. AD 180). In that work, he promoted an earthy view of the kingdom of God that included a fulfillment of promises to Israel. For example, he writes:

But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that “many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (*Haer.* 5.30.4)

That Irenaeus envisioned a future salvation for a regathered Israel in terms similar to that of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs seems evident based on a brief but lucid statement earlier in that same chapter regarding the coming of the antichrist:

And Jeremiah does not merely point out his sudden coming, but he even indicates the tribe from which he shall come, where he says, “We shall hear the voice of his swift horses from Dan; the whole earth shall be moved by the voice of the neighing of his galloping horses: he shall also come and devour the earth, and the fullness thereof, the city also, and they that dwell therein.” This, too, is the reason that this tribe is not reckoned in the Apocalypse along with those which are saved. (*Haer.* 5.30.2)

Irenaeus’s reference is unmistakably to the twelve tribes of Israel sealed in Revelation 7:4–8, among which Dan is conspicuously missing. It is clear that Irenaeus understood the antichrist to

arise from the Hebrew tribe of Dan—that is, from among ethnic Israelites. It is therefore equally clear that Irenaeus understood Revelation 7 and the sealing of the twelve thousand from each tribe of Israel to be a reference to actual ethnic Israelites, not “spiritual Israel” as it is so often interpreted today. This is consistent with the perspective of the (Jewish) Christian redactors of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

A few chapters later, Irenaeus also seems to suggest a possible regathering of the nation of Israel in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. The ANF translation renders the difficult passage this way:

Now I have shown a short time ago that the church is the seed of Abraham; and for this reason, that we may know that He who in the New Testament “raises up from the stones children unto Abraham” is He who will gather, according to the Old Testament, those that shall be saved from all the nations, Jeremiah says: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, who led the children of Israel from the north, and from every region whither they had been driven; He will restore them to their own land which He gave to their fathers.” (*Haer.* 5.34.1 [ANF 1:563–64])

In this older rendering, though it may first appear that Irenaeus is equating the spiritual “seed of Abraham”—the church—with those who will be gathered “from all the nations,” thereby setting the church in the place of Israel as the New Testament children of Abraham. However, in light of the fact of the (Jewish) Christian understanding evident in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, which uses this same language in reference to the gathering of the literal “children of Israel” from the nations during the future kingdom, it may be that Irenaeus is advancing a similar tradition. However, the ANF reading is not the only approach one can take with this passage.

Though the ANF translation seems straightforward enough, the passage is riddled with textual problems. In the chart below, I compare the Sources Chrétiennes edition (2013) with the old Migne edition (1857) and Unger’s translation notes from the 2024 ACW translation.

Sources Chrétiennes Edition	Migne Edition	Unger Translation Note
Et propter hoc, ut sciamus ⁹ quoniam in novo Testamento haec erunt , ¹⁰ quae ex omnibus gentibus colliget eos qui	Et propter hoc, ut sciamus quoniam in Novo Testamento a Veteri qui ¹¹ ex omnibus gentibus colliget eos qui	<i>Et propter hoc, ut sciamus, quoniam in novo testamento a veteri <unus</i>

⁹ Per SC: the Armenian translates *videbimus*—“we will see”—or *videamus*—“let us see.” In either case, no critical editions follow this reading.

¹⁰ SC follows the supposed Latin underlying the Armenian translation, which has *haec erunt quae* instead of a *veteri qui* or *ac veteri quae*.

¹¹ Per Migne, Codex Vossianus (1494) reads *ac veteri quae* but Migne favors the reading *a veteri qua*.

salvabuntur, ex labidibus suscitans filios Abrahae, Jeremias ait:	salvabuntur, ex lapidibus suscitans filios Abrahae, Jeremias ait:	<i>sit Deus</i> ¹² <i>qui ex omnibus gentibus colliget eos, qui salvabuntur, ex lapidibus suscitans filios Abrahae, Jeremias ait.</i>
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The differing text-critical decisions are based on how one navigates the diverse readings of the Armenian and Latin texts and whether one must supply a subject for the verbs, as Unger does.

The translation of Unger and Moringiello renders the passage in a direction completely different from that of the ANF:

Shortly before, we showed that the Church is the offspring of Abraham, for this reason, too, that we may know that <there is one God> in the new covenant and the old who will assemble from all the Gentiles those who will be saved—*raising up children from stones*. Jeremiah said: *Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, “As the Lord lives, who brought up the people of Israel <out of the land of Egypt>”; but, “As the Lord lives who brought up the children> out of the north country, and out of all the countries where he had driven them, and he shall restore them to their land which he gave to their Fathers.”* (Unger)

Another approach may be to combine elements of the underlying Armenian text and the Latin testimony, rendering something like the following:

Ostendimus autem paulo ante quoniam Ecclesia est semen Abrahae: et propter hoc, ut sciamus quoniam in Novo Testamento haec erunt a Veteri qui ex omnibus gentibus colliget eos qui salvabuntur, ex lapidibus suscitans filios Abrahae, Jeremias ait:

We have shown a little before that the Church is the seed of Abraham: and for this reason, that we may know that in the New Testament these things will be from the Old, [the one]

¹² Unger explains, “I inserted in angular brackets what I think fell out of the text. The Latin MSS have *a veteri* or *ac veteri* (Voss). The first makes no sense, whatever one might think of supplying. The second does make sense. Arm. Iren. Does not have this at all. Now let us work backward. *Suscitans* has as subject God, not the Church of the preceding sentence. That is certain. But the subject of *colliget*, on which *suscitans* depends, must be the same God. That justifies the relative *qui* of the Latin and disqualifies *quae* of Arm. Iren. Arm. Iren., having omitted *ac veteri*, tried to patch the matter, very poorly, by inserting *haec erunt quae*. Since God is nowhere in sight here, but is needed as subject, that word must have fallen out. If we insert it, as I did, we have the simple oft-repeated teaching of Irenaeus that there is one God in the New and the Old Testaments.” St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, books 4 and 5, trans. and annotated by Dominic Unger, with introduction and rev. by Scott D. Moringiello, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, vol. 72 (New York: Newman, 2024), 304–305n3.

who will gather from all nations those who will be saved, is raising up the children of Abraham from the stones, Jeremiah says:

Unger may be right that an explicit reference to God may be missing, but without textual support, I am simply supplying “the one” to provide a subject. With my own very tentative rough reconstruction and translation, I make a case for the following interpretation. Irenaeus begins 5.34.1 by quoting Isaiah 26:19, a clear reference to bodily resurrection, which he places at the time of the kingdom. He adds to this a quotation of Ezekiel 37:12, again emphasizing bodily resurrection and a restoration of God’s people to their “own land.” Irenaeus then he leaps forward to paraphrase Ezekiel 37:24–25. In that passage God is the one who will—according to Irenaeus, in the future era of resurrection—gather Israel from among the nations (*Colligam Israel ab omnibus gentibus, ubi disperse sunt illic*). The passage in its context refers to the regathering of the tribes of Israel from exile, returning them to their own land under the new King David who will rule over them in the future kingdom.

A closer reading of Irenaeus here reveals that he affirms the present New Testament truth that God is currently raising up children of Abraham who constitute the “seed” (*ex lapidibus suscitans* [present active participle] *filios Abrahae*) in the “New Testament” period. On this point there is no dispute.¹³ Yet, in keeping with the Old Testament promises (if we read *a Veteri* versus *ac Veteri*), in the future God “will gather (*colliget* [third-person plural future active indicative]) out of all the nations those who will be saved (*salvabuntur* [third-person plural passive future indicative]).”

Because bodily resurrection is in the immediate context and because the unity of the Old and New Testaments is Irenaeus’s overall rhetorical goal, a fulfillment of those Old Testament promises related to the land must be in Irenaeus’s mind. Thus, a dual fulfillment makes sense—that in the present time of the New Testament the spiritual seed of Abraham is being raised spiritually from the stones to constitute the church, but in the future, from the Old Testament promises, the literal

¹³ Irenaeus does mention that “earlier” he had established that the “seed of Abraham” is the “church” who, together with Abraham, will inherit the blessing of the literal land. This he argued in *Against Heresies* 5.32. There, he urged a literal resurrection of the just as well as an earthly kingdom that will fulfill the explicit promises to Abraham in the Old Testament (5.32.1). God had promised that he would give the land to Abraham and to his “seed” (citing Gen 13:13–14). He concludes, “If, then, God promised him the inheritance of the land, yet he did not receive it during all the time of his sojourn there, it must be, that together with his seed, that is, those who fear God and believe in Him, he shall receive it at the resurrection of the just” (*Haer.* 5.32.2). Then he states, “For his seed is the Church (*semen autem ejus Ecclesia*).” In support of this, he quotes the words of John the Baptist (Luke 3:8) that God could raise up children of Abraham from stones, as well as Galatians 3:16 and 4:28. In particular, Irenaeus makes the case that the church constitutes the “seed” by virtue of their union with Christ: “He [Paul] plainly declares that they who have believed in Christ do receive Christ, the promise to Abraham thus saying, ‘The promises were spoken to Abraham, and to his seed. Now He does not say, And of seeds, as if [he spoke] of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.’” Irenaeus firmly establishes that by virtue of their union with Christ and justification by faith, the church will receive the promise of the inheritance: “they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just” in the kingdom on earth (*Haer.* 5.32.2). Though Irenaeus indisputably includes the church, united with Christ by faith, in the promise to Abraham and his “seed,” he does not thereby rule out a further fulfillment applying to ethnic Israel.

seed of Abraham will be gathered from among the nations and restored to the land. The real question, then, is whether the eschatological gathering from among the nations is due to resurrection of the Old Testament saints or a restoration of the remnant of Israel at the time. Due to the complexities of the textual reconstruction and translation, this issue cannot be firmly resolved.

In the next chapter, Irenaeus connects the promise of the new covenant established at the Last Supper with the future inheritance of the land:

For this reason, when about to undergo His sufferings, that He might declare to Abraham and those with him the glad tidings of the inheritance being thrown open, [Christ], after He had given thanks while holding the cup, and had drunk of it, and given it to the disciples, said to them: “Drink ye all of it: this is My blood of the new covenant, which shall be shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I will drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (*Haer.* 5.33.1)

Irenaeus concludes that Christ will “renew the inheritance of the earth” in the future and will “drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples” when the earth is renewed and his disciples are resurrected “in the flesh.”

In light of Irenaeus’s demonstrable both/and approach to prophecy, even though it is true that he viewed the New Testament church to be “the legitimate spiritual successor of the Hebrew nation, the new and true Israel of God,”¹⁴ this fact alone does not rule out a future regeneration, repentance, and restoration of ethnic Israel in Irenaeus’s eschatological expectations. Only if he insisted on an either/or approach to eschatology would this be the case. So, when he makes assertions such as “God has justly rejected [those Jews who rejected the Son of God], and given to the Gentiles outside the vineyard the fruits of its cultivation” (*Haer.* 4.36.2), such language must be understood in light of his both/and approach in 5.34.2.

Tertullian of Carthage (Early Third Century)

Tertullian’s premillennial eschatology has already been discussed in Go Deeper Excursus 8. Within that basic premillennial framework, he also anticipated a future repentance and restoration of the Jewish people associated with the return of Christ in terms similar to those of Justin and Irenaeus before him. In *Against Praxeas* (c. 210), Tertullian writes that Christ “is ‘exalted at the right hand

¹⁴ John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: Epworth, 1948; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 79; cf. also 252.

of God,' as Peter declares in the Acts; is the Lord of hosts, because all things are by the Father made subject to Him; is the King of Israel because to Him has especially been committed the destiny of that nation" (*Prax.* 17 [ANF 3]). Tertullian does not develop what he means by "the destiny of that nation"—Israel—at this point, but further passages shed light on his intention. In *On Modesty* (c. 220?), commenting on the parable of the prodigal son, Tertullian writes:

And accordingly the Jew at the present day, no less than the younger son, having squandered God's substance, is a beggar in alien territory, serving even until now its princes, that is, the princes of this world. Seek, therefore, the Christians some other as their brother; for the Jew the parable does not admit. Much more aptly would they have matched the Christian with the elder, and the Jew with the younger son, "according to the analogy of faith," if the order of each people as intimated from Rebecca's womb permitted the inversion: only that (in that case) the concluding paragraph would oppose them; for it will be fitting for the Christian to rejoice, and not to grieve, at the restoration of Israel, if it be true, (as it is), that the whole of our hope is intimately united with the remaining expectation of Israel. (*Pud.* 8 [ANF 4])

The first portion of this sounds like doom for Israel, not dissimilar to the judgment and dispersion of Israel envisioned in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs or even Paul's own language of hardening in Romans 11. Yet the latter part of the text indicates that Israel will one day be restored—and with this restoration of Israel, "the whole of our hope" is united.

In his lengthy polemic against the heretic Marcion (c. 207), Tertullian writes, "To Christ, however, 'the order of Melchizedek' will be very suitable; for Christ is the proper and legitimate High Priest of God. He is the Pontiff of the priesthood of the uncircumcision, constituted such, even then, for the Gentiles, by whom He was to be more fully received, although at His last coming He will favour with His acceptance and blessing the circumcision also, even the race of Abraham" (*Adv. Marc.* 5.9 [ANF 3]). Elsewhere, Tertullian proves to his opponents, who rejected a future resurrection in favor of a spiritual, realized resurrection, by pointing to the fact that certain prophecies of the future had not yet occurred: "Up to the present moment they have not, tribe by tribe, smitten their breasts, looking on Him whom they pierced. No one has as yet fallen in with Elias; no one has as yet escaped from Antichrist; no one has as yet had to bewail the downfall of Babylon" (*Res.* 22 [ANF 3]).¹⁵

¹⁵ Here Tertullian echoes similar language as used by Justin, *Dial.* 14 and *1 Apol.* 52.

Third-Century Fathers and Beyond

Origen of Alexandria (early third century) was quite explicit in his rejection of a restoration of Israel. He asserts that Jerusalem was destroyed as judgment for crucifying Christ: “One fact, then, which proves that Jesus was something divine and sacred, is this, that Jews should have suffered on His account now for a lengthened time calamities of such severity. And we say with confidence that they will never be restored to their former condition” (*Cels.* 4.22 [ANF 4]). Because they committed such an unholy crime against Jesus, “it accordingly behooved that city where Jesus underwent these sufferings to perish utterly, and the Jewish nation to be overthrown, and the invitation to happiness offered them by God to pass to others” (*Cels.* 4.22). Of course, because Origen rejected a literal earthly kingdom, he would have had no space or time period in which such a future restoration could possibly occur.

At the same time, though, the earlier idea of a future restoration of Israel persisted. Like Irenaeus before him, Victorinus of Pettau (late third century) held to a future for Israel, drawing on the vision of the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel in Revelation 7.¹⁶ On the angel descending from heaven to seal the 144,000, Victorinus writes:

He speaks of Elias the prophet, who is the precursor of the times of Antichrist, for the restoration and establishment of the churches from the great and intolerable persecution. We read that these things are predicted in the opening of the Old and New Testament; for He says by Malachi: “Lo, I will send to you Elias the Tishbite, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, according to the time of calling, to recall the Jews to the faith of the people that succeed them.” And to that end He shows, as we have said, that the number of those that shall believe, of the Jews and of the nations, is a great multitude which no man was able to number. [*On the Apocalypse* 7.2 (ANF 7)]

The interpretation that the 144,000 from the twelve tribes in Revelation 7:4–8 referred to the future salvation and restoration of ethnic Israel would not stand. Later commentators would simply combine the two groups in Revelation 7—the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel and the “great multitude” from all nations—as Jews and Gentiles in the church of the present age. Tyconius [fourth century] understood the 144,000 in Revelation 7 as “the whole entire church” [*Exp. Apoc.* 7:8].¹⁷ Not much should be made of this, though, since Tyconius was eager to identify numerous symbols in Revelation as the church. He has no allowance for a future for Israel in the teachings of

¹⁶ Gumerlock notes, “Some early interpreters of the Book of Revelation saw the 144,000 as Jewish people who would believe in Christ during the future reign of the Antichrist (Victorinus)” (Francis X. Gumerlock, Francesca Lecchi, and Tito Orlandi, *Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria: Commentary on the Apocalypse* [Middletown, RI: Stone Tower Press, 2021], 8).

¹⁷ Tyconius of Carthage, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 134 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 85.

Jesus or the apostles: “For the Lord in the Gospel describes the whole church, which is both from the Jews and from the nations, as being the twelve tribes of Israel, saying: ‘You will sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel,’ although it is obvious that the whole church, which is from every nation, not from only the circumcision, is going to be judged” [*Exp. Apoc.* 7:10].¹⁸ Cassiodorus [c. AD 580], too, conflates the 144,000 and the great multitude, noting, “Then the multitude and congregation of the saints [*Exp. Apoc.* 7.9; cf. 14.1–5].¹⁹ This is consistent with Tyconius before him.²⁰ Cassiodorus also understood the references to Jerusalem and the temple in Revelation 11 as indicating “the places which Christian people held” [*Exp. Apoc.* 11.1].

¹⁸ Gumerlock, *Tyconius*, 86.

¹⁹ Francis X. Gumerlock, “Cassiodorus: *Brief Explanations on the Apocalypse*,” in *Cassiodorus, St. Gregory the Great, and Anonymous Greek Scholia: Writings on the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, Mark Delcogliano, and T. C. Schmidt, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, ed. David H. Hunter et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 24.

²⁰ Gumerlock, “Cassiodorus,” 24n34.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 22 The Old Testament and the Day of the Lord

In the following discussion, I assume the genuineness of the prophetic oracles, visions, and dreams. Thus, I am open to the possibility that the authors of these texts may not have fully understood the prophecies they recorded or that the prophetic words themselves could play double (or even triple) duty in predicting both near and far fulfillments. This, admittedly, is a theological reading of these texts. Therefore, I am not overly concerned with questions of intertextuality, who knew whose writings when, and how authors may have adopted or adapted previous texts for their own purposes. Not that such considerations are entirely absent from the following discussion; I do believe in the progress of revelation that prophecies were originally revealed to particular people at particular times with particular purposes and that the divine author intended to communicate *something* in a cultural-linguistic setting with its own familiar images and tropes.

In this light, I believe God himself intended to build meaning throughout the growing canon, one concept upon another, toward a fuller, broader, and deeper understanding. Thus, completely “flat” readings of these texts in which no consideration is given to the progress of revelation or to the centrality of key passages (the *sedes doctrinae*) should be avoided. Nevertheless, because the divine revealer of these prophecies knows the end from the beginning and speaks only truth, we must never read these texts in ways that limit the meaning, interpretations, or understandings merely to what an author or audience would have or could have known, nor do we shy away from the possibility that later revelations may genuinely illuminate the actual intended meaning of previous revelations even when no conscious literary dependence can be demonstrated.

Methodologically, then, I begin with passages for which internal indicators of dating particular prophecies are available, using as the core passages that directly address the Day of the Lord (יוֹם יְהוָה) as such, starting with the discernably earliest passages and continuing with those that can be dated subsequently in order. Then I will consider additional information provided by Day of the Lord passages whose dating are less evident. From here, we may summarize the basic language and imagery related to the Day of the Lord concept, arguing that the “Day” had quickly become a

technical term among the prophets of ancient Israel. Using the unique language, phraseology, and imagery drawn from these key passages, I will then expand my sources beyond the specific Day of the Lord passages to those which communicate obviously supplementary or complementary concepts.

With these basic presuppositional and methodological considerations in place, I will begin by examining the Day of the Lord passage in Amos—the earliest of the Old Testament Prophets who prophesied “in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel” (Amos 1:1; cf. 7:10). Uzziah reigned from 767–740 BC, while Jeroboam II reigned from 781–753 BC. If the first verse is intended to limit the time of the prophesying to the period during which these two reigns overlapped, we have a rough fifteen-year window between 767–753 BC.

Following our examination of Amos, we move on to Isaiah, who prophesied “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (Isa 1:1), that is, a potential span between 767–686 BC. However, most regard the commencement of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry—his “commissioning”—to have occurred “in the year that King Uzziah died” (6:1). If this is the case, then his prophetic ministry began at least by the year 740 BC, extending to the death of Sennacherib (681 BC) (Isa 37:38). It seems reasonable, then, to date the height of Isaiah’s prophesying and writing during a sixty-year period between about 740 and 680 BC.

Next, Zephaniah prophesied “in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah” (1:1), that is, in a fairly narrow window of about thirty years between 640–609 BC, in any case subsequent to the prophecies of Amos and Isaiah.

The imagery of the Day of the Lord in Jeremiah and Lamentations gives us insight into the state of the technical concept in the seventh-to-sixth centuries BC. Following this, Ezekiel’s prophecies are frequently dated relative to the time that had elapsed after the exile of Jehoiachin (597 BC). Thus, the earliest vision is dated “the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin,” that is, 593 BC. The particular passages themselves may sometimes be precisely dated, but the entire book seems to have been completed during the period between 593 and 573 BC—twenty years.

Obadiah’s prophecy is variously dated, but if the reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in verse 11 is a genuine past event (and not a prophecy expressed in the past tense), then the earliest date would be after 586 BC. The mention of the fall of Edom as not yet having been accomplished (verse 1) suggests that the book was written prior to 553. Thus, we will operate from an assumption of a range between 586 and 553 BC, or roughly 33 years.

Malachi has no clear date indicators, but the mention of conditions that seem to necessitate a functioning temple (Mal 1:10; 3:1, 8) suggests a date after its reconstruction during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus, a date roughly around 500–450 BC seems reasonable for our purposes.

The book of Joel, quite rich in Day of the Lord language and imagery, is difficult to date with any degree of confidence. However, it seems that a date after the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions and the resultant scattering of the tribes throughout the world is most likely (see Joel 3:2–3), though this could be looking forward to the reversal of a diaspora that had not yet come to pass. We will place our consideration of Joel’s Day of the Lord passages last, assuming a context

similar to that of Malachi, between about 550–400 BC, though open to the possibility of an earlier or later date. The problem is, it is possible Joel stands as a background even to the language of Amos; or that it stands far in the foreground of all these other writings, placing a capstone on their development of the Day of the Lord imagery. Placing it last in our examination should do little harm if we consider the various possible intertextual relationships these other books could have with Joel.

The Day of the Lord in Amos (c. 767–753)

The prophecy of Amos comes about 30–50 years before the Assyrian invasion of Israel and its fall in 722 BC during the latter part of the reign of Jeroboam II (c. 767–653 BC). In fact, in a brief narrative section, Amaziah the priest of Bethel reported to Jeroboam, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear his words” (Amos 7:10). Amaziah summed up the basic message of Amos as “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land” (7:11). Amos responded that God had called him to “prophesy to my people Israel” (7:15).

This scope of the prophecy and its general content as a warning of judgment against Israel agrees with the repeated statements throughout Amos limiting the focus of the prophecies and visions on Israel. The book describes itself as “The words of Amos...which he saw concerning Israel” (1:1). Yet the prophet first declares judgment against seven other kingdoms before settling on Israel: Damascus (1:3–5), Gaza (1:6–8), Tyre (1:9–10), Edom (1:11–12), the Ammonites (1:13–15), Moab (2:1–3), and Judah (2:4–5). For each of these, their wickedness will be punished when God sends fire upon them (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5).

In Amos 2:6, the focus shifts to Israel, and there it remains. In response to their abiding wickedness and godlessness, God vows to level punishment (2:6–16). Chapter 3 begins, “Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt” (3:1; cf. 2:10). God will punish Israel for all their iniquities (3:2). The certainty of disaster is emphasized by a series of rhetorical questions, the answers to which are only “yes,” culminating with, “Does disaster (רעה) come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?” This warning of coming judgment, however, is revealed through God’s prophets as a final warning, like a “trumpet blown in a city” (3:6, 7–8). God declares through Amos that an adversary (the Assyrians) will “surround the land and bring down your defenses from you and your strongholds shall be plundered” (3:11), and the great majority will be devoured by the army (3:12). God then declares, “On the day (ביום) I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel” (3:14). Though it is God who is punishing, he does so by means of the invading Assyrian army.

Because they exploit the poor and needy, “the days are coming (ימים באים)” upon Israel in which they are dragged into exile (4:2–3). Further, their sham worship at Bethel and Gilgal are

condemned, including their illicit sacrifices, tithes, and thanksgivings (4:4-5). In this false worship, they “multiply transgressions” (4:4). God then describes five distinct judgments he sent to Israel as warnings for the climactic coming judgment on the horizon: famine (4:6), drought (4:7-8), locusts (4:9), pestilence (4:10), and fire (4:11). Yet even in light of these warnings, they did not return to God (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). On the basis of their wickedness and failure to respond in repentance to his warnings, Amos writes, “Therefore thus I will do to you O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” (4:12). In this theophanic “coming,” God will “meet” Israel in judgment.

Chapter 5 portrays a disastrous situation for the house of Israel that has fallen, is forsaken, and is left with merely a tenth remaining (5:1-3). Yet even in the midst of this, God calls to them, “Seek me and live” (5:4-5). If they do not seek him, God will “break out like fire in the house of Joseph” (5:6)—language similar to the judgments of fire against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, and Judah in chapters 1 and 2. God identifies himself as the one who “turns deep darkness (צלמות) into the morning and darkens (ךחך) the day into night” (5:8), he “makes destruction (ךש) flash forth against the strong, so that destruction (ךש) comes upon the fortress” (5:9). The oppressors of truth-tellers and the poor will themselves lose the lavish lifestyles they had established (5:10-12).

Complementing his exhortation to “seek the Lord and live” (Amos 5:4, 6), the prophet pronounces, “Seek good, and not evil, that you may live, and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said” (5:14). The hope of the people is that God would visit the nation in blessing. If they would “hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate,” then “the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph” (5:15). Though Israel had been dealt several preliminary blows of judgment, an opportunity for repentance and blessing from the presence of God is still available to them. Yet the hope of repentance and a visitation from Yahweh in blessing is dashed with the prophecy in verses 16-17. He will, in fact, be with them, but not in blessing: “In all the squares there shall be wailing, and in all the streets they shall say, ‘Alas! Alas!’ They shall call the farmers to mourning and to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation, and in all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through your midst.” On the heels of this stern warning and reversal of expectations at the coming of the Lord, we arrive at the central Day of the Lord passage in Amos: “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord?” (Amos 5:18).

Commentators have debated who was desiring the Day of the Lord and had a misunderstanding of its character. It seems the most likely explanation given the immediately preceding context is that many believed the days of trial were over (4:6-13), the worst had passed, and God would “be with” Israel and “be gracious to the remnant of Joseph” (5:14-15). That is, the earnest desire and expectation was a theophanic visitation of God to mediate restoration and blessings to the nation. However, Amos makes it clear that though a visitation by Yahweh (a Day of the Lord) would occur, it would not be for blessing but for judgment. Here we see the startling characteristics

of this יום יהוה (ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου): “It is darkness (רשח, σκότος), not light (אור, φῶς)” (5:18).¹ This repeats the earlier warning of a theophany in which Israel is told to “prepare to meet your God” (4:12), noting that the God of hosts is the one who “makes the morning darkness (עיפה)” (4:13) and later, he “darkens (רשח, συσκοτάζω) the day into night” (5:8). Thus, the coming Day of the Lord would be “darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it” (5:20). For those caught by the Day of the Lord, there would be no escape (5:19). Later God will swear, “And on that day (ביום ההוא)...I will make the sun go down at noon and darken (רשח) the earth in broad daylight” (8:9). This establishes a clear conceptual connection between the phrase יום יהוה (day of the Lord) and יום ההוא (that Day), when other Day of the Lord terms and images are present.

The reason for this darkness of judgment is given in 5:21–22—“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them” (5:21–22). This is a similar rebuke of their sham worship as in 4:4–5, repeated again in 8:10 as the basis for judgment on “that day” (יום ההוא): “I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation.” This further suggests “that day” is a reference to the Day of the Lord concept. Instead of the hypocritical singing and music, God desires them to “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an every-flowing stream” (5:24). Because of their spiritual rebellion and idolatry, their judgment was sure: “I will send you into exile beyond Damascus” (5:25).

The Day of the Lord prophecy continues into chapter six, with another “woe”—the first “woe” appearing against those who desire the Day of the Lord (5:18). In this second woe, God castigates “those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes” (6:1). These great ones of Judah in the south (Zion) as well as of Israel in the north are victims of a false sense of security. They forget the cities around them that had already fallen to the Assyrians (6:2). In their minds, they had “put far away the day of disaster (יום רע, ἡμέραν κακήν)” (6:3).

The third “woe”—connecting this entire passage with the first mention of the Day of the Lord (5:18)—begins in verse 4 against “those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sounds of the harp...who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the infest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph” (6:4–6). These people living in absolute luxury, though, will be “the first of those who go into exile” (6:7). The city would be delivered up and death and destruction would ensue (6:8–10). God himself decrees destruction against the great houses of Israel (6:11) because of their injustice and pride (6:12–13), which will manifest itself through the

¹ In many instances, I will provide both the original Hebrew as well as the Septuagint (LXX) version of these texts because ultimately the purpose of this lengthy excursus is to provide the OT background for the language and imagery that will be adopted in the NT, the writers of which depend almost entirely on the LXX version.

invasion of the Assyrians: “For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel...and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah” (6:14).

In this primary Day of the Lord lamentation against Israel, which extends from 5:1–6:14, we see terms and images repeated or emphasized that seem to constitute the concept of the Day of the Lord in the mind of the prophet. We can make the following observations regarding the Day of the Lord:

- It is a manifestation of God in judgment like fire (Amos 5:6, 17).
- It is characterized by darkness, not light (5:8, 18, 20).
- Its destruction is certain and inescapable (5:19).
- It comes as a result of religious unfaithfulness and social injustice (5:7, 10–11, 14–15; 21–24).
- It comes upon rulers who are at ease, believing they are untouchable (5:11; 6:1–6).
- It results in disaster to the city and its people by an invading nation (5:2–3; 6:3, 8–14).
- It results in exile from the land of Israel (5:5, 27; 6:7).

The Day of the Lord in Isaiah (c. 740–680)

Unlike the preceding treatment of Amos, it is not necessary for us to present a detailed survey of Isaiah’s entire sixty-six chapters. The key Day of the Lord passage occurs in Isaiah 13, and after examining this central text to discover how the phrase is used, we can then trace a few important terms, images, and ideas related to the Day of the Lord in Isaiah to establish a broader understanding of the concept.

Among non-confessional critical scholars, Isaiah 13 is understood as part of the earliest layers of the text, “proto-Isaiah” (chapters 1–39), from the seventh century.² It is not my intention to enter into pros and cons of the unity of Isaiah, the dating of proto-Isaiah (1–39), deuterio-Isaiah (40–55), and trito-Isaiah (56–66), or whether the three distinct sections were written by a single author, Isaiah, contemporary members of his prophetic circle, or a “school” of Isaianic followers over the course of centuries.³ However, it is interesting to note that the Day of the Lord passage in Isaiah 13 comes from a section of the book that serves as its thematic foundation.

In contrast to Amos’s declaration of the Day of the Lord oracle against Israel ultimately realized in the invasion by Assyria in 722 BC, Isaiah’s seventh-century oracle is “concerning Babylon” (Isa

² See J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 32.

³ Suffice it to say I approach Isaiah as a confessional Christian and hold to its inspired and canonical unity. Though I am not entirely opposed to theories of a community of writers within an “Isaianic group” with Isaiah at the center, I see no compelling reason to reject the view that the book in its entirety was written by the seventh century BC. See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 113

13:1). Conveniently, chapter 13 begins a distinct oracle or revelation within which the Day of the Lord language may be discretely treated before tracing similar themes through Isaiah.

The prophetic message begins by God beckoning the enemies of Babylon to bring about their judgment: “I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger (ἦρα, θυμός)” (Isa 13:3). The result is a gathering of a great multitude, an “uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The Lord of hosts is mustering a host for battle” (13:4). Thus, the impending judgment against Babylon comes by means of human armies “from a distant land, from the end of the heavens” (13:5). Because they are but a means of carrying out God’s will to judge Babylon, mustered by the Lord of hosts for battle (13:4), these foreign invaders are called “the weapons of his indignation (ἄετα), to destroy (בלח, καταφθείρω) the whole land” (13:5).

From this pronouncement of judgment against Babylon by means of invading armies executing God’s anger and indignation (ἦρα and ἄετα), Isaiah’s oracle launches into the Day of the Lord description: “Wail, for the day of the Lord (יום יהוה, ἡμέρα Κυρίου) is near; as destruction (ἄψ, συντριβή) from the Almighty it will come!” (Isa 13:6). Already in this opening line we see language recalling themes from Amos’s Day of the Lord prophecy in Amos 5, where God identified himself as the one who “darkens the day into night” (5:8) and “makes destruction (ἄψ) flash forth against the strong, so that destruction (ἄψ) comes upon the fortress” (5:9).

Isaiah describes the human response to the Day of the Lord: “Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. They will be dismayed: pangs and agony (צירים וחבליים, ὠδίνες) will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor (יחילון, τικτούσης). They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame” (Isa 13:7–8). Already we begin to hear language and imagery that will be picked up in later prophets as well as New Testament authors in connection with Day of the Lord discourse (cf. 1 Thess 5:3—“The day of the Lord [ἡμέρα κυρίου] will come like a thief in the night...then sudden destruction (ἄεθος) will come upon them as labor pains (ὠδίν) come upon a pregnant woman”; Matt 24:8—“All these are but the beginning of the birth pains [ὠδίνων]”).

Isaiah continues: “Behold, the day of the Lord (יום יהוה, ἡμέρα Κυρίου) comes, cruel, with wrath (עברה, θυμοῦ) and fierce anger (ἦρα ὀρον, ὀργῆς), to make the land a desolation and to destroy (ישמיד, ἀπολέσαι) its sinners from it” (Isa 13:9). Isaiah then draws on “darkness” imagery, as seen in Amos 5:8, 18, 20—“For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark (ἄσος, σκοτισθήσεται) at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light” (Isa 13:10).

With this Day of the Lord, the wicked of the world in all their pride and arrogance will be punished to such an extent that survivors will be “more rare than fine gold” (13:11–12). God will cause the skies and earth to quake “at the wrath of the Lord (בעברת יהוה, θυμὸν ὀργῆς Κυρίου) of hosts in the day of his fierce anger (ביום חרון אפו, τῆ ἡμέρα ἣ ἄν ἀπέλθῃ ὁ θυμὸς αὐτοῦ)” (13:13).

Though each will try to escape “to his own land” (13:14), they will be killed by the sword and suffer great calamities associated with warfare (13:15–16).

That this wrath and anger of the Day of the Lord is mediated through earthly means is clear in verse 17: “I am stirring up the Medes against them [Babylon], who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold” (13:17). They cannot be bribed or satiated. Instead, their barbarity will lead to the death of young men, women, and children (13:18). The result will be the destruction of the once-glorious Babylon to the extent that it will not be inhabited by anything other than wild animals (13:19–22).

In Isaiah’s Day of the Lord oracle against Babylon, which extends from 13:1–22, we see several things in common with his forerunner (Amos 5:1–6:14) as well as several additional complementary terms and images. We can make the following observations regarding the Day of the Lord in Isaiah:

- It is characterized by God executing his judgment through the means of the armies of surrounding nations (13:3–5).
- It is characterized by mournful destruction from God as punishment against sinners (13:6, 9, 11, 20–22).
- It is comparable to the pains of a woman in labor (13:8).
- It will be marked by darkness of the sun and moon (13:10).
- It comes as a result of pride and arrogance (13:11, 19).
- Both heaven and earth will tremble and quake (13:13).
- Suffering and death of the people will be great (13:12, 14–16, 18).

An Oracle concerning Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2–4)

With this explicit **יום יהוה** passage as the standard, we can find a handful of other passages in Isaiah that do not use the specific phrase “Day of the Lord,” but they do use similar language and imagery, supplementing our central passage with additional details. One of these is Isaiah 2:6–22, a warning against Jacob for their religious infidelity and faithlessness to God, following after idols and riches (2:6–9). In response to the terrifying coming of the Lord, they are instructed to “enter into the rock and hide in the dust form before the terror (**פחד, φόβου**) of the Lord, and from the splendor of his majesty” (2:10). As the proud and haughty are brought low by judgment, “the Lord alone will be exalted in that day (**ביום ההוא, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ**)” (2:11).

This emphasis on “that day” is underscored with similar definite “Day” language in the oracle of Isaiah 2–4 (see 2:12; 2:17; 2:20; 3:18; and 4:2).⁴ The “Lord...has a day” (**יום ליהוה**) in which he

⁴ That a distinct oracle extends from 2:1 to 4:6 is a fairly well established, long-standing consensus. Motyer notes, “The easiest explanation of this unexpected ‘heading’ [in 2:1] is that what we call chapters 2–4 once ‘circulated’ as a

will bring low the proud and lofty (Isa 2:12), “and 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” (2:17). Both the language and imagery of this “day” correspond with that of the Day of the Lord passage proper in chapter 13, when God puts an end to the pomp and arrogance of Babylon (13:11). Though the objects of God’s mediated theophanic visitation are different—Judah and Jerusalem in 2:1–4:6 and Babylon in 13:1–22—the language and imagery of God’s orchestrated actions of judgment are similar.⁵ In response to “the terror of the Lord (פחד יהוה)” people “enter the caves of the rocks (LXX σπήλαια καὶ τὰς σχισμὰς τῶν πετρῶν) and the holes of the ground (LXX: τὰς τρώγλας τῆς γῆς)” (Isa 2:19).⁶ “In that day (ביום ההוא)” the idolatry of all people will cease as they enter the caves to escape the terror of the Lord (2:21). This very close repetition of 2:18–19 in 2:20–21 suggests that the יום indicated by phrases like “in that day” (ביום ההוא) in 2:11 and 2:20 and “the Lord...has a day (יום ליהוה) in 2:12 is a definite referent—“a Day,” not just “a day.” That is, even apart from the specific Day of the Lord (יום יהוה) terminology, the term “Day” (יום) in the context of earthly judgment and formulaic words and images is well on its way to becoming a technical concept.

Though this “Day” is figuratively portrayed as a theophanic event in which God’s wrath and judgment as well as his splendor and majesty are manifested to humanity, the continuation of the oracle in chapter 3 demonstrates that this is a mediated theophanic visitation. God is portrayed as the primary subject of the judgment, but as the subject he utilizes various earthly agents to carry out his will. In short, this is not God himself taking on a glorious form, stepping out of heaven, so to speak, and personally waging a heavenly war against the wicked. This is God himself orchestrating the events of earthly history in such a way that his will is accomplished, his just judgment manifested, and his glory revealed. Isaiah 3 begins, “For behold, the Lord God of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and supply”—not only material goods necessary for living, but leadership necessary for addressing the crisis (Isa 3:1–7). This anarchy

separate ‘book’ or even as a ‘wall-newspaper’ (Motyer, *Isaiah*, 58). See Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 113; George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, I–XXXIX*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner’s, 1912), 40–41.

⁵ The phrase “mediated theophanic visitation” refers to language and imagery in prophetic literature which portrays God arriving on the scene or acting in history on a glorious manifestation of power, which, when read carefully, is dramatic figurative language for God’s providential use of means to accomplish his will. A key passage to understand how this mediated theophanic visitation functions in prophetic literature is Isa 19:1–15. There the oracle begins with a dramatic theophany: “Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptian will melt within them” (19:1). However, this figure of God’s theophanic visitation is interpreted as portraying mediated acts of God’s judgment through civil war (19:2), international conflict (19:2), the rise of a harsh dictator (19:3–4), drought and famine (19:5–9), economic devastation (19:10), political corruption (19:11–15).

⁶ The same language and imagery will be picked in the Revelation of John, where the people of the earth “hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains (εἰς τὰ σπήλαια καὶ τὰς πέτρας τῶν ὄρεων)” because the day of the wrath (ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τῆς ὀργῆς) of God and the Lamb had come upon them (Rev 6:16–17). This demonstrates that at least by the late first century much of this language and imagery of the Day of the Lord and “Day of wrath” had developed into a technical eschatological concept. The question is how early these terms and images became stereotyped into a stable Day of the Lord theme.

comes as a result of the fall of Jerusalem and Judah, reducing them to a “heap of ruins” (Isa 3:6, 8). Through their open rebellion against God, they brought evil upon themselves (3:9); and though it will be will for the righteous, who will reap the fruit of their righteousness, the wicked will receive what they deserve (3:10–11). All this economic, political, and social devastation as a result of religious and moral apostasy is described as the Lord taking a stand to judge the people: “The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people” (Isa 3:13–15). The wanton luxury and materialism of the people will be replaced with destruction (3:16–26) characterized by rottenness, captivity, baldness, sackcloth, branding, sword, battle, lamentation, mourning, and emptiness (3:24–26).

Yet this particular “Day” oracle, extending from Isaiah 2:1–4:6, concludes not with wrath, but with blessing. The phrase “in that day” (ביום ההוא) signals God’s mediated theophanic visitation, as it does throughout the oracle, but this time it points to his actions in restoring the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel under “the branch of the Lord” in beauty and glory (Isa 4:2). This brief conclusion more fully explicates what had been only hinted at in 3:10—“Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.” Now, in 4:2, “the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.” The remnant of Israel in Jerusalem will be holy after “the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning (ברוח) (משפט וברוח בער)” (Isa 4:4). Though the scene has decisively shifted from judgment and wrath to restoration and blessing, the preceding judgment of the Day is not far from sight. Yet this judgment is cast as God’s means of purification. This gives way to imagery of the literal theophany of the exodus: “a loud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night” (4:5). Whether this is to be understood as a literal divine theophany or some means established by God to provide protection from the elements is unclear (4:6); but the imagery of restoration, blessing, protection, and provision is obvious. Though we passed over it at the beginning, this glorious ending mirrors the introduction of the oracle, so restoration and blessing of Judah and Jerusalem form bookends. In Isaiah 2:2–5, during what the prophet calls “the latter days” (באחרית הימים, ἐν ταῖς ἔσχαταις ἡμέραις), the Lord will exalt Jerusalem above all the nations, people will come to the city for instruction in God’s ways, and Zion’s influence over the earth will be preeminent (2:2–3). God’s righteous judgment among the nations will result in unparalleled peace and security, described by the classic Isaianic imagery—“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (2:4). This restoration, of course, is contingent upon—or at least coterminous with—the house of Jacob walking in the light of the Lord (2:5). This earthy restoration and glorification of Jerusalem and Judah under the theocratic rule of God, however, is only accomplished after God cleanses and purifies the nation through judgment and fire (4:4).

It seems that in the oracle of Isaiah 4–6 the references to the “Day” is nearing a technical concept. It does not refer to a single twenty-four-hour day but to a period during which God mediates his theophanic visitation of judgment primarily through warfare, in this specific case

through the enemies of Judah and Jerusalem. Added to the typical language of sword, battle, and fire, this oracle refers to people hiding themselves in caves of the earth to avoid judgment (2:10, 19, 21–22), shortage of food, water, and clothing (3:1, 7), and the promise of restoration, protection, and prosperity to the righteous remnant of God’s people—and through them a blessing to all the nations (2:2–5; 3:10; 4:2–6). However, those blessings of the “latter days” seem to be the result of the necessary period of purifying judgment and wrath contained in the technical concept of “the Day.”

An Oracle concerning Egypt (Isaiah 19:1–25)

Though missing the exact term “Day of the Lord,” the oracle against Egypt includes a similar pattern of God’s mediated theophanic visitation in judgment (19:1–15) followed by an unexpected and unprecedented restoration and blessing of Egypt along with Assyria and Israel (19:16–25). In the second half related to the conversion of a remnant of Egyptians to the God of Israel, the restoration and blessing are repeatedly said to take place “in that day” (ביום ההוא) (19:16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24). At first the “in that day” language refers to the fear the Egyptians experience because of the devastating judgments inflicted upon them. In language depicting a theophanic visitation, the prophet writes, “Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptian will melt within them” (19:1). This dramatic image of God’s theophanic visitation is interpreted as mediated acts of judgment which unfold in history as civil war—“I will stir Egyptians against Egyptians” (19:2), international conflict—“city against city, kingdom against kingdom” (19:2), the rise of a harsh dictator—“I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master and a fierce king will rule over them” (19:3–4), drought and famine—“And the waters of the sea will be dried up....The branches of Egypt’s Nile will diminish and dry up...All that is sown by the Nile will be parched....Fishermen will mourn and lament...Workers in combed flax will be in despair” (19:5–9), economic devastation—“All who work for pay will be grieved” (19:10), and political corruption—“Princes of Zoan are utterly foolish....Those who are the cornerstones of her tribes have made Egypt stagger....The Lord has mingled within her a spirit of confusion” (19:11–15).

As a result of this mediated judgment described in terms of a theophany, Egyptians will fear the Lord and the land of Judah (19:16–17). Several of the cities in Egypt will convert to the Lord of hosts (19:18). They will establish worship of the Lord in Egypt, and God will send them a deliverer and “the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day” (19:19–22). Finally, Egypt, Assyria, and Israel will be united under the Lord and all will be God’s people (19:23–25). These latter developments of redemption are tagged with the phrase “in that day.” In this case, although the epic “Day” thus described does not directly refer to the mediated judgments themselves but rather the resulting redemption, it still refers to a theophanic visitation directly connected to God’s visiting the earth in mediated judgment.

An Oracle concerning the Valley of Vision (Isaiah 22:1–14)

It is difficult to place the oracle in verses 1–14 in a particular historical setting, though many see it as referring to the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib in 701 BC.⁷ However, for our purposes in surveying language and imagery contributing to the growing Day of the Lord concept, it is not necessary to determine whether this passage refers to a past event, an imminent event, or a far future event.

In any case, the oracle begins by Isaiah rebuking the rejoicing and celebrating of the people of Jerusalem (Isa 22:1–4). They seem to be rejoicing over their immediate good fortune in having been delivered from a siege, but they overlook the fact that their dead—though not slain in battle—are still dead! They also fail to reckon with the fact that their leaders have abandoned them (22:3). Isaiah, though, who can see the future judgments against Jerusalem on the horizon, cannot help but “weep bitter tears” for “the destruction of the daughter of my people” (22:4).

Thus begins the ominous oracle with the phrase “For the Lord God of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion (יהוה לאדני יהוה)” (Isa 22:5). Whether this “day” refers to the crisis from which the city had just emerged or to a future crisis—or perhaps to both as the former serves as a type of the latter and the latter as an intensification of the former—is not vital here. It is sufficient to see the “day for the Lord YHWH” (יום...לאדני יהוה) is characterized by certain elements. We see destruction at the invasion of archers, chariots, cavalry, and infantry (22:5–8). In “that day” (ביום ההוא) Jerusalem focused on its physical fortifications against the siege rather than looking to God for protection (22:8–11); instead of repentance in mourning with sackcloth, they feasted with joy (22:12–13). For this sin the Lord would pay them back (22:14).

This passage is not a direct eschatological Day of the Lord warning, but a reflection on a missed opportunity for proper repentance when the enemies of Judah laid siege to Jerusalem. Even the terms “in that day” seem to be looking to the past—probably the siege during the days of Hezekiah. Yet this past experience in which the Lord “has a day” in which God providentially sends an invading army to carry out his will underscores an important facet of the Day of the Lord concept. God’s purpose in bringing the Day of the Lord is to stir his people to genuine repentance. Thus, any threat of a Day of the Lord could be avoided by turning from sin.

Minor References to the “Day” and Its Imagery in Isaiah

The time of eschatological judgment and restoration in Isaiah 24:1–25 is described with “day” language. God’s judgment of desolation puts an end to merry-making and mirth (24:1–13); inescapable judgment falls upon the sinners (24:17–20). And “on that day the Lord will punish the

⁷ Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 417.

host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth” (24:21). This is the first time the “Day” language extends beyond the earthly rulers to those in heaven, which seems to point to an ultimate eschatological judgment. It seems proper to connect this to the Day of the Lord concept because of the typical language of the darkness of judgment in verse 23: “Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed.”

“That day” language is also used in reference to the time of the judgment of the serpent, Leviathan and the dragon (27:1–2), yet this very brief mention of judgment and warfare by God’s great sword quickly gives way to “in that day” language referring to the glorious restoration of Jacob and Israel (27:2–6) and the gathering of his people from the nations back to Jerusalem (27:12–13). Here, “in that day” may be used more in the sense of “at that time,” though the eschatological overtones of the term are certainly present.

“Day” language is also used in reference to the time of vengeance against the nations (Isa 34:1–35:10). There “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” (34:3). This is standard Day of the Lord imagery. In fact, ultimate, eschatological language is used in connection with “Day” terminology: “For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (34:8). The destruction of the earth, however, gives way to the return of God’s people and their restoration (35:1–3). In fact, God’s faithful people should be encouraged by his coming in judgment: “Your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you” (35:4), with the result of glorious restoration of the nation (35:5–10).

Day of the Lord passages seem to have been only prominent in the first major section of Isaiah (chapters 1–39). The second section (40–55) is basically devoid of sustained treatments on coming judgment. The final section (56–66) does have a few brief references to the “day,” such as the “day of vengeance” (63:1–6), during which both vengeance and redemption occur (63:4). The image of labor pains returns in 66:7–8, followed by a brief and vivid description of the Lord coming in fire in fury and judgment (66:15–16). In 66:14–16, the final pronouncement of judgment in Isaiah, makes important verbal and visual connections with other common Day of the Lord language and imagery without using the actual term “Day”—The Lord “shall show his indignation against his enemies. For behold, the Lord will come in fire (יהוה באש יבוא, κύριος ὡς πῦρ ἦξει), and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury (בַּחֲמָה אֵפוּ, ἐν θυμῷ ἐκδίκαησιν αὐτοῦ) and his rebuke with flames of fire (בַּלְהֲבֵי־אֵשׁ, ἐν φλογὶ πυρός). For 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 66:14–16).

The Day of the Lord in Zephaniah (c. 640–609)

The revelatory “word of the Lord” came to Zephaniah during the days of “Josiah...king of Judah” (Zeph 1:1), that is, sometime during the span of 640–609 BC. Perhaps a “median” year of about

625 BC is reasonable for our purposes.⁸ So, the Day of the Lord language and imagery of Zephaniah follow that of Isaiah by about fifty years or so. Its language, vivid and rich, employs both established Day of the Lord terminology while adding a few new thoughts. In fact, Greg King has argued persuasively for parallels with the eighth-century prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah that are “numerous and sometimes striking.”⁹ He thus concludes, “In light of these extensive parallels, the question as to whether the message of Zephaniah is largely an echo or a reformulation of the messages of earlier prophetic books must be answered in the affirmative.”¹⁰

The *יום יהוה* phrase itself appears three times in chapter 1, but given that the entire book constitutes a single oracle, we should view this first chapter as a preamble for the prophet’s sustained treatment of the Day of the Lord concept throughout its three chapters.¹¹ Thus, “on that day” and similar “day” language is more reasonably understood as referring back to the opening Day of the Lord description. O. Palmer Robertson justly surmises:

The “Day of Yahweh” may be seen as that theme which unifies the entirety of the book of Zephaniah. Certainly in the first chapter Yahweh’s Great Day binds together the message of the prophet. The destruction of the cosmos, judgment on God’s own people, the sacrificial feast of Yahweh, and the terrors of a finalizing theophany relate to “the Day.”¹²

While the phrase Day of the Lord proper occurs three times (once in 1:7, twice in 1:14), the phrase “that day” with clear reference to this same Day of the Lord occurs five times (1:9, 10, 15; 3:11; 16), and “day” alone or modified by a number of vivid descriptors occurs a dozen more times (1:8, 15 [5 times], 16, 18; 2:1, 2, 3; 3:8). The fulness and repetition of this phrase throughout the prophet’s three chapters provides valuable insight into the Day of the Lord concept as it developed in the century from Amos, through Isaiah, to Zephaniah.

In the opening line of Zephaniah’s oracle of the Day of the Lord, YHWH makes a shocking pronouncement that sets the tone for the entire book: “I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth (*פני האדמה*)” (Zeph 1:2). This expands the scope of the judgments beyond the land of Judah or any particular nation. The vastness of the judgment is further enlarged in verse 3: “I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble of the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth” (1:3). Yet the oracle immediately zooms in to verse 4, with a threat of judgment against “Judah” and “the

⁸ Whether he prophesied prior to or after the discovery of the book of the covenant in 622 is not of consequence to the purpose of our study.

⁹ Greg A. King, “The Message of Zephaniah: An Urgent Echo,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32.2 (Autumn 1996): 213.

¹⁰ King, “Message of Zephaniah,” 221.

¹¹ David W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 23b (Downers Grove: InverVarsity, 1988), 84; Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah: Morphology and Ideas* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), 80.

¹² O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 306.

inhabitants of Jerusalem.” The purpose of God stretching out his hand of judgment is to “cut off from this place [Judah and Jerusalem] the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests” as well as those priests who try to serve both YHWH and Milcom (1:4–6).

With this background, the prophet introduces the specific Day of the Lord language in verse 7: “Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near (יהוה יום קרוב; ἔγγυς ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου).” The oracle likens the punishment of the officials and princes “and all who array themselves in foreign attire” to a sacrifice the Lord is offering up, having consecrated as guests the Babylonians (cf. Isa 13:3). This imagery of judgment as a sacrifice can be seen in Isaiah 34:6; Jeremiah 46:10; and Ezekiel 39:17.¹³ This suggests that the Day of the Lord anticipated by Zephaniah’s oracle was not some distant eschatological event at the end of time but a real threat to the people of Judah who engaged in idolatrous worship and the adoption of foreign customs and religion.

On that day (ביום ההוא) God will punish pagan rituals and wickedness (Zeph 1:9).¹⁴ That the scope of this Day of the Lord in Zephaniah’s prophecy relates specifically to Judah and Jerusalem is evident in verses 10–13. There Jerusalem is clearly in focus and the judgments mediated through a number of temporal catastrophes—a siege that results in plunder, destruction of homes, and ultimate exile from their land (1:13).

The prophecy reaches its crescendo in verses 14–16, where the “great day of the Lord (יום יהוה הגדול)” is modified by several vivid descriptions. It is, firstly, “near and hastening fast (קרוב ומהר, ἔγγυς καὶ ταχεῖα σφόδρα)” (1:14), an indication that Zephaniah has in view a near-fulfillment of this particular Day of the Lord. The sound of the Day of the Lord will be “bitter,” in which the valiant man cries in defeat. Verse 15–16 sets forth a litany of six images of this day: “a day of wrath is that day (היום ההוא עברה היום ההוא, ἡμέρα ὀργῆς, ἢ ἡμέρα ἐκείνη), a day of distress and anguish (יום מצוקה וצרה, ἡμέρα θλίψεως καὶ ἀνάγκης), a day of ruin and devastation (יום שאה ומשואה, ἡμέρα ἀωρίας καὶ ἀφανισμοῦ), a day of darkness and gloom (יום חשך ואפלה, ἡμέρα σκοτους καὶ γνόφου), a day of clouds and thick darkness (יום ענן וערפל, ἡμέρα νεφέλης καὶ ὀμίχλης), a day of trumpet blast and battle cry (יום שופר ותרועה, ἡμέρα σάλπιγγος καὶ κραυγῆς).”¹⁵

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. First, Zephaniah is expressly referring to the “Day of the Lord,” a term that has already been used in earlier prophets with a developing quasi-technical meaning as a mediated theophanic visitation. We are not dealing with a side issue or parallel concern; this is the prophet’s own description of the Day of the Lord. Second, Zephaniah draws together in one cluster the specific terms used to delimit this Day of the Lord as a technical concept. Thus, when we see these terms appear elsewhere with similar imagery and language, we

¹³ See Larry L. Walker, “Zephaniah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel–Malachi*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 666.

¹⁴ See Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, The New American Commentary, vol. 20 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 430–31.

¹⁵ De Backer notes the constant sounds “des trompes et des tambours” associated with the siege of an ancient city, which alone would shock and demoralize its inhabitants (Fabrice De Backer, *L’art du Siègle Néo-Assyrien*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, vol. 61, ed. M.H.E. Weippert, Thomas Schneider, et al. [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 282).

can more reasonably conclude that the author intends to refer to the technical concept even if the specific language of Day of the Lord (יום יהוה) is not used. Third, as New Testament authors receive the Old Testament Scriptures in the form of the Septuagint, the Greek vocabulary associated with the Day of the Lord in these passages helps us understand the connections New Testament authors are making with the Old Testament concept.

In Zephaniah 2:1–3, the prophet offers deliverance through repentance: the hope that the Day of the Lord may be averted—or escaped—if sinners gather in humility before the day of the Lord’s anger begins (2:1–2). Clearly, once the day comes, it will be too late, for then the “burning anger (הוה אף יהוה, ὀργήν Κυρίου) of the Lord” will come upon them, “the day of the anger of the Lord (הוה אף יום, ἡμέραν θυμοῦ Κυρίου)” (2:2). Verse 3 even inspires the humble law-keepers, who seek God in righteousness and humility, with the hope that they “may be hidden (רוסתרו, σκεπασθητε) on the day of the anger of the Lord” (2:3). This imagery is suspiciously similar to that of Isaiah 26:20–21—“Come, my people, enter your chambers (בחדרי, εἰς τὰ ταμεῖα), and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves (בחי, ἀποκρύβηθι) for a little while until the fury (עז, ὀργή) has passed by. For behold, the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain.”

We begin to see here glimmers of hope in the midst of the darkness and gloom of the Day of the Lord judgments. Righteousness will be rewarded. If the whole nation repents, the Day itself can be delayed or averted. Otherwise, the humble and penitent remnant, who seek God, may hope to be somehow protected from the burning wrath of the Day of the Lord. The term רוסתרו, “to be hidden,” is used in similar contexts in Isaiah, where the wicked have foolishly “taken shelter” in lies and falsehood from the “overwhelming whip” of divine judgment (Isa 29:14). And Psalm 27:5 holds out the general promise, “He will hide me (בסכה, ἐν σπηλαιῶν) in his shelter (בסכה, ἐν σπηλαιῶν) in the day of trouble (ביום רעה, ἐν ἡμέρα κακῶν); he will conceal me (בסתירי, ἐσκέπασέν) under the cover (בסתר, ἐν ἀποκρύφω) of his tent; he will lift me (בירוממי, ὑψώσέν) high upon a rock.” In this Psalm, David introduces themes that appear again in Isaiah’s hope of deliverance (Isa 26:20–21) and Zephaniah’s hope of sheltering (Zeph 2:3). In a similar vein, Job pleads with God, “Oh that you would hide me (בסתירי, ἐφύλαξας) in Sheol, that you would conceal me (בסתירי, ἐκρυψας) until your wrath be past (שוב אפר, παύσηται σου ἡ ὀργή), that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me” (Job 14:13). And in Proverbs we read, “The prudent sees danger and hides (בסתיר) himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it” (Prov 22:3; cf. 28:28). The general principle that God protects the prudent from danger, redeems the righteous from wrath, and hides those who seek him from the day of evil is woven throughout the Old Testament. Zephaniah’s brief respite of hope in 2:1–3 may feel a little out of place in the context of the Day of the Lord imagery, but it is in keeping with the constant reminder that the Day of the Lord will ultimately result in deliverance for the righteous remnant and restoration for his purified people. This theme will become central later in the book.

After the focused development of Day of the Lord imagery, the scope of the oracle zooms in on the desolation and destruction that will come upon the peoples around Judah (Zeph 2:4–15). Though once thriving cities and nations, the surrounding enemies of Judah will become pastures, meadows, fields for flocks, and haunts for wild animals (2:6, 13–15). They will be reduced to nettles and salt pits like Sodom and Gomorrah (2:9). The gods of the world will be destroyed, and the nations will bow down to the one true God (2:11). Yet in the midst of these pronouncements of judgment against the surrounding Gentile nations, God reminds his people that he will restore the “remnant of the house of Judah” and “restore their fortunes” (2:7). Also, “the remnant of my people shall plunder them [the nations], and the survivors of my nation shall possess them” (2:9).

Chapter 3 re-centers the prophet’s attention on Jerusalem, casting the city as “rebellious and defiled the oppressing city” (3:1), incorrigible, untrusting, and far from God (3:2). Though the political and religious leaders of Jerusalem are wicked, God himself is righteous, gracious, and good even in the midst of their wickedness (3:3–5). Though God had laid waste the surrounding nations in judgment as an example of the effects of his wrath (3:6), Jerusalem failed to take heed and accept God’s correction and pleas for repentance to avoid judgment (3:7).

Verse 8 shifts again to a wide scope and scale, perhaps even telescoping beyond the near judgment of 586 BC, through the intermediate judgment of AD 70, and onto a distant future judgment—the ultimate eschatological Day of the Lord.¹⁶ God begins, “Therefore, wait for me (כחול).” The shift to second person plural suggests a return to the Lord’s direct address of the “humble of the land” who “seek righteousness” (2:3), calling on the righteous remnant to wait on the Lord for deliverance and restoration through the coming large-scale judgment.¹⁷ In that future judgment, God will gather nations and kingdoms “to pour out upon them my indignation (עמתי), all my burning anger (אפי, ὀργήν θυμοῦ); for in the fire (שׂב, ἐν πυρί) of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed (לכח, καταναλωθήσεται)” (Zeph. 3:8).

At that time, though, God will bring about a universal conversion even of the nations, drawing all people to “call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord” (3:9). The humble remnant of the people of Judah will be restored, no longer engaged in injustice, lies, or deceit (3:11–13). This restoration results in great rejoicing (3:14), because the Lord will have taken away the judgments against them (3:15). Moreover, “the King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil” (3:15). This theophanic visitation of Yahweh ruling in the midst of Israel projects this oracle—at least its ultimate fulfillment—into the distant future, and a canonical-theological reading of this text points us to the incarnate God-Man Jesus, “the Lord your God...in your midst” (3:17). This divine King will be “a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing” (3:17). It is

¹⁶ Robertson notes, “The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 anticipated that great Day of Yahweh which shall consummate the Lord’s judgments, even as did the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Even as in Zephaniah’s prophecy, so also in Jesus’ prophecy, the judgment of God on Jerusalem inevitably anticipates the final devastation of the nations” (Robertson, *Naham, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 325).

¹⁷ See Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 484–85.

difficult not to hear in these lines echoes of Isaiah’s messianic prophecies of restoration, consolation, and jubilation: “Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes” (Zeph 3:19–20).

This exposition of the Day of the Lord theme in Zephaniah reveals both continuity and synthesis with preceding Day of the Lord prophetic traditions. With Zephaniah, then, we see the technical concept of the Day of the Lord coming into even sharper focus. Certain visual cues and verbal tropes have become stereotyped.¹⁸ Increasingly since its first introduction in Amos, the phrase Day of the Lord alone begins to carry a technical meaning of its own, even without elaborate modifiers and descriptions. The term is also flexible enough to accommodate a number of manifestations within history. Its referent is not to a single event—either near, intermediate, or remote—but to a certain type of event characterized by God’s mediated theophanic visitation, in either judgment or deliverance, and often both.

Thus, Zephaniah stands in strong continuity with the developing Day of the Lord *terminus technicus* in the prophetic tradition. Greg King rightly concludes:

In Zephaniah’s description of his central theme of the Day of the Lord, the prophet largely echoes his eighth-century predecessors. In Zephaniah’s portrayal of this day as a time of judgment in which Yahweh punishes the covenant nation, and certain especially wicked groups within it, through a military defeat, the prophet follows the contours of one or more of his predecessors. He also follows them in his indication that this punishment comes on account of their oppression of the poor and lack of social justice, their arrogance and human pride, and their idolatry. The parallels continue with Zephaniah’s announcement that the punishment overwhelms the entire world and in his ringing declaration that the day is near at hand.

And the parallels do not stop with the description of judgment, for Zephaniah also echoes his predecessors with his portrayal of a dramatic reversal of fortunes following the punishment.¹⁹

But why does Zephaniah “echo” the same language and themes of the Day of the Lord that had already been proclaimed and recorded by his predecessors? King suggests that Zephaniah may have simply believed that the Day of the Lord spoken by other eighth-century prophets “really was

¹⁸ The most prominent terms (or their related verbal forms) in the Septuagint of Zephaniah include: ἀφανισμός (1:15; 2:4, 15 [3:1]; 3:6); ἐγγύς (1:7, 14); θλίψις (1:15; cf. 1:17); θυμός (2:2; 3:8); ὀργή (1:15, 18; 2:2, 3; 3:8); πῦρ (1:18; 3:8); σκληρός (1:14); and σκότος (1:15).

¹⁹ King, “The Message of Zephaniah,” 220–21.

now imminent. The time was at hand, and judgment would no longer be delayed.”²⁰ This seems reasonable, given the fact that so many of the reasons for the imminent judgment expressed in Zephaniah relate to spiritual, political, and social conditions at the time. However, there is another way of looking at Zephaniah’s prophecy and taking seriously its urgency and imminence without suggesting that the previous prophets were wrong in their own urgency or that Zephaniah heralded an end that did not actually occur. A sustainable solution is found in the notion that the Day of the Lord is a technical concept pointing to various mediated theophanic visitations in judgment and restoration which finds numerous historical manifestations—judgments against Israel, Assyria, Judah, Babylon, etc. Thus, the Day of the Lord language and imagery echoed by the prophets in their particular historical circumstances lead to the biblical teaching that there are, in reality, numerous “days of the Lord” all manifesting the general technical concept of the Day of the Lord and pointing forward typologically toward the ultimate eschatological Day of the Lord at the end.

The Day of the Lord in Jeremiah (Seventh–Sixth Centuries BC)

Jeremiah has several “Day” passages that seem to draw from common Day of the Lord language and imagery. In a reference to the threat of Babylon “from the north” (Jer 4:6), Jeremiah prophesies, “Blow the trumpet through the land; cry aloud and say, ‘Assemble, and let us go into the fortified cities!’” (Jer 4:5). The mention of the “trumpet” (רֶפֶשׁ, σάλπιγξ) as an alarm of judgment (here as well as in 4:19, 21) echoes standard Day of the Lord imagery found in Zephaniah 1:16 and Joel 2:1. In Jeremiah 4:6, it is the Lord himself who brings disaster (רָעָה, κακά) and great destruction (רָבַח, συντριβήν) from the north—reflecting the mediated theophanic visitation in judgment typical of the Day of the Lord. The prophet likens Babylon to a lion; he is a destroyer of nations who will reduce the cities of Judah to ruin (Jer. 4:7). The people are urged to don sackcloth and to lament because “the first anger of the Lord (חַר־אֱלֹהִים, ὁ θυμὸς Κυρίου) has not turned back from us” (4:8). Verse 9 continues, “In that day (בְּיוֹם־הַהוּא)...courage shall fail both king and officials. The priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded” (4:9). In that Day, the Lord will bring a sword upon Judah (4:10), a sword of harsh judgment (4:11–12). Then the prophet paints a vivid word-picture of a theophany—the Lord coming on the clouds, in chariots like a whirlwind, horses like eagles, bringing ruin (4:13), yet even this theophany is fulfilled through the agency of “besiegers” who come “from a distant land” (4:16)—horsemen and archers (4:29). Beyond these common themes, we also see the earth reduced to chaos, darkness in the heavens (4:23, 28), the quaking of mountains and the destruction of land and cities (24–26), “before the Lord, before his fierce anger (הָרֶגֶז־אֱלֹהִים, ὀργῆς θυμοῦ αὐτοῦ)” (4:23–26). The turmoil endured by the “daughter of Zion” is likened to a “woman in labor,” crying out and gasping for breath (4:31). Yet in the midst of this warning the people are called to repentance—“O Jerusalem, wash your heart from evil, that

²⁰ King, “The Message of Zephaniah,” 222.

you may be saved” (4:14)—and God promises that he “will not make a full end” (4:27), holding out promise of a future restoration.

Another passage that uses “Day” language to describe God’s mediated theophanic visitation is found in Jeremiah 30. The prophecy begins with a charge to Jeremiah to write down the words God had spoken to him (30:2), because “days are coming...when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah...and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it” (30:3). In this instance the prophecy begins with the promise of restoration. Though harsh judgment comes upon them, God always preserves a remnant, which will later be restored according to God’s covenant faithfulness. Jeremiah then records an oracle spoken “concerning Israel and Judah” that brings the Day of the Lord themes of both judgment and restoration together: “Thus says the Lord: we have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace” (30:5). The coming judgment is likened to the pain and panic of “a woman in labor” (30:6; cf. 4:31). Then the “Day” language is employed: “Alas! That day (הַיּוֹם הַהוּא, ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνη) is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress (עַת־צָרָה, χρόνος στενός) for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it” (Jer 30:7). Following this time of distress and deliverance, the Lord will raise up “David their king” (30:10), restore the people of Israel from captivity (30:10), and make an end to the nations where they had been scattered, but not make an end of Israel (30:11). The remainder of the oracle paints a vivid picture of glorious restoration and blessing of Jacob in the land (30:12–21), in which they shall be his people and he will be their God (30:22). Yet it concludes with standard Day of the Lord imagery: “Behold the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intentions of his mind. In the latter days you will understand this” (Jer 30:23–24).

These examples seem sufficient to show that “the Day” theme is well known and utilized in Jeremiah’s oracles. Besides the explicit reference to “that day,” of course, Jeremiah is filled with Day of the Lord imagery of sword, fire, judgment, wrath, and destruction—as well as preservation, purification, restoration, and deliverance for his people. A few more specific passages that draw on the pool of common Day of the Lord imagery, using “the Day” language itself, though, will complete our profile of Jeremiah’s reception and appropriation of the technical concept of the Day of the Lord. In an oracle “concerning the nations” (Jer 46:1), and in particular, “concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt” (46:2), the prophet describes the confusion and defeat of the army (46:3–5) when Babylon defeated Egypt near the Euphrates (46:6). The advance of Egypt’s army is likened to the river rising: “Egypt rises like the Nile, like rivers whose waters surge” (46:8; cf. 47:2). Yet little do the nations know that they are the agents of God’s providential wrath and judgment, as Jeremiah 46:10 makes clear: “That day is the day of the Lord God of hosts (הַיּוֹם הַהוּא, לַאֲדָנִי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת), a day of vengeance (יּוֹם נִקְמָה, ἡμέρα ἐκδουλήσεως, cf. Isa 66:6), to avenge himself on his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood. For the Lord God of hosts holds a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates.” Again, the Day of the Lord

is cast as a mediate theophanic visitation in judgment—this time judgment against Egypt by the agency of the Babylonians.

In the next chapter we see the same pattern in the pronouncement of judgment against the Philistines at the hand of the Babylonians. Here the coming of the armies from the north are likened to the rising of flood waters, “an overflowing torrent” that floods the land and the cities (Jer 47:2; cf. 46:8). This is a symbol for an army of horses and chariots (47:3). The prophet calls this “the day that is coming (יום הבא, τῆ ἡμέρα τῆ ἐπερχομένη)” to destroy the Philistines and the cities of Tyre and Sidon (47:4). However, in keeping with the notion of the Day of the Lord as mediated theophanic visitation, the verse concludes: “For the Lord is destroying the Philistines” (47:4) and verse 6 proclaims, “Ah, sword of the Lord!” (47:6). It is God who has appointed the sword of Babylon against the Philistines (47:7). Additional passages describing the “Day” of God’s vengeance against Babylon (50:27–31; 51:2), which also fit the pattern of mediated theophanic visitation in judgment.

The Day of the Lord in Lamentations (Sixth Century BC)

Lamentations 2:22 declares, “On the day of the anger of the Lord (ביום אַף־יהוה), no one escaped or survived.” Variations of this phrase are found throughout the first two chapters of the book: “the days of her affliction (ימי עניה) and wandering” (Lam 1:7); “the day of his [YHWH’s] fierce anger (ביום חרון אפו)” (1:12); “the day you announced (יום־קראת)” (1:21); “the day of his anger (ביום אפו)” (2:1); “the day we [enemies of Israel] longed for (היום שקוינהו)” (2:16); “the day of your anger (ביום אפך)” (2:21). In these cases, the prophet is looking back on the Babylonians’ destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC.

A number of terms and images come together to form the concept of the “Day of the anger of the Lord” in Lamentations: vex/affliction (יגה/עני, ταπεινωσις/ταπεινάω) (1:4, 5, 7, 9, 12; 3:1, 19); wrath/[fierce] anger (אפ [חרון]/עם, ὀργή [θυμοῦ]), (1:12, 2:1, 2, 3, 6, 21, 22; 3:43, 66; 4:11); sorrow (מכאב, ἄλγος) (1:12); fire/flame/burn (שלהבה, πῦρ/φλόξ) (1:13, 2:3, 4; 4:11); distress/bring distress (מצר/צר, θλίβω/θλίψις) (1:3, 20); badness (רעה, κακός) (1:21); fury (עברה/חמה, θυμός) (2:4; 4:11); ruins/ruin/destruction/destroy (שחת/שבר, συντριβή/διαφθείρω) (2:5, 6, 8, 11, 13; 3:47–48); desolation/desolate (שמים, ἀφανίζω) (1:4, 16; 3:11; 5:18); darkness (רשח, σκοτός) (3:2, 6).

Besides these oft-repeated terms, vivid images also emerge: God’s judgment is like stomping a winepress (Lam 1:15). He casts down the proud, wicked nation (1:7, 9; 2:1–3, 17). Judah has been defeated by the armies of enemy nations (1:5, 6, 7, 9–10, 14–17; 2:3, 7, 16, 17) and have gone into exile and captivity (1:3, 5, 18; 4:15–16, 20). The city has become like a widow (1:1; 5:3), a slave (1:1), and a filthy prostitute (1:8–9, 17).

Clearly Lamentations looks back on the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian armies and the ensuing aftermath. Men, women, and children died by sword and famine (Lam 1:20; 4:9). They were sent into captivity and exile. Yet this Babylonian invasion and destruction is

seen as an act of God—a mediated theophanic visitation in judgment: “In the dust of the streets lie the young and the old; my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword; you have killed them in the day of your anger, slaughtering without pity” (Lam 2:21). As in other Day of the Lord passages, God is seen as operating through agents—in this case the army of Babylon and the aftershocks of warfare.

The Day of the Lord in Ezekiel (c. 592)

The specific **יום יהוה** phrase occurs in Ezekiel only at 13:5 (but cf. Ezek 30:3, **יום ליהוה**). Taking the chronological indicators in Ezekiel seriously, this oracle came to the prophet following the vision of the temple abominations in the autumn of 592—“in the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifteenth day of the month” (Ezek 8:1).²¹ Whereas chapters 8 through 11 clearly contain the events of a single vision (cf. 8:1–3 and 11:24–25), it is unclear whether the following chapters are meant to be understood as arising from that same place and time.²² However, it is not necessary to precisely date the Day of the Lord prophecy in chapter 13. An approximate date immediately preceding the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon is sufficient.

Ezekiel’s oracle in chapter 13 addresses the “prophets of Israel...who prophesy from their own hearts” (13:2). This rebuke comes after the people of Israel have doubted that Ezekiel’s own prophecy relates to impending destruction, saying “the vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off” (12:27). Having rejected the imminence of Ezekiel’s prophecies, the false prophets of Israel had taken on the roles of soothsayers, assuring them that judgment would not come as Ezekiel had announced.

The deception of the false prophets led the people of Israel to fail to prepare for the coming judgment: “You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the Lord (**ביום יהוה**)” (Ezek 13:5). Whether Ezekiel means the nation had literally failed to take their military defenses seriously or—more likely—that they had failed to attend to their spiritual breaches of the covenant and breaking of the Law, the point is clear. Because of their dependence on false prophets and their failure to prepare, judgment was coming. This judgment is identified as the “Day of the Lord.” However, in the historical context of this message, it is evident that the imminent judgment intended by the phrase was the invasion of

²¹ This dating is reckoned by attention to Ezek 1:3, where the prophet notes that the first vision came “the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin,” that is, in 593 B.C. See Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Jeremiah–Ezekiel*, rev. ed., vol. 7, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 647–48.

²² Alexander may be correct when he suggests, “Since no new chronological notice is given, and since the speeches of chs. 12–19 are closely related thematically to the foregoing vision, it can be assumed that these messages are uttered shortly after Ezekiel’s explanation of the vision in chs. 8–11” (“Ezekiel,” 703).

Nebuchadnezzar. Alexander notes, “In this context ‘the day of the Lord’ does not imply future eschatological judgment, but rather the immediate judgment by Babylon.”²³

What is the character of this imminent Day of the Lord? Employing figurative language, the Lord God says, “I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath (בַּחֲמָתִי, μετὰ θυμοῦ), and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger (בַּאֲפִי, ἐν ὀργῆ ἡ μου), and great hailstones in wrath (בַּחֲמָה, ἐν θυμῶ) to make a full end (לְכַלֵּל, εἰς συντέλειαν)” (Ezek 13:13). Yet even in the midst of this judgment in which God pours out his wrath upon the “wall” of false security and deception built by the deceitful prophets, the Lord promises deliverance for his righteous people from the lies of the false prophets: “Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely...I will deliver (וְהַצַּלְתִּי, ῥύσομαι) my people out of your hand” (Ezek 13:22-23).

Beyond these typical Day of the Lord images of wrath, fury, and destruction as well as the hope of deliverance for the righteous, the theme of the Day of the Lord in Ezekiel 13 is rather underdeveloped. However, we should recall that by this point the Day of the Lord language is well on its way to becoming a technical concept, bringing to the oracle in chapter 13 the general theme of God’s mediated theophanic visitation in judgment of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous. The language in verse 13 is, of course, entirely consistent with other Day of the Lord passages in the prophets. However, beyond this, Ezekiel himself may be able to use the bare phrase “Day of the Lord” in 13:5 because he had already treated it more extensively in Ezekiel 7.

Regarding the oracle of chapter 7, Allen notes:

Ezekiel is echoing a prophetic convention of judgment that, with Israel as target, went back to Amos (Amos 5:18–20) but that gradually took on overtones of judgment for neighboring nations (see Isa 2:6–21) and for the world at large (see Zeph 1:2–18). Other nations may already have been the sphere of reference for Amos’s audience (cf. Amos 1:3–2:16). The universal nature of the day of Yahweh will again be Ezekiel’s concern in one of his oracles against Egypt, in 30:2–9 (see esp. v 3). Yet the chosen corner of Israel would not be exempt from Yahweh’s general destruction of a wicked world in the coming cataclysm.²⁴

With this notion, Block concurs: “As a unit, the vocabulary and style of 7:1–27 have been heavily influenced by previous prophetic oracles concerning the ‘day of Yahweh’” and “Ezekiel’s portrayal of the day of Yahweh demonstrates that he was the heir not only of Amos but of others who had followed in his wake.”²⁵

²³ Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 710.

²⁴ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 28, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 107.

²⁵ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 244, 246.

The Day of the Lord theme is filled out with more vivid detail in verses 5–27. Allen notes that “the Day” in verses 7, 10, and 12 “is shorthand for the day of Yahweh.”²⁶ In fact, the Septuagint renders הנה היום (“Behold, the day!”) in verse 10 as ἰδοὺ ἡ ἡμέρα Κυρίου (“Behold, the Day of the Lord!”). Unless it translates a missing Hebrew variant, the gloss is not without justification, for throughout this passage we see standard language and imagery related to the established technical concept of the Day of the Lord: “Disaster after disaster”—their sure end—comes upon Israel (7:5–6). The language is ominous: “The time has come; the day is near (קרובה היום, ἤγγικεν ἡ ἡμέρα),²⁷ a day of tumult (מהומה), and not of joyful shouting on the mountains” (7:7). The Lord warns, “I will soon pour out my wrath (תמיח, τὴν ὀργήν μου) upon you, and spend my anger (פיא, τὸν θυμόν μου) against you” (7:8). Over and over the prophet pronounces that the day has come (7:5, 7, 10, 12). This underscores the certainty of the impending judgment at the hands of God, who reveals himself through these judgments as “the Lord, who strikes (יהוה מכה)” (7:9). In this day of judgment, God justly punishes their pride, wickedness, and opulence (7:10–13).

The imagery of blowing a trumpet appears in verse 14: “They have blown the trumpet (תקעו בתקוע, σαλπίζατε ἐν σάλπιγγι) and made everything ready, but none goes to battle, for my wrath (חרוני) is upon all their multitude.” In the following verses, then, the prophet describes the agents God uses to mediate his theophanic visitation of judgment: sword, pestilence, and famine in the wake of foreign invaders (Ezek 7:15–22). Note the providence of God governing the acts of his human agents in carrying out his theophanic visitation in judgment: “I will bring the worst of the nations to take possession of their houses. I will put an end to the pride of the strong, and their holy places shall be profaned” (7:24). This judgment was fulfilled in the invasion of Babylon and the resulting destruction of the temple and exile of the people. Through these events, God confirmed his sovereignty as Lord over all the earth (7:27).

Firming up the confirmation that Ezekiel 7 has in mind common Day of the Lord imagery, almost the exact language is found in both Zephaniah’s undisputed יהוה יום passage and Ezekiel 7:

Zephaniah 1:18	Ezekiel 7:19
גם־כסףם גם־זהבם לא־יוכל להצילם ביום עברה יהוה	כסףם וזהבם לא־יוכל להצילם ביום עברה יהוה
Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord.	Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord.

With this parallel, it appears beyond dispute that Ezekiel intends by his language and imagery in chapter 7 to make a deliberate connection to the explicit Day of the Lord motif of Zephaniah. This

²⁶ Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 107.

²⁷ Allen notes, “The nearness of the day is a traditional element in ‘day of the Yahweh’ passages (cf. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; Zeph 1:7, 14)” (Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 107).

demonstrates that by the sixth century BC the *יום יהוה* was a well-established technical concept—a mediated theophanic visitation. This “day” refers to the period of time during which God would visit his people in judgment, yet these judgments would come through the mediation of earthly agents. In the case of Ezekiel 7, that agent was Nebuchadnezzar and the army of Babylon.

Having established that Ezekiel draws from a common pool of Day of the Lord language and imagery in Ezekiel 13, this opens the door for us to see other ways Ezekiel uses similar imagery based on the technical concept of the Day of the Lord. Thus, in Ezekiel 30 (perhaps written in 571 BC, cf. 29:17), we read: “Wail, ‘Alas for the day (*ליום*)!’ For the day is near (*קרוב יום*), the day of the Lord is near (*יום ליהוה*); it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. A sword shall come upon Egypt, and anguish shall be in Cush, when the slain fall in Egypt, and her wealth is carried away, and her foundations are torn down. Cush, and Put, and Lud, and all Arabia, and Libya, and the people of the land that is in league shall fall with them by the sword” (Ezek 30:2–5). This time of judgment upon Egypt and its allies is viewed as God’s action: “I will put an end to the wealth of Egypt” (30:10), but only through the agency of an earthly army: “by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon” (30:10). God will be the one who brings the army of Babylon in “to destroy the land” (30:11), but “they shall draw their swords against Egypt” (30:11). Again, the Lord swears, “I will bring desolation upon the land and everything in it,” but this will be “by the hand of foreigners” (30:12). This invasion and destruction at the hand of the Babylonians is viewed as God pouring out his wrath on Egypt (30:15). The warfare results in fire, which then turns the day into darkness (30:16, 18).

Contributing to our developing understanding of the technical concept, the Day of the Lord is a repeated event of God’s mediated theophanic visitation. Note especially that though God is pouring out his wrath (30:15), he does so through the means of an invading army—in this case, the Babylonians.

The Day of the Lord in Obadiah (c. 583–553)

The short, twenty-one verse book of Obadiah provides our first glimpse of the Day of the Lord concept after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians,²⁸ viewed by the previous prophets as a judgment on Judah for breaking God’s covenant. The phrase *יום יהוה* itself appears only in verse 15, but as this is a single-chapter book with a solitary message, we would expect that established language and imagery associated with the Lord’s time of earthly judgment would be found throughout. This is, in fact, the case. Carl Armerding notes that one of the unifying themes of Obadiah is the “concept of the ‘day’ (*yôm*) of God’s judgment (vv. 8, 11 [2x], 12 [4x], 13 [3x],

²⁸ See Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, The New American Commentary, vol. 19B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 171–72.

14, 15) and by the principle of reversal that informs that judgment, stated throughout but most clearly in vv. 15–16.”²⁹

The oracle concerns Edom (Obad 1), against which the Lord has set his hand of judgment. He has summoned the surrounding nations to rise up against Edom to reduce the nation to insignificance (Obad 2–4). They are to be plundered by those they had once deemed allies (5–7). Thus, as we have seen in other prophecies regarding the coming Day of the Lord, Obadiah presents a mediated theophanic visitation in judgment—God’s hand of wrath against Edom mediated through the agency of its surrounding nations: “The Lord is the ultimate mover, but there is also an international political alliance motivated only by callous self-seeking....Even nations raised up by such base motives serve the overriding purposes of a God who sovereignly shapes human affairs through countless envoys of his own.”³⁰

In verse 8 the prophecy refers to “that day” on which the wise and mighty men of Edom will be dismayed and destroyed (8–9). This judgment comes because Edom—the descendants of Esau—failed to come to the aid of Judah when the Babylonians plundered them and dragged them into exile (10–11). The destruction of Jerusalem is called “the day of his misfortune,” “the day of their ruin,” “the day of their distress (הַצָּרָה, θλίψεως)” (12, 14), “the day of their calamity (מִדְּמַי, πόνων)” and “the day of their destruction (יְדִימָה, ὀλέθρου)” (13). Though Edom gloated over the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah’s own experience of the Day of the Lord, the oracle makes it clear that Edom itself would experience their own Day. Here, between verses 8 and 14, we see that “day” of judgment is not a single eschatological event, never to be repeated. Rather, it may be applied to any historical events in which God exercises his judgments against his own people or other kingdoms through the agency of surrounding nations. David Baker notes, “A key word throughout is ‘day’. Edom can look forward to a ‘day’ in which she is judged (v. 8), since she stood by on the ‘day’ that her neighbour, Judah, was attacked (vv. 11, 12 [three times], 13 [three times], 14). Also, on a wider scale, there will be a ‘day’ which will involve all nations (v. 15) in either judgment or deliverance. All three sections are thus bound by their respective ‘days’.”³¹ In 8–9 the object of the day of destruction is Edom; in verses 11–14 the day of destruction recalls the judgment of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians.

Verses 15–18 present Obadiah’s vision of the Day of the Lord (יְדִימָה יְהוָה, ἡμέρα Κυρίου) coming upon “all the nations” (15). As in Zephaniah (1:7, 14), this day for the wicked nations—including but surpassing Edom—is “near” (קָרוֹב, ἐγγύς). Because of the similarities in the use of קָרוֹב in connection with יוֹם elsewhere in the prophets used to convey imminence (see Isa 13:6; Ezek 30:3; Joel 1:15; 4:14; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14), Ben Zvi concludes, “It is most reasonable to conclude that

²⁹ Carl E. Armerding, “Obadiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel–Malachi*, rev. ed., vol. 8, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 425.

³⁰ Armerding, “Obadiah,” 432.

³¹ David W. Baker, “Obadiah,” in David W. Baker, T. Desmond Alexander, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 26, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988; reprint, 2009), 25.

the expression יוֹם־ה' in Obad 15 points to the use of a stock form available to the writer/s of the text of Obad 15, and which was most likely recognized as such by the (trained) community/ies of (re)readers of the Book of Obadiah, and certainly by the intended audience of the book.³² He goes on: “Such a reference to יוֹם־ה' in this text indicates that יוֹם־ה' is a concept—or at the very least a code-word whose referent may vary only within certain limits insofar as it concerns the addressees of the speaker, the intended audience of the book, and as it stands to reason also the community/ies of (re)readers for which and within which the book was composed.”³³ In short, “Day of the Lord” in Obadiah bears the signs of a technical concept, the contours of which would have been well-known by the readers of the prophecy in the sixth century BC.

The Day of the Lord will be characterized by just retribution—what they had done to others will be done to them (Obad 15). Because of how they treated the holy mountain of God, they have brought destruction upon themselves (16). Though Judah had suffered its own day of destruction in the recent past (verses 11–14), and Edom would experience its judgment soon (8–9), the Day of the Lord in verse 15 appears to look into the distant future toward an ultimate manifestation of God’s wrath against all nations for their wickedness. Amerding notes that the Day of the Lord theme “gives final definition to the preceding references to a ‘day’ in Obadiah: Edom’s and Judah’s downfall both constitute elements in the pattern of this ‘great and dreadful day of the Lord’ (Joel 2:31).”³⁴

However, just as Zephaniah had foreseen not only judgments upon the wicked nations but also rescue of the righteousness remnant, so Obadiah portrays a similar scenario. Verse 17 says, “But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape (פְּלִיטָה, σωτηρία), and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions.” Yet in this scenario, God’s people Israel will be the mediator of God’s theophanic judgment against Edom: “The house of Jacob shall be a fire (אֵשׁ, πῦρ), and the house of Joseph a flame” (18). Baker rightly notes, “*Fire and flame* represent God’s wrath (cf. Ps. 18:8; Lam. 1:13; Amos 1:4), here actualized through God’s people.”³⁵ Again, God’s mediated theophanic visitation in judgment—this time against the nations through the agency of his own people—is apparent. Also, this is a notable instance of the figurative use of “fire” to refer to God’s decisive mediated judgment.

The last three verses map out the extent of the territory that will be won by “saviors” who go up to (LXX: or “out of”) Mount Zion (21), to rule over Mount Esau and expand the borders of the restored nation (19–20). This newly restored nation will be the Lord’s (21). In any case, the oracle of Obadiah ends with a vindicated and restored nation of Israel blessed in the land in fulfillment of the Old Testament expectations. Baker aptly summarizes, “This salvation is better seen as

³² Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Obadiah*, BZAW, vol. 242, ed. Otto Kaiser (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 163.

³³ Ben Zvi, *Obadiah*, 164.

³⁴ Amerding, “Obadiah,” 444–45.

³⁵ Baker, “Obadiah,” 45.

eschatological, when the messianic kingdom will be inaugurated and Israel will achieve universal dominion under its ideal King (Gen. 49:10; cf. Ezek. 21:25–27; Rev. 5:5–6).³⁶

The Day of the Lord in Malachi (c. 500–450)

Pin-pointing the date of the composition of Malachi is difficult. The general consensus among scholars is that the book was written in the post-exilic era, after the time of Haggai and Zechariah and after the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Mal 1:10).³⁷ For our purposes, precise dating with reference to post-exilic conditions surrounding the period of Ezra and Nehemiah is not necessary. A general fifty-year range between 500–450 BC is sufficient to establish the generation in which Malachi’s message concerning the Day of the Lord would be heard.

Because the specific יהוה יום language is used in 3:23 [4:5] amidst conventional Day of the Lord language and imagery, the earlier mention of the “day of the his coming (ביום בואו)” in 3:2 may be read in this connection.³⁸ In that earlier passage, the Lord responds to the charge that he has been unjust because the wicked go unpunished and appear to be a delight to the Lord (Mal 2:17). In response, God promises that he will first send his messenger: “He will prepare the way before me.” When the forerunner has prepared the way, then the Lord will indeed come and bring the longed-for justice.

Though it has been common to try to identify the specific fulfillment of this “messenger (מלאכי)” (3:1), it seems best to view this as reflecting the general pattern established by the prophets that prior to any historical instance of the Day of the Lord, God sends prophetic messengers. Thus, he will also do so prior to the next Day of the Lord. Malachi is one such messenger, as were the other prophets warning about the impending Day of the Lord. Here God is affirming the precedent that prior to his mediated theophanic visitation in judgment, he would send an official prophetic voice to sound the alarm.³⁹

After the messenger prepares the way, “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal 3:1). The prophetic “messenger” who prepares the way is distinct from the “Lord” (האדון) who comes suddenly to his temple. And the context indicates that this very “Lord” is the one whose way is prepared. Because God declares, “My messenger...will prepare the way before me (לפני),” and the doubters were wondering, “Where is the God of justice?” it seems most reasonable that the “Lord whom you seek” who comes suddenly to “his temple” is God himself

³⁶ Baker, “Obadiah,” 48.

³⁷ See Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 156–60.

³⁸ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 313.

³⁹ In the New Testament this “messenger” was John the Baptist, warning that a Day of the Lord judgment was coming upon the nation. Perhaps the Book of Revelation also presents the Two Witnesses (Rev 11) as fulfilling this same mission for the ultimate Day of the Lord.

coming in a theophanic visitation. But is “the messenger of the covenant” the same as the messenger who prepares the way for the Lord, the Lord who is coming to his temple, or some third person distinct from the two?⁴⁰ Traditionally Christian readers have applied both the “Lord” and “messenger of the covenant” to Jesus and the first messenger to John the Baptist. In any case, the prophecy is casting the sudden coming of the Lord in theophanic terms as the fulfillment of the scoffers’ desire for a show of justice. Thus, the coming of the Lord is described with language and imagery similar to the Day of the Lord motif in previous prophets.

Malachi 3:2 says, “Who can endure the day of his coming (יִוִּם בּוֹאֵוֹ), and who can stand when he appears?” That is, the doubters will suddenly discover the severity of the justice for which they long. Malachi then casts the coming of the Lord in terms of purification: “He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord” (3:2–3). The image of purifying “fire” is not new to the prophets (Isa 1:25; 48:10; Jer 6:2, 30; Ezek 22:17–22),⁴¹ and here it is directly connected to the Lord’s mediated theophanic visitation, which leads to the restoration of righteousness and faithfulness in Judah and Jerusalem “as in the days of old and as in former years” (3:4). Thus, the coming judgment is not merely retributive but also redemptive and restorative. Malachi 3:5 clarifies that the Lord’s drawing near in judgment comes as just action against all sorts of covenant-breaking sins—sorcery, adultery, lying, oppression, and mistreatment of foreigners.

From here we may leap forward to the Day of the Lord passage proper (3:16–24 [Hebrew]; 3:16–4:6 [English/LXX]). Once again, the Lord counters the cynical claims of scoffers who doubt the justice of God: “Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape” (3:15). In response, the prophet first highlights the response of “those who feared the Lord” (3:16). In contrast to the scoffers who spoke hard against God (3:13), the God-fearers “spoke with one another” (בְּדַבְּרוֹ יִרְאֵי יְהוָה אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ), literally, “those who fear the Lord spoke each man to the other”). The Septuagint loosely translates this as, “those who fear the Lord spoke against these things” (Ταῦτα κατελάλησαν οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον), that is, against the cynical remarks about God’s justice in verse 15. Whatever the intention, the prophet reports that the righteous “who feared the Lord and esteemed his name” were not, after all, forgotten as the scoffers claimed; rather, “a book of remembrance (סֵפֶר זְכוֹרוֹן) was written before him” (3:16) as a sign that God would never forget them. The phrase (סֵפֶר הַזְּכוֹרוֹת) is used in Esther 6:1 to describe “the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles” that keep a record of important people and events. The figure in Malachi

⁴⁰ See discussion in Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 28, ed. David G. Firth and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 334–335; Eugene H. Merrill, “Malachi,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel–Malachi*, rev. ed., vol. 8, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 857–58.

⁴¹ See Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 28, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1972), 265.

3:16 emphasizes the fact that God will never forget those who fear him, even if for a season it may appear that wickedness and injustice have won.

With the fact of remembrance, then, comes the promise of deliverance: “They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make (ליום אשר אני עשה), cf. 3:21 [4:2]) up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him” (3:17). In contrast to the cynics’ claim that “it is vain to serve God” and that nothing is to be gained by “keeping his charge” (3:14), God assures them that a day is coming when he spares his spiritual children. Hill notes, “The righteous will not just escape God’s wrath in the coming day of judgment; they will be delivered or preserved as beloved children....Malachi echoes Joel 2:18, which relates the restoration of Israel’s fortunes in the Day of YHWH as a result of his compassionate reorientation to his people.”⁴² In that day of redemption, all question of God’s failure to distinguish between the righteous and wicked will be answered: “Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him” (Mal 3:18).

The “once more” or “again” (שובתם) reminds us that this distinction made between the righteous and the wicked during the seasons of divine judgment is not new. This has always been God’s *modus operandi*, and it always will be. With regard to the use of “again” in 3:18, Verhoef notes, “They will again see that which they have refused to observe, that the Lord has proclaimed the difference through the message of his prophets and the facts of his judgments in the course of their history (Exod. 11:7; Isa. 26:8, 9). In the past they could have seen it, but on the Day of the Lord they surely will see the difference.”⁴³ Perhaps we are meant to recall pivotal episodes in God’s visitation of his people to preserve them from his just judgment, e.g., Noah and his family at the time of the flood (Gen 6–8), Lot’s family in the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19), and Israel in Egypt at the judgment of the ten plagues (Exod 7–12). Abraham’s intercession on behalf of Lot in view of the destruction of Sodom is paradigmatic here when he says to the Lord, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?...Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen 18:23, 25). This passage establishes the important theological principle that rather than the righteous being destroyed along with the wicked when the Day of the Lord comes, God will make a clear distinction. The day of wrath is not for the righteous. This seems to be the thought behind God’s promise of obvious distinction between the fate of the righteous and the fate of the wicked. The righteous will be made his treasured possession, and they will be spared in that day (Mal 3:17).

The fate of the wicked is described in the next three verses—Malachi 3:19–21 (Hebrew text; 4:1–3, English/LXX). The chapter break is misleading and unfortunate, as the כִּי (“for”) in 3:19 [4:1] logically connects the description of the Day of the Lord with the previous assertion that the

⁴² Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 355–56.

⁴³ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 323.

distinction between the righteous and the wicked will be obvious in “the day” when God spares the righteous: “For behold, the day is coming (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, ἡμέρα ἔρχεται), burning like an oven, when all the arrogant (דִּידִים) and all evildoers (עוֹשֵׂי רָשָׁע) will be stubble. The day that is coming (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, ἡ ἡμέρα ἐρχομένη) shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch” (3:19 [4:1]). This passage reaches back to the cynics’ complaint of God’s injustice, where the “arrogant (דִּידִים)” are called blessed and “evildoers (עוֹשֵׂי רָשָׁע)” are blessed and escape judgment (3:15). In keeping with God’s long-established pattern to make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, the righteous are promised deliverance from the Day of the Lord while the wicked are utterly destroyed. The image of burning is used here metaphorically, not literally, as the coming judgment is likened to an oven that burns up stubble, leaving neither root nor branch (3:19 [4:1]).

Returning to the lot of the righteous, the next verse promises, “But for you who fear my name [cf. 3:16], the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, one the day when I act (בְּיוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה, cf. 3:17), says the Lord of hosts” (3:20–21 [4:2–3]). Thus, the coming day promises preservation and reward for the righteous while threatening destruction for the wicked.

The passage concludes with an exhortation and a sign: “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel” (Mal 3:22 [4:4]) and “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes (בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא, ἐλθεῖν ἡμέραν Κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ)” (3:23 [4:5]). This “Elijah” would call young and old alike to reconciliation and repentance, providing the opportunity for preventing or delaying the mediated theophanic visitation in judgment, in which God would strike the land “with a decree of utter destruction” (3:24 [4:6]).

The Day of the Lord in Joel (Date Uncertain)

Date ranges for the writing of Joel fall between as early as the ninth century BC to as late as the second century BC—a span of about seven centuries!⁴⁴ Fortunately, the other prophets can be more confidently dated, thus establishing a fairly clear picture of the development of the Day of the Lord concept. Rather than attempting to work the data from Joel into the historical development by forcing it onto a timeline in a place uncertain, I have decided to treat its contribution to the theme separate from the development. I personally suspect a date after the exile during the early days of the second temple.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See David Allan Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 25, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1989), 23–25.

⁴⁵ With regard to similar Day of the Lord language and imagery between Obadiah and Joel (cf. Joel 4), Ehud Ben Zvi notes, “No convincing case can be made for a direct dependence of the Book of Obadiah on the text of the Book

The uncertainty of the date of Joel is unfortunate, because the entire book deals with the Day of the Lord theme in ways that contribute significantly to the Old Testament concept.⁴⁶ Its language and imagery are incorporated into several significant New Testament Day of the Lord texts.⁴⁷ Therefore, because this study of the Day of the Lord concept in the Old Testament is in the service of a broader biblical-canonical and ultimately theological treatment of the eschatological significance of the Day of the Lord, I am treating the contribution of Joel as a capstone to the Old Testament prophets.

The oracle of the Lord through Joel begins by addressing the “elders” and “inhabitants” of the land, warning them of unprecedented events in their day that they would pass on to succeeding generations (Joel 1:2–3). Wave after wave of a devastating locust plague had destroyed vines, trees, fruits, and grain, resulting in starvation of both people and animals (1:4–20). The reference to the locust invasion in verse 4 has overwhelmingly been interpreted literally by modern commentators. In this interpretation, the prophet uses the analogy of a human army to describe the invading force: “Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run” (2:4), and “as with the rumbling of chariots” and “like a powerful army drawn up for battle” and “like warriors they charge” and “like soldiers they scale the wall” (2:5–7). Such analogies make best sense if the army is not literally humans, but a swarm of locusts.⁴⁸

However, elsewhere language seems to point to the invasion of a foreign army as carrying out the work of the figurative locust plague. Joel 1:5 says, “For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number.” Verse 19 refers not to locusts destroying the produce of the land but “fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field” (1:19, 20). Consuming fires are more naturally the result of a military invasion rather than a locust swarm. In Joel 2:2, the text explicitly refers to the Day of the Lord marked by the coming of “a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.” This language is similar to the opening words in 1:2–3—“Has such a thing

of Joel (or *vice versa*). In fact, the observed similarities do not require anything more than the existence of a shared reservoir of expressions and images” (Ben Zvi, *Obadiah*, 149). That is, the reason we see such similar language and imagery among these (and other) prophets is that the Day of the Lord had become a technical concept by the sixth-to-fifth centuries B.C., and these prophets were drawing upon that common apocalyptic vocabulary as they wrote to an audience familiar with the concept.

⁴⁶ See Willem S. Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985), 35–36.

⁴⁷ See Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 39. He writes, “Among the words, phrases, or motifs which have helped to shape the picture of the end-times are these: (1) the blast of the trumpet to signal the Day (2:1; cf. 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 8:6–11:19); (2) the use of *near* to express the imminence of the Day (1:15; 2:1; 3:14; cf. Matt. 24:32; Mark 13:29; Jas 5:8); (3) ‘You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied’ (2:26; cf. Luke 6:21 and the accounts of the feeding of the multitudes, Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14); (4) judgment of the Gentiles (3:1–14; cf. Matt. 25:31–46); (5) darkening of sun and stars as signs (2:30–31; 3:15; cf. Luke 21:25; Rev. 8:12); (6) shaking of earth and heaven (3:16; cf. Heb. 12:26); (7) ‘Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe’ (3:13; cf. Mark 4:29); (8) the locust army compared to horses (2:4–5; cf. Rev. 9:7, 9).”

⁴⁸ J. M. Powis Smith, William Hayes Ward, and Julius August Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 62.

happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation.” This language of the unprecedented nature of the Day of the Lord events lend support to the idea that the locust invasion mentioned in Joel 1:4 is a figure for the invasion of a great army mentioned in 1:5 and 2:2. In fact, with the invasion of this army “fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns” (2:3)—the same effects of the so-called locust invasion (1:19), resulting in the devastation to the vines, trees, fruits, and grains. And 2:11 says, “The Lord utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful.” In response to their repentance, God says, “I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea” (2:20). The result of this defeat of the invading army will be a restoration of the grain, wine, oil, and other victims of the original invasion (3:19, 21–24). The idea of a swarm of locusts coming from the north would have been odd, as they came from the south and east. Yet the invasion of human armies from other nations is frequently associated with the north.

The language of Joel seems to require us to decide which image is figurative. Does the image of the locust represent an invasion of a human army? Or does the language of human invaders represent an invasion of locusts? Joel 2:25 seems to favor former: “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.” It seems the final line identifies the referent of the symbol: “my great army,” that is, the army of the Assyrians or Babylonians, or even a future invading army, unleashed upon Israel to exercise judgment. It may also be that Joel’s description of an invading “army” of locusts is real, but the army itself was sent as an intentional sign and symbol of a future invasion of a human army—a type of an invasion that would decimate the land. This view, I think, is favored by the sharp eschatological turn that takes place in chapter 3: “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land” (3:1–2). No doubt, by Joel 3 any thought of a locust invasion has been entirely left behind. The objects of God’s fury are Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Egypt, and Edom (3:4, 19).

Thus, I take the locust invasion as either a prophetic vision, a parable or, more likely, a current or near-at-hand historical event the prophet turns into a prophetic sign of past and future invasions by foreign nations. It could be that the then-present locust plague and drought—a near-fulfillment of the Day of the Lord—was a type of a future, greater Day of the Lord, as Patterson notes: “The terrible locust plague is a harbinger of awesome things to come.”⁴⁹ In this case, the primary means of God’s theophanic visitable in judgment is the invading armies from the north, not a swarming

⁴⁹ Richard D. Patterson, “Joel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel–Malachi*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 310.

army of locusts. The ultimate referent is not an immediate or near day of the Lord, but the ultimate eschatological Day of the Lord—especially in chapter 3.

Joel's Day of the Lord language and imagery echo a number of elements already seen in other prophets. Having explored those developed themes already, we can summarize them here as follows:

- The Day of the Lord is unprecedented, unable to be compared to what came before or what will come after (1:2–3; 2:2).
- It involves the invasion of a powerful nation and warfare among the nations (1:6; 2:2; 2:4–11; 2:20; 2:25; 3:9–14).
- It is characterized by desolation of the land and its natural resources (1:7–12, 16–20; 2:3).
- It's characterized by consuming fire and flame (1:19; 2:3, 30).
- It's marked by the blowing of a trumpet of alarm (2:1, 15).
- It's accompanied by darkness, gloom, earthquakes, darkening of sun, moon, and stars, heavenly signs and wonders (2:2, 10, 30–31; 3:15).
- It calls God's people to repentance and offers a way of deliverance (1:8, 13–14; 2:12–17, 32; 3:16).
- Deliverance from its wrath will lead to material and spiritual blessing for God's people and judgment upon the nations (2:18–32; 3:1–8, 16–21).

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 23

Joel 2 in Acts 2: The Day of the Lord in Peter's Sermon

The first New Testament occurrence of the technical phrase “Day of the Lord” appears in Acts 2 in the midst of Peter’s Pentecost message to a Jewish audience. In the context of the coming of the Spirit as promised by Jesus (Acts 1:4–9), the Spirit indeed was poured out upon the disciples gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:2–4). In response to this miraculous ability to speak languages unknown to the speakers, by which they were “speaking about God’s deeds of power” (2:11), Jews from all over the world who had gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost expressed confusion and astonishment (2:5–12). However, some accused them of being drunk (2:13). At this point, Peter stands up and preaches his famous Pentecost message, dispensing with the false charge of drunkenness (Acts 2:14–15) and affirming that what they were witnessing in the miraculous ability to proclaim the things of God in languages they had never learned was “what was spoken through the prophet Joel (τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Ἰωήλ)” (Acts 2:16).

Luke’s report of Peter’s quotation from Joel 2:28–32 (LXX) closely matches the Septuagint,¹ in some places exactly (see comparison below). The different opening line “in the last days” (Acts 2:17) and “after these things” (Joel 2:28) are best explained by Peter both acknowledging the eschatological context of Joel 2 and notifying his audience that the outpouring of the Spirit indicated that the “last days” had in some sense arrived. Approaches to the quotation of Joel 2 in Acts 2 have varied from maximalist to minimalist with regard to the realization of eschatological events prophesied in Joel. On the “maximalist” side, amillennialist Oswald Allis understood Peter’s quotation of Joel as indicating that the kingdom of God has now come, representing the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation.² Likewise, premillennialist Grant Osborne suggests Peter applied a *Pesher* approach to the passage, declaring that the events in Acts 2 were a direct

¹ The passage in the Hebrew Bible is Joel 3:1–5; in the LXX, the passage is Joel 2:28–32. Most English translations follow the LXX versification.

² Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945), 136.

fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2.³ So, for instance, the “portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below” (Acts 2:19) corresponds to the coming of the Spirit with wind and fire while the “blood, and fire, and smoky mist” (2:19) refer to the darkness, earthquake, and torn veil associated with Christ’s death.⁴ On the minimalist side, A. C. Gaebelein suggests, “When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost it was not in fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. This prophecy has never been fulfilled nor will it be fulfilled during this present age, in which the church is being formed.”⁵ As indicated even by my quotation from a century-old source, this minimalist approach is usually found among older dispensational premillennial interpreters, though even that tradition has tended to opt for a mediating position on Peter’s use of Joel 2 in Acts 2.

The mediating approach often sees some elements of the Joel prophecy fulfilled in Acts 2 while other elements await a future fulfillment; a present spiritual fulfillment in anticipation of a future literal fulfillment; or a partial fulfillment in anticipation of a more complete fulfillment in keeping with the pattern of iterative fulfillments related to the Day of the Lord. For example, Polhill notes, “The signs in v. 19 are standard apocalyptic language and almost certainly refer to the final cosmic events preceding the Parousia.”⁶ Polhill’s language applies to the heavenly and earthly signs of the Day of the Lord, and they do not rule out a present, partial, spiritual fulfillment of other aspects of the prophecy. Many understand the fulfillment at Pentecost to be inaugural or a “partial” fulfillment of the prophecy, with the complete fulfillment to await the parousia.⁷ David Peterson attempts to relieve the tension by noting, “The prophet Joel does not indicate the length of time between the outpouring of God’s Spirit and the outpouring of his wrath, but the former is a sign that the latter will most definitely take place.”⁸ And C. K. Barrett notes that in Luke’s eschatological understanding, “God has begun, but not completed, the work of fulfillment; Christians are living in the last days, but the last day has not yet come.”⁹

³ Grand R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 48; Aaron W. White, *The Prophets Agree: The Function of the Book of the Twelve Prophets in Acts* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 57. The “missing link” that connects the pouring out of the Spirit (Joel 2:28) and the enthronement of the Messiah is T. Jud. 24.1–6 (cf. White, *Prophets Agree*, 88–94). This demonstrates that a messianic reading of the prophecy of Joel 2 was not unknown in the first century, but the collage of images of the coming kingdom in the Old Testament and their association with the future Davidic king would already have established that thematic connection (see Go Deeper Excursus 11).

⁴ Osborne, *Acts*, 49.

⁵ A. C. Gaebelein, *The Prophet Joel* (New York: Our Hope, 1909), 136.

⁶ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 110.

⁷ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 27–28; George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 272; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980), 79.

⁸ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 143.

⁹ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, *Preliminary Introduction and Commentary on Acts I–XIV*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 135.

Amidst this mere sampling of views along the “maximalist—mediating—minimalist” spectrum, my own “both/and” approach to the Day of the Lord and to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies places my view among the “mediating” positions. I understand the vision of Joel 2 as referring ultimately to a future eschatological Day of the Lord (cf. similar imagery as Joel 2:31 and Acts 2:20 in Rev 6:12). However, as we have seen in Go Deeper Excursus 11, even these ultimate pictures of the Day of the Lord involve numerous partial historical iterations. Peter’s application of the passage to his audience appears to add another dimension—that the end-times pouring out of the Spirit has in some real way arrived, even if partial, and the events of Pentecost advance the realization of the kingdom of God while also heralding an eschatological judgment that demands urgent repentance.

Looking closer at this passage, Acts 2:17–18 (quoting Joel 2:28–29) is intended to establish that common people—not merely official prophets—will be recipients of the prophetic gifts: prophesying, seeing visions, and dreaming dreams.¹⁰ Though both Acts 2:17–18 and Joel 2:28–29 include the same spiritual phenomena, the order is different: Acts has prophesying, visions, and dreams; Joel has prophesying, dreams, and visions. However, as seen in the comparison chart, it is merely a swapping of the second and third items; both have the older men dreaming dreams and the younger men seeing visions. At the end of an almost exact quote of Joel 2:29, though, Luke has Peter repeating a reference to prophesying: both male and female slaves will receive the Spirit “and they shall prophesy (καὶ προφητεύσουσιν).” The repetition of the phenomena of prophesying is likely intended to reemphasize the fact that this Jewish audience was witnessing prophesying in other languages, not drunken mutterings.

Peter could have stopped the quotation there, and it would have sufficiently accomplished his purpose of explaining that the amazing phenomena of speaking the things of God in unlearned languages was a last-days manifestation of the Spirit. Yet he continues the quotation with the threat of the coming of judgment: that is, the “great and spectacular Day of the Lord (ἐλθεῖν ἡμέραν κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ)” (Acts 2:20, my translation). In essence, Peter’s sermon intends to place pressure on his audience to respond rightly to his message in light of a coming theophanic visitation in judgment (see discussion in Go Deeper Excursus 22).

It should be noted that Peter did not say that what they were experiencing at that precise moment was itself the Day of the Lord. Rather, those signs and wonders—as well as the stock imagery of portents in heaven and earth, darkening of the sun, and the turning of the moon to blood—would come “before (πρὶν)” the great and spectacular Day of the Lord. His Jewish audience

¹⁰ Blumhofer’s detailed study of Luke’s minor adjustments to the quotation from the LXX of Joel 2:28–32 claims to discover deep theological motives in the alterations, alternations that change the meaning of the Old Testament prophecy to apply the words better to the church’s fulfillment of Israel’s restoration. See C. M. Blumhofer, “Luke’s Alternation of Joel 3.1–5 in Acts 2.17–21,” *NTS* 62 (2016):499–516. Blumhofer’s arguments seem too subtle for a narrative in which Peter’s rhetorical purpose in the Pentecost sermon was to convince his hearers that Jesus was the risen Messiah and that the miracle of speaking unlearned languages was a sign of the presence of the Spirit of God and imminent doom for unbelievers.

would have understood that implicit in the quotation was a warning of divine judgment if they failed to repent: “Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment” (Joel 2:12–13). This is confirmed by Peter’s answer to their question, “What should we do?” (Acts 2:37). He replies, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.... Save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (Acts 2:38, 40).

Joel 2:28–32	Acts 2:17–21
<p>²⁸ καὶ ἔσται μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα, καὶ προφητεύσουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες ὑμῶν, καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑμῶν ἐνύπνια ἐνυπνιασθήσονται, καὶ οἱ νεανίσκοι ὑμῶν ὀράσεις ὄψονται·</p>	<p>¹⁷ καὶ ἔσται ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, λέγει ὁ θεός, ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα, καὶ προφητεύσουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες ὑμῶν καὶ οἱ νεανίσκοι ὑμῶν ὀράσεις ὄψονται καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑμῶν ἐνυπνίους ἐνυπνιασθήσονται·</p>
<p>²⁹ καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου·</p>	<p>¹⁸ καὶ γε ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου, καὶ προφητεύσουσιν·</p>
<p>³⁰ καὶ δώσω τέρατα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς αἶμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ·</p>	<p>¹⁹ καὶ δώσω τέρατα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἄνω καὶ σημεῖα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κάτω, αἶμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ·</p>
<p>³¹ ὁ ἥλιος μεταστραφήσεται εἰς σκότος καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἰς αἶμα πρὶν ἔλθειν ἡμέραν Κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ·</p>	<p>²⁰ ὁ ἥλιος μεταστραφήσεται εἰς σκότος καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἰς αἶμα, πρὶν ἔλθειν ἡμέραν κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ·</p>
<p>³² καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου σωθήσεται· ὅτι ἐν τῷ ὄρει Σειῶν καὶ ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ ἔσται ἀνασωζόμενος, καθότι εἶπεν Κύριος, καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι οὗς Κύριος προσκέκληται</p>	<p>²¹ καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται·</p>

In hindsight, it seems likely that Peter was warning his audience about the coming judgment just as Jesus had prophesied in his Olivet Discourse about the pending destruction of the temple (Matt 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–24). In fact, it is probable that Peter expected this coming period of tribulation, invasion of Jerusalem, and destruction of the temple in mind when he quoted from Joel 2. Yet this does not demonstrate that the first-century events constituted the ultimate fulfillment of the Day of the Lord. We must recall that even by Peter’s time, the Day of the Lord was understood as an archetype that had many historical fulfillments that would climax in the ultimate Day of the Lord at the literal second coming. Whether Peter comprehended a distinction between the first-century Day of the Lord and the ultimate eschatological Day of the Lord is impossible to know. However, he knew that if the people of Israel failed to repent and turn to

Christ, then judgment would certainly come. For that, he needed no special prophetic knowledge; all he needed was a basic knowledge of the Day of the Lord motif from the Old Testament prophets and Jesus' sayings concerning the destruction of the temple and siege of Jerusalem.

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Go Deeper Excursus 24

The Last Trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 vs. the Seventh Trumpet in Revelation 11:15

On very rare occasions, some commentators have attempted to identify the “last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the sounding of the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15.¹ It is difficult to find support for this identification in published works on eschatology, 1 Corinthians, or the Book of Revelation, as its weaknesses, discussed briefly in this excursus, are so many. The connection is usually made by popular-level end-times enthusiasts and rarely among commentators and scholars. More in keeping with the question are the words of G. K. Barrett: “It would be wrong to take the *last trumpet* here to mean the last of a series (such as the seven in Revelation); it means the trumpet-call that accompanies the End.”²

Several considerations make association of the seventh trumpet in Revelation and the “last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 untenable. First, in chapter 10 of *The Fathers on the Future*, I warned against confusing the symbolic events John saw and heard within the apocalyptic visions with the actual fulfillment of those events that will take place in the future. The sounding of the trumpet by the seventh angel in 11:15 belongs to the vision that John experienced at the end of the first century. John was witnessing symbols of future things, not the future things themselves. In keeping with this principle, the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 was sounded during John’s vision; it will not be literally sounded in the future.

Second, even supposing the seventh angel’s sounding of the trumpet in Revelation was pointing to a more literal trumpet blast of the future, this does not imply that the “last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 is the same as the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15. Paul makes no indication

¹ E.g., Norman B. Harrison, *The End: Re-Thinking the Revelation* (Minneapolis: Harrison Service, 1941), 75. More common, though, is the identification of the “last trumpet” with that of Matthew 24:31 (G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary [London: Black, 1966], 107). However, we have already demonstrated that the “trumpet” in Matt 24:31 is the trumpet that sounds at the gathering of Israel from exile (see chapter 7 of *The Fathers on the Future*).

² C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1968), 381.

that ἔσχατος is the last of a series; and in any case, because Revelation was likely written some forty years later, and some thirty years after Paul's death, it was impossible that Paul intended ἔσχατος to bear the weight of "last in a series of seven trumpets that will be blown in the book of Revelation." Even if we were to accept the Neronian dating of Revelation (c. AD 68),³ this would be over ten years after 1 Corinthians and still after Paul's death. I suppose one could posit that Paul wrote better than he knew and that ἔσχατος refers prophetically to the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15, but Paul and his readers would not have been aware of the referent until many years later. Paul's use of "last trumpet" in 1 Corinthians 15:52, though, had to have meant something to both himself and his audience.

This leaves us with the possibility that John (or the Spirit working through John) arranged the trumpet visions of Revelation with the intention that the seventh angel sounding the trumpet would correspond with Paul's "last trumpet" in 1 Corinthians 15:52. However, Revelation made no effort at drawing attention to such a connection. Had the vision been dependent on Paul's solitary reference to the trumpet as the "last," it seems likely he would have designated the seventh trumpet with that adjective to make the allusion obvious. Rather, Revelation 11:15 simply says, "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet (καὶ ὁ ἕβδομος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν)." If an allusion to 1 Corinthians 15:52 were intended, then John, a master at intertextuality, failed in this instance to make the connection. Also, since Paul associates the "last trumpet" exclusively with the resurrection and transformation of the righteous in 1 Corinthians 15:52 (and in 1 Thess 4:16), we would expect to see at least a passing acknowledgment of this ultimate salvation and defeat of death through resurrection in Revelation 11. Instead, we have an announcement of the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah and his eternal reign (11:15–18). In light of these considerations, it seems artificial and forced—and perhaps even desperate—to equate the "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with "the seventh angel sounding" in Revelation 11:15.

To avoid eisegetical anachronism, it is best to link Paul's eschatological trumpet announcing the resurrection and transformation of the saints in 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the "trumpet of God" in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, which itself associates the trumpet with the announcement of the coming final Day of the Lord associated with the coming of Christ as mediator of God's theophanic visitation in judgment.⁴

³ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 957–61.

⁴ See further discussion in Michael J. Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation," *TrinJ* NS 22.1 (2001): 39–45.

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Go Deeper Excursus 25

Who (or What) Is the Restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2?

One matter from the eschatological section of 2 Thessalonians 2 tends to confuse readers and elude interpretation: the identity of the “restrainer” or “restraining influence” mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:6. Paul says that this restraining influence in his day prevented the man of lawlessness from being revealed, thus preventing the Day of the Lord from commencing. It is therefore relevant to our investigation of the Day of the Lord in the New Testament to try to ascertain the identity of this restrainer.

Evidently, the Thessalonians already knew what Paul meant when he wrote, “And you know what restrains (τὸ κατέχον) him” (2 Thess 2:6). Paul first uses a present active neuter participle—the “thing that restrains” or “the restraining force,” “restraining influence,” or “restraining condition.” This restraining influence will continue to operate until the time comes for the man of lawlessness to be revealed (2:6). In the next verse, Paul notes that “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains (ὁ κατέχων) will do so until he is taken out of the way” (2:7). In this second reference to the restrainer, Paul uses a present active masculine participle. The shift from the neuter to the masculine presents a puzzle. Bruce writes, “Any one undertaking to identify the restraining agency must reckon with the fact that it may be viewed either personally (ὁ κατέχων) or impersonally (τὸ κατέχον). It is plain, moreover, that both the mystery of iniquity and the restraining agency are at work at the time of the writings of the epistle; the restrainer has not yet been removed, therefore the man of lawlessness has not yet appeared, and *a fortiori* the Day of the Lord has not yet arrived.”¹ If Paul had a particular person in mind—say, the archangel Michael or the Roman emperor—then he would most likely have simply stuck with the masculine participle. And if he had a particular impersonal condition in mind, like the system of human government, then it makes the shift from the neuter to the masculine participle difficult to explain. The term κατέχω simply means to hold back, prevent, or hinder something or someone.² There is

¹ F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 171.

² BDAG, 532–33.

no obvious New Testament or Septuagint parallel to the idea of something or someone holding back or preventing the coming of eschatological persons or events. Understandably, commentators have offered numerous—and sometimes desperate—explanations for what restrains the coming lawless one.³

Bruce writes, “They [the Thessalonians] knew because they had been told; later readers are at a disadvantage compared with them, and have to guess.”⁴ Or do we? If it is really the case that Paul managed to cover details of eschatological events like the coming of the lawless one and the identity of the restrainer even in the short time he spent in Thessalonica, then it is reasonable to assume he was able to cover these same topics in other places where he preached the gospel and planted churches. In fact, the confusion and deception regarding future things that occurred in connection with Thessalonica may have prompted Paul to be even more diligent in clarifying such matters wherever he ministered in the gospel. If Paul did teach the identity of the restrainer far and wide during his apostolic ministry, then we would expect to see in the early generations of post-apostolic Christian writings echoes of that teaching of someone or something that restrains the forces of evil—the “mystery of lawlessness”—and the coming of the Day of the Lord judgments. It is reasonable to inquire, then, whether we can discern the theme of a restraining person or influence in the first couple generations of the church.

Before I examine the early Christian testimony concerning a restrainer of wickedness and the end times, I should first point out that early Christians did not see a real theological separation between God’s works through the Spirit and the means he uses to accomplish his purposes. So, whether we ultimately understand the restrainer to be human government, the church, the conscience, an angel, or something else, God is ultimately the one who does the work through various means. To answer that the Holy Spirit restrains evil is ultimately correct, but what means of restraint was Paul describing in 2 Thessalonians 2?

In the early third century, Tertullian gives us this following interpretation of the restrainer: “What obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon (its own ruins)?” (*Res.* 24 [ANF 3]). This statement is the earliest clear interpretation of the passage as “human government.” Interestingly, Hippolytus of Rome also identifies the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2 as the fourth beast in Daniel 7; that is, Rome: “Who then is he that now restraineth but the fourth beast; and when he is removed and

³ Some understand the “restrainer” to refer to the Holy Spirit, as in John 16:7–8. Others refer it to the Roman emperor (personal) and the empire (impersonal), or to the work of human government to restrain sin by its God-ordained system of punishment and reward (Rom 13:1–5) (Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 171–72). Some apply it to the church’s spiritual restraint on wickedness (Matt 16:18–19). Still others have identified the restrainer as the archangel Michael (Dan 12:1–2). Perhaps it is the Jewish state, or Satan, or maybe even Paul himself is the restrainer and the preaching of the gospel the restraining thing.

⁴ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 170.

taken out of the way, the deceiver shall come.”⁵ Later in the fourth century, Chrysostom writes that “some indeed say, the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman empire, to whom I most of all accede. Wherefore? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts, withhold him. And otherwise he ought now to have come, if he was about to come when the gifts ceased; for they have long since ceased. But because he said this of the Roman empire, he naturally glanced at it, and speaks covertly and darkly” (*Fourth Homily on 2 Thessalonians* [NPNF¹13]). Thus over a century after Paul, Tertullian and Hippolytus, likely relying heavily on Romans 13, argue that the Roman Empire was the restrainer of God to hold back evil. Yet, various perspectives continued to be held. However, in my study of second century literature, I have been unable to identify any clear development of the idea that human government holds back evil and God’s judgment, though some must have held this position since it suddenly appeared in the third century.

When we look at the earliest days of the church and trace the theme of the restraint of wickedness, demonic powers, and even end-times judgments, a different picture emerges. The tradition is early, widespread, consistent, and has no competing perspectives—just the situation we might expect had Paul actually taught the identity of the restraining influence among the numerous churches he planted.

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110)

Early in the second century, Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, wrote: “Therefore make every effort to come together as often as possible to give thanks and glory to God. For when you gather together frequently, the powers of Satan are destroyed and his destruction is brought to an end by the unanimity of your faith. There is nothing better than peace by which all war in heaven and on earth is abolished” (Ign. *Eph.* 13.1–2 [Brannan]).

Here, the gathered church engaged in prayer and worship wages spiritual warfare against Satan and establishes peace in heaven and on earth.

Aristides of Athens (c. 125)

In the early second century, the apologist Aristides of Athens makes the following claim regarding the presence of Christians in the wicked world: “And because they [Christians] acknowledge the goodness of God towards them, lo! On account of them there flows forth the beauty that is in the

⁵ J. H. Kennedy, *Part of the Commentary of S. Hippolytus on Daniel (Lately Discovered by Dr. Basilios Georgiades), with Introduction, Notes, and Translation* (Dublin: Hodges & Figgis, 1888), 37–38.

world.... And I have no doubt that the world stands by reason of the intercession of Christians” (Arist. *Apol.* 16).⁶

Thus according to Aristides, when Christians pray and behave in conformity with their calling, their active presence preserves the world.

Justin Martyr (c. 150)

In the second book of his apology explaining and defending the Christian faith against critics, Justin writes:

Therefore God postpones the collapse and dissolution of the universe (through which the bad angels, the demons, and men would cease to exist), because of the Christian seed, which He knows to be the cause in nature [of the world’s preservation]. If such were not the case, it would be impossible for you to do the things you do and be influenced by the evil demons; but the fire of judgment would descend and would completely dissolve everything, just as the flood waters once left no one but him, with his family. (*2 Apol.* 7 [Falls])

Here, the abiding presence of Christians in the world postpones the coming judgment; if Christians were removed, then fire would utterly destroy all the ungodly forces of wickedness—human and angelic.

Theophilus of Antioch (c. 170–185)

In a beautiful passage describing the role of the church in the world, Theophilus, bishop of Antioch in the latter part of the second century, wrote:

For as the sea, if it had not had the influx and supply of the rivers and fountains to nourish it, would long since have been parched by reason of its saltness; so also the world, if it had not had the law of God and the prophets flowing and welling up sweetness, and compassion, and righteousness, and the doctrine of the holy commandments of God, would long ere now have come to ruin, by reason of the wickedness and sin which abound in it. And as in the sea there are islands, some of them habitable, and well-watered, and fruitful, with havens and harbours in which the storm-tossed may find refuge,— so God

⁶ Translation from J. Rendel Harris, ed. and trans., *The Apology of Aristides on Behalf of the Christians*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893).

has given to the world which is driven and tempest-tossed by sins, assemblies—we mean holy churches—in which survive the doctrines of the truth, as in the island-harbours of good anchorage; and into these run those who desire to be saved, being lovers of the truth, and wishing to escape the wrath and judgment of God. (*Autol.* 2.14 [ANF 2])

According to Theophilus, the church, mediating the blessing of God’s revelation as well as truth and virtue to the world, prevents and delays the ruin of the world.

Epistle to Diognetus (c. 150–200)

In an oft-quoted passage drawing parallels between the soul-body relationship and the church-world relationship, the anonymous author of the letter to Diognetus writes:

But to put it simply, what the soul is in the body, this *is what* the Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed throughout all the limbs of the body, and Christians throughout the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body but is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world but are not of the world. The invisible soul is guarded in the visible body. And Christians are known as being in the world, but their religion remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul and fights against it, having been wronged in no way, because it is forbidden to indulge in its pleasures. The world also hates Christians, having been wronged in no way, because they are opposed to its pleasure. The soul loves the flesh that hates *it*, and its members, and Christians love those who hate *them*. The soul has been locked up in the body, but it holds the body together, and Christians are restrained in the world as in prison, but they hold the world together. The soul, *though* immortal, dwells in a mortal tent, and Christians temporarily dwell in corruptibility, waiting for incorruptibility in heaven. When badly treated in food and drink, the soul becomes even better, and Christians, when punished daily, increase even more. God has appointed them to so great a position, which is not right for them to reject. (*Diogn.* 6.1–10 [Brannan])

Though filled with imagery that suggests the many blessings the world receives because of the presence of Christians, the most pertinent line is in 6.7: “The soul has been locked up in the body, but it holds the body together, and Christians are restrained in the world as in prison, but they hold the world together.”

Tertullian of Carthage (c. 200)

Though I cited Tertullian as the first proponent of the view that the restrainer is the Roman Empire, elsewhere in his writings Tertullian displays a different—or at least nuanced—view:

There is also another and a greater necessity for our offering prayer in behalf of the emperors, nay, for the complete stability of the empire, and for Roman interests in general. For we know that a mighty shock impending over the whole earth—in fact, the very end of all things threatening dreadful woes—is only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman empire. We have no desire, then, to be overtaken by these dire events; and in praying that their coming may be delayed, we are lending our aid to Rome’s duration. (*Apol.* 32 [ANF 3]).

At first glance, it appears that the Roman Empire is the agent that delays the coming of end-times judgment; but upon closer examination, Christians offering prayers for the delay of the coming doom indirectly aids to the continuation of the empire, which necessarily must be removed in the judgments of the Day of the Lord. Several chapters later, Tertullian writes, “And, for all that is said, if we compare the calamities of former times, they fall on us more lightly now, since God gave Christians to the world; for from that time virtue put some restraint on the world’s wickedness, and men began to pray for the averting of God’s wrath” (*Apol.* 41 [ANF 3]). Here, the presence of praying, righteous Christians restrain the world’s wickedness and the wrath of God.

Conclusion

As seen above, a widespread understanding in the early church was that the presence of the church in the world promoted righteousness and virtue, held back wickedness and vice, and thus prevented the full manifestation of satanic power, the revelation of the man of lawlessness, and the unleashing of the Day of the Lord. This is consistent with the role of the Spirit as described by Jesus in John 16:8: to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment; yet because God employs means, this unique work of the Spirit in the era of the new covenant is accomplished by means of the church. If the special ministry of the Holy Spirit functioning in and through the presence of the church is what restrains wickedness and holds back the full revelation of the man of lawlessness, then the removal of the church from the earth would allow the apostasy to occur, the man of lawlessness to be revealed, and the Day of the Lord to commence. This, then, may conform to Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians concerning the rescue of the church from the coming wrath and Day of the Lord (1 Thess 1:10; 4:13–5:11).

This solution accommodates Paul’s use of both the neuter and masculine participle—as the presence of the church in the world is thought of both as personal and impersonal—the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, a new man, a bride—and because ultimately the restrainer is the Holy Spirit himself, working through the church. However, if these echoes of the restraining power as Christians in the world is not what Paul meant in 1 Thessalonians 2, then we are left with Morris’s remark: “The plain fact is that we do not know. It is best honestly to admit this and not to try to force the passage into conformity with some theory we have evolved on the basis of imperfect knowledge.”⁷

⁷ Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 13 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 129.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 26 The Mystery of Babylon the Great

The interpretation of the “great whore who is seated on many waters” (Rev 17:1), ultimately identified as “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (17:18), is not simple. As with most of the figures in Revelation, much depends on one’s presuppositions regarding the nature of the Apocalypse (preterist, idealist, futurist, or historicist). Because my purpose in *The Fathers on the Future* is to avoid outright speculation, I will not engage deeply with the identity of the woman except to suggest that, in my view, a consistent futurist interpretation in the Irenaeian eschatological tradition will conclude that Babylon in Revelation 17 is a symbol for a future apostate Jerusalem as the antichrist’s capital.

The vision of the woman riding the scarlet beast involves a number of clues to her identity. She sits on many waters (Rev 17:1). She is guilty of immorality with kings and nations (17:2). She rides on—probably symbolizing a close relationship and support by—the beast; that is, the antichrist (17:4). She is described as luxuriously and seductively adorned with purple, scarlet, gold, and pearls (17:4). Yet all her lovers—the kings of the earth—will turn on her, leaving her desolate and naked and even burn her with fire (17:16). She is drunk with the blood of the saints and witnesses to Jesus (17:6). She is, in fact, a city: the great city ruling over all the kings of the earth (17:18). Importantly, “on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth’s abominations’” (17:5). Finally, we are told that the “seven heads” of the beast “are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings” (17:9).

A minority view has interpreted the figure of the woman as actual Babylon, which would need to be rebuilt in modern-day Iraq.¹ Without directly engaging the details of this argument,² I believe several considerations rule it out as a possibility. First, we are told that the name “Babylon” is a “mystery (μυστήριον)” (Rev 17:5). The term indicates a puzzle or symbol that must be figured out,

¹ The series of six articles begin with Andrew M. Woods, “Have the Prophecies in Revelation 17–18 about Babylon Been Fulfilled? Part 1,” *BSac* 169 (2012): 79–100.

² See, for example, Charles Dyer, *Future Babylon: The Biblical Arguments for Rebuilding Babylon* (Taos, NM: Dispensational Publishing House, 2017).

like the “mystery” of the seven stars and seven gold lampstands in Revelation 1:20; the solution to the mystery is not stars and lampstands but angels and churches. Similarly, the “mystery” of the woman and of the beast in Revelation 17:7 means that the symbols do not stand for themselves. The woman is not a literal woman. The beast is not a literal beast. John’s use of μυστήριον in 17:5, saying that the name “Babylon” is a mystery, must mean that term “Babylon” could potentially refer to any city *except* Babylon, because that would not be a mystery. While some may argue that the whole ordeal of the rebuilding of Babylon is a “mystery” in the sense of something that had not been known before now being revealed,³ Revelation 17:5 does not say that the vision is a mystery being revealed but that the name itself—or even the word *Babylon* itself—is the mystery: ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον, Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη (“a name was written, a mystery, Babylon the great”).

Second—and more devastating—the interpreting angel tells John that the seven heads of the beast “are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings (ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσιν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ’ αὐτῶν. καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσιν)” (Rev 17:9). This poses an insurmountable topographical problem as Babylon has no hills, much less seven. Built on either side of the Euphrates River, joined by a bridge, and surrounded by massive walls, Babylon was built on a flat plane. In fact, the massive walls around ancient Babylon were called “artificial mountains,”⁴ owing to the fact that the city had no other natural defense against aggressors. The only mounds recorded in the history of its geography are actually the ruins of the ancient city itself, hardly fitting the description that the city sits on seven hills (Rev 17:9). In defense of the literal Babylon interpretation, one may suggest that the “seven mountains” are actually themselves symbols for the real interpretation of the seven heads: the seven kings. Yet this requires us to accept the unprecedented and absurd idea that the angel—whose task it is to explain the mystery of the woman, beast, the heads, and the horns (Rev 17:7)—actually explained a symbol with another symbol, which itself required further explanation. Such a scenario pushes against the bounds of credulity. Where in all of apocalyptic literature does an interpreter interpret a symbol with a second symbol that needs an interpretation? Appealing to “apposition”—that the “seven kings” is in an exegetical relationship to the “seven hills”—suffers from the same problem of the irrelevant and inexplicable half-way interpretation; but it also fails because the appositional use of καὶ follows the phrase it explicates immediately without an additional verb, while Revelation 17:9 has the words ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ’ αὐτῶν intervening and a second εἰσιν. No, Revelation 17:9 says the seven heads are symbols for seven literal hills or mountains on which the woman (a city) sits. The figure of the heads also plays double duty as symbolizing seven kings, probably related to the history of that city in some way.

Dispensing with the interpretation that “Babylon” means Babylon, what options are left to us? Literally dozens of cities past and present claim to have been built on seven hills (Babylon is not

³ L&N, 344.

⁴ William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible, Comprising Its Antiquities, Biography, Geography, and Natural History* (Philadelphia: Penn, 1884), 88.

one of them).⁵ However, the primary candidate is Rome, known famously as the City on Seven Hills. Grant Osborne writes, “The image is so general that the only likely antecedent might be the goddess Roma, represented on a coin minted in A.D. 71 in Asia during the reign of Vespasian (father of Domitian) as sitting on the seven hills of Rome (cf. 17:9), bearing a sword.... The prostitute is clearly Babylon/Rome, depicted in all her alluring depravity.”⁶ This is further supported by the fact that Peter surreptitiously referred to Rome as “Babylon” in 1 Peter 5:13. And the most compelling proof of this interpretation is that Revelation 17:18 calls it “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” In the first century, this was clearly Rome.

However, from a futurist perspective, which views the book of Revelation as referring primarily to events and conditions of a future period of tribulation prior to the intermediate kingdom, the appeal of identifying eschatological Babylon as “Rome” fades. We have seen in Scripture, and in the early Irenaeus eschatological consensus, that the antichrist’s exploits will focus on Jerusalem and its environs (Dan 9:27; 11:41, 45; 2 Thess 2:4; Rev 11:2; 16:16). In fact, as the man of lawlessness—by means of strong deception (2 Thess 2:9–12)—establishes himself as the “savior” of the world, perhaps even masquerading as the true messiah himself, Jerusalem will become the capital of his global empire (2:4). Though it has become a mainstay of preterist interpretations of Revelation,⁷ it seems necessary that the ultimate fulfillment of the mysterious figure, Babylon the Great, must be the actual future capital of the antichrist’s empire: the apostate Jerusalem of the tribulation period. This futurist understanding of the ultimate manifestation of Babylon as the antichrist’s Jerusalem does not rule out a both/and understanding by which, in the first century, “Babylon” could be spiritually applied to Rome. Nor does it prevent the label from being spiritually applied to any city that takes (or has taken) a stand against God and his people—from Berlin to Beijing to Berkeley.

Regarding the symbolism of Revelation and the seven hills, Malinowski notes, “From Roman times Jerusalem has been identified as having seven hills: 1) Mount Ophel, 2) the original Mount Zion, 3) the New Mount Zion and 4) the hill on which the Antonia Fortress was built, 5) the Mount Scopus, 6) Mount Olivet and 7) the Mount of Corruption (the latter three are peaks in a mountain ridge that lies east of the old city).”⁸ Also, according to the fantastical account of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, based on Jonah’s descent to the roots of the mountains below the temple, “we may learn

⁵ See Cościwit Malinowski, “Septimontium (Seven Hills) as *conditio sine qua non* for a City to Pretend to Be a Capital,” *Horizons* 8.1 (June 2017): 3–26.

⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 608–609. The hills of Rome are 1) the Capitoline (Tarpeius), 2) the Palatine (Pallanteum), 3) the Quirinal, 4) the Caelian, 5) the Aventine, 6) the Esquiline and 7) the Viminal (Malinowski, “Septimontium,” 4). For those who take the extra step and regard the woman to be the Roman Catholic Church, it should be noted that “Vaticanus” is not one of the seven traditional hills of Rome.

⁷ E.g., Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2d ed. (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997), 392. However, preterists obviously understand the symbol as fulfilled in first-century Jerusalem, not as pointing to future Jerusalem.

⁸ Malinowski, “Septimontium,” 19–20.

that Jerusalem stands upon seven (hills).”⁹ In reality, the identification of the so-called seven hills of Jerusalem seems rather forced; and in any case, modern Jerusalem is a sprawling city that occupies far more than seven hills.

Yet other factors help us identify antichrist’s apostate Jerusalem of the future with the symbol of the woman. The woman is referred to as a “harlot” or “whore” (πόρνη) (Rev 17:1). Except in Revelation, the term πόρνη is used in the New Testament only of literal prostitutes. However, in the Old Testament Greek Septuagint, of its ten uses, five refer to literal prostitutes (Gen 34:31; 38:21 [2x]; Deut 23:17; and additions to 1 Kgs 12:24). The other five use the term πόρνη figuratively. The first is applied to the city of Nineveh: “O city of bloodshed, entirely lying, full of injustice.... Beautiful and gratifying prostitute, leader of sorcerers, she who sells nations with her fornication, and people by her sorcerers” (Nah. 3:1, 4 [Brannan]). The second is Jerusalem: “How did a faithful city, Zion, full of justice, in whom justice slept, become a harlot, but now murderers are in her?” (Isa 1:21 [Brannan]). The third instance applies the epithet to Tyre (Isa 23:16). The fourth and fifth again apply πόρνη to Jerusalem: “Son of man, warn Jerusalem of its lawlessness.... You prostituted yourself with the daughters of Assyria.... You became like a harlot (πόρνη) gathering her wages.... On account of this, O harlot (πόρνη), hear the word of the Lord” (Ezek 16:1, 28, 31, 35 [Brannan]). Thus calling apostate Jerusalem a “harlot (πόρνη)” in a spiritual sense has deep roots in the Old Testament.¹⁰

By combining imagery usually associated with Babylon—including the very name of Babylon assigned as a “mystery”—the vision of Revelation 17 communicates the depths of apostasy that Jerusalem will experience under the tyranny of the antichrist. Revelation 17:1 is not the first time the book of Revelation cast Jerusalem as a villainous enemy of God. In Revelation 11, in an account of the fate of the mysterious “two witnesses” who prophesy for 1,260 days (the first half of the seven-year tribulation) (Rev 11:1–14), we are told that they are killed by the “beast that comes up from the bottomless pit” (11:7). Their dead bodies, we are told, “will lie on the street of the great city (τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης) which spiritually (πνευματικῶς) is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified” (11:8). Having already called Jerusalem “spiritually” Sodom and Egypt, it is certainly not a stretch that Revelation would later call Jerusalem “mysteriously” Babylon and a harlot. Note also that the term “great city” is used in reference to Jerusalem (cf. 11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 19, 21).

All things considered, the “great city ruling over the kings of the earth” (Rev 17:18) will be the capital of the antichrist’s empire: Jerusalem. From there, the antichrist will oversee a reconstruction

⁹ Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, “The History of Jonah,” in *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, edited and translated by Gerald Friedlander (New York: Bloch, 1916), 71.

¹⁰ This image of a prostitute contrasts with the image of the 144,000 Israelites from the twelve tribes who symbolize the righteous remnant of Israel sealed and protected: “It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14:4). Not only will the remnant not be counted among the spiritually apostate πόρνη, but they will be pure and undefiled in a spiritual sense from all impurity (14:5).

of the temple and claim to be the long-awaited messiah and savior of humanity. This likely will constitute the great apostasy that will reveal to those with wisdom that this figure is the antichrist (2 Thess 2; Rev 13). His miraculous restoration after a mortal wound will only strengthen the deception, enabling him to take complete control of the world for forty-two months, after which the coming of Christ will destroy him, his allies, and his armies (2 Thess 2; Rev 19). This is consistent with both the biblical testimony as well as classic Irenaean premillennial expectations.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 27

Escape from the Coming Wrath in the Shepherd of Hermas¹

In the patristic period, the Shepherd of Hermas was highly valued as an inspiring—if not inspired—work (e.g., Origen, *Princ.* 1.3.3; 2.1.5; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 3).² Yet in the modern period, it continues to vex scholars with regard to date, authorship, and integrity.³ I believe a strong case can be (and has been) made for some type of redactional development of the Shepherd between the years 80 and 140 by the hand of the same author, Hermas, who edited his own work throughout his life.⁴ Leslie Barnard reasonably dates Visions 1–4—the main focus of this section—to the late first century and the remainder of the work around 135.⁵ In any case, the writing is generally assumed to have come to its final form before the middle of the second century.⁶

In Vision 2, the revelator introduced in the first vision—the Elder Lady (Herm. Vis. 1.2; cf. 2.4.1)—presents Hermas with a little book, the contents of which Hermas is to report to God’s people (Vis. 2.1.3). The book contains a personal warning and call to repentance for Hermas and

¹ This section is adapted from a paper presented to the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, conducted virtually online in 2020, and then subsequently adapted into relevant excurses related to Visions 2, 3, and 4 in Caroline P. Buie and Michael J. Svigel, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A New Translation and Commentary*, The Apostolic Fathers Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023), 88–90; 120–24; 137–39. The translation of passages from the *Shepherd* are from the Buie/Svigel translation.

² See Philippe Henne, *L’unité du Pasteur d’Hermas: tradition et rédaction* (Paris: Gabalda, 1992), 15–44, and Philippe Henne, “Canonicité du ‘Pasteur’ d’Hermas,” *RThom* 90.1 (1990): 82–83.

³ Norbert Brox, *Der Hirt des Hermas*, Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern, vol. 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 29–33; Alastair Kirkland, “The Literary History of the Shepherd of Hermas,” *Second Century* 9 (1992): 87–102; Caroline Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 18–20.

⁴ See Buie and Svigel, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 25–36. Cf. Robert Joly, “Le milieu complexe du ‘Pasteur d’Hermas,’” In Wolfgang Haase, ed., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt Part II, Principat*, vol. 27, 1, *Religion (Vorkonstantinische Christentum: Apostolischen Väter und Apologeten)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 527–29; John Christian Wilson, *Five Problems in the Interpretation of the Shepherd of Hermas: Authorship, Genre, Canonicity, Apocalyptic, and the Absence of the Name “Jesus Christ”*, Biblical Series, 34 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1995).

⁵ Leslie W. Barnard, “The Shepherd of Hermas in Recent Study,” *Heythrop Theologica Journal* 9 (1968): 32.

⁶ Joseph Verheyden, “The Shepherd of Hermas,” in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Paul Foster (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 64–65.

his family (2.2.2–4), as well as a general call to repentance for all the saints in light of a coming day of reckoning. Though the eschatological tone of this passage has been generally acknowledged,⁷ attention to its chronology as it relates to the idea of the eschatological “second chance” for Hermas has not been well developed, or it has been intentionally downplayed. Osiek points out the puzzle of the “second chance” for repentance for some category of sinners:

The time of salvation is now..., yet it will not last forever—a warning that focuses the urgency of the message on the present. Later, the end of that time will be imaged as the completion of the Tower (Vis. 3.8.9), after which change is not possible (Vis. 3.9.5; Sim. 9.32.1; 10.4.4). But the completion of the Tower is also the end (Vis. 3.8.9). It is therefore not certain that the end of possible conversion for believers is something more proximate than the “end time,” even though this creates more difficulty to explain how the outsiders seem to have more time. The answer lies not in chronological but in narrative theological structure: believers have the word of revelation already addressed to them in baptism and repeated in Hermas’ proclamation; the time for conversion is therefore the immediate present, whereas for unbelievers, it is the time in which they hear the message.⁸

However, I argue that the solution to the difficulty created by the idea of an availability of repentance for the heathen distinct from that for the saints is, in fact, found in careful attention to Hermas’s eschatological chronology. The saints have “until this Day” (μέχρι ταύτης τῆς ἡμέρας) as the fixed deadline for repentance (Herm. Vis. 2.2.4; 2.2.5). The phrase “this Day” again occurs in Vision 3.2.2 in connection with an opportunity to repent of and be cleansed from the sin of double-mindedness. This demonstrates that the warning does not refer literally to the day on which the message is given but something more akin to “that day” (ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνη) found in the Septuagint associated with the coming Day of the Lord or impending judgment upon this earth (cf. Joel 1:15) (see chapter 15 in *The Fathes on the Future* and Go Deeper Excursus 22). Hermas’s use of “this Day” instead of the more typical “that Day” may serve to underscore the imminence of the appointed Day after which the opportunity for the saints’ repentance will be lost.⁹

So, the saints addressed in Vision 2.2.4–5 are given a final opportunity to repent, but this opportunity comes to an end (ἔχει τέλος) (2.2.4). If they repent of their double-mindedness, “they will fully receive the promises with great glory” (2.2.6) and the end of their journey will be “with the holy angels” (2.2.7). In Similitude 9.25.2, this destiny with the holy angels is ascribed to “apostles and teachers” and such people who walked in righteousness and truth. According to

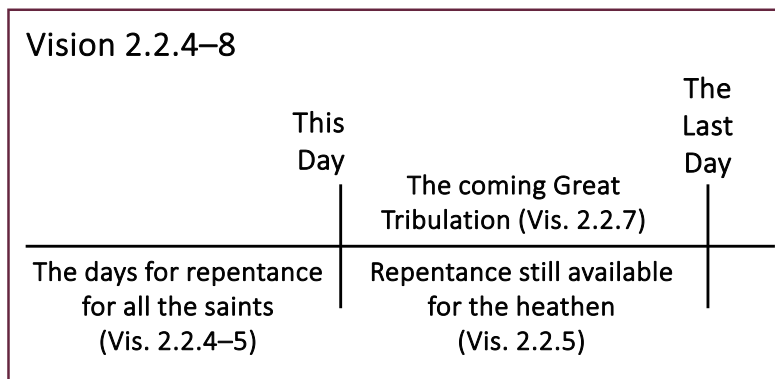
⁷ Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 55; Brox, *Hirt*, 99–100

⁸ Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 55; cf. Martin Dibelius, *Der Hirt des Hermas*, Apostolischen Väter, vol. 4, HNT (Tübingen: Mohr, 1923), 447–48.

⁹ The phrase “these days” (ταύτας τὰς ἡμέρας) is used in Similitude 9 to refer to the time until which repentance is possible for those who had previously denied the Lord. That text connects the appointed time to the completion of the Tower: “If, then, any are about to repent, it must happen quickly, before the Tower is completed, but if not, they will be destroyed” (Sim. 9.26.6).

Irenaeus, this is also the destiny of those resurrected, glorified saints who will be ruling in the coming kingdom (*Against Heresies* 5.35.1).

Even though the “saints” or “righteous” have until “this Day” to repent, Hermas is told that “for the heathen, repentance is available until the ‘Last Day’” (τοῖς δὲ ἔθνεσιν μετάνοιά ἐστὶν ἕως ἑσκάτης ἡμέρας) (Herm. Vis. 2.2.5). Thus we have two distinct appointed times: “this Day” set for the believers to repent of double-mindedness, and “the ‘Last Day’” until which unbelievers will still have a chance to repent. Those who denied the Lord have therefore been granted mercy to repent prior to “this Day” (2.2.8). Yet if a person continues to deny the Lord “in the coming days”—presumably those days following “this Day”—they will be “stripped of their life” (2.2.8). These coming days, it seems, are those referred to in 2.2.7 by the eschatological term “the coming Great Tribulation” (τὴν θλίψιν τὴν ἐρχομένην τὴν μεγάλην) (2.2.7; cf. 2.3.4). If this is the case, then Vision 2.2 establishes an eschatological chronology that calls believers to repentance prior to “this Day,” urges some to faithfulness during the coming “Great Tribulation,” and allows for others to be granted repentance until a later “Last Day.”



Yet this leaves unanswered questions. Are the first two groups—those who repent prior to “this Day”—the same as those urged to endure “the coming Great Tribulation”? And what about believers who fail to repent prior to “this Day”? Will they be cut off from such an opportunity or, like the “heathen,” will they also have a “second chance” for repentance between “this Day” and the “Last Day”? These questions are addressed in the subsequent Visions 3 and 4.

In Vision 3, Shepherd of Hermas uses a vision of a tower that represents the church under construction until the end of the age. Individual stones—representing people—are variously placed in the tower at different times and under different conditions, or they are rejected from entering the tower because of defects or deficiencies. In Vision 3.5.5, we see the fate of those who are tossed aside, though not too far from the tower. Because of their close proximity to the tower, these stones have an opportunity to repent and have a place in it. However, this opportunity persists only as long as the tower is in the process of being built. Once it is finished, that opportunity for being placed in it will come to an end.

At this point, we must differ from Osiek’s insistence that “*the accent is not on chronology but*

on the immediacy of the call to conversion.”¹⁰ As was the case in Vision 2.2, chronology and urgency cannot be separated, nor can one dismiss the chronology and comprehend the matter of the “second chance” given to those stones cast near the tower. In this vision of the stones the lady addresses the unanswered question left from Vision 2: what is to become of those saints who do not repent prior to the arrival of “this Day”? Will they, like the heathen, have an opportunity to repent after “this Day” but prior to the “Last Day”? The answer, it seems, is yes and no depending on how near to the tower one is upon its completion. Through the image of the scattered stones—some tossed far away, some near—we recognize that some may still have a second chance for repentance even after “this Day” or, in terms of Vision 3, after the completion of the tower.

In Vision 3 the imminent completion of the tower is the external circumstance that creates the urgency for immediate conversion, as was “this Day” and coming “Great Tribulation” in Vision 2. The opportunity for incorporation into the church will eventually end with its completion, evidently when the last stone is placed. Yet this leads to a natural question: once all the stones have been placed and the tower is completed, do any of the stones that were near the tower, desiring to repent, have any hope? Do they, as it were, have a “second chance”?

In Vision 3.7, Hermas asks the lady whether the stones thrown away have an opportunity for repentance and whether they have a place in the tower, to which the lady responds that they do have an opportunity for repentance, but they would not fit into the tower being built (3.7.5)—presumably because once the tower is completed, no more stones can be added. Rather, those stones have an opportunity to be part of a “more subordinate place” after they are tormented to fulfill the days of their sins (3.7.6), assuming, of course, that they repent of their evil deeds.

At the outset, it must be determined what Hermas means by “all these stones that had been thrown away” (Herm. Vis. 3.7.5). Contrary to some treatments, this is not a reference to every category of stones that did not fit into the tower prior to its completion, but to a subcategory: those specifically mentioned in Vision 3.5.5. Brox rightly insists on this precise reading, scolding interpreters who assume that Hermas is referring to a second chance for all stones rejected by the builders.¹¹ Such a universal second chance would contradict the stern warnings in Vision 2.2. Rather, these stones refer to those who are “ones who sinned but want to repent, so they weren’t thrown too far away from the Tower” (Vis. 3.5.5).

What are we to make of the “second chance” for repentance after the completion of the tower and those who are relegated to the “subordinate place”? Bernhard Poschmann’s evaluation of this scenario in terms of personal eschatology—what happens to a person when they die—is fairly

¹⁰ Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 72 (emphasis hers).

¹¹ He notes, “Hermas fragt nämlich nicht nach »allen Steinen, die nicht in den Turmbau paßten«, sondern (nur) nach »allen *weggeworfenen* Steinen, die nicht in den Turmbau paßten«; »alle *weggeworfenen* Steine« bedeutet aber eine Einschränkung und bezeichnet nur eine Teilmenge aller Steine, die nicht in den Turmbau passen. Denn außer »allen *weggeworfenen* Steinen« gibt es »alle *weit* *weggeworfenene*«. Seit Vis III,2,7.9 und in 5,5; 6,1; 7,1 operiert Herma mit dieser wichtigen Unterscheidung zwischen den »*weggeworfenen*« und den »*weit* / μακράν (sc. vom Turm) *weggeworfenen*« Steinen” (Norbert Brox, “Die *weggeworfenen* Steine im Pastor Hermae Vis III,7,5,” *ZNW* 80.1–2 [1989]: 132).

typical: “Their fate in the next life remains obscure. A continuation of penitential punishment in the afterlife or an inferior degree of beatitude have been suggested. However, these are mere guesses.”¹² In contrast, when we read Visions 2, 3, and 4 together, it appears that Hermas’s emphasis is less on personal eschatology and more on the coming Great Tribulation and the “Last Day.”¹³ Insisting that Hermas is dealing with personal eschatology and thus personal soteriology has led to the correlated insistence that for him there is only one opportunity for post-baptismal repentance (or penance) to restore one’s right standing with God and his church. However, if one reads the Shepherd in the context of a looming, imminent cosmic eschatological event just over the horizon, then the offer of a single repentance to his readers makes good sense of the language and imagery.

With regard to the “more subordinate place” (τόπος...πολὺ ἐλάττωνι), some, like D’Alès, understand this to refer to the literal place in the narthex of the church, where catechumens and the penitent are relegated until their full conversion or penance is accepted and they are reincorporated into the church.¹⁴ However, Osiek calls this view “anachronistic.”¹⁵ Poschmann sees it more as an inferior situation rather than place—the time between beginning a process of penance and being fully admitted into the church.¹⁶ However, Giet reminds us that this inferior place is not occupied by the penitents but is the place the penitent will earn by means of their repentance.¹⁷ One’s understanding of this “more subordinate place” must be governed by the eschatological warnings and promises in the broader context of Visions 2, 3, and 4.

This brings us to the statement in Vision 3.7.6 that these stones will fit into this subordinate place “only when they have been tormented and have fulfilled the days of their sins.” The word βασιανίζω means “to subject to punitive judicial procedure” or “to subject to severe distress,” usually in a physical sense.¹⁸ In the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the term is used for physical tortures endured by believers at the hands of persecutors (2.2; 6.1). Later in the Shepherd, we find much

¹² Bernhard Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, trans. and rev. by Francis Courtney (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 32.

¹³ Brox rightly points out the strong eschatological warning looming over the passage (“Die weggeworfenen Steine” 133).

¹⁴ A. D’Alès, *L’édit de Calliste: Étude sur les origines de la pénitence Chrétienne*, Bibliothèque de théologie historique, 2nd ed. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1914), 62–64. D’Alès admits this view risks over-literalizing Hermas’s vision and falling into anachronism, but nevertheless suggests, “Telle nous paraît l’interprétation la plus naturelle” (D’Alès, *L’édit de Calliste*, 64).

¹⁵ Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 75.

¹⁶ “Der τόπος ἐλάττων bezeichnet also den Zustand des Büßers, der bei aufrichtiger Bekehrung seine Buße noch nicht vollendet hat und deswegen für die Aufnahme in den Turm noch nicht reif ist” (Bernhard Poschmann, *Paenitentia Secunda: die kirchliche Busse im ältesten Christentum bis Cyprian und Origenes: eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung* [Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1940], 156). This points either to an “innere Zustand des Büßers” or to an “äußere Stellung zur Kirche.” Poschmann does not consider the possibility of a distinct eschatological position for those who had not been repentant by the time of the completion of the Tower.

¹⁷ He writes, “Toutefois l’Eglise parle ici, non de la place occupée par les penitents, mais de celle qu’ils auront méritée par leur pénitence” (Stanislas Giet, *Hermas et les Pasteurs: les trois auteurs du Pasteur d’Hermas* [Paris: University of France Press, 1963], 26).

¹⁸ BDAG, 168. Ignatius of Antioch uses the term to refer to inner turmoil (Ign. *Eph.* 8.1).

more detail added to the concept of βασανίζω.¹⁹ In Similitude 6.3, the shepherd shows Hermas a vision of the “angel of punishment,” who is seen punishing sheep with beatings (Herm. Sim. 6.3.1). The shepherd interprets the sheep in this parable as those who wandered from God and followed the lusts of this world; therefore, they are inflicted with great punishments (6.3.3). When asked to describe these punishments, the shepherd replies, “The various punishments and torments are torments in this life (βιοτικάί εἰσι βάσανοι). For some are punished by losses, others by poverty, some by various illnesses, and some by every kind of disturbance. Still others are abused by the rabble and suffer in many other ways” (6.3.4). In this case, the “tortures” appear to be similar to the kind of earthly discipline envisioned by Hebrews 12:7–11.²⁰ Except in three instances when it refers to inner turmoil (Herm. Mand. 4.2.2; Herm. Sim. 7.4; 9.9.3), the verb βασανίζω and its related descriptors in the Shepherd refer to earthly torments designed for the disciplining and purifying of God’s people. In light of this, the Shepherd seems to have no concept of a post-death purgatory.²¹

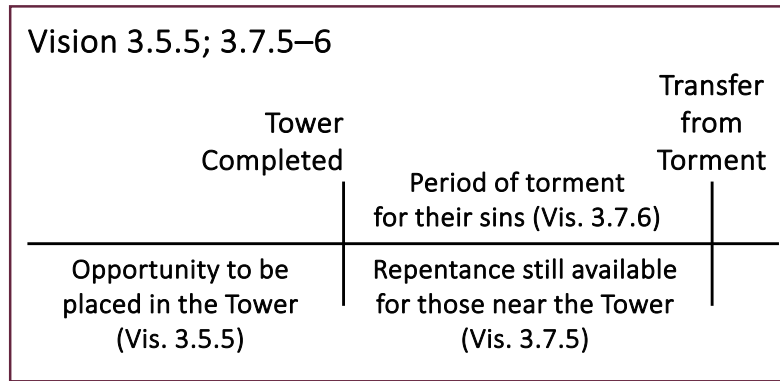
Though Osiek acknowledges that the Shepherd refers to torment and tribulations occurring in this life, she argues that “more likely, some kind of eschatological punishment is in view” in Vision 3.7.6. Though I agree with Osiek that the reference is to eschatological torments, they do not refer to torments in the afterlife. That is, reading Visions 2, 3, and 4 together, these are torments endured in the coming Great Tribulation. The purging envisioned in Vision 3.7.6 are both this-worldly and eschatological in the sense that Hermas anticipates a period of judgment, tribulation, and purifying torment about to arrive in this world and upon this earth. Those who are near the tower—that is, within the orbit of the church—and who are close to repentance will have an opportunity to be saved. However, because they did not repent prior to “this Day” (Vis. 2) and prior to the completion of the tower’s construction (Vis. 3), they will be relegated to a subordinate place compared to those who had been incorporated into the tower.²²

¹⁹ The term βασανίζω is found in the Similitudes thirteen times: 6.3.1; 6.4.1 (2x), 2 (2x), 4 (2x); 6.5.3, 4 (2x), 6.

²⁰ Later Hermas enquires about the length of time a person must endure such torment compared to the time they spent in “luxury and pleasure” (Sim. 6.4.1). The Shepherd explains that one hour of torment is equal to thirty days, so if a person is tormented for a single day (twelve hours), it is equivalent to a whole year (6.4.4). We may be tempted to anachronistically project back onto Hermas the later concept of purgatory, but we must recall that the context of this discussion is still torments one experiences in this earthly life (βιοτικάί εἰσι βάσανοι, Sim. 6.3.4). He further explains the reason behind this counter-intuitive economy of luxury versus torment: luxury is fleeting and easily forgotten while punishment and torment has lasting effects on the memory—that is, a little suffering goes a long way for reforming wicked behavior (Sim. 6.5.1–7).

²¹ However, once the doctrine of a posthumous purgation develops later in the history of the church, Hermas’s imagery and language would be ready-at-hand for contributing to the doctrine. On the development of the doctrine of purgatory and even its displacement of the idea of an earthly, eschatological purgation during an earthly tribulation, see Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 83–84.

²² Giet rightly notes, “Leur retour tardif et imparfait à Dieu, qui peut se faire sur terre, au terme des épreuves eschatologiques, ne leur permettra pas d’entrer comme partie intégrante dans la construction de la tour, topôt achevée pour eux.” Giet, *Hermas et les Pasteurs*, 26.



This eschatological reading of the text fits well with the warning of Vision 3.9.5: “Beware of the coming judgment! Those in a privileged position, therefore, ought to seek out those who are hungry until the Tower is completed. For after the Tower is finished, you’ll long to do good, but you’ll have no opportunity.” The phrase “coming judgment” (τὴν κρίσιν τὴν ἐπερχομένην) in Vision 3.9.5 is likely parallel with the “coming Great Tribulation” (τὴν θλίψιν τὴν ἐρχομένην τὴν μεγάλην) in Vision 2.2.7 and later in Vision 4.1.1, 4.3.6. This “coming judgment” is associated conceptually with the time of the completion of the tower—that is, the completion of the building of the church. Reading these visions together, Hermas appears to have in mind a convergence of several events: the time when the church is completed with the incorporation of its last member, the time of the coming judgment, the appointed Day after which the opportunity for repentance and thus participation in glory and fellowship with angels is lost, and the time of the coming Great Tribulation.

Vision 4 ties the eschatology of Vision 2 and 3 together. At the beginning of the fourth vision, the author tells us in advance that it is “a type of the coming Tribulation” (τύπον τῆς θλίψεως τῆς ἐπερχομένης). In light of the eschatological use of the term in Vision 2.2.7 and 2.3.4, as well as the relation to the “coming judgment” in 3.9.5, the translation “coming tribulation” is preferred to the more neutral “impending persecution.” The theme of coming judgment associated with the completion of the tower is recurrent throughout the Visions (see Vis. 3.9.5), and this particular vision is specifically associated with God’s wrath (Vis. 4.2.6), not merely with earthly persecution by, say, the Roman authorities.²³ Osiek rightly notes, “While the word can simply refer to any kind of trouble, in apocalyptic literature it most often carries the meaning of eschatological tribulation, or affliction that is ordered to the eschaton.”²⁴

The first point that must be made clear is the distinction between the faithful saints and those

²³ Thus, I have translated the term θλίψεως as the more technical “Tribulation” rather than the general “persecution,” which we believe fails to grasp the author’s portrayal of eschatological ultimacy. Holmes translates this phrase as “a foreshadowing of the impending persecution” (Vis. 4.1.1) (though he translates the similar phrase in 4.2.5 as “a foreshadowing of the great tribulation that is coming”). Brennan translates the phrase in 4.1.1. as “a type of the tribulation which was coming.” Lightfoot: “a type of the impending tribulation.” Lake has “a type of the persecution which is to come.” Osiek has “an omen of the coming tribulation.”

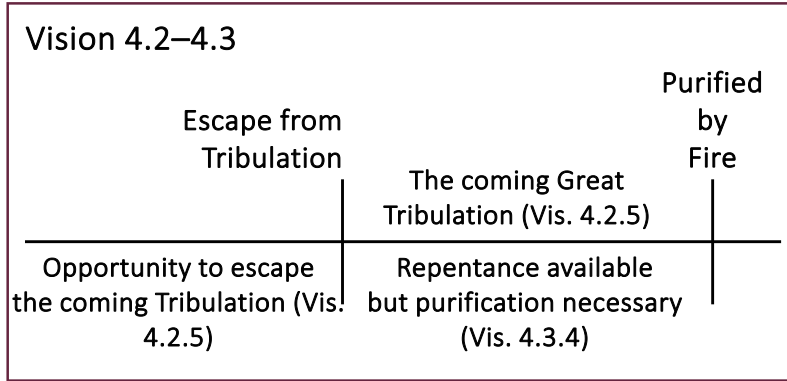
²⁴ Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 91.

who require repentance, a common theme in *Hermas* from the start. *Hermas* says that the Lord gave him his previous visions to “grant repentance to his servants who had succumbed to sin” (*Herm. Vis.* 4.1.3). Now *Hermas* is asking that God would “complete” these visions. This implies that the fourth vision is a completion of these same themes of impending judgment, a final call to repentance, and the various classes of church members and attendees who will be dealt with differently in the coming judgment. Thus the eschatology of Vision 4 is rightly read in harmony with the eschatology of Visions 2 and 3.

As *Hermas* is walking along a road pondering these things, he hears a voice urge him to hold to an unshakable faith: “Don’t be double-minded, *Hermas*” (*Vis.* 4.1.4). With that puzzling statement in his head, he sees a dust cloud approaching that eventually reveals a massive monster charging toward him (4.1.6–10). In light of *Hermas*’s previous visions, it seems that in this “type of the coming tribulation,” *Hermas* himself symbolizes faithful, true Christians: those who fit well into the building of the tower, and those prepared by an unwavering faith against the coming tribulation and thus have confidence instead of fear. It appears that at least the righteous, faithful saints—represented by *Hermas*—are not to fret over the coming tribulation because they will somehow survive it unscathed (*Vis.* 4.1.9). This is confirmed by the Lady’s interpretation in the next chapter (*Vis.* 4.2.4–6). *Hermas*’s escape from the vision of the beast due to his faith and fortitude is a type of opportunity for the elect to escape the coming Great Tribulation—that is, if they are prepared for it: “Trust in the Lord, you double-minded, because he is able to do all things—he sends his wrath away from you and sends out punishments upon you double-minded” (4.2.6).

However, *Hermas*’s experience must not to be taken as universal for all believers. Rather, in this reading, *Hermas* represents those who overcome their double-mindedness, who heed the call to repentance prior to “this Day” (*Vis.* 2), who are incorporated into the tower prior to its completion (*Vis.* 3), and who are righteous and holy because of their confidence in God. Yet the vision also deals with those who, by being close to the church and near to repentance, will have a sort of second chance for repentance and purification in the coming tribulation. This is symbolized by the colors of the beast, explained in Vision 4.3.2–6.

Vision 4 presents two possibilities: the saints may escape the coming tribulation by having repented prior to “this Day” (*Vis.* 2)—that is, prior to the completion of the tower (*Vis.* 3); or, the saints may become victims of the divine plagues (*Vis.* 4.3). Those who endure the judgments of the coming tribulation fall in one of two categories: (1) those destroyed by God’s wrath, represented by red blood in Vision 4, which corresponds to the stones that were cast far off in Vision 3; or, (2) those purified by the torments, represented by the red fire in Vision 4, which corresponds to the stones that were cast near the tower in Vision 3. From this, we gather that the pouring out of judgment from the beast’s mouth is an expression of the coming wrath of God, for in Vision 4.2.6 we are told that God “sends his wrath away from you and sends out punishments upon you double-minded.”



THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Sviel

Go Deeper Excursus 28

The Rapture of the Church in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as an Actual Event

It has become popular in some circles in recent years to suggest that the whole question of the timing of the rapture is irrelevant because there will be no such event in the future, at least not an event that is separate from the coming of Christ at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. Ben Witherington writes, “It should be clear from the beginning of v. 16 that Christ is said to come *down* out of heaven and meet his followers somewhere else.... The meeting does not take place in heaven, so there is no rapture into heaven here.”¹ Usually a literal catching up of saints is dispensed with by appealing to a Graeco-Roman background of a formal reception of a dignitary. N. T. Wright expresses the parallel this way:

When the emperor visited a colony or province, the citizens of the country would go to meet him at some distance from the city.... When they met him, they wouldn’t then stay out in the open country; they would escort him royally into the city itself. When Paul speaks of “meeting” the Lord “in the air”....[t]he point is that, having gone out to meet their returning Lord, they will escort him royally into his domain, that is, back to the place they have come from.²

Wright’s appeal to this background—like that of many modern scholars who follow the same approach—serves his purpose of removing the reality of the actual catching up from the timeline of future events. In his masterful work, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Wright takes a bit of a detour in what comes across like a rant when he argues that 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11 “is a highly contentious passage, being used with astonishing literalness in popular fundamentalism and critical scholarship alike to suggest that Paul envisaged Christians flying around in mid-air on

¹ Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 141.

² Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), 145.

clouds. The multiple apocalyptic resonances of the passage on the one hand, and its glorious mixed metaphors on the other, make this interpretation highly unlikely.”³ In another work he writes:

These two verses in 1 Thessalonians 4, then, have been grievously abused by those who have constructed out of them a big picture of a supposed “rapture”. This has had its effect not only on popular fundamentalism, but on a fair amount of New Testament scholarship, which has assumed that Paul really meant what the fundamentalists think he meant. Only when we put together the several different things that he says on the same topic does the truth emerge. This is a typical piece of highly charged and multiply allusive rhetoric. The reality to which it refers is this: Jesus will be personally present, the dead will be raised, and the living Christians will be transformed. That, as we shall now see, is pretty much what the rest of the New Testament says as well.⁴

It should be evident to anybody familiar with scholarly discussions of the rapture as well as critical commentaries on 1 Thessalonians that Wright’s otherwise careful and commendable scholarship is tarnished by a number of rhetorical devices, tricks, and fallacies. For instance, by noting that understanding 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as a literal catching up into the clouds is used by “fundamentalism” and “critical scholarship,” Wright presents a kind of false choice and guilt by association. A reader with imprecise definitions of “fundamentalism” and “critical” is left believing that a literal rapture is only held by people on extremes: fundamentalists or critics. This leaves the average reader longing for a “third way” that avoids such negative associations, a third way Wright conveniently provides.

Wright also lampoons the doctrine of the rapture with a caricature that sets up a strawman: he claims that those who believe in a literal rapture envisage “Christians flying around in mid-air on clouds.”⁵ Elsewhere, he mischaracterizes the rapture doctrine associated with the believers’ resurrection this way: “It would therefore be nonsense to imagine that the presently alive Christians are literally going to be snatched up into the sky, there to remain forever. How would they then be with the others who, having died previously, will be raised and given new bodies?”⁶ I can think of no reasonable treatment of the rapture teaching that suggests anything remotely close to this. The final question seems to suggest Wright is completely ignorant of what people who believe in a literal assumption of the church actually believe and teach, because, again, nobody teaches this. It appears Wright is unfamiliar with the actual substance of the position he is claiming to disprove, or he is intentionally misrepresenting it.

³ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: SPCK, 2003), 215.

⁴ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 145–146

⁵ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 215.

⁶ N.T. Wright, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, N.T. Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 32.

Wright also leans upon what I see as a modern prejudice against the pre-modern worldview in which Jesus spoke and acted. He notes, “When Paul talks of Jesus ‘descending,’ he doesn’t suppose that Jesus is physically above us at the moment. Heaven, where Jesus is, isn’t another location without our space, but another *dimension*.”⁷ We may grant that the heavenly realm of God and angels is not “up” in the physical sense. But this itself does not mean the catching up of the glorified church is not foreseen as a literal event. Just as Moses ascended the mountain covered in clouds, Jesus ascended the Mount of Transfiguration to appear in his glory, and the resurrected Lord ascending into the clouds to enter into the heavenly realm, we may quite reasonably and responsibly assent to the notion that through these very real, physical acts God communicated a spiritual reality. Could Christ have simply vanished from the earthly dimension to the heavenly dimension? Certainly. But what would that have communicated in the first-century world? The action of ascension itself communicates something to the observers. Thus, to cast aspersions against a literal ascension of the resurrected/transformed saints from the earth to heaven because the spiritual, heavenly realm is not literally “above the clouds” seems rash, especially considering the fact that even in our modern world, people still think of heaven as “up.”

Wright presents his own case for a “metaphorical” reading of the rapture passage, suggesting that when Paul speaks about the Lord descending and the living saints being snatched into the air, he is not thereby communicating a literal event. Rather, Wright suggests that Paul is employing “richly metaphorical ways” to allude to three other stories in this passage.⁸ Here he appeals to three backgrounds his readers were expected to bring to the text to understand the metaphorical rather than literal nature of the rapture. I will interact with each of Wright’s alleged backgrounds in turn. First, he suggests that Paul starts with the story of Moses coming down the mountain: “The trumpet sounds, a loud voice is heard, and after a long wait Moses appears and descends from the mountain to see what’s been going on in his absence.”⁹ The alleged background is Exodus 19:18–20 and Exodus 20:18. Those passages read:

Exodus 19:18–20; 20:18	1 Thessalonians 4:16–17
<p>Now all of Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up....</p> <p>When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance.</p>	<p>For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever.</p>

⁷ Wright, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 32.

⁸ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 145.

⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 145.

While both passages mention a trumpet, Paul makes no mention of other telltale elements of Moses’s encounter with Yahweh in Exodus: no smoke, fire, violent shaking, thunder, lightning, or any other detail that would more clearly tie the two scenes together. Yes, Yahweh comes down to the mountain, but not in the air. Yet the people are not “caught up”; in fact, they do not even come up. Moses alone comes up the mountain; the people are so frightened they actually run away. How the descent of Christ and the catching up of the saints into the air mirrors God coming down, Moses coming up, then Moses descending again to check on the people is inexplicable. I see no compelling exegetical evidence that Paul had in mind Moses’s meeting with Yahweh on the mountain as an explanatory background to 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17—at least not enough evidence to disprove a literal future assumption of the church. I would regard this as a careless appeal to background material.¹⁰

Wright’s second story has more promise. He writes, “Then there is the story of Daniel 7, in which the persecuted people of God are vindicated over their pagan enemy by being raised up on the clouds to sit with God in glory. This ‘raising up on the clouds’, which Jesus applies to himself in the gospels, is now applied by Paul to the Christians who are presently suffering persecution.”¹¹ I think the parallels in imagery between Daniel 7 and 1 Thessalonians 4 are much more compelling. In fact, I would not be surprised if Paul had this vision of the Son of Man at least in the back of his mind, though I probably could not demonstrate it exegetically beyond a reasonable doubt.¹² Yet, pleading in the alternative, even if Paul fully intended to direct the minds of his readers to the coming of the Son of Man in Daniel 7, how does this disprove a literal assumption of the church from earth at the coming of Christ? In fact, I will demonstrate below that even those early fathers who did see a background here in Daniel 7 still understood 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 to portray a literal event. Thus, the argument that the background of Daniel 7 rules out a literal rapture is a *non sequitur*.

Daniel 7:13–14	1 Thessalonians 4:16–17
As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.	For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever.

Finally, Wright ushers in his final background image, already alluded to above: the picture of the greeting party going out to receive a dignitary visiting a city. Wright says:

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 41–43.

¹¹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 145.

¹² Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 180.

Putting these two stories together, in a typically outrageous mix of metaphors, enables Paul to bring in the third story, to which we have already alluded. When the emperor visited a colony or province, the citizens of the country would go to meet him at some distance from the city. It would be disrespectful to have him arrive at the gates as though they his subjects couldn't be bothered to greet him properly. When they met him, they wouldn't then stay out in the open country; they would escort him royally into the city itself. When Paul speaks of 'meeting' the Lord 'in the air', the point is precisely not—as in the popular rapture theology—that the saved believers would then stay up in the air somewhere, away from earth. The point is that, having gone out to meet their returning Lord, they will escort him royally into his domain, that is, back to the place they have come from. Even when we realize that this is highly charged metaphor, not literal description, the meaning is the same as in the parallel in Philippians 3:20. Being citizens of heaven, as the Philippians would know, doesn't mean that one is expecting to go back to the mother city, but rather that one is expecting the emperor to come *from* the mother city to give the colony its full dignity, to rescue it if need be, to subdue local enemies and put everything to rights.¹³

Though it has been claimed that ἀπάντησις (“meeting”) is a kind of technical term for sending a greeting party to meet a royal dignitary approaching a city in order to usher them back into the city,¹⁴ this idea approaches the semantic fallacy of making false assumptions about technical meaning or an unwarranted restriction of the semantic field, if not also a careless appeal to background material.¹⁵ In a 1930 study, German scholar Erik Peterson made a case that ἀπάντησις is a technical term for a formal reception of a dignitary and that this background should inform our reading of the use of the term in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.¹⁶ Six decades later, Michael Cosby set out to strengthen Peterson's argument and ended up rejecting the idea that ἀπάντησις is a technical term.¹⁷ Cosby admitted to wanting Peterson's argument to be true because of its apparently devastating effects on the reality of the rapture. He writes: “The journey into this research forced me to confront my own deeply held biases. I still detest what I perceive to be the misguided teaching on the Rapture of the Church in some Christian circles because of the abuses it produces. So I did not want to face the possibility that Peterson's interpretation was incorrect, since it was

¹³ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 145.

¹⁴ Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 141. Cf. Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 226; Stephen Motyer, *Come, Lord Jesus! A Biblical Theology of the Second Coming of Christ* (London: Apollos, 2016), 237–38. Cf. also Helmut Koester, *Paul and His World: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 59–60.

¹⁵ See Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 41–43, 45–47, 57–60.

¹⁶ Erik Peterson, “Die Einholung des Kyrios,” *Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* 7 (1929–1930): 682–702. Cf. Bédard Rigaux, *Saint Paul: Les épîtres aux Thessaloniens* (Paris: Gabalda: 1956), 198.

¹⁷ Michael R. Cosby, “Hellenistic Formal Receptions and Paul's Use of ΑΠΑΝΤΗΣΙΣ in 1 Thessalonians 4:17,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1994): 15–34. Also see earlier critiques in Jacques Dupont, “‘Avec le Seigneur’ a la Parousie,” in *ΣΥΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ: L'union avec le Christ suivant Saint Paul*, Part 1: “Avec le Christ” dans la vie future, ed. Jacques Dupont (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1952), 39–79.

such an effective and easy means of dispensing with the fanciful notion of the Rapture.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, Cosby describes the conundrum he faced:

A man with a mission, I sought to locate further texts describing Hellenistic formal receptions so that the case would be airtight and the information readily accessible. When I first began to see some problems with the theory, I did not want to face them.

Only after a period of about a year was I able to admit the possibility that Peterson’s exegesis was eisegesis. With great hesitation I carefully examined the data, and honesty forced me to admit I had been wrong. In a way this was a triumph, for it illustrated again the power of the text to transform the view of the reader.

At this point, with only a small amount of residual resentment, I admit that the text of 1 Thess 4:13-17 leaves open the matter of whether or not the Christians are caught up in the air in order to escort the Lord back to earth. By comparing this passage with the other New Testament texts that speak of the Parousia it remains clear, at least to me, that the Parousia in Paul’s mind included divine reward of the righteous and judgment of the wicked. But honesty forced me to defuse the most effective bomb in my historical arsenal that so readily destroys the fanciful notion of the Rapture. How much of our scholarship do we perform while looking over our shoulders at the beliefs of our youth that have become sources of embarrassment to us as scholars?¹⁹

Paul’s reference to saints being caught up “in the clouds (ἐν νεφέλαις)” certainly has no direct relationship to the imagery of a greeting party meeting a dignitary outside the city. Rather, it is used in passages in which God descends from heaven to earth—theophanic epiphanies (e.g., Exod 16:10; 34:5; Num 11:25; Deut 31:15). However, the term *παρουσία* can be used in the sense of an official visit by a dignitary,²⁰ but it can also simply mean the arrival or coming in a general sense (2 Cor 7:6; 10:10; Phil 2:12). Mostly it is simply a quasi-technical term used in reference to the return of Christ (Matt 24:3; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; etc.). This seems to be its use in 1 Thessalonians 4:15.

The same is true of the term *ἀπάντησις* itself. It means “the action of going out to meet an arrival,” especially “as a mark of honour.”²¹ However, this is far from a technical meaning for an “official welcoming of a dignitary.” The phrase *εἰς ἀπάντησιν*, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, is used two other times in the New Testament: once in Matthew 25:6—“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet (εἰς ἀπάντησιν) him’”; and in Acts 28:15—“The brothers and sisters from there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and

¹⁸ Cosby, “Hellenistic Formal Receptions,” 32.

¹⁹ Cosby, “Hellenistic Formal Receptions,” 32–33. Readers are urged to locate and read Cosby’s article carefully. Not only does he interact with Peterson’s primary source evidence, he provides a helpful catalogue of proponents of the position in his own day.

²⁰ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1343.

²¹ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 178.

Three Taverns to meet (εἰς ἀπάντησιν) us.” The Septuagint uses the phrase numerous times, mostly in reference to a general reception or meeting when a person or thing arrives (1 Kgs 6:13; 9:14; 13:10, 15; 15:12; 25:32, 34; 30:21; 2 Kgs 6:20; 19:25), though in 1 Kings 4:1 it is used for an army going out to meet εἰς ἀπάντησιν another army for battle.²² Cosby observes that “1 Thess 4:14-17 does not specifically mention any of the elements normally associated with receiving dignitaries” and concludes, “The dominant scholarly understanding of the ἀπάντησις in 1 Thess 4:17, based on the work of Peterson, does not sufficiently account for the differences between Paul’s words and descriptions of receptions of dignitaries. All of the main elements of Hellenistic receptions found in ancient papyri, inscriptions and literature are missing from 1 Thess 4:15-17.”²³

Cosby’s reluctant dismantling of the “Hellenistic reception” background did not sit well with many New Testament scholars, especially those who deeply desired to continue using it to reject a literal catching up in the sky at the coming of Christ. For instance, Robert Gundry attempts to salvage the Hellenistic reception background by piecing together similar elements from passages other than 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 and pointing out that Cosby himself admits the reception of a dignitary was part of the general cultural milieu of first century readers.²⁴ Yet he does not address the greatest problem surfaced by Cosby’s investigation—the numerous non-technical uses of ἀπάντησις in Greek literature and the lack of clear parallels to the alleged background of the reception party in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 itself.²⁵

In 2012, Candida Moss and Joel Baden authored an article suggesting that 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 rather depends on a Rabbinical background.²⁶ They note, “A closer examination of rabbinic texts pertaining to the Day of the Lord will reveal that there were traditions in which the righteous escaped judgment and destruction in Sheol by flying and being borne aloft by clouds.”²⁷ After exploring Rabbinical backgrounds that may have been familiar to Paul, they conclude:

The structural, thematic, conceptual, and functional parallels between 1 Thess 4.16–17 and rabbinic expectations about the Day of the Lord are illuminating and suggestive. Taken

²² Cosby notes, “Of its many occurrences in Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliotheca historica*, for example, most involve the meeting of soldiers in battle, and the same is true for the historical work of Polybius. Sometimes ἀπάντησις describes a formal greeting of a dignitary, but often it does not. . . . In the LXX the noun ἀπάντησις is used frequently in 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles and sporadically in other books, particularly 1–3 Maccabees. Often it designates the hostile meeting of armies, although it also describes virtually any kind of meeting” (Cosby, “Hellenistic Formal Receptions,” 20, 21).

²³ Cosby, “Hellenistic Formal Receptions,” 22, 28–29.

²⁴ Robert H. Gundry, “A Brief Note on ‘Hellenistic Formal Receptions and Paul’s use of ΑΠΑΝΤΗΣΙΣ in 1 Thessalonians 4:17,’” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 39–41.

²⁵ In a final line, Gundry seems to expose a strong motivation for retaining the background, despite Cosby’s own admission that the argument is weak: “Of course, this connotation is hardly needed to keep Cosby or anyone else from slipping back into the doctrine of a pretribulational rapture of the church” (Gundry, “A Brief Note,” 41). This is the very same kind of confirmation bias about which Cosby’s article warns, and it is a pit into which numerous New Testament scholars have fallen in the subsequent decades.

²⁶ Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden, “1 Thessalonians 4.13–18 in Rabbinic Perspective,” *New Testament Studies* 58 (2012): 199–212.

²⁷ Moss and Baden, “1 Thessalonians 4.13–18,” 204–5.

seriously, the similarities both press hard against assumptions in Pauline scholarship and offer some intriguing solutions to questions that have plagued interpreters of 1 Thessalonians.²⁸

While this discussion of possible Rabbinical backgrounds does not settle the issue of the precise setting within which 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 should be read, it should be noted that the language in this section of 1 Thessalonians already depends heavily on Old Testament Jewish imagery related to the eschaton (trumpet, resurrection, archangel, Day of the Lord, destruction, etc.). In light of this, the Rabbinical background has a *prima facie* greater weight than the reception of a dignitary in the Graeco-Roman world, especially since scholarly consensus on that Hellenistic background is ambiguous and disputed.

In sum, not enough evidence decisively points to the specific metaphorical scenario of a greeting party meeting a victorious king to usher him back to the city, though this image may still be in the back of Paul's mind as a general cultural milieu. Even if the imagery were intended, though, it is a *non sequitur* to conclude that this means there will be no literal catching up of the saints.²⁹ Rather, it would only illustrate what those who hold to a literal rapture already actually teach (regardless of their views on the particular timing of the event): Christ will descend as a warring judge to do battle against his enemies; his remnant will meanwhile be rescued to meet him in the air; wrath will be inflicted upon Christ's enemies; then Christ and his people will eventually return to earth to take possession.

F. F. Bruce is far more nuanced in dealing with the potential background of the dignitary and meeting party: “When a dignitary paid an official visit (παρουσία) to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escort him back on the final stage of his journey was called the ἀπάντησις.”³⁰ After providing a few examples, he concludes, “These analogies...suggest the possibility that the Lord is pictured here as escorted on the remainder of his journey to earth by his people—both those newly raised from the dead and those who have remained alive. But there is nothing in the word ἀπάντησις or in this context which *demand*s this interpretation; it cannot be determined from what is said here whether the Lord (with his people) continues his journey to earth or returns to heaven.”³¹

So, it is irresponsible to rest an entire case against a literal rapture event in Scripture upon merely plausible backgrounds that do not themselves actually disprove a literal rapture, even if they are true. And it is especially irresponsible to criticize the traditional view of the catching up of the saints with the kind of cutting overconfidence with which the novel and idiosyncratic

²⁸ Moss and Baden, “1 Thessalonians 4.13–18,” 212.

²⁹ In fact, I would have honestly preferred that a better case could be made for the background of a reception of a dignitary, as it would strengthen rather than weaken the idea of a scenario in which the resurrected/transformed saints ascend to meet the Lord, abide with him “outside the city” until the city is judged and liberated, then return with him joyously to partake in the kingdom on earth.

³⁰ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 102.

³¹ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 103.

interpretation is often expressed. At this point I challenge what I see as the most vulnerable weakness in the modern insistence that the catching up of the saints is merely an image or metaphor rather than a literal snatching from earth to heaven: its novelty and idiosyncrasy in the history of interpretation.

Following the metaphorical background argument popularized by people like N. T. Wright, it has become fashionable among modern rapture critics to interpret the imagery of the catching up of the saints from earth in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as symbolic of something other than an actual translation and ascension into heaven. Sometimes packaged in incredulous and condescending tones, the modern interpretation rejects the classic interpretation through a subtle process of demythologizing the text and contextualizing it within an apparent Roman cultural idiom.

The very term Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 points in the direction of an actual catching away into the heavenly realm. Paul employs the Greek verb ἀρπάζω in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 in reference to an actual assumption into the heavenly realm—with some ambiguity as to whether it was bodily or spiritually: “I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up (ἀρπαγέντα) to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—was caught up (ἠρπάγη) into paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.” Scarcely any commentary attempts to suggest Paul’s use of ἀρπάζω in 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 was anything other than literal—a sudden assumption into the third heaven—paradise.³²

In what follows, however, I demonstrate that the earliest Christian readers of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 understood the catching up of the transformed living and resurrected dead saints to refer to a literal future event—not a metaphor for something other than assumption. I believe the burden of proof is on the modern exegete’s sophistic explanation for why this passage, even granting its vivid apocalyptic imagery, is not teaching an actual, physical ascension of the saints after the manner of Christ’s ascension and similar to Paul’s assumption in 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4. The burden of proof does not rest on those who hold to an actual resurrection, actual transformation, and actual ascension of the saints into heaven based on a straightforward reading of 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

³² With few exceptions, commentators take Paul’s description of an assumption or catching up into heaven literally, not metaphorically. For ancient interpretations on this, see Iren. *Haer.* 2.30.7; 5.5.1; Tert. *De Praecriptione* 24; Orig. *Cels.* 1.48; John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 26.2 (on 2 Cor 12.); Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 3.24.4; Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12; etc. For a sample of modern commentators, see, e.g., William R. Baker, *2 Corinthians*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999), 424–27; David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 509–15; George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 581–83; R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 209–11; Larry Kreitzer, *2 Corinthians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 121–24; Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 193–97; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 595; V. G. Shillington, *2 Corinthians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1998), 230; C. H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 123.

Irenaeus of Lyons (Second Century). I have already treated his passage in some detail in *The Fathers on the Future* chapter 18. Though Irenaeus of Lyons does not explicitly cite 1 Thessalonians 4:17, in his discussion regarding the church’s present persecutions by the nations in comparison with the future Tribulation, he writes, “And therefore, when in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this (*repente hinc Ecclesia assumetur/ἀθρόως ἐντεῦθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀναλαμβάνομένης*), it is said, “There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be” (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.29.1). The action pictured by Irenaeus’s future passive indicative (*repente*) *assumetur* (“will be suddenly taken up”)—and its equivalent genitive absolute in the Greek fragment (*ἀναλαμβάνομένης*)—is equivalent to that pictured in the future passive indicative ἀρπαγησόμεθα (“will be suddenly caught up”) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Semantically, the addition of the adverb *repente/ἀθρόως* renders the phrase comparable to the Greek ἀρπαγησόμεθα. Contextually, both passages refer to the taking up of the church in an eschatological passage. In Paul’s text, “we who are alive” at the coming of the Lord will be “caught up together with” those who had been raised to life—thus, all those “in Christ” will be caught up together. Similarly, in Irenaeus’s passage, the “church” as the subject of *assumetur/ἀναλαμβάνομένης* is caught up prior to the great Tribulation mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24:21. However, it is possible that Irenaeus had in mind not 1 Thessalonians 4:17 but Matthew 24:40–41, where, in the context of coming judgment, “one will be taken and one will be left” (Matt 24:40; cf. Luke 17:34). At least in the Vulgate, the same term, *assumetur*, is used in Matthew 24:40–41 and its parallel in Luke 17:34–35, and given that Irenaeus cites Matthew 24:21 in reference to the “great Tribulation,” this connection seems plausible. He expressly mentions Luke 17:34 in *Against Heresies* 27.1 in connection with the coming judgment. Yet it is equally plausible that Irenaeus employs the more vivid *repente assumetur* instead of the Gospels’ unmodified *assumetur* in order to correlate Jesus’s words with Paul’s in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It seems unlikely that Irenaeus would have envisioned two instances when the church would be “suddenly taken up”—one recorded in the Gospels, the other in 1 Thessalonians. Of course, it may be that Irenaeus had not thought through these details precisely. In any case, if Irenaeus was referring to the “snatching” of the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 with his reference to the church being “suddenly taken up” in *Against Heresies* 5.29.1, this would indicate that Irenaeus understood the catching up in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as a literal future event, not a mere symbol of metaphor.

Clement of Alexandria (Third Century). In his discussion of the degrees of heavenly glory, Clement describes those who, in this life, develop a high degree of spiritual maturity by living “according to the Gospel” (*Stromata* 6.14). Such Christians advanced in holiness and perfection will share the same destiny as the chosen apostles—the “chosen of the chosen.” Though they may not hold the office of presbyter here on earth, in heaven they will be exalted to the presbyterate of the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:4. In this context of those rewarded in the highest degree of glory in heaven, Clement writes:

Since, according to my opinion, the grades here in the Church, of bishops, presbyters, deacons, are imitations of the angelic glory, and of that economy which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who, following the footsteps of the apostles, have lived in perfection of righteousness according to the Gospel. For these taken up in the clouds (Ἐν νεφέλαις τούτους ἀρθεντας/*Hos sublato in nubibus*), the apostle writes, will first minister [as deacons], then be classed in the presbyterate, by promotion in glory (for glory differs from glory) till they grow into “a perfect man.” (*Stromata* 6.14)

Here Clement draws together several passages, including 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but instead of employing Paul’s vivid and dramatic language of ἀρπάζω, he uses the more neutral term ἀρθέντας (“join”), translated in the Latin as *sublato* (take up). Regardless of what one makes of Clement’s discussion concerning the levels of glory and ascent in the heavenly realm, it is evident that Clement understood the language of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as referring to a literal ascent to heaven of at least some of the saints.

Tertullian of Carthage (Third Century). Though his purposes are primarily to argue against the docetic and dualistic theology of Marcionism, Tertullian touches on 1 Thessalonians 4:17 in his large work, *Against Marcion*, associating it with the resurrection and return of Christ. In the first mention in 3.25, he connects the catching up of the saints with an actual ascent into heaven—a point which, in fact, is crucial to his argument of establishing that the church has both an earthly and heavenly promise because the true God is God of both heaven and earth. He writes:

Amos says: “He buildeth His ascensions into heaven;” certainly not for Himself alone, but for His people also, who will be with Him. “And Thou shalt bind them about Thee,” says he, “like the adornment of a bride.” Accordingly the Spirit, admiring such as soar up to the celestial realms by these ascensions, says, “They fly, as if they were kites; they fly as clouds, and as young doves, unto me”—that is, simply like a dove. For we shall, according to the apostle, be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord (even the Son of man, who shall come in the clouds, according to Daniel) and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (*Adv. Marc.* 3.25)

The fact that Tertullian prefaces this quotation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 with passages directly related to the faithful ascending to heaven demonstrates that this passage is a literal catching up from the earthly realm to the heavenly realm. Also, it is notable that even though Tertullian connects 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 with a background imagery of Daniel 7, he still holds to a literal assumption of the church to heaven.

In *Against Marcion* 5.15, Tertullian quotes 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 (“caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” [*quod in nubibus auferentur in aerem obviam domino*]) along with Isaiah 60:8 (see LXX), then explains, “Now, as Christ has prepared for us this ascension (*Hunc*

ascensum si Christus nobis praeparavit), He must be the Christ of whom Amos spoke: ‘It is He who builds His ascent up to the heavens,’ even for Himself and His people” (*Adv. Marc.* 5.15). Thus, the *in nubibus auferentur*, equivalent to the Greek ἀρπαγησόμεθα, is interpreted as *ascensum* into heaven, just as literal as Christ’s own ascension. Later he writes:

If, again, Christ in His advent from heaven “shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body,” it follows that this body of ours shall rise again, which is now in a state of humiliation in its sufferings and according to the law of mortality drops into the ground. But how shall it be changed, if it shall have no real existence? If, however, this is only said of those who shall be found in the flesh at the advent of God, and who shall have to be changed, what shall they do who will rise first? They will have no substance from which to undergo a change. But he says (elsewhere), “We shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord (*simul rapiemur in nubibus obviam domino*)” Then, if we are to be caught up with them (*si cum illis sublati*), surely we shall likewise be changed together with them. (*Adv. Marc.* 5.20)

Tertullian gives no hint of anything other than a literal understanding of the “catching up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. In fact, he provides an interpretive gloss of the original *rapiemur* with *sublati*—the same term used by the translator of Clement of Alexandria in *Stromata* 6.14. Thus, Tertullian regarded the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as an actual assumption into heaven, concurrent with the transfiguration of the mortal bodies of living saints and resurrection of dead saints—all of whom would be taken up together.

In his argument against those who say the souls of all Christians—rather than only of the martyrs—ascend to Paradise rather than to Hades immediately upon death, Tertullian appeals to the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. His argument is that if all the saints are already in heaven with Christ, why would they long for the resurrection? If, however, they are kept in Hades until the coming of the Lord before they may ascend to heaven, then resurrection would certainly be a real hope. He writes: “How, indeed, shall the soul mount up to heaven, where Christ is already sitting at the Father’s right hand, when as yet the archangel’s trumpet has not been heard by the command of God,—when as yet those whom the coming of the Lord is to find on the earth, have not been caught up into the air (*ereptis in aerem*) to meet Him at His coming, in company with the dead in Christ, who shall be the first to arise” (Tertullian, *Treatise on the Soul* 55). Like the reference to the catching up in *Against Marcion* 5.20, this text links the assumption of the living into the air at the coming of Christ with those who had been resurrected. Tertullian uses the verb *eripio*, “to snatch away” (*ex + rapio*), a synonym for ἀρπάζω. Because the whole argument relates to the timing of the ascent of Christians to heaven, one must take Tertullian’s words as referring to a literal catching up to heaven.

In an argument against an over-realized eschatology that denies a future fulfillment, Tertullian directly quotes 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17, then argues that the resurrection therein mentioned could

not be merely spiritual because the attending prophecies had not yet occurred. He writes, “For, allowing that the word of the gospel may be called ‘the trump of God,’ since it was still calling men, yet they must at that time either be dead as to the body, that they may be able to rise again; and then how are they alive? Or else caught up into the clouds; and how then are they here?” (*Res.* 24). The “they” refers to the heretics who are claiming this passage is fulfilled in them and their non-literal, realized eschatology. Regardless, Tertullian’s point affirms a literal interpretation of the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. He interprets the passage as having two objects: those who are dead, who will then rise again; and those who are alive, who will disappear from the earth.

After quoting Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:2–3 regarding being clothed with our heavenly garments, Tertullian notes:

Before we put off the garment of the flesh, we wish to be clothed with the celestial glory of immortality (*virtutem caelestem aeternitatis*). Now the privilege of this favour awaits those who shall at the coming of the Lord be found in the flesh, and who shall, owing to the oppressions of the time of Antichrist, deserve by an instantaneous death (*merebuntur compendio mortis*), which is accomplished by a sudden change, to become qualified to join the rising saints; as he writes to the Thessalonians: “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we too shall ourselves be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (*Res.* 41).

Tertullian here adds a peculiar (and unwarranted) gloss on the transformation of the living saints who had suffered under the Antichrist and are still found in mortal flesh at the coming of the Lord—their transformation to glory will be accomplished by an instantaneous death and resurrection, which seems to contradict Paul’s assertion in 1 Corinthians 15:51—“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.”³³ It may be that Tertullian is reading 1 Corinthians 15:51 as a reference to being lain to rest in a grave and asserts the instantaneous death/resurrection of the living saints at the time of the return of Christ because it better fits the 2 Corinthians 5:1–2 passage regarding being clothed with immortality after death. In any case, in this context Tertullian affirms that these resurrected/glorified saints, having put on immortality, are taken into heaven—“Owing to the fact that our flesh is undergoing dissolution through its sufferings, we shall be provided with a home in heaven” (*Res.* 41).

³³ Tertullian actually paraphrases this in the next section as “We shall all indeed rise again (though we shall not all undergo the transformation) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” (*Res.* 42), which fits his doctrine of instantaneous death/resurrection but does not actually match Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 15:51 or 1 Thess 4:17.

These passages are sufficient to show that Tertullian read 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as referring to a literal resurrection/glorification of dead and living saints at the coming of Christ and their subsequent ascent into the clouds for the purpose of entering heaven. He did not understand it as merely symbolic, metaphorical, or affective language.

Origen of Alexandria (Third Century). Origen read 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 as referring to the same future event of resurrection of the dead and transformation of the living saints (*Cels.* 2.66; 5.17). In 2.66, after quoting Romans 14:9, that Jesus died and rose to be Lord of both the dead and the living, Origen notes:

Jesus died that He might be Lord of the dead; and that He rose again to be Lord not only of the dead, but also of the living. And the apostle understands, undoubtedly, by the dead over whom Christ is to be Lord, those who are so called in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible;” and by the living, those who are to be changed, and who are different from the dead who are to be raised. And respecting the living the words are these, “And we shall be changed;” an expression which follows immediately after the statement, “The dead shall be raised first.” Moreover, in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, describing the same change in different words, he says, that they who sleep are not the same as those who are alive; his language being, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them that are asleep” (*Cels.* 2.66).

That Origen understood the destination of those caught up in the clouds as a literal spiritual location somewhere “between heaven and earth” is made clear in *On First Principles* 2. 11.5–6.

Then, if that atmosphere which is between heaven and earth is not devoid of inhabitants, and those of a rational kind, as the apostle says, “Wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now worketh in the children of disobedience,” Again he says, “We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” We are therefore to suppose that the saints will remain there until they recognise the twofold mode of government in those things which are performed in the air. (*Princ.* 2.11.5–6).

We may (and I would say, must) quibble with Origen over the subtleties of his personal eschatology here, but it is clear that he regarded the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as a literal, not metaphorical, event.

Gregory of Nyssa (Fourth Century). Gregory of Nyssa illustrates the conformity of resurrected humanity to the resurrection of Christ by drawing a parallel between Christ’s ascension to heaven and the resurrected body’s ascension to heaven according to 1 Thessalonians 4:17. He writes: “For that which has taken place in Christ’s Humanity is a common boon bestowed on mankind generally. For as when we see in Him the weight of the body, which naturally gravitates to earth, ascending through the air into the heavens, we believe according to the words of the Apostle, that we also ‘shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.’” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 12.1). There can be no doubt Gregory of Nyssa regarded the catching up of the saints into the air to be a literal future event. Elsewhere, Gregory describes the sudden event of the resurrection of the dead and transformation of the living at the trumpet announcing the resurrection, “which awakens the dead, and transforms those who are left in life, after the likeness of those who have undergone the resurrection change, at once to incorruptibility; so that the weight of the flesh is no longer heavy, nor does its burden hold them down to earth, but they rise aloft through the air—for, ‘we shall be caught up,’ he tells us, “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (Gregory of Nyssa, *on the Making of Man*, 22.6).

Methodius of Olympus (Fourth Century). In his explanation of the coming of the Bridegroom in Matthew 25:6, Methodius writes, “But the cry which was made when it was said, ‘Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him,’ is the voice which shall be heard from heaven, and the trumpet, when the saints, all their bodies being raised, shall be caught up, and shall go on the clouds to meet the Lord” (Methodius, *Concerning Chastity* 6.4). Methodius immediately interprets 1 Thessalonians 4:17 in a peculiar way, differing from commentators prior to him. He understands the “dead in Christ shall rise first” as referring to our bodies—which were dead in the grave—and “we which are alive” as referring to our souls that are spiritually alive. Thus, he sees not two groups of people—the dead resurrected and the living transformed—but one: the spiritually alive who, though physically dead, are raised in new bodies. In any case, Methodius understands this company of resurrected saints to be caught up to heaven literally: “For we truly who are alive are the souls which, with the bodies, having put them on again, shall go to meet Him in the clouds” (*Concerning Chastity* 6.4).

John Chrysostom (Fourth Century). John Chrysostom may also be added to the unison choir of patristic voices in support of a literal catching up of the saints according to 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Commenting on Matthew 24, Chrysostom first correlates the ascension and return of Christ; just as Christ was taken up in a cloud at the ascension, he will appear in the clouds at his return: “And He cometh in a cloud as He was taken up” (*Homily* 76.3). This is in concord with the statement of the angels in Acts 1:9–11. Then, commenting on the saying of Christ in Matthew 24:31—sending

angels to gather the elect from the four winds—Chrysostom correlates this with the gathering of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17.³⁴ He writes:

And why now doth He call them by angels, if He comes thus openly? To honor them in this way also. But Paul saith, that they “shall be caught up in clouds.” And He said this also, when He was speaking concerning a resurrection. “For the Lord Himself,” it is said, “shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel.” So that when risen again, the angels shall gather them together, when gathered together the clouds shall catch them up; and all these things are done in a moment, in an instant. For it is not that He abiding above calleth them, but He Himself cometh with the sound of a trumpet. And what mean the trumpets and the sound? They are for arousing, for gladness, to set forth the amazing nature of the things then doing, for grief to them that are left. (John Chrysostom, *Homily 76.4*)

Just as Christ’s ascension was a literal skyward event, so the return will be a literal skyward event; and if the return was a literal skyward event, so will be the catching up of the saints after resurrection (also see his similar literal handling of this text in *Homily 14 on Romans 8:12–13*).

In his homilies on 1 Thessalonians itself, Chrysostom describes his interpretation in even greater detail. In *Homily 8 on 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17*, he writes:

If He is about to descend, on what account shall we be caught up? For the sake of honor. For when a king drives into a city, those who are in honor go out to meet him; but the condemned await the judge within. And upon the coming of an affectionate father, his children indeed, and those who are worthy to be his children, are taken out in a chariot, that they may see and kiss him; but those of the domestics who have offended remain within. We are carried upon the chariot of our Father. For He received Him up in the clouds, and ‘we shall be caught up in the clouds.’ (Acts i. 9.) Seest thou how great is the honor? and as He descends, we go forth to meet Him, and, what is more blessed than all, so we shall be with Him. (John Chrysostom, *Homily 8 on 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17*).

Note that Chrysostom appeals to the Roman cultural background of a king’s honored people meeting him outside a city to laud him. Whereas modern commentators have appealed to this background to dispense with a literal interpretation of the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Chrysostom uses it to amplify, illustrate, and explain the literal catching up of the saints. Thus, even granting the appeal to the Roman background, this does not eviscerate a literal catching up into the sky.

³⁴ I challenge this correlation in chapter 6 and 17, but the correlation between Matt 24 and 1 Thess 4 is common among commentators in the Christian tradition, especially among those who a priori reject a regathering of the elect of Israel.

Another point should be noted in Chrysostom's writings on the catching up of the saints to heaven. In several places he associates it with a rescue from the judgment coming upon the earth, which is reserved for the wicked who are literally left behind. We see this in his *Homily on Matthew 24:16–18* as well as his *Homily 8 on 1 Thessalonians 14:15–17*. Though we see nothing like a long, drawn-out period of Tribulation, we do see the order of a catching up first, followed by judgment upon the earth by fire, followed by the ushering of the resurrected saints into the heavenly kingdom and the banishment of the wicked into eternal condemnation. We see this vividly described: "What trembling then, what fear will possess those that remain upon the earth. For one woman is caught up and another is left behind, and one man is taken, and another is passed over. (Matt. xxiv. 40, 41; Luke xvii. 34, 35.) What will be the state of their souls, when they see some indeed taken up, but themselves left behind? Will not these things be able to shake their souls more terribly than any hell?" (*Homily 8 on 1 Thessalonians 14:15–17*). Given the basic elements of Chrysostom's eschatological expectations, it may be that he held to something similar to what is called a pre-wrath rapture position today.

Rufinus of Aquileia (Fourth Century). In his discussion of the final affirmations of the creed, Rufinus quotes 1 Thessalonians 4:17, then notes, "And do not marvel that the flesh of the saints is to be changed into such a glorious condition at the resurrection as to be caught up to meet God, suspended in the clouds and borne in the air, since the same Apostle, setting forth the great things which God bestows on them that love Him, says, 'Who shall change our vile body that it may be made like unto His glorious body.' [Phil. 3:21] It is nowise absurd then, if the bodies of the saints are said to be raised up into the air, seeing that they are said to be renewed after the image of Christ's body, which is seated at God's right hand" (Rufinus, *The Exposition of the Creed* 46). That Rufinus expected a literal catching up of the saints into the air is evident from the fact that he defends the plausibility of the event based on the nature of the resurrection body.

Aphrahat the Persian and Ephrem the Syrian (Fourth Century). Two fourth-century fathers from the oriental church also testify to the literal assumption of the church. Aphrahat the Persian regards 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as a literal event: "And death shall be swallowed up in life, and body shall be swallowed up in Spirit. And by the power of the Spirit, that man shall fly up to meet the King and He shall receive him with joy" (*Demonstration* 6.14). Likewise, Ephrem the Syrian has a similar literal reading of the catching up of the saints: "Moses was a type of the dead, and Elijah a type of the living, that fly to meet Him at His coming. For the dead that have tasted death, them He makes to be first: and the rest that are not buried, are last caught up to meet Him" (Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 1). The catching up of the saints of the future is as literal as the assumption of Elijah in the past.

Augustine of Hippo (Fifth Century). As we have seen, earlier interpretations of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 differed as to whether those who were alive at the coming of the Lord would be

transformed without experiencing death or would be instantly resurrected after a sudden death. Augustine reveals his awareness of this dispute in his discussion of 1 Thessalonians 4. He writes:

But it is commonly asked whether those whom our Lord shall find alive upon earth, personated in this passage by the apostle and those who were alive with him, shall never die at all, or shall pass with incomprehensible swiftness through death to immortality in the very moment during which they shall be caught up along with those who rise again to meet the Lord in the air? For we cannot say that it is impossible that they should both die and revive again while they are carried aloft through the air. For the words, “And so shall we ever be with the Lord,” are not to be understood as if he meant that we shall always remain in the air with the Lord; for He Himself shall not remain there, but shall only pass through it as He comes. For we shall go to meet Him as He comes, not where He remains; but “so shall we be with the Lord,” that is, we shall be with Him possessed of immortal bodies wherever we shall be with Him. We seem compelled to take the words in this sense, and to suppose that those whom the Lord shall find alive upon earth shall in that brief space both suffer death and receive immortality. (*Civ.* 20.20)

Though I must differ from Augustine on his understanding of the nature of the living saints’ transformation (resting, as it is, on a faulty textual variant in 1 Cor 15:51), it is evident that Augustine regarded the catching up of the saints as a literal event at the coming of Christ in the air, which is also a literal event. If Christ’s ascent into the clouds recorded in the narrative of Acts 1 was literal, then so is the return of Christ in the clouds a literal event, as promised by the angels then present. And if the return of Christ in the clouds is a literal event, so too is the catching up of the church to the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Elsewhere Augustine connects this catching up of the saints to heaven—their being gathered together unto him—with their enthronement at Christ’s right hand and invitation into the kingdom (*Civ.* 20.24).

Augustine also refers to 1 Thessalonians 4:17 with a seemingly literal rendering of the text in *Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 2.50 (31): “At last, upon some there will be bestowed this blessing at the last day, that they shall not feel death itself in sudden change, but shall be caught up along with the risen in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, and so shall they ever live with the Lord.” This event, Augustine believes, is a future event, connected to the bodily resurrection” (*Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel of John* 9).

Theodoret of Cyrus (Fifth Century). On the nature of the resurrected, glorified body, Theodoret writes:

After the resurrection our bodies also will be incorruptible and immortal, and being released from what is earthly will become light and æthereal. This moreover is distinctly taught us by the divine Paul in the words ‘It is sown in corruption, it is raised in

incorruption, it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown in dishonour it is raised in glory; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body' and in another place 'We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.' If then the bodies of the saints become light and æthereal and easily travel through the air, we cannot wonder that the Lord's body united to the Godhead of the only begotten, when, after the resurrection, it had become immortal, entered in when the doors were shut" (Theodoret, *Letter 145 to the Monks of Constantinople* [NPNF 2.3:315–16]).

Theodoret thus understood the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to be a literal event, made possible by the "aethereal" quality of the resurrection body.

Jerome of Stridon (Fifth Century). In a text relaying Jerome's responses to various Bible questions, we read: "Paul says that some shall be 'alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord;' and that they shall be 'caught up to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thess. iv. 15, 17). Are we to suppose this assumption to be corporeal and that those assumed will escape death? Yes, Jerome answers, but their bodies will be glorified" (*Letter 59 to Marcella*). In another place Jerome explains 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as metaphorical: "Minervius and Alexander two monks of Toulouse had written to Jerome asking him to explain for them a large number of passages in scripture. Jerome in his reply postpones most of these to a future time but deals with two in detail viz. (1) 'we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed,' 1 Cor. xv. 51; and (2) 'we shall be caught up in the clouds,' 1 Thes. iv. 17. With regard to (1) Jerome prefers the reading 'we shall all sleep but we shall not all be changed,' and with regard to (2) he looks upon the language as metaphorical and interprets it to mean that believers will be 'assumed' into the company of the apostles and prophets. The date of the letter is 406 a.d." (Jerome, *Letter 119 to Minervius and Alexander*). It appears Jerome takes the "clouds" as referring to the "cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 12:1. In any case, the assumption itself is literal—to be assumed into the company of apostles and prophets is to be taken into the heavenly realm. The question of the meaning of the clouds is subject to dispute in Jerome's mind. This fifth-century interpretation of "clouds" as a metaphor seems to be the earliest, and even this does not alter the literal assumption.

Conclusion on the Event of the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Through the overwhelmingly harmonious chorus of testimonies regarding the literal assumption of the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, I have demonstrated this to be the clear patristic consensus on the matter. This does not, of course, demonstrate its truthfulness, but in my theological method, the literal interpretation serves as the "default" position unless it can be overturned by compelling exegesis. Again, unprecedented interpretations are not invalid per se, but they bear the burden of proof.

In the foregoing discussion, I have demonstrated that Wright—and those who have adopted the same metaphorical reading of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and thus rejected a literal assumption of the church—often either misunderstand or intentionally misrepresent the classic rapture doctrine. The language of the passage often fails to confirm their speculative Old Testament or cultural backgrounds, and in any case, those backgrounds, even if accepted, do not disprove a literal rapture. The metaphorical reading of the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is also overly modernistic and—in light of the history of interpretation—idiosyncratic, unprecedented in the patristic period; it is not, therefore, merely the odd interpretation of fundamentalists and critical scholars. The burden of proof is on the metaphorical reading of this passage, a burden which its supporters have failed to meet.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

Go Deeper Excursus 29 Diverse Interpretations of the Male Son of Revelation 12

When viewed in light of modern commentaries on the book of Revelation, the interpretation that the male son represents the corporate body of Christ is a minority view and seemingly idiosyncratic.

If we limit ourselves to modern commentaries, consult study Bibles, or hear lectures and sermons on Revelation 12, then we would assume the interpretation of the male son as the individual, Jesus Christ, to be an open and shut case. Jacob Smith writes, “The reference here is unmistakably to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem of Judea.”¹ And J. Dwight Pentecost notes, “Since this child is born ‘to rule all nations with a rod of iron’ (Rev 12:5), it can only refer to Christ, the one whose right it is to rule.”² He later asserts that the allusion to Psalm 2:9 “identifies the man child here as none other than Jesus Christ.”³ A survey of commentators from a variety of exegetical and theological perspectives reveals the same kind of straightforward identification of the male son as none other than Jesus Christ.⁴ However, the more cautious words of George Faber in 1808 reveal a less confident assessment of the *status quaestionis*: “In short, I consider the symbol of *the man-child* as a complete *crux criticorum*. Much has been written on the subject, but I have read nothing

¹ Jacob B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, ed. J. Otis Toder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1961), 183.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 215.

³ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 286.

⁴ Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse 12: Histoire de l'exégèse*, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese*, vol. 2, ed. Oscar Cullmann, Ernst Käsemann, et al (Tübingen: Mohr, 1959), 145; Heinz Giesen, “Symbole und mythische Aussagen in der Johannes-Apokalypse und ihre theologische Bedeutung,” in *Studien zur Johannes-apokalypse*, *Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände, Neues Testament*, vol. 29, ed. Gerhard Dautzenberg and Norbert Lohfink (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 62; Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 231–234; William R. Newell, *Revelation: Chapter-by-Chapter*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994), 175–76; Ford C. Ottman, *The Unfolding of the Ages in the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1967), 284–85; Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, reprint (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 151; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22, An Exegetical Commentary*, ed., Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 125-26; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 189-90.

that is *wholly* unobjectionable. It is possible, that some future commentator may be more successful in his inquiries than those who have preceded him.”⁵

Although the identification of the male son in Revelation 12:5 as Jesus Christ alone has dominated the modern history of interpretation of that text, the corporate interpretation of the male son has always had representatives and, at times, appears to have held a place of particular importance. Methodius’s comments from the fourth century are illustrative of one ancient voice:

O faultfinder, it will not even be possible for you to show that Christ Himself is the one who is born. For long before the Apocalypse the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word was fulfilled. And John speaks concerning things present and things to come. But Christ, long ago conceived, was not caught up to the throne of God when He was brought forth, from fear of the serpent injuring Him. But for this was He begotten, and Himself came down from the throne of the Father, that He should remain and subdue the dragon who made an assault upon the flesh. So that you also must confess that the Church labors and gives birth to those who are baptized. As the spirit says somewhere in Isaiah: “Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child. Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.” (Methodius, *On Chastity* 8.7)

Among modern, post-Reformation interpreters, we can discern several variations of this corporate identity of the male son. Many see a dual significance whereby the woman and male son literally and historically represent Mary and Jesus, but they also carry a prophetic or allegorical sense.⁶

On the other end of the spectrum, some interpret the text purely allegorically, in what can be described as an “idealist” sense. Thus Thomas Hall in 1658 interpreted the woman as the church and the male son impersonally as “reformation” of the church, which always results in persecution from the dragon (Satan).⁷ I. R. Park interpreted the birth of the male child as “regeneration through Christ,” in which true conversion to Christianity is fixed and enshrined in the heart, the figurative “throne of God.”⁸ Quite unique among a more allegorical interpretation, William Wall understood

⁵ George Stanley Faber, *A Dissertation on the Prophecies, That Have Been Fulfilled, Are Now Fulfilling, or Will Hereafter Be Fulfilled*, vol. 1 (Boston: Andrews and Cummings, 1808), 62. (Italics in original.) William Thomson notes several interpretations prevalent in his day: “By *the male-child, or the Son*, whom the woman brought forth, some have understood a race of manly Christians, and others have understood the powerful truth of the Gospel: and some have understood Constantine” (*The New Testament, with Some Preliminary Observations and Notes Critical and Explanatory*, vol. 3 [Kilmarnock: H. Crawford, 1816], 436).

⁶ David Pareus, *A Commentary upon the Divine Revelation of the Apostle and Evangelist John*, trans. Elias Arnold (Amsterdam: C. P., 1644), 264; Thomson, *New Testament*, 436.

⁷ Thomas Hall, *A Practical and Polemical Commentary or, Exposition upon the Third and Fourth Chapters of the Latter Epistle of Saint Paul to Timothy* (London: John Starkey, 1658), 388, cf. 128.

⁸ I. R. Park [a.k.a. John Ranicar], *A New Exposition of the Apocalypse*, 3rd ed. (London: Smith, Elder, and Co.,

the woman as the apostolic church while the male son is holy Scripture: “This the devil strove to devour as soon as it was written, by mixing spurious scriptures, and monstrous doctrines of heretics with it.”⁹ The early view of John Nelson Darby in 1839 can also be regarded as an “idealist” position. He understood the vision to refer not to historical or prophetic events but to a general picture of the relationship of various participants in God’s plan. Thus the initial vision of the woman in heaven refers to the positional reality of the church, whose subject is Jesus Christ, while the later actions of being pursued and fleeing refer to the actual historical experiences of God’s people.¹⁰

A common historical interpretation of Revelation sees the events of Revelation 12 as having been fulfilled in the first few centuries of the church. Francis Roberts identified the woman as the persecuted church of the first three centuries, traveling in the midst of Roman oppression to “bring forth *Christ mystical*, (*viz.*, iChrist formed in his mystical body and members, 2 Cor. 12.12. Gal. 4.19.) into the Roman world.”¹¹ When the male son is “caught up” to the throne of God, this could represent divine protection in the midst of the dragon’s attacks,¹² or it could refer to the ascent of the church to political power in the fourth century: “As Christ himself was in his ripe age taken up to God’s supreme Throne: so Christ mystical, when maturely grown in his Kingdome, was exalted to the Roman Throne, *viz.* under *Constantine*.”¹³

Several commentators have identified the woman as the New Testament “church” personified.¹⁴ Thus the male son is not Christ (who could not have been literally birthed by the church),¹⁵ but he is the company of those “born again” through the church’s ministry and united

1832), 152, 154.

⁹ William Wall, *Brief Critical Notes, Especially on the Various Readings of the New Testament Books* (London: William Innys, 1730), 396.

¹⁰ John Nelson Darby, *Notes on the Book of Revelations; to Assist Enquirers in Searching into That Book* (London: Central Tract Depot: 1839), 69–93.

¹¹ Francis Roberts, *Clavis Bibliorum: The Key of the Bible, Unlocking the Richest Treasury of the Holy Scriptures*, 4th rev. ed. (London: Peter Parker and Thomas Guy, 1675), 605. (Italics in original.)

¹² Anonymous (“A Graduate of the University of Cambridge”), *The Rule, Based on the Word of God, for the Calculation of Time in the Prophecies of the Old and New Testament* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1843), 30.

¹³ Roberts, *Clavis Bibliorum*, 606. See also John Worthington, *Miscellanies* (London: John Wyat, 1704), 66–67. Cf. Thomas Newton, *Dissertations on the Prophecies, Which Have Remarkably Been Fulfilled, and at This Time Are Fulfilling in the World*, vol. 2 (New York: William Durrell, 1794), 279–280; Thomas Pyle, *A Paraphrase, with Notes, on the Revelation of St. John*, 2d ed. (London: Robinson, 1795), 110; Thomas Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. 6, 5th ed. (London: Seeley, Hatchard, & Son, 1822), 503; John Ranicar Park [a medical doctor and lay student of Scripture], *A Concise Exposition of the Apocalypse*, 2d ed. (London: James Duncan, 1825), 39. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ with Commentary and Critical Notes*, new ed. (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1844), 515; David Nevins Lord, *An Exposition of the Apocalypse* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1847), 313–336.

¹⁴ Thomson, *New Testament*, 436.

¹⁵ Thomas Scott, favoring the corporate interpretation, but specifically Christian emperors, argues against the male child as Christ: “Some commentators, indeed, would interpret this *man child* to be Christ Himself; but this cannot be meant, for He was born of the church of Israel, not of the Christian church; nor is He ever spoken of as ‘the Son of the church,’ but rather as the Husband, or even the Father of it” (Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 503).

in Christ.¹⁶ Christopher Wordsworth (1849), citing Psalm 2:9, acknowledged that “at first sight these words appear applicable only to CHRIST.” He then noted, “But, we must remember, that what is true primarily of Christ alone, is, by virtue of His union with all true members of His body, and by reason of the working of His grace, transferred to *them*.”¹⁷ However, he interpreted the rule of the church with Christ in heavenly places in this age, as in Ephesians 1:20, applying Revelation 3:21 to this present spiritual reign of Christ with the church. The catching up of the male son, therefore, refers to those who depart to heaven—the church triumphant—while the woman remains on earth as the church militant.¹⁸

Others interpret the woman as the entire people of God without clearly distinguishing Old and New Testament dispensations. In this case, the male son could represent the Messiah as the child of the one covenant community. Moses Stuart interpreted the woman as “the church all glorious and resplendent in the eyes of God” and then noted, “The man-child who is born, and who is ‘to rule all nations with a sceptre of iron’ (Ps. 2: 9. Rev. 12: 5), is doubtless the *Messiah*.... *The child caught up unto God*, is the Saviour ascended to glory.”¹⁹

The English Baptist, Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691) commented on Revelation 12:5, “*And she brought forth a Man-Child who was to Rule all Nations with a rod of iron*; which is Christ and his Saints, as one mystical Body.... The *man-child* brought forth was *Christ*, and his *Saints*, the *spiritual* Seed of this *mystical* Woman, the Church of the firstborn written in Heaven.... This Child was prophesied of, *Psal.* 2.6, 7, 8, 9, 10. And also his Saints shall have the Dominion over the Nations, *Dan.* 7. 27, 28. and *Rev.* 11. 15.”²⁰ Anglican priest Thomas Wilson (c. 1563–1622) wrote, “[Childe or Man-Childe.] Eyther Christ alone, or joyned to the Church his body, to which hee communicateth his owne power, according to his promise, *Rev.* 2, ver. 27. *Rev.* 12, 5.”²¹

Some have limited the identity of the woman historically to the “Jewish church” (that is, Old Testament Israel). After this identification, the male son may then be understood as (1) only Jesus Christ, (2) as Jesus Christ in union with the body of Christ, the church, or (3) as a special remnant from among the larger body of Christianity. Henrietta Bowdler represents the first position, interpreting the woman as “the times of the church under the Jewish dispensation,” pointing to Joseph’s dream as the key to understanding the symbolism. This Jewish church brings forth not

¹⁶ Benjamin Colman, *Some of the Glories of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Exhibited in Twenty Sacramental Discourses, Preached at Boston in New England* (London: Ford and Farmer, 1728), 84.

¹⁷ Christopher Wordsworth, *Lectures on the Apocalypse: Critical, Expository, and Practical*, 2nd ed. (London: F. & J. Rivington, 1849), 257.

¹⁸ Wordsworth, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 258–59. Cf. Charles William Boase, *The Elijah Ministry: Tokens of Its Mission to the Christian Church Deduced from the Ministry of John the Baptist to the Jews* (Edinburgh: Robert Grant & Son, 1868), 559–560.

¹⁹ Moses Stuart, *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy*, 2d ed. (Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1842), 114.

²⁰ Hanserd Knollys, *An Exposition of the Whole Book of the Revelation* (London: Hanserd Knollys, 1689), 41, 161–62. (Italics in original.)

²¹ Thomas Wilson, *A Complete Christian Dictionary*, ed. Thomas Wilson and John Bagwell, 3rd ed. (London: William Iaggad, 1622), s.v. “Childe or Man-Childe.”

the Christian church but Jesus Christ himself: “She brings forth a man-child ... *i.e.* Christ, as Ps. ii.9.”²² For the second option, Hans Wood rejected the identification of the woman as representing the New Testament church on the basis of the identification of the male son:

It is altogether necessary to a due apprehension of the subsequent Revelation, that the object before us be not mistaken. The Christian Church has been supposed to have been figured in this Woman. The crown of twelve stars may agree as well to the twelve Apostles, as to the twelve tribes, did not her parturiency and seed denote an offspring, which gives one descriptive character of the Christian Church, in a spiritual descent from the Jewish.²³

Wood went on to argue that “there can be no question that Our Lord and his Church are intended by the man child, ‘who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron;’ because the words, taken from prophetic Scripture, are unappropriable but to him.”²⁴ Finally, representing the third option, an anonymous author in 1845 identified the male son with the firstfruits or the 144,000 described in Revelation 7.²⁵

²² Henrietta Maria Bowdler, *Practical Observations on the Book of the Revelations* (Oxford: J. Fletcher, 1787), 18. Cf. Franklin Weidner, *Annotations on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, The Lutheran Commentary, vol. 12, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs (New York: Christian Literature, 1898), 156–157.

²³ Hans Wood (Jn. M-d), *The Revelation of St. John Considered as Alluding to Certain Services of the Jewish Temple* (London: T. Payne & Son, 1787), 157.

²⁴ Wood, *Revelation of St. John*, 160. Cf. Henry Goodwyn, *The Judgment Seat of Christ* (London: Elliot Stock, 1876), 57.

²⁵ Anonymous, *The Retrospect, Being an Enquiry into the Fulfillment of Prophecy during the Last Twenty Years* (London: Painter, 1845), 106.

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

Michael J. Svigel

**Index of Scriptures and Ancient Literature
for the Print Edition of *Fathers on the Future*
and Online Excurses at www.fathersonthefuture.com**

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