



**Study guide for  
NEW HEAVENS & NEW EARTH**

**OR  
IT'S SO WRONG IT'S GOT TO BE WRIGHT**

**OR  
IF LOVING YOU IS WRONG, I WANT TO BE WRIGHT**

## What do we mean by heaven?

In popular culture, and for many believers, heaven evokes images of cloudy, ghost-like existence, or angelic beings floating about among the clouds. This image comes directly from the radical separation of the physical and spiritual worlds. Some of the misconceptions are:

### Popular View of Heaven

A place for disembodied, ghost-like beings

A place where people sing all the time

A place up by the clouds A place everyone goes after death

A place where all beings live as angels

### Biblical View of Heaven

However, the final destination of believers is not an ethereal place like that. The final destination of all believers is the renewed heavens and earth anticipated in Revelation 21. A very physical, concrete future awaits us when Christ comes back.

### A Non-Biblical understanding of the universe

Behind the cloudy, ethereal idea of heaven lies the old Gnostic value system that the physical world is evil and the spiritual is good. Thus, one must focus on the spiritual to escape this evil world. This is not a biblical idea. Such a view of the world is poison to Christian spirituality.

Such a view ignores some basic biblical facts: A biblical understanding of the universe God made the whole universe and called it very good (Gen. 1:31). Satan is a spiritual being and is very much evil. Satan did not get bad press because God wrote the Bible. He is evil.

Conclusion: just because it is spiritual doesn't mean it is inherently good. Just because it is physical/material doesn't make it inherently evil. Not all spiritual is good and not all physical is evil. God promises a renewed heavens (spiritual) and earth (physical) at the end of time (Rev. 21).

N. T. Wright, states it this way:

“In the last two hundred years Western thought has overemphasized the individual at the expense of the larger picture of God's creation. What is more, in much Western piety, at least since the Middle Ages, the influence of Greek philosophy has been very marked, resulting in a future expectation that bears far more resemblance to Plato's vision of souls entering into disembodied bliss than to the biblical picture of new heavens and new earth.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York HarperCollins 2008) 80

# Biblical Theological Look at Last Things

## New Heavens and a New Earth <sup>2</sup>

The idea of new heavens and a new earth is explicitly noted in Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pe 3:13; and Revelation 21:1. The Old Testament has no term that directly translates as "universe"; the phrase "heavens and earth" was the Hebrew way of referring to the universe they knew. This imagery is set in prophetic-apocalyptic texts that hold forth future hope for a redeemed world that transcends the sinful world we know. It is especially noteworthy to observe how the closing chapters of Revelation reflect the motifs of Genesis 1-3. The world God originally created suffered the catastrophe of sin and all of its consequences but the future new world will be a perfect world in which the effects of sin are no longer present. The phrase in Revelation 21:1, "and there was no longer any sea, " illustrates this imagery of a new perfect environment. The sea is used in apocalyptic literature as a symbol of chaos and may symbolize evil. The beast came from the sea ( Rev 13:1 ). The great harlot sits on many waters ( Rev 17:1 ). The absence of the sea in the restored universe symbolizes that the deliverance for which the creation groans has been realized (cf. Rom 8:18-22 ; Rev 21:27 ).

The concept of new things is a major motif in redemptive history, especially in eschatological passages. The new heavens and earth in Revelation 21 is the consummation of many new things. The crescendo for redemptive history is stated in verse 5, "everything new"!

The journey toward this climax includes

- a new covenant ( Jer 31:31 ),
- a new name ( Isa 62:2 ; cf. Rev 2:17 ; 3:12 ),
- a new song ( Isa 42:10 ; Rev 5:9 ; 14:3 ),
- a new spirit/heart ( Ezek 11:19 ; 18:31 ; 36:26 ),
- new wine ( Matt 9:17 ; Mark 2:22 ; Luke 5:37-38 ),
- the new Jerusalem ( Rev 3:12 ; 21:2 )

The concept of newness and renewal is prominent in extrabiblical apocalyptic literature as well.

The primary new heavens and new earth texts yield a variety of contexts while still focusing upon the future restoration. Isaiah 65-66 provides comfort that the devastation Israel has observed in their history is not Yahweh's ultimate intention for his people. The use of bara [a'r'B] (to create) in 65:17 probably calls to mind the creation account of Genesis 1. The old and new creation thus become the terminal points of redemptive history.

Second Peter 3:13, while in a context that addresses eschatological issues, is actually focused on ethics. The ethical dimension of Christian living is intensified by the prospect of the future renovation of heaven and earth. Second Peter 3:1, 11, 14, and 17 exhort godly living in light of the future. The final clause of 3:13 also highlights this nuance by noting that it will be an earth in which righteousness dwells. The call to ethics is a prominent theme in New Testament prophetic passages. The last reference is Revelation 21:1. Revelation 21-22 provides the crescendo to prophetic-apocalyptic biblical revelation. It is interesting that the imaging of eternity has humankind on a restored earth, not in God's heavenly realm. This is certainly the eternal state and not a millennial scene. The sea is gone from Revelation 21 but not from other millennial images. Human history climaxes where it all began: on the earth.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from 'New Heavens and a New Earth', Gary T. Meadors in Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology.

The manner in which the new heavens and earth come into existence is a matter of debate among biblical scholars.

#### A. Hermeneutical Issue of Genre

Are these descriptions purely apocalyptic genre, and thereby merely mythical symbols of an eschatological salvation without historical continuity? Or are these prophetic statements that utilize certain characteristics of apocalyptic imagery to describe the historical future? It seems wiser to speak in terms of the latter and call it prophetic-apocalyptic.

#### B. Theological Issue of 'how God will do it'.

The question of the nature of bringing the new heavens and earth into existence is in regard to whether the new creation comes into existence by means of renewal (a renovation of the old) or replacement (a totally new act of creation). Such a question may be more influenced by our modern scientific curiosity than by textual indicators. The apostle John was more impressed with the fact and nature of the new order than by how it will come about. Yet part of exegesis and theology is to theorize these questions.

1. The replacement view claims 2 Peter 3:12b-13 as its key text. It is claimed that this tradition is reflected in Matthew 5:18 (cf. Mark 13:31 ; Luke 16:17 ) and 1 John 2:17. References in the Didache (10:6), 2 Clement (16:3), and 1 Enoch (72:1; 83:3-5; 91:15-16) are cited as reflecting a replacement view. Some would note that Isaiah 65:17 uses the same term as Genesis 1:1 (bara [a'r'B], as ex nihilo is contextually dependent and does not always apply as in Genesis 1 cf. Psalm 51:10 ). The view sees the new heavens and earth as a replacement of the present creation, the product of a second "ex nihilo" creative act.
2. The renewal (also called renovation) view is more widely represented in the literature on this subject. Second Peter 3:12b-13 is viewed as a purging of the old heaven and earth and forming it into the new. The catastrophe is comparable to Noah's flood, which was only a temporary fix. This provides a continuity and fulfillment of the purposes God began in the original creation and has now been brought to completion. There is a continuity of substance now given new form. Christ's incarnation and the believer's resurrection body provide analogies although in different realms. The term palingenesia [paliggenesiva], "renewal, " in Matthew 19:28, argues for renovation rather than replacement. The term kainos, [kainov] "new, " in contrast to palaios [palaiov], "old, " may mean new in character rather than substance (cf. 2 Cor 5:17 ; Heb 8:13 ).
  - a. Neos and Kainos: Greek has two different words for the idea of new. Neos is a newness of time; kainos is a newness of quality. A neos object would mean that the object did not exist and now is there. A kainos object means that the object was there but its quality has changed: it is better, it is made different. In this sense, the new heavens and earth in Rev. 21:1 are not neos but kainos. That is, God will renew, transform, improve, and refresh his creation. It will be a kainos heaven and earth.

## NEW CREATION

New creation (καινὴ κτίσις, kainē ktisis). A Pauline expression in 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15, which refers to

- (1) a believer's ontological transformation in Christ,
- (2) the community of Christian believers,
- (3) the end-time cosmological renewal and restoration.

Among the biblical writers, only Paul uses the exact phrase “new creation” (καινὴ κτίσις, kainē ktisis) (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). A related expression, “new human/humanity” or “new man/self” (καινὸς ἄνθρωπον, kainos anthrōpon), appears in Eph 2:15; 4:23–24; Col 3:9–10. As Levison notes, however, “This expression is not unique to Paul. It, and ideas associated with it, occur in several literary texts and traditions of Second Temple Judaism” (Levison, “Creation and New Creation,” 189).....

*[I have skipped the first two sections given they are not our focus in this study]*

### “New Creation” as the End-Time Cosmological Renewal and Restoration

“new creation” refers to the creation being renewed and restored by God in the age to come.

#### New Testament

In Romans, Paul describes the current status of creation: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now” (Rom 8:19-22 NRSV). This passage implies that the scope of a new creation is not limited to individual believers or their community but rather extends to the whole universe.

#### Old Testament

Isaiah 65:17 says, “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa 65:17 NRSV). Hubbard offers several observations on the importance of Isaiah in understanding this meaning of “new creation”:

1. “The classic expression of cosmic new creation in the biblical tradition is found in the concluding chapters of the book of Isaiah.”
2. “In continuity with chapters 40-55, the new event of Isa 65:17 is contrasted with ‘the former thing,’ which ‘will no longer be remembered.

’ Yet whereas earlier chapters focused on the transformation of God’s people, with creation playing a supportive role (e.g., 43:18), the situation in chapters 65 and 66 is reversed. Here, creation itself takes center stage, with God’s people and God’s city being swept up in the ovation of praise to the Creator (65:17, 18; compare 42:5, 43:1,15)

3. “The Isaianic motif of new creation is both anthropological and cosmological in scope” (Hubbard, Paul’s Letters and Thought, 16-17).<sup>3</sup>

“New creation”- The Laxham Bible Dictionary

***Readers note:*** The next two sections are optional and were develop for those who wished to go a little deeper into the very interesting concept of “new creation” in Paul. If you wish to continue with the broader study skip the next two pages.

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<sup>3</sup> “New creation” Yongbom Lee, The Laxham Bible Dictionary (Logos software, 2018)

### **Paul use of “New Creation” as a conceptual image.**

Let's consider the way Paul's utilizes the term 'new creation' to teach theology. In Paul's letters the term new creation covers three categories of meaning; Individual, corporate, and cosmic. All three are works of the same the eschatological Spirit, with the first two envisioning and anticipating the last. When Paul uses the term 'new creation' he is invoking the glory of the "new heavens and earth" while relating that future glory to what the Holy Spirit has done ontologically in individual believers and socially in forming a "New humanity" in Christ. Firstly we can conclude, Paul saw believers and the church as an 'already' aspect of the renewal of all things.

So when Paul wrote, "New Creation" regardless of the object in view (individual believer or corporate body), he was seeing the end for the beginning, and seeking to invoking imagery of the Beauty, glory, and permanence of the new heavens and new earth. But that's not all, the term creation is ripe with a Hebraic understanding of biblical creation and created order, a conceptual imagery likely assumed by Paul. So again regardless of the object in view, Paul was harkening back to the fitted order of things, and the harmony and shalom that rises from creatures being nothing more or less than what they were created to be. Humanity functioning within the created order in harmony with nature, others, and God.

### **A Bifurcated Vision**

The conceptual image of 'new creation' invokes a bifurcated vision. 'Creation' points back to eden and 'new' points forward to the new heavens and new earth. The imagery of new creation has the ability to point back to the created order while also pointing forward to a day when all is set right and hope will be realized in the renewal of all things. Talk about choosing your words wisely! Paul was a baller at word choice! Paul literally phrase something in such a way as to keep the fixed categories of the created order in mind while energetically spurring one's thinking into the freedom and newness found in the age to come. (It's like God was helping him or something)

### **Consideration**

From this consideration of Paul's term we can begin to glimpse how Paul envisioned Christians and the Christian community.

**Christain:** For Paul the new birth experienced by God's children anticipates the created order's renewal. A transformation ontological in nature but not altogether different from what is. In Christ by the Spirit, a believer is made altogether human and at the same time different, set apart, 'holy'. In the gospel, the human divine relationship takes on a joinery of friendship. A journey marked by a fellowship with God as in the garden as well as an experience of God's Greatness in ever increasing measure, from glory to glory, until we behold him, as if face to face, in our glorified bodies.

**Christain community:** The church, new humanity formed of many nations bound as one by blood cores of a crucified King. A community A community gathered to be human, acting in harmony the order of God's design, expressing in part the shalom of creation, and simply being human, fart jokes and all. The community is also a beach-head of the kingdom of God, an outpost by which the future kingdom are glimpsed, the manifest presents of God is experienced (like the eden/temple), and the eschatological blessings of God are realized (New heavens New earth)

**Exegetical investigation: Consider the Connections of Paul's Thought:**

Read Rom 8:18-30. It is a key text bringing together the concept of suffering, resurrection, the work of the Spirit, and creation, all to bear on the "hope" for new creation. In the passage, the creation is understood to refer to the fallen created order. It is personified as groaning for its renewal into the new creation. Consider the quotes below in light of the text.

"In 8:19 the personified creation is pictured as "frustrated" because of the fall (v. 20) but hopeful of deliverance (v. 21). Just as humankind's shame has enslaved creation, so will humankind's "apocalypsed" glory bring release... Sufferings are actually the "birth pangs" that herald the new creation (see also Mark 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3; 1 En. 62:4). In particular, God's suffering people play a role, for they are inhabited by the Spirit groaning alongside them as a kind of midwife (Rom. 8:23). Through our prayers, energized by the Holy Spirit, God will bring about a new birth of the whole of creation: all that he has made "will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (8:20 NRSV). Thus, the salvation that has come to our world in Jesus now through the Spirit is directed from the inside out. We "boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2), knowing that this will affect the entire creation!"<sup>4</sup>

But there is another meaning to the resurrection — that those who believe in him will one day share that same destiny. As Paul remarks, since believers have been adopted as children of God, they share the same inheritance rights as the natural child. Christians are thus 'heirs of God' and 'co-heirs with Christ' (Romans 8:17), in that they share in the same inheritance rights as him. This means that, just as Christ suffered and was glorified, so believers may expect to do the same. All that Christ has inherited from God will one day be theirs as well. For Paul, this insight is of considerable importance in understanding why believers undergo suffering. Christ suffered before he was glorified; believers must expect to do the same. Just as suffering for the sake of the gospel is real, so is the hope of future glory, as believers will share in all that Christ has won by his obedience. Their situation has been transformed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Edith M. Humphrey Dictionary of the theological interpretation of the Bible (Downers grove IVP press 2007) 536

<sup>5</sup> "Christain hope" Alister McGrath, The New Lion Handbook Christian beliefs ed. Alister McGrath (Oxford, Lion Hudson Pub, 2006) 268



The dominant theme in the preaching of Jesus is the coming of the 'kingdom of God'. This phrase is rare in contemporary Jewish writings, and is widely regarded as one of the most distinctive aspects of the preaching of Jesus. This term, or closely related ideas, occurs about seventy times in the gospels. The use of the word 'kingdom' in this context is potentially misleading. Although this English word has been used regularly since the sixteenth century to translate the Greek term *basileia*, the term 'kingship' is more appropriate. The term 'kingdom' suggests a definite geographical region which is being ruled, whereas the Greek term refers primarily to the act of ruling itself. The term 'the kingly rule of God' has often been used to make this point clear.

The kingdom of God ... as used by Jesus, the term has both present and future associations. The kingdom is something which is 'drawing near' (Mark 1:15), yet which still belongs in its fullness to the future... New Testament scholars generally agree that there is a tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet' in relation to the kingdom of God, similar to that envisaged by the parable of the growing mustard seed (Mark 4:30—32). Something has begun which will reach its culmination in the future. The kingdom of God is thus not something that is postponed to the future. It is something that is experienced in part now, preparing the way for its complete realization in the future.<sup>7</sup>

This idea of kingdom is not separated from the idea of resurrection or last things. Jesus connected the kingdom of God with the resurrection in his discussion of judgment. So that the ideas coalesce into one concept, the final judgment. Alister McGrath notes:

"In the preaching of Jesus, there is a clear link between the coming of the kingdom of God and the resurrection of the dead. In his controversy with the Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38), Jesus draws a clear distinction between the 'people of this age' and 'those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead' (Luke 20:34-35). Jesus' teaching about future rewards and judgments is also closely linked with the theme of resurrection. Some will rise from the dead to be rewarded, and others to be judged."<sup>8</sup>

Jesus was not just a spiritual teacher but God incarnate came to save humanity and in his life (including incarnation), death and resurrection everything changed. Alister McGrath gives Four Principles from the letters of Paul on how the human situation has changed. He outlines Paul's understanding of the new situation brought about by Christ's person and work.

1. The presence of a 'new age. At several points, Paul emphasizes that the coming of Christ inaugurates a new era or 'age' (Greek: *azonos*). The old era has passed away, and the new has been born. Paul characterizes the 'old age' as 'evil' (Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 9:16), and refers to those who inhabit it as a 'crooked and perverse generation' (Philippians 2:15). .... Paul opposes a teaching which holds that each and every aspect of the age to come has been fulfilled in the present. It seems that Paul's opponents at Corinth were teaching that the final age was now present, and all the benefits of eternity were to be had in the here and now. For Paul, there is an element of postponement: the ultimate transformation

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<sup>7</sup> "Christain hope" Alister McGrath, *The New Lion Handbook Christian beliefs* ed. Alister McGrath (Oxford, Lion Hudson Pub, 2006) 265

<sup>8</sup> "Christain hope" Alister McGrath, *The New Lion Handbook Christian beliefs* ed. Alister McGrath (Oxford, Lion Hudson Pub, 2006) 265

of the world is yet to come, but may be confidently awaited. The Christian believer is thus caught up in the tension between the 'now and the 'not yet'.<sup>9</sup>

2. The resurrection of Jesus is seen by Paul as affirming that this new age really has been inaugurated. Although this does not exhaust the meaning of Christ's resurrection (which has significant implications for our understanding of the identity of Christ), Paul clearly sees Christ's resurrection as an event which enables believers to live in the knowledge that death — a dominant feature of the present age — has been overcome. Yet the new age has not merely begun; it is something in which believers may share. Paul's use of the 'first fruits' imagery (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23) is intended to emphasize that Christ is both the guarantee of the resurrection of the believer, and the model of what this resurrection will be like. Christ rose from the dead as the 'first fruits' of the resurrection, inaugurating the great harvest that will follow. Christ is the first representative of the whole resurrection harvest that will take place when he returns. What happened to Christ will one day happen to believers, who share in both Christ's glory and resurrection.
3. Paul looks forward to the future coming of Jesus Christ in Judgment at the end of time, confirming the new life of believers and their triumph over sin and death. A number of images are used to refer to this, including 'the day of the Lord. At one point (1 Corinthians 16:22), Paul uses an Aramaic term, maranatha (literally, 'Come, our Lord!') as an expression of the Christian hope. The Greek term parousia (meaning 'appearing') is often used to refer to the future coming of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8-9). For Paul, there is an intimate connection between the final coming of Christ and the execution of the final judgment.
4. A major theme of Paul's thought is the importance of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Paul, building on a longstanding aspect of Jewish expectations, sees the gift of the Spirit as a confirmation that the new age has dawned in Christ. One of the most significant aspects of Paul's thought at this point is his interpretation of the gift of the Spirit to believers as an arrabon (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). This unusual word has the basic sense of a 'guarantee' or 'pledge', affirming that the believer may rest assured of ultimate salvation on account of the present possession of the Spirit. Although salvation remains something which will be consummated in the future, the believer may have present assurance of this future event through the indwelling of the Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

From these four points it can be seen how important the already and not yet is to the Christian life and hope.

### **3. The renewed heavens and earth:**

The biblical narrative comes to a glorious ending when Christ returns. He will renew all things (Rev. 21:1). It will not be a different creation or a non-creation. It will be this creation renewed; God will restore his creation to its original glory and purpose. As if to close the circle, what God began at Eden he will fulfill in Revelation. Not everything will be the same. Some things from the biblical idea of Eden will continue in the renewed creation; others will end.

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<sup>9</sup> References for the Present Age and the Age to Come: "The NT divides history into two eras, "this age" (the present reign of evil) and "the age to come" ("the last days," Messiah's reign of justice and peace; Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 20:34–35; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 6:5). In Jesus' person and ministry, the age to come has broken into the present age rather than replacing it, so the two ages overlap "between the times" of Jesus' comings (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor. 10:11b; Heb. 1:1–2; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18)" "Eschatology" Stephen R. Spencer p.439

<sup>10</sup> "Christain hope" Alister McGrath, *The New Lion Handbook Christian beliefs* ed. Alister McGrath (Oxford, Lion Hudson Pub, 2006) 268-269

Scripture gives us a sure vision of a few things. It portrays believers in a restored paradise, new creation (Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7; 22:1–5) and the new Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21). God's people share table fellowship at an eschatological banquet (Matt. 8:11; Mark 14:25; Luke 14:15–24; 22:30) or wedding feast (Matt. 25:10; Rev. 19:9). As children of God Christians will enjoy perfect fellowship with God (Rev. 21:3, 7), worshipping God (7:15; 22:3) before his face (Matt. 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4).

#### Considerations from biblical narrative

The movement towards the new heavens and new earth can be seen through the whole scope of scripture. The themes of a renewed eden, restored shalom and embodied life in God's presence dots scripture. The biblical story is marked by a progression of dwelling places, from a garden to a tabernacle, to a temple, to the body of Christ (church) to new heavens and new earth. All pictures of god's dwelling with man and in the culmination of the biblical narrative that dwelling in the new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:1-7) It that great end times vision humanity is pictured as returning to an eden like relationship and surpassing it in a direct embodied life with God.

#### Reflections from natural theology

We do have glimpses of this life in the new heavens and new earth, even if many things are not clear. We can see it in the love we experience for and from people, in the majesty of nature's beauty and power, in the generosity and kindness of people in times of need, in the smile of a happy baby, in the loyalty and warmth of our pets, in the tenderness and wisdom of old age, and in moments of deep emotional and spiritual connections with our loved ones. These are just some of the forth-tellings of general revelation. General revelation does not just point back to the Creator, it also points forward to the consolation of all things in him.

#### Chart Comparing Redemptive arch from Creation and the eschatological New Creation

<b>Creation (Genesis)</b>	<b>New Creation (Revelation)</b>
Heaven and earth created, 1:1	Heavens and earth renewed, 21:1
Original Sun created, 1:16	No need of sun, 21:23
The night established, 1:5	No night there, 22:5
The seas created, 1:10	No more seas, 21:1
The curse enters the world, 3:14–17	No more curse, 22:3
Death enters the world, 2:19	Death is no more, 21:4
Humanity is cast out of paradise, 3:24	Humanity is restored to paradise, 22:14
Sorrow and pain begin, 3:17	Sorrow, tears, and pain end, 21:4

#### 4. Why is the resurrection important eschatology?

More straightforwardly, that question could be stated “why does Jesus's resurrection matter?” This answer is complex but not confusing. Jesus's resurrection and work of redemption in general, has many layers because it has corporate, individual and cosmic implications.

- A. **Personally**, Jesus' resurrection gives us a good idea of what our experience in the new heavens and new earth may be like. This is because as Paul makes clear our futures are tied to Jesus' own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12–34). He concludes, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...” (15:17).
- Because Christ has been raised from the dead, our hope is true and secured.
  - Our future includes a resurrected body; that is, it will be a physical reality. Our future resurrected bodies will be like Jesus' own resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:42–49).
  - The women and disciples recognized Jesus after his resurrection (Matt. 28:9, 17).
  - Jesus' body was physical (Lk. 24:39). Jesus ate with his disciples (Lk. 24:41- 43).
  - Yet, it was not a body like ours. Jesus' body was better. He could walk through walls, disappear and reappear, even travel faster than a speeding bullet. I am not saying Jesus is the real Superman but DC better watch out.

In First Corinthians Chapter 15, Paul explains this difference in two ways:

1. Just as different animals have bodies suited for their environment (for the sea, the air, and the ground), so our resurrected bodies will be suited for the renewed creation (1 Cor. 15:39). A creation where heaven and earth have become one. The spiritual and the material made one reality.
2. There are also “natural bodies” and “spiritual bodies.” Both Jesus' pre- and post-Resurrection bodies were physical; the difference is about perishability. That is, natural bodies die; spiritual bodies do not. Sin has polluted and damaged our natural bodies; our bodies die, decay, and are unfit for a future in God's presence. Just as God will renew this creation, also marred by sin, God will give us renewed bodies that will not be polluted by sin, will not decay, and will be fit to be in the presence of God.

#### Two Key Theological Descriptions of the Resurrected Body

##### 1.) Imperishable

Consider the term imperishable in relation to our fitness for the kingdom. Just as Jesus is now perishable so our bodies will be like our Lord. This is an important distinction, Davis explains:

“The crucial distinction is this: when a person is resuscitated, that person must inevitably die a second time at some later point, and on that occasion, death would presumably be final. But the Christian claim is not that Jesus was resuscitated, but rather that he was resurrected. He was transformed into a new and exalted mode or condition of life fit for the kingdom of God. He still lives today and will never die.”<sup>11</sup>

##### 2.) Incorruptible

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul adds “incorruptible” to describe our new bodies. This gets at our human nature in the new heavens and new earth. We can't forget to be human is to be in a body human nature is not subtracted from embodied existence. What does it mean to have a body that is incorruptible. It means it is unable to be corrupted again.

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<sup>11</sup> “Eschatology and resurrection” Steven T Davis, Oxford handbook On eschatology, Ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York, Oxford Press 2008) 445-446

Adam was able to sin yet in the fall all humanity after Adam was unable not to sin (or unable to be sinless - for the grammar nerds). In Christ, believers are empowered to be able not to sin but in the resurrection believers will exist in bodies that are unable to sin. Such is the glory of the incorruptible bodies. As one scholar has noted: “When that time comes, we will have bodies vivified by the very Spirit of God (sma pneumatikon, “en-Spirited bodies”) rather than simply by the breath of life (sma psychikon, “animated bodies,” 1 Cor. 15:44).”<sup>12</sup>

Natural Bodies	Spiritual Bodies
<b>Psychikos</b>	<b>Pneumatikos</b>
Derived from psyche meaning “soul”	Derived from pneuma, meaning “spirit”
<p>The ending ‘<b>ikos</b>’ is used in Greek to make an adjective, and it means “in reference to.” It does not describe the material out of which something is made. Rather, it refers to the force that animates an object. In this case, psychikos refers to the human soul that animates our bodies. In the case of pneumatikos, it refers to the Spirit, God’s Spirit, as the animating force (see, Rom. 1:11 and Gal. 6:1). Thus, both kinds of bodies are physical. The difference is that a “natural body” dies and a “spiritual body” does not die.</p>	

Steven Davis articulate this well:

“Paul’s notion of a spiritual body means a transformed body or perhaps a supernatural body, not a nonphysical body. The pre-resurrection body, he says, is dishonorable, weak, and subject to decay and death, while the transformed body is honorable, powerful, and immune to decay and death (1 Cor. 15: 42–44). When Paul says, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” he is not saying that a body (the very term Paul uses, soma, implies physicality) “cannot enter the kingdom of God, but that a body that has not yet been transformed by God via resurrection cannot do so. Paul is not denying that resurrected bodies are physical, but is denying that they are frail and corruptible like natural bodies. So Paul’s notion is that when God raises us, God will change our bodies into spiritual bodies, bodies controlled by the Holy Spirit, bodies fit for the kingdom of God. But they will still be bodies, and they will be continuous with (because they are the result of changes in) our old natural bodies”<sup>13</sup>

- B. On a more corporate and cosmic levels,** Jesus' resurrection is victory over death and the grave, bringing life and immortality to light in the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). Christ is raised as the first fruits of those who will follow (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). The church can be assured that God, who raised Jesus, will also raise us (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14). The resurrection is connected to eschatology not only in that it will happen in the last days but in some way we are already raised in Christ to reign with him.

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, individuals, communities and the cosmos finds reconciliation and renewal in Christ. As believers are raised with Christ and

<sup>12</sup> Edith M. Humphrey Dictionary of the theological interpretation of the Bible, (Downers grove IVP press 2007) 537

<sup>13</sup> “Eschatology and resurrection” Steven T Davis, Oxford handbook On eschatology, Ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York, Oxford Press 2008) 445-446

seated with him, God image and original task is regained. Believers live out resurrection life in the time between ages.

For Paul we experience a foretaste of the resurrection to come through our Union with Christ. In one aspect, our “union with Christ through the indwelling Spirit of Christ enables new life ethically in the present body, and so anticipates its future transformation into a “spiritual,” imperishable body (Rom. 8:2–11; 1 Cor. 15:44–49; Gal. 4:6; 5:16–26).”<sup>14</sup> This is why Paul uses language in speak of believers as already “raised with [Christ]” and “seated ... with him in the heavenly realms” (Col. 2:12–13; 3:1; Eph. 2:5–6). Behind this kingly imagery, Paul’s could have in mind believers as restored image bearers. It is important to point out Paul’s use is not to spiritualist the resurrection of the dead for those passages do not erase a future eschatology (Eph. 6:13–17; Col. 3:4, 6, 24; cf. Eph. 1:13–14). So we see Paul stresses both present fulfillment and future completion of eschatological hope.

For Paul, Easter is the start of something not the end. Theologically speaking, the earth and heavens are already renewed in himself for Jesus is the cosmic resurrected ruler. His resurrection to a life incorruptible assured us all that our own bodies and the cosmos will be renewed to an incorruptible state, following in his own incorruptibility (first-fruits). In short, In Christ, the work was already accomplished (Eph 1:10) but not yet complete until the day of the Lord. N.T. Wright explains it better:

“John has so ordered his gospel that the sequence of seven signs, climaxing in the cross of Jesus on the sixth day of the week and his resting in the tomb on the seventh, functions as the week of the old creation; and now Easter functions as the beginning of the new creation... Jesus’s resurrection is to be seen as the beginning of the new world, the first day of the new week, the unveiling of the prototype of what God is now going to accomplish in the rest of the world.”<sup>15</sup>

“The message of Easter is that God’s new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you’re now invited to belong to it.”<sup>16</sup>

“The resurrection [of Jesus] is not, as it were, a highly peculiar event within the present world (though it is that as well); it is, principally, the defining event of the new creation, the world that is being born with Jesus.”<sup>17</sup>

The life death and Resurrection of Jesus is the key to all transformation both personal and cosmic. N.T Wright explains it:

Resurrection took center stage and would involve the transformation of the present body into a new type of physicality, incapable of corruption (and hence immortal; “immortality” need not mean, and as used in 1 Cor. 15:52–54 does not mean, “disembodied immortality”). Moreover, “Resurrection” was no longer simply a large-scale, last-minute future event. It had already happened in one instance, that of Jesus himself, an event to be repeated at the last for all his people (1 Cor. 15:23).

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<sup>14</sup> Pauline Epistles, Judith Gundry-Volf, Dictionary of the theological interpretation of the Bible, ed. Kenin Vanhoozer, (Grand rapids. Baker Academic 2005) 579

<sup>15</sup> N. T. Wright, Surprised by Hope (New York HarperCollins 2008) 238

<sup>16</sup> N. T. Wright, Surprised by Hope (New York HarperCollins 2008) 252-253

<sup>17</sup> N. T. Wright, Surprised by Hope (New York HarperCollins 2008) 73

The early Christian belief in future resurrection, then, was based on Jesus' own resurrection, which they rightly saw as an event within history, bringing to birth God's future world in advance of its full appearing. Paul drew out the significance of this, not least in terms of the renewal and redemption of the entire cosmos (Rom. 8:18–25). He understood baptism in terms of dying and rising with Christ, so that the Christian ethic consists not of rule-keeping from within the old creation, but of learning in the present to live the life that will characterize God's new creation (6:1–11; 1 Cor. 6:12–20)...

[The church proclaims] God's ultimate future for his people in terms, not of "going to heaven," but of the two-stage future that first-century Jews would have assumed. Except for those still alive at the Lord's return, those who die go to be "with Christ," in a state of conscious and blissful rest (Luke 23:43; John 14:2–3; Phil. 1:23). But when the Lord reappears, joining heaven and earth into one, the dead will be given new bodies like the one he already has (Rom. 8:11; Phil. 3:20–21). The hope for the resurrection of the dead is thus to be distinguished from the normal language about "life after death"; it denotes, instead, a new bodily life after "life after death." The fact that most Western Christians are unaware of this indicates a serious weakness in the biblical formation of the modern church, which has corollaries in the difficulties often felt in imitating the early church's integration of faith and public life. Resurrection is about the Creator God reclaiming, judging, and renewing the created world. The Christian who believes in resurrection should also believe that working for God's kingdom in the present is therefore "not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).<sup>18</sup>

The Oxford handbook on eschatology gives a good summary:

"[This view] involves the complete transformation of the world by a radically new act of God beginning at Easter and continuing into the future. ... eschatology as transformation is derived in large measure from a view of the resurrection which emphasizes elements of continuity and discontinuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Jesus. In this view, the empty tomb plays a key role in pointing to an irreducible element of physical/material continuity within an overarching discontinuity. Some ... scholars interpret personal resurrection not only as an event following death but as a process which occurs throughout life, transforming the whole of life into eternity. By analogy, the transformation of the world happens not only synchronically at the end of time but also diachronically throughout the entire course of world history."<sup>19</sup>

***Readers note:*** For anyone struggling with understanding these connections an additional resource has been given in the appendix to this guide. The resource is a portion of a chapter from Richard Middleton's book 'A new heaven and a new earth : reclaiming biblical eschatology'. In it Middleton explains the connection between resurrection and Reigning with Christ in a clear and biblically saturated way.

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<sup>18</sup> Resurrection of the dead N. T. Wright, Dictionary of the theological interpretation of the Bible ed. Kenin Vanhoozer, (Grand rapids. Baker Academic 2005) 677-678

<sup>19</sup> "Cosmology and eschatology" Robert Russell Oxford handbook On eschatology, Ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York, Oxford Press 2008) 638-639

## **N.T. Wright gives some Application of this Doctrine**

“Resurrection doesn’t mean escaping from the world; it means mission to the world based on Jesus’s lordship over the world.”<sup>20</sup>

“Jesus is risen, therefore his followers have a new job to do. And what is that new job? To bring the life of heaven to birth in actual, physical, earthly reality... Jesus’s resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven.”<sup>21</sup>

“The resurrection means that what you do in the present, in working hard for the gospel, is not wasted. It is not in vain. It will be completed, will have its fulfillment, in God’s future.”<sup>22</sup> (p. 162)

“The task of the church between the ascension and [Jesus’ return] is therefore set free both from the self-driven energy that imagines it has to build God’s kingdom all by itself and from the despair that supposes it can’t do anything until Jesus comes again. We do not ‘build the kingdom’ all by ourselves, but we do build for the kingdom. All that we do in faith, hope, and love in the power of his Spirit, will be enhanced and transformed at his appearing. This too brings a note of judgement, of course, as Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17. The ‘day’ will disclose what sort of work each builder has done.”<sup>23</sup>

“If a church is... actively involved in seeking justice in the world, both globally and locally, and if it’s cheerfully celebrating God’s good creation and its rescue from corruption in art and music, and if, in addition, its own internal life gives every sign that new creation is indeed happening, generating a new type of community—then suddenly the announcement [that Jesus is lord and his new kingdom has begun] makes a lot of sense.”<sup>24</sup>

## **Another application is the connection between theodicy and resurrection**

“For Christian theology, the logic of theodicy receives historical confirmation by the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection brings to light not only the full extent of what it means to say that God is love, but also that the love of God has defeated death. The promise of heaven is not merely a matter of justice in the face of evil, but the ultimate gift of one whose eternal nature is self-giving love. If the resurrection is true, then the deepest roots of heaven are not the manipulation and coercion .. but the love of a God for whom these are out of the question.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, (New York HarperCollins 2008) 235

<sup>21</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, (New York HarperCollins 2008) 293

<sup>22</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, (New York HarperCollins 2008) 162

<sup>23</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, (New York HarperCollins 2008) 143

<sup>24</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, (New York HarperCollins 2008) 227-228

<sup>25</sup> “Heaven” Jerry L. Walls, *Oxford handbook On eschatology*, Ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York, Oxford Press 2008) 467

# History of Modern Eschatology Thought

## Part One

For the better part of church history the study of the last things was limited to bodily resurrection, judgment, heaven, and hell. Today eschatology is seen by many theologians as a hermeneutical key for understanding New Testament theology and ethics. To understand this shift we must look at four historical developments in eschatology. The development surrounds the question to what does the new testament teach about the kingdom of God. Four points of development will guide our discussion.

- 1.) Developmental eschatology: The Kingdom as progress
- 2.) Catastrophic eschatology: The Kingdom as Future.
- 3.) Realized eschatology: The Kingdom come in Jesus
- 4.) Inaugurated eschatology: The Kingdom as already and not yet.

### The kingdom as progress

Beginning in the 19th century theologians began moved away from common categories for the doctrine of last things. They began to placed an emphasis on the concept of the kingdom of God. One thinker who focused on the concept was Albrecht Ritschl. Ritschl rejected Hegel's metaphysical approach as well as Schleiermacher's starting point of religious experience, in favor of a more historical approach. He began with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, understood as a historical movement of moral and social progress initiated by Jesus and continued by the church. His teachings as well as the rise of evangelical postmillennialism helped promote 1 to 1 correlation between God's Kingdom and human social progress. The result was a theologically driving belief in human progress.

### The kingdom as Future.

Other scholars like Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss's respond to views like Ritschl pointing to the eschatological expectation in Jesus' proclamation.

They understood Jesus to be proclaiming a soon coming kingdom. They argued that Jesus was a wild Jewish apocalyptic visionary proclaiming the end of the world (Weiss). Schweitzer affirmed Jesus' ethic of love, but viewed Jesus as sacrificing his life in the false belief that God would intervene to save him from the cross and usher in the new age of the kingdom. Yeah, Schweitzer though Jesus was a date setter that missed it in the biggest most 'Monty Python' way. loosely around the same time another apocalyptic view of the kingdom was developing in dispensational circles. They interpreted eschatological texts in a literal and futurist way. In short, Both saw that the kingdom of God could only come with the dramatic crisis of divine intervention at the final day.

### The Kingdom Come in Jesus

C. H. Dodd pushing back against the view of the kingdom as future view. Dodd's counterclaim was that the NT taught a realized kingdom. Dodd argued that Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God had already come in his ministry. This idea of 'realized eschatology' held that in Jesus the kingdom is fully realized.

### The Kingdom as already and not yet.

Later Dodd's idea of 'realized eschatology' was tweaked by an number of NT scholars, like W. G. Kümmel, Oscar Cullmann and George Eldon Ladd. They concluded that the NT taught both the presence of and expectation for the kingdom of God. Concluding, that the reality of the kingdom was an inaugurated but not consummated kingdom. The kingdom was already and not yet.

“The eschatology of Jesus and of the NT was paradoxical. In one sense the kingdom God had already come with the presence of Jesus, but in another sense it had not yet come. This has become the standard and widely accepted interpretation of NT eschatology: this paradox is thought to recapture the structure of thought soon lost as the church lost contact with its Jewish roots and was shaped by the culture of the Greco-Roman world. That being so, the implication for systematic theology is that eschatology is not merely the doctrine of the Last Things, to be treated as the final topic.... Rather, it shapes the whole of Christian theology: it is the key in which the whole music is set.”<sup>26</sup>

Applied eschatology: From Last things to first principle.

As Inaugurated eschatology began to gain popularity, other theologians begin to see the importance of eschatology as a lens for understanding all of theology. Men like Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann began to take eschatology as the starting point for theology. It was often called a ‘Theology of Hope’ (more on this in a later section) but the two forerunners have significant differences between them.

(1) Pannenberg accepts the idea that revelation came as history. The whole, total history of the world would reveal God only at the end, but the end had come proleptically in Jesus. We could establish his resurrection by the historical-critical method and so enter rationally into faith in Jesus as the revelation of God.

(2) Moltmann though Hope arises from faith in the crucified Jesus in whom God shared in our suffering, and it is this eschatological perspective which motivates Christians to crusade for social justice in the present.

In evangelicalism, following thinkers like Ladd and later N.T. Wright, theologians gained insights from this new way of viewing eschatology. As a result many church leaders began to wake many from their dogmatic slumber. They saw how improper theological categories and the resulting theological assumptions had significantly affected the World-views and value systems of many in the Christian community.

“evangelical Christianity has recovered a sense of the wholeness of the mission of the church in both evangelism and social action from this recovery of the eschatological perspective. But in articulating eschatology itself, N. T. Wright sums up the new perception that the Christian hope is not the long-held and rather Platonist one of a disembodied existence as disembodied souls or spirits in an eternal heaven, but that, while at death believers go to be with the Lord, the real hope is for ‘life after life after death’. It is hope not just for individual souls, but hope for resurrection ‘transphysical’ life in the new creation.”<sup>27</sup>

At one time Eschatology was the hobby doctrine. Everyone assumed the structure of Christian theology to be well established with eschatology relegated to certainty about a few things and speculation over much that was to come. It in no way a category of elucidating Christian thought as a whole. Today, eschatology (particularly, the already not yet nature of the kingdom, the resurrection, and the eschatological new creation) now shapes the whole building.

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Eschatology’ T. A. Noble, *New Dictionary of Theology: historical and systematic*, ed. Martin Davis, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, (Downers grove, IVP 2016) p. 299

<sup>27</sup> ‘Eschatology’ T. A. Noble, *New Dictionary of Theology: historical and systematic*, ed. Martin Davis, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, (Downers grove, IVP 2016) p. 299

While popular conservative apocalyptic eschatology survives in many conservative circles and are promoted at a popular level. The study of N. T. eschatology has furthered thought in ethics, and led to new insights affecting the whole corpus of Christian theology, ethics and mission.

## **Part Two**

Further elaboration on the Theology of Hope from the New Dictionary of Theology

*Readers Note In this article what is meant by Christian Hope is the objective doctrines of Last things not so much a psychology of expectation. Yet since the Bible does teach of Hope as a doctrine and a virtue. The virtue is the inward expectation born of the Spirit in the life of the Christian. The doctrine is about last things that are the outward object of focus for our inward hope. It is easy to get them confused. Keep this in mind as you read.*

### **Hope**<sup>28</sup>

In Christian theology the understanding of hope initially rests in God's promises communicated to humanity. In other words, hope is grounded in the God who established a relationship with all of creation, but is specifically revealed in God's creation of humanity. Eventually, the final revelation on which hope rests is interpreted through Christ. In this the final revelation is expressed in Christ's victory over sin, death and hell through his resurrection.

Moltmann held that the centre for theological thought was in the eschatological hope in Christ. The concept of hope and the related idea of eschatology became the hermeneutic for theology and a basis for rethinking Christian social ethics.

Pannenberg held, God is ahead of us, making all things new. The future is now to be brought into the present through Christ the God-man...(p426)

For both Moltmann and Pannenberg, their work continued on a biblical focus regarding the affirmation of the historical Jesus as an eschatological prophet. Through Jesus' words and deeds we gain an insight into the future hope in the present. Jesus proclaimed, 'The kingdom of God has come near' (Mark 1:15), meaning that the future has now become present, and, in his eventual death and historical resurrection, there now was confidence in Christ as the hope for the future for both humanity and all of creation. The resurrection of Christ was the culmination of his entire ministry from birth to death. At every stage of Jesus' life he defeated the powers of evil and won a decisive victory. Hope now centered in the person of Christ and in his work. Importantly, the affirmation was clear that in Christ came the universal hope for all (Col. 1:20). With Christ bringing the future into the present, Christian theology was now to run counter to the world of evil powers. This meant that patience, a fruit of the Spirit, does not translate into inactivity. Since God's mission is reconciliation, the church is given the ministry of reconciliation to the world (2 Cor. 5:18–19), as difficult as this may be. Here, with active patience, the future expectation does not lose sight of God's presence with us (Matt. 1:23). Trials and tribulations are to be expected, but they do not lead to despair (Rom. 5:1–5), for it is the ministry of the church, in light of Christian hope, that protests against the prevailing evil powers. This leads to the conclusion that no political system deserves ultimate allegiance, so a theological protest is always necessary since the hope for the future is made secure in God's mission to the world.

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<sup>28</sup> "HOPE" D. L. Rainey New Dictionary of Theology: historical and systematic, ed. Martin Davis, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, (Downers grove, IVP 2016) Page number at end of paragraphs in brackets.

Christian hope is to be understood in light of the trinitarian activity. The Father who sent the Son to take human flesh (John 1:14) and live with humanity, also sent the eschatological Spirit who brings Christ's victory over sin, death and hell into the Christian experience. Holiness, then, is not only a specific human spiritual reality, but with the Spirit there is holiness and renewal in the Christian community, and within the Christian community the emphasis on renewal and reconciliation is displayed at the Lord's Table in sacramental action. This leads to a renewed emphasis on the interpretation of God's creation as a 'new heavens and a new earth' (Isa. 65:17–25). Such a mission is accomplished through Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. With our hope in Christ we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:12–13) as the foretaste of how the present is to be recreated. God's promised hope is 'Yes' in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20–22) and is made present in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hope creates mission, and so it is the church's mission to establish hope throughout the world. Moltmann stated,

'One of the first senses in which this happens is in the missionary proclamation of the gospel, that no corner of this world should remain without God's promise of new creation through the power of the resurrection' (Theology of Hope, p. 328).

Primarily, hope does not begin in human effort. Hope begins in the resurrected Christ with whom the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is this eschatological community, in mission, that brings hope into every corner of the world... (p.427)

## Eschatology and Ethics <sup>29</sup>

Over the last century, eschatology's influence on ethics has shifted several times in ways that parallel changes in biblical studies. These shifts can be traced in both disciplines' treatments of "the kingdom of God." Through the centuries, Christians have differed over the extent to which this kingdom is present or future, earthly or heavenly, and partially or fully actualized. Yet they have often forgotten that God's kingdom was the major theme of Jesus' ministry, until the nineteenth-century European "quest for the historical Jesus" rediscovered this fact..(276)

### Developmental Eschatology

The questers noticed that Jesus' sayings pictured this kingdom both developing in history and arriving catastrophically at its end. Living in a Europe dominated by confidence in progress, they considered the latter sayings as primitive fancy but the former as Jesus' true perspective. Albrecht Ritschl interpreted Jesus' mission, person, and deity in terms of bringing God's kingdom. Yet this kingdom of God sounded much like Kant's moral "kingdom of ends" (where all persons are ends in themselves, not means for others' ends). In many versions of this developmental eschatology, even Jesus' radical teachings could be applied to society: those about nonviolence to ending war (Kant's "perpetual peace"), those on accepting marginalized persons to expanding democracy, and Jesus' critique of riches and favor for the poor to socialist and labor movements.....(276)

### Catastrophic Eschatology

Late in the nineteenth century, however, this immanent eschatology received a double blow. In North America, many evangelicals, finding it excessively optimistic, turned to newly crystallized pre-millennial schemes. The most influential of these, dispensationalism, interpreted eschatological texts literally and noticed that NT "kingdom" language diminishes rapidly after the Synoptic Gospels. Dispensationalists reinstated catastrophic eschatology and insisted that neither Jesus' teachings nor God's kingdom could become operative in this evil world. Premillennialists downplayed or discouraged social-ethical activism and predicted that world affairs would worsen rapidly, heralding Jesus' return....(277)

### Inaugurated Eschatology

The biblical theology movement. By the 1930s, however, Weiss and Schweitzer's exegesis had long been under scrutiny. Hans Windisch noticed that some of Jesus' radical teachings are not apocalyptic but rather are concrete wisdom sayings incorporated into an eschatological framework (e.g., Matt. 5:29–40, 44–45; 6:19–21, 25–31). C. H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias removed, as later accretions, most narrative and historical features from the Synoptic parables and claimed that Jesus taught not a catastrophic eschatology but rather a "realized" one. By the 1950s, most biblical scholars had concluded that God's kingdom, for Jesus, was "already" inaugurated but "not yet" consummated. Consequently, his teachings held some significance for continuing historical life. Many of these scholars, influenced by Barth and neo-orthodoxy's biblical orientation, were developing a "biblical theology." Biblical theology stressed the unity—better, unity in diversity—of the entire Bible. God, it claimed, is revealed through history, not mainly in moments of encounter, whether existentially or from eternity. Old Testament scholars such as Walther Eichrodt traced the development of a universal eschatological vision, especially through the prophets. John Bright re-presented biblical history (or Heilsgeschichte)

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<sup>29</sup> "Eschatology and Ethics," Thomas Finger. *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2011). Pages are marked at the end of paragraphs in brackets.

as a whole in his book titled *The Kingdom of God*. By “kingdom” Bright meant both the earthly process, with its social and political dimensions, and an eschatological vision that inspired but also critiqued the former, some-times severely. Catastrophic eschatology's demonic powers became the energy behind sociopolitical forces that killed Jesus. They were defeated by his resurrection, which released the energies of the new age. These are available to the church, though it still struggles against the powers. It can oppose them...(277)

in part, through social and political channels, but primarily by “being the church,” a community that actualizes and expresses God's “already” present but “not yet” fully realized kingdom. Biblical scholars had developed a third eschatological paradigm that was impacting ethics. Here, the kingdom of God, as in catastrophic eschatology, broke into history by divine initiative, sharply judging all societies. Human effort could not construct it. Jesus' life and teaching, in their radical thrust if not every detail, shaped its ethics. Christians were to respond to this kingdom and make it tangible, as in developmental eschatology, yet not so much by transforming macrostructures as through their individual and communal lives, in concrete ways and settings, incarnating, by the energies of the new age, alternatives to the old age's destructive patterns...(278)

Ethics of hope, and reversal.

From the 1970s on, as massive apocalyptic evils increasingly threatened the world, this eschatologically informed ethics enjoyed wide appeal. It is expressive, not simply cognitive. It denounces current evils. It calls for decisions and for commitments to new ways of life. Such an ethic is more concerned with developing moral character and embodying social alternatives than with elaborating general rules or decision-making procedures. This approach informed the “theology of hope.” For neo-orthodox ethics, biblical expressions such as “God's name” and “God's word” indicated divine self-revelation in the present. Wolfhart Pannenberg and some biblical colleagues argue that such themes almost always referred to partial, indirect revelations through historical events. It was these events that pointed toward God's self-manifestation, but only at history's end, and “proleptically” at Jesus' resurrection. Jürgen Moltmann shows that God's speech in biblical narrative usually conveyed promises, and that a promise-fulfillment schema overarched it. Both Pannenberg and Moltmann stress that God's words were received not only by faith but also by hope, which propelled their recipients toward the future to overcome whatever opposed it. Moltmann highlights the opposition between Jesus and his political and religious enemies and the agony of his resulting crucifixion. His social ethics, which also draw on neo-Marxism, critique many social structures and favor the oppressed. Pannenberg, however, emphasizes humankind's eschatological unity and promotes transformation of current structures. Ethicists who appropriated this third paradigm were attracted by what Allen Verhey calls “the great reversal” (in a 1984 book so titled) of the old age's social hierarchies, such as the rich over the poor, men over women, and “the righteous” over “sinners.” Verhey highlights the Synoptic Gospels but traces these themes and many current ethical implications through the NT. Wolfgang Schrage also developed a detailed NT ethic from its internal eschatological vantage point. Thomas Ogletree carefully delineated Scripture's role in this sort of approach. He suggests that it fosters a “dialectical” ethics: neither withdrawing from society nor seeking its overall transformation (as in the catastrophic and developmental paradigms) but rather living provisionally within its structures and focusing on specific issues....

Recent New Testament ethics.

This third paradigm also draws heavily from the apostle Paul. According to Christiaan Beker, Paul highlights Jesus' resurrection, which inaugurated God's triumph over the world's power structures and bestowed the first fruits of the new creation. Paul's eschatology includes the dynamic vindication, manifestation, and universal sweep of God's righteousness but also a continuing dualism against opposition. His eschatology arouses a hope that inspires struggle against injustice, but only according to Jesus' cruciform pattern. This hope points not toward

an endlessly open future but rather toward a real coming triumph. It calls for action but also for receptivity, prayer, meditation, and adoration. Ever since Windisch, NT scholarship has recognized that many ethical and wisdom sayings appear in eschatological contexts. ... Bruce Chilton and J. I. H. MacDonald, however, return ethics to eschatological contexts by restoring to the parables of the kingdom those narrative features that Dodd and Jeremias removed. So construed, many parables point toward an alternative world or an eschatological future and call for immediate ethical responses. Numerous ethical and wisdom sayings reappear within the eschatological horizon. This ethics is more a matter of creative response to God's eschatological inbreakings than of precise following of Jesus' teachings. (277-278)

For N. T. Wright, however, Jesus' teachings outline a radically different way of being the true Israel in real-life Palestine, including nonviolence as a response to Roman oppression. John Howard Yoder argues, from an Anabaptist perspective, that Jesus intended these for continuing historical existence. Although loving enemies and disregarding wealth might seem impractical, they can be practiced in daily life. Individuals, indeed, might find this lifestyle unsustainable. Yet it can be followed corporately, through mutual effort and assistance, in the church, which in turn can render its social implications visible. Yoder identifies expressions of this ethic throughout the NT, not just in the Synoptics—for example, in appeals to Jesus' way of the cross. However, since evil powers permeate social structures, only through cruciform discipleship will God's kingdom come to light. Stanley Hauerwas expands many of Yoder's points, especially that Christian ethics is taught and practiced in the church. Consequently, he adds, ethics are developed and transmitted more through traditions and narratives than through rational argument, and it is more concerned with developing character, or virtues, than with general norms. Richard Hays's comprehensive *Moral Vision of the New Testament* probes the eschatological perspectives of all four Gospels. He begins, however, with Paul, whose outlook he finds highly eschatological, and who, he maintains, alludes to Jesus surprisingly often. Hays wrestles with hermeneutical issues and applies his findings to concerns such as war, homosexuality, and abortion. Hays organizes his findings around three “focal images”: community, cross (or cruciform existence), and new creation, all of which are main themes of inaugurated eschatology. If Jesus' teaching is crucial to this third paradigm, one would expect to find numerous ethical treatments of his Sermon on the Mount. David Gushee and Glen Stassen, however, complain that none exists, and they provide a lengthy treatment covering numerous current moral issues. Stassen proposes, intriguingly, that Jesus did not begin by commanding impossible ideals (e.g., one should never be angry [Matt. 5:22]). Instead, Jesus first described a vicious behavioral cycle (covering all of Matt. 5:22) and then outlined practices to transform this cycle (Matt. 5:23–26 [e.g., “Come quickly to terms with your accuser”]).

In conclusion, although differences between the developmental and the catastrophic paradigms, and their partial resolution in an inaugurated paradigm, affect more issues than Jesus' teachings about God's kingdom, no other eschatological topic seems more central to ethics. Closely related is the question of whether eschatological sayings concern a wholly future, transcendent, or inner/subjective realm or whether they interconnect with concrete, this-worldly ethical teachings. Inaugurated approaches often connect them by conceiving eschatology not as apocalyptic (as in the previous sentence) but rather as akin to the prophetic. Eschatologically informed ethical texts envision a divinely initiated, radically different future, but one that transforms earthly life.. (279)

# Appendix

J. Richard Middleton, in *A new heaven and a new earth : reclaiming biblical eschatology*, Middleton explains the connection between resurrection and Reigning with Christ. For all still fuzzy about Wright's understanding of How the resurrection connects with eschatology the extended citation from Middleton's book will be helpful. After explaining the doctrine of resurrection in the Old Testament Middleton show how the idea of resurrection was connected with the Jewish idea of earthly rule. From that point, he goes on to explain the New Testament connection between Ruling and Resurrection in its eschatological context.

## The Connection between Resurrection and Earthly Rule

Corresponding to these two groups in Daniel 12 is the contrast found in Daniel 7 between four beasts and a human being, which Daniel sees in a vision (vv. 2–27). Daniel's vision is explained as a contrast between two sorts of people: the kings of the nations, pictured as wild beasts (vv. 2–8, 17, 19–21, 23–26), and “one like a human being” (literally, “one like a son of man” [v.13])—that is, someone who acts not as a beast, but humanely. This human one approaches the throne of God in heaven and receives an everlasting dominion and kingdom (vv. 13–14), whereas the beastly rulers have their dominion stripped from them (vv. 11–12, 26). The distinction between beast and human is equivalent to the earlier contrast between those destined for everlasting contempt and those raised to everlasting glory.

Although the “son of man” figure in Daniel 7 came to have messianic connotations in later Judaism (and Jesus's use of “Son of Man” language may allude to this), the original context suggests that the human one is equivalent to “the holy ones [or saints] of the Most High” (v. 22) or “the people of the holy ones of the Most High” (v. 27), who are also described as receiving dominion and an eternal kingdom. The point is that whereas in the present the oppressive rulers of the world persecute the righteous, in the future there will be a great reversal: the oppressors will be judged, and the righteous will receive the kingdom that is rightfully theirs. This reversal of dominion for God's people is manifested in being raised to eternal life in Daniel 12. In the linkage between Daniel 7 and Daniel 12, we find an unmistakable connection between resurrection and the restoration of rule.

That a great reversal is coming is basic to the biblical picture of God's justice. As Mary sings in her song known as the Magnificat, God “has brought down the powerful from their thrones, / and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:52). But before the Magnificat, there was Hannah's victory song in 1 Samuel 2, on which Mary's song was modeled.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;  
he brings low, he also exalts.  
He raises up the poor from the dust;  
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes  
and inherit a seat of honor.  
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,  
and on them he has set the world.  
He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,  
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;  
for not by might does one prevail. 1 Samuel 2:7–9

This picture of being lifted up from the dust to rightful rule (sitting with princes) provides the theological grounding of resurrection. This exaltation is accomplished by none other than the

God of creation, the one who set the world firmly on its foundations (1 Sam. 2:8) and who attends to the humble and lowly (Isa. 57:15; 66:1–2). Indeed, the creator restores them to their rightful status, for humanity was originally crowned with royal dignity (Ps. 8:4–8) to be God's vice-regent on earth (Gen. 1:26–28).

The raising of the humble coheres with the reference to the righteous shining like stars in Daniel 12. That this reference is an image of exaltation and glory can be seen in Numbers 24:17, which compares a future ruler of Israel to a rising star. And Jesus tells the disciples that after the final judgment “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43). In Philippians 2 Paul even uses astral imagery for the Christian life after he exhorts his readers to have the same mind that Christ had (v. 5) by willingly embracing servanthood and suffering (vv. 6–8), which leads to exaltation and cosmic rule (vv. 9–11). This *imitatio Christi* (which is the restoration of the *imago Dei*) results in Christians becoming “children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world” (v. 15).

We should be clear that the exaltation associated with resurrection in Daniel 12 has nothing to do with going to heaven or literally becoming a celestial being; it certainly does not describe the immortality of the soul. Rather, this is a metaphor for the restoration of dignity to the faithful who had been subjected to an ignoble death at the hands of the wicked; it refers to their rising up from death to stand on solid ground once again, since humanity was created to live with dignity on earth. Thus “rising up” and “standing” (Hebrew *qûm*; Greek *anastasis*) become synonyms for resurrection in the Bible (note that Jesus raises Jairus's daughter with the Aramaic words *Talitha cum*, meaning “Little girl, arise” [Mark 5:41]). And since Daniel 12 draws on the Isaiah 26 image of awakening from the dust, we do well to note the this-worldly reference in Isaiah 26, especially in the final words of the lament to which resurrection is God's response: “We have won no victories on earth, / and no one is born to inhabit the world” (Isa. 26:18b)....  
(p 139-141)

### **Reigning with Christ in the New Testament**

Given the numerous references to resurrection in the New Testament (see the list at the start of this chapter), there is no need to establish its centrality. Instead, it will be more helpful to focus on the motif of eschatological rule for God's people—a motif interwoven into many New Testament texts, often in connection with resurrection, as if it were an obvious component of early Christian hope.

Take, for example, the reason Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 6:1–6 why Christians should not take each other to court (in the pagan legal system), but instead should settle their disagreements in the church. “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” he asks. “And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters?” (vv. 2–3). If Paul were to ask most Christians these questions today, he would probably receive some uncomprehending stares. The saints will judge the world? They will judge angels?

But Paul is simply drawing on Second Temple Jewish expectation of the great reversal, with the accompanying restoration of rule for the elect. And judgment (which includes making wise decisions and even pronouncing sentence when evil needs to be rectified) is an integral aspect of exercising rule. In fact, wherever we find language in the New Testament of the saints ruling, reigning, judging, or otherwise exercising authority, including reference to thrones or crowns, we are moving in the conceptual field of the eschatological kingdom of God, which is the promised inheritance of God's people.

Jesus himself appeals to the great reversal at the end of the age in response to Peter's question, on behalf of the disciples, about their reward for leaving everything and following him (Matt. 19:27). Jesus explains that his followers will receive a hundredfold for what they have lost and will "inherit eternal life," for "many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Matt. 19:29–30). But Jesus also connects this reversal to thrones and judgment: "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28).

Jesus makes a similar statement about the future of his disciples in response to a dispute among them about which of them is the greatest (Luke 22:24). There he challenges them to model their authority not on the kings of the gentiles (who misuse power), but on his own life of service (Luke 22:25–27). He ends with these words: "You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28–30).

Not only is it clear that Jesus was steeped in Second Temple expectation of the eschatological rule of the saints, but also he grounds this rule in his own life pattern: if his followers share in his suffering, they will share in his kingdom (Luke 22:28–29). This sharing or participation in Christ's life is fundamental to the way the Bible conceives the Christian hope. So Paul can say that believers are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17).

Elsewhere Paul affirms his own need to share in Christ's sufferings if he is to attain to the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10–11), and he uses the sequence of Jesus's self-emptying unto death and consequent exaltation to cosmic lordship as the model for the church (Phil. 2:5–11).

Paul's focus is the humble use of power to serve one another, as Jesus served sinful humanity by his sacrificial death (Phil. 2:5–8); in a fallen world, service often leads to suffering. This clearly calls into question any superficial, triumphalistic understanding of the kingdom of God or the restoration of rule, especially to engage in "culture wars" on behalf of the Christian faith (a powerful temptation in some varieties of contemporary Christianity). We should heed N. T. Wright's helpful emphasis on the abasement and submission of Jesus (the incarnate Word) as crucial to God's mode of kingship—hence the title of Wright's profound study of the Gospels, *How God Became King*. Likewise, Michael Gorman has insightfully described the Pauline understanding of the Christian life as "cruciform," conforming to the pattern of Christ's sacrifice.

Yet Jesus was raised from death victorious; and the climax of the Christ hymn in Philippians 2 states the end point of the exaltation: "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10–11).

This cosmic and eschatological reign of God's Messiah, the Suffering Servant, is integral to the pattern in which Christians will share. The key point here is that the abuse of power that characterizes our world does not mean we should avoid the clear teaching of Scripture about eschatological rule. Power itself is not the problem; it is the misuse of power. Humans were commissioned at creation to rule the earth in the image of a loving God, and Jesus embodied this rule in his own life and death as the incarnate Word (John 1:14–18). The very point of the coming reversal is that dominion is taken from those who abuse power and given to those who humble themselves to follow the Messiah, on the path of discipleship and service.

## Christ as Representative of Israel and Humanity

The paradigmatic character of Jesus's death/humiliation and resurrection/rule is grounded in the developing Second Temple expectation that a representative of Israel (who is also a representative of humanity) will bring about the vindication of the people as a whole. It is this representative sense of the “son of man” in Daniel 7 that allows the term to stand both for the people (in its original context) and (legitimately) for a messianic figure to come.

This representative idea helps us understand the logic of Paul's sermon at the Areopagus in Athens, recorded in Acts 17. After informing his hearers about God's creation of the cosmos and their status as *imago Dei* (vv. 24–29), he calls them to repentance (v. 30), because God “has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (v. 31). Since the resurrected one who exercises judgment is the representative of righteous humanity (Jesus perfectly manifests the *imago Dei*), his resurrection and rule become the pattern for those whom he represents.

Hebrews 2 is extremely helpful in clarifying how the participation of God's people in Christ's exaltation and rule is grounded in creation and the original human calling. Having portrayed Christ as the perfect revelation of God, by which he is superior to angels (1:1–2:4), the writer declares, “Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels” (2:5). Coming on the heels of Hebrews 1, this could easily be mistaken as a reference to Christ's eschatological reign; but anyone steeped in Second Temple expectation will understand that God has entrusted the future world to humanity (specifically, righteous humanity). And the reference to human rule is enhanced when 2:6–8 goes on to quote the Septuagint of Psalm 8:4–6. In the Old Testament, Psalm 8 clearly refers to the original human status and role—created a little lower than God (*’ēlohîm*), crowned with glory and honor, granted rule of all God has made.

Since Hebrews 2 is sometimes misread as providing a straightforward messianic interpretation of Psalm 8, we must be careful to understand the actual argument that the author marshals.<sup>35</sup> The writer of Hebrews does not apply the psalm text to Jesus in any uncritical and simplistic way, as if it were directly referring to the Messiah. Rather, he starts with the original human calling, which has been compromised because of sin. Hebrews 2:5–9 is worth quoting in full:

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere,

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
or mortals, that you care for them?  
You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned them with glory and honor,  
subjecting all things under their feet.”

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The Septuagint, which Hebrews quotes here, has two divergences from the original Hebrew. The first narrows down the meaning of *’ēlohîm* to “angels,” which may well have been part of the meaning of the term (*’ēlohîm* can refer to God, divine beings, angels). But the second

divergence actually makes the Hebrew more ambiguous; the Greek phrase *brachy ti par'* in connection with the verb *elattoō* ("make lower") in Hebrews 2:7 can mean made "a little lower than" (in conformity with the original Hebrew, followed by KJV and NIV) or "for a little while lower than" (NRSV and ESV). It is this latter, temporal meaning that the author mines for his interpretation.

Humanity was created to rule the world (at creation and at the eschaton), but we do not see this at present; instead, it is death that rules, and the human race is "held in slavery by the fear of death" (Heb. 2:15). But we do see Jesus, who was temporarily subordinated to the angels, becoming "flesh and blood" in solidarity with the human family (described both as his brothers/sisters and as God's children [2:11–14, 17]). Because Jesus became fully human ("like his brothers and sisters in every respect" [2:17]), even to the point of death, he was able to conquer the devil, resulting in atonement for the human race and their liberation from the power of death (2:14–17). Now exalted in resurrection and ascension, Jesus fulfills the royal vision of Psalm 8 ("crowned with glory and honor" [Heb. 2:9]).

But this risen Jesus, to use Pauline language, is "the firstborn within a large family" (Rom. 8:29). The Gospel of John explains that the unique Son of God (1:14, 18) does not hoard the privilege of his royal status; rather, he gives "power to become children of God" to all who trust in him (1:12). This is fundamentally in line with Hebrews 2, which affirms that through the incarnation and death of Jesus, God is "bringing many children to glory" (v. 10). Just as Jesus has shared in the human condition (including the humiliation of death), so too all who follow him will share in his exaltation and rule, thus fulfilling God's purpose for humanity. And just to be clear, the writer of Hebrews states that Jesus "did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham" (2:16).

In line with Hebrews 2, Paul affirms that Abraham's descendants were indeed given the promise that they would "inherit the world" (Rom. 4:13). Contrasting the consequences of Adam's sin and Christ's obedience, Paul explains that whereas "death exercised dominion" through the former, those who are the recipients of God's grace and righteousness will themselves "exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). Thus, Paul can speak of Jesus's resurrection as the "first fruits" of a harvest of resurrection that is to come (1 Cor. 15:20–23). Or as 2 Timothy 2 puts it, "The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him" (vv. 11–12a). New life in Christ is clearly associated with eschatological rule.

## **A "Spiritual" Reign?**

But is this necessarily a rule on earth? New Testament references to the reign of the saints have often been read as referring to a "spiritual" reign in heaven. And there is a grain of truth to this interpretation. Unlike the verb "rule," which often requires an object, "reign" (whether in English or in Greek *basileuō* and its derivatives) does not; this grammatical possibility of a decontextualized reign is often grounded by biblical interpreters in the motif of being seated in the "heavenly places" (literally, "heavenlies," *epouraniois*) found in the book of Ephesians. That this is a royal image is clear from the Old Testament picture of God seated on his heavenly throne and from Christ's ascension in the New Testament, resulting in his being seated at the right hand of the Father; the royal character of these references is further borne out by their context in Ephesians, yet they do not seem to refer to an earthly reign.

The most important reference in Ephesians focuses on the resurrection and ascension of Christ, with resulting cosmic rule, described in the most extravagant terms: "God . . . raised him [Christ] 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. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church” (1:20–22).

Another Ephesians reference depicts the church as sharing in both Christ's resurrection life and his reign: “God, who is rich in mercy, . . . made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:4–6). Since the participation of believers in Christ's resurrection and ascension begins in the present, and is conceived as happening in the heavenlies, this does not match the earthly rule envisioned in the great reversal. It certainly sounds as if the resurrection and rule of the church are here spiritualized (or at least are nonearthly). And this interpretation is supported by an earlier statement in Ephesians that believers have been “blessed . . . in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (1:3).

The final two references to the heavenlies in Ephesians speak of a cosmic conflict between God and the forces of darkness, taking place in the heavenlies, in which the church has an important role. In Ephesians 3 we read of the “mystery” of God's plan to include the gentiles as coheirs in his purposes (vv. 5–9), a plan hidden in previous times but revealed in the church, “so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (v. 10). Amazingly, the reconciliation of Jew and gentile as the new humanity is a proclamation of God's victory over demonic heavenly powers. But the battle is not over. Ephesians 6:10–18 speaks of putting on the armor of God to stand firm in prayer against the devil and all the powers of evil; “for our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (v.12).

The partial truth of the interpretation that would spiritualize the reign of the saints is that we do not simply wait for the great reversal. As Ephesians reveals, this renewal has already begun in Christ; we may participate in his new life and victory in the present, even while we continue to struggle with evil and are subject to the suffering that often accompanies discipleship. But the point is that what is presently hidden (in heaven) will be revealed on earth at the last day. This is the apocalyptic pattern of the New Testament (as we will see more clearly in chap. 10 below). This pattern is clarified by a text from Colossians that, on first reading, might actually seem to counsel otherworldly escape from earth.

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)

Far from being a counsel of escape, this is an honest recognition that present earthly life is compromised by evil, and so we need to pattern our behavior on a heavenly model (in practice, on Christ himself). But what is “hidden” (our resurrection life) will on the last day be “revealed”—with Christ in glory.

### **Reigning on Earth as the Final State**

To gain a clearer picture of the eschatological unveiling of what is now hidden, we must turn, appropriately enough, to the book of Revelation, the only New Testament apocalypse; both the name of the book and its genre speak of an unveiling (“apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” are derived from a Greek word meaning “reveal”). In the book of Revelation we find clear confirmation of the picture of earthly rule we have been discerning from both Old and New Testaments.

To begin with, the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2–3) encourage the faithful with mention of crowns, thrones, and rule over the nations as reward for conquering or overcoming—that is, faithful endurance under persecution (2:10, 26–28; 3:11, 21; also 21:7).

While rule over the nations certainly suggests an earthly context, this is confirmed by the vision of celestial worshipers around the throne of God and the Lamb in Revelation 5; there, four living creatures and twenty-four elders praise the crucified one for his sacrifice, by which he redeemed people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (v. 9). Through his sacrifice, the Lamb has constituted the redeemed as “a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (v. 10). A clearer statement of an earthly final state for God's people can hardly be found.

This earthly reign is explicitly connected with resurrection in Revelation 20. There we find a vision of the millennium, where faithful martyrs (“those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God”) “came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (v. 4). This seems to be the first stage in a two-stage future; hence it is designated “the first resurrection” (v. 5). Then, in language reminiscent of Revelation 5, we are told that these risen ones “will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years” (20:6). The context suggests an earthly reign, though a temporary one.

But almost identical language is found in the vision in Revelation 22, describing not a temporary millennium for martyrs, but the final state of all the righteous. Between the millennium and the final state comes a general resurrection of all people to face final judgment, at which time death itself is cast into the lake of fire (20:13–14). Then John sees a new heaven and earth, with a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth (21:1–2), and this vision is accompanied by a variety of images to depict God's full presence to his people, including God's dwelling, face, throne, and light (21:3; 22:1–5). Not only will God's people (now risen to new life) worship and commune with him (22:3–4), but also, in accordance with Old Testament and Second Temple expectation, “they will reign forever and ever” (22:5). Thus, the final state of the righteous is unmistakably depicted in terms of resurrection and earthly rule.

### **The Logic of Resurrection and Rule**

As we come to the end of this overview of resurrection themes in the New Testament, it becomes evident that resurrection is grounded in the reversal of injustice, intended to rectify a situation in which death has impeded God's purposes for earthly blessing and shalom. Especially in oppressive situations where those faithful to God's covenant are persecuted, it may look like death has the last word. But the biblical tradition came to the profound insight (to use language from the Song of Songs) that God's “love is as strong as death” (8:6); indeed, it is stronger than death. YHWH's love for his people and faithfulness to his promises led to the expectation of a return from exile and a gathering of the remnant from the nations (as we saw in chap. 5 above). But it also led to the passionate hope that death itself could not, in the end, thwart God's purposes.

The doctrine of resurrection is thus grounded in a vision of God's restorative justice. This leads N. T. Wright to claim that “resurrection was from the beginning a revolutionary doctrine.” It inspired martyrs to resist tyranny in the hope of a future beyond death. This may be why the Sadducees, who were among the ruling elites of Judaism and thus had a stake in maintaining the status quo, objected to resurrection (see Matt. 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Acts 23:6–10); they were invested in the present world order. But resurrection means that the present order will not last forever. Resurrection turns the world upside down.

Hope of the resurrection is thus able to inspire believers to expect that God's original purposes for human life will ultimately come to fruition, despite what suffering we experience in the present. Paul's affirmation in Philippians 1:6 is apropos: "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." Resurrection is the ultimate completion of God's purposes.

It is in God's purposes from creation that the unbreakable linkage between resurrection and the restoration of rule is forged. From the beginning, God's intent for human life was centered on the royal status of humanity and our commission to image our creator in loving and wise stewardship of the earth, which has been entrusted to our care (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15; Ps. 8:4–8). This is the cultural mandate, our sacred calling to develop earthly life in a manner that glorifies God and reflects his intentions for a world of shalom (as we saw in chap. 2 above). God's intent was for the holistic flourishing of embodied people in the entirety of their earthly, cultural existence. Since resurrection is God's restoration of human life to what it was meant to be, it naturally requires the fulfillment of the original human dignity and status, which have been compromised by sin. Resurrection, therefore, when biblically understood, cannot be separated from the fulfillment of the cultural mandate.

Indeed, hope of resurrection can be a significant spur to action in the present as the church seeks to manifest God's kingdom in daily life. Thus, Paul concludes his lengthy discourse on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 with this encouragement: "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (v. 58). By our present earthly life, as we live between the times, if we are faithful to our Lord, we anticipate and embody God's new world that is coming.<sup>30</sup>

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Dawson's Short Summery:

Middleton, makes a good case for the resurrection's connection to the restoration of earthly rule for the redeemed. Since resurrection is God's restoration of human life to what it was meant to be, it naturally requires the fulfillment of the original human dignity and status, which have been compromised by sin. If this rule is best understood as a fulfillment of the original human dignity of imago Dei, necessarily implying that the earth which is both the original context for the exercise of the imago Dei, and the context for the eschatological rule that accompanies the resurrection, then the resurrection, therefore cannot be separated from the fulfillment of the cultural mandate. In short:

1. Man was made in God's image
2. God's purpose in making man in his image is fulfillment of the cultural mandate
3. Resurrection Restores that image in man
4. Because the resurrection is structured eschatologically; already raised with Christ yet awaiting our future bodily resurrection at the eschaton.
5. So, in this interim period, we rule with Christ now and seek to fulfill the cultural mandate as we await the renewal of all thing.

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<sup>30</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *A new heaven and a new earth : reclaiming biblical eschatology*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic 2014) 139-141, 145-154.

