



THE DOCTRINE OF THE END TIMES

Mark A. Snoeberger, Ph.D.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY 8: THE DOCTRINE OF THE END TIMES

Institute for Church Leadership: Community Bible Church, Trenton, MI
Instructor: Mark A. Snoeberger (msnoeberger@dbts.edu)

I. Introduction

The doctrine of end times and events (eschatology) is a topic that has tended to wax and wane in popularity in the history of the Church. In times of ecclesiastical, economic, and political peace and prosperity, interest in the end times has characteristically waned, and premillennial ideas of a divine overhaul of the world order have been abandoned as *unnecessary*. Conversely, times of ecclesiastical, economic, and political turmoil have awakened hope of a better tomorrow, particularly one suddenly and supernaturally established by God.

In America, a century of turmoil beginning with the Civil War and reconstruction, upheaval in Europe resulting in two World Wars, economic depression, decades of skirmishes with Communism, and on the ecclesiastical front a prolonged bout between theological modernism and fundamentalism, proved to be fertile ground for progress in the study of eschatology. Several decades of conciliation and safety (the end of the Cold War, ecumenical camaraderie, and general prosperity), have seen diminished interest in eschatology.

While not unmindful of these factors, this course will build on more stable issues than these, namely hermeneutics (methods of Bible study) and exegesis (the practice of Bible study), issues that are connected unapologetically to the immutable truth claims of God's Word. Our interest in God's continuing program should not rest in our satisfaction or dissatisfaction with our temporal condition, but in our eagerness to see "every knee bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10–11).

A. Glossary of Terms: The doctrine of eschatology introduces a set of terms to our vocabulary that can overwhelm students who are unfamiliar with them. A few of these key terms that will be used with regularity in this class are as follows:

- ***Eschatology*:** The study of end times and events. Also appears in the root form *eschaton* (the last days) and the adjective form *eschatological* (having to do with end times and events).
- ***Second Coming*:** The return of Christ in glory to establish a new world order. Also known as the ***Second Advent***, but not to be confused with the *Rapture*.
- ***Rapture*:** The sudden return of Christ to remove his Church from the world, but not to directly effect any other changes the world order. Not to be confused with the *Second Coming*. The *Rapture* is held only by *Premillennialists*.
- ***Millennium*:** A period of 1,000 years in which Christ reigns over the earth. Also

appears in the adjectival form *millennial*. Belief in a Millennium is called *Millennialism* or *Chiliasm*.

- ***Premillennialism***: Belief that the *Second Coming* will precede the literal, visible 1000-year reign of Christ. Also appears in the adjectival form *premillennial*.
- ***Postmillennialism***: Belief that Christ's reign is not visible, but that world conditions will gradually improve over this period of time and culminate in the *Second Coming* of Christ (note: most postmillennialists deny a precise 1000-year duration of this period of improvement). A recent variation of this understanding called *Theonomy* or *Christian Reconstructionism* seeks to accelerate this period by aggressively promoting OT Laws as the basis for judicial, educational, and economic policies today.
- ***Amillennialism***: Denial of the 1000-year reign of Christ and affirmation that Christ's kingdom is currently present "in our hearts." The present world order will simply end with the Second Coming, effectively ushering in the eternal state.
- ***Tribulation***: A period of unparalleled trouble on the earth prior to Christ's Second Coming. Belief in the Tribulation is held only by *Premillennialists*.
- ***Pretribulationism***: Belief that the *Rapture* will occur before the *Tribulation*.
- ***Midtribulationism***: Belief that the *Rapture* will occur sometime in the middle of the *Tribulation*, at which time the Tribulation will dramatically intensify. A recent variation of this view is known as the *Pre-Wrath Rapture* view.
- ***Posttribulationism***: Belief that the Church will endure the *Tribulation* along with the rest of the world. The Church will be gathered together with Christ at the end of this period at his *Second Coming* and avoid the final judgment of the unregenerate, but few if any posttribulationists designate this "gathering" as the *Rapture*. Many posttribulationists prefer to be called *Historic Premillennialists*.

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II. The Doctrine of Physical Death

A. The Idea of Death in the Scriptures: Three Basic Meanings.

The main idea of death is *separation*, not annihilation, non-existence, or perpetual unconsciousness (e.g., the Adventist idea of soul-sleep). While Scripture occasionally uses the term *sleep* to describe death, this is probably best understood as a euphemism for death based either on (1) the language of appearance or (2) the departure of consciousness to another location (much like our euphemisms of “departing” or “passing away”).

1. Spiritual Death

Spiritual Death is the separation of the person from God. This is obviously not a metaphysical separation from God, because God is omnipresent (even in the place of the dead—Ps 139:8); instead, it is the...

- Removal of fellowship with God.

Isaiah 59:2—Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he does not hear.

See also Rom 11:15

Note also the death immediately experienced by Adam was of this description. He was barred entry to the garden, the tree of life, and the direct daily fellowship with God he had experienced there.

- Complete insensitivity to the things of God. Man is both unwilling and unable to initiate any true righteousness or positive overture to God.

Ephesians 2:1, 5, 12—You were dead in your trespasses and sins... We were dead in our transgressions... You were at that time separate from Christ...having no hope and without God in the world.

Eph 4:18–19—They walk in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life...having become callous.

See also Rom 6:4, 13; Eph 5:14; 1 Tim 5:5–6; Rev. 3:1–2.

Spiritual death is the condition of all men at birth, and its only remedy is regeneration.

2. The Second Death

The second death is the permanent and final separation of the person from God; the irrevocable perpetuation of spiritual death marked by the termination of all the benefits of common grace.

Revelation 20:14—Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the *second death*, the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:8—...their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the *second death*.

The second death is the fate of all the unregenerate, and it has no remedy.

3. Physical Death

Physical death is the temporary separation of the body from the soul/spirit.

Genesis 35:18—Her soul was departing (for she died).

James 2:26—The body without the spirit is dead.

Physical death involves the whole person. It is not as though death merely affects the body, liberating the soul/spirit from the restraints of the body. The whole person dies, and the soul, while conscious, is rendered incomplete. Paul describes the disembodied soul as “naked” or “unclothed” at death (2 Cor 5:1–4). And though this condition is “much better” than our present condition (Phil 1:23), the righteous dead still look forward to the Resurrection and the wholeness it secures.

Physical death is the inevitable fate of all men (with the notable exceptions of Enoch, Elijah, and those believers who “are live and remain” at the coming of Christ) and its remedy is resurrection.

B. The Origin of Physical Death

1. Death was not a part of the original creation.

Genesis 1:31—God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

Human existence is not intrinsically mortal. It was subject to death only after the seeds of corruption were sown in it. This was apparently true of all conscious, animate life prior to the fall (cf. Rom 8:19–22).

2. Death came as a result of Adam’s sin.

Genesis 2:17—In the day that you eat from it you will surely die.

Genesis 3:19—By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Romans 5:12—Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men (cf. vv. 15, 17).

1 Corinthians 15:22—In Adam all die.

Question: How can we explain the fact that Adam did not “surely die” on the day he ate of the fruit?

We have already suggested above that Adam died spiritually when he ate of the fruit, even though he lived on physically. This explanation, however, seems to be something of a technical escape from a more obvious meaning that Eve would likely have inferred: physical death. Indeed, Genesis 3:19 and 1 Cor 15:22, cited above, are clear in saying that *physical* death was incurred in the fall, and that its only remedy would be *physical* resurrection.

This being the case, then, how do we harmonize God’s statement that the very death in view would occur “*on the day you eat*”? Two suggestions emerge:

- God could have intended the lesser idea that “on the day you eat the seeds of corruption and death will be sown and your mortality will be assured.” This is possible, but it does not seem to be an obvious meaning.
- A better alternative is to take the phrase “in that day” of Genesis 2:17 in an idiomatic sense, and thus “When you eat you will die” or, better, “If you eat you will surely die.” While, again, these are not the most literal readings available to the English reader, the idiom is attested elsewhere in Hebrew (see the translations offered in the NIV and NLT).

C. The Causes of Physical Death

1. Direct or “Natural” Causes

Genesis 3:19—Deterioration

Psalm 103:15–16—Frailty

Psalm 90:10—Old Age

Luke 13:1—Violence

Luke 13:4—Natural Hazards and Accidents

Acts 9:39—Sickness

2. The Moral Cause—Sin

While sickness and death are not always tied to *specific, personal* sins (John 9:2–3), sin still stands behind all the “natural” causes of death.

Romans 5:12—Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men.

1 Corinthians 15:21—In Adam all die.

Psalm 90:7–11—God effectively shortens the days of the wicked.

James 1:14–15—When lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

3. The Ultimate Cause—God

God is not blameworthy for physical death—humanity alone bears all guilt associated with death. Nor does he regularly intersect our normal time-space continuum to kill men directly. However, physical death lies ultimately in the hands of God. He determines when a person leaves this life.

1 Samuel 2:6—The Lord kills and makes alive.

Job 14:5—[Man's] days are determined; the number of his months is with you; and his limits you have set so that he cannot pass.

Psalm 66:9—He “keeps us in life.”

Psalm 104:29—When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

D. The Assessment of Death

1. For Mankind in General

a. It is an enemy.

1 Corinthians 15:26—The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

b. It is inevitable.

Ecclesiastes 3:19–20—For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other.... All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust (cf. also v. 2).

Hebrews 9:27—It is appointed for men to die once...

2. For the Unsaved

a. It is the loss of all good.

The Epicurean idea “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (Luke 12:19; 1 Cor 15:32) is, for the unbeliever, fairly sound advice. The benefits of common grace that give a modicum of pleasure in this life to the unregenerate are discontinued at death.

b. It is an escape from a miserable existence.

1 Chronicles 10:4–5—Saul asks his armor-bearer to kill him.

Revelation 9:6—In those days men will seek death and will not find it.

c. It is a precursor to divine judgment.

Hebrews 9:27—It is appointed for men to die once *and after this comes judgment*.

3. For the OT Saint

- a. It was generally viewed as a gloomy, uncertain sphere of existence.

Job 10:21–22—I go—and I shall not return—to the land of darkness and deep shadow, the land of utter gloom as darkness itself, of deep shadow without order, and which shines as the darkness.

Hebrews 2:15—Through fear of death they were subject to slavery all their lives.

Also Job 17:13; 1 Sam 2:9; Pss 6:5; 88:10–12; 143:3; Lam 3:6, etc.

Reasons for this gloomy outlook:

- Uncertainty of final expiation. Christ had not yet died, and the promise of final expiation remained unfulfilled (Heb 11:39–40).
- Lack of revelation as to their immediate future. While they had hope of *final* resurrection (see below), the *intermediate* period was cloaked in considerable uncertainty.
- The promises concerning Israel's future were connected to the land, not to heaven (Gen 50:24–26; and esp. Psalm 27:13).

- b. There was hope amidst the gloom.

Job 19:25–27—I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will take his stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God.

Psalms 16:10—You will not abandon my soul to Sheol.

Hosea 13:14—I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O Sheol, is your destruction?

Luke 16:25—Lazarus experienced “comfort” in death, though it is not clear that other OT saints were privy to this detail revealed by Christ.

Also Gen 22:5; Ps 49:15; Isa 25:6–8; Dan 12:1–2.

4. For the NT Saint

- a. The fear associated death is *ultimately* alleviated by the death of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:56–57—The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Hosea 13:14).

2 Timothy 1:10—Our Savior Christ Jesus [has] abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.

That fear of death is *ultimately* alleviated in Christ does not mean that there is no temporal *discomfort* or *uncertainty* associated with death (we don't have guidebooks or websites that detail all the many experimental details about the

death event). But we do have one incredible advantage that the OT saint did not have: we have Christ and the promise that our experience will be *just like his* (Rom 6:3–4; 1 Cor 15:21ff). He made it through, and so will we.

- b. Clearer revelation about the intermediate state gives confidence of our improved situation at death.

2 Corinthians 5:8—We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Philippians 2:13—I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

- c. Death is still an enemy.

1 Corinthians 15:26—The last enemy yet to be abolished is death.

No one, even a Christian, ever has *unreserved* delight about the prospect of death. Death remains an ugly and abnormal reminder of the ravages of sin, and is attended by feelings of loss, uncertainty, broken relationships, and an incomplete existence (2 Cor 5:1–4). Further, death remains today a divine instrument of *chastening* (1 Cor 11:27–32; Heb 12:9). If death were in no sense an enemy of humanity, chastening by death would not be particularly disconcerting—but it is.

- d. Death is not, however, inevitable or permanent.

1 Corinthians 15:51— We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

III. The Intermediate State

- A. Definition: That sphere of conscious existence between physical death and the Resurrection.

Resurrection does not immediately follow death, being associated primarily with the eschatological arrival(s) of Christ (1 Cor 15:51–54; 1 Thess 4:13–17). Nonetheless, our souls do not “sleep” during this period. The dead are conscious (Luke 16:19–31; 23:43; 2 Cor 5:8).

- B. The Intermediate State in the Old Testament

- 1. The Biblical Terms

- a. *Sheol*

This Hebrew term is used 65 times in the OT, and is translated variously as “the grave” (31X KJV, most instances in the NIV84), “hell” (31X KJV), “pit,” “death,” etc. The NASB, ESV, and HCSB simply leave the word untranslated as *Sheol* in a majority of cases. Perhaps the best translation is “place of the dead,” the favored translation used in the NLT.

b. *Hades*

This Greek term is used 11 times in the NT, and the Septuagint uses this term to translate the Hebrew term in 61 of 65 uses in the OT. The use of *Hades* in Acts 2:27, 31 to quote Psalm 16:10 definitively equates *Hades* with *Sheol*.

2. The Nature of *Sheol/Hades*

a. It is not Death.

While death and *Sheol* are closely related (Rev 20:13–14; etc.), they are not the same thing. It is probably best to think of *Sheol* as the destination of souls, and death as that event which brings the soul to *Sheol*.

Psalm 49:14—As sheep they are appointed for *Sheol*; death shall be their shepherd.

b. It is not the Grave

(1) Both Hebrew and Greek have distinct words for the grave

(a) Jacob requested to be buried in a grave (*qeber*) in Caanan (Gen 50:5 cf. 37:35).

(b) Lazarus's body was in a grave (*mnemeion*) for four days (John 11:17).

(2) In Scripture, the *grave* is technically the destination of the material remains of a person and *Sheol/Hades* the destination of the immaterial part of a person.

Isaiah 14:15, 19—The King of Babylon is “thrust down to *Sheol*,” but his body is described as having no tomb..

Psalm 141:17—While one's bones are “scattered at the mouth of *Sheol*,” the soul actually enters *Sheol*.

(3) It is not the final destination of the damned.

Revelation 20:14—Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

(4) One can never return from *Sheol* to participate in the land of the living.

Psalm 89:48—No man can deliver his soul from the power of *Sheol*.

Job 7:9; 17:13–16—The inhabitants of *Sheol* cannot return to the land of the living.

2 Samuel 12:23—But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.

Ecclesiastes 9:10—It is a place without knowledge or wisdom with reference to the world of the living.

(5) It is nonetheless controlled by God.

Psalm 139:8—If I make my bed in *Sheol*, you are there.

Job 26:6—*Sheol* is naked before God.

3. The Inhabitants of OT *Sheol/Hades*

a. The Wicked Dead

Psalm 9:17—The wicked will return to *Sheol*, even all the nations who forget God.

Psalm 31:17—Let the wicked...be silent in *Sheol*.

Revelation 20:13—*Hades* gives up the wicked dead for transfer into the Lake of Fire.

b. The Righteous Dead

Genesis 37:35—Jacob expected to join Joseph there (cf. 42:38; 44:29, 31).

1 Samuel 12:23—David expected to join his infant child there.

Also Isaiah 38:10 (Hezekiah); Job (Job 14:13).

c. Certain Fallen Angels?

Luke 8:31—The legion of angels “were imploring him not to command them to go away into the *abyss*,” preferring instead inhabitation of a herd of pigs.

Jude 6–7—Angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, he has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day (cf. 2 Pet 2:4, which identifies their destination as *Tartarus*).

Question: Are some angels incarcerated while others roam free? If so, why?

Some suggest that the reference to “bound angels” in Jude and 2 Peter is simply a reference to all demons—all those angels confirmed in wickedness and thus “bound in sin.” The incident in Luke 8 suggests contrarily that some demons have greater liberty than others.

Assuming that this is the case, theories abound as to the reason why certain angels are incarcerated and others remain free. Some connect Jude and 2 Peter to Genesis 6 and suggest that certain sexual sins are in view, but this is unlikely for several reasons. While far from certain, a more promising link is found in Luke 8 (the only occasion in Scripture where demons were actually threatened with incarceration). The crime described in Luke is that of *possessing a human being*. This fits plausibly with the language of Jude 6–7 that the incarcerated angels “abandoned their proper abode,” and is this professor’s preference.

In the final analysis, however, there is probably insufficient data to come to dogmatic conclusions.

4. Compartments of *Sheol/Hades*

a. The Place of the Righteous Dead—called Paradise or Abraham’s Bosom

Luke 16:22—Lazarus died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.

Luke 23:43—Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “Today you shall be with me in Paradise.”

b. The Place of the Wicked Dead—called “Lower Sheol.”

Deuteronomy 32:22—For a fire is kindled in my anger, and burns to the lowest part of *Sheol*.

Also Psalm 86:13; Prov 9:18; 15:24; Isa 14:9.

c. The Place of Certain Fallen Angels—The Abyss, Tartarus, Abaddon?

Luke 8:31—The legion of angels “were imploring him not to command them to go away into the *abyss*,” preferring instead inhabitation of a herd of pigs.

Jude 6–7—Angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, he has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day (cf. 2 Pet 2:4, which identifies their destination as *Tartarus*).

Cf. Revelation 9:1–2, 11: in the end times demon hordes emerge from the *abyss* under the leadership of Abaddon (also 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3).

5. The Location of *Sheol/Hades*

Created beings—even spirit beings (see Dan 10:13)—are not omnipresent; they are localized. So it follows that the dead are in some literal location. *Sheol/Hades* is not merely a suspended state or a condition of the mind. While most scholars claim ignorance of the location of *Sheol*, several factors suggest that it is located in the center of the earth.

Numbers 16:33—The earth opened its mouth and [Korah and his followers].... So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them.

Amos 9:2—One can “dig into Sheol.”

Genesis 37:35; Isa 5:14; Matt 11:23—People descend into it.

Psalm 63:9; Matt 12:40; Eph 4:9—It is described variously as the “depths,” the “heart,” and the “lower parts” of the earth.

Most commentators and theologians suggest that the language used here is metaphorical. The geo-physical possibility of *Sheol* being at the earth’s center is also a matter of some doubt. The consistency and variety of expressions used in Scripture, though, at least points to this possibility. Again, however, a dogmatic conclusion is probably inadvisable.

6. The Condition of Those in *Sheol/Hades*.

a. The inhabitants of *Sheol* are uniformly described as conscious. They recognize, feel, speak, remember, know, see, and hear.

Luke 16:23–25—The rich man and Lazarus.

Deut 32:22—The wicked dead experience God’s wrath.

1 Peter 3:18—They receive and understand divine messages.

Isaiah 14:9—The dead anticipate the arrival of the king of Babylon.

Question: What about passages like Psalm 6:5; 115:17; and Isaiah 38:18 that there is no praise or thanksgiving in Sheol, or Ecclesiastes 9:10, which denies activity, planning, knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol?

It is probably best to see these in reference with the experiences of life. After death there are no new opportunities for planned activities, no accumulation of knowledge or chances to apply knowledge, no knowledge of what is occurring on earth, and, for the wicked dead, no comforts or pleasures of any kind. These verses are not speaking absolutely of man's awareness, but of his epistemology relative to meaningful activity in the world of the living.

Question: Do people have bodies during the intermediate state?

Among the Greeks (esp. the followers of Platonic thought) it was popular to regard the body as a restrictive, distasteful thing, and they looked forward with anticipation to the liberation of the soul from the shackles of corporeality. Paul clearly had a different understanding of his body in 2 Corinthians 5. He does not look forward to the loss of bodily existence, choosing descriptors like "soul-nakedness" (v. 3) and an unsavory "unclothed" existence (v. 4). So it is clear that the Platonic idea is incorrect—having a body is a good thing that renders humans *complete*.

That this fact demands corporeality in the intermediate state, however, is not certain. Some, arguing from the philosophical point above and citing texts in which individuals in the intermediate state have perceptions, pain, thirst, speech (Luke 16:23–25; Rev 6:9–11) and even body parts such as tongues and fingers (Luke 16:23–25), argue that the dead have corporeality. Further, whenever we see the OT dead reappear later in Scripture, they have a visible form (1 Sam 28:14; Matthew 17:3).

On the other hand, Paul speaks of becoming "clothed" with a new body not at death, but at the *Resurrection* (1 Cor 5) which is connected with the Second Coming. We also find that the resurrection bodies are in some sense connected to the *original* bodies of the dead—the graves open and the refurbished body emerges to unite with a waiting and presumably *disembodied* soul (John 5:28 et al). The non-corporeal view also emphasizes more completely the glory of resurrection: if saints receive a superior body *at death*, what is the attraction of another one?

While good men differ, it seems easier to defend the absence of an intermediate body. That a human is incomplete without a body is clearly a biblical idea; nonetheless, it does not follow that a disembodied human spirit ceases to be human or becomes some sort of anomalous incongruity. Furthermore, that the dead see, hear, speak, and perceive does not demand the existence of a body. Other incorporeal beings (God, angels) have all these sensory functions apart from a body, so it seems reasonable that the souls of men could have these functions without a body. Again, however, dogmatism is ill-advised.

b. The wicked dead are in torment and punishment

Luke 16:23–25—The rich man was "in torment."

Deuteronomy 32:22—The wicked dead experience God’s wrath.

Isaiah 57:21—There is no rest for the wicked (in context, after death, cf. vv. 1–2).

- c. The righteous dead are in a state of rest and comfort.

Luke 16:23–25—Lazarus was “comforted” in Abraham’s bosom.

Isaiah 57:1–2—When a righteous man perishes he is “taken away from evil and enters into peace.”

1 Samuel 28:15—Samuel, when called back by Saul through the witch at Endor, greets Saul by asking him, “Why have you disturbed my rest?”

7. Deliverance from *Sheol/Hades*

- a. There is no hope of deliverance for the wicked dead.

Luke 16:26—Between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that...none may cross over from there to us.

1 Peter 3:18—Christ’s preaching to the “disobedient spirits” was not to give them a second chance at salvation. Instead, it sealed their doom (see below).

- b. For the righteous there was hope of deliverance.

Psalm 16:10—You will not abandon my soul to Sheol.

Psalm 49:15—God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.

Hosea 13:14—I will ransom them from the power of Sheol.

C. The Intermediate State Since the Resurrection of Christ

- 1. When Christ died, he went to Sheol/Hades and fundamentally altered its structure.

- a. Biblical Support for Christ’s Visit to *Sheol/Hades*

Acts 2:27–31—You will not abandon my soul to *Hades*.

Luke 23:43—Jesus promised the thief that they would be together in Paradise on that very day.

Romans 10:7—Who will descend into the *abyss* (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)?

Ephesians 4:8–9—He also had descended into the “lower parts of the earth.”

Note: For a denial of this understanding see Wayne Grudem, “He Did Not Descend into Hell: A Plea for Following the Scriptures Instead of the Apostles’ Creed,” *JETS* 34 (March 1991) 103–113.

While Grudem’s arguments are surely not to be dismissed out of hand, I find the response by David P. Scaer more compelling (“He Did Descend into Hell: In Defense of the Apostles’ Creed,” *JETS* 35 [March 1992]: 91–99). The student is encouraged to examine the data and answer the question for himself.

- b. The Purpose of Christ’s Visit in *Sheol/Hades*

(1) He did not go to hell to complete his suffering in payment for sin.

- Christ's cry "It is finished" signaled not only the end of his life but the completion of his atoning suffering/death.
- Christ's presence in *Paradise* suggests that his purpose was not to suffer.
- While *Sheol/Hades* is a place of torment for the unregenerate, it is not the place of final judgment and payment of sin's debt.

(2) He instead brought deliverance to OT saints then in Paradise and took them to be with God.

1 Peter 4:6—The gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

Ephesians 4:8—He ascended on high, led captive a host of captives, and gave gifts to men.

When Christ died, he made final expiation for sin, rendering it possible for the righteous dead who died "without having received the promise" (Heb 11:39) to become "the spirits of righteous men made perfect" (Heb 12:23). In the summary words of Hebrews 9:15, "Since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called have been freed to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."

It is possible, though by no means certain, that a tantalizing event (offered without commentary after the death of Christ) may reflect this transition of OT saints from Paradise to Heaven:

Matthew 27:50–53—When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment...tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

(3) He Confirmed the Doom of Sinners

1 Peter 3:19—He went and made proclamation to the spirits [now] in prison, who once were disobedient.

This is not a "second chance" for regeneration, but a message of doom. Why these specific sinners were mentioned is not clear. Probably this is a well-known and defined group representative of the all the OT unregenerate. The "chained" fallen angels (Jude 6–7) may also have received this proclamation.

c. The Results of Christ's Visit to Sheol/Hades

(1) "Paradise" is now in the third heaven with God.

2 Corinthians 12:1–4—Paul was caught up into the "third heaven," a place he also called "Paradise."

(2) No NT saint will ever again enter Sheol/Hades

Matthew 16:18—The gates of Hades will not overcome [church saints].

See the explanation above: this text does *not* teach, as the postmillennialist does, that the church will storm hell's gates and conquer it. Rather, the verse teaches that the doors of hell will never close on the church.

(3) Upon death believers go immediately to be with God.

Acts 7:59–60—Stephen looked *up to heaven* and asked Jesus to receive his spirit.

Philippians 1:23—I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

2 Corinthians 5:8—To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.

(4) Sheol/Hades remains unchanged for the wicked.

2 Peter 2:9—The Lord...keeps the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.

Revelation 20:13–14—The wicked dead remain in Hades until the Great White Throne Judgment.

IV. The Second Coming of Christ

A. The Second Coming in the Old Testament

1. The principal divisions of the Bible fall along the lines of the coming of Christ

- Christ Is Coming (Old Testament)
- Christ Has Come (Gospels)
- Christ Is Coming Again (the balance of the New Testament)

2. The Old Testament makes many clear prophecies about the coming of Christ, but does not distinguish two “advents” or comings.

a. The OT presents two apparently conflicting lines of prediction about the Messiah.

(1) A Lowly Messiah

Isaiah 53:2–9—The Suffering Servant

Zechariah 13:7—The Smitten Shepherd

Daniel 9:26—The Cut-off and Destitute Messiah

(2) A Great Messiah

Isaiah 9:6–7—Mighty God; a prince with a limitless kingdom

Daniel 7:14—And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

b. The Problem of Interpretation

1 Peter 1:10–11—The prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. [Cf. Dan 12:6–13]

The prophets were aware of the prophetic *events* but not the prophetic *timing*. In retrospect, we can say that they were not informed that there would be a first advent that ended in rejection and a second advent in glory.

B. The Second Coming and the Church

These notes will defend a pretribulational coming of Christ to remove his Church to Heaven. This “rapture” will be followed by a great Tribulation and thence by a second stage of Christ’s coming, this time to establish his glorious Millennial Kingdom. It is conceded that a *premillennial second coming* is more easily defended than a *pretribulational rapture*; however, we will deal with these events in chronological order.

1. The Rapture of the Church

a. The Idea of a Rapture.

The English term *rapture* does not appear in Scripture. It is derived from the Latin term *rapto* that is used in the Vulgate to translate the “catching up” of the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The idea of a sudden removal from earth to a separate sphere of existence, however, appears several times in the NT.

John 14:1–3—I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

1 Thessalonians 1:10—...and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 4:17—We who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 2:1 is written “with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him.”

b. The Rapture in Church History

A serious charge that has long been levied against proponents of the Rapture of the Church is that it is a “new” doctrine created in the 1820s by sensationalists such as Emmanuel Lacunza, Edward Irving, and Margaret McDonald, and only afterward incorporated by J. N. Darby into dispensationalism. That the Rapture of the Church has had a resurgence of interest since that time is indisputable; however, note the following:

(1) The idea of the rapture that is separate from the premillennial Second Coming

of Christ was held widely in the church until A.D. 325, and intermittently thereafter in the history of the church. Since most of the early church fathers viewed their own sufferings as part of this Tribulation, it is unlikely that any of these were pretribulationists in the modern dispensational conception. Instead, they held variously to either a posttribulational or midtribulational Rapture (i.e., the church escapes only the worst portions of the Tribulation and the final destruction of Earth). Larry Crutchfield describes the view of the pre-*Ante-Nicene* fathers as compellingly as “imminently intratribulational.” But as Erickson (a posttribulationist) notes, the early church fathers planted the “seeds from which the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture could be developed” and suggests that “the premillennialism of the church’s first centuries may have included belief in a pretribulational rapture of the church” (*Contemporary Options in Eschatology*, 112, 131).

- (2) Though the posttribulationist idea of the rapture has enjoyed the most acceptance among the rapture theories, a pretribulational rapture can be traced at least as far back as several early Baptist leaders such as Morgan Edwards and John Gill. See chaps. 4–5 of *When the Trumpet Sounds*.
- (3) While the witness of church history should never be taken lightly, history is not our final court of appeal in doctrinal matters. Many important doctrines of Scripture have been unpopular in the historical church (e.g., justification by faith), but this does not diminish their orthodoxy. Further, as noted above, several sociological factors can be cited as reasons for the unpopularity of pretribulationism during much of the history of the Church.

c. Inadequate Theories of the Rapture

(1) The Partial Rapture Theory

This theory states that only faithful and deserving believers will be raptured prior to the Tribulation (Luke 21:36; 1 Cor 9:27; Phil 3:11; 1 John 2:28). Less deserving believers will endure all or part of the Tribulation. Problems with this view include:

- It ignores the fact that genuine *belief* is the prerequisite of being included in the Rapture (John 14:1–3).
- It falsely dichotomizes belief and a sanctified life, positing a sustained category of “unspiritual” Christians. The passages above are not warning against *carnal* Christianity, but against *pseudo*-Christianity.
- It turns passages that exhort Christians to *watchfulness* for the Rapture into *conditions for participation* in the Rapture (Titus 2:11–13; Heb 9:24–28; etc.).
- It misinterprets the Olivet Discourse to reference *faithful and unfaithful Christians just prior to the Rapture* instead of *believing and unbelieving Jews just prior to the Second Coming* (Matt 24:40–51; Matt 25:1–13; Luke 21:36).
- It divides the bride of Christ, allowing some to participate in the wedding and

others to miss the wedding. Scripture is clear that all those *in Christ* (regenerate church saints) are raptured (1 Thess 4:15–16; 1 Cor 15:51–52).

(2) The Midtribulational Rapture Theory

This theory states that the church will endure the first 3½ years of Daniel’s 70th week, but that this period is not marked by the wrath that dominates the “Great and Terrible Day of the Lord” during the latter 3½ years. The Rapture occurs at the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15 (hence the “last trumpet” of 1 Cor 15:52; also 1 Thess 4:16) and the translation (rapture?) of the two witnesses of Revelation 11:11–12.

Problems with this view include:

- The “last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15 is probably better understood as a “last times trumpet,” not the chronologically last trumpet (See Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 802). Besides, a chronologically later trumpet (Matt 24:31) actually closes the Tribulation, so to make the Revelation 11:15 the “last trumpet” seems arbitrary.
- The first half of the Tribulation is a time of incredible wrath (Rev 6:16). In fact, over half the world’s population dies (Rev 6:8; 9:15)!
- It denies the imminency of the Rapture. We should be able to time it precisely.
- The two witnesses (Rev 11) are clearly connected with Temple life, and should not be confused with church saints.
- Alternative theories, which places the Rapture between the fifth and sixth seals in response to the cries of the martyrs (6:9–11) or with the redemption of the 144,000 “from the earth” (Rev 14:3), suffer from similar deficiencies.

(3) The Posttribulational Rapture Theory

This view typically rejects the term *rapture*; nonetheless, adherents recognize an end-times “gathering” of the redeemed of all the ages who then act as an escort or entourage for the Second Coming of Christ in triumph at the end of the age. This view has been very popular historically; in fact, its adherents often favor the label “historic premillennialism.” Because of the depth and complexity of this view, I will deal with the basic tenets and rebuttals of this view individually.

- (a) **The Olivet Discourse implies that saints endure the Tribulation, seek deliverance during this event (esp. Matt 24:31), and even possess “signs” of the Coming of Christ for this period (Matt 24:3 *et passim*).**

Answers:

- The trumpet of Matthew 24:31 does not necessarily share identity with the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 (see above).
- The “removal” that the Olivet Discourse saints anticipated was not their own removal, but the removal of the unregenerate (24:40, 41; 25:30, 41). Those

who *remain* that are gathered together (24:31; 25:10) for eternal bliss.

- The individuals being rescued here are not described as Church saints but as a Jewish remnant (see the Jewish references in 24:3, 14, 15, 16, 20; 25:1). They are “elect,” to be sure (24:22, 24, 31), but they are not *Church* saints. To classify the redeemed of all ages equally as the Church is to ignore the new category of believers baptized into Christ (1 Cor 12:13) from Pentecost to the Rapture. The Olivet Discourse contains instruction for Tribulation Jews, not for the Church. The Church is absent in the Olivet Discourse, even as it is absent from Revelation 4ff.

(b) 1 Thessalonians 2:2 implies that the Day of the Lord *precedes* the Rapture. And since the Bible elsewhere describes the “Great and Terrible Day of the Lord” as occurring *after* the Tribulation, the Rapture must logically follow the Tribulation.

Answers:

- This understanding of the Day of the Lord is too narrow. While the Bible points forward to a culminating day when the universe will be subjected to him and the creative order restored, the Bible also speaks of the Day of the Lord more broadly as any day on which God bares his arm and intrudes upon our normal time-space continuum to effect his will directly and establish order. Day of the Lord terminology is used to describe historical events (Ezek 13:5; Lam 2:22; Amos 5:18, 20) and also a variety of eschatological events, including the Tribulation (Joel 1:15–2:2), the Rapture and Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 1:8), Armageddon (Joel 3:14), the Millennium (Zech 14:9), and the dissolution of heaven and earth (2 Pet 3:10).
- The purpose of 2 Thessalonians 2 is not to give *signs* of the Rapture, but to prove, since various Day-of-the-Lord events were still future, that the Thessalonian saints had not “missed” the Rapture. He is arguing from the greater to the smaller: since the broad Day of the Lord was still future, the Rapture (a part of that Day) must also still be future.

(c) The verb used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 sometimes denotes a procession to meet a party and then accompany him on his entry.

Answers:

- Though the verb (*apantano*) is sometimes used this way, sometimes it does not (Luke 17:12; John 4:51).
- John 14:3 implies that the destination of those raptured is “the Father’s house” where Christ is currently preparing a place for us, and from which he will arrive.
- This scenario allows no time for the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 4:5; 1 Thess 2:19; Rev 3:11), which occurs after the Rapture, and the Marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:7ff) which precedes the Second Coming.
- This scenario cannot account for the Millennial population. Zechariah 8:4–5, Isaiah 65:20–23, etc., speak of saints in their natural bodies in the

Millennium. If at the Rapture our bodies are “changed” or *glorified* (1 Cor 15:51) and all the unregenerate are put to death (Matt 25:41), then who populates the Millennial Kingdom? Whence come the nations who will be “deceived” by Satan at the close of the Millennium (Rev 20:8)? Douglas Moo, who champions the Posttribulationist view in the *Three Views on the Rapture* debate, admits the seriousness of this problem (p. 161), then goes on to suggest that (1) unbelievers may enter into the Millennium, and (2) that the large number of Jews who, at the Second Coming, “look on him whom they pierced” in faith, enter into the Millennium in non-glorified bodies. This explanation is meager, and, in fact conflicts with the data of Matthew 25:41, and the presence of *nations* in Revelation 20:8.

(d) 2 Thessalonians 1:6–7 says that church saints will be given rest at the revelation of Jesus Christ in power and glory (a reference to the Second Coming).

Answer: The Coming of Christ must be viewed as a complex of events that occurs in stages and not an event. That believers can expect rest at the first stage (the Rapture) is certainly true, but it is also true that ultimate satisfaction comes when God “deals out retribution” at the second phase (the Second Coming) against those who have persecuted believers.

d. The Pretribulation Rapture of the Church

The Pretribulation Rapture of the Church teaches that the church will be gathered *to heaven* before the tribulation period, thus escaping the entire period of God’s eschatological wrath. Note the following:

(1) Direct Promises of Scripture That Argue for a Pretribulation Rapture

- (a) Revelation 3:10–11 — “Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly.”
- The description of the hour of testing as being universal in extent suggests that this testing is broader than that of the Philadelphian church being directly addressed.
 - The fact that it is “the” hour of testing indicates that this is a well known and clearly defined period of time described elsewhere in Scripture, not a local persecution known only to the Philadelphian church. The seven churches of Revelation 1–3 are historical churches, but they have a representative function in that the information in these letters is applicable to the church in all ages.
 - The fact that v. 11 closes with a promise of Christ’s coming indicates that the source of deliverance is the arrival of Christ.
 - The verb “kept from” denotes *deliverance*, not “protection through” the Tribulation, as suggested by some posttribulationists. Note the following:

- Deliverance is the most common meaning of this construction—to convey the idea of “protection through” requires a different Greek preposition (see John 17:15, the only other NT use of this phrase).
 - A numberless throng of saints will die in the Tribulation (e.g., Rev 6:9–11), which in itself proves that saints are not summarily protected “through” the Tribulation.
 - The posttribulationist response that the church is protected from *God’s* wrath but not from *man’s* wrath rings hollow for the Philadelphian context, which was suffering human persecution, not divine wrath.
- (b) 1 Thessalonians 1:10—You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.
- The verb phrase used (*rhuomai ek*) is most commonly translated as “rescue from,” and clearly cannot mean “deliverance through.” The latter translation would be absurd for all the other NT uses of this verb phrase: Lot from Sodom (2 Pet 2:9); Paul from death (Rom 7:24; 2 Cor 1:10), believers from the domain of darkness and to the kingdom of his dear Son (Col 1:13) and Paul from the lion’s mouth (2 Tim 4:17).
 - The deliverance from the wrath in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is in the arrival of Jesus from heaven.
 - The wrath, while eschatological, clearly is not the final wrath of hell (as some suppose), as can easily be seen in the context of 1 Thess 2–3. Here we find that the persecution of the readers was so intense that some believed that they were already in the tribulation, having somehow missed Christ’s coming. Yet no one confused this with the flames of the Lake of Fire.
- (c) 1 Thessalonians 5:9—God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Again, context demands *eschatological* wrath, but not final damnation. It is in the context of “times and seasons” (v. 1) and the “Day of the Lord” (v. 2).
 - The context suggests that the instruction is greater than just the Thessalonian church. The contrast is between the **Night People**, who promise peace and safety (v. 2), experience destruction in the Day of the Lord (vv. 2–3), and are in darkness (v. 5), and the **Day People**, who do not experience destruction in the Day of the Lord (v. 4), have faith (v. 8), obtain salvation (v. 9), and escape God’s wrath (v. 9).
- (d) 2 Thessalonians 2:6–8 and the removal of the “Restrainer.”
- In this passage something is removed from the world that allows the Antichrist to assert his authority and commence his terrible reign. Some suggest that the “restrainer” is Paul, Rome, or the Jewish nation, but these have all been removed with no identifiable Antichrist being revealed. Others suggest that the Holy Spirit is removed, but, as we shall see, many people are regenerated and grow in their sanctification during the Tribulation, demanding the presence of the Spirit. The most likely candidate for this

“restrainer” is the moral/ethical restraint of church saints worldwide.

- This is confirmed by the context of 2 Thess 2–3. Here we find that the persecution of the readers was so intense that some believed that they were already in the tribulation, having somehow missed Christ’s coming. Even in their confusion, they correctly recognized that there will be a defined tribulation period distinct from eternal judgment. They were simply confused about their participation in it, not realizing that they would be “taken out” prior to this time of eschatological wrath.

(2) The Argument from the Place of the Church in the Book of Revelation

- (a) Despite the glut of references to the Church in Revelation 1–3, all references to the Church on earth cease abruptly for the entire book of Revelation.
- (b) On the other hand, we find the “elders” in heaven (4:4), and also the “bride” of Christ (Rev 19:7 cf. Eph 5:26–27). The bride also accompanies Christ in his final return (Rev 19:14). The fact of the marriage of Christ to the Church in Revelation 19 strongly implies that the church in its entirety is present: what sort of groom would Christ be if he went ahead with the wedding ceremony while a portion of the bride is enduring unmerciful persecution on earth?
- (c) This is in keeping with passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and John 14:3 which indicate that believers are removed from the earth to meet Christ in the clouds and be with him in the place that he is preparing. Note that the grammar of John 14 does not indicate that he will bring this place to us, but us to the place.

(3) The Argument from the Purpose of the Tribulation

The Tribulation is described as the time of *Jacob’s* trouble (Jer 30:7) and marks the seventieth week of God’s dealings with *Israel* (Dan 9:24). Luke further describes this period as one of great distress for *Israel* (Luke 21:23), and culminates in the wholesale embrace of Messiah by the ethnically defined *House of David* (Zech 12:10). Since, as we have seen, these designations are never used to reference the Church, we conclude that the Tribulation is not directed toward the Church, but represents the promised renewal of divine attention toward the chosen nation of ethnic Israel. Dispensationally speaking, it is not surprising and in fact is to be expected that the Church not participate in this event.

(4) The Argument from Imminency

Imminency is the doctrine that (1) no one knows the time of the rapture; it may occur at any moment and (2) that the rapture is fundamentally “signless”: no prophecy need be fulfilled before the rapture: it is both unannounced and unexpected. If the doctrine can be biblically established, it is argued, then the Rapture cannot occur at the middle or end of the Tribulation, since these could be precisely timed and anticipated.

(a) The Biblical Ground of Imminency

- Paul thought of himself as a potential participant in the rapture (1 Cor 15:51–53; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:15–17).

- Several texts teach that Christ's coming is "at hand," that is, liable to happen suddenly at any time (Rom 13:12; Jas 5:8–9; 1 John 2:18; 1 Pet 4:7),
- Further, we are instructed to "watch" for his return (1 Cor 1:7–8; Phil 3:20; Titus 2:13).

(b) Objections to Imminency

Several passages imply that there are signs during the eschatological period. There are none, however, that are demonstrably *rapture* passages. Note the following:

- The coming of the man of sin (2 Thess 2:3) and the signing of the treaty with Israel (Dan 9:27) are essential to the commencement of the *Tribulation*, but these need not necessarily occur before the *Rapture*. Likewise, the Temple will be in operation sometime during the first half of the Tribulation (Dan 9:27), but the Temple need not be rebuilt for the Rapture to occur.
- The exhortations to watchfulness in Matt 24–25 are exhortations for Israel to watch for the Second Coming from the standpoint of the Tribulation, not exhortations for the Church to watch for the Rapture. Note the following:
 - The occasion for Matthew 24 & 25 (see esp. 24:3 and 24:15) was the destruction of the temple, false messiahs, Mosaic ordinances, and other Jewish phenomena. The occasion for 1 Thessalonians 4 was concern about a resurrection of Church saints.
 - Matthew 24 & 25 is filled with signs of the Second Coming. 1 Thessalonians describes a sudden event.
 - In Matthew 24 & 25 unbelievers are taken away and consigned to outer darkness and eternal punishment, while believers remain to greet the Lord, feast with him, and receive authoritative positions in the kingdom. In 1 Thessalonians 4 believers are taken away to be with Christ.
 - Matthew 24 & 25 deals with individuals living on the earth; 1 Thessalonians 4 deals primarily with the resurrection of dead Church saints.
 - The specific term "the dead *in Christ*" a term used strictly of Church saints, is used in 1 Thessalonians 4, while Matthew 24 & 25 employs a generic term "elect," which applies variously to Israel, the Church, even angels and Jesus himself.
 - Unbelievers figure prominently in Matthew 24 & 25. They are absent in 1 Thessalonians 4.
 - Angels do the gathering in Matthew 24 & 25; we simply rise in 1 Thessalonians 4.

(c) The Importance of Imminency to a Pretribulational Rapture

The language of eager expectation and alertness can be used for both imminent and non-imminent events (the Rapture and Second Coming, respectively). However, the compounding of the language of expectation in the context of the Rapture together with Paul's anticipation of possibly participating in the Rapture strongly suggest that the Rapture of the church is an imminent event distinct from

the Second Coming.

2. The Home of the Church During the Eschaton

a. During the Tribulation, the Church is in Heaven.

John 14:1–3—“In my Father’s house”

b. During the Millennium, the Church and other NT saints will reign with Christ.

Revelation 3:21—He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Revelation 20:4—I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

c. During the eternal state, the church will inhabit the “new Jerusalem” with the angels, the saints of all the ages, and God himself.

Revelation 21:2, 9–10— I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.... “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

Abraham (Hebrews 11:10, 16); the nations (Rev 21:24), and angels (Heb 12:22).

Revelation 21:3—Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be among them.

3. The Marriage of the Church

a. The Betrothal

2 Corinthians 11:2—For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

b. The Preparation of the Bride

Ephesians 5:25–27—Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

c. The Wedding Proper

In the Ancient Near East, the marriage festivities had two parts. First, there was a ceremony and meal at the home of the bride’s father, and second, the entire wedding party moved to the home of the bridegroom, where a second feast was

held. The marriage of Christ to his bride likewise has two stages: the marriage proper and the marriage supper.

Revelation 19:1, 7—The marriage takes place in heaven, apparently sometime near the close of the Tribulation (verse 1 indicates that the wedding takes place *after* the events of Revelation 17–18).

Revelation 19:9—The marriage supper takes place after the wedding, but apparently not in heaven, but on earth (cf. Luke 12:36 and Matthew 25:10, where the remnant of believers at the Second Coming are described as preparing for the return of the master to the wedding feast).

d. Participants in the Wedding Ceremony

(1) Christ, the Groom

(2) The Church, the Bride (Ephesians 5:32 cf. 1 Cor 12:13)

(3) OT Saints, the Friends of the Bridegroom (John 3:28–29)?

(4) Tribulation Saints, the Attendants of the Virgin (Matt 25:1–10).

V. The Doctrine of Antichrist

A. The Meaning of *Antichrist* in Scripture

1. The Greek preposition *anti* has a variety of meanings, all of which seem to apply to Antichrist. It is difficult to determine which is intended by the biblical authors.

a. *Anti* can mean “against,” denoting opposition.

2 Thessalonians 2:4—He “will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped.”

See also Rev 17:14; 19:19.

b. *Anti* can mean “instead,” denoting substitution or imposture.

2 Thessalonians 2:4—He sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

2 Thessalonians 2:9–11—He uses counterfeit miracles to deceive.

2. References to the Antichrist in Scripture.

a. The designation *antichrist* appears only in John’s epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), and only once of the eschatological Antichrist (1 John 2:18a). The other uses of *antichrist* in John’s epistles describe contemporary people with characteristics of *the* Antichrist, whom John views as a real eschatological person.

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

1 John 4:3—Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from

God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Note: While there have been and continue to be many historical individuals who may be described as “antichristian,” these are all “antichristian” with reference to a single archetypal Antichrist whose world dominance is wholly future. Contemporary attempts to identify this man within current events (e.g., the Pope or the Catholic Church, Hitler, Communism, etc.) are misplaced.

- b. Other NT designations for Antichrist as a single, identifiable, personal, and eschatological arch-opponent of Christ include
 - the “Beast” (Rev 13ff)
 - the “Man of Lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:3, 8)
 - the “Abomination of Desolations” (Mark 13:14)
- c. The OT speaks of a similar eschatological arch-opponent of God, describing him as the “little horn” (Dan 7:8), the coming prince (Dan 9:26), the willful king (Dan 11:36), the worthless shepherd (Zech 11:16–17), etc.

B. The Description of Antichrist

1. He will be a quintessential man

a. He will be a great orator

Daniel 7:8—His mouth utters great boasts.

See also Revelation 13:2, 5

b. He will be a military genius.

Revelation 13:4—Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?

See also Dan 7:8, 24; Rev 6:1–2.

c. He will be a political genius.

His rise to dominance will be due to his apparent solution of the Jewish problem (Dan 9:27), and he will successfully wed church and state (Rev 17).

d. He will possess universal charisma

Revelation 13:3–4—The whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; and they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast.

2. He will be morally destitute.

a. He is completely antinomian.

2 Thessalonians 2:3, 8—He is the “man of lawlessness,” eschewing all external restraints.

- b. He is a self-aggrandizing law unto himself.

Daniel 11:36–37—He will “do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god....He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all” (cf. 2 Thess 2:4).

- c. He is a blasphemer

Daniel 11:36—He will “speak monstrous things against the God of gods.”

See also Revelation 13:1, 5, 6.

3. The Origin of Antichrist

- a. Ethnically, he is a Jew.

Daniel 11:37—He is described as showing to regard for the *elohim* of this fathers, probably a reference to his Jewish lineage.

This may explain the readiness of the Jews to embrace him (John 5:43?)

- b. Nationally/Geographically he emerges from the ashes of the Roman Empire.

Daniel 7:7–8—He emerges from the fourth beast.

Daniel 9:26 identifies the Antichrist as the prince of the people who cut off Messiah.

Revelation 13:1; 17:3, 9–12 identifies Antichrist as governing the 10-horned Roman coalition, perhaps to be equated with the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue of Daniel 2.

Note: Though the revived or “Holy Roman Empire,” which dates from the Carolingian period, is largely West European, the original Roman Empire at its height controlled not only most of Europe, but also much of Africa and Asia. It is highly unlikely that Daniel’s “ten horns” are to be equated with the ten most dominant nations of the European Union (which currently has 29 members); in fact, the Antichrist may not be European at all.

- c. Morally, he is the product of Satanic influence.

2 Thessalonians 2:9—His coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders.

Revelation 13:2—The dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

- d. Providentially, his rise is orchestrated by God himself.

Zechariah 11:16—*I am going to raise up the [worthless shepherd].*

Revelation 6:1–2—The Lamb breaks the seal that causes the rise of Antichrist.

Revelation 17:17—It is by divine impetus that the kings surrender authority to Antichrist.

C. The Career of Antichrist

1. His Rise to Power

- a. His rise is precipitated by the removal of the “restrainer,” argued above to be the moral/ethical restraint of church saints worldwide.

2 Thessalonians 2:7–8—He who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of his mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of his coming.

- b. As a “little horn” (Dan 7:8) he vaults onto the political scene by making a seven-year treaty with the Jews, apparently solving the generations-old Jewish/Arab conflict in the Middle East, even resolving tensions concerning the Temple.

Daniel 9:27—He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, a treaty that allows resumption of the Jewish sacrificial system.

- c. He receives the support of the Roman Confederacy.

Romans 13:1; 17:12–13; Dan 7:8, 20, 24.

- d. He defeats the great army of the North, leaving him the undisputed political leader of the world.

(1) The King of the North crushes Antichrist’s armies and continues into Africa (Dan 11:40–43).

(2) “Rumors from the East and North” (perhaps of Antichrist’s miraculous healing from a mortal wound described in Revelation 13:3) will draw the king of the North back out of Africa to his doom in the land of Palestine (Dan 11:44–45, cf. Ezek 38–39). This is known as the battle of Gog and Magog.

2. His Iron Rule.

- a. He breaks his treaty with the Jews

Dan 9:27—In the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.

- b. He kills God’s two witnesses

Revelation 11:3–7

- c. He destroys the harlot church that he had previously used to gain political power.

Revelation 17:15–18

- d. He presents himself as the object of true worship in the Jewish Temple.

2 Thessalonians 2:4—He takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Daniel 12:11—After the Jewish sacrifice is abolished, the “abomination of desolation” is set up “in the Holy Place” for 1,290 days (cf. Matt 24:15).

Revelation 13:14–15—Antichrist’s lieutenant, the False Prophet, will design an image of the Antichrist that highlights his supernatural powers and capital authority to enforce Antichrist-worship.

- e. He persecutes Israel severely.
 Revelation 12:13–17—Israel is persecuted 1260 days.
 Matthew 24:15, 21—The presentation of the “Abomination of Desolations” in the Temple signals a time of great tribulation.
 See Jeremiah 30:7; Dan 7:21–22, 25; 12:1.
 - f. He reaches the pinnacle of world domination
 - (1) He has absolute military power (Rev 13:4).
 - (2) He has absolute religious authority (Rev 13:8, 15).
 - (3) He has absolute economic power (Rev 13:17–18).
3. His End
- a. God’s seventh bowl judgment will destroy Antichrist’s capital.
 Revelation 16:17–21
 Revelation 18:1–24
 - b. Antichrist, enraged, will attack Jerusalem, to whose aid Christ will come.
 Revelation 19:19—I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against him who sat on the horse and against his army.
 See Zechariah 12–14.
 - c. Christ will slay Antichrist in his coming in power and glory.
 2 Thessalonians 2:8—That lawless one...the Lord will slay with the breath of his mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of his coming.
 Isaiah 14:19–20—Antichrist will have no tomb.
 - d. Antichrist is the first inhabitant of the Lake of Fire.
 Revelation 19:20—And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.
 Revelation 20:10—He is still there 1000 years later.

VI. The Doctrine of the Tribulation

A. References to the Tribulation in Scripture

1. The word *thlipsis* as reference to an eschatological period of intensive wrath

Matthew 24:21—Then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will (cf. v. 29; Mark 13:19, 24).

Revelation 7:14—These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation.

2. The *hour of testing* upon the whole world

Revelation 3:10—I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

3. The time of *distress/trouble*

This term is specifically related to the function of the Tribulation with respect to Israel.

Jeremiah 30:7—How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob.

Daniel 12:1—At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.

4. The day of *wrath/indignation*

1 Thessalonians 1:10—The wrath to come.

Revelation 6:16–17—Fall on us and hide us from the presence of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?

Daniel 8:19—Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for it pertains to the appointed time of the end.

5. The *Day of the Lord*

As noted above, the “Day of the Lord” is a broad term that can reference any day in which God intervenes supernaturally into human affairs to restore the divine order by force. However, it refers to no event more often than the tribulation period, and specifically its climax.

Malachi 4:5—I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

Joel 1:15–2:2

B. The Chronology of the Tribulation Period

1. It is preceded by the Rapture of the Church

(See the arguments above).

2. It is a period of seven years.

Daniel 9:24–27—It is the seventieth “week” (lit. *seven*) of years. The first 69 weeks, or 483 years (69 x 7) extended from the “decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” of Daniel’s prophecy until the death of Messiah. The seventh and last week of seven years occurs after the death of Messiah, but the timing is unspecified.

Note: The exact termini of the sixty-nine weeks is disputed. Artaxerxes made decrees to rebuild the temple in 458 B.C. (Ezra 7:11–26) and to rebuild the walls in 445 B.C. (Neh 2:5–8). Messiah was cut off, by most estimates, in approximately A.D. 30. Solutions to the problem include the possibility that our identification of the dates is inaccurate, the dates are imprecise (doubtful), and the possibility that the years in question were calculated on the basis of the Jewish lunar calendar of 360 days (a distinct possibility in view of the fact that 42 months is calculated as 1260 days in Rev. 11–13). In any case, we can say with certainty that the “sevens” in view are septads of years, and not the seven days that we tend to associate with the word *week* in contemporary usage.

3. It is divided into two halves of 1260 days

- a. The first half commences with the treaty of Antichrist with Israel and ends with the breach of that covenant, the death of the two witnesses, and the revelation of the abomination of desolations.

Daniel 9:27—He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate (cf. Rev 6:1–2).

Revelation 11:3—I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth [they die in v. 7, when the fury of the beast turns against them].

- b. The second half extends from the midpoint until the Second Coming of Christ.

Revelation 12:6, 14—Israel is protected in the wilderness for 1260 days (v. 6) or “a time, times, and a half a time”—3½ years (v. 14).

Revelation 13:5—The rule of Antichrist extends 42 months.

4. The End of the Tribulation corresponds roughly with the commencement of the Millennium, though a gap of 75 days technically separates the two (Dan 12:11–12). The purpose of these 75 days is unspecified—perhaps it is for the purpose of judgment, cleanup after the battle, the marriage supper, or the setup of the new kingdom with all its political reapportionment and topographical adjustments.

C. The Purposes of the Tribulation

1. Judgment of Advanced Sinfulness

Joel 3:13—Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.

Revelation 14:18–20—“Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.” So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

By some calculations, as much as 80% of the world of mankind is killed during the ravages of the Tribulation even before Armageddon and the final judgment. Despite this carnage, most people will be hardened in their sin and will not repent (Rev 9:20–21; 16:9–11).

2. Chastening of Israel

Though Israel has been storing up this wrath for millennia, the tribulation seems specifically directed toward their alliance with Antichrist.

Isaiah 28:15, 18—Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, for we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception.” Therefore thus says the Lord God, . . . “Your covenant with death will be canceled, and your pact with Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, then you become its trampling place.”

See also Jeremiah 30:7 and Daniel 12:1, cited above.

3. The Salvation of Israel

At the close of the tribulation there will be a national return to God by individual repentance among the Jews.

Romans 11:26—A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob.”

Zechariah 12:10—I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

Zechariah 13:1—In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.

Jeremiah 30:7ff—That day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s distress, but he will be saved from it.

Daniel 12:1—And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

4. The Salvation of Many Gentiles

Zephaniah 3:8–9— My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them my indignation, all my burning anger; for all the earth will be devoured by the fire of my zeal. Then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, to serve him shoulder to shoulder.

Matthew 25:34—The sheep nations.

Revelation 7:9–17

Question: Will people who have rejected the gospel prior to the Rapture be excluded from the possibility of salvation during the Tribulation?

Many suggest, based on 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12, that all those who actively rejected Christ before the Rapture will inevitably be deceived by Antichrist “because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.” The aorist tense here, however, is not determinative. It is more likely that this is a general veiling over the vast majority of humanity, and not a specific

veiling that applies strictly to the special class of people who actively resisted the gospel prior to the Rapture. While the latter understanding certainly lends urgency to the invitation in revival meetings, it is probably not exegetically sustainable.

VII. The Doctrine of the Millennium

A. Three Basic Views of the NT Kingdom of God (to be studied in conjunction with the material on pp. 10ff *supra*).

1. The Kingdom is a spiritual phenomenon that is “within” NT believers: Amillennialism.

a. Key Supporting Texts

Matthew 13—The “mysteries” of the kingdom.

Luke 17:21—The kingdom of God is within you.

Acts 28:31—Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God.

Colossians 1:13—He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.

Added to these are several texts that seem to merge Israel with the Church (Gal 3:29; 2 Pet 2:9), thus allowing God to make the church the new recipients of all of God’s promises to Israel.

b. Answers

(1) This view either comprehensively spiritualizes or completely detaches the kingdom from its OT moorings that explicitly promise a kingdom with not only spiritual, but also geographical, political, meteorological, ecclesiastical, and ethical aspects (see below).

(2) This view ignores the great number of NT passages that present the kingdom as future:

Luke 19:11—parable explains explicitly that Jesus was *not* about to establish his kingdom immediately

Luke 21:31—When you see these things happening (Tribulation events), you know that the kingdom of God is near.

Acts 14:22—*Entry* into the kingdom occurs after a lifetime of progressive sanctification.

2 Tim 4:1, 18—Christ will judge the world when he appears to establish his kingdom; After a lifetime of persecution Paul hopes to be brought into Christ’s Kingdom.

James 2:5—The rich in faith *will inherit* the kingdom

Rev 11:15, 17—At the 7th trumpet Christ will *begin* to reign.

Rev 20:1–10—details the timing and duration of the kingdom that begins after Satan is bound.

- (3) This view recognizes a God who can capriciously change the meaning of words, suggesting a troubling predilection of God to renege on his promises.
- (4) This view ignores the fact that national Israel remains a part of God's plans for the future (Rom 9–11 et al.).

(5) In response to the texts listed above, note the following.

- A “mystery” in Scripture is something previously unrevealed and now made plain. In Matthew 13 Jesus is not revealing a mystery *form* of the kingdom or a spiritual reinterpretation of the OT teaching about an earthly kingdom; instead, he was delineating a previously unrevealed detail about the kingdom program, namely, that there would be a gap between Christ's first advent and the establishment of his millennial reign.
- Christ's kingdom *within* the Pharisees (Luke 17:21) was not Christ's saving presence in their hearts (indeed, there is no intimation that the Pharisees were believers); instead, Christ is stating that the king was *in their midst* making an offer of the kingdom. Since they rejected this offer, the kingdom is postponed.
- The kingdom preaching seen in Acts does not demand that the apostles were inviting people to experience the kingdom in their hearts; instead, they were explaining the new developments in Christ's kingdom program and the corresponding ramifications for all people, Jew and Gentile.
- The transfer of believers “into the kingdom” does not demand that they are now “in” a spiritual kingdom; instead, it teaches that salvation guarantees their participation in the coming millennial kingdom (cf. Eph 2:6).

2. The Kingdom is the gradual establishment of divine order in the world's improving social and political structures that culminates in the Second Coming of Christ [Postmillennialism].

a. Key Supporting Texts

Psalm 2:7 cf. Acts 13:33; Rom 1:4—Christ's installation as king seems to be connected with the Resurrection, not his Second Coming.

Matthew 28:18–20—All power is given unto me in heaven and earth.

Matthew 13:31–33—The growth of the kingdom from something small to something that takes over the whole earth.

Matthew 16:18—I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

b. Answers

To their credit, postmillennialists do offer a more robust picture of the kingdom than do their amillennialist brothers. Nonetheless, they still ignore much of what the OT promises concerning the Kingdom.

- (1) The postmillennialist cannot explain, for instance, the physical aspects of the promised kingdom (e.g., the geological and meteorological changes) promised of the Messianic reign.
- (2) While he makes grand promises of ethical, political, and sociological advance in

society, the anticipated upward trajectory of culture does not seem to match reality.

(3) He does little to account for NT passages that depict the Kingdom as future or for the robust role of Israel in the Kingdom (detailed above).

(4) Specifically with regard to the postmillennialist's proof texts we note the following:

- Psalm 2:7 is probably best seen not as an establishment of sonship or an installation as king, but as a declaration of God's anointing/appointment. It is important to note that this verse is applied to Christ at his baptism (Matt 3:17) before it is applied to him at his resurrection. Second, the expectations of Psalm 2:9 (the crushing of earth's kingdoms) seem far better suited to NT descriptions of the Second Coming than descriptions of his resurrection (Matt 25:31–46; 2 Thess 1:6–12; Rev 19:15). Finally, the connection of Luke 19:11–12 with Psalm 110:1 definitively places the commencement of the kingdom after Christ's return.

Far more compelling in Psalm 2 in establishing the starting point for Christ's kingdom is verse 9, which indicates that his kingdom will commence with the crushing of earth's kingdoms. This in turn ties well with Psalm 110, in which we find Christ seated at his Father's right hand, awaiting the time when his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet, whereupon he will commence his reign in Zion.

- The fact that "the gates of hell do not prevail" against the church (Matt 16:18) is notoriously misinterpreted. The verse does not say that the church will advance so powerfully as to beat down the doors of hell (why, in fact, would the church want to do this?); instead, it promises that the gates of hell will never close on the church—it will survive the ravages of time.
- Christ clearly receives *something* at his Resurrection/Ascension in Matthew 28, and the "all" might reasonably be taken to imply that he receives every possible seat of authority in the universe at this time. The fact, however, that the NT acknowledges *another* ruler of this world (John 14:30; Eph 2:2), who continues to exercise his power after this time, suggests that there is at least one throne he does not yet occupy, viz., David's.

It is more likely that Christ's statement is something of an announcement of the reversal of the Kenosis—a restoration of Christ kingship over the universe that was in some sense abdicated during his earthy ministry (Matt 4:8–9). Christ is restored to a manifest place of divine glory and power, but there is, at present, another ruler of this world who continues to wield power. With Psalm 110 again as our guide, Christ's *Davidic* Kingship does not commence until this enemy is placed under his feet—bound in the abyss for 1000 years (cf. Rev 3:21, discussed above, for a full picture of the unfolding state of affairs).

- Matthew 13:31–33 speak not of the growth of the kingdom itself, but of the changes in the kingdom program and the growth of a kingdom constituency in the absence of the king. Note esp. vv. 41–43, where the kingdom extends beyond Christ's Second Advent.

3. The Kingdom is a 1000-year earthly reign of Christ that commences with his Second Coming in glory at the close of the Tribulation.

a. Key Supporting Texts:

Luke 19:11–12—Jesus went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and they *supposed* that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. *So* he said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return...” Cf. Psalm 110:1.

Explanation: As Christ and his disciples near the city of Jerusalem for his Triumphal Entry, the suggestion “that the kingdom of God was about to appear at once” was apparently circulating. And *so*, i.e., as a corrective to this suggestion, Christ offers a parable to explain what *was* going to happen over the next week. Specifically, a nobleman (contextually, a clear reference to Christ) went on a long journey to a far country in order to receive his kingdom. The kingdom would *not* begin at once; rather, Jesus’ companions would be obliged to live out their faith in the promise of a kingdom. The kingdom would not be established until the nobleman returned as king (cf. again the connection with David/Saul and also Psalm 110:1–2).

Revelation 20:6—Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. Cf. 19:11–16.

Luke 21:10–33—The arrival of the kingdom (v. 31) will be anticipated by a period of Great Tribulation (vv. 10–26) suffered by a single generation (v. 32) and the subsequent arrival of Christ (v. 27).

Also Daniel 2:44–45; 7:8–14; Zechariah 14; Matthew 24:27–51.

b. Key OT Descriptors that Demand a Future Kingdom

One of the more troubling characteristics of the Amillennial and Postmillennial positions on the Kingdom is their haste to dismiss or replacement the plain teaching of the OT about the kingdom with new and fundamentally different teachings about the (1) nature of and (2) participants in the Kingdom. Of all the views, only premillennialism successfully integrates the many particulars of the OT descriptions of the Kingdom with the NT teachings about the Kingdom.

(1) It has a physical aspect.

(a) Disease will be eliminated.

Isaiah 33:24—No one living in Zion will say “I am ill.”

Isaiah 35:5–6—Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame will leap like the deer, and the mute tongue will shout for joy.

Psalm 91:10–12—At that time, no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent; for he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

Isaiah 65:20 indicates that the average life expectancy will dramatically increase. A 100-year-old will be considered a youth, and old men will live out their days. Some suggest that the righteous will not die at all; others that people

will have lifespans that rival what we see, say, in Genesis 5, prior to the flood.

(b) Animals will lose their aggressiveness.

Isaiah 11:6–9— The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,

Isaiah 65:25— The wolf and the lamb will feed together and the lion will eat straw like the ox and dust will be the serpent's food; they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.

(c) Meteorological changes occur, ensuring agricultural success

Isa 4:5–6— Over Zion will be a canopy, a shelter from the heat of day and a hiding place from storm and rain.

Amos 9:13— The reaper shall overtake the plowman, and the treader of grapes him that plants. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all its hills.

Even in traditionally barren climates there will be agricultural success: the desert will become as a fertile field, and the fertile field a veritable forest (Isa 32:15). The desert, the parched places, and wilderness will blossom and burst into bloom; the splendor of Carmel and Lebanon will be restored (Isa 35:1–2, 7). The sandy places (v. 7) will become pools with springs capable of supporting meadows and even papyrus—a swamp plant.

(2) It has a social aspect.

(a) War will be eliminated.

Zechariah 9:9–10— Behold, your king is coming to you... And the bow of war will be cut off and he will speak peace to the nations; and his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Micah 4:3–4— Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war. Each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

(b) Poverty will be eliminated through industry.

Isaiah 65:21–22— They will build houses and inhabit them; they will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and another inhabit. They will not plant and another eat. For as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of my people, and my chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands.

(3) It has an ethical aspect.

There will be a universal and accurate standard of righteousness that will be enforced perfectly.

Isaiah 32:1, 5—The king will reign righteously, and princes will rule justly.... No longer will the fool be called noble, or the rogue be spoken of as generous.

Isaiah 42:3—A bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not extinguish. He will faithfully bring forth justice.

(4) It has a political aspect.

The King will rule from a throne in his political capital, Jerusalem.

Isaiah 9:6—The government will be upon his shoulders.

Isaiah 2:4ff—He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples.... and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

Isaiah 32:1—A king will reign righteously, and princes will rule justly.

Psalms 48:1–2—Jerusalem will finally become the “city of the Great King.”

(5) It has a liturgical aspect.

Zechariah 6:12–13—He will build the temple of the Lord, he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he who will bear the honor and sit and rule on his throne. Thus, he will be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.

In fact, a full nine chapters of Ezekiel (chaps. 40–48) are given over to extreme detail about the new Temple and its operation in the Millennial Kingdom as the center of international worship.

Isaiah 56:7—In that day “my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.”

Isaiah 61:6—The entire nation of Israel will function as priests for the world.

(6) It has a spiritual aspect.

John 3:3—Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Zephaniah 3:9—For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, to serve him shoulder to shoulder.

Question: How do the various millennial positions deal with this sampling of OT material concerning the Kingdom?

- **Amillennialists** are obliged to follow one of two courses: (1) Some suggest that the terms of the kingdom were fundamentally altered after national Israel rejected her Messiah; (2) others claim that the terms of the kingdom are all metaphorical in nature and therefore subject to spiritualization.
- **Postmillennialists** follow the lead of amillennialists in many respects, but soften

the tension to a degree by regarding some of the specific details of the kingdom as being established more-or-less literally in naturalistic or common-grace terms. For instance, modern advances have made enormous progress in eliminating disease, irrigating once barren regions, improving the political landscape by introducing democracy and republicanism (rule by law), etc.

ANALYSIS: In view of attempts by these models to spiritualize prophecy without contextual warrant, to fundamentally change the terms of the kingdom so as to effectively dispense with them, and to render natural what is clearly depicted in the OT as supernatural, I have severe concerns with both of these models.

The kingdom promised Israel in the OT is unbelievably splendid and glorious, with far-reaching and comprehensive features. This same kingdom that was *promised* to Israel in the OT was *offered* to Israel during Christ's first advent (Matt 3:2; Mk 1:14–15), was *taken from* first-century Israel to be given to another generation (Matt 13; 21:43), and will be gloriously *revealed* in the eschaton. Any proposed kingdom that fails to deliver *all* the blessings promised in the OT is not the Messianic Kingdom of Christ. And I would suggest that anyone who looks about today and purports to be enjoying the Messianic Kingdom of Christ serves a God who is rather unreliable and whose glory is quite small.

- **Historic Premillennialists** effectively bifurcate the fulfillment of the kingdom promises into two phases. Its spiritual terms are in effect today, but the physical terms are still future. The prominence of national Israel described in the OT accounts, however, is typically suppressed.
- **Progressive Dispensationalists** likewise bifurcate the fulfillment of the kingdom promises into two phases, with its spiritual terms in effect today, but its physical terms delayed until Christ's Second Coming. Progressive Dispensationalists make a fundamental break with historic premillennialism, though, by insisting on the eschatological prominence of national Israel in literal, ethnic terms.
- **Traditional Dispensationalists** maintain a strictly literal and future explanation of the Millennial Kingdom, arguing that an incomplete kingdom is no kingdom at all. The church's institutional role relative to the Kingdom is simply the gathering of a kingdom constituency via evangelism.

ANALYSIS: These three models reflect significant advance, in my mind, on the previous two models. But they cannot, of course, all be right. The fact that the gifts and promises of God to Israel are irrevocable (Rom 11:29) stands significantly in the way, to me, of embracing the historic premillennial model. The big question that remains, then, is whether the establishment of the kingdom can be effected in two distinct phases. Both historic premillennialism and progressive dispensationalism say YES. In fact, both are insistent on this arrangement in order to provide the church with a basis for socio-cultural and political engagement.

The traditional dispensationalist argues instead that the kingdom, being wholly future and incapable of being established piecemeal, argues for a function of the church that is different from that of the kingdom. Until such time as the kingdom arrives, the believer's function is twofold—he renders unto Caesar the things that are distinctly Caesar's (civil functions) and unto God the things that are distinctly God's (ecclesiastical functions).

It must be stressed that this does *not* mean that the believer may disconnect from social-political interests, but rather that these interests must be pursued in a way that does not confuse them with the presence of the kingdom or the mission of the institutional church.

c. The Participants in the Kingdom

The kingdom will be composed of distinguishable echelons. These administrative layers will have nothing to do with personal superiority, importance, or value, and will in no wise constitute levels of happiness and enjoyment within the kingdom. These layers are purely functional.

(1) The King and His Bride—The Church

Isaiah 32:1a—The king will reign righteously

2 Timothy 2:12—If we endure, we will also reign with him.

Revelation 3:21—He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

(2) Old Testament Saints and Tribulation Martyrs.

Isaiah 32:1b—...and princes will rule justly.

Revelation 20:4, 6—I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.... Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Haggai 2:23—Zerubbabel will have a place of honor in the kingdom.

Malachi 3:16–17—The Malachi remnant will have a special place in the kingdom.

Ezekiel 37:24–25; 34:23–24; Jer 30:9; Hosea 3:5—David will have a ruling position in the Kingdom.

As promised, OT saints will receive the promised land inheritance (Gen 13:15), “not a foot of ground” of which Abraham has received (Acts 7:5).

(3) Living Israel

Israel will have a place of nobility and a priestly function among the nations.

Isaiah 60–61—Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.... The wealth of the nations will come to you.... They will go up with acceptance on my altar, and I shall glorify my glorious house.... Foreigners will build up your walls, and their kings will minister to you.... The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, and all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet, and they will call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.... Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks, and foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers. But you will be called the priests of the Lord; you will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. Instead of your shame you will have a double portion.

(4) Living Gentiles

That living Israel has a place of honor among the nations assumes that a large number of Gentiles also survive the Tribulation to populate the Millennial Kingdom. These “ordinary citizens” of the Kingdom are the “sheep” nations of Matthew 25:34.

VIII. The Doctrine of Resurrection

A. Resurrection in the Old Testament

1. OT saints understood that the possibility of resurrection from the dead.

Genesis 22:5 cf. Hebrews 11:19—Abraham clearly intended to sacrifice Isaac, but also expected God to raise him from the dead so that his promise might stand.

2. The actual raising of individuals from the dead in the OT anticipates final resurrection.

1 Kings 17:17–24—Elijah and the son of the woman from Zarephath.

2 Kings 4:32–35—Elisha and the son of the woman from Shunem

2 Kings 13:21—The man who touched Elisha’s bones

3. The OT predicts a final resurrection.

Job 19:25–26—As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will take his stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from (prob. *in* or *from the standpoint of*) my flesh I shall see God.

Isaiah 26:19—Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.

Daniel 12:2—Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

Psalms 16:10; 49:15; Hosea 13:14—The promise of redemption from Sheol.

B. Resurrection in the New Testament

1. Resurrection is predicted by Christ.

John 2:19, 21—Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.... He was speaking about the temple of his body.

John 5:28–29—A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.

2. Resurrection is anticipated in the ministry of Christ.

Luke 7:12–15—The widow’s son

Luke 8:41–42, 49–56—Jairus’s daughter

John 11:41–44—Lazarus

3. Resurrection is accomplished in the person of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:20—Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

4. Resurrection is fully revealed in the writings of Paul and John.

1 Corinthians 15 explains resurrection in great detail.

John sets resurrection in its eschatological context in Revelation 20.

C. The Meaning of Resurrection

When theologians speak of the resurrection, reference is made to the *permanent, bodily reintegration of the material and immaterial parts of the person as a single living entity*.

1. Of the 42 uses of the term *resurrection* (Grk. *anastasis*) in the NT, 41 apply to final resurrection: like Christ, we will be raised “never to die again” (Rom 6:9). Hebrews 10:35 is the lone instance detailing a temporal resurrection, but quickly follows it up with reference to “a better resurrection.”

2. The only reference to a “spiritual” resurrection in Scripture is soundly condemned.

2 Timothy 2:18—Hymenaeus and Philetus...have wandered away from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and destroying the faith of some.

3. Scripture speaks clearly not only of an immortal soul, but also of an immortal body.

1 Corinthians 15:53—This perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

D. The Order of the Resurrection

The resurrection is not a single event; there is no “general” resurrection. Instead resurrection is described as a sequence of events involving three separate orders or divisions (Grk. *tagma*).

1 Corinthians 15:22–24—As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive, but each in his own order: Christ the *first fruits*, *after that* those who are Christ’s at his coming, *then* the end, when he hands over the kingdom to the God and Father.

1. Christ the first fruits...

1 Corinthians 15:23—Christ the firstfruits.

Colossians 1:18—Firstborn from the dead

Revelation 1:5—The firstborn of the dead

Acts 26:23 (NIV)—The first to rise from the dead

a. He is first in time.

This is the main idea of *firstfruits* in the Levitical system. The first ripe heads of grain, the firstlings of Israel’s livestock, and the first child were dedicated to God

in a special sense, and were offered as an expression of faith that more was to come. See 1 Corinthians 15:23 for this idea in connection with the resurrection.

- b. He is first in rank.

This is the main idea of being *firstborn*. The firstborn son was not only first in time, but also first in position. The firstborn received a double portion and was given leadership over the family in the event of the absence or death of the father. The idea of lordship is dominant here.

- 2. ...after that those who are Christ's at his coming...

Having established that the coming of Christ has two phases to it, it is probably best to see more than a single resurrection event associated with Christ's Second Coming. In fact, at least four groups can be seen participating in this resurrection:

- a. The whole corpus of Church saints, living and dead, are resurrected at the Rapture to prepare for marriage to Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:16—The dead "in Christ" will rise first.

Note: There is a sense in which all believers, even those who are not Church saints, are "in Christ": apart from inclusion in Christ's sacrifice and reception of his imputed righteousness there is no salvation. As noted above, however, a technical use of "in Christ" language is reserved for those who have been baptized by the Spirit into Christ to form the newly conceived multi-ethnic body unique to the present age (1 Cor 12:13, Gal 3:27; etc.). It is this group, specifically, that rises first.

- b. The two witnesses are raised at the middle of the Tribulation (Rev 11:11–12).
- c. OT saints are resurrected after the Tribulation, but prior to the commencement of the Millennial Kingdom, in which they have a promised part.

Daniel 12:2— Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life.

Compare. vv. 1, 11–13, which places this event *after* the time of great distress.

- d. Tribulation martyrs are also resurrected at the close of the Tribulation and immediately prior to the Millennium.

Revelation 20:4–6—I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.... This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

- 3. ...then comes the end.

The unrighteous dead rise for judgment at the close of the Millennium.

1 Corinthians 15:24—The sequence implies a final resurrection at “the end, when he hands over the kingdom to the God and Father.”

Revelation 20:5, 11–14—The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.... Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

E. The Resurrection Body

1. It is patterned after Christ’s resurrection body.

Philippians 3:21—He will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory [i.e., his glorified body].

1 John 3:2—We know that when he appears, we will be like him.

2. It is a physical body.

Luke 24:36–43—“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.... and he ate before them.

Note: It is possible that the glorified body has some heightened abilities, including the ability to disappear and rematerialize (Luke 24:31, 36) and to pass through solid barriers (John 20:3–9, 19, 26), though there are other explanations for these texts.

3. It is similar in appearance and substance to the original body.

Christ’s body was recognizable to those who had known him prior to his death (Matt 28:9, 17; John 20:19–20, 26–28), but it was not always *immediately* recognizable (Luke 24:16, 31; John 20:14–16). Perhaps the lines of aging, grief, pain, and sorrow were erased, restoring Jesus’ appearance to its pristine youthful vigor and perfect health, so that he *resembled* but was not a precise *mirror image* of his former self. Sexual identity will apparently be preserved, though sexual activity will end (Matt 22:30; Mark 12:25).

4. The new body will be the same in identity but different in substance from the original body.

1 Corinthians 15:37—When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed.

The human body today changes in molecular *substance* as we eat, excrete, shed hair and skin, etc. But its *identity* does not change. Thus it does not appear necessary that there is identity of substance between mortal and resurrection bodies. The resurrection is not stymied by the supposed problems of cremation (inadvertent or intentional), amputations, organ donation, being devoured by animals, etc.

5. It is a spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 15:44—It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Note: Just because a body is *spiritual* does not mean that it is *incorporeal*. It is a Platonic fallacy that pits spiritual and physical against one another as incompatible. When Paul speaks of a person or thing as being “spiritual,” he does not mean by it that it is immaterial. What he means is that it is controlled by and compatible with the Holy Spirit. The resurrection body is like the body of Jesus Christ, and similarly “fitted for the new age” (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 786).

6. It is a glorious and incorruptible body.

1 Corinthians 15:42—It is raised and imperishable body.

1 Corinthians 15:43—It is raised in glory.

IX. The Doctrine of Divine Judgment

A. The Necessity of Divine Judgment

1. It is essential to God’s nature.

Judgment for sin is not the arbitrary flailing of a capricious God who has become angry or impatient. Judgment is an expression of the wrath of God, his eternally staid and holy disposition against sin. It is sourced in God’s *nature/disposition* and not in any *passions* that some attribute to him.

Habakkuk 1:13—God’s eyes are too pure to approve evil.

Psalm 89:14—Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

2. It is essential to universal justice.

It is not only an assault to God’s character to overlook sin; it is also an affront to the righteous who throughout life have observed the prosperity of the wicked.

Habakkuk 1:2–4; 12–17; Psalm 73:1–18; Luke 16:25; etc.

B. The Nature of Divine Judgment

The judgment of the end times is not an inquiry as into the character, motives, and actions of persons—these are well known to God. Nor is it a remedial chastening designed to improve the character, motives, or actions of those being judged. Instead, it is a judgment that reveals the works of men and metes out appropriate reward or punishment.

C. The Eschatological Judge

1. God the Father is the ultimate judge.

Hebrews 12:23—God is the judge of all.

Romans 14:12—Each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

2. Christ is the mediating judge.

John 5:22, 27—Not even the Father judges anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son.... He has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Acts 17:31—[God] has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom he has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.

- a. As God, he has all knowledge and discernment for judgment

Revelation 2:23—I am he who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

- b. As man, he understands human experience from the inside.

John 5:27—The Father gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.

- c. As the God-man, he is uniquely qualified to serve as judge/mediator.

1 Timothy 2:5—There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

D. The Judgments

1. The Judgment (Bema) Seat of Christ

- a. The Time: Immediately after the Rapture of the Church

1 Corinthians 4:5—When the Lord comes he will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Revelation 22:12—Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to what he has done.

- b. The Participants: Church Saints

The "we" of the pertinent texts (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10) probably includes Paul and his regenerate readership. Since the normal pattern of the judgments is for them to occur at the time of resurrection, this makes good sense.

- c. The Basis of Judgment: Believers' Post-Conversion Works.

1 Corinthians 3:13—Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

2 Corinthians 5:10—We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, *according to what he has done*, whether good or bad.

- d. The Results: Rewards commensurate to Christian service

1 Corinthians 3:13–15

2 Corinthians 5:10

Ephesians 6:8—Whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord.

Colossians 3:24—From the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.

2 Corinthians 9:6—He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Note that there is no punitive language attached to this judgment. This is not a judgment for sins committed. Although there is a negative aspect to this judgment, it is expressed in terms of meager reward or the loss/withholding/removal of anticipated reward. It would seem, though, that all believers have at least *some* reward (1 Cor 4:5).

Question: What is the nature of the reward received?

Several NT texts use the term *crown* to describe believers' rewards (2 Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4) and this fact, coupled with the casting of crowns at Christ's throne by the 24 elders (Rev 4:10), leads many to suggest that the reward takes the form of physical crowns that we will be pleased to give immediately back to Christ. While it is possible that literal crowns are involved, several factors suggest that this is not the primary nature of our reward:

- The connection between the actions of the 24 elders and those of church saints at large is not at all certain.
- While it is true that there would be great pleasure involved in giving crowns to Christ, this reward seems rather fleeting (unlike the imperishable crown anticipated by Paul in 1 Thess 2:19), and does not seem to be commensurate with the deeds rewarded.
- Paul sometimes references crowns in a figurative way (Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19), indicating that his anticipated "crown" is not literal, but instead consists of the converts and disciples to whom he ministered during his years as an apostle.
- It is reasonable to understand the crown language in other than a literal way (e.g., receiving a crown of life means that a believer is crowned with life; receiving a crown of rejoicing means that a believer is crowned with joy; etc.). Cf. Rev 12:1.

In view of the preceding, it is this author's understanding that the crowns consist of (1) eternal life itself (1 Cor 9:25; Jas 1:12), (2) the satisfaction of seeing the continuing results of one's Christian service (Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19), and (3) heightened capacities either to enjoy eternity (1 Thess 2:19) or to exercise authority in eternity (Luke 19:16–19). Details, however, are not forthcoming in Scripture.

2. The Judgment of Tribulation Martyrs

Revelation 20:4—I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and

they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

- a. The Time: During the 75 days between the Tribulation and the Millennium
- b. The Participants: Tribulation martyrs
- c. The Basis of Judgment: Faithfulness during the brief time between their conversion and death during the Tribulation
- d. The Results: Position/Rank in the Millennial Kingdom

Question: Who are the individuals to whom “judgment is given” over these martyrs?

The text is not clear. Some suggest, based on the prominent place that angels occupy in *executing* divine judgment in Scripture (Matt 13:41, 49; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31), that these are angels. Additionally, Luke 12:8–9 has angels at the very least *observing* the judicial assessment. However, Hebrews 2:5 seems to suggest that angels do not enjoy *officiating* functions in the eschaton.

Another suggestion, borrowing from the fact that Paul’s readers will judge the world, including angels (1 Cor 16:2–3), is that church saints, having been resurrected, judged, and given a place in Christ’s train at his Second Coming, are the judges in view.

3. The Judgment of OT Saints

- a. The Time: During the 75 days between the Tribulation and the Millennium.

Daniel 12:2–3, 11–13—Daniel is assured by God that he would “rest” until the Tribulation period was complete, then rise to receive his “allotted portion at the end of the age.”

- b. The Participants: OT Saints

Daniel 12:1–2—“...your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book,” many of whom “sleep in the dust of the earth.”

- c. The Basis of Judgment: Faithfulness to the covenant stipulations after conversion.

Daniel 12:3—Based on the Jews’ “wisdom” and efforts to “lead many to righteousness” God will grant reward.

- d. The Results: Place and Prominence in the Millennial Kingdom

Daniel 12:3—They will “shine like the brightness of the heavens,...like the stars for ever and ever.”

Daniel 12:13—At the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

4. The Judgment of Living Israel

Note: The judgment of living Israel and of the living Gentiles at the close of the Tribulation is not a final judgment. The unsaved are *put to death* and consigned to the flames at this time (Matt 25:41–42), but will receive final judgment upon the second

resurrection at the Great White Throne. It follows, likewise, that there is a final judgment for the saved at the close of the Millennium when millennial saints receive their resurrection bodies and their eternal inheritance, though Scripture is silent about this judgment.

a. The Time: At the close of the Tribulation

Matthew 25:1–30—The account of the wise and foolish virgins and the parable of the talents depict faithful and unfaithful Israelites at the time of the Second Coming.

Ezekiel 20:33–35—Specifically describes the judgment of unbelieving Israel in an unidentified wilderness area (prob. the wilderness of Judah or the wilderness of Zin) after they are gathered from among the nations at the close of the Tribulation.

b. The Participants: Jews who survive the Tribulation (Ezek 20:34).

c. The Basis of Judgment: Their response to the Kingdom Message.

144,000 Jews serve as Tribulation evangelists, and their message is alternately accepted (Zech 12:10–13:1) or rejected (Ezek 20:33)

d. The Results:

(1) Unbelieving Jews are put to death and excluded from the Kingdom

Ezek 20:38—I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel.

Matthew 25—The virgins without oil are denied entrance, and the unfaithful servant is cast out into outer darkness and consigned to the flames.

(2) Believing Jews enter the Kingdom.

Ezekiel 20:37—Believing Jews are brought “into the bond of the covenant.”

Matthew 25—The virgins with oil are granted entry to the wedding feast, and the faithful servants are “given charge over many things.”

5. The Judgment of Living Gentiles

a. The Time: At the close of the Tribulation, after true Israel has been restored.

Joel 3:1–2—In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them.

Matthew 25:31–32—When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him; and he will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

b. The Participants: Gentiles who survive the Tribulation

Joel 3—The *goyim*

Matthew 25—The *ethne*

The terms here are for non-Jewish people groups. The judgment itself, however, is individual. People are judged on their individual response to the Gospel.

c. The Basis of Judgment: Their response to the Kingdom Message/Program.

Joel 3:2 and Matthew 25:40, 45 draw special attention to their treatment of the Jews as demonstration of their acceptance/rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

d. The Results:

(1) Unbelieving Gentiles go to Eternal Fire.

Matthew 25:41—Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.

Matthew 25:46a—These will go away into eternal punishment...

(2) Believing Gentiles enter the Kingdom.

Matthew 25:34—Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Matthew 25:46b—...but the righteous into eternal life.

6. The Judgment of the Damned—The Great White Throne Judgment

a. The Time: After the Millennium

Revelation 20:5–6, 11–12—The rest of the dead [those over whom the second death has power] did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.... Then [after the thousand years] I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it,...and the dead were judged.

b. The Participants: Unbelievers of all the ages

Revelation 20:12, 13—The dead, small and great...Hades gave up its dead.

Daniel 12:2—Those awakening to “disgrace and everlasting contempt.”

c. The Basis:

Revelation 20:12—Exclusion from the Book of Life.

Revelation 20:12–13—The contents of the “other books” (from context, apparently a record of their “deeds”).

d. The Results:

Revelation 20:14–15—Eternal consignment to the Lake of Fire.

The fact that they are judged “according to their deeds” may suggest that there are gradations of punishment assigned to the damned at this time (cf. Matt 10:15; 11:22, 24).

7. The Judgment of the Fallen Angels

- a. The Time—Unknown. Probably after the Millennium and perhaps in conjunction with the Great White Throne.

1 Corinthians 6:3—Do you not know that we will judge angels?

Jude 6—Angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, he has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

Cf. Rev. 20:7–10—Satan is released from his prison at the close of the Millennium and is cast into the Lake of Fire after leading his final rebellion.

- b. The Participants—Satan, the angels who sinned in Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4, and presumably all fallen angels.
 - c. The Basis—Not stated; but apparently connected with their allegiance to Satan.
- Matthew 25:41—Eternal fire has been prepared for the devil and his angels (cf. Rev 12:3–4, 7).

- d. The Results—Eternal consignment to the Lake of Fire (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10).

8. Presumably there is also a judgment for millennial saints when they receive their glorified bodies (see above). There may also be a judgment for good angels, though some argue that there is no need for the latter. In both cases, however, the Bible is silent.

X. The Doctrine of the Eternal State

A. The Eternal State of the Damned—Eternal Conscious Torment.

There is a persistent band of evangelicals who emphasize the love of God to the exclusion of his holy wrath, with the result that they minimize/eliminate either the degree or duration of the punishment that is to befall the damned. These can be divided up into four distinct categories:

- *Annihilationists* argue that the impenitent will simply cease to exist.
- *Universalist Exclusivists* argue that all people will eventually come to Christ, but that many will do so only when given a second chance in the afterlife.
- *Universalist Inclusivists* argue that all people are saved (1) by casting themselves on the mercy of God, (2) by unconscious faith, or (3) by universal election in Christ.
- *Pluralists* argue that provision for salvation is made in every religion and that God accepts expressions of faith of every sort.

As we shall see, however, none of these theories match the biblical data.

1. The Duration of Eternal Punishment

a. It is *eternal*.

Matthew 18:8—Eternal fire

Matthew 25:41—Eternal fire

Matthew 25:46—Eternal punishment

2 Thessalonians 1:9—Eternal destruction

Note that the meaning of this word is confirmed by its other uses. We find that God is eternal (Rom 16:26); salvation is eternal (Heb 5:9); life is eternal (John 3:16); and our coming glory is eternal (1 Pet 5:10). If the fires of hell are not unending, then neither are these other things we hold so dear.

b. It lasts *forever*.

Jude 13—The black darkness has been reserved forever.

Revelation 14:11—The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night.

Revelation 20:10—They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Likewise note other matters that extend forever: The believer's life (John 6:51; 10:28); Christ (John 12:34); God's word (1 Pet 1:23); God's throne (Heb 1:8); etc. In the words of Moses Stuart, "We must either admit the endless misery of Hell, or give up the endless happiness of Heaven."

2. The Nature of Eternal Punishment

a. It is a place of darkness.

Matthew 25:30—outer darkness.

2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13—black darkness.

This term fundamentally denotes exclusion from the presence of God and all moral rectitude. It probably also denotes literal darkness, a condition that heightens the horrors that are experienced.

b. It is a place of extreme torment.

Revelation 14:10–11—torment...no rest

Revelation 21:8—includes fire and brimstone

Mark 9:47–48—unquenchable fire

Question: Do these texts demand eternal *physical* torment?

Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle recently raised eyebrows by affirming the *literal*, *eternal*, and *conscious* nature of hell, but denying its *physical* nature. This view is surprisingly common, even among conservative writers (e.g., among others, Herman Hoyt, Robert Peterson, D. A. Carson, J. I. Packer, Leon Morris, and historical figures such as Charles Hodge, John Calvin, and Martin Luther). Note some of the arguments they raise:

- There is no biblical statement that the damned receive *resurrection bodies*, and it is hard to imagine what these might be like.
- While the rich man in Hades speak of physical body parts such as fingers and tongues, and speak of torments in patently physical language, it is at least probable that he had no body (see above).
- The sensate ideas of “seeing” and “hearing” and anthropomorphic attribution of eyes, ears, and hands to God also suggest that, in some inscrutable way, spiritual beings can have sensory perception without sensory organs.
- Bodies normally burn up. Hoyt concedes that the living unregenerate (i.e., those who survive the Tribulation, Millennium, etc.) will be cast bodily into hell, but then argues that their bodies will be consumed.

Conclusion: What is biblically non-negotiable about hell is that it involves *eternal, conscious* torment in a *literal* place. While I am personally uncomfortable giving up the adjective *physical*, the physicality of hell is probably best seen as less “fundamental” than other adjectives used here.

c. Its inhabitants are conscious.

Mark 9:47–48—Their worm does not die.

This seems to have reference to continued existence, consciousness, and pangs of conscience that linger forever.

Question: Are there degrees of punishment in hell?

Since eternal punishment is according to one’s deeds (Rom 2:5–6; Rev 2:12–15) it can probably be argued that there are degrees of punishment in hell. It is also apparent that individuals with greater exposure to God’s revelation are subject to more severe punishment (note Matt 11:20–24, where it will be more tolerable for those in Tyre and Sidon than it will be for Capernaum in the judgment).

3. Objections to Eternal Conscious Torment

a. **It is unjust to punish forever sins committed in the few short years of one’s life.**

Answer: The assumption here is that the duration of punishment is to be determined based on the amount of time it took to commit the sin. Even human jurisprudence does not operate on this principle. The punishment is fitted to the *nature* and not the *duration* of the crime (e.g., one can get life in prison for a crime committed in a few seconds). Further, punishment is increased in view of the dignity or station of the victim of the crime (e.g., kicking a dog is not as serious as kicking a drunken man sleeping on your porch, and both of these pale in comparison to kicking the president or the pope).

Sin against God takes on infinite proportions and requires infinite payment.

b. **Hell cannot be eternal because Jesus’ payment for sin was not eternal.**

Answer: Christ is an infinite being who could bear the infinite *force* of God’s wrath in a few hours. Since finite humans cannot bear the infinite force of God’s

wrath, they are obliged to suffer for an infinite *duration*. The penalty is equal in both instances.

c. **Payment will eventually be made, or perhaps repentance will eventually occur.**

Answer: Observation tells us that people become more and more confirmed in their sin over time. Time does not loosen sin's grip; it tightens it. Sinners continue to sin in hell, ever increasing their guilt. 2 Peter 2:14 tells us that apostates "never cease from sin."

d. **God in his goodness will eventually welcome sinners into heaven.**

Answer: In addition to the lexical material on *eternal* and *forever* (above), please note the following texts:

Proverbs 29:1—A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

Proverbs 11:7—When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish.

1 Thessalonians 4:13—[Unbelievers who die] have no hope.

e. **The Bible speaks of death and eternal destruction, implying annihilation.**

Answer: Death never means *annihilation* in Scripture, but instead *separation*. When a wicked person dies he does not cease to exist (everlasting existence is part of the image of God in man); instead, he is separated from the life of God (Rom 9:3; Eph 4:18) and from every manifestation of divine grace. Likewise, to be "destroyed" or "ruined" in Scripture does not mean cessation of existence. Instead, it means irremediable devastation or irreversible collapse.

B. The Eternal State of the Elect—The New Heaven and New Earth

1. The Existence of the New Order

a. The eternal abode of the elect should not be confused with present-day structures such as our present earth or even the third heaven, the current abode of God. Scripture tells us that these will be replaced:

Revelation 21:1—I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.

2 Peter 3:7–13—The present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.... The heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.... The heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat. But according to his promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

b. The purpose of the recreation seems to be the erasure of all vestiges of sin and the curse (see esp. 2 Pet 3:13 and Rev 22:3). Symbols of judgment and destruction will also be removed—there will be "no more sea" (Rev 21:1).

- c. The New Order will have a capital: the New Jerusalem.

The new city will descend from heaven and be of immense proportions (1500 miles in width, length and height, shaped like a pyramid or perhaps a cube) and of stunning beauty.

2. The Structure of the New Order

- a. The city is ruled by God, Christ having delivered up his kingdom to the Father.

Revelation 22:1, 3—The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it.

1 Corinthians 15:24—Christ will “hand over the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power.”

- b. Many of the Millennial structures apparently remain in place in the New Order.

- God and the Lamb have a preeminent throne (Rev 22:1, 3).
- His “bondservants” will “reign forever and ever” (Rev 22:5).
- *Nations* will walk by its light, and the *kings* of the earth will bring their glory into it (Rev 21:24).
- The fact that the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles are distinguished (Rev 21:12, 14) may imply a continued distinction between Israel and the Church.

This explains, perhaps, how the Kingdom can be described in Scripture as “eternal” (Ps 145:13; Dan 2:44; 4:3; 7:27) when its Millennial phase lasts only 1,000 years.

3. The Conditions of the New Order

- a. All the vestiges of the curse are eliminated

Revelation 22:3—There will no longer be any curse.

- b. Death, pain, and sorrow will be replaced by unending happiness.

Revelation 21:4—He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

- c. The centerpiece of our experience will be fellowship with God.

Revelation 21:3—Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be among them.

Revelation 22:3–4—His bond-servants will serve him; and they will see his face.

Some 14 songs appear in the book of Revelation, implying that worship and praise will be dominant activities in the New Order.