DR. NORMAN

GEISLER

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY



VOLUME FOUR

CHURCH

LAST THINGS

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VOLUME FOUR

PART ONE: THE CHURCH (ECCLESIOLOGY)

PART TWO: LAST THINGS (ESCHATOLOGY)



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SYNOPSIS FOR VOLUME FOUR

In Volume One we discussed Introduction to Theology (*Prolegomena*, preconditions) and the Bible (*Bibliology*). These serve as the method and basis for doing systematic theology.

In Volume Two we focused on theology proper, that is, on the attributes and activities of God. In the first half attention was centered on God Himself—His attributes and His characteristics, both nonmoral (metaphysical) and moral. After we addressed who God *is*, in the second half we discussed what God *does* (in relation to His creation) and then examined the doctrines of Christ (*Christology*) and the Holy Spirit (*pneumatology*).

In Volume Three we dealt with the doctrine of sin (*hamartiology*) and the discipline of humanity (*anthropology*), then turned to the doctrine of salvation (*soteriology*), including origin, theories, nature, evidence, assurance, extent, exclusivity, results, condition, and content.

PART ONE: THE CHURCH (ECCLESIOLOGY)

Volume Four also has two major sections. Part One deals with ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. We will first discuss the church's origin (chapter 1), then the nature of the invisible (universal) church (chapter 2), followed by the nature of the visible (local) church (chapter 3). After this, we will treat the government (chapter 4), ordinances (chapter 5), and ministry (chapter 6) of the visible church, followed by the relation of church and state (chapter 7).

PART TWO: LAST THINGS (ESCHATOLOGY)

Part Two deals with eschatology, the study of the last things, and has two subsections: personal eschatology (chapters 8–12) and general eschatology (chapters 13–17). We begin with the intermediate state and the resurrection (chapter 8), the final state of the saved (heaven—chapter 9), and the final state of the lost (hell—chapter 10). Following these are examinations of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory (chapter 11) and the theories of annihilationism (chapter 12).

The final section opens with a study of the interpretation of prophecy (chapter 13), followed by a treatment of God's kingdom (chapter 14) and God's covenants (chapter 15). Finally, we will cover Christ's return (the Second Coming) and the Millennium (chapter 16), and then the Tribulation and the Rapture (chapter 17).



PART ONE

THE CHURCH
(ECCLESIOLOGY)



CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

The root meaning of the term *church* (Gk: *ekklesia*) is "those called out." In classical Greek, *ekklesia* referred to an assembly of any kind, religious or secular, lawful or unlawful. The Hebrew words *qahal* and *edhah*, often translated as *ekklesia* in the Greek Old Testament,[1] meant a gathering or assembly such as Judaism eventually had in the synagogue. In the New Testament, *ekklesia* came to refer to an assembly of believers, namely, followers of Jesus.

The term *church* as used in this volume refers to the New Testament church founded by Jesus Christ; that is, an assembly of believers joined to Christ's spiritual body by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) at the moment of regeneration (Titus 3:3–6), when they individually place their faith in the Lord Jesus as their Savior (Acts 16:31). If still on earth, they should be part of a local body of believers meeting regularly (Heb. 10:25) for edification (Eph. 4:12), worship (John 4:24), and participation in the ordinances.[2] To this group Paul addressed most of his epistles, such as, for example, "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2 NKJV).

The Universal *Church* vs. Local *Churches*

We must distinguish between *the universal church* (which constitutes the invisible body of all believers[3]) and *the local church* (a visible manifestation of the universal church in a given locality.[4]) *The invisible church* is made up of

believers already in heaven; *the visible church* is comprised of those yet on earth. Likewise, a distinction is often made between *the church militant* and *the church at rest*; the former are living believers, and the latter are those who have died and gone to their reward.[5] The focus of the following chapters will be both the universal spiritual body (bride) of Christ[6] and the local manifestations of that body (e.g., cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2).

It is noteworthy that the New Testament never uses the word *church* of a physical structure. Indeed, the early Christians had no public buildings of their own in which to meet; they met at first in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 2:46) and in homes (cf. Philem. 1:2). The church is only called a "building" in a spiritual sense (1 Peter 2:4–8; cf. Eph. 2:20).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN

As used of an assembly of believers after the time of Christ, the word *ekklesia* came to mean "the Christian church," either in its universal (invisible) or local (visible) sense.[7] Its non-ecclesiastical New Testament use includes references to a mob[8] and to the Old Testament assembly of Israelites.[9] In almost every other New Testament instance, *ekklesia* refers to a body of believers in Christ who worship and serve God (universal or local, invisible or visible).

The Ordination of the Church by God

Like every other work of God, the church is not an afterthought; He ordained the church from all eternity. Since God is eternal and immutable,[10] whatever He wills, He unchangeably wills from eternity: "He chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph. 1:4; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). God's decrees are eternal and final (Rom. 11:29); He is the source and initiator of all salvation,[11] including of those in the New Testament church, for we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God."[12] He knew and ordained not only the church in general but also each person in particular who would be in it. His foreknowledge is infallible,[13] and His providence is specific and minute.[14]

The Old Testament Groundwork for the Church

Though the church began on earth after the time of Christ,[15] the Old Testament made preparation for it. The church, ordained by God from all eternity, also began as prescheduled. Thus, "when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal. 4:4–5).

The Old Testament Predicts a Coming Time of Gentile Blessing

The church involves a mystery[16] that was not understood in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:1–5; cf. Col. 1:26), but God was then making preparations for the church regardless. All the plans to choose a nation through which God would bless the world (Gen. 12:1–3) were also plans for the church to be built on Christ: "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner of the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious" (Isa. 11:10 NKJV); "the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name" (Isa. 62:2 KJV).

The Old Testament Foretells Abraham's Spiritual Seed

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:1–3).

Some of these blessings through Abraham are the heritage of New Testament believers; we, the members of the church, are Abraham's spiritual seed.[17]

> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.… Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (Rom. 4:13–16)

Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.… He

redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Gal. 3:7–14)

The Old Testament Predicts the New Covenant

Furthermore, the Old Testament foretold the New Covenant, which is applied to the church in the New Testament:

> Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers.… This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days … I will put my law in their inward parts, and will write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:31–33 KJV)

The writer of Hebrews, citing this text, adds, "In speaking of 'a new covenant,' he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear" (8:13 TLB). The blessings of this covenant are experienced by the church through the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:14) and the inner law written on the heart (2 Cor. 3–6). Isaiah saw this covenant connected with the coming of the Messiah (Isa. 42:6–7; cf. 49:28); Jesus the Messiah celebrated the New Covenant with His disciples at the Last Supper.[18]

Accordingly, all Old Testament preparations for Christ were also preparations for the church, laid on His foundation (1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Peter 2:6–8). He is the promised Redeemer of the Jews *and* of the Gentiles, as promised in general to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) and mentioned specifically by the prophets:

> Indeed He [the Lord] says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6 NKJV).

Again, "The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isa. 60:3 NKJV); "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6 NKJV; cf. v. 1).

In short, it was not a mystery in the Old Testament *that* Gentiles would be brought into the redemptive community of God;[19] it was a mystery *how* Jew and Gentile would be united as coheirs into one body, the "church" of Christ.[20]

The Establishment of the Church on the Day of Pentecost

Various views have been proposed as to when the church originated, including everything between Adam and the apostle Paul.[21] However, numerous lines of evidence (including those immediately below) support Christ's church beginning on the Day of Pentecost, several weeks after Christ died and rose again, not in the Old Testament with Adam, Abraham, Moses, or even during the earthly life of Jesus.

The Church Involved a Mystery Not Known in Old Testament Times

According to Paul, the church did not exist in the Old Testament, nor was it foreseen as such, because it was a "mystery" that Jew and Gentile would be united in one body, coheirs of God's blessings. This was not revealed until the New Testament "apostles and prophets":

> I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles—if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward; how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in *the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men*, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Eph. 3:1–6 ASV)

Several facts make it clear that the church did not begin until after Christ ascended.[22]

First, it involved a "mystery," which means something once concealed and now revealed.

Second, it was not revealed until the time of the New Testament "apostles and prophets."

Third, this time was after the Old Testament, since it was not in "other generations" before the time in which Paul wrote.

Fourth, grammatically, "apostles" and "prophets" are both prefaced by one article ("the"), indicating that they should be viewed as one class.

Fifth, the "apostles and [New Testament] prophets" were the church's foundation, which shows that the church began with them.

Sixth, Christ is the "chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20), and the building cannot exist until the cornerstone is in place.

Seventh, and finally, Ephesians 3:4–5 (along with parallel passages) reveals that this "mystery" church did not exist before Christ's time: The church is Christ's mystery, not revealed in other generations "as it has now been revealed

by the Holy Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets."

The phrase "as it has now been revealed" plainly indicates that the mystery church was previously unknown.

For one thing, the contrast between then (before Christ) and "now" reveals that the church did not begin until the time of the apostles.

For another, other texts by Paul on the same topic do not use the word *as*, which some have taken to mean that the revelation about the church is *greater* in the New Testament than in the Old.[23] This is untenable, since, for example, Paul did not use *as* in Colossians 1:26–27 but made the same point:

> The mystery … *has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.* To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you [Gentiles], the hope of glory. (NKJV)

The church simply didn't exist in the Old Testament. The Gentiles were not yet fellow heirs in God's blessings but were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:12 NKJV); that the wall between the two was not broken down (v. 14) until the Cross is further supported by Romans 16:25–26:

> [He] is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest. (NKJV)

The contrast is clear: the mystery of how Jew and Gentile would be joined into one body in Christ was not in the Old Testament, which revealed *that* Gentiles would receive the gospel's blessings; the New Testament made it known *how* this would be possible (Eph. 3:6). The church did not begin until after Jesus came, died, rose, and established it on apostolic foundations.[24]

Christ Predicted the Church to Be Future in His Time

Christ foretold His church in the New Testament. After Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus replied,

> Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I *will* [in the future] build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matt. 16:17–18)

Jesus had not yet built the church. Indeed, because His death and resurrection are the church's foundation, it *could* not have yet begun, since He hadn't yet died. Further, since all who are in Christ's body are baptized into it by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), it follows that the church did not begin before the baptism of the

Spirit occurred (Pentecost—Acts 1:5; 2:1–3).

Jesus Called It "My Church"

Jesus said, "On this rock I will build *my church*" (Matt. 16:18); it wasn't someone else's church to which He was merely making additions, but the church itself He was building and of which He is the foundation. Earl Radmacher (b. 1933) said,

> When Jesus established "my *ekklesia*" [assembly] it was as different from the Old Testament *ekklesia* as it was from the numerous "Greek *ekklesiai*," etc. The content of *ekklesia* is determined by its modifiers. (*NC*, 134)

The modifier "my" makes this *ekklesia* one that Christ built Himself.

The Foundation of the Church Was Finished After Christ's Time

The church was built on the foundation of Christ and His apostles. The apostles did not complete the foundation until the time of the early book of Acts, *after* Jesus died (cf. Acts 2 and 10). Hence, the church could not have begun until after His time, as Paul wrote:

> You [Gentiles] are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,*[25] *with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*. (Eph. 2:19–20)

Likewise, Peter confessed,

> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.… "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and *precious cornerstone*, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. (1 Peter 2:4–7, citing Isa. 28:16)

Paul added, "No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). This foundation consists of His death and resurrection, for "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Just prior to speaking of Christ as the church's cornerstone, Paul testified:

> He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Eph. 2:14–16)

So it was by His death that Jew and Gentile could be reconciled and joined. Thus, in the church, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

References to Ekklesia in the Septuagint[26] *Are Not to the Church*

As noted earlier, the use of *ekklesia* is broader than only referring to the Christian church, even in the New Testament; it also references a mob (Acts 19), Israelites assembled before Mount Sinai (Acts 7:38), and an assembly singing praises to God (Heb. 2:12; cf. Ps. 22:22). None of these bears even a remote resemblance to the New Testament church, which is *functionally* distinct from Israel.[27]

The Church Began After Christ’s Death and Resurrection

In Acts 20:28, Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (NKJV). As noted by Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952):

> There could be no church in the world … until Christ’s death; for her relation to that death is not a mere anticipation, but is based wholly on His finished work, and she must be purified by His precious blood. (*ST*, 4:45)

Likewise, there could have been no church until Christ’s resurrection and ascension; Ephesians 4:8–11 declares that the church is dependent on the functioning gifts of her various members, which were given only after these events. Ephesians 1:22–23 teaches that Christ is the exalted Head over the church, which He could not be without these same accomplishments.

The Church Began at Pentecost

Paul affirms that the church consists of those who are baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body: “We were all baptized by one Spirit … and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13). He added, “Each member belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:5), which is, of course, by one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27). John informs us that this Spirit baptism did not begin until the Day of Pentecost: “This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39 KJV). Just before His ascension, Jesus also said the Spirit’s baptism had not yet taken place: “John truly baptized with water, but you shall

be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5 NKJV). The only Spirit-activated event that took place a few days later was the Day of Pentecost (2:1ff.).

Later References to Church Growth Imply Pentecost As Its Origin

The Jerusalem church's growth is mentioned in Acts 5:14 (NKJV): "Believers were increasingly added to the Lord." The only sense in which this was true is that they were added to His body, the church, which had just begun on the Day of Pentecost (cf. 4:11). Indeed, one textual tradition[28] references the word *church* (2:47) immediately thereafter, declaring that "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (NKJV). In any event, the first references to the church being in existence[29] are early in Acts, just after Pentecost.

Peter Points to Pentecost As the "Beginning" of the Church

Peter declared: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon [Cornelius and the Gentiles at Caesarea] as upon us [Jews in Jerusalem] *at the beginning*" (11:15 NKJV). Luke confirms that they spoke in tongues (10:46), just as the apostles did at Pentecost;[30] since that event was the baptism into Christ's body, this is further confirmation that the Day of Pentecost was the beginning of the church.

The Gifts to Operate the Church Were Not Given Until Pentecost

According to Ephesians 4:11–12, the gifts God gave to operate His church included "apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (KJV). Since the body cannot exist without the gifts by which it is sustained, it follows that the church could not exist until after these gifts were given. According to verse 8, these gifts were not given until after Christ's ascension, which would place the church's start no earlier than Pentecost, when the gift-giving Spirit came (1 Cor. 12:4ff.); these gifts were not given until He "ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (KJV; cf. Acts 1:5, 10–11).

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN

Several objections have been leveled at this view that the church began at Pentecost. Some covenantalists claim it began in the Old Testament; others, called ultradispensationalists,[31] maintain the church did not begin until well after Pentecost.

Objection One: From Covenant Theology

Since some covenant theologians claim that the New Testament church replaces Old Testament Israel,[32] they deny that the church began at Pentecost and say that the church's roots are in the people of God, beginning in the Old Testament and later known as the children of Israel. The New Testament church, supposedly, is really only a "spiritual Israel."

Response to Objection One

This objection has already been answered: The church could not have been started at any time from Adam to Christ, since it involved a mystery not *known* in the Old Testament, not *possible* until Christ died and ascended, and not *actual* until believers were Spirit-baptized into His body, the church.[33]

Of course, there were people of God before there was a church, but not all members of God's family are members of the Christian church. Just as there were believers in God before there was a theocratic nation of Israel,[34] even so there were Israelites before there was a church of Christ. The kingdom of God is broader than Israel and broader than the church;[35] while all members of Christ's church are part of the broader kingdom of God, not all members of God's kingdom are members of the church (cf. Matt. 11:11).

God's family of *all* ages has many basics in common, such as one God, one Savior, one brotherhood as God's children, one great plan of God, and one ultimate purpose to glorify God. Nonetheless, this overall oneness no more obscures the legitimate differences between various members of God's family than humanness negates all national and geographical differences within the human race (cf. Acts 17:26).

Objection Two: From Ultradispensationalism[36]

Ultradispensationalists argue that the New Testament church, known as the

mystery body of Christ, did not begin until *after* the Day of Pentecost. Some say no earlier than Acts 9; others say not until after Acts 28. The latter follow E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913); the former follow J. C.O'Hair (1877–1958).

The Bullingerites

According to the Bullingerites (extreme ultradispensationalists), the mystery body of Christ is entirely absent in the book of Acts (Bullinger, *M*, 40); there was an early Jewish "bride" church, but the later "body" church was not revealed until after Acts 28. This revelation is believed to have come to Paul during his second imprisonment, revealed only in his later epistles, such as Ephesians and Colossians (ibid.). Allegedly, the earlier New Testament references to a "church" are to an early Jewish church, not to the mystery church composed of conjoined Jew and Gentile. Bullingerites reject both water baptism and the Lord's Supper, reasoning that Paul did not refer to either in his later epistles.[37]

The O'Hairites

The O'Hairites (less-extreme ultradispensationalists) maintain that the mystery body of Christ did not begin until after Acts 9 (see O'Hair, *URC*, 136–40); some say at Acts 13:46, and others at Acts 18:6. This group is represented by Cornelius Stam (1909–2003) (see *TTD*, chapters 2–3) and Charles F. Baker (1910–2002) (see *DT*, chapters 66–68); their school, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is called Grace Bible College; they are sometimes referred to as the Grace Movement. The O'Hairites observe the Lord's Supper but do not practice water baptism.

Response to Objection Two

The ultradispensationalist groups will be addressed together, although some arguments apply only to the more moderate O'Hairites. The following arguments support the New Testament church of today—the body of Christ that joins Jew and Gentile in one body—as beginning before Acts 28; some also show that it began before Acts 9–18.

The Church (Body of Christ) Began on the Day of Pentecost

As was shown above, there are many good reasons to believe the mystery church (Eph. 3:5–6) of this age[38] began on the Day of Pentecost. The heart of the argument is that the present church is the body of Christ (1:22–23); one is placed in this body only by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), which first

took place in Acts 1 (cf. 2:1ff.). Hence, the mystery church of Paul's later epistles originated at Pentecost.

The Church Existed Before Acts 9

Luke affirms that "believers were increasingly added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14 NKJV), which must mean being added to the Lord's "body" (the church), since the Lord was in heaven. In fact, the majority text of Acts 2:47 reads, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (NKJV). Likewise, 8:1 informs us that "a persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem" (NKJV); this is the same "church" baptized into Christ's body on Pentecost (1:5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13), *before Acts 9*, in contradiction to hyperdispensationalism.[39]

The Church Existed in Acts 9

In Acts 9:4, Jesus asked Paul, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?" Yet Jesus, the Head of the church, was in heaven (Eph. 1:20–22); the only part of Him that was on earth was His "body," the church. Therefore, Christ's body, which Paul defines as the mystery church of this age, is already in existence in Acts 9,[40] including some of the same people (like Peter) baptized into Christ's body at Pentecost.[41]

Further, Paul affirmed emphatically that he persecuted "the church" before he was saved (in Acts 9): "I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ" (Gal. 1:22 NKJV; cf. 1 Cor. 15:9). "In Christ" refers to being in Christ's body; thus, here too the church is referenced before Acts 9.

Gentiles Are Made Part of the Body of Christ in Acts 10

According to Ephesians (3:6) and Colossians (1:26–27), the mystery body of Christ joins both Jew and Gentile. Gentiles were baptized into this body in Acts 10, in the house of Cornelius: "Those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also" (v. 45 NKJV). As such, by this text, the church was in existence at least by the time of Acts 10.

Acts 11:15 Affirms That the Body of Christ Began at Pentecost

Referring to the Acts 10 event, Peter said in Acts 11:15 that "the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning" (NKJV). This makes two facts clear: (1) the Gentiles thereby became part of the same body; (2) this body of which Jew and Gentile are part had its "beginning" on the Day of Pentecost,

when Peter and the rest were baptized by the Spirit (1:5; cf. 2:1).

Acts 2 Includes Gentiles in the Body of Christ

At Pentecost there were Gentiles present who became part of this experience and received "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38) just as the apostles did. Thus, there were both "Jews" (v. 5) *and* Gentile converts ("proselytes," v. 10) present "from every nation under heaven" (v. 5); again, the church, the mystery body of Christ, began at Pentecost.

Objection Three: Based on Pentecost

This objection, regarding whether the church was foreseen in the Old Testament, claims that it must have been if it began at Pentecost, since that's when the Spirit's baptism occurred (1:5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). The Old Testament prophet Joel predicted Pentecost (Joel 2:28ff.), and Peter even quoted him as one who foresaw this event (Acts 2:16).

Response to Objection Three

While it appears to be true that the phenomenon of Pentecost (by which the Spirit was poured out) was predicted in Joel 2,[42] nonetheless, neither Joel nor any other Old Testament prophet foresaw this event as an act that would coequally unite Jew and Gentile into one body. Once again, they foresaw *that* there would be a time of the outpouring of God's Spirit and of Gentile blessing; they did not foresee *how* God would form one new body of Jews and Gentiles on the same spiritual footing in Christ (Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:26–27).[43]

Objection Four: From Romans 1:2

Here Paul says the "gospel" of Christ was "promised beforehand through his [God's] prophets in the Holy Scriptures." This gospel is the power of God by which people are saved (Rom. 1:16) and placed in the church by His Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). It seems, then, that the Old Testament prophets foresaw the church.

Response to Objection Four

Romans 1:2 does not mean that the *church* was thereby envisioned; here Paul

simply declares that the *gospel* he preached was predicted in the Old Testament, as elsewhere he says that the same gospel he preached (Gal. 1:8) was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8). God's promise that "all nations" would be blessed through Abraham was not understood anywhere in the Old Testament as meaning that Gentiles would gain equal footing with Jews in the divine redemptive plan. Gentiles were accepted as proselytes, but there was still a "middle wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14 KJV) separating them from equality.

Objection Five: Based on 1 Peter 1:10–12

> The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

This is taken to be a prediction of the church age and contrary evidence to the dispensational claim that the church age was unknown in the Old Testament.

Response to Objection Five

A careful examination of this text reveals the following:

(1) Old Testament prophets predicted Christ's suffering and subsequent glory (which included His death and resurrection).
(2) They knew those predictions were for another age, not their own.
(3) They didn't know to which time period their prophecies referred.
(4) Their predictions were about the salvation by grace (proclaimed in the New Testament) that Peter's audience had experienced.

Nowhere does this or any other New Testament text say that they foresaw, predicted, or understood *the mystery of the church*, which Paul proclaimed was unknown in Old Testament times. Again, they did know *that*; they did not know *how*. In short, they prophesied about the church *age,* but not about the *church* itself; that mystery, once concealed, was revealed in New Testament times.

Objection Six: Based on Acts 26:22

Paul declared to Agrippa: “Having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come” (NKJV). Some believe this means the church was not a mystery unknown to Old Testament prophets.

Response to Objection Six

This understanding is incorrect, for the very next statement indicates the context in which Paul is speaking: “That the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles” (NKJV). So the prediction of Christ’s death and resurrection would be preached to the nations; again, this reveals that Old Testament prophets knew about salvation that would come to the Gentiles in a future age, but they did not know about the mystery of the church.

Objection Seven: Based on Romans 16:25–27

Some argue that, according to this passage, the Old Testament prophets foresaw the “mystery” of the church itself, not just a time of Gentile salvation:

> Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (NKJV)

Response to Objection Seven

Two things are clear from this text: (1) Paul is speaking about “the mystery” of the church; (2) he is not speaking about Old, but New Testament prophets.

First of all, he speaks of “the mystery,” “my gospel” (glad tidings), and what was not known in other ages. All these point to the same mystery of which he spoke elsewhere (cf. Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:26–27).

In addition, as in other texts where he speaks of “prophets” in connection with this mystery, he clearly denotes them as New Testament prophets. This is evident both here—“*the* mystery kept secret since the world began” (NKJV)—and in a parallel text about the “mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past” but which “has *now* been revealed by the Spirit *to God’s holy apostles and prophets*.” Comparing Romans 16:25–26 with Colossians 1:26–27 (see NKJV)

reveals that what has now been unveiled (cf. Eph. 2:20) is the mystery of the church, not known in the Old Testament.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN

The origin of the church, like all other doctrines, is rooted in God's nature and several of God's attributes.

God's Eternality As the Basis for the Church's Origin

Since the church was predetermined from all eternity, being chosen "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4 NKJV), God's eternality is an anchor of this doctrine. Having created time, God is beyond time; hence, all His decisions, including the one to build a church, are eternal.[44] This being the case, it's no wonder the church finds its origin in the council chambers of eternity. Christ, the foundation of the church, was "the lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8 NKJV); indeed, we are eternally the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Peter 1:2 NKJV):

> We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8:28–29)

Hence, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11).

God's Immutability As the Basis for the Church's Origin

The church's origin is also rooted in God's immutability,[45] for if He could change His mind, there would be no assurance that the church He chose before time wouldn't later be discarded. The Scriptures are definitive: "He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13 NKJV); "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

God's eternal will is also His immutable will:

> When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he

> swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.…
>
> Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. (Heb. 6:13–15; 17–18)[46]

Not only does God not change, it is *impossible* for Him to change. There are things He *cannot* do, namely, whatever is contrary to His immutable nature. God's will to found the church is eternal and unchangeable.

God's Omniscience As the Basis for the Church's Origin

Of course, in order for God to be sure that what He willed would come to pass (in choosing the elect to be members of His church), He had to have infallible foreknowledge of all future free acts,[47] including the free acts of those who would later choose (in accordance with His foreknowledge) to be part of the body of Christ. Scripture assures that God has exactly this; *His knowledge is infinite*.[48] Thus, God knew who would be saved before the world began (Eph. 1:11; cf. Rom. 8:29); "The Lord … does these things that have been known for ages."[49] With unlimited, infallible foreknowledge, God was able to predetermine the nature and constituents of His church before the world's foundation.

God's Omnibenevolence As the Basis for the Church's Origin

At the root of the church's existence is God's love,[50] by which we were chosen in Christ before the world began, that we should "be holy and blameless before him in love."[51] Without this love that moved God to send His Son to sacrifice His life for the church, there would be no church.

God's Omnisapience As the Basis for the Church's Origin

By His omniscience God knows the end of all things; by His omnisapience He knows the best means to this end.[52] The church, one of God's great mysteries, is dependent on God's infinite wisdom; without it, the great mystery once concealed and now revealed[53] would not have been possible. Indeed, this mystery is so great that even the angels are amazed at the plan:

> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to

> the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:10–11; cf. 1 Peter 1:12)

God's infinite wisdom is so great that the devil was trapped by it: "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). As we saw in Volume 3, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395) explained the plot of redemption this way: "The Deity [of Christ] was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh" (*C*, 22). That is, the omnisapient God[54] conceived a plan in which Satan bit on the bait of Christ's humanity and got caught on the hook of His deity; the serpent struck the heel of the woman's Seed, who used that very heel to crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

> [Christ,] having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:14–15)

Further, divine omnisapience was manifest in God's redemptive plan by which He, without breaking His unconditional promises to Israel, was able to permit blindness to Israel that the light of the gospel might shine to the Gentiles. Paul wrote, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25).[55]

> [Israel was] broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith.… If God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you [Gentiles] either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! (vv. 20–24).

Israel, who rejected her Messiah at His first coming (John 1:10–11), will accept Him at His second, when "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him" (Rev. 1:7) and a nation will be born in a day (Isa. 66:8). Israel will not come into God's kingdom empty-handed, for "the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth" (Rev. 14:7 NKJV) from every "tribe" of Israel will win "a great multitude which no one could number, of all

nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the … Lamb" (7:9 NKJV). Thus, in the mystery, the fall of Israel became the salvation of the Gentiles, and the rise of Israel will bring salvation to countless souls: "If their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11:15; cf. Col. 1:26–27).

God's Sovereignty As the Basis for the Church's Origin

As God's omnisapience *planned* the great mystery of the church in accordance with His eternal and immutable will, His sovereignty and providence are able to *accomplish* it.[56] Sovereignty is God's universal rule, and providence is the means by which He carries it out. The Westminster Confession of Faith states: "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass" (III). Job confessed to God, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted."[57]

> The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand." … For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? … "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but [it] will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa. 14:24, 27; 55:11; cf. Matt. 16:18).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN

Early Church Fathers

The early Church Fathers, though then engaged with other pressing doctrinal issues, did speak to the church's origin, and there is broad consensus (supported by ample citations) that it began with Christ and His apostles.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

"The disciples were called Christians at Antioch, when Paul and Peter were laying the foundations of the Church" (*EIM*, 10).

> The Lord Jesus Christ … according to His own will, has firmly established His Church upon a rock, by a spiritual building, not made with hands, against which the winds and the floods have beaten, yet have not been able to overthrow.… There is but … one Church which the holy apostles established

from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil. (*EIP*, 1, 5)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

Therefore these words testify explicitly that He is witnessed to by Him who established these things, as deserving to be worshiped, as God and as Christ.… It thus addresses the church which has sprung from His name and partakes of His name (for we are all called Christians). (*DJ*, 63)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

"The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith" (*AH*, 1.10.1).

"The Universal Church … through the whole world has received this tradition from the apostles" (ibid., 2.9.1).

"Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church" (ibid., 3.1.1).

"[The Church] is the synagogue of God, which God—that is, the Son Himself—has gathered by Himself" (ibid., 3.6.1).

"The Church throughout all the world, having its origin firm from the apostles, perseveres in one and the same opinion with regard to God and His Son" (ibid., 3.12.7).

"Christ was also, in a strange country, to generate the twelve-pillared foundation of the Church" (ibid., 4.21.3).

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

"Therefore the churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive church, (founded) by the apostles, from which they all (spring)" (*PAH*, 20).

"His Holy Spirit … builds the church, which is indeed the temple, and household and city of God" (*FBAM*, 3.23).

"[Jesus] was born the God-man who was to build the church according to the Father's will" (ibid., 4.13).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Paul [is] the founder, after Jesus, of the Churches that are in Christ.… We assert that the whole habitable world contains evidence of the works of Jesus, in the existence of those Churches of God which have been founded through Him by those who have been converted from the practice of innumerable sins. (*AC*, 1.63, 67)

John Chrysostom (347–407)

"[Christ's words] 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church,' [meaning] 'on the faith of his confession' " (*HSJCM*, 54.3).

"As the cloud designated the camp of the Hebrews, so the Spirit distinguished the Church" (*HSJCFT*, 5.870).

Early Liturgies

"[Gather] us together within Thy holy Church, which Thou hast purchased by the precious blood of Thy only-begotten Son, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (cited in Walvoord, *ELDLJ*, 4).

The Medieval Fathers

Following the early fathers, the great theologians of the Middle Ages placed the origin of the Christian church with Christ and the apostles.

Augustine (354–430)

"Christ ascended into heaven, and the Church was established under her King" (*CG*, 18.32).

"The Church … was to be built by Christ" (ibid., 18.48).

Ambrose (339–397)

"So the Lord saith through Isaiah: 'Behold, I lay a stone for a foundation in Zion.' This means Christ is the foundation of the Church" (*ODC*, 1.29.142).

Jerome (c. 340–420)

"The Acts of the Apostles seem to relate a mere unvarnished narrative descriptive of the infancy of the newly born church" (*LSJ*, 53.9).

> I have purposed … to write a history of the church of Christ from the advent of our Savior up to our own age, that is, from the apostles to the dregs of time in which we live, and to show by what means and through what agents it received its birth. (*TLMCM*, 1)

If ever you hear of any that are called Christians taking their name not from the Lord Jesus Christ, but from some other, for instance, Marcionites, Valentinians, Men of the mountain or the plain, you may be sure that you have there not the Church of Christ, but the synagogue of Antichrist. For the fact that they took their rise after the foundation of the Church is proof that they are those

whose coming the Apostle foretold. (*TDAL,* 28)

The Church was founded upon Peter: although elsewhere the same is attributed to all the Apostles, and they all received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the strength of the Church depends upon them all alike. (*TAJ*, 1.26)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"The Church takes her origin from Christ" (*ST,* 1a.92.2).

"From the side of Christ sleeping on the Cross the Sacraments flowed—namely, blood and water—on which the Church was established" (ibid., 1a.92.3).

"Our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to other doctors" (ibid., 1a.1.9).

Reformation Leaders

The Reformers carried on the established teaching of the church's origin.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

"Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Ghost who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one can come to Christ the Lord" (*LC,* 2.3.63).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

While Calvin saw a foundation for the church in the Old Testament prophets, he nevertheless recognized that the apostles' doctrine was necessary for the church's establishment:

> Paul testifies that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." If the doctrine of the apostles and prophets is the foundation of the Church, the former must have had its certainty before the latter began to exist.… If the Christian Church was founded at first on the writings of the prophets, and the preaching of the apostles, that doctrine, wheresoever it may be found, was certainly ascertained and sanctioned antecedently to the Church, since, but for this, the Church herself never could have existed. (*ICR,* 1.7.2)

Post-Reformation Theologians

After the Reformation, there was likewise an emphasis on the foundational role of Christ and the apostles in establishing the church. However, moving into

modern times, insights into ecclesiology were deepened, an attention due in part to the conflict between Roman Catholic and Protestant views.

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

> The Roman Pontiff is not Christ. Therefore, neither is he the foundation of the church. But the metonymy,[58] by which the Prophets and Apostles are called "the foundations of the church," and by which the saints are said to be "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," attributes nothing more to them than their being "laborers together with God" in laying down Christ as this foundation, and in building up the whole house on Him.…
>
> St. Peter was also among these; yet he excelled none of the other Apostles in any prerogative, but was inferior to St. Paul, not indeed in power, but in [Paul's] "more abundant labor" in building up the church. (*D*, 21.4)
>
> The Church Universal is "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," and the Apostles are called "the foundations of the celestial Jerusalem," which is the mother of us all. The Apostles have declared all things … necessary for the whole church to the final consummation. (ibid., 2.17.6)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

> As I speak chiefly to those who believe the Scriptures, the method I propose is this: First, to observe what account is given therein of the Jews, the ancient Church of God, inasmuch as all these things were written for our instruction, who say, We are now the visible Church of the God of Israel: Secondly, to appeal to all who profess to be members thereof, to everyone who is called a Christian, how far, in each instance, the parallel holds; and how much we are better than they. (*FAMRR*, 2.1.2)

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith (1632)

> These we confess to be the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, who are declared to be the bride and wife of Christ, yea, children and heirs of everlasting life, a tent, tabernacle, and habitation of God in the Spirit, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ Himself is declared to be the cornerstone (upon which His church is built). (VIII)

John Nelson Darby (1800–1882)

This discussion took on new emphasis following 1830, when dispensationalists,[59] led by John Nelson Darby, rediscovered the long neglected truth of the church's origin and nature. These insights were later furthered considerably by the *Scofield Reference Bible*,[60] the establishment of Dallas Theological Seminary under Lewis Sperry Chafer, and many Bible schools around the United States.

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952)

> In Ephesians 3 the church is said to involve a mystery (v. 3) that is a sacred secret, hitherto

unrevealed truth, in which the Gentiles are "heirs together" with believing Israelites (vv. 1–6). A mystery is a truth not revealed in the Old Testament but revealed in the New.… The fact that the church is distinct from believers in the Old Testament makes unscriptural the point of view that Old Testament saints constituted a church. (*ST*, 2.261)

Charles Ryrie (b. 1925)

The inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in the same body is a mystery, the content of which is "that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promises in Christ through the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). This is a mystery "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). (*DT*, 133)

[John Walvoord[61]] also calls attention to the rather amazing omission by [covenantalist Oswald] Allis of any discussion of the similar passage in Colossians 1:26, where the mystery is stated in no uncertain terms as completely hidden to previous generations. (ibid., 134)

CONCLUSION

The origin of the New Testament church was planned and ordained by God's infinite wisdom from all eternity. The mystery of how Jew and Gentile would be united as coheirs in the one spiritual body of Christ was kept secret in times past but was revealed to His New Testament "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:3–5; cf. Col. 1:26–27). The Old Testament *did* refer to a time of Gentile blessing, and many Old Testament passages about salvation are appropriately applied in the New Testament to believers in this age, since Christ died for all persons.[62]

This mystery of how God could provide for Gentile blessings promised though Abraham (Gen. 12:3)—*without* breaking His land and throne promises to Israel[63]—was made possible by Christ and revealed in the New Testament age. Paul reminded Gentile believers:

At that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Eph. 2:12–16)

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CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The New Testament Greek word for "church," *ekklesia*, from which we get the word *ecclesiastical*, means "an assembly of persons."[1] There are some one hundred fifteen New Testament occurrences of this term, and except for a handful of texts,[2] they indicate either the universal church (Christ's spiritual body of believers) or a local church or churches.[3] While the vast majority refer to local churches, many refer to the universal church, and some seem to include both aspects.[4]

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Most of the texts that deal with the universal church[5] are found in Paul's writings, particularly the later prison epistles;[6] some are found in the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 16:16–18), Acts (e.g., 20:28), and Paul's earlier writings (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:13), and, again, some pertain to both the universal and local church (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2).

Biblical References to the Universal Church

Matthew 16:18

"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Clearly Jesus was not referring only to a local church in Jerusalem —hell did prevail against that when it was destroyed. Further, "*my* church" indicates something broader than a local church, otherwise churches in other cities could not properly be called by Christ's name.[7] Also, the "keys" to the kingdom (v. 19) were used first to open the door to the universal church at Pentecost, when believers were Spirit-baptized (Acts 1:5) into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), Christ's universal church. Later Peter used the keys to welcome Gentiles who had not converted to Judaism (Acts 10).

Acts 2:47

Luke says, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (NKJV); likewise, in Acts 5:11 he affirms, "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." In context, this obviously refers to the visible church (the local assembly), but at this point "the church" included both the visible manifestation at Jerusalem, where thousands were being added (2:14, 41; 4:4), and the invisible church. In any event, the local church was initially coterminus with the universal church, since all who were Spirit-baptized into Christ's body were still alive on earth (see Radmacher, *NC*, 321–22).

Acts 8:3

"Saul began to destroy *the church*. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison"; however, when Saul was arrested by Jesus on the road to Damascus, "he fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?' " (9:4). Plainly, Paul was persecuting the spiritual body of Christ; given this, it appears that the local church was immediately considered a visible manifestation of the invisible universal church. Indeed, in 1 Corinthians 15:9, Paul says he was persecuting "the church of God" (cf. Gal. 1:22).

Acts 20:28

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."[8] While Paul is talking both to and about the visible church of

which his audience were “elders” (v. 17), nonetheless, the phrase “bought with his own blood” is more inclusive than the local church: It includes all members of the universal and invisible church as well (cf. Eph. 5:25).[9]

Romans 16:16

Paul signed off his epistle to the Romans with these words (among others): “Greet one another with a holy kiss. *All the churches of Christ* send greetings.” In referring also to other passages with a universal implication to their local manifestation,[10] the comment of Frédéric Godet (1812–1900) is to the point: Paul “associates them with a larger whole, of which they are only one of the members” (*CFESPC*, 1.45). In brief, the local church is a miniature pattern of the universal church (Radmacher, *NC*, 327).

1 Corinthians 1:2

Paul wrote “to the church of God [universal aspect] in Corinth [local manifestation], to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.” This greeting too seems to combine both aspects, a visible (local) manifestation of the invisible (universal) church.

2 Corinthians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia.” Same pattern, with both universal and local aspects.

1 Corinthians 10:32

“Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.” This may be a generic reference to all local churches, since members of Christ’s spiritual (universal) body as such cannot be offended. Or it could refer to visible manifestations of the invisible church.

1 Corinthians 12:13, 27

> In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.… Now *you are the body of Christ*, and members individually. (NKJV)

Here once more is the universal church in miniature, a visible manifestation of

the invisible. The local body should operate with the unity possessed by the universal church, each part fitting in with the whole.

1 Corinthians 12:28

> In the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

Again, with his reference to the body of Christ (v. 27), Paul seems to include the universal aspect of the church; obviously, he doesn't intend to imply that he was baptized into the church at Corinth and left his membership there, since he identified with the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1–7).

Ephesians 1:22–23

"God placed all things under his [Christ's] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." That this is a clear reference to the universal church is indicated by: (1) the definite article ("the") used with "church"; (2) the overall context in which (a) "all things [are] under his feet," which could not be true of a local church or even all local churches; (b) Christ is "far above principalities and power" (v. 21 NKJV), which is the spiritual domain; (c) Christ "fills all in all" (NKJV), a phrase not applicable to the local church.

Ephesians 3:10

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." Again, Paul refers to *the* church, not just *a* church. Also, the involvement of the angelic world depicts more than a local church or churches.

Ephesians 3:21

"To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." The visible local church will not exist forever, but God will be glorified through the invisible universal church forever.

Ephesians 5:23–30, 32

> The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in

> everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.… He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body.… This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

While referencing how believers should act on earth, that this passage too goes beyond the visible church is evident from (1) the use of "*the* church" and (2) Christ's death for all believers, not just those in the local church at Ephesus or even in all existing local churches at that time.

Colossians 1:18

"He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." Christ as *the* Head of *the* body cannot be confined within local boundaries; that the cosmic context of Colossians 1 reaches far beyond a local church is seen in words like *all things* (three times in vv. 18–19).

Colossians 1:24

"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." Again, Christ did not just suffer for the church at Colossae, and "his body" is more than a local body or the sum total of all local churches at that time. He died for all believers and all unbelievers.[11]

Hebrews 12:22–24

> You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Clearly Jesus' blood was shed for—and He is the Mediator for—more than the local (visible) church; the names written in heaven also include the elect of all ages.[12] Further, since the local (professing) church can and often does have unsaved members, the local church cannot be said to have all its members' names written in heaven, as does this church in Hebrews 12.

Other Terms for the Church

The universal church is also called by many other names; one book, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* by Paul Minear (b. 1906), lists ninety-six different figures of speech, each revealing a different dimension of Christ's relationship to the church. Among these the following are noted.

The Body of Christ

The New Testament uses the term *body* (Gk: *soma*) numerous times of the church.[13] Christ is the Head, the church's source and sustenance.

Soma is used of the church both visible and invisible; many references are to the universal body, some are of the local body, and others include both.[14] In First Corinthians 12:12–27, Paul describes at least six features of the church as Christ's body.[15] It has:

(1) an organic unity as "one body" (vv. 12–13);
(2) a diversity of "many members" (14–20);
(3) a universality because "all" believers are in it (13);
(4) a mutuality because the members mutually edify one another (21–27);
(5) a visibility through its visible members who shine as lights in the world (cf. Phil. 2:14–16; 2 Cor. 10:4–5); and
(6) are spiritually animated by the Holy Spirit, who gifts its members.

The Bride of Christ

Christ is also depicted as the Bridegroom who wooed and loved His *bride*, the church (cf. Rev. 21:9). John wrote, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (v. 2; cf. 19:7; 22:1). Paul said elsewhere, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (2 Cor. 11:2).

The Wife of Christ

In the same vein, the church is called the *wife* of Christ (Eph. 5:24–25; cf. Rev. 21:9). As Husband of the wife, Christ is depicted in intimate and loving relationship to His church.

The Firstborn of Christ

Again, Hebrews refers to "*the church of the firstborn*, whose names are

written in heaven" (12:23). Here too the church is seen in a special relationship to Christ, "the mediator of the new covenant" (v. 24), who was firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), and by virtue of whom the church is also firstborn.

The Building of Christ

Christ is the foundation of the church—the chief Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20; cf. 1 Peter 2:7)—but the church consists of the superstructure of "living stones" built on that foundation: "*You also*, like living stones, *are being built* into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (v. 5).

A Spiritual House

Though Scripture never uses the word *church* of a physical building made from brick and mortar, the church is described as a *spiritual building* (1 Peter 2:5). Christ is both the foundation and the Master Builder.

A Holy Priesthood

Peter used a series of powerful images to describe the church, one of which is *holy priesthood*: "Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood" (ibid. TLB). Not only does this demonstrate the priesthood of all believers,[16] it also points to our "great high priest" who ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 4:14).

A Royal Priesthood

The church as *royal priesthood* (1 Peter 2:9) emphasizes the regal nature of our relation to Christ, the King with whom we'll reign. John declared: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). He is King of kings and Priest of priests; we will reign and minister under Him, drawing from Him both example and power.

A Chosen People

"You [the church] are *a chosen people*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9); "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph. 1:4).

The People of God

The select nature of our relationship with God is manifest in this term variously rendered in 1 Peter 2:9 as “peculiar people” (KJV), “elect race” (ASV), “a people for God’s own possession” (NASB), “God’s own people” (RSV), “a people of His own” (NAB), “a people claimed by God” (NEB), and “God’s very own” (TLB). However translated, Peter wrote: “Once you were not a people, but now you are *the people of God*; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:10).

The Flock

God’s relationship to His people as one of Shepherd to His flock has a venerable history (cf. Ps. 23). Jesus spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd and of believers as His sheep (John 10); He told Peter to “feed My sheep” (John 21:15–17). To the elders in Acts 20:28, Paul ordered, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Peter said,

> To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1–3)

All this because we serve the Great Shepherd, “and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (v. 4).

There are many more New Testament figures of speech depicting a vital, personal, intimate relationship between Christ and His church, including:

- Cornerstone/temple (Eph. 2:20–21);
- Beloved/virgin (2 Cor. 11:2);
- Ruler/city (Rev. 21:9–10);
- Owner/possession (Titus 2:14);
- Firstborn/household (Eph. 2:19);
- Creator/new creation (2 Cor. 5:21);
- Heir/inheritance (Eph. 1:18); and
- Vine/branches (John 15:1; cf. House, *CCDT*, 117).

SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE UNIVERSAL

CHURCH

Using the above and other passages, the following is a brief summary of conclusions that can be drawn as to the nature of the universal church.

The Universal Church Was Chosen From Eternity

Christ is eternal, and the universal church was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); hence, in the mind of God, the church of God is eternal. Further, Christ is the elect of God (cf. Matt. 3:16–17), and we are elect in Him (op. cit.); not only is Christ the elect One, but in the New Testament those "in Christ," the church, the members of His body, were elect in Him before time began.[17]

The Universal Church Is Invisible

Christ's body is the "the joyful assembly," "the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:22–23). The writer is speaking here of "Mount Zion," "the City of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," i.e., *heaven*; this refers to the invisible church, the heavenly body of believers. While all true believers of this age are members, only those who have gone on before us are actually there. The rest of us in the visible church await that day (1 John 3:2).

While it has a visible manifestation in the local church, the universal church as such is not a *visible organization* (like the Roman Catholic Church); rather, it is an *invisible organism*, a living body that grows daily.

The Universal Church Is Increasable

Luke records that "the Lord *added* to the church" (Acts 2:47 NKJV); the universal church grows both in number and in quality. Colossians 2:19 speaks of Christ "the Head, from whom the whole body … grows as God causes it to grow" (cf. Eph. 4:15–16). Christ both supports and sustains the growth of His body, providing the Spirit's gifts and power to fulfill His purpose for His church (4:11–12; 5:18).

Christ's headship over the universal church involves the preeminence of the Head over the body (Col. 1:15–17; see Radmacher, *NC,* 237–45), the unity of the

body with the Head (Eph. 1:22–23), and most of all the sustenance of the body from the Head:

> Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:15–16)

Without the Head, the body cannot grow.

The Universal Church Is Indivisible

Unlike the church's local manifestations, which can undergo divisions and schisms,[18] the universal church has an unbreakable unity. It is the spiritual body of Christ and, as such, can no more be broken than Christ can be. Paul urged believers to "*keep* the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) in the church, but it is God who *made* this unity when by "one Spirit" we were baptized into "one body" (v. 4; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

Several related terms are often confused in this regard. Merrill Tenney (1904–1985), commenting on Jesus' prayer in John 17 that we all "may be one," noted that "a clear distinction should be drawn between four closely allied concepts: Unanimity, uniformity, union, and unity."

> *Unanimity* means absolute concord of opinion within a given group of people. *Uniformity* is complete similarity of organization or of ritual. *Union* implies political affiliation without necessarily including individual agreement. *Unity* requires oneness of inner heart and essential purpose, through the possession of a common interest or a common life.
>
> [Hence,] unanimity of belief does not necessarily mean uniformity of ritual; nor does uniformity of ritual presuppose organic union; nor does organic union involve unity of spirit.… Unity prevails wherever there is a deep and genuine experience of Christ; for the fellowship of the new birth transcends all historical denominational boundaries.… Such unity was what Jesus petitioned in His prayer, for He defined it as the unity which He obtained between Himself and the Father (John 17:21). Clearly, no earthly union, whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or the World Council of Churches, is what is intended in this text. (*GJ*, 248–49)

The Universal Church Is Invincible

In the very first biblical reference to Christ's church, Jesus promised Peter, who had just confessed "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," that hell would not overcome His church (see Matt. 16:18). This or that local congregation may fold, but His universal fold will never fail; the visible church may not always be victorious, but the church triumphant will be successful. *The*

universal church will accomplish the ultimate mission for which God called it (cf. Eph. 3:9–11).

The Universal Church Is Doxological

The purpose of all creation is to bring glory to God.[19] Specifically, about the church, Paul wrote:

> To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves … in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.… To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 1:6, 12; 3:21; cf. 1 Tim. 1:17)

In John's vision, around God's throne,

> The living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever.… In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 4:9; 5:12).

Everything, including the church, is ordained for the glory of God.

The Universal Church Is Apostolic

Along with Christ, the Chief Cornerstone, the church was "built on the foundation of the apostles" (Eph. 2:20). At Pentecost, the apostles received one of the special "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV), the gift of tongues (Acts 2:1–5). Later, believers who were there from "every nation under heaven" (v. 5) repented and received "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). Some time later, the same thing happened to the neighboring Samaritans by the hands of the apostles:

> When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. [Then] Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14–17)

Likewise, the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred later, on the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius:

> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been

poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. (10:44–46)

Even as late as Acts 19, there were some who had not heard about Pentecost, and even though they had repented, believed, and been baptized by John, they had not been Spirit-baptized into this new body of Christ:

> [In Ephesus, Paul] found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"
>
> They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."
>
> So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"
>
> "John's baptism," they replied.
>
> Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."
>
> On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (vv. 1–6)

Thus, after the Day of Pentecost, Spirit baptism was administered by God only through the apostles; this was part of their role as the church's foundation.[20] From the transitional time period when their message had officially reached the whole earth (Col. 1:23), it appears that converts received Spirit baptism at the moment of conversion. At least by the time of Romans (A.D. 58), Paul wrote: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (8:9). This method of God's initially giving the Spirit only through an apostle's hands makes sense: If every believer all over the world had simultaneously received Spirit baptism, Christianity would have been a fragmented movement from its inception, and the foundation upon the "apostles and prophets" of this new dispensation—those who recorded the New Testament for the faith and practice of all future believers—would not have been established. Thus it was that the early church was established in apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42), and in this way God pinpointed both the apostles' *living* authority and their *written* authority for the church in their writings, which would succeed them.[21]

The apostles also played an authoritative role in the government of the local churches,[22] and gradually they established self-governing local churches under the leadership of elders and deacons chosen by the congregation. They also left their written authority, the New Testament, to replace their living authority in matters of doctrine and practice. This was recognized by churches who read, collected, and passed these writings on to others, even during apostolic times.[23] Peter recognized and used a collection of Paul's letters as Scripture:

> Our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way

> *in all his letters*, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15–16)

The Universal Church Is Ethnically Neutral

The universal church, Christ's spiritual body, is ethnically and socially neutral. The universal church, of which the local church should be a reflection, is composed of all who belong to Jesus Christ, for in Him *all* are one (Gal. 3:28). There are no racial, national, or political distinctions; Christ's body transcends all of these as a spiritual union of all believers since Pentecost.

The Universal Church Is Regenerate

Not only are all saved persons in the universal church, but *only* saved people are in it. Unlike the local church which, unfortunately, contains both wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24–30), the universal church has a totally and completely regenerate membership, made up only of sheep (see Matt. 25). The local church has "wolves" (Acts 20:28–29), "false brethren" (Gal. 2:4 NKJV), "unbelievers" (1 Cor. 14:23), and "certain men [who] crept in" from the outside (Jude 4 NKJV).

The Universal Church Is Spiritually Equal

Believers are spiritually equal in Christ, and again, the real mystery, given God's unconditional election of Israel as His chosen nation (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. Rom. 11:29), is how Gentiles could be brought into the redemptive community on the same ground (Col. 1:27). According to Judaism, Gentiles could convert as proselytes, but they were still second-class citizens in the kingdom; for instance, the temple had a "court of the Gentiles" and a middle wall of partition they couldn't pass. Now, "this mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6; cf. 2:12–16).

The *Invisible* Church Is *Universal*

Other than the early post-Pentecost church in Jerusalem, there never has been and never will be a truly catholic[24] (universal) church on earth. Neither the

Roman nor the Greek branch of Christendom is truly catholic; the only truly catholic church today is the spiritual body of Christ, which is all true believers in whatever local church or denomination. Never does the Bible use the word *church* to denote one visible ecclesiastical union that is the sole organization representing Christ on earth; the repeated use of the word *churches*[25] reveals that only in a general, collective sense can we speak of the many self-governing, independent churches that are based on New Testament teaching as the "church" on earth. Only the invisible church is truly universal.

The Universal Church Is Original

As we'll later discuss in detail,[26] the body of Christ is *not* a spiritual Israel. The church is brand-new: In His day, Christ said it was yet future and called it "my church."[27] Again, the church, founded on Christ and by His apostles (Eph. 2:20), was a mystery not revealed in the Old Testament.[28]

Here is a summary of the reasons why the church (the body of Christ) did not originate until the New Testament age:

(1) The church was a mystery not known in Old Testament times (Eph. 3:3–6).
(2) Christ declared that the church was yet future (Matt. 16:16–18).
(3) His phrase "my church" (ibid.) indicates it did not begin before His time.
(4) The church's foundation was not completed until after Christ's time (Eph. 2:20).
(5) The use of *ekklésia* of Israel in the Old Testament[29] does not identify it with the New Testament church.
(6) The church did not begin until after Christ died and rose (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:8–11).
(7) The church (the body of Christ) began at Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. Acts 1:5).
(8) Peter pointed to Pentecost as the "beginning" of the church (Acts 11:15).
(9) The gifts needed to operate the church were not given until after Christ ascended (Eph. 4:11–12; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4ff.).

As an original work of God, the church is not a continuation of Israel in some spiritual sense; even in the New Testament "Israel" and its future are clearly

distinguished from the church (Rom. 9–11). Jesus never denied there would be a future kingdom for Israel but said the times were in God's hands (Acts 1:6–7; cf. Matt. 19:28). At no time have the unconditional land-promises, given to Abraham and his descendants "forever," been fulfilled.[30] Consistent application of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic[31] demands that they will be.

The last thing the disciples asked Jesus was "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6; cf. 15:13–16). If there were to be no future literal kingdom, then this was Jesus' last opportunity to correct them, as He had done with their misunderstandings on many other occasions. But He did not; instead, He implied that it would come in the Father's good time, and that meanwhile they were to be witnesses in all the world (1:7–8).

Even after the church began, this future literal kingdom was offered to Israel (in Acts 3) by Peter, who referred to the restoration of Israel (vv. 19–21), promised in the Old Testament and to be fulfilled when Messiah returned. In fact, Peter declared that He would *not* return until they repented and accepted Him as their Messiah.

Paul informs us that the nation of Israel will yet be restored to its place of blessing under God. To set the context, Romans 9–11 is about Israel's past blessings (9), present rejection (10), and future national restoration (11). In 9:3–4, Paul makes it evident he is speaking of literal physical Israel, not any kind of "spiritual" Israel, and in 10:1, he declares: "My heart's desire and prayer to God *for the Israelites* is that they may be saved." They are said to be the "nation" (v. 19) to whom Moses wrote and the "Israel" to whom Isaiah prophesied (v. 21). Further, in Romans 11, Paul calls them "His [God's] people," of whom Paul is one (v. 1), that God has not rejected forever (vv. 1–2 NKJV), because "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (v. 29).

> After all, if you [Roman Christians] were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches [the people of Israel], be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written. (11:24–26)

The nation *as a whole*[32] will be converted and restored, just as God promised, *when Messiah returns*.[33]

Revelation speaks of a role for Israel in the last days before the Second Coming,[34] a specific and significant involvement in God's future plan, first mentioned during the Tribulation: "Then I heard the number of those who were

sealed: 144,000 *from all the tribes of Israel*" (7:4). Neither word, *tribe* or *Israel*, is ever scripturally used in anything but a literal way.[35]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Like the origin of the church, the nature of the church is rooted in the very nature and will of God.[36] God is eternal and, hence, eternally willed this mysterious plan of how individual Jews and Gentiles would be conjoined as coheirs in one body. God is also immutable and thus His will to create the church cannot be changed. By His omniscience He could see His desired end in decreeing the church's existence; by His omnisapience He was able to ordain the best means to His ultimate end; and with his sovereign, omnipotent power, God is able to achieve the plan He has ordained.[37]

An Objection: Based on Christians Being Abraham's Offspring

According to Paul, we are Abraham's heirs:

> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (Rom. 4:13–16)

Paul added elsewhere, "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal. 3:14). So even though the promise was made to Abraham and his descendants, the church is also the beneficiary; accordingly, why can't this likewise be true of other promises made to Abraham —such as the inheritance of the Promised Land?[38]

Response

In reply, there are several important facts to keep in mind.

For one thing, even if the land-promises were applicable to the church, there is no sense in which she has inherited the literal land of Israel forever. There is

no biblical indication that the church ever will, and if it does, then God will have broken His promise to Israel, which He cannot do (Heb. 6:13–18). Christians at best have possessed some of the land for a short time.

In addition, God's promise of the blessing of salvation was given through Abraham to all from the very beginning:[39] "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). Therefore, this promise of spiritual salvation through the Seed of Abraham (Christ—see Gal. 3:16) was intended by God for all people from the start. This is *not* the case with the guarantee of the Holy Land and of other national blessings God promised to Israel.[40]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Early Fathers

There is ample support in the writings of the early Fathers for the nature of the universal church as presented above.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

"Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" (*EIS*, 8).

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

"The word of God speaks to those who believe in Him as being one soul, and one synagogue, and one church" (*DJ*, 63).

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

"The Catholic Church possesses one and the same faith throughout the whole world" (*AH*, 1.10.3).

"Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church" (ibid., 3.24.1).

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

"We have one faith, one God, the same Christ, the same hope, the same baptismal sacraments; let me say it once for all, we are one Church" (*OVV*, 2).

"The churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one

primitive church, (founded) by the apostles, from which they all (spring)" (*PAH*, 20).

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

"He who eats of this meal [Communion], the best of all, shall possess the kingdom of God, fixing his regards here on the holy assembly of love, the heavenly Church" (*I*, 2.1).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

"The expression … 'effluents of an earthly church and of circumcision,' was probably taken from the fact that the church on earth was called by some an effluent from a heavenly church and a better world" (*AC*, 6.35).

> The Holy Scriptures declare the Body of Christ, animated by the Son of God, to be the whole Church of God, and the members of this body—considered as a whole—to consist of those who are believers … each individual member belonging to the Church … do[ing] nothing apart from the Word. (ibid., 6.48)

Cyprian (200–258)

"It becomes us all to watch for the body of the whole Church, whose members are scattered through every various province" (*EC*, 29.4).

"There is one God, and Christ is one, and there is one Church" (ibid., 39.5).

"There is one Church, divided by Christ throughout the whole world into many members" (ibid., 51.24).

Athanasius (c. 293–373)

"There is one body of the Catholic Church" (*DA*, 1).

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395)

"The populous Church of God … [was] to fill the whole world from end to end of the earth" (*OBC*, 983).

John Chrysostom (347–407)

"The Church amongst you is a part of the Church existing everywhere and of the body which is made up of all the Churches" (*HSJCEPC*, 1.32.1).

> "Unto the Church of God" [1 Cor. 1:2]. Not "of this or of that man," but of God … shewing that it ought to be united. For if it be "of God," it is united, and it is one, not in Corinth only, but also in all the world: for the Church's name is not a name of separation, but of unity and concord. (ibid., 1.1)
>
> Although [this] letter be written to the Corinthians only, yet he [Paul] makes mention of all the

> faithful that are in all the earth; showing that the Church throughout the world must be one, however separate in [diverse] places. (ibid., 1.1.2)

The Medieval Fathers

The Fathers of the Middle Ages also spoke of the invisible, universal church as Christ's spiritual body, of which local churches are a visible manifestation.

Augustine (354–430)

> In this manner was I confounded and converted, and I rejoiced, O my God, that the one Church, the body of Thine only Son (wherein the name of Christ had been set upon me when an infant), did not appreciate these infantile trifles. (*C*, 6.4.5)

"On account of their perversity, [the Donatists] have long ceased to receive from the undivided Catholic Church which is spread throughout the world" (*LSA*, 43.1.1).

"The Church is His body, as the apostles' teaching shows us; and it is even called His spouse. His body, then, which has many members, and all performing different functions" (*OCD*, 1.16).

Jerome (c. 340–420)

"Though the Church be seven-fold she is but one" (*TAJ*, 2.19).

> "Know ye not that your bodies are a temple of the Holy Ghost?" [1 Cor. 3:16]. A temple, he [Paul] says, not temples, in order to show that God dwells in all alike. Call the Church what you will, bride, sister, mother, her assembly is but one and never lacks husband, brother, or son. (ibid.)

Reformation Leaders

Ecclesiology came further into focus during the Reformation because of the differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants. This was true not only of the basis of the church but also of its nature and government. The Reformers placed even more emphasis on the universal church's invisible nature, in opposition to the Catholic stress on one visible organization.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

> The true Church is an assembly or congregation depending on that which does not appear, nor may be comprehended in the mind, namely, God's Word; what that says, they believe without addition, giving God the honor. (*TT*, 367)

Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Ghost who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one can come to Christ the Lord. (*LC*, 2.3.63)

God wonderfully preserved his Gospel in the Church, which now from the pulpits is taught to the people, word by word. In like manner, it is a special great work of God, that the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, have remained and cleaved to the hearts of those who were ordained to receive them in the midst of Popedom. (op. cit., 220)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> The judgment which ought to be formed concerning the visible Church which comes under our observation, must, I think, be sufficiently clear from what has been said. I have observed that the Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways. Sometimes when they speak of the Church they mean the Church as it really is before God—the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are sons of God, and by the sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ. In this case it not only comprehends the saints who dwell on the earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world. Often, too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world.…
>
> In this Church there is a very large mixture of hypocrites, who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance: of ambitious, avaricious, envious, evil-speaking men, some also of impurer lives, who are tolerated for a time, either because their guilt cannot be legally established, or because due strictness of discipline is not always observed. Hence, as it is necessary to believe the invisible Church, which is manifest to the eye of God only, so we are also enjoined to regard this Church which is so called with reference to man, and to cultivate its communion. (*ICR*, 4.1.7)

Post-Reformation Teachers

After the Reformation, and particularly in modern times, the nature of the invisible church has become the center of additional attention. This is true not only in the Anabaptist and independent traditions but also in Reformed circles.

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

> As many of the called profess with their mouths "that they know God, while in works they deny him"; and since of the hearts of these men, God is the sole judge, who alone "knoweth them that are his"; therefore such persons are judged, on account of the promise, to belong to the visible church, although equivocally, since they do not belong to the invisible Church, have none of that inward communion with the Head, which is the Form of the church. (*D*, 18.15)
>
> The saints, said to be "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," attribute nothing more to them than their being "laborers together with God" in laying down Christ as this foundation, and in building up the whole house on Him. (ibid., 21.4)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

"Pray much for the ministers and the church of God; especially, that he would carry on his glorious work which he has now begun, till the world shall be full of his glory" (*MJE*, 9).

John Wesley (1703–1791)

> A provincial or national Church, according to our article, is the true believers of that province or nation. If these are dispersed up and down, they are only a part of the invisible Church of Christ. But if they are visibly joined by assembling together to hear his word and partake of his supper, they are then a visible Church, such as the Church of England, France, or any other. (*EAMRR*, 77)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

> Our afflictions are the sufferings of Christ mystical, the sufferings of Christ's body, the sufferings of Christ's church; for you know that if a man could be so tall as to have his head in heaven and his feet at the bottom of the sea, it would be the same body, and the head would feel the sufferings of the feet. (*SSC*, "CPSS—Sermon 13," 93)
>
> Let us then be doubly earnest in pleading with the Holy Ghost, that he would come and own our labors; that the whole church at large may be revived thereby, and not ourselves only, but the whole world share in the benefit. (ibid., "PHG—Sermon 4," 36)

CONCLUSION

While the vast majority of New Testament references to the church (the body of Christ) refer to the local church,[41] many also refer to the universal church, and others include both aspects. These reveal the God-intended unity between the two, the local being a visible and tangible manifestation of the invisible and universal church.

There are many other ways to refer to this spiritual entity, such as "the firstborn," "living stones," "a spiritual house," "a holy priesthood," "a chosen generation," "a holy generation," "a royal priesthood," "the people of God," Christ's "bride," the Lamb's "wife," and so on. All these figures of speech depict a vital, intimate, and dependent relationship on Christ—the Cornerstone, Head, Husband, and High Priest of His redeemed, the universal church.

This body was elected by God from all eternity; it is invisible (in contrast to the local church); it began on the Day of Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit; it constitutes an ethnically neutral group of spiritual equality; it was a

mystery not known in the Old Testament; and it is to be distinguished from the nation of Israel, not inheriting Israel's unique blessings, such as the eternal inheritance of the Holy Land given to Abraham and his physical descendants.[42]

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CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURE OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH(ES)

Of the 115 New Testament references to *church* or *churches*,[1] nearly one hundred of them refer to the visible church(es). The biblical writers' efforts were focused in that direction; after all, the invisible church is Christ's spiritual body, which is *His exclusive work*,[2] while the local visible church(es) are *a work of Christ's disciples on earth*. The local churches' number, nature, and purpose are the subject of this chapter.

THE NUMBER OF THE LOCAL CHURCH(ES)

Again, in all the scriptural references to visible local churches, there is no mention of one universal visible church, such as the Roman Catholic Church claims to be. Indeed, even though a few New Testament letters (called the General Epistles) were written to a group of churches or to believers scattered abroad, there are none that speak of one visible earthly church.[3]

John wrote to seven local churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev. 2–3). Paul addressed most of his epistles to local churches.[4] In fact, while there are some cyclical letters for churches in a given area, such as Galatians (cf. 1:2) and Revelation (cf. 1:10),

there are no letters explicitly written to the whole visible church.

Even the General Epistles (Hebrews through James, in the New Testament canon) had less-than-universal targets. Hebrews, for example, is from "Italy" to Hebrew Christians elsewhere (13:24). James nears the status of universal epistle but is still specifically addressed to "the twelve tribes" scattered abroad (1:1). Peter targeted his first letter to "the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1:1 NKJV), which falls short of true universality. The audience of his second letter—"those who have obtained like precious faith" (1:1 NKJV)—is less well-defined but yet indefinite, with no indication that the epistle is written to one universal visible church.

While John's first epistle has a fairly general audience, his last two are very specific: 2 John is to "the elect lady and her children" (v. 1 NKJV), which shows it is not to one universal church, and 3 John, to "the beloved Gaius" (v. 1 NKJV), refers to "the church" in which Diotrephes was a member (v. 9), obviously a local congregation. The letter from the apostles in Acts 15, while intended for the whole church, was addressed only to "the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia" (v. 23 KJV). The General Epistles had a specific destination: each of the many self-governing churches that had their own independently chosen elders and deacons[5] and disciplined their own wayward members (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1–5), later restoring them by majority congregational vote if they repented (cf. 2 Cor. 2:6).[6]

Again, repeated biblical usage of the word *churches*[7] reveals that only in a general, collective sense can we speak of the "church on earth"; there are myriad self-governing, independent "churches" based on New Testament teaching. Even by the time of the last book (Revelation), John, the last living apostle, did not write to any supposed single, universal visible church, but to many individual churches scattered throughout Asia Minor (1:4). "The church," when scripturally used in an unqualified way, almost always refers to the invisible universal church.

THE NATURE OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The primary ecclesiastical debate in Christendom, which is over the nature of the visible church, can be divided into several points:

(1) Is there one visible church?[8]

(2) Is the Roman Catholic Church the one visible church? Was Peter appointed by Christ to be the visible head of the church?
(3) Is the present bishop of Rome (the pope) Peter's successor?
(4) Is the pope infallible in official pronouncements on faith and practice?

Catholics affirm all of the above; Protestants deny all of the above.[9]

The Head of the Local Church(es)

Christ is not only the invisible Head of the invisible universal church (see Eph. 1:22–23), He is also the invisible Head of the visible local church(es). This is made clear in Revelation, where He stands in their midst as Lord over them.

Christ As Invisible Head Over the Seven Churches in Asia Minor

This is biblically manifest in numerous ways:

(1) He holds the "messengers" (1:20) in His right hand.
(2) He rebukes the churches for their sin (2:9).
(3) He commands them to repent (v. 5).
(4) He will judge and reward them for their deeds (vv. 5, 10, 26; 3:12).
(5) He takes away their lampstand (church) if they are not faithful (v. 5).
(6) He searches all of their minds and hearts (v. 23 NKJV).
(7) He convicts them by His Spirit (3:22).

It is noteworthy that Christ addresses each of the seven (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) as an individual church; collectively they are known as "churches" (2:11, 17, 29, etc): "*All the churches* shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts" (2:23 NKJV). There is no thought of an overarching, singular visible church; there are individual churches that Christ commands, scrutinizes, rebukes, or rewards. He is the invisible Head of all visible churches.

Local Church Leaders Submit to Christ's Headship

Though each individual New Testament church has its own elders and deacons,[10] they are undershepherds of Christ, who is the invisible Shepherd of all:

> Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2–3)
>
> Further, that they have their own elders who guide the church under Christ demonstrates that they do not have one bishop who rules over a group or over all the churches.

Even Individual Apostles Submitted to a Local Church

To be sure, the apostles, *as apostles of Christ*, had authority to establish doctrine and practice in the churches (Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 12:12), and at times they sent their delegates to set things in order (Titus 1:5). Nevertheless, they respected the local churches' authority and leadership. This is evident in that, first, they exhorted the churches to "obey those who rule over you" (Heb. 13:17 NKJV), and, second, they urged the local church to choose their own leaders (Acts 6:3), to excommunicate unruly members (1 Cor. 5:4ff.; Titus 3:10), and to settle their own disputes (1 Cor. 6:1–11). Paul submitted to a leader of a local church to be baptized (Acts 22:10–16), and he was sent out as a missionary under the authority of a local church (13:1–2).

The Relation of the Local Church to Apostolic Doctrine

In a doctrinal dispute, the local church was subject to the authority of the apostles. The church was built on their doctrinal foundation (Eph. 2:20) and "continued steadfastly" therein (Acts 2:42 NKJV; cf. Titus 1:5–9). For our understanding, an exposition of the relevant Acts 15 text is necessary.

The Occasion of the Dispute

Antioch was Paul's home church; from this church he was sent out on his missionary journeys (Acts 13:1–2), and to this church he reported back about his missionary activity (14:27). Significantly, it was to the Antioch church that zealous teachers "came from Judea" and insisted that "unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (15:1). Paul and Barnabas disputed with them, and consequently the church at Antioch determined that Paul, Barnabas, and others should go to "the [Jerusalem] apostles and elders about this question" (v. 2). They preached on "the conversion of the Gentiles, and they caused great rejoicing among all the brethren" (v. 3 AMP).

Upon arriving, the Antioch contingent was "received by the church" at

Jerusalem and by “the apostles and the elders” (v. 4 NKJV). They reported on the conversion of the Gentiles (v. 4), but “some of the sect of the Pharisees” opposed Paul and insisted that they “circumcise them [his Gentile converts], and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (v. 5 NKJV).

The Parties of the Dispute

The principle parties were Paul and Barnabas on one side (Acts 15:1–2, 5), and the teachers from Judea who were a “sect of the Pharisees” (Judaizers) on the other (v. 5). The latter believed that one must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved; the former (from the Antioch church) had already debated the issue and now wanted to discuss it with the leaders of the Jerusalem church (the third party).

The Subject of the Dispute

“Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter” (v. 6 NKJV). The issue to consider was twofold: (1) Do Gentile converts need to be circumcised to be saved? and (2) Do they need to keep the Mosaic law? This issue was repeated later in the council’s letter, which contained the Judaizers’ claim that “you must be circumcised and keep the law” (v. 24 NKJV).

Participants in the Dispute

Those who participated were “apostles and elders” (v. 6), other unnamed disputants (v. 7), “the multitude” (v. 12 NKJV), Simon Peter (vv. 6–11), Paul and Barnabas (v. 12), and James (vv. 13–21), a leader in the Jerusalem church and “the Lord’s brother” (Gal. 1:19).

After there “had been much dispute,” Peter rose and testified:

(1) God saved Gentiles through His Word (Acts 15:7).
(2) God had acknowledged the legitimacy of their conversion by giving them His Holy Spirit (v. 8).
(3) God purified their hearts by faith and made no spiritual distinction between them and Jewish converts to the faith (v. 9).

Peter then

(4) urged the group not to put a yoke [of the law] on Gentile converts that not even Jews could bear (v. 10); and

(5) concluded, “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (v. 11 NKJV).

Paul and Barnabas then took the floor, and when they spoke, “all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles God had worked through them among the Gentiles” (v. 12 NKJV). As elsewhere, Paul considered this a divine confirmation of their message (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Heb. 2:3–4).

Then James summed up the issue:

(1) God had saved Gentiles through Peter’s ministry (v. 14).
(2) The Old Testament prophets agree, as Amos 9:11–12 says: “ ‘In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,’ declares the Lord, who will do these things” (cf. Acts 15:15–17).
(3) God planned this from all eternity (v. 18).
(4) Hence, we should not make keeping the law for Gentiles who are coming to faith in Christ difficult, but ask them only “to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (v. 20), adding that Moses (the law) had been read on the Sabbath in the synagogues for many generations (v. 21).

The Decision on the Dispute

The decision-making group was the “apostles and elders, *with the whole church*” at Jerusalem (v. 22). Originally, the Antioch representatives went up “to the apostles and elders” (v. 2), who “came together to consider this matter” (v. 6 NKJV), but the ruling was made by the apostles and elders *with the congregation*. This involvement of the local church is an early example of something they would be compelled to do on their own (based on apostolic teaching) after the apostles died. (See appendix 8.)

The content of the decision is recorded in verses 24–29 (NKJV), beginning with “We have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law.’ ”In short, since the Jerusalem church was the source of the people who went to the Antioch church and caused the dispute, they were responding, and their response was terse: “*We gave no such commandment*” (v. 24). They then

referred to being “assembled with one accord” (v. 25) and sending chosen men to Antioch, men who’d risked their lives for Christ (vv. 25–26). These included Judas (Barsabas) and Silas, who would confirm the content of the statement (v. 27). Then the statement itself opens with these words:

> It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things [namely,] that you [1] abstain from things offered to idols, [2] from blood, [3] from things strangled, and [4] from sexual immorality. (vv. 28–29 NKJV)

The statement (“letter”) concludes with, “If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell” (ibid.).

The decision’s authority is plainly revealed by three factors:

(1) It was made by “apostles,” who, again, had authority in such doctrinal matters.[11]
(2) There is a reference to the apostle’s ability to make a “commandment” in such cases (v. 24).
(3) This ruling was later labeled by Paul as “the decrees to keep” (16:4).

The Destination of the Decision

The decision’s destination is described as “to Antioch” (15:22), which was the church that had raised the question (v. 2). However, it was also addressed more broadly “to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia” (v. 23 NKJV), i.e., intended for Gentile believers in general.

Conclusions

Several conclusions may be drawn from examining this text.

First, although the decision was occasioned by one local church, it is applicable to all believers who may raise this question (v. 23).

Second, since the appeal was made to the apostles and the decision came from them, it has apostolic authority and is not simply an opinion expressed by one local church to another.[12]

Third, although the issue affected the Christian church as a whole, it was not really “the first church council,” as is often stated by commentators. Two churches were directly involved, not all churches—there was no general call by any political or ecclesiastical hierarchy for all local congregations to send representatives to decide the issue.[13]

Fourth, there is no idea of appealing to an authoritative or infallible bishop, of

Rome or anyone/anywhere else, to make an *ex cathedra*[14] pronouncement. Indeed, Peter, who simply gave his testimony, doesn't seem to have been in charge of the meeting; if anyone, James was leading, since he had the last word on the matter (vv. 13–21).

Fifth, because this was a doctrinal matter and living apostles were involved (we do not have living apostles today, but apostolic writings,[15]) this cannot be a procedural example for today in all respects.

Sixth, and finally, as we have seen, the local church's role in this decision is significant:

(1) The issue was raised by a local church about those who had come to another local church with their teaching.
(2) The meeting was held in another local church.
(3) The representatives were recognized by the local church.
(4) Elders of the local church were part of the decision.
(5) The local church concurred in the decision.
(6) The decision went back to the local church and to other local churches.

The Authority of Apostolic Delegates in the Local Church

There were also times when the apostles exercised authority on other local church matters. In the very early church, they brought divine judgment on Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–6), clearly an act of God that demonstrated their apostolic authority (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12).

At other times the apostles sent their delegates to handle problems. Paul told Titus, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). Several facts must be noted here.

First, this work was part of an apostle's foundational task in establishing a church.

Second, an apostle appointed elders to establish a self-governing independent church.

Third, what an apostle was doing through his delegate was doctrinal; only a few verses later Paul wrote of an elder (bishop)[16] that "he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by *sound doctrine* and refute those who oppose it" (1:9). He added, "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for *sound doctrine*" (2:1). The church was to

continue faithfully in apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42), and the apostle's delegate was to establish "elders" who would help to preserve this path. There is no contradiction between the apostles and the autonomous, independent local churches they were establishing. The "angels" (lit: "messengers") to the seven churches in Revelation 1–3 appear to have been apostolic delegates sent by John to put things in order in those congregations. (See appendix 8.)

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

Regarding the visible church(es), the primary debate in Christendom is over the Roman Catholic claim that Christ established one visible organization on earth with a visible head, the infallible teaching magisterium to be identified with the Catholic Church; the Roman pontiff (pope) is the alleged successor of St. Peter, whom Christ supposedly appointed as the first pope and bishop of Rome. All other branches of Christendom, including Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and all forms of Protestantism, reject this claim. The Anglican and Orthodox Churches do have their own episcopal form of government,[17] the difference being that neither acknowledge the bishop of Rome (pope) as their head.

The Roman Catholic view is further distinguished by its belief in the pope's infallibility when speaking *ex cathedra* (lit: "from the chair"), that is, as the official interpreter of faith and practice. Of course, this presupposes several other beliefs, such as the Catholic Church's divinely appointed identity as the specific ecclesiastical jurisdiction (true church) that Christ started and a set of divinely appointed doctrines and practices it administers. Since many of these issues are discussed elsewhere,[18] focus here will be on the pope's alleged infallibility.

Statement of the Roman Catholic View[19]

According to Catholic dogma, Rome's teaching magisterium is infallible when officially defining faith and morals for believers. One manifestation of this doctrine is popularly known as "papal infallibility," pronounced as dogma in 1870 at the First Vatican Council (Vatican I). Roman Catholic authorities define infallibility "as immunity from error, i.e., protection against either passive or active deception. Persons or agencies are infallible to the extent that they can

neither deceive nor be deceived" (Dulles, "IT" in *TA*, 71).

Vatican I concluded,

> All the faithful of Christ must believe that the Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold primacy over the whole world, and that the Pontiff of Rome himself is the successor of the blessed Peter, the chief of the apostles, and is the true vicar of Christ and head of the whole Church and faith, and teacher of all Christians.… To him was handed down in blessed Peter, by our Lord Jesus Christ, full power to feed, rule, and guide the universal Church, just as is also contained in the records of the ecumenical Councils and in the sacred canons. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 454)

The council went on to speak of "The Infallible 'Magisterium' of the Roman Pontiff":

> When he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians in accord with his *supreme apostolic authority*, he explains a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church.… [This he has] through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, *operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished* that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so *such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself*, but not from the consensus of the Church, *are unalterable*. (ibid., 457, emphasis added)

All who reject this are anathematized—excommunicated and condemned to hell by the Church—unless they repent (ibid.).

Qualifications to Papal Infallibility

Roman Catholic scholars have expounded significant qualifications on the doctrine of papal infallibility.

First, the pope is not infallible in everything he teaches, but only when he speaks *ex cathedra* as the official interpreter of faith and morals. Avery Dulles (b. 1918), an authority on Catholic dogma, states the conditions for a pope's *ex cathedra* pronouncement are that it must be:

(1) in fulfillment of his office as supreme pastor and teacher of all Christians;
(2) in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, i.e., as successor of Peter;
(3) determining a doctrine of faith and morals, i.e., a doctrine expressing divine revelation;
(4) imposing a doctrine to be held definitively by all. ("IT," 79–80)

Dulles notes that "Vatican I firmly rejected one condition … as necessary for infallibility, namely, the consent of the whole church" (ibid., 79).

Second, the pope is not infallible when pronouncing on matters not pertaining

to faith and morals, wherein he may be as fallible as anyone else.

Third, the pope is infallible but not absolutely: "Absolute infallibility (in all respects, without dependence on another) is proper to God.… All other infallibility is derivative and limited in scope" (ibid., 72).

Fourth, infallibility entails irrevocability. A pope cannot, for example, declare void previous *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the church.

Fifth, and finally, in contrast to Vatican I, many (usually liberal or progressive) Catholic theologians believe that the pope is not infallible independently of the bishops, but only infallible as he speaks in one voice with and for them in collegiality; infallibility "is often attributed to the bishops as a group, to ecumenical councils, and to popes" (ibid.). Conservatives argue that Vatican I condemned this view.[20]

Roman Catholic Arguments in Support of Papal Infallibility

Ludwig Ott (b. 1906), in his authoritative work on the *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, offers the two standard arguments for papal infallibility: the proof from Scripture and the proof from tradition.

The Catholic Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Scripture

Ott argues,

> Christ made Peter the foundation of His Church, that is, the guarantor of her unity and unshakable strength, and promised her a duration that will not pass away (Matt. 16, 18). However, the unity and solidarity of the Church is not possible without the right Faith. Peter is, therefore, also the supreme teacher of the Faith. As such he must be infallible in the official promulgation of Faith, in his own person and in his successors. (*FCD*, 287)

Ott appeals to John 21:15–17 to prove that "Christ installed Peter (and his successors) as the supreme pastor over the whole flock":

> The task of teaching Christian truth and of protecting it from error is part of the function of the supreme pastor. But he could not fulfill this task if, in the exercise of his supreme teaching office, he himself were subject to error. (ibid., 287–88)

For further support, Ott cites Luke 22:32(ff.), where Christ said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (KJV). Ott insists that "the reason for Christ's praying for Peter especially was that Peter, after his own conversion, should confirm his brethren in their faith, which clearly indicates Peter's position

as head of the Apostles" (ibid., 288).

John 11:49–52 also is used by some Catholics to defend papal infallibility. Caiaphas, in his official capacity as high priest, made an unwitting prophecy about Christ dying for the nation of Israel so they would not perish. Since in the Old Testament the high priest had an official revelatory function connected with his office, Catholics claim it's to be expected that the same would be true in the New Testament, and that this is indeed manifest in the bishop of Rome.

The Catholic Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Tradition

Ott also bases his belief about papal infallibility in the early fathers who "attest the decisive teaching authority of the Roman Church and its Pontiff." Irenaeus said, "With this Church on account of its special eminence, every other Church must agree … in her apostolic traditions [she] has always been kept pure" (*AH*, 3.3.2). Ott further argues that "the teaching Primacy of the Pope from the earliest times was expressed in practice in the condemnation of heretical opinions" (*FCD*, 288), supporting this view by citing Thomas Aquinas, who argued that the papal office had the official power "finally to decide questions of faith, so that they may be held with unshakable faith by all" (ibid., 289). Of course, all Catholic theologians admit that papal infallibility was not officially proclaimed as dogma by the Roman Church until 1870 (Vatican I), and, as we will see, even then it was done under questionable circumstances and with significant opposition.

A Protestant Response to Papal Infallibility

Not only Protestants but also the rest of Christendom—Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox included—reject papal infallibility.[21] Protestants embrace scriptural infallibility but deny that any human being or institution is Scripture's infallible interpreter. Harold O. J. Brown (b. 1933) writes:

> In every age there have been those who considered the claims of a single bishop to supreme authority to be a sure identification of the corruption of the church, and perhaps even the work of the Antichrist. Pope Gregory I (r. 590–604) indignantly reproached Patriarch John the Faster of Constantinople for calling himself the universal bishop; Gregory did so to defend the rights of all the bishops, himself included, and not because he wanted the title for himself. (*PTP*, 122)

Even within modern Catholicism the doctrine of papal infallibility is not without its opponents. Hans Küng (b. 1928), for instance, wrote a pointed

critique in *Infallible? An Inquiry*, for which he was censured and forbidden to teach under the auspices of the Roman Church.

Response to the Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Scripture

There are several texts Catholics use to defend papal infallibility. Among the Protestant responses are the following points.

Matthew 16:18(ff.)

Roman Catholics use Jesus' statement to Peter—"Upon this rock I will build my church (KJV)"—to support papal infallibility. Properly understood, though, this passage falls far short of support for the dogma.

First, many Protestants, insisting that Christ was not referring to Peter when He spoke of "this rock" being the church's foundation,[22] note:

(1) Whenever Peter is referred to in this passage, it is in the second person;[23] the "this rock" is in the third person.
(2) Further, "Peter" (Gk: *Petros*) is a masculine singular term, and "rock" (Gk: *petra*) is feminine singular. Hence, they do not have the same referent, and even if Jesus spoke these words in Aramaic (which does not distinguish genders), the inspired text is in Greek (which does make such distinctions).
(3) What is more, the same authority to bind given to Peter (v. 18) is given later to all the apostles (18:18).
(4) In addition, no Catholic commentator gives primacy in *evil* to Peter simply because he was singled out by Jesus' rebuke a few verses later: "Get behind me, Satan!" (16:23). Why then should they give primacy in *authority* to Peter because Jesus singled him out in response to affirmation of His identity? It makes sense for Jesus to have replied to Peter; only Peter spoke, but he was representing the group.
(5) Renowned authorities (some Catholic) can be cited in agreement with this interpretation, including John Chrysostom and Augustine, who wrote: " 'On this rock,' therefore, He said, which thou hast confessed, 'I will build my Church.' For the Rock (*petra*) is Christ; and on this foundation was Peter himself built" (*OGJ* in Schaff, *NPNF*, 106).

Second, even if Peter were the rock referred to by Jesus,[24] he would not be the *only* rock in the church's foundation. Again, Jesus gave all the apostles the

same power to “bind” and “loose” (18:18); these were common rabbinic terms used for “forbidding” and “allowing.” The “keys” were not some mysterious power reserved for one person, but the power granted by Christ to His church upon which, when they proclaim the gospel, they can proclaim God’s forgiveness of sin to all who believe. Jesus breathed on all the disciples and gave them the power to forgive sins (John 20:21–23) through the proclamation of the gospel (Luke 24:46–49; cf. Matt. 28:18–20). John Calvin noted,

> Since heaven is opened to us by the doctrine of the gospel, the word “keys” affords an appropriate metaphor. Now men are bound and loosed in no other way than when faith reconciles some to God, while their own unbelief constrains others the more. (*ICR,* 1105)

From the scriptural affirmation that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20), two things are clear: (1) *All* the apostles (not just Peter) are the church’s foundation; and (2) The *only* one given a place of uniqueness was Christ, the Capstone. Indeed, Peter himself refers to Christ as “the capstone” of the church (1 Peter 2:7) and the rest of believers as “living stones” (v. 5) in the church’s superstructure. There is no indication that Peter was given special prominence in the church’s foundation (above the rest of the apostles and below Christ); Peter is one stone along with the others.

Third, Peter’s New Testament role falls far short of the Catholic argument that he was given unique authority among the apostles.[25]

(1) While Peter did use the keys of the kingdom in opening the door of the gospel to Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10), his role in the rest of Acts is not that of chief apostle; he is no more than *one of* the “most eminent apostles” (*plural*, 2 Cor. 12:11 NKJV).
(2) Under God’s inspiration, Paul revealed that no other apostle was superior to him: “I am not in the least inferior to the [so-called ‘superapostles’ ” (2 Cor. 12:11).[26]
(3) No one reading Galatians carefully can come away with the impression that *any* apostle is *superior* to Paul, who received his revelation independently of the other apostles (Gal. 1:12; 2:2) to be granted the same status (2:8), even using that revelation to rebuke Peter when necessary (vv. 11–14).[27]
(4) That both Peter and John were sent by the apostles on a mission to Samaria reveals that Peter was not *the* superior apostle (Acts 8:4–13).

(5) Indeed, if Peter were the God-ordained superior apostle, it would be strange that more attention is given to the ministry of Paul than to Peter's in Acts. Peter is the focus in chapters 1–12; Paul is the dominant figure in 13–28.[28]

(6) Though Peter addressed the council in Acts 15, he exercised no primacy over the others; once again, the decision came from "the apostles and elders, with the consent of the whole church" (v. 22 TLB, cf. v. 23) and many scholars feel that James, not Peter, presided over the council (cf. vv. 13–21).[29]

(7) In any event, by Peter's own admission he was not *the* pastor of the church but a "*fellow* elder" (1 Peter 5:1–2). While he said he was "*an* apostle" (1:1), he nowhere claimed to be "*the* apostle" or the chief of apostles; he was one of the church's "pillars" (*plural*) (Gal. 2:9).

Fourth, however Peter's role in the early church is understood, there is absolutely no reference to his having any kind of infallibility. While the word *infallible* never occurs in the New Testament, when parallel words or phrases do occur, they are used in reference to God's Word alone, not anyone's ability to interpret it: "*Scripture* cannot be set aside" (John 10:35 AMP), and "until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18 TLB).

This is not to say that Peter didn't have a significant role in the early church; he did. He even seems to have been the initial leader of the apostolic group and, again, was one of the early church's pillars. Regardless, there is no evidence in Matthew 16 or any other text for the dogma of Peter's superiority (to say nothing of infallibility).

Fifth, and finally, whatever apostolic powers Peter and the other apostles possessed, it is clear that these were not passed on to anyone after their deaths. The repeated New Testament criterion[30] is that apostles had to be first-century eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ; there could be no true apostolic succession in the bishop of Rome or in anyone else. Jesus said, "I will give *you* [not to "your successors"] the keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:19). The "keys" Peter used to open the door of the gospel to both Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10) were singular, onetime events,[31] with no New Testament indication that divine, apostolic (let alone infallible) authority was given to the apostles' successors.

Further, these original, select individuals were given certain unmistakable

"signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV), including the ability to raise the dead on command (Matt. 10:8), immediately heal diseases that were naturally incurable (ibid.; John 9:1–7), bring supernatural judgment on believers who lied to God (Acts 5), perform instantly successful exorcisms (16:16–18), speak messages in languages they had never studied (2:1–8; cf. 10:44–46), and give gifts to others so that they could assist in the apostolic mission of founding the church.[32] These unique miraculous powers ceased during their lives;[33] Hebrews (c. 68–69) refers to these gifts as already past:

> This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (2:3–4)

Jude, writing late in the first century (c. 71 or later), speaks of "faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (v. 3 TLB), exhorting his hearers to "remember the words that were spoken *beforehand* by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17 NASB). Here too the miraculously confirmed apostolic message was spoken of as *past*.[34]

In addition, these miraculous signs were specifically given to the apostles to establish their authority as Christ's representatives in founding His church. Jesus had promised them "power" to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8); Paul spoke of "the signs of an apostle" in confirming his authority to the Corinthians, some of whom had challenged it (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV); again, Hebrews 2:3–4 highlights the apostolic miracles as being given to confirm that God chose them. It was God's pattern (from the time of Moses on) to give unique abilities to his servants to confirm that their revelations were from Him.[35]

In summation, because apostles had to be first-century eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, because they were given certain unmistakable apostolic signs to establish their authority, and because these miraculous powers ceased during their lifetimes, it follows that no one since has possessed apostolic authority. The absence of these apostolic gifts proves the absence of apostolic authority; what remains today is the apostolic *teachings* (in the New Testament) not the *office* of the apostles. The authority of the apostolic *writings* replaced the authority of the apostolic *writers*.

John 21:15–17 (NKJV)

In this passage Jesus says to Peter, "Feed My lambs," "tend My sheep," and "feed My sheep." Roman Catholic scholars believe this shows that *Peter alone*

was given infallible authority to be *the* pastor of the whole Christian church. A careful examination of the text reveals that this is a serious overclaim.

First, whether this passage is taken of Peter alone or of all the disciples, there is absolutely no reference to infallible authority. Jesus is addressing pastoral care; feeding is a God-given pastoral function that even non-apostles had in the New Testament.[36] One need not be an infallible shepherd in order to properly feed his flock.

Second, if Peter had infallibility—which, essentially, is the ability not to mislead—why did he mislead believers and have to be rebuked by Paul for so doing (Gal. 2:11–14)? The infallible Scriptures, accepted by Roman Catholics, on one occasion declare of Peter, "He clearly was wrong" and "stood condemned":[37] Peter "acted hypocritically … with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy." Here *hypocrisy* is defined by the Catholic Bible (ASV) as "pretense, play-acting; moral insincerity." Peter's having led believers astray is hard to reconcile with the Catholic claim that as the universal church's infallible pastor he would not and could not do so.

The Catholic response that Peter was not infallible in his actions but only his *ex cathedra* words rings hollow: Actions speak louder than words. Actions are the domain of morals, and the pope is alleged to be infallible in faith *and* morals; accordingly, the despicable behavior of some popes[38] is revealing. Peter cannot both be an infallible guide for faith and morals and also mislead other believers on an important matter of faith and morals (cf. Gal. 2).

Third, contrary to Catholic insistence, the overall import of John 21:15–17 speaks more to Peter's weakness and need of restoration than to his supposed unique powers. The reason Peter is singled out to be restored is that only Peter denied the Lord three times; here Jesus was not exalting Peter above the other apostles, but bringing him back to their status.[39]

Fourth, and finally, in view of the New Testament titles used of Peter, it's clear he would never have accepted those used of the pope today, like "Holy Father" (cf. Matt. 23:9), "Supreme Pontiff," or "Vicar of Christ." The Vicar of Christ on earth today is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 16:13–14). Also, as noted earlier, Peter referred to himself in much more humble terms: "*an* apostle," not *the* apostle (1 Peter 1:1), and "*fellow* elder" (5:1).

John 11:49–52

As mentioned (regarding Caiaphas), the Catholic argument is that since the Old Testament high priest had an official revelatory function connected with his

office, it is to be expected that there would be a New Testament equivalent (namely, the pope). This contention begs the question and is gravely flawed.

First, this is merely an argument from analogy, not based on any New Testament affirmation.

Second, the New Testament affirmations about the Old Testament priesthood reject this analogy, explicitly stating that the Old Testament priesthood has been abolished: "There is a change of priesthood" from that of Aaron (Heb. 7:12), the Aaronic priesthood having been fulfilled in Christ, who is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (vv. 15–17).

Third, Catholics acknowledge that there is no new revelation after the time of the New Testament; thus, no one (popes included) after the first century can have a revelatory function in the sense of giving new revelations.

Fourth, and finally, there was a New Testament revelatory function: the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20; cf. 3:5), whose revelation ceased when they died.

Response to the Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Tradition

That there is evidence Peter eventuated in Rome (cf. 1 Peter 5:13)[40] and was, by virtue of being an apostle, the leader in its church falls far short of establishing a basis for papal authority. There are crucial links missing in this chain of reasoning. For one thing, evidence is lacking that Peter was appointed by Christ as His successor, the head of the visible church.[41] For another, there is no real evidence of any living apostolic succession after Peter. To the contrary, there are strong lines of evidence that support no living apostolic authority after the apostles: (1) "the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV) ceased—these were the credentials of an apostle[42]—and (2) there was consistent belief that only the Bible is the infallible authority for faith and practice. Consider the following citations.[43]

Irenaeus, who is reported to have heard Polycarp, the disciple of the apostle John, declared in his treatise *Against Heresies*:

> The Lord of all gave the power of the Gospel to his apostles, through whom we have come to know the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God.… This Gospel they first preached. Afterwards, by the will of God, they handed it down to us in the Scriptures, to be "the pillar and ground" of our faith. (3.1.1)

Tertullian, "The Father of Latin Theology," maintained that the four gospels "are reared on the certain basis of Apostolic authority, and so are inspired in a far

different sense from the writings of the spiritual Christian; all the faithful, it is true, have the Spirit of God, but all are not Apostles" (in Westcott, *ISG*, 434). The "apostles have the Holy Spirit properly, who have Him fully, in the operations of prophecy, and the efficacy of [healing] virtues, and the evidences of tongues; not particularly, as all others have" (in Schaff, *OEC*, 4).

J. N. D. Kelly (1909–1997), a highly regarded authority on early church doctrine, affirmed:

> There is little need to dwell on the absolute authority accorded to the Scripture as a doctrinal norm. It was the Bible, declared *Clement of Alexandria* about A.D. 200, which, as interpreted by the Church, was the source of Christian teaching. His greater disciple *Origen* was a thorough-going biblicist who appealed again and again to Scripture as the decisive criterion of dogma.… "The holy inspired Scriptures," wrote *Athanasius* a century later, "are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth." Later in the same century *John Chrysostom* bade his congregation seek no other teacher than the oracles of God. (*ECD*, 42–43)

Jerome declared,

> I beg you … to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else. Does not such a life seem to you a foretaste of heaven here on earth? Let not the simplicity of the scripture offend you; for these are due either to faults of translators or else to deliberate purpose: for in this way it is better fitted for instruction. (*LSJ*, 53.10, 102)

Also, Augustine said,

> When they [the apostles] write that He [Christ] has taught and said, it should not be asserted that he did not write it since the members only put down what they had come to know at the dictation [*dictis*] of the Head. Therefore, whatever He wanted us to read concerning His words and deeds, He commanded His disciples, His hands, to write. Hence, one cannot but receive what he reads in the Gospels, though written by the disciples, as though it were written by the very hand of the Lord Himself. (*HG*, 1.35)

Consequently, he added, "I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error" (ibid., 40). "If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, the author of this book is mistaken: but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have misunderstood" (*AF*, 11.5).

In *Cur Deus Homo?* Anselm declared: "The God-man himself originates the New Testament and approves the Old. And, as we must acknowledge him to be true, so no one can dissent from anything contained in these books" (*SABW*, 287–88). As archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm addressed the question of

biblical authority in another treatise: “What is said in Scripture … I believe without doubting, of course” (*TFWE*, 185).

In *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas stated, “The Author of Holy Scripture is God.” The Scriptures are “divine revelation” (1.1.1.8.2) and “without error” (2.1.6.1 in *CBJ*, 13.1). “That God is the author of Holy Scripture should be acknowledged.… The author of holy Scripture is God” (*ST*, 1a.1.10). Thus, “revelation is the basis of sacred Scripture or doctrine” (1a.1–2; 2); the Bible is “divinely inspired Scripture” (1a.1.1). Aquinas maintained that we stood in need of an errorless “divine revelation,” otherwise the “rational truth about God would have appeared only to a few, and even so after a long time and mixed with many mistakes” (ibid.).

“It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical Scripture” (*CBJ*, 13.1); “a true prophet is always inspired by the spirit of truth in whom there is no trace of falsehood, and so he never utters untruths” (op. cit., 2a2ae.172.6.2). “Nothing false can underlie the literal sense of Scripture” (1a.1.10.3); therefore, “the truth of prophetic proclamations must … be the same as that of divine knowledge. And falsity … cannot creep into prophecy” (1a.14.3).

Agreeing with Augustine, Aquinas confessed of Holy Scripture, “I firmly believe that none of their authors have erred in composing them” (1a.1.8). In this same passage he referred to Scripture as “unfailing truth” and concurred with the later Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, the Bible alone as the inerrant Word of God, the totally sufficient norm for our faith:

> We believe the prophets and apostles because the Lord has been their witness by performing miracles.… And *we believe the successors of the apostles and the prophets only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings*. (*OT*, XIV.10.11, emphasis added)

“The truth of faith is contained in sacred Scripture” (*ST*, 2a2ae.1.9), and “the reason for this is that *only the canonical Scriptures are normative for faith*. Whereas others who write about the truth do so in such a way that they do not want to be believed unless what they affirm is true” (*CGJ*, 21.6, emphasis added).

There were, of course, early fathers who appealed to the authority of certain leaders and traditions, but this once again falls far short of their having claimed there was a divinely appointed, living infallible authority seated in Rome. The Catholic Church’s “infallible pronouncement of the pope’s infallibility” in 1870

is not only more than eighteen centuries late, it is also without biblical, theological, or historical foundation.

OTHER ARGUMENTS AGAINST PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

In addition to the total lack of scriptural support and equivocal backing from tradition, there are many other arguments against papal infallibility, here categorized as theological, philosophical, and historical.

Theological Problems With Papal Infallibility

The Problem of Heretical Popes

For instance, Pope Honorius I (r. 625–638) was condemned by the Sixth General Council (680–681) for teaching the monothelite heresy (that there was only one will in Christ);[44] Ludwig Ott admits that "Pope Leo II (r. 682–683) confirmed his anathematization" (*FCD*, 150). We are left, then, with the incredible situation of an infallible pope teaching a fallible (and heretical) doctrine. If the papal teaching office cannot mislead on doctrine and ethics, how could a pope's teaching be heretical? To claim that the pope was *not* infallible on this occasion only further undermines the doctrine of infallibility: How can a pope know when his doctrinal pronouncements are or are not infallible? Without an infallible list,[45] the Catholic Church cannot provide infallible guidance on doctrine and morals; if the pope can be fallible on one doctrine, why can't he be fallible on another?

Further, Ott's comment that Leo II did not condemn Honorius I with heresy "but with negligence in the suppression of error" (ibid.) is an ineffective defense.

First, it still raises serious questions as to how Pope Honorius could be an infallible guide in faith and morals while teaching heresy; the Catholic response that he was not speaking *ex cathedra* on this point is convenient but inadequate. Even if such a distinction *were* to exist, invoking it would only tend to undermine the authority of the far more numerous occasions when the pope is allegedly speaking with authority but not with infallibility.

Second, it does not explain why the Sixth General Council condemned Honorius as a heretic.

Third, disclaiming papal infallibility on this and like situations makes

supposedly infallible pronouncements extremely rare; for example, by this standard, a pope has spoken *ex cathedra* only one time in the last hundred years (on the bodily assumption of Mary). "Infallibility" exercised this rarely has almost no practical value on almost all occasions. With the pope nearly always having only fallible speech, Catholics are bound to accept his authority on faith and morals when he may be (and sometimes has been) wrong. The infallible guidance the papacy is supposed to provide is negligible at best; and, by the Church's admission, on the overwhelming number of occasions there is no supposed infallible guidance at all.

Also, in 1590, Pope Sixtus V authorized a version of the Bible that alleged to have full authority for all future time. Its preface declared, "By the fullness of apostolic power, we decree and declare that this edition, approved by the authority delivered to us by the Lord, is to be received and held as true, lawful, authentic, and unquestioned, in all public and private discussions, reading, preaching and explanations."

If ever an infallible pope laid claim to an infallible pronouncement, this is it. However, the Pope Sixtus' version of the Bible was so error-ridden with thousands of mistakes that it had to be revised only two years later (see Mathison, *SSS*, 222). So much for papal infallibility!

The Problem of Revelational Insufficiency

One of the chief reasons given by Catholic authorities for an infallible teaching magisterium is that we need infallible guidance to understand God's infallible revelation, lest it be misinterpreted.

There are at least two problems with this. For one thing, how is an infallible interpretation any better than the infallible revelation? Divine revelation is a disclosure or unveiling by God; to claim that God's infallible unveiling needs further infallible unveiling is to say it was not properly unveiled to begin with.

To be sure, there is a difference between objective disclosure (revelation) and subjective discovery (understanding), but the central problem in this regard is not in our *perception* of God's truth (cf. Rom. 1:19–20). More critical to the truth of God's revelation is *reception*; the "natural man does not *accept*[46] the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14 TLB). He cannot "know"[47] these truths because he does not receive them into his life, even though he understands them in his mind. Indeed, what he clearly perceives (Rom. 1:19–20) he does not openly receive but "suppress[es]" (v. 18); he chooses atheism for his mind by rejecting the truth about God in his heart (Ps. 14:1). Though there *is* a difference between

objective disclosure and subjective understanding, humans are "without excuse" for failing to understand God's revelation, whether in nature or in Scripture.[48]

Interestingly, Catholic theology itself maintains that unbelievers can and should understand the truth of *natural law*[49] apart from the Roman teaching magisterium. As such, why should they need an infallible magisterium in order to properly understand *divine law*? It seems singularly inconsistent for Catholic scholars to claim they need another mind to interpret Scripture correctly on their behalf, when the minds God gave them are sufficient to interpret everything else. For instance, many of them are experts in interpreting classical literature, involving both the religious and moral meaning of those texts. Yet we're asked to believe that these same highly educated minds are inadequate to obtain a reliable religious and moral interpretation of their own Scriptures.

The Catholic response that Protestants have their own teaching magisterium of modern scholarship misses the mark for several reasons.

For one thing, the Catholic magisterium depends on scholarship just as much as Protestants do. If they didn't, they would not be able to translate the texts and understand them in context.

For another, Protestants do not claim it is necessary to have *infallible* scholarship in order to interpret the Bible.

Further, for Protestants the scholarship needed for biblical understanding does not provide a theological framework to *interpret* the Bible, as does the teaching magisterium of the Roman Church; rather, it provides the necessary linguistic tools to *translate* the Bible.

Finally, the skills of scriptural interpretation are the same as those for interpreting any other document: to understand in the text the author's expressed meaning.[50] Again, Catholic attorneys and judges who are experts in interpreting the Constitution are told that their skills are inadequate to obtain a reliable interpretation of the Scriptures God gave to all believers.

It doesn't take an expert to interpret Scripture's crucial teachings. For instance, the New Testament was written in the vernacular of the times, the first-century trade language known as *koine* Greek, the common, everyday language for the common, everyday person. Likewise, the vast majority of English Bible translations (including Catholic versions) are written in plain English; the essential truths of God's Word can be understood by any literate person. In fact, it is a profound insult to our God-given intelligence to suggest that we can read and understand the daily news but need some infallible magisterium in order to understand God's Good News for all people.

The Problem of Indecisiveness With Infallible Pronouncements

Another difficulty for Catholic doctrine: If an infallible teaching magisterium is needed to overcome conflicting interpretations of Scripture, why are their supposedly infallible declarations also subject to conflicting interpretations? There are many hotly disputed differences among Catholic scholars on just what *ex cathedra* statements mean, including those on Scripture, tradition, Mary, and justification. Though there may be future clarifications on some issues, the problem remains for at least two reasons: (1) It shows the indecisive nature of supposedly infallible pronouncements; (2) judging by past experience, even future declarations will not settle all matters completely. Pronouncements on scriptural inerrancy are a case in point, for despite infallible statements, there is strong internal disagreement on whether the Bible is really infallible in all matters or only on matters of salvation.[51]

Philosophical Problems With Papal Infallibility

The Epistemic Problem

Catholicism's supposed need for an infallible magisterium is epistemically[52] insufficient ground for rising above the level of probable knowledge. Catholic scholars admit (as they must) that they do not have infallible evidence for an infallible teaching magisterium; they merely have what they believe to be good (probable) arguments. This being the case, epistemically (or apologetically) there is no more than a probable basis for a Catholic to believe that a supposedly infallible pronouncement by the Church is true. The bottom line: he is in no better position to be certain about matters of faith and morals than is a Protestant who accepts scriptural infallibility on good (probable) arguments.[53]

The Problem of Death by Qualification

Once all qualifications are presented, both in theory and in practice, papal infallibility is defrocked of its glory, standing as nakedly fallible as any other human teaching. The pope is allegedly infallible only when speaking

(1) in fulfillment of his office as supreme pastor and teacher of all Christians;
(2) in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, i.e., as Peter's successor;
(3) to determine a doctrine of faith and morals, i.e., expressing divine revelation;

(4) to impose a definitive doctrine to be held by all (Dulles, "IT," 79–80);
(5) as the real pope (as opposed to rival popes).[54]

Also, many Catholic scholars believe the pope speaks infallibly only in concert with all the bishops (with collegiality);[55] that is, his decision must be ratified by an ecumenical[56] council.

But not only are all these criteria not infallibly pronounced, they are not all universally accepted among Catholics. What is more, when one tries to apply these criteria to the doctrine of papal infallibility, it begins to suffer "death by a thousand qualifications." For instance, if the pope was not infallible when excommunicating Galileo[57] or when teaching heresy,[58] how can we be sure when he really is? If we can't ever be sure, then what good is the doctrine of infallibility?

Historical Problems With Papal Infallibility

The Problem of the Antipopes

Another anomaly of Roman Catholicism is the scandalous specter of having had more than one supposedly infallible pope at the same time—a pope and an antipope: "There have been about thirty-five antipopes in the history of the Church" (Mercati, "NLP" in *MS*, 71–80).[59] How can there be infallible and opposing popes at the same time? Which is the true pope? Since there is no infallible list of popes, or an infallible way to determine who is the infallible pope, the system has a serious logical problem that surpasses the hypothetical; this difficulty has had several actual historical manifestations.[60]

Catholic apologists claim there never have actually been two popes, since only one can be infallible. This is at best a theoretical solution, for the faithful have no way of knowing with certainty which one can give legitimate (and infallible) guidance in faith and morals. In times of multiple popes, each can excommunicate (and sometimes has excommunicated) the other.

The Problem of Galileo

Perhaps one of the greatest embarrassments to the "infallible Church" is its fallible judgment about Galileo Galilei (1564–1642). In opposition to Galileo's heliocentric model of the solar system, Rome sided with the scientifically outdated Ptolemaic geocentric model. Galileo's unjust condemnation and

banishment has caused pause for any subsequent infallible pronouncements on scientific matters. (Perhaps this explains Rome's reluctance to formally reject macroevolution, allowing belief in it for fear it might prove to be true.)

Galileo, using his telescope to view the heavens, adopted the Copernican view[61] that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the solar system. This, of course, opposed the Church-held theological position of an earth-centered system. Trouble arose when Galileo wrote his *Letters on Sunspots* in 1613, and attention shifted from discussions of science to scriptural difficulties:

> People wanted to know why [Joshua] would command the sun to stand still if it never moved anyway (see Josh. 10:12–13). They wondered how a moving earth could be reconciled with the statement that God "fixed the earth upon its foundation, not to be moved forever" (Ps. 103:5). (Marthaler, *NCE*, 252)

In 1616, Rome condemned the Copernican theory.[62] In 1632, Galileo was summoned by the Inquisition; in 1633, after being tried, he was pronounced "vehemently suspected of heresy." By way of punishment, he was ordered to repeat the seven penitential psalms once a week for three years. After five months, Pope Urban VIII (r. 1623–1644) allowed Galileo to return to his home in Florence, where he remained under house arrest until his death in 1642.[63]

In 1979, after the Church had suffered centuries of humiliation for its errant condemnation of Galileo, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) spoke to the Pontifical Academy of Science; in his address titled "Faith, Science, and the Galileo Case," he called for a reexamination of the whole episode (Brown, *PTP*, 177). In 1983, while addressing "the church and science," John Paul II conceded that "Galileo had 'suffered from departments of the church.' "[64] This, of course, is neither a clear retraction of the condemnation nor a solution to the problem of how an infallible pronouncement of the Roman Church could be in error.

There have been various Catholic responses to the Galileo fiasco. One authority claims that while both Pope Paul V (r. 1605–1621) and Pope Urban VIII were committed anti-Copernicans, their pronouncements were not *ex cathedra*: the 1616 decree "was issued by the Congregation of the Index, which can raise no difficulty in regard to infallibility, this tribunal being absolutely incompetent to make a dogmatic decree" (Herbermann, *CE*, 345). As to the second trial in 1633, this condemnation sentence of Galileo is said to be of lesser importance because it "did not receive the Pope's signature" (ibid., 346). A different Catholic source states that although the treatment of Galileo was inappropriate, "the condemnation was the act of a Roman Congregation and in

no way involved infallible teaching authority" (Marthaler, *NCE*, 254). Still another observes that "the condemnation of Galileo by the Inquisition had nothing to do with the question of papal infallibility since no question of faith or morals was papally condemned *ex cathedra*" (Delaney and Tobin in *DCB*, 456). One Catholic apologist suggests that although the decision was a "regrettable" case of "imprudence," the pope made no error, since Galileo was not *condemned* of heresy, but *strongly suspected* of it.

None of these "solutions" is convincing, having all the earmarks of after-the-fact tinkering with the pronouncements that resulted from this episode. Galileo *and* his opponents would be nonplussed to discover that the serious charges leveled against him were not *ex cathedra* in force. Furthermore, in view of the weighty nature of both the condemnation and the punishment, Galileo would be *beyond* surprised to hear Catholic apologists claim he was not being condemned for false teaching, but rather that "His 'proof' did not impress even astronomers of that day—nor would they impress astronomers today."[65] At any rate, the pope's condemnation of Galileo further weakens this notoriously shaky Roman doctrine. The persistent claim that the pontiff wasn't speaking infallibly on that occasion is an appeal to an unverifiable distinction that undermines the alleged infallibility it purports to defend.

A PROTESTANT VIEW OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The Protestant response to Catholic ecclesiology points out several biblical teachings that conflict with the Church of Rome, including the principle of *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone) and the principle of Scripture's perspicuity (clarity) on all essential matters. There is no need for a teaching magisterium: The Bible alone is sufficient and plain for all matters of faith and practice. There is also no need for apostolic succession: Again, the writings of the apostles (written authority) succeeded the apostles (living authority).

The Principle of *Sola Scriptura*

Roman Catholics affirm, as an unchangeable part of their faith, *de fide*, the infallible teaching authority of the Church as manifested in the bishop of Rome (the pope). What Catholics affirm infallibly, Protestants deny emphatically, and

talk about “first among equals” or “collegiality” will not solve the problem, for the very concept of an infallible teaching magisterium, however composed, is contrary to *sola scriptura*, the Bible alone.[66] While both sides believe the Bible is infallible, Protestants deny that Rome or the pope has an infallible interpretation of it. Catholics believe that the visible church Christ started is the Roman Catholic Church; they hold that it’s the same organization over which Christ established Peter as the first pope. As we have seen, there is no legitimate support for this contention, leaving the door open to an examination of the biblical evidence for the nature of the visible, local church(es) of the New Testament.

While all Protestants agree that there is no infallible head of the visible church(es), they do have intramural differences as to the form of government the visible church(es) should have.[67] Nonetheless, all concur that Christ (the Word) is the invisible Head of the visible church (cf. Rev. 1–3) and that the visible church’s only infallible authority is Holy Scripture (the Word).[68] Local church governance was left in the hands of the congregation and their elders, who were at first appointed by the apostles (Acts 14:23) to lead the church.[69]

The Principle of the Perspicuity of Scripture

The oft-misunderstood principle of biblical perspicuity does not claim that everything in Scripture is clear; it affirms that *Scripture’s central teachings are clear*. As stated popularly: In the Bible, the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things. Indeed, the gospel itself is stated in one-syllable words, none of which is over four letters:[70] “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). Also, Jesus said plainly, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Doubters and distorters only need be asked, “Which of these words do you not understand?”

As proof of the perspicuity of the Scriptures, Protestants can point Roman Catholics to there being more essential unity among evangelical Protestants—who have an infallible Bible but no infallible interpreter—than there is among Catholics, whose views range from nearly evangelical to radically liberal. What is the value, then, of an infallible teaching magisterium?

There Is No Apostolic Succession

Apostleship was not only a gift, it was a temporary gift. There is no apostolic succession; Peter wasn't the first pope, he wasn't infallible, and he has no successors. The many reasons for this are briefly summarized here:[71]

(1) Apostles lived only in the first century.
(2) Apostles were only needed for the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20).
(3) The gifts of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) ceased in the first century.
(4) Jesus gave the kingdom authority to His apostles, not to successors; i.e., the twelve apostles never appointed apostles to succeed them.[72]
(5) Apostles never appointed their successors (Acts 12:1–2).
(6) The term *apostle* faded in the latter New Testament.
(7) Second-century impostors had to claim apostleship to gain acceptance for their writings.
(8) Apostolic succession is contrary to the priesthood of all believers. (See appendix 8.)

The Autonomy of the Local Church(es)

Once again, there is no visible head of the local church: Christ, the invisible Head of His body, has not been decapitated and replaced by the bishop of Rome.[73] There is astonishing wisdom in God's plan to establish self-governing, independent local churches, with many benefits to the ongoing ministry of Christ.

First, it preserves His lordship and headship, as He is still the invisible Head of each visible local church.

Second, individual independent churches are less vulnerable to wide-scale corruption, since if one goes astray doctrinally or morally, the others are not automatically or directly affected by it.

Third, a church with checks and balances—such as elders and deacons being voted in by the congregation and being ultimately responsible to it—can better overcome the corrupting influence of the penchant for power resident in depraved human beings. John warned of the primacy of the episcopacy in the first century when he spoke of "Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them" (3 John 9).

Fourth, independent, self-governing churches are more conducive to the development of lay leadership, which is essential in fulfilling the Great

Commission.[74]

Fifth, people have a stronger motive to promote and preserve that in which they have a vital voice.

Sixth, and finally, authority is best kept on the level it is to be exercised—in this case, on the local level.

As for the objection that a visible head of the visible church is more conducive to Christian unity, the facts do not support it. For one thing, it has not helped preserve the unity and orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church. Further, it confuses true *unity* with *uniformity*:[75] That everyone belongs to the same organization with the same supposedly visible head does not mean they maintain true spiritual and doctrinal unity, let alone vitality as an assembly of God's people. A survey of the dichotomy between what the Roman Catholic Church teaches and what its members believe and practice will reveal that it doesn't measure up to what evangelical Christianity exhibits in its membership as compared to its teachings.

The Plurality of Elders in the Local Church

Another New Testament church check-and-balance was the plurality of elders, not just one bishop or pastor with centralized power. That "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely"[76] is true no matter what kind of church exercises episcopal government. In-depth discussion of New Testament elder roles will further elucidate this point.[77]

The Purposes of the Local Church

The purpose of a local church can be viewed in many relationships.

First, in relation to God, the church's purpose is to glorify Him: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31 KJV). Specifically, the church should glorify Him whose church it is: "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."[78]

Second, in relation to the universal church, the purpose of the local church is to be a visible manifestation, an outward expression of the inward character of Christ's body, manifesting its recognition of His headship and our unity. Paul urged,

[We should be] endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, [recognizing that] there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph. 4:3–6 KJV)

Third, in relation to other believers, the purpose is to edify Christ's body:

> It was he [the ascended Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service*, [1] so that the body of Christ may be built up [2] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and [3] become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11–13)

Of course, part of edification is fellowship with other believers, the earliest of whom "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42 KJV). The result of all this?

> We will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:14–16)

Fourth, in relation to unbelievers, the purpose is evangelism. This is evident even in keeping the ordinances:[79] The Lord's Supper, which is only for believers, "proclaim[s] the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26 NASB). Further, Paul refers to unbelievers coming into the local church and being convinced by the message (1 Cor. 14:24). The service was not primarily for evangelism of unbelievers, but for edification of believers; nonetheless, *edification is the internal mission of the church, and evangelism is the external mission*. Jesus said to his disciples:

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

Indeed, the last thing He said before ascending was "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).[80]

Finally, in relation to the angels, the church's purpose should be to exhibit God's wisdom and grace. Paul said,

> To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:9–11 NKJV)[81]

The Destiny of the Church

In addition to discussing the church's nature, a word should be added here about its destiny.[82] James, the brother of Jesus, declared:

> Men and brethren, hearken unto me: [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up. (Acts 15:13–16 KJV)

When the church is completed, Christ will return and rapture her to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16–18).[83] *Then* will come the marriage and supper of the Lamb, when the bride will be united with her Bridegroom forever.[84]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The history of the Christian church is really the history of Christian churches. Regardless of the varying authority from outside the local church, in the final analysis all church government is local. While the church became institutionalized after the Roman emperor Constantine (c. 274–337) made Christianity the official religion of the empire; nonetheless, from the beginning there was a strong, continual emphasis on the biblical doctrine of the visible local church. (See appendix 7.)

Early Fathers

Beginning immediately after the time of the New Testament apostles, the Church Fathers wrote about the visible local churches and of Christ's headship

over them, speaking of apostolic, Bible-based congregations functioning under the ultimate authority, their invisible Head.

Clement of Rome (c. first century A.D.)

> The Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth, to them that are called and sanctified by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from Almighty God through Jesus Christ, be multiplied. (*FECC*, 1.14)

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

> Remember in your prayers the Church which is in Syria, which, instead of me, has now for its shepherd the Lord, who says, "I am the good Shepherd." And He alone will oversee it, as well as your love towards Him. (*EIR*, 9)

To the Church of God the Father, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is at Philadelphia, which has obtained mercy through love, and is established in the harmony of God, and rejoiceth unceasingly, in the passion of our Lord Jesus, and is filled with all mercy through His resurrection. (*EIP*, 1)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

> In the body, although the members are enumerated as many, all are called one, and are a body. For, indeed, a commonwealth and a church, though many individuals in number, are in fact as one, called and addressed by one appellation. (*DJ*, 42)

Methodius (c. 260–311)

> It is frequently the case that the Scriptures thus call the assembly and mass of believers by the name of the Church, the … body of the Church … a church and help-meet of Christ, betrothed and given in marriage to Him as a virgin. (*BTV*, 1.8)

Today, the trumpet-blasts of the prophets have roused the world, and have made glad and filled with joyfulness the churches of God that are everywhere amongst the nations. (*OP*, 1)

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles

> Hear this, you of the laity also, the elect Church of God. For the people were formerly called "the people of God," and "an holy nation." You, therefore, are the holy and sacred "Church of God, enrolled in heaven, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," a bride adorned for the Lord God, a great Church, a faithful Church. (II, 25)

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

> The Church, to whom the stable name of endurance is given; for this cause surely, because she alone remains to all generations, rejoicing ever, subsisting as she does by the endurance of us believers, who are the members of Christ.… For the Lord's crown prophetically pointed to us, who once were barren, but are placed around Him through the Church of which He is the Head. (*I*, 1.5, 2.8)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

> [The apostles] founded churches in every city, from which all the other churches, one after another, derived the tradition of the faith, and the seeds of doctrine, and are every day deriving them, that they may become churches. Indeed, it is on this account only that they will be able to deem themselves apostolic, as being the offspring of apostolic churches. Every sort of thing must necessarily revert to its original for its classification. Therefore the churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive church, [founded] by the apostles, from which they all [spring]. (*PAH*, 20)
>
> They who reject that Scripture can neither belong to the Holy Spirit, seeing that they cannot acknowledge that the Holy Ghost has been sent as yet to the disciples, nor can they presume to claim to be a church themselves who positively have no means of proving when, and with what swaddling-clothes, this body was established. (ibid., 22)
>
> To this test, therefore, will they be submitted for proof by those churches, who, although they derive not their founder from apostles or apostolic men (as being of much later date, for they are in fact being founded daily), yet since they agree in the same faith, they are accounted as not less apostolic because they are akin in doctrine. (ibid., 32)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

> The God who sent Jesus dissipated all the conspiracies of the demons, and made the Gospel of Jesus to prevail throughout the whole world for the conversion and reformation of men, and caused Churches to be everywhere established.… Whereas the Churches of God which are instructed by Christ, when carefully contrasted with the assemblies of the districts in which they are situated, are as beacons in the world. (*AC*, 3.29)

Cyprian (200–258)

"When we came before them, and our purpose was understood, they themselves also began to observe what the others did, so that the agreement of the churches abiding there was in no respect broken" (*EC*, 44.2).

"There is one Church, divided by Christ throughout the whole world into many members" (ibid., 51.24).

John Chrysostom (347–407)

"Ought not each individual believer to build a Church, to get a Teacher, to cooperate (with him), to make this above all his object, that all may be Christians?" (*CAA*, 18.220).

“Let the house be a Church, consisting of men and women” (ibid., 26.303).

“A man is more dignified than a Church: for it was not for walls that Christ died, but for these temples” (*HESPR*, 26.954).

“If we thus regulate our own houses, we shall be also fit for the management of the Church.… Indeed a house is a little Church” (*HE*, 20.313).

Medieval Fathers

Even after the church was institutionalized,[85] the doctrine of Christ’s headship in the visible church continued to be elaborated upon in biblical and apostolic teaching. The authority and autonomy of the local church diminished increasingly throughout the Middle Ages, but the authority of Scripture and the foundation of the church persisted.

Augustine (354–430)

“We have seen that things severally are good, and all things very good, in Thy Word, in Thine Only-Begotten, both heaven and earth, the Head and the body of the Church” (*C*, 13.34.49).

“The whole earth consists of many lands, and the Church universal of many churches” (*CG*, 13.12).

“The Church is His body, as the apostles’ teaching shows us; and it is even called His spouse. His body … has many members” (*OCD*, 1.16.15).

Jerome (c. 340–420)

> It is not the case that there is one church at Rome and another in all the world beside. Gaul and Britain, Africa and Persia, India and the East worship one Christ and observe one rule of truth. If you ask for authority, the world outweighs its capital. (*LSJ*, 146.1)

Reformation Leaders

Through the Reformation there was a rediscovery and reaffirmation of the biblical teaching on the church (as well as on salvation). This included an emphasis on independent church governance, Christ’s invisible headship, and the Word’s primal authority.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> When in the Creed we profess to believe the Church, reference is made not only to the visible Church of which we are now treating, but also to all the elect of God, including in the number even those who have departed this life. (*ICR*, 4.1.2)
>
> Often, too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord's Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding the word of the Lord, and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it. (ibid., 4.1.7)

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

> As many of the called profess with their mouths "that they know God, while in works they deny him;" and since of the hearts of these men, God is the sole judge, who alone "knoweth them that are his"; therefore such persons are judged, on account of the promise, to belong to the visible church, although … they do not belong to the invisible church. (*D*, 18)

Post-Reformation Leaders

After the Reformation, especially among the Anabaptists, a stronger emphasis was placed on local church autonomy as found in the New Testament.[86] Church leaders continued to make known the biblical teaching on the visible church and the headship of Christ.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

"Not only will Christian humility dispose persons to honor those wicked men that are out of the visible church, but also false brethren and persecutors" (*RA* in *WJE*, 3.948).

> When God, in any great dispensation of his providence, remarkably sets his King on his holy hill of Zion, Christ in an extraordinary manner comes down from heaven to the earth and appears in his visible church in a great work of salvation for his people. (*PRR* in ibid., 2.1.48)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

> What do you mean by the Church? A visible Church (as our article defines it) is a company of faithful or believing people—*coetus credentium* ["a congregation of believers"]. This is the essence of a Church; and the properties thereof are (as they are described in the words that follow), "among whom the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered" (*EAMRR*, 76).
>
> A provincial or national Church, according to our article, is the true believers of that province or nation. If these are dispersed up and down, they are only a part of the invisible Church of Christ. But if they are visibly joined by assembling together to hear his word and partake of his supper, they are then a visible Church. (ibid., 77)

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith (1632)

> We believe in, and confess a visible church of God, namely, those who, as has been said before, truly repent and believe, and are rightly baptized; who are one with God in heaven, and rightly incorporated into the communion of the saints here on earth. (VIII)

The Schleitheim Confession of Faith (1527)

> The shepherd in the church shall be a person according to the rule of Paul.… The office of such a person shall be to read and exhort and teach, warn, admonish, or ban in the congregation, and properly to preside among the sisters and brothers in prayer, and in the breaking of bread, and in all things to take care of the body of Christ, that it may be built up and developed, so that the name of God might be praised and honored through us, and the mouth of the mocker be stopped. (5)

CONCLUSION

There is a fundamental difference between the Roman Catholic and Protestant views on the nature of the visible church. Catholics believe that the one true visible church Christ established is the Roman Church, over which He placed a visible vicar of Christ, namely, St. Peter. They further hold that God set up an apostolic succession so that those who subsequently served as bishop of Rome are the only divinely appointed, infallible, official interpreters of faith and practice for believers.

All other branches of Christendom, including Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and every form of Protestantism, reject this claim, though both the Anglican and Orthodox Churches have their own episcopal form of government with a single head.[87] The biblical and historical evidence favors the Protestant view, which asserts that an infallible Bible is sufficient for faith and practice without any alleged infallible interpreter of it.[88] Indeed, both Scripture and the early Fathers support the position that neither Peter nor his supposed successors in Rome were divinely appointed to any such position. And, as we shall see,[89] Christ's apostles established independent, self-governing churches that didn't have overarching human governing authority but rather were based on apostolic teaching that was later replaced, upon the death of the apostles, with apostolic writings (the New Testament).

Hence, there is no one visible church: There are many visible churches—with one invisible Head, Christ—that are to be based on the teachings of His infallible Word (the Bible). These doctrines are best expressed in the helpful but not infallible ecumenical confessions, creeds, and councils of the churches in the

first five hundred years after the earthly life of Jesus. Accordingly, the root basis for historic orthodoxy is found in *one Bible, two Testaments* (Old and New), *three creeds* (Apostles' [c. 150], Nicene [325], Athanasian [428]), *four councils* (Nicea [325], First Constantinople [381], Ephesus [431], Chalcedon [451]), and *five centuries*. After this there was increasingly no catholicity, little unity, and progressive unorthodoxy, which culminated in the Roman Catholic Council of Trent's (1545–1563) "infallible" decisions, including the rejection of crucial Protestant teachings, such as salvation being

(1) by faith alone;[90]
(2) based on the Bible alone;[91]
(3) accomplished by the work of Christ alone;[92] and
(4) for the glory of God alone (1 Cor. 10:31).

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

Christendom contains three main views about the basic governmental form the visible church should have: episcopal, presbyterian, or congregational. These three forms of church government take their meaning from three Greek New Testament words for offices or entities. The word for "elder" is *presbuteros*, from which we get the word *presbyterian*; a *presbuteros* form of government is one of elder authority. The word for "bishop" is *episcopos*, from which we get the word *episcopalian*; an *episcopos* form of government is one ruled by the bishop, who is considered higher than elders. Naturally in a congregational form of government the congregation (corresponding to the word *ekklésia*, "assembly") is the final authority.

The Episcopal View

The word *episcopos* ("bishop") means "overseer," distinguishing the office of a bishop from that of an elder, giving him authority over the elders and the congregation. Various forms of episcopal government are found in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, some Lutheran,[1] Anglican, Episcopal, and Methodist churches; many smaller denominations (particularly but not exclusively those springing from a Methodist background) are episcopal in

practice. The classic exposition of episcopal government is found in the multivolume *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* by Richard Hooker (1553–1600); Kenneth Kirk (1886–1954), in *The Apostolic Ministry*, attempts to give a New Testament foundation for this view; see also *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* by T. M. Lindsay (1843–1914).

The Presbyterian View

The word *presbyterian*, from the Greek *presbuteros*—meaning "older," "more mature," or "wiser"—signifies that a board of elders holds final authority in the administration of church affairs. This view sees elder and bishop as *one* office, based on two different words, one (*bishop*) coming from the Greek background and the other (*elder*) from the Hebrew background of the early church. Presbyterian government is represented in Presbyterian churches, Plymouth Brethren assemblies, and a growing number of baptistic and independent churches influenced by the Reformed tradition. A prime exposition is *The Form of Presbyterial Church Government* approved by the Westminster Assembly in 1645; a more recent treatment is found in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*.[2]

The Congregational View

While it may also have elders and/or deacons, the congregational form views the final authority as resting in the congregation, which, accordingly, must approve major matters relating to faith and practice. Congregational government is represented by Congregational, Free, Baptist, and many independent churches. Baptist theologian A. H. Strong (1836–1921) provided the most succinct explanation of congregational church government (see *ST*); the article on the church in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*[3] is also helpful.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Doctrinally, the basis of New Testament church government was apostolic: The church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ being the cornerstone and the apostles being the living authority. Paul implied

that either “word” or “letter” from him is authoritative (2 Thess. 2:2 NKJV); as the church was built on the “apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42), their word was the final authority on matters of faith and practice. However, since there is no apostolic succession,[4] after their deaths the living apostles were replaced by their writings. Because their oral authority was replaced by their written authority, the New Testament is the sole divine authority for determining the type of church government they established.

Offices and Gifts

The New Testament makes an important distinction between an *office* and a *gift*. Gifts for ministry are given only by God.[5] Apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, and pastoring/teaching are all gifts; elder and deacon (Gk: *diakonos*), however, are offices under the domain of the local church (Acts 6:1ff.), which must find people who meet the required qualifications (see 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9) and then place them in office. Thus, while the church determines *offices*, she cannot bestow *gifts*.[6]

God provided for the *whole* church “apostles and prophets” (who received His revelation that became the New Testament); they were the *universal* church’s foundation (Eph. 2:20) and, as apostles, had authority in all the churches. On the other hand, pastors and evangelists were/are God’s gifts to the *local* church; the apostles appointed “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23 NKJV), “in every town” (Titus 1:5), and bishops (elders) and deacons in Philippi (Phil. 1:1). These offices (elder and deacon) are the only two recognized in the New Testament.

The Overall Principle of Church Government

In dealing with a turbulent church in Corinth, the apostle Paul set forth the most basic principle beneath all church government: “*Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way*” (1 Cor. 14:40). This he applied to many situations: People who were speaking at the same time, he told to wait and speak consecutively (v. 27). Others who were speaking out of place, he told to be silent (vv. 28, 34). Those who were overusing a gift not edifying to all, he told to cease (v. 19). All were to take their God-given place in the body according to the gifts He had given them (12:14–27); all were to recognize the primary role of a living apostle, followed by prophets and teachers (v. 28). God is not the God of confusion but of order (14:33), and Paul stressed the “order” needed in the

church.[7]

Specific Order in the Local Church

Of course, the New Testament gives more intricate directions as to precisely what form orderliness should take in the local church, the manifestations of which Earl Radmacher (b. 1933) summarizes well:

> There was what approximated an orderly local church election in Acts 6:1–6. There were local church rolls, at least for the widows who were to receive help (1 Tim. 5:9), and evidence seems to support … carefully kept membership records, for all were associated with a particular local church. [Further,] the numbers were known (Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4); election of officers assumes a roll (Acts 6:2–5); and church discipline assumes a roll (1 Cor. 5:13). There were rules for orderly procedures and practices in the local churches (11:1–34; 14:1–40). There was an orderly system of local church finances (16:2). (*WCAA*, 355)

That there were also local church officers to whom proper submission was to be given (Heb. 13:17) leads directly to a discussion of the officers and government expressed in the New Testament.

The Role of Elders in New Testament Church Government

The office of elder was one of authority, maturity, sagacity, and dignity.

A Position of Authority

In the Jewish community, elder was a position of great authority.[8] The elders were rulers: “Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest (Matt. 26:3; cf. 15:2).[9] Paul received authority from the Jewish elders: “As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished” (Acts 22:5). He adds, “About [another prisoner], when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed [me], desiring to have judgment against him” (25:15).

A Position of Dignity

Elder was also a position of dignity: “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land (Prov. 31:23); “she [Jezebel] wrote letters in Ahab’s name, and sealed [them] with his seal, and sent the letters unto

the elders and to the nobles" (1 Kings 21:8).

A Position of Maturity

The term *elder* also implies maturity: "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat [him] as a father" (1 Tim. 5:1). An "elder" in time (i.e., older) was generally wiser in truth. However, the term can also mean "more mature," for while some people are wise beyond their years, some are old and foolish.

A Position of Sagacity

By virtue of his age and/or maturity, an elder also held a position of wisdom: "They will try to get a vision from the prophet; [but] the teaching of the law by the priest will be lost, as will the counsel of the elders" (Ezek. 7:26 NIV).

The Location of Elders in the New Testament Church

There Were Elders in Jerusalem

"[It was] determined that Paul and Barnabas … should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question" (Acts 15:2 NKJV). The church had collected a gift for the poor believers in Jerusalem "and sent it to the elders" with Paul and Barnabas (11:30); "when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and elders, and they reported all things that God had done with them" (15:4; cf. v. 6). "As they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem" (16:4).

There Were Elders in Every City

Luke records that "from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church"[10] (Acts 20:17). Further, Paul said to Titus, "I left you in Crete … that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (Titus 1:5 NIV).

There Were Elders in Every Local Church

"When they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23). Since not "every" church was large, it's clear that a plurality of elders (not just one) was intended for each church (not just the whole church)—even the small Philippian congregation had many "bishops" (Phil. 1:1).

The Function of an Elder in the New Testament Church

The elder's many functions included being an overseer, ruler, shepherd, teacher, apologist, arbiter, and watchman.

An Elder Is an Overseer

Peter exhorted elders: "Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). Since *bishop* means "overseer," and since elders were undershepherds of the Great Shepherd (5:1–4), it follows that elders were to be overseers of God's flock.

An Elder Is a Ruler

Referring to elders (leaders/rulers), Hebrews commands believers: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves" (13:17). Indeed, the Greek word for "rule" (from *hégeomai*) means "to lead, guide, think, consider." However, *ruler* here connotes "director," not "dictator"; they were leaders, not commanders; their leadership was administrative, not legislative. Further, the members were to obey their leaders in matters of *administrating* faith and practice in the church, not in establishing it: *God's* revelation is the basis for faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16–17), and this is found in the Old Testament and in the New Testament teaching of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). In contrast to obeying leaders who come with alleged revelations from God (2 Thess. 2:2), congregations are exhorted to watch out for false prophets and false teachers (cf. 1 Tim. 4; 1 John 4).

An Elder Is an Undershepherd

> The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint,[11] but willingly; not for filthy lucre,[12] but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Peter 5:1–4)

Therefore, elders are to rule as undershepherds, not as overlords; elders should lead members like sheep rather than drive members like goats; elders should guide by example, not by executive order.

An Elder Is a Teacher

An elder feeds "the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:2 NKJV); he is "apt [able] to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2; cf. 2 Timothy 2:24); he must be able to teach "sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9). Again, these teachings (Acts 2:42) are the church's doctrinal basis.

An Elder Is an Apologist

Further, an elder must be a defender of the faith. Paul (an elder) said, "I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17). Elders are commanded: "[Hold] fast the faithful word as [you have] been taught, that [you] may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9), or, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (NIV).

An Elder Is an Arbiter of Disputes

The New Testament elders assisted the apostles in the arbitration of disputes: "Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders" (Acts 15:2 NIV; cf. 1 Cor. 6:1–4).

An Elder Is a Watchman

Hebrews says of elders, "They watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (13:17). As such, an elder should be a restorer of the wayward: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

The Gender of an Elder

All elders were males, for they needed to be "the husband" of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2). Elder was a position of authority, and women were not "to usurp authority over the man" (1 Tim. 2:12). The reasons given, which clarify that this is not merely cultural, are based here on the order of creation and elsewhere (1 Cor. 11:3) on the nature of the Godhead.[13] However, *women are not inferior in nature, redemptive status, or spiritual gifting; they differ only in* function.

Women Are Equal to Men in Nature

If women were naturally unequal to men because of their God-appointed role

as submissive to their head, then Christ would be naturally inferior to God, since He is submissive to the Father (1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28). For instance, Jesus said, "I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30; cf. 8:28). *Both women and men were created in God's image* (cf. Gen. 1:27).

Women Are Equal to Men in Redemptive Status

Neither are women inferior as to redemptive status; soteriologically (salvifically), "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for *you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28 NIV).

Women Are Equal to Men in Spiritual Gifting

Nor are women inferior to men in the area of spiritual gifts, there being no sex indicators on the gifts. There were prophetesses in the New Testament (Acts 21:29); the woman Priscilla taught the man Apollos (Acts 18:26); and women prophesied in the church service, since Paul told them how to do it (1 Cor. 11:13).

Women Are Different in Function From Men

That women are different in function in no way makes them inferior; if anything, they have an unparalleled function—childbearing—which Paul singles out in 1 Timothy 2:15. Functions (or lack thereof) do not make one naturally *inferior* or *superior* to members of the opposite sex; they merely make one *different*. Everyone, male or female, functions best in his/her God-given role. For example, men are neither inferior because they cannot bear children nor superior because Jesus chose males to be His apostles or because the Bible teaches elders should be males.

The Interchangeability of the Terms *Elder* and *Bishop*

As noted earlier, in the episcopal form of church government, a bishop is distinguished from an elder, bishop being considered a higher position. However, the two terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament—different backgrounds, same basic function. *Elder* (*presbuteros*) is from the Jewish term for an overseer, and *bishop* (*episcopos*) is the Greek term for an overseer; the early church had officers from both backgrounds, and that both terms were used

of the same office can be seen from several facts.

Both Were a Plurality in Each Church

We've noted that there were "elders in every church" (Acts 14:23 NKJV). Likewise, Paul reminded Titus that there were bishops in each: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops [plural] and deacons" (Phil. 1:1).

Both Had to Have the Same Basic Qualifications

Paul wrote to Timothy:

> Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [Gr: *episcopos*], he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be [1] above reproach, [2] the husband of but one wife, [3] temperate, self-controlled, [4] respectable, [5] hospitable, [6] able to teach, [7] not given to drunkenness [lit. "much wine"], [8] not violent but gentle, [9] not quarrelsome, [10] not a lover of money. [11] He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) [12] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. [13] He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (1 Tim. 3:1–7 NIV)

Paul gives the same basic requirements for an "elder" to Titus:

> An elder [Gk: *presbuteros*, v. 5] must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (1:6–9 NIV)

Elder and Bishop Are Used Interchangeably

The terms are used interchangeably *in name* by Paul in the *same text*:

> For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain *elders* in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a *bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre. (Titus 1:5–7)

Further, the terms are also used interchangeably *in function* by Peter:

> Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop [overseer] of your souls.… [Yet] the elders which are among you I exhort … and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: *Feed the flock of God* which is among you, *taking*

the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Peter 2:25; 5:1–2).[14]

Acts 20 also shows this interchangeability: "Paul sent to Ephesus for the *elders* of the church.… 'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers* [bishops]. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood' " (vv. 17, 28 NIV).

Again, *elder* was the term for Jews to denote the same function that *bishop* denoted for Greeks. Hence, the New Testament inclusively used both words for the same office, setting no distinction in function or authority.*

Must Every Church Have Elders?

Some opponents of presbyterian and/or congregational church governments have suggested, contrary to the biblical evidence, that the texts on the plurality of elders in each church are descriptive rather than prescriptive; that is, the straightforward New Testament directive (to us) is simply the broad imperative "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

In response, *first*, many passages about elders/bishops are in a didactic (teaching) context (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:16; Titus 1:5).

Second, Paul explicitly exhorts Titus to appoint elders in every city.

Third, since these churches were the originals in their areas, there were not yet many congregations, yet all were to have a plurality of elders.

Fourth, again, even the little Philippian church, which grew out of the converts from Lydia's riverside prayer meeting, had pluralities of elders and deacons (1:1).

Fifth, it wasn't only every city that required elder plurality but every *church* (e.g., Acts 14:23).

Sixth, taking such texts descriptively undermines other teachings in these books, reducing them to "what they were doing" and eliminating "what we *should* also be doing."

Seventh, and finally, the language and contexts of the passages on church government *are* prescriptive; the appointment of elders was established by the apostles, the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20; Acts 2:42).

The Proper Treatment of an Elder in the New Testament Church

The function of elders/bishops can also be seen from the treatment that was accorded them.

Elders Should Not Be Rebuked but Entreated

Paul said, “Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity” (1 Tim. 5:1–2).

Elders Should Be Honored

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17).

Elders Should Not Be Unfairly Accused

“Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19 NIV).

Elders Should Receive Submission

Peter said, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.… Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder” (1 Peter 5:1, 5).

Elders Should Be Obeyed

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Heb. 13:17). Again, the Greek word for *rule* means “to lead” or “to guide” (Arndt and Gingrich, *GELNT*, 344), not to command or to dictate. Even so, this obedience was not blind but biblical, not unthinking but thoughtful. Just as Paul said to children, “Obey your parents in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1), even so obedience to elders should be only “in the Lord” and according to His Word. Further, since ultimately the congregation was the final authority,[15] the elders’ “rule” was administrative, not legislative (see below).

Elders Should Be the Subject of Our Prayers

“Pray for us [elders]: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly” (Heb. 13:18).

Elders Should Be Remembered

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7 NIV). Whatever form this remembrance took, it showed honor and respect for the elders.

Elders Should Be Saluted (Greeted)

"Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints" (Heb. 13:24). While Jesus said, "Call no man your father" in a spiritual sense (Matt. 23:9), the Bible also says, "Render therefore to all their due … fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor" (Rom. 13:7 NKJV).

Elders Should Be Called Upon for Prayer

When the sick needed prayer they were to call on the elders: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14). The sick were not taken to the church, and it was not one leader praying for them but many.

The Role of Deacons in New Testament Church Government

The role of deacons is seen from their origin, qualifications, and relationship to the elders.

The Origin of Deacons

> When the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve [who were elders] gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."
>
> This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1–6 NIV)

The Qualifications of a Deacon

Paul, in 1 Timothy 3:8–13 (NIV), lays down the qualifications of a deacon:

> Deacons … are to be [1] men worthy of respect, [2] sincere, [3] not indulging in much wine, and [4] not pursuing dishonest gain. [5] They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. [6] They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as

> deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, [7] not malicious talkers but [8] temperate and [9] trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be [10] the husband of but one wife and [11] must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Unlike elders, deacons could be younger in the faith (v. 6) and need not have the same aptness to teach (3:2) or refute heresies (1:10). Nonetheless, some deacons —such as Stephen (Acts 7) and Philip (Acts 8)—were gifted for ministry.

THE RELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONS OF ELDERS, DEACONS, APOSTLES, PASTORS, AND THE CONGREGATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The Relationship Between Elders and Deacons

Each church had a plurality of both deacons and elders (Phil. 1:1). Deacons were created to assist the elders. As subordinates, they were to relieve the elders of menial tasks so that the elders could concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the Word of God (Acts 6:2). Elders were overseers of the church's doctrinal and spiritual matters; deacons, as assistants, were in charge of the social and physical ministries.[16]

As for the deacons' tasks, first of all, they distributed food and clothing:

> In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration [of food]. Then the twelve [said] … Brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. (Acts 6:1–3)

Jesus taught, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on" (Matt. 6:25). Paul added, "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8); such was the concern of deacons.

Furthermore, deacons took care of widows and orphans. Regarding these, Paul admonished, "No widow may be put on the list of widows [to receive aid] unless she is over sixty [and] has been faithful to her husband" (5:9). James added, "Pure religion and [being] undefiled before God and the Father is this, to

visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep [one]self unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Paul called one woman a *deacon* in Romans 16:1: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister … a servant [Gk: *diakonon*] of the church … at Cenchrea." Since the word *deacon* means "servant," there is no certainty as to whether Phebe was an official deacon or an unofficial servant.[17] Even so, in favor of the latter are these facts:

(1) No group of female deacons is biblically mentioned (cf. Phil. 1:1).
(2) One qualification of a deacon was to be a husband (male) of one wife (1 Tim. 3:12).
(3) All the original deacons were men (Acts 6:5).

The reference to "the women" with a separate list of qualifications (1 Tim. 3:11) may be to the wives of deacons or to a separate group of females who served in the church:

> If they were deaconesses one would expect that they would be mentioned after verse 13 when the discussion of the deacons was finished rather than inserted right in the middle of the paragraph about deacons. That seems to point to the conclusion that they were the wives of the deacons. (Ryrie, *SBD*, 145)

The Special Role of Apostles in the New Testament Church

That the apostles played a foundational, authoritative, and temporal role in the church can be seen from their relationship to others.

The Relationship of Apostles and Elders

All apostles were elders, but not all elders were apostles; elder is an *office* in the church, while apostleship was a *gift* to select individuals in the church. For instance, the apostles John and Peter were elders (2 John 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1; cf. 3 John); when Judas defected, Peter, citing Psalm 109, said, "May another take his place of *leadership*" (lit.: "bishop's office" or "eldership"; Acts 1:20 NIV). All apostles were elders (bishops) by *office*; they were apostles by *gift*, given by God to the church (Eph. 4:8, 11). An apostle was an elder with the apostolic gift.

The Apostolic Role Was Temporary

Not only was apostleship a gift, it was also a *temporary* gift; apostles lived only in the first century, for they had to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected

Christ, a qualification laid down when Judas was replaced by Mathias in Acts 1:22. Paul also defended his apostleship by saying, "Am I not an apostle? … have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1; cf. 15:7–9). Further, apostles were part of the church's *foundation*, laid only in the first century (Eph. 2:19–20). What is more, apostles, along with prophets, received the revelation inscripturated in the New Testament, which was given *once* to edify the church of *all* times (2 Tim. 3:16–18). These men were the living authority who recorded a permanent written authority for our faith. (See appendix 8.)

Never did they appoint new apostles *to replace them* (Acts 12:2), *but only new* elders *to serve with them and after them* (cf. 14:23; Titus 1:5). In fact, even those who were apostles called themselves "elders" in their later epistles (cf. 2 John 1; 3 John 1; 1 Peter 5:1). Also, after the death of the apostles, when second- and third-century authors wanted to claim divine revelation and authority for their writings, they claimed to be apostles, implying *they knew such revelation and authority had died with the apostles*.

Apostles Were the Early Church's Final Authority

Not only were the apostles the New Testament church's foundation (Eph. 2:20), they were also its ruling authority. They appointed the elders (Acts 1:23; Titus 1:5), their teaching (being God's revelation) was the church's basis (Acts 2:42), and they settled doctrinal disputes (Acts 15; cf. Gal. 2).

Apostles Were the Early Church's Source of New Revelation

Paul said, "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11–12). Peter recognized Paul's epistles as revelation from God (2 Peter 3:13–16) and placed them alongside Old Testament Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15–16).

In point of fact, (1) since Jesus had promised to lead the apostles into "all truth" and bring to their mind "everything I have said to you";[18] (2) since apostles lived only in the first century;[19] and (3) since the New Testament is the only authentic record from the first century of apostolic teaching,[20] it follows that the apostles were the vessels of God's final revelation for the church. This is why *only* they were given and could give "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV), miracles to confirm their revelation from God (Heb. 2:3–4). Indeed, when the last apostle wrote the New Testament's last book, he appended to it this warning:

> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Rev. 22:18–19 NIV)

The Relationship Between Elders and Pastors

There is a close connection between elders and pastors, but here again, not all elders were pastors, since elder is an office and pastoring is a gift. Paul said, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1; cf. Acts 1:20). Pastoring is a gift that *some* elders had (Eph. 4:8, 11), so a pastor is a unique elder gifted with pastoring/teaching: *"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine"* (1 Tim. 5:17).

The Role of the Congregation in Local Church Government

Not only was the New Testament church self-governing, but the congregation also played an important role in that governing. While the elders were the congregational leaders, the congregation significantly impacted the church's affairs.

The Congregation Screened Their Own Membership

While Jesus *described* Christendom between His two comings as having both wheat and tares, believers and unbelievers (Matt. 13:24–30), nowhere is it *prescribed* by Jesus or His apostles that unbelievers should be part of a local church. Like the invisible church, the visible church *should* have only a regenerate membership; only those who are in Christ's invisible church (2 Cor. 5:17) *should* be in His visible church, for He is the Head of both. Never does a New Testament epistle address itself to unbelievers; if there were unbelievers in the church, it is because they "crept in" (Jude 4 KJV) under false pretenses, not because they were knowingly accepted. The devil sowed the tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:26–28).

The Congregation Chose Their Leaders

It is clear from the emphasized words in the following quotation about the origin of deacons that the congregation actually *chose* the deacons whom the

apostles then *appointed* to their work:

> The Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. *Brothers* [the church], *choose* seven men *from among you* [the church] who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."
>
> This proposal pleased *the whole group* [the church]. *They* [the church] chose [the deacons].… *They* [the church] presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:2–6 NIV)

Acts 14:23 says that apostles "ordained" [not elected] elders in the church. The wording in 6:3 is important: The congregation was to select them, and the apostles would appoint them. We may presume that since elders and deacons had similar qualifications, the same procedure applied to both. John Calvin said:

> Luke relates that Barnabas and Paul ordained elders throughout the churches, but he at the same time marks the plan or mode when he says that it was done by suffrage [voting]. [Thus,] the whole body, as was the custom of the Greeks in elections, declared by a show of hands which of the two they wished to have.… Certainly it is not credible that Paul conceded more to Timothy and Titus than he assumed to himself. Now we see that his custom was to appoint bishops by the suffrages of the people. (*ICR*, 4.3.15)

The whole church was involved; apparently, the congregation screened and chose deacons, whom the apostles then appointed and dedicated (set apart) for their ministry. When the apostles died, the body of believers likely chose the elders too, just as they chose their own deacons (Acts 6, 15).

The Congregation Exercised Church Discipline

In addition to choosing their own leaders, the local church exercised discipline:

> It is reported commonly that there is fornication *among you* [the congregation], and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And *ye*[21] [the congregation] are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.… In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when *ye* [the congregation] are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. 5:1–2, 4–5)

Obviously, all were involved in the decision to excommunicate this member. Happily, he repented, and the whole congregation was also involved in restoring him to membership:

> Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted *of many* [the congregation]. So that contrariwise *ye* [the congregation] ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. (2 Cor. 2:6–7)

Paul speaks of the whole church at Thessalonica being involved in discipline: "As for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:13–14 NIV). (1) Paul refers to those involved as "brothers" (brethren); (2) all of them were to disassociate with the disciplined member; and (3) all of them were to persist in doing right.

The Congregation Made the Final Decision in Cases of Offense

Further, the procedure for offenses set forth by Jesus in Matthew 18 shows that the "church" as a whole (i.e., the congregation) made the final decision in these crucial matters:

> If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just *between the two of you*. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, *take one or two others* along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, *tell it to the church*; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (vv. 15–17 NIV)

The final court of appeal was not the elders but the whole church.

The Congregation Commissioned Missionaries

> In *the church* at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While *they* were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after *they* had fasted and prayed, *they* placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1–3 NIV)

While "they," in context, seems to refer directly to these named church leaders, the leaders were probably acting as representatives of the entire congregation. Indeed, later (in 15:40) Luke speaks of "the brethren" commending Paul and Barnabas, which implies the broader congregation's involvement in the commissioning. This is particularly noteworthy with regard to the role of the local church; even Paul, who received revelation directly from God (Gal. 1), was commissioned by a local church to do missionary work.

The Whole Jerusalem Congregation Was Involved in a Doctrinal Decision

Though there were living apostles who had divine authority in doctrinal matters,[22] nonetheless, "the whole church" at Jerusalem was involved in deciding whether circumcision was necessary under the New Covenant: "The apostles and elders, *with the whole church*, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose … two men who were leaders among the brothers" to present the decision (Acts 15:22 NIV).

The inclusion of these men seems to reveal a role for which they were being prepared in the absence of apostles, when the local church would have to handle these kinds of issues on the basis of apostolic doctrine, recorded in the apostolic writings of the New Testament. So the living "apostles and elders" of the Jerusalem church[23] made the decision with which the whole church concurred; the groups involved were (1) the apostles, (2) the elders (vv. 2, 6), and (3) the congregation (v. 22).

By this time (c. 49), Paul had already completed his first missionary journey, churches were planted throughout Asia Minor, and Christianity was expanding rapidly; James, although not one of the twelve apostles, was one of the leading elders; his status can be inferred from his summing up the group's decision (vv. 13–21), as well as his being mentioned as "our Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19 nlt) and, along with Peter, as a highly respected leader in the Jerusalem church (cf. Gal. 2:2).

Since the living apostles were still the primary authority, the church's decision may simply have been a concurring one, although this is not entirely clear. What seems plain is that although they had authority to specify doctrine, the apostles had already brought in other elders, were training them for leadership, and were involving the entire congregation in decisions. Again, perhaps this was in preparation for when living apostolic authorities would no longer be present and the local congregations (with their leaders) would have to make these decisions.[24]

Elder Rule or Congregational Rule?

In the light of the congregation's role as spelled out in the New Testament, we must disagree with Alexander Strauch (b. 1944), who says,

> The New Testament does not indicate that the congregation governs itself by majority vote, and there is no evidence that God has granted every member one equal vote with every other member. Rather, the New Testament congregation is governed by its own congregational elders. (*BE*, 293)

There is an important distinction between elder *rule* and elder *guidance*; the

former is not taught in the New Testament, but the latter is. As we have seen, the final authority for the church—including the selection of leaders and the discipline of members—rests with the congregation.

Relationships Between the New Testament Churches

The apostles and early evangelists started independent, self-governing congregations, all of which had their own elders and deacons and were responsible, with their leaders, for making decisions. This, of course, was based on God's infallible Word (John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16–17), which was the Old Testament[25] and, incrementally, the authoritative teaching of the "apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20; cf. Acts 2:42) who were receiving additional revelation from God that would later be inscripturated in the New Testament. Therefore, as to the relationship between these churches, what (if anything) were the organizational ties between them and was there a "denomination" of churches?

Before these questions can be answered, a preliminary question must be asked: Is the biblical data regarding church government merely *descriptive* of the way it was done then, or is it *prescriptive* of the way it should be done now? Without getting into many details, it would seem that the related texts in the pastoral epistles are more than descriptive—they are *prescribing what ought to be* as is made evident by the exhortations therein.[26] Paul even specifically told Timothy that he was writing so his congregation would "know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15 NIV). Further, just as "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4), and just as "these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us" (1 Cor. 10:11 NIV), even so the pattern for how the church should be operated, as exemplified by the apostles, was a pattern prescribed by God that we likewise should follow.

It is difficult to improve upon Earl Radmacher's summary of this topic:

> (1) *The local church has the authority to judge its own membership* (1 Cor. 5:13). Even an apostle [did] not assume to excommunicate a member, but call[ed] upon the local church to do so.
> (2) *The local church has authority to elect its own officers* (Acts 6:1–6). Not even the apostles assume[d] to choose the officers of a local church but

call[ed] upon the church to do it.

(3) *The local church has authority to guard and observe the ordinances* (1 Cor. 11:23, "I delivered unto you"). Not to the clergy, the elders or bishops [was this authority given].…

(4) *The local church has authority to settle its own internal difficulties* (1 Cor. 6:1–5). Paul [did] not appoint a committee, but direct[ed] the church to look into the matter.…

(5) *The local church has authority in matters involving the relationship of various local churches* (Acts 15:1–2, 22–23, 25, 30). This was not a conference of ecclesiastical overlords but of two local churches, each sovereign in its own affairs. One protests through delegates (22), the other answers through delegates (22). Even the apostles [did] not assume exclusive authority in the matter.

(6) *All "Church Government in the New Testament applies onto local bodies"* (see Forrester, "CG" in *ISBE*).

(7) *The authority of the local church is final as far as its own affairs are concerned* (see Matt. 18:17). There is no higher court.[27]

(8) *Voluntary cooperation and fellowship of churches is possible and desirable*. (*NC*, 347–48)

Voluntary cooperation can and should occur between independent churches of like precious faith; today we have too much turf building and not enough kingdom building. However, such cooperation should be *voluntary, not compulsory*—a fellowship, not a hierarchical organization that usurps the local church's autonomy and authority. Paul specifically encourages churches to help each other: He himself sponsored an offering to help poor believers in another church (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10); he requested prayer for those in other churches (1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1); he was sent out as a missionary from one church to start others (Acts 13:1–3); and he received the "right hand of fellowship" from another group of members (Gal. 2:9 NIV). In addition, there is the overall duty to manifest love to the brethren of other churches (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16).

The Autonomy of the Local Church

There are many indications (most of which are contained in the above discussion) that each local church had its own autonomy. Each church:

(1) had its own officers (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:2);

(2) had its own membership rolls (1 Tim. 5:9);
(3) elected its own officers (Acts 6:1–7);
(4) sent its own representatives to the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15:2);
(5) had its own duty to deal with internal difficulties (1 Cor. 6:1–5);
(6) disciplined its own members (5:1–5);
(7) had authority to extend fellowship to those of other churches (Gal. 2:9);
(8) sent its own missionaries (Acts 13:2);
(9) bore its own responsibility to its invisible Head (Rev. 1–3);
(10) had freedom to cooperate with other churches (2 Cor. 8:8–19); and
(11) had authority to guard and administer its own ordinances (1 Cor. 11:23).

The Lessons of John the Apostle and the Seven Churches of Asia Minor

Even while John was still alive and many churches of his area were in decline or disarray, the manner of his approach leaves us several remarkable lessons.

First, *John never used his apostolic power to override local church autonomy*. Indeed, he never used his title of *apostle* in the entire book of Revelation. No doubt by this time, the apostolic doctrine as the church's foundation had been firmly laid, the signs of an apostle had passed away,[28] most or nearly all of the New Testament had been written,[29] and the permanent form of intended church government had been established. John never pulled apostolic rank even as some of these churches were in dire straits.

Second, by contrast, *John showed great respect for the plurality and autonomy of the churches*. He recognized each church as a self-governing authority, and he appealed to each one to rectify its own problems. Not once did he hold a denominational club over their heads and demand that they conform; rather, he called upon them as individual churches to "repent."[30]

Third, *John assumed that Christ was the invisible Head of these churches*. No appeal is made to a visible head in Rome, Jerusalem, or anywhere else; instead, John reminds them that Christ is walking in their midst and would judge them. Indeed, He threatens to take away their lampstand (Rev. 2:5) if their light for Him goes out. We have noted that this idea of Christ as Head of the visible body of believers is present in other passages (cf. Acts 9:4; 1 Cor. 12:12–31); the Head holds the local churches in His right hand (Rev. 1:16), His holy eyes penetrating their inner thoughts and His righteous hand weighing their every deed.

Fourth, and finally, *the Holy Spirit, who indwells the church, is an all-sufficient guide*. Because of the omnisapient Spirit, the church has no need for a

visible head or a super-organization imposing its will on the local congregations. Seven times in Revelation 2–3 we read: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 NIV). *The Spirit of God speaking through the Word of God is sufficient to guide the church of God.*

Comparing and Contrasting the Universal Church and Local Churches

Now that we have discussed both the universal church[31] and the local church,[32] we can compare and contrast them. The universal church is invisible; the local churches are visible. There is only one universal church; there are many local churches. The universal church is an organism; a local church is an organization. The universal church has only saved members; the local church may contain both saved and lost members. The universal church possesses all believers from this age, both living and dead; the local church has only living members.

Hence, whereas the universal church contains the whole body of Christ, the local church has only part of it. Christ, the Head of the church, is visible to members of the universal church who are in heaven, but He is the invisible Head of the local churches on earth. There are no elders or deacons in the universal church, but local churches have both. Likewise, the ordinances are not practiced in the universal church, since they have been fulfilled, but local churches practice baptism and the Lord’s Supper.[33] There are no denominations in heaven; the local church is represented by many denominations. Finally, while the gates of hell cannot destroy the universal church, some local churches have been destroyed by their influence.

To summarize:

Universal Church	**Local Church(es)**
Invisible	Visible
One church	Many churches
An organization	An organism
Saved members	Saved and lost members
Living and dead members	Living members

Whole body of Christ	Part of the body of Christ
Christ is visible Head in heaven	Christ is invisible Head on earth
No elders or deacons	Elders and deacons
No ordinances	Two ordinances
No denominations	Many denominations
Indestructible	Destructible

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

In addition to the visible church's biblical basis, there is also a strong theological foundation, both in the nature of God and in the nature of humans.

The Nature of God

A number of God's attributes undergird the doctrine of the local church, including eternality, immutability, omnisapience, sovereignty, and grace. Support for these has already been presented.[34]

The Nature of Man

However, regarding the local church, at least one more doctrine should be mentioned: human depravity.[35] God knew His local churches would be in the hands of finite and fallible people. Among other aspects of depravity is the human penchant for power, which John noted in his third epistle: "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us" (v. 9 NIV). This desire for preeminence may be the origin of the primacy of the episcopacy's dogmatic basis.[36] At any rate, God foreknew what human history has revealed to us about the correlation of power to corruption, and He apparently deemed that His visible church would be best off with authority distributed throughout many churches rather than localized in one top-heavy organization.

For example, poisoning one well doesn't affect other disconnected wells, but

poisoning a city's central water supply will affect everything and everyone tapped into it. Similarly, one individual congregation diseased by false teaching doesn't directly pollute others the way that false teaching in a hierarchical organization, coming from the top down, will pervade all the churches under its domain. *Human depravity calls for the existence of independent, self-governing churches*. Just as govenment is best done on the local, not national, level; even so church government is best done locally, not denominationally.

God's wisdom as to our depravity is also manifest inside the local church; congregational government contains a check-and-balance structure not found in elder-rule or bishop-rule models. In the multitude of counsel there is wisdom: The majority of the congregation is less likely to deviate from the truth than one or a few leaders.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

When approaching church government's historical development, three things stand out.

First, the apostles' immediate successors followed the pattern of government laid down in the New Testament—independent, autonomous local churches led by a plurality of elders (synonymous with bishops).

Second, by the second century, a basic episcopal form of government had emerged, with one bishop in each church (along with elders).

Third, as time passed, increasing authority was given to bishops until there was a bishop over a whole region and ultimately a bishop over bishops, the bishop of Rome; eventually, the Roman Catholic Church, in 1870, at the First Vatican Council, pronounced the bishop of Rome infallible in faith and practice.[37]

Apostolic Fathers on Church Government

The late-first-century apostolic Fathers, and most of the early-second-century Fathers, followed the New Testament pattern of a plurality of elders (bishops) in independent, autonomous local churches united by the common authority of Old and New Testament doctrine.

The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. 70–130)

Many scholars consider this work the earliest of all post-New Testament extrabiblical sources. The epistle is addressed to "sons and daughters"[38] in the faith (1); they are urged to avoid any "schism" (19) and make peace between contending factions, which implies that congregations had the authority to do so. There is no reference to any bishop over a church or group of churches.

Clement of Rome (c. first century A.D.)

Even though the *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* is written from the "the Church of God which sojourneth in Rome," he exhorted believers to be "submitting yourselves to your rulers [plural] and rendering to the older men among you the honour which is their due" (1). "Let us set before our eyes [the example] of the good Apostles" (5). There is no affirmation of Petrine primacy; believers were admonished to "oppose leaders exalting themselves over others" (13; cf. 23). That they are warned not to "exalt themselves over the flock" (16) speaks against an authoritarian episcopalianism. Instead, "Let us reverence our rulers; let us honour our elders" (21); "submit yourselves unto the presbyters" (57).

Clement spoke of "the Apostles [who] received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ." When they established a church they "appointed … bishops and deacons" (42). He even affirmed that the apostles foresaw "that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office" and thus appointed "approved men [who] should succeed to their ministrations" (44). This belies any apostolic succession—the apostles appointed *elders* to succeed them in each church (Acts 14:23). Even Ludwig Ott admits: "The letter contains neither a formal statement of the Primacy, that is, an express invocation of the pre-eminence of the Roman Church, nor juridical measures" (*FCD*, 283).

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

Ignatius manifests what may be the earliest form of episcopal government in which each church has a bishop in addition to elders and deacons.[39] He speaks to the Ephesians about "your bishop" (*EIE*, 1)[40] and about their need of "submitting yourselves to your bishop and presbytery" (2). "Let us therefore be careful not to resist the bishop, that by our submission we may give ourselves to God" (5); "plainly therefore we ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself" (6); "assemble yourselves together in common … to the end that ye may obey the bishop and the presbytery without distraction of mind" (20).

While he makes similar statements in his other epistles (e.g., *EIM*, 3), this respect is to be paid ultimately to God, "the Bishop of all" (ibid.). Ignatius speaks of a group of "churches" (12) as independent entities with their own elders and bishop (pastor) and of his being a "member" of a local church (13). He also wrote to "Polycarp, who is bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans or rather who hath for his bishop God the Father and Jesus Christ, abundant greeting" (*EIS*, intro.).

> Give ye heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. I am devoted to those who are subject to the bishop, the presbyters, the deacons.… It becometh thee, most blessed Polycarp, to call together a godly council and to elect someone among you who is very dear to you and zealous also, who shall be fit to bear the name of God's courier to appoint him, I say, that he may go to Syria and glorify your zealous love unto the glory of God. (6–7)

These texts obviously represent a form of episcopal government in which each church has one bishop, many elders, and many deacons. The bishop is not only a leader of the elders but is in a position of authority to which they must submit (cf. *EIR*, intro).[41] However, there is no affirmation of the primacy of the bishop of Rome over other bishops: Peter is given recognition alongside Paul (ibid.), but not over him. Likewise, first-century authority rested in the "apostles" (plural—*EIM*, 6; cf. *EIR*, 4), and several times God is called the invisible "Bishop of all" (*EIM*, 3) and the "Shepherd" (*EIR*, 9). This fits with the biblical emphasis of Christ as the invisible Head of the visible churches, just as the apostle John pictured Him in Revelation (cf. 1–3).

Even J. B. Lightfoot (1828–1899), who defends the rise of the episcopacy, comments on the extremes to which Ignatius took it:

> It need hardly be remarked how subversive of the true spirit of Christianity, in the negation of individual freedom and consequent suppression of direct responsibility to God in Christ, is the crushing despotism with which this language, if taken literally, would invest the episcopal office. (*SPEP*, 237)

The Shepherd of Hermas (c. early second century)

Hermas's form of government involved plurality of elders and deacons (2.4; cf. 3.1) guided by "the book" (2.4). He provided an implicit warning against the rise of episcopal government, speaking of one "who, seeming to have the Spirit, exalts himself and would fain have the first seat" (Mand. 11; cf. 3.9). He also spoke of "the apostles and bishops and teachers and deacons" (3.5) and of "the rulers of the Church" who "occupy the chief seats" (3.9). There is no reference to a singular bishop over any church or churches.

Polycarp (fl. second century)[42]

One value of Polycarp's writings is that their author was a disciple of the apostle John, thus bringing us into immediate contact with the apostolic age. His *Epistle to the Philippians* begins: "Polycarp and the presbyters (elders) that are with him" (introduction). He declared that "the presbyters [plural] also must be compassionate, merciful toward all men" (6); he placed himself alongside the other "elders" (op. cit.);[43] he also made reference to "deacons," insisting that they should be "blameless" (5).[44] He referred to "Paul himself and the rest of the Apostles" (9) but made no reference to Peter by name. He wrote of those who "are well trained in the sacred writings" (12), which he himself repeatedly quoted in this short letter, showing his belief in their importance.

The Didache (The Teachings of the Apostles—c. 120–150)

The Didache exhorted all believers to follow "according to the ordinance of the Gospel" as they received it from "the apostles and prophets" (11). The form of government was patterned after the New Testament (see Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23): "Appoint for yourselves therefore bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord.… Despise them not; for they are your honourable men along with the prophets and teachers" (15). While there is no affirmation of any episcopacy, there is a hint of the conditions that led to the development of bishopric primacy, found in the warning against any "schism" (4); the persistent presence of schisms led to later developments of episcopal-form attempts to unify the visible church against divisions in doctrine and practice.

An Ancient Homily (the So-Called "Second Epistle of Clement"—c. 120–140)

"Scripture" is cited repeatedly as having divine authority (2–7, etc.). Citations are prefaced with "He [God] Himself saith" or the like (e.g., 3–5). Believers are to "give heed to the things which are written" (19). Both "the Books [of the Bible] and the Apostles" declare God's truth (14). Church leadership was not episcopal but had a plurality of elders; there is no mention of a single bishop in a church or over a group of churches; the church was "admonished by the presbyters," that is, elders (18); woe is pronounced on those who "obeyed not the presbyters" (17).

Papias (fl. second century)

Papias's famous *Exposition of Oracles of the Lord* has perished; only

fragments of his writings survive. Irenaeus preserved two fragments, and other writers, including Eusebius (263–340), contain additional material about him, including that he is believed to have been "a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp" (Lightfoot, *AF*, 527). Papias confirmed that there is no primacy of Peter—his two lists of the apostles have Andrew first and Peter second (*F*, 3, 7), and he gave unique attention to John (1, 3–4, 6, 9, 19–20). While Polycarp is called a bishop by later writers, Papias referred to all the apostles as "elders" (3), again showing the terms' interchangeability, and made no mention of episcopal government in the church or churches.

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

Irenaeus, an important witness in early Christianity, claimed to have heard Polycarp, the disciple of John, when he was a boy. Irenaeus is said to have later become bishop of Lyons (France) and was the first great Western Father. His major work, *Against Heresies* (see Cross, *ODCC*, 713), is dated between 182 and 188 (Schaff, *ANF*, 1.312).

On the Church's Apostolicity

Repeated statements emphasize that the church's final authority rests in the apostles, not in any one apostle; even the founding of the church at Rome was said to be by Paul and Peter (*AH*, 3.1.1). Irenaeus repeatedly speaks of "the apostolic tradition" (3.3.2) and "the blessed apostles" (plural) who "founded and built up the Church" (3.3.3), "the doctrine of the apostles" (3.12.4), and "the tradition from the apostles" (3.5.1).

> These [apostles] are the voices of the Church from which every Church had its origin.… These are the voices of the apostles; these are the voices of the disciples of the Lord, the truly perfect, who after the assumption of the Lord, were perfected by the Spirit. (3.12.4)

On the Church's Unity

Irenaeus often refers to "churches" in the plural, e.g., to "that tradition which originates from the apostles, and which is preserved by means of the successions of presbyters in the Churches" (3.2.2). He sometimes spoke generically about the unity of the Christian church, as when he said: "The Catholic [universal] Church possesses one and the same faith throughout the whole world" (1.10.3). However, as just noted, this unity was not organizational but spiritual and

doctrinal: “The Church, though dispersed throughout the world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith” (1.10.1); this one church, “although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it” (1.10.2).

> Nor will any one of the rulers (bishops) in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no one is greater than the Master). (ibid.)

In short, Christ is the invisible Head of all the visible churches, and His teaching through the authority of His apostles is the basis for one church’s unity:

> The Word of God [Christ] is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal He might possess the supremacy, and, taking to Himself the pre-eminence, as well as constituting Himself Head of the Church, He might draw all things to Himself at the proper time. (3.16.6)

Clearly, Christ has no vicar over earth; He Himself heads His church universal. As even Peter said, elders are only undershepherds who lead the local congregations to follow the “chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:1–4).

On the Church’s Authority

Much controversy revolves around a disputed text in Book Three of *Against Heresies*, where Irenaeus refers to

> that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also by pointing out the faith preached to men, which comes down to our times by means of the succession of the bishops.… It is a matter of necessity that *every Church should agree* [Lat: *convenire*] *with this Church*, [Lat: *principalitas*] on account of its preeminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those faithful men *who exist everywhere*. (3.3.2, emphasis added)

If *convenire* here means “agree with” and *principalitas* refers to the Roman primacy (in whatever sense), then it would favor the claim of the Roman Church. However, many scholars, including J. N. D. Kelly (1909–1997), have found fault with this translation for two reasons.

First, the weakness of the final clause strikes them as “intolerable” (ibid.).

Second, “the normal meaning of *convenire* is ‘resort to,’ ‘foregather at,’ and *necesse est* does not easily bear the sense of ‘ought’ ” (ibid.).

Indeed, Arthur Cleveland Coxe, editor of the *Apostolic Fathers* volume in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, cites one candid Roman Catholic scholar who

translates it as follows: “For to this Church, on account of more potent principality, it is necessary that every Church (that is, those who are on every side faithful) *resort*; in which Church ever, *by those who are on every side*, has been preserved that tradition which is from the apostles” (Schaff, *ANF*, 1.415). Coxe adds,

> Here it is obvious that the faith was kept at Rome, by *those who resort there* from all quarters. She was a mirror of the Catholic World, owing her orthodoxy to them; not the Sun, dispensing her own light to others, but the glass bringing their rays into focus. (ibid.)

In short, Irenaeus meant that Rome was the center of orthodoxy, since she, by virtue of being the empire’s capitol, was the repository of all Catholic tradition —“all this has been turned upside down by modern Romanism” (ibid.). Kelly adds that many scholars

> have judged it more plausible to take Irenaeus’s point as being that the Roman church [of that day] supplies an ideal illustration for the reason that, in view of its being placed in the imperial city, representatives of all the different churches necessarily (i.e., inevitably) flock to it, so that there is some guarantee that the faith taught there faithfully reflects the apostolic tradition. (ibid., 193)

That is to say, Rome’s primacy is *reflective*, not *authoritative*. Lightfoot’s comment is to the point: “The episcopate is regarded now [by Irenaeus] not so much as the *centre of ecclesiastical unity*, but rather as the *depository of apostolic tradition*” (*SPEP*, 239).

Irenaeus asked, “How should it be if the apostles had not left us writing? Would it not be necessary to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the churches?” (3.4.1). J. Barton Payne (1922–1979) responds:

> First of all, the above statements by Irenaeus are theoretical; it was not necessary to follow the course of traditions, because the apostles *had* left writings.
>
> Second, the above statements have as their subject the facts which one must accept to be saved, and not the degree of authority which lies behind any given medium.[45]
>
> Third, the above statements assume that the truths of the tradition are in fact those recorded in the Scriptures. (“BII” in Walvoord, *II*, 63–64)

The traditions are to be judged by the Scriptures, not the reverse. Again, the apostles did not appoint more apostles to replace themselves after Pentecost, where they became the “foundation” of the church (Eph. 2:20). Rather, they appointed “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23), and Irenaeus spoke of “the disciples of the apostles” as “presbyters [elders]” (*AH*, 5.35.2): “We refer them [heretics] to that tradition which originates from the apostles, and which is preserved by means of the successions of presbyters in the Churches” (3.2.2).

However, Irenaeus seemed to believe that each church was to have a single bishop over it, for he spoke of Polycarp as "bishop of Smyrna" (cf. 3.3.4) and a line of bishops in Rome beginning with Linus (r. c. 67–79; 3.3.3). Once more, *this is in contrast to the New Testament, which affirms that every local church had its own "bishops and deacons"* (cf. Phil. 1:1).[46] Their leadership was to be followed by their congregations (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24) as from Christ, the Chief Shepherd, the invisible Head of the visible church who rebuked individual churches for not recognizing His headship.[47]

Pope Victor I (r. 189–198)

By the end of the second century, a new milestone was reached in the episcopacy's development. According to Lightfoot, Victor was "the first Latin prelate who held the metropolitan see of Latin Christendom" and "the first Roman bishop who is known to have intimate relations with the imperial court, and the first also who advanced those claims to universal dominion" (*SPEP*, 223–24). Victor held a council at Rome and assumed the authority to excommunicate other bishops (Cross, *ODCC*, 1437).

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

Clement spoke of "the elders [who] attend to the department which has improvement for its object and the deacons to the ministerial" (*S*, 7.1). He distinguished a bishop from an elder, referring to "grades" in the church of "bishop, presbyters, [and] deacons" (ibid., 6.13). Likewise, he mentioned biblical commands that apply "some to presbyters, some to bishops, [and] some to deacons" (ibid., 3:12).

Cyprian (200–258)

While Irenaeus saw the episcopate as the depository of apostolic tradition and Ignatius as the center of Christian unity, Cyprian added to the evolution of the monarchial episcopate by viewing it as "the absolute vicegerent [deputy] of Christ" (Lightfoot, *SPEP*, 240); "there is one God, and Christ is one, and there is one chair [episcopate] founded upon the rock by the word of the Lord" (Cyprian, *EC*, 43 (39).5). "The Bishop is appointed directly by God, is responsible directly to God, [and] is inspired directly from God" (op. cit., 243).

Under this system, "Each bishop in his place succeeded to and exercised the apostolic authority. Each bishop therefore had a right to a voice in the common concerns of the whole church." But even the bishop of Rome—who certainly

enjoyed a special dignity and a special right to leadership as Peter's successor —"was nevertheless, substantively, the colleague and therefore the equal of his brethren" (Walker, *HCC*, 83). Catholic authority Ludwig Ott admits, "The Fathers did not expressly speak of the Infallibility of the Pope, but they attest the decisive teaching authority of the Roman Church and its Pontiff" (*FCD*, 288).

Eusebius (c. 263–c. 340)

The great church historian Eusebius recorded other important developmental steps. Eventually, bishops gained authority over their areas, and before the end of the second century (by c. 180–190), there were bishops over Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Corinth, and Ephesus (and perhaps others—see *CH*, 5.22). When a dispute arose over when the passion and resurrection of Christ should be observed (ibid., 5.23), "Victor, who presided over the church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the common unity the parishes of all Asia, with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; and wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate" (ibid., 5.24). This early tendency for the Roman Church, due to its size and location at the seat of political power, to exercise widespread authority was a portent of things to come.

Disputes like this, and later more serious doctrinal ones, occasioned the development of a stronger and more authoritarian head. In fact, they called for general church councils to decide on the matter. The first of these was the Arian dispute over the deity of Christ, which occasioned the Council of Nicea (325). Constantine's motives for calling the council can be seen in this citation from a "copy of an epistle in which the emperor commands another synod to be held for the purpose of removing all dissensions among the bishops" (ibid., 10.5.21). It reads, "I formerly gave command that certain bishops should be sent from Gaul, and that the opposing parties … should be summoned from Africa; that in their presence, and in the presence of the bishop of Rome, the matter which appeared to be causing the disturbance might be examined and decided with all care" (ibid). Little wonder a top-heavy and monolithic Roman Church soon emerged with a structure similar to the Roman government, with the pope corresponding to the emperor. Add to this that Constantine put the church on the state payroll, which bound them with strong economic cords (ibid., 10.6.1).

Augustine (354–430)

Augustine added to the developing doctrine of the episcopacy's authority when he concluded that heretics could be coerced by the church to deny their

unorthodox doctrine and accept ecclesiastical authority. In *On the Coercion of the Donatists* he wrote:

> Great mercy is shown toward them, when *by the force of those very imperial laws* they are in the first instance *rescued against their will* from that sect … so that afterwards they might be made whole in the Catholic Church, becoming accustomed to the good teaching and example which they find in it. (3.13, emphasis added)

In *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus* he stated:

> The consent of peoples and nations keeps me in the Church; so does her authority, inaugurated by miracles.… The succession of priests keeps me, beginning from the very seat of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after His resurrection, gave charge to feed His sheep, down to the present episcopate. (5.4)

Thus, the church presided over by the bishop of Rome, as Peter's successor, has authority to coerce people to believe in its truth. Indeed, Augustine added,

> The Catholic Church alone is the body of Christ, of which He is the Head and Saviour of the body. Outside this body the Holy Spirit giveth life to no one.… Therefore they have not the Holy Ghost who are outside the Church. (op. cit., 11.50)

General Church Councils

Church councils played an important role in the development of monolithic Roman episcopalism.[48] Roman Catholics acknowledge twenty-one ecumenical councils, which, allegedly, involved the whole Church, even though sometimes major portions of the Church have been only sparsely represented. Local councils were only in specific geographical areas and are not held to be binding unless affirmed by a later ecumenical council. Most sections of Christendom accept the doctrinal pronouncements of the first four councils; the Eastern Church accepts the first seven; the Roman Church claims that all twenty-one are authoritative.

Actually, from the very first council (Constantinople, 381) called by Constantine, there were forces moving toward a more authoritarian ecclesiastical structure.[49] By the eighth century (The Fourth Council of Constantinople, 869), this was becoming even more evident, but Roman Catholicism as known today begins its development from the twelfth council (The Fourth Lateran, 1215), which pronounced the doctrine of transubstantiation, the primacy of the bishop of Rome, and seven sacraments. The counterreformational Council of Trent (1545–1563) solidified Romanism's unique doctrines, including purgatory,

prayers for the dead, the necessity of works for salvation, transubstantiation, veneration of Mary and images, indulgences, prayers to the saints, and the addition of the Apocrypha to the Bible. At Vatican I (1870), the pope's infallibility was proclaimed, and in 1950, Mary's bodily assumption was made an infallible dogma.

A Summary of the Development of Roman Catholic Church Government

While the development of Roman Catholicism from the original church was gradual, beginning in early centuries, one of the most significant turning points came in 1215—here the seeds of what distinguishes Roman Catholicism were first pronounced as dogma. Furthermore, the evolution of the doctrine of papal infallibility illuminates the development of the Roman Church in general, standing in stark contrast to the apostolic teaching. As we have shown, in the New Testament the visible church had no hierarchy; each church was independent and congregational in form. There was no episcopal government, where a single bishop held authority over elders. Again, *elder* and *bishop* are terms that refer to the same office,[50] but gradually *bishop* was used to refer to the office at each church's head.

The Emergence of One Bishop Over a Church

Richard A. Norris (b. 1930) provides a plausible explanation of how this happened:

> It came about almost naturally, and certainly informally, as special status and responsibility in each church came to be assigned to an elder who regularly chaired meetings of what Ignatius calls "the presbytery."… [First,] even after the development of the monarchial episcopate, bishops seem often to have been referred to as "elders." [Second,] the third-century church order known as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* [*The Teaching of the Apostles*] identifies the chief pastor of a local church as "bishop and head among the presbytery." … [Third,] for a long time elders were regarded not as the bishop's representatives or delegates but as his colleagues. [Fourth,] at least for a while the two different structures must have existed simultaneously. (cited in Walker, *HCC*, 48–49)

The Appearance of One Bishop Over a Region

This informal and local episcopate eventually gave way to regional bishops and then to one prime bishop, viz., the bishop of Rome. Eusebius speaks of "Silvanus, bishop of the churches [plural] about Emesa" during the wicked reign of Emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305). It is understandable that the growth of one church in an area might lead to many churches in that area, over which the

bishop of the mother church would remain in charge.

The Evolution of One Bishop Over the Whole Church

Rome, being the empire's capital city, would naturally have a powerful and influential bishop. Irenaeus seems to have been a transition in this process, for he took a key step in the direction of a bishop of bishops (*AH*, 3.3.2[51]). Once again, while Irenaeus was probably not stressing the *authority* of the medium, but its *accuracy* in transmitting the apostolic message, nonetheless, he did believe that each church had a single bishop over it. Likewise, he believed there was some sense of primacy in the bishop of Rome, whether reflective or authoritative.

At least by the time of Cyprian (d. 258), the evolution of a more monarchial episcopate had occurred. Lightfoot's general comment is instructive of the origins of the Catholic Church: "There was a crying need for some organization which should cement together the diverse elements of Christian society and preserve it from disintegration. Out of this need the Catholic Church arose" (*AF*, 201–03).[52] There is merit, though not justification, in the suggestion of Jerome (340–420) that "one presbyter was elected from among the elders … [and] placed over the rest, so that the care of the church should devolve on him, and the seeds of schism be removed" (cited by Lightfoot, ibid., 206). If true, however noble the motives, the results eventually contradicted the intents. Lightfoot may be correct that "the Church of Jerusalem … presents the earliest instance of a bishop," and this "as early as the middle of the second century" (ibid., 208). Even so, this is a far cry from the primacy of the bishop of Rome, let alone his alleged infallibility—both of which were many more centuries in the making.

The Emergence of the Bishop of Rome's Coercive Authority

We saw that Augustine gave credence to the developing doctrine of the episcopacy's authority when he concluded that the church could coerce heretics to deny unorthodox doctrine (*OCD*, 3.13; cf. 11.50). As time has passed, the church presided over by the bishop of Rome (as Peter's successor) has assumed authority to coerce people to accept its truth.

The Appearance of Monarchial Papal Authority to Formulate Creeds

Another step had been taken in doctrinal emergence in the late Middle Ages by the time of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).

> There must be one faith for the entire Church.… This norm could not be followed unless every question arising out of faith were resolved by one having care over the whole Church. A new version of

> the creed, then, falls to the sole authority of the Pope, just as do all other matters affecting the whole church. (*ST*, 2a2a1.10.1)

However, Aquinas upheld the primacy of Scripture, for he affirmed that "the truth of faith is sufficiently plain in the teaching of Christ and the apostles" (ibid.). Further,

> The truth of faith is contained in sacred Scripture, in diverse ways and, sometimes, darkly.… That is why there was a need to draw succinctly together, out of the Scriptural teachings, some clear statements to be set before all for their belief. The symbol [i.e., creed] is not added to Scripture, but drawn from Scripture. (2a.2a2.1.9)

Aquinas never repudiated his earlier statement: *"We believe the successors of the apostles only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings"* (*OT*, 14.10.11). Likewise, the pope has no authority to set forth doctrines not found in Scripture, which differs from restating in clear form (e.g., by creeds) what the Scriptures teach.

Catholic authority Yves Congar (1904–1995) admitted: "It is a fact that St. Thomas has not spoken of the infallibility of the papal magisterium. Moreover, he was unaware of the use of *magisterium* in its modern sense" ("STAIPM" in *T*, 102). He went on to say it is not certain that Aquinas would even have said that the pope is without error "in his role of supreme interpreter of Christ's teaching" (ibid.), citing several texts in support (see Aquinas, op. cit.). So while Aquinas believed in the Roman bishop's authority to promulgate a creed based on apostolic truth,[53] it is evident from the foregoing quotation that he also held to *sola scriptura*, which would later be repudiated by the Council of Trent.

The Pronouncement of Papal Infallible Authority Over the Whole Church

The final step in the evolution of the Roman episcopacy's primacy, however, awaited the pronouncement of Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878), at the First Vatican Council (1870), that the bishop of Rome is infallible when speaking from Peter's chair (*ex cathedra*) on matters of faith and practice.

> We, adhering faithfully to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith … teach and explain that the dogma has been divinely revealed, that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of pastor and teacher of all Christians in accord with his supreme apostolic authority he explains a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining a doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 1840)

This declaration of papal infallibility was the climax of centuries of increasing authority for the Roman bishop and his successors, a macro leap from (A) the New Testament role of a bishop/elder as one among many leaders in a local church to (B) one God-appointed vicar of Christ over all Christian churches. As we have seen,[54] there is no real foundation for this teaching in the New Testament or in the earliest Fathers; it resulted from a long process whereby more and more authority was given to fewer and fewer persons until at last it rested in one person, the alleged bishop of all bishops, the bishop of Rome.

Consider the following contrast:

New Testament Role of Peter	Pope's Role As Peter's Alleged Successor
One of many apostles	Chief apostle and Peter's successor
Only part of the church's foundation	Visible head of the church on earth
No governmental authority over any church	Governmental authority over all churches
Not infallible in faith or practice	Infallible in matters of faith and practice

There is a great gulf between the New Testament and papal infallibility, an essential difference between the New Testament form of government and that of the post-Vatican I Roman Catholic Church. This entirely new creation, genetically unrelated to the governmental structure of the New Testament church, has produced serious doctrinal deviations.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, it took many centuries for monolithic episcopal government to gradually emerge from the simple self-governing independent New Testament churches. This evolution can be traced in several steps.

First, the seeds of the Roman view existed in New Testament times, as John the apostle revealed when he warned, "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us" (3 John 9 NKJV; cf. Hermas 2.4).

Second, even in apostolic times, a false tradition began based on some

disciples' misinterpretation of one of Christ's statements; this also had to be corrected by John (see John 21:22–23). If false traditions could spring up even during the time of the apostles, it is easy to see how quickly they could spread without an apostle to squelch them. Tradition as such is neither authoritative nor reliable, except insofar as it is accurately transmitted. Written transmission (such as exists in Scripture and other writings based on it) are the only reliable source we have of apostolic teaching.

Third, the mid-second century, during which Irenaeus wrote, was almost a century after most apostles had died—the era when even apocryphal gospels were emerging.[55] Plenty of time had elapsed for false views to emerge, even among those who were otherwise orthodox.

Fourth, considering the attacks on Christianity at that time, there was strong external motivation to develop an ecclesiology that would provide a united front against the divergent heretical groups. This is reflected in Irenaeus's emerging episcopal view of church government, a view that achieved a more mature form in Cyprian.

Fifth, even if some second-century writers can be shown to have favored the primacy of Rome as the center of Christianity, this does not support later Roman Catholic pronouncements of papal infallibility: The early Fathers constantly appealed to the original "apostles" (plural) as the God-established authority. Further, they did not single out Peter as superior to the other apostles—he was at best a cofounder of the Roman church and was, in fact, on the same level as Paul and the other apostles to whom he repeatedly refers. His own stress on the primacy of Scripture as the final written authority of the Christian faith demonstrates that all ecclesiastical authority is based on Scripture, not the reverse. Even Ludwig Ott admits: "The Fathers did not expressly speak of the Infallibility of the Pope" (*FCD*, 288).[56]

Sixth, even if the disputed text of Irenaeus (*AH*, 3.3.2) was understood that "every Church should agree with this Church [at Rome]"in his day, it does not follow that Rome couldn't later deviate from the truth and be an unreliable source for all essential Christian truth. This is precisely what Protestants believe, pointing to numerous Catholic teachings supported neither by Scripture nor the early church Fathers.[57]

Seventh, and finally, the conversion of Constantine and his use of imperial power to influence the emergence of an imperial church structure was a significant catalyst in the formation of monolithic episcopal church government. This, combined with the natural penchant for power manifest in the political

extension under Charlemagne (d. 816), produced the Roman Church with its claim to papal infallibility and other unbiblical teachings; the travesty was well under way by 1215 (Fourth Lateran Council) and culminated in the doctrinal deviations of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the disastrous dogma of papal infallibility of Vatican I (1870).

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ORDINANCES OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

The ordinances of the visible or local church are a subject of wide diversity and debate among churches. Some (Bullingerites) say there are none; others (ultradispensationalists; Bereans) claim there is one; most Protestants say there are two; Roman Catholics insist there are seven. Further, there is a great deal of difference as to the nature of the communal elements. For instance, Catholics consider them a *cause* of grace in one's life; Anglicans and Lutherans believe they are a *means* of grace; Congregationalist, Baptist, and most Independent churches believe the ordinances are a *symbol* of grace.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW OF THE SACRAMENTS

The Council of Trent (1545–1563) proclaimed in general that "if anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord … let him be anathema" (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 1.844.262). This excommunication includes almost all Protestants,[1] because they adhere to less than seven sacraments, and it never has and never can be revoked as an infallible *ex cathedra* pronouncement of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic view, unique in many respects, differs from Protestant views on sacramental nature, function, necessity, number, and administration.

The Nature of the Sacraments

According to Catholic authority Ludwig Ott (b. 1906), by "its etymology the word *sacramentum* means a sacred or holy thing" (*FCD*, 325). Early scholastic theologians, such as Hugo of St. Victor (1096–1141) and Peter Lombard (1100–1160), defined it "not merely as a sign but as a cause of grace" (ibid.). "The Roman Catechism defines a sacrament as "a thing perceptible to the senses, which on the grounds of Divine institution possesses the power both of effecting and signifying sanctity and righteousness [sanctifying grace]" (II, I, 8 in ibid., 326).

By decree of the Roman Catholic Church,

> If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place any obstacle in the way, as though they were only outward signs of grace or justice, received through faith … let him be anathema. (Denzinger, *SCD*, 6.849.262)

Furthermore, according to Catholic dogma it is anathema to claim that "grace is not conferred from the work which has been worked" [Lat: *ex opere operato*]; grace is not from "faith alone" (ibid., 8.851.263).

The Function of the Sacraments

It is through the outward sacramental sign that the inner workings of God's grace occur; Catholicism maintains that "the Sacraments of the New Covenant contain the grace which they signify, and bestow it on those who do not hinder it" (Ott, *FCD*, 328). Sacraments are effective objectively, whether or not their efficacy is felt subjectively: "Sacraments confer grace immediately, without the mediation of fiducial faith. [However,] it is true that in the adult recipient, faith is an indispensable precondition or a disposing cause, but it is not an efficient cause of grace" (ibid., 329). In order to designate the objective efficacy of a sacrament, Catholic theology coined the phrase *ex opere operato*,[2] that is, "the Sacraments operate by the power of the completed sacramental rite." This phrase, which Trent adopted (op. cit., 8.851.263), was vigorously opposed by the Reformers, who believed it demeaned the grace of God. Nonetheless, Catholics

hold that “the sacraments … not only point externally to salvation; they contain and bestow the salvation they signify” (Arndt and Jordan, *CCA*, 265).

Catholic scholars differ as to precisely how the sacraments work. According to the “moral mode of operation” view (following John Duns Scotus [1266–1308]), the sacraments “move God to bestow the grace by their objective value. God gives grace *immediately* on account of the moral pressure exercised on Him by the Sacrament” (Ott, *FCD*, 331, emphasis added).

According to the “physical mode of operation” view (following Thomas Aquinas [1225–1274]), “the sacraments operate physically if, through the power received from God indwelling in them, they cause the grace which they signify” (ibid., 330). That is, God, as the primary cause of grace, utilizes the physical sacrament as an instrument (secondary cause) to produce grace in the recipient’s soul. Grace is conveyed *mediately* [not immediately] through the sacrament.

The Necessity of the Sacraments

The purpose of a sacrament is to bestow the grace of God through the Roman Catholic Church[3] to its recipient in seven stages from birth (baptism) to death (extreme unction). Thus, the sacraments are necessary for salvation, said Trent (infallibly):

> If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary for salvation, but are superfluous, and that, although all are not necessary individually, without them or without the desire of them through faith alone men obtain from God the grace of justification: let him be anathema. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 4.847.262)

The Number of the Sacraments

Again, Trent proclaimed:

> If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, or that there are more or less than seven, namely Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, [Holy] Order, and Matrimony, or even that any one of these seven is not truly and strictly a sacrament: let him be anathema. (ibid., 1.844.262)

According to Catholic theology, “Holy Scripture attests that Christ immediately instituted the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Penance and Consecration [Confirmation]. The other Sacraments … were [already] in existence in apostolic times” (Ott, *FCD*, 337). The apostles, then, simply became

the dispensers of these sacraments.

The Administration of the Sacraments

"Except for Baptism and Matrimony, a special priestly or episcopal power conferred by Holy Order, is necessary for the valid ministration of the Sacraments" (ibid., 341); this is known as *sacerdotalism*. Catholic laypersons and even Protestants may administer baptism in the name of the Trinity; however, Trent soundly condemned the view that "all Christians have the power to administer all the sacraments" (ibid.). "The validity and efficacy of the Sacraments is independent of the minister's orthodoxy and state of grace" (ibid.), meaning, the priest does not have to be holy in order for the sacraments to convey grace.

Only human beings are valid recipients of sacraments, and, "excepting the Sacrament of Penance, neither orthodox belief nor moral worthiness is necessary for the validity of the Sacrament, on the part of the recipient" (ibid., 345). Heretics and the immoral can be valid recipients, although in adults "the intention of receiving the Sacrament is necessary" (ibid.), as is moral worthiness in the sense of removing any obstacle to grace (ibid., 346).

The Roman Catholic Defense of the Seven Sacraments

Acknowledging that the Bible and the Church Fathers do not agree on the enumeration of these seven sacraments as such, Catholic scholars seek other grounds to support them.

Theologically, they argue that the existence of seven sacraments "has been regarded as a truth of Faith since the middle of the twelfth century." Later, "it was confirmed by the official teaching of the Church from the thirteenth century on" (ibid., 338).

Historically, "the Greek-Orthodox Church … agrees that there are seven Sacraments" (ibid., 339); even the nestorian and monophysite sects of the fifth century "held firmly to the sevenfold number" (ibid.).

Speculatively, foundation for seven is sought in "the appropriateness of the number seven of the Sacraments [which] flows from the analogy to the supernatural life of the soul with the natural life of the body" (ibid.).[4]

Therefore, Roman Catholics insist that there are seven (and *only* seven) sacraments—the ones the Church has infallibly proclaimed and enumerated.

A DISCUSSION OF TWO IMPORTANT SACRAMENTS

Although Catholics and Protestants disagree about the *number* of the sacraments (the latter generally affirming only two—Baptism and the Eucharist [Communion]), the difference on the *nature* of the sacraments is more crucial.[5]

The Sacrament of Baptism

Trent declared that baptism must be administered with water:

> If anyone shall say that natural water is not necessary for baptism, and on that account those words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Unless a person is born of water and spirit" (John 3:5), are distorted into some sort of metaphor; let him be anathema. (Denzinger, *SCD*, 2.858.263)

And, according to the same Council, "If anyone shall say that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation: let him be anathema" (ibid., 5.858.264). Baptism properly administered is a once-for-all act, not to be repeated (ibid., 11.867.264); however, baptism is not a guarantee of salvation,[6] which even the regenerate can lose (ibid., 6.862.264). Even baptism done by heretics (Protestants and others) in the name of the Trinity is valid (ibid., 5.860.263), but denial of infant baptism (such as is the case with Baptists and many other Christian groups) is heresy:[7]

> If anyone shall say that infants, because they have not actual faith,[8] after having received baptism are not to be numbered among the faithful, and therefore, when they have reached the years of discretion, are to be rebaptized … let them be anathema. (ibid., 13.869.264)

This, of course, condemns all Baptists and like groups, including the author of this book.

Crucial to the debate between Catholics and Protestants is the Catholic belief that "baptism confers the grace of justification" (Ott, *FCD*, 354), an *ex cathedra* (nonnegotiable) pronouncement of the Catholic faith (by Trent):

> If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in Baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; or even assert that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away … let him be anathema. (op. cit., 792.247)

The many proof texts offered in support of infant salvation by baptism have already been discussed.[9]

The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (Communion)

Few things strike to the core of the difference between Catholics and Protestants more than the doctrine of Holy Communion, which Catholic theology defines as follows:

> The Eucharist is that Sacrament, in which, under the forms of bread and wine, [Christ] is truly present, with His Body and Blood, in order to offer Himself in an unbloody manner to the Heavenly Father, and to give Himself to the faithful as nourishment for their souls. (op. cit., 370)

In the words of Trent's infallible pronouncement:

> The holy Synod teaches and openly and simply professes that in the nourishing sacrament of the Holy Eucharist after the consecration of the bread and the wine our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things. (op. cit., 1.874.265)

The reason the Eucharist is Catholicism's greatest sacrament is found in its official doctrine of *transubstantiation*—that the bread and wine at consecration are *literally* transformed into Christ's actual body and blood:

> By the consecration of the bread and wine a conversion takes place of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the Body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This conversion is appropriately called transubstantiation by the Catholic Church. (ibid., 4.877.267–68)

Since transubstantiation turns the elements of Communion into the actual body and blood of Christ, Catholics believe it is appropriate to worship the consecrated elements as God. Trent pronounced emphatically that there is "no room left for doubt that all the faithful of Christ … offer in veneration (can. 6) the worship of *latria* [the act of adoration] which is due to the true God, to this most Holy Sacrament" (ibid., 5.878.268). The reasoning for this is that since Christ in His human form is God and, therefore, appropriately worshiped (e.g., John 20:28), and since in the Mass the bread and wine are transformed into His actual body and blood, this sacrament can be worshiped as God.

> If anyone says that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist the only-begotten Son of God is not to be adored even outwardly with the worship of *latria* … and is not to be set before the people publicly to be adored, and that the adorers are idolaters; let him be anathema. (op. cit., 6.888.271)

The Catholic defense of the doctrine of transubstantiation is based primarily on the words of Christ when He instituted this sacrament at the Last Supper: "This is my body" (Matt. 26:26; cf. 1 Cor. 11:24). Other passages are sometimes used, especially John 6:53, where Jesus said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Of course, taking Jesus' words here literally (rather than symbolically) is the key to the Roman Catholic view. Ott summarizes the argument as follows:

> The necessity of accepting a literal interpretation in this case is evident:
>
> (a) From the nature of the words used. One specially notes the realistic expressions *aléthés brôsis* = true, real food (v. 55); *aléthés posis* = true, real drink (v. 55); [from] *trôgein* = to gnaw, to chew, to eat (v. 54 et seq.).
>
> (b) From the difficulties created by a figurative interpretation. In the language of the Bible to eat a person's flesh and drink His blood in the metaphorical sense means to persecute Him in a bloody fashion, to destroy Him (cf. Ps. 26, 2; Isa. 9:20; 49:26; Mic. 3:3).
>
> (c) From the reactions of the listeners, which Jesus does not correct, as He had done previously in the case of misunderstandings (cf. John 3:3 et seq.; 4:32 et seq.; Matt. 16:6 et seq.). In this case, on the contrary, He confirms their literal acceptance of His words at the risk that His disciples and His apostles might desert Him (John 6:60ff.).

A PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO THE CATHOLIC VIEW OF THE SACRAMENTS

Protestants respond in different ways to different aspects and different sacraments of the Roman Catholic model. Virtually all, however, disagree regarding the number and nature of the sacraments.[10]

Response Regarding the Number of the Sacraments

Ludwig Ott frankly admits that "Holy Writ … does not summarize them in the figure seven. Again, no formal enumeration of the seven Sacraments is found in the Fathers." In fact, "this [enumeration of seven] emerged only around the middle of the 12th century" (ibid., 338). Further, Catholic scholars openly acknowledge,

> *It cannot be shown that any one of the seven Sacraments was at any particular time instituted by a Council, a Pope, a Bishop or a Community*.… The doctrinal decisions of the Church, the Fathers and the theologians *presuppose* the existence of the individual Sacraments as something handed down from

> antiquity. From this one may *infer* that the seven Sacraments existed in the Church from the very beginning. (ibid., 338–39, emphasis added)

This argument for seven sacraments is so weak that it scarcely needs critique; the italicized words speak for themselves. There is no real basis in the Bible, the Church Fathers, or the church councils for the enumeration of seven, and the decision to recognize seven (and only seven) was late.

The other argument (from analogy) is also weak. At *best*, Catholic scholars can point to the scriptural acts or events that allegedly correspond to these sacraments. Even so, proving they were/are sacraments, especially as Catholics understand them (namely, as a *cause* of grace), is another matter to be discussed.[11] Roman Catholic scholars claim that seven sacraments exist in Scripture implicitly, as the Trinity does. But *this is a false analogy*, since all the premises from which the Trinity is logically derived are taught explicitly in Scripture: (1) There is one God; (2) there are three persons who are God;[12] so (3) there must be three persons in the one God. *Nowhere* does the Bible teach that marriage, penance, and confirmation (for example) are sacraments. These activities are no more sacramental than Bible reading, which is also a means of receiving grace.[13]

Response Regarding the Nature of and Necessity for Sacraments

Catholic theology claims that sacraments are an actual cause of grace to the recipient; baptism, for example, is said to cause the grace of justification and sanctification to occur in the infant recipient's life,[14] even though he or she has exercised no actual faith in God.[15] Likewise, Catholicism maintains that the Holy Eucharist actually conveys Christ's literal physical body and blood to the recipient.[16]

Since our response to the Roman Catholic use of Scripture to support baptismal regeneration is found elsewhere,[17] we will now concentrate on other problems with the Catholic view of baptism as a saving sacrament.[18]

Baptismal Regeneration Is Contrary to Grace

The belief that baptism brings regeneration is inconsistent with scriptural teaching on God's grace. Salvation came "by grace through faith," not by any "righteous works" (including baptism). Jesus called baptism a work of "righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), and Paul declared that it was "not because of

righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" that God saved us (Titus 3:5): "By grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9 net). So baptism is no more necessary for being saved than is any other work of righteousness.[19]

Baptismal Regeneration Is Contrary to the Need for Faith

The Bible consistently maintains that faith and faith alone[20] is commanded as a condition for receiving God's gift of salvation.[21] If baptism (or anything else) is soteriologically necessary, then Jesus misled His audience throughout the entire gospel as recorded by His beloved disciple.

Baptismal Regeneration Is Contrary to Paul's Teaching

Paul, the great apostle called of God to take the Good News to the Gentiles, said emphatically: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17). Clearly, baptism is not part of the gospel; *the gospel "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"* (Rom. 1:16). Since, then, the gospel saves us and baptism is not part of the gospel, it follows that baptism cannot be part of what saves us. *Baptism is an outward sign of what saves us*, namely, the Spirit's regeneration in the lives of those who believe.

"Baptism of Desire" Proves That Baptism Is Not Essential

According to Roman Catholic theology, someone who has never been baptized can be saved if the desire to be baptized was present; "baptism of desire, it is true, replace[s] Sacramental Baptism in so far as the communication of grace is concerned" (Ott, *FCD*, 311). Even Aquinas conceded "that a person may be saved extrasacramentally by baptism of desire and therefore [there is] the possibility of salvation without actual membership … in the Church" (ibid., 313; see Aquinas, *ST*, III.68.2).

The same applies to those who suffered but were not baptized—the so-called "baptism of blood." As Augustine acknowledged, "I find not only suffering for the sake of Christ can replace that which is lacking in Baptism, but also faith and conversion of the heart, if perhaps the shortness of time does not permit the celebration of the mystery of Baptism" (*OB*, cited by Ott, ibid., 357). That within Catholic theology there is salvation without baptism proves that baptism is not essential to salvation (cf. Luke 23:43).

In brief, consistent biblical and evangelical teaching affirms the historic

Protestant principle that we are saved by faith alone. Adding *anything* else as a condition for salvation is inconsistent with this fundamental truth. (See Vol. 3, chap. 16.)

A Response to the Catholic Defense of Transubstantiation

Even more important than differences over baptism is the disagreement about Communion. Catholic scholars argue that it is necessary to take Jesus' words in a physical sense: for example, "This [the bread] is my body"[22] and "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Evangelicals believe there are many good reasons for rejecting this view.

It Is Not Necessary to Take These Phrases Physically

Jesus' words need not be taken in the sense of ingesting His actual (physical) body and blood; He often spoke in metaphors and figures of speech.[23] Jesus also said, "I am the true vine" in this same book (15:1); Roman Catholic scholars do not take this physically, nor do they understand Jesus to be speaking physically in saying, "I am the gate" (10:9). There is, therefore, no necessity to take Jesus' words "this is my body" or "eat my flesh" in a literal way. He Himself said that He often spoke in graphic parables and figures (Matt. 13:10–11), and, as we shall see, these can be understood from context.

It Is Not Plausible to Take Jesus' Words Physically

Vivid phrases are no proof of their literalness (cf. John 15:1). The Psalms and other writings are also filled with vivid figures of speech: God is depicted as a rock (Ps. 18:2), a bird (Ps. 63:7), a tower (Prov. 18:10), and by many other means in Holy Writ.[24] Further, the Bible often uses the language of ingesting in a figurative sense, such as "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8 NKJV). When John was told to eat a scroll in the Apocalypse, he did and then said, "When I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour" (Rev. 10:10)—undeniably vivid, yet it was all part of a vision John had in reference to his receiving God's Word (the scroll). Peter tells young believers, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk" (1 Peter 2:2 TLB); the writer of Hebrews speaks of "solid food" for mature Christians (5:14) and of others who "tasted the heavenly gift" (6:4).

Neither is it necessary (as Catholic scholars suggest) to take "flesh and blood" literally just because the phrase was used that way in many places in other contexts. As all biblical scholars know, the same words can have different

meanings in different contexts; the very word *flesh* (Gk: *sarx*) is used in the New Testament in a spiritual, nonphysical sense of fallen human nature, such as when Paul said, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Rom. 7:18 NKJV; cf. Gal. 5:17). *Meaning is discovered by context, not by whether the same or similar words are used*. The word *body* (Gk: *soma*), which means a physical body when used of an individual person, means the spiritual body of Christ (the universal church) in other contexts (cf. Eph. 1:22–23), as both Catholics and Protestants acknowledge.

That some of Jesus’ listeners took His words in a physical sense without His giving explicit and immediate rebuke is not a solid argument. First of all, Jesus rebuked their understanding (at least implicitly) when He later said in the same discourse, “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63 RSV).[25] To borrow a phrase from Paul, Jesus’ words are to be “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14; cf. Matt. 16:17), not in a cannibalistic sense.

Furthermore, Jesus did not have to explicitly rebuke their immediate response in order for it to be wrong. Since a literalistic understanding in this context would have been so vile, no disciple should have expected Him to be making such an absurd statement.

Neither is the appeal to an alleged miraculous transformation of the elements (bread and wine) called for by the context. The only miracle in this connection is the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:11), which was the occasion for this discourse on the Bread of Life (v. 35). An appeal to miraculous transubstantiation here is *deus ex machine*,[26] a failed attempt to evoke God in order to keep one’s interpretation from collapse.

Finally, appealing to the Church Fathers to support Trent’s dogma of transubstantiation is poorly grounded for many reasons.

First, as even Catholic scholars admit, the Fathers were by no means unanimous in their interpretation. Trent speaks of the “unanimous consent of the Fathers” as the means of determining true apostolic tradition, but some Fathers clearly opposed taking the phrase “this is my body” literally.

Second, at best many of the Fathers were simply supporting the idea of Christ’s real presence in the Communion, not that the elements were literally transformed into His actual body and blood.[27] The later dogma of transubstantiation cannot be based on any early or unanimous consent (even though Catholics claim it).

Third, the Eastern Orthodox Church, whose roots are at least as old as

Rome's, has always held a mystical view of Christ's presence in Communion and has never upheld transubstantiation.[28] Likewise, the Lutheran understanding, which rejects transubstantiation, appeals to the same Fathers in support of its view over against Catholicism.

Fourth, as noted before, the early Fathers had only a fallible interpretation of the infallible Word. They could be and often were wrong, and there is no reason any of them could not have been wrong on this issue.[29]

The Catholic Church's use of the Fathers to proclaim a doctrine as infallibly true is not always consistent with the evidence; sometimes their proclamation of a view as apostolic truth isn't well supported in the early Fathers. In the final analysis, the decision of the teaching magisterium to proclaim a view as an article of faith is not based on the evidence, and their appeal to the Fathers and councils is imbalanced and after the fact (*ex post facto*). For example, when earlier Fathers or councils condemned a view that Rome later pronounces as infallible, Rome ignores the earlier statements against it. But even when only a few early Fathers and councils support a view they desire to pronounce *de fide*,[30] they point triumphantly to this minority voice. The Catholic use of the Fathers is not only inconsistent but also circular; the Fathers are used as a basis for the church's infallible teaching, while the church's infallible teaching is the actual basis for the use of the Fathers.

It Is Not Possible to Consistently Take a Physical View

In at least one very important respect, it is not theologically possible for an orthodox Christian to hold to a literalistic interpretation of "This is my body." *When Jesus said this of the bread in His hand, no apostle present could have understood Him to mean that the bread was actually His physical body, which was right there with them, the hands of which were holding that very bread; or we must believe that Christ was holding His own body in His own hands*.

Jesus could not have been speaking physically in this case, because ever since the Incarnation He has always been a human being and has always dwelt continuously in a human body (except when He was in the grave). *If the bread and the wine He held in His hands were actually His literal body and blood, then He would have been incarnated in two different places at the same time*. One physical body cannot be in two different locations at the same time, so despite Catholic protests to the contrary,[31] transubstantiation (logically) involves two bodies and two incarnations of Christ, which is contrary to the orthodox doctrine of *the* Incarnation.

It Is Idolatrous to Worship the Host

As we have seen, official Catholic dogma says the consecrated Eucharist can and should be worshiped. Most Protestants believe this is a form of idolatry,[32] for this is the worship of something that our God-given senses say is a finite creation of God (bread and wine). Worshiping God under a physical image is clearly forbidden by the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:4).

Furthermore, the appeal to the ubiquitous presence of Christ's body (or omnipresence of Christ *as God* in the host) does not resolve the problem;[33] that is, considering the Eucharistic elements as only the "accidental clothing" under which Christ is somehow localized does not avoid the difficulty. By the same kind of argument, one could justify pagans worshiping stones or statues, since God is everywhere present, including their objects of worship. After all, no animistic pagan truly worships the stone but rather the spirit that animates it.

Transubstantiation Undermines Belief in the Resurrection

Finally, claiming that the consecrated host is anything but finite undermines the very epistemological basis by which we know anything in the empirical world[34] and, indirectly, the very historical basis of support for the truth about the incarnate Christ's life, death, and resurrection.[35] If the senses cannot be trusted when they experience the Communion elements, then neither can the apostles' senses be trusted to verify Christ's claims to resurrection: "*Look* at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! *Touch* me and *see*" (Luke 24:39; cf. John 20:27). John said of Christ that He was "what was from the beginning, what we have *heard*, what we have *seen* with our eyes, what we have *looked at* and *touched* with our hands" (1 John 1:1 TLB).

The Mass Shows No Evidence of the Miraculous

The Roman Catholic response to the foregoing arguments is that the Mass is a miracle and, hence, appealing to the normal, natural way of observation is irrelevant. True, miracles are not normal occurrences; however, this strategy will not work, since the Mass shows absolutely no evidence of the miraculous.

First of all, by similar reasoning—attempting to justify an invisible material substance miraculously replacing the empirically obvious signs (bread and wine)—one could justify belief in Santa Claus at Christmas or an invisible gremlin moving the hands on a watch. This is literally nonsense; it is *not sensible*, even though its object is a sensible (physical) body. Philosophically, it is alleged to be

an empirically unknowable event in the empirical world; theologically, it is presented as a matter of pure faith. One must simply believe what the Church's teaching magisterium says—namely, that the host is really Jesus' body—even though his senses plainly tell him otherwise.

Furthermore, if the Mass is a miracle, then virtually *any* natural empirical event could also be a miracle, and if this is true, then *nothing* is a miracle, since nothing is unique. Hence, claiming the Mass is miraculous undermines the nature of miracles as special events with apologetic value.[36]

Finally, the appeal of Catholic apologists to divine appearances (theophanies) in attempting to avoid these criticisms is futile: *When God Himself appears in a finite form, it is an obvious miraculous appearance, so that observers know clearly it is not a normal event*. There are supernatural manifestations, voices, prophecies, or unusual events of nature connected with it (cf. Ex. 3:1ff.); the Mass has none of these. Nowhere in the New Testament are the normal words for "miracle" (*sign*, *wonder*, and *power*)[37] used of the Communion; there is absolutely no evidence that it is anything but a natural event with natural elements on which Christ places spiritual blessings as we remember His death (1 Cor. 11:25).

The Problem With the Mass As a "Sacrifice"

Roman Catholics and Anglicans[38] view the Eucharistic Feast as a "sacrifice" (although bloodless).[39] The term *sacrifice* is found as early as Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604), who held that at every mass Christ was sacrificed afresh (Cross, *ODCC*, 594–95); as a result, "this notion of the mass as sacrifice eventually became standard doctrine of the Western church—until it was rejected by Protestants in the sixteenth century" (González, *SC*, 247).

In 831, a Frankish monk named Paschasius Radbertus (c. 786–c. 860) addressed this issue in a work titled *On the Body and Blood of the Lord*. Radbertus taught that Christ is "corporeally" present during Communion. Early in the church, the Eucharist had been considered a fellowship meal, but now,

> The new emphasis on the corporeal presence of Christ permitted the Church to begin to treat Christ as a victim, rather than as the host [of the feast], to think of itself as offering him to the Father, rather than as coming to be nourished at table. (Brown, *H*, 233)

Thus, the Lord's Supper itself became known as a sacrifice; what was intended as *memorializing* a sacrifice became *enactment* of that sacrifice (see ibid.). That the New Testament term *remembrance* (Gk: *anamnesis*) is often used in a

sacrificial context (as Roman Catholics point out) does not justify the contention that Communion is a sacrifice. Jesus wants us to *remember* His sacrifice on the cross, not *reenact* it.[40]

Regarding Roman Catholic belief in the need for mediation in the Eucharist, even if they were to grant that God is the *primary* cause of the transformation, Protestants still object to the sacerdotal belief that the priest is a *secondary* cause or instrument through which God accomplishes it.[41] It is contrary to the ways of God revealed in Scripture to endow any human with the power to transform created things (the bread and wine) into the body of the Creator (Christ).[42]

In brief, the whole concept of reenacting and re-presenting Christ's sacrifice on the cross is contrary to the clear message of Hebrews that this sacrifice occurred only "once for all" (10:10). Trent's dogma on Christ being repeatedly "immolated" (sacrificed)[43] in the Mass violates the clear teaching of Scripture.

The Problem With Multilocality of Christ's Physical Body

As mentioned earlier, the Roman Catholic doctrine of Christ's corporeal (bodily) presence during the Eucharist poses another problem for most evangelicals.[44] The difficulty may be stated as follows: "In order to be bodily present at thousands of altars, the Body of Christ must possess one of the so-called attributes of the majesty of God, namely, omnipresence or ubiquity" (Brown, *H*, 229).[45] Simply put, "to believe that Jesus was in two places at once is something of a denial of the incarnation, which limited His physical human nature to one location" (Erickson, *CT*, 1121).

This Eucharistic understanding is fraught with difficulties. Those who try to preserve Christ's "actual presence" in Communion come perilously close to monophysitism, which held that, following the Incarnation, Christ possessed only one incarnate divine nature, thereby combining and comingling His two natures.[46] Monophysitism was condemned by the Council of Ephesus (431), an official condemnation reaffirmed at Chalcedon (in 451; see Brown, op. cit., 168–72; 181–85). Why then should not the comingling of divine and human in the substance of the Communion elements also be condemned as unorthodox?

In summation, the sacraments (especially the Eucharist) are at the heart of Roman Catholic belief and practice, and few issues involve greater disagreements between Catholics and Protestants. Catholics untenably maintain transubstantiation[47] and believe that a sacrament is a cause of grace—for example, that the grace of justification and sanctification are conveyed through

baptism.[48] Further, we have examined the Roman Catholic arguments from both Scripture and tradition and found them wanting. In fact, some dimensions of Catholic teaching on the sacraments are clearly contrary to Scripture, contrary to other orthodox Christian teaching, and even contrary to fact and logic.

In view of these significant differences between Roman Catholic and evangelical Protestant doctrine, realism demands that we take a less optimistic view than the ecumenical call "Rome is home." As long as Catholics maintain that these are nonnegotiable dogmas, we will have to find ecclesiastical lodging elsewhere. This is in spite of all the other theological truths on which we agree and the practical areas in which we can cooperate.

THE VIEW THAT THERE ARE NO ORDINANCES

On the other end of the spectrum is the view of E. W. Bullinger and William Booth, who both claimed there are no ordinances required for observance by the local church today. (This includes both baptism and the Lord's Supper, observed by the vast majority of all churches.) Booth did not observe them on practical grounds; Bullinger opposed them on theological grounds.

The Salvation Army Position

The Salvation Army, founded by William Booth (1829–1912), is a movement that began as a Christian mission and rescue operation on London's east side, shunned by mainline churches and left unprotected by magistrates. In spite of being an ordained Methodist minister, Booth adopted a nondenominational policy; while he drew criticism for observing no sacraments, he "denied he was against them. Perhaps, the wrangling these had caused in other churches did not encourage him to change his mind" (Elwell, *EDT*, 172).

The Bullinger View

E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913), a noted Greek scholar, is considered the father of the ultradispensational movement. Ultradispensationalism[49] places the origin of the Christian church *after* Acts 28, contending that earlier believers were a Jewish church in which baptism and the Lord's Supper were practiced. The true church, the mystery body of Christ, did not appear until Paul's prison epistles,

which Bullinger contended have no reference to water baptism or Communion.[50]

Response to the No-Ordinance View

There is little to address in Booth's position, since it's more of a nonview than a view; he didn't so much oppose the sacraments as he omitted them. Furthermore, he omitted them on pragmatic grounds, seeing them as a seemingly endless source of conflict that merely wasted precious resources better spent in helping the needy.

Because Bullinger, on the other hand, presented a sophisticated biblical argument against both ordinances, his position requires a more extensive reply. His essential reasoning is based on two contentions: (1) The Christian church did not begin until after Acts 28 (hence, all references to baptism or the Lord's Supper before this point do not apply to our dispensation);[51] (2) there are no references to water baptism in any epistle written after this time.[52]

First, the second argument is at best a weak argument necessarily from silence. However, from nothing, nothing follows. Omission is not exclusion; that some ordinance is not mentioned in some letters doesn't mean it was not in effect. For example, the Resurrection is unmentioned in certain epistles;[53] this in no way demonstrates that the authors didn't believe in it or affirm its essential significance.

Second, it is possible that Paul does refer to water baptism in the Prison Epistles. Colossians 2:12, for example, refers to baptism as "burial" with Christ; this depicts immersion, the mode of baptism expressed in the New Testament. Indeed, in a parallel reference, Paul refers to baptism by burial as an outward act that is in the "likeness" of the real act of salvation, which is Spirit baptism into Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13); the only baptism that is an outward likeness of the inner reality is baptism by water. Ephesians 4:5 is also a likely reference to water baptism, since Spirit baptism is implied in the preceding verse (where there is "one body" formed by "one Spirit"—precisely what Spirit baptism is). Further, "baptism" follows "faith" in the text, the same order for faith and water baptism throughout the New Testament.[54] Finally, these elements form a confessional unity, a kind of mini-creed that bespeaks water baptism, an outward confessional activity, which Spirit baptism is not.

Third, Bullinger's entire argument collapses if it can be shown that the church as Christ's body occurs earlier than Acts 28, and there is good evidence that it

does.[55] (1) The church as Christ's body resulted from the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), which occurred only "days" after His ascension (Acts 1:5) on the Day of Pentecost (2:1ff.); (2) Jesus told Saul that he was persecuting *His* body in Acts 9:4, and the only earthly body of Christ that Paul could have been persecuting was His church, which he himself plainly acknowledged (1 Cor. 15:9). Both water baptism and the Lord's Supper were practiced by the church after Acts 9 (e.g., Acts 19; 1 Cor. 11).

Fourth, ultradispensationalism engages in distinctions without real differences, making a lot out of little or nothing. Distinguishing an earlier Jewish church from the later Christian church is based on circumstantial appearances and arguments for silence, not positive and solid evidence. (Indeed, it overlooks negative evidence.)

Fifth, and finally, ultradispensationalism misses the whole point of Acts 10, where Peter was called to the Gentiles and they too were baptized into Christ's body. It also misses the point of Acts 15, where the apostles[56] issued a declaration that Gentiles were fellow heirs of the gospel along with Jews (Eph. 3:6; Col. 1:27). This, the mystery—how Gentiles could be joined with Jews in one body, which Bullingerites proclaim as the true church—existed at least as early as Acts 10, which Peter said was the same as Acts 2 (cf. 11:15). Bullinger's view against the church's two ordinances, plainly practiced in Acts, cannot stand.

The Berean View (One Ordinance)

Perhaps because of some of the above criticism, there arose a modified form of ultradispensationalism that claims there is only one ordinance for the church—the Lord's Supper. This view, expressed by Cornelius Stam (1909–2003), Charles Baker (1910–2002), and the Berean [Grace] movement, holds that the Christian church began sometime between Acts 9 and 13.[57] Modified ultradispensationalists believe they can thereby avoid Bullinger-related criticisms and retain the Lord's Supper without holding to water baptism.

Response to the Berean View (One Ordinance)

This view fares little better than its precursor; the Berean problems are much the same as those of the Bullingerites.

First, as shown above, it is largely an argument from silence.

Second, it again makes distinctions without real differences. For instance, the ministries of circumcision (Peter) and uncircumcision (Paul) are different *audiences* but not different *gospels*.

Third, even granting that the mystery of the church was not *revealed* to anyone before Paul does not mean the church did not *exist* before Paul spoke it.

Fourth, the church existed from the time the Holy Spirit baptized people into Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13), at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1ff.).

Fifth, Christian water baptism took place after Acts 9–13 (when the Bereans say the New Testament church began). In Acts 19 Paul baptized converts in Christ's name who'd already undergone an earlier Jewish baptism.

Sixth, modified ultradispensationalism confuses Old Testament prophecies that Gentiles *would be* blessed with there being no predictions as to *how* they would be on the same (soteriological) level with Jews.[58]

Seventh, and finally, its claim that there are different gospels contradicts Paul, who said there is only one (Gal. 1:8; cf. 3:8). A more extensive evaluation of ultradispensationalism can be found later.[59]

PROTESTANT VIEWS ON THE ORDINANCES

With the above exceptions, Protestants are almost universally agreed that there are two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is at this point that the differences begin.

Differences Concerning Baptism

First, there are differences over the *mode* of baptism. Baptists, Congregationalists, and others springing from the Anabaptist tradition[60] insist on baptism by immersion. Others, like Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists, baptize by effusion (sprinkling or pouring). Each side presents its case based on biblical images of salvation that depict baptism as an outward sign of its reality.

Second, there are differences over the *candidate* for baptism. Baptists and other Baptistic groups insist on believer's baptism.[61] Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and others also baptize infants.

Third, there are differences over the *efficacy* of baptism. Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, and Anglicans hold to baptismal regeneration; Baptists, Methodists,

Presbyterians, and others do not. Some differences spring from views on the nature of the sacraments, such as whether they are merely *symbols* or the actual *means* of grace.[62]

Differences Concerning the Lord's Supper

As will be discussed below,[63] Protestants differ over the nature, number, participation, and effect regarding the Lord's Supper. While Roman Catholicism claims that the elements (bread and wine) actually become the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation), Protestants hold two other primary views (consubstantiation[64] and memorial[65]) with varying degrees in between. Again, while Catholics believe the Eucharist is a cause of grace, other sacramentalists maintain it is a means of grace, and nonsacramentalists insist it is a symbol of grace. Note too that Catholics believe only the priest should partake of the cup and that only properly ordained priests can administer this sacrament.[66]

In light of the divergent views on baptism and Communion, a brief examination on the biblical data is in order.

A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM

Of the many issues related to water baptism, some have been discussed elsewhere;[67] the rest will be briefly sketched here.

The Command to Be Baptized

The basis for baptism is the Great Commission of Christ:

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

Not only did Jesus command it, but His disciples practiced it; Peter repeated at Pentecost when the church was born: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38; cf. 10:47). Paul, the great proclaimer of

the mystery of the church (Eph. 3:3–5), was directed by Ananias: "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). Contrary to the ultradispensationalists who deny that baptism applies to New Testament believers after Acts 13, even those who were baptized by John the Baptist were rebaptized in Jesus' name (19:1–6). In obedience to Christ, water baptism was practiced throughout the New Testament.[68]

The Candidate for Baptism

The debate over who should be baptized falls into two basic categories: Pedobaptists (lit.: "child-baptizers") argue that infants should be baptized, while Anabaptists (lit.: "rebaptizers") rebaptize those already baptized in infancy; following them, those in the modern Baptistic tradition insist on baptizing only those children or adults who are old enough to (independently) believe.

Consider the following arguments offered for infant baptism (followed by responses).

That Baptism Is Like Old Testament Circumcision (Performed on Infants)

Proponents of infant baptism appeal to verses such as Colossians 2:11–12:

> In whom [Christ] also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (KJV)

They reason that if baptism is New Testament circumcision, and if circumcision was performed on infants, then baptism should be done on infants too.

In response, this falls far short of proof that the New Testament teaches infant baptism.

First, the text says nothing about baptizing infants. Any conclusion to the contrary is strictly a speculative inference.

Second, only males were circumcised in the Old Testament. Proponents of infant baptism obviously baptize females as well, so not only is this a weak argument from analogy but also an inconsistent one.

Third, this text (like numerous other New Testament passages) mentions "faith" as the means by which one is saved (cf. Eph. 2:8). Faith is the only means of salvation;[69] and infants are not old enough to believe (have faith).[70]

That There Were Many Household Baptisms in the New Testament

Four times the New Testament mentions whole households being baptized.[71] Whole families usually include infants or small children. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that these are examples of infant baptism.

In reply, several facts stand out.

First, nowhere does the text say any infants were baptized; this is a supposition.

Second, there is evidence in these passages that there were no infants involved. In the Philippian jailor's case, everyone who was baptized had *believed*, since Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).[72] Luke continues: "He rejoiced, having believed in God *with all his household*" (v. 34 NKJV; cf. 18:8). Also, Paul baptized the "household of Stephanas" (1 Cor. 1:16), in which it's clear there were no infants, for we read later, "The household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the *service of the saints*" (16:15); infants are not old enough to serve.

Third, Lydia was clearly a woman of means (having her own household); being a single, virtuous women, she had no children; and, being a woman of commerce, she undoubtedly had servants. Accordingly, her "household" would have been only adults. Here again, all that supports infant baptism is an argument from silence—the text (Acts 16:15) says nothing about infants being baptized.

> Not only are there no solid biblical reasons to baptize infants, there are also many strong reasons for not doing so, such as the following.

Every Instance of New Testament Baptism Is of an Adult

As just demonstrated, there is not a single case of Jesus or His disciples baptizing an infant. With Jesus' love for and emphasis on little children (cf. Matt. 18:1–6), surely there would be a command or example of an infant baptism if it were what Jesus had commissioned. There are a considerable number of baptisms in the New Testament,[73] and in all cases, only adults are said to have been baptized.

Belief Is a Condition for Being Baptized, and Infants Cannot Believe

Perhaps the most fundamental reason for not baptizing infants is that they are not yet capable of believing, and belief in Christ is a condition for being saved.[74] Repeatedly, the New Testament affirms the essence of what Paul declared:

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Jesus taught, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned already* because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."[75] Infants are not yet sufficiently developed to make a conscious decision to accept the gift of God's salvation (Rom. 6:23), and there is no salvation by proxy—everyone is responsible for his own sin (Ezek. 18:20) and his own decisions (Rom. 14:12). Baptism is for those who are able to believe.[76]

Baptism Is an Outward Symbol of an Inner Reality

Baptism is a symbolic representation of salvation, an outward sign of what happens inwardly when we are saved: *"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"* (Rom. 6:4). We cannot outwardly symbolize what we have not inwardly experienced, so baptism should *follow* salvation (not precede it). We wear the wedding ring *after* we're married.

The Mode of Baptism

The mode of baptism is another hotly debated topic. Those in the Baptistic tradition insist that immersion alone is acceptable, symbolizing Christ's death and resurrection. Others claim that sprinkling or pouring are appropriate, since they too symbolize acts of salvation, such as the sprinkling of blood on our souls or the pouring of the Holy Spirit on our lives.

Among the many arguments offered for pouring or sprinkling water as an appropriate way to baptize, the following are noteworthy.

That Baptism Is Symbolized by Pouring in Acts 1–2

Jesus said, "John baptized with water, but … you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). When this was fulfilled, the Spirit descended on them (2:3), and Peter said it was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, "I will *pour out* my Spirit on all people" (2:17). As such, baptism was symbolized by pouring.

Response

Immersionists reply by noting that the early believers were also *immersed* in the Spirit, since Luke says the room was "filled" with the Spirit's presence (2:4). Hence, the Spirit being poured out until they were all covered by His

manifestation is best symbolized by immersion. Further, they were put "into" the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), which is an experience of immersion.

That Salvation Is Symbolized by Sprinkling

"Sprinkling" was a common figure of salvific speech under both covenants.[77] "Jesus [is] the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24). Since baptism is a symbol of salvation, and salvation is described as sprinkling, then sprinkling with water is an appropriate symbol of salvation.

Response

While salvation is sometimes symbolized by sprinkling, immersionists reply with two arguments. One, water baptism never uses this symbol in the New Testament, and two, death and resurrection are at the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3–5). The best way to symbolize all of this is by immersion: burial with Christ and rising up in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

That Isaiah Speaks of Sprinkling Many Nations

Isaiah said of Messiah: "So will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand" (Isa. 52:15). This is the very passage the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when he said to Philip, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). His words possibly were prompted by Isaiah's reference to the messianic sprinkling of many nations; if so, his baptism by sprinkling follows naturally from the context.

Response

This is probably a mistranslation of the Hebrew word (*nazah*, in Isa. 52) rendered "sprinkle" by the King James Version. Even the *New King James Version* notes in the margin that *nazah* could be translated "startle" (or "make speechless," etc.), as many contemporary translations do. This better fits the context: "So shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him" (RSV; cf. ASV, CEV). Also, neither Luke (the author of Acts) nor the Ethiopian made any connection between this text and his baptism. Further, the eunuch "went down into" and "came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38–39), depicting immersion.

Those who favor *immersion* as the proper baptismal mode also offer many arguments from Scripture; the following is a summary.

That Jesus Was Baptized by Immersion

"As soon as Jesus was baptized [in the Jordan], he went up out of the water" (Matt. 3:16). To be in and then come up out of the water speaks of having been immersed. Why a river, if a cup of water would do? Why wade in, if all that was needed was a handful?

That John Baptized Where There Was Much Water

The Bible says, "John [the Baptist] also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized" (John 3:23). Why go to a place for an abundance of water, if far less was needed? The circumstance fits better with immersion as the mode.

That the Eunuch's Baptism Was by Immersion

> They came to some water and the eunuch [having received Christ] said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch *went down into the water* and Philip baptized him. When they *came up out of the water*, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:36–39)

That Baptism Is Depicted As Burial

The New Testament describes baptism as "burial" and "resurrection" (cf. Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Burial and resurrection is going down into a grave and then coming up out of it—precisely what immersion depicts. Paul's words: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were *baptized into his death*? We were therefore *buried with him through baptism* into death in order that, just as *Christ was raised from the dead* through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been *united with him like this in his death*, we will certainly also be *united with him in his resurrection*" (Rom. 6:3–5).

Thus, baptism by immersion is a perfect picture of Christ's death and resurrection for us, which is the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–8).

That Early Church Baptismal Tanks Support Immersion

Unearthed baptismal tanks provide evidence that the nascent church practiced immersion. Some churches with the earliest of roots, such as the Eastern

Orthodox, still baptize by immersion, and even as late as the Reformation, Martin Luther prescribed baptism by immersion. The overall arguments plainly favor immersion as the primary (if not exclusive) New Testament baptismal mode.[78]

VIEWS ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

The second ordinance of the local church is Communion (or the Lord's Supper).[79] As noted earlier, while Protestants are virtually unanimous in believing Communion is a prescribed ordinance, they are divided over its nature, frequency of observation, and effects. Thus, we'll examine the New Testament texts.

There are five basic ways to understand what Jesus meant when He said, "This is My body.…":

(1) transubstantially/physically (Roman Catholic);
(2) really/actually (Eastern Orthodox);[80]
(3) consubstantially/permeationally (Lutheran);
(4) spiritually/dynamically (Reformed);
(5) symbolically/memorially (Zwinglian/Baptist).

The Roman Catholic View of Communion

The official Catholic view—transubstantiation—affirms that the elements of bread and wine are transformed, under priestly administration, into the actual physical body and blood of Jesus (see above). This sacrament is not only a cause of grace but a bloodless reenactment of Christ's sacrificial death, which is efficacious for the forgiveness of venial (non-mortal) sins.[81]

The Lutheran View of Communion

The Lutheran position is known as consubstantiation; Martin Luther believed that Christ's actual body is in and under the elements, penetrating in the same way that fire penetrates metal.[82] He rejected Catholic transubstantiation, stating that "it is not that the bread and wine have become Christ's body and blood, but that we now have the body and blood in addition to the bread and wine" (in

Erickson, *CT*, 1117). Thus Lutheran theology rejects the idea of the mass as a sacrifice (Luther, *BC*, 140, in ibid.). Lutherans believe Christ is present not transformationally but *permeationally*—i.e., He penetrates and permeates the bread and the wine.

The Lutheran view differs from the Catholic view in several respects.

First, while Christ's body and blood are believed to be physically present, there is no change of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood; His body and blood *coexist* and are *concurrently* present with the elements. Luther used the illustration of an iron bar heated in fire. The iron does not cease to exist; fire penetrates it and exists in, with, and under it.

Second, Luther rejected sacerdotalism, insisting that priestly action is in no sense responsible for Christ's physical presence in the elements; this comes through the action of God. Nonetheless, Luther did accept the idea of *manducation*; that is, he took Jesus' statement "Take, eat; this is My body" (Matt. 26:26 NKJV) in a literal sense.

Third, like Roman Catholics, Lutherans believe that the event is a sacrament, i.e., a means of grace by which we receive real spiritual benefit, namely, forgiveness of sins and confirmation of faith.

The Reformed View of Communion

The Reformed view of the Lord's Supper is that the bread and the wine *spiritually* contain the body and blood of Christ; He is found in the sacrament in a *spiritual, dynamic* sense rather than through *physical* or *bodily* presence. John Calvin used the sun as an illustration: "The sun remains in the heavens, yet its warmth and light are present on earth. So the radiance of the Spirit conveys to us the communion of Christ's flesh and blood" (*ICR*, cited in Erickson, *CT*).

However, while the elements *signify* the body and blood of Christ, they also *seal* the believer with assurances of God's promises; real objective spiritual benefits come not from the elements but from Christ, in large part depending on the participant's faith and receptivity.

The Memorial View of Communion

Following the view expressed by Reformation leader Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), the memorial (symbolic) view of the Lord's Supper states that the Communion service is primarily a commemoration of Christ's death on the

cross, following His words “Do this in *remembrance* of me” (Luke 22:19). Adherents include those of the Anabaptist tradition, modern Baptist and other Baptistic groups, and Congregational and Independent churches. These often prefer to use the term *ordinance* rather than “sacrament” when referring to the Eucharist.

Symbolically, the value of the elements lies simply in receiving by faith the benefits of Christ’s death. Like a sermon, the event proclaims His death, except that (unlike a sermon) Communion is a visual reminder. Since Jesus was there in bodily form when the Eucharist was instituted, it is absurd to claim that the elements He held in His hand—bread and wine—were His physical body and blood.

AN EVALUATION OF THE VARIOUS VIEWS

There are two main points regarding these views that call for evaluation:

(1) the presence of Christ and
(2) the efficacy of the ordinance.

The Presence of Christ

The Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Lutheran views all claim that Christ is bodily present; the Reformed view maintains that He is spiritually present. Christ being physically present in the Communion event has serious problems. As noted earlier, the Roman Catholic view is unfounded because

(1) *it is not necessary to take these words of Christ physically* (since Jesus often spoke in metaphors and figures of speech);
(2) *it is not plausible to take these words of Christ physically* (since vividness is no proof of physicality—these words are often used in a nonphysical way, and the Church Fathers were by no means unanimous in support of the Catholic interpretation);
(3) *it is not possible to take a physical view* (otherwise, we must believe, for instance, that Christ was holding His own physical body in His own physical hands);
(4) *it is idolatrous to take a physical view* (since Catholics worship the host,

which is not God);

(5) *it undermines belief in the Resurrection to take a physical view* (since if the senses cannot be trusted during communion with Christ, how can they be trusted when the disciples saw, heard, and touched Christ after He arose?)[83]

The Lutheran view fairs little better.

For one thing, how can Christ physically be in two places at the same time, since His corporeal form was beside the elements He was holding?

Further, how could two material substances (body and blood) be simultaneously in the same place (as Lutherans hold)?

In addition, Paul's account of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11) says absolutely nothing about Christ's presence in the elements. Rather, he presents the event as one to remember and to proclaim the Lord's death.

In response to the Reformed view that Christ is spiritually present, this cannot be referring to Christ's omnipresence as God, for in that sense He is everywhere. Nor can it mean He is spiritually present in His human nature, for in that sense He is presently in heaven, not on earth, "till he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26 NKJV). Nor can it mean that He is automatically there in a spiritual way to bless those present, for only those who participate by faith in a worthy manner (cf. v. 27) have this experience; those who do not are judged (v. 29). Hence, in contrast to the Reformed view, the Communion elements as such *symbolize* (which is effective whether one accepts them or not), and the experience of Christ's spiritual presence is dependent on the recipient, as affirmed by the Zwinglian/Baptist memorial view.

The Efficacy of the Ordinance

Another issue is that of *sacrament* versus *ordinance*. The views claiming Jesus is present in the elements[84] are sacramental; they hold that the Communion elements are a special means of grace.

There are at least two significant difficulties with this position. For one thing, it is contrary to the claim of the passage that the event is essentially memorial and proclamational: "Do this in *remembrance* of me" and "you *proclaim* the Lord's death" (1 Cor. 11:24, 26). For another, if the ritual itself has spiritual efficacy, then why did some who partook become sick or even die (v. 30) rather than being spiritually edified by it? There was nothing automatic about the

ordinance's effect: Those who responded in faith were edified, and those who did not were not. Communion's efficacy did not depend on the elements or the ritual but on the faith and reception of the participant.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER

Scripture is clear as to the basic nature of Communion. Just before His crucifixion and after the Passover meal with His disciples,

> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:26–28).

Paul added more details:

> I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.
>
> Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. (1 Cor. 11:23–31)

The Communion event can be summarized as follows.

An Outline of the Biblical Data on Communion

I. *The Names of Communion*
   A. The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20).
   B. The Lord's Table (10:21).
   C. Communion (10:16).
   D. Eucharist ("Thanksgiving," 11:24).

II. *The Elements of Communion*
   A. Bread ("This is my body," 11:24).

B. The Cup (wine: “This cup is … my blood,” 11:25).
C. Cup of blessing (10:16).
D. Cup of the Lord (10:21).

III. *The Participants in Communion*
A. Believers (“My brethren,” 11:33).
B. Those who “examine” themselves (11:27–28).

IV. *The Location of Communion*
A. “When you come together in one place” (11:20 NKJV).
B. “When you come together as a church” (11:18).

V. *The Frequency of Communion*
A. The early church: daily (Acts 2:46).
B. The later church: weekly (Acts 20:7).
C. Any church: “As often” as you do it (1 Cor. 11:26).

VI. *The Meaning: It is a …*
A. Remembrance service (“Do this in remembrance of me,” 11:24).
B. Communion service (“Is it not the communion of the body [and blood] of Christ?” [10:16 KJV]; “It is a spiritual participation in the blood of Christ symbolized in the cup.”)[85]
C. Covenantal service (“This cup is the new covenant in my blood,” 11:25; cf. Matt. 26:28).
D. Fellowship service (“When you come together as a church,” 11:18; “Wait for one another,” 11:33 NKJV).
E. Thanksgiving service (“When He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body,’ ”11:24 NKJV).
F. Proclamation service (“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death,” 11:26 NKJV).
G. Anticipation service (“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes,” 11:26 NKJV).

It is incredible that something so brief (three verses in Matthew) and simple as “eat this bread” and “drink this cup” in remembrance of Jesus could be the subject of endless discussion and dispute down through the years. Yet it has been. Nevertheless, given all the foregoing discussion, the Zwinglian position

seems closest to the biblical presentation, since it views the elements as symbols that signify ("set forth") two basic aims: (1) to help believers "remember" Christ's death, and (2) to "proclaim" it until He returns. The effect on the participant, whether good or bad, comes from his faith and manner of participation.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR COMMUNION

With the exception of ultradispensationalists like Bullinger, there is virtually universal agreement in Christendom that the Lord's Supper (Communion) is an event that the church should celebrate. There is also agreement on the basic elements to be used and with what they are associated, namely, the body and blood of Christ; we listed the various views in their differing theological traditions because not everyone agrees on the Eucharist's exact meaning. Likewise, virtually all agree baptism should be administered and that with water

Early Church Fathers

From the earliest days after the apostles, there is abundant support for the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, beginning in subapostolic times.

The Didache (c. 120–150)

> Concerning baptism, baptise thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, "baptise, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," in running water; but if thou hast no running water, baptise in other water, and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head "in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." And before the baptism let the baptiser and him who is to be baptised fast, and any others who are able. And thou shalt bid him who is to be baptised to fast one or two days before. (7.1–3)
>
> Hold Eucharist thus: First concerning the Cup, "We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David thy child, which, thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be glory for ever." And concerning the broken Bread: "We give thee thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy Child. To thee be glory for ever. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy Kingdom, for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever." But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptised in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs" (9.1–5).

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

> Ye appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us,

in order that, by believing in His death, ye may by baptism be made partakers of His resurrection. (*EIT*, 2.133)

I have confidence of you in the Lord, that ye will be of no other mind. Wherefore I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of God, and exhort you to have but one faith, and one kind of preaching, and one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ; and His blood which was shed for us is one; one loaf also is broken to all [the communicants], and one cup is distributed among them all: there is but one altar for the whole Church, and one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants.

Since, also, there is but one unbegotten Being, God, even the Father; and one only-begotten Son, God, the Word and man; and one Comforter, the Spirit of truth; and also one preaching, and one faith, and one baptism; and one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil; it behooves you also, therefore, as "a peculiar people, and a holy nation," to perform all things with harmony in Christ. (*EIP*, 5.161)

If there is one God of the universe, the Father of Christ, "of whom are all things"; and one Lord Jesus Christ, our [Lord], "by whom are all things"; and also one Holy Spirit, who wrought in Moses, and in the prophets and apostles; and also one baptism, which is administered that we should have fellowship with the death of the Lord; and also one elect Church, there ought likewise to be but one faith in respect to Christ. For "there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is through all, and in all" (ibid., 1.223).

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we pray and fast with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. (*FAJ*, 61.336)

What is the use of that baptism which cleanses the flesh and body alone? Baptize the soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; and, lo! the body is pure. For this is the symbolic significance of unleavened bread, that you do not commit the old deeds of wicked leaven. (*DJ*, 14.377)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

In like manner he also who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognize the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures. (*AH*, 1.9.4)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Let not that "He Himself baptized not" trouble any. For into whom should He baptize? Into repentance? Of what use, then, do you make His forerunner? Into remission of sins, which He used to give by a word? Into Himself, whom by humility He was concealing? Into the Holy Spirit, who had not yet descended from the Father? Into the Church, which His apostles had not yet founded? (*OB*, 11)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Matthew alone adds the words “to repentance,” teaching that the benefit of baptism is connected with the intention of the baptized person; to him who repents it is salutary, but to him who comes to it without repentance it will turn to greater condemnation. (*COGJ*, 6.17)

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (c. fourth century)

If he afterward repents, and turns from his error, then, as we receive the heathen, when they wish to repent, into the Church indeed to hear the word, but do not receive them to communion until they have received the seal of baptism, and are made complete Christians; so do we also permit such as these to enter only to hear, until they show the fruit of repentance, that by hearing the word they may not utterly and irrecoverably perish. But let them not be admitted to communion in prayer. (2.39)

Medieval Fathers

During the Middle Ages the ordinances of baptism and Communion continued to be stressed. Indeed, some leaders carried their significance to an extreme that eventuated in the later pronouncement of the unbiblical doctrine of transubstantiation.

Ambrose (339–397)

“It is not doubtful that sin is forgiven by means of baptism, but in baptism the operation is that of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*OHS*, 3.18.138).

Augustine (354–430)

For whatever unbaptized persons die confessing Christ, this confession is of the same efficacy for the remission of sins as if they were washed in the sacred font of baptism. For He who said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” made also an exception in their favor, in that other sentence where He no less absolutely said, “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven”; and in another place, “Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it” (*CG*, 13.7.534).

Our Lord Himself, and apostolic practice, have handed down to us a few rites in place of many, and these at once very easy to perform, most majestic in their significance, and most sacred in the observance; such, for example, as the sacrament of baptism, and the celebration of the body and blood of the Lord. And as soon as anyone looks upon these observances he knows to what they refer, and so reveres them not in carnal bondage, but in spiritual freedom. (*OCD*, 3.9.13)

“He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him” shows what it is in reality, and not sacramentally, to eat His body and drink His blood; for this is to dwell in Christ, that He also may dwell in us. So that it is as if He said, He that dwelleth not in me, and in whom I do not dwell, let him not say or think that he eateth my body or drinketh my blood. (op. cit., 21.25.998)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"Christ's merit avails baptized children for the gaining of Happiness, though they have no merits of their own; because by Baptism they are made members of Christ" (*ST*, 2a.5.7.2).

> Just as Adam's sin is transmitted to all who are born of Adam corporally, so is the grace of Christ transmitted to all that are begotten of Him spiritually, by faith and Baptism: and this, not only unto the removal of sin of their first parent, but also unto the removal of actual sins, and the obtaining of glory. (ibid., 2a.81.3.3)

The Council of Trent (1545–1563)

> Since Christ our Redeemer declared that to be truly His own body which He offered under the form of bread, it has, therefore, always been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy council now declares it anew, that by the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church properly and appropriately calls transubstantiation. (in Saucy, *CGP*, 221)

Reformation Teachers

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

> God wonderfully preserved his Gospel in the Church, which now from the pulpits is taught to the people, word by word. In like manner, it is a special great work of God, that the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, have remained and cleaved to the hearts of those who were ordained to receive them in the midst of Popedom. (*Three Treatises*, 220)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> Our two sacraments present us with a clearer exhibition of Christ, in proportion to the nearer view of him which men have enjoyed since he was really manifested by the Father in the manner in which he had been promised. For baptism testifies to us our purgation and ablution; the Eucharistic supper testifies to our redemption. (*CICR*, 188)
>
> What, then, someone will say, do you apply the same rule to the water by which we are baptized, and the bread and wine under which the Lord's Supper is exhibited? I answer that in the sacraments of divine appointment, two things are to be considered: the substance of the corporeal thing which is set before us, and the form which has been impressed upon it by the Word of God, and in which its whole force lies. In as far, then, as the bread, wine, and water, which are presented to our view in the sacraments, retain their substance. (ibid., 4.19.7)

Post-Reformation Theologians

Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)

> The transubstantiation of the bread has long been disputed. Some argue that we take the body and

blood of Christ as they hung on the cross; others that we take the resurrection body. The Word of God shows us that all these opinions are erroneous. (in Bromiley, *ZB*, 186)

A sacrament is the sign of a holy thing. When I say: The sacrament of the Lord's body, I am simply referring to that bread which is the symbol of the body of Christ who was put to death for our sakes. The papists all know perfectly well that the word sacrament means a sign and nothing more, for this is the sense in which it has always been used by Christian doctors. (in ibid., 188)

In our native tongue the word [*sacrament*] suggests something that has power to take away sin and to make us holy. But this is a serious perversion. For only Jesus Christ and no external thing can take away the sins of us Christians and make us holy. (in ibid., 131)

These most friendly elements and signs, water and wine and bread, have been given to us in order that by the outward signs we may know the grace and loving-kindness of the New Testament, that we are no longer under the Law—the shedding of blood has therefore been abrogated by the blood of Christ—but under grace. (in ibid., 132)

In this matter of baptism—if I may be pardoned for saying it—I can only conclude that all the doctors have been in error from the time of the apostles … for [they] have ascribed to the water a power which it does not have and the holy apostles did not teach. (in ibid., 130)

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)

They [Roman Catholics] are opposed to the signs or tokens of grace in several ways: by multiplying them, by contaminating baptism with various additions, by mutilating the Lord's Supper of its second part [the cup,] and by changing it into a private mass. Those heresies which infringe upon our Duty to God and Christ as they principally relate to divine worship, and have idolatry united with them, may be appropriately referred to the second cause of the refusal of the reformed churches. (*D*, 22.17.4)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

None ought to be admitted to the communion and privileges of members of the visible church of Christ in complete standing, but such as are in profession, and in the eye of the church's Christian judgment, godly or gracious persons. (*WJE*, 3.2.1)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

Baptism and the Lord's Supper become spiritually helpful, not from any virtue in them, or in him who does administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of the Spirit in those who by faith receive them. (*PC*, 74)

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, instituted by Jesus Christ, to be to the person baptized a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death, and burial, and resurrection, of his being engrafted into him, of remission of sins, and of his giving up himself to God through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.…

Baptism is to be administered to all those who actually profess repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to none other. (ibid., 75–76)

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the New Testament, instituted by Jesus Christ; wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to his appointment, his death is shown forth, and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporeal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace. (ibid., 80)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

Jesus took the bread … after they had eaten the Passover.… "This bread is," that is, signifies or represents my body, according to the style of the sacred writers [Gen. 40:12; Ex. 12:11; Gal. 4:24]. Now, Christ substituting the Holy Communion for the Passover, follows the style of the Old Testament, and uses the same expressions the Jews were wont to use in celebrating the Passover. (*CGM*, 26.26)

"If any eat of this bread"—That is, believe in me: "he shall live for ever"—in other words, he that believeth to the end shall be saved. My flesh, which I will give you—this whole discourse concerning his flesh and blood refers directly to his passion, and but remotely, if at all, to the Lord's Supper. (*CGJ*, 6.51)

"And he took bread"—namely, some time after, when supper was ended, wherein they had eaten the paschal lamb. "This is my body"—as he had just now celebrated the paschal supper, which was called the Passover, so in like figurative language, he calls this bread his body. And this circumstance of itself was sufficient to prevent any mistake, as if this bread was his real body, any more than the paschal lamb was really the Passover. (*CGL*, 22.19)

The Schleitheim Confession of Faith (1527)

Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and [who] believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with Him in death, so that they might rise with Him; to all those who with such an understanding themselves desire and request it from us; hereby is excluded all infant baptism, the greatest and first abomination of the pope. For this you have the reasons and the testimony of the writings and the practice of the apostles (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:6; Acts 2:38; 8:36; 16:31–33; 19:4). We wish simply yet resolutely and with assurance to hold to the same. (1)

Concerning the breaking of bread, we have become one and agree thus: all those who desire to break the one bread in remembrance of the broken body of Christ and all those who wish to drink of one drink in remembrance of the shed blood of Christ, they must beforehand be united in the one body of Christ, that is the congregation of God, whose head is Christ, and that by baptism. (3)

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith (1632)

Concerning baptism we confess that penitent believers, who, through faith, regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, are made one with God, and are written in heaven, must, upon such Scriptural confession of faith, and renewing of life, be baptized with water, in the most worthy name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, according to the command of Christ, and the teaching, example, and practice of the apostles, to the burying of their sins, and thus be incorporated into the communion of the saints; henceforth to learn to observe all things which the Son of God has taught, left, and commanded His disciples. (VII)

We also confess and observe the breaking of bread, or Supper, as the Lord Christ Jesus before His suffering instituted it with bread and wine, and observed and ate with His apostles, commanding them to observe it in remembrance of Him; which they accordingly taught and practiced in the church, and commanded that it should be kept in remembrance of the suffering and death of the Lord; and that His precious body was broken, and His blood shed, for us and all mankind, as also the fruits hereof, namely, redemption and eternal salvation, which He purchased thereby, showing such great love toward us sinful men; whereby we are admonished to the utmost, to love and forgive one another and our neighbor, as He has done unto us, and to be mindful to maintain and live up to the unity and fellowship which we have with God and one another, which is signified to us by this breaking of bread. (IX)

James Strong (1822–1894)

> The Romanist regards the ordinances as actually conferring grace and producing holiness. Instead of being the external manifestation of a preceding union with Christ, they are the physical means of constituting and maintaining this union. With the Romanist, in this particular, sacramentalists of every name substantially agree. The Papal Church holds to seven sacraments or ordinances.… The ordinances prescribed in the N.T., however, are two and only two (Baptism and the Lord's Supper). (*ST*, 3.7.2.280)
>
> The analogy of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper also leads to the conclusion that baptism is to be observed as an authoritative memorial of Christ and his truth until the time of his second coming. (ibid., 3.7.2.1.285)

Charles Hodge (1797–1878)

> Peter Lombard is the first who enumerated the seven sacraments as held by the Romanists. He gives no reason for fixing on the number seven; but that which was already on hand in the traditional sanctity, attributed to that number.… Romanists have not even any plausible ground for their appeal to common consent in support of their doctrine on this subject. (*ST*, 3.20.496)

CONCLUSION

When all the evidence is surveyed and weighed, it seems the biblical view is most closely approximated by the Zwinglian position on the number, nature, and effects of the Lord's Supper. There are only two ordinances: water baptism and Communion; with this most segments of Christendom are in agreement. Those who confess Christ are to be baptized, and the New Testament mode seems to have been immersion. Other modes were later and exceptional rather than original and primary.

Further, it best accords with Scripture and sound reason to conclude that the ordinances are not sacraments, either as a cause or means (vehicle) of grace, but symbols that, if properly observed in obedient faith, can occasion blessings in one's life. The symbols do not themselves bring grace; rather, they are a reminder and proclaimer of Christ's sacrificial death and, in the case of baptism, His resurrection.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE MINISTRY OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH (SPIRITUAL GIFTS)

As we have seen, the authority for the visible church's ministry was in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), the church having been built on their foundation (Eph. 2:20). In addition to their doctrinal authority, the living apostles seemed to be focused on establishing local churches (cf. Acts 14:23), gifting its ministers (2 Tim. 1:6), and receiving revelations from God.[1] When these roles ceased and the apostles eventually died, the basic doctrinal authority was left in the apostolic writings of the New Testament; the functional authority rested in the local church itself, led by elders and assisted by deacons.[2] A local church looked to elder leadership[3] for guidance in the use of their gifts for ministry.

Further, while there was a plurality of elders and apostles, there was no hierarchy among them; no one apostle had authority over other apostles. Peter used the "keys" to open the door of God's spiritual kingdom to both Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10), and though he was one of the chief apostles (Gal. 2:9), his prominence seems gradually to have waned in significance after Paul's conversion (Acts 9) and commission to the Gentiles (Acts 13). Initially mentioned over fifty times in Luke's record, Peter vanishes entirely after a role in the gathering of apostles and elders to Jerusalem.[4]

That Peter had no unique enduring authority is clear from several factors.

First, again, Jesus gave the same authority to bind and loose to all the

apostles (Matt. 16:19; cf. 18:18).

Second, Peter was not even in charge of the Acts 15 gathering; James summed up the proceedings.

Third, Peter was only *one* of the church's "pillars" (Gal. 2:9).

Fourth, he was only *one* of the "apostles" on whom the church was built (Eph. 2:20).

Fifth, he was rebuked by the apostle Paul, an action hardly befitting another of lesser status (Gal. 2:11).

Sixth, Peter introduces himself as only an "apostle" in his writings (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:2), even though they are called General Epistles. If he alone had authority over the church, he should have asserted this in a general epistle.

Seventh, he acknowledged Paul's special role in the church (Gal. 1–2).

Eighth, and finally, even Paul's commission to missionary service was not done by Peter but by "the [local] church that was at Antioch" (Acts 13:1–3 NKJV). Hence, the Roman Catholic view that makes Peter primary and infallible in official teaching on faith and practice is without New Testament foundation. The early local churches were independent self-governing bodies under the headship of Christ, with the leadership of their own elders as approved by their congregations.[5]

THE GIFTS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

In order for visible churches to accomplish their internal and external missions, they must be gifted for the task. This they are, through gifts that God gives each member to edify the whole (1 Cor. 12, 14). Paul told the Ephesians,

> *To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.…* "When he [Christ] ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (… He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who *gave* some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:7–8, 10–13)

Some observations are obvious; for instance, "pastor and teacher" clearly is a gift to help fulfill the internal mission of edifying believers, while "evangelists" help to accomplish the external mission of evangelization. However, within the church today there are markedly divergent views on the existence and function

of the various spiritual gifts.

THE VIEW THAT *ALL* OF THE GIFTS EXIST TODAY

In 1 Corinthians Paul lists many more gifts that existed in the early New Testament church.[6] Many Christians (e.g., charismatics) believe that all these gifts are still in existence today, and hence, they should all be sought and exercised by believers today. John Wimber (1934–1997), father of the "signs and wonders movement," claimed that all these gifts still exist:

> Today we see hundreds of people healed every month in Vineyard Christian Fellowship services. Many more are healed as we pray for them in hospitals, on the streets, and in homes. The blind see; the lame walk; the deaf hear. Cancer is disappearing. (*PE*, 55)

Some even say that people are being raised from the dead. One author told of a group singing and praying for a dead person:

> Nothing happened during the first few songs, but by the sixth song the man began to move his toes. When we sang the seventh and eighth songs, that brother woke up, looked around and smiled.… He just opened his mouth and said, "Jesus has brought me back to life!" (Tari, *LMW*, 70).

Wimber insisted that "miracles and healings of all kinds and classes should be received gladly.… They should be expected as part of the normal Christian life."[7] Wimber maintained that all kinds of miraculous healings are still occurring, even resurrection from the dead (op. cit., 38, 62).

Peter Wagner (b. 1930) of Fuller Theological Seminary contends that "the great future breakthrough to the Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims will be accompanied with signs and wonders in the New Testament style" (ibid., 44). So *are* the sign gifts being manifest today? Do we possess the powers to perform the signs and wonders done by the early-church apostles?

A List of All the Gifts in the New Testament

Combining the gifts mentioned in Paul's epistles yields a list of twenty in all (unless pastor and and teacher are combined—cf. Eph. 4:11):

1 Corinthians 12, 14	Romans 12	Ephesians 4[8]
(1) Apostles		Apostles
(2) Prophets	Prophecy	Prophets
(3)		Evangelists
(4)		Pastors
(5) Teachers	Teaching	Teachers
(6)	Exhortation	
(7)	Leading	
(8)	Serving	
(9)	Giving	
(10)	Mercy	
(11) Miracles		
(12) Healings		
(13) Helps		
(14) Administration		
(15) Tongues		
(16) Interpretation		
(17) Faith		
(18) Knowledge		
(19) Wisdom		
(20) Discernment		

Reasons Offered for These Gifts All Existing Today

Varying reasons are given by different charismatics, but combining them yields several primary arguments.[9]

The Argument That Jesus Does Not Change

Some charismatics maintain that because Jesus does not change, there has been no change in His gift of tongues to believers. The writer to the Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8); hence, the gifts He gave to the early church are still in operation today.

Response

While Jesus does not change, His plan and purpose for different times does. For example, He no longer requires animal sacrifices; because Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic law, we no longer have to be conscientious about not eating ceremonially unclean meat (cf. Mark 7:19; Acts 10:9–15).

The Argument That the New Testament Nowhere Indicates That Any Gifts Have Passed Away

The contention here is that, for instance, 1 Corinthians 13:8—which says, "whether there are tongues, they will cease" (NKJV)—is referring to a change that will occur after death, not at the end of the apostolic period. Paul also says, "*Now* we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; *then* we shall see face to face. *Now* I know in part; *then* I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (v. 12). The "now and "then" refer to this life and the next life, not to the first century compared to the second century and following.

Response

While it may be granted that this text is not referring to tongues being replaced by the "perfect" (complete) canon of Scripture in the first century;[10] nonetheless, there are other reasons to believe that the gift of tongues no longer exists.[11] This very text (v. 8) indicates that tongues would pass away; this is implied in the phrase "whether there are tongues, they will cease," which is written in the Greek middle voice[12] and can be translated, "They will cease *of their own accord*." In general, they will cease sometime before we get to heaven. In particular, they will last as long as the other revelatory gifts (see v. 12), which all sections of Christendom agree ended with the apostles.

The Argument That Many Persons Today Possess the Gift of Tongues

That many today seem to have the gift of tongues is said to be living proof that tongues still exist. Hence, any interpretation of verses to the contrary must

be wrong, by virtue of being contrary to experience.

Response

Two observations are made on this point.

First, experience should not be used to interpret the Bible; the Bible should be used to interpret our experience.[13]

Second, there are other ways to interpret the current tongues phenomena than to equate it with the unique supernatural gift of speaking in a known language foreign to the speaker (such as in the New Testament—Acts 2:5–10). For instance, it may be explainable as a natural phenomenon or as the misinterpretation of a spiritual experience. Ater all, tongues, for instance, are found among pagan religions, and no orthodox Christian would take this to mean they must have come from God.[14]

The Argument That the New Testament Books Are Written for Believers[15]

The New Testament, in which the gift of tongues is found throughout,[16] was written for believers. There is no indication that this gift ever ceased to exist (cf. Rom. 8:26).

Response

All of the Bible is *for* us today, but not all the Bible was written *to* us. Paul said, “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). However, he is clearly speaking of the Old Testament here, and again, we know that some things in it are no longer binding on believers today. Hence, even though tongues are mentioned in the New Testament, it is possible that tongues are no longer for us. Other gifts from the early New Testament period have passed away, such as apostleship—one had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ in order to be an apostle,[17] and Christ’s post-resurrection appearances were only to the “eyewitnesses” (1 Cor. 15:1–9).

Since apostles existed only in the New Testament (Acts 1:22) and since there were supernatural sign gifts given to apostles (2 Cor. 12:12), it follows that these sign gifts ceased with the apostles in the first century. There is no evidence that anyone since the time of the apostles has had special powers to instantaneously and irrevocably cure incurable diseases, raise the dead, heal a whole city of sick people, and speak in real but unlearned languages.

THE VIEW THAT *NONE* OF THE GIFTS EXISTS TODAY

On the opposite end of the gift spectrum is the position set forth by Gene Getz (b. 1932), who believes that all these gifts listed in the New Testament were temporary and have passed away. His reasoning is as follows:

First, "the number and kinds of gifts varied significantly from church to church in the New Testament World" (*SFC*, 155). Of the different lists, 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 23 names seventeen; Romans 12:6–8 names seven; Ephesians 4:11 names five; and 1 Peter 4:11 names two. "Therefore, as [contemporary] Christians, we must be careful not to total the gift lists in the New Testament and conclude that it is God's will for this total list to be present in every [contemporary] church" (ibid., 156).

Second, "the passages where gifts are referred to most extensively are written to correct the improper use of spiritual gifts" (ibid.). The Corinthians, for example, were using their gifts to build themselves up, not the body. They were also giving attention to the lesser gifts rather than the greater ones.

Third, "nowhere in the Bible does it say we are, as individuals, to search for or to discover our spiritual gifts" (ibid., 158); the body as a whole (the Greek is plural) is told to "desire earnestly the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31 ASV). Since God had only given some to be apostles, etc. (v. 29), God clearly was not commanding each individual to seek the gift of apostleship. Indeed, God sovereignly gave gifts as He willed (v. 11; Heb. 2:3).

Fourth, "the Scriptures emphasize that there is a more excellent way than an emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit" (*SFC*, 160). After telling the Corinthian church to seek the higher gifts, Paul went on to say, "I will show you the most excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31). He urged them to do away with "childish things" (13:11 NKJV). They were to have as their priority *love*, the only thing that would endure after tongues and prophecy ceased.

Fifth, "when local church leaders were to be appointed, Paul did not instruct Timothy and Titus to look for spiritual gifts: rather, he instructed them to look for spiritual qualifications and maturity. Paul said nothing about selecting these men [elders] on the basis of the spiritual gifts that related to these functions." In short, nowhere does the Bible say that we are "as individuals to search for or try to discover our spiritual gifts before we can function in the body of Christ"

(ibid., 160–62).

Sixth, "body [church] function is not dependent on spiritual gifts, but rather on biblical teaching and a love and concern for one another" (ibid., 162). There is no need for any of these gifts today, argues Getz; they were supernatural gifts needed to found the church, not to sustain it.

In these arguments, no specific response will be given except to note that the cessationist position (below) opposes them.

THE VIEW THAT *SOME* OF THE GIFTS EXIST TODAY (CESSATIONISM)

A third view is that some of the gifts still exist, while others have passed away. Those that have passed away are often called "sign" gifts, since they were supernatural; such were the "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV).

Those who hold this view are called cessationists, since they believe that some gifts given to the early New Testament church have subsequently ceased to exist. The reason given is that such gifts were needed only to establish the church, not to continue it; hence, once they served their foundational purpose, they vanished. As sign gifts, they were outward signs (miracles) of the new message given by revelation to the apostles:

> This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him [the apostles]. *God also testified to it [the message] by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit* distributed according to his will. (Heb. 2:3–4)

Many arguments can be given for the cessation of the supernatural sign gifts; the most important ones include the following.

The Sign Gift of Apostleship Passed Away

Because apostleship no longer exists, at least one of the sign gifts is no longer in operation. Again, the New Testament affirms that to be an apostle one had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ; accordingly, *apostle* in this unique, foundational sense of the twelve apostles and Paul[18] no longer exists, since only persons living in the first part of the first century could have been an eyewitness.

Other Sign Gifts Associated With Apostles Also Passed Away

Paul said there were “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV); these included the gifts of healing, evangelism, and raising the dead (Matt. 10:6), as well as tongues and giving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8, 10, 19). If everyone had these gifts, they would not have been unique to an apostle. As just shown, the gift of apostleship has passed away, and since certain other gifts (such as miracles, healings, and prophecy) were “sign” gifts of an apostle, they also must have passed away with the apostles.

Tongues As an Apostolic Sign Gift Passed Away

Mark says of tongues, “These signs will follow those who believe” (16:17 NKJV), and Paul added, “Tongues, then, are a *sign*, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22).[19] *Only the apostles received and could give these sign gifts*, which is why they were called the “signs of an apostle.” Indeed, only the apostles spoke in tongues at Pentecost,[20] and Stephen, who had the gifts of evangelism and healing, could not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (and, thereby, tongues) except by “the laying on of the apostles’ hands” (Acts 8:18). Likewise, Cornelius and the Gentiles received the gift of tongues only after the apostles came (10:44–46), and the Ephesians received the gift of tongues only “when Paul placed his hands on them [and] the Holy Spirit came on them” (19:6).

Other gifts were given in the same way. Paul told Timothy: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6). Paul told the Romans, whom he had never seen, “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong” (Rom. 1:11).

Unlike the Modern Tongues Phenomena, Apostolic Tongues Were a Real Language[21]

Clearly, at Pentecost, people heard the apostles praying in their languages:

> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because *each one heard them speaking in his own language*. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that *each of us hears them in his own native language*?” (Acts 2:5–8).

Peter said that what had happened to Cornelius (in Acts 10) was the same thing that happened on the Day of Pentecost:

> As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them *as he had come on us at the beginning*. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (11:15–16).

Hence, there is no reason to dispute that the only other passage mentioning tongues in Acts was also the same thing (Acts 19)—a real language the speaker did not know but was supernaturally given by God.[22]

The general phenomena of tongue-speaking today is not a real language but a spiritual gibberish. Linguists have tested it and found that it has no linguistic pattern, such as a real language has. For instance, Dr. Massey, president of a large seminary in Lagos, Nigeria, following research on tribal tongue-speaking, reports the same phenomena among pagan religions; surely God is not giving a miraculous confirmation of paganism.

What is more, many people in North America are taught to speak in these "tongues," being asked to repeat certain letters or words to "prime the pump." One charismatic pastor pondering this was led to search the Scriptures on the matter, and, as a result, he and his church ceased expressing themselves in alleged "tongues" and "prophecies."[23] If the general charismatic phenomena were miraculous, people wouldn't have to be taught to do it, nor, if it is truly of God, would pagan religions also have the same experience. It is reasonable to conclude that today's general tongues phenomena is not a supernatural gift to speak in a foreign language that a speaker has never spoken, such as was done on the Day of Pentecost and in subsequent events (Acts 2; 10; 19).

The Special Gift of Healing As Practiced by the Apostles Has Ceased

The cessation of the apostolic healing gift is clear from several arguments. Even the apostles themselves ceased to practice it in the latter New Testament period, for it is not in the lists from that time,[24] and the apostles had close associates whom they apparently were not able to heal (cf. 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20). Further, the latter New Testament implies that it was a past event, saying by A.D. 68–69 that their message had already been confirmed by miracles (Heb. 2:3–4). No one alive today displays such gifts. Biblical miracles were unique, wrought by power no one now possesses.

First, they involved instantaneous cures. Jesus commanded the invalid to "get up! Pick up your mat and walk" and "*at once* the man was cured" (John 5:8–9).

He touched Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14–15) and immediately "she got up and began to wait on him." Peter, "taking [the man lame from birth] by the right hand, he helped him up, and *instantly* the man's feet and ankles became strong" (Acts 3:7).

Second, they were always successful. When Jesus undertook the task of healing, no illness was too severe, no sickness had done too much damage, no affliction had too tight a grip on a victim. Jesus was *always* successful with all kinds of disease (e.g., Matt. 12:15; Acts 5:16) and even with the raising of the dead (e.g., John 11). This characteristic of the fingerprint of God bears repeating, because the acts of healing incurable organic diseases and of raising those who were physically dead are not easily emulated.

Third, the healings always lasted. In all of Jesus' healings there is not a single account of a relapse. Of course, eventually those healed all physically *died*, as does every human (Rom. 5:12); only the final resurrection will "cure" *that* malady (John 5:5).

Fourth, the miracles always glorified God. God always has a purpose for performing a miracle; He is not arbitrary about what He does. There are two basic reasons for miracles: to manifest God's nature and to confirm His Word. Lazarus was raised in order that the people there "would see the glory of God" (John 11:40). Glory is the outward manifestation of God's inward character (cf. 1:14); glory is manifest excellence.

Moses' miracles in Egypt were "so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers … has appeared to you" (Ex. 4:5). In Acts 2:22 Peter told the multitude that Jesus "was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know." One of the most succinct statements about miracles confirming Jesus' claim to have been sent from God was made by Nicodemus: "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2).

In view of these standards, it is clear that no one alive possesses these kinds of powers to perform, on command, instantaneous cures of incurable sicknesses, with 100 percent success and with no relapses, and resurrecting the dead. The miraculous *gift* of healing has ceased, the temporary gift used to establish the church's foundation. Again, this does not mean the *fact* of miracles has ceased; God can perform a miracle anytime He chooses.

The Gift of Prophetic Foreknowledge Has Passed Away

Those who claim that the New Testament gift of prophecy is still in existence find it difficult to sustain its identity (its identicalness) with the *infallible* predictions made by biblical prophets. The Old Testament insisted that if one gave *a* false prophecy, then he was a false prophet (Deut. 18:22). Those who today attempt specific predictive prophecy sooner or later (usually sooner) make a false prediction. In the Old Testament era, anyone who did this was stoned—the very threat of which placed fear in the hearts of those who would try to be self-initiated prophets.[25]

Arguments for the Fallibility of New Testament Prophecy

In order to counter this (see Grudem, *AMGT*), some have argued that even the gift of prophecy *in the New Testament* was only a gift of fallible prophecy. In other words, they believe that some of a New Testament prophet's utterances could be wrong. In support of this view they offer the following arguments:

(1) Agabus predicted that Paul would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles if he went to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10). That Agabus tried to no avail to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem is taken as proof that his prophecy was wrong.
(2) One prophet could interrupt another (1 Cor. 14:30) when he gave a prophecy. If it were really God speaking, the utterance could not be interrupted.
(3) The audience was to judge the prophecy being given ("weigh carefully what is said," v. 29). Why do this if it was believed to be infallible?
(4) There was no "Thus saith the Lord" with it, such as used by Old Testament prophets.

A Response to the Arguments for the Fallibility of New Testament Prophecy

First, Agabus's prophecy was not false: He predicted that "the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt [Paul] and will hand him over to the Gentiles" (Acts 21:11), and this is literally what happened. Soon thereafter we read that "some Jews … stirred up the whole crowd and seized him." And when "the Roman troops" came, "they stopped beating Paul." Then they relinquished him to the commander, who "came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains" (vv. 27, 31–33). The prophecy was fulfilled as stated in the same chapter.

Second, that prophets could be interrupted does not mean their message was not from God; rather, it reveals that "the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets" (1 Cor. 14:32). Ecstatic utterances were common among pagans at that time, and pagans are what the Corinthians once were. In occult prophecies, the one delivering the utterances was overpowered by the spirit giving the utterance; by contrast Paul is saying that if a revelation is truly from God, then the prophet will remain in conscious control of his mind and will. In short, if it is really of God, it can wait. Paul was saying, Take your turn, for "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (v. 33).

Third, that New Testament believers were told to judge or weigh what was being offered as a prophecy does not imply that an actual prophetic utterance could be a false prophecy, but instead that false prophets could pretend to give true utterances. Jesus warned that "many false prophets will appear and deceive many people" (Matt. 24:11), and John urged Christians not to "believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). The issue wasn't that a true prophet could give a false prophecy, but that there were false prophets.

Fourth, and finally, many Old Testament prophets did not preface with "Thus saith the Lord" or the like; the phrase is not essential. Some prophets before Christ simply said "I saw" [in a vision] or "the Lord showed me" (e.g., cf. Amos 7:1; 8:1). Others just authoritatively spoke without any formula; David did so in the Psalms, yet he also made it clear that the words came from God: "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). Furthermore, when Agabus made his prediction he *did* indicate that it was from God: "The Holy Spirit says …" (Acts 21:11). There is no reason to believe that New Testament prophets exercised their gifts any differently than did Old Testament prophets.

Arguments Showing That the New Testament Gift of Prophecy Is Identical to the Old Testament Gift

There is a lack of any real support for distinguishing the Old Testament gift of prophecy from that in the New. In addition, there are many good arguments in favor of acknowledging New Testament prophecy as an infallible gift.

New Testament Prophets Were in Continuity With Their Old Testament Predecessors

The Old Testament predicted John the Baptist (Mal. 3:5); Jesus declared that John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets (Matt. 11:11), thus placing him in line with the Old Testament seers. John the apostle spoke of "the prophecy of this book" that he wrote (Rev. 22:7 NKJV), and the angel from God that spoke to him placed him among "the prophets," such as the other "servants" God used in the Old Testament (v. 6); John also said of himself, "I am a fellow servant with … the prophets" (v. 9). From John the Baptist to John the apostle, New Testament prophets stood in continuity with Old Testament prophets. Their revelations from God were both authoritative and infallible, for everyone was forbidden to change it in any way (cf. 22:18–19).

New Testament Prophets Were Placed Along With Apostles As the Foundation of the Church

According to Ephesians 2:20, the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." That this is a reference to New Testament prophets is evident from two facts.

For one thing, the order of listing would have been "prophets and apostles" if Paul had been referring to Old Testament prophets (cf. 3:5).

For another, Paul affirms plainly that the Old Testament prophets did not understand "the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets" (ibid.); "the mystery … has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" (Col. 1:26; cf. Rom. 16:25).

So the New Testament prophets, along with the apostles, were the means through which God revealed Himself to the New Testament church. The apostles' revelations were divinely authoritative and infallible (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37); thus, it follows that the New Testament prophets gave equally authoritative and infallible messages. If they did not, then the church is built on a foundation of fallible prophecy (cf. Eph. 2:20). They established it, and, indeed, many of the New Testament books were not written by apostles—such as Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, James, and Jude. If their prophetic utterances are not infallible, then their books are not infallible.[26]

New Testament Prophets Received Revelations From God

Paul describes what a New Testament prophet received as *revelation* from God (1 Cor. 14:29); this is the same word (both from Gk: *apokalupsis*) used in the same book (2:10) to describe his own words from God. Indeed, Paul speaks

of these as “words taught by the Spirit” (v. 13). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13; 1 John 4:6), and the Spirit of truth cannot utter error—“it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18; cf. Titus 1:2). When a New Testament prophet gave a revelation from God, it was just as infallible and without error as a revelation through an Old Testament prophet or a New Testament apostle. God cannot speak fallibly; if it was a revelation from God, it must have been infallible.[27]

New Testament Prophets Gave Predictive Prophecies

Foretelling the future was not unique to Old Testament prophets. For example, the New Testament prophet Agabus “through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world” (Acts 11:28); Luke adds that “this happened during the reign of Claudius.” Again, when Agabus gave his prophecy about Paul, he declared, “The Holy Spirit says” (21:11), so he not only gave predictive prophecies, as Old Testament prophets did, but he also claimed the same divine authority. If the utterances of Old Testament prophets were infallible, then so were those of New Testament prophets (cf. Deut. 18:22).

Prophecy Is Given a High Status on the List of Gifts

In the New Testament gift listing, prophecy is placed alongside apostleship (1 Cor. 12:28–29) and “miraculous powers” (v. 10). Even though both prophecy and tongues were gifts through which God spoke, Paul listed prophecy above tongues (14:18) and urged the church as a whole to desire “especially the gift of prophecy” (v. 1), a gift by which one gives a “revelation” from God (v. 6). That Paul gives this exalted position to the New Testament gift of prophecy is further indication that it is neither fallible nor inferior to the Old Testament gift.

Both Old and New Testament prophecies were means by which the infallible word of God was given to the people of God. In brief, the prophet’s words were God’s words; what the prophet said, God said. As Peter noted, “Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2).[28]

It follows from this that either (1) those who claim the gift of prophecy today are uttering infallible truths on a par with those in the Bible or else (2) the New Testament gift of prophecy does not exist today. The “prophecies” given today are not infallible but are often false; thus, we conclude that the New Testament gift of prophecy no longer exists. What is being called “the gift of prophecy” is really no more than preaching; it is authoritative insofar as it is based on the

Bible but is not inerrant because it comes from fallible human beings.[29]

Abiding Gifts[30]

Those who support the view that certain apostolic sign gifts have passed away usually hold that some gifts still remain. Those involving special revelation and other miracles were only needed in the original confirmation of the apostolic message (Heb. 2:3–4); that is, in laying the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20). Gifts needed for the building of the superstructure, however, have not passed away. Ephesians 4, which illustrates this point, lists four gifts: apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor/teacher.

Apostle

As already mentioned, there are two senses of the word *apostle*.[31] In the sense of the twelve apostles and Paul, who all had the signs of apostleship (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV), the gift has passed away. But in the root sense of the word, as "one sent" (e.g., a missionary), apostles could still exist in the church. Certainly others in the first century, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), Timothy, and Silvanus (1 Thess. 1:1; cf. 2:6) were "apostles" in this more general sense.[32]

Prophet

Likewise, the word *prophet* has two senses: foretelling (which foresees what will happen) and forthtelling (which proclaims the truth already known). According to the cessationist view, the former has passed away, being a special sign gift, while the latter remains. A prophet is also someone who brings God's message to the body of Christ for edification (1 Cor. 14:3–4), and in this sense there can still be prophets in the church today.

Evangelist

While all believers should "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5), the special *gift* of evangelism is given only to some (e.g., see Acts 21:8; cf. 8:4–8, 26–40). Evangelists proclaim the *euangelion* (the gospel); today, they might be called church planters, though evangelism in terms of gospel proclamation certainly has an ongoing role in church growth as well.

Pastor/Teacher

These two, *pastor* and *teacher*,[33] are grammatically connected.[34] That teachers are listed with pastors signifies that *as* pastors, one of their primary roles is feeding the flock of God. (cf. 1 Peter 5:1; Acts 20:28). Paul commanded Timothy,

> Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (2 Tim. 4:2–3)

The risen and ascended Lord gave these gifts to His church in order to

> prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:12–13)

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

There are several views of the role of women in the contemporary church. Even though they differ functionally, it's inarguable that women are equal with men by nature, by redemption, and by spiritual gifts.[35]

Women Are Equal With Men by Creation

Both men and women are created in God's image: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Jesus said,

> Haven't you read … that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one. (Matt. 19:4–6)

Paul reasoned, "As woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God" (1 Cor. 11:12).

Women Are Equal With Men by Redemption

The sexes are also equal because of their redemption (Gal. 3:28). There are no

second-class citizens in God's kingdom; redemptively, all are on the same spiritual level.[36]

Women Are Equally Gifted With Men for Ministry

There are no gender symbols on Scripture's gift listings, such as "gift of teaching (M)" or "gift of helps (F)." *All the gifts are for all the body* (1 Cor. 12:4ff.). Women were told how to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5); Philip had four daughters with the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9); Priscilla (along with her husband, Aquila) taught the eloquent preacher Apollos (18:24–26).

Women Are Functionally Superior to Men in Childbearing

According to Paul, women have a functional superiority in that only women bear children (1 Tim. 2:15). Every man since Adam has come by way of a woman (1 Cor. 11:12). This functional superiority in the bearing and nursing of children is part of woman's created nature.

Women Should Not Usurp Authority Over Men in the Church

Just as a wife is to submit to the headship of her husband, even so the church should submit to the headship of Christ. Speaking of the manifestation of this on the local scene, Paul wrote: "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). Hence, Paul exhorted that "a woman should learn in quietness and full submission" (1 Tim. 2:11);[37] this means that everything must be done "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40 NKJV), according to the pattern God established for the church.

Women Should Not Be Elders

While the *ministry* of women is unlimited—women having the same gifts for ministry that men have—the *authority* of women is limited in the New Testament church. This is not because women are naturally or redemptively inferior, but because they are functionally different; they have a different function in the family, and they have a different function in the church. Again, *different* does not mean inferior; it simply means that God has equipped men and women differently for different roles both in the home and in the church.

As for administrative authority in the church, that God placed it in the hands of the elders[38] is evident from these facts.

First of all, there were no women among the twelve apostles (see Matt. 10:1–4), who were also elders by office (Acts 1:20; cf. 2 John 1), though women played an active role in the ministry of Jesus (cf. Luke 23:49) and the apostles (Rom. 16:1).

In addition, there are to be no women elders (bishops), for "a bishop then must be … the *husband* of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2 NKJV).

Furthermore, elder is a position of authority, and the apostle said, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Tim. 2:12–14). It is noteworthy that the reasons given for male church leadership are not cultural but (1) the order of creation and (2) the nature of the Fall.

Women Deaconesses?

The New Testament says nothing about women deacons, although the Greek word for *deacon* (*diakonon*, which means "servant") was used of Phoebe, a woman Paul used in the ministry (Rom. 16:1). Some believe that he speaks of deaconesses when he says that "in the same way, their wives[39] are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything" (1 Tim. 3:11). However, this seems more likely to refer to deacons' *wives*, as often translated;[40] Paul goes on to say that "a deacon must be the *husband* of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well" (v. 12). Though there is no evidence that women were part of any board or group of deacons,[41] again, women had a significant ministry in the life of Christ and of the apostles (cf. Luke 8:3; Rom. 16:1, 7).[42] Nonetheless, women can be servants of Christ in full exercise of all the gifts in existence.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE CESSATIONIST VIEW

A number of objections have been leveled against the view that not all gifts listed in the New Testament still exist today. Among these the following are

worthy of consideration.

Objection One: Based on the Fact That Healings Still Occur

Some appeal to the present occurrence of miraculous healings as proof that the gift of healing is still in existence. However, this misses the point.

First, cessationists do not deny the *fact* of healings, but only that the special *gift* of healing, such as the apostles had, still exists. That God can and does perform healings anytime He wishes is not the point. The question is whether any human being today still possesses the kind of miraculous healing power the apostles had.[43]

Second, not all healings that occur today are supernatural like those of the apostles. Some are psychosomatic. Others are providential acts of God employing the natural curative powers of the body. Some alleged healings are of demonic origin (Rev. 16:14). Others are merely magical tricks and not healings at all. All that glitters is not gold, and all that is unusual is not supernatural (see Geisler, *SW*); all of these fall short of being a supernatural event such as Jesus and the apostles accomplished.[44]

Objection Two: Based on Paul's Desire That All Should Seek Tongues

Some charismatics have used Paul's wish that everyone speak in tongues as proof that the gift exists today. "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified" (1 Cor. 14:5).

No such conclusion follows from this verse for many reasons.

First, even if it were a fulfillable wish for *his* day, it does not mean the gift is still in existence today.

Second, not all wishes are fulfillable. Paul also said he wished to go to hell for his Jewish brethren so they could be saved (Rom. 9:3), but this is impossible. Likewise, since God gave the gift of tongues only to some in the early church, Paul may have been expressing his unfulfillable desire that all have the same gifts he had. That only some were given the gift is clear from the text, which demands a negative answer, as indicated in the brackets: "Are all apostles? [No] Are all prophets? [No] Are all teachers? [No] Are all workers of miracles? [No] Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? [No]"

(1 Cor. 12:29–30).

Third, even if Paul expressed a fulfillable desire for all to speak in tongues at that time, it does not follow that this was meant for believers later in the church age. Since the gift of apostleship was not intended for later, it makes no sense that the sign gifts of an apostle would be for the entire church age either (Acts 1:22).

Objection Three: Based on Paul's Command That All Seek the Gifts

"Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31 KJV). Some charismatics use this to argue that believers should speak in tongues today.

This conclusion also does not follow.

First, even if this were meant for today, tongues should not be sought by all for two reasons: (1) They were told to seek the "best gifts," but Paul said tongues were inferior to prophecy (1 Cor. 12:31 NKJV; 14:26–39), and tongues were listed last (v. 30); (2) only some were given the gift of tongues (ibid.), so it would have been futile for all to seek a gift God had not given to all.

Second, the command to seek the best gifts was to the congregation as a whole, not to each individual. The "you" is plural in Greek. Obviously, the gift of apostleship was higher, but all were not to seek it; only resurrection eyewitnesses qualified (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1).

Third, here again, this begs the question, since it assumes that tongues are for today.

Objection Four: Based on the Assumption That These Were "Private Prayer Tongues"

Some have argued that 1 Corinthians is speaking about private tongues, not public tongues as on the Day of Pentecost. Hence, they were not a real language (like in Acts 2) and, as such, cannot be criticized for not measuring up to those standards, nor forbidden for all to utilize at a service.

Several arguments have been offered to support this assumption: (1) They were called "tongues of angels," which are unknown; (2) they were unintelligible (1 Cor. 14:9–11); (3) 1 Corinthians is much later than the book of Acts and is speaking of another kind of tongues, a private unknown tongue that serves as a believer's special prayer language.

In response, several facts stand out.

First, Paul's letter was not private but to the whole church at Corinth, and the rules he set down were binding on the local church.

Second, 1 Corinthians was not later than Acts. It was written by about A.D. 55–56 and Acts was not completed until about A.D. 62. As late as Acts 19, the kind of tongues that occurred in Acts 2 and 10 at the hands of the apostles was still occurring.

Third, reference to tongues in the latter part of Acts is the same as that which occurred at Pentecost, and they were a real language. Peter declared of the Cornelius event (Acts 10) that it was the same as Acts 2: "As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, *as on us at the beginning*" (11:15 KJV). The event at the beginning was clearly a known language, not a private prayer tongue:

> When this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak *in his own language*.… Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak *in our tongues* the wonderful works of God. (2:6, 9–11 KJV)

This is also supported by many other arguments.[45]

Fourth, nowhere does Scripture make a distinction between a later private unintelligible tongue and an earlier public one involving real language.

Fifth, all the rules set down for the exercise of tongues in the early church implied that the real gift of tongues was a real language. Most basic is that it had to be translatable (interpretable). Only a real language, which alone has intelligible linguistic patterns, is translatable.

Sixth, as to the language of angels, every instance of an angel speaking involves a real, understandable language (cf. Gen. 18; Jude 13; Luke 1). Besides, the phrase is probably a figure of speech meaning "eloquent."

Seventh, the biblical gift of tongues was a supernatural gift, but there is nothing miraculous about speaking in an unintelligible gibberish that one can be taught to do by repeating certain phrases over and over.

Eighth, again, it has been verified by research among pagans and primitive religions that tongue-speaking of the same unintelligible pattern is part of their experience. Since their religion is demonically inspired (1 Tim. 4:1; 1 Cor. 10:20), clearly this kind of tongue-speaking cannot be of God.

Ninth, and finally, while not all private prayer "tongues" need be demonic, neither need they be divine. Some can easily be a sincere but misguided attempt

to identify a spiritual experience of trying to utter the unutterable that results in the unintelligible. On this experience one may easily have been (mis)taught to place the label of the biblical gift of tongues (see Babcox, *SCR*).

THE PREEMINENT MINISTRY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Regardless of how many gifts exist in the church today, even when all the gifts did exist, Paul made it indisputable that edification and love were to take precedence over ecstatic gifts.

The Priority of Prophecy Over Tongues

The local church's primary internal purpose is edification, or the building up of believers:

> To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it … *to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and *become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. (Eph. 4:7, 12–13)

With this in mind, speaking words of edification in a known language was to take precedence over all speaking in an unknown tongue. Paul said clearly: "In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor. 14:19). He added, "Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy" (v. 39 NKJV).

> Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. (vv. 3–4)

The Priority of Love Over All Things

Sandwiched between two chapters on ministry and the spiritual gifts is the great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, which Paul introduces with these words: "I will show you the most excellent way.… Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away" (12:31; 13:8). While it is debated just when tongues would expire, it is not debatable that they would cease and that

love is superior. In short, *"the fruit of the Spirit," which is, first of all, love (Gal. 5:22), is more important for ministry than spiritual gifts*. "Love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1); it is the most edifying of all Christian graces. Indeed, in contrast to faith and hope, love is the only virtue that will last forever. "*Now* these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (13:13). Even if there were no special gifts of the Spirit in existence today, Christian love exercised in the body of Christ could build it up for maturity.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR MINISTRY GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

The Early Fathers

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

"The apostle most assuredly foretold that there were to be "spiritual gifts" in the church. Now, can you refuse to believe this, even if indubitable evidence on every point is forthcoming for your conviction?" (*TS*, 9).

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)

> The prophets are perfect in prophecy, the righteous in righteousness, and the martyrs in confession, and others in preaching, not that they are not sharers in the common virtues, but are proficient in those to which they are appointed. For what man in his senses would say that a prophet was not righteous? For what? did not righteous men like Abraham prophesy? … "But each has his own proper gift of God"—one in one way, another in another. But the apostles were perfected in all. (*S*, 21)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> What shall I more say? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world, has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and which she exerts day by day for the benefit of the Gentiles. (*AH*, 2.32.4)
>
> After our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things [sent] from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do all equally and individually possess the Gospel of God. Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. (ibid., 3.1.1)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

I shall refer not only to His miracles, but, as is proper, to those also of the apostles of Jesus. For they could not without the help of miracles and wonders have prevailed on those who heard their new doctrines and new teachings to abandon their national usages, and to accept their instructions at the danger to themselves even of death. And there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. They expel evil spirits, and perform many cures, and foresee certain events, according to the will of the Logos.…

Many have been converted to Christianity as if against their will, some sort of spirit having suddenly transformed their minds from a hatred of the doctrine to a readiness to die in its defense, and having appeared to them either in a waking vision or a dream of the night. (*AC*, 46)

The Medieval Fathers

John Chrysostom (347–407)

"He set the apostles first who had all the gifts in themselves" (*EPC*, 1.32.2).

Now by saying this, he gently hinted that they were the cause of their own receiving the lesser gifts, and had it in their power, if they would, to receive the greater. For when he saith, "desire earnestly," he demands from them all diligence and desire for spiritual things.… As if he said, it is not one, or two, or three gifts that I point out to you, but one way which leadeth to all these: and not merely a way, but both "a more excellent way" and one that is open in common to all. For not as the gifts are vouchsafed, to some these, to others those, but not all to all; so also in this case: but it is an universal gift. Wherefore also he invites all to it. "Desire earnestly," saith he, "the better gifts and yet show I unto you a more excellent way;" meaning love towards our neighbor. (ibid., 32.5)

Ambrose (339–397)

He gave all gifts to his disciples, of whom he said: "in My name they shalt cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall do well." So, then, he gave them all things, but there is no power of man exercised in these things, in which the grace of the divine gift operates. (*TBCR*, 1.8.35)

Augustine (354–430)

What tongue can tell, or what imagination can conceive, the reward He will bestow at the last, when we consider that for our comfort in this earthly journey He has given us so freely of His Spirit, that in the adversities of this life we may retain our confidence in, and love for, Him whom as yet we see not; and that He has also given to each gifts suitable for the building up of His Church, that we may do what He points out as right to be done, not only without a murmur, but even with delight? (*OCD*, 1.15)

That the one incredibility of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ may be believed, we accumulate the testimonies of countless incredible miracles, but even so we do not bend the frightful obstinacy of these skeptics. But if they do not believe that these miracles were wrought by Christ's apostles to gain credence to their preaching of his resurrection and ascension, this one grand miracle suffices for us, that the whole world has believed without any miracles. (*CG*, 22.5)

Would the human mind have refused to listen to or believe in the resurrection of Christ's body and its ascension into heaven, and have scouted it as an impossibility, had not the divinity of the truth itself,

or the truth of the divinity, and corroborating miraculous signs, proved that it could happen and had happened? … For the predictions of the prophets that had preceded the events were read, they were corroborated by powerful signs, and the truth was seen to be not contradictory to reason, but only different from customary ideas, so that at length the world embraced the faith it had furiously persecuted. (ibid., 22.7)

Men spoke in tongues which they did not know, through the Holy Spirit coming upon them … when it was needful that his coming should be made plain by visible signs, in order to show that the whole world, and all nations constituted with different tongues, should believe in Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit, to fulfill that which is sung in the psalm, "there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard; their sound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (*OT*, 4.20).

Reformation Teachers

John Calvin (1509–1564)

[In] the Epistle to the Romans, and the first Epistle to the Corinthians, he [Paul] enumerates other offices, as powers, gifts of healing, interpretation, government, care of the poor (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28). As to those which were temporary, I say nothing for it is not worthwhile to dwell upon them. But there are two of perpetual duration—government and care of the poor" (*ICR*, 4.3.8).

Christ was the giver of the Holy Spirit, and would declare this virtue by a visible miracle on the day on which he would send the Holy Spirit on the apostles, under the form of tongues of fire. (ibid., 4.15.8)

It pleased the Lord that those visible and admirable gifts of the Holy Spirit, which he then poured out upon his people, should be administered and distributed by his apostles by the laying on of hands.… Did this ministry, which the apostles then performed, still remain in the church, it would also behoove us to observe the laying on of hands: but since that gift has ceased to be conferred, to what end is the laying on of hands?

Assuredly the Holy Spirit is still present with the people of God; without his guidance and direction the church of God cannot subsist.… But those miraculous powers and manifest operations, which were distributed by the laying on of hands, have ceased. They were only for a time. For it was right that the new preaching of the gospel, the new kingdom of Christ, should be signalized and magnified by unwonted and unheard-of miracles. When the Lord ceased from these, he did not forthwith abandon his church, but intimated that the magnificence of his kingdom, and the dignity of his word, had been sufficiently manifested. (ibid., 4.19.6)

In the same way, also, the apostles laid their hands, agreeably to that time at which it pleased the Lord that the visible gifts of the Spirit should be dispensed in answer to their prayers; not that posterity might, as those apes do, mimic the empty and useless sign without the reality.… This they have no resemblance to the apostles, except it be in manifesting some absurd false zeal. (ibid., 4.19.7)

The gift of healing disappeared with the other miraculous powers which the Lord was pleased to give for a time, that it might render the new preaching of the gospel forever wonderful. Therefore, even were we to grant that anointing was a sacrament of those powers which were then administered by the hands of the apostles, it pertains not to us, to whom no such powers have been committed. (ibid., 4.19.18)

Post-Reformation Theologians

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

> Christianity being established through so great a part of the known world by miracles, it was after that more easily continued by tradition; and by means of these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, the apostles and others were enabled to write the New Testament, to be an infallible and perpetual rule of faith and manners to the church. And these miracles recorded in those writings are a standing proof of the truth of Christianity to all ages. (*WJE*, 4.3.4)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

"They had received 'the powers of the world to come,' not miraculous gifts, which are denied us in these days, but all those powers with which the Holy Ghost endows a Christian" (*SSC*, 1.75.1.1).

> Perhaps there shall be no miraculous gifts—for they will not be required; but yet there shall be such a miraculous amount of holiness, such an extraordinary fervor of prayer, such a real communion with God, and so much vital religion, and such a spread of the doctrines of the cross, that everyone will see that verily the Spirit is poured out like water, and the rains are descending from above. For that let us pray; let us continually labor for it, and seek it of God. (ibid., 1.30.3.2)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

> Whether these gifts of the Holy Ghost were designed to remain in the Church throughout all ages, and whether or not they will be restored at the nearer approach of the "restitution of all things," are questions which it is not needful to decide. But it is needful to observe this, that, even in the infancy of the church, God divided them with a sparing hand. Were all even then prophets? Were all workers of miracles? Had all the gifts of healing? Did all speak with tongues? No, in no wise. Perhaps not one in a thousand. Probably none but the teachers in the church, and only some of them (1 Cor. 12:28–30). It was, therefore, for a more excellent purpose than this, that "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (*WJW*, 5.4.3).

CONCLUSION

The internal purpose of the local church is edification so that its members can do the work of the ministry; evangelism is also a prime mission. Not all spiritual gifts given to the early (first-century) church were permanent. Some, like the "signs of an apostle" (including tongues), were initially foundational but then passed away as the church was established on apostolic doctrine and replaced with the apostolic writings. Nonetheless, as Paul indicated, the gift(s) of pastor and teacher still exist today and are to be used for "edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12–13 NKJV).

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH TO THE STATE

Though there are many perspectives on the relationship of church and state, they all can be placed broadly in three categories. Two views represent opposite poles: (1) state over church and (2) church over state; the third attempts to promote (3) a cooperation between church and state. Three dominant models within these categories can be called, respectively, *secularism*, *reconstructionism*, and *Jeffersonianism*. Each will be examined and evaluated in the light of the biblical data.

SECULARISM: STATE OVER CHURCH

Of secularism's various forms, the most widespread in modern times has been Marxism, as manifested in the old Soviet Union and China; even though leadership would often claim a separation of church and state, in practice it is domination of church by state. On the North American scene, in the name of separating church and state, there has been a secularization of the state and an increasing isolation of the church from the state. In contrast to reconstructionism, in which the church imposes religion on the state, in secularism the state ends up imposing irreligion on the state.

The Moral Basis for Secularism

In secularism the moral basis for government is reduced to situationalism, a secular humanist perspective that eschews all God-given moral absolutes. This view has been expressed in the *Humanist Manifestos I and II*; John Dewey (1859–1952) and other influential Americans signed the first in 1933, declaring: "The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human value" (Kurtz, *HM*, 8). Humanists later added, "Moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction" (ibid., 2.3.17).

One of the signatories of *Humanist Manifesto II* was Joseph Fletcher (1905–1991), author of *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*, in which he argued that "only the end justifies the means: nothing else" (120). Fletcher maintained that all "decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively" (ibid., 134); he rejected all content-based ethical norms and insisted that we should unilaterally avoid absolutes (ibid., 43–44). In the name of this moral relativism, *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973) went on to approve of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, and total sexual license for consenting adults (Kurtz, *HM*, 18–19).

According to this system of thought, there is no objective moral basis for government. Unlike Jeffersonianism, secularism has no God-given moral basis for civil rights; inalienable rights from the Creator are shed for the alienable rights of the creature. With secularism, rather than being *based* in moral law, civil law *replaces* moral law: What is morally right is what the constantly changing body politic decides is right, wherever it may be on the political spectrum—from monarchy to anarchy.[1]

The Moral Dilemmas of Secularism

There are numerous moral problems with the secularist viewpoint. Some of the more significant issues are noted here in contrast to the natural-law view of early America.

Secularism Is Contrary to Its Own Human Inclinations

Which of the *Manifesto* signatories was naturally inclined to believe that his mother should have killed him in her womb? Even the pagan Hippocratic Oath pledges: "I will neither give a deadly drug to anyone if asked for it, nor will I

make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy." That both our natural inclination *and* the great moral creeds are against taking an innocent life is ample testimony that the natural law is understood by all people.[2]

Seneca (c. second century), whose stoic philosophy allowed for abortion,[3] nevertheless lauded his mother for not aborting him (as cited by Noonan, *MALHP*, 7n). However, because the natural law[4] teaches that we should do to others what we would have them do to us, the speculative rationalizations of the stoics were contrary to their own moral inclinations. The natural law is clear, but it must be read from our actual nature rather than from our theoretical notions.

Secularism Is Self-Defeating

Furthermore, the denial of any objective moral law as a proper basis of government is self-defeating. This is painfully evident in Joseph Fletcher's attempt to deny all moral absolutes; in his futile quest for moral relativism he insists that we should never use the word *never* … a statement that itself fails to avoid the word *never* (*SENM*, 43–44). In addition, the claim that we should always avoid the word *always* is equally self-destructive, and to insist that all is relative is tantamount to claiming that one is absolutely sure there are no absolutes. In each case the moral relativist defeats his own argument—wielding his sword to behead the monster of absolutism, he decapitates himself on the backswing.

There *must* be some natural law, or else moral judgments would not be possible.[5] C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) insightfully made this point in his *Abolition of Man*:

> This thing which I have called for convenience the Tao, and which others may call Natural Law … is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgments.… If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory. There never has been, and never will be, a radically new judgment of value in the history of the world. (56)

Professor Allan Bloom (b. 1930) makes a similar case for an absolute moral law in *The Closing of the American Mind*, chiding the view that "there are no absolutes; freedom is absolute.… Of course the result is that … the argument justifying freedom disappears" (*CAM*, 28). As to the oft-repeated claim that the study of different cultures proves all values to be relative:

> All to the contrary, that is a philosophical premise that we now bring to our study of them.

> [Furthermore,] this premise is unproven and dogmatically asserted for what are largely political reasons. History and culture are interpreted in the light of it, and they are said to prove the premise.

Different opinions on values does not prove that value is relative: "To say it does so prove is as absurd as to say that the diversity of points of view expressed in a college bull session proves there is no truth" (ibid., 39). There *are* absolute values; absolute values are undeniable.

Secularism Is a Destructive "End Justifies Any Means" Ethic

By their own confession, secularists' situationalism embraces an "end justifies the means" moral approach, destructive on both a private and a public level. For example, this is particularly applicable in a capitalistic context, in which the profit motive dominates: Capitalism based on an antinomian ethic[6] is destructive to society, feeding on greed, producing poverty, and inciting revolution and war. Universal moral restraints, such as the natural law, are necessary to keep government in check; otherwise, money (rather than morality) becomes the end—moral principles are sacrificed for monetary profit.

Secularism Provides No Secure Basis for Human Rights

Any attempt to ground human rights in human choice inevitably generates human wrongs. Note again these claims of secular humanists:

> The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human value.… Values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. (Kurtz, *HM*, 8, 17)

Herein is no sufficient basis for human rights, for if, as Fletcher argued, "Only the end justifies the means: nothing else," then all "decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively" (*SENM*, 120, 134). Thus, there is no sanctity of human life based on purely human law—at least so-called "humanistic" law. Other forms of strictly man-based government—whether of the Nazi (fascist) right or of the Marxist (communist) left—have scarcely fared better, accounting for the slaughter of multimillions of human lives.

Secularism Provides No Real Basis for International Law

Since the law of the land is the final authority—since, allegedly, there is no moral law above and beyond a nation to judge its policies and actions—secularism offers no objective basis either for deciding issues between nations or

for making moral judgments about a nation (or state). As such, tyranny, genocide, and other violations of human rights are uncondemnable, lacking any transcendent, overarching standard by which to evaluate them.

It is no accident that the "Father of International Law," Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), established his view on the foundation of natural law, for only on this basis can one find secure grounding for moral judgments between nations.

RECONSTRUCTIONISM: CHURCH OVER STATE

On the other end of the spectrum in the church/state debate is *reconstructionism*, also known as *theocracy*.[7] The Old Testament nation of Israel, for instance, was a true theocracy.[8] In direct opposition to secularism, theocratic reconstructionism affirms the church over the state; reconstructionists want to reconstruct civil government in a theocratic model.

The Mosaic Theocracy

"Theocracy," which comes from two Greek words (*theos*, "God," and *arché*, "rule of"), is a form of government where God is the direct authority; He, as the Supreme Being, directly rules over a nation (or state). Through Moses, God proposed theocracy to Israel, whom He had just redeemed from Egypt, and they accepted:

> "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." …
>
> The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said" (Ex. 19:5–6, 8).

The Mosaic theocracy was a conditional and voluntary covenant: "*If* you obey me fully and keep my covenant." Israel's affirmation made them God's willing subject, a classic case of church over state. Indeed, it was not simply God *over* government: God *was* the government. This is why, when Israel later said to Samuel, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have" (1 Sam. 8:5), God responded, "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (v. 7).

Theocratically, as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," Israel was

unique; as the psalmist said, “He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. *He has done this for no other nation*; they do not know his laws” (Ps. 147:19–20).

In this theocracy God not only ruled directly but also directly revealed His will. God used instruments like Moses through whom He spoke: “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Ex. 33:11). Likewise, God would use His theocratic nation as a special agent of His direct rule; just as He commanded the sun and moon to obey him (cf. Josh. 10) and plagues to come from His hand (cf. 2 Sam. 24), even so He used Israel to bring judgment on the Canaanites (cf. Josh. 6:21). Although some have tried, no other nation has had this theocratic arrangement regarding the execution of God’s judgment on the wicked (cf. Lev. 18).

Medieval Roman Catholicism’s Theocratic Issues

While Roman Catholicism has adapted to many different forms of government, during the Middle Ages, following Emperor Constantine (in 313), there was a decided tip in the direction of the union of church and state; in effect, Christianity became the favored state religion. And under Charlemagne (d. 814) the “Holy Roman Empire” was developed and expanded. Hence, while state government retained its monarchial form, the church became a dominant and official influence on the state.

As the old Roman empire was dying, Augustine’s *City of God* offered a system whereby the church provided for the state a means by which the City of God could establish a foundation for the City of Man. This proved to be fateful for religious freedom, as became evident in the later Augustine’s view on coercing heretics against their will to submit to the church.[9] The long history of church/state woes in the wake of this view, from that time through the Spanish Inquisition and beyond, is well documented and well known.

Islamic Theocracies

Some radical forms of Islam have set up theocratic states; contemporary Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini (b. 1939) is one example. In this form of theocracy the state is dominated by a religious leader (or ruling religious faction); while there is a semblance of civil government, the religious hierarchy is undeniably dominant. The rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan was also a kind

of theocracy.

These kinds of theocracy are part of Shiite Muslim belief, which imposes radical *shari'a* (Qur'anic law) upon society; Sunni Muslims often support a more detached relationship between religious and civil government. The cruelty, inhumanity, and terrorism generated by extremist Muslim beliefs (see Geisler and Saleeb, *AI*, appendix 5) were vividly manifest in the attacks on the United States in September 2001.

Reformational State Churches: John Calvin and the Puritans

John Calvin did for Reformed Protestantism what Constantine did for Catholicism: He established a state church (in Geneva, Switzerland), though this establishment, a "rule of God," was not as drawn-out and intense. Calvin did rule with an iron hand, having the heretic Michael Servetus (1511–1553) burned at the stake for his divergent religious beliefs.

The Puritans in the early American Colonies followed Calvin's example. For instance, they persecuted Roger Williams (c. 1603–1683), founder of the American Baptists, and ran him out of Massachusetts into Rhode Island, which became a free state—that is, one without a state religion (which many colonies had).

The Names of the Movement

The church-over-state movement goes by many names, each depicting a different aspect of it. The most important variety in contemporary North America, flowing from the writings of R. J. Rushdoony (1916–2001), is *reconstructionism*,[10] so-called because it endeavors to reconstruct society on a Reformed Christian basis. The movement is also dubbed *Neo-Puritanism*, since it is a new form of Puritanism, and is also known as *dominion theology*, due to its goal of taking dominion over the world for Christ. In some circles, especially charismatic ones, reconstructionism is labeled *kingdom-now theology*, because its adherents maintain that they are, literally, setting up the kingdom now. Governmentally, the name of this view is *theonomy*, meaning "law of God,"[11] since it holds that governments should be subject to the Old Testament law of God.[12]

A more moderate form of the church-over-state paradigm could be called *biblionomy*,[13] proponents of which include D. James Kennedy (b. 1930), Jay

Grimstead (b. 1934), and David Barton (b. 1954). Many other Christian social-action groups, being influenced by one or more theonomist views, have (wittingly or unwittingly) adopted a biblionomist perspective; in their zeal to counteract the increased secularism of our society, they have backed into a kind of biblionomy by calling for a return to our country's Christian roots. America's Christian roots, however, were most prominently demonstrated in the Puritans, who were theonomists, who allowed no true religious freedom in their Massachusetts Colony, and who persecuted those with different beliefs.

The Roots of the Movement

Theonomists see their roots in the Old Testament but deny that their view entails a theocracy. Their more recent foundations in nationally binding divine law, as briefly discussed above, are in John Calvin (sixteenth century), the Puritans (seventeenth century), and in R. J. Rushdoony (twentieth century), an Armenian-American who penned the standard of the theonomist movement: *Institutes of Biblical Law*.[14]

The Goals of the Movement

Christian theonomists plan to reconstruct society upon Christian essentials, desiring to live according to God's law as revealed in the Old Testament. Theonomists aim to Christianize both America and the world ("dominion theology"); they want to set up the millennial kingdom on earth (kingdom-now theology), at the end of which they believe Christ will return. Eschatologically, then, theonomists are postmillennialists.[15]

The Leaders of the Movement

Leaders of the theonomist movement have included R. J. Rushdoony, who headed the Chalcedon Foundation; Gary North (b. 1931), author of *Dominion Covenant*, head of the Institute for Christian Economics and Geneva Ministries; the late Greg Bahnsen (1948–1995), who penned *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*; David Chilton (1951–1997), author of *Paradise Restored*; and Gary DeMar (b. 1952), director of the Institute for Christian Government and author of *God and Government*. Others include Rus Walton (d. 1999), founder of the Plymouth Rock Foundation and author of *One Nation Under God*; Herb Titus (b. 1937),

who wrote *America's Heritage: Constitutional Liberty*; and, although he disavows being a theonomist, Jay Grimstead, biblionomist director of the Coalition on Revival;[16] David Barton fits into this same category.[17] Many charismatics[18] and others[19] have been significantly influenced by theonomists and biblionomists and/or shown affinities with the overall movement.[20]

Basic Beliefs of Theonomists and Biblionomists

Theonomy emerged out of Reformed theology, which embraces five-point Calvinism.[21] Its founders believe that the Old Testament law[22] applies today, including capital punishment for, among other offenses, fornication, blasphemy, kidnapping, and disobedience (in children), though some followers have backed off these severe punishments. Again, Reformed reconstructionists are postmillennial in their eschatology, believing that Christ's return *after* the millennium[23] will be set up by the advance of Christianity in the world. They affirm that Jesus (in Matt. 28:18–20)[24] gave a cultural mandate to Christianize the world.

Biblionomy, the more moderate version of the state-over-church movement, has a wider theological orientation, including Calvinists, Arminians, charismatics, and others. Specifically, biblionomy is the belief that, while all Old Testament punishments may not apply today, nonetheless, God's biblical law (His special revelation in Scripture[25]) is His divinely prescribed mandate for all civil governments to follow. Biblionomy has some popular appeal because it has removed one of theonomy's more repugnant aspects, the insistence that there are over twenty sins for which capital punishment should be administered (see Bahnsen, *TCE*). Also, eschatologically, biblionomists are not limited to postmillennialism.

The influence of theonomists and biblionomists far outweighs their numbers. While they do not sponsor a major American seminary, they have a widespread impact through their writings by way of organizations like the Coalition on Revival (COR), through conferences (often with charismatics), and by infiltrating non-reconstructionist social activist groups.

Critical Errors of Theonomists and Biblionomists

There are many errors embraced by leaders of the reconstructionist

movement; we'll now briefly examine some of the more basic problems. Since they are treated elsewhere, we will here pass over the errors of allegorism, or spiritualizing away prophecies made to Israel,[26] as well as the postmillennial optimism that we can Christianize the world,[27] and instead focus on fallacies relating to law and government.

Legalism

Fundamental to Reformed theonomists is their error of *legalism*, the belief that we are sanctified by law-keeping—that adhering to Old Testament law is a means of our sanctification (salvation from sin's power in the present).[28]

First, this error is precisely why Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians, in which he said:

> I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? *After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort [in keeping the law]*? (3:2–3)

Second, again, Scripture makes it very clear that we are *not* under the Mosaic Law. Only Israel was given the law (Ex. 19:1–8), as the psalmist affirmed (147:19–20; cf. Deut. 4:32–34).

Third, Paul declared that Gentiles "do not have the law [of Moses]"but rather have the natural law "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:14–15). He added later, "You [believers in Christ] are not under law, but under grace" (6:14).

Fourth, while Jesus did not do away with the law of Moses by *destroying* it (Matt. 5:17–18), He did do away with it by *fulfilling* it. As Paul proclaimed, "*Christ is the end of the law* so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4).

Fifth, the apostle made it clear that Christians are not even under the Ten Commandments given to Moses:

> If the ministry that brought death, which was *engraved in letters on stone*, came with glory … will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? … And if what was *fading away* came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! … Only in Christ is it *taken away*. (2 Cor. 3:7–8, 11, 14)

Sixth, Paul couldn't be more straightforward: "Now that faith has come, *we are no longer under the supervision of the law*" (Gal. 3:25). The purpose of the law was not to save or sanctify but to condemn; the gospel of Jesus Christ brings salvation.

Seventh, the writer of Hebrews declared that "when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.… The former regulation is

set aside because it was weak and useless" (7:12, 18).

Eighth, the whole purpose of the consultation with the apostles in Acts 15 was to decide whether "it is necessary to circumcise them [Gentile converts to Christianity], and to command them to *keep the law of Moses*" (v. 5 NKJV).[29] The answer from the apostles was emphatic and terse: "We gave no such commandment" (v. 24 NKJV).

Ninth, and finally, nowhere does the Old Testament condemn non-Jews for not keeping the Mosaic Law. Of course, like any person in another country, non-Jews were bound by the local Jewish laws while living there (cf. Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:15–16), but *never in all the moral condemnations of pagan countries were they ever judged by God for not keeping the Sabbath, for not being circumcised, or for not offering sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple*.[30]

Reconstructionism

Another serious error of theonomists (and of many biblionomists) is that of theological reconstructionism itself. *Theological reconstructionism* is defined here as *the belief that God has ordained that every government in the world impose the moral law of God, as expressed in the Bible, as the law of the land*. This is not to be confused with the question of whether civil government should encourage morality by legislating (and enforcing its legislation) on the basis of universal moral principles, some of which, for instance, are found in the Ten Commandments.[31] The issue here is whether the Bible teaches theonomy, namely, that every government is obligated to prescribe, as the law of the land, that everyone live by Mosaic Law and enact capital punishment for noncapital crimes (like adultery, homosexuality, kidnapping, blasphemy, idolatry, etc.).

First, God never gave biblical law to the Gentiles as a divine basis for civil law. In fact, as we have seen, God never gave them the law of Moses as the moral standard by which they should live (see Ps. 147:19–20).

Second, theonomy is an unworkable ethical basis in a religiously pluralistic society. The reason for this is simple: There is no universal agreement on whose revelation should be the basis of civil law. Should it be the Bible, the Qur'an, the Analects, the Gita, the Vedas, the Book of Mormon? …

Third, theonomy politicizes the church's mission. It confuses the gospel mandate (Matt. 28:18–20) with the Creation mandate (Gen. 1:28). It confuses Christian government with moral government (1 Tim. 2:1–4). Theologically stated, theonomy confuses present spiritual kingdom (cf. Matt. 13) with future political kingdom (cf. Rev. 20).[32]

Fourth, and finally, theonomy stresses God's special revelation to the neglect

of His general revelation (Rom. 1:19–20; 2:12–14), tending to downplay or even deny in practice the value of general revelation by claiming that it's unclear, being obscured by the effects of sin.[33] By contrast, the Word (the special revelation) declares that the general revelation is clearly seen (1:20), is written on the hearts of all unbelievers (2:15), is the grounds for their being without excuse (1:20), and is sufficient for them to eternally perish (2:12).[34]

JEFFERSONIANISM: CHURCH *AND* STATE (THE NATURAL-LAW VIEW)

There are many different attempts to preserve a system in which neither state dominates over church (as in secularism) nor church presides over state (as in theocracy and theonomy [reconstructionism]). While allowing freedom for other religions, some countries in this category have an official but nominal state religion (as in Britain) and others do not (as in Canada). Some systems allow the state (or province) to have an established religion (such as post-Revolution America), while others allow neither a national religion nor state-established religions (such as post-1947 America). The early American system allows for a fruitful Jeffersonianism in contrast with secularism and reconstructionism.

Government Is Based in Natural Law

Jeffersonianism, named for adherent Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826, third president of the United States), attempts to avoid the extremes of both secularism and reconstructionism. Against secularism, Jeffersonianism denies that there is no divinely given moral (natural) law as a basis for government; against reconstructionism, Jeffersonianism denies that any special revelation from God is the divinely prescribed basis for civil government. It also denies that any national church should be the established religion of the land, thus allowing religious freedom of belief for all groups. The following chart summarizes the difference between the three views:

Religion (Church) and Government (State): Three Views

	Secularism	Jeffersonianism	Reconstructionism
Nature of	Secular		Religious

State	Gov't	Just Gov't	Gov't
Church/State	Separation	Cooperation	Union
Nature of religious freedom	Freedom from all religions	Freedom for all religions	Freedom for a particular religion
Extent of religious freedom	For none	For all	For a preferred religion
Belief in God	Discouraged	Encouraged	Demanded
Basis of civil law	Human Experience	Natural law (general revelation)	Divine law (special revelation)
Example	Marxist China	Early America[35]	Iran

Jeffersonianism is a means between the two extremes, secularism (which has no firm moral basis for government) and reconstructionism (which imposes a religious basis for government that chooses one religion and alienates all others). By basing civil government in "Nature's Law," which comes from "Nature's God,"[36] American morality was established without establishing any religion, except a broadly theistic (or deistic) belief in the Creator God, who gave these "unalienable rights," a belief that, according to God, is part of the general (or natural) revelation to all humankind (Rom. 1:19–20). African scholar John Mbiti (b. 1931), for one, has demonstrated that even preliterate ("pagan") people naturally have this belief in a High God.[37] Thus, by basing government in natural, universal, moral law, Jeffersonianism avoids antinomianism (secularism) on the one hand and state-mandated religion (reconstructionism) on the other. The following are some of Jeffersonianism's chief elements.

There Is a Natural Revelation Common to All Human Beings

God has two revelations; one in His world (general) and the other in His Word (special).[38] Divine law is a special revelation to believers; natural law is a general revelation to all persons. Natural law is described as that which human

beings “do by nature,” the law written on the hearts of all people (Rom. 2:14); those who disobey it go “contrary to nature” (11:24).

Belief in natural law did not begin with Christians: *Natural law is also found in ancient Hindi, Chinese, Greek, and Roman writings that predate the time of Christ*. Even before Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.), the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c. 504/501–c. 444/441) believed in an unchanging *Logos* (Reason, Truth) behind the changing flux of human experience (*F*, 197–200, in Kirk and Raven, *PP*, 188–89). Plato (427–347) held to moral absolutes (see *R*, Books IV-VI), and the stoics developed natural-law theories well before the first century.[39]

The concept of natural law likewise has a venerable history among great Christian thinkers. As did others before him, Augustine (354–430) held that God gave the Gentiles “the law of nature” (*OSL*, 48 in Schaff, *NPNF*, Vol. 5), to which he referred as “the system of nature” (*OGM*, 203, 407, in ibid., Vol. 3); this law is “implanted by nature” in all people (op. cit.). Natural law is reflected in God’s image within humanity; to be sure, the image has been marred by sin, but Augustine insisted that God’s image “is not wholly blotted out” in unbelievers (in ibid., 5.103).[40] Thus he maintained that God was just in punishing unbelievers for not living in accordance with the natural law written on their hearts (*RFM*, 19.1 in ibid., 4.239).

Following Augustine’s view, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) declared that “natural law is nothing else than the rational creature’s participation in eternal law” (*ST*, 91.2 in Pegis, *BWSTA*, 750); law is “an ordinance of reason made for the common good” (in ibid., 747); it is the rule and measure of acts” (in ibid., 743). Eternal law is the divine reason by which God governs the universe (in ibid., 748), and natural law is the human participation in it. Natural law is the first principle governing human action, just as the laws of logic are the first principles governing human thought.[41]

Aquinas distinguished natural law, common to all people, from divine law, imposed only on believers. Natural law is directed toward man’s temporal good; divine law is aimed toward his eternal good (in ibid., 753). Divine law is for the church; natural law is for all of society. The basis for human law is natural law.

The divine ingraining of natural law within all people was also upheld by John Calvin (1509–1564):

> That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute.… There is no nation so barbarous, no race so brutish, as not to be imbued with the conviction that there is a God. (*ICR*, 1.3.1)

This "sense of Deity is so naturally engraven on the human heart … that the very reprobate are forced to acknowledge it" (ibid., 1.4.4).

This innate knowledge of God includes a knowledge of His righteous law (see Kantzer, *JCTKGWG*, 1981). Calvin held that since "the Gentiles have the righteousness of the law naturally engraved on their minds, [so] we certainly cannot say that they are altogether blind as to the rule of life" (op. cit., 2.2.22). He called this moral awareness "natural law" (general revelation), which is "sufficient for their righteous condemnation" (ibid.) but not for their salvation.[42] By means of this natural law "the judgment of conscience" is able to distinguish between "the just and the unjust."[43] God's righteous nature "is engraved in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse" (ibid., 1.5.1).

The Natural Law Is Clear

Once again, Paul declared that natural law is "clearly seen" and "written on their hearts" (Rom. 1:20; 2:15). According to Calvin, the natural law is also specific:

> [It includes a sense of justice] implanted by nature in the hearts of men. [There] is imprinted on their hearts a discrimination and judgment, by which they distinguish between justice and injustice, honesty and dishonesty. [It is what makes them] ashamed of adultery and theft.…
>
> [The natural law even governs] good faith in commercial transactions and contracts. [Even the heathen] prove their knowledge … that adultery, theft, and murder are evils, and honesty is to be esteemed.… [Man's] natural knowledge of the law [is] that which states that one action is good and worthy of being followed, while another is to be shunned with horror. (*EPAR*, 48–49)

The Natural Law Is the Basis for Government

Richard Hooker (1553–1600) defended the natural-law view in England (see *LEP*), where it was picked up by John Locke (1632–1704), who argued that good civil government is based in natural law.

> The law of Nature [teaches us that,] being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions; for men [are] all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker. (*AE*, 2.6)

Jefferson expressed this same view in The Declaration of Independence:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of

Happiness.

Jefferson believed these unalienable rights are rooted in the "Laws of Nature" that derive from "Nature's God." On the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., are inscribed these words he wrote: "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?" Here again it is clear that Jefferson's America was based on the concept of God-given rights grounded in God-given moral rules (natural law). For Jefferson, natural law is not a humanly descriptive "is" but a divinely prescriptive "ought."

Arguments for Natural Law

Many have denied the existence of natural law, and others have simply tried to diminish its value. Nevertheless, there are excellent reasons for holding to the natural law as actual and binding.

The Argument From Divine Justice

It is evident from Paul's argument in Romans 1–2 that God's justice in condemning the unbelieving Gentiles was based on His having clearly revealed Himself through nature to all people (1:19) and having His law written on their hearts (2:15). It certainly would be contradictory to divine justice[44] to condemn people to eternal separation from God for not living according to a standard they never had and never knew.[45] The existence of natural law (general revelation), therefore, is absolutely indispensable to the belief in divine justice.

The Argument From Social Need

Furthermore, society cannot function without some kind of common moral code that binds people together in a cultural unit. *Every* society has a moral cohesiveness; if it did not, then it would not be a society, and it would self-destruct. Even so, *not* every society accepts a single divine law (such as the Bible or the Qur'an); accordingly, there is an evident need for some kind of naturally available moral code to bind people together.

All great cultures, past and present, manifest a common moral law. C.S. Lewis collected quotations from these various societies and correlated them under various headings;[46] vastly different and separate cultures not only *need* such a moral cohesiveness but also have *expressed* it in their writings. This is

ample testimony to the universal social need for natural moral principles by which conduct can be governed.

To argue that there is no adequate moral basis for society apart from (1) special revelation[47] or (2) human experience[48] runs contrary to the moral writings of the world's renowned cultures and is tantamount to saying these civilizations have not expressed discernable moral character. This is not only blatantly false, it is also contrary to the biblical teaching on common grace and general revelation.[49]

The Argument From International Law

Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) saw the obvious necessity of having a natural-law foundation for international affairs. Grotius believed this was important because he viewed it as a rational "method for arriving at a body of propositions underlying political arrangements and the provision of the positive [civil] laws" (in Sabine, *HPT*, 425); his definition of law was "what[ever] God makes known as his will" (*DIBP*, Vol. 2 in *TT*, 8).[50]

Grotius was so convinced natural law stood on its own two feet that he declared, "What we have been saying regarding the priority of natural law would have a degree of validity even if we should concede … that there is no God, or that the affairs of men are of no concern to Him" (ibid., 13). The point is that, even apart from belief in God, natural law is necessary for ruling human societies. For his pioneering work in this area, Grotius earned the title "Father of International Law."

As human technology developed, the need for international affairs to have a natural-law foundation became even more apparent. The Nuremberg war-crimes trials after the Second World War are a classic case in point. Adolf Hitler engaged in horrifically cruel, barbarous, and inhumane actions by masterminding the murder of six million Jews and another six million from "undesired people groups"; *emerging from the holocaust was collective recognition of a moral standard that transcends individual cultures and countries*. If Hitler's actions are judged from within the Nazi state, they are not immoral crimes but moral causes. Only if there is some overarching natural law —given to all cultures and binding upon all people—can we justify calling the Nazis cruel, barbarous, and inhumane.

Further, efforts to redress the Hitler horrors led to the human rights movement, related to which the United Nations drafted a "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." A. H. Robertson, spokesman for the European Convention on

Human Rights, wrote:

> The perversion of democracy and the maintenance of the rule of law necessitated foundations … on which to base the defense of human personality against all tyrannies and against all forms of totalitarianism. Those foundations were effective protection of the rights of man and fundamental freedoms. (cited in Montgomery, *LAL*, 22)

The very concept of fundamental human rights transcending all states demands a moral law that is above and beyond all particular governments and religions; thus, the desire for a transnational moral code is a will-o'-the-wisp unless there is a natural law that transcends all governments.

The Argument From Common Moral Codes

C.S. Lewis demonstrated in his classic on natural law, *The Abolition of Man*, that there are universal moral laws. If there were not, we would not be able to engage in moral disputes, to make moral judgments, or to discern the moral progress (or regress) of society—which we do. Nor would there be a common core of widely held moral codes, such as there are (see *AM*, appendix), like commands to honor parents and commands not to steal, lie, and murder.

> The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. (*MC*, 25)

Again,

> [As an atheist] my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. (ibid., 45)

Hence,

> It seems then we are forced to believe in a real Right and Wrong. First, human beings all over the earth have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way. Second, they do not in fact behave in that way. The truth is, we believe in decency so much that we cannot bear to face the fact that we are breaking it, and consequently we try to shift the responsibility. (ibid., 21)

The Argument From Pluralistic Culture

The importance of a natural-law ethic is that it can be taken into the political world without showing favor to one religious group over another. Further, without an objective ethical basis for our actions there is no realistic alternative to antinomianism; government cannot function as needed without an objective

ethical standard common to all who are part of the body politic. Thus, natural law is essential to viable government in our religiously pluralistic world.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE NATURAL-LAW VIEW (JEFFERSONIANISM)

Objections from both extremes, secularism and reconstructionism, have been leveled against the natural-law view of government, some of which have been addressed in the process of the above discussion.

Objection One: That Natural Law Implies a Lawgiver (God), Which Involves Religion

Secularists argue that it is a violation of the First Amendment to impose a moral law based on a Moral Lawgiver (God).

In response, *first*, foundational natural law is the view of the Declaration of Independence, our country's founding document. It is a twisted logic that pronounces our National Birth Certificate unconstitutional.

Second, establishing a national *morality* is not contrary to the First Amendment; establishing a national *religion* is.

Third, implicitly recognizing a Moral Lawgiver behind the moral law is neither establishing religion in general nor any religion in particular—that can only be done by mandating worship of God. Religion has to do with our duty to God; morality is concerned with our moral responsibility to fellow human beings. Government can and should make laws regarding the latter but not with respect to the former.

Objection Two: That There Is No Moral Law Agreed Upon by All

The secularist objection that there is no commonly acknowledged morality fails for many reasons.

First, the Bible says that there is, and that all persons are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20) and will "perish" for not obeying it (2:12).

Second, again, that the moral creeds among most cultures are essentially the same—and that there is a universal moral law—is illustrated in C.S. Lewis's *Abolition of Man*. Lewis provided a noteworthy service in cataloging many of

these expressions; interestingly, they look strikingly similar to the second tablet of the Ten Commandments.

Third, the universal moral law is written on the hearts of human beings (v. 15) and can be detected, not so much by our actions (which fall short of our own standards), but by our *reactions* when someone else's actions don't measure up to the moral law. Even those who say it's okay to lie, cheat, steal, and murder nevertheless show, by their reactions when they are affected, that they know these actions are wrong.

Objection Three: That Morality Cannot be Legislated

Secularists protest that to affirm moral laws behind government is to claim that morals can be legislated. However, everyone innately knows that this objection is wrong and misguided.

First, all laws legislate morality; *every* law pronounces one behavior right and another wrong. Morality deals with right and wrong; the question isn't *whether* morality is legislated, but, rather, *which* morality is the basis for legislation? The answer is *the common morality*, the one engraved upon everyone's nature.

Second, even secularist objectors don't want to do away with laws that say child abuse, spousal battery, rape, and murder are wrong. To legislate against any of these is to legislate morality.

Objection Four: That Natural Revelation Is Unclear

Theonomists (reconstructionists) often argue that sin impairs man's ability to understand natural revelation. However, the defect is not in the revelation itself, but in man's refusal to accept it; according to Romans 1:19, natural revelation "is plain … because God has made it plain." The problem with unbelievers is not that they do not apprehend the truth, but that "the man without the Spirit [of God] does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14). It is not that they do not *perceive* it, but that they do not *receive* it (Howe, *CR*, 72); in fact, they suppress it (Rom. 1:18). God has clearly revealed Himself in nature and in the conscience, so unbelievers *see* the truth of natural revelation but also *shun* the truth it reveals to them (ibid.).[51] Rejecting the revealed truth is not unique to unbelievers who have God's general revelation; believers likewise do not always live according to the truth of God's special revelation.[52]

To claim that general revelation is inadequate because unbelievers have

perverted it is to reject special revelation for the same reason. Peter, for example, tells us that "people distort [Paul's writings], as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). There is nothing God has revealed in Scripture that has not been subjected to the same kind of mangling as the moral truths He has revealed to everyone in His natural law. There is no defect with either of God's revelations—the problem isn't God's disclosure, but man's distortion of it.

The existence of hundreds of religious sects, all claiming that the Bible contains revelation from God, is ample testimony to the fact that even the supernatural revelation in Scripture is not immune to misuse. In fact, the misapplication of the natural law among the various human cultures is no greater than the misinterpretation of supernatural revelation among the various cults. Careful examination of both areas indicates that in spite of the clarity of both revelations, depraved human beings have found a way to deflect, divert, or demean God's commands. Biblical teaching has no edge on natural revelation in the matter of immunity from distortion.

Objection Five: That the Bible Is a Clearer Revelation Than Natural Law

Theonomists argue for the superiority of God's special revelation as a reason for prescribing the Bible as a basis of civil government.

In response, it should be noted that the Bible is certainly a more detailed and specific revelation *and* the only infallible written revelation we have.[53]

However, *first*, this is not to say that God's (general) revelation in the natural law is not clear and sufficient to accomplish its purpose; it is (Rom. 1:19; 2:12), as has already been shown.

Second, unlike the natural law, the Bible is not universally available to all human beings, and many deny that it is God's Word. The heart-written natural law is undeniable; people's codes and reactions reveal that they truly believe it.

Third, the "Bible" is a religious book and mandates *more* than a moral code. Legislating it creates vulnerability to the charge that religion itself is being established.

Fourth, the question can rightly be asked by adherents to other religions: which "Bible" should be mandated?[54] The Jewish Bible? The Christian Bible? The Muslim Bible? In a pluralistic society no single religious book will be accepted by everyone as a foundation for all people.

Fifth, and finally, even if the Christian Bible were chosen, which overall

interpretation of it would be accepted? Theonomists hold that it should be the Reformed/Calvinist view, but here there is much less common ground than general revelation. Even theonomists engage in heated debates over whether certain Old Testament laws, such as those against wearing garments with mixed fiber, still apply today.[55] (Think of what applying this law would do for Christians in the clothing industry!)

CHURCH AND STATE: SUMMING UP THE ISSUES

Now that the three main church/state perspectives have been explained and discussed, we can draw some conclusions, many of which are reflected in the contrasts revealed on the above chart.[56] In short, Jeffersonianism avoids the extremes of secularism and reconstructionism on all the issues.

First, on the nature of the state, the natural-law view avoids both a purely secular government and a religiously dominated government in favor of a morally just government.

Second, with regard to the relation of church and state, the early American position opts for cooperation between church and state, not a radical separation between or union of the two.

Third, while secularism insists on freedom from all religion and reconstructionism on freedom for a particular religion, Jeffersonianism maintains freedom for all religions.

Fourth, with respect to belief in God, the natural-law view again occupies important middle ground: rather than requiring it (as theonomy does) or discouraging it (as secularism does), Jeffersonianism encourages it without demanding it.

Fifth, and finally, instead of basing civil law in changing human experience (secularism) or in divine law (reconstructionism), state government is to be grounded in the natural law common to all human beings.

The Relationship Between Mosaic Law and Natural Law

While there isn't identity[57] between the Mosaic Law and the natural law, there is similarity in their moral obligations. This is to be expected, since both general and special revelation come from the same Moral Lawgiver, whose

moral nature does not change.[58] However, since the Mosaic Law had national, civil, ceremonial, and theocratic dimensions not found in other nations, there are also significant dissimilarities between the two. For example, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament; there is no command to observe the Sabbath (Saturday) as a day of rest. Likewise, different penalties are now attached to disobeying certain statutes; for example, in the Old Testament era persons were stoned for adultery, but in the New Testament age they are excommunicated from the church, with restoration granted upon repentance (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. 2 Cor. 2:5–8). While the basic moral principles in Old Testament (Mosaic) law and New Testament (church) law are the same,[59] context and consequences differ significantly.

This helps to explain the apparent equivocation by Christians on support for publicly displaying and promoting the Ten Commandments. The *basic moral principles* embedded in them apply not only to the New Testament church but to society as well. Certainly, the second table of the law (i.e., the commands that address our duty to other humans)[60] is found also in the natural law, which is the basis for good civil government. The *specific Christian responsibilities* in the Commandments, though, applied pointedly to Israel and not to society—government should not be legislating duty to God. In this area, the best that civil government can do is encourage freedom of expression without government sponsorship.

This seems to be precisely the original intent of the First Amendment, for the Free Exercise Clause[61] in effect encouraged religion, and the Establishment Clause[62] erected a protective barrier between *federal* (national) government and *states'* rights to have their own religion. Of course, since the aforementioned *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), the states no longer have this right; that Supreme Court decision helped move the U.S. closer to a secularist separation of church and state (with state being preeminent) rather than furthering the original cooperation between them. Nevertheless, our country's founders' words and actions support this interpretation of their original view on church/state relations; Jefferson himself, and other presidents, helped effect laws that paid missionaries to do evangelistic work among Native Americans,[63] and the Northwest Ordinance (1787) encouraged religion in schools (see Article III). Indeed, both prayer and Bible reading were common in American schools from the very beginning (in the 1640s) until the early 1960s, when the Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional.

The Relationship Between Biblical Law and Natural Law

The Bible (special revelation) does not contradict the natural law (general revelation) but rather complements and supplements it.[64] After all, as we have seen, the same God whose moral nature is reflected to all people in the natural law (through His world) has expressed His moral character in commands to believers in the Bible (through His Word).

God's basic moral principles do not change any more than His nature does—both are eternal. However, this is *not* to say that believers today are bound to live according to Old Testament law: Paul tells us clearly that "you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). Before Jesus came to fulfill the law,[65] having the law (of Moses) was the Jews' advantage over the Gentiles (3:1–2; 2:14); Paul stressed that what "was engraved in letters on stone" has faded away (2 Cor. 3:7);[66] Christ did this "by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (Eph. 2:15); now that He has come, "we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Gal. 3:25).

Hebrews says clearly that "the law was given to the people" of Israel (7:11), that there was "a change of the law" (v. 12) by which "the former regulation is set aside" (v. 18). As noted before, the Old Testament never condemned Gentiles for not keeping the law of Moses (cf. Ps. 147:19–20); God measured them by the truths within the general revelation.[67]

That the law of Moses was given only to Israel is not to say that Christians have no law: We have the natural law, we have the divine law of the New Testament, and we also have much to learn from what God revealed to Israel (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). Nevertheless, that moral principles embodied in the Old Testament[68] are restated in the New Testament does not mean we are under the Mosaic Law any more than we are under the statutes of Illinois when we violate a traffic law in Texas (see Aldrich, *HFG*, chapter 7). Just as each state codifies legislation differently—though the laws are *based* on the same ultimate principles—so the revealed moral code for the church is not the same as that for Israel.

Consider the moral duty to honor parents. When this principle is stated for Israel in the Old Testament, it is given with the promise that they will live long in the land the Lord would give them (the Promised Land—Ex. 20:12). However, when in the New Testament Paul directs believers to honor parents,

the attached promise has nothing to say about living long in the land the Lord would give Israel but simply promises "long life on the earth" (Eph. 6:3).[69]

While the Christian is not under the law of Moses, he is under the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). For instance, the Christian businessman is bound not only by the natural law, which he shares with unbelievers, but also by a divine law that he does not have in common with them. This special (biblical) revelation places some greater obligations on the believer; these deserve careful attention that the limits of this present topic do not allow, but we will note two observations.

First, the Christian's greater duties are based upon the moral principles that are the same in both Old and New Testaments insofar as they reflect God's unchanging character. Jesus Christ did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17–18), and the "new commandment" He gave that we love one another (1 John 2:8 NKJV) was actually the "old commandment" they had "from the beginning" (v. 7 NKJV). Christ set this very example, saying (and then doing), "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13; cf. v. 15). Therefore, the natural law is only the believer's minimal duty; New Testament divine law is his maximal duty. Natural law demands that we act justly; divine law commands that we act sacrificially as well.

Second, the Christian's greater responsibility extends to his dealings with others. For example, while natural law forbids that we rob the poor, divine law adds that we must help the poor (Mark 10:21). It is not enough that we do not exploit the economically oppressed; we must also try to deliver them.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHURCH AND STATE

There is ample support among the Church Fathers for distinguishing between church and state. Further, the idea that the church is a kind of theocracy[70] or earthly kingdom did not come into practice until after Emperor Constantine (c. 274–337) began to join the dying Roman empire to the spiritual force of the church.

Early Church Fathers

Before the Middle Ages, it was not uncommon to find support of Christian

respect for the state in distinction from Christian duties to the church. The church has not replaced the state, and Christians, while obedient to the state, would not allow the state to replace the church.

Mathetes (c. 130)

> Every foreign land is to them [believers] as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. (*ED*, 5)

Polycarp (fl. second century)

"We are taught to give all due honor (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities … ordained of God" (*MP*, 10).

Theophilus (c. 130–190)

> I will rather honor the king [than your gods], not, indeed, worshipping him, but praying for him. But God, the living and true God, I worship, knowing that the king is made by Him.… Accordingly, honor the king, be subject to him, and pray for him with loyal mind; for if you do this, you do the will of God. (*TA*, 1.11)

Melito of Sardis (fl. second century)

> My opinion is this: that in "this" way a kingdom may be governed in peace—when the sovereign [earthly ruler] is acquainted with the God of truth, and is held by fear of Him from doing wrong to those who are his subjects, and judges everything with equity, as one who knows that he himself also will be judged before God; while, at the same time, those who are under his rule are withheld by the fear of God from doing wrong to their sovereign, and are restrained by the same fear from doing wrong to one another. By this knowledge of God and fear of Him all evil may be removed from the realm. For, if the sovereign abstain from doing wrong to those who are under his rule, and they abstain from doing wrong to him and to each other, it is evident that the whole country will dwell in peace. (in *RSTC*, 1)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> As therefore the devil lied at the beginning, so did he also in the end, when he said [to Jesus], "All these are delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give them" [Matt. 4]. For it is not he who has appointed the kingdoms of this world, but God; for "the heart of the king is in the hand of God." And the Word also says by Solomon, "By me kings do reign, and princes administer justice. By me chiefs are raised up, and by me kings rule the earth." Paul the apostle also says upon this same subject: "Be ye subject to all the higher powers; for there is no power but of God: now those which are have been ordained of God." And again, in reference to them [earthly rulers] he says, "For he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, the avenger for wrath to him who does evil."
>
> Now, that he spake these words, not in regard to angelical powers, nor of invisible rulers … but of

those of actual human authorities, [he shows when] he says, “For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, doing service for this very thing.” This also the Lord confirmed, when He did not do what He was tempted to by the devil; but He gave directions that tribute should be paid to the tax-gatherers for Himself and Peter; because “they are the ministers of God, serving for this very thing” (*AH*, 5.24).

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Examine, then, and see if He be not the dispenser of kingdoms, who is Lord at once of the world which is ruled, and of man himself who rules; if He has not ordained the changes of dynasties, with their appointed seasons, who was before all time, and made the world a body of times; if the rise and the fall of states are not the work of Him, under whose sovereignty the human race once existed without states at all. (*A*, 1.26)

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (c. fourth century)

Be ye subject to all royal power and dominion in things which are pleasing to God, as to the ministers of God, and the punishers of the ungodly. Render all the fear that is due to them, all offerings, all customs, all honor, gifts, and taxes. For this is God’s command, that you owe nothing to any one but the pledge of love, which God has commanded by Christ. (4.13)

Medieval Fathers

Despite the overall *union* between church and state in the later Roman empire, many medieval theologians recognized the basic *distinction* between church and state and the respective responsibilities of Christians to each.

Augustine

In this world, therefore, the dominion of good men is profitable, not so much for themselves as for human affairs. But the dominion of bad men is hurtful chiefly to themselves who rule, for they destroy their own souls by greater license in wickedness; while those who are put under them in service are not hurt except by their own iniquity. For to the just all the evils imposed on them by unjust rulers are not the punishment of crime, but the test of virtue. (*CG*, 4.3)

Thomas Aquinas

The common good of the state cannot flourish unless the citizens be virtuous, at least those whose business it is to govern. But it is enough for the good of the community that the other citizens be so far virtuous that they obey the commands of their rulers. (*ST*, 2a.92.1.3)

He who is placed over a community is empowered to dispense in a human law that rests upon his authority, so that, when the law fails in its application to persons or circumstances, he may allow the precept of the law not to be observed. (ibid., 2a.97.4)

Concerning the right ordering of rulers in a state or nation … all should take some share in the government: for this form of constitution ensures peace among the people, commends itself to all, and

is most enduring.… This is the best form of polity, being partly kingdom, since there is one at the head of all; partly aristocracy, in so far as a number of persons are set in authority; partly democracy, i.e., government by the people, in so far as the rulers can be chosen from the people, and the people have the right to choose their rulers.

Such was the form of government established by the Divine Law. For Moses and his successors governed the people in such a way that each of them was ruler over all; so that there was a kind of kingdom. Moreover, seventy-two men were chosen, who were elders in virtue (Deut. 1:15) … so that there was an element of aristocracy. But it was a democratical government in so far as the rulers were chosen from all the people (Ex. 18:21) … and, again, in so far as they were chosen by the people (Deut. 1:13).… Consequently it is evident that the ordering of the rulers was well provided for by the Law. (ibid., 2a.105.1)

Reformation Teachers

John Calvin

Unfortunately, some Reformers were not averse to using the state to establish the church. John Calvin set up a theocracy (or theonomy) of his own in Geneva, Switzerland, which, as mentioned earlier, even used civil government to execute a heretic (Servetus) by burning him alive.

Calvin wrote:

> This civil government is designed, as long as we live in this world, to cherish and support the external worship of God, to preserve the pure doctrine of religion, to defend the constitution of the Church, to regulate our lives in a manner requisite for the society of men, to form our manners to civil justice, to promote concord with each other, and to establish general peace and tranquility. (*CICR*, 203)

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith

Other Reformers, antecedent to modern Baptist and Independent churches, were more conscious of any unholy alliance with government. In fact, they often found themselves being politically persecuted for their faith, sometimes under the heavy influence of other Protestant groups. The emphasized words show their reservations about unlimited submission to civil government:

> We believe and confess that God has ordained power and authority, and set them to punish the evil, and protect the good, to govern the world, and maintain countries and cities, with their subjects, in good order and regulation; and that we, therefore, may not despise, revile, or resist the same, but must acknowledge and honor them as the ministers of God, and be subject and obedient unto them, yea, ready for all good works, *especially in that which is not contrary to the law, will, and commandment of God*; also faithfully pay custom, tribute, and taxes, and to render unto them their dues, even also as the Son of God taught and practiced, and commanded His disciples to do; that we, moreover, must constantly and earnestly pray to the Lord for them and their welfare, and for the prosperity of the country, that we may dwell under its protection, earn our livelihood, and lead a quiet, peaceable life, with all godliness and honesty; and, furthermore, that the Lord would recompense unto them, here, and afterwards in eternity, all benefits, liberty, and favor which we enjoy here under their praiseworthy

administration. (XII)

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PART TWO

LAST THINGS
(ESCHATOLOGY)



CHAPTER EIGHT

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE AND THE RESURRECTION

Before we address the resurrection of humankind, we must consider the state between death and resurrection, which has become a theological battleground. On the one pole is a view called extreme preterism,[1] which claims there is no such state and that resurrection occurs immediately at death. On the other end of the spectrum are proponents of "soul sleep," who claim the dead are not conscious between death and resurrection. In this chapter we will examine—biblically, theologically, and historically—the traditional view[2] of a conscious soul, temporarily separated from its body, awaiting its reunion at the resurrection when Christ returns.[3]

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE SOUL'S CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Since death is the entry to life after death, we must first investigate what the Bible teaches about the nature of death. This, of course, depends on the nature of the soul/body relationship, which has already been treated; we demonstrated

earlier that the soul is distinct and separable from the body.[4]

The Nature of Death

The Bible describes death as the moment the soul leaves the body. For instance, Genesis 35:18 (KJV) says of Rachel that "her soul was in departing, (for she died)." Likewise, James teaches, "The body without the spirit is dead" (2:26). Since soul is the principle of life that animates a body,[5] it follows that when the soul leaves the body, the body is dead.

The State Between Death and Resurrection

Numerous biblical passages teach that the soul survives death in a disembodied state. Among these are the following.

Genesis 25:8 KJV

The Lord told Abram[6] that he would "be *gathered to his people*." [7] He would be buried in a specified cave—"old … and full of years." The italicized phrase means more than merely "go to the grave":

(1) The body returns to dust—the *soul* is "gathered to" a person's loved ones.[8]
(2) God said he was going to a place of "peace."
(3) Jesus called where he was going "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22 NKJV), a place of conscious bliss.
(4) "Gathered to" implies a get-together of spirits, not merely a disintegration of the body (as would be the case with solely "going to the grave").
(5) This also happened at Jacob's moment of death; Jacob was still in his bed at that time, so the words of Genesis 49:33 could not refer to the burial of his body: "When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people."[9]

Genesis 35:18

"It came to pass, as *her soul was in departing, (for she died)* that she [Rachel] called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin" (KJV). The

implication is that her soul was leaving for somewhere else; otherwise, the narrative would have said that her soul was dying or being destroyed.

Again, the act of the soul leaving the body is called *death*. This moment of *actual* death is to be distinguished from *legal* (or *medical*) death, which is determined by the measure of organic function. A person may or may not be actually dead in the absence of observable measurements.

So-called "near-death experiences" (NDE's)—where the soul allegedly leaves the body, has an apparent encounter with the other world, and then returns to its body here—are not real-death experiences. When the soul actually does leave the body, a person is dead, and if his soul returns, he is resurrected. Many people who claim such experiences have encountered figures and teachings contrary to Scripture, and God would not (indeed, cannot[10]) perform a miracle (e.g., resurrection) that would confirm anything contrary to His Word. Hence, we conclude that such experiences are either purely psychological or demonic.[11]

Job 19:25–26

Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that *in my flesh I shall see God*" (NKJV). While this text refers to bodily (physical) resurrection, it also encompasses immortality after death. There is no hint of the soul's nonexistence or unconsciousness between death and resurrection, only assurance that Job will live eternally because of his Redeemer.

Psalm 16:10–11

"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; *you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand*." Here David speaks of conscious joy in God's presence after death; however, Christ's resurrection, which he envisions ("Holy One," cf. Acts 2:26–27), did not take place for another millennium. Indeed, the final resurrection is described elsewhere as occurring in the last days (John 11:24; cf. Dan. 12:2). Accordingly, the soul must be in conscious bliss *before* being reunited with the body for it to have "eternal" bliss in His presence after death.

Ecclesiastes 3:21

Solomon wrote, "Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" The implication is that while the spirit

of a beast perishes with its body, nonetheless, the human spirit survives death (see Eccl. 12:5–7, next).[12]

Ecclesiastes 12:5–7

"*Man goes to his eternal home* and mourners go about the streets. Remember him—before … the dust returns to the ground it came from, and *the spirit returns to God who gave it*."[13] Here again, the spirit exists after death in God's presence and lives on with Him forever; only the body returns to the ground from which it came (Gen. 2:7; cf. Ps. 104:29).

Matthew 17:3

"Moses and Elijah *appeared* to them [Peter, James, and John], *talking* with Him [Jesus]" (NKJV). The scene here is the Mount of Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah, whose bodies had been dead for centuries, appeared and were speaking; they were in spiritual, disembodied form *and* conscious.

Matthew 22:31–32

"About the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you? 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? *He is not the God of the dead but of the living*." Since Abraham was not yet resurrected but was said to be "living," Jesus must mean that his soul is alive between death and resurrection.

Luke 16:22–24

"The beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. *And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom*" (NKJV). This passage depicts not only the conscious bliss of saved, disembodied souls but also the conscious woe of the unsaved.[14] Note that real names (like *Lazarus*) are never used in parables, and parables are usually introduced as such by name (e.g., cf. Matt. 13:3).

Luke 23:43

"Jesus said to him [the repentant thief], " 'Assuredly, I say to you, *today you will be with Me in Paradise*' " (NKJV). The man's body was in the grave later that same day, but his soul was with Christ in paradise, which Paul described (in 2 Cor. 12:1–4) as a place of astonishing, inexpressible bliss—the "third heaven,"

in the very presence of God.

There is no justification for the Watchtower's (Jehovah's Witnesses') mistranslation of this verse to read, "I tell you today, you will be with me in Paradise [after the resurrection]."[15] Virtually all standard translations reject this rendering, and for good reasons:

(1) It makes better sense that the promise of Jesus was fulfilled that same day, rather than in the distant future.
(2) "Today" (Gk: *séméron*) is used eleven times in Luke and nine times in Acts, signifying the fulfillment of God's plan *in the present*.[16]
(3) Same-day fulfillment fits with another saying of Jesus from the cross —"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"—which implies conscious bliss with the Father.
(4) Same-day fulfillment is consistent with Jesus' reference to an intermediate state immediately after death in Luke 16:22–24.

Luke 23:46

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, '*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*.' When he had said this, he breathed his last." Again, Jesus' words not only imply that He was conscious between death and resurrection, but also that He would be with the Father in heaven (cf. 24:44; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4).

John 19:30

"Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and *gave up his spirit.*" Here again, Jesus surrendered His spirit to the Father, implying that He would consciously be with Him. This assertion is also supported by His saying that He would be with the Father when He died (cf. 14:12).

Acts 7:56, 59

Stephen said, " 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' … And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, *receive my spirit*' " (NKJV). This shows that the *spirit* (1) is separate from the body, (2) survives death, and (3) will be with the Lord. Observe that, *at the moment of Stephen's death*, the Lord was standing in heaven to welcome his spirit.

1 Corinthians 5:5

"Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his *spirit may be saved* in the day of the Lord Jesus" (NKJV). Here, in distinction from the flesh, Paul speaks of the human spirit, which survives death and can be "saved," teaching again that humans can survive in a disembodied state.

2 Corinthians 5:1–3, 8

> We know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.… We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be *absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*. (NKJV)

Despite questions about whether the "habitation" from heaven (the heavenly body) is a reference to an interim body or to the resurrection body,[17] at least three facts are evident:

(1) There is something spiritual (immaterial) that survives death.[18]
(2) For believers, this spiritual something (spirit/soul) consciously survives in a place of bliss ("with the Lord").
(3) Until it receives another body, the spirit/soul is somehow "naked" or incomplete (v. 3).

Philippians 1:21

"To live is Christ, and *to die is gain*" (NKJV). There is no reasonable sense in which death can be gain if a person is annihilated (snuffed out of existence) or separated from consciousness at death; in annihilation, death is loss—not only the loss of life but also the loss of existence.[19] It is the ultimate category mistake to affirm that nothing is better than something. Nothing is nothing, so it cannot be better than anything.

Philippians 1:23–24

"I am hard pressed between the two [life and death], having a desire to *depart and be with Christ*, which is far better. Nevertheless to *remain in the flesh* is more needful for you" (NKJV). This passage leaves little doubt Paul taught that the spiritual man, apart from his "flesh," will survive death and "be with Christ" in a conscious state. Further, unconsciousness between death and resurrection can hardly be described as a "far better" condition; nonexistence is a state of nothingness.[20]

Hebrews 12:22–23

> You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem … to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, *to the spirits of just men made perfect*. (NKJV)

This reference is unquestionably to heaven and to a point *before* the final resurrection; just (righteous) human spirits are there in a perfect condition while their bodies are obviously still in the grave.

Revelation 6:9–10

> When He [the Lamb] opened the fifth seal, *I [John] saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain* for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And *they cried out with a loud voice*, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (NKJV).

John calls these disembodied martyrs, whose bodies lie on earth, "souls" in heaven. In his vision they were not only conscious, they were praying and concerned about God's plan on earth. Clearly, again, the soul (immaterial) consciously survives death apart from the body (material), for which it awaits reuniting at the resurrection.

Revelation 19:20

"The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence.… *These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone*" (NKJV). A thousand years later, they were still conscious, for "the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And *they will be tormented day and night forever and ever*" (20:10 NKJV).[21] In John's vision, they were still conscious, and they will continue to be conscious eternally; persons who are not conscious cannot be tormented.

Revelation 20:4

John said, "*I saw [in heaven] the souls of those who had been beheaded* for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God" (NKJV). This is probably the same group mentioned in Revelation 6:9; here too they are in a conscious, heavenly, and disembodied state.

Concluding Comments

The Bible teaches that between death and resurrection, the human soul/spirit survives consciously apart from its body. This is neither a state of annihilation[22] nor a state of unconscious "sleep";[23] this is an eternal state of conscious bliss for the saved[24] and conscious anguish for the lost.[25]

THE STATUS OF OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS BEFORE CHRIST

Some biblical scholars believe that the saints of the Old Testament went to a compartment of *sheol*, the place of departed spirits, to await Christ's death and resurrection, and that they were then taken to heaven with Him at His ascension. Several arguments are offered for this view.

First, they point to Jesus' words in Luke 16 about a great wall or gulf fixed between heaven and hell (v. 26).

Second, Ephesians 4 declares that after His resurrection these souls went to heaven (v. 8). Since He was the "firstfruits" of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23), they could not enter heaven before He did.

Third, they note that 1 Peter 3:19 tells of Christ speaking to the "spirits in prison" after his death. Thus, it is argued that while Old Testament saints were conscious between death and resurrection, they were not yet in heaven: They were in a state of conscious existence in *sheol*, a holding place, until Christ finished His redemptive work and took them with Himself to heaven after His resurrection. This view was popularized by the *Scofield Reference Bible*'s note on Luke 16.

However, it seems best to agree with others who assert that Old Testament saints went directly to heaven between death and resurrection. This is supported by many passages.

First, in Luke 16 Jesus was not speaking of a "wall" between two sections of *sheol* (*hades*). The "great gulf" was between heaven and hell. Only the unsaved man in this story went to hades; the saved person (Lazarus) was in "Abraham's bosom" (heaven).

Second, Ephesians 4 does not refer to taking Old Testament saints into heaven, but taking the forces of evil captive by virtue of Christ's death and

resurrection. There is no sense in which "leading captivity captive" can refer to the liberation from sin that all saints will experience in heaven. The background of the passage is Psalm 68, which refers to David defeating enemies, taking them captive, and distributing the spoils of the battle to the victors.

Third, 1 Peter 3:19 is about Christ announcing the victory of His death and resurrection to the fallen spirit world that was defeated by His actions. There is no reference to leading saved spirits out of a compartment in hades and taking them to heaven.

Fourth, the uniform teaching of Scripture is that Old Testament saints went directly to heaven as spirits, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies when Christ returns. He is the first to go to heaven in a body (1 Cor. 15:22), but He is not the first departed spirit to go there.[26]

Fifth, other Old Testament passages (cited above) support this same view (particularly Eccl. 3:21; 12:5–7).

Sixth, and finally, despite the later insertion in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus descended "into hell," it is not found in the original Apostles' Creed (see Bettenson, *DCC*, chapter 2), and even when it does appear, there is no assertion that Jesus went there to take Old Testament saints to heaven.

In short, there is no biblical or early extrabiblical evidence that the spirits of Old Testament saints after death went anywhere except heaven between death and resurrection. There, with New Testament saints (Heb. 12:23), they await the resurrection of their bodies (1 Thess. 4:13–17).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE SOUL'S CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

Several doctrines form the basis for soul survival. While some are related to the nature of human beings, others relate to the nature of God; soul survival (through the intermediate state, between death and resurrection) has both a necessary and sufficient condition[27] in God's nature[28] and will.[29]

Soul Survival Is Rooted in God's Omnipotence

God is all-powerful,[30] and, as such, He can do anything that is not impossible

to do. It is not impossible for someone who can create a soul to also sustain its existence after death, for God is not only the originating cause of all that exists,[31] He is also the sustaining cause.[32] Thus, the *necessary* condition for the soul's conscious survival has been met in God's omnipotence.

Soul Survival Is Rooted in God's Omnibenevolence

However, simply that God *can* cause the soul to survive does not mean He *will*—there must also be a sufficient cause for His doing so. This is rooted in His good will; that is, based on His infinite goodness,[33] God wills (purposes) to keep the soul alive after death. It is because of His mercies that we are not consumed (Lam. 3:22), and by His will "all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). In heaven the presently disembodied souls around the throne sing, "You created all things, and by your will they were created and *have their being*" (Rev. 4:11; cf. Acts 17:28). In short, the soul will consciously survive death because God can sustain it and also desires to sustain it. Without these two roots in God's nature—omnipotence and omnibenevolence—there would be no conscious survival of the soul.

Soul Survival Is Rooted in God's Image

There is also an anthropological reason for soul survival: human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Since we are made by God[34] and made like God,[35] God annihilating His image would be an act of God against God, an attack of God on His own reflection. Granted that God freely chose to make creatures in His image,[36] it follows reasonably that He would want to preserve them.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS AGAINST CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL

Many arguments have been offered against the biblical teaching that the soul exists in a conscious state between death and resurrection.

Objection One: Based on Biblical Descriptions of Death As "Sleep"

Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up” (John 11:11). Paul used the same word of departed loved ones: “According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thess. 4:15). Doesn’t “sleep” imply a state of unconsciousness?

Response to Objection One

This view should be rejected for several reasons.

First, as shown above,[37] the soul is conscious after death.

Second, only the body dies,[38] so only the body can be raised. Jesus referred to the resurrection of the *body* as awakening it from sleep (John 5:28–29; cf. 11:11, 14).

Third, regarding what Jesus said, being “asleep” and being “dead” were the same thing (cf. John 11:11, 14); the body is dead, the soul is not.

Fourth, “sleep” is an appropriate figure of speech about death, since they share the same posture; both are temporary, and both are followed by awaking and standing up again.

Therefore, these texts do not support the concept of the soul losing consciousness at death.

Objection Two: Based on the Analogy With Animals

Higher forms of animals have a soul, since the same Hebrew word for *soul* (*nephesh*) is used of animals, as is the word *spirit* (*ruach*; cf. Eccl. 3:21).[39] If animal souls do not survive death, why should we not assume the same is true of human beings?

Response to Objection Two

There are significant differences between human souls and animal souls.

First, humans are made in God’s image (Gen. 1:27) and rule over animals (v. 28).

Second, humans will be resurrected,[40] while there is no evidence that animals will be.

Third, the Bible affirms clearly that the human soul is conscious after death,[41]

but the animal soul is not (see Eccl. 3:21).

In light of these substantial discrepancies, the analogy breaks down.

Objection Three: Based on 2 Corinthians 5:1

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." In this passage, Paul seems to say that a person receives his resurrection body immediately at death. If so, then there would be no intermediate state involving a conscious, disembodied soul. This Pauline assertion gives no indication of any time lapse between death and receiving this permanent resurrection body.

Response to Objection Three

There are at least two other possible interpretations of this passage that do not negate an intermediate disembodied state. The interim-body view is held by those who allege that an intermediate spiritual body is provided at death; therein, the soul is never disembodied (e.g., see Chafer, *ST*, 2.506–07). Others point out that Paul does not pointedly affirm that the body is received at the instant of death but merely anticipates the final resurrection state. This latter view fits better with Paul's statement about the ultimate resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:42–44.[42]

The interim-body view conflicts with the other scriptural references to a disembodied state between death and resurrection. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 5:1, rather than implying that the soul is unconscious or that an intermediate body is given, Paul is likely teaching that after death comes the ultimate anticipation of the permanent resurrection body. This also fits with his earlier assertion that "this mortal must put on immortality" (v. 53 NKJV).

Objection Four: Based on the Hylomorphic View of the Soul/Body

We maintained earlier[43] that man is a hylomorphic (lit.: "form/matter") unity of soul and body; as such, it would seem to follow that a soul cannot survive without a body. If embodiment is a necessary vehicle for the soul, how could it survive alone?

Response to Objection Four

If soul and body were identical, then one could not survive without the other. However, *soul and body are a unity, not an identity*; this is one of the major problems with anthropological monism.[44] The soul is to the body what thought (immaterial) is to words on paper (material)—thought, expressed through words, remains even when the paper perishes.

The Bible teaches that the soul survives when the body dies.[45] Yes, the soul is incomplete without the body, and it awaits the resurrection when it will again be complete (2 Cor. 5:1), but survival as a naked soul is not impossible. Both God and angels are pure spirit (John 4:24; Heb. 1:14), yet they exist without a body. Also, between His death and resurrection, Christ existed without His body. Hence, the objection fails.

Objection Five: Based on Arguments for Anthropological Monism

The basic arguments from Scripture for anthropological monism (a soul/body *identity*) are from the nature of human beings and from supposed oneness of soul and body. It is argued that humans have only one nature—a human nature (cf. Acts 17:26)—and that this nature is shared equally by all human beings. Therefore, soul and body must be one nature and not two natures.

Response to Objection Five

These data can be interpreted another way, namely, as hylomorphism, a form/matter unity rather than identity. For example, there is a unity between a pattern and a garment, but the two are not identical, and the former survives when the latter perishes. Further, it is true that we have one nature, but it has two dimensions, as was shown above. The two cannot be identical, because one is material and the other is immaterial; one is perishable and the other will not perish.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE SOUL'S CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

The Early Fathers

Since the Fathers' ultimate focus was on the completed state of Christ's resurrection, they said less about the intermediate state. Nonetheless, they were clear that it is one of conscious existence in a disembodied soul.

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> [The body] dies and is decomposed, but not the soul or the spirit. For to die is to lose vital power, and to become henceforth breathless, inanimate, and devoid of motion, and to melt away into those [component parts] from which also it derived the commencement of [its] substance. But this event happens neither to the soul, for it is the breath of life; nor to the spirit, for the spirit is simple and not composite, so that it cannot be decomposed, and is itself the life of those who receive it. (*AH*, 5.7.1)
>
> As the Lord "went away in the midst of the shadow of death," where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up into heaven, it is manifest that the souls of His disciples also … shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event; then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is, bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come thus into the presence of God. (ibid., 5.31.2)

Clement of Rome (c. first century A.D.)

> It is better that a man should acknowledge his transgressions than that he should harden his heart, as the hearts of those were hardened who stirred up sedition against Moses the servant of God, and whose condemnation was made manifest [unto all]. For they went down alive into Hades, and death swallowed them up. (*FECC*, 51)

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

> Entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may not be found troublesome to anyone. Then shall I be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. (*EIR*, 4)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

> Since sensation remains to all who have ever lived, and eternal punishment is laid up (i.e., for the wicked), see that ye neglect not to be convinced, and to hold as your belief, that these things are true. (*FA*, 18)
>
> The wicked in the same bodies [will be] united again to their spirits which are now to undergo everlasting punishment; and not only, as Plato said, for a period of a thousand years. (ibid., 8)

Athenagoras (fl. second century)

> We are persuaded that when we are removed from the present life we shall live another life, better than the present one, and heavenly, not earthly (since we shall abide near God, and with God, free from all change or suffering in the soul, not as flesh, even though we shall have flesh, but as heavenly spirit),

> or, falling with the rest, a worse one and in fire; for God has not made us as sheep or beasts of burden, a mere by-work, and that we should perish and be annihilated. (*PC*, 31)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

> The apostolic teaching is that the soul, having a substance and life of its own, shall, after its departure from the world, be rewarded according to its deserts, being destined to obtain either an inheritance of eternal life and blessedness, if its actions shall have procured this for it, or to be delivered up to eternal fire and punishments, if the guilt of its crimes shall have brought it down to this: and also, that there is to be a time of resurrection from the dead, when this body, which now is "sown in corruption, shall rise in incorruption," and that which "is sown in dishonor will rise in glory" (*DP*, preface).

Third-Century Catacomb Epitaph

"Alexander is not dead, but lives among the stars, and his body rests in this tomb" (cited in Schaff, *CC*, 7.86).

Methodius (c. 260–311)

> It is the flesh which dies; the soul is immortal. So, then, if the soul be immortal, and the body be the corpse, those who say that there is a resurrection, but not of the flesh, deny any resurrection; because it is not that which remains standing but that which has fallen and been laid down that is set up; according to that which is written, "Does not he who falls rise again, and he who turns aside return?" (*DR*, 1.7).

Medieval Fathers

John of Damascus (676–754)

> Again [God said] to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: God is not the God of the dead (that is, those who are dead and will be no more), but of the living, whose souls indeed live in His hand, but whose bodies will again come to life through the resurrection. (*EEOF*, 4.27)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

"It was for the soul's good that it was united to a body.… Nevertheless, it is possible for it to exist apart from the body" (*ST*, 1.89.1).

Reformation Leaders

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

"In the interim [between death and resurrection], the soul does not sleep but is awake and enjoys the vision of angels and of God, and has converse with them"

(*LW*, 25.32).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> How groveling an error it is to convert a spirit, formed after the image of God, into an evanescent breath, which animates the body only during this fading life, and to reduce the temple of the Holy Spirit to nothing; in short, to rob of the badge of immortality that part of ourselves in which the divinity is most refulgent and the marks of immortality conspicuous, so as to make the condition of the body better and more excellent than that of the soul. (*ICR*, 3.25.6)
>
> [If] the soul [were not to] survive the body, how could it be present with the Lord on being separated from the body? But an apostle removes all doubt when he says that we go "to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23).… And [if] the soul, when unclothed from the body, [were not to] retain its essence, and be capable of beatific glory, our Savior would not have said to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). (ibid.)

Post-Reformation Teachers

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)

> The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment and outer darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. (32.1)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

> The souls of true saints, when they leave their bodies at death go to be with Christ.… They are not reserved in some abode distinct from the highest heaven; a place of rest, which they are kept in till the day of judgment as some imagine … but they go directly to heaven itself. ("FSDO" in *WJE*, 3)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

> The light of nature is sufficient to tell us that the soul is immortal, so that the infidel who doubts it is a worse fool even than a heathen, for he, before revelation was given, had discovered it—there are some faint glimmerings in men of reason which teach that the soul is something so wonderful that it must endure forever. (*SSC*, 66)

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE HUMAN BODY

While the intermediate state means conscious bliss for believers and conscious woe for unbelievers,[46] it still contains an incompletion. Human beings were created in an embodied state, and during the interim they are in a "naked" condition, the soul awaiting reunion with the body (2 Cor. 5:1–4). Indeed, as shown earlier,[47] the "image of God" includes the body (Gen. 1:27; 9:6; Heb. 1:3), and, unlike the platonic view, the Bible pronounces material things "good" (Gen. 1:31). The second person of the Godhead assumed a body Himself; thus, belief in the resurrection of the human physical body is perfectly in line with both Scripture's affirmation of it as "good" and its inclusion in God's image.

There is overwhelming biblical support for the bodily resurrection of all human beings. That there would be two resurrections—one of the saved (the just) and the other of the unsaved (the unjust)—is implied even in the Old Testament.

An angel told Daniel that in the last days "multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: [1] some to everlasting life, [2] others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). Jesus reaffirmed the same when He declared, "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—[1] those who have done good will rise to live, and [2] those who have done evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:28–29).[48] In each of these passages where both resurrections are mentioned, the order is the same: The saved are raised, then the unsaved are later raised.

In addition, Paul wrote:

> Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But *each in his own turn*: Christ, the firstfruits; then, [1] when he comes, those who belong to him. [2] Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:21–26)

This text maintains the same sequence. After Christ's return,[49] there is the resurrection of "those who belong to him." Then He reigns until "the last enemy is destroyed," namely, "death," which includes the resurrection of the lost. The two resurrections will be separated by a thousand years—Christ's millennial reign—as confirmed by John:

> I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. *They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection*. Blessed

> and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but *they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years*. (Rev. 20:4–6)

Several facts, explicit or implicit, are evident in regard to this text.

First, there will be two resurrections: one (of the righteous) at the beginning and the other (of the unrighteous) at the end of the thousand years (millennium).[50]

Second, both are physical resurrections.

Third, during the thousand years, those who were raised in the first resurrection will reign with Christ.

Fourth, *resurrection* means the body will again "come to life." Since the soul does not die, it is the body that will be raised.

Fifth, and finally, those who are part of the second resurrection (after the thousand years) will also experience "the second death," which is eternal separation from God (vv. 14–15).[51]

The Resurrection of *Believers*

Two resurrections of human beings are named in Scripture, and both are physical in nature: the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust. These resurrections are separated by a thousand years (the millennium): the resurrection of believers comes before, and the resurrection of unbelievers comes after.

Several biblical passages speak of two resurrections, and one gives the span of time between them.[52] The hope of believers' resurrection comes from the earliest times.

Genesis 22:2–5

> God said [to Abraham], "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."
>
> Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.
>
> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then *we* will come back to you."
>
> Abraham could be sure Isaac would return with him after the sacrifice *only* if he believed God would resurrect Isaac. According to Hebrews, this is exactly what Abraham believed: "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from

death” (11:19).

Job 19:25–26

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet *in my flesh* I will see God.” While some translations (e.g., ASV) render this verse “without my flesh,” it seems best to follow the traditional rendering (e.g., KJV, NIV); even “from my flesh” (e.g., RSV, NASB, NAB) implies he will be in his resurrection body when he sees the Redeemer. While the Hebrew word *min* often means “without,” it is used in the sense of “within” in Job 36:25. Further, when used in connection with “to see” (*hazah*), *min* takes on the meaning of “from within” or “from the vantage point of,” which again implies being in the resurrection body.

Job’s belief in the final resurrection is further implied in that while God restored *all his possessions twofold* after his suffering, he was only given *the same number of children* (42:13; cf. 1:2). This indicates that Job never really lost the others, that he would be reunited with them in the resurrection.

Psalm 16:10–11

David declared:

> *You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay*. You have made known to me the path of life; *you will fill me with joy in your presence*, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Peter said of David’s prophecy (Acts 2:31) that “seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body [Gk: *sarx*] see decay.” The belief that the resurrection involved a physical body of “flesh” (*sarx*) is unmistakable.

Psalm 17:15

“In righteousness I will see your face; when *I awake*, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.”

With death being viewed as “sleep,”[53] resurrection is pictured as awakening from the “sleep” of death. Further, the psalmist clearly believed He would see God face-to-face in the Beatific Vision (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4), which will occur in heaven after the resurrection of the just.[54]

Isaiah 26:19

"*Your dead will live; their bodies will rise*. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; *the earth will give birth to her dead*." The italicized phrases are unmistakable references to a literal, physical resurrection.

Isaiah 53:8–10

> He [Messiah] was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

This text speaks plainly of the Messiah's death as indicated by phrases like "assigned a grave with the wicked," "a lamb to the slaughter" (53:7), "cut off from the land of the living," and "the Lord makes his life a guilt offering." Again, *"He will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand."* To be alive to experience this, His body would have to be resurrected.

Daniel 12:2

"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." Since it is the body that returns to the dust and will awake to either everlasting life or everlasting contempt, this obviously refers to the physical resurrection of both the saved and the lost. Jews not only believed that humans were created from the dust (Gen. 2:7) and would return to dust (Eccl. 12:7), but also that at the final resurrection they would be reconstituted from the dust. If everlasting life includes the body and comes after the body has turned into dust, then a physical resurrection is inarguably in view.

The Wisdom of Solomon 3:7–8

While not made up of canonical writings,[55] even the extrabiblical intertestamental literature[56] speaks of a physical resurrection. For instance, "in the time of their visitation [the departed souls of the righteous] (v. 1) will shine forth" (be restored) and that "they will govern nations and rule over peoples."

2 Maccabees 7:11

This passage tells of a courageous Jewish believer who suffered his tongue

and hands to be cut off, saying, “I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again [at the resurrection].”

4 Esdras 7:32

According to this text, when the Messiah comes “the earth shall give up those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence.” Death is described here as a time: “We shall be kept in rest until those times come when you [God] will renew the creation” (v. 75).

2 Baruch 49:2; 50:2

To the question “In what shape will those live who live in Thy day?” the answer is unequivocal affirmation of the material resurrection:

> The earth shall then assuredly restore the dead [which it now receives, in order to preserve them]. It shall make no change in their form, but as it has received, so shall it restore them, and as I delivered them to it, so also shall it raise them.

The New Testament is a Jewish book, and, unsurprisingly, it contains continued Judeo-Christian affirmation to the physical resurrection.

Matthew 22:30

“*At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage*; they will be like the angels in heaven.” The Sadducees’ query about the resurrection—regarding whether a woman married seven times on earth would be married to one of her husbands in eternity—highlights not only the Jewish belief in a physical resurrection (cf. Acts 23:8) but also Jesus’ own affirmation of it. They conceived of the resurrection body as being so physical that it was meaningful to ask which of her husbands she would be joined to in heaven.

John 5:28–29

Jesus said, “A time is coming when *all who are in their graves* will hear [the Son of Man’s] voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”[57] Everyone who has died will be physically resurrected in the future.

John 11:23–26

> Jesus said to [Martha], *"Your brother will rise again."* Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live [eternally], even though he [physically] dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

This passage not only reaffirms Jewish belief in a "last day" physical resurrection, it again reiterates Jesus' affirmation; His demonstration of the power to be able to do it was then shown in raising Lazarus from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:21–26

> Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so *in Christ all will be made alive*. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.… He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Paul's words affirm that all persons will rise from the dead because Christ did, as He Himself said: "Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. *Because I live, you also will live*" (John 14:19).

1 Thessalonians 4:13–17

> Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and *the dead in Christ will rise first.* After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

When Christ returns,[58] all believers will be raised. Physical death is temporary; the body will awaken from it at the final resurrection.

2 Timothy 2:17–18

Paul said certain heretics claimed that believers had already been resurrected: "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some." Paul is speaking here of the resurrection of believers; to deny that this is yet a future event is heretical.

Revelation 20:4–6

> I saw the souls of those who … had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark.… They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead[59] *did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*[60]*)* This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection.[61] The second death[62] has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

The Nature of the Believer's Resurrection Body

The believer's resurrection body will have several notable characteristics. For starters, since it will be like Christ's (cf. Phil. 3:21), we can use His body as an example.

Numerical Identity

There are many lines of evidence to support the resurrection body being numerically[63] identical to the pre-resurrection body.

First, the empty tomb says the body that vacated it is the same one that occupied it.[64]

Second, the crucifixion scars on the resurrection body show that it was the same one that died (John 20:27; Luke 24:40).

Third, that the resurrection body has "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39) reveals that it was the same body of flesh in which Jesus was incarnated (John 1:14) and in which He continually lives (1 John 4:2).

Fourth, that Jesus ate food in His resurrection body supports it being the same physical body He had before He died (Luke 24:42).

Fifth, and finally, the resurrection body is tangible (Matt. 28:9; cf. John 20:27).

Being numerically the same body does not mean Christ's body had all the same particles;[65] even now the basic cells of our pre-resurrection bodies change every seven years and yet they comprise the same body. However, if there were *not* numerical identity between the pre- and post-resurrection bodies, the Resurrection would have been a failure; if what died had not risen again, God would have lost the battle over death to Satan.

Materiality

As the above evidence shows, the believer's resurrection body is physical.

First, it is said to be a resurrection out from "among the dead" (Luke 24:5), which is, of course, the grave. Since only physical bodies are buried, the resurrection will be of the physical body that died.

Second, the body raised is the one "sown" in death (1 Cor. 15:42).

Third, rather than replacing the mortal body, the immortal resurrection body is "put on" over it. We will be raised in our physical bodies.

Fourth, the word *body* (Gk: *soma*), in regard to the resurrection body (cf. v. 44), always means a physical body when used of an individual human being (see Gundry, *SNT*).

Fifth, and finally, Jesus, "by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21; cf. 1 John 3:2–3).

Unfortuately, some noted evangelicals have denied the numerical identity and essential materiality of the resurrection body. George Ladd of Fuller Seminary wrote: "One body is buried; another body springs forth." If one were watching the body of Jesus at the moment of resurrection, "all he would have seen was the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of the body of Jesus." And Christ's appearances were not in the same body that died, but were of Him "who was with them but invisible [but] made himself visible to their physical senses."[66]

Likewise, Murray Harris of Trinity Seminary affirmed that at the moment of the Resurrection Jesus was "changed into a spiritual mode of being,"[67] which in "his essential state was one of invisibility and therefore immateriality"[68] with the "ability to materialize at will." Thus, "the new body is qualitatively and numerically distinct from the old body." Further, "the believer's resurrection body will come from heaven, not from the grave."[69]

In an embarrassing example of placing fraternity over orthodoxy, Wayne Grudem, Murray Harris's former colleague, affirmed Harris's view on the Resurrection was orthodox,[70] even though Harris claimed that believers get their resurrection body at the moment of death,[71] while their dead bodies continue rotting in the grave, never to be resurrected (cf. John 5:28–29). Even Harris later recanted this view after being examined by a panel headed up by Millard Erickson, who had called this view a "heresy."[72]

Immortality

The resurrection body is not a mere physical body, it is a *supernatural* physical body, spiritually powered, literally *Spirit-dominated* (1 Cor. 15:44). Just

as the Rock that followed Israel in the wilderness[73] was a literal rock out of which came literal water (10:4) with a supernatural[74] source, even so the resurrected believer will be physically embodied and spiritually vital. As Paul calls the new body "incorruptible" and "immortal" (15:53 KJV), the "change" (v. 51) will not be from a material body to an immaterial body but from a perishable physical body to an imperishable physical body.

Glory, Mobility, and Agility

The resurrection body also has characteristics such as glory, mobility, and agility. It is called a "glorious body" (Phil. 3:21), which assumes that a kind of radiance comes from it, perhaps like with Jesus' body on the Mount of Transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17). It will have supernatural powers enabling it to move through space (Acts 1:10–11) and perhaps through other material things (cf. John 20:19). Since Jesus could eat in His resurrection body, assumably we will be able to do so as well. However, since the resurrection body is supernaturally powered (1 Cor. 15:44), we will eat not for nourishment but for pleasure and celebration (cf. Matt. 26:29).

In regard to the resurrection body, it is a serious error to hold that Jesus was not resurrected in an immortal and glorified body, but rather that He only received it later, at His ascension. Millard Erickson (b. 1932) writes:

> The body that he [Jesus] had at the point of resurrection was yet to undergo a more complete transformation at the point of the ascension. It was yet to become a "spiritual body." … We might say, then, that the Easter event was something of a resuscitation, such as that of Lazarus, rather than a true resurrection, as will be the case for us. Jesus' postresurrection body may well have been like the body with which Lazarus came out of the tomb—Lazarus could still (and presumably did again) die. If this was the case with Jesus, he may have needed to eat to remain alive. (*CT*, 777)

Speaking of Christ's ascension, Erickson adds,

> At that time Jesus underwent the remainder of the metamorphosis begun with the resurrection of his body. The significance of the ascension is that Jesus left behind the conditions associated with life on this earth. (778)

Supposedly, then, Jesus was raised mortal and did not receive a glorified, immortal body until His ascension.

In response, there are several notable problems with this view.

First, if Jesus was not raised immortal, then His resurrection was not a victory over death, as the Bible proclaims it to be (1 Cor. 15:55).

Second, this theory opposes Philippians 3:21, which declares that our

resurrection body will be like His glorious body.

Third, it contradicts Paul's pledge that we will be raised to an immortal and incorruptible body, just as Christ our "firstfruits" was (1 Cor. 15:20, 53).

Fourth, it is contrary to 1 Peter 1:11, which speaks of "the sufferings of Christ [death] and the glories that would follow [resurrection]" (cf. Acts 26:23).

Fifth, Christ's victory over death is one of glory (1 Cor. 2:8).

Sixth, Paul said flatly, "The resurrection of the dead … is sown in dishonor, it is *raised in glory*" (15:42–43).

Seventh, and finally, Christ's resurrection body possessed characteristics of a glorified body, like the ability to appear and disappear (Luke 24:31) and even enter rooms that had closed doors (John 20:19). Neither was the blinding radiance of His ascended body unique to His post-ascension state; as mentioned earlier, this had occurred, for instance, at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2).

The Timing of the Believer's Resurrection

Since believers will be resurrected at Christ's second coming,[75] and since no one knows the time of His return (cf. Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:5), no one knows when the resurrection of believers will take place. *This* much is known: There will be two resurrections—of the just and the unjust—and they will be separated by a thousand-year reign of Christ.[76]

The Resurrection of *Unbelievers*

Death will be reversed for all human beings. Everyone, saved and unsaved, will be restored in their pre-resurrection body and made undying (immortal).

The above references make it evident that the second resurrection is of unbelievers. Again, this is called variously (among other things) the resurrection "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2); the resurrection of "those who have done evil" and will "rise to be condemned" (John 5:29); and the resurrection of "the rest of the dead" (Rev. 20:5). Whatever the name, it is clearly (1) a second resurrection, (2) after the resurrection of believers, and (3) the resurrection of those who are lost forever.[77] Of this, John wrote, "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15).

The Timing of the Unbeliever's Resurrection

As already established, the second resurrection is separated from the first resurrection by a thousand years, during which believers will reign with Christ (vv. 4–6). An intervening time period between the two resurrections is both allowed and implied in other texts.[78]

First, the resurrection of believers is out from "among the dead" (Col. 1:18), implying that other dead bodies are left in the graves when it occurs.

Second, John speaks of the period of both resurrections as an "hour" (i.e., a long period of time), yet the first resurrection takes only "the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52). Thus, the remainder of the "hour" must transpire before the second resurrection.

Third, John states emphatically (six times) that there will be a thousand years between the "first resurrection" and the second one when "the rest of the dead" are raised (cf. Rev. 20:3–6).

The Nature of the Unbeliever's Resurrection Body

Although the word *immortal* is not used of the unbeliever's resurrection body —since *immortal* contains connotations of a positive quality of eternal life reserved for only the saved[79]—nevertheless, there are many reasons to believe that the unsaved also will possess physical bodies that will live on forever.

First, the second resurrection is listed several times in connection with the first resurrection, which is indubitably a resurrection into a never-dying physical body. Since those on both sides of this issue agree that the second resurrection is physical, it follows that it too is into a never-dying body.

Second, in Revelation 20:5 the lost are designated as "the rest of the dead" who will "come to life,"[80] the same term used of those in the first resurrection (cf. vv. 4–5), believers, who physically will come out from among the dead.

Third, Jesus said that both soul and body of unbelievers would be punished in hell (Matt. 10:28). Since the same word[81] is used of both soul and body in regard to hell, since hell is "forever" (Matt. 25:41; cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–9), and since we know that the soul will not be annihilated,[82] the unbeliever's body will live eternally as well.

Fourth, and finally, since the body is part of God's image (Gen. 1:27), even in unbelievers (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), were God *not* to resurrect it forever, He would

in effect be conceding victory over it to the devil. However, His Word declares that Christ will reign until He has defeated death (1 Cor. 15:26), and unless physical death is reversed for all people, death will not be completely defeated. Accordingly, marred and lost as God's image may be in unbelievers,[83] even their bodies will be restored to life so that they can remain in their chosen destiny.[84]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE HUMAN BODY

As with our conscious survival after death,[85] the resurrection of all human beings is rooted in both God's nature and ours. This includes God's omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omnisapience, and our being created in His image.

God's Omnipotence As the Basis for Bodily Resurrection

Once again, resurrection is rooted in God's power. If God can do anything that is possible,[86] then He can raise the dead. If He can create life—and He did[87]—then He can restore it. God's omnipotence is a necessary condition for our physical resurrection.

God's Omnibenevolence As the Basis for Bodily Resurrection

Another cornerstone for the doctrine of the final resurrection is God's omnibenevolence.[88] That God has the power to resurrect the dead does not assure that it will happen; unless God is also all-good, we have no real basis for believing there is hope for a decayed corpse. What is it in God's nature that prompts Him to want to restore His wayward creatures? Were it not for His mercy, His justice would allow the punishment of death to go unreversed.[89] Thanks be to God's omnibenevolence, for on its foundation He is moved to redeem us in both soul and body.

The Omnisapience of God As the Basis for Bodily Resurrection

God's wisdom[90] is manifest in Christ's resurrection, for while sin brought

death (Rom. 5:12), His sacrificial death reverses the curse to bring us life.[91] Jesus overcame the devil's victory (of inflicting death on all humankind—Heb. 2:14) by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:55); as we have seen, in the Cross, Satan struck at the bait of Christ's humanity and was caught on the hook of His deity.[92] Without a *physical* resurrection, the devil would be the winner and God the loser, for he would have brought physical death, and God would not have reversed it by bringing physical life. Anything short of a material reconstruction of the body would spell failure for God's creative purpose, as correctly noted by Robert Gundry (b. 1935): "Anything less … undercuts Paul's ultimate intention that redeemed man possess a physical means of concrete activity for eternal service and worship of God in a restored creation" (*SBT*, 182). Thus, as Paul affirmed, "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (2:8). But they did crucify Him, and God, in His infinite wisdom, allowed it in order to defeat sin and restore His creation (Rev. 21–22).[93]

Our Creation in God's Image As the Basis for Bodily Resurrection

The doctrine of humans created in God's image is also at the basis of the final resurrection. As was shown earlier, that image included the body;[94] hence, unless physical resurrection occurs, there is no full restoration in the image of God. Since His purpose in creation included humans made in His image, we reasonably conclude that He will work to restore it. To do less would be for God to forsake the completion of His own image, for Him not to be concerned about what is His. Because this is contrary to God—because perfection is rooted in His very nature[95]—the creation of humans in God's image (including their physical dimension) is a basic biblical truth in which the final resurrection is based.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO PHYSICAL RESURRECTION

Many objections have been leveled at the historical orthodox belief that all human beings will be resurrected in the same physical body in which they died. We will examine the basic arguments to sharpen our focus on this doctrine.

Objection One: Based on Paul's Calling It a Spiritual Body

One passage often cited is 1 Corinthians 15:44, where Paul refers to the resurrection body as a "spiritual body" in contrast to the pre-resurrection body, which is a "natural body."

Response to Objection One

A "spiritual" body is one dominated by the spirit, not one devoid of matter; the Greek word *pneumatikos* (*spiritual*) means a body directed by the Spirit, as opposed to one under the dominion of the flesh. *Spiritual* here does not mean "immaterial" but "immortal, imperishable":[96] "That which belongs to the supernatural order of being is described as *pneumatikos*: accordingly, the resurrection body is a *soma pneumatikos* [supernatural body]."[97]

Paul used the same word earlier to refer to the "spiritual rock" that followed Israel in the wilderness from which they received "spiritual drink" (10:4); the Old Testament (cf. Ex. 17; Num. 20) reveals that it was a physical rock from which they got literal water. Further, when Paul spoke about "the spiritual man" (1 Cor. 2:15), he obviously did not mean an invisible, immaterial person with no corporeal body.

Objection Two: Based on Christ's Ability to Make Himself Appear

It is also argued that Christ's resurrection body was essentially immaterial and invisible and, therefore, not an object observable in our history. The New Testament repeatedly stresses that it could appear,[98] which implies that it was invisible before it appeared;[99] each time the text says "he appeared" or "he let himself be seen." Grammatically, the action rests on He who appears, not on the one who sees Him appear. This, supposedly, suggests that Jesus was essentially invisible and, hence, could be seen[100] only when He chose to be (during His resurrection appearances).

Response to Objection Two

This argument fails for several reasons.

First of all, the phrase "he let himself be seen" (*ophthé*)[101] simply means that

Jesus took the initiative to show Himself to the disciples, *not that He was essentially immaterial*. The same form ("He [they] appeared") is used in the Greek Old Testament (2 Chron. 25:21), in the Apocrypha (1 Macc. 4:6),[102] and in the New Testament (Acts 7:26) of human beings appearing in physical bodies.

In addition, the same event is also described in the *active* mood: Paul said, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). If the resurrection body can be seen by the naked eye, then it is not invisible.

Furthermore, that the same basic word *appeared* (*ophthé*) refers to a natural event is supported by standard Greek lexicons. The *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* points out that the word is used "of persons who appear in a natural way."[103] *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* notes that appearances "occur in a reality which can be perceived by the natural senses."[104] *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* notes that *appeared* means "He could be seen by human eyes, the appearances were not just visions."[105]

Finally, when Jesus did appear, the event is described by the word *horaô* ("to see"). Although *horaô* is sometimes used of seeing invisible realities (cf. Luke 1:22; 24:23), it often means "to see by the naked eye."[106] For example, John uses *horaô* of seeing Jesus in His earthly body before the Resurrection (6:36; 14:9; 19:35) and also of seeing Him in His resurrection body (20:18, 25, 29). Since the same word for body (*soma*) is used of Jesus before and after the Resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:44; Phil. 3:21), and since the same word for its appearing (*horaô*) is also used of both, there is no reason to believe that the resurrection body is not the same literal, physical body.

Objection Three: Based on the Fact That Jesus Could Disappear

Luke writes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he *disappeared* from their sight" (Luke 24:31). Jesus also disappeared from the disciples on other occasions (e.g., v. 51; Acts 1:9). If Jesus could disappear suddenly, then His body must have been able to go into an immaterial mode of existence.

Response to Objection Three

This reasoning fails; that Jesus "disappeared" doesn't demonstrate His body's immateriality any more than it proves that Philip's pre-resurrection body

immaterialized simply because the Holy Spirit quickly transported him some distance away (Acts 8:39). Jesus could have been transported to another place, or He could have stepped into another dimension in His physical body.

Also, that Jesus appeared repeatedly in the same physical body for some forty days (1:3) to over five hundred different people (1 Cor. 15:6) on twelve different occasions is indisputable evidence that He rose bodily and continued in the same physical body thereafter, including His ascension (Acts 1:10–11).

Objection Four: Based on Resurrection Appearances Being Called Visions

The contention that resurrection appearances are called visions is also used to support the immaterial view of the resurrection body.[107] Luke, for instance, records that women at the tomb "had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive" (24:23); likewise, Paul's experience with Christ on the Damascus Road[108] is called a vision (Acts 26:19). Immaterialists insist that visions are always of invisible, unseen realities, not of physical, material objects.

Response to Objection Four

First, Luke 24:23 does not refer to seeing the resurrected Christ, but to seeing a vision of angels. The Gospels nowhere speak of a resurrection appearance of Christ as a vision, and neither does Paul in his 1 Corinthians 15 list.[109]

Second, all post-resurrection encounters with Christ in the Gospels are later described as literal appearances (15:5–8), not as mere visions.

Third, the difference between a vision and a physical appearance is significant. Visions are of invisible, spiritual realities, such as God and angels. Appearances are of physical entities that can be seen with the naked eye.

Fourth, the only time the word *vision* appears to be used of a post-resurrection appearance is in connection with Paul's experience en route to Damascus. Even here, though, Paul possibly does not refer to Christ's appearance, but rather to the vision God later gave Ananias,[110] to commission Paul for ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 22:10, 15; cf. 9:10–15).

Fifth, and finally, even if there *is* some overlap of meaning between visions and appearances, the fact that every appearance is clearly one of Christ in the same physical body in which He died would only allow that the word *vision* could sometimes refer to the same reality. It would not prove that Christ did not have a physical resurrection body.

Objection Five: Based on Jesus' Walking Through Doors

Many critics of the physical resurrection point to Jesus walking through closed doors to allege that His body could not have been material. This is inferred from John 20:19, which reads: "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' "

Response to Objection Five

A careful reading of this text reveals that it does not actually say Jesus passed through a closed door—it says that even though the doors were closed, Jesus came in. There are natural ways He could have entered without walking through the door. He could have knocked and someone opened it. He could have come in through another opening. He could have disengaged the lock, as the angels did to take Peter out of prison (Acts 12:10). And, of course, Jesus could have performed a miracle to walk through the door in His physical body; this would be no problem, for He who could walk on water (cf. John 6:16–20). Walking on water no more proved that Jesus' pre-resurrection body was immaterial than Peter's walk on water proved that his body dematerialized for a moment and then quickly rematerialized (cf. Matt. 14:29).

At any rate, according to modern physics it is not an impossibility for a material object to pass through a door: it is only statistically improbable. Physical objects are mostly empty space, and what is necessary for one physical object to pass through another is the right alignment of the particles in the two physical objects—not a difficulty for the One who created the body (cf. John 1:3).

Objection Six: Based on the Irretrievability of the Body's Particles

Following the Socinians,[111] some critics insist that a physical resurrection body would imply "a crassly materialistic view of resurrection, according to which the scattered fragments of decomposed corpses were to be reassembled" (Harris, *RI*, 126).

Response to Objection Six

First of all, within the parameters of the orthodox view, it is unnecessary to believe that the same particles will be restored;[112] even common sense dictates that a body can be the same physical body without having the same physical particles.[113] The observable fact that bodies eat food and give off waste products (as well as get heavier or lighter) is sufficient evidence of this; if I gain or lose several pounds, we do not say my body is no longer material or no longer my body.

Furthermore, regardless, an omnipotent God could certainly bring all of the scattered particles of one's body together again at the final resurrection. As for those particles shared at one time or another by two or more bodies, there is no difficulty for God, Creator even of dust, to supply the missing particles.

Finally, again, it is unnecessary to believe that God needs to reconstitute the exact particles of a pre-resurrection body. As mentioned, our pre-resurrection body remains physical, even though its exact physical molecules change (recycle) approximately every seven years. The resurrection body can be the same body as the present one while having new molecules.

Objection Seven: Based on "Flesh and Blood" Not Being Able to Enter the Kingdom

Paul said, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50), and from this some have reasoned that the resurrection body cannot be physical. As early as the second century, Irenaeus noted that this passage was being used by heretics in support of what he called their "very great error."[114]

Response to Objection Seven

First, the very next phrase, omitted from the above quotation of 1 Corinthians 15:50, indicates clearly that Paul is speaking not of flesh as such but of *corruptible* flesh: *"nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."* Paul is not saying the resurrection body will not have flesh, but that it will not have *perishable* flesh.

Second, in order to convince the frightened disciples He was not an immaterial spirit (Luke 24:37), Jesus emphatically said His resurrection body had flesh (v. 39).

Third, Peter directly said that the resurrection body would be the same body

of *flesh* that went into the tomb and never saw corruption (Acts 2:31). Paul reaffirmed this (13:35), and John implies that it is against Christ to deny that He remains "in the flesh" after His resurrection (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).

Fourth, and finally, "flesh and blood" in this context apparently means *mortal* flesh and blood, that is, a mere human being. Compare Jesus' statement to Peter, who had just confessed that He is Messiah: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you" (Matt. 16:17 NKJV). Jesus could not have been referring to the mere substance of the body as such, which obviously couldn't reveal His identity as the Son of God; rather, "the only correct and natural interpretation [of 1 Cor. 15:50] seems to be that *man, as he now is*, a frail, earth-bound, perishable creature, *cannot have a place in God's glorious, heavenly kingdom*."[11][5] There is nothing in this text that denies the physical nature of the resurrection body.

Objection Eight: Based on the Difference Between Resurrection and Resuscitation

Opponents of physical resurrection also maintain that Jesus' body was not material because His resurrection was more than the mere resuscitation of a physical corpse. They argue that saying His body was the same physical body He had before He was raised is to reduce the Resurrection to resuscitation.

Response to Objection Eight

For one thing, Jesus' resurrection *was* more than a resuscitation. Resuscitated corpses die again; Jesus' resurrection body was immortal. He conquered death (Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:54–55), whereas merely resuscitated bodies will eventually be conquered by death, as in the story of Lazarus, who was raised by Jesus but eventually died again (cf. John 11). Jesus was the first to be raised in an immortal body, one that will never die again (1 Cor. 15:20). However, that Jesus was the first to be raised in an immortal body does not necessitate that His body was immaterial. The Resurrection was *more* than a reanimation of a material corpse, but not *less*.

Further, it does not follow that because Jesus' resurrection body could not die, it could not be seen—what is immortal is not necessarily invisible. The re-created physical universe will last forever in its recreated state (Rev. 21:1–4), and yet it will be visible. The resurrection body differs from resuscitation not in that it's immaterial but in that it's immortal (1 Cor. 15:42, 53).

Objection Nine: Based on Jesus Appearing in a "Different Form"

Mark 16:12 declares that "Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them [His followers] while they were walking in the country." From this, some claim that after the Resurrection "we cannot rule out the possibility that the visible form of Jesus had altered in some mysterious way, delaying recognition of him." They suggest that "the expression 'he appeared in another form' in the Markan appendix[116] encapsulates this" (Harris, *RI*, 56).

Response to Objection Nine

First, there are significant questions about the authenticity of this text: Mark 16:9–20 is not in some of the oldest and best manuscripts.[117] In reconstructing the original texts from the known extant manuscripts, many scholars believe the older texts are more reliable, since they are closer to the originals.[118]

Second, even granting the passage's (and thus the verse's) authenticity, the event of which it is a summary (cf. Luke 24:13–32) says simply that "they were kept from recognizing him" (v. 16). The miraculous element was not in Jesus' body, but in what God did to the eyes of the disciples; recognition of Jesus was kept from them until their eyes were opened.

Third, at best Mark 16:12 is an obscure and isolated reference upon which it is unwise to base doctrinal pronouncement.

Fourth, and finally, whatever "another form" means, it certainly does not mean a form other than His physical, material body. On this very occasion Jesus ate physical food (Luke 24:30), an ability He soon thereafter gave as a proof that He was "flesh and bones" and not an immaterial "spirit" (vv. 38–43). "Another form" probably means that sometimes He appeared in the form of a gardener (cf. John 20), sometimes in the form of a traveler (cf. Luke 24), etc.

Objection Ten: Based on the Disciples Not Recognizing Jesus

Another objection to Christ being resurrected in the same physical body is that, if He was, why did the disciples often not recognize Him? Surely if He was in the same physical body He'd have had the same physical recognizability.

Response to Objection Ten

This contention misses the whole point: In every such passage, before the appearance was over, the disciples were so absolutely sure it was the same Jesus with whom they'd spent more than three years that they were converted overnight from scared, scattered skeptics to the world's greatest missionary force! True, there was occasional initial hesitancy in recognizing Him because of darkness, fear, unbelief, and anxiety, but this momentary doubt[119] was soon overshadowed by indubitable certainty of what was later called "infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3 NKJV) that it was the same Jesus in the same body, crucifixion scars and all (cf. Luke 24:40; John 20:27).

Objection Eleven: Based on Jesus Being Raised "in the Spirit"

According to Peter, Jesus was "put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18 NKJV). Some have used these words to suggest that the resurrection body was not material flesh but immaterial "spirit."

Response to Objection Eleven

This interpretation is neither necessary nor consistent with the context of this passage and the rest of Scripture.

First of all, the passage can be translated "He was put to death in the body but made alive by the [Holy] Spirit" (NIV); it is rendered with this same understanding in others as well.

What is more, in the New Testament the parallel between "death" and being "made alive" normally refers to bodily resurrection. For example, Paul declared that "Christ died and returned to life" (Rom. 14:9), and "He was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power" (2 Cor. 13:4).

Also, the context refers to the event as "the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21), which is everywhere understood in the New Testament as a bodily resurrection.

Finally, even if "spirit" does refer to Jesus' human spirit (rather than to the Holy Spirit), it cannot mean Jesus had no resurrection body; otherwise, the reference to His "body" (flesh) before His resurrection would mean He also had no human spirit. Hence, "flesh" in this context refers to His whole condition of humiliation before the Resurrection;[120] "spirit" refers to His unlimited power and imperishable life afterward (Schep, *NRB*, 77).

Objection Twelve: Based on Christ Being a "Life-Giving Spirit" After the Resurrection

According to 1 Corinthians 15:45, Christ was made a "life-giving spirit" after being raised. Some have presented this passage as evidence that Jesus had no physical resurrection body.

Response to Objection Twelve

This conclusion does not follow for reasons similar to those given for the previous argument.

First, "life-giving spirit" does not speak of the *nature* of the resurrection body, but of the Resurrection's divine *origin*. Jesus' physical body came back to life only by God's power (cf. Rom. 1:4); Paul is speaking about its spiritual *source*, not its material *substance*.

Second, if "spirit" did describe the nature of Christ's resurrection body, then Adam (with whom He is contrasted[121]) would not have had a soul, since he is described as "of the dust of the earth" (1 Cor. 15:47). Adam was "a living being" ("soul," Gen. 2:7).

Third, Christ's resurrection body is called a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44), which, as we have seen, is the same description used by Paul for food, drink, and a literal rock (10:3–4).

Fourth, the resurrection body is called a "body" (*soma*), which always means a physical body when referring to an individual human (Gundry, *SBT*, 168).

In brief, the resurrection body is called "spiritual" and "life-giving spirit" because its source is the spiritual realm, not because its substance is immaterial. Adam's natural body was "of the earth" (15:47), but just as the one from "earth" also has an immaterial soul, so the One from "heaven" also has a material body.

Objection Thirteen: Based on Our Being Like Angels in the Resurrection

Jesus said that in the final resurrection we "will be like the angels" (Matt. 22:30). Angels do not have physical bodies; they are spirits (cf. Heb. 1:14); thus, it is argued that when we are resurrected we will not have physical bodies.

Response to Objection Thirteen

This conclusion is unnecessary.

For one thing, the context is not about the nature of the resurrection body, but whether there will be marriage in heaven. Jesus replied that there will not; He said nothing here about people having immaterial bodies in heaven.

For another, Jesus saying that "at the resurrection … they will be like the angels in heaven" obviously means that, like angels, we "will neither marry nor be given in marriage." He said we would be like angels in that we would not marry, not in that we will be immaterial.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE HUMAN BODY

The doctrine of the physical resurrection of all human beings is firmly grounded in church history. In countering gnosticism, the early Fathers even chose the strongest term to describe it—the resurrection of the *flesh* (Gk. *sarx*), used four times in the New Testament (and once in the Apostles' Creed) to describe the nature of the resurrection body.[122]

Early Church Fathers

With the exception of scattered unorthodox views (such as Origen's), the earliest Fathers affirmed that Jesus rose in the same body of flesh in which He was crucified.

The Apostles' Creed (c. 150)

The creed says, "I believe in the … resurrection of the flesh." That the Christian church has always confessed its belief in Christ's physical resurrection is expressed in this unmistakably clear phrase.

> We may say, therefore, that the entire early Church, in the West and in the East alike, publicly confessed belief in the resurrection of the flesh. In the Western creeds … this confessional formula has retained its place with hardly any exception. Up to the Reformation there is no exception at all. (Schep, *NRB*, 221)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

Converted philosopher Justin Martyr was one of the early church's great

apologists. He not only uses the phrase "resurrection of the flesh," but he also designates it as referring to the flesh (body), not to the soul. He said plainly, "The resurrection is a resurrection of the *flesh* which dies" (*ORF* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1.298).[123] "He has even called the *flesh* to the resurrection, and promises to it everlasting life. For where He promises to save man, there He gives the promise to the *flesh*" (ibid., 297).

Furthermore,

> When He had thus shown them that there is truly a resurrection of the *flesh*, wishing to show them this also, that it is not impossible for *flesh* to ascend into heaven … "He was taken up into heaven while they beheld," as He was in the flesh. (ibid., 298)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> The Church [believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them: and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation … and [in] the resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven in the *flesh* of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord. (*AH*, 1.10.1 in ibid., 1.330)
>
> Resurrecting the *flesh* is no problem for God. Since the Lord has power to infuse life into what He has fashioned, since the *flesh* is capable of being quickened, what remains to prevent its participation in incorruption, which is a blissful and never-ending life granted by God? (*AH*, 3.3 in ibid., 530)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

> With regard to this rule of faith … you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth … at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb … having been crucified, He rose again the third day … will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their *flesh*. (*PAH*, XIII in ibid., 3.249)

Athenagoras (fl. second century)

> [That] His power is sufficient of the raising of dead bodies is shown by the creation of these *same bodies*. For if, when they did not exist, He made at their first formation the bodies of men, and *their original elements*, He will, when they are dissolved, in whatever manner that may take place, raise them again with equal ease: for this too, is equally possible to Him. (*RD*, 3 in ibid., 2.150)

Rufinus (345–410)

Rufinus, a Latin bishop, wrote "Commentary on the Apostles' Creed," in which he declared that even the lost particles of the dead body will be restored in the resurrection body. In another statement found in a preface to Pamphilus's

“Defense of Origen,” he emphasized the identity of Christ’s body and His flesh:

> We believe that it is *this very flesh* in which we are now living which will rise again, not one kind of flesh instead of another, nor another body than the body of *this flesh*.… It is an absurd invention of maliciousness to think that the human body is different from the *flesh*. (cited by Schep, *NRB*, 225)

Epiphanius (c. fourth century)

The Second Creed of Epiphanius, an enlargement of the Nicene Creed, affirmed:

> The Word became *flesh*, not undergoing any change nor converting Godhead into Manhood, [but] uniting into his own one holy perfection and Godhead.… The same suffered in the flesh; rose again; and went up to heaven in the *same body*, sat down gloriously at the right hand of the Father; is coming in the *same body* in glory to judge the quick and the dead. (*TCESF* in Schaff, *CC*, II.37)

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)

> Let no heretic ever persuade thee to speak evil of the Resurrection. For to this day the Manichees say that the resurrection of the Saviour was phantom-wise, and not real, not heeding Paul who says, *Who was made flesh of the seed of David according to flesh*; and again, *By the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead*. (*CL*, XIV.21 in Schaff, *NPNF*, VII.99)
>
> The Faith which we rehearse contains in order the following: “AND [WE BELIEVE] IN ONE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS; AND IN ONE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH; AND IN THE *RESURRECTION OF THE FLESH*; AND IN ETERNAL LIFE.” (*CL*, XVIII.22 in ibid., 139)

Regarding Cyril’s reference to the resurrection body as “the very same body” we have before the final resurrection (XVIII.18 in ibid.), similar views were also held by Gregory of Nazianzen (c. 330–c. 389, a president of the Constantinople Council), Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395), and Basil the Great (c. 329–379).

Medieval Fathers

Augustine (354–430)

The earliest great Father of the Middle Ages was Augustine, bishop of Hippo, whose extensive and influential writings dominated the medieval church and continue to this day.

> It is indubitable that the resurrection of Christ, and His ascension into heaven with the *flesh* in which He rose, is already preached and believed in the whole world. (*CG*, XXII.5 in Schaff, *NPNF*, II.482)
>
> The *earthly body* of Christ was received up into heaven. Already both the learned and unlearned have believed in the resurrection of the *flesh* and its ascension to the heavenly places, while only a very

few either of the educated or uneducated are still staggered by it. (ibid.)

Far be it from us to fear that the omnipotence of the Creator cannot, for the resuscitation and reanimation of our bodies, recall all the portions which have been consumed by beasts or fire, or have been dissolved into dust or ashes, or have decomposed into water, or even evaporated into the air. (XXII.20.498 in ibid.)

Anselm (1033–1109)

The future resurrection of the dead is clearly proved. For if man is to be perfectly restored, the restoration should make him such as he would have been had he never sinned.… Therefore, as man, had he not sinned, was to have been transferred with the *same body* to an immortal state, so when he shall be restored, it must properly be *with his own body as he lived in this world*. (*CDH*, II.III in *SABW*, 241)

I do not think mortality inheres in the essential nature of man, but only as corrupted. Since, had man never sinned, and had immortality been unchangeably confirmed, he would have been as really man: and, when the dying rise again, incorruptible, *they will be no less really men*. For, if mortality was an essential attribute of human nature, then he who was immortal could not be man. (II.XI, in ibid., 255–56)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

The soul does not take an airy or heavenly body, or a body of another organic constitution, but a human body composed of *flesh and bones* and the same members enjoyed at present. (*CT*, 153 in Gilby, *STAPT*, 764)

They have not believed in the resurrection of the body, and have strained to twist the words of Holy Scripture to mean a spiritual resurrection, a resurrection from sin through grace.…

That St. Paul believed in a bodily resurrection is clear.… To deny this, and *to affirm a purely spiritual resurrection, is against the Christian Faith*. (*SCG*, 79 in ibid., 662)

By conjunction to a soul numerically the same, *the man will be restored to matter numerically the same*. [Therefore,] although this corporeality yields to nothingness when the human body is corrupted, it cannot, for all that, be an obstacle to the body's rising with numerical identity.… [Hence,] it is clear that *man returns numerically the same both by reason of the permanence of the rational soul and by reason of the unity of matter*. (*SCG*, IV.81.6–7, 10)

Reformation Confessions

The Formula of Concord (1577)

This great Lutheran confession says, "We believe, teach and confess … the chief articles of our faith (of Creation, of Redemption, of Sanctification, and the Resurrection of the *flesh*). (in Schaff, *CC*, 3.98)

This same human nature of ours (that is his own work) Christ has redeemed, the same (inasmuch as it is his own work) he sanctifies, the *same [human nature] doth he raise from the dead*, and with great glory (as being his own) doth he crown it. (in ibid., 3.99)

The Saxon Visitation Articles (1592)

These articles, prepared by Aegidius Hunnius (1550–1603) and other Lutheran theologians in Saxony, declare:

> By this personal union [of Christ's two natures], and the exaltation which followed it, Christ, according to the *flesh*, is placed at the right hand of God, and has received power in heaven and earth, and is made partaker of all the divine majesty, honor, power, and glory. (in ibid., 3.183)

The French Confession of Faith (1559)

This confession, prepared by John Calvin and his student Antoine de la Roche Chandieu (1534–1591) states:

> Although Jesus Christ, in rising from the dead, bestowed immortality upon *his body*, yet he did not take away from it the truth of *its nature*, and we so consider him in his divinity that we do not despoil him of his humanity. (in ibid., 368–69)

The Belgic Confession (1561)

This confession, composed in French for the churches in Flanders and the Netherlands, was adopted by the Reformed Synod at Emden (1571) and the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).

> Though he [Christ] hath by his resurrection given immortality to [humans], nevertheless he hath not changed the reality of his human nature; forasmuch as our salvation and resurrection also depend on the *reality of his body*. (in ibid., 404)
>
> Finally, we believe, according to the Word of God … that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty, to declare himself Judge of the quick and the dead.… For *all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies, in which they formerly lived*. (in ibid., 433–34)

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1571)

These articles of the Church of England were revised for the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States in 1801. They both declare,

> Christ did in truth *rise* again from death, and *took again his body, with flesh and bones*, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day. (in ibid, 489)

Post-Reformation Confessions

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)

This confessional standard for orthodox Presbyterians affirms:

> [Christ] was crucified, and died; was buried, and remained under the power of death, *yet saw no corruption*. On the third day *he arose from the dead, with the same body in which he suffered; with*

which he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father. (in ibid., 620–21)

Declaration of the Congregational Union (1833)

Early Congregationalists and Baptists also held to the physical, material nature of the Resurrection. The Declaration of the Congregational Union of England and Wales speaks of Christ being "manifested in the *flesh*" and, "after his death and resurrection, he ascended up into heaven." In addition, "*The bodies of the dead will be raised again*" (in ibid., 731–33).

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) likewise acknowledged the material nature of the resurrection body, speaking of *raising "the dead from the grave"* where the material corpse was buried (in ibid., 748). Other Anabaptist and Baptist groups also affirmed the literal physical nature of the resurrection body (see ibid., 749ff.).

Not until 1552 was the phrase "resurrection of the body" admitted to the Apostles' Creed as an alternate reading for "the resurrection of the flesh." Furthermore, even here "the terms *flesh* and *body* were regarded as equivalent"; the phrase "resurrection of the flesh" is a "legitimate expression of the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection" (in Schep, *NRB*, 222, 227). Affirming the resurrection of the flesh is not only the biblical teaching on the Resurrection, but it also has been the universal confession of the orthodox church down through the centuries.

CONCLUSION

There is a firm biblical, theological, and historical basis for the belief that the souls of both believers and unbelievers survive death and exist consciously between death and resurrection. These souls will be raised immortal into the same physical bodies in which they existed before death.

There will be two resurrections. The first is of believers and will occur *before* the thousand-year reign of Christ; the second is of unbelievers and will happen *after* the millennium.[124]

The believer's resurrection body will be physical *as well as* immortal and incorruptible. Believers will spend an eternity of bliss in their physical, glorified resurrection bodies;[125] unbelievers will experience eternal woe in their never-dying resurrected bodies.[126]

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CHAPTER NINE

THE FINAL STATE OF THE SAVED (HEAVEN)

The biblical words for "heaven" (Heb: *shamayim*; Gk: *ouranos*) are used in several different ways. There are three heavens: The first is the sky above us (earth's atmosphere—Matt. 6:26), the second is the stars (the realm of space—24:29), and the third is the very abode of God, called "the third heaven" or "paradise" (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). It is in this third sense that "heaven" is used in this chapter, namely, as God's dwelling place, the final destiny of the righteous.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN

The Bible is filled with references to heaven. Though many questions are left open, making heaven the subject of a wide range of speculation, there are also many truths we do know about it.

Heaven in the Present: A Place of Bliss for Departed Spirits

Heaven now is a real place of departed spirits, the place of bliss in God's presence where believers go when they die. Enoch entered heaven when "God took him" to be with Himself (Gen. 5:24). Elijah also "went up to heaven in a

whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:11). Jesus went there at death after saying, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."[1] A repentant thief did also after Jesus said to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Paul referred to it as being "absent from the body" and "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8 NKJV).

Heaven is God's home; Jesus spoke of "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9; cf. 5:16) and said it was an actual place, reminding His disciples:

> In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare *a place* for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be *where I am*. (John 14:2–3)

Jesus said He came from heaven and would return there: "No one has ever gone into heaven [bodily] except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man" (3:13);[2] "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all" (v. 31); "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he wll live forever" (6:51).

Jesus told Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' " (20:17). This He did at His ascension, when the angels said He would return the same way He'd just departed.[3]

Angels also are said to be "in heaven" (Matt. 18:10), to come "from heaven" (28:2), to dwell "in heaven" (Mark 13:32), and return to heaven (Luke 2:15). In heaven is God's "throne" (Matt. 5:34), where Christ sits at His "right hand" (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3), where angels surround Him in praise and adoration (Rev. 4–5), and where the seraphim sing the tersanctus: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty" (Isa. 6:3).

That God dwells in heaven does not mean He is localized and not omnipresent.[4] Solomon prayed: "The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you" (1 Kings 8:27). God is everywhere, as the psalmist revealed: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there" (139:7–9). The reality of heaven as God's dwelling simply means that there is a place (like the old covenant tabernacle and temple) where God is manifested in a special way, a center or "throne" from which He rules the universe. Whether heaven is within the physical universe or in another physical dimension, it is an actual place where the righteous will "see his face" (Rev. 22:4).

Heaven in the Future: The New Heaven and the New Earth

According to Revelation, after the resurrection, after all believing human spirits have been reunited with their bodies, heaven will descend to earth[5] in the form of the New Jerusalem:

> Then I [John] saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (21:1–3)

Heaven has foundations, gates, and dimensions:

> One of the seven angels … came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.…
>
> The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. (vv. 9–12, 14–17)

The Constituents of Heaven

The innumerable occupants of heaven, in addition to the triune God, include angels and the great multitude of the redeemed from all ages.

The Triune God

At the heart of heaven is the throne of God, which John described:

> After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. (4:1–3)

Not only is God the Father in heaven, but so is God the Son: "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals" (5:5). Paul spoke of "Christ Jesus, who died—more than

that, who was raised to life—[and] is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34). John added, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). In heaven Jesus lives forever, with a permanent priesthood: "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25).

The blessed Holy Spirit of God is likewise in heaven. John described Him symbolically as "the seven spirits before his [God's] throne" (Rev. 1:4). This is the "sevenfold Spirit" of Isaiah 11:2: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."[6]

When we get to heaven, we will see Christ in His physical glorified resurrection body with our physical eyes, and we will see the essence of God with our spiritual eyes. This is called the Beatific Vision.[7]

Good Angels

Further,

> Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. (Rev. 4:4–6)

Redeemed Humans

In addition to God and a great multitude of angels, there are incalculable redeemed human beings:

> After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. (7:9)

The writer of Hebrews added,

> You [believers] have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect. (12:22–23)

Indeed, John “heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them” (Rev. 5:13) singing in heaven to the Lamb.

The Duration of Heaven

Heaven will endure as long as God does, and God is eternal; heaven is where we will experience eternal life in its fullness.[8] Further, heaven is the fulfillment of God’s promised everlasting life to believers, “the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2). Jesus said, “The righteous [will go] to eternal life” (Matt. 25:46), and John declared, “I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, *for ever and ever*!’ ” (Rev. 5:13).

The Nature of Heaven

The following is some of what is known about heaven from Scripture’s extensive witness.

Heaven Is a Place Far Better Than Earth

Paul wrote, “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Phil. 1:23); “we … would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

Heaven Is a Place of No Sorrow

John foretold, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Paul added,

> [God] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (2 Cor. 1:4–5)

Heaven Is a Place of No Curse

In Genesis, God said that by Adam’s sin the world was cursed:

> Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, "You must not eat of it": Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. (3:17–19)

But in the paradise to come, "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him" (Rev. 22:3).

> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that *the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay* and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Rom. 8:18–21)

Heaven Is a Place of No Darkness

People of this sinful world love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). By contrast, John said of heaven, "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.… On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there" (Rev. 21:23, 25).

Heaven Is a Place of No Sickness

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more … mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (v. 4). "On each side of the river [of the water of life] stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (22:2).

Heaven Is a Place of No Death

"There will be no more death" (Rev. 21:4).

> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:53–54).

Heaven Is a Place of Perfect Bodies

Paul declared that by "the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, [God] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21)—immortal, imperishable, and glorious:

> 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. (1 Cor. 15:51–53)

These perfect bodies will never degenerate, decay, or die:

> Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. (Luke 20:35–36)

Heaven Is a Place of Completed Salvation

As we have seen,[9] salvation comes in three stages: justification (salvation from the past *penalty* of sin), sanctification (salvation from the present *power* of sin), and glorification (salvation from the future *presence* of sin). This last stage, glorification, is heaven.

John described it this way:

> How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! … Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:1–2)

Paul said, "Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, *he also glorified*" (Rom. 8:30), for "when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

Heaven Is a Place of Many Mansions

Listen to these words of Jesus:

> Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1–3)

Sing the wondrous love of Jesus,
Sing His mercy and His grace;
In the mansions bright and blessed
He'll prepare for us a place.[10]

There will be heavenly homes, magnificent mansions, and palatial palaces—all prepared for those who follow the Lord.

Heaven Is a Place of Perpetual Worship

Eternity is described as a heavenly temple (Rev. 21:3) where the angels worship (Isa. 6:3), where "the living … creatures … do not rest day or night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" and where the elders "fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever" (Rev. 4:8, 10 NKJV; cf. 5:13–14).

Heaven Is a Place of Everlasting Service

John's vision declares: "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and *his servants will serve him*" (Rev. 22:3). Believers will not be idle in heaven; like the angels, we will be engaged in ceaseless activity for God.

Heaven Is a Place of Abundant Life

Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10 KJV). Paul told Timothy that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8 KJV). Indeed, John says that in the paradise to come there is a tree of life and a river of life:

> He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:1–2 KJV)

Heaven Is a Place of Overflowing Joy

Here on earth we are given a foretaste of what is to come because we serve "God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17; cf. Ps. 16:11). Jesus said that the angels already rejoice in heaven because of what God is doing for us: "There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

Heaven Is a Place of Grand Reunion

> Brothers, *we do not want you* to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or *to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope*. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. (1

Thess. 4:13–18)

Christians never say a final good-bye; rather, it's "So long—I'll see you there."

Heaven Is the Place of the Great Heavenly Wedding

People love weddings, as well we should—every earthly wedding is a picture, a temporal reflection, of the great heavenly wedding to come. Paul said of marriage, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32 NKJV). There will be no earthly marriage in heaven (cf. Matt. 22:30), but there will be something far better—the heavenly marriage of the Lamb.

> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (Rev. 21:2–3)

Heaven Is a Celestial City

"None of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone" (Rom. 14:7). We shall all be together as residents in a heavenly city, in "Mount Zion … the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God." We will be with "thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [in] the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:22–23).

> Love divine, so great and wondrous,
> Deep and mighty, pure, sublime!
> Coming from the heart of Jesus,
> Just the same through tests of time.
> He the pearly gates will open,
> So that I may enter in;
> For He purchased my redemption
> And forgave me all my sin.[11]

Heaven Is a Place of Incredible Beauty

In regard to what we have here, Paul said, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). How much greater will heaven be? The Old Testament speaks of "the beauty of holiness" (1 Chron. 16:29 NKJV), of which heaven is the apex. John described heaven as the jewel-studded, golden-paved city of God (Rev. 21:18–

21). This veritable cornucopia of aesthetic delight is literally beyond description.

Heaven Is a Place of Moral Perfection

The present world is laden with layers of evil; even the apostle Paul considered himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). In heaven, though, every believer will be made absolutely perfect, for "when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears" (1 Cor. 13:10; cf. 1 John 3:2).

"Nothing impure will ever enter it [heaven], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). Therefore, we are to "make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Heaven is a place of ultimate and complete sanctification.

Heaven Is a Place of Eternal Rest

Ever since the Fall, life has been filled with toil (Gen. 3:17–19)—even the spiritual life is a struggle (Eph. 6:11–12). Jesus said, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4). On earth, we are the church militant; in heaven, we will be the church at rest. Hebrews says, "There remains … a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (4:9), and the Spirit said to John, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.… They will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

Heaven Is a Place of Eternal Reward

We are not saved *by* works, but we are saved *for* good works:[12]

> By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:8–10)
>
> If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. (1 Cor. 3:12–14)

Jesus promised, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12). Those who have followed will hear Him say, "Well done, my good servant!" (Luke 19:17).

Heaven Is a Place of Perfect Knowledge

> [Now] we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; *then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*. (1 Cor. 13:9–12)

Heaven Is a Place of Indescribable Glory

Paul said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Trying to describe his vision of heaven's glory, he wrote:

> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man … was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. (2 Cor. 12:2–4)

In a passage that narrates the Transfiguration,

> [Jesus] took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.… While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matt. 17:1–2, 4–5).

Ezekiel described a dazzling display of the divine: "The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it" (Ezek. 1:13).

When Moses experienced only a passing glimpse of God's glory, the Israelites had to cover his head because of the blinding brightness of its glow (Ex. 34:29–35); to them "the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain" (24:17).

Heaven Is the Place of the Beatific Vision

The Beatific Vision is the blessed vision that Moses sought, God forbade, Jesus promised, and John described—*seeing God face-to-face*.

Mortal Man Cannot See God

"No one has seen God at any time," wrote John in his gospel (1:18 NKJV). When Moses pleaded, "Show me your glory,"

> The Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But you cannot see my face, for *no one may see me and live*.…
>
> Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen" (Ex. 33:18–23).

Immortal Man Will See God

However, immortal human beings will see God face-to-face; John declared that in heaven "*they will see his face*, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4). Again, Paul explained, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; *then we shall see face to face*. Now I know in part; *then I shall know fully*, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). The psalmist added, "In righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, *I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness*" (17:15). As John said, "When he appears, we shall be like him, for *we shall see him as he is*" (1 John 3:2).

The term *Beatific Vision*, this face-to-face experience with God, comes from the word for *beatitude*, meaning "blessed" or "happy." This vision is the ultimate fulfillment of all divine aspirations—it will be a direct, complete, and final revelation of God in which the believer will see the divine essence. Of the many who have declared this vision of God, Thomas Aquinas spoke repeatedly of the glory of this ultimate experience;[13] Benedict XII (r. 1334–1342) said that the divine essence would be seen by direct intuition (face-to-face); and the Council of Vienne (1311–1312) insisted that since it transcended a human's natural capacity, the Beatific Vision is only possible by a supernatural act of God (see Cross, *ODCC*, 146).

> There are several important characteristics and consequences of the Beatific Vision that we can derive from Scripture and reason.

The Beatific Vision Brings Direct Knowledge of God

Paul said our present knowledge of God is indirect (1 Cor. 13:12); now, God is not known directly but through His creation, "for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, *being understood from what has been made*" (Rom. 1:20). However, in heaven we will see and know fully (1 John 3:2); what is now dim for us will become bright; what we now know indirectly we will know directly.

All we know now about the infinite God is known through finite images,

which is why our knowledge is *analogous*.[14] In the Beatific Vision's unmediated knowledge, the divine essence will inform our finite minds; we will have a full and direct knowledge of God Himself.

The Beatific Vision Brings Perfect Knowledge of God

This ultimate knowledge of God will be perfect (1 Cor. 13:9–10); our partial knowledge will turn into whole knowledge; our incomplete understanding will be transformed into complete understanding. Whatever we can know about God, we will know, and we will know it perfectly.

This does not mean we will know God infinitely. Because we will always be finite, so will our knowledge be finite. Only God has an infinite knowledge of the infinite;[15] even in heaven our knowledge will be finite. *We will perfectly apprehend God, but will never completely comprehend Him*. God will always be ineffable.[16]

The Beatific Vision Brings Perfect Love of God

Jesus said, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matt. 22:37–38). This kind of love is never fully attained in this life, but it will be in the next:

> We are told that our final destiny consists in beholding God immediately, face to face, and as He really is … even as He knows Himself; that it [the Beatific Vision] consists also in loving Him even as He loves Himself. (Garrigou-LaGrange, *P*, 379)

"God is love" (1 John 4:16), and to know Him is to know His very essence. To know perfect love is to be able to love perfectly, and "we love Him because He first loved us" (v. 19 NKJV).

The Beatific Vision Makes Sin Impossible

Knowledge of God is knowledge of an infinite good;[17] once one directly sees infinite good, it will no longer be possible for him to do evil,[18] for to be directly informed in one's mind by absolute good is to become completely conformed to it. Hence, the Beatific Vision makes sin impossible. Just as seeing absolute beauty will spoil one forever from longing for anything ugly, likewise, beholding the absolutely holy will overpower any attraction to or desire for the unholy.

The Beatific Vision Fulfills Our Freedom

Though heaven makes sin impossible, it does not destroy but instead *fulfills* our freedom. Heaven completes our freedom to completely love God, just as (analogously) marriage here on earth frees us to love the one to whom we belong. True freedom is not the freedom to do evil, but the freedom to do good. The essence of free will is self-determination, and if one's self chooses to do only the good, then the fulfillment of it in a place where only good can be done is not the destruction of freedom, but the completion of it.[19]

God is both free and unablee to sin; it will be likewise for us when we become most godlike, for the perfection of our freedom is the freedom *from* sinning, not the freedom *of* sinning. The best freedom is the freedom to do the best; beholding and loving the absolute best (which makes sin impossible) is the best thing we can ever do.[20]

The Beatific Vision Is Given Only to Believers

It is important to note that the Beatific Vision is not forced on anyone against his will: Only those who seek God will see God (Heb. 11:6). It is those who choose to fall in love that are overwhelmed by it; no one can be forced to love another. Love, like God's saving grace, is irresistible, but only on the willing,[21] for irresistible force on the unwilling is not grace but assault. Once again, as C.S. Lewis aptly stated:

> The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His [God's] scheme forbids Him to use.… Merely to override a human will … would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. (*SL*, 46)

The Beatific Vision Brings a Permanent State of Perfection

Just as God is changeless perfection,[22] even so the perfection of beatified saints will be changeless. Salvation from the presence of sin (glorification) will save us from the damage and distortion that sin wreaks in our lives. Our present growth in perfection (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18) is due to our not yet having reached the ultimate state of perfection. One no longer needs to be changed into what he has ultimately achieved; heaven (and the Beatific Vision it brings) will make permanent (by glorification) what is only in process in this life (through sanctification).[23] The more we become like God, the more unchangeably we become like His moral attributes.[24]

The Beatific Vision Brings a Dynamic State of Perfection

Being in an immutable state of perfection (in heaven) is not to be confused with being in a static state. God is immutable but not immobile;[25] likewise, in heaven we will be immutably (though finitely) perfect without being immobile (static). God is the Unmoved Mover,[26] but He is not an Unmoving Mover. In fact, as Pure Actuality,[27] He is the most active being in the universe (He is Pure Actuality, having no potentiality). God is active in sustaining everything in existence,[28] in His sovereignty (governance) over the entire world,[29] through His providence in the world,[30] and by His miraculous intervention in human affairs.[31] God also interacts with the prayers of all the saints and saves all sinners who repent.[32] Note, though, that while God is interactive, He is not reactive but proactive; as Isaiah said, before we call, God answers (Isa. 65:24).

Likewise, when we reach the most godlike state of absolute perfection possible (via the Beatific Vision), we do not become less active but more active. We will not be God's frozen chosen—we will be His mobile millions, actively worshiping and serving Him (cf. Rev. 4–5). Nevertheless, our action will not be that of striving but of enjoying, not of seeking but of treasuring what was found. Our minds will be active, not in searching for truth but in rejoicing over the infinite truth discovered (1 Cor. 13:12). Our intellectual and spiritual action in heaven will not be that of desiring God but of delighting in Him.

The hymnist said it eloquently:

> Face to face with Christ, my Savior,
> Face to face—what will it be
> When with rapture I behold Him,
> Jesus Christ who died for me?
> Face to face—O blissful moment!
> Face to face—to see and know;
> Face to face with my Redeemer,
> Jesus Christ who loves me so.
> Face to face I shall behold Him,
> Far beyond the starry sky.
> Face to face in all His glory,
> I shall see Him by and by.[33]

One day, while meditating on this topic, these words came to me:

In That Great Day …

The mountains shall be lowered
And the crooked things made straight
When we see the Lord of glory
And pass through the open gate.
The Lord Himself will tell us:
“I have saved you by my grace.”
And all we once-lost sinners
Will see His wondrous face.
The angels up in glory
Will shout with ecstasy
For ne’er in all the ages
Ere this sight did see.
We’ll have the glory of Jesus;
Our bodies will be the same;
In that great Day
When the Lord of Hosts shall reign.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT HEAVEN

As with other ultimate truths, when it comes to heaven there are more questions than answers. Many queries are not addressed in Scripture and must await the final reality itself; in the meantime, we must be content that “the secret things belong to the Lord our God” (Deut. 29:29). Even so, there is nothing to hinder theological speculation, provided it contradicts neither Scripture nor sound reasoning.

Will Those Who Die in Infancy Remain Babies in Heaven?

Probably not. Heaven is a place of maturity and perfection, and babies stunted in their growth, short of maturity, would not reflect a state of perfection.[34] It seems to better befit God’s nature and plan for those who were not granted earthly maturity to attain it in heaven.

Will Everyone Be Equally Blessed in Heaven?

The evidence seems to support a negative answer. Everyone in heaven will be *fully* blessed, but not everyone will be *equally* blessed. Every believer's cup will be full and running over, but not everyone's cup will be the same size. We determine in time what our capacity for appreciating God will be in eternity.[35] Different persons can listen to the same musical performance and have varying degrees of appreciation because they have developed different capacities for enjoying it; similarly, different people can be in the same heaven and yet have different degrees of enjoyment due to developing different abilities for enjoying God here on earth.

By our temporal obedience we determine our reward in eternity (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10), as Paul clearly explains:

> No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor. 3:11–15).[36]

How Can Heaven Be a Place of Glory to God and Yet of Reward for Us?

The Bible seems to present contradictory motifs: (1) the worship of God, and (2) rewards for us. How can we be working for rewards and yet doing all things for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31)?

The answer lies in the nature of the reward: If the reward is the capacity to love and serve God more, then these two elements are not contradictory. This seems to be the case in Jesus' parable of the stewards (Matt. 25:14–30); those who invested their talents were given more, and their master said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Indeed, the elders mentioned in Revelation do not strut their crowns on the corner of Glory Street and Hallelujah Avenue:

> They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (4:10–11).

There is nothing selfish about working for a crown if it is for the privilege of casting it at the feet of Jesus.

Will Believers Have Physical Bodies in Heaven?

Yes.[37] Jesus' resurrection body was the same physical body in which He died, crucifixion scars and all (cf. Luke 24:39–40; John 20:27). The empty tomb, the scars, the physical touching of His body (cf. Matt. 28:9), calling it "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39), and His statement that it was the same body that died (John 2:19–21) all demonstrate that His resurrection body was physical. Our resurrection bodies will be like His (Phil. 3:21), and, like Him, we will leave behind an empty grave (John 5:28–29).

Will We Eat in Heaven?

Yes,[38] but for enjoyment, not for sustenance—for pleasure rather than necessity.[39] The physical resurrection body is supernaturally rather than naturally sourced (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4; 15:44); God will have incomparably rich enjoyment for us in heaven even as He has given us great pleasure here on earth.[40] Jesus said to His disciples, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29).

Will We Recognize Loved Ones in Heaven?

Yes. Moses and Elijah were recognized when they appeared from heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3); Peter even acknowledged them by name (v. 4). There seems to be a personal identity by which we will recognize each other in heaven, as is at least implied in Paul's comfort of the bereaved among the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:13–18) and in Jesus' response to the Sadducees' question about the resurrection (Matt. 22:28–30).

Can We Be Married in Heaven?

No, there will be no marriage ceremony or marriage relationship in heaven. This ends at the time of physical death:

> By law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she

> is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. (Rom. 7:2–3)

How Many People Will Be in Heaven?

Everyone whom God can bring there without violating the free will that He gave them.[41] God desires *all* to be saved (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4), but we cannot know how many will be. Augustine speculated that it would be the same percentage as the angels who fell (one-third; see Rev. 12:9), but the Bible nowhere says this.

Many believe that only a small fraction of all the people who ever lived will be in heaven, based on passages like Matthew 7:13–14:

> Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

However, B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) argued that this is taking such verses out of context ("ATFTBS" in *BTS*); he maintained that they refer to the *immediate* and *local* response to Jesus' message, not to the ultimate and universal statistics of heaven. Indeed, granting that all who die in infancy go to heaven,[42] that life begins at conception,[43] and that the mortality rate before the age of accountability[44] down through the millennia has been roughly half of those conceived, it would seem to follow that there will be more people saved than lost. This is to say nothing of much of the world's population *since the time of Adam* being still alive at this time;[45] a great revival before Christ's return could sweep even more souls into God's kingdom.

Finally, by analogy with the angels, two-thirds of which did not rebel against God (Rev. 12:4), one could reason that perhaps two-thirds of all humans will be saved. This also is merely speculative, but we do know that "the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). Once again: *There will be as many people in heaven as God can get there without violating the free choice that He freely gave His creatures.*[46]

Is Heaven a Place or a State of Mind?

Liberal theologians have long insisted that heaven is a state of mind, not a place; thus, those in the right state of mind are in heaven now—here on earth.

However, while it's true that unless one enters the right state of mind and heart—a state of belief in God[47]—he will not go to heaven, it is *untrue* that everyone in this state of mind is already there. *Heaven is much more than a state of mind: It is a real place*. Jesus used the word *place* three times in regard to heaven in John 14:2–4;[48] He also taught us to pray to "our Father *in heaven*," and that His will would be accomplished "on earth as it is *in heaven*" (Matt. 6:9–10). Heaven is a different place than earth (cf. Rev. 21:9–27).[49]

Where Is Heaven Located?

Presently, before the final resurrection, heaven is the abode of righteous human souls and angelic spirits in God's presence (2 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 12:23), where Christ sits on the right hand of God's throne (1:3). This may be somewhere in a far corner of the space-time world, shrouded from human view behind a cloud of God's glory, or in an entirely different physical dimension.

In favor of heaven being in the space-time world, some have cited Job's reference to God coming from the north (Job 37:22; cf. 26:7). Plus, Jesus ascended bodily into the sky and off into space (Acts 1:10–11), and He will return to the same place (the Mount of Olives), in the same physical body, from which He left (Zech. 14:4).

In favor of heaven being in another dimension, others have noted that Jesus seemed to step in and out of this space-time dimension when in His resurrection body (Luke 24:31; John 20:26). Further, contemporary science presents a multidimensional universe that allows for many dimensions beyond the customary three.

Eventually, after the Second Coming,[50] heaven (the Holy City) will descend to be part of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1–2). Peter exhorted believers:

> Look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:12–13)

This will be the eventual fulfillment of the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:10): In that day there literally will be heaven on earth. For He asks us to pray: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Will We Continue to Learn and Morally Improve in Heaven?

Christian theologians have held both views.

Those who hold to eternal human process cite texts like Ephesians 3:10–11:

> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Also, 1 Peter 1:12 states:

> It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were not serving themselves but you [later believers], when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

From such passages it is inferred that even heaven is a great university wherein we continue to learn about (and grow in) God.

On the other hand, those who deny heavenly spiritual progress point to several factors.

First, heaven is a place of perfection, not progress (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2). Heaven represents rest and attainment, not striving (cf. John 9:4; Rev. 14:13).

Second, heaven is a place of receiving, not working for, rewards (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11ff.; Rev. 22:12).

Third, the sense of urgency and finality about this life (cf. Heb. 9:27) supports the conclusion that heaven completes and finalizes what is done here and now. As Jesus said to Peter, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19; cf. 18:18).

Fourth, and finally, the very nature of the Beatific Vision as the ultimate and final state of perfection and sinlessness suggests that once we have it, we will no longer be learning;[51] instead, we will be engaged in the eternal experience of resting in, delighting in, and reveling in the incredible and unsurpassable knowledge provided by God's infinite nature.

The one thing heaven will *not* be is a place of boredom, which results from falling short of perfection rather than from attaining it. The following chart illustrates the difference:

Moral Perfection on Earth	Moral Perfection in Heaven
Changing	Unchanging
Growing	Matured
Striving for	Resting in
Seeking	Enjoying
Desiring of	Delighting in
Our goal	Our reward
Our aim	Our attainment

Paul wrote,

> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.… I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12–14)

Will We Be Able to Explore the Universe in Heaven?

Yes, but in an infinitely higher way than space travelers could. The nature of the Beatific Vision grants this: We will know everything our finite capacity will allow us to know directly through the infinite mind of God. As He knows the entire universe in and through Himself,[52] so will we know the universe by virtue of knowing everything directly in and through His Mind (essence). Hence, with effortless ease, we will be able to explore the entire universe, insofar as it is finitely possible. Such exploration will not be that of ceaseless discovering, but of endless delighting in what we have *already* discovered in God.

Will We Experience Time in Heaven?

Here again, there are two views held by orthodox Christians.

The first position says yes, we will experience time in heaven, a conclusion based on passages that speak about eternity being described as, for instance, "day and night" forever (e.g., Rev. 4:8; 7:15), though these *could* be figures of speech for an endless eternity.

The second view emphasizes that heaven is the abode of the eternal

(nontemporal) God.[53] We, the beatified, will have reached a state of changeless perfection in which the timeless God directly informs our minds. Because time is a measurement of change according to a before and an after, we cannot be temporal in heaven; if we were temporal, then we would still be changing; however, we will be perfect, and what is perfect does not need to change.[54] If perfection changed, it would have to be either change for the better (we cannot be better than being absolutely perfect) or change for the worse (we cannot get worse in heaven). Since humans in heaven cannot be in time, nor, as finite,[55] can we be absolutely changeless like God, the medieval theologians gave another name to this state: *aeviternity*. Our state of aeviternity will be one like that of the angels, who are not in time by nature but can be related to it by activity.[56]

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN

Like every other major biblical doctrine, heaven is rooted in the very nature and will of God. Particularly, heaven is based in God's omnibenevolence, omniscience, omnisapience, and omnipotence. As the place of ultimate good, heaven was desired by God's omnibenevolence, was conceived by His omniscience, was planned in accordance with His omnisapience, and will be achieved by His omnipotence.

Heaven Follows From God's Omnibenevolence

God, by nature, is all-loving.[57] He does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9) but desires "all men … to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4 net). "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16 TLB), who is the sufficient sacrifice for the sins of "the whole world" (1 John 2:2).[58] The love of Christ is manifest in that "one died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14); that is, "He might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9 nlt). If God loves everyone and wants everyone to be saved, then there must be an eternal place for them. This is why Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). In the Bible, this place is called "heaven" (Matt. 6:9).

Heaven Follows From God's Omniscience

Of course, it would be useless for God to prepare a heaven unless He knew in advance that someone was going to be there. Only an omniscient being with infallible foreknowledge of human freedom[59] could know with certainty that any free creatures would accept His offer of salvation.[60] Paul confirms,

> *Those God foreknew he also predestined* to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; *those he justified, he also glorified*. (Rom. 8:29–30)

Peter wrote to those "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (1 Peter 1:2). In accordance with God's foreknowledge of those who would receive Him (cf. John 1:12) and thus be saved, He provided an eternal heaven for their happiness.

Heaven Flows From God's Omnisapience

God is not only all-knowing, He is also all-wise;[61] He not only knows who will be saved, but He also knows how to get them there. This requires omnisapience: *Wisdom chooses the best way to obtain the best end*.[62] Since humans were created free, the infinitely wise God ordained the best means to keep them on the track to heaven. Needless to say, this was no small task, since He willed not to violate our choice and yet also assure our ultimate destiny.[63]

Heaven Flows From God's Omnipotence

A plan that transforms sinners and makes them saints cannot be accomplished by natural powers—*only* the efficacious grace of God can do this.[64] As such, it is God's omnipotence that can guarantee the end from the beginning: "What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do" (Isa. 46:11). It is with this assurance that we can know heaven will have occupants, the exact ones whom God has foreordained will be there.[65] Because of God's omnipotence, Peter was compelled to speak of those "who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). The surety of heaven is a confident expectation, not only

because God is all-loving and wants to achieve it, but also because He is all-powerful and can do it.[66]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN

In addition to the strong biblical and theological bases for the doctrine of heaven, there is also ample historical support, beginning with the earliest church and continuing through the Reformation into modern times.

Early Fathers

The church's early leaders made numerous references to the final blessed state of believers, beginning with the ante-Nicene fathers.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

> Grace, mercy, and peace from Almighty God, and from Christ Jesus our Lord, His only-begotten Son, "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from the present evil world," and preserve us unto His heavenly kingdom. (*EIHDA*, introduction)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

> We are just as if drawn out from the fire, when purified from our former sins, and [saved] from the affliction and the fiery trial by which the devil and all his coadjutors try us; out of which Jesus the Son of God has promised again to deliver us, and invest us with prepared garments, if we do His commandments; and has undertaken to provide an eternal kingdom. (*DJ*, 116)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> There shall in truth be a common joy consummated to all those who believe unto life, and in each individual shall be confirmed the mystery of the Resurrection, and the hope of incorruption, and the commencement of the eternal kingdom, when God shall have destroyed death and the devil. For that human nature and flesh which has risen again from the dead shall die no more; but after it had been changed to incorruption, and made like to spirit, when the heaven was opened, [our Lord] full of glory offered it (the flesh) to the Father. (*FLWI*, 50)

Cyprian (200–258)

> You also, retaining this faith, and meditating day and night, with your whole heart prepared for God, think of the future only, with contempt for the present, that you may be able to come to the fruit of the eternal kingdom, and to the embrace and kiss, and the sight of the Lord. (*EC*, 80)

Methodius (c. 260–311)

> The creation, then, after being restored to a better and more seemly state, remains, rejoicing and exulting over the children of God at the resurrection; for whose sake it now groans and travails, waiting itself also for our redemption from the corruption of the body, that, when we have risen and shaken off the mortality of the flesh … and have been set free from sin, it also shall be freed from corruption and be subject no longer to vanity, but to righteousness.… For in reality God did not establish the universe in vain, or to no purpose but destruction, as those weak-minded men say, but to exist, and be inhabited, and continue. Wherefore the earth and the heaven must exist again after the conflagration and shaking of all things. (*FDR*, 1.8)
>
> As the earth is to exist after the present age, there must be by all means inhabitants for it, who shall no longer be liable to death, nor shall marry, nor beget children, but live in all happiness, like the angels, without change or decay. Wherefore it is silly to discuss in what way of life our bodies will then exist, if there is no longer air, nor earth, nor anything else. (ibid., 1.9)

Medieval Fathers

The doctrine of heaven was abundantly confirmed during the Middle Ages.

Augustine (354–430)

"Christ is the head of the Church, which is His body, destined to be with Him in His eternal kingdom and glory" (*OCD*, 1.37.55).

> In His promise to the good he says that He will flow down as a river of peace, that is to say, in the greatest possible abundance of peace. With this peace we shall in the end be refreshed; but of this we have spoken abundantly in the preceding book. It is this river in which he says He shall flow down upon those to whom He promises so great happiness, that we may understand that in the region of that felicity, which is in heaven, all things are satisfied from this river. But because there shall thence flow, even upon earthly bodies, the peace of incorruption and immortality, therefore he says that He shall flow down as this river, that He may as it were pour Himself from things above to things beneath, and make men the equals of the angels.
>
> By "Jerusalem," too, we should understand not that which serves with her children, but that which, according to the apostle, is our free mother, eternal in the heavens. In her we shall be comforted as we pass toil worn from earth's cards and calamities, and be taken up as her children on her knees and shoulders. Inexperienced and new to such blandishments, we shall be received into unwonted bliss. There we shall see, and our heart shall rejoice. (*CG*, 20.21)
>
> Sight shall displace faith; and hope shall be swallowed up in that perfect bliss to which we shall come: love, on the other hand, shall wax greater when these others fail. For if we love by faith that which as yet we see not, how much more shall we love it when we begin to see! And if we love by hope that which as yet we have not reached, how much more shall we love it when we reach it! For there is this great difference between things temporal and things eternal, that a temporal object is valued more before we possess it, and begins to prove worthless the moment we attain it, because it does not satisfy the soul, which has its only true and sure resting-place in eternity: an eternal object, on the other hand, is loved with greater ardor when it is in possession than while it is still an object of desire, for no one in his longing for it can set a higher value on it than really belongs to it, so as to think it comparatively

worthless when he finds it of less value than he thought; on the contrary, however high the value any man may set upon it when he is on his way to possess it, he will find it, when it comes into his possession, of higher value still. (op. cit., 1.38.42)

John of Damascus (676–754)

We shall therefore rise again, our souls being once more united with our bodies, now made incorruptible and having put off corruption.… Those who have done good will shine forth as the sun with the angels into life eternal, with our Lord Jesus Christ, ever seeing Him and being in His sight and deriving unceasing joy from Him, praising Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit throughout the limitless ages of ages. (*DFO*, 4.27)

Anselm (1033–1109)

If swiftness or endurance, or freedom of body, which naught can withstand, delight thee, they shall be as angels of God—because it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body—in power certainly, though not in nature. If it is a long and sound life that pleases thee, there a healthful eternity is, and an eternal health. For the righteous shall live forever, and the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord. (*CDH*, 30)

If honor and riches, God shall make his good servants rulers over many things; nay, they shall be called sons of God, and gods; where his Son shall be, there they shall be also, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. (ibid., 31)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

He cannot be fathomed by our intellect: but our most perfect knowledge of Him as wayfarers is to know that He is above all that our intellect can conceive, and thus we are united to Him as to something unknown. In heaven, however, we shall see Him by a form which is His essence, and we shall be united to Him as to something known. (*ST*, 6.92.1)

The distinctive principle of the mansions or degrees of beatitude is twofold, namely proximate and remote. The proximate principle is the difference of disposition which will be in the blessed, whence will result the difference of perfection in them in respect to the beatific operation: while the remote principle is the merit by which they have obtained that beatitude. In the first way the mansions are distinguished according to the charity [love] of heaven, which the more perfect it will be in any one, the more will it render him capable of the Divine clarity, on the increase of which will depend the increase in perfection of the Divine vision. In the second way the mansions are distinguished according to the charity of the way. For our actions are meritorious, not by the very substance of the action, but only by the habit of virtue with which they are informed. Now every virtue obtains its meritorious efficacy from charity [love], which has the end itself for its object. Hence the diversity of merit is all traced to the diversity of charity, and thus the charity of the way will distinguish the mansions by way of merit. (ibid., 6.93.3)

Reformation Theologians

The great Reformers likewise held firmly to the scriptural and traditional doctrine of heaven. Their unique contribution was to stress the simplicity of the

plan of salvation by which people arrive at this final place of ultimate bliss.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

> The coming of God's Kingdom to us occurs in two ways; first, here in time through the Word and faith; and secondly, in eternity forever through revelation. Now we pray for both these things, that it may come to those who are not yet in it, and, by daily increase, to us who have received the same, and hereafter in eternal life. All this is nothing else than saying: Dear Father, we pray, give us first Thy Word, that the Gospel be preached properly throughout the world; and secondly, that it be received in faith, and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the power of the Holy Ghost Thy kingdom may prevail among us, and the kingdom of the devil be put down, that he may have no right or power over us, until at last it shall be utterly destroyed, and sin, death, and hell shall be exterminated, that we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness. (*LC*, 3)
>
> The manner of the resurrection consists in these words: "Arise, come, stand up, appear, rejoice ye which dwell in the dust of the earth." I shall arise again, and shall speak with you; this finger wherewith I point must come to me again; everything must come again; for it is written: "God will create a new heaven and a new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell."
>
> It will be no arid waste, but a beautiful new earth, where all the just will dwell together. There will be no carnivorous beasts, or venomous creatures, for all such, like ourselves, will be relieved from the curse of sin, and will be to us as friendly as they were to Adam in Paradise. There will be little dogs, with golden hair, shining like precious stones. The foliage of the trees, and the verdure of the grass, will have the brilliancy of emeralds; and we ourselves delivered from our mundane subjection to gross appetites and necessities, shall have the same form as here, but infinitely more perfect.
>
> Our eyes will be radiant as the purest silver, and we shall be exempt from all sickness and tribulation. We shall behold the glorious Creator face to face; and then, what ineffable satisfaction will it be to find our relations and friends among the just! If we were all one here, we should have peace among ourselves, but God orders it otherwise, to the end we may yearn and sigh after the future paternal home, and become weary of this troublesome life. Now, if there be joy in the chosen, so must the highest sorrow and despair be in the damned. (*TT*, 797)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> All that has hitherto been said of our salvation calls upon us to raise our minds towards heaven, that, as Peter exhorts, though we now see not Christ, "yet believing," we may "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. For this reason Paul says, that the faith and charity of the saints have respect to the faith and hope which is laid up for them in heaven, (Col. 1:5). When we thus keep our eyes fixed upon Christ in heaven, and nothing on earth prevents us from directing them to the promised blessedness, there is a true fulfillment of the saying, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). (*ICR*, 3.25.1)
>
> Let it be a fixed principle in our hearts that the kingdom of heaven is not the hire of servants, but the inheritance of sons (Eph. 1:18), an inheritance obtained by those only whom the Lord has adopted as sons, and obtained for no other cause than this adoption, "The son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman" (Gal. 4:30). And hence in those very passages in which the Holy Spirit promises eternal glory as the reward of works, by expressly calling it an inheritance, he demonstrates that it comes to us from some other quarter. Thus Christ enumerates the works for which he bestows heaven as a recompense, while he is calling his elect to the possession of it, but he at the same time adds, that it is to be possessed by right of inheritance (Matt. 25:34). (ibid., 3.18.2)

Post-Reformation Teachers

Space does not permit an extensive listing of citations from the church's teachers of this period. Since the abundance of their testimony itself is fairly common knowledge, a few references will suffice.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

> The heaven I desired was a heaven of holiness; to be with God, and to spend my eternity in divine love, and holy communion with Christ. My mind was very much taken up with contemplations on heaven, and the enjoyments there; and living there in perfect holiness, humility, and love; and it used at that time to appear a great part of the happiness of heaven, that there the saints could express their love to Christ. (*WJE*, 1.1)
>
> It is no solid objection against God aiming at an infinitely perfect union of the creature with himself, that the particular time will never come when it can be said, the union is now infinitely perfect. … God, in glorifying the saints in heaven with eternal felicity, aims to satisfy his infinite grace or benevolence, by the bestowment of a good infinitely valuable, because eternal: and yet there never will come the moment, when it can be said, that now this infinitely valuable good has been actually bestowed. (*EWGCW*, 2.7)
>
> What can be more reasonable than to believe a man, when he tells us, that he is sent from God to heal the diseases of our souls, and, in order that we may believe him, heals all sorts of men, of all manner of diseases, by a touch or a word; and plainly shows that he can do it when he will, let the disease be what it will? He tells us, that he will deliver us from spiritual and eternal death; that he will raise us from the dead, and give us eternal life; so that we shall live for ever, and not die: and to prove this, he gives evidence that he has power over men's lives, by restoring them after they are dead; and rises from the dead himself. He tells us, that he will bestow heavenly glory upon us; and will translate us to heaven: and, to confirm us in this belief, tells us, that we shall see himself, after his death, ascend into heaven. What more could we desire? (*MOITS*, 1.1.36)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

> If they "hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end," they shall undoubtedly receive the promise of God, reaching through both time and eternity. But here is another snare laid for our feet: While we earnestly pant for that part of the promise which is to be accomplished here, "for the glorious liberty of the children of God," we may be led unawares from the consideration of the glory which shall hereafter be revealed. Our eye may be insensibly turned aside from that crown which the righteous Judge hath promised to give at that day; "to all that love his appearing"; and we may be drawn away from the view of that incorruptible inheritance which is reserved in heaven for us. (*WJW*, 42.1.10)
>
> Thus saith the Creator and Governor of the universe: "Behold, I make all things new"—all which are included in that expression of the Apostle, "A new heaven and a new earth." A new heaven: The original word in Genesis is in the plural number; and, indeed, this is the constant language of Scripture; not heaven, but heavens. Accordingly, the ancient Jewish writers are accustomed to reckon three heavens; in conformity to which, the Apostle Paul speaks of his being caught "up into the third heaven." It is this, the third heaven, which is usually supposed to be the more immediate residence of God; so far as any residence can be ascribed to his omnipresent Spirit, who pervades and fills the whole universe. It is here (if we speak after the manner of men) that the Lord sitteth upon his throne, surrounded by angels and archangels, and by all his flaming ministers. (ibid., 64.5)

> Certainly there will be no sorrow in heaven; there all tears will be wiped from our eyes, but if it were possible grief could enter there, we should grieve at that irreparable loss. Irreparable then, but not now. Now, by the grace of God, we may choose the "more excellent way." Let us now compare this, in a few particulars, with the way wherein most Christians walk. (ibid., 89.8)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

> Oh, to have seen Him in the freshness of His resurrection beauty! And what will He be in His glory, when He comes again the second time, and all His holy angels with Him, when He shall sit upon the throne of His glory, and heaven and earth shall flee away before His face? To His people He will then be "altogether lovely." Angels will adore Him, saints made perfect will fall on their faces before Him; and we ourselves shall feel that, at last, our heaven is complete. We shall see Him, and being like Him, we shall be satisfied. (*THCWB*, 2)
>
> When we think of seeing Him as He is, and being like Him, how heaven approaches us! We shall soon behold the beatific vision, of which He will be the center and the sun. At the thought thereof our soul takes wing, and our imagination soars aloft, while our faith, with eagle eye, beholds the glory. As we think of that glad period, when we shall be with our Beloved for ever, we are ready to swoon away with delight. It is near, far nearer than we think. (ibid.)
>
> Heaven is the place of perfect holiness, the place of sinless service, the place of eternal glory; and there is nothing that will prepare us for heaven like this rest that Jesus gives. Heaven must be in us before we are in heaven; and he who has this rest has heaven begun below. Enoch was virtually in heaven while he walked with God on the earth, and he had only to continue that holy walk to find himself actually in heaven. This world is part of our Lord's great house, of which heaven is the upper story. Some of us may hear the Master's call, "Come up higher," sooner than we think; and then, while we rest in Christ, there we shall rest with Christ. The more we have of this blessed rest now, the better shall we be prepared for the rest that remaineth to the people of God, that eternal "keeping of a Sabbath" in the Paradise above. (*THCIWGYR*, 2)

CONCLUSION

Heaven, the ultimate destiny of the saved, is a place, not merely a state or condition.

Heaven is where God dwells and where there is absolute perfection. Heaven is where all believers will receive the Beatific Vision and, as a consequence, will never be able to sin again—not because their freedom is lost, but because it is fulfilled,[67] for, as with marriage, one's freedom is fulfilled by "forsaking all others" and clinging, in love, solely to one's beloved.

While being a place of perfection, heaven represents not static and immobile perfection, but dynamic and active perfection. Heaven will not include striving for perfection (as we do on earth), but of resting in, delighting in, and enjoying the perfection we have attained through God's indescribable work.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE FINAL STATE OF THE LOST (HELL)

Among many other things, hell has been called cruel and barbarous. As we'll later examine,[1] Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) said that anyone who threatens people with eternal punishment, as Jesus did, is inhumane (*WIANC*, 593–94). Unbelievers in general have questioned both hell's existence and justice; even some otherwise evangelical Christians, such as John Stott (b. 1925), have denied it. However, mainstream orthodox Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, has defended the reality and equity of hell.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

The existence of hell is supported by many arguments from both the authority of God's Word and the use of human reason. Scripture contains numerous emphatic affirmations of the doctrine of hell.

Terms Used for the Place of Ultimate Damnation

The Old Testament Hebrew word for *hell* is *sheol*, which means "the unseen

world." While *sheol* is often used of the grave, wherein the body is unseen, it also sometimes refers to the world of spirits.[2] The New Testament Greek word for *hell* is *hades*, which usually signifies a place of departed wicked spirits.

In addition, *gehenna* is often translated using the word *hell*;[3] the Valley of Gehenna was a putrid dump outside Jerusalem that burned perpetually. In reference to the eternal damnation of fallen angels, the New Testament also uses the word *tartaroô* (2 Peter 2:4); Tartarus was envisioned by the Greeks as a subterranean place even lower than hades (see Arndt and Gingrich, *GELNT*, 813).

Old Testament Teaching on Hell

The doctrine of hell, like the doctrine of the Trinity,[4] was revealed progressively: more implied (implicit) in the Old Testament and more developed (explicit) in the New Testament.

Genesis 3:15

From the very beginning, hell is implied in the curse on the serpent (Satan): "I [God] will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel." As we learn later, the devil's final defeat will come when he is cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10; cf. Rom. 16:20).

Psalm 9:17

"The wicked return to the grave [Heb: *sheol*], all the nations that forget God." This word for *hell* and its translation as *hades* in the Septuagint[5] often mean "the grave,"[6] but some passages seem to go beyond this, suggesting something deeper into "the unseen world." Deuteronomy 32:22, for instance, speaks of the "lowest hell" (NKJV). At any rate, since death is the soul's point of departure from the body,[7] there is more involved in hell than the body's burial in a grave—*death is also the soul's entrance into the spiritual realm.*

Psalm 16:10–11

> You will not abandon me [David] to the grave [*sheol*], nor will you let your Holy One [Jesus Christ] see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Just as in the Old Testament (here as elsewhere) the word *sheol* means more than the grave for a believer,[8] so it means more than the grave for an unbeliever. Specifically, this includes the spiritual world, to which the grave is merely the entrance.

Daniel 12:2

"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, *others to shame and everlasting contempt*."

Isaiah 66:22–24

> "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord. "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; *their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched*, they will be loathsome to all mankind."[9]

Intertestamental Jewish Belief About Hell

In the era between the Old and New Testaments,[10] Jewish religious sources referenced hell. The writer of 4 Maccabees said:

> Thou for our cruel murder shalt suffer at the hands of divine justice sufficient torment by fire for ever.… Thou for thy impiety and thy cruelty shalt endure torments with end … [in] eternal doom.… The divine justice delivers thee unto a more rapid and eternal fire and torments which shall not leave hold on thee to all eternity.… A great struggle and peril of the soul awaits in eternal torment those who transgress the ordinance of God. (9:9; 10:11, 15; 12:12; 13:15)[11]

Flavius Josephus on Hell

In a similarity with statements that Christ made,[12] the Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37–100), a contemporary of Jesus, wrote a "Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades":

> Hades is a place in the world not regularly finished; a subterraneous region, where the light of this world does not shine; from which circumstances, that in this place the light does not shine, it cannot be but there must be in it perpetual darkness. This region is allowed as a place of custody for souls, in which angels are appointed as guardians to them, who distribute to them temporary punishment, agreeable to every one's behaviour and manners.
>
> In this region there is a certain place set apart, as a lake of unquenchable fire, wherein we suppose

> no one hath hitherto been cast; but it is prepared for a day afore-determined by God, in which a righteous sentence shall deservedly be passed upon all men.… [They shall receive] this everlasting punishment, as having been the causes of defilement; while the just shall obtain an incorruptible and never-dying kingdom. These are now confined in Hades, but not in the same place wherein the unjust are confined.…
>
> [God allots] to the lovers of wicked works eternal punishment. To these belong the unquenchable fire, and that without end, and a certain fiery worm never dying, and not destroying the body, but continuing its eruption out of the body with never ceasing grief.

Jesus' Teachings on the Existence of Hell

Perhaps the strongest of all arguments for hell as a place of punishment for those (angels and humans) who reject God is that the Lord Jesus Christ, second person of the Holy Trinity,[13] repeatedly affirmed its existence. Indeed, He had more to say about hell than He did about heaven.

Matthew 5:29–30

> If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.[14]

Matthew 10:28

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Matthew 11:23

"And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day."

Matthew 13:40–41

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil."

Matthew 13:49–50

Jesus added of those who reject Him, "This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw

them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 22:13

"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "

Matthew 23:15, 33

> Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.… You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?

Matthew 25:41

In His Mount Olivet Discourse, our Lord declared, "Then he [the King] will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' "[15]

Mark 9:43–48

> If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their "worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

Luke 12:5

"I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell."

Luke 16:19–31

In a stunningly vivid story that speaks for itself and, unlike parables, uses a person's actual name (Lazarus), Jesus tells of a man in hell:

> There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.… The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."
>
> But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

He answered, “Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”

Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.”

“No, father Abraham,” he said, “but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.”

He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

Other New Testament Teachings on the Existence of Hell

In addition to the words of Jesus in the Gospels, other New Testament writings also affirm the doctrine of hell.

2 Thessalonians 1:7–9

Talking of everlasting separation from God, Paul wrote,

> This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Hebrews 9:27

The writer of Hebrews added this note of finality: “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

2 Peter 2:4, 9

“If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment … if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.”

Jude 6

“The angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

Jude 12–13

> These [immoral, godless] men [who secretly slipped in among you] are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness

has been reserved forever.

Revelation 2:11

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death."[16]

Revelation 14:10–11

"He [the beast], too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever."

Revelation 19:20

"The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur."

Revelation 20:10

"The devil, who deceived them [those who march against God's people], was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Revelation 20:11–15

> Then I [John] saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:8

"The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

Several attributes—some of God's and some of ours—call for the existence of hell. The characteristics of God that necessitate hell are His justice, His love, and His sovereignty. The characteristics of humanity that require the same are depravity and dignity.

God's Justice Demands a Hell

In addition to the direct biblical affirmations, Scripture contains many other reasons for hell's existence. One is that justice demands it, and God is just (cf. Rom. 2); He is so pure and holy that He cannot even look upon sin (Hab. 1:13). "There is no partiality with God" (Rom. 2:11 NKJV), and "the Judge of all the earth [will] do [what is] right" (Gen. 18:25).[17]

It is a simple fact that not all evil is punished in this life; many observers have noted that the wicked sometimes prosper (cf. Ps. 73:3). Thus, the existence of an after-this-life place of punishment for the wicked is necessary to maintain God's justice. In a trenchant defense, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) pointed out that even one sin deserves hell:

> The eternal holy God cannot tolerate any sin. How much more, then, a multitude of daily sins in thought, word, and deed? This is all compounded by the fact that we reject God's immense mercy. And add to this man's readiness to find fault with God's justice and mercy, and we have abundant evidence of the need for hell. [Therefore,] if we had a true spiritual awareness we would not be amazed at hell's severity but at our own depravity. (*WJE*, 1.109)

God's Love Demands a Hell

The Bible shows that "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and love cannot be coercive but rather is persuasive. A God of love cannot force people to love Him;[18] we respond to His love freely, not because we are required (1 John 4:19; 2 Cor. 9:7). God does not force Himself upon humans against the will He chose to give them (cf. Matt. 23:27), so those who do not wish to love God must be released. Those who decide not to be with Him must be allowed to be separated from Him (see Lewis, *GD*, 38). Hell is eternal separation from God.

God's Sovereignty Demands a Hell

If there were no hell, there would be no final victory over evil.[19] Evil frustrates good. The wheat and tares cannot grow together forever (cf. Matt. 13:40–41)—if there were no ultimate separation, good would not ultimately triumph and God would not be in ultimate control. God's sovereignty demands a hell;[20] His Word declares Him the ultimate victor over evil (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 20–22).

Jonathan Edwards argued,

> It is a most unreasonable thing to suppose that there should be no future punishment, to suppose that God, who had made man a rational creature, able to know his duty, and sensible that he is deserving punishment when he does it not; should let man alone, and let him live as he will, and never punish him for his sins, and never make any difference between the good and the bad. (*WJE*, 2.884)

Human Depravity Demands a Hell

The only just punishment for sin against the eternal God is eternal punishment. God is absolutely perfect (Hab. 1:13; Matt. 5:48), and human beings are irretractably sinful:[21]

> There is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.[22]
>
> Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.[23]
>
> They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips.[24]
>
> His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue.[25]
>
> Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths.[26]
>
> There is no fear of God before his eyes.[27]
>
> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.… There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.[28]

The wisest man who ever lived said, "This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes" (Eccl. 7:29). We are born in sin (Ps. 51:5) and are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3 KJV):

> [Although God's creatures] knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be

> wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (Rom. 1:21–23)

How can anyone suppose that unrepentant, depraved rebellion against flawless, unblemished holiness is undeserving of God's wrath?

Human Dignity Demands a Hell

God created humans to be free;[29] because He will not (*cannot*) force people into heaven against this freedom, human dignity demands a hell. Jesus cried out, "'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but *you were not willing*' " (Matt. 23:37). C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) explained, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, '*Thy* will be done' " (*GD*, 69).

The Cross of Christ Implies Hell

At the center of Christianity is the Cross;[30] it is the very purpose for which Christ came into the world.[31] Without Him salvation is not possible,[32] and only through His finished work can we be delivered from our sins (Rom. 3:21–26). Jesus suffered unimaginable agony and even separation from His beloved Father (Heb. 2:10–17; 5:7–9); anticipating the Cross, His "sweat became as it were great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44 ASV). *Why the Cross and all this suffering unless there is a hell*? If there is no hell to shun, then the Cross was in vain. Christ's death is robbed of its eternal significance unless there is a hellish eternal destiny from which sinful souls need to be delivered.[33]

It Is Illusory to Deny Hell

It is not only Christians that acknowledge or demonstrate the reality of hell. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) defined an illusion as beliefs that "are derived from human wishes." He added, "We call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and [when] in doing so we disregard its relations to reality" (see *FI*, 38–40). Given the evidence for hell, denial of hell is a strong candidate for an illusion. Freud said of religion, "We shall tell ourselves

that it would be very nice if there were a God who created the world and was a benevolent Providence … but it is very striking that all this is exactly as we are bound to wish it to be so" (ibid., 52–53). We can rephrase this as: We can tell ourselves that it would be wonderful if there were no hell or no final day of judgment at which we will be held accountable for all our deeds, but we shouldn't fail to note that all of this is exactly what we naturally want to be true.

Another atheist, Walter Kaufmann (1921–1980), admitted that belief in hell is not based in illusion: "It neither follows that everybody who believes in hell is prompted by wishful thinking nor … that belief in hell originated in this way" (*CRP*, 135). Indeed, belief in hell did not; however, *disbelief* in hell may have originated as such. Polls have yielded an interesting statistic in this regard: While a majority of people in North America believe in the reality of hell, very few believe they are going there. This could be an even greater illusion than that of those who deny hell's existence.

HELL'S NATURE, LOCATION, AND DURATION

What is hell like? Where is it? How long will it last? These and numerous other questions have been the subject of theological discussion for centuries.

The Nature of Hell

The nature of hell is a horrifying reality. Hell is like being left outside in the dark forever. Hell is like a wandering star, a waterless cloud, a perpetually burning dump, a bottomless pit, an everlasting prison. Hell is a place of anguish and regret.[34]

To borrow the title of a marvelous book (see Lewis, *GD*), hell is like a great divorce—an eternal separation from God (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–9). There is, in biblical language, "a great gulf fixed" between hell and heaven so that no one can pass from one side to the other (Luke 16:26 NKJV).

It is noteworthy that Scripture nowhere describes hell as a torture chamber where people are forced against their will to undergo agonizing pain; this is a caricature of hell created by unbelievers in an attempt to paint God as cruel. That a loving God will not torture anyone does not mean hell is not a place of torment—Jesus said it is (v. 24). However, unlike *torture*, which is inflicted from without *against* one's will, *torment* is self-inflicted *by* one's own will. As has

been noted even by atheists—for example, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)[35]—the door of hell is locked from the inside.

We can be condemned by our own freedom: Torment is living with the consequences of our own bad choices. Torment is the anguish that results from realizing we used our freedom for evil and chose wrongly. Everyone in hell will know that the pain he or she suffers is self-induced; hence, the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13; Mark 8:12).

Hell is also depicted as a place of eternal fire. The fire is *real*, but not necessarily *physical* (at least not as we customarily understand the word), because people in hell will have imperishable physical bodies (John 5:28–29; Rev. 20:13–15), so normal fire will not affect them. Further, the figures of speech that describe hell are contradictory if taken in a strictly physical sense. Hell has *flames*, yet it is outer *darkness*. Hell is a *dump* (with a bottom), yet it is a *bottomless* pit. While everything in the Bible is literally true, not everything is true literally.[36] For instance, God is not a literal rock (Ps. 42:9), since He is spirit (John 4:24), but He is literally a solid, rocklike foundation.

The Location of Hell

Hell is said to be "under the earth" (Phil. 2:10), a place of "outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12; 22:13 NKJV), "outside" the gate of the heavenly city (Rev. 22:15). Hell is away from the "presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:9; cf. Matt. 25:41). Of course, "under" and "outside" are relational terms that need not necessarily be taken as spatial. God is "up" and hell is "down." God is "inside" and hell is "outside." *Hell is the other direction from God*, eternal separation from Him (2 Thess. 1:7–9).

The Duration of Hell

Annihilationists[37] argue that the Greek word rendered *everlasting* (*aiôn, aiônios*) when applied to heaven means "unending" but when applied to hell means "ending" (see Froom, *CFF*, 1.433). As we will see, this is inconsistent and untrue—that hell will last as long as God and heaven is supported by several lines of evidence.

God's Word declares that He will endure forever (Ps. 90:1); He had no beginning and has no end (Rev. 1:8); He created all things (Col. 1:15–16; John 1:3); and He will abide after this world is destroyed (2 Peter 3:10–12). Because

God by His very nature cannot tolerate evil (Isa. 6:1ff.; Hab. 1:13), evil persons must be separated from Him *forever*.

Hell Will Last As Long As Heaven Does

Heaven is "everlasting," and the same word (Gk: *aiônion*), used in the same context, also affirms that hell is "everlasting."[38] If heaven is forever, then so is hell; there is absolutely no biblical ground for supposing that one is eternal and one is temporal. Likewise, there is no possibility of a person escaping hell after arriving (cf. Luke 16:26). Judgment begins after death (Heb. 9:27; John 8:21).

What is more, people are conscious after they die, whether in heaven or in hell.[39] It makes no sense to resurrect unbelievers to everlasting judgment (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28–29) before the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11ff.) in order to punish them for their sins unless they are conscious.

Annihilation of the wicked is contrary to both the nature of God and the nature of humans made in His image.[40] It is not consistent with the character of an all-loving God to snuff out the souls of those who do not do His wishes;[41] can you imagine an earthly father killing his children for not doing what he wants them to do? Further, were God to annihilate human beings, He would be attacking Himself, for we are made in His image (Gen. 1:27), and He is immortal.[42] That these persons will be suffering does not justify annihilating them any more than having a child in pain justifies smothering him. Annihilationism violates God's nature and human freedom,[43] as recognized not only by believers but also by some who have denied God. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who held that annihilation is not preferable to conscious freedom, once wrote, "I would rather will nothingness than not to will at all" (*TGM*, last line).

Hell Will Last As Long As God Does

Not only will hell's duration be as long as heaven's, but it also will endure as long as God Himself—the same term meaning "eternal" (Gk: *aiônion*) is used of all three.[44] Romans 16:26 declares that God's mystery is "now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him."[45] Since hell is reserved for those who have lived for sin instead of for the eternal God, hell will endure as long as the eternal God against whom they have sinned—forever.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO HELL

Critics of biblical and historic Christian teaching on hell have offered many objections to the doctrine. We'll now examine some of the most common.

Objection One: Why Punish People in Hell—Why Not Reform Them for Heaven?

Why never-ending punishment? Why doesn't God try instead to reform sinners? Even human beings, with their limited abilities and resources, provide reformatories for criminals. How much more should God, with His unlimited abilities and resources, have a reformatory, rather than an eternal penal institution, for the creatures He made in His image and likeness?

Response to Objection One

The answer is not difficult, either biblically or rationally.

First, God does try to reform people; the time of reformation is called life. Peter declared, "The Lord … is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). After the time of *reformation* comes the time of *reckoning*: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Second, hell is only for the unreformable and unrepentant, the reprobate (cf. 2 Peter 2:1ff.). Hell is *not* for anyone who is reformable; anyone reformable will still be alive, for God in His wisdom and goodness does not allow anyone to go to hell whom He knew would go to heaven if He gave more opportunity.[46] *God wants everyone to be saved* (1 Tim. 2:4); hell was created not for people, but for the devil and his fallen angels (Matt. 25:41). Lewis observed, "No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock [the door] is opened" (*GD*, 69).

Third, contrary to the assumption that once a person reached such a horrible place he would want to leave, it is simply not so. There is no evidence for this in the gospel story of the man in hell,[47] and there is no support for it in the known nature of the human psyche. In regard to changing the hearts and dispositions of wicked people, *how can a place devoid of God's mercy accomplish what no measure of His grace could accomplish on earth*? If hell could reform those who

choose evil, then they could be saved without Christ, who is the sole means of God's salvation.[48] In fact, as opposed to softening a hard heart, suffering often has the result of hardening it more, as illustrated in the case of Pharaoh (Ex. 7–14) and as demonstrated by the recidivism of hardened criminals.

Fourth, and finally, God cannot force free creatures to be reformed.[49] Forced reformation is worse than punishment, for punishment honors the freedom and dignity with which God endowed His human creation: "To be 'cured' against one's will … is to be put on a level with those who have not yet reached the age of reason or those who never will; to be classed with infants, imbeciles, and domestic animals" (Lewis, *GITD*, 292). Humans are not objects to be manipulated; humans are subjects to be respected. People, made in God's image, receive punishment when they do evil because they were free and knew better (see Rom. 1:18ff.).

Objection Two: Isn't Eternal Damnation for Temporal Sins Overkill?

To punish a person eternally for what he did temporally seems like a gigantic case of overkill. No human parent would mete out a lifetime of punishment upon his child for a crime that involved a few minutes; why should God punish forever those who have only sinned for a short time?

Response to Objection Two

On closer examination, eternal punishment turns out to be not only just but also necessary.

For one thing, *only eternal punishment will suffice for sins against the eternal God*. Sins committed in time are perpetrated against the Eternal One; analogically, while it may take only an instant to kill someone, the deserved punishment is life in prison. No sin can be tolerated as long as God exists;[50] because He is eternal, punishment for sin must also be eternal. God's justice demands eternal punishment because "the heinousness of any crime must be gauged according to the worth or dignity of the person it is committed against" (Edwards in Davidson, "RD" in *JETS*, 50).[51] Sin against an infinite God is infinitely evil and worthy of infinite punishment (Edwards, *WJE*, 2.83).

What is more, as we have seen, the only alternative to eternal punishment is robbing persons of their freedom by forcing them into heaven. *This would not be heavenly but instead would be "hell" for them*, since they would be trapped in a

place where everyone is loving and praising the One they want most to avoid (cf. Lewis, *PP*, 106–07). Again, God's third choice, annihilating His own image within His creatures—and, therefore, snuffing them out of existence—would be an attack of God on Himself.[52]

In addition, *without an eternal separation of evil from good (in hell), there could be no heaven, an eternal preservation of good*. Evil is contagious (1 Cor. 5:6) and must be quarantined;[53] like a deadly plague, if uncontained, evil will continue to contaminate and corrupt. If God did not eventually separate the tares from the wheat, the tares would choke out the wheat (cf. Matt. 13:24–30); an eternal heaven necessitates an eternal hell.

Finally, unbelievers prefer to be distanced from God in time. Why should we not expect this to be their chosen state in eternity?

Objection Three: How Can We Be Happy in Heaven Knowing a Loved One Is in Hell?

The mere thought of a loved one eternally separated from God is dreadful. How could a husband be happy in heaven knowing his wife is forever in hell's anguish? A parent is tormented by a child suffering the pain of leukemia for a few months; how could a parent possibly be happy in heaven knowing the child is going to be suffering forever?

Response to Objection Three

First of all, the seriously flawed presupposition of this question is that we are more merciful than God. He is infinitely more merciful than we are (cf. Lewis, *PP*, 114).

Furthermore, God is happy in heaven, yet He knows that not everyone will be there.

Also, if we could not be happy in heaven while knowing that others were in hell, then our happiness would be in someone else's hands:

> What some people [wrongly] say on earth is that the final loss of one soul gives the lie to all the joy of those who are saved. The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned [is] that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe: that till they consent to be happy (on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy: that theirs should be the final power; *that Hell should be able to veto Heaven [is invalid]*. (*GD*, 124)

We would not be happy in heaven if we knew that others had been unjustly kept out. However, we can be happy in heaven the same way we can be happy eating while knowing that others are starving—namely, if we have offered them food but they have refused to eat it. *No matter the situation, God will "wipe away all tears" in heaven* (Rev. 21:4 KJV).

Objection Four: Why Did God Create People He Knew Would Go to Hell?

Some critics of hell argue that if God knew some creatures would reject Him and eventuate in such a horrible place, He would have never created them. Wouldn't it be better to have never existed than to exist and spend eternity in hell?

Response to Objection Four

Nonexistence cannot be said to be a better condition than existence, since nonexistence is nothing; to affirm that nothing can be better than something is a colossal category mistake. In order for two things to be comparable, they must have something in common, and there is absolutely nothing in common between being and nonbeing—they are diametrical opposites. Someone may *feel* like being put out of his misery, but he cannot even consistently *think* of nonbeing as a better state than being. *What has no being cannot be better than what is*.

Jesus' statement that it would have been better if Judas had never been born (Mark 14:21) is simply a strong expression indicating the severity of his sin, not a statement of nonbeing's superiority over being. In a parallel condemnation of the Pharisees, Jesus said Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented had they seen His miracles (Matt. 11:20–24). This does not mean Sodom and Gomorrah literally would have repented;[54] rather, this is a powerful figure of speech indicating that the Pharisees' sin was so great that "it will be more tolerable" (v. 24 TLB) for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment[55] than for the Pharisees.

That not all people will win in the game of life does not mean it should not be played: "If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it" (Lewis, *PP*, 106). Before the Super Bowl ever begins, players from both teams know that one of them will lose, yet they all will play. American drivers know that people will be killed daily in auto accidents, yet we still daily take to the road. All of us who are parents know that having children could end in tragedy for them and for

ourselves, yet our knowledge of evil's existence does not negate our will to permit the likelihood of good. Why do we will as such? Because we deem it worthwhile—because we *know* that it's better to have had the opportunity for goodness, for life, for love. Likewise, from God's standpoint, it is better to have loved all the people of the world (John 3:16) and have lost some than not to have loved them at all.[56]

Objection Five: That Hell Has No Redeeming Value

Some maintain that hell has no redeeming value because no one ever emerges from it; no one who goes there learns from it; no one "lives to tell the tale." What's the point, if everyone who chooses hell stays there forever?

Response to Objection Five

To this argument Jonathan Edwards answered that hell's redeeming value is that it not only satisfies God's justice but also glorifies God's justice by showing how great a standard it is: "The vindictive justice of God will appear strict, exact, awful, and terrible, and therefore glorious" (*WJE*, 2.87). In other words, the more terrific and fearsome the judgment, the brighter the sheen on the sword of God's justice.[57] Awesome punishment befits the nature of an awesome God: By a majestic display of wrath, God reclaims the majesty that the wicked have refused to return to Him.[58] Awful punishment in the afterlife will bring to God what people stole from Him in this life; those who choose no glory for God during this life will be given no such choice thereafter.[59]

All human beings are either actively or passively useful to God. In heaven believers will be actively useful in praising His mercy; in hell unbelievers will be passively useful in bringing majesty to His justice. Just as a barren tree is useful for firewood, so the wicked are fuel for an eternal fire (ibid., 2.126).

Further, in hell the tares are separated from the wheat and the evil from the good. This is both useful and necessary. For what frustrates evil is good. Hence, heaven is a place where there is no evil to frustrate good people, and hell is a place where there is no more good to frustrate evil people. The final separation is needed for the triumph of good over evil so that evil can no longer contaminate good.

Objection Six: Is It Right (Just) to Send People to Hell When They Can't

Help Being Sinners?

The Bible says we are born sinners (Ps. 51:5) and are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3 KJV). If sinners cannot avoid sinning, then is it fair to send them to hell for sin?

Response to Objection Six

People go to hell for two reasons: (1) They are born with a bent to sin *and* (2) they choose to sin. They are born on a road that leads to hell, but those who remain on that road also fail to heed the warning signs to turn from destruction and be saved.

While human beings sin because they are sinners by nature, nonetheless, their sin nature does not force them to sin; they choose to sin.[60] As correctly said by Augustine (354–430), "We are born with the propensity to sin and the necessity to die." Notice he did not say we are born with the necessity to sin; while sin is *inevitable*, since we are born with a bent in that direction, nonetheless, sin is not *unavoidable*.[61] Likewise, the ultimate place to which sinners are destined is also avoidable—all one needs to do is repent.[62] Everyone is held responsible for his decision to accept or reject God's offer of salvation, and responsibility always implies the ability to respond (if not on our own, then by God's grace[63]). All who go to hell could have avoided it; even the pagan has clear light from God so that he is "without excuse."[64] Those who seek will find,[65] and just as God sent a missionary to Cornelius (Acts 10:23–25), so He will provide the message of salvation for all who seek it: "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

Objection Seven: Why Not Annihilate Sinners Instead of Consciously Tormenting Them?

If God is merciful, as the Bible maintains, then would it not be more merciful to put sinners out of their misery by annihilating them?[66] If, for example, people shoot farm animals that will not be able to escape burning barns, why should not God be at least as merciful to humans?

Response to Objection Seven

It is precisely because we are not animals that God does not treat us like them. Annihilating those who do not carry out His will would be unkind and unmerciful, as would be a father who shot his son because the young man grew up and disagreed with him. It is more merciful for God to allow us to choose our own way—even if it is against His will—than to force His will on us.[67]

Objection Eight: Hell Itself Is Contrary to the Mercy of God

In the same vein, some have insisted that a merciful God would not permit suffering in hell. No loving earthly father could allow his child to be in perpetual torment if he could do anything about it.

Response to Objection Eight

First, it is untenable to suppose that God's mercy does not permit suffering in hell. God allows plenty of suffering in this world. It is an empirical fact that God and creature-pain are not incompatible.[68]

Second, Edwards contended that God's mercy is not a passion or emotion that overcomes His justice. Mercy so construed is a defect in God that would make Him weak and inconsistent within Himself, not fit to be a judge.[69]

Third, from the vantage point of eternity, as our attitudes and feelings will be transformed and correspond to God's, we will love only what He loves and hate what He hates. Since God is not miserable at the thought or sight of hell, neither will we be—even in the case of people we loved in this life. John Gerstner (1914–1996) compiled a digest of Jonathan Edwards' entire sermon devoted to this, called "The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous," in which he says that "it will seem in no way cruel in God to inflict such extreme suffering on such extremely wicked creatures" ("OAJE" in *BS*, 90). *Not* doing so would be unjust, and God is perfectly just.[70] Since none of God's attributes are inconsistent with each other,[71] it follows that God is not unmerciful to allow hell.

Fourth, and finally, God will have done everything he could do, short of robbing His creatures of His very image in them. He has loved all (John 3:16), sent His Son to die for all (1 John 2:2), and sent His Holy Spirit to convict all (John 16:8). He cannot make their decision for them, and He cannot force a free

decision (Matt. 23:37), so the rest is in human hands; God could not possibly have been more merciful.

Objection Nine: Eternal Punishment Is Not Eternal Misery

Annihilationists argue that God's punishment is eternal in its *results* but not in its *process*; that is, the effect is eternal but the duration is temporal (see Froom, *CFF*, 1.294). Take the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see 2 Peter 2:6): They are not still being punished, but the result of their punishment will never end.

> Everlasting punishment is clearly not the same as being everlastingly punished. It is eternal loss of being. [Hell is a place where] the undying worm and the quenchless flame feed upon their victim until the whole is consumed. (op. cit., 1.295)

Response to Objection Nine

This objection is contrary to clear scriptural statements that speak, for example, of those in hell being "tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). In hell, their "worm *does not* die, and the fire is *not* quenched" (Mark 9:48). The flames of hell are said to be eternal.[72]

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

The doctrine of eternal suffering for the wicked is amply supported in church history. In fact, denials of it are rare before modern times, and most of these are based on false premises about God's nature,[73] the nature of free choice,[74] or the reformatory view of justice.[75]

A Pre-Christian View of Hell

Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) held to the doctrine of eternal punishment:

> Those who have been guilty of the most heinous crimes and whose misdeeds are past cure—of these warnings are made, and they are no longer capable themselves of receiving and benefit, because they are incurable—but others are benefited who behold them *suffering throughout eternity* the greatest and most excruciating and terrifying tortures because of their misdeeds, literally suspended as examples there in the prison house in Hades, a spectacle and a warning to any evil doers who from time to time

arrive. (*G*, 525c, emphasis added)

Early Fathers

Affirmation of hell appears in the writings of the earliest Fathers. Shortly after the apostles set forth Christ's teachings,[76] their followers taught the same.

Ignatius (d. c. 110)

> If those that corrupt mere human families are condemned to death, how much more shall those suffer everlasting punishment who endeavor to corrupt the Church of Christ, for which the Lord Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, endured the cross, and submitted to death! Whosoever, "being waxen fat," and "become gross," sets at nought His doctrine, shall go into hell. (*EIE*, 16)
>
> Brethren, be not deceived. If any man follows him that separates from the truth, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and if any man does not stand aloof from the preacher of falsehood, he shall be condemned to hell. (*EIP*, 4)

Polycarp (fl. second century)

> Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. (*EECS*, 11)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> God, foreknowing all things, prepared fit habitations for both, kindly conferring that light which they desire on those who seek after the light of incorruption, and resort to it; but for the despisers and mockers who avoid and turn themselves away from this light, and who do, as it were, blind themselves, He has prepared darkness suitable to persons who oppose the light, and He has inflicted an appropriate punishment upon those who try to avoid being subject to Him. Submission to God is eternal rest, so that they who shun the light have a place worthy of their flight; and those who fly from eternal rest, have a habitation in accordance with their fleeing.
>
> Now, since all good things are with God, they who by their own determination fly from God, do defraud themselves of all good things; and having been [thus] defrauded of all good things with respect to God, they shall consequently fall under the just judgment of God. For those persons who shun rest shall justly incur punishment, and those who avoid the light shall justly dwell in darkness. For as in the case of this temporal light, those who shun it do deliver themselves over to darkness, so that they do themselves become the cause to themselves that they are destitute of light, and do inhabit darkness; and, as I have already observed, the light is not the cause of such an [unhappy] condition of existence to them; so those who fly from the eternal light of God, which contains in itself all good things, are themselves the cause to themselves of their inhabiting eternal darkness, destitute of all good things, having become to themselves the cause of [their consignment to] an abode of that nature. (*AH*, 4.39.4)
>
> To as many as continue in their love towards God, does He grant communion with Him. But communion with God is life and light, and the enjoyment of all the benefits which He has in store. But on as many as, according to their own choice, depart from God, He inflicts that separation from Himself which they have chosen of their own accord. But separation from God is death, and separation from

light is darkness; and separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits which He has in store. … Now, good things are eternal and without end with God, and therefore the loss of these is also eternal and never-ending. (ibid., 5.27.2)

It is in this matter just as occurs in the case of a flood of light: those who have blinded themselves, or have been blinded by others, are for ever deprived of the enjoyment of light. It is not, [however], that the light has inflicted upon them the penalty of blindness, but it is that the blindness itself has brought calamity upon them: and therefore the Lord declared, "He that believeth in Me is not condemned," that is, is not separated from God, for he is united to God through faith. On the other hand, He says, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God"; that is, he separated himself from God of his own accord. (ibid.)

Theophilus (c. 130–190)

Admitting, therefore, the proof which events happening as predicted afford, I do not disbelieve, but I believe, obedient to God, whom, if you please, do you also submit to, believing Him, lest if now you continue unbelieving, you be convinced hereafter, when you are tormented with eternal punishments; which punishments, when they had been foretold by the prophets, the later-born poets and philosophers stole from the holy Scriptures, to make their doctrines worthy of credit. (*TA*, 1.14)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

O ye heathen; who have and deserve our pity, behold, we set before you the promise which our sacred system offers. It guarantees eternal life to such as follow and observe it; on the other hand, it threatens with the eternal punishment of an unending fire those who are profane and hostile; while to both classes alike is preached a resurrection from the dead. (*AN*, 1.1.7)

Therefore after this there is neither death nor repeated resurrections, but we shall be the same that we are now, and still unchanged—the servants of God, ever with God, clothed upon with the proper substance of eternity; but the profane, and all who are not true worshipers of God, in like manner shall be consigned to the punishment of everlasting fire—that fire which, from its very nature indeed, directly ministers to their incorruptibility. (*A*, 1.48)

If, therefore, any one shall violently suppose that the destruction of the soul and the flesh in hell amounts to a final annihilation of the two substances, and not to their penal treatment (as if they were to be consumed, not punished), let him recollect that the fire of hell is eternal—expressly announced as an everlasting penalty; and let him then admit that it is from this circumstance that this never-ending "killing" is more formidable than a merely human murder, which is only temporal. (*ORF*, 35)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

This … is what we expect and have learned from Christ, and teach. And Plato, in like manner, used to say that Rhadamanthus and Minos would punish the wicked who came before them; and we say that the same thing will be done, but at the hand of Christ, and upon the wicked in the same bodies united again to their spirits which are now to undergo everlasting punishment; and not only, as Plato said, for a period of a thousand years. (*FAJ*, 8)

Reflect upon the end of each of the preceding kings, how they died the death common to all, which, if it issued in insensibility, would be a godsend to all the wicked. But since sensation remains to all who have ever lived, and eternal punishment is laid up (i.e., for the wicked), see that ye neglect not to be convinced, and to hold as your belief, that these things are true. (ibid., 18)

That it is better to believe even what is impossible to our own nature and to men, than to be

> unbelieving like the rest of the world, we have learned; for we know that our Master Jesus Christ said, that "what is impossible with men is possible with God," and, "Fear not them that kill you, and after that can do no more; but fear Him who after death is able to cast both soul and body into hell." And hell is a place where those are to be punished who have lived wickedly, and who do not believe that those things which God has taught us by Christ will come to pass. (ibid., 19)

From Justin's *Apology*, one can glean a substantial list of verses that support eternal punishment for the wicked (cited in Froom, *CFF*, 1.819):

"To undergo everlasting punishment" (op. cit., 8).
"To the everlasting punishment of fire" (12).
"Suffer punishment in eternal fire" (17).
"Eternal punishment is laid up" (18).
"There will be burning up of all [the wicked]" (20).
"Are punished in everlasting fire" (21).
"Brings eternal punishment by flames" (45).
"Punished in eternal fire" (*SAJ*, 1).
"In eternal fire shall suffer their just punishment and penalty" (ibid., 8).
"The wicked are punished in eternal fire" (ibid.).

Some maintain Justin adds that when the fires have done their work, the wicked then "shall cease to exist" (ibid., 7); conditionalists and annihilationists[77] use this in support of their views (Froom, *CFF*, 1.819). However, they take Justin's statement out of context, which reads in full like this:

> God delays causing the confusion and destruction of the whole world, by which the wicked angels and demons and men shall cease to exist, because of the seed of the Christians, who know that they are the cause of preservation in nature.

Then Justin goes on to say that "since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free-will, they will justly suffer in *eternal* fire the punishment of whatever sins they have committed" (ibid., emphasis added). Why would he say the fire will be eternal if he believed it would only last for a short time? If one follows the sound rule of interpretation—that an unclear text should be understood in the light of the clear ones[78]—then Justin's statement that men "shall cease to exist" should be taken in another sense. It could mean "cease to exist *on this earth* so as to spread their destructive influence."

Church Councils

After already having been earlier condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople (553), the denial of hell was condemned by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1513 (see Cross, *ODCC*, 328). The last of the nine anathemas (543) of Emperor Justinian (c. 483–565) against Origen (c. 185–c. 254) reads: "If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary and will one day have an end … let him be anathema" (in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, Vol. 14).[79]

Medieval Fathers

The "bookends of the Middle Ages," Augustine and Aquinas, sum up the orthodox doctrine of hell. Aquinas especially addressed the rational problem of eternal suffering.

Augustine (354–430)

> Since the devil has nothing to do with the death of the flesh, whence comes his exceeding pride, a death of another kind is prepared in the eternal fire of hell, by which not only the spirits that have earthly, but also those who have aerial, bodies can be tormented. (*CG*, 4.13)
>
> If the soul live in eternal punishments, by which also those unclean spirits shall be tormented, that is rather eternal death than eternal life. For there is no greater or worse death than when death never dies. But because the soul from its very nature, being created immortal, cannot be without some kind of life, its utmost death is alienation from the life of God in an eternity of punishment. (ibid., 6.12)
>
> If both destinies are "eternal," then we must either understand both as long-continued but at last terminating, or both as endless. For they are correlative—on the one hand, punishment eternal, on the other hand, life eternal. And to say in one and the same sense, life eternal shall be endless, punishment eternal shall come to an end, is the height of absurdity. Wherefore, as the eternal life of the saints shall be endless, so too the eternal punishment of those who are doomed to it shall have no end. (ibid., 21.23)

John Chrysostom (347–407)

> Let us then turn to Him, my beloved friend, and execute the will of God. For He created us and brought us into being, that He might make us partakers of eternal blessings, that He might offer us the kingdom of Heaven, not that He might cast us into Hell and deliver us to the fire; for this was made not for us, but for the devil: but for us the kingdom has been destined and made ready of old time. (*ETAHF*, 1.9)
>
> Thus hell has not been made for us but for him and his angels: but the kingdom has been prepared for us before the foundation of the world. Let us not then make ourselves unworthy of entrance into the bride-chamber: for as long as we are in this world, even if we commit countless sins it is possible to wash them all away by manifesting repentance for our offenses: but when once we have departed to the other world even if we display the most earnest repentance it will be of no avail, not even if we gnash our teeth, beat our breasts, and utter innumerable calls for succor, no one with the tip of his finger will

apply a drop to our burning bodies, but we shall only hear those words which the rich man heard in the parable, “Between us and you a great gulf has been fixed” (ibid.).

Anselm (1033–1109)

O hidden strength: a man hangs on a cross and lifts the load of eternal death from the human race; a man nailed to wood looses the bonds of everlasting death that hold fast the world. O power: a man condemned with thieves saves men condemned with devils, a man stretched out on the gibbet draws all men to himself. O mysterious strength: one soul coming forth from torment draws countless souls with him out of hell, a man submits to the death of the body and destroys the death of souls. (*PM*, 230–31)

So then, nothing can be seen to follow more consistently, and nothing ought to be believed more assuredly, than that man’s soul was created in such a way that if it despises loving the Supreme Being it will suffer eternal wretchedness. Consequently, just as the loving soul will rejoice in an eternal reward, so the despising soul will grieve in eternal punishment. And as the former will experience immutable sufficiency, so the latter will experience inconsolable need. (*M*, 71)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

It must also be known that the condition of the damned will be the exact contrary to that of the blessed. Theirs is the state of eternal punishment, which has a fourfold evil condition. The bodies of the damned will not be brilliant: “Their countenances shall be as faces burnt” [Isa. 13:8]. Likewise they shall be passible, because they shall never deteriorate and, although burning eternally with fire, they shall never be consumed: “Their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched.” They will be weighed down, and the soul of the damned be as it were chained therein: “To bind their kings with fetters, and their nobles with manacles of iron. Finally, beasts have rotted in their dung” (*CISTA*, 62).

The disposition of hell will be such as to be adapted to the utmost unhappiness of the damned. Wherefore accordingly both light and darkness are there, in so far as they are most conducive to the unhappiness of the damned. Now seeing is in itself pleasant, for … “the sense of sight is most esteemed, because thereby many things are known.”

Yet it happens accidentally that seeing is painful, when we see things that are hurtful to us, or displeasing to our will. Consequently in hell the place must be so disposed for seeing as regards light and darkness, that nothing be seen clearly, and that only such things be dimly seen as are able to bring anguish to the heart. Wherefore, simply speaking, the place is dark. Yet by Divine disposition, there is a certain amount of light, as much as suffices for seeing those things which are capable of tormenting the soul. The natural situation of the place is enough for this, since in the centre of the earth, where hell is said to be, fire cannot be otherwise than thick and cloudy, and reeky as it were. (*ST*, 4.97.4)

Further, according to the Philosopher, punishment is meted according to the dignity of the person sinned against, so that a person who strikes one in authority receives a greater punishment than one who strikes anyone else. Now whoever sins mortally sins against God, Whose commandments he breaks, and Whose honor he gives another, by placing his end in some one other than God. But God’s majesty is infinite. Therefore whoever sins mortally deserves infinite punishment; and consequently it seems just that for a mortal sin a man should be punished forever. (ibid., 4.99.1)

The suffering of eternal punishment is in no way opposed to divine justice. Even in the laws men make, punishment need not correspond to the offense in point of time. [For example, one may commit murder in a minute but deserve a lifetime in jail]. (*CT*, 183)

We should also take into consideration the fact that eternal punishment is inflicted on a sinner who does not repent of his sin, and so he continues in his sin up to death. And since he is in sin for eternity, he is reasonably punished by God for all eternity. Furthermore, any sin committed against God has a

certain infinity when regarded from the side of God, against whom it is committed. For clearly, the greater the person who is offended, the more grievous is the offense. He who strikes a soldier is held more gravely accountable than if he struck a peasant: and his offense is much more serious if he strikes a prince or a king.

Accordingly, since God is infinitely great, an offense committed against Him is in a certain respect infinite; and so a punishment that is in a certain respect infinite is attached to it. Such a punishment cannot be infinite in intensity, for nothing created can be infinite in this way. Consequently a punishment that is infinite in duration is rightly inflicted for mortal sin. Moreover, while a person is still capable of correction, temporal punishment is imposed for his emendation or cleansing. But if a sinner is incorrigible, so that his will is obstinately fixed in sin, as we said above is the case with the damned, his punishment ought never to come to an end. (ibid.)

Reformation Leaders

The Reformers did not reject their predecessors' teaching on hell but strongly reaffirmed it.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

The Fathers made four sorts of hell. (1) The fore-front, wherein, they say, the patriarchs were until Christ descended into hell. (2) The feeling of pain, yet only temporal, as purgatory. (3) Where unbaptized children are, but feel no pain. (4) Where the damned are, which feel everlasting pain. This is the right hell; the other three are only human imaginings. (*TT*, 802)

The fiery oven is ignited merely by the unbearable appearance of God and endures eternally. For the Day of Judgment will not last for a moment only but will stand throughout eternity and will thereafter never come to an end. Constantly the damned will be judged, constantly they will suffer pain, and constantly they will be a fiery oven, that is, they will be tortured within by supreme distress and tribulation. (*WLS*, 2:627)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

God, who is perfect righteousness, cannot love the iniquity which he sees in all. All of us, therefore, have that within which deserves the hatred of God. Hence, in respect, first, of our corrupt nature; and, secondly, of the depraved conduct following upon it, we are all offensive to God, guilty in his sight, and by nature the children of hell. (*ICR*, 2.16.3)

On the other hand, he [God] proclaims not only that iniquity is hateful in his sight, but that it will not escape with impunity, because he will be the avenger of his insulted majesty. That he may encourage us in every way, he promises present blessings, as well as eternal felicity, to the obedience of those who shall have kept his commands, while he threatens transgressors with present suffering, as well as the punishment of eternal death. (ibid., 2.8.4)

The mode in which the Spirit usually speaks in Scripture is, that God was the enemy of men until they were restored to favor by the death of Christ, (Rom. 5:10); that they were cursed until their iniquity was expiated by the sacrifice of Christ, (Gal. 3:10, 13); that they were separated from God, until by means of Christ's body they were received into union (Col. 1:21–22). Such modes of expression are accommodated to our capacity, that we may the better understand how miserable and calamitous our condition is without Christ. For were it not said in clear terms, that Divine wrath, and vengeance, and eternal death, lay upon us, we should be less sensible of our wretchedness without the mercy of God,

and less disposed to value the blessing of deliverance. (ibid., 2.16.2)

Post-Reformation Teachers

Beyond the Reformation and into modern times, the doctrine of hell continues to be the standard teaching of the orthodox Christian church. Jonathan Edwards summed up the earlier orthodox view, and C.S. Lewis gave the best expression to the modern orthodox view.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

Once again,

> The eternal holy God cannot tolerate any sin. How much more, then, a multitude of daily sins in thought, word, and deed? This is all compounded by the fact that we reject God's immense mercy. And add to this man's readiness to find fault with God's justice and mercy, and we have abundant evidence of the need for hell. [Thus,] if we had a true spiritual awareness, we would not be amazed at hell's severity but at our own depravity. (*WJE*, 1.109)
>
> It is a most unreasonable thing to suppose that there should be no future punishment, to suppose that God, who had made man a rational creature, able to know his duty, and sensible that he is deserving punishment when he does it not; should let man alone, and let him live as he will, and never punish him for his sins, and never make any difference between the good and the bad.… How unreasonable it is to suppose, that he who made the world, should leave things in such confusion, and never take any care of the governing of his creatures, and that he should never judge his reasonable creatures. (ibid., 2.884)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

> Consider a few of the circumstances which will follow the general judgment. And the first is the execution of the sentence pronounced on the evil and on the good: "These shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." It should be observed, it is the very same word which is used, both in the former and the latter clause: It follows, that either the punishment lasts for ever, or the reward too will come to an end: No, never, unless God could come to an end, or his mercy and truth could fail. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and shall drink of those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore" (*WJW*, 5.15.3.1).
>
> The wicked, meantime, shall be turned into hell, even all the people that forget God. They will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." They will be "cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone," originally "prepared for the devil and his angels"; where they will gnaw their tongues for anguish and pain, they will curse God and look upward. There the dogs of hell—pride, malice, revenge, rage, horror, despair—continually devour them. There "they have no rest, day or night, but the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever!" (ibid.).
>
> Does any man find in himself ill will, malice, envy, or any other temper opposite to kindness? Then is misery there: And the stronger the temper, the more miserable he is. If the slothful man may be said to eat his own flesh, much more the malicious, or envious. His soul is the very type of hell—full of torment as well as wickedness. He hath already the worm that never dieth, and he is hastening to the fire that never can be quenched. Only as yet the great gulf is not fixed between him and heaven. (ibid., 7.139)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

The third kind of death is the consummation of the other two.[80] It is eternal death. It is the execution of the legal sentence; it is the consummation of the spiritual death. Eternal death is the death of the soul; it takes place after the body has been laid in the grave, after the soul has departed from it. If legal death be terrible, it is because of its consequences; and if spiritual death be dreadful, it is because of that which shall succeed it. The two deaths of which we have spoken are the roots, and that death which is to come is the flower thereof. (*SSC*, 1.52)

Oh! had I words that I might this morning attempt to depict to you what eternal death is. The soul has come before its Maker; the book has been opened; the sentence has been uttered; "Depart, ye cursed" has shaken the universe, and made the very spheres dim with the frown of the Creator; the soul has departed to the depths where it is to dwell with others in eternal death. Oh! how horrible is its position now. Its bed is a bed of flame; the sights it sees are murdering ones that affright its spirit. The sounds it hears are shrieks, and wails, and moans, and groans; all that its body knows is the infliction of miserable pain! It has the possession of unutterable woe, of unmitigated misery. The soul looks up. Hope is extinct—it is gone. (ibid.)

It looks downward in dread and fear; remorse hath possessed its soul. It looks on the right hand—and the adamantine walls of fate keep it within its limits of torture. It looks on the left—and there the rampart of blazing fire forbids the scaling ladder of e'en a dreamy speculation of escape. It looks within and seeks for consolation there, but a gnawing worm hath entered into the soul. It looks about it—it has no friends to aid, no comforters, but tormentors in abundance. It knoweth naught of hope of deliverance; it hath heard the everlasting key of destiny turning in its awful wards, and it hath seen God take that key and hurl it down into the depth of eternity never to be found again. It hopeth not; it knoweth no escape; it guesseth not of deliverance; it pants for death, but death is too much its foe to be there; it longs that non-existence would swallow it up, but this eternal death is worse than annihilation. It pants for extermination as the laborer for his Sabbath; it longs that it might be swallowed up in nothingness just as would the galley slave long for freedom, but it cometh not—it is eternally dead. (ibid.)

When eternity shall have rolled round multitudes of its everlasting cycles it shall still be dead. Forever knoweth no end; eternity cannot be spelled except in eternity. Still the soul seeth written o'er its head, "Thou art damned forever." It heareth howlings that are to be perpetual; it seeth flames which are unquenchable; it knoweth pains that are unmitigated; it hears a sentence that rolls not like the thunder of earth which soon is hushed—but onward, onward, onward, shaking the echoes of eternity—making thousands of years shake again with the horrid thunder of its dreadful sound—"Depart! depart! depart! ye cursed!" This is the eternal death. (ibid.)

C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)

Milton was right.… The choice of every lost soul can be expressed in the words "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." There is always something they insist on keeping, even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy—that is, to reality. (*GD*, 66)

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "*Thy* will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock [the door] is opened. (ibid., 69)

[Let's say, for example, that] my bad temper or my jealousy are gradually getting worse—so gradually that the increase in seventy years [of life on this earth] will not be very noticeable. But it

might be absolute hell in a million years: in fact, if Christianity is true, Hell is the precisely correct technical term for what it would be. (*MC*, 73)

If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it. If the happiness of a creature lies in self-surrender, no one can make that surrender but himself (though many can help him to make it) and he may refuse. I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully, "All will be saved." But my reason retorts, "Without their will, or with it?" If I say "Without their will" I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say "With their will," my reason replies, "How, if they *will not* give in?" (*PP*, 106–07).

In a sense, it is better for the creature itself, even if it never becomes good, that it should know itself a failure, a mistake. Even mercy can hardly wish to such a man his eternal, contented continuance in such ghastly illusion. Thomas Aquinas said of suffering, as Aristotle had said of shame, that it was a thing not good in itself, but a thing which might have a certain goodness in particular circumstances. (ibid., 110)

"He has his wish—to live wholly in the self and to make the best of what he finds there. And what he finds there is Hell" (ibid., 111).

[Some object] that death ought not to be final, that there ought to be a second chance.[81] I believe that if a million chances were likely to do good, they would be given. But a master often knows, when boys and parents do not, that it is real useless to send a boy in for a certain examination again. Finality must come some time, and it does not require a very robust faith to believe that omniscience knows when. (ibid., 112)

A damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see. (*GD*, 127)

Finally, it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating free beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat. [However,] what you call defeat, I call miracle: for to make things which are not Itself, and thus to become, in a sense, capable of being resisted by its own handiwork, is the most astonishing and unimaginable of all the feats we attribute to the Deity. I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*. I do not mean that the ghosts may not *wish* to come out of hell … but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved. (*PP*, 115–16)

CONCLUSION

There are sound biblical, theological, and historical bases for the Christian doctrine of hell, and there are no good reasons to deny it. Even Sigmund Freud showed that anything based on mere wish-fulfillment is an illusion. The root of the denial of hell is the wish to avoid suffering—no one wants to suffer, let alone suffer forever. However, this is nothing more than the wish that it be so; the denial of hell, like its cousin universalism,[82] is illusory.

While it might seem nice to imagine that there are no consequences for defying God, given the depravity of humankind (among other facts),[83] this is an absurd theory. Reality therapy—immersion in truth[84]—can help cure such illusions, but unfortunately for some, their therapy will be self-chosen shock treatment: “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ALLEGED TEMPORARY STATE OF THE SAVED (PURGATORY)

Roman Catholics, many Anglicans, and some Eastern Orthodox believe in a third place after death, called purgatory, while Protestants reject the existence of any such place. The debate is both crucial and enlightening to the differences between Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants.[1]

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY

Purgatory is an essential doctrine of the Catholic faith, as the Council of Trent declared "infallibly":

> If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged, either in this world or in Purgatory, before the gates of Heaven can be opened, let him be anathema. (in Schroeder, *CCT*, 46)

Not everything Catholic theologians have said about purgatory has been pronounced as an infallible Catholic truth, as the following have:

(1) A purification takes place before one enters heaven.
(2) This purification involves some kind of pain or suffering.
(3) This purification can be assisted by prayers and devotions of the living.
(4) Purgatory is an actual place (Ratzinger [now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–], *E*, 230).
(5) A person will be there for a certain amount of time.

Of course, "infallible" or not, many other teachings about purgatory are widely believed and practiced in Catholicism, as both noted theologians and popes have made declarations on the issue. Even granting room for poetic license, the currently shrinking dogma of purgatory is a far cry from that in the classic *Purgatorio* (Dante Alighieri, 1265–1321).

The Nature of Purgatory

Catholic scholar Ludwig Ott (b. 1906) defined it thus: "The souls of the just which, in the moment of death, are burdened with venial sins or temporal punishment due to sins, enter Purgatory" (*FCD*, 482). Purgatory, then, is *a period of temporal punishment for sins after death and before heaven*. Many contemporary Catholic theologians downplay and even deny that purgatory is a place, thinking of it more as a *process* of purification that leads to heaven.

With regard to fire in purgatory,[2] the contemporary liberal Catholic tendency is to take it in a spiritual sense. One catechism states,

> The talk of purgatorial fire is an image that refers to a deeper reality. Fire can be understood as *the cleansing, purifying, and sanctifying power of God's holiness and mercy*. God's power straightens, purifies, heals, and consummates whatever remained imperfect at death.[3]

The Objective of Purgatory

The purpose of purgatory is to provide cleansing for *venial* sins; unrepented *mortal* sins send a person to hell.[4] Ott notes that purgatory is for "the remission of the venial sins which are not yet remitted" (*FCD*, 485); supposedly, purgatory will produce "contrition deriving from charity and performed with the help of grace," thus, "the temporal punishments for sins are atoned for in the purifying fire by the so-called suffering of atonement, that is, by the willing bearing of the expiatory punishment imposed by God" (ibid.).

The Duration of Purgatory

The punishment of purgatory is said to be temporal, not eternal: "The purifying fire will not continue after the General Judgment" (ibid.),[5] and after this there is only heaven and hell. Contemporary Catholic theologians (even conservatives like Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005– , b. 1927) shy away from quantifying the "time" one spends in purgatory, speaking, rather, of an "existential time" or "transforming experience" in which one "encounters" Christ. Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–) claims that purgatory "is the inward necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ" (*E*, 230). In the more traditional view, however, purgatory is a place in which, depending on his sins, one spends either longer or shorter periods of time. Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–) admits that Trent's doctrinal pronouncement implies that purgatory is a place, since it uses the preposition *in* (ibid., 220).

Roman Catholics utilize both Scripture and tradition to defend the dogma of purgatory; we will now examine those defenses, respectively.

Catholic Arguments for Purgatory Using Scripture

Ott holds that "Holy Writ teaches the existence of the cleansing fire indirectly, by admitting the possibility of a purification in the other world" (*FCD*, 483). He cites several passages in support of purgatory.

2 Maccabees 12:42–46 [6]

Ott observes that, in this text, "the Jews prayed for their fallen [dead] … that their sins might be forgiven them" (ibid.). This would seem to indicate that there was both punishment and forgiveness beyond the grave.

Matthew 12:32

Jesus says there will never be forgiveness for blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, "either in this age or in the age to come." Ott infers that this "leaves open the possibility that [other] sins are forgiven not only in this world but in the world to come" (ibid.).

1 Corinthians 3:15

Paul declares, "If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He

himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (net). Ott notes, "The Latin Fathers take the passage to mean a transient purification punishment in the other world" (ibid.).

Matthew 5:26

Jesus speaks of a judge who will not release his prisoner until complete repayment of debt. Ott comments, "Through further interpretation … a time-limited condition of punishment in the other world began to be seen expressed in the time-limited punishment of the prison" (ibid., 484).

Catholic Arguments for Purgatory Using Tradition and Speculation

In spite of his attempt to infer the existence of purgatory from Scripture, Ott admits, "The main proof for the existence of the cleansing fire lies in the testimony of the Fathers" (ibid.)—particularly the Latin Fathers, such as Cyprian (200–258) and Augustine (354–430).

In addition to tradition is theological speculation in favor of purgatory:

> Speculatively, the existence of the cleansing fire can be derived from the concept of the sanctity and justice of God. The former demands that only completely pure souls be assumed into Heaven.… The latter demands that the punishment of sins still present be effected, but on the other hand, forbids that souls that are united in love with God should be cast into hell. [Therefore,] an intermediate state is to be assumed, whose purpose is the final purification and which for this reason is of limited duration. (ibid.)

A PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS FOR PURGATORY

Two preliminary notes.

First, Ott admits that the Bible teaches the existence of purgatory only "indirectly," and even then it is only a "possibility" from these texts. Such phrases obviously reveal the weakness of purgatory's supposed biblical basis.

Second, Ott acknowledges that the last argument is only arrived at "speculatively." *Purgatory has no direct or positive proof from Scripture; the entire doctrine is based on extrabiblical tradition and human speculation.*

A Response to the Arguments From the Bible

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* frankly discloses that "the doctrine of purgatory is not explicitly stated in the Bible" (11:1034). In fact, neither is purgatory *implicitly* taught in Scripture, since the Roman Catholic use of God's Word to support purgatory does violence to the contexts of the passages employed. Brief examination and rebuttal will suffice.

2 Maccabees 12:42–46

The Protestant response to the use of this text to support purgatory is basic: 2 Maccabees is not part of the inspired canon and has no biblical authority.[7] That work, along with the rest of the Apocrypha, was not accepted as inspired by the Jewish community that wrote it. The apocryphal writings were not accepted by Jesus and the apostles, who never quoted them with authority in the New Testament.[8] They were rejected by many important early Fathers, including Jerome (340–420), the great biblical scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate. Indeed, they weren't infallibly added to the Roman Catholic Bible until *after* the Reformation (c. 1546) in a futile attempt to support purgatory and prayers for the dead, which had been rightly attacked by Martin Luther (1483–1546). Even then, the polemical, counterreformational Council of Trent inconsistently rejected some apocryphal books, including one that speaks against prayer for the dead.[9]

Matthew 12:32

"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

Roman Catholic use of Matthew 12:32 to support theoretical forgiveness of sins after death fails for several reasons.

First, the text is not saying that there will/could be forgiveness in the next life (after suffering for sins), but that *there will be no forgiveness for this sin*[10] *in the next world*. How can Christ's absolute denial of post-death forgiveness for a specific sin possibly be the basis for speculation that sins in general will be forgiven in the next life?

Second, purgatory (as defined by the Catholic Church) involves only venial sins, and this sin is not venial, it is mortal—eternal and unforgivable. How can Jesus' statement about the impossibility of post-death forgiveness for a mortal sin be the foundation of an argument that non-mortal sins will then be forgiven?

Third, Jesus isn't even speaking about punishment, which Catholics affirm will occur in purgatory. Accordingly, in no sense could this passage be used to

support the concept of purgatorial punishment.

Fourth, and finally, even if this passage did imply punishment, it would not be for those who will eventually be saved (as Catholics believe is the case with those who go to purgatory); *Christ is speaking about those who will never be saved*. That Catholic scholars would cite Matthew 12:32 in support of purgatory only highlights the profound lack of biblical support for the doctrine.

1 Corinthians 3:15

First, again, Paul, speaking of believers who will one day be given a "reward" (v. 14) for their service to Christ, says, "If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (net). This neither says nor implies *anything* about a believer suffering temporal consequences in purgatory for his sins: *He* is not burned in the fire; his *works* are burned. Ott seems to admit that this text "is speaking of a transient punishment *on the Day of General Judgment*, probably consisting of severe tribulations after which the final salvation will take place" (*FCD*, 483, emphasis added). If so, then even by Catholic admission Paul is not referring to what has traditionally been called purgatory.

Second, just as revelatory, the tendency of contemporary Catholic apologists to reduce purgatorial pain to the scrutinizing experience of postmortem sanctification indicates their retreat from their traditional, even more objectionable, dogma.

Third, 1 Corinthians is written to those "who *have been* sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1:2 NASB). Since they were already positionally sanctified in Christ,[11] they needed no further purification to give them a right standing before God. After listing examples of those who will not inherit God's kingdom—including fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers—Paul adds, "That is what some of you were. But you *were washed*, you *were sanctified*, you *were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (6:11). From this and other texts (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21), it is evident that their sins were already taken care of by Christ's suffering (cf. 1 Peter 2:22–24; 3:18) and that they were clothed in His righteousness, standing perfect before God. They needed no further suffering for sins; that God desired them to improve their practical state on earth in no sense diminishes their absolutely perfect status in His kingdom.[12]

Fourth, the context reveals that Paul is not speaking about the *consequence* for sin, but the *reward* for service to those already saved: "If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward" (1 Cor. 3:14

TLB).[13] Likewise, as even Catholic theology acknowledges, the "loss" is clearly not of salvation, since "he himself will be saved" (v. 15); the loss is of reward for not serving Christ faithfully. There is absolutely nothing here about believers suffering for sins after death; *Jesus suffered for our sins by* His *death*.[14]

Fifth, and finally, this "fire" does not purge our *soul* from sins; rather, it will disclose and test our *work*: "Each man's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire [itself] will test what sort of work each one has done" (v. 13 RSV). There is literally nothing here about purging from sin; contrary to Catholic claims, the purpose of this cleansing is not ontological (actual) but functional (pragmatic). The focus is on what the Christian will receive for service (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8; 2 Cor. 5:10), not on how his character is cleansed from sin.[15]

Matthew 5:26

With regard to Jesus' words about a judge who would not release the prisoner until he paid in full, Ott's comment is that "through further interpretation … a time-limited condition of punishment in the other world began to be seen expressed in the time-limited punishment of the prison" (*FCD*, 484). This "further interpretation" goes well beyond the context for several reasons.

First, that Jesus is not talking about a post-death spiritual prison but a pre-death physical prison is made plain by the previous verse: "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court … or he may hand you over to the judge … and you may be thrown into prison." To be sure, Jesus is speaking beyond mere external matters to spiritual matters of the heart (cf. vv. 21–22); however, nothing warrants the conclusion that He intended the concept of a "prison" to refer to a place (or process) of purgation for sins in the next life (which is what one must conclude if this passage is made to speak of purgatory). Even orthodox Catholics shy away from the prison image of purgatory, claiming it is not "some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp" (Ratzinger, [now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–] *E*, 230).

Second, to force this text into functioning as an analogy or illustration of a spiritual prison after death (i.e., purgatory) is to beg the question; one has to assume that there actually is a purgatory where we "will not be released until [we] have paid" (v. 26 AMP) before this passage can be an illustration of it. Illustrations do not *prove* anything; they *illustrate* a belief or concept that may or may not be true.

Third, if this text were a reference to purgatory, it would contradict

Scripture's clear teaching that, for the believer, there is nothing left to pay for the consequences of our sins, temporal or eternal.[16]

While Catholic theology acknowledges that Christ's death paid the penalty for the eternal consequences of our sins, it denies that this means there is no purgatory in which we pay the temporal consequences. Conversely, as we shall see,[17] Christ's death was both complete and sufficient for all our sins *and all their consequences*. To say some suffering for sins remains for us is to insult His "once for all" finished work (cf. Heb. 10:14–15). Because Jesus suffered for our sins, there is "no condemnation" for those in Christ (Rom. 8:1).

A Response to the Arguments From Tradition and Speculation

Ott admits that "the main proof for the existence of the cleansing fire [purgatory] lies in the testimony of the Fathers" (*FCD*, 484), even though he is not hesitant in rejecting their majority testimony on other occasions. At any rate, the question regarding the Fathers' testimony, in each case, is whether "they attest a truth of [God's] Revelation or whether they wrongly interpret a truth of [God's] Revelation" (Ratzinger, [now Pope Benedict XVI, r. 2005–] *E*, 230). This is what we will ask of the Roman doctrine of purgatory, for, as we have seen, biblical passages used by Catholics to support it have been misinterpreted.

Ludwig Ott is a standard Catholic authority on dogma; in reading through his work, it is fascinating to note how frequently he admits that this doctrine "is not explicitly revealed in Scripture" or that "direct and express scriptural proofs are not to be had" or that "express scriptural proofs are lacking" (op. cit., 200, 208, 214, etc.). The fact is, purgatory has no biblical basis.

PROTESTANT REASONS FOR REJECTING PURGATORY

In addition to counterarguments, Protestants offer many other reasons for rejecting purgatory, including the following.

Purgatory Is a Denial of the All-Sufficiency of Christ's Suffering

Protestants reject purgatory primarily because it effectively denies the all-sufficiency of Christ's atoning death,[18] at which he cried, *"It is finished"* (John

19:30). Speaking of His salvific work, Jesus said to the Father, "I glorified you on earth by *finishing* the work that you gave me to do" (17:4 TLB). Hebrews declares emphatically that salvation by Christ's suffering was a once-for-all accomplished fact: "By one sacrifice *he has made perfect forever* those who are being made holy" (10:14).

Purgatory, the insistence that we must suffer for our own sins, is the ultimate insult to Christ's ultimate sacrifice. Purgatory is not *after* our death; it was *in* Christ's death, for "when he had made *purification* for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3 TLB). Purification, or purging from our sins, *was* accomplished (in the past) through the Cross. Praise be to God that this is the only purgatory that ever needed to be suffered!

Of course, there *is* hell for those who reject this marvelous provision of divine grace,[19] and there *are* temporal cause-effect relations in this life regarding what we sow, and, consequently, reap (Gal. 6:8–9). Nevertheless, there is no evidence that in the next life we will pay for results of our sins, either eternally or temporally.

To argue that purgatory is part of our experiential sanctification is to overlook two very important points.

One, all *experiential* sanctification is in this life, before death;[20] the only sanctification after death is *ontological* (actual). The Bible calls this post-death change *glorification* (Rom. 8:30; 1 John 3:2).[21]

Two, sanctification is not a process of *suffering* for our sins; it is a process through which God, by His grace, *delivers* us from our sins—all of which Christ has suffered for, *past, present, and future*. To be sure, salvation is not fully obtained at the moment of initial justification. As we have repeatedly seen, salvation comes in three stages:[22] salvation from the *past penalty* of sin (positional justification), salvation from the *present power* of sin (practical sanctification), and salvation from the *future presence* of sin (ultimate glorification). *In none of these stages do we suffer for our sins as a condition for entering heaven.* Salvation is not something we do to obtain heaven; by Jesus' death, salvation is done!

Jesus paid it all.
All to him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain.
He washed it white as snow.[23] (cf. Isa. 1:18)

Purgatory Is Contrary to the Immediacy of Heaven or Hell After Death

The Bible speaks of death as the final moment of life after which one goes immediately either to heaven or to hell (Heb. 9:27).[24] A great chasm has been fixed between the two to prevent anyone from crossing the border after death (Luke 16:26). Paul says that at death believers are instantly "away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8); this certain reality is evident from his declaration that "we know" it is so (v. 1).[25]

The at-death immediacy of ultimate bliss for the Christian is elsewhere confirmed as well.[26] The dying thief on the cross would be in paradise that very day (Luke 23:43). Paul said that when he died he would "depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23), and some of his last written words speak of his "departure" to his "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:6–8). The saints who will be martyred during the Tribulation[27] will go immediately to heaven (Rev. 6:9–10), as did Enoch (cf. Heb. 11:5) and Moses and Elijah (cf. Luke 9:30–31).

The at-death immediacy of ultimate anguish for the unbeliever is likewise attested. In Jesus' story about Lazarus dying and going to heaven, "the rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment," he cried out (Luke 16:22–23).[28] Scripture completely lacks indication that anyone will be purified for sins after death. Death is final, and a destiny of woe or bliss is instantaneous.

Purgatory Is Based on the Unbiblical Teaching of "The Treasury of Merit"

Another concept associated with the doctrine of purgatory is the Roman Catholic belief in the treasury of the saints and meritorious works for the dead. According to Catholic theology there is, in addition to the merit obtained by Christ on the cross, a storehouse of merit deposited by the saints on which others can draw for help. This concept of merit (or reward) involves the dispersion of mercy over and above justice, but such merit is required for salvation nonetheless. In short, those saints who have done more good deeds than necessary for their salvation have put extra funds in heaven's bank; those in need can draw on these resources for their own deliverance.[29] Through prayers and good deeds on behalf of the dead, the Catholic's stay in purgatory can be shortened as he draws on the surplus:

> The possibility of vicarious atonement [of one believer for another] is founded in the unity of the

> Mystical Body. As Christ, the Head, in His expiatory suffering, took the place of the members, so also one member can take the place of another. [Thus,] the doctrine of indulgences is based on the possibility and reality of vicarious atonement. (Ott, *FCD*, 317)

In the Jubilee Bull (1350), Pope Clement VI (r. 1342–1352) was the first to declare the doctrine of the "Treasury of the Church." According to Ott, this speaks of "the merits (atonements) of Mary,[30] the Mother of God, and of all the chosen, from the greatest to the least of the just, [who] contribute to the increase of the treasure from which the Church draws in order to secure remission of temporal punishment" (ibid.).

Catholic Arguments for a Treasury of Merit

Some Catholic scholars see biblical grounds for the treasury of merit and for indulgences. An indulgence is the remission of a temporal punishment for a sin whose guilt God has already forgiven. According to Trent (in Schroeder, *CCT*, 25th Session, 1563), the Church of Rome has the power to grant indulgence, of which there are two kinds: partial and plenary (full). According to Catholic dogma, a partial indulgence frees a person from only part of the temporal punishment for sin that must be suffered either in this life or in purgatory. A plenary indulgence frees a person from the whole punishment due for that sin.

The idea that indulgences may be obtained from the Church is based on the doctrine of merit and that one person, by his works or prayers, can merit substitutionary favor with God for another. Trent proclaimed infallibly,

> [The bishops] instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to intercession and invocation of the saints … to invoke them and to have recourse to their prayers, assistance and support in order to obtain favors from God through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (ibid.)

Ott claims,

> Even in the Old Testament the idea of vicarious atonement by innocent persons for [the] guilty is known.… Moses offers himself to God as a sacrifice for the people who sinned (Ex. 32:32). [Further,] Job brings God a burnt offering, in order to expiate the sins of his children (Job 1:5). Isaiah prophesies [in Isa. 53] the vicarious suffering of atonement of Christ as a ransom, as an offering in atonement for the sins of mankind. [Likewise,] the Apostle Paul teaches that also the faithful can rend[er] expiation for one another [Gal. 6:2]. (*FCD*, 317)

In addition to also citing Colossians 1:24, 2 Corinthians 12:15, and 2 Timothy 4:6 as proof texts, Ott points to early Fathers (including Ignatius and Polycarp)

in support of Catholic belief in a treasury of merit:

> Origen teaches that the Apostles and Martyrs by their death remove the sins of the faithful.… Cyprian says expressly that sinners can be supported with the Lord by the help of the martyrs.… And St. Thomas Aquinas argued on the basis of Galatians 6:2 (“Bear one another’s burdens”) [that] in so far as two men are one by charity, one can render [temporal] atonement for the other. (ibid., 317–18)

A Protestant Response to Catholic Arguments for a Treasury of Merit

Protestants reject the Roman Catholic doctrine of a treasury of merit as based in misinterpretation of Scripture and contrary to the all-sufficiency of Christ’s atonement.[31]

Exodus 32:30–32

Moses told Israel, “I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” Then he prayed, “If you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written” (TLB).

Even a casual look at these words yields interpretation contrary to Catholic usage.

For one thing, there is absolutely nothing, literal or figurative, about any heavenly storehouse of merit to which some can contribute and upon which others can draw.[32] At best, the passage merely reveals the highly commendable desire of one person willing to suffer for others.

In addition, Exodus doesn’t say that God accepted Moses’ offer to be blotted out of His book, and, in fact, God did not blot him out. What God did accept was Moses’ sacrificial desire as an indication of his heart’s sincerity.[33] God did not accept Moses’ life as atonement for Israel; he accepted Moses’ *willingness* to be sacrificed. Paul expressed willingness to go to hell if Israel could be saved (Rom. 9:3), which was admirable but unfulfillable, commendable yet impossible, though indicative of Paul’s passion for his people.

Job 1:5

Job said that he offered sacrifices for his children because “it may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts” (NKJV). However, this again falls far short of supporting a heavenly treasury of merit.

First, the text makes no mention of any such treasury.

Second, the text never indicates that God accepted this solicitous act on behalf of Job’s children. The passage could be descriptive (not prescriptive), informing

us as to what Job did but not as to whether this is what ought to be done. This is true of the record of Job's friends, which is descriptive of what they said, but not of what God thought (e.g., cf. Job 42:7).

Third, a careful contextual study reveals that the passage's intent is to show us how righteous Job was (cf. 1:1), not whether atonement can be made for someone else's sins. Certainly, God hears the prayers of a righteous person (42:8; cf. James 5:16), but this in no way implies that he or she can help atone for another's sins. A person's right standing before God is not transferable: "The righteousness of the righteous shall be his own" (Ezek. 18:20 TLB).

Fourth, and finally, even if the acts of one righteous person (like Job) *were* in some way efficacious for his family or friends on earth, that would not support its effectiveness for the departed. Even if this passage *were* prescriptive, Job offered sacrifices for the living, not for the dead.

Isaiah 53

Unfortunately for Catholicism, this famous passage does not teach the substitutionary atonement of one sinful human being for another; it teaches that the sinless Christ is the substitutionary atonement for a sinful world.[34]

> He [Christ] was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins,
> Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole.…
> We had *all* gone astray like sheep, each following his own way;
> But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us *all*. (vv. 5–6, NAB)

Furthermore, notice that it's not simply our *guilt* for which Christ died but also our "chastisement" or *punishment* (v. 5). This is directly contrary to the Catholic claim that we must satisfy temporal consequences for sin. Either Christ did not pay for the temporal consequences, in which case His death is not all-sufficient for our sins (as this text and others declare it to be), or Christ paid for all (including the temporal) consequences of our sins, in which case there is no need for purgatory. Catholicism is stuck: Either its view of Christ's death is deficient or purgatory is unnecessary.

Galatians 6:2

Paul exhorts us to "bear one another's *burdens*" (NKJV), but he does not say we can bear the *punishment* for each other's sins.

> The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be

> charged against him. (Ezek. 18:20)

There is solidarity between believers in regard to our struggles, but there is no human substitution for sins. We are to bear our "own load" (Gal. 6:5), and then we are to help bear our brother's load, but that we cannot bear his sins is made clear in the verse "A man reaps what *he* sows" (v. 7).

Colossians 1:24

Paul's words about "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (TLB) give no basis for purgatory.

First, Paul does not mean that Christ's atoning sacrifice is inefficient for all eternal and temporal consequences of sin. If he did mean this, he plainly would be contradicting himself and the rest of the New Testament.[35] If Christ's death is sufficient—and Catholics say they believe that it is—then nothing can be added to this sufficiency.[36]

Second, there is a certain sense in which Christ still suffers after His death. When Jesus said to Paul, "Why are you persecuting Me?" He was not then literally on earth, so this must be a reference to His body (the church), which Paul was persecuting (cf. Acts 8:1; 9:1–2).[37] In a similar sense, we can suffer for Jesus, since "it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29 NKJV). But this is *not* atoning for sin. Only Jesus suffered *for* sin (cf. 1 Peter 2:21; 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:21); we suffer *because* of our sins, but never *for* the sins of others (cf. Ezek. 18:20). When we suffer for Christ, we are undergoing pain as part of His spiritual body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26), but only what He suffered in His physical body on the cross is efficacious for our sins. Our suffering is in *service* to Christ, not for the *salvation* of others.

Third, even according to the nonsalvific sense in which this Pauline statement declares that we can suffer for others, no passage in the scriptural canon says we can suffer on behalf of those who are dead (cf. Rom. 5:7).

2 Corinthians 12:15

The apostle says to the Corinthians, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (NKJV). However, there are several significant leaps one must take from this to reach the teaching that the living can offer prayers and indulgences on behalf of those suffering in purgatory:

(1) Neither this nor any other passage speaks of purgatory.
(2) The action in this text on behalf of others is for the living, not for the dead.
(3) The suffering is not for their *sins* (or sin's temporal consequences) but in order to help bear their *burden* or help minister the grace of Christ to them.

2 Timothy 4:6

Paul's being "poured out as a libation [offering]" (TLB) is referring to his death as a martyr. There is *nothing* here about purgatory, indulgences, prayers for the dead, or a treasury of merit. The truth is, this Catholic dogma is biblically unfounded and contrary to the unassailable doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.[38]

Other Reasons to Reject a Treasury of Merit and/or Purgatory

The Very Idea of Salvific Merit Violates Clear Biblical Teaching

The most important reason to reject a treasury of merit, by which one human being can perform good deeds that will be credited to the account of another in purgatory, is the concept of merit itself. Salvation is not earned (Rom. 4:4–5); eternal life is by grace alone through faith alone.[39] The idea of buying[40] an indulgence (the concept that prompted Martin Luther's reaction against abuses in the Catholic Church) is repugnant: "You were ransomed from the futile ways … not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish" (1 Peter 1:18–19 TLB). Like the "official" Jewish traditions that grew up around the Old Testament, official Roman Catholic tradition has often gone contrary to the Word of God (cf. Matt. 15:6).

Catholic Church Tradition Is Not Infallible

Extrabiblical speculation for purgatory fares no better. As already noted, the early Fathers were not at all unanimous on this issue, which is in contradiction to the Council of Trent's demand that the Bible be interpreted according to the "unanimous consent" of the Fathers.

Tremendous Catholic scholars have rightly taught that the Fathers were not infallible and that only Scripture is.[41] For example, Augustine declared,

> It is to the canonical Scriptures alone that I am bound to yield such implicit subjection as to follow

> their teaching, without admitting the slightest suspicion that in them any mistake or any statement intended to mislead could find a place. (*L*, 82.3 in Schaff, *NPNF*)

Likewise, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) affirmed, "We believe the successors of the apostles and prophets only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their own writings" (*DV*, XIV.10–11). Even the official (infallible) pronouncement of this doctrine at Trent (1546) is late and ill-founded, finding only scant early-church support.

According to God's Word, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Catholics accept that those who go to purgatory are "in Christ," that is, they are believers. Thus, no condemnation for anything having to do with our sins (guilt or consequences) awaits us after death: Jesus took all our condemnation for us on the cross.[42]

Purgatory Is Inconsistent With Other Catholic Doctrines

First of all, Catholic theology teaches that there will be no purgatory after the Second Coming[43] *and* that all believers need to suffer in purgatory for the temporal consequences of their sins. As such, it follows that purgatory is not necessary for those who die just before Christ returns. This would also be applicable to the countless millions of believers who will still be alive at that time.[44]

Furthermore, since God is absolutely just,[45] the consequences of these sins will only be able to have been removed if they've been endured by someone else, and this contains at least two problems for Catholic belief. For one thing, it reveals that purgatory is not truly necessary for the person who commits the sin—someone else can substitute. For another, if substitutionary atonement for temporal consequences of sin is possible, then why not accept Christ's substitutionary atonement for this purpose (precisely what the Scriptures affirm; cf. Heb. 1:2–3)?[46]

In addition, those who live wickedly before their late-in-life or even deathbed conversion, but die at just about the time of the Second Coming, cannot suffer for sins, because there is no purgatory after Jesus returns. Regardless of whether they were baptized before they died, they will not have paid for temporal consequences. Again, since God is just and must punish sin, the death of Christ must have covered all the eternal *and* temporal consequences, and so there is no need for purgatory. This, of course, does *not* mean that in this life we don't endure hardships caused by our sins; God does use this world's circumstances and experiences to chasten and purify His own.[47] It *does* mean that there is no

need for us to satisfy some outstanding justice in God, either in this life or in the next. Christ's ultimate sacrifice completely fulfilled God's justice on behalf of all the sins of the entire human race.[48]

Finally, the Catholic contention that purgatory is necessary for the payment of sin's temporal consequences is contrary to their own doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. If Mary could obtain complete sanctification at the moment of her *conception* without suffering the consequences of original sin, why cannot believers receive complete purification at *death*?

Purgatory Involves the Unbiblical Belief in Praying for the Dead

Nothing was more repulsive to Protestant reformer Martin Luther than the sale of indulgences. Johann Tetzel (1465–1519), a Catholic salesman of indulgences, is said to have advertised that "when the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." While current Roman scholars say this is an extreme, it did focus attention on belief in prayers for the dead and indulgences, which are closely associated with the doctrine of purgatory and the treasury of merit—in fact, parasitical on them, as there is no need to pray for the dead to be released from their sins unless there is such a place (or condition) as purgatory, and unless prayers can obtain merit on their behalf.

The Catholic Doctrine of Prayers for and to the Dead

Catholic dogma (*de fide*) states:

> The living Faithful on earth can come to the assistance of the souls in Purgatory by their intercessions (suffrages).… [By] suffrages are understood not only intercessory prayers, but also indulgences, alms and other pious works, above all the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. (in Ott, *FCD*)

The Council of Trent pronounced infallibly:

> There is a purgatory, and that the souls there detained are aided by the suffrages [prayers] of the faithful and chiefly by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar.… [The bishops are to] instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to intercession and invocation of the saints … to invoke them and to have recourse to their prayers, assistance and support in order to obtain favors from God through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (*CCT*)

Biblical passages that Catholics venture in support of this doctrine are scant. There is the apocryphal 2 Maccabees 12:42–45, and Ott gives only 2 Timothy 1:18, while others appeal to 1 Timothy 2:1 and Matthew 17:3. We will examine

each of these shortly.[49]

The primary arguments in favor of praying for the dead are taken from tradition. As though to make up for the lack of biblical support, Ott boasts that "tradition abounds in testimony in favor of the doctrine." Strangely, in addition to claiming the witness of Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225) and Cyprian, Ott cites what he admits is the "apocryphal Acts of Paul and of Thecla" in support of praying for the dead (ibid.).

A Protestant Response to the Catholic Doctrine of Prayers for the Dead

There have been different Protestant understandings as to the meaning of "the communion of saints." J. I. Packer (b. 1926) states that it can mean "the Creed's own elucidation of what the church is; namely, Christians in fellowship with each other—just that, without regard for any particular hierarchical structure" (*AC*, 76). "Communion of saints" also indicates the connection between the "church militant" (here on earth) and the "church triumphant" (in heaven; cf. Heb. 12:22–24); Peter Kreeft (b. 1938) notes that to these distinctions, Catholics add "the Church suffering" (in purgatory).[50] Communion of saints can also be understood as "[the sharing of holy things] (word, sacrament, worship, prayers), and to make the true but distinct point that in the Church there is a real sharing in the life of God" (Packer, op. cit).

It is within this framework that contemporary Roman Catholic apologists attempt to find a biblical basis for the practice of praying to the saints in heaven. Karl Keating states, "To fundamentalists the term communion of saints and its allied term, the Mystical Body of Christ, mean nothing."[51] He continues by mentioning the Pauline development of the unity of Christ's body;[52] however, admittedly, "Paul is writing about the members of the Church Militant [on earth], but his teaching on the Mystical Body [of Christ] implies that prayers unite us with the Church Triumphant [in heaven], too" (*CF*, 263–64). While perhaps we are united with the church triumphant in the sense of sharing the same goals—goals that departed believers had while they themselves were struggling in this "vale of tears"[53]—it seems a great stretch to go beyond this understanding and find biblical sanction for the reality of *intercessory* prayer between the two groups of believers.

2 Maccabees 12:45

The dispute is not over whether this text teaches praying for the dead—it says clearly, "It was a holy and pious thought [to] pray for them in death … [for] thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from their sin." The debate is over whether 2 Maccabees belongs in the canon. We have already given our general objections to the Roman Catholic canonization of eleven apocryphal books at Trent and our specific objections to the status of 2 Maccabees,[54] so we will not repeat them now. It is sufficient here to say that there is no sound biblical, theological, or historical reason for accepting the inspiration of 2 Maccabees.[55] The *dead* are praying for *us* (cf. Rev. 6:10).[56]

2 Timothy 1:18

That Paul prayed for God to have mercy on Onesiphorus on the day of his reward does not at all support praying for the dead: *Onesiphorus was still alive when Paul prayed for him*. Praying that someone alive will receive mercy on the Day of Judgment is a far cry from praying for him *after* he has already died.[57]

Protestant Arguments Against Praying for the Dead

Catholicism's Arguments Are Speculative and Inferential (Not Exegetical)

Consider this statement from one defender of praying to/for the dead: "(1) The Church is Christ's body. (2) Christ has only one Body; not one on earth and one in heaven. (3) Christians are not separated from each other by death. (4) Christians must love and serve each other" (Madrid, *TR*, 8). Based on those four premises, the idea (conclusion) is that we must continue to pray for and ask for the help of those believers who have died.

From a biblical perspective there are several serious problems with this argument. While Protestants affirm the first and fourth premises, we have strong objections to the third and qualifications for the second.

First, the second premise, while true, is easily misconstrued. That there is only one body of Christ does not mean there is no real distinction between its visible and invisible dimensions.[58] Likewise, it does not mean that our duties to love can be performed the same way in each dimension. For example, I cannot (and need not) now perform my duty to physically care for my departed parents as I could and did while they were living on earth. I also can no longer perform my duty to engage them in fellowship; they are in the invisible realm, so conversations and other interaction are not possible. Prayer has no place from the living toward the dead.

Second, the third premise is flatly false. God's Word says that death *is* separation from others on earth (believers included). Paul says the dead are "absent" from the visible bodily realm (2 Cor. 5:6 NKJV) and that they "depart" from this world (Phil. 1:23); he also comforted and assured the bereaved Thessalonian Christians that they would again one day be "with" believers who had already died (1 Thess. 4:17). It is simply false to claim that at death we will not be separated from other living believers.

Third, at least one implication of the fourth premise is inaccurate: while we must love and serve one another, we should not (and cannot) always do it the same way. Even on earth, when loved ones are unavailable, I cannot speak with them. According to Scripture, the dead are permanently unavailable until the Second Coming.[59]

Fourth, there are several other mistakes in this argument.

For one thing, it is beyond dubious to assume that because God has revealed to the dead *some* things that transpire on earth (e.g., Luke 15:10), they can hear us if we speak to them (or know our mind if we pray silently).

Further, it is highly questionable to assume that *prayer* and *asking* (others) are the same. Biblically, prayer is always to the Creator and never to a creature (even an angel). While prayer is not identical to worship, prayer is part of worship, and worship should always be directed to God alone.

Also, it is invalid to infer that because the saints in heaven may be praying *for* us we should be praying *to* them. There is no logical connection between the two—they would be praying to God, not to any created being. If anything, this proves the opposite of what Catholics believe.

Lastly, it is a false analogy to maintain that because Jesus' mother *on earth* interceded to Him at the wedding in Cana, believers on earth should ask Mary for intercession to God *in heaven* on their behalf. This says nothing of the fact that when Mary was approached (on earth), she pointed those in need *to Jesus*, saying, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

Catholic Arguments From Tradition Rely on an Unreliable Test for Truth

First, there are contradictory traditions, even from other early Fathers and apocryphal books.

Second, tradition, unlike the Bible, is not infallible.[60]

Third, that there were early traditions (e.g., from Tertullian) proves nothing. There were false traditions even earlier than that; for instance, John's gospel debunked a false tradition, emanating from a misunderstanding of Jesus' words,

that John would never die (21:21–23). The apostles condemned many other false teachings in their day as well.[61] Some early traditions reflect apostolic truths; others are simply early errors.[62]

Fourth, and finally, if we are in any sense to be serving the dead (in light of their being our fellow believers), there are ways of honoring them and their memory without attempting to communicate with them.

Praying for the Dead Is Contrary to Death As Separation

The Bible speaks of death as separating the living from the deceased; death is "departure" from earth and being with Christ (Phil. 1:23; cf. 2 Tim. 4:6), the moment when we are "away from the body" (2 Cor. 5:8) and are separated from living loved ones until reunion at the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13–18). In all of Scripture death is a veil, a chasm, that seals off the living from the dead (cf. Luke 16:26).[63] Any attempt to contact the dead is not only futile but forbidden (cf. Deut. 18:11); every such endeavor carries the possibility of demonic deception (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1).

Praying for the Dead Is Contrary to the Example of David

When David's baby was alive but seriously ill, he prayed fervently; when the baby died, David ceased praying immediately.[64] When asked why, he replied,

> While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, "Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me, and the child may live." But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me. (2 Sam. 12:22–23 TLB)

David, who as a prophet of God claimed that "the Spirit of the Lord spoke through [him]" (23:2), obviously believed that prayers for the dead were ineffective; otherwise, he certainly would have attempted it in his desperate hour. In all of his many spiritual writings (cf. Psalms) about communicating with God, David never once suggested that we pray for the dead.

Praying for the Dead Is Contrary to the Example of Jesus

When Jesus lost his close friend Lazarus to death, He didn't pray for him;[65] He resurrected him with a command (John 11:43). Jesus prayed for the living: "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (vv. 41–42). Ironically, many reverse this by weeping for the

living who stray while praying for the dead who are gone; *Jesus wept for the dead* (v. 35) *and prayed for the living* (op. cit.). Praying for the dead is a humanly initiated religious practice that opposes the teaching of sacred Scripture (cf. Matt. 15:6).

Praying for the Dead Is Contrary to the Sacrifice of Christ

As we have already noted, the whole idea that our prayers or works can do anything on behalf of the dead is contrary to the all-sufficiency of Christ's completed work on the cross. When Jesus died and rose again, the task of salvation was "finished" (John 19:30; cf. 17:4; Heb. 10:14), and when he purged our sins He "sat down" at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3), since there was absolutely nothing more to accomplish for our salvation. The whole concept of praying for the dead so they might be freed from sin is an insult to Jesus Christ, who "freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev. 1:5). Not only did He obtain salvation for all our sins at once, but also, as our great High Priest (Heb. 7), He alone implements it for all time.[66]

Purgatory Is a Practical Denial of the Mediatorship of Christ

Despite theological protests to the contrary, any additional mediation with God is an affront to the all-sufficient, divinely appointed mediatorship of Jesus Christ: "There is … *one mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."[67] In Him,

> We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:15–16)

There is no reason to go to Mary or any other saint in heaven with our requests.[68]

Catholic apologists attempt to avoid the sting of this argument by making a distinction between *Christ as the sole mediator* and *all believers as intercessors*. This does not help their cause (of proving we should pray to saints), because all the passages they employ are about direct intercession in prayer *to God*, not to other creatures.[69] No biblical passage states or implies that we should pray to the saints; Catholic dogma, which maintains infallibly that we should, places tradition over Scripture, thereby proving the fallibility of the magisterium.

Catholic rationalization for praying to the saints is also based on the seemingly plausible argument that because of their position in heaven, they may be better able to intercede. This, though, rejects the ministry of the Spirit, whose task it is to do this on our behalf. Who is better able to intercede for us than another person of the Trinity? “We do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26 NKJV); “through Him [Christ] we … have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18 NKJV). Since beyond our explicit prayers to God, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us perfectly “in accordance with God’s will” (Rom. 8:27), there is no need to call on anyone else in heaven to do so. *It is wrong to expect any person to be more efficacious with God the Father than God the Son and God the Spirit* (cf. 1 John 2:1–2).

Purgatory Is Pagan in Origin

If purgatory is not Christian in origin, then what is its source? Like so many extrabiblical Catholic doctrines, purgatory originated in pagan thought. Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) taught similarly, four centuries before Christ:

> The soul which has been polluted, and is impure at the time of her departure, and is the companion and servant of the body always, and is in love with and fascinated by the body and by the desires and pleasures of the body … do you suppose that such a soul as this will depart pure and unalloyed? … That is impossible … and these must be the souls, not of the good, but of the evil, who are compelled to wander about such places in payment of the penalty of their former evil way of life; and they continue to wander until the desire which haunts them is satisfied and they are imprisoned in another body. (*P*, 81c–e)

THE HISTORICAL TESTIMONY AGAINST THE DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY

Early Fathers

Other than some pagan influence among certain church Fathers, there is little early support for the doctrine of purgatory,[70] and there is compelling evidence against it in the writers’ emphasis on the all-sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice.[71]

Medieval Fathers

Some later Latin Fathers—Cyprian, Gregory, and Augustine—are cited in

support of purgatory. However, the Reformers fiercely challenged the basis for these references and spoke out strongly against purgatorial doctrine.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

> Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome held nothing at all of purgatory. Gregory, being in the night-time deceived by a vision, taught something of purgatory, whereas God openly commanded that we should search out and inquire nothing of spirits, but of Moses and the prophets. Therefore we must not admit Gregory's opinion on this point. (*TT*, 519)
>
> "And their works do follow them" must not be understood of purgatory, but of the doctrine of good works, or of godly and true Christians, and of heretics. Arius, the heretic, has had his judgment; the fire of faith has declared it. For the last day will discover and declare all things. God has, in his word, laid before us two ways; one which by faith leads to salvation—the other, by unbelief, to damnation. (ibid.)
>
> As for purgatory, no place in Scripture makes mention thereof, neither must we any way allow it; for it darkens and undervalues the grace, benefits, and merits of our blessed, sweet Savior Christ Jesus. The bounds of purgatory extend not beyond this world; for here in this life the upright, good, and godly Christians are well and soundly scoured and purged. (ibid.)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

> [Catholicism's] purgatory cannot now give us much trouble, since with this ax we have struck it, thrown it down, and overturned it from its very foundations. I cannot agree with some who think that we ought to dissemble in this matter, and make no mention of purgatory, from which (as they say) fierce contests arise, and very little edification can be obtained. I myself would think it right to disregard their follies did they not tend to serious consequences.
>
> But since purgatory has been reared on many, and is daily propped up by new blasphemies; since it produces many grievous offenses, assuredly it is not to be connived at, however it might have been disguised for a time, that without any authority from the word of God, it was devised by prying audacious rashness, that credit was procured for it by fictitious revelations, the wiles of Satan, and that certain passages of Scripture were ignorantly wrested to its support. (*ICR*, 3.5.6)
>
> When the expiation of sins is sought elsewhere than in the blood of Christ, and satisfaction is transferred to others, silence were most perilous. We are bound, therefore, to raise our voice to its highest pitch, and cry aloud that purgatory is a deadly device of Satan; that it makes void the cross of Christ; that it offers intolerable insult to the divine mercy; that it undermines and overthrows our faith. For what is this purgatory but the satisfaction for sin paid after death by the souls of the dead? Hence when this idea of satisfaction is refuted, purgatory itself is forthwith completely overturned. (ibid.)
>
> If it is perfectly clear … that the blood of Christ is the only satisfaction, expiation, and cleansing for the sins of believers, what remains but to hold that purgatory is mere blasphemy, horrid blasphemy against Christ? I say nothing of the sacrilege by which it is daily defended, the offenses which it begets in religion, and the other innumerable evils which we see teeming forth from that fountain of impiety. (ibid.)
>
> To the passage which they [the Romanists] produce from the history of the Maccabees, I will not deign to reply, lest I should seem to include that work among the canonical books. But Augustine holds it to be canonical. First, with what degree of confidence? "The Jews," says he, "do not hold the book of the Maccabees as they do the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, to which the Lord bears testimony as to his own witnesses, saying, 'Ought not all things which are written in the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, concerning me be fulfilled?' But it has been received by the Church not uselessly, if it be read or heard with soberness." Jerome, however, unhesitatingly affirms that it is of no authority in

establishing doctrine; and from the ancient little book *De Expositione Symboli*, which bears the name of Cyprian, it is plain that it [Maccabees] was in no estimation in the ancient Church. (ibid., 3.5.8)

[Regarding 1 Corinthians 3:12–15,] what fire [Catholics ask] can that be but the fire of purgatory, by which the defilements of sin are wiped away, in order that we may enter pure into the kingdom of God? But most of the Fathers give it a different meaning, viz., the tribulation or cross by which the Lord tries his people, that they may not rest satisfied with the defilements of the flesh. This is much more probable than the fiction of a purgatory. I do not, however, agree with them, for I think I see a much surer and clearer meaning to the passage.… In following out the thread of the metaphor, and adapting its parts properly to each other, he gave the name of fire to the examination of the Holy Spirit." (ibid., 3.5.9)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

As the pope and his clergy robbed the people of their ecclesiastical and civil liberties and privileges, so they also robbed them of their estates, drained all Christendom of their money. They engrossed most of their riches into their own coffers, by vast revenues, besides pay for pardons and indulgences, baptisms and extreme unctions, deliverance out of purgatory, and a hundred other things. See how well this agrees with the prophecies (2 Thess. 2:3–4; Dan. 7:20–21; Rev. 13:6–7; 17:3–4). During this time also superstition and ignorance more and more prevailed. The Holy Scriptures by degrees were taken out of the hands of the laity, the better to promote the unscriptural and wicked designs of the pope and the clergy; and instead of promoting knowledge among the people, they industriously promoted ignorance. (*HWR*, 3.4.1)

They [Catholics] pay money to buy the souls of their departed friends out of purgatory; they worship the relics of dead saints, such as pieces of their bones, their teeth, their hair, pieces of their garments, and the like. And innumerable other such foolish delusions are they under. (*MNBTR*, 2.3)

The papists, many of them at least, make no doubt of the truth of those foolish notions of a purgatory, and the power of the priests to deliver them out of it, and give them eternal life, and therefore will not spare vast sums of money to purchase deliverance from those imaginary torments. How confident are many heretics in the grossest heresies! (ibid., 2.5)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In view of purgatory's unbiblical nature, it is understandable that some contemporary Roman Catholics are deemphasizing certain aspects of traditional thinking. One insists that "in spite of some popular notions to the contrary, the Church has never passed judgment as to whether purgatory is a place or in a determined space where the souls are cleansed" (Hardon, *CC*, 274). As to its importance, Catholics are confessing that "in the hierarchy of revealed doctrines, purgatory does not rank as high as the Trinity or the Incarnation" (ibid., 278).

A popular Catholic lay-evangelist wrote that some Catholics fall into the "legalism of Purgatory," thinking of it as a second chance. However, "Sacred Scripture indicates that there's really only one punishment for sin—and that's death." The Bible teaches "that we're off the hook. Jesus paid that awful price on

the cross—our punishment was laid upon him."[72]

Another well-known charismatic lay-leader has mentioned changes in Catholic practices that should gladden evangelical hearts:

> The reform of various rites, the restoration of the catechumenate for adult baptism, the beginning restoration of baptism by immersion are all hopeful signs.… [In some areas of Latin America,] infant baptism is being withheld if there is no assurance that the child will grow up in a community of faith and genuine Christian life.[73]

These speculations, welcomed at whatever level by Protestants as moves in the right direction, are quite divergent from traditional Catholic dogma and practice.[74] The biblical basis for these (purgatory and its accompanying doctrines) is found seriously wanting. In fact, these tenets are antibiblical, for they run contrary to such scriptural basics as the all-sufficiency and finality of Christ's atoning sacrifice[75] and the uniqueness of God as the sole object of our devotion and prayer.[76]

Conflicting traditions and human speculations are based often on apocryphal books that have been rejected from the canon by both Catholic and Protestant scholars. Consider the articulate observation of a contemporary Catholic about the effect that the practice of venerating and praying to the saints has had on the Church:

> I visited a prominent Catholic cathedral dedicated to St. Joseph … and it sure seemed that one going through the cathedral could easily get the impression that St. Joseph was a Savior … in a way that all but obscured the unique role of Jesus as Savior and Lord. (Martin, *HFG*, 136)

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CHAPTER TWELVE

ANNIHILATIONISM

Annihilationism is the doctrine that the wicked will not suffer an everlasting conscious hell.[1] Annihilationism is also called *conditional immortality*; for instance, Anglican minister John Stott (b. 1925) holds that only believers will live forever, that immortality is a gift given only on the condition of belief.[2]

Annihilationism holds that unbelievers, who will not have received God's gift of salvation, will be snuffed out of existence after the final judgment;[3] accordingly, they will experience no eternal conscious torment forever. It is alleged that this view of the unsaved's destiny most fully upholds God's mercy, that nonexistence is the best alternative for the unrepentant sinner. Annihilationists argue that while the lost cannot enjoy everlasting bliss with the righteous, they aren't deserving of conscious eternal wrath.

Annihilationism was embraced by Arnobius (fl. fourth century) but did not become popular until the nineteenth century, when it was propagated by Congregationalist Edward White[4] and then by Seventh-Day Adventist Le Roy Froom (1874–1970); Jehovah's Witnesses are also annihilationists. In the mid-twentieth century, Harold Guillebaud (1882–1964)[5] and Basil Atkinson (1895-?)[6] defended conditionalism, and a few other evangelicals, such as John Wenham (b. 1913), John Stott, and Clark Pinnock (b. 1920) have embraced the view.[7]

As stated previously,[8] annihilationism was condemned as heretical by a Constantinople synod in 543, by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553,

and by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1513 (see Wenham, *GG*, 28, and Cross, *ODCC*, 328). The traditional orthodox doctrine of hell as the eternal conscious punishment of the wicked has been upheld by most of the church's great fathers and theologians, including Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225), Augustine (354–430), Anselm (1033–1109), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–1564), Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894),[9] and B. B. Warfield (1851–1921). One of the orthodox position's best recent defenses is *Hell on Trial* by Robert A. Peterson (b. 1948), and there is no more magnificent literary expression of the doctrine than *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis (1898–1963).

The traditional doctrine of hell has evoked strong reactions from unbelievers and even believers. Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) declared,

> There is one *very serious defect* to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in Hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really *profoundly humane* can believe in everlasting punishment.… [Indeed,] one does find repeatedly a *vindictive* fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching.… I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of *cruelty*. (*WIANC*, 593–94, emphasis added)

Of course, the atheistic Russell did not inform us by what standard he knew Christ's actions to be morally defective, inhumane, vindictive, and cruel. If all of these are absolute moral laws, then there must be an absolute Moral Lawgiver (God).[10] If they are not—or if Russell believed they are not—then his argument collapses into a groundless personal opinion.

Amazingly, some believers have parroted this emotive reaction in even more vivid terms, based on alleged moral repugnance. For instance, Pinnock wrote:

> Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed.… How can Christianity possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God. ("DFI," 246–47)

This caution by Millard Erickson (b. 1932) is to the point: One who makes such claims "had better be very certain he is correct. For if he is wrong, then he is guilty of blasphemy" (*EMH*, 152).

ANNIHILATIONIST APPEALS TO THE BIBLE: PRESENTED AND ADDRESSED

Le Roy Froom summarizes biblical arguments for annihilation in four points:

(1) Death by fire, or burning, set forth as the designated *mode* of final punishment (Ps. 21:9; Mal. 4:1, 3; cf. Rev. 20:14–15; Matt. 13:40, 42; 25:41, 46).
(2) Perishing as the *result* of such punishment (Ps. 37:28; cf. 2 Peter 2:1; John 3:14–15).
(3) Death, or cessation of being, as the *end* of such punishment (Ezek. 18:4, 20; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8).
(4) Utter destruction as the permanent *effect* of such punishment (Ps. 55:23; 92:7; 145:20; cf. Matt. 7:13; 10:28). (*CFF*, 1.119ff.)
These and other arguments will be addressed in the following discussion.

Annihilationists present an array of New Testament terms that they insist show hell as a place of eternal extinction, not eternal suffering:

(1) *analiskô*—to consume, destroy (2 Thess. 2:8).
(2) *apôleia*—death, especially by violence, loss of things, ruin, waste (Phil. 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9).
(3) *apollumi*—to destroy utterly (twenty-three times), come to an end, ruin, to lose utterly … cause to perish (thirty-three times), bring to naught (Matt. 10:28; 21:7; Luke 17:27, 29; John 3:16; Rom. 2:12; 2 Cor. 4:3).
(4) *apothnéskô*—die out, expire, cease (John 11:16, 26; Rom. 8:18).
(5) *diaphtheirô*—to spoil throughout, corrupt utterly (Rev. 11:18).
(6) *exolethreuô*—to destroy utterly, slay wholly, dissolve (Acts 3:23).
(7) *katakaiô*—to burn up, or burn down (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17).
(8) *katanaliskô*—to consume wholly or thoroughly (2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 12:32).
(9) *katargeô*—to render inactive, idle, bring to naught, make void, abolish (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:26).
(10) *kolasis*—punishment … a result, not a process (cf. Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:17).
(11) *olethros* (*olothreutés*)—death, ruin, that which causes death (2 Thess. 1:9).
(12) *phtheirô* (*kataphtheirô*)—to deprave, mar, spoil, corrupt (1 Cor. 3:17).
(13) *phthora* (*diaphthora*)—corruption, spoiling, destruction (Acts 2:27, 31;

Gal. 6:8).

(14) *thanatos*—extinction of life, death by judgment of court, or judgment of God against sin (the second death, Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8; Rom. 6:21, 23). (ibid.)

While the crucial ideas behind these terms will be treated below, a few general comments are in order here.

First, many of these texts do not necessarily refer to hell.[11]

Second, not one text that definitely does refer to hell demands an annihilationist interpretation.[12]

Third, as will be shown, many clearly *cannot* support the annihilationist view in the way they are used by proponents.

In short, we will demonstrate that no definitive argument for annihilation can be based on these terms and texts. The conditionalists' statement that these terms always mean ultimate loss of life and final, complete termination of being is a serious overclaim.

The Use of the Term *Second Death*

Annihilationists point out the reference to the wicked's fate as the "second death" (Rev. 20:14). At death, a person loses consciousness in this world; hence, it is reasoned that at the "second death" he will lose consciousness in the world to come. Just as death cuts off all physical awareness in this life, even so the second death will sever all spiritual awareness in the next life. Ezekiel said, "The soul who sins shall die" (18:20 NKJV).

Response

For one thing, the second death is no more annihilation than is the first death. The first death is the separation of the soul from the body for a short time (until the resurrection),[13] not the soul's annihilation; the second death is the separation of the body *and* soul from God forever.

For another, once again, biblical "death" denotes conscious separation. Adam and Eve died spiritually the moment they sinned, yet they still existed and could hear God's voice (Gen. 2:17; cf. 3:10). Likewise, before one is saved, he is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 NKJV), yet he is still in God's image (Gen. 1:27; cf. 9:6; James 3:9) and is called on to believe (Acts 16:31) for

salvation.[14]

Thus, to regard the biblical terms *death* or *second death* as annihilation is to misconstrue their meaning.

References to Being "Destroyed"

Annihilationists appeal to passages that speak of hell as a place of destruction as evidence for their view:

> The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth. (Rev. 11:18)

They argue that both the root word for *destroy* (Gk: *diaphtheirô*) and the context in which it is used imply the annihilation of unbelievers' souls. The word means "to cause to wholly perish" (Froom, *CFF*, 1.405), and the earth will be "destroyed" during the Tribulation.[15] The term *exolethreuô* is said to mean "utter destruction by death." Along with *olethros*, conditionalists maintain that to take these terms in any other sense than annihilation is "to translate black as white" (ibid., 494).

Response

First of all, as to interpretation of the word *destroy*, Greek authorities Arndt and Gingrich affirm that it means "spoil, destroy of rust-eating iron … of moths … that eat clothes … destroy persons and nations … ruin in the moral sense … be corrupted" (*GELNT*, 189). In none of these cases does it mean "annihilate" or "take out of existence."

In addition, the term is used four other times in the New Testament: once of a moth corrupting a garment (Luke 12:33); once of the outward body "wasting away" (2 Cor. 4:16) or "being worn down" (tcnt); once of corrupt minds (1 Tim. 6:5); and once of ships being broken up (Rev. 8:9). None of these imply annihilation.

What is more, even the context of the word's usage in Revelation 11:18 does not denote annihilation. "Destroying" the earth during the Tribulation will involve plagues, pollution, and purification to pave the way for the Millennium.[16] It does *not* mean "wholly perish" or "utterly destroy," let alone "obliterate from existence."

Also, even many of the annihilationists' illustrations of destruction do not prove their point. Froom lists the following:

(1) a house falls (Matt. 7:26–27);
(2) tares are burned (13:30, 40);
(3) bad fish are cast away (13:48);
(4) harmful plants are rooted up (15:13);
(5) worthless trees are cut down (Luke 13:7);
(6) withered branches are burned (John 15:6);
(7) a debtor is held in prison (Matt. 5:26; 18:34);
(8) an offender is cast into outer darkness (8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

He concludes, "In each case (save the last two, given for another purpose) the destruction is declared complete, leading to utter and final disintegration" (*CFF*, 1.286–89).

This conclusion is wholly unwarranted.

First, some of these texts are not addressing hell (e.g., John 15:6), but the discipline of believers who do not abide in Christ.

Second, all are speaking of physical things that ultimately disintegrate, which misses the point, since the soul is not physical (cf. Luke 24:39).

Third, there is an equivocation in the verses that speak of burning, since the fire of hell is never quenched (Mark 9:43), while all earthly fires die out.

Fourth, most of the things "destroyed" do not cease to exist; rather, they fall, are cast away, rooted up, cut down, thrown in prison, or put out in darkness. None exemplifies annihilation.

Fifth, and finally, it begs the question to say that eventually all of these will disintegrate—of course they will, because they are all material. (Again, the soul is not.) Also, the material things take on a different mode of existence; they do not go out of existence. The illustrations used by conditionalists do not bolster but instead oppose their position.

The Words *Everlasting Destruction*

Some passages speak of destruction for the wicked:

> This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with *everlasting destruction* and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the

majesty of his power. (2 Thess. 1:7–9)

Annihilationists insist that the figure of "destruction" is incompatible with a continued conscious existence. The common meaning of the word, inside and outside Scripture, points to an object's obliteration; therefore, as applied to a conscious human being, it would mean a loss of consciousness.

Response

The term *destruction*, as used of judgment on the wicked at death, does *not* mean extinction.

First, the very phrase itself (in 2 Thess. 1:9) does not fit with annihilationism: "Paul has in mind an irreversible verdict of eternal nonfellowship with God. A person exists but remains excluded from God's good presence" (McKnight, "ECEC" in Crockett, *TNFTO*, 155–56).

Second, the same word for *destruction* (*olethron*) is used in 1 Corinthians 5:5 of the disfellowshiping (or *disciplining*) of a church member's "flesh." Whatever *flesh* means here (whether body, old nature, etc.), it certainly was not annihilated when he was excommunicated—he was later returned to the fellowship of the church (cf. 2 Cor. 2:6).

Third, *destruction* does not mean extinction in Revelation 17 (vv. 8, 11), where the beast and the false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire and are still there a thousand years later (20:7). John says emphatically that they "will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (v. 10).

Fourth, the Bible uses several main pictures to speak of hell: (1) darkness, (2) separation, (3) weeping, (4) gnashing of teeth, (5) punishment, (6) fire, (7) death, and (8) destruction. The first five in no sense coalesce with the idea of annihilation; and, when properly understood in context, neither do the last three.[17] As applied to hell, then, *destruction* clearly does not mean annihilation but connotes the punishment of something still in existence. *Punishment* is precisely what Paul called the action taken on the excommunicated man (using the same word—cf. 2 Cor. 2:6; 1 Cor. 5:5).

Fifth, if *destruction* did mean "annihilation" when used of the unbeliever's post-death state, it would not be "everlasting" destruction, for annihilation is instantaneous; annihilation does not stretch over a long period of time, let alone forever, but only takes an instant and then is over. If someone undergoes everlasting destruction, then they must have an everlasting existence.

(Analogously, just as the cars in a junkyard have been destroyed but are not annihilated—they are beyond repair or irredeemable—so the people in hell are not extinguished but are simply irredeemable and irreparable.)

Sixth, and finally, as Augustine observed, the terms *eternal punishment* and *eternal life* (see Matt. 25:46) are parallel, and it would be absurd to use them in the same sentence while meaning one is temporal and the other is eternal (*CG*, 21:21–24). Hence, the conditionalists' distinction between eternal consequences (which they accept) and eternal consciousness (which they reject) is contrived and not based on God's Word (see Harmon, "CAC" in *UDH*, 210–12).

The Images of Burning

Conditionalists, arguing that biblical images of hell as fire support annihilationism, point to John's words: "His [Christ's] winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and *burning up* the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12). The notion is that the primary purpose of fire is to consume, not to punish, and that, thus, hellfire is designed for the consumption (not the punishment) of the wicked (e.g., see Stott, *EE*, 316).

Response

This also is contrary to Scripture.

First, it does not mesh with the description of an unquenchable fire. If the fire never runs out, then neither does the fuel: no fuel (the wicked), no fire (hell).

Second, hell is a place where the "worm" never dies (Isa. 66:24; cf. Mark 9:43–48). If the fire consumed those in hell, they would die, so the fire of hell cannot be consumptive; it must be punitive.

Third, again, the comparison of eternal life and eternal punishment (in Matt. 25:46).[18]

Fourth, Jesus described hell as a "place of torment" (Luke 16:28). There is no evidence, here or elsewhere, that this is only to be understood as temporal, any more than heaven ("Abraham's Bosom") in the same text is to be understood as temporal.

Fifth, hell is described as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:40–42, 49–50), which indicates conscious pain.

Sixth, the lake of fire is where the devil, the beast, and the false prophet will

be tormented forever (Rev. 20:15). John says that this is exactly where unbelievers will be sent (14:10), so there is no reason to believe their torment will not also be eternal. Annihilationists force an alien meaning into the text in maintaining that the lost will only be tormented so long as their suffering lasts. Not only are there no such words in the text, but the words of the text are directly contrary to the conditionalists' textual emendation.

Seventh, and finally, John's description of the new heaven and earth (after the lake-of-fire scene) reveals that the unsaved are still conscious; they are depicted as outside the gate of the heavenly city (22:15).

Torment Is Not Eternal, Only the Results Are

Conditionalism insists that while the *result* of judgment is eternal, the *process* of judgment is temporal. One text used to defend this is Revelation 14:10–11: "He [who worships the beast] will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And *the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever*." The suggestion is that only the result of the fire (viz., the smoke) will exist forever, not the fire itself (Froom, *CFF*, 1.411).

Response

For one thing, as the adage goes, "Where there's smoke, there's fire." If there's eternal smoke, there's an eternal fire.

For another, John says the wicked will be "tormented" (Rev. 14:11). Annihilation is not torment but the cessation of torment.

Significantly, other similar texts (e.g., 20:10) say clearly, "*They* will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

The Reference to Going Into "Perdition"

The wicked are said to go into "perdition" (2 Peter 3:7 NKJV), and Judas is called the "son of perdition" (John 17:12 NKJV). The word *perdition* (Gk: *apôleia*) simply means "perish," which, conditionalists argue, indicates that the wicked will perish (go out of existence). They say Peter is declaring that the unrighteous should repent or else they will be annihilated (cf. v. 9).

Response

Perdition (*apôleia*) means “perish” or “come to ruin.” In 2 Peter 3:7 it is used in the context of *judgment*, a term that implies consciousness.

That the wicked are said to go into “perdition” (and that Judas is called the “son of perdition”) does *not* mean they will be annihilated. Again, cars in the junkyard have perished in the sense of having been ruined, but they’re still cars, and they’re still in the junkyard. Jesus spoke of hell as a junkyard or dump where the fire would not cease and where a person’s resurrected body would not be consumed (cf. Mark 9:48). That the fire of hell is ceaseless (continual) is an indication that the punishment it inflicts is everlasting.

That Hell Is Like Never Being Born

Conditionalists bring up what Jesus said of Judas, that “it would be better for him if he had not been born” (Mark 14:21). Before one is conceived, he does not exist; for hell to be like the pre-birth condition, it must be a state of nonexistence. Consequently, Jesus was saying that nonexistence would have been better for Judas, and this is precisely what Judas, because of his great sin, was consigned to have—no more existence forever.

Response

First of all, even if taken literally, Jesus’ declaration is not a comparison of Judas’s perdition to his nonexistence before conception; it is a comparison to his existence in the womb before he was born. Jesus did not say it would have been better if Judas had never been *conceived* but if he’d never been *born*.

Further, Jesus’ statement may simply be a figure of speech (hyperbole or exaggeration) to indicate the severity of Judas’s punishment.

What is more, His words cannot be a statement about the superiority of nonbeing over being, for, as we have seen, since nothing cannot be better than something, nonbeing cannot be better than being.[19]

Lastly, we’ve already noted that in a similar condemnation of the Pharisees, Jesus said Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented had they seen His miracles (Matt. 11:20–24). This does not mean they actually would have repented, or else God would surely have shown them these miracles (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).[20] There is no evidence in this text for annihilation of the wicked.

The Reference to the Wicked As Destined to *Perish*

Annihilationists also posit that the Old Testament speaks of the wicked perishing. For example, "The wicked will perish … they will vanish—vanish like smoke" (Ps. 37:20; cf. 68:2; 112:10). Peter also used this word of unbelievers in saying, "The Lord … is patient with you, not wanting anyone to *perish*, [Gk: *apollumi*] but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Response

First, the same Old Testament word (Heb: *abad*) used to describe the wicked perishing is also used to describe the righteous perishing (e.g., see Isa. 57:1; Micah 7:2). Even conditionalists admit that the righteous are not snuffed out of existence; as such, there is no reason they should conclude that the wicked are exterminated in the hereafter.

Second, the same word for *perish* is used to describe things that are merely lost but then later found (e.g., cf. Deut. 22:3), which demonstrates that they were still in existence.

Third, the parallel term (*apollumi*) can mean to "ruin, destroy, lose, kill, put to death" *or* "perish forever," as in John 3:16[21] (Arndt and Gingrich, *GELNT*, 94). Not only does this meaning not necessitate annihilation, but the context and other passages speak against this view. John says only a few verses later that those who are perishing have the wrath of God abiding on them (3:36), and, once again, the disobedient face "everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9). To perish cannot mean being annihilated, since that takes only an instant; Paul speaks of perishing as a present process as well (2 Cor. 4:4).

Verses That Supposedly Support Being Blotted Out of Existence

Annihilationists allege to have found verses that actually speak of God blotting the wicked out of existence; Froom offers several (*CFF*, 1.487). As we shall see, all fall short of proof for annihilation when considered in context.

Hebrews 9:25–26

> [If Christ had needed to] enter heaven to offer himself again and again … then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to *do away with* sin by the sacrifice of himself.

In reply, the Greek word *athétasis* (*athetésin*), translated *do away with*, means "annulment" (cf. 7:18), not annihilation; "removal" (or taking from one place to another), not taking out of existence (Arndt and Gingrich, *GELNT*, 20).

Revelation 3:5

Jesus said, "He who overcomes will … be dressed in white. I will never *blot out* his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." Here the word is *exaleiphô*, which means to "wipe away," "wipe out, erase," or "remove" (ibid., 272), none of which means to annihilate from existence. Jesus is not talking about wiping out a *person* but his *name*; anyway, whatever this means, He says God will *not* do it.

Revelation 18:21

"Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: 'With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, *never to be found* again.' "Here the word *eurethé*, from *euriskô* (*found*), along with *never*, means "never to be found, to disappear, not ever to be discovered despite a thorough search" (ibid., 325). Not only does this not mean being snuffed out, but John is speaking of a city, not a soul. Material cities go out of existence; immaterial souls fashioned in God's image do not.

1 Corinthians 1:19

"I will *destroy* the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." This word for *destroy* is *apollumi*, which means "to ruin, kill, put to death, lose, pass away" (ibid., 94). Here again, the term does not mean to put out of existence, and even if it did, God is speaking here not of destroying the so-called wise but of destroying so-called wisdom.

> In brief, annihilationism is nowhere found in any of these passages. Every text is taken out of context in a vain attempt to support an unbiblical doctrine.

The Argument That the Nature of the Human Soul Reveals Its Mortality

Rehashing a two-part argument, conditionalists contend the soul's nature reveals that it is mortal.

(1) "The same Hebrew term *living soul* [*nephesh*] is applied to the lower animals. In fact, *nephesh* (*soul*) is four times applied to lower animals [which

have mortal souls] before it is used of man—in Genesis 1:29, 21, 24, 39" (Froom, *CFF*, 1.34).

(2) That eating from the tree of life was necessary for humans to live forever (3:22) shows they were mortal (op. cit., 1.35). Along with this are other indications that immortality is a gift, not an inherent human attribute.[22]

Response

First, the same word for *soul* is used of both animals and humanity; it means "life," which animals also have. However, animals do not have the same *kind* of life, for they are not made in the image of the eternal God.[23] The endless life of people is unique because they alone are in the image of the Eternal One.

Second, immortality is a gift of God that comes only (at the resurrection) to saved humans in bodily form. It does *not* thereby follow that humans have a mortal soul; once again, numerous passages[24] teach that the human soul survives death and is conscious between death and resurrection.[25] Further, angels are never said to be immortal, yet they never die (Luke 20:36).

Third, the annihilationist fails to acknowledge that *immortality* and *existing forever* are not the same. As noted, angels will live forever but are never called immortal. The term *immortality*, like *eternal life*, has a positive quality that mere *existence* does not. Jesus defined *eternal life* as knowing God (John 17:3), and though unbelievers do not have this, by virtue of His image they will still exist forever.[26]

The Argument That Immortality Is a Gift Only for the Righteous

Annihilationists argue that immortality is intrinsic only to God (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16). The word *immortality* is never used of unbelievers, and believers receive it only as a gift (Rom. 2:7; cf. 1 Cor. 15:53–54). There is no scriptural affirmation that unbelievers will live forever, so they will have no continued life after death.

Response

We've already acknowledged that in terms of biblical usage *immortality* is intrinsic to God and a gift to believers in the resurrection. However, as with

Trinity, the created immortality of the human soul is a biblical *teaching*, even though it is not a biblical *term*. We've extensively demonstrated that every person's created soul[27] will consciously live forever in either heaven or hell.[28]

Also, even though the term *immortal*[29] is biblically used *only* of God and His gift to believers, nevertheless, terms like *everlasting* (Matt. 25:41 NKJV) and *eternal* (Mark 3:29) *are* used of unbelievers. While their quality of existence will be nothing like that of the saved, the duration will be the same.

The Argument That Eternal Punishment Need Not Be Eternal Misery

As we've observed,[30] annihilationists say that punishment of the wicked is eternal in its results but not in its process—the effect is eternal but the duration is temporal. "Everlasting punishment is clearly not the same as being everlastingly punished. It is eternal loss of being" (Froom, *CFF*, 1.295).

Response

God's Word says that those in hell will be "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). Hell is a place where "the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48); thus, the fuel is never burned up. The flames of hell eternally burn, and those who have rejected God will eternally suffer.

The Argument That the Nature of Christ's Death Supports Annihilationism

Froom insists,

> [Death] means cessation of life, not eternal life in torment.… [It is a] strange contention of some that to perish is to live on forever! [For] if the death that threatened Adam were eternal torture, then it would have necessitated that our Savior, as man's complete Substitute, must be tormented eternally in order to pay his designated debt. (*CFF*, 1.78)

Response

This contention confuses the *value* and the *duration* of Christ's death. Being by nature the infinite God,[31] Christ's death had infinite value, even though His suffering and death occurred in a finite amount of time. Time is not a mandatory measure of worth—birth, for instance, happens over a relatively short span but produces something of extraordinary value. One death in limited time achieved

something of limitless value for all eternity.

The fallacy in this conditionalist argument is akin to the claim that punishing someone forever is overkill for sins he committed in a lifetime. This is *not* overkill because sin against the Infinite has infinite significance and endless ramification. In the same sense, Christ's finite suffering has infinite significance because of the suffering's infinite value.[32]

The Argument That All Life and Activity Are Suspended in Sheol

Conditionalists argue that *sheol* (Gk. *hades*) suspends all life and activity: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Eccl. 9:10). *Sheol* is a place of death, darkness, and silence; in complete contrast to the state of the living (cf. Deut. 30:15, 19; 1 Sam. 2:6–9), *sheol* is the state of the nonliving.

Response

For one thing, clearly Solomon was not claiming in Ecclesiastes that there is no life after death. Indeed, he speaks of death as when "man goes to his eternal home" (12:5) and when "the spirit returns to God," who gave it (v. 7).

For another, Solomon's words about the lack of activity in *sheol* refer to the body in the grave, not to the spirit in the spirit world. He is not speaking of the cessation of *all* activity but merely *earthly* activity.

John Stott's References to the Reality of Hell

Noted scholar John Stott refers to the reality and horror of hell with biblical language that for years kept most evangelicals from realizing he does not believe in the biblical doctrine:

> We surely have to say that this banishment from God will be real, terrible … and eternal. The New Testament contains no hint of the possibility of a later reprieve or amnesty.… The biblical phraseology includes … "eternal judgment" (Heb. 6:2 and possibly Mark 3:29), "everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2), "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46), "everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9) and "eternal fire" (Matt. 18:8; 25:41). (*EE*, 314)

This all sounds accurate until we hear Stott deny what he claims is "traditional

orthodoxy" in favor of "annihilation" (ibid., 314–15). He concludes, "I question whether 'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice" (ibid., 319).

Response

First, given Stott's belief that the wicked will be annihilated and will not endure eternal separation from God, his use of this biblical language is misleading and misapplied; he seems to be affirming scriptural teaching but is actually redirecting it.

Second, Stott significantly misuses language in speaking of the "reality" of nonexistence. Nonexistence is nothing, and nothing has no reality—it is by definition non-reality. Talking about the alleged non-reality of hell as real and terrible is meaningless.

Third, while Stott claims to be "a committed evangelical" (ibid., 315), his view on hell is not compatible with Scripture's affirmations. Nor is he, by his own words, committed to "traditional orthodoxy" (ibid., 314–15); in addition to being denounced by other creeds,[33] his position was condemned by the Church's Fifth Lateran Council. (His own Anglican Church is a Catholic branch.) Stott's annihilationist views are neither orthodox Catholic nor orthodox Protestant.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS FOR ANNIHILATIONISM

In addition to the biblical arguments, many conditionalists offer philosophical reasons for rejecting eternal conscious punishment. Most of these—granting a theistic perspective[34]—are a variation on one theme.

The Argument That Eternal Punishment Is Contrary to God's Justice

The Bible teaches that God will judge the wicked "according to what they have done" (Isa. 59:18) and that God "will give to each person according to what he has done" (Rom. 2:6). This is what justice demands, no more and no less. However, eternal judgment for temporal sins is not justice; a penalty infinite in duration for sins finite in duration is a monstrous injustice. Only annihilation after temporal judgment would represent justice.[35]

Response

First, eternal punishment is inflicted on a sinner who does not repent,[36] and since he continues in his sin up to death and on into eternity, he is reasonably punished by God forever.

Second, no sin is acceptable as long as God exists, and God is eternal. Hence, punishment for sin must also be eternal; temporal punishment would diminish God's justice and holiness.[37]

Third, as observed earlier,[38] God's justice demands eternal punishment because "the heinousness of any crime must be gauged according to the worth or dignity of the person it is committed against" (Edwards in Davidson, "RD" in *JETS*, 50). Sin against an infinite God is an infinitely wicked sin worthy of infinite punishment (see Edwards, *WJE*, 2.83; cf. Aquinas, *ST*, 4.99.1).

Fourth, and finally, everlasting punishment is not only just, but it is also necessary. Only eternal punishment will suffice for sins against the eternal God. Sins committed in time are sins perpetrated against the Timeless One.

The Argument That Eternal Punishment Is Contrary to God's Mercy

God is a God of mercy (Ex. 20:6),[39] and it is merciless to allow people to suffer consciously forever. If we put hopeless, suffering creatures out of their misery, why wouldn't an all-merciful God do the same for His creatures?

Response

First, the very concept of an ultimately merciful being supposes that this being has an absolute moral standard[40] that has been violated, and that merciful forgiveness is needed to rectify the situation.[41] Indeed, the moral argument for God's existence[42] demonstrates this very fact. But if God is the ultimate standard for what is morally right (just), then we cannot impose our concept of justice upon Him.

Second, in reply to the above illustration, while it is true that suffering animals are often put down to alleviate their pain, again, we don't do the same thing to people *precisely because they are not animals*. Animals are neither immortal[43] nor created in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:27). Humans are made in

God's image[44] and, therefore, should be treated with the greatest respect for their dignity as God's image bearers (cf. 9:6; James 3:9). Not allowing their continued existence in their freely chosen destiny,[45] however painful it may be, would be to snuff out God's image in them.

Third, exterminating a creature in God's immortal image would be to assault God's own likeness (which includes unending existence[46]). Annihilationism would be God attacking Himself in effigy, and God cannot be against God.[47]

Fourth, everlasting conscious suffering is not contrary to God's mercy;[48] God's mercy and God's allowing His creatures to undergo pain are not incompatible (cf. Edwards, *WJE*, 2.84). God's mercy is not an emotion that overcomes His justice,[49] and since none of God's attributes is in conflict with any other,[50] we can be fully assured that He is both absolutely merciful *and* absolutely just.

Fifth, and finally, annihilating a human being would violate what God determined is most precious—the gift of freedom to choose one's destiny.[51] Since free will (as part of God's image) is morally good, taking it away would be a moral evil. This is what annihilation would achieve—the eternal destruction of human freedom. Annhilationism has it backward: What is truly inhumane (anti-human) is to destroy a person's humanness.

The Argument That Eternal Punishment Is Contrary to the Universal Nature of God's Victory

While the annihilationist disagrees with the universalist contention that all will be saved;[52] nonetheless, he concurs that the passages describing God's universal victory over evil demand that there be no evil left in the universe.[53] For example, in the end everyone will bow the knee to Christ (Phil. 2:10); the world will be reconciled to Christ (2 Cor. 5:19); all will be "in Christ" (Eph. 1:10 NKJV); death and sin will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26); and everyone will be subject to Christ (v. 15:28). Even though universalism's interpretation of these texts is incorrect,[54] they do indicate that *sin* will be completely defeated, which conditionalists insist cannot occur unless all *sinners* are destroyed.

Response

The annihilationist conclusion does not follow from these "universal victory

passages." Some only refer to the fact that salvation is universally *possible* (e.g., Rom. 5:18–19; 2 Cor. 5:19); Christ's death for all means salvation is universal in extent but limited in application, since not all will believe.[55] Other passages do not refer to the salvation of all but the subjugation of all (e.g., Phil. 2:10), while others apply to believers and not unbelievers (e.g., Eph. 1:10).

Some texts do speak of the unilateral defeat of all death (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:26); this is fulfilled in the resurrection of all persons, saved and unsaved (cf. John 5:29; Rev. 20:4–5). The other verses that speak of God's triumph over all evil teach the *separation*, not the annihilation, of all evil (e.g., Matt. 13:41–42; 25:31–41). As has been repeatedly demonstrated, no passage speaks of the annihilation of evil beings: Evil is defeated by everlasting imprisonment and quarantine. Once again, for God to annihilate His image in fallen beings would not be a victory but a defeat, an attack of God upon Himself.

BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST ANNIHILATIONISM

In addition to the lack of any good arguments in favor of annihilationism, there are numerous arguments that support the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment.[56]

The Rich Man in Hell Was in Conscious Torment

> [The rich man cried out,] "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."
>
> But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony" (Luke 16:24–25).

The rich man then begged that his brothers be warned "so that they will not also come to this place of torment" (v. 28). This passage contains not annihilation, but constant, conscious suffering and torment.

Hell Is a Place of Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth

Jesus spoke repeatedly of the people who eventuate in hell as being in continual agony: They "will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."[57] This is obviously a place of conscious

sorrow; the unconscious do not weep, and those who weep are conscious.

Hell Is a Place of Everlasting Torment

John affirmed that hell is a place of eternal torment (Rev. 20:10). No unconscious person can experience torment, and eternal torment indicates that the everlasting state of woe is conscious and continuous.

The Beast and False Prophet: Conscious After One Thousand Years of Torment

There is a clear biblical example of still-conscious beings who have endured a thousand years of hell's torment. The beast and false prophet "were thrown *alive* into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Rev. 19:20) before the "thousand years" (20:2). Yet after this time the devil "was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet [still] *are*" (v. 10 NKJV). Not only were they alive when they entered, but they were still alive after a thousand years of conscious torment. This alone is a definitive argument against annihilationism.

Hell Will Endure As Long As Heaven Endures

Hell is said to be of the same duration as heaven, viz., "everlasting" (Matt. 25:41 NKJV); the same Greek word (*aiônion*) is used to describe both.[58] If there is an eternal heaven, there must be an eternal hell; no eternal hell, no eternal heaven. Since heaven's bliss is conscious, hell's woe is conscious.

Punishment Can Only Be Experienced by Those Who Are Conscious

That the wicked receive "everlasting punishment" shows that they must be conscious. One cannot suffer punishment unless he consciously exists to be punished (cf. 2 Thess. 1:9). Further, again, God's justice cannot be upheld if those who have chosen evil and refused Him are unconscious (annihilated).

Hell Is a Place of Unquenchable Flames

Jesus called hell a place of unquenchable flames (Mark 9:43–48), where the bodies of the wicked will never die (cf. Luke 12:4–5). It is nonsensical to posit

everlasting flames and bodies without souls to experience torment. There is simply no ground for the implausible annihilationist speculation that "the unquenchable fire and undying worms mean only fire which is unquenchable and worms which are undying *until their work of destruction is complete*" (Wenham, *GG*, 36, emphasis added). No such words are biblically stated *or* implied; to the absolute contrary, the flames will never go out, and the worms will never die (op. cit.).

PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST ANNIHILATIONISM

Annihilation Is Contrary to the Nature of God As Love

Annihilation would be demeaning both to the love of God[59] and to the nature of human beings as free moral creatures.[60] It would be as if God said, "I will allow you to live only if you do what I say. If you don't, I will snuff out your very existence!" Eternal existence is an eternal testimony to the freedom and dignity with which God created humans; eternal bliss is the destiny of the redeemed, and eternal suffering is the destiny of the unrepentant.

Annihilationism Is Contrary to the Nature of Humanity

It would be contrary to the created nature of humans to exterminate them, since we are made in God's everlasting image and likeness (Gen. 1:27). God is ultimate freedom,[61] and in His infinite wisdom[62] He bestowed freedom upon His human creatures.[63] To renege on this gift would be for Him to attack what is good in our nature—a good that He determined was best for us to receive.

Moral Justice Demands Degrees of Punishment

To equally punish a "white lie" and genocide would be unjust; murder should receive greater punishment than petty theft.[64] However, there is no evidence that judgment proportionate to the sin is always meted out in this life; the wisest man who ever lived complained of this life's inequities (Eccl. 3:16–22).

Annihilation is the great equalizer, having upon all who are unreconciled with

God the same eternal effect—nothingness. Not all sin is equal, though, and all will not receive the same eternal result. Annihilationism is contrary to moral justice, which demands that the punishment fit the crime.

There Are No Degrees of Annihilation

The Bible reveals degrees of eternal punishment in hell (Matt. 5:22; Rev. 20:12–14). Because "degrees of annihilation" is implausible—nonexistence would be the same for everyone—annihilationism is irrational. God's Word also gives no indication about post-death degrees of temporary conscious punishment and then annihilation; it speaks of immediate, post-death, "eternal," "everlasting" punishment.[65]

Annihilationism Is Illusory

Anything based on wish-fulfillment is an illusion.[66] At the base of annihilationism is the desperate wish to avoid suffering—no one wants to suffer, let alone to suffer forever. Annihilationism, like universalism,[67] is pie in the sky: That it would be nice if it were true doesn't make it true. Again, C.S. Lewis said about the latter,

> I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully "All will be saved." But my reason retorts, "Without their will, or with it?" If I say "Without their will," I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say "With their will," my reason replies "How, if they *will not* give in?" (*PP*, 106–07).

In our fallenness we would love to believe that there really are no consequences for our sins, either in this life or the next, so we need help to be cured of such psychological diseases. The antidote is the truth, which sets us free (John 8:32).

HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST ANNIHILATIONISM

The historical evidence against annihilationism is the same as the historical argument for eternal conscious punishment—that is, the historical evidence against annihilationism is identical to the evidence for hell, already

summarized;[68] annihilationism is opposed by most orthodox teachers in church history, from the beginning to the present.

We saw earlier that annihilationism was roundly condemned by the early church. In one example, the last of the nine anathemas of Emperor Justinian (c. 483–565) against Origen (c. 185–c. 254) reads: “If anyone says … that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary and will one day have an end … let him be anathema” (in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, Vol. 14). Before the Reformation, the Fifth Lateran Council (1513) also condemned the denial of hell (see Cross, *ODCC*, 328).

CONCLUSION

When examined carefully and in context, none of the above passages proves annihilationism. Certain words used may *permit* that meaning, but nowhere do they *demand* it regarding eternal punishment. In view of comparison with other clear passages, conditionalism must be fully rejected, for it rests on a sentimental (rather than scriptural) basis, rooted more in emotion than in reason. Numerous passages plainly state that those who have chosen wickedness will suffer consciously and eternally.[69]

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

Eschatology (the study of Last Things) is notorious for divergent views. Much of this is due to the different methods of interpreting prophecy employed by opposing positions. The basic debate is between what are commonly known as the *literal* and *allegorical* schools of interpretation.

The issue is actually more complicated, since, as we shall see, both sides lay claim to the literal historical-grammatical method (of interpretation). As such, the debate often reduces to exactly what is meant by that term or to which view has the most consistent use of the method itself. Nonetheless, in learning to understand the various views on prophecy, it is useful to set forth the differences between the bases of these two main hermeneutical schools. Some scholars/groups who lay claim to a basic literal method actually utilize an allegorical element of interpretation with crucial prophetic passages.

Our conclusions about biblical prophecy are profoundly affected by which method is used. For example, if language about a "thousand years" of Christ's reign (Rev. 20:1–6) is taken *literally*, a premillennialist position is favored. If this is taken *allegorically*, then an amillennialist or postmillennialist perspective results.[1] Accordingly, the important question is: Which method is correct?

Again, it complicates matters that even those who allegorize certain prophetic passages claim adherence to the historical-grammatical method of interpretation.

(Some do admit to enhancing and expanding it to include an allegorical, symbolical, or typological understanding of certain texts.) The issue, then, boils down to the *understanding and/or application* (rather than the name) of the method of interpreting (hermeneutics). Bernard Ramm (1916–1992) asserted:

> In fundamental theory there is no difference between [Louis] Berkhof's *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics* [1873–1957, amillennial] and [Lewis Sperry] Chafer's *The Science of Biblical Hermeneutics* [1871–1952, dispensational].[2] Both agree that the historical-grammatical method is basic to understanding the Bible. (*PBI*, 224)

The key words are *"in fundamental theory,"* for there is a tremendous difference *in practice* between these views; hence, the various components of the literal method must be spelled out carefully. We will examine three primary approaches: (1) the literal method, (2) the allegorical method, and (3) the expanded literal method.

Preliminary Definitions

Since not everyone defines these crucial terms the same way, we need to establish definitions before proceeding with a discussion of hermeneutics.

Mind is an entity that can think, that can generate and understand thought.

Meaning is an intelligible form or pattern of thought generated by a mind.

Language is an intelligible form or pattern of thought expressed in words, symbols, or other means of expression (e.g., gestures or sign language).

Intention is what a mind meant to express (whether it succeeded or not).

Significance is the importance or value assigned to a meaning by a mind.

Implications are thoughts logically implied in other thoughts, whether or not the one expressing the thoughts is aware they are implied.

Application is how meaning is applied to specific situations. *Legitimate* application is the restricted way a given meaning can be appropriately applied to specific situations.

A *referent* is an object to which a thought refers or may refer.

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: THE LITERAL SCHOOL OF INTERPRETATION

What the Literal Method *Is*

Literal

The word *literal* as used in hermeneutics comes from the Latin *sensus literalis*, meaning the literal sense of the text, as opposed to a nonliteral or spiritualized sense. William Sanford LaSor (1912–1991) observed, "A 'literal' interpretation means the understanding which any person of normal intelligence would get, without any special spiritual gifts and without any 'code' or 'key' " (in Ramm, *H*, 99). In application to prophecy, John Walvoord (1910–2002) adds correctly:

> If a person does not interpret the plain statements of prophecy literally, there is no rule by which any consensus of meaning can be established; the existence of a wide diversity of interpretations shows the failure of this approach. (*ET*, 10)

Normal

Another way to describe Scripture's literal meaning is as the normal, everyday, common understanding of its terms. There is nothing irregular or unusual about the way the words are being used; they are given the meaning that they normally have in common communication. As stated by Charles Ryrie (b. 1925), the correct means of interpretation is "the basic hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation" (*DT*, 85).

Historical

A common way of describing the literal means of interpretation is the *historical-grammatical method*. The word *historical* in this term means the sentences should be understood in their historical setting; they should not be taken out of the space-time, cultural context in which they were uttered. Dwight Pentecost (b. 1915) describes this point well:

> [The exegete] will have to transfer himself mentally into the first century [when interpreting the New Testament].… He must place himself on the standpoint of the author, and seek to enter into his very soul, until he, as it were, lives his life and thinks his thoughts.… [This is in order to] guard carefully against the rather common mistake of transferring the author to the present day and making him speak the language of the twentieth century. (*TC*, 37)

Grammatical

The term *grammatical* indicates that the true meaning of a sentence is rooted in its grammar, emerging from the structure wherein all parts of speech—including nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositions, etc.—are placed in a form from which a specific meaning can be derived. Alleged textual meaning that ignores and/or is opposed to grammatical structure is not the

correct meaning. The historical-grammatical method involves giving each word "the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking" (ibid., 9).

Contextual

Another important term in describing the literal hermeneutic is *context*: Every sentence should be understood in the context of the paragraph, the paragraph in the setting of the book, and the book in view of the whole Bible. Charles Feinberg (1909–1997) noted: "No prophecy of the Word is to be interpreted solely with reference to itself … but all other portions of the prophetic revelation are to be taken into account and considered" (*PA*, 39, as cited in ibid.). Therefore, meaning is discovered by context, from the immediate to the remote. A text taken out of its context is a pretext; the real meaning is what a text has in its context.[3]

Authorial

Also, the literal meaning is the author's—the author gives the meaning to the text. The reader's obligation is to *discover* the meaning that the author *determined*. Consequently, what is meant in the text is what the author meant by it, not what the reader desires it to mean. The true meaning of a biblical passage is not what it means to me, but what was meant by the one who wrote it.[4]

Exegetical

Further, the true meaning of a text is the one read out of it (*exegesis*), the one that the author put in it. It is not a meaning read into it (*eisegesis*) by the reader —the reader, who must seek the meaning of the author, has no right (according to the literal hermeneutic) to read his meaning into a text. The reader's task is to *discover* the meaning already in a text, not *determine* what he thinks it ought to mean.

Singular

What is more, according to the literal method, there is only one textual meaning: the one expressed in it by its author. That is, every text has one meaning (*sensus unum*), not many meanings (*sensus plenior*). Since the very same words of the Bible are coauthored by the divine Author and the human writer, this one meaning expressed in the text is the same for both writers.

Objective

Finally, the literal method insists that the meaning in the text is the same for everyone, not just for some. The meaning is fixed, not fluid; it is determined, not dynamic.

What the Literal Method *Is Not*

As we've previously noted,[5] *the literal method of interpretation does not mean that everything in the Bible is true literally; rather, it means that everything in the Bible is literally true*.[6] Also, it does not mean that the Bible contains no figures of speech, like metaphors and anthropomorphisms. (That these can be used to utter a literal truth will be demonstrated in the following discussion.) E. R. Craven (1824–1908) said:

> The *literalist* (so called) is not one who denies that *figurative* language, that *symbols*, are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great spiritual truths are set forth therein. Rather, his position is simply that the prophecies are to be normally interpreted (i.e., according to the received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted—that which is manifestly figurative being so regarded. (as cited in Poythress, *UD*, 91)

It Does Not Eliminate Spiritual Application

Denying allegorism as a basic hermeneutical method (*interpretation*) does not mean there are no legitimate spiritual *applications*; the literal meaning, once determined, can be applied in legitimate spiritual ways.[7] Sometimes the New Testament does this in its use of the Old Testament: Moses spoke of not muzzling an ox when it treads the grain (Deut. 25:4), and a principle of "the laborer is worthy of his hire" is applied by Paul to urge paying ministers of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:9, 13–14). The same truth, "blessed are the poor," is applied by Jesus to those who are spiritually poor (Matt. 5:3) and to those who are financially poor (Luke 6:20).

The limit or boundary on such spiritual applications is the essential meaning of the text. For example, Hosea said of Israel (God's "son"), "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1), thereby limiting the use of this text to one who is appropriately called the "Son" of God. Matthew applied this to Christ in the New Testament (2:15), a most appropriate application, since He is the personal Son of God.

To use a common illustration, a chair is made to sit on, but to use it otherwise doesn't destroy either its original purpose or its structure; for example, a chair can be used to stand on or used to prop open a door. On the other hand, taking a

chair outside of its feasible usages would turn it into something other than a chair—for instance, it cannot be used as kindling wood without destroying its form, that is, its "chairness." There is a difference between the *interpretation* of a text (which is one) and the *application* of a text (which are many).

Also, while there is only *one interpretation* of a text—the one literally meant by the author—there are *many implications*. This is why New Testament use of the Old Testament sometimes seems removed from a proper interpretation; the New Testament is often not giving an interpretation, but an implication or application of that text. *A text's correct interpretation is the historical-grammatical interpretation.*

It Does Not Eliminate Figures of Speech

The Bible's statements about the eye, arms, or wings of God should not be taken as true literally. God does not really have these physical features, for He is pure Spirit (immaterial; cf. John 4:24); hence, He is not actually material. Even so, we could not know what is *not* literally true of God unless we knew what *is* literally true. For example, if it were not literally true that He is pure Spirit and that He is infinite,[8] then we would not be able to say that certain attributes metaphorically ascribed to Him (such as materiality and finitude) are not literally true.

Likewise, the literal method of interpretation does not take Jesus' statement "I am the true vine" (John 15:1) as physically actual. That He is a vine is literally true, but it is not true literally (i.e., physically). Literally and physically Jesus was a human being, and His hearers understood this; since a vine is not a person, it follows that Jesus is not literally a vine. Nevertheless, there is a literal truth behind this metaphor, viz., that as we are branches on the vine (v. 5), our source of spiritual life literally (actually) comes from Christ.

Of course, it can be difficult to determine when a passage should not be taken literally. Pentecost offers the following guidelines for our assistance in knowing when a text should be interpreted figuratively:

> (1) when it is obviously figurative;
> (2) when the New Testament authorizes the figurative sense; or
> (3) when literal interpretation would contradict non-figurative portions of Scripture. (in Terry, *BH*, 40)

As the dictum goes,

When the literal sense makes good sense,
seek no other sense,
lest it result in nonsense. (Anonymous)

With an illustration, we might say, “When the literal sense does not make good sense (such as God, a pure Spirit, having eyes, ears, and arms), then we should seek some other sense lest it result in nonsense.”

It Does Not Eliminate the Use of Types

The literal hermeneutic also does not eliminate instances of typology. Clearly, the New Testament affirms that Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament types that prefigured Him and that passed away when He fulfilled them. For instance, Paul said plainly, “Christ, our Passover [Lamb] was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7 NKJV). Hebrews speaks of the entire Levitical sacrificial system as being fulfilled by our great High Priest:[9] “This Man [Christ], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.… For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (10:12–14 NKJV). These types found their fulfillment in the antitype (Jesus); they were only the shadow of the substance found in Him (Col. 2:17). This fulfillment is in no sense a spiritualization or allegorization of any literal thing or event; it is a literal fulfillment of the literal type by a literal antitype.

It Does Not Eliminate the Use of Symbols

The literal hermeneutic does not eliminate usage of symbols. The Bible is *filled* with symbols; even so, each symbol is emblematic of something literal. Take, for example, Revelation, which contains symbols from beginning to end, yet every one of them represents something literal and is so interpreted by the book itself. For example, John said the “seven stars” in Christ’s right hand were “the angels [messengers] of the seven churches” (1:20); “the seven lampstands” were “the seven churches” (ibid.); the “bowls full of incense” were “the prayers of the saints” (5:8); “the waters” were “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (17:15 NKJV); and so forth.

Jesus told Peter he would give him the “keys” to the kingdom (Matt. 16:18). These keys were *symbolic* of Peter’s God-given authority to open the door of the Good News to the Jews (Acts 2) and the Gentiles (Acts 10), which he *literally* did;[10] seeing the keys as a symbol does not spiritualize away the literal truth that

Peter actually opened the "gospel door" to both literal Jews and literal Gentiles. Likewise, John's mention of the "keys" to the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1) gives us no license to spiritualize away Satan's existence (vv. 2–3).

Ramm noted that symbolic language is often used within the context of literal truths: "The literalist in prophetic interpretation admits the presence of poetic and figurative elements, and the amillennialists[11] who think they deny this are wrong" (*PBI*, 243). LaSor adds a key observation:

> Every formula or equation in mathematics, chemistry, physics, symbolic logic, and many other subjects, is written in symbols and is interpreted literally. [Thus, the use of the symbolic] does not necessarily imply a departure from the literal meaning. (in Ramm, *H*, 101)

In the same way, we encounter symbols in road signs all the time, but we never doubt that they signify literal realities.

It Does Not Eliminate the Use of Parables and Allegories

Though the many parables of Jesus are not to be taken literally, they convey a literal point nonetheless. Sometimes Jesus interpreted a parable and directly stated its literal meaning (cf. Matt. 13:18–23); Paul used an allegory and labeled it as such (Gal. 4:24). Different literary genres *must* be distinguished—taking them all literally will obscure textual meaning. However, determination of genre is not a decision made before the total historical-grammatical context is thoroughly examined. Likewise, since Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture, taking into consideration its overall context, we can often discover internally whether or not the author meant the text to be taken literally.

For example, there are clues both inside and outside the book of Jonah that it isn't allegorical. The name of an actual prophet known from another historical book is used (cf. Jonah 1:1; 2 Kings 14:25), as are the real cities of Nineveh and Tarshish (Jonah 1:2). In Scripture's broader context, Jonah appears elsewhere in a prophetic ministry (2 Kings 14:25), and Jesus refers to him as a historical figure (Matt. 12:39–41).

The same is true of Adam and Eve in Eden, since the text reveals a real place with real rivers (Gen. 2:8–14), real children (4:1–2; 5:1–4), and real physical results of their actions on the world (cf. Rom. 5:12).[12] Hence, there is no reason to take this narrative as an allegory.

These principles should never be forgotten:

First, without a literal understanding of the matter, we cannot determine what is allegorical; we cannot know what is not literal unless we know the literal.

Second, again, every parable or allegory conveys a literal truth (Matt. 13:18–23).

Third, genre decisions should not be made in advance of looking at the total context via the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. We also must not import ideas alien to Scripture into "up-front genre decisions," for this is no more than a covert way to insert theological biases under the guise of adding a "literary" element to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.[13] For example, to decide, *a priori*, on the basis of alleged similarities with other types of literature, that a biblical text must be allegorical because it contains miracle stories is to force antisupernatural bias upon it[14] rather than interpreting the supernatural message contained in it.

Reasons for a Literal Approach to Interpretation

Dwight Pentecost lists six reasons for adopting a literal interpretation:

(1) Literal interpretation is the normal (standard) approach in all languages.
(2) All secondary meanings depend on the literal meaning.
(3) The greater part of the Bible makes sense when taken literally.
(4) Literal interpretation will take the secondary meaning when demanded.
(5) Literal interpretation is the only "sane and safe check on the imagination of man."
(6) Literal interpretation is the only one in line with the nature of inspiration.[15] (from *TC*, 10)

To this may be added,

(7) Any other approach is self-defeating, for it claims that the literal truth is not the proper way to interpret, even though it expects its reader (listener) to take *its* words literally.

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: THE ALLEGORICAL SCHOOL OF INTERPRETATION

Most Christian writers and teachers have not accepted the allegorical method of interpretation as the basic and primary approach to biblical hermeneutics. However, many have employed it, particularly with regard to prophecy. The following are some of the most egregious examples.

Augustine (354–430)

Augustine, the "medieval monolith," substantially engaged in the allegorical method. This approach was supplementary—Augustine did believe that a text's literal interpretation is basic to its meaning (cf. *OCD*, II, III)—but he nevertheless engaged in extensive allegorization of Scripture. In this sense, the allegorical method became more of a textual application than its real interpretation, but Augustine was inconsistent at this point (as were other biblical interpreters). For example, even though he wrote *Literal Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, he engaged in fanciful spiritualization of literal realities, such as claiming that when God created light and separated the light from the darkness, "for our part, we understand these [as] two societies of angels—the one enjoying God, the other swelling with pride" (*CG*, 11.33).

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

Origen was one of the earliest to engage in widespread use of the allegorical method as a basic hermeneutic, notoriously allegorizing away literal truth (such as the existence of Adam and Eve—*DP*, 4.1.16). Origen's treatment of Genesis 24:16 is an evocative illustration: He claimed that " '[Rebecca] was a virgin' means that Christ is the husband of the soul when it is converted, and that Satan becomes the husband of the soul when it falls away" (cited in Ramm, *H*, 970).

Christian Science

Cults, especially New Age and pantheistic types, are infamous for their allegorical approach to God's Word; Mary Baker Eddy's (1821–1910) entire *Science and Health With Keys to the Scriptures* uses allegorical interpretation. Eddy denied the reality of Satan, the material world, all evil, death, and hell.[16] Broadly, Christian Science rejects any literal interpretation that contradicts its assumed pantheistic and spiritualistic foundation. This includes all evangelical doctrines, including the Virgin Birth, Christ's deity, the (substitutionary) Atonement, Christ's bodily resurrection, and the literal Second Coming.[17]

What the Allegorical Method Represents

The allegorical method is the literal method's antithesis (opposite); a

passage's basic sense is taken spiritually, esoterically, or even mystically. For example, according to allegorical understanding, Adam and Eve are often taken not as literal persons but as symbolic representations. The devil is not a real being but a myth. (And so forth.)

As to the following characteristics of allegorism, most evangelicals do not embrace them when interpreting Scripture's historical and narrative sections. The problem is that some do when it comes to the prophetic sections. This, as will be shown, is inconsistent and untenable.

Meaning Is Not Literal

First and foremost is that an allegorical interpretation is not literal. Literal interpretation is perceived as carnal and materialistic—some would even argue that it's like reading the letter of the law while neglecting its actual intent.

Meaning Is Spiritual

The meaning of a text is not literal but spiritual. Meaning is not found in the literal sense, but in a "more profound" spiritual sense that goes beyond a passage's surface (literal) understanding. Meaning is not in letters and words, but in the spirit behind them.

Meaning Is Deeper

Scripture's true meaning is "deeper" than the common, everyday understanding of it (just as the soul is deeper than the body). Dwight Pentecost likewise observed that allegorical interpretation is "the method of interpreting a literary text that regards the literal sense as the vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual and more profound sense" (*TC*, 1).

Meaning Is Fuller

The allegorical method emphasizes a fuller meaning than the one intended by the human author. Often this takes the form of asserting that the divine author intended something more, and that so to grasp the full and complete meaning of the text we must go beyond what the human author had in mind to reach the mind of God. This is usually called *sensus plenior* (multiple meanings), in contrast to *sensus unum* (one meaning).

Meaning Is Beneath the Text

Another allegorical-method claim is that the Bible's real meaning is not *in* the

text but *beneath* it. Truth is not in the grammar but beyond the grammar. The text itself is only the shell; the pearl of truth, the real meaning, comes from a deeper and more significant level.[18]

Why the Allegorical Method Is Wrong

There are many reasons for rejecting the allegorical method as such, and additional reasons for rejecting it when applied to prophetic Scripture.

The Allegorical Method Is Self-Defeating

The allegorical method of interpretation is self-defeating, for the very claim that "all meaning is allegorical (nonliteral)" is itself a claim to have the literal truth about this matter. To put it another way, no allegorist wants us to take his claims allegorically—he wants his writings to be interpreted literally.

The Allegorical Method Is Impossible

Even liberal theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who championed symbolic talk about God,[19] acknowledged that allegorical interpretation was not possible to do completely (cited by Kaufmann, *CRP*, 195–96). One cannot say that everything about God is symbolic (nonliteral), since we cannot know what is *not* literally true about God unless we know what *is* literally true. Tillich's solution to the dilemma was to say it is literally true that God is Being and that all other statements are symbolic. However, to say God is Being is to make many other statements as well, since being is all-encompassing, with numerous characteristics.[20] Tillich was right on the basic idea, namely, that a totally allegorical (symbolic) approach to God is impossible.

The Allegorical Method Doesn't Have Objective Criteria

There are no objective criteria by which we can determine a text's allegorical meaning—it is purely subjective, leaving us with no knowable objective meaning.[21] Again, it's self-refuting to claim there is no objective meaning, because that very statement claims to be objectively meaningful. Allegorism is a way to "pervert the true meaning of Scripture" rather than to interpret it; "the basic authority in interpretation ceases to be the Scriptures [and is instead] the mind of the interpreter" (Pentecost, *TC*, 5).

The Allegorical Method Is Contrary to Common Sense

An old dictum says: "If you lack knowledge, go to man for help. If you lack

wisdom, go to God. But if you lack common sense, neither God nor man can help you." So it is with the allegorical method of interpretation, which is contrary to common sense—without common sense in approaching a text, almost anything goes. For example, if one uses common sense and approaches the Bible like the newspaper, he will never become an allegorist. Merrill Tenney (1904–1985) wrote:

> The futurist school of thought,[22] because of its insistence upon an interpretation as literal as possible, has been a healthy antidote to an overbalanced symbolism that has tended to make Revelation mean everything except the obvious. (*IR*, 145)

The Allegorical Method Is Inconsistent

Few allegorical-method interpreters of prophecy are consistent, and many who take the rest of Scripture literally insist that prophecy is allegorical. LaSor responded that "prophecy is to be interpreted according to the same principles that apply in all biblical study.… The interpretation of messianic prophecy should follow the same rules that apply for all prophecy" (in Ramm, *H*, 94–95). *The rules of hermeneutics don't change when we turn to a new page*, as Reformed theologian John Gerstner (1914–1996) illustrated when he admitted to not being a complete literalist:

> We *all* agree that most literature, including the *Bible*, is usually meant to be understood according to the literal construction of the words which are used.… There is a small area of Scripture, mainly in the area of prophecy, where there is a lively debate as to whether one interprets literally or figuratively.… We are all literalists up to a certain point.[23]

Other adherents to allegorism are inconsistent in that they will take some parts of a single passage as literal and some parts as allegorical. For instance, of one text, they regard the first resurrection as spiritual and the second resurrection as literal (Rev. 20:4–6; e.g., Augustine, *CG*, 20.6–7).

The Allegorical Method Is Not Biblical

From an evangelical point of view, perhaps the most telling argument against allegorism is that it is unbiblical. With the exception of one New Testament passage that clearly labels itself as a nonliteral allegory (or illustration—Gal. 4:21–31), there are no allegorical interpretations in the Bible.[24] The Old Testament historical text is consistently literal, from Adam and Eve (cf. Rom. 5:12; 1 Tim. 2:13–14) to Noah and the Flood (cf. Matt. 24:37–38) to Jonah and the great fish (cf. 12:40), et al. George Peters (1825–1909) summed it up

forcefully:

> Where a literal construction will stand, the furthest from the letter is commonly the worst. There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changes the meaning of words … making anything what it pleases, and bringing in the end all truth to nothing. (*TK*, 47)

The Allegorical Method Is Contrary to the Literal Fulfillment of Messianic Predictions

The ultimate proof that Old Testament prophecies should be taken literally and not spiritually (or allegorically) is that of its 113 messianic predictions that Christ has already fulfilled (see Payne, *EBP*, 665–68), *all* were fulfilled literally. To mention just a few, Jesus literally was the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the offspring of Abraham (15:1–6), of the tribe of Judah (49:10), the son of David (2 Sam. 7:12ff.), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); He suffered for our sins (Isa. 53), died around A.D. 33 (cf. Dan. 9:24–27), and rose from the dead (Ps. 16:10; cf. Acts 2:30–32). *If the predictions surrounding Christ's first coming are to be taken literally, then by logical extension there is no justification for spiritualizing predictions about His second coming*.[25]

A case in point demonstrating literal understanding of the Old Testament by the New is our Lord's use of Isaiah's prophecy, when He stood up to read:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18–19, NKJV, citing Isa. 61:1–2)

All of this was literally true of Jesus' ministry. Thus, He finished, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21), that is, *literally* fulfilled.

Note this: When sharing the fulfillment of this passage, Jesus stopped in the middle of a sentence (from Isaiah). The rest of that prophecy refers to His second coming and was not yet fulfilled: "… to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor *and the day of vengeance of our God*." If the allegorists can be believed, we must assume that the rest of this sentence (the clause Jesus did not apply to His earthly [adventive] ministry) is spiritual and not literal.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

Two texts are most often used to oppose the literal hermeneutic, which allows

for only one meaning (with many applications).

Objection One: Based on John 11:49–52

> Then one of them [the Sanhedrin], named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."
>
> He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

Those who claim that the divine author intended more in a given text than did the human author claim this as a proof that we must go beyond the meaning in the mind of the human to the intention of God to find a biblical text's complete meaning.

Response to Objection One

A closer examination reveals that the text does not support the objection.

First, Caiaphas was not a prophet God was using as a channel through whom He conveyed some higher intention than that of Caiaphas. The passage asserts that Caiaphas uttered it "as high priest" but not as a prophet.

Second, Caiaphas's statement was made in sarcasm and was introduced by scoffing: "You know nothing at all!" It was put forth not by a prophet, but by one who was about to sentence the sinless Son of God to a cruel execution.[26]

Third, the use of this statement by John (under inspiration) is not in the same spirit and context and has a different meaning. After all, the same words in different contexts can have different meanings; for instance, Paul's citation from a *pantheistic* poet that "we are also His [God's] offspring" (Acts 17:28) was given in a *theistic* sense.

The worldview's context makes a world of difference in meaning. Meaning is not discovered by finding the intention of the author behind the words. We do not know the mind of the author's statement except insofar as he has expressed it in the text, and the only way we can discover the text's meaning is in its historical-grammatical (biblical) context.

Fourth, and finally, that Caiaphas did not speak "of himself" means he did not speak on his personal authority; rather, "as high priest" he predicted that Jesus' death would deliver Israel *politically* from *Rome's* wrath for not killing a person who claimed to be "King of the Jews" (as would later read the accusation on His

cross). In short, Caiaphas's context was political; John finds his statement ironic, since in truth Jesus was dying for the Jews in a *redemptive* sense—John was concerned about how by Christ's death we could be delivered from *God's* wrath.

Objection Two: Based on 1 Peter 1:10–12

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

From this some infer that God intended more by prophecies than the human authors did, so that they even searched their own writings for what was meant by God in what they wrote, over and above what they meant.

Response to Objection Two

This is *not* what Peter said. As Walter Kaiser (b. 1933) notes, "We may be certain that the prophets' areas of ignorance about their own prophecies existed exactly where our ignorance occurs: *the time* of Christ's coming." That is, they were not ignorant about what it meant but as to its time referent. And,

> If the prophets were short in this one area [time], they were certain in five other areas. They knew for sure that they were announcing (1) the Messiah, (2) Messiah's suffering, (3) Messiah's coming in glorious splendor to reign, (4) the sequence of those two events—suffering first and then glory, and (5) a message that had relevance not only for the Old Testament saints, but for another day as well.[27]

The human authors meant exactly the same thing God meant by their words; they coauthored those words with Him. However, since God knew more about the topic and knew more of its implications, they searched their own writings to see if they could ascertain hints as to the time implied.

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: THE EXPANDED HISTORICAL GRAMMATICAL SCHOOL(S) OF INTERPRETATION

As noted earlier, the issue at hand is more complicated than can be resolved by a contrast between the classical literal and allegorical methods of

interpretation. Both amillennialists[28] and progressive dispensationalists[29] employ what may be called an expanded or revised version of the historical-grammatical method, which they believe is the way to understand crucial prophetic passages about Israel. Classical dispensationalists[30] strongly oppose this revision, calling it a distortion of the true historical-grammatical method.[31]

Of the different versions of an "expanded" literal hermeneutic, basically, two are noteworthy.

The Traditional Covenantal View

Traditional covenantalism, represented by Oswald T. Allis (1880–1973) in *Prophecy and the Church*, foundationally includes the following premises.

Rejection of Strict Literal Interpretation

Allis characterizes literal interpretation as arguing:

> [Some say,] "God must have said just what He means, and must mean just what He has said; and what He has said is to be taken just as He has said it, i.e., *literally*." But [in contrast] the New Testament makes it plain that the literal interpretation was a stumbling block to the Jews. It concealed from them the most precious truths of Scripture. (*PC*, 258)

Acceptance of Sensus Plenior

Sensus plenior (Lat: "the fuller sense") conceptualizes a deeper sense to these prophetic texts than what the author supposedly intended. The Bible is coauthored,[32] and God intended more by each text than the human author did.

Interpretation of the Old Testament in Light of New Testament Fulfillment

> The assertion that "Israel always means Israel" and that kingdom prophecies regarding Israel enter the New Testament "absolutely unchanged" leads at once and inevitably to the conclusion that the "kingdom of heaven" which John the Baptist announced as "at hand" was an earthly, political, national kingdom of the Jews.[33] But since Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament, these passages should be understood as fulfilled spiritually. (ibid., 256)

Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament

Just as Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's sacrificial system, even so He is said to be the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic land- and throne-promises through which Messiah will have a political reign.[34] Hence, believers

should see the Old Testament promises to Israel through this spiritual lens, and they will thereby observe that the New Testament church is the *spiritual* Israel, a continuation of the Old Testament *ethnic* Israel. No future literal fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies can be expected.

Retroactive Interpretation

A common thread in these points is a retroactive method of interpretation: Rather than the Old Testament being interpreted within its own context,[35] the New Testament is read back into the Old Testament. For example, in the historical-grammatical context, it is clear that Abraham's descendants would unconditionally inherit the Promised Land, from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean;[36] when these texts (Gen. 12–18) are read retroactively through a New Testament lens, the literal promise is canceled and replaced by a spiritual fulfillment in the church.

Response to Traditional Covenantalism

The hermeneutic of traditional covenantalism is plainly not an exegesis of the text (reading the meaning *out of* it), but an eisegetical exercise (reading another meaning back *into* it). The net result, covenantal amillennialism,[37] is unsupported by contextual, historical-grammatical interpretation.

Traditional covenantalism allows no literal national future for Israel, posits the church as the spiritual fulfillment of Old Testament predictions about Israel, and leads to an allegorical interpretation of the "thousand years" in Revelation 20. The Millennium,[38] rather than being a literal thousand years, is supposedly symbolic of the church age. Regarding the two resurrections of Revelation 20,[39] there is only one literal *physical* resurrection, the second one (v. 5), of "the rest of the dead" (the unregenerate). The "first resurrection"—the one explicitly called a resurrection (v. 6)—is not physical but spiritual, viz., the believer's regeneration.

Whatever this method may be called, from a traditional historical-grammatical perspective it is allegorical, a seriously errant way of interpreting crucial prophetic texts about Israel's future.[40] As traditional covenantalism admittedly fails to take these predictions literally, it is a symbolic understanding of them; consequently, it is at best an inconsistent use of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic and at worst subject to myriad criticisms against the

allegorical method.[41]

The Modified Covenantal View

Chastened by the faults of inconsistency and allegory in the traditional covenantal hermeneutic, some contemporary amillennialists have attempted to redeem their view by another approach: a modification that allows for a future literal fulfillment of land- and throne-promises made to Israel. This position is represented by Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988) and Vern Poythress (b. 1944), and the basic elements of their modified covenantal approach are the same as the traditional:

(1) Both reject a strict literal view of interpretation.
(2) Both accept the *sensus plenior*.
(3) Both interpret the Old Testament in light of New Testament fulfillment.
(4) Both view the Old Testament Christologically (fully fulfilled in Christ).
(5) Both engage in a retroactive method of reading New Testament truth back into the Old Testament (see Poythress, *UD*, 8, 45–47, 76–91, 116).

However, the modifiers maintain all this with an innovative, sophisticated twist that allows them to admit a literal future for ethnic Israel (as dispensationalists have long defended) *without* giving up belief in a spiritual fulfillment of these Old Testament predictions in the church. The modified covenantal model holds that there will be no literal thousand-year reign of Christ,[42] since all these prophecies will be fulfilled *in the new heaven and new earth*.[43]

This alteration builds on the concept of typology, meaning that the literal understanding serves as a springboard for a typological understanding. Poythress argues for traditional covenantalism with the following points.

The Traditional Covenantal View Is Wrong About Israel's Future

> All prophecies are relevant to the church; all apply to us in some fashion, directly and indirectly. But not all are fulfilled in the church as such. Some are not at present fulfilled at all in the church. Some are only partially fulfilled in the church. In studying some prophecies we come to think that their full realization is still future. In principle, this fuller realization could take place either in the final golden age, described in Revelation 21:1–22:5, or in a "silver" age, commonly called "the Millennium" (*UD*, 47).

All Old Testament Promises Are Fulfilled in Christ, the True Israelite

> One proceeds by way of Christ himself, the center point of fulfillment of the promises. Christ is an Israelite in the fullest sense. In fact, though all Israel be rejected for unfaithfulness (Hos. 1:9), yet Christ would remain as the ultimate faithful Israelite, the ultimate "remnant" (cf. Isa. 6:11–13; 11:1). [Consequently,] as 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (ibid., 126; cf. 69, 106).

The Church (in Christ) Participates Equally in These Promises

> Now to which of these promises are Christians heirs in union with Christ? Theologically, it is hard to resist the answer "All of them." After all, "in Christ all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Col. 2:9–10). Thus, one cannot neatly divide between heavenly and earthly blessings because there is only one Christ, and we receive the whole Christ. (ibid., 69)

A Typological Fulfillment in the Church Does Not Cancel a Future Literal Fulfillment in Israel

A partial or initial spiritual fulfillment of these Old Testament promises in the church does not overthrow direct literal guarantees therein; the typological *complements* (not cancels) the literal. That there are two senses in a text does not mean one must nullify the other (cf. ibid., 35, 45, 47, 91, 115); one *supplements* the other and brings it to a higher level of fulfillment.

> Thus grammatical-historical interpretation, constrained as it is to interpret the prophets against the background of Moses, will go ahead and introduce the symbolic and typological element directly into prophetic utterances about the future. (ibid., 113)

There Is Only One Salvific Head (Christ) and One People of God

> Because Christ is an Israelite and Christians are in union with Christ, Christians partake of the benefits promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah [31]. With whom is the new covenant made? It is made with Israel and Judah. Hence, it is made with Christians by virtue of Christ the Israelite. Thus one might say that Israel and Judah themselves undergo a transformation at the first coming of Christ, because Christ is the final supremely faithful Israelite. Around him all true Israel gathers. (ibid., 106)

Both the Church and Israel Will Experience a Literal Future Fulfillment of Old Testament Promises Made to Israel

The conclusion Poythress draws from these premises is that rather than (as traditional covenant theologians have argued) the church's spiritual fulfillment canceling or replacing the literal fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy

about Israel, the church today is a partial, initial spiritual fulfillment. The future will provide more fully realized and literal fulfillment in which Israel and the church will share equally.

> Since Christians share in Abraham's inheritance of the heavenly city now, they will share in it then also. It is legitimate to distinguish Jew and Gentile as peoples with two separate origins. [Nevertheless,] their destiny (if they come to trust in God's promises) is the same: they share in the inheritance of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. Hence the two parallel destinies, heavenly and earthly, fall away.… Gentile Christians must also participate [in Israel's blessings], because they are coheirs with their union with Christ the Jew (Eph. 3:6). (ibid., 123)

Response to Modified Covenantalism

While it is more intricate and developed than the traditional view, modified covenantalism is no less problematic, being constructed on the foundation of the same faulty hermeneutic.[44] The adjustments made by Hoekema and Poythress have not forwarded their cause for several reasons.

First, modified covenantalism is a major concession to the contrary hermeneutical approach—the literal method. It acknowledges that dispensationalists were right all along when they contended for a literal future fulfillment of Old Testament promises to Israel.[45] Covenant theologians who grant this point have already conceded too much if they do not wish to uphold overall consistency and go the rest of the way with dispensationalists.

Second, distinguishing Jews and Gentiles as peoples with separate origins (ibid.) is also a concession to dispensationalism. If the two groups do have separate origins, then concluding that they also differ by nature and destiny[46] is an easy step, especially when it is acknowledged that the promises made to Israel (strictly in historic context) offered them a literal, political, messianic kingdom.

Third, it is neither helpful nor unique to argue (as modified covenantalists do) that Israel and the church do not have different destinies. Some dispensationalists (e.g., Erich Sauer) *have* long affirmed this view (ibid., 125), and other traditional dispensationalists agree that there is one overall people of God who have more in common than differences (e.g., see Pentecost, *TC*, 576). Regardless, having one large family does not mean all live in the same house or have the same occupation. They may live in different areas—some may be ministers and some farmers—but all are still children of the same parents. Likewise, there need not be only one heavenly and earthly destiny within the one family of God.[47] The rest of this debate is largely semantic[48] and, in any event,

does not provide a unique feature for the covenantal view.

Fourth, adding typology to the historical-grammatical method is a category mistake. There *are* Old Testament types that find a spiritual fulfillment in the New Testament. For example, the Passover lamb was a type of Christ (John. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7), and Hebrews 7–10 speaks of Christ fulfilling the typology of the Old Testament levitical system just as the Old Testament "shadows" of sabbaths and festivals are fulfilled in the "substance" of Christ (Col. 2:17). However, using typology of the levitical system in a way the New Testament explicitly approves is one thing; using it as a way of interpreting Old Testament prophecies made to Israel is another.

Fifth, it is inconsistent to agree (as both traditional and modified covenant amillennialists do) that the literal method of interpreting Old Testament prophecy is legitimate while simultaneously spiritualizing the Revelation 20 prophecy about the "thousand years" and the "first resurrection," claiming that neither are literal.[49]

Sixth, and finally, a significant remaining difference between the modified covenant view and the essential dispensational view is both interpretational and theological. By its illegitimate retroactive hermeneutic, the former destroys the distinctiveness of both Israel and the church.

The Hermeneutical Problem

Even with all its qualifications, the stark fact remains: Modified covenantalism, no less than the traditional covenantal view, embraces an inconsistent and unacceptable historical-grammatical method of interpretation that ends in the allegorization of many Old Testament prophecies about Israel.

First of all, modified covenantalism spiritualizes predictions meant for Israel, applying them to the church today. For instance, Zechariah's oracle (6:12–13) that the Messiah "will build the temple of the Lord" (see Poythress, *UD*, 114) supposedly is fulfilled in the church. Contextual (exegetical) examination reveals that this passage is meant for national Israel (to whom it was directed); only by illegitimately reading back *into* the Old Testament an originally unintended meaning can one reach this conclusion.

What is more, modified covenantalism further violates the historical-grammatical hermeneutic with New Testament texts on the church, insisting that the church and Israel are on identical footing in their inheritance of promises.[50]

Many Old Testament predictions proclaim that Israel will have a unique place in the messianic kingdom, *functionally* superior to that of the Gentiles.[51] Moses

said to Israel:

> The Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, *above all the nations*, as it is today.… He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor *high above all the nations he has made* and that you will be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised. (Deut. 10:15; 26:19)

Paul added,

> What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? *Much in every way*! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.… Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! (Rom. 3:1–2; 9:4–5)

Truly, God made Israel a special people and has granted to them a distinctive role in His coming messianic kingdom. Isaiah recorded:

> This is what the Lord says: "The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and those tall Sabeans—they will come over to you and will be yours; they will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, 'Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god' " (Isa. 45:14).

Indeed, Israel will take a lead role in teaching God's Word to the nations:

> In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isa. 2:2–3)

So while all God's people share equally in His salvation *personally and spiritually*,[52] nonetheless, there will be a special future place for Israel *collectively and nationally*.[53]

The Theological Problem

There is also a serious theological issue with the modified covenantal view: It ignores the church's status as a "new creation" of God (2 Cor. 5:17), which differentiates Israel from the Gentiles. Paul said, "… by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself *one new man out of the two*, thus making peace" (Eph. 2:15). Paul distinguishes three groups in 1 Corinthians 10:32: "Do not cause anyone to

stumble, whether [1] Jews, [2] Greeks [non-Jews] or [3] the church of God." And, in contrast with the church, which is grafted in, national Israel is still a distinct entity (cf. Rom. 11:25–26).

Further, modified covenantalism ignores the separate natures of Israel and the church in the one overall people of God, one heavenly (the church) and the other earthly (Israel).[54] The universal church is the body of Christ, which began at Pentecost[55] and wherein the unity of Jew and Gentile in one non-ethnic spiritual body is a mystery not known in Old Testament times.[56]

In addition, modified covenantalism gives the church coequal ethnic status with national Israel. Conversely, the New Testament is explicit that the church is not an ethnic group[57] and, hence, has no status as such alongside another ethnic group (Israel). There is no ethnic, social, or generic status in Christ (the church —Gal. 3:28); accordingly, to read church/Israel equality back into Old Testament passages that placed Israel in a functionally superior position in the coming kingdom results from eisegesis. Hermeneutically, once again, this fundamentally violates a tenet of the historical-grammatical method.

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: THE PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONAL SCHOOL OF INTERPRETATION

Not only are there modified forms of *covenantal* hermeneutics, but there are also mutant forms of *dispensational* interpretation. One of these is called "progressive dispensationalism" (see Blaising and Bock, *PD*), which adopts a hermeneutic with strong similarities to modified covenantalism.

Progressive dispensationalists admit they hold a "mediating" position with covenant amillennial views.[58] Focus will be on the hermeneutic presented by Craig Blaising (b. 1949) and Darrell Bock (b. 1952) in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, with some reference to *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* by Robert Saucy (b. 1937).[59]

What Progressive Dispensationalism Represents

Rejection of the Sensus Unum

Blaising and Bock reject that "*meaning* is what the author intended to say in

the original setting in which his text was produced;[60] *significance* refers to *all subsequent uses* of the text." In other words, in regard to the traditional formula, they reject that "there is only one interpretation of that original meaning [*sensus unum*] and many applications (significances)"; these are "helpful" but "simplistic" (*PD*, 64). There are, then, many meanings in a text, not just one, and we are to look for "a deeper understanding" (*sensus plenior*) than the author's expressed meaning, for "an authorial unity remains [in Scripture] that transcends the human authors" (ibid., 65, 67).

Rejection of the Author's Meaning

Blaising and Bock also reject the historical-grammatical limitation of a text's meaning to what the author meant by it:

> Textual meaning is not really limited to reproducing what the reader thinks the author might have meant. [The proper] understanding [of a text] often emerges from events and their sequel, rather than being simply inherent in the events themselves. (ibid., 64)

They then provide an illustration that betrays confusion between the *original, singular authorial meaning* and *subsequent significance derived from seeing the application (significance) of that one meaning*. The idea is that God means more by the text than the human author did:

> The reality of a mediated text about events and the presence of a divine author carries with it important implications for meaning in the biblical text.… These factors allow a text to speak beyond its human author. [Thus, a] connection to the original passage exists, but not in a way that is limited to the understanding of the original human author. (ibid., 66–67)

Rejection of a Fixed Objective Meaning

"Since Scripture is about linked events and not just abstract ideas, [the] meaning of events in texts has a dynamic, not a static quality" (ibid., 64). By the use of pejorative terms like *abstract* and *static*, Blaising and Bock barely conceal their abandonment of historical-grammatical, objectively fixed meaning.[61] The literal position is described as a "type of pharisaism" in contrast to "pluralism" and relativism (ibid., 71).

Rejection of the Interpreter's Attempted Neutral Role

Robert Thomas (b. 1928) points out that the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, as expressed by Milton Spenser Terry (1840–1914) in his classic *Biblical Hermeneutics*, maintains that the interpreter endeavors to take a neutral

stance toward the text so as not to read his own views into it: We "should aim rather to place ourselves in the position of the sacred writers" ("CPDH" in Walvoord, *ET*, 417). Bernard Ramm cites Martin Luther in this regard: "The best teacher is the one who does not bring his meaning into the Scripture but gets his meaning from Scripture" (*BH*, 595). Likewise, John Calvin asserted, "The Holy Scripture is not a tennis ball that we may bounce around at will. Rather it is the Word of God whose teaching must be learned by the most impartial and objective study of the text" (op. cit., 417–18).

Blaising and Bock instead hold that one's theological pre-understanding should be allowed to influence his textual interpretation: "Each of us has our own way of seeing, a grid for understanding that impacts what we expect to see in the text, the questions we ask of it, and thus the answers we get" (*PD*, 59). Although more implicit, Robert Saucy appears to hold a similar view, allowing his "progressive" idea of dispensations to color his view (*CPD*, 32).

Modification of the Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutic

In order to accomplish the goal to produce an "interactive," "progressive," and "dynamic" view of interpretation (op. cit., 77), Blaising and Bock make a severe alteration in the literal hermeneutic: adding the category of "literary-theological" to historical-grammatical.

> [This] literary theological level highlights the fact that there is an abiding message and unity in the text, which is laid out literarily in various ways called genres. Each genre presents truth in its own way and makes unique demands for how it should be read. (ibid.)

In other words, an up-front, *a priori* choice of genre becomes hermeneutically determinative of textual meaning. Blaising and Bock's exhortation to "*Be Genre Sensitive*" means that "the study of genre moves us into the area of interpretation that helps us unify the pieces of the message" (ibid., 85). In actuality, this method often becomes an interpretive grid through which views and conclusions from "contemporary scholarship" that are foreign and contrary to the text (as read by the standard method) can be read into it. Bock goes so far as to recommend a so-called "complementary" reading of the text, from the standpoint of later events, that allows "multiple meaning" by adding new ones (ibid., 64–67): "Does the expansion of meaning entail a change of meaning? … The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, to add to the revelation of a promise is to introduce 'change' to it through addition" ("CMA" in *TJ*, 71).

Saucy gives an example of how this works through his claim that there are

multiple meanings in Psalm 110: The Son of David reigns on two thrones, one in heaven (now) and later, during the Millennium, one on earth (*CPD*, 69–75). Of course, Saucy would not see this as an actual *change* in the prophecy, but as two *stages* encompassed in the original prediction—an inaugural stage in Christ's ascension and a final one in the Millennium. However, this *does* involve a real change, since the Messiah is seated in heaven at God's right hand only after His ascension (*now*, cf. v. 1); *later* He will be seated on David's earthly throne (after His return), during the Millennium. The original phrase "sit at my right hand" (in heaven) does not in its historical-grammatical sense also mean "on earth" (in Jerusalem); the latter is not announced until verse 2, which declares: "You [Messiah] will rule in the midst of Your enemies" with "the rod of Your [God's] strength out of Zion [Jerusalem]" (NKJV). This can only mean later, when Christ comes back to earth (since His "enemies" are not in heaven).[62]

This is not to say that the authority given Christ by the phrase "at My right hand" extends through the Millennium, at the "end" when "he hands over the kingdom to God" (1 Cor. 15:24), and nowhere does this verse say that Christ assumed David's throne when He was seated in heaven at the Ascension. To read this back into the text from alleged New Testament fulfillment is eisegesis. It is not the historical-grammatical method of understanding a verse in its context, but a revised hermeneutic that allows for alteration of meaning, whereby a later throne on earth is identified with an early one in heaven. This is not merely an "expanded" and "multileveled" use of the New Testament; it is a *revision* of the Old Testament author's textual meaning.

Acceptance of a Retroactive Hermeneutic

Bock also accepts a modified form of covenantal (retroactive) interpretation that Thomas calls "anachronistic," one that "read[s] New Testament revelation back into the context of the Old Testament under the banner of grammatical-historical methodology" ("CPDH" in *ET*, 421). Ironically, Blaising and Bock criticize the covenantal amillennial view for "reading the New Testament back into the Old" (*PD*, 97), but the progressive genre-driven hermeneutic has a retroactive move of its own, reading the Old Testament in light of New Testament events.

For example, Bock claims that the New Testament makes an "expansion of promise" or "additional inclusion" to Old Testament prophecy. As a dispensationalist, he rejects the cancellation of any yet-unfulfilled promise to Israel;[63] however, as a *modified* dispensationalist, he insists that the New

Testament makes changes in these promises *as meant by the original author*. This is achieved through denial of the *sensus unum* and embracing of the *sensus plenior*, that God meant more by the original text than the human author did.

Adoption of an Implicit Covenantal Hermeneutic

Ironically, the very people Bock is hoping to influence by his modified dispensational method believe that he has logically given up the farm. Poythress writes: "I am personally glad to see the moves that they [progressive dispensationalists] are making.… However, their position is inherently unstable" (*UD*, 137). Why? Because their hermeneutic leads into a covenantal view. Only time will tell whether the logic will work its way out historically, but since a bad methodology leads to a bad theology, one cannot help but wonder how long it will take progressive dispensationalists to become theologically covenantal.[64]

Thomas pinpoints the issue when he says this hermeneutic "amounts to an allegorical rather than a literal method of interpretation" ("CPDH" in *ET*, 422). This symbolic (typical) element is made possible by a revision of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic: "These texts have a message that extends beyond the original setting in which they were given" (Blaising and Bock, *PD*, 64).

An Evaluation of the Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutic

Since there is little new in this method that has not already been evaluated above, we will briefly summarize the problems, many of which are common to covenantal views as well.

Rejection of the Human Author's Meaning Is Self-Defeating

The claim that a text's meaning need not be limited to what the author meant by it is itself a textual claim (statement) demanding we limit our interpretation of that claim to what its author means. Hence, it is self-defeating.

Rejection of Objective Meaning Is Self-Defeating

Likewise, rejecting objective meaning for a "non-static" view is self-defeating, for the very statement "Meaning is not objective" presents itself as an objectively meaningful statement. The proponent of an unfixed view of meaning hangs on his own semantical gallows.[65]

Rejection of One Meaning (Sensus Unum) Is Self-Defeating

Furthermore, the rejection of singular textual meaning is self-defeating. Once again, the very statement "Texts may have more than one meaning" implies that *it* has only one meaning, and its author would object if the reader supplemented additional unintended meaning to his words.

God Cannot Mean More Than the Human Author Does

In addition, it makes no sense to say that God meant more by a given text than the human author did. God knows more about that *topic*, and God sees more *implications* in it, but He cannot *mean* more by it—the Bible is an inspired book in which God and the human author affirm the same text.[66]

Progressive Dispensationalism Confuses Meaning and Significance

The basic convolution here is made possible by rejecting the difference between meaning (*sense*) and significance (*implications*). There is only *one meaning* in a text—the one meant by the author. Simultaneously, there are *many implications and applications* of that text; God is aware of these, and subsequent readers can be aided by later revelation to see them.

This reality is explained by the doctrines of progressive revelation and progressive understanding of revelation.[67] With further revelation on a given topic, and, prophetically speaking, through its fulfillment, we better comprehend (and see more implications in) the original text. *We cannot legitimately get more meaning out of a text than the author put into it; the original meaning cannot be altered*. Any attempt to deny this brings affirmation of it in the very denial.

ANSWERING SOME OBJECTIONS TO THE LITERAL HERMENEUTIC

Objections to the literal historical-grammatical hermeneutic can be placed in two broad categories: biblical and nonbiblical. Regarding the former, many have been leveled at the literal interpretation of Scripture in general and of prophecy in particular. The main ones will be discussed here, while some will get more extensive treatment later.[68]

The Argument From 1 Corinthians 10:4

One example given of the New Testament allegorizing an Old Testament

passage is Paul's statement about the children of Israel in the wilderness: "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (NKJV). Covenantalists conclude that Paul is making Christ a spiritual fulfillment of the literal rock that followed Israel in the wilderness.

Response

This is a misunderstanding: The Rock that followed Israel was a literal rock, just as the manna they ate was literal food from heaven. The Greek word *spiritual* (*pneumatikos*) does not refer to the rock's nature, but to its source (God), who is spiritual. Just as a spiritual person (cf. 2:14–15) is a literal physical person whose life is dominated by the Spirit, even so the literal rock in the wilderness was dominated by the Spirit—it "followed them" for forty years with an endless source of water. *The rock was a Christophany*—that is, a literal manifestation of Christ and His supernatural power—as was the Angel of the Lord, who appeared in physical human form (e.g., cf. Gen. 18:2, 8, 22). There is no spiritualization in 1 Corinthians 10:4; a literal rock, from which literal water came, was literally a manifestation of Christ.[69]

The Argument From Romans 4:13, 16

> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.… Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

On this basis it is argued that Abraham has spiritual children, that the promise to him has a fulfillment in all of us, Jew or Gentile, who have faith in Christ—we are all Abraham's spiritual seed.

Response

This is true, but it does not result in the conclusion that the unconditional promises God made to Abraham's *literal* seed (the nation of Israel) are not literally true and will not literally be fulfilled. That Abraham has two "seeds," one physical and one spiritual, does not mean the latter replaces the former; *the spiritual seed is parallel, not a replacement*. There is a future for Abraham's physical descendants;[70] indeed, as will be shown,[71] all outstanding land- and

kingdom-promises to Israel will be fulfilled at the Second Coming.[72]

The Argument From Galatians 6:16

Paul's reference to the "Israel of God" is often taken by allegorists to mean "spiritual Israel," and that this is a proof that Paul is using the term *Israel* in a spiritual sense of the church.

Response

This interpretation is by no means necessary. In fact, given the context (which is how we discover meaning[73]), it should be taken of Israelites (Jews) who are true believers, which fits also with Paul's usage in other places. Consider the following evidence for not taking this as referring to a so-called spiritual Israel (the church).

First, Paul says nothing of a spiritual Israel; his reference to "Israel of God" delineates literal Israelites who have accepted the message of God's grace. This blends with his language in a similar allusion to literal Israelites who are false teachers, in contrast to "we … the circumcision [Jews], who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3 NKJV). "Israel of God" and "the circumcision [Jews], who worship God" are the same group: Jews saved by God's grace rather than by circumcision.

Second, this fits with the context, in which Paul is contending with those who taught legalistic messages of works, false teachers who were Israelites (Jews) not of God; that is, their teaching was contrary to the true gospel. In Galatians Paul refers to them as those who "try to compel you to be circumcised" and "keep the law" (6:12–13 NASB).

Third, Paul's language here matches his consistent use of *Israel* as a reference to literal Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham and David (e.g., cf. Rom. 9:3–4; 10:1). *There is not one New Testament example of the word* Israel *being used in a spiritual sense; it always refers to ethnic Israel*.[74] A. B. Davidson (1831–1902) summed it up well:

> Certainly the extreme anti-literal interpretation which considers the names Zion, Jerusalem, Israel, and the like to be mere names for the Christian Church, without reference to the people of Israel, does no justice either to the spirit of the Old Testament and its principle, or to the principles on which the apostle reasons. (*OTP*, 490 in Ramm, *PBI*, 254n)

The Argument From Matthew 2:15

Hosea (11:1) spoke of God bringing Israel out of Egypt. Regarding Matthew's citation of this passage as a fulfillment of bringing baby Jesus out of Egypt, allegorists argue that this is not a literal use of Hosea's prophecy.

Response

Again, while the New Testament sometimes gives an application (rather than an interpretation) of an Old Testament passage, it never spiritualizes away the literal truth of an Old Testament text. There is a central generic core truth in the prophecy: God's "son" (whether Israel, the messianic nation, or Jesus, its Messiah) was delivered from Egypt to provide salvation for God's people. Hosea applied this to the messianic nation and Matthew to the Messiah; both were God's "son," and both were delivered from Egypt. The meaning cannot change, even though the application can; this is an instance of the "one meaning, many applications" dictum of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

The Argument From 1 Peter 2:9

In Old Testament context (Ex. 19:6), the term *holy nation* is used of Israel; Peter here seems to use it in a spiritual sense of the church.

Response

First, Peter does not offer this as a spiritual fulfillment of what God promised Israel.

Second, this does not even appear to be a citation of the prophecy that Israel was to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6 NKJV). Peter says much more: Believers are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His [God's] own special people" (NKJV).

Third, at best, Peter borrows some of the Old Testament's language and appropriately applies it to New Testament believers, who, after all, are part of God's people as well.[75]

Fourth, and finally, even if this were a literal, word-for-word quotation of the earlier text, it would not justify an allegorical or spiritual interpretation of it, nor an identification of the New Testament church with Old Testament Israel. That

two entities have a common description of some characteristics does not mean they are identical. New Testament believers are just as literally God's people and priests as were Old Testament believers; in no sense does this text show that Peter is spiritualizing a text once intended for literal Israel and now identifying it with a spiritual Israel (the church). At most, Peter is borrowing language used of God's people in the Old Testament and applying it to God's people in the New Testament.

The Argument From Hebrews 8:7–13

Jeremiah 31:31 informs us that God said, "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel." The writer of Hebrews asserts that this applies to the New Testament church, and allegorists use this to justify understanding Old Testament predictions for Israel as being spiritually fulfilled in the church.

Response

This does not follow for several reasons.

First, for whomever the promise was intended, its fulfillment is *literal*, for those in the New Testament age and/or for those in the Old. New covenant benefits are literally (not allegorically) the possession of all believers.

Second, that the church is also the beneficiary of the new covenant does not mean there will not also be a literal fulfillment of it in national Israel. Applying the benefits to one group does not mean they are thereby cancelled for the other; it means that the same thing literally promised for Israel (to be fulfilled in the future) is also presently true of New Testament believers.

Third, while the covenant was *made* with Israel, it is also appropriately *applied* to the church (8:7–13); the benefits of Christ's death were intended by God from the very beginning for both.[76] The New Testament is *not* spiritualizing a promise that will not be literally fulfilled.[77]

The Argument From Luke 3:5

Citing Isaiah 40:4, Luke recorded the words of John the Baptist: "Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth." Since no such topographical changes occurred when John preached, it is objected by some covenant

theologians that this is an example of the New Testament spiritualizing an Old Testament prediction. Certainly, the New Testament does not take it literally.

Response

Of course the New Testament does not take it literally, and for very good reason: it was never intended to be taken literally. These are figures of speech, and *the literal method of interpretation insists that figures of speech be taken figuratively—this is* literally *the way they were meant to be understood*.[78]

Again, the use of symbols and metaphors is by no means incompatible with the literal hermeneutic. If it were, we would be compelled to hold that the Old Testament is often mistaken in other texts (many of which are nonprophetic), such as when it speaks of jubilant mountains (Isa. 49:13), rejoicing fields, and singing trees (Ps. 96:12); joyous deserts (Isa. 35:1), singing stars (Job 38:7), and handclapping trees (Isa. 55:12).

The Argument From Acts 2:17–20[79]

> In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. *I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord*.

The critic of the strictly literal method of interpretation notes that in no sense was the italicized section literally fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

Response

First, while Peter quotes the whole text from Joel 2, only the first part of it was fulfilled at Pentecost and following; the rest refers to Christ's return. Clearly, the signs in the heavens did not occur at Pentecost.

Second, since the first part of the text was literally fulfilled, there is no reason to believe that the second part will not also be literally fulfilled at the Second Coming.[80] This *supports* the literal method.

The Argument From Galatians 3:29

Paul wrote to the Galatians, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” He mentions also in Romans 4:13–16 that believers in Jesus are the spiritual seed of Abraham. However, in Genesis 15:5 (from which this is taken), God is speaking about the physical descendants of Abraham, who will be numberless.

Response

This text is a literal fulfillment of what God promised Abraham from the beginning, namely, that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3). As we’ve noted, Paul makes it clear that Abraham has both physical and spiritual descendants (Rom. 4:16), so the New Testament is not spiritualizing the prediction but confirming what God pledged. Indeed, God promised that the only physical descendants who are true heirs of the promise are those who receive the promise by faith (9:6); “in other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (v. 8). God literally fulfilled what He had promised: only those (Jew *or* Gentile) who believe will be recipients of His promise.[81]

Most of the other objections to a literal hermeneutic have already been addressed. To put them in terms of the response, the literal method does not exclude the use of symbols, figures of speech, types, poetry, or parables—these all are based on and convey a literal truth. Neither does it mean that a text has only one application or implication, nor that further revelation cannot add to our comprehension. The following are in addition to these misunderstandings of the literal method.

The Objection to the Term *Literal*

Some protest that the term *literal* is misleading because it is best understood in contrast to *figurative* or *symbolic*, which the literal method claims to embrace. Poythress argues that “it is a confusing term, capable of being used to beg many of the questions at stake in the interpretation of the Bible.… We had best not use the phrase [literal interpretation]” (*UD*, 96).

Response

First, it is not the *term* but the *truth* of this method that is important. If a

better term can be found, so much the better, as long as the truth is retained.

Second, because the term has a solid origin and a venerable history, it should not be discarded lightly. Again, it comes from the Latin *sensus literalis*, which has a classical, commonly understood, and stable meaning.

Third, it is an appropriate term in contrast to the nonliteral and allegorical interpretations to which it is opposed. If understood in the sense that all the Bible is literally true but not all is true literally, then *literal* seems to be the best term available.

Fourth, proposed alternatives are often cumbersome and complex; putting together terms suggested by revisionists would yield something along the burdensome lines of "the historical-grammatical-exegetical-biblical-contextual-literary-theological-canonical method" (Blaising and Bock, *PD*, 77, 100–101).

Fifth, and finally, those who object to *literal* often have an agenda by which —under a new added word or phrase—they can change the meaning of the classical hermeneutic into something else that suits their theological biases. Certainly, words like *dynamic*, *organic*, *progressive*, and *holistic* are inferior candidates, covering a multitude of hermeneutical sins; best to stick with what has withstood the test of time and leave the rest to exposition.

The Objection That *Literal* Is a Question-Begging Term Favoring Dispensationalism

Poythress contends that many dispensationalists use *literal* historical-grammatical as a "question-begging" method to support their system of belief (*UD*, 94). Since dispensationalists favor literal interpretation of Old Testament predictions about Israel, it's understandable that they would desire to use a literal hermeneutic to reach this conclusion.

Response

This objection reverses cart and horse: *Because* dispensationalists nonnegotiably maintain literal interpretation of Scripture, they are forced to acknowledge a literal national future for Israel.[82]

In actuality, the charge of choosing a hermeneutic to fit preconceived theology can more appropriately be applied to the covenant approach. Most covenant (specifically) and amillennial (generally) theologians use the literal method to interpret the rest of Scripture but then inconsistently switch to an

allegorical or symbolic method when it comes to texts that, if interpreted literally, would contradict their preestablished system.[83]

BIBLICAL PROPHECY: CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSISTENT LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Many methods of interpreting prophecy claim to be literal, but not all are consistently literal. There are several characteristics of a consistent method.[84]

It Interprets Prophecy Literally (Not Allegorically)

A consistent hermeneutic *must* be literal—there is no more reason to change one's hermeneutic when it comes to prophetic Scripture than there is for one to change to an allegorical hermeneutic when he moves from a newspaper's local news to the weather forecast. Statements about the future do not preclude literal predictions, as noted by Milton Terry: "While duly appreciating the peculiarities of prophecy, we nevertheless must employ in its interpretation essentially the same great principles as in the interpretation of other ancient writings" (*BH*, 418).

Back to the newspaper analogy: Someone might retort that this may be true of the news and weather, but not of the funnies—literal interpretation doesn't apply here, does it? The answer is yes: It is literally a comic section. The genre has changed, and all readers know it; the characters are not real people, but the points made are what the creator of each strip or frame believes are the literal truths he wishes to convey. Even comedy, like parable or symbolism, contains literal truth; in fact, we usually laugh at it *because* it conveys literal truth with which we identify.

It Interprets Prophecy Contextually

A consistent literal hermeneutic also takes prophetic statements contextually. For example, if a passage is speaking of literal national Israel, then we have no right to take it as meaning the New Testament church.[85] This is often done with regard to Israel's land-promises, given unconditionally to Abraham, specified geographically, and granted to them "forever."[86] This has never been fulfilled in

either the duration sense of *forever* or in the extended sense of the land dimensions. Even in Joshua's day, when God fulfilled the Mosaic guarantee of their conquering and possessing the Promised Land, they did not have the land all the way to the Euphrates (Josh. 21:43–45; cf. Gen. 15:18);[87] furthermore, after this time there is reference to the Abrahamic promise's fulfillment as yet future (cf. Amos 9:14–15). A consistent literal hermeneutic acknowledges that these land-promises have not been fulfilled and, therefore, will be in the future, with a restored national Israel.

It Interprets Prophecy With a Single Meaning (*Sensus Unum*)

Does a text have one interpretation or many? The *sensus unum* view insists there is only one (the one intended by both God and the human author), and the *sensus plenior* view claims there is more than one (the one intended by the human author and the one intended by God). Raymond E. Brown (b. 1928), tracing the *sensus plenior*, explains:

> The *sensus plenior* is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation. (cited in Ramm, *H*, 106–07)

We have already demonstrated that a text has only *one interpretation*, but that it may have *many implications/applications*; while both God and the human author affirmed the same meaning/interpretation,[88] the human author may or may not have had all of the implications/applications in mind. However, maintaining a deeper meaning than what the prophet had in mind[89] in the sense of either a double meaning or of God meaning more is a badly mistaken hermeneutic; likewise, reading back into a text retroactive meaning derived from later revelation is a serious interpretational error.

According to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, a given text's meaning is the meaning expressed by both God and the human author. Biblical inspiration means that in any given text, whatever the author affirms, God affirms, and whatever the author denies, God denies—no more and no less.[90] There cannot be two meanings to the same set of words in the same context; meaning is discovered by context, and there is only one context for these same words.[91]

Once again, we can learn more about a *topic* through further revelation, but the further revelation does not add any meaning to a previous *text*. It has no

retroactive right to be read back into previous revelation. The previous revelation is not dependent on subsequent revelation for its meaning or for any alleged deeper meaning.[92] Taken in this sense, the *sensus plenior* is misdirected.

It Recognizes Figures of Speech Within the Literal Meaning

The following examples help to illustrate that literal textual meaning does not eliminate the use of parables, metaphors, figures of speech, and even symbols (etc.) within literal interpretation.

Parables

Jesus told many parables, some of which were prophetic, but even though the literary genre was parabolic, nonetheless, there was a literal truth conveyed. While the parable is symbolic, it is symbolic of an actual reality. For instance, Jesus' parable of the tenants (Luke 20:9–18) clearly foretells His rejection by the Jews, His crucifixion, and His return to earth. The "servants" of the owner (God) that were beaten by the tenants (vinedressers—Jews) were prophets; the son of the vineyard owner who was killed by the tenants was Christ; the destruction of the tenants is the Second Coming.[93] Jesus drove home the point by quoting Psalm 118:22 about rejecting the "chief cornerstone" (NKJV). Literal truths about the future, taught through a parable.

Metaphors and Similes

Scripture is replete with metaphors and similes: God is metaphorically represented as a "rock" (Ps. 31:3) and a "strong tower" (Prov. 18:10). While these are not true literally, they are literally true: the immutable God literally is as solid as a rock.[94] In no way does usage of metaphor/simile eliminate literal biblical truth but, rather, reinforces it through lively, descriptive, evocative terms.

Symbols

Many symbols are used in the Bible. As noted above, Revelation is full of them, as are the books of Zechariah and Daniel. Gentile nations are seen by God as wild beasts (Dan. 7) or as a metallic man (Dan. 2) who will be broken in pieces by a great stone (Christ) at His return (vv. 44–45). But none of these symbols spiritualizes away the literal nations and persons of which they are symbols—the literal hermeneutic does not eliminate the text's literal meaning.

Symbols help to express truth in a vital and colorful way, just as do other figures of speech like *hyperbole, satire,* and *anthropomorphism*.

Poetry

Some of the Old Testament's magnificent prophecy is expressed in poetic form. This, again, in no sense diminishes the literalness of its referent. God, humans, animals, hills, and trees are all literal realities; speaking of them poetically does not make them figurative. Poetic language, rather than de-literalizing or dematerializing its object, makes it even more vivid (see Ramm, *PBI*, 228), as the remarkable prophecies of Isaiah demonstrate.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR STANDARD HERMENEUTICS

The literal historical-grammatical method of interpretation is firmly rooted in church history. Even those (like Augustine) who were prone to allegorize admitted that literal interpretation was the foundation on which the others should be built. Since the literal method is rooted in aristotlelianism (just as the allegorical method is based in platonism), we'll begin with citations from the fountainhead.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

It is no accident that the grandfather of the literal method was empirical in his epistemology,[95] for those who hold that knowledge begins in sensory experience are not easily swayed to allegorism. Aristotle affirmed not only the grammatical sense of meaning but also that there is only one meaning (*sensus unum*) to an affirmation:

> Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images. (*OH*, 16a.4–8)
>
> The first class of simple propositions is the simple affirmation, the next, the simple denial: all others are only one by conjunction.… We call those propositions single which indicate a single fact, or the conjunction of the parts of which result in unity: those propositions, on the other hand, are separate and many in number, which indicate many facts, or whose parts have no conjunction. (ibid., 17a, 15–18)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

These things are such as fall [plainly] under our observation, and are clearly and unambiguously in express terms set forth in the Sacred Scriptures. And therefore the parables ought not to be adapted to ambiguous expressions. (*AH*, 2.27)

[On Antichrist's number of 666,] it is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved. (ibid., 5.30.3)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

Tertullian chides allegorists for distorting the literal truth of prophecy:

For some, when they have alighted on a very usual form of prophetic statement, generally expressed in figure and allegory, though not always, distort into some imaginary sense even the most clearly described doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. (*ORF*, 19)

Let me dispel at once the preliminary idea on which they rest—their assertion that the prophets make all their announcements in figures of speech. Now, if this were the case, the figures themselves could not possibly have been distinguished, inasmuch as the verities would not have been declared, out of which the figurative language is stretched. And, indeed, if all are figures, where will be that of which they are the figures? How can you hold up a mirror for your face, if the face nowhere exists? (ibid., 20)

Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 235)

These words he [Noetus] cites without understanding what precedes them. For whenever they [Noetus and his followers] wish to attempt anything underhand, they mutilate the Scriptures. But let him quote the passage as a whole, and he will discover the reason kept in view in writing it. (*EWFHAHON*, 4)

Origen (c. 185–c. 254)

In spite of his well-known allegorization of some of Scripture, Origen had an underlying literal hermeneutic. He also understood some basic hermeneutical principle like the following:

It belongs only to those who are wise in the truth of Christ (and to all them it does belong) to unfold the connection and meaning of even the obscure parts of prophecy, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, and interpreting each passage according to the usage of Scripture writers. (*DP*, 7.11)

Augustine (354–430)

It is well known that Augustine widely allegorized Scripture, including prophetic passages such as Revelation 20 on the Millennium (see *CG*). However wrong he was in practice, though, in principle Augustine held the literal to be the basis of the allegorical (which was a spiritual application of it):

I do not censure those who may have been able to carve out some spiritual interpretation from every historical fact recounted, so long as they take good care, and foremost to adhere to the historical fact.

(ibid., 17.3)

No one should object to such reflections and others even more appropriate that might be made concerning the allegorical interpretation of the Garden of Eden, so long as we believe in the historical truth manifest in the faithful narrative of those events. (ibid., 13.21)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *On Interpretation* perpetuated the peripatetic's literal *sensus unum* hermeneutic:

An affirmation signifies something about something, and the subject is either the name or that which has no name, and one thing must be signified about one thing in an affirmation. (*AOI*, II.1.125, 127)

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

The Reformation might have been aborted had not Luther relied on the heart of literal interpretation: "The words [of Scripture] are to be considered according to the intention of the speaker" (*BTW*, 129).

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Calvin's commentaries on Scripture, and his basic theology built on them, are known for their exemplary use of the literal hermeneutic:

We must consider, I say, how far interpretation can be permitted to go beyond the literal meaning of the words, still making it apparent that no appending of human glosses is added to the Divine Law, but that the pure and genuine meaning of the Lawgiver is faithfully exhibited. (*ICR*, 2.8.8)

George Peters (1825–1909)

Where a literal construction will stand, the furthest from the letter is commonly the worst. There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changes the meaning of words … making anything what it pleases, and bringing in the end all truth to nothing. (*TK*, 1.47)

"The only true standard of interpretation is the grammatical (aided by the historical)" (ibid., 9).

Milton Terry (1840–1914)

First we should ascertain the historical position of the prophet; next the scope and plan of his book; then the usage and import of his words and symbols; and, finally, ample and discriminating comparison of the parallel Scriptures should be made. (*BH*, 418)

"A new language was not made for the authors of Scripture; they conformed

to the current language of the country and time" (ibid., 73).

"If the literal meaning of any word or expression makes good sense in its connections, it is literal; but if the literal meaning does not make good sense, it is figurative" (ibid., 40).

"[The interpreter is to] proceed on the presupposition that the word is literal unless there is a good reason for deciding otherwise" (ibid.).

"The interpreter must have strict regard (1) to the historical standpoint of the writer or prophet, (2) to the scope and context, and (3) to the analogy and import of similar symbols and figures elsewhere used" (ibid., 356–57).

Merrill Tenney (1904–1985)

> The futurist school of thought, because of its insistence upon an interpretation as literal as possible, has been a healthy antidote to an overbalanced symbolism that has tended to make Revelation mean everything except the obvious. (*IR*, 145)

"Symbols as a whole are not taken from fanciful or imaginary sources, but are related to ideas that would be readily recognized by the readers" (ibid., 193).

"The more literal an interpretation that one adopts, the more strongly will he be construed to be a futurist" (ibid.).

Charles Feinberg (1909–1997)

"No prophecy of the Word is to be interpreted solely with reference to itself … but all other portions of the prophetic revelation are to be taken into account and considered" (*PA*, 39).

"[When] the symbols are explained in the immediate context, in the book in which they occur, or elsewhere in the Word, no room [is] left to the imaginations of man to devise explanations" (ibid., 55).

Bernard Ramm (1916–1992)

"The interpreter should take the literal interpretation of a prophetic passage as his limiting or controlling guide" (*PBI*, 253).

"The literal interpretation is the point of departure for prophetic interpretation" (ibid., 258).

"The literal fulfillment of some of the prophecies within the Old Testament period indicates the validity of that principle" (ibid., 261–62).

John Walvoord (1910–2002)

> If a person does not interpret the plain statements of prophecy literally, there is no rule by which any consensus of meaning can be established; the existence of a wide diversity of interpretations shows the failure of this approach. (*ET*, 10)

Dwight Pentecost (b. 1915)

"No question facing the student of eschatology is more important than the question of the method to be employed in the interpretation of prophetic Scriptures" (*TC*, 1).

"The observance of these sound rules of prophetic interpretation [literal, grammatical, historical, etc.] will lead one into a correct [i.e., futuristic] interpretation of the Scriptures" (ibid., 64).

The literal method involves giving each word "the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking" (ibid., 9).

> The interpretation of prophecy requires attention to the same considerations in regard to words, context, grammar, and historical situations that are the accepted principles in respect to any field of interpretation. (ibid., 64)
>
> It is impossible to mix the methods of interpretation in the field of prophecy. One method must be adopted and used throughout. It may be safely stated that the problem in the interpretation of prophecy is this problem of consistency. (ibid.)

Charles Ryrie (b. 1925)

> [Dispensational futurism] is built on a consistent use of the literal, normal, or plain method of interpretation without the addition of any other principle.… Classical dispensationalism is a result of consistent application of the basic hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation. No other system of theology can claim this. (*DT*, 85)

CONCLUSION

The basic disagreement in biblical interpretation is between the literal and allegorical methods, and examination of the latter unveils foundational flaws. The allegorical method as such is an invalid hermeneutic because all true meaning is literal meaning;[96] also, any allegorical (nonliteral) means of interpretation presupposes a literal meaning, since one cannot know what is not literal unless he knows what is literal. The allegorical hermeneutic, including its covenantal mutations, is self-defeating, without objective criteria, contrary to common sense, inconsistent, and unbiblical.

Within the camp of literal interpreters are some who claim to utilize a literal

hermeneutic but do not do so consistently in all sections of the Bible, particularly prophecy. This inconsistency is due to a covert use of the allegorical approach in search of an alleged “deeper meaning” or by reading back spiritual meaning into literal Old Testament predictions. By contrast, the historical-grammatical method, an unwavering literal hermeneutic, brings much consensus among those who adhere; this will be made manifest in the following discussions.[97]

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

No study of the Last Things is complete without a treatment of the kingdom of God; in fact, God's kingdom (with its many dimensions) is so essential to our understanding of eschatology that we will discuss it first. From this beginning we'll be able to expand on elements including the nature of Israel, the nature of the church, the relationship between them, and the relationship between present and future kingdom aspects. This chapter is based on an exhaustive study of the more than three hundred biblical references to *kingdom,* in addition to relevant passages that refer to God's kingdom by other names.

BIBLICAL USAGE AND HISTORICAL APPLICATION OF *KINGDOM*

Various Hebrew words for *kingdom* are used 146 times in the Old Testament. The vast majority refer to earthly political kingdoms; only a few are about God's kingdom, and these are later in the Old Testament: For example, Chronicles has one; Isaiah has two; Psalms has five; Daniel has the most Old Testament references to God's kingdom, with seven (Heb: *malku*).

The Greek word for *kingdom* (*basileia*), used 161 times in the New Testament, is employed three times of the devil's domain,[1] seven times of earthly kingdoms,[2] and three times in a general sense.[3] Of course, the rest are not

all of the New Testament references to God's kingdom, only those that actually use the word *kingdom*.

The root meaning of the term *kingdom* is a kingship, a royal reign (Arndt and Gingrich, *GELNT*, 134); it involves the sovereign authority of a ruler, the activity of a ruler, as well as the realm and benefits of the ruler (Kittel, *TDNT*, 1.579–80). In short, *kingdom* is a reign or dominion, whether of God, the devil, or human potentates. *Kingdom*'s theological meaning includes several dimensions, including God's overall reign in the universe, His present spiritual reign in His people, and His future messianic reign on earth.

Alva McClain (1888–1968) offers three essential elements of a biblical definition of kingdom: "First, [there is] a ruler with adequate authority and power; second, a realm of subjects to be ruled; and third, the actual exercise of the function of rulership" (*GK*, 17). God's kingdom is also called the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt. 3:2; 10:7), my Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:29), the kingdom of God's dear Son (cf. Col. 1:12), and the kingdom of our father David (Mark 11:10).

Of the numerous views on the kingdom, McClain lists eight (*GK*, 8–14):

(1) the national kingdom (of Israel), held by Philo (b. c. 25 B.C.);
(2) the millennial kingdom, held by the early Fathers;
(3) the celestial kingdom (heaven), held by the later church;
(4) the ecclesiastical kingdom (the church), held by Augustine (354–430);
(5) the spiritual kingdom (God rules in hearts), held by A. B. Bruce (1831–1899);
(6) the moral kingdom (the reign of moral law), held by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804);
(7) the liberal social kingdom (progressive social improvement), held by Walter Rauschenbush (1861–1918); and
(8) the eschatological kingdom (unfulfilled expectations of Jesus), held by Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965).[4]

GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN FOR HIS KINGDOM

Because God is eternal,[5] so are all of His plans. That God's rule of the universe is from the very beginning of its creation[6] is another way of speaking about His sovereignty.[7] His earthly reign, and particularly that of Messiah, is one

planned from all eternity: “The King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, *the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world*’ ” (Matt. 25:34, on the Eschaton).

God’s kingdom means God’s *reign*, and the various times, spheres, and purposes of His overall reign have taken on different forms. We must distinguish these forms in order to have a proper understanding of this topic.

God’s Universal Kingdom

In harmony with what McClain calls “the universal kingdom of God” (op. cit., 22), the Bible speaks of God’s all-encompassing, invisible, everlasting reign over the entire universe. God is sovereign over all creation, including good and evil angels and good and evil human beings.[8] God reigns supreme: “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made” (Ps. 145:13).

God’s Messianic Kingdom

The messianic kingdom is a visible, earthly, political kingdom promised to Israel in which Christ, her Messiah, will reign from a throne in Jerusalem over the whole earth, with His apostles and other disciples serving Him. This rule will bring both peace and justice for all people and will last “a thousand years.”[9] McClain calls this “the mediatorial kingdom,” God’s reign through a divinely appointed representative (op. cit., 41), set up by God in Israel and culminating in the messianic reign.

God’s Spiritual Kingdom (in the Broad Sense)

Beginning with Jesus’ announcement of the mystery of the kingdom and the parables connected to it (see Matt. 13ff.), God established a spiritual reign that represents professing Christendom; the wheat (true believers) and the weeds therein will not be separated[10] until the end of this kingdom at Christ’s second coming.[11] This rule is called “the kingdom of heaven” in Matthew and “the kingdom of God” in parallel passages (Mark 4, Luke 13, et al.).

Some have suggested that, in this case, *heaven* is a softened reference to *God*

for Jews who reverenced His name and would not speak or write it.[12] Even if so, however, Matthew does occasionally use "kingdom of God";[13] furthermore, he uses the term *God* almost fifty times in his gospel.

Others hold that "kingdom of heaven" (found only in Matthew) should be used of this broader spiritual kingdom with both good and evil beings in it, and that "kingdom of God" refers only to the narrower sense of a kingdom containing only saved persons. This seems to be incorrect for the following reasons.

First, the Synoptic Gospels[14] use "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" interchangeably. In Matthew 3:2 John says, "Repent for the kingdom of *heaven* is near," and in Mark 1:15 he says, "The kingdom of *God* is near. Repent and believe." In Matthew 5:3 Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of *heaven*," and in Luke 6:20 he says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of *God*." More likely, Matthew's unique "kingdom of heaven" was accounted for by a Jewish tendency to use euphemistic terms for God's revered name. *Or*, with Matthew's strong emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, perhaps he wished to make the more direct messianic connection in the minds of his audience with the use of Daniel's phrase "God of heaven" (Dan. 2:44–45).

Second, the kingdom parables recorded by Mark and Luke (which use "kingdom of God") contain evidence of earthly evil therein, *before* the final harvest:

(1) In the parable of the sower (Mark 4; Luke 8), at least three of the soils involved people who did not continue to believe.[15]
(2) In the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4; Luke 13), "the kingdom of God" represents the tree of Christendom that shelters many creatures (Mark 4:32).
(3) The parable of the leaven (Luke 13) depicts the growth of yeast, which is often a scriptural picture of evil.[16]

"Kingdom of heaven" cannot be distinguished from "kingdom of God" by claiming that one still includes evil and the other does not; in addition to interchangeability, both are used in parables that include evil under "the kingdom of God."[17]

Third, that Matthew's gospel also uses "kingdom of God" (e.g., 12:28; 19:24;

21:32, 43) suggests that he may regard them interchangeably, for he makes no distinction with "kingdom of heaven." Again, it seems likely that his use of the latter regards its messianic connection to Daniel, who said that "the God of heaven" will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44).

God's Spiritual Kingdom (in the Narrow Sense)

The invisible spiritual reign of God is in the hearts of believers, beginning when the first person was saved and continuing throughout eternity. God's spiritual kingdom excludes all the unsaved, for one can enter only by believing and being born again:[18]

> "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.… I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again' " (John 3:3–7).

If no one can enter "the kingdom of God" unless he is born again, then this kingdom must be distinguished from the above use of the same phrase,[19] which includes both the saved and the unsaved. Those who profess faith and yet do not possess true faith are still part of God's broader kingdom (cf. Matt. 7:21–22).

Since the narrow sense of God's spiritual kingdom is ultimately the equivalent of heaven, which is treated elsewhere,[20] we will not discuss it further except to contrast it with the broad sense of God's kingdom.

"The Kingdom of God"		
	Broad Sense of the Term	Narrow Sense of the Term
Duration	From Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming	From the first saved person into eternity
Subjects	The saved and the unsaved	The saved only
Location	On earth	On earth and in heaven
Entrance	Profession of faith	Possession of faith

God's Spiritual Reign in the Church

Because “kingdom of God” is also used of the New Testament church, some conclude that the two are identical, but they do not have the same scope. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (for example) are in God’s kingdom (cf. Luke 13:28), and the church did not exist in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:3–6)—it is a mystery only later revealed (Col. 1:26–27) that began at Pentecost (Acts 2), when believers were baptized into Christ’s body (1:5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).[21] Peter used “the keys of the kingdom” (cf. Matt. 16:19)[22] to open the door of the gospel to the Jews (Acts 2; cf. 11:15) and to the Gentiles (10:1ff.); even people saved in New Testament times before Pentecost were in God’s kingdom but not in the church. *The kingdom of God is broader than the church*. All who are in the church are in the kingdom of God, but not all in the kingdom of God are in the church—again, such as Old Testament saints, John the Baptist, and other believers who died before the message of Pentecost came to them (cf. Acts 1:5, 19:1–7).

God’s Overarching, Constant, Invisible, Universal Reign

Before we discuss the messianic kingdom and its future implications, we’ll quickly look at God’s universal kingdom. This divine reign is the foundation for all other spheres of His sovereign rule, including not only the physical and animate creation but also all angels and all human beings.[23] “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all” (1 Chron. 29:11; cf. Prov. 21:1).

In one sense, *everything* is in God’s kingdom, for since He reigns over the entire universe and nothing is out of His control, it is appropriate to speak of everything as under His dominion.[24] We have already seen (above) that this is clearly taught in the Old Testament; it is also implied in several New Testament passages.[25] God’s universal reign is

(1) from heaven, where He is exalted above all (1 Chron. 29:11);
(2) majestic (Ps. 145:5, 11–12);
(3) eternal (Ps. 145:13); and
(4) extended over all earthly kingdoms (Ps. 103:19).

In later Judaism the understanding of this last aspect was part of the outward

messianic kingdom proclaimed by John, Jesus, and the apostles.

THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

As noted above, one extremely important application of the biblical "kingdom of God" is to the visible, earthly, political reign of the promised Jewish Messiah. Even in God's all-encompassing, invisible, universal reign, there is one distinct aspect focused on human kingdoms: "The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and *his kingdom rules over all*" (Ps. 103:19). Daniel further developed this into a revelation of the basis for Christ's teaching about a future political messianic kingdom on earth.[26] Only an unacceptable allegorical interpretation of these texts[27] can avoid this conclusion.

The Nature of and Biblical Basis for the Messianic Kingdom

The scriptural grounds for belief in a literal, political messianic kingdom span from one end of God's Word to the other.[28] Shortly we'll survey the main supporting texts; for now, a brief description of its various dimensions.

McClain lists six aspects of the messianic kingdom:

(1) the spiritual dimension;
(2) the political dimension;
(3) the ecclesiastical dimension;
(4) the economic (social) dimension;
(5) the physical dimension; and
(6) the moral dimension (*GK*, 66–85).

While some of these aspects will be stressed more than others in the following discussion, they are all part of the messianic kingdom, which will be an overarching religious, moral, political, and economic system.

Genesis 49:10

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his." *A descendent of Judah will come to rule*.

Even before this, the promise of a Messiah was given to Adam and Eve after

the Fall (in 3:15); however, little (if anything) can be deduced from this text about Messiah having a future earthly political reign—it reveals that He is to "crush the head" of the serpent and thereby bring spiritual deliverance for Adam's race. The same can be said for other passages narrowing down the messianic line by giving the blessing through Shem (9:26) and Abraham, who was promised to be a channel of blessing to all nations (12:3), and to have a land in which they would live (13:15, 18; 15:7, 18). While land ownership might imply some kind of ruler, nothing is said about this until Abraham's son Isaac had Jacob; Jacob had twelve sons, one of whom was named Judah.

Exodus 19:6

When God ratified the Mosaic covenant[29] with His people, He said, "You will be for me a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation." This records the establishment of a theocracy:[30] Israel accepted the role of being directly ruled by God. They were God's kingdom on earth, and He was their King.

Deuteronomy 17:14–20

Long before Israel had an earthly king,[31] Moses was told that there would later be rulers connected with the unconditional land-promises God gave to Abraham:

> When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses.
>
> He must be from among your own brothers.… He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.… Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel. (cf. Gen. 35:11)

Even under Moses the kingdom did have a political dimension, though this would become more apparent in the later monarchy.[32] Furthermore, *while rule was to be based on God's law, it was a political rule nonetheless*. Indeed, Israel was promised:

> If only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. *You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you*. (Deut. 15:5–6)

2 Samuel 7:11–12, 16–17

David desired to build a house for the Lord, but God declared that instead He would build the house of David, a dynasty from which Messiah would come and reign on David's throne.

> The Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.… *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever*.

While the immediate context refers much of this prediction to Solomon, David's son (cf. v. 14), it is clear from the use of *forever* that further descendants were in mind as well, and other passages confirm that this passage is a prophecy that Messiah would come through the line of David and reign on David's throne.[33] When Jesus was heralded at His triumphal entry, the Jerusalem crowd shouted, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" and "Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:10) and "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:9). They were expecting the start of the promised messianic kingdom.

Like the Abrahamic covenant,[34] this Davidic covenant, which was an extension of it, was irrevocable, "everlasting," based on "the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:1–3 NKJV). Israel *would* sin and need repentance, but God promised,

> I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him.… My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn [strength] will be exalted.…
>
> I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. *I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure*. If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but *I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness*.
>
> I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky. (Ps. 89:20–37)

God put His name on the line. The Davidic kingdom—a political, religious, moral, visible, earthly kingdom—would be restored and remain forever.

Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah wrote of the coming Messiah: "To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and *the government will be on his shoulders*. And he will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father [Father of eternity], Prince of Peace." Christ's deity *and* political reign are mentioned here. He is not only divine ("Mighty God") and human ("to us a child is born"), but He will reign as the God-man, for "the government will be on his shoulders."

Isaiah 11:11–12

In order to accomplish this literal political restoration of the Davidic kingdom, God will again bring His people to their land.

> In that day *the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people* from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.
>
> He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

Not only is this a literal prediction of a literal return to a literal land, it has been literally fulfilled in part since May 15, 1948, when Israel was declared a nation. Millions of Jews from all over the globe have already returned. If this has been literally fulfilled, why should there be any doubt about the restoration of the messianic political kingdom as well?

Isaiah 24:23

Even the center of Messiah's reign is specified: "The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for *the Lord* Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously."

Zechariah speaks of Messiah's return to the place He left:

> On that day *his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives*, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. (Zech. 14:4)

Again, when the literal sense makes good sense, seeking other sense results in nonsense. God's angels at Christ's ascension presented it literally:

> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same *Jesus*, who has been taken from you into heaven, *will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11).

Since they saw Him go visibly, physically, and gloriously, He will return visibly, physically, and gloriously. If the King, joined to and inseparable from His kingdom, will return as such, why should we expect any less of His kingdom?

Isaiah 32:1

"*A king will reign in righteousness* and rulers will rule with justice." The Old Testament repeatedly reminds us that the messianic kingdom will be *monarchial*. Messiah will sit on David's throne (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12ff.), and "the government will be on his shoulders" (Isa. 9:6): "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill" (Ps. 2:6); He is "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16).

Jeremiah 31:31–33

> "The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the [Mosaic] covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

This covenant, the new covenant, contains some significant implications concerning the messianic reign.

First, the new covenant is new in relation to the time-bound Mosaic covenant, which it replaced, but it gives no implication of annulling the unconditional, timeless Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.[35]

Second, the New Covenant is a continuation of God's promises that there would be a moral and spiritual restoration of national Israel, called "the house of Israel" (v. 31). As such, the New Covenant is an implied promise of the restoration of the whole messianic kingdom.

Third, God's promise is unconditional and irrevocable:

> "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the Lord, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.… Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done" (vv. 36–37).

Ezekiel 11:23

Tragically, the early kingdom, set up as a vehicle through which Messiah could reign, was destroyed by the Babylonians. Ezekiel records the final moment when God's glory, the visible symbol of His presence in the kingdom, departed:

“The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.” Even the secular Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (c. 37–100) recorded the regal absence (*JW*, 5.5.5).

Hosea 3:4

At this point political supremacy was transferred to the Gentiles. Hosea foretold: “The Israelites will live many days without king or prince,” and from here onward it was a matter of prophesying a coming messianic kingdom.

Amos 9:11

God will rebuild in direct continuity with the Davidic kingdom that was defeated: “In that day *I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will* repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and *build it as it used to be*.” There is no sense in which a merely spiritual restoration can meaningfully fulfill this prediction.

Micah 4:7–8

The restored kingdom will not be only spiritual and moral but also political:

> I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion [Jerusalem] from that day and forever. As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, *the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem*.

Daniel 2:44

After speaking of four great successive earthly kingdoms—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome—and ten kings to come after them, Daniel declares that “In the time of those kings, *the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that* will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It *will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever*.”

What stands out here is that, given Jesus’ teaching is rooted firmly in the Old Testament (cf. Matt. 5:17–18) and that John and Jesus used a phrase reminiscent of Daniel’s,[36] it is difficult to believe there is not within these words an affirmation of an outward, literal, political kingdom. Also, in Matthew 19:28, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Again, the literal sense[37] of a visible, outward political kingdom seems clearly to be in view; this is the common (if not universal) biblical use of terms like *tribes* and *Israel*.

Daniel 4

The whole point of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliating experience was for him to realize, as he would eventually confess: "*The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men* and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men" (v. 17).

> At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. (v. 34)

This is obviously said in the context of an earthly political kingdom.

Daniel 7

Between the second chapter of Daniel's references to a political kingdom of God and Daniel 7, which picks up and expands on the same theme, *all* the references to the word *kingdom* refer to a literal, earthly, political reign.[38]

Matthew 26:63–64

This text is of supreme importance because Christ used it of Himself before the Jewish High Priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus' forthright answer is absolutely astounding: "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future *you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven*." Given the messianic political context in Daniel, there seems to be no way to consistently utilize historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture without concluding that this will be a literal messianic kingdom.

Daniel 9:24–27

Seventy "sevens" are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens," and sixty-two "sevens."

> It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two "sevens," the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.
>
> He will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven." In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes

desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

Meditating on the "seventy years" of the Babylonian captivity (v. 2), Daniel was told that there would come seventy "sevens" (of years) relating to Messiah. More specifically, he was informed that after sixty-nine "sevens," or 483 years, Messiah would die (v. 26), but only after He had made "reconciliation for iniquity" (v. 24 NKJV) and sealed up "vision and prophecy" about His coming (ibid.).

Then the time interval is specified: Daniel was told there would be sixty-nine "sevens" between "the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" and the coming of "the Anointed One, the ruler" (v. 25). The first date is generally held to be 445/444 B.C.[39] Given that the 483 years (69 × 7) are probably Jewish lunar years of 360 days (30 days × 12 months), the extra five days for each 365-day Gregorian-calendar year yields a total of about six years (more than 2,400 days) that must be added to the 483. From the year of Cyrus's decree, 444 B.C. (and the 6+ years for the extra calendar days, yielding roughly 450), minus the 483 years foretold by Daniel, we reach the date of Christ being crucified (the Anointed One being cut off), about A.D. 33.[40]

We may now summarize some of the salient points from the above texts about the messianic kingdom.

The Old Testament Foretold That a Literal Messiah Would Come to Reign

According to *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* by J. Barton Payne (1922–1979), some one hundred thirteen prophecies of the coming Messiah were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament.[41] Many of these are connected to the claims that He will one day set up a messianic government in Jerusalem and reign over the whole earth.

Jesus Said He Is the Fulfillment of Daniel 7

As mentioned previously, Jesus cited this messianic passage at His trial before the Jewish high priest (Matt. 26:64).

Jesus' Favorite Term for Himself (Son of Man) Is Rooted in This Claim

It is Christ's claim to deity in His identity as the Messiah of Daniel 7 (cf. Matt. 26:63–64). Daniel even calls Him "the Ancient of Days" (7:22), which an earlier reference applied to God (vv. 9, 13). Jesus' insistence that it pointed to Him as "the Son of God" indicates that He knew it as a reference to deity, and the reaction of Caiaphas removed all doubt: "The high priest tore his clothes and

said, '*He has spoken blasphemy*!' " (Matt. 26:65).

Daniel 2 Prophesies the Messiah's Destruction of World Powers

This literal, visible, political messianic rule will come only after the four kingdoms and the ten kings (v. 44 cf. 7:24) have all been crushed by a great Stone (Christ, v. 45).

This Future Divine Reign Will Never End[42]

> He [the Messiah to come] was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. *His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*.… The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, *for ever and ever*. (Dan. 7:14, 18; cf. v. 27)

The Messiah's Kingdom Is Given to Him by the Father

> In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man [the Messiah], coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [God the Father] and was led into his presence. He [the son of man] was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. (vv. Dan. 7:13–14)

All Other Earthly Kingdoms Will Serve Under the Messianic Kingdom

> The sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him. (v. 27)

Messiah Will Bring Righteousness and Justice to the Earth

The messianic reign means that Jesus Christ will rule in righteousness and justice forever on David's throne.[43]

The Messiah Will Reign With the Saints

Christ will not rule alone; the "saints of the Most High" will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever … for ever and ever" (v. 18); "the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" (v. 22).

The Issue of "Forever"

Before moving on to the New Testament's teaching on the coming messianic

kingdom, one problem should be addressed. Throughout these texts (above), Messiah's kingdom is said to last "forever," whereas there are Old Testament hints that it will not be forever: "In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished *after many days*" (Isa. 24:21–22).

McClain (*GK*, 216) believes that the "many days" correspond to the Millennium;[44] whatever the case, the New Testament says that the messianic reign has an actual ending point:

> He [Messiah] must reign *until he has put all his enemies under his feet*. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.… When he has done this, *then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him*, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:25–28)

John also declares that the messianic reign is temporary, affirming six times that it is a thousand years long (Rev. 20).[45]

In response, three brief comments are in order.

First, the Hebrew word (*olam*) often translated *forever* can (and sometimes does) mean "a long period of time" rather than "eternal"—the mountains, for example, are called "everlasting" (Micah 6:2). The context determines the meaning.

Second, even though Christ's reign is less than literally eternal, the results of it are everlasting. Further, it does continue forever in that it is subsumed under the Father's direct control. Accordingly, His reign—both directly and indirectly—*will* be forever.

Third, it is not uncommon for future events to be initially lumped together,[46] and then for further revelation to show that they are separable. Isaiah 66 (see vv. 22–24) joins Messiah's reign (a thousand years, Rev. 20) to the eternal state of the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21). The actual result of a literal thousand-year reign will be an unending kingdom.[47]

Many other Old Testament passages about the messianic reign could be cited: "The Lord of hosts will reign" (Isa. 24:23 NKJV); He "will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth" and who will have Judah saved and "Israel will dwell safely" in the land (Jer. 23:4–6 NKJV); He will judge all nations and establish permanent peace (Micah 4:1–7) with a universal dominion from Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9–10). As we'll discover, this picture of the coming Messiah, seen through the historical-grammatical (literal) hermeneutic, is the same one

presented in the New Testament as being yet future in the time of John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and John.[48]

The Manner of the Arrival of the Messianic Kingdom

Before examining New Testament texts on the messianic kingdom, let's note the manner of its arrival, which, according to both Testaments, will not be gradual or natural but sudden and catastrophic.

Malachi 4:1–6

> "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire.… Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty.… "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Zephaniah 1:12–18

> "At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.' Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished.… The great day of the Lord is near—near and coming quickly.
>
> "Listen! … That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.… In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth."

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 concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land."

Isaiah 63:1–4

> Who is this coming … with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come."

Zechariah 14:1–9

> A day of the Lord is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.
>
> Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two.…
>
> Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light.… The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

Nothing like this happened when Jesus came the first time; the promised messianic kingdom was not set up during the Advent. Jesus promised that at His second coming the kingdom would be inaugurated with amazing events.[49] Consider two later texts:

Matthew 24:3, 27–31

> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "*when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*" …
>
> [He answered,] "As lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

Matthew 26:63–64

> At His trial the high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."
>
> "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Jesus clearly linked Himself with the coming kingdom's Messiah (Dan. 2, 7), the One who would come as the Great Rock hewn out of the mountains without hands (i.e., He is uncreated[50]) and crush this world's kingdoms.

The Time of the Messianic Kingdom

Now that we have established the nature of and biblical basis for an outward, political earthly messianic reign, we can discuss the time of its fulfillment. Has it

yet occurred? If not, when will it occur?

The Messianic Kingdom Was Not Fulfilled in the Old Testament

It is clear that no such political messianic kingdom was yet fulfilled by the Old Testament's end.

First, the Old Testament states no such fulfillment and, on the contrary, is still expecting the Messiah right down to its finish (cf. Mal. 4:1–6).

Second, orthodox Judaism (which still awaits its Messiah, and which regards the Old Testament alone as Holy Scripture[51]) denies that the kingdom-predictions have been fulfilled.

Third, since the time of Messiah's coming is dated by Daniel as being the first part of the first century A.D.,[52] the fulfillment could not have occurred before then.

The Messianic Kingdom Was Still Anticipated in the New Testament

The New Testament contains this same Old Testament messianic anticipation of a literal, political earthly kingdom that fulfills all the prophecies about it. For instance, Joseph of Arimathea was waiting for the culmination of the kingdom (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51), and Jesus said John the Baptist died before becoming a part of it (7:28; cf. 16:16).

The Messianic Kingdom Was Announced as "at Hand" ("Near") in Jesus' Early Ministry

From the very beginning of the Gospels there are verbal announcements of the messianic kingdom: The angels spoke it to Zechariah (1:11–17), to Mary (vv. 26–35), to Joseph (Matt. 1:20–25), and to the shepherds (Luke 2:8–15); it was anticipated by the Magi (Matt. 2:1–6) and celebrated by Elizabeth (Luke 1:39–45) and Mary (vv. 46–55) and Zechariah (vv. 67–79; see McClain, *GK*, 268). It was announced by John the Baptist, the King's herald (Matt. 3:1–2; 12:28), by our Lord himself (4:17), by His twelve apostles (cf. 10:5–7), and later by the seventy (cf. Luke 10:1–12).

The Announced Kingdom Was Identical to the One Promised in the Old Testament

McClain demonstrates that the kingdom John and Jesus announced was the same as that which God had earlier promised (*GK*, chapter 21).

First, the absence of any formal definition in its announcement assumes that

the Jewish hearers (readers of the Old Testament) were expected to know what it meant.[53]

Second, Jesus never intimated that His kingdom was any different than what the Old Testament presented; by contrast, He insisted that there was complete continuity in His teaching (Matt. 5:17–18).

Third, the terms *Son of Man* and *kingdom of heaven*, used by Jesus regarding the kingdom, are rooted in the Old Testament messianic predictions.

Fourth, Jesus constantly appealed to the Old Testament to support His claims to the messianic kingdom.[54]

Fifth, the gospel record persistently connects the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus with that of Old Testament prophecy.[55]

Sixth, messianic events predicted by the prophets have *literal identity* with the life of Christ.[56] Again, with all of these literally fulfilled, why should anything else be expected for the rest of the messianic oracles concerning a literal, political earthly kingdom?[57]

Seventh, and finally, all the basic elements of the Old Testament prophetic kingdom are found in Christ's message and miracles:

(1) the *spiritual* element of repentance in His teaching (Matt. 3:2);
(2) the *moral* element in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7);
(3) the *social* element in His concern for children, widows, and the poor (Mark 12:40–44; Luke 10:29–37);
(4) the *ecclesiastical* element in His faithful adherence to true Jewish religion (Matt. 5:17–18; 8:34), including feasts (Luke 22:7–16) and regular synagogue attendance (4:16);
(5) the *political* element in that He would "reign over the house of Jacob forever" (1:31–33) and from a throne in Jerusalem with His apostles on twelve thrones (Matt. 19:28);
(6) the *physical* element in all the miracles in His life being in the physical world, as with His healings of others.[58]

Christ's Miracles Confirmed the Proclamation That His Messianic Kingdom Was "at Hand"

Jesus' ministry as the messianic King was also supported by His many miracles,[59] as the Jewish ruler Nicodemus recognized: "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous

signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2). Peter later reminded the Jews: "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.… Many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. … [He] went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.… Many followed him, and he healed all their sick. (Matt. 4:23–24; 8:16; 9:35; 12:15; cf. 15:30)

Not only did Jesus perform miracles to confirm His messianic credentials, but He also gave His apostles the ability to do the same:

> This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb. 2:3–4; cf. Matt. 10:1)

This Messianic Kingdom Was Not Established During Jesus' Day

John the Baptist preached the messianic kingdom as a future but impending event: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is *near*" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Then he died, having not seen the kingdom (11:1–5; 14:1–12). That the kingdom is still future is further shown in Jesus' model prayer: "Our Father … your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (6:9–10; Luke 11:2). This is plainly about a kingdom that had not yet come and that was not only spiritual but would be accomplished "on earth."

Jesus also said, "Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). Considering His teaching that this could not happen without a physical resurrection,[60] which didn't happen in His day, there must be a literal fulfillment of this *after* His first coming.[61] Indeed, He spoke of it as future at the Last Supper: "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."[62] At no time up to the Ascension[63] did He or His disciples literally do this; hence, one must either give up a consistent literal interpretation of Scripture or accept that this is yet future.[64]

Several textual factors support future fulfillment.

First, "the renewal of all things" (Matt. 19:28) indicates it will be in the end times, not during Jesus' years on earth.

Second, never is the word *tribes* (ibid.) as applied to Israel used to mean anything but literal tribes of people.

Third, sitting on a throne and judging Israel (which Jesus elsewhere said He would do—see John 12:48–49) is a prophetic (messianic) fulfillment.

Fourth, again, the prophecies in Daniel, with a literal political context, spoke of the time when "the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it *forever*" (7:18; cf. v. 22).

Late in His earthly life, Jesus taught a parable (geared to correct a false belief) showing that the promised messianic kingdom would not appear during His ministry. "While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable [of the minas (three months' wages)], because he was near Jerusalem and *the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once*" (Luke 19:11). Sentences like "a certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return" (v. 12 NKJV) and the "enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them" (v. 27 NKJV) show the parable's messianic nature, as John Walvoord (1910–2002) and Roy Zuck's (b. 1932) *Bible Knowledge Commentary* well summarizes:

> Jesus was going away to receive a kingship. When He returned, He would establish His kingdom. Until that time His followers were to fulfill their responsibilities He gave them. On His return He would reward the faithful [servants] commensurate with their service to Him, and His enemies would be judged before Him. (2.253)

The messianic kingship will arrive at the Second Coming.[65]

The Delay of the Messianic Kingdom

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the visible, political messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament and announced in the Gospels was not realized during the life of Jesus but was proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles as future. What happened?

The New Testament account of why the messianic kingdom-promises are yet unfulfilled is presented with freshness and clarity: "He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:10–11). After His rejection by the Jews, just before His crucifixion, Jesus

declared: “Therefore I tell you that *the kingdom of God will be taken away from you* and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matt. 21:43). He said that His followers “will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (Luke 21:24). Israel rejected her Messiah, and the kingdom was taken from Israel *temporarily*.[66]

Tracing the Rejections in the Gospels

The outline of Matthew’s gospel serves as a background for understanding Israel’s rejection of the messianic kingdom.[67]

I. The Person of the King (1–3a)
   A. His Ancestry—to Abraham and David (1a)
   B. His Advent—by the Virgin Mary (1b-2)
   C. His Ambassador—John the Baptist (3a)
II. The Preparation of the King (3b-4)
   A. His Baptism (3b)
   B. His Temptation (4a)
   C. His Proclamation (4b)
III. The Principles of the King (5–9)
   A. His Manifesto (5–7)
   B. His Miracles (8–9)
IV. The Presentation of the King (10–16a)
   A. His Proclamation (10)
   B. His Rejection (11–12)
      1. Doubts of John the Baptist (11a)
      2. Condemnation for Unbelief (11b)
      3. Rejection by the Religious Establishment (12)
V. The Parables and Miracles of the King (13–16a)
   A The Mysteries of the Kingdom (13)
   B. The Miracles of the Kingdom (14–16a)
VI. The Passion of the King (16b-27)
   A. Revelation of (16b-17a)
   B. Instruction of (17b-20a)
   C. Rejection of (20b-23)
   D. Vision of (24–25)
   E. Crucifixion of (26–27)

VII. The Power of the King (28)
A. Resurrection (28a)
B. Requirements (28b)

After citing Christ's ancestry back to Abraham, who received an unconditional land-promise, and David, who received an unconditional promise of the coming Messiah-King,[68] Matthew speaks of His virgin birth as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 7:14), who revealed that His name would be *Immanuel* ("God with us") and who would be the "mighty God" and would reign "upon the throne of David" with "no end" (9:6–7 NKJV). Matthew then turns to John the Baptist, who himself had been foretold (Mal. 3:1). When the King was introduced and anointed (Matt. 3), His message was immediately proclaimed: The long-awaited messianic kingdom promised to David has arrived in the person of Jesus. It was "at hand" ("near"); all Israel needed to do was repent of their sins and accept their Messiah-King (v. 2).

Instead, they rejected Him, and Jesus pronounced coming judgment: "Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent" (11:20). An apex of unbelief was reached when He healed a demon-possessed blind and deaf man, for "when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.' To which Jesus replied, 'I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven' " (12:24, 31).

Subsequently, in parables, Jesus announced the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (13:11 NKJV) that will dominate the interregnum between His rejection and His return.[69] This mystery form of the kingdom would intervene until the Second Coming, when Jesus will set up the long-promised messianic form, and the central feature of this time period is the church, a mystery unknown in the Old Testament but now revealed to the apostles.[70] In the wake of Israel's rejection, Christ announced, "I will build my church" (16:18), and began to announce His ultimate rejection—His death at the hands of the Jewish nation (17:9, 22–23), using a messianic passage: "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" (21:42, from Ps. 118:26).

Through the Messiah's rejection, God would temporarily set aside His dealings with national Israel and attempt to provoke her to jealousy by centering on the Gentiles' salvation. Israel would not be restored as a nation until the

“fullness of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:25 NKJV) was complete, for, said Paul, “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (ibid. NIV).

The Parables of the Kingdom

Jesus explained the situation to His disciples: “The knowledge of the secrets [mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them [outsiders]” (Matt. 13:11). Here Jesus cited Isaiah 6:9–10, a text used five times in the New Testament, always in connection with Israel’s rejection of her King.[71] The judicial blindness that resulted from Israel’s unbelief was a judgment from God.[72]

This kingdom mystery is unfolded in these parables:

(1) the sower
(2) the wheat and the tares
(3) the mustard seed
(4) the yeast
(5) the hidden treasure
(6) the pearl
(7) the net.

Their respective meanings can be understood this way:

(1) The gospel will be rejected by most people.[73]
(2) Both disingenuous professors of faith and genuine possessors of faith[74] will coexist to the end.
(3) Christendom would grow rapidly from a tiny beginning.
(4) Persons with false faith will grow in number.
(5) Christ came to purchase His treasured possession (Israel).
(6) Christ gave His life to provide redemption for the church.
(7) Angels will separate the saved from the lost when Jesus returns (see Walvoord and Zuck, *BKC*, 2.52).

The Parable of the Talents (Pounds)

The parable of the talents (Luke 19:11–27) is of special interest to the concept of the kingdom as it unfolds between Christ's two comings (see McClain, *GK*, 342–43).

First, the nobleman (Christ) goes into a far country (heaven) for two purposes: to receive a kingdom and to return (v. 12).

Second, there are two classes of people: servants and citizens.

Third, each servant (Gentile) accepts an equal amount of money and the duty to invest it until Christ returns (v. 13).

Fourth, the citizens (Jews) hate him and repudiate his claims to rule over them (v. 14).

Fifth, having received the kingdom that is His, the nobleman (Christ) will return to earth to reward His servants according to their service in His absence (vv. 15–27).

Sixth, at his return He will execute judgment on the citizens who rejected Him (v. 27).

Seventh, the interim between His two comings is not given (though it is called a "long time" in a similar parable—see Matt. 25:19).

The Gospel of the Kingdom

From the standpoint of individual salvation, there is one gospel (Gal. 1:8; cf. 3:8), based on God's grace (Eph. 2:8–9), made possible only by the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1–6).[75] Nevertheless, the *revealed content* of the gospel varied from age to age in the progress of revelation;[76] accordingly, there is marked development from *the gospel of the kingdom* first preached to the Jews (before they rejected Jesus) to *the gospel of Christ*:

	Gospel of the kingdom	**Gospel of Christ**
Kingdom	Kingdom is at hand	Kingdom is not at hand
Death/Resurrection	Not part of it	Essential to it (cf. Rom. 10:9)
Audience	Jews only (cf. Matt. 10:6)	Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom. 1:16)

Emerging from the foregoing discussion are several features of God's present

spiritual reign.[77]

First, it includes both believers and unbelievers, wheat and tares.

Second, it is not a visible kingdom, but an invisible reign of God over both good and evil beings, angelic and human.

Third, it is temporary—lasting only to the Second Coming.[78] At this point it reaches the *Eschaton* (end), which is the separation of good from evil and the eternal punishment of evil along with the eternal reward of good.[79]

In addition to the seven parables listed and interpreted together above,[80] there are at least five others in the Gospels regarding this matter:

(1) the parable of the king who wanted to settle his accounts (the unmerciful servant—Matt. 18:23–35), which teaches the grounds for forgiveness;
(2) the parable of the king who prepares a wedding banquet (22:2–14), which teaches that many will not enter the kingdom;
(3) the parable of the landowner who hired laborers (20:1ff.), which shows that rewards in the kingdom are under God's control;
(4) the parable of the ten virgins (25:1–13), which teaches that the faithful[81] will be watching for His return; and
(5) the parable of the seed (Mark 4:26), which demonstrates the kingdom's mysterious growth by the operation of God (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6).

Explaining the Messiah's Rejection in the Epistles

Chapters 9–11 of Paul's letter to the Romans form a unit wherein he deals with the question "Has God cast away His people?" (11:1 NKJV); Romans 9 deals with Israel's past, Romans 10 with Israel's present, and Romans 11 with Israel's future, including a description of the process of rejection, retribution, and restoration.

Regarding use of the word *Israel* in this passage, Paul begins (9:1) with a clear statement about what *Israel* means, namely, his "countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (vv. 2–4 NKJV). Inarguably, this is national Israel; Paul longs for his people to receive salvation (10:1), later citing their prophet Isaiah and claiming to be one of them (11:1). *Israel*, throughout this passage, continually and consistently delineates a group of people known as literal, physical, national Israel. There is no hint of

any alleged spiritual Israel that has replaced national Israel in God's plan. The chapter unfolds as follows.

The Scope of Israel's Rejection

> Did God reject his people? By no means! I [Paul] am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.… [Just as in Old Testament times God always preserved a remnant,] so too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (11:1–6)

The Reason for Israel's Rejection

> What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever" (vv. 7–10).

In an earlier text Paul describes why they were blinded:

> I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (10:2–4)

The Result of Israel's Rejection: Salvation to the Gentiles

> Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, *because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles* to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring.… For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? … If some of the branches have been broken off, and you [Gentile believers], though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches.… You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in" (11:11–19).

The Final Restoration of National Israel

> If you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!
>
> I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: *Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in*. And so all Israel will be saved,[82] as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away

> from Jacob." … As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (11:24–32)

What conclusions can be drawn? Israel as a nation (though not all individuals in it) rejected her Messiah and, thus, her promised messianic kingdom. However, God, in His mysterious and eternal wisdom, preplanned Israel's fall for the Gentiles' salvation; His grace to Israel is irrevocable. When God's complete plan of salvation is accomplished, He will restore (re-ingraft) national Israel and fulfill His unconditional promises, including the messianic kingdom, which was delayed (but never annulled) by their rejection. When Messiah returns and is accepted by national Israel, then "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26); this will be at the end of the tribulation before the beginning of the millennium.[83]

A good deal of unnecessary ink has been spilt over the question of whether the messianic kingdom was postponed or whether the apparent change of timing was preplanned; *both can be true*. It was not postponed from God's standpoint—He knew and planned from all eternity when it would occur.[84] As for the death of the Messiah-King, Peter declared: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). Likewise, the church age that intervened was not a divine afterthought; it was a "mystery" (Rom. 11:25), known and planned by God from all eternity (Eph. 1:4), unknown to humans until the coming of the apostles and New Testament prophets (2:20; cf. 3:3–6).

Is the church extraneous to God's plan? It *is* parenthetical from the standpoint of Israel's national history, since God's time-clock for Israel stopped at Messiah's rejection; hence, there is a break between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel[85] in which the church fits. However, from the standpoint of God's plan, there is *not* a break; as we have seen, God's purpose was to provoke the Jews and provide salvation for the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13–15). No wonder Paul concludes this section as he does: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (v. 33).

The Messianic Kingdom Was Not Yet Fulfilled in the Early Church

Another fact seems clear: This same literal, political messianic kingdom that the Jews rejected in the Gospels was not fulfilled at any time up to and through the end of Acts. The very last question Jesus answered before ascending was about this yet unfulfilled promise from the Old Testament and the Gospels.

Acts 1:6–11

Considering the Messiah Himself had just spent forty days speaking of things pertaining to "the kingdom of God" (v. 3), the disciples were not speaking out of ignorance when they asked Him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (v. 6). Notice the implications of their question:

(1) The future "restoration" implies that such a kingdom once existed.
(2) The "restoration" implies that it did not now exist (cf. Luke 21:31).
(3) When the kingdom is restored, Israel will possess it in the sense expected in the Old Testament.
(4) "Israel" here is historic and national, not spiritual or symbolic; the text is surrounded by other references to "Israel."[86]
(5) The "restoration" implies that the one point on which the disciples lacked information was the *time* of the coming kingdom (not its nature).
(6) If there were no literal national future for Israel, then Jesus missed His last chance to correct them and say something like "Do you still not understand?" (Matt. 16:9). By contrast, He gave not one word of rebuke and affirmed a future messianic kingdom of which only God knew the timing:

It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority [for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel]. But you will receive power [that is, in the interim you will be empowered to perform a different task —helping to build my church] when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:7–8)

Notice these important elements from the text.[87]

First, Jesus' answer neither contains nor implies rebuke of any alleged misconceptions about the coming kingdom.

Second, since their question deals only with the timing, His answer is only to this point ("It is not for you to know"). He had already once given a similar

response (Mark 13:34–37).

Third, during the interregnum, they would be evangelizing the world.

Fourth, this post-resurrection period ended with His visible ascension into heaven and the promise of His visible return (Acts 1:9–11). Both of these bolstered Jesus' messianic claims and bring additional assurance about the restoration of His messianic kingdom.

Fifth, in the final promise of the Second Coming, "the angelic messengers seem almost to exhaust the resources of human language in declaring the reality and visibility of that grand event" (McClain, *GK*, 396):

> After he said this, *he was taken up before their very eyes*, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? *This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven*" (vv. 9–11).

The Ascension was bodily, visible, glorious. So will be His return.

Acts 3:19–26

Here Peter offers the messianic kingdom to Israel upon their repentance:

> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.… Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers.

A consistent, straightforward reading of this passage, along with all that has been shown above, yields several crucial facts.

First, the messianic kingdom of Israel had not yet been fulfilled.

Second, God would restore the kingdom to Israel at a yet future time.

Third, this will not occur until after Jesus returns.[88]

Fourth, there is not the slightest hint that any spiritual kingdom had replaced these prophecies.[89]

Fifth, the Old Testament promises were not just for Israel but also for their literal descendants, whom Peter calls "heirs" of the promises.[90]

Sixth, and finally, these covenants made by God include an unconditional promise for Israel to inherit forever the Holy Land, from Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18).[91]

Romans 11:26

"All Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.' "As do so many others, this text reveals beyond question a literal national future for Israel, refuting so-called "realized" eschatologies alleging that Israel's kingdom-promises have already been fulfilled; plainly, they are still expectations of a future fulfillment.[92]

1 Corinthians 15:23–28

> Each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, *when he comes*, those who belong to him. *Then the end will come*, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For *he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death*. For "he [the Father] has put everything under his [the Son's] feet." … "Everything" has been put under him … does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. *When he [the Son] has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him [the Father]* who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Paul clarifies that the literal kingdom is yet future, beginning only after Christ returns, and that during His reign, effectively but not literally eternal,[93] there will still be death; death will *finally* be defeated[94] by resurrection.[95] Revelation 20:1–6 places the two resurrections[96] as bookends of Christ's reign: the first (of the saved) at the beginning, and the second (of the lost) at the end of the Millennium.[97] This contrasts Christ's temporal reign with God's eternal reign; the Millennium (Rev. 20) and the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21–22).

	The Millennium	**The New Heaven and New Earth**
Time frame	At end of Christ's reign	No end
Death	Death occurs	No death occurs
Evil	Present	Not present
Location	On earth	In heaven and on earth
Final Judgement	Not yet occurred	Completed
Constituents	Saved and unsaved	Saved only

Satan	Not yet finally judged	Finally judged

The details of these differences will be spelled out later;[98] for now, note that the millennial and eternal states are not the same.

2 Timothy 4:1

In Paul's last epistle the hope of the messianic kingdom is still being soberly anticipated: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge." Not only is the kingdom still coming (not present), it will also visibly *appear*. The Greek word for *appearing* is from *epiphaneia*, which in the Jewish literature of the time "means a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity, within the form of a personal appearance, or by some deed of power by which its presence is made known" (Arndt and Gingrich, *GELNT*, 304). In the New Testament this term is used only of Christ—of the Advent (2 Tim. 1:10), when He came with grace, and of the Return, when He will come in judgment (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1). The invisible King at last will be manifest in a visible kingdom.

Revelation 11:15

"The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever*."

Given this is the last trumpet at the end of the tribulation,[99] its statement that Christ's kingdom will have come pinpoints the beginning of His return to earth and setting up of the long-awaited messianic kingdom. Regarding the judgment in this passage, *judgment* on literal earthly kingdoms has throughout Scripture been literal judgment, and the same word *kingdom* is used of Christ's kingdom; accordingly, it is unacceptable (and contrary to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic[100]) to take this as the establishing of some spiritual kingdom. The spiritual kingdom is what He established while He was on earth the *first* time; at *this* juncture (His return) there is a major and radical transformation from a purely invisible kingdom to a visible one, from the early mystery form of the kingdom to the messianic form, from the spiritual to the political dimension of Christ's reign (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–27).

Two unassailable truths follow from the preceding discussion.

For one thing, the Old Testament foretells a literal, political messianic rule

over all the earth.

For another, no such reign that fulfilled these predictions was realized in Old Testament *or* New Testament times. As we've noted, the latter part of the Old Testament is still anticipating its fulfillment (cf. Amos 9:14–15; Mal. 4:1ff.), as is the entire New Testament. Since God's promises cannot go unfulfilled, there will yet be a literal fulfillment.

In short, with regard to the messianic kingdom of Israel,

(1) The Old Testament predicted it.[101]
(2) Jesus confirmed it (Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6–7).
(3) Peter promised it (3:19–21).
(4) Paul reaffirmed it (Rom. 11:11–36).
(5) God never revoked it (v. 29; cf. v. 26).

New Testament Teaching on the Spiritual Reign of God

As we have seen, once the literal, political messianic kingdom was rejected (see Matt. 12ff.), an interim spiritual kingdom form was established. God's plan on earth shifted focus from establishing the Jewish kingdom to saving the Gentiles, through whom He desired to provoke the Jews into accepting their King and His kingdom for them (cf. Rom. 11).

God's Spiritual Kingdom Is Present Later in the Gospels

This spiritual or mystery form of the kingdom is distinguished from the messianic form in several important ways:

	Mystery Form of the Kingdom	**Messianic Form of the Kingdom**
Begins	Matthew 13	Revelation 19
Visibilty	Invisible	Visible
Form	Inner	Outer
Nature	Spiritual	Political
Subjects	Saved and unsaved are in it	Only saved enter

Time	Present age	Age to come
End	At the Second Coming	At the end of the Millennium

Matthew 13: The Kingdom Parables

There is a literal mystery involved in the transition from Christ's offer of the messianic kingdom (to Israel) and the spiritual form that followed. The kingdom parables seem to be a crucial turning point; as already noted,[102] before Matthew 13 the Jewish King had been officially present to the Jewish nation. After they rejected Him (Matt. 3–12), Jesus told parables in which a kingdom was established that would grow rapidly and contain both good and evil; in the end, the saved would be separated from the lost, each sent to their final destiny.[103]

John 18:36: "Not of This World"

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But *now my kingdom is from another place*." It is difficult to square this with earlier statements by John the Baptist and Jesus that the hoped-for messianic kingdom was "at hand" (i.e., "near"—Matt. 3:2; 4:17)[104] unless one recognizes that when Jesus' offer was rejected, an interregnum period was enacted (to accomplish God's eternal purpose to save the Gentiles) between the Advent and the Second Coming, when all prophecies of the messianic kingdom will be fulfilled (25:31–45).[105]

Again, Christ's kingdom parables introduced the previously unknown plan (mystery) of God by which plans for the messianic kingdom (Israel's final restoration) would be put on hold in favor of the mystery form (cf. 21:43). Since the chosen nation would completely reject and then crucify her Messiah, the freight train of Israel would be *temporarily* sidetracked (Rom. 11:15) in order to allow the express train of the church to come through on the main tracks (v. 25). Only then, provoked by Gentile salvation (v. 11), will Israel finally (at the Second Coming) embrace her Messiah, when Christ returns to judge the nations and separate good from evil.[106]

Luke 17:20–21: "The Kingdom of God Is Within You"

> Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "*The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation*, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because *the kingdom of God is within you*."

Jesus said this about God's spiritual kingdom (reign); that is, "the King is in your midst." Hence, the kingdom was present when the King cast out demons (e.g., Matt. 12:28), and it was also present (prefiguratively) when He said, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (16:28; cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). Peter testified of this event,

> We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:16–17).

God's Spiritual Reign in the Church

While God's spiritual reign has continued into the church age, this reign is not identical to the church. God's spiritual kingdom began while Jesus was on earth,[107] and the church did not start until the Day of Pentecost.[108] Coexistence does not prove identity; the church is a mystery not revealed until New Testament times, a unique entity in which Jew and Gentile are coheirs with Christ (Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:26–27). So while the church is part of God's broader spiritual community, it is a narrower group made up of *all believers since Pentecost who have been baptized by the Spirit into Christ's body*.[109] The church's relation to God's kingdom in the narrower and broader senses was charted above[110] and is diagrammed on page 495.

While Christ is not King of the church in the Davidic (or messianic) sense of the political ruler situated in Jerusalem—since the messianic kingdom has not yet begun[111]—nonetheless, He is the sovereign Head of the church and reigns over it spiritually. While we agree with McClain that several New Testament references to the kingdom can be taken in a future sense as *either* referring to heaven *or* the messianic reign,[112] his attempt to explain all of them in other than a present spiritual kingdom seems implausible and stretched. Consider the following support for speaking of God's spiritual reign as present in the church.

Romans 14:17

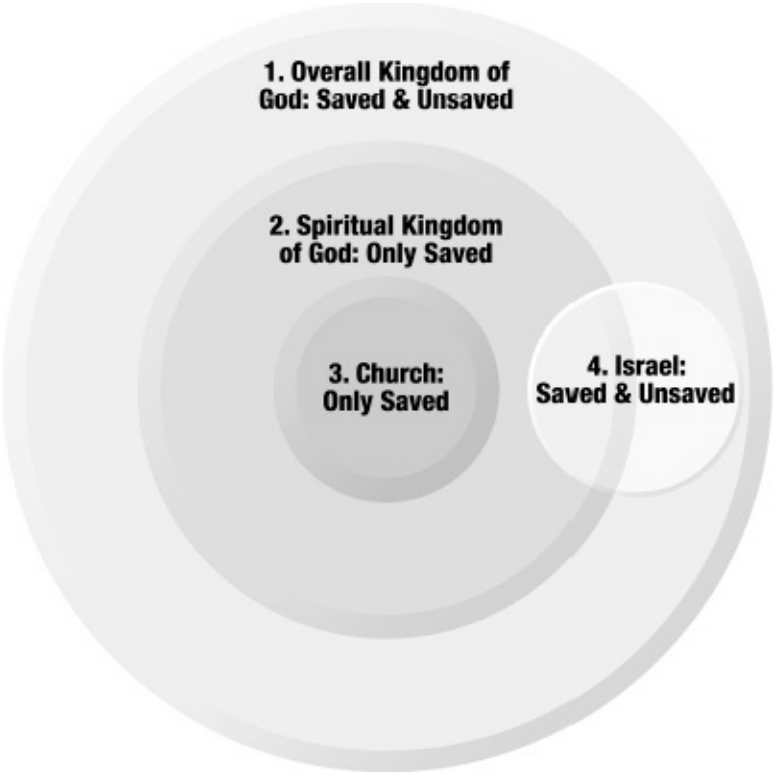
Paul wrote to the church at Rome: "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." It seems evident that he was addressing their condition at the time, namely, of not offending a weaker brother by eating meat offered to idols.

1 Corinthians 4:20

Paul informed the Corinthians that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." The context indicates that he is responding to their arrogant use of words (v. 19); his reply is not eschatological, but practical and to the point of their situation regarding God's spiritual reign in the church.

Colossians 4:11

The "Jews among *my fellow workers for the kingdom of God* … have proved a comfort to me." Admittedly, this could have a future sense because of the word *for*, which might refer to rewards we will receive in the coming kingdom. It also may have a present sense, that of working for spiritual realities rather than material ones (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18).



1 Thessalonians 2:12

Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his ministry that is "encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, *who calls you into his kingdom and glory*." Since by virtue of being saved they were already in His

kingdom (cf. John. 3:3, 5), it makes sense to take this as speaking of God's present spiritual kingdom.

2 Thessalonians 1:5

"God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering." The Thessalonians were suffering for Christ in the present, for the church (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28); there is no need to interpret this as referring to some future state (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12).

1 Timothy 1:17

"Now to *the King eternal*, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen." While Christ is never called King of the church in so many words, nevertheless He does reign over it as "head of all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22 NKJV). Since the interregnum between His comings is a spiritual kingdom (cf. Matt. 13), there is no reason to deny His spiritual kingship in the present.

1 Timothy 6:15

"God will bring about [Christ's return] in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the *King of kings* and Lord of lords." Again, the word *King* implies that He has a spiritual kingdom now.

The New Testament uses the word *kingdom* several times of the church. The apostles preached about the "kingdom of God";[113] Philip evangelized for the kingdom (Acts 8:12); Paul speaks of God having "rescued us from the dominion of darkness and [bringing] us into the kingdom of the Son he loves";[114] Christians are a kingdom of priests.[115] *Members of the true church are part of this present kingdom*.

Hebrews 12:28

"Therefore, since *we are receiving a kingdom* that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." Given the context—"You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God … to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn" (vv. 22–23)—it seems natural to take it in the present spiritual sense of the kingdom.

As noted, the word *kingdom* is not limited to God's spiritual reign in earthly believers; it is also used of heaven, or the place of bliss into which believers pass

when they leave this life.[116] Jesus said to the thief who wanted to be part of His kingdom, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), which Paul says refers to the "third heaven" (the very presence of God, 2 Cor. 12:2).[117] Paul also mentions God's call of us "into his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12) and notes that we are counted worthy to suffer for the kingdom (2 Thess. 1:5), as the apostle John was (Rev. 1:9): "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The history of the church contains abundant support for God's kingdom in its various aspects. The overall kingdom of God, viz., His sovereign reign over the universe, is treated elsewhere;[118] God's spiritual reign in the church was discussed earlier;[119] and we will later learn more about the messianic kingdom.[120]

CONCLUSION

The biblical concept of *kingdom* has at least five different senses.

First, there is *God's universal kingdom*, His overall, invisible, and everlasting reign over the entire universe.

Second, there is *Christ's messianic kingdom*, a visible, earthly, political kingdom promised to Israel in which Messiah reigns over the whole earth from a throne in Jerusalem.

Third, there is *God's spiritual kingdom (in the broad sense)*, including both good and evil, announced by Jesus in Matthew 13 and sometimes called the mystery form of the kingdom.

Fourth, there is *God's spiritual kingdom (in the narrow sense)*, God's invisible reign only in the hearts of believers; this began when the first person was saved (John 3:3, 5) and will continue throughout eternity.

Fifth, there is *God's spiritual reign in the church*; Peter used "the keys of the kingdom" (cf. Matt. 16:19) to open the door of the church to the Jews (Acts 2; cf. 11:15) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

With regard to the messianic kingdom, several comments are in order. From

Genesis to Revelation there are promises of a literal, political kingdom in which the Ruler (King), who is Christ, will reign on earth. This kingdom (1) was promised in the Old Testament, (2) was offered by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples to the Jews in the Gospels, (3) was rejected by the Jewish authorities, (4) was, in accord with God's eternal plan, put on hold while He brought Gentiles into a new body (the church), (5) will be offered again by Jesus at His return, and (6) will be accepted by the Jewish nation and fulfilled in the Millennium (Rev. 20:1–6). Any attempt to spiritualize away these yet unfulfilled prophecies is a violation of literal, historical-grammatical biblical interpretation;[121] if this same allegorical hermeneutic were applied to the rest of Scripture, it would undermine the fundamentals of the historic Christian faith.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE COVENANTS OF GOD

Many of the issues in prophecy revolve around the covenants—with whom they were made, as well as how and when they will be fulfilled. There are two primary views on this topic, covenantalism and dispensationalism, and, as we have seen,[1] there are also modified forms of each.[2]

Traditional Dispensationalism

Traditional (classical) dispensationalism is found in the writings of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), C.I. Scofield (1843–1921), and Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952). It holds that the Old Testament covenants known as the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the new were made strictly with the nation of Israel and its literal descendants and will be literally fulfilled in them. This involved the belief that there were two new covenants, one for Israel (yet to be fulfilled) and one for the church (presently being fulfilled). Further, Israel and the church form two separate peoples of God, one earthly and the other heavenly. Hence, they will have two destinies, one in heaven for the church and one on earth for Israel.

Revised Dispensationalism

Revised dispensationalism is represented by John Walvoord (1910–2002) and

Charles Ryrie (b. 1925). Like its forerunner, it affirms that there is yet a literal national fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to Israel. However, it holds that there is only one new covenant, which, while having a later literal fulfillment in national Israel, has a present application to the church. Most revised dispensationalists hold that while there are distinctive differences between Israel and the church and their respective destinies, all are part of one overall people of God who share in the spiritual redemption wrought by Christ.

Progressive Dispensationalism

Progressive dispensationalism, embraced by Robert Saucy (b. 1937), Craig Blaising (b. 1949), and Darrell Bock (b. 1952), is a further revision of dispensationalism in the direction of covenant theology.[3] While claiming there will be a literal fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants in ethnic Israel, they insist that there is a present inaugural fulfillment in the church. Thus, they maintain that fulfillment of the Davidic covenant began at Christ's ascension to God's right hand and will later come to earth at the Second Coming. Like covenant theologians, they both stress the view that there is one people of God and embrace a hermeneutic that reads these Old Testament promises to Israel in the light of their supposed fulfillment in Christ and His church.

Classical Covenantalism

Classical covenantalism was formulated by Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), was embraced by Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and most Reformed theologians, and was articulated by Oswald Allis (1880–1973). According to this position, these Old Testament covenants made with Israel are fulfilled in the New Testament church, God's "spiritual Israel," rather than a literal fulfillment in national Israel.

Modified Covenantalism

According to modified covenantalism, held by Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988) and Vern Poythress (b. 1944), the church is the New Testament Israel in which there is spiritual fulfillment of these Old Testament covenants, even though there also will be literal future fulfillment of them in ethnic Israel. Most

modified covenantalists do not believe these will be fulfilled in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ (the Millennium), but in the new heaven and new earth.[4] Further, like classical covenantalists, they believe there is only one people of God and, hence, there will not be two separate destinies, one on earth for Israel and one in heaven for the church.

The Number and Nature of the Covenants

Rather than engage in a point-by-point interaction between these views, it will be more profitable to study covenants—there are at least seven in the Bible—and fulfillments. The Hebrew word for *covenant*, *berit*, and the Greek term, *diathéké*, mean "an agreement" or "an arrangement." Three covenants are before Israel began:

(1) The Edenic covenant (Gen. 1–2);
(2) The Adamic covenant (Gen. 3); and
(3) The Noahic covenant (Gen. 9).

The last four all deal with Israel:[5]

(4) The Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12);
(5) The Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19);
(6) The Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7); and
(7) The new covenant (Jer. 31).

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Genesis 12:1–3

Genesis 1–11 records the history of the nations; Genesis 12 begins the history of the chosen nation, starting with the Abrahamic covenant when the Lord said to Abram,

> "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. [1] I will make you into a great nation and [2] I will bless you; [3] I will make your name great, and [4] you will be a blessing. [5] I will bless those who bless you, [6] and whoever curses you I will curse; and [7] all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (vv. 1–3).

Later, [8] God promised Abraham innumerable descendants (12:7; 13:14–16; 15:4–7; 17:4–7), and that [9] the covenant would be established with them (17:7, 9, 21). These are the essential features of the Abrahamic covenant:

(1) It is unconditional ("I will bless you").
(2) It is national ("I will make you into a great nation").
(3) It is geographical (involving "the [Holy] land").
(4) It is perpetual ("to you and your offspring").
(5) It is international ("All peoples on earth will be blessed through you").

Genesis 13:14–17

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him,

> Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. *All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever*. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.

There are three important elements in the emphasized section: (1) God gave the land to Abraham (2) for his natural descendants (3) forever.

Genesis 15:7–18

> He [God] also said to him, *"I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."*
>
> But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"
>
> So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."
>
> Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other.… As the sun was setting, *Abram fell into a deep sleep*, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.…
>
> When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and *passed between the pieces*. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, *"To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."*

Several important facts emerge. *First*, the covenant is *unconditional*—Abraham was not even conscious when it was made, and God alone passed through the split sacrifice. This was a one-way arrangement, like the original pledge He made to Abraham ("*I will* bless you"), as opposed to the conditional Mosaic covenant—"*If* you obey my voice" (Ex. 19:5 TLB). The Lord's passing through the parts alone followed the legal form of a grant covenant (such as a king would give to a subject, or a master to a servant), not the bilateral (two-

way) form of a treaty.[6] Paul stresses this point (Rom. 4:1ff.), as does the writer of Hebrews (6:13–18).

Second, the dimensions of the land given to Abraham were spelled out, and they include all of modern Israel, the territory of the Palesinians, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and all the way to Northern Iraq. Even under Joshua's conquests they did not occupy all this land, and at no time in Israel's history did they ever occupy it all for any prolonged period of time, let alone "forever." So to date, the Abrahamic covenant remains yet to be fulfilled.

Third, the great New Testament text on justification appears here: Abraham was declared righteous on the basis of his faith alone. Paul used this in Romans to show that all who believe are Abraham's spiritual seed (cf. 4:3–5; 13–16). This fulfills in part the promise to bless all nations through Abraham, for he believed the "gospel" when it was preached to him (Gal. 3:8), as do all others who follow in the footsteps of his faith (3:26).[7]

Genesis 17:1–8

> When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. *I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers*."
>
> Abram fell face down, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; *your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations*. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and *kings will come from you*. I will establish my covenant as an *everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants* after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. *The whole land of Canaan*, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

First, God repeated that He had given the "whole land."

Second, it is a gift not only to Abraham but also to his physical descendants, as later confirmed to them.[8]

Third, this is the first reference to "kings" coming from Abraham. In fact, the entire Davidic kingdom would unfold from his descendants.[9]

Fourth, again, the covenant is "everlasting."

Fifth, "Abram" ("exalted father") underwent a name change to "Abraham" ("father of a multitude"), befitting the promise God made to him.

Sixth, and finally, it is unconditional—God called it "my covenant," something "I will" do.

Genesis 22:17–18

> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. *Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies*, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

Many of the covenant elements are repeated here, including (1) God's promised blessing to Abraham, (2) God's blessing on his descendants, (3) God's multiplication of his offspring, (4) God giving them the Promised Land, and (5) God blessing all nations through Abraham.

Genesis 26:3–5

> Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you [Isaac] and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.[10]

Here the Abrahamic covenant is confirmed with his son Isaac. Many essential elements are repeated—the land, the blessing, the descendants' blessing, the multitude of descendants, and the blessing of all nations.

Genesis 35:10–12

> God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel. And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you."

The name of "Jacob" ("supplanter") being changed to "Israel" ("prince with God") signified a title that would become the national name perpetually.

Genesis 46:3–4

> "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you [Jacob] into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."

Again the promise is renewed with Isaac's son Jacob, who is reminded how great a nation will come from him and that God will bring them back from Egypt into

their land.

Genesis 48:3–4

> Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.’ ”

Jacob’s descendants will increase; they and their descendants will be given this land forever.

Deuteronomy 28:8–13

> The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways.… The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands.… The Lord will make you the head, not the tail.

Even amid the conditional Mosaic blessings,[11] God reminds them, through Moses, of the unconditional promise made to the patriarchs, that He had given them the Holy Land. In accordance with the Mosaic covenant, *their blessings in this land*, as described in this passage, *would depend on their obedience to God*.

Joshua 1:2–6

> Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. *Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates … to the Great Sea on the west.*… Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

Here Joshua is reminded that God was *giving* them all the land He had promised. However, they did not yet *possess* all of it and were not yet being *blessed* in it. Possession and being blessed therein were conditioned on their obedience to the Mosaic covenant:[12] “Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you” (v. 7).

Joshua 21:43–45

> The Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. *Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.*

Some have mistakenly taken this as a fulfillment of the unconditional land-promises given to Abraham, but that cannot be the case for many reasons.

First, the last statement refers only to the promises through Moses made with "the house of Israel,"[13] not those made to Abraham.

Second, it appears to refer to the extent of the land as outlined in the Mosaic covenant (Num. 34), which was *not the full extent God had promised to Abraham* (cf. Gen. 15:18–21; Josh. 1:2–6).

Third, although Israel possessed the land as a whole, they did not literally possess the whole land, since right after this (in the very beginning of Judges) they were still trying to drive out the remaining evil inhabitants (1:27–34).

Fourth, what they did possess they were later dispossessed of;[14] the Abrahamic covenant promises that they would have it forever (Gen. 17:1–8).

Fifth, later in the Old Testament there are prophecies about Israel inheriting the land after Joshua's time (cf. Jer. 11:5; Amos 9:14–15), which plainly shows they were not yet fulfilled in Joshua's day.[15]

Sixth, and finally, even in the New Testament the kingdom had not yet been restored to Israel (Luke 19:11ff.; Acts 1:6–8); Paul spoke of it as yet future.[16]

1 Chronicles 16:15–18

> He [God] remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit."

Isaiah 49:6

> It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Israel was not designed to be a mere receptacle of God's blessing—Israel would channel it to the whole world (cf. Isa. 55:3–4).

Jeremiah 25:9–12

> I will bring them [Babylon] against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.… *This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years*. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt … and will make it desolate forever.

Israel's exile from her God-given land was only to be temporary; she would return after a seventy-year exile in Babylon. While they were later to be uprooted again (c. A.D. 70), Isaiah foretold:

> In that day the Lord will reach out his hand *a second time* to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. (Isa. 11:11)

This began in 1948, when national Israel was reestablished and Jews returned from far and wide to the land.

Ezekiel 37:21–25

> This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. *There will be one king over all of them* and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.… *My servant David* will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. *They and their children and their children's children will live there forever*, and David my servant will be their prince forever."

Given that this prophecy was given after the Babylonian captivity, and given that Israel had a king neither then nor since, literal fulfillment awaits the future. Also, David cannot be a part of it until after he is resurrected in the first resurrection, just before the Millennium (Rev. 20:4–6).[17]

Daniel 9:2

"In the first year of his [Darius's] reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years." Daniel was reading Jeremiah 25, which says Israel will return to the Promised Land and rebuild again.

Amos 9:14–15

> "*I will bring back my exiled people Israel*; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. *I will plant Israel in their own land*, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God.

This is a prediction that God will fulfill His land-promises to Abraham's descendants. If it had already been fulfilled before this, as some suggest,[18] Amos would have given no such prophecy.

Acts 1:6–7

> [The disciples asked Jesus,] "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

Even after Jesus' time on earth, the *kingdom* of Israel, which included its unconditional land-promises (*forever*), had not yet been fulfilled. Jesus here implied that it was coming but did not say when.

Acts 3:19–21

> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that *times of refreshing* may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. *He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.*

We examined this text earlier—Peter is offering the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to the nation ("Men of Israel") who had handed Him over to be killed (3:12–13). He even includes some of the Abrahamic covenant as part of the fulfillment: "You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed' " (3:25).

Because national Israel, through a Sanhedrin vote, officially rejected their Messiah, the nation was called on to repent. While remnants of the people *did* repent (cf. Rom. 9:6–8; 11:1), the nation as a whole has not yet repented. This awaits the Second Coming,[19] of which God said,

> I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (Zech. 12:10; cf. Rev. 1:7)

As a result of their encounter with the returned Messiah, a nation will be born in a day, that is, "all Israel [as a nation] will be saved" (Rom. 11:26).

Acts 15:14–17

> Simon [Peter] has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: "*After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it,* that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things" (cf. Amos 9).

God *will* rebuild and restore the kingdom of Israel to what He promised. Nevertheless, this was not accomplished at the First Coming, for Jesus told a parable to correct mistaken notions that "the kingdom of God would appear immediately" (Luke 19:11 NKJV), and just before the Ascension He informed His disciples that the kingdom would not then be restored to Israel (Acts 1:6–8). There cannot be kingdom restoration without the King's presence.

Romans 11:1–32

> *Did God reject his people? By no means*! … God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.… Again I ask: *Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all*! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. *But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! … If their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead*? … If they do not persist in unbelief, *they will be grafted in,* for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you [Gentile believers] were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.… God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Romans 11 crucially reveals that even after the church has been established, there is still a future for national Israel—they will one day be re-ingrafted, restored, and "saved" (v. 26). This refers to those of the chosen nation who are left, namely, the remnant who accept Christ as Messiah, after some two-thirds are destroyed in the Tribulation judgments:[20]

> Naturally there is no salvation for Israel merely because they are bodily descendants of Abraham. Much rather does the whole prophecy of blessing of the Old Testament refer to the transformed and renewed Israel. (Sauer, *EE*, 159)

That there is no explicit mention of their land being restored is no problem; it is implied in the nation being restored, since they cannot be nationally restored unless they are geographically restored. Further, verses 26–27 refer to Isaiah 59:20–21, which presents full national restoration, including their homeland.

Hebrews 11:8–10, 12–16

> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. *By faith he made his home in the promised land* like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.…
>
> And so from this one man [Abraham], and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. All these people were still living by faith when they died. *They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance*. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, *they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

It is noteworthy that (1) Abraham and his descendants had not yet received the complete fulfillment of God's land-promise; (2) Abraham's descendants are still awaiting this promise's fulfillment; and (3) God will yet fulfill this promise in the future.

What can this mean but that it is yet to be fulfilled, not in the church, but in a literal earthly kingdom of God described in the last chapters of Revelation?

Revelation 7:4

"Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: *144,000 from all the tribes of Israel*."

During the Tribulation period, 144,000 Jews from the twelve tribes are "sealed" (cf. 14:3), 12,000 from each (7:5–8). Since the literal hermeneutic requires that *Israel* and *tribe* be taken literally[21]—and since they are presented as such throughout the Bible—it follows that God will preserve His remnant through the Tribulation so they can go into the millennial kingdom[22] just as He promised.[23] This remnant, plus the great multitude (14:3, 6) of others who come to Christ during the Tribulation,[24] will be the "sheep" Christ welcomes into His messianic kingdom (Matt. 25:33–34).

Summary: The Abrahamic Covenant

The first of Israel's covenants (Abrahamic) is an unconditional agreement God made with Abraham and his descendants that has never been fulfilled at any time in history, either prior to or after the Advent. Because Israel rejected their Messiah-King who is to rule in Jerusalem (Matt. 19:28) over the whole land God gave Abraham, and since this reign is to be forever, the event is yet future; it will not be fulfilled until Christ returns (24:30; 25:31–34). At this time Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and all other Old Testament saints will be raised[25] and literally will reign over the whole earth in physical, resurrected bodies.[26]

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

Unlike the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant was conditional. Likewise, whereas the Abrahamic covenant is everlasting (Gen. 17:19), the Mosaic covenant was temporal and would be replaced.[27] The following chart contrasts them:

	Abrahamic Covenant	**Mosaic Covenant**
Nature	Unconditional	Conditional
Agreement	Unilateral	Bilateral
Parties	God alone	God and Israel
Stated condition	None	Obedience to God
Duration	Everlasting	Temporal
Beginning	Genesis 12	Exodus 19
End	No end	At the cross

Again, the Abrahamic covenant is (among other things) an unconditional gift of the land from the Mediterranean Sea (west) to Northern Jordan and Northern Iraq (east), from Egypt (south) to Lebanon and Syria (north). The Mosaic covenant involved (among other things) the conditions for being blessed in that land.

The Condition of the Blessing

From its very inception the Mosaic covenant was conditional; it was not in a grant covenant, but a treaty form of the same legal structure as the suzerain-vassal treaties of the day. It included:

(1) identity of the King (Ex. 20:2; Deut.1ff.);
(2) historical relationship between King and people (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 1:6–4:49);
(3) stipulations—laws of the King (Ex. 20–31; Deut. 5–26);
(4) blessings and curses (Lev. 26; Deut. 27–30);
(5) witnesses (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28);
(6) ceremonial meal (Ex. 24:9–11);
(7) filing of the treaty (Ex. 25:16; 40:21; Deut. 31:25–26). (See Blaising and Bock, *PD*, 143.)

> You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now *if you obey me fully and keep my covenant*, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Ex. 19:4–6)

The Mosaic covenant was bilateral: God required Israel to obey His word as a condition for being "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (v. 6), and the people said, "*We will do everything the Lord* has said" (v. 8).

> The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The Lord spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. (Deut. 5:2–3)

The Nature of the Blessing

The nature of the blessing was earthly and temporal, involving the land God had given, an inheritance in it, children to share it, good health, and many other elements. God promised to

(1) bless Israel (Lev. 26:4–12; Deut. 7:13–15; 28:3–12);
(2) multiply Israel (Lev. 26:9; Deut. 6:3; 8:1; 28:11);
(3) give Israel the land (Lev. 26:5; Deut. 6:3; 8:1; 9:4; 28:11);

(4) make Israel a great nation (Deut. 7:14; 28:1, 3);
(5) be Israel's God, and they His people (Lev. 26:11–12; Deut. 7:6–10; 28:9–10)
(6) confirm His covenant with Israel (Lev. 26:9). (See Blaising and Bock, *PD*, 143.)

Many of these promises were already in the Abrahamic covenant, and, thus, were incorporated here.[28] However, again, the Mosaic covenant dealt not with the blessings of being *given* the land, but with the conditions of *living* in the land. While the land grant to Abraham was unconditional, the blessings that came from living in the land were conditional. There was a flip side to every blessing in the Mosaic covenant; namely, everyone who did not live up to God's words would experience a curse.

> *If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today,* the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you *if you obey the LORD your God*. (Deut. 28:1–2)

Moses then enumerated the ways they will be blessed, including their offspring, crops, livestock, calves, defeating their enemies, etc.:

> The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.… The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, *if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways*.… The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands.… *Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them*. (vv. 8–14)

The blessings were largely physical, material, and earthly, and all were conditional, coming only as a result of obedience to God's laws.

The Nature of the Cursing

The curses, recorded in remarkably vivid language, show that the result of disobedience was as bad as the result of obedience was good:

> *If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you*: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.… The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess.

The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed.… *All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you*. (vv. 15–45)

The Duration of the Covenant

Other scriptural indications that the Mosaic covenant was not permanent are that it involved sacrifices and types pointing forward to fulfillment in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7); once they were fulfilled there was no longer a need for a type—the antitype had arrived. Also, as the writer of Hebrews noted, the very fact that a "new" covenant was prophesied indicates that the "old" would pass away.

Jeremiah 31:31–33

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "When *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel* and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the [Mosaic] covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because *they broke my covenant*, though I was a husband to them.…

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time.… *I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts*. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Hebrews 8:7, 13

If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.… *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete*; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Romans 6:14

"Sin shall not be your master, because you [who are under the new covenant] are not under law, but under grace."

Romans 7:1–4

Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that *the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?* … So, my brothers, *you also died to the law* through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

Galatians 3:17–25

> *The law [the time-bound Mosaic covenant], introduced 430 years later [than the timeless Abrahamic covenant], does not set aside the [Abrahamic] covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise*. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through promise.… So the [Mosaic] law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. *Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law*.

Galatians 4:1–7

> As long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees *until the time set by his father*. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, *God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons*. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So *you are no longer a slave,* but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 4:21–31

> Tell me, *you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says*? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman [Hagar] and the other by the free woman [Sarah]. … *One covenant [the Mosaic] is from Mount Sinai* and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now *Hagar [the slave] stands for Mount Sinai* in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.… But what does the Scripture say? "*Get rid of the slave woman and her son,* for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, *we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman*.

2 Corinthians 3:7–11

> If the ministry that brought death, which was *engraved in letters on stone,* came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? … And *if what was fading away [the Mosaic covenant] came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts [the new covenant]*!

Romans 10:3–4

> Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. *Christ is the end of the law* so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The law was done away with not by destruction but by fulfillment: Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not

come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

Colossians 2:14, 17

> *Having canceled the written code*, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; *he [Jesus] took it away*, nailing it to the cross.… [The law was] a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Old Testament history is the history of Israel breaking the Mosaic covenant. It is for this reason that they were punished, and again why they went into captivity: "They mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16). Indeed, the Old Testament ends with the threat of a curse (Mal. 4:6).

Hebrews 7:12

"When there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be *a change of the law*."

In summary, the Mosaic covenant (the law) passed away, being fulfilled by Christ. While many of the Ten Commandments are restated in the New Testament, nonetheless, they are affirmed in the context of grace rather than theocratic use.[29] For example, the Mosaic penalty for breaking the seventh commandment, against adultery, was capital punishment (Lev. 20:10); the new covenant calls for excommunication from the church if the offender is unrepentant (1 Cor. 5:1–5). Likewise, the Mosaic promise attached to the fifth commandment, to honor one's parents, was "that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12).[30] However, when the new covenant states the same moral principle, the promise is not land inheritance/blessing but a broader and more generally applicable pledge to New Testament believers, "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth" (Eph. 6:3). *While the basic moral principles, reflective of God's moral nature,[31] embedded in the theocratic construct of Old Testament Israel, are the same immutable principles expressed in the context of grace for the New Testament church, nevertheless, church-age believers are not under Mosaic Law, which has been fulfilled and passed away.*

The Relationship Between the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants

Even though the Mosaic covenant was conditional and its blessings dependent on Israel's legal obedience, it adds much to our understanding of national Israel. For one thing, the promises of how they would be blessed in the land are wrapped around the Abrahamic covenant, which promised them that land. For another, as suggested earlier in Genesis (17:6; 49:10), it was during the period of the Mosaic covenant that the nation's monarchy was set up and the promise of the Davidic covenant eventually given.

The relationship between the unconditional Abrahamic and the conditional Mosaic covenants can be summarized thus:

(1) The Abrahamic covenant takes precedence over the Mosaic covenant;[32]
(2) The Mosaic covenant did not void the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gal. 3:17);
(3) The Abrahamic covenant is unconditional, while the Mosaic covenant was conditional (v. 12);
(4) The Mosaic covenant was instituted because of human sinfulness (v. 19), whereas the Abrahamic covenant was given because of God's graciousness;
(5) The Mosaic covenant was temporary (v. 19); the Abrahamic covenant is forever.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

As the Abrahamic covenant centers around the land, the Davidic covenant centers around the throne. The former provides the land and the nation; the latter provides a king to rule over the kingdom. *Both* involve literal, national, unconditional, and perpetual blessings.

2 Samuel 7:11–16

Though David desired to build a house for the Lord, God instead declared that He would build David's house for him, a dynasty from which the Messiah would come and reign on David's throne.[33]

> The Lord declares to you that *the LORD himself will establish a house for you*: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.… *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever*. (cf. 1 Chron. 17)

Like the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, which expanded God's blessings to Israel, was irrevocable—"everlasting," based on "the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3 NKJV). While much of this prophecy refers to David's son Solomon (cf. v. 14), the use of *forever* clearly reveals that further Davidic descendants were also in mind. Other passages confirm that this text is a prediction that Messiah would come through David's line and reign on David's throne.[34] Indeed, at His triumphal entry, Jesus was heralded by the Jerusalem crowd with shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:15), "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" (Mark 11:10). They expected the beginning of the promised messianic kingdom.

Isaiah 55:1–3

> Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. *I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David*.

Psalm 89:20–37

To be sure, Israel would sin and need repentance, but God promised:

> I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him.… My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn will be exalted.… I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. *I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure*.
>
> If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; *but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered*. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.

Despite countless acts of disloyalty on Israel's part,[35] God has been (and will be) absolutely faithful. The Davidic covenant promises to Israel a political, religious, moral, visible earthly kingdom, and God personally guaranteed that it would endure forever and that all nations would be blessed through it (as with the Abrahamic covenant).[36]

The New Covenant

In addition to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants, the Old Testament sets forth a future new covenant. What makes it "new" can be set forth in the following contrasts.

	The Old Covenant	**The New Covenant**
Duration	Temporal	Everlasting
Replaced	Yes	Never
Written	In stone	On hearts
Initiated	By the blood of animals	By the blood of Christ
Number of sacrifices	Many sacrifices	One sacrifice forever
Mediator	Moses	Jesus
Forgiveness	Anticipatory	Realized by the Cross
Holy Spirit	No permanent indwelling	Permanent indwelling
Approach to God	Through Aaron the high priest	Through Christ our High Priest
Celebrated	By sacrifices (looking forward to the Cross)	By Communion (looking backward to the Cross)

This covenant, foretold by Jeremiah, is also mentioned in several other places.

Jeremiah 31:31–34

> "The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will *not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers* when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them.…
>
> "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time.… *I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts*. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.… I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Isaiah 59:21

> "As for me, this is *my covenant* with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever."

Ezekiel 36:25–27

> I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.[37]

Ezekiel 37:10–23

> So I prophesied as he [the Spirit] commanded me, and breath entered them [the dry bones on the valley floor]; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.… "Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land.… I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land.… There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.… I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

Clearly, there are elements of three covenants here:

(1) their return to their God-given land (Abrahamic);
(2) one king over them (Davidic); and
(3) His Spirit within them (new).

This will be *after* Israel is resurrected; verses 9 and 12, taken literally,[38] refer to their bodily resurrection in the last days.[39] Daniel, Ezekiel's contemporary, predicted this also: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2; cf. Rev. 20:1–6).

Matthew 26:26–28 (cf. Luke 22:19–20)

> As they were eating, Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the *new covenant*, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (NKJV).[40]

It would appear that Jesus is initiating the new covenant at this point, and Hebrews applies it to believers in Him. Thus, even though the new covenant is said to be *made* "with the house of Israel" (Jer. 31:31), that it is *applied* to the New Testament church is appropriate for several reasons.

First, Gentile blessing was promised from the Abrahamic covenant on (Gen. 12:3).

Second, the church age is contemporaneous with the spiritual kingdom established by Jesus while on earth, after the messianic political form of the kingdom had been rejected by national Israel.[41]

Third, Christ, the Jewish Messiah, died for all, Jews and Gentiles. The results of His death—the basis of the new covenant—[42]are applied to Gentiles and Jews in the New Testament church.

Romans 8:2

Without naming it, this text seems to be a reference to the new covenant: "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."[43]

Romans 11:26–27

"All Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.' And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

This crucial text shows a future new covenant in a restored Israel. That is, whatever the significance of applying some of these covenant benefits to believers today, there will be a fulfillment of this in national Israel—exactly as the Old Testament promised.

1 Corinthians 11:25

"After supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the *new covenant* in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' "

2 Corinthians 3:3, 6

> You [Corinthians believers] show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, *written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*. … He has made us competent as *ministers of a new covenant*—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Using 2 Corinthians 3, Erich Sauer succinctly summarizes the differences between the old and new covenants:

> [This chapter] also throws into relief a sevenfold glory of the new covenant: [1] stone-flesh (vv. 3, 7); [2] letter-spirit (v. 6); [3] death-life (vv. 6–7); [4] lesser-greater (vv. 8–10); [5] condemnation-righteousness (v. 9); [6] passing-remaining (v. 11); [7] veiling-unveiling (vv. 12–18). (*TC*, 91)

Hebrews 8:7, 13

> If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.… *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete*; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (cf. Matt. 26:26–28)

Hebrews 9:15

> *Christ is the mediator of a new covenant*, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (cf. 12:24)

Hebrews 10:16–18

> "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.… Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Hebrews 10:28–29

> Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the [*new*] *covenant* that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 13:20

"The God of peace … through the blood of the eternal *[new] covenant* brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus."

Observations on the New Covenant

Some observations emerge from our study of the new covenant.

First, the manner in which the Old Testament passages are (1) cited by Jesus[44] and (2) applied to the church rules out the *classical* dispensational view,

viz., that there are two covenants. There is simply no textual indication that the New Testament writers did not see their application of this to the church as a fulfillment of the new covenant prophecies.

Second, that there will be an ultimate fulfillment of the new covenant after Israel has been resurrected and returned to the Holy Land (Ezek. 37) clearly indicates that the promise is not entirely fulfilled in the church. The implication of a state of final perfection (where sin is eliminated and God makes individuals perfect) also supports a final fulfillment (Jer. 31:33–34).

Third, that a covenant was *made* with Israel (v. 31) does not mean spiritual benefits cannot be *applied* to Gentiles (Heb. 8:7–9); insofar as the new covenant depends on the death of Christ for forgiveness of sins,[45] it applies to Jewish and Gentile believers alike.

Fourth, in the same way, the Abrahamic covenant's promise that all nations[46] would be blessed through its provisions (Gen. 12:3) does not in any way annul the other provisions (e.g., the land-promise) to Abraham and his physical descendants. Jesus inaugurated a spiritual (mystery) form of the kingdom in Matthew 13; there is still a political messianic form to come.[47]

THE COMBINED TESTIMONY OF ISRAEL'S COVENANTS

The overall testimony of the covenants, understood through the historical-grammatical hermeneutic,[48] leads to rejection of both the traditional dispensational and classical covenantal interpretations of Scripture. *There are not two new covenants*. The New Testament does apply Old Testament promises to church-age believers (contrary to traditional dispensationalism), and both Testaments foretell a future literal fulfillment in restored national Israel (contrary to traditional covenantalism). We must still discover whether these prophecies will be fulfilled in a literal millennial reign of Christ (as revised dispensationalists claim) or, rather, in the new heaven and new earth (as revised covenantalists maintain).[49]

Combining what is taught about Israel under all its covenants yields the emergence of seven features, outlined by Lewis Sperry Chafer.[50]

(1) A Land Forever

The Duration of the Promise

In the Abrahamic covenant, Israel was promised the Holy Land forever: "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring *forever*" (Gen. 13:14–15; cf. 17:7, 13; Psa. 105).

The Extent of the Promise

The borders of the Promised Land were specified: They extended from the edge of Egypt on the south, to the Mediterranean Sea (the Great Sea) in the west, all the way to the Euphrates on the east, and Lebanon in the north. The peoples that then occupied this land were enumerated (15:18–21; Josh. 1:3–4), and the Lord said, "*The whole land of Canaan*, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8).

The Permanence of the Promise

Even though Israel would be periodically exiled for disobedience, God would bring them back nonetheless, for never would their banishment be permanent: "The Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people" (Isa. 11:11; cf. Jer. 25). God's promise to Abraham is unconditional and, hence, not dependent on anyone's faithfulness but His (2 Tim. 2:13). Speaking of Israel in this context, Paul declared, "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

(2) A Nation Forever

The People Multiplied

Not only did God promise Abraham a land, He also assured countless descendants (Gen. 15:5) that He would make "into a great nation" (12:1–2). From Abraham came Isaac, and from Isaac came Jacob; Jacob had twelve sons who were the fathers of Israel's twelve tribes. While their people were in Egyptian bondage, God multiplied them greatly (Ex. 1:7), and by the time Moses led them out they numbered two or three million (cf. Num. 1:26).[51]

The Nation Was Chosen

It was under Moses that God said to Israel, "If you obey me fully and keep

my covenant, then *out of all nations* you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests *and a holy nation*" (Ex. 19:5–6; cf. Deut. 14:2). Israel is the only chosen nation (Ps. 147:19–20), the exclusivity of which Paul spells out: "They have been entrusted with the very words of God" (Rom. 3:2); furthermore, "theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises" (9:4).

The Nation Is Unique

Israel brought the Savior to the world (Gal. 4:4). They alone produced the Scriptures.[52] They alone had prophets confirmed by God through miracles. They alone had Moses, the mediating lawgiver with whom God spoke face-to-face. They alone had the covenants. They alone had God, in His glory, dwell personally in their tabernacle and temple. They alone were a theocratic nation under the only God.

The Nation Will Endure

God has determined that His chosen nation, Israel, will endure in its land forever; this will be fulfilled after the resurrection:

> Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.… As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me … so will your name and descendants endure. (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; cf. Rev. 21–22)

The return of exiled Jews to their land after nearly two millennia—and their having been nationally restored—is another proof that God fulfills His promises literally.

(3) A King Forever

God promised that Israel would be a nation forever, living in its land forever; He also decreed that they would have a king forever. Even before the Davidic covenant there were intimations that Israel would have a ruler or king.

THE EVIDENCE FOR AN EVERLASTING KING

Genesis 17:6

"I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will

come from you." Israel eventually would have a line of kings from whom the King of kings would come.

Genesis 49:10

"The *scepter* will not depart from Judah, nor the *ruler's staff* from between his feet, until *he comes to whom it belongs* and the obedience of the nations is his." Again, a descendant of Judah would rule Israel.

Exodus 19:6

God said, "You will be for me a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation." This records the establishment of a theocracy: Israel accepted direct rule by God. They were His kingdom on earth; He was their King.

Deuteronomy 17:14–15

> When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses.

The kingdom's political dimension existed even under Moses, but it would become more apparent in the later monarchy.[53] While the ruling was to be based in God's law, it was a political rule nonetheless.

Isaiah 9:6

"To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and *the government will be on his shoulders*. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father [Father of eternity], Prince of Peace." Both deity and political reign are mentioned: This Son would reign as the God-man.

THE CESSATION OF ISRAEL'S KINGS

The apparent problem with these predictions is that Israel went into exile in 605 B.C. and has not had a king since, as Hosea predicted.

Hosea 3:4

"The Israelites will live many days without king or prince." Historical records confirm that it has indeed been millennia since Israel had a king. Nevertheless, God promised to restore the kingdom.

Psalm 89:28–37

> I will maintain my love to him [David] forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.… I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.… [David's] line will continue forever.

The text does not say David's throne will never be left unoccupied—the promise is that it will be *established forever*. Descendants to David's throne were kept alive until the return of Christ, the Son of David (cf. Matt. 1; Luke 3); when He begins to reign on David's throne, it *will* be established forever (Matt. 24:30; cf. 19:28).[54]

(4) Restoration of Israel Forever

Even the latter part of the Old Testament contains repeated prophecies that Israel would return to its land and that God would restore its king.

Amos 9:11

"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be."

Micah 4:7–8

> I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion [Jerusalem] from that day and forever. As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem.

Daniel 2:44

After speaking of four great successive earthly kingdoms and ten kings still to come after them, Daniel declares that "in the time of those kings, *the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that … will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever*."

Daniel 9:24–27

Regarding the "seventy years" of desolation (9:2), Daniel was told that after sixty-two "sevens" (434 years, v. 25) the "Anointed One will be cut off" (v. 26), but only after he had "put an end to sin" and sealed up "vision and prophecy" about His coming (v. 24). The time interval would be "from the issuing of the

decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes" (v. 25); roughly, this span works out to 445/444 B.C.–A.D. 33.[55]

(5) Presentation of the Messianic King

The herald of Christ proclaimed the promised Ruler: "In those days John the Baptist came … saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near' " (Matt. 3:1–2). Jesus announced the same message (4:17) and also commissioned His apostles to deliver it to "the lost sheep of Israel" (10:5–6; cf. Luke 10:1–12). They proclaimed the good news of the "kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 3:2) or "kingdom of God" (12:28). There is no kingdom without a king; the King, Jesus of Nazareth, would later be crucified as the King of the Jews.

(6) Rejection of the Messianic King

Israel rejected their King, sealing it by calling Jesus' work of healing the work of the devil.[56] Just before His execution, Jesus declared: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (21:43); "They [the Jews] will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" (Luke 21:24).

Immediately thereafter, Jesus announced the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:11ff.) in parables that unfold the mystery form to dominate the interim between His rejection and His return, when He will set up the long-awaited messianic form. The central feature of this time period is the church (Matt. 16:18; cf. Eph. 3:3–5); God would temporarily set aside His dealings with national Israel and attempt to provoke them to envy by centering on the salvation of the Gentiles. Israel will be restored as a nation when "the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25).

(7) Restoration of the Messianic Kingdom[57]

With the King's rejection, the plans to restore the kingdom to Israel were postponed; though it is coming, no one knows when (Acts 1:6–7). Israel was offered their restoration if they would repent, but they refused (3:11ff.), and as a nation they continue in unbelief to this very day (cf. 2 Cor. 3:14; Rom. 11:25). However, God has not rejected His people, and they have not transgressed

beyond His forgiveness. God is working through their rejection to save the peoples of the world, reconciling us to Himself:

> Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. (vv. 30–31)

COMPARING/CONTRASTING ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Now that we have examined the covenants, we can address the relationship between Israel and the church, another issue that divides covenantalists and dispensationalists. As we saw earlier,[58] the church is the mystery bride of Christ wherein there is neither Jew nor Gentile—believers all are joined together as coheirs of God's spiritual blessings.[59] Further, we have seen that the New Testament distinguishes Israel from the church (1 Cor. 10:32) and that after the church age God will restore Israel as a nation (Rom. 11).

Similarities Between Israel and the Church

Israel and the church have a great deal in common; the following are several areas of similarity.

Both Are Part of the People of God

Members of both Israel and the church are part of God's people, that is, the saved through all the ages,[60] also including saints from both testaments. One day we will all gather around the same throne and sing praises to the same God (Rev. 4–5).

Both Are Part of God's Spiritual Kingdom

In addition to being under God's sovereign rule over all creation,[61] Israel (see Luke 13:28) and the church are part of the same overall spiritual kingdom,[62] to which Jesus referred when He said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

Both Are Designed to Glorify God

For both national Israel and the spiritual body of Christ, the ultimate purpose

is to give glory to God. Indeed, this is the purpose for which everything was created, and we will worship the Lord in heaven (cf. Rev. 4:10–11).

Both Participate in the Spiritual Blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant

As we saw earlier, the Abrahamic covenant contains blessings for Gentiles as well as Jews (Gen. 12:3). Everyone is justified by faith alone, as was Abraham (15:6), a patriarchal model of faith for all who believe (Rom. 4:16).

Both Are Participants in the Spiritual Blessings of the New Covenant

Once again, even though the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–33) was *made* with Israel, it is also *applied* to the church. As with the Abrahamic covenant, there are spiritual benefits for all persons contained in Christ's sacrifice (cf. 1 John 2:2), which is sufficient for the entire human race.[63] As we have repeatedly observed, the Mosaic (Law-based) covenant was temporal (Heb. 8:7, 13).

Both Will Endure Forever

Finally, both Israel and the church will exist forever, for, as shown above, the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are everlasting. We, Christ's eternal bride, were chosen in Him before the world began (Eph. 1:4) in accordance with His "eternal purpose" (3:11). Paul told Timothy, "I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with *eternal glory*" (2 Tim. 2:10). The Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2–3), is eternal.

Differences Between Israel and the Church

Despite all that Israel and the church have in common spiritually, they are not identical. Paul clearly distinguished them (1 Cor. 10:32) and spoke of the chosen nation's restoration after the church age is completed (Rom. 11:25–26).

The following chart summarizes some of the significant differences in the origins, natures, and purposes of Israel and the church. Since we have extensively discussed the church,[64] the contrast will be based on that study and what we have learned about Israel in this chapter.

	The Nation of Israel	**The Church**
Headship	Moses	Christ

Origin	Abraham	Pentecost
Nature	Earthly (a political body)	Heavenly (a spiritual body)
Governing Principle	Law of Moses	Grace of Christ
Holy Land	Divine inheritance	No inheritance
Davidic covenant	Promised to Israel	Not promised to church
Constituents	Jews only	Jews and Gentiles
Membership	By physical birth	By spiritual birth
Function	Channel of blessing to the world	To provoke Israel to repent

Different Heads

Moses was the head of Israel: "The law was given through Moses" (John 1:17). Christ is the Head of the church: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John. 1:17; cf. Eph. 5:23). Israel was baptized into Moses (1 Cor. 10:2); believers are baptized into Christ (12:13).

Different Origins

The roots of Israel predate Moses, for Abraham was given the promise of being the father through whom Israel would come (Gen. 12:2–3). The church began on the Day of Pentecost; Jesus previously had said, "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). Baptism into Christ's body is membership in the universal church,[65] "whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free … we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Different Natures

Israel is the name of an earthly political entity that was officially organized under Moses (Ex. 19:5–6). The universal church is the invisible spiritual body of Christ (Eph. 1:3; Heb. 12:22–23).

Different Governing Principles

While there is grace under law (e.g., redeeming Israel from Egypt—Ex. 12ff.) and law under grace (cf. Gal. 6:2), there is nonetheless a difference between the

governing principles of Israel and the church. Israel was under the *Law* as given to Moses and set in the context of a national, political theocracy, with numerous violations calling for capital punishment, including adultery (Lev. 20:10), homosexuality (v. 13), incest (v. 11), the cursing of parents (Deut 5:16), rebellious children (Ex. 20:15–17), idolatry (22:20), and kidnapping (21:16). While the New Testament contains the same basic moral principles that reflect God's unchanging character (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17), these essentials are codified in the context of *grace*.[66]

Different Inheritances

Emphatically declared in the Abrahamic covenant is the promise of the Holy Land to Abraham's physical descendants.[67] The church received no such promise; its inheritance is not tied to any real estate but is spiritual and heavenly (Eph. 1:3, 11, 14, 18; Col. 1:12), even though believers will reign with Christ on the earth after the final resurrection (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:4–6). The New Testament nowhere switches over the Abrahamic promise from Israel to the church—the covenantal doctrine of replacement theology (or realized eschatology) is without biblical foundation.

Different Promises

Neither is the church promised that it will be part of the Davidic covenant, which guarantees that a descendant of David would forever reign on his throne in Jerusalem.[68]

Progressive dispensationalists argue that fulfillment of the Davidic covenant began with Christ's ascension to heaven, but the New Testament does not say this—the texts they use for support are taken out of context.[69] Some verses say nothing about David whatsoever.[70] Others say nothing about Christ's reign.[71] Still others refer to the Second Coming, not the Ascension.[72] A few verses speak of Christ reigning at God's right hand in heaven, not on David's throne in Jerusalem.[73]

One verse is a prediction that Christ will reign on David's throne but does not specify when this begins (Luke 1:32). Another verse connects David's throne with Christ's reign (Acts 2:30), but it is about the Resurrection (v. 31) and the Ascension (vv. 34–35), which were a *prelude* "to sit on his [David's] throne" (v. 30 NKJV), and the text does not specify when He would do this. The same is true of Psalm 110:1, which refers to making Christ's enemies His footstool;[74]

that will occur at the end of the Millennium (cf. Rev. 20:1–6).[75] No text shows that Jesus assumed David's political throne[76] at His ascension.

> In the present time, between His ascension and His return, Christ is on His *Father's* throne (Rev. 3:21; Heb. 8:1). "Sit at my right hand *until* I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Ps. 110:1). Through His "waiting" time (Heb. 10:13) His kingship is *super*-national, purely spiritual, invisible, concerned with the course of salvation. *This is the kingdom of grace*. [However,] in the Millennial kingdom Christ is on *David's* throne (Luke 1:32; Acts 2:30). The throne of this His earthly ancestor is then *His* throne (Rev. 3:21; Matt. 19:28; 25:31). (Sauer, *TC*, 51–52)

Different Constituencies

The nation of Israel was composed of Jews only. Gentiles could convert to Judaism and become proselytes, but even then they were a sort of second-class citizen, since they were not Jews by birth—they were still beyond the "middle wall of separation" (Eph. 2:14 NKJV) that was torn down by Christ in the church, where both Jew and Gentile are one in Him (Eph. 2:12). While the constituents of Israel are Jews, both Jews and Gentiles are part of Christ's body (Gal. 3:28).

Different Conditions for Membership

Likewise, there are different conditions for membership in national Israel and the body of Christ. One becomes a Jew by natural, physical birth (cf. Phil. 3:5);[77] a member of the church is such only by a supernatural spiritual birth (cf. John 3:3).

Different Functions

One of national Israel's primary functions was to be a channel of blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3). Two of the primary ways they were to accomplish this were through the body and through the book; the Living Word and the Written Word. Hebrews declares:

> When Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but *a body* you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in *the scroll [the Book]*—I have come to do your will, O God' " (10:5–7).

Strangely enough, Paul showed that one of the church's functions was to provoke Israel into repentance and acceptance of their Messiah (Rom. 11:25): "I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them" (vv. 13–14).

Reasons for Distinguishing Israel and the Church

The following is a summary of the many reasons for maintaining a distinction between the promises to national Israel and the promises to Christ's spiritual body.

Consistent Use of the Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutic Demands That Literal Unconditional Promises to Israel Are Yet to Be Fulfilled[78]

The unconditional land-promise God made to Abraham and his descendants (e.g., Gen. 13:1–17) has never been fulfilled; it must have a future fulfillment for national Israel.

Further, it was a unilateral covenant made by God with Abraham (not Abraham with God); Abraham was unconscious when it was made (15:12, 18).

What is more, it was a gift of the *whole* land, not just west of the Jordan (e.g., vv. 18–21).

Finally, it was an eternal inheritance: "The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (17:8, cf. v. 19; 26:3).

In short, God forever gave the land to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac, Jacob, and his sons, who became the twelve tribes. This includes modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and all the way to Northern Iraq. Even under Joshua and Solomon this was not fulfilled, let alone fulfilled forever. The unconditional land-promise to Israel must have a future literal fulfillment.

John, Messiah's Herald, Offered a Literal Kingdom to National Israel

The Baptist's simple message was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2); to the Jewish mind, this was the kingdom promised in the Old Testament (e.g., Dan. 2, 7).

> He announced a coming kingdom, which simply means "a coming rule." This rule was to be heaven's rule: "the kingdom of heaven." [Would God then begin to rule in the heavenly realm?] Obviously not, for God has always ruled over the heavenly spheres since Creation. John must mean that God's heavenly rule was about to be extended directly to earthly spheres. [That is,] God's rule over earth had drawn near and was about to be instituted through the person of the Messiah for whom John was preparing the way. (Walvoord and Zuck, *BKC,* 1.24)

Though the Jews rejected Him and thereby His earthly visible reign over them, Jesus began to reign spiritually (cf. Matt. 13) in the kingdom's interim, containing both saved and unsaved, who will be separated after the Second

Coming.[79] The outward messianic reign was set aside until His return, when the so-called "Lord's Prayer" will be literally and ultimately fulfilled; meanwhile we have the church age (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 3:3–5), the mystery form described in the kingdom parables (op. cit.). The messianic promises to Israel (delayed until Jesus comes back) are not to be confused with spiritual blessings for the church; they are distinct entities, and literal promises are not to be spiritualized away.[80]

Jesus Foretold a Literal Reign Over Israel at His Second Coming

"I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28; cf. 24:30). The Second Coming is a literal physical return in a literal physical body.[81] Jesus left physically and visibly, and He will return in the same manner, as Zechariah and John foresaw: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west" (Zech. 14:4); "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be!" (Rev. 1:7).

The Apostles Will Sit on Twelve Thrones to Judge Israel

The twelve apostles, through whom Jesus built His church, were literal physical persons, who at the final resurrection will regain their literal physical bodies (John 5:28–29), which will be just like Jesus' resurrection body (Phil. 3:21), made of "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39; cf. v. 44; John 20:27). It makes no sense to call this a spiritual reign of Christ—both He and His apostles will be in physical resurrection bodies. The reign after Christ's return can be no less literal and physical than the body in which He comes to reign; *a denial of Christ's literal reign is, in effect, a denial of His literal resurrection body*.[82]

Regarding the twelve apostles on twelve thrones judging the twelve *tribes* of Israel (Matt. 19:28), again, the word *tribe* is never used of Israel or any other group in a purely spiritual sense. These are always the twelve literal tribes, who were the literal descendants of the literal twelve sons of Jacob (whom God renamed "Israel"—Gen. 32:28).

The Promised Messianic Kingdom Was Not Yet Fulfilled at the Ascension

The disciples asked Jesus if He was then going to "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6); as mentioned earlier, if there were to be no future literal

kingdom, this was His last opportunity to correct them, as with their errors on other occasions. Instead, He implied that this kingdom had not yet been fulfilled but *would be*, in the Father's good time (vv. 7–8).

After the Church Began, Peter Offered the Kingdom to Israel

In Acts 3:19–21 Peter offered restoration (the literal messianic kingdom) to national Israel, specifically addressing the "Men of Israel" (v. 12) who had killed Jesus (v. 15) and their "rulers" (v. 17 nkvj). This was the promised Old Testament kingdom that would be inaugurated when Messiah came, but Jesus would not return until they repented and accepted Him as their Messiah.

This was not merely a hypothetical offer. Had they repented, Christ would have returned in accordance to what was prophesied. Since God knew they were not going to repent,[83] it is not contradictory to affirm with Scripture that the "times of the Gentiles" (Ezek. 30:3 NKJV) would occur in the intervening time: "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). Since Israel did not repent, this will occur at the Second Coming.[84]

National Israel Will Yet Be Restored to Its Place of Blessing Under God

The promises about Israel's future restoration to their land and national status were not fulfilled in the first century (as preterists claim)[85] or today through the church in a spiritual sense (as amillennialists insist).[86] We have already seen how, in Romans 11, Paul speaks clearly of national Israel's literal future.[87] Verses 9–11 are about Israel's past blessings (9), present rejection (10), and future restoration (11); Paul makes it evident he is speaking of literal physical Israel, not some "spiritual" Israel (like the New Testament church); they are the "nation" to whom Moses wrote, the "Israel" to whom Isaiah prophesied, "his [God's] people" of whom Paul is one (9:3; 10:1, 19, 21; 11:1).

They are "the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises" (9:4). God has not, will not, and cannot cast them away (11:1–2, 29). God's unconditional promises will be fulfilled; the nation as a whole will be converted and restored when their Messiah returns (vv. 24–26).

Revelation Speaks of National Israel's Role Before Christ Returns

John's Apocalypse points to Israel's future role during the tribulation period

before the Second Coming: “Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah, 12,000 were sealed … [12,000 from each of the tribes]” (see 7:4–8). This refers to literal national Israel,[88] and it is these who are alive and active during the Tribulation,[89] bringing into the kingdom “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands” (v. 9).

Then Jesus’ words about the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles (Matt. 19:28) will be literally fulfilled, and He will separate those who have believed from those who have not believed (25:31–34).

Having said all of this, it is important to repeat that, despite these differences between Israel and the church, there are many commonalities. In addition, as with the pre-Israelite believers (before Abraham and Moses), believers of the present age will have more in common than they have differences. After all, *there is one Savior, one plan of redemption, and one family of all the redeemed people who will worship God in heaven. Spiritually, God’s people share a redemptive inheritance, even though there are functional differences between Israel and the church.*

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE COVENANTS WITH ISRAEL

The theological foundation for belief in a literal fulfillment of Israel’s unconditional covenants is based in (1) several attributes of God and (2) a consistent application of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic to Old Testament prophecy. Specific divine attributes stand out in this regard: sovereignty, eternality, omniscience, immutability, omnipotence, and omnisapience. With His sovereign power God has no difficulty bringing about His plan and purpose for Israel, which He willed from all eternity. In order for God to be sure that what He willed would come to pass when He made the covenants, He must have infallible foreknowledge. His immutable will, by means of His omnipotent power, will accomplish His eternal decrees and unconditional covenants, and His omnisapience planned Israel’s election, dispersion, and ultimate restoration.[90]

God's Glory As the Basis for His Covenants With Israel

Ultimately, everything is for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31; cf. Ps. 76:10), and, as with New Testament believers, God's plan for Israel was to bring glory to Himself:

> God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that *no one may boast before him.* (1 Cor. 1:27–29)

God is glorified through His faithfulness to Israel:

> The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. (Deut. 7:7–9)

The Literal Hermeneutic as the Basis for God's Covenants With Israel

While God is the basis for Israel's unconditional election, the basis for our knowing about it is the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. The only way to deny Israel's literal national future is to deny literal interpretations of all covenants with Israel; as we have seen, denial of the literal hermeneutic is both self-defeating *and* undermining of the Christian faith.[91]

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

Many objections have been leveled against distinguishing between Israel and the church;[92] we'll focus on the texts around which the primary arguments are drawn. Misunderstanding of such passages (and misapplication of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic[93]) is what leads to claims that promises made to Israel are fulfilled "spiritually" in the church, with no literal future fulfillment for Israel.

Matthew 2:15

While the New Testament sometimes gives an application of an Old Testament passage, it never spiritualizes away the literal interpretation. For example, Hosea 11:1—"Out of Egypt have I called my son"—referred to the

children of Israel emerging from bondage in Egypt. Matthew *applied* this verse to the Christ-child coming out of Egypt; Jesus too is God's "son."

This fits the dictum of the literal hermeneutic: one common interpretation; many applications. The same is true of 1 Peter 2:9 (regarding a kingdom of priests and a holy nation), which in its Old Testament context (Ex. 19:6) refers to Israel, and Peter does not spiritualize it away when he uses it of church-age believers, of whom it is also literally true. Peter doesn't even quote the passage as such or claim it is fulfilled in the church; he merely borrows language appropriately used of God's people (Israel) and applies it to God's people (the church).

Hebrews 8:7–13

Likewise, the new covenant (contrasted with the "first covenant" in Heb. 8), which was *made* with the nation of Israel (and will be literally fulfilled with them), is also *applied* to the church; the benefits of Christ's death were always intended by God for both (cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:3). Again, this is not a New Testament spiritualization of a literal promise. The application to current believers, also saved through the predicted Messiah, means neither that the promise is fulfilled in the church nor that the church thereby is Israel's replacement. Abraham was promised that Gentiles would be included (12:3); Gentile inclusion does not mean Jewish exclusion.

1 Corinthians 10:4

We have seen[94] the allegation of allegorization regarding Paul's statement about the children of Israel in the wilderness: "They drank of that *spiritual* Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (NKJV). This is *not* allegory—the Rock that followed them was a literal rock, just as the manna they ate was literal food from heaven. The Greek word *spiritual* (*pneumatikos*) refers not to the rock's nature but the rock's source. Just as a "spiritual" person (cf. 2:14–15) is a literal physical person whose life is dominated by the Spirit, even so the literal rock in the wilderness was Spirit-dominated—it "followed them" around for forty years with an endless source of water. The rock was a Christophany, a literal manifestation of Christ and His supernatural power, like the Angel of the Lord appearing in physical human form (cf. Gen. 18:2, 8, 22).

Romans 4:13–16

> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.… Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

From this passage it is argued that Abraham has spiritual seed, and that the promise to him has a fulfillment in all of us, Jew or Gentile, that have faith in Christ—we are all Abraham's spiritual seed.

While this is correct, it doesn't necessitate that the unconditional land-promises God made to Abraham's literal seed (Israel) are not literally true and will not be literally fulfilled. Abraham has two "seeds," physical and spiritual; the spiritual seed is a parallel (not a replacement) seed. There is a future for Abraham's physical descendants;[95] as has been shown above,[96] the yet-unfulfilled land- and kingdom-promises to Israel *will* be fulfilled.[97]

Galatians 3:16

"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ." Some covenant theologians suggest that since Christ is the seed who fulfilled Abraham's promise, there is no need to look for a further future fulfillment in Abraham's literal seed (descendants).[98] In Acts 3:25–26, Peter says to the Jews, "You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant [Jesus], he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Here too Jesus is set forth as the Seed that fulfills Abraham's promise.

In response, note several points.

First, even other covenantalists[99] do not accept this conclusion. Amillennial scholars like Hoekema and Poythress maintain that there will be a literal fulfillment of this promise to Abraham's physical descendants.

Second, no double fulfillment of this promise is necessary, at any rate. The word *seed* (Gk: *sperma*), in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, is singular.[100] Hence, Paul's referring it to Christ (Gal. 3:16) leaves room also for the obvious Old Testament references to the "seed" as being Abraham's physical offspring, said to be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17–18).

Third, that Christ in some way fulfills the seed-promise in no way means He fulfills the land-promise. The New Testament never says, "Christ is the Land."

Fourth, and finally, even after the time of Christ, Scripture mentions fulfillment of Israel's promises.[101] Considering Christ as the Seed of Abraham does not deny a literal fulfillment of the Abrahamic land promises to national Israel.[102]

Galatians 6:15–16

"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, *and* upon the Israel of God" (KJV). The ASV, the NASB, *Young's Literal Translation*, and the NKJV all follow suit regarding "*and* [up]on the Israel of God." The NIV deviates, however, rendering, "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, *even* to the Israel of God."

Linguistically, the Greek word *kai* can mean "and," "even," or "also," the intended meaning normally being determined by the context. Sometimes, though, other considerations come into play, which will be made evident by the following summary of the three basic ways to interpret this text.[103]

The first interpretation, which renders *kai* as "even," takes "the Israel of God" to refer to the church. This is a standard amillennialist view,[104] supporting the idea that the church is "spiritual Israel," the spiritual heir to Old Testament promises, as supposedly implied in all believers[105] being called the "seed of Abraham" (3:29). This view has been held by (among others) John Calvin (1509–1564), Martin Luther (1483–1546), R. C.H. Lenski (1864–1936), Herman Ridderbos (b. 1900), and John Stott (b. 1925); the earliest representative among the fathers was Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165; see *DJ*, 11:1–5).

The second interpretation regards "the Israel of God" as a reference to the remnant of believing Jews in the church. In support of this is Paul's claim that he is a believing Israelite (Rom. 11:1), "a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (v. 5 NASB). Also, "Israel of God" is understood in contrast to "Israel after the flesh" (1 Cor. 10:18 NKJV). Adherents include Charles Ellicott (1819–1905), Adolf von Schlatter (1852–1938), Walter Gutbrod (1901–1998), and many premillennialists.[106]

The third interpretation sees this text as a reference to the future redeemed ethnic Israel, emphasizing "all Israel" (11:26) as roughly equivalent to "the Israel of God." Proponents include Ernest De Witt Burton (1856–1925), F. F. Bruce (1910–1991), W. D. Davies (b. 1911), and Franz Mussner (b. 1916).

Our focus is not on deciding between the last two views—both hold that "the Israel of God" is a reference to ethnic Israel—but to show that the first (favored by amillennialists) is not demonstrable.

First, translating *kai* as "and" is standard.[107]

Second, this translation is the common grammatical tradition; without compelling arguments to the contrary, it is generally unwise to deviate.

Third, the common usage makes good sense in Galatians 6:16.

Fourth, Ellicott points out that it is doubtful whether Paul ever used *kai* in "so marked an explicative sense" (as "even").

Fifth, S. Lewis Johnson (1915–2004) notes:

> From the standpoint of biblical usage this view stands condemned. There is no instance in biblical literature of the term *Israel* being used in the sense of the church, or the people of God as composed of both believing ethnic Jews and Gentiles. ("PTIG," 189)

Occasionally, Romans 9:6 is offered as an exception, but Paul is speaking there of a division *within* ethnic Israel, not of believing Gentiles: "They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel" (NASB). There is no support here for the amillennial view that the New Testament church is spiritual Israel, and, in short, no real support for literal Old Testament promises to Israel being fulfilled spiritually in the church.

Response to Modified Covenantal Arguments

2 Corinthians 1:20

"No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God." This is alleged to prove that all Old Testament promises are spiritually fulfilled in Christ, and from this Poythress infers that since Christians are in Christ, the church is a spiritual fulfillment of these prophecies to Israel (*UD*, 126). Many also go on to add that, therefore, the land and throne promises to Abraham and David will not have a literal fulfillment in a future national Israel.

These conclusions do not follow for several reasons.

First, again, that Christ fulfilled salvific prophecies[108] does not mean He has thereby spiritually fulfilled all Old Testament prophecies about Israel returning to the land and about Christ reigning on David's political throne.

Second, again, even some covenant theologians (like Poythress and Hoekema) admit there will be a literal fulfillment of these promises to ethnic

Israel. Accordingly, Paul's claim that there is fulfillment in Christ cannot be taken to exclude Israel; for that matter, the promises unfulfilled during the First Coming will be fulfilled in Christ and His literal reign at the Second Coming.

Third, as we have observed repeatedly,[109] historical-grammatical interpretation of prophecy reveals that some unconditional land- and throne-promises have never yet been fulfilled; God stakes His own immutable character[110] that these promises *will* be fulfilled (cf. Ps. 89:24–37; Heb. 6:13–18).

Hebrews 12:22–24

> You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Poythress attempts to use this to say that if Christ fulfills all the Old Testament sacrificial types, then, by analogy, this "is simultaneously a fulfillment of prophecies about a perfect, restored Jerusalem (Isa. 60:14; Mic. 4:1–2)."

First, Hebrews is speaking of a "heavenly" city, (heaven itself), not an earthly city in which Christ will reign when He returns (Isa. 2:3; Matt. 19:28).

Second, this city is a spiritual place where "spirits" dwell, not an earthly place where bodies dwell.

Third, again, even some covenant theologians admit there will still be a future literal fulfillment of this (e.g., Poythress, *UD*, 120).

Fourth, and finally, since the Holy City will come down to earth (Rev. 21–22), since this is the place from which Christ will reign for a thousand years (20:1–6),[111] and since there will be a literal resurrection before this reign and Christ will return in a literal physical body,[112] there is no reason why this presently "heavenly" city cannot be the same city that will descend for Christ's earthly reign.

1 Corinthians 3:21–23

"No more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether … *the world* or life or death or the present or *the future*—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God." Since Paul informs the Corinthian Christians that even "the world" is theirs, Poythress argues that there is no reason Gentiles cannot share in

Israel's literal future land-promise fulfillment, After all, we share in other promises given to Abraham (Gal. 3:28) and in the new covenant (Heb. 8:7–13); why, then, cannot the church partially fulfill the land-promises?

In response, *first*, this text is a general affirmation that believers possess the world; it in no way excludes God's promise for Israel to inherit a specific portion of this world in the future.

Second, believers today do not possess the Holy Land in the way in which it was promised to Israel, namely, as a *national inheritance*. The church is not a nation but a non-ethnic entity (Gal. 3:28).

Third, the church does not directly possess the world or any piece of property in it. Whatever we possess is indirect; we are possessed by Christ, who possesses the world.

Fourth, and finally, once again, some covenantalists admit that ethnic Israel will one day directly possess the land given to Abraham, so there is no reason national Israel as a nation cannot occupy this very land as promised.

Galatians 3:28

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." From this, covenant theologians infer that there is only one people of God who have no religious difference in God's future plan, all sharing equally in all the Old Testament promises made to Israel (including the Davidic prophecies).

In reply, *first*, no New Testament believers—Jews or Gentiles, members of Christ's body—have any claim on the promises made to believing Jews as part of ethnic Israel.

Second, Paul is not speaking here of national Israel and her promises from God; he only addresses what present believers have in Christ's body.

Third, the New Testament church is not a funnel through which Gentiles can receive Jewish blessings—it is a non-ethnic entity composed of those who are a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) or "new man" (Eph. 2:15). The ancient prophecies made to Israel, if interpreted literally, make an ethnic distinction.

Fourth, to affirm functional equality of the church with Israel is to reject historical-grammatical interpretation of the texts that give a *functionally* superior place to Israel in the future messianic kingdom.[113] All God's people share equally in His salvation *personally and spiritually*; nonetheless, Israel has a special future place *collectively and nationally*.

Fifth, Paul clarified that the church is a third New Testament group alongside

Gentiles and Jews: “the church of God” (1 Cor. 10:32). “In the place of the former twofold division of mankind there thus arises a threefold division, and to Israel and the peoples of the world there is added the church as a ‘third race’ ” (Sauer, *TC*, 58).

Sixth, and finally, Israel will be a separate entity after the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (the church age, Rom. 11:25), which would not be true if the church had replaced Israel and fulfilled her prophecies.

In summation, none of these verses demonstrates the covenantal view; all are amenable to a revised dispensational understanding. Indeed, taken in immediate context (to say nothing of Holy Writ’s overall context), they make much more sense as understood by dispensationalists.

CONCLUSION

What can we conclude from the above discussion? National Israel was promised a literal physical kingdom involving the Holy Land and the Davidic throne on which the Messiah will reign. This messianic kingdom was through ethnic Israel and, thereby, their promised fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Since the covenants are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29), God, in His mysterious and eternal wisdom, preplanned Israel’s fall (in accordance with their own foreseen rebellion) to provide for Gentile salvation, which was from the beginning envisioned as part of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:3; Rom. 4:16) and the new covenant (Heb. 8:7–8).[114]

Blindness will remain with national Israel (Rom. 11:25) until God finishes His plan of calling out from Jews and Gentiles a heavenly bride (the church) for Himself. When this work is accomplished, God will restore (re-ingraft) ethnic Israel and fulfill the new covenant made with her (Jer. 31:31). Thus, the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants with Israel will be fulfilled. When Messiah returns and is accepted by Israel, “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26); that is, all who are believers (cf. Rev. 14:3–4) and are left at the end of the Tribulation[115] and the beginning of the Millennium.[116]

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE SECOND COMING AND THE MILLENNIUM

There are three primary eschatological views with regard to the Second Coming and the Millennium, and their differences are largely a matter of how prophecy is interpreted:[1] Those who use an allegorical method generally uphold an amillennial or postmillennial view, while those who apply a literal hermeneutic embrace a premillennial view.

The basic issue is whether or not Christ will return before a literal thousand-year reign on earth (cf. Rev. 20). *Premillennialists* say yes, contending that Christ will return bodily and reign over the whole world. *Amillennialists* and *postmillennialists* say no; the former hold that there will be *no* literal thousand-year reign—that related predictions are to be understood spiritually as being fulfilled in the church of this present age—while the latter stress that the church, by Christianizing the world, will usher in the millennial era, *after which* Christ will literally return to earth.

THE PREMILLENNIAL VIEW

The essence of premillennialism is that Christ will physically return to earth and set up a worldwide thousand-year reign. There are two main forms: historic

premillennialism (e.g., George Eldon Ladd [1911–1982]) and dispensational premillennialism (e.g., John Walvoord [1910–2002]). The latter stresses that the Millennium will be a time of fulfillment of unconditional promises to Israel;[2] the former essentially rests its case for the Millennium on a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1–6.

In addition to being maintained by many early church Fathers (e.g., Justin Martyr [c. 100–c. 165], Clement of Alexandria [150–c. 215], Tertullian [c. 155–c. 225]), and others (see historical section below), premillennialism has been embraced by a diverse group of medieval, modern, and contemporary scholars, including some Roman Catholics (the early Augustine [354–430]), some Puritans (Cotton Mather [1663–1728]), Plymouth Brethren (John Nelson Darby [1800–1882]), Anglicans (Griffith Thomas [1861–1924]), Presbyterians (Lewis Sperry Chafer [1871–1952]), Reformed (James Montgomery Boice [1938–2000]), Baptists (Millard Erickson [b. 1932]), and a wide variety of charismatics.

The numerous arguments offered in support of premillennialism include:

(1) It best explains the unconditional land-promise to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12, 14–15).
(2) It provides the best understanding of the unconditional Davidic covenant (that his descendent would reign forever (2 Sam. 7:12ff.).
(3) It is needed to fulfill numerous Old Testament predictions about a messianic age (cf. Isa. 9, 60, 65).
(4) It explains Jesus' promise that He and His apostles would reign on thrones in Jerusalem (Matt. 19:28).
(5) It is supported by Jesus' response to the disciples' question about restoring the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:5–7).
(6) It upholds Paul's affirmation about Christ reigning until death is defeated (1 Cor. 15:20–28).
(7) It is consistent with the Romans 11 promise that Israel will be restored.
(8) It maintains a literal interpretation of Christ and the resurrected saints reigning "a thousand years" (Rev. 20:1–6).

THE AMILLENNIAL VIEW

The term *amillennial* means literally "no Millennium." However, proponents are quick to point out that they do not deny the statements (in Rev. 20) about a thousand-year reign but, rather, deny that there will be a literal, physical, earthly

millennial reign of Christ following the Second Coming.[3] They often prefer to label their view "realized millennialism," "realized eschatology," or "inaugurated eschatology" (Hoekema in Clouse, *MMFV*, 177), for, unlike dispensational premillennialists, amillennialists hold that the unfulfilled Old Testament predictions made to Israel are fulfilled spiritually in the New Testament church.[4]

The later Augustine was amillennial, as were Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564). Most Puritans held to amillennialism, as do most Roman Catholics; more recent proponents include Oswald Allis (1880–1973), Louis Berkhof (1873–1957), and Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988).

The basic arguments for amillennialism include the following:

(1) The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were *conditional* and, thus, need no future fulfillment.[5]
(2) Prophecy demands a symbolic approach and, hence, need not be taken literally.[6]
(3) Israel and the church are not two distinct entities, but one people of God bound by one covenant of grace.[7]
(4) The Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament and so must be understood in light of this fulfillment.[8]
(5) The "first resurrection" of Revelation 20 should be understood as a "spiritual resurrection," namely, souls being delivered from earth to heaven where they reign with Christ spiritually.[9]
(6) Numerous New Testament passages show that Old Testament prophecies (e.g., the new covenant—cf. Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8–13) are fulfilled in the church.[10]

THE POSTMILLENNIAL VIEW

Postmillennialism and amillennialism have much in common: Both believe that Christ will not physically return before a literal thousand-year reign; both allegorize or spiritualize much of Old Testament prophecy; and both reject dispensational interpretations of it.

However, postmillennialism maintains that Christ will return after "the thousand years" (= long period of time); the *church* (not the Second Coming)

will inaugurate the Millennium. The preaching and teaching of the Christian message throughout the world will increasingly Christianize it; the Millennium will be a thousand years of peace and prosperity *preceding* Christ's physical return.

Although some postmillennialists claim Augustine, it's difficult to find much support for the view before modern Reformed theology. A. A. Hodge (1823–1886), B. B. Warfield (1851–1921), A. H. Strong (Baptist, 1836–1921), and Loraine Boettner (1932–2000) were postmillennialists; on the contemporary scene, postmillennialism's main impetus is the reconstructionist movement spawned by R. J. Rushdooney (1916–2001).[11]

The following are some of the main postmillennial arguments:

(1) The Bible promises universal gospel proclamation (Matt. 28:18–20).
(2) Christ's throne, from which He reigns, is in heaven (Ps. 47:2; 9:5).
(3) People from all nations and ethnicities will be saved (Rev. 7:9–10).[12]
(4) Jesus' parable of the mustard seed foretells continual advance of Christianity in the world (Matt. 13:31–32).
(5) There is ample evidence that world conditions, through Christian teaching, are improving morally, socially, and spiritually.[13]
(6) In the Bible, *thousand* is often used symbolically (cf. 1 Chron. 16:15; Ps. 50:10).

Comparison of the Three Views

	Pre-millennialism[14]	**Amillennialism**	**Postmillennia**
Literal Millennium	Yes	No	No
Resurrection before Millennium	One[15]	None	None
"Thousand years" of Revelation 20	Future	Present	Present
Resurrection(s)[16]	Two	One	One
Consistent literal understanding of prophecy	Yes	No[17]	No
UnconditionalOld			

Testamentcovenants	Yes	No[18]	No
Distinctionsbetween Israel and the Church	Many	None	None
Messianic kingdom	Future	Present	Present
Rapture[19]/SecondComing	Separate events	Same event	Same event
Binding of Satan[20]	In the future (during the Millennium)	In the present	In the present
Moral progress	Not inevitable	Not inevitable	Inevitable
Final judgment[21]	Two events	One event	One event

In these categories, for the most part, amillennialism and postmillennialism agree, which is why it's sometimes difficult to determine whether a writer is one or the other. Loraine Boettner admitted that "there is comparatively little difference between postmillennialism and amillennialism, at least when either of these is compared with historic premillennialism or dispensationalism" (in Clouse, *MMFV*, 199). One chief distinguisher is the postmillennial belief that moral and spiritual progress is inevitable between Christ's first and second comings; this seems to contradict the many passages revealing an apostasy before He returns[22] and to effectively ignore teaching about Antichrist and the Tribulation.[23]

From this brief comparison it's obvious that the crucial eschatological difference between premillennialism and the others is hermeneutical:

(1) Consistent literal interpretation of Revelation 20 yields two resurrections,[24] one before and one after a literal thousand-year reign (the Millennium) of Christ.
(2) Consistent literal interpretation of Old and New Testament teaching on Israel's future reveals that they are distinct from the church and have a literal national future.
(3) Consistent literal interpretation of Old and New Testament prophecy yields dispensational premillennialism.[25]

Since the defense of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic has already been given,[26] here we will illustrate and apply it to the issues and events at hand.

THE SECOND COMING

It is possible to overemphasize variations between the major evangelical views on the Millennium and forget two facts: (1) They are all within the boundaries of evangelicalism; (2) they all believe in the Second Coming:

> It should be remembered … that while post-, a- and premillennialists differ in regard to the manner and time of Christ's return, that is, in regard to the events that precede or follow his return, they agree that he will return personally, visibly and in great glory. (Boettner in Clouse, *MMFV*, 119)

Christ's Return Will Be Literal and Physical

The Second Coming is grounded in the Resurrection. Christ was resurrected in the same physical body of flesh and bones in which He died (Luke 24:36–39); He still had the crucifixion scars (cf. v. 40; John 20:20), was touched (Matt. 28:9), and consumed physical food (Luke 24:42–43). Christ also ascended, literally and physically, in that same physical body (Acts 1:11); He will come again in the same way (Zech. 14:4).[27]

Christ's Return Will Be Visible and Tangible

"Look, he is coming with the clouds, and *every eye will see him*, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him" (Rev. 1:7). "The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two" (Zech. 14:4).

Christ's Return Will Be Supernatural and Glorious

Jesus predicted the Second Coming[28] when interpreting the parable of the soils:

> The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. *The harvest is the end of the age*, and the harvesters are angels.
>
> As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. *The Son of Man*

> *will send out his angels*, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.[29]

John describes the Second Coming in dramatic words:

> I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.
>
> He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. (Rev. 19:11–15)

These precious truths about Christ's return, which constitute one of the faith's great fundamentals and are held by all orthodox Christians, *are* a test of orthodoxy. That the intramural debate about the Millennium is not a test of orthodoxy does not mean it lacks importance; one could say that the literal hermeneutic (which yields premillennialism) is a hermeneutical fundamental, though not a doctrinal fundamental.[30] This may be why premillennialists are less likely to slip into liberalism, while those who allegorize prophecy are more likely to spiritualize (and, thereby, perhaps deny) doctrinal nonnegotiables.

PREMILLENNIALISM

Premillennialism is rooted in a literal interpretation of prophecy.[31] A consistent literal interpretation of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants,[32] a host of other Old Testament predictions, the early announcement of the kingdom of heaven by John and Jesus, and later statements by Jesus and Paul about Israel's future inexorably yield dispensational premillennialism. While historic and dispensational premillennialists both apply the literal hermeneutic to Revelation 20, unfortunately the former does not apply the same consistency when interpreting biblical predictions about Israel's destiny and the messianic (millennial) kingdom.[33]

Amillennialist Oswald Allis agreed that other views discard literal interpretation (in favor of allegorism) when it comes to biblical prophecies about the future of Israel and the exposition of Revelation (especially Rev. 20): "The Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age" (cited by

Hoyt in Clouse, *MMFV*, 67). Somehow, amillennialist Anthony Hoekema took certain predictions about Israel to be fulfilled spiritually in the church, yet concedes a literal future fulfillment of the Abrahamic land-promises in the new heaven and new earth. Also, he conceded[34] that symbolic language can refer to a literal future event (such as hell—ibid., 184), but the heart of traditional amillennialism argues that millennial passages cannot be interpreted literally when they contain symbolic language.

The Biblical Basis for Premillennialism

We have already set forth groundwork for dispensational premillennialism in a biblical examination of the messianic kingdom and in a study of the unconditional covenants made with Israel.[35] Building on this, here we will note the primary issues and show how dispensational premillennialism is the natural working-out of these promises.

The Eternal Land-Promise to Israel Is Yet to Be Fulfilled

The unconditional Abrahamic covenant has not yet been fulfilled,[36] so it will be, in a future messianic kingdom, for "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29 NKJV).

The Eternal Davidic Throne-Promise Is Yet to Be Fulfilled

The unconditional pledge of a future, political, earthly messianic reign is found in 2 Samuel 7:11–16. Though David wished to build a house for the Lord, God declared that He would build the house of David for him, a dynasty from which Messiah would reign on David's throne (cf. Ps. 89:20–37).

The Old Testament Ends With Israel Expecting the Messianic Kingdom

During the years prior to the end of the Old Testament (c. 400 B.C.), the prophets were still looking forward to the yet unfulfilled messianic kingdom. Isaiah prophesied of Messiah that "the government will be on his shoulders.… Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness" (Isa. 9:6–7; cf. 16:5). Malachi recorded God saying, "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come" (Mal. 3:1).

John the Baptist Offered Israel the Messianic Kingdom

The very one of whom Malachi wrote heralded the Messiah-King (Matt. 3:1–2). Jesus (4:17), the Twelve (10:5–7), and other followers delivered the same message (Luke 10:1–12).

Jesus Offered Israel the Messianic Kingdom

The kingdom John and Jesus announced was the same as the political messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament (see McClain, *GK*, chapter 21).

First, the absence of any formal definition in its announcement assumes that the Jewish hearers would know what it meant; the kingdom they expected was a visible messianic reign over the earth from Jerusalem.

Second, Jesus said His teaching had continuity with the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17–18), and the terms *son of man* and *kingdom of heaven* are rooted in Daniel's messianic prophecies (see Dan. 7:13–14, 22). Jesus constantly appealed to the Old Testament to support His claims to the messianic kingdom,[37] and the gospel record always connects the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus with that of Old Testament prophecy.[38]

Third, there is literal identity with messianic events foretold by the prophets and the life of Christ, such as being born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in the city of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) from the tribe of Judah (Matt. 1:3), performing miracles (Isa. 35:5), making a triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9), dying (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26), and rising from the dead (Ps. 16:10).

Fourth, and finally, all the basic elements[39] of the Old Testament prophetic kingdom are found in Christ's message and miracles: *spiritual* (Matt. 3:2), *moral* (5–7), *social* (Mark 12:40–44; Luke 10:29–37), *ecclesiastical* (Matt. 5:17–18; 8:34), *political* (Luke 1:31–33; Matt. 19:28), and *physical*, e.g., the Virgin Birth, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection.[40]

The Chosen Nation Rejected the Messianic Kingdom

"He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:10–11). After His rejection by the Jews, Jesus declared, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you[41] and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43).

Jesus announced that His kingdom was at hand (3:2), but instead of repenting and accepting their Messiah-King, they rejected Him (21:42; cf. Ps. 118:26). "Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent" (11:20). An apex of unbelief was reached when the Jewish leaders attributed His miraculous power to Satan, to which Jesus replied, "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (12:31). The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11), explained through parables, revealed the kingdom form that will dominate the interregnum until the Second Coming, when Jesus will return and initiate the long-awaited messianic form.

Christ Instituted a Present Spiritual Kingdom Until He Returns

Jesus explained the situation to His disciples: "The knowledge of the secrets [mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them" (ibid.). Jesus cited Isaiah 6:9–10, a text used five times in the New Testament, always in connection with Israel's rejection of her King;[42] Israel's unbelief resulted in divine judgment in the form of spiritual blindness, deafness, and hardness.[43]

Jesus Promised to Restore the Messianic Kingdom to Israel

"At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28; cf. 25:31–34; Acts 1:6–7).[44] No such event has ever happened, from Jesus' time to the present; the only option besides future fulfillment is rejection of the literal hermeneutic in favor of allegorism, which is self-defeating and inconsistent, and (if applied more broadly) undermining of evangelicalism in general.[45]

Paul Affirmed the Irrevocability of God's Promised Kingdom to Israel

Clearly the word *Israel* here means literal, national Israel, which Paul called my "countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:3–4; cf. 11:1). Israel is not beyond recovery but is being used of God to bring eternal life to the Gentiles, who are in turn purposed to compel Israel to jealousy and salvation.[46] When God's complete plan of salvation is accomplished,[47] He will restore national Israel and fulfill His

unconditional promises to them, including the messianic kingdom, which was delayed but never annulled by their rejection. When Messiah returns and is accepted by Israel, "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26), at the end of the Tribulation,[48] before the beginning of the Millennium.

Peter Promised Israel the Messianic Kingdom

Peter told Israel that if they repented, they would be forgiven and the promised long-awaited messianic kingdom would come (Acts 3:19–21, 24–25). They refused, and though this kingdom has not yet been fulfilled, God *will* restore it after Jesus returns. There is not the slightest hint that any spiritual kingdom has replaced the land- and/or throne-prophecies, which are not just for Israel but also for their literal descendants, whom Peter calls "heirs."

Paul Specified That Christ's Future Reign Would End

Paul wrote, regarding the Second Coming and the final resurrection:

> All will be made alive.… Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.… [God] has put everything under his [Christ's] feet. Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:22–28)

This fits with John's affirmations that place the two resurrections as bookends of Christ's reign: the first resurrection (of the saved) at the beginning and the second resurrection (of the lost) at the end of the thousand years. This occasions a contrast between Christ's temporal reign and God's eternal reign, between the Millennium (Rev. 20) and the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21–22).[49]

John Specified That Christ's Reign Would Be for a Thousand Years

> I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.
>
> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.… They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (20:1–6)

A historical-grammatical reading of this passage[50] informs us that there will be a literal Millennium, during which Satan is bound, beginning with the raising of the saved and ending with the raising of the lost.[51] The last enemy (death) will not be destroyed until the end of Christ's reign (1 Cor. 15: 23–26), and, because the word *resurrection* is used exclusively of literal, bodily resurrection from the grave,[52] it makes no hermeneutical sense to spiritualize away one resurrection (as amillennialists do) while embracing the other as literal.

THE MILLENNIUM

The Length of the Millennium

The length of this period has been hotly debated, despite the meaning of the word *millennium* and the abundant reasons for interpreting it as a literal thousand years. (See Rev. 20:1–6.)

This Time Period Is Repeatedly Called "a Thousand Years"

Facts mentioned only once in the Bible are true; the future messianic kingdom is said to be a thousand years long *six times* in Revelation 20:1–7.

First, some have taken the word *thousand* to be symbolic of a long period of time (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:15) or of a great number of things (e.g., Job 33:23), as indeed it sometimes is. However, of its hundred-plus occurrences in the biblical text, only a handful are nonliteral, and even these are mostly hyperbole (not allegorical).

Second, other numbers in Revelation are used literally; for example, 1,260 days (12:6) is a literal three and one-half years (Dan. 12:7, 11).[53]

Third, even symbols refer to something literal, as indicated by John's literal interpretation of symbolic usage (e.g., 1:20).[54]

Fourth, as just noted, Paul indicated that Christ's earthly reign would be a long period of time with an end.[55]

Fifth, and finally, literal numbers can have symbolic significance—Israel was tested for forty years in the wilderness (cf. Matt. 4), and while there is a symbolic meaning to this time of wandering, it is also true that they literally wandered for about forty years. Relatedly, *thousand* can symbolize a long period and still be literally true.

Isaiah's "Little Apocalypse" Fits John's Description in Revelation 19–21

Isaiah 24 is a prediction of the Day of the Lord that resembles John's expanded version in Revelation 6–19. Isaiah 25:6–9 envisions an everlasting kingdom that corresponds to Revelation 21–22 (the new heaven and new earth). Between these two bookends is Isaiah 24:21–23:[56]

> In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.

When Christ returns, He will punish the devil and his emissaries, imprisoning Satan (Rev. 19:17–21; 20:1–6) and then reigning on Mount Zion (Jerusalem). "After many days" (the Millennium) there will be a punishment of the wicked before the Great White Throne (20:11–15), followed by the new heaven and new earth (20:21–22; cf. Isa. 25:6–9). These verses in Isaiah are Old Testament foretellings of an intermediate kingdom before the final judgment and God's eternal reign.

Use of the Term Forever

The term *forever* is often used in relation to the messianic kingdom: God promised, "Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me" (Ps. 89:35–36). As mentioned earlier, *forever* (Heb: *olam*) does not always mean "without end" (e.g., Ezek. 36:3–4), but since Christ's kingdom will be delivered up to the Father, who will continue to reign on into the new heaven and new earth, there is no reason why *forever* cannot mean "without end" in this case. A thousand-year period could be a *literal* fulfillment of such promises.

The Existence of Evil and Death in the Millennium Implies an End

That Messiah's kingdom reign will contain sin and death is a sure indication it will not last forever; during the thousand years Christ will have to rule with a rod of iron (Rev. 12:5), some sinners will be judged and die (Isa. 65:20), and He will crush a large rebellion at the end (Rev. 20:7–10). By contrast, the new heaven and new earth will be entirely devoid of sin and death: "He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (21:4).

The Nature of the Millennium

Again, the millennial and eternal states can be contrasted as follows:

	Millennium	**New Heaven and New Earth**
Terminus	At end of Christ's reign	No end
Evil	Present	Not present
Death	Death occurs	No death occurs
Location	On earth	In heaven and on earth
Final judgement	Not yet occurred	Completed
Constituents	Saved and unsaved	Saved only
Satan	Not yet finally judged	Finally judged

The nature of Christ's millennial reign can be described briefly in the following points.

The Millennium Will Begin With the Second Coming

There is no kingdom of God without God the King; there is no literal kingdom without a literal King's presence. It is Messiah's return that will inaugurate the messianic kingdom:

> Immediately after the distress of those days[57] "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (Matt. 24:29–30)

Christ Will Judge the Nations and Separate the Sheep (Saved) From the Goats (Lost)

> I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it.… Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. (Zech. 14:2–4)
>
> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from

> another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. [Then,] the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." … Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:31–41).

So only saved people will enter the Millennium, namely, the remnant of the 144,000 Jews who are saved, plus the multitude they win to Christ (see Rev. 7:4–9).[58]

Some Children Born During the Millennium Will Not Believe

Saved parents can have unsaved children; of those born during the Millennium, some will accept Christ as their Savior, and others will not. Of those who do not, some will go along with His reign outwardly, while others will overtly rebel against it. The latter will be judged and die prematurely (Isa. 65:20) under the rod of iron (Rev. 12:5) with which Christ will crush all opposition. At the end of the Millennium, the false believers who only followed outwardly will rebel, at the instigation of the devil's release from his prison, only to be destroyed by Christ:

> When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth.… They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. (20:7–9)

Resurrected Humans Will Take Part in the Heavenly New Jerusalem

The first resurrection[59] takes place before the Millennium:

> Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection.[60] The second death has no power over them,[61] but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. … [These will be part of] the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (20:6; 21:2)

There will be a great wedding as the church, Christ's bride, is joined to her Husband and Head.[62]

Christ Will Reign on a Throne in Jerusalem

Jesus promised His disciples that when He sits on His throne, they would also be seated on thrones and would judge the twelve tribes (Matt. 19:28; cf. Isa. 2:3). As we have seen, this will fulfill the unconditional, everlasting Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:12ff.; cf. Ps. 89:33–36).

Christ's Followers Will Be Positionally Rewarded in His Reign

Christ's disciples will reign with Him, each being rewarded according to his works (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:11–15); in a parable of a king entrusting servants with resources, those who were faithful and industrious were congratulated and promoted (Luke 19:16–19). Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12).

One Faith Will Be Established Over All the Earth

The millennial kingdom will not only be a divine but also a religious monarchy. The King will be the Priest (Ps. 110), the one object of worship for all nations: "'From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the Lord" (Isa. 66:23).

Every nation must comply:

> The survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain.… The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (Zech. 14:16–18)

A central sanctuary, established for all worship (Ezek. 37:27–28), will be filled with God's *shekinah* (43:1–7). God's original intention for Israel will be established as she becomes a spiritual beacon to the nations (Isa. 61:6), making universally known the knowledge of the true God (59:19; Ezek. 37:28).

Peace Will Be Restored to the Earth

There will be no real peace until the Prince of Peace comes back: "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). But when Christ returns,

> He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Micah 4:3; cf. Isa. 2:4)

What the current peace movement tries to do impotently, God will accomplish by His omnipotent hand. There will be no more war (Zech. 9:10).

Prosperity Will Be Restored to Earth

Not only peace but also prosperity will be restored. The earth will be fruitful and prosperous. None will want, and everyone will be supported physically and financially:

> "In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree," declares the Lord Almighty.… They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.… [It will again be] a land flowing with milk and honey.[63]

Creation Will Be Delivered From Bondage

Adam's sin brought toil, suffering, and bondage to God's creation, but Paul reminds us that in the Millennium the effects of the Fall will be reversed:

> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. [For] the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.
>
> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:18–23)

At the Millennium's commencement, the Paradise lost will become the Paradise regained. The dead who believed will be raised and reverse the curse on the body; nature will be restored and reverse the curse on creation.

There Will Be No Carnivorous Animals

The curse on the animal kingdom likewise will be reversed. No longer will nature be red in tooth and claw; no animals will be carnivorous; rather, they will be herbivorous, as in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9; 3:2). " 'The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,' says the Lord" (Isa. 65:25).

Longevity Will Be Restored

Before the time of the Flood, people commonly lived 900 or more years, and apparently this kind of longevity will be restored during the Millennium:

> As the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands.… Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. (vv. 22, 20)

Death Will Result From Rebellion and Punishment

Even though life is lengthened in the Millennium, death will still occur; those who survive the Tribulation[64] will still be mortal. Apparently, though, there will be no death of natural causes—decay, disease, or degeneration. It will be by judgment for rebellion against God (Rev. 12:5; Isa. 65:20) and perhaps by accident.

The Millennium is not heaven—it will not be absolutely perfect, but it will be as perfect as it can be on earth with unsaved people still in the mix (Matt. 13:29–30). *The Millennium is not the first chapter of heaven but the last chapter of earth—not the completed victory but the last chapter in the ultimate victory*: "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25; cf. 13:10–12). Nonetheless, the Millennium will be a vast improvement over the world before the Second Coming: There will be no more poverty, sickness, famine, plagues, or war, and, instead, there will be peace, prosperity, and tranquility. "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE MILLENNIUM

Like all other doctrines, premillennialism as embraced by dispensationalists is rooted in the nature of God. Several attributes[65] stand out in this regard: God's eternality, immutability, omniscience, omnisapience, omnipotence, and sovereignty.[66] The all-wise eternal God, who knows all things by His omniscient knowledge, makes unconditional promises based on His immutable character, plans all things by His unchangeable will, and achieves them with His omnipotent power. God foretold and will accomplish the future messianic millennial kingdom in which Christ the Messiah, chosen by the Father to this end, will reign.

There are other arguments for premillennialism that do not flow directly from a specific attribute of God but are based in God's activity, particularly His revelation of Himself.[67]

Unless Premillennialism Is True, God Loses the War of History

God started human history by creating people in a literal Paradise with trees, plants, animals, and rivers (Gen. 2). It had a specific geographical location, by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Iraq). There was no evil or suffering; Adam and Eve lived in a perfect environment.[68]

This Paradise was lost by sin: Adam and Eve defied God and brought sin, suffering, and death on themselves (3:14–9) and on the whole human race (Rom. 5:12). They were expelled from the Garden, which was sealed off and guarded by an angel (Gen. 3:24). The tempter won that battle—he brought death and its fear upon humankind (Heb. 2:14).

Consequently, if the Paradise lost is *not* a Paradise regained, then God will have lost the war; if physical death is not reversed by physical resurrection, then Satan obtains ultimate victory; if literal perfection is not restored, then God will have lost what He created. However, because God is immutable and omnipotent,[69] He will reverse the curse and gain victory over the Satan-damaged creation. This He will do by a literal resurrection[70] and by a literal earthly reign of Christ.[71] He will reign until death is actually[72] defeated (1 Cor. 15:24–27; Rev. 20:4–6), at the end of the Millennium and the beginning of the new heaven and earth (21:4).

Unless Premillennialism Is True, History Has No Consummation

It is widely acknowledged that a linear view of history (that history is moving forward toward a goal) is the result of the Judeo-Christian revelation.[73] History is said to be His-story, for God has planned and is moving history toward its end (the Eschaton). Without a literal historical millennium, there is no real end to history; in traditional amillennialism, history never comes to a climax, merely ceases to be, and then the eternal state dawns. Premillennialism maintains that the Millennium is not the first chapter of eternity but the last chapter of time, the time when sin, suffering, and death will be finally overcome by Christ's reign (1 Cor. 15:24–25).

Only Premillennialism Employs a Consistent Hermeneutic

To deny premillennialism is to deny consistently literal interpretation:

(1) Nonpremillennialism takes parts of the Bible nonliterally.
(2) Nonpremillennialism takes prophecy regarding the Advent literally, but takes some of what relates to the Second Coming allegorically.
(3) Nonpremillennialism takes part of the Gospels literally, viz., Christ's death and resurrection (Matt. 26–28), but not all His statements, viz., about His return (19:28; 24–25).
(4) Nonpremillennialism will even apply both literalism and allegory to the same sentence.[74]
(5) Nonpremillennialism takes the second resurrection literally and the first spiritually (cf. Rev. 20:5–6; John 5:25–29).[75]

Further, applying the nonliteral (i.e., allegorical) hermeneutic of amillennialists and postmillennialists to other sections of Scripture undermines Christian essentials. If applied to Genesis 1–3, it would deny the historicity of Adam and Eve, the Fall, and the doctrine of creation. (If the end isn't literal, then why should the beginning be literal?) If applied to the texts on the Cross, it would deny the Atonement. If applied to the resurrection narratives, it would deny Christ's victory over death. This is why premillennialism is a *hermeneutical* fundamental of the faith. There are three kinds of fundamentals:

- *Doctrinal fundamentals* (e.g., the Trinity, the deity of Christ, sacrificial atonement, and the Resurrection) are tests of evangelical *authenticity*.[76]
- *Epistemological fundamentals* (e.g., inspiration and inerrancy) are tests of evangelical *veracity*.[77]
- *Hermeneutical fundamentals* (e.g., literal historical-grammatical interpretation and its subsequent premillennialism) are tests of evangelical *consistency*.[78]

Premillennialism Adds Urgency to Evangelism

Premillennialism, especially in those who uphold the imminence[79] of Christ's return, creates urgency not generated by the other views. If Christ is coming before the Millennium at a time we know not, we must live with a constant sense of expectation (Luke 19:13; John 9:4). Believing that time is limited, that Christ may come at any moment, and that the eternal status of human souls is in the

balance heightens the realization that any hour might be our last to reach someone for Jesus. It's no coincidence that an amazing percentage of the modern missionary movements (e.g., through William Carey [1761–1834], Adoniram Judson [1788–1850], and David Livingstone [1813–1873]) and evangelistic efforts (e.g., through John Wesley [1703–1791], D. L. Moody [1837–1899], Billy Sunday [1862–1935], and Billy Graham [b. 1918]) have been headed by premillennialists.

Premillennial Imminence Adds an Incentive for Holiness

There *are* other incentives for godliness, but, once again, certainly the premillennial expectation of Christ's imminent return is significant (cf. 1 John 3:2–3):

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives*. (2 Peter 3:10–11)

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR PREMILLENNIALISM

Premillennialism's foundation is strong in the early church—it was the standard for the Fathers up to and through the early Augustine;[80] Augustine, who powerfully influenced the thousand years that followed him, later incorrectly discarded the view.

Early Fathers

Clement of Rome (c. first century A.D.)

> God said to him [Abraham], "Get thee out from thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to a land which I shall show thee.… And again, on his departing from Lot, God said to him, "Lift up thine eyes, and look from the place where thou now art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. (*FECC*, 10)
>
> Soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, "Speedily will He come, and will not tarry"; and "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One for whom we look" (ibid., 23).
>
> He forewarns us: "Behold, the Lord [cometh], and His reward is before His face, to render to every

man according to his work." He exhorts us, therefore, with our whole heart to attend to this, that we be not lazy or slothful in any good work. Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those that wait for Him in order that we may share in His promised gifts. (ibid., 34–35)

Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110)

Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit.… Be ever coming more zealous than what thou art. Weigh carefully the times. Look on Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes. (*EP*, 1, 3)

The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. 70–130)

The Day is at hand on which all things shall perish with the evil [one]. The Lord is near and His reward.… It therefore behooves us, who inquire much concerning events at hand, to search diligently into those things which are able to save us. (21)

Didache (c. 120–150)

Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to God (Son) of David! If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen. (10.6)

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)

I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare. (*DJ*, 80)

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

It behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards.… It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous.

Thus, then, the promise of God, which He gave to Abraham, remains steadfast.… Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (*AH*, 5.32).

[Jesus said,] "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I will drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Thus, then, He will Himself renew the inheritance of the earth, and will reorganize the mystery of the glory of [His] sons; as David says, "He who hath renewed the face of the earth." He promised to drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples, thus indicating both these points: the inheritance of the earth in which the new fruit of the vine is drunk, and the resurrection of His disciples in the flesh. For the new flesh which rises again is the same which also received the new cup. And He cannot by any means be understood as drinking of the fruit of the vine when settled down with his [disciples] above in a super-celestial place; nor, again, are they who

drink it devoid of flesh, for to drink of that which flows from the vine pertains to flesh, and not spirit.

The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food, from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth … and that all animals feeding [only] on the productions of the earth, should [in those days] become peaceful and harmonious among each other, and be in perfect subjection to man. (ibid., 5.33)

Lactantius (c. 240–c. 320)

"The dead will rise again, not after a thousand years from their death, but that, when again restored to life, they may reign with God a thousand years" (*DI*, 7.22).

He, when He shall have destroyed unrighteousness, and executed His great judgment, and shall have recalled to life the righteous, who have lived from the beginning, will be engaged among men a thousand years, and will rule them with a most just command.… Then they who shall be alive in their bodies shall not die, but during those thousand years shall produce an infinite multitude, and their offspring shall be holy, and beloved by God; but they who shall be raised from the dead shall preside over the living as judges.…

About the same time also the prince of the devils, who is the contriver of all evils, shall be bound with chains, and shall be imprisoned during the thousand years of the heavenly rule in which righteousness shall reign in the world, so that he may contrive no evil against the people of God.… Throughout this time beasts shall not be nourished by blood, nor birds by prey; but all things shall be peaceful and tranquil. (ibid., 7.24)

When the thousand years shall be completed, the world shall be renewed by God, and the heavens shall be folded together, and the earth shall be changed, and God shall transform men into the similitude of angels, and they shall be white as snow; and they shall always be employed in the sight of the Almighty, and shall make offerings to their Lord, and serve Him for ever. At the same time shall take place that second and public resurrection of all, in which the unrighteous shall be raised to everlasting punishments. (ibid., 7.26)

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (c. first century)

The saints shall rest in Eden, and the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem, which shall be unto the glory of God for ever and ever. And no longer shall Jerusalem endure desolation, nor Israel be led captive; for the Lord shall be in the midst of her, dwelling among men, even the Holy One of Israel reigning over them in humility and in poverty; and he who believeth on Him shall reign in truth in the heavens. (7.5)

Commodianus (fl. between third and fifth centuries)

In the flame of fire the Lord will judge the wicked. But the fire shall not touch the just, but shall by all means lick them up. In one place they delay, but a part has wept at the judgment. Such will be the heat that the stones themselves shall melt. The winds assemble into lightnings, the heavenly wrath rages; and wherever the wicked man fleeth, he is seized upon by this fire.… Flames on the nations, and the Medes and Parthians burn for a thousand years … then after a thousand years they are delivered over to Gehenna; and he whose work they were, with them are burnt up. (*ICAGH*, 43)

> We shall arise again to Him, who have been devoted to Him. And they shall be incorruptible, even already living without death. And neither will there be any grief nor any groaning in that city. They shall come also who overcame cruel martyrdom under Antichrist, and they themselves live for the whole time, and receive blessings because they have suffered evil things; and they themselves marrying, beget for a thousand years.… The earth renewed without end pours forth abundantly. (ibid., 44)

Ephraem of Syria (c. 306–373)

Grant Jeffrey (b. 1948) discovered an untranslated manuscript by a Syrian Christian poet who was not only premillennial but also pretribulational.[81] This is a phenomenal find, particularly in light of posttribulationist pronouncements that "we can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early church" (Ladd, *BH*, 31). The argument from perceived silence is often dangerous.

> Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ? … All saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered together before the Tribulation which is about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins. (cited in Ice, *WTS*, 110–11)

Medieval Fathers

During the early Middle Ages and continuing on through the Reformation, the amillennial view gained dominance under the influence of the "Medieval Monolith," Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Unfortunately, as regards prophecy, Augustine would come to reject the literal hermeneutic[82] for a more allegorical approach. Thus, coupled with the Roman Catholic wedding of the spiritual and earthly kingdoms,[83] and with the later Reformers' preoccupation with other critical issues, allegorical amillennialism gained preeminence up to modern times. Through exegetical progress and reapplication of the literal hermeneutic, premillennialism has experienced revival.

Augustine

The early Augustine was premillennial, but he changed his view when he overreacted to a chiliastic cult[84] and adopted an allegorical approach, a crucial error that amillennialists and postmillennialists have perpetuated since his time.

> Those who, on the strength of this passage [Rev. 20:1–6], have suspected that the first resurrection is future and bodily, have been moved, among other things, specially by the number of a thousand years, as if it were a fit thing that the saints should thus enjoy a kind of Sabbath-rest during that period. … And this opinion would not be objectionable, if it were believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath shall be spiritual and consequent on the presence of God; for I myself, too, once held this opinion. (*CG*, 259)

Why did Augustine forsake premillennialism?

> They assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feelings of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself; such assertions can be believed only by the carnal. (ibid.)

With what did Augustine replace literal interpretation? With allegorical: "This resurrection [in John 5] regards not the body, but the soul. For souls, too, have a death of their own wickedness and sins.…[85]

Regarding Revelation 20:1–6, Augustine likewise offers his allegorical interpretation:

> There are two resurrections—the one the first and spiritual resurrection, which has place in this life, and preserves man from coming into the second death; the other the second, which does not occur now, but in the end of the world, and which is of the body, not of the soul, and which by the last judgment shall dismiss some into the second death, others into that life which has no death. (*CG*, 20.6)
>
> Many passages I omit, because, though they seem to refer to the last judgment, yet on a closer examination they are found to be ambiguous, or to allude rather to some other event—whether to that coming of the Savior which continually occurs in His Church, that is, in His members, in which comes little by little, and piece by piece, since the whole Church is His body, or to the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem. For when He speaks even of this, He often uses language which is applicable to the end of the world and that last and great day of judgment, so that these two events cannot be distinguished unless all the corresponding passages bearing on the subject in the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are compared with one another—for some things are put more obscurely by one evangelist and more plainly by another—so that it becomes apparent what things are meant to be referred to one event. (ibid., 20.5)

Thus, the medieval departure from the permillenialism of the New Testament and the early Fathers was based in the adoption of an allegorical hermeneutic.

Reformation Fathers

The major Reformers, like Luther and Calvin, were amillennial. As they were largely preoccupied with soteriological matters,[86] they left latent their Augustinian eschatology to await a future consistent application of the literal hermeneutic (as they themselves had done to salvific matters, which made the Reformation possible).

Post-Reformation Teachers

Among the many who rediscovered the premillennialism of the New

Testament and the early Fathers were those in the Lutheran, Reformed, and Puritan traditions.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

> The saints have hitherto for the most part been kept under, and wicked men have governed. But now they will be uppermost; the kingdom shall be given into the hands of the saints of the "most high God" (Dan. 7:27). And "they shall reign on earth" (Rev. 5:10). They shall live and "reign with Christ a thousand years" (20:4). (*HWR*, 3.8.3)
>
> Then antichrist will be confined to hell, and will have no more place here on earth; much after the same manner as the devil is said at the beginning of Christ's thousand years' reign on earth, to be cast into the bottomless pit, as you may see in the beginning of [Rev. 20]. (*EWCR*, intro.)

John Gill (1697–1771)

> *The rest of the dead* … meaning not the dead saints, for they will be all raised together, but the wicked dead; and not them as morally or spiritually, but as corporeally dead: these *lived not again until the thousand years were finished*; so that there will be such an exact term of years between the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of the wicked; nor will there be any [of these] wicked living upon earth, or in bodies, during that time; for the wicked dead will not be raised with the saints at Christ's coming, and the wicked living will be destroyed in the conflagration of the world, and neither of them shall live again until the end of these years. (*EWB*, on Rev. 20:5)

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

> What galleys, laden to the water's edge, come to us from the millennium! What visions we have of the days of heaven upon earth! Through our glorious Lord we have commerce with angels; communion with the bright spirits washed in blood, who sing before the throne; nay, better still, we have fellowship with the Infinite One. (*ME*, Nov. 24)

There is also a host of nineteenth- and twentieth-century premillennialists, including John Nelson Darby, C.I. Scofield (1843–1921), George Peters (1825–1909), Erich Sauer, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie (b. 1925), and many others. Since their teachings are widely disseminated, it is unnecessary to fill these pages with their citations supporting premillennialism.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO PREMILLENNIALISM

Many arguments have been leveled against premillennialism (especially of the dispensational variety); those we have already addressed, directly or

peripherally,[87] we'll only examine in summary form.

Objection One: That the Millennium Is Mentioned Only Once in Scripture

Opponents often argue that a thousand-year reign comes up only once in the Bible (Rev. 20). All other references to a future reign speak of it being "eternal" (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:36), and, thus, this single reference should not be taken literally.

Response to Objection One

First of all, the charge is untrue—the "thousand years" of the millennial reign is mentioned six times (Rev. 20:2–7). Being "born again" is only mentioned twice (John 3:3, 7), yet no evangelical has difficulty upholding that.

Furthermore, one biblical occurrence is sufficient: "The truth and reliability of a Divine word does not depend upon the number of statements which God permits to be made concerning it. If God makes a statement only once we have simply to believe it" (Sauer, *EE*, 147).

Also, there are other scriptural indications that Christ will reign for a long period of time;[88] Revelation 20 repeatedly tells us how long that time will be.

Objection Two: That the Promises to Israel Are Conditional

The amillennial response to one of premillennialism's strong arguments is that the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, which clearly have not yet been literally fulfilled as predicted, are actually conditional. Oswald Allis offers the following:

> [*First*,] a condition may be involved in a command or promise without its being specifically stated. This is illustrated by the career of Jonah. Jonah was commanded to preach judgment, unconditioned, unqualified.…
>
> [*Second*,] it is true that, in the express terms of the covenant with Abraham, obedience is not stated as a condition. But that obedience was presupposed is clearly indicated by two facts. The one is that obedience is the precondition of blessing under all circumstances (Ps. 68:6).… The second fact is that in the case of Abraham the duty of obedience is particularly stressed (in Gen. 18:17ff.; 22:18; 26:5).…
>
> [*Third*,] that obedience was vitally connected with the Abrahamic covenant is shown with special clearness by the fact that there was connected with it a sign, the rite of circumcision.… Cutting off from the covenant people was the penalty for failure to observe it.…
>
> [*Fourth*,] that those who insist the Abrahamic covenant was wholly unconditional, do not really so regard it, is shown by the great importance which Dispensationalists attach to Israel's being "in the

land" as the precondition of blessing under this covenant.…

[*Fifth*,] that Dispensationalists do not regard the Abrahamic covenant as wholly unconditional is indicated also by the fact that we never hear them speak of the restoration of Esau to the land of Canaan and to full blessing under the Abrahamic covenant.… Why is Esau excluded from the blessing of his covenant? He was a son of Isaac as much as Jacob was. How could his disobedience deprive his descendants of the blessing of the covenant, if the covenant did not require obedience? …

[*Sixth*,] it is important to distinguish between the certainty of the ultimate fulfillment of the promise to the seed of Abraham and the blessedness and security of the nation or of the individuals at any given time under the covenant.… The certainty of the fulfillment of the covenant is not due to the fact that it is unconditional, nor is its fulfillment dependent upon the imperfect obedience of sinful men. [Rather,] the certainty of the fulfillment of the covenant and the security of the believer under it, ultimately depend wholly on the obedience of Christ. (*PC*, 32, 34, 36)

Response to Objection Two

In response, (1) all of these arguments are flawed, and (2) there is abundant evidence to the contrary.

Refuting the Argument From Jonah's Commission

It's true that there was an implied condition in Jonah's proclamation of Nineveh's doom; however, applying this to the unconditional covenant with Abraham is a category mistake for many reasons:

(1) No covenant was made with Jonah—he was merely commissioned to give a divine message to Nineveh.
(2) The very nature of the proclamation about the Assyrians' moral condition and the forty-day period implies that God was giving them time to repent. There are no such implied conditions in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.[89]
(3) Jonah understood the announcement of God's judgment on Nineveh as conditional—that's why he didn't want to go (Jonah 4:2).
(4) Jesus presented it as conditional (Matt. 12:41). Claiming Jonah as a reason these other covenants should be taken as conditional is a false analogy.

Further, and most important, we have seen clear, explicit evidence that the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are unconditional:[90]

(1) The Abrahamic covenant was one-sided (unilateral).
(2) The Bible declares emphatically that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional (e.g., Heb. 6:13–14, 17–18).

(3) The same is true of the Davidic covenant, about which God pointedly stated that disobedience would not annul His unconditional promise (Ps. 89:30–37).

Refuting the Argument From Abraham's Obedience

First, as Allis admits, "It is true that, in the express terms of the covenant with Abraham, obedience is not stated as a condition." With a covenant, it is the "express terms" that matter.

Second, to argue that obedience is a condition under all circumstances begs the question and is contrary to fact, as shown by the explicit unconditional statements about these covenants.[91]

Third, that Abraham's obedience is mentioned in other texts[92] is irrelevant; this confuses the *result* of Abraham accepting God's unconditional promise with a *condition* for receiving it. While obedience is a condition for Abraham's seed to *experience* the blessings of the covenant, it was not a condition for God *giving* them.[93]

Fourth, it is contrary to the biblical teaching of grace (unmerited favor) to say that anything, including our obedience, is a condition for God granting us His grace. We do not work *for* grace; we work *from* grace.[94] How ironic that biblical scholars from the Reformed tradition would miss this truth.

Refuting the Argument From Circumcision

This too is a strange position for a Reformed scholar. Circumcision was not a condition for receiving the benefit of the unconditional Abrahamic covenant; as Paul argued, circumcision is not a condition for receiving God's grace but a sign of it (Rom. 4:9–11). Regarding justification by faith, the unconditional covenant was given to Abraham in Genesis 15, and he was not circumcised until Genesis 17.

> The law, introduced 430 years later,[95] does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but *God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise*. (Gal. 3:17–18)

The Abrahamic land- and seed-promises are unconditional, and so is the Davidic throne promise (cf. Ps. 89:20–37); the later Mosaic covenant was conditional (cf. Ex. 19:5).

Refuting the Argument From the Need for Israel to Be in the Land

The stress on the importance of Israel being in the Promised Land is not because that is a condition for God *giving* them the land; rather, it was a condition for their receiving the *blessings* that accrued to this promise. The *gift* of the Land is unconditional; Israel's *blessings* for dwelling in the Land were conditional.

A similar distinction is found in our salvation. There are no conditions for God *giving* us salvation; it is completely by grace. However, there is one condition for our *receiving* this gift and enjoying its blessing: faith.[96]

Refuting the Argument From Esau

Some covenant theologians claim that Esau's exclusion from the blessing is a proof that the Abrahamic covenant is not unconditional (see Allis, *PC*).

In response, *no one* entered into the blessing of the covenant by virtue of being a physical descendant of Abraham (cf. Rom. 9:6–7); *only* those who appropriated the blessing by faith were able to enjoy it (cf. 4:13–16). Esau is portrayed as an unbeliever in Hebrews 12:16–17, so he forfeited his enjoyment of the covenant blessings by his unbelief.

Like Ishmael (see Gen. 17), Esau was blessed by God, but as an outsider to the covenant. Remember, the everlasting promise of the Holy Land to Abraham's physical descendants is unconditional, but this is distinguished from receiving the blessings of being in the Land. Being a physical descendent of Abraham did not guarantee every individual Israelite a place in the kingdom;[97] ethnic heritage is a necessary condition for this blessing but not a sufficient one.[98] The blessing is to be claimed by faith, as Paul unmistakably teaches (Rom. 9:6; 4:13, 16).

Refuting the Argument From the Distinction Between Blessedness and Fulfillment of the Promise

This is the most perplexing of the six arguments, for it appears to be presenting the same point just made and thus undermines the footing of the amillennialist. We can agree completely with Allis that "the certainty of the fulfillment of the covenant is not due to the fact that it is unconditional, nor is its fulfillment dependent upon the imperfect obedience of sinful men." This is precisely premillennialism's point, namely, that Israel's disobedience did not annul God's unconditional, eternal land- and throne-promises.

Of course, there is a sense in which God cannot fulfill His ultimate purposes

to have a redeemed Israel in the land of a crucified and resurrected Messiah-King unless both the Redeemer and the redeemed exercise their freedom[99] to accept God's will for them. This, though, is another version of the predestination/free-will question already discussed in detail.[100] In brief, the answer is that God both foreordained and foreknew exactly who would believe (1 Peter 1:2; Rom. 8:29).

Whatever God foreknows must come to pass, otherwise He would have been wrong in what He foreknew. An omniscient mind cannot be wrong about anything, so the event is determined from the standpoint of God's foreknowledge and foreordination (which are coordinate eternal acts), and yet it is free from the vantage point of the freedom of choice God gave us. After all, God ordained the Cross from all eternity (Acts 2:22–23; Rev. 13:8), and yet Jesus freely chose it (John 10:17–18).

To summarize, the amillennialist arguments in no way undermine the straightforward biblical teaching about God's unconditional land- and kingdom-promises to Israel (cf. Rom. 11:29). Since these have not yet been fulfilled, we can rest assured, based on God's unchangeable nature,[101] that there will be a future, literal, earthly, thousand-year messianic reign (Rev. 20:1–6).

Objection Three: That the Land-Promises Were Fulfilled in Joshua's Day

According to some amillennialists, the Abrahamic land-promises were fulfilled after Joshua conquered the Land:

> So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers.… Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled. (Josh. 21:43–45)

Response to Objection Three

This cannot have been the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.[102]

First, there were still prophecies about Israel inheriting the land after Joshua's time (e.g., cf. Amos 9:14–15).

Second, they did not possess all the land that was promised to Abraham, namely, east of Jordan all the way to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18).

Third, they did not possess it forever, as promised to Abraham, but were later dispossessed of it by the Babylonian captivity.

Fourth, statements in Judges, immediately after Joshua died, indicate that

they did not even possess all the land west of Jordan at this time. They were still trying to drive out the evil inhabitants who remained (Judges 1:27–34).

Fifth, Joshua 21 refers to the promises through Moses made with "the house of Israel," not to those made to Abraham.

Sixth, Joshua 21 appears to refer to the extent of the land as outlined in the Mosaic covenant (Num. 34), which was not the full extent God promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18–21).

Seventh, even in the New Testament the kingdom had not yet been restored to Israel (Luke 19:11ff.; Acts 1:6–8).

Eighth, and finally, Paul affirmed that the restoration of national Israel would not be until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25; cf. Luke 21:24).

Objection Four: That the Abrahamic Land-Promises Were Fulfilled in the Later Monarchy

Allis argues, "The very words which appear in the covenant (Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 22:7) are used of the nation of Israel in the time of Solomon: 'sand' (1 Kings 4:20), 'stars' (1 Chron. 27:23) and 'dust' (2 Chron 1:9) are the standards of comparison. This would indicate that the [Abrahamic] promise was regarded as fulfilled in this respect in the golden age of the Monarchy" (*PC,* 58).

Response to Objection Four

While 1 Kings 4:20 says that Solomon at one time reigned over the land designated in the Abrahamic covenant, this cannot be taken as the fulfillment.

First, he reigned over it for a very short time, not forever, as promised to Abraham.

Second, again, even after Solomon's time, future land promises were made.

Third, the seed-promise made to Abraham (viz., Christ—see Gal. 3:16) was not fulfilled in the monarchy.

Fourth, the references to Israel being as numerous as the stars and the dust do not fulfill the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants for the same reasons as those just listed.

Fifth, this text does not claim that it is a complete and final fulfillment of either the Abrahamic or the Davidic covenant.

Objection Five: That the Land-Promises Will Be Fulfilled in the New Earth

Some amillennialists, such as Anthony Hoekema and Vern Poythress (b. 1944), have posited that the land-promises to Israel will not be fulfilled in the Millennium but in the new earth (Rev. 21:22). They do this by holding to the literal and unconditional nature of these promises while at the same time rejecting consistent literal interpretation of the millennial passage in Revelation 20.

Response to Objection Five

First of all, the premillennialist rejoices that at least some amillennialists have taken the promises as literal, as yet unfulfilled, and as finding their fulfillment in the new earth (as premillennialists have upheld all along).

However, their skipping over the Millennium as the beginning point in this fulfillment is inconsistent; the same hermeneutic that yields a literal future fulfillment of these promises also yields a literal thousand-year messianic reign and a clear difference from the eternal state (see above under "The Nature of the Millennium").[103]

Also, like the First and Second Comings, which the Old Testament sometimes connects (cf. Isa. 61:1–2), even so the Millennium and the new heaven and new earth are spoken of together (Isa. 66:22–24; cf. 65:17ff.).

In conclusion, many premillennialists believe the land-promises to Israel will go on literally forever (without end) in the new earth (e.g., see Walvoord, *M*); this is not inherently contradictory to the premillennial view.

Objection Six: That the Promises to Israel Are Fulfilled Spiritually in the Church

A more serious charge, one that strikes to the core of the differences between covenant theologians and dispensationalists, is that there will be no literal fulfillment of these promises to Israel, since they are being fulfilled spiritually in the church, "spiritual Israel." This position is based on a number of texts that require separate replies.[104]

Responses to Objection Six

Matthew 2:15

Matthew uses Hosea 11:1, a text that refers to Israel coming out of Egypt, to Jesus returning from Egypt as a child. This does not bolster the claim that the church spiritually fulfills all Israel's literal land- and kingdom-promises. As we've seen again and again, while the New Testament sometimes gives an *application* of the Old Testament passage, it never spiritualizes away the literal truth (*interpretation*).

Hebrews 8:7–13

The same is true of the new covenant, which was *made* with national Israel (and will be literally fulfilled with them). While it is also *applied* to the church (Heb. 8:7–13), since the benefits of Christ's death are for both (Gen. 3:15; 12:3), the literal promise will be literally fulfilled.[105]

1 Corinthians 10:4

Israel, in the wilderness, "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (NKJV). As already established,[106] the Rock that followed them was a literal rock with an endless source of water—a Christophany, a literal manifestation of Christ and His supernatural power (cf. Gen. 18:2, 8, 22).

Romans 4:16

This verse teaches that "the promise comes by faith … to all Abraham's offspring … also to those who are of the faith of Abraham." On this basis, amillennialists argue that Abraham's spiritual seed, those who have faith in Christ, will inherit what was originally promised to Abraham's physical seed.

In reply, this is true, but Abraham having two sets of offspring does not mean one replaces the other; once again, the spiritual seed is a parallel seed, not a replacement seed. As already demonstrated,[107] Abraham's physical descendants will see the fulfillment of God's land- and kingdom-promises at the Second Coming.[108]

Galatians 6:16

Paul's reference here to the "Israel of God" is often taken by allegorists to mean "spiritual Israel," so they consider this to be proof that Paul is using "Israel" in a spiritual sense of the church. This interpretation is by no means necessary; in fact, given the context (which leads to the discovery of

meaning),[109] it should be taken as referring to Israelites (Jews) who are true believers (which also fits with Paul's usage in other places). Consider the following evidence for not taking this as a so-called spiritual Israel.[110]

First, Paul says nothing of a spiritual Israel. "Israel of God" denotes literal Israelites who have accepted the message of God's grace.[111] This fits with his language in a similar situation where he refers to literal Israelites who are false teachers in contrast to: "We are *the circumcision [Jews] who worship God* in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." "Israel of God" and those of the "circumcision, who worship God" (Phil. 3:3 NKJV) are the same group, viz., Jews saved by grace.

Second, this interpretation fits contextually; Paul is contending with those who taught legalistic messages of works. These he called false teachers who were Israelites (Jews) not of God; that is, their teaching was contrary to the true gospel (cf. Gal. 6:12–13).

Third, Paul's language here fits with his consistent use of *Israel* as a reference to literal Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham and David (e.g., cf. Rom. 9:3–4; 10:1). Not once does the New Testament use *Israel* in a spiritual sense.[112] A. B. Davidson (1831–1902) summarized:

> Certainly the extreme anti-literal interpretation which considers the names Zion, Jerusalem, Israel, and the like to be mere names for the Christian Church, without reference to the people of Israel, does no justice either to the spirit of the Old Testament and its principle, or to the principles on which the apostle [Paul] reasons. (*OTP,* 490, quoted in Ramm, *PBI,* 254n)

Ephesians 1:9–10

> [God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

God's "mystery" coming to fulfillment "in Christ," according to covenant theology, demonstrates that the church fulfills the promises to Israel, showing that there is only one people of God under Christ's headship.

In response, *first,* Harold Hoehner (b. 1935) says, "This dispensation is the millennial kingdom when 'the times' in God's purposes will be completed (fulfilled), and all things both spiritual and material will be under Christ and His rule" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:27; Col. 1:20). So rather than oppose the dispensational view, the text supports it.

Second, while dispensationalists admit there is ultimately one family of God

to which all believers of all ages belong, this passage is apparently not speaking about it. The "general assembly" in heaven (Heb. 12:23 NKJV) may refer to it, as may "his whole family in heaven and on earth" (Eph. 3:15). In any event, that all believers from all ages share a common God, a common Savior, a common faith, and a common family in no way diminishes the fact that God has different functions and different roles for different members of His overall family, such as those distinguishing Israel and the church.

Third, while the Old Testament made promises fulfilled in Christ, it never says all of this would be completed at the First Coming, or that the literal, unconditional land- and throne-promises (to Abraham and David, respectively) would be fulfilled in the church as a "spiritual Israel" replacing national Israel.

1 Peter 2:9

Peter uses language from Exodus 19:6, which describes national Israel as a chosen people belonging to God, as applicable to the church. We have seen that this does not affirm the church as a spiritual Israel and/or that Israel's literal promises are fulfilled spiritually. (1) Peter doesn't quote this passage but borrows some language from it. (2) He applies these words to the church; he doesn't claim that this is the fulfillment of the original text. (3) Even if it could be shown that the church is somehow a fulfillment of *some* Old Testament promises, it wouldn't mean that *all* of Israel's literal land- and kingdom-promises are transferred spiritually to the church.

Objection Seven: That Jesus Said His Kingdom Was Not of This World

> "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."
>
> "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.
>
> Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:36–37).

Amillennialists take this as a clear and emphatic denial that Jesus had any intentions to set up a political kingdom: "Surely Jesus' replies to Pilate indicate that he is not the King of an earthly kingdom but that he is King in the realm of truth—in other words, the King of a kingdom which is primarily spiritual, not earthly" (Hoekema in Clouse, *MMFV*, 106).

Response to Objection Seven

This is correct up to a point: Christ's words *were* a clear and emphatic denial that He had any intentions of setting up such a kingdom—*then*. Jesus *is* only the King of a "spiritual" kingdom—*now*. The problem is the assumption, contrary to the evidence, that Jesus will not set up the unconditionally promised earthly political Davidic kingdom in the future. This is:

(1) contrary to numerous unconditional Old Testament prophecies;[113]
(2) contrary to the New Testament offers by John and Jesus of this kingdom;[114]
(3) contrary to Jesus' statement in Acts 1:6–8;[115]
(4) Contrary to Peter's offer in Acts 3;
(5) contrary to Pauline declarations in Romans 11;[116] and
(6) contrary to a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1–6.[117]

Objection Eight: That There Will Be Only One Resurrection

A key difference between premillennial and nonpremillennial views is in interpreting the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4–6. If it is a literal resurrection, separated by a thousand years from the second literal resurrection, then premillennialism is correct. If it is a spiritual resurrection—namely, spiritual regeneration (i.e., salvation), then nonpremillennialism is correct and there is only one literal resurrection, which would take place after the (real or supposed) thousand years.

Nonpremillennialists often use John 5:25–27 as evidence that the first resurrection of Revelation 20 is spiritual and that only the second resurrection will be literal. Here Jesus speaks of a spiritual regeneration resulting from believing in Him; He then describes a physical resurrection, namely, those who "come forth" from "graves" (John 5:28–29 NKJV). It is argued that, by analogy, this is the same as the two resurrections of Revelation 20, the first resurrection being spiritual regeneration and the second being the literal resurrection at the end of the age.

Response to Objection Eight

Historic premillennialist George Eldon Ladd responds pointedly to such

reasoning:

> This passage does not provide a real analogy to the passage in the Apocalypse.… There is an all-important difference. In John the context itself provides the clues for the spiritual interpretation in the one instance and the literal in the other.
>
> Concerning the first group [in John 5], *the hour has already come*. This makes it clear that it refers to those who are spiritually dead and who enter into life upon hearing the voice of the Son of God. [By contrast,] the second group … are *in the tombs*. They are not spiritually dead but physically dead. (in Clouse, *MMFV*, 36)
>
> In Revelation 20 *there is no such contextual clue for a similar variation of interpretation*. The language of the passage is quite clear and unambiguous. There is neither necessity nor contextual possibility to interpret *ezesan* ["come to life," vv. 4–5] spiritually in order to introduce meaning to the passage. At the beginning of the thousand years some of the dead [the saved] come to life; at the conclusion, the rest of the dead [the lost] come to life.… The passage makes perfectly good sense when interpreted literally. [That is,] natural inductive exegesis suggests that both words are to be taken in the same way, referring to literal resurrection. (ibid., 37)
>
> This is reinforced by the fact that the same word [*ezesan*] is used two other times … in Revelation in reference to a physical resurrection (2:8; 13:14). As the noted commentator Henry Alford said: "If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned … the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave … then there is an end of all significance to language,[118] and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything" (ibid., 36–37).
>
> John, who also wrote Revelation (cf. 1:1), when speaking of the literal resurrection from the "graves" (John 5:28), records Jesus' teaching that there will be two resurrections within a future "hour":[119]
>
> A time is coming when all who are *in their graves* will hear his voice and *come out*—those who have done good will rise to live [first resurrection], and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned [second resurrection]. (vv. 28–29)

This follows the almost universal pattern of referring to end-time resurrection.[120] "Resurrection" (Gk: *anastasis*) is never biblically used of a spiritual resurrection; it always means a literal physical resurrection from the dead.[121] There *is* a spiritual coming to life called "regeneration" (Titus 3:5–7; cf. Eph. 2:1), but this is never scripturally called a resurrection. It *isn't* a resurrection, that is, "a coming alive again";[122] those dead in sin were born that way—they were never alive spiritually.[123]

Objection Nine: That Prophecies Are Symbolic, Since They Use Symbolic Language

Many prophetic passages use symbolic language, so covenantalists argue that they shouldn't be understood as referring to literal events. For example, because Revelation 20 refers to a "key," a dragon, and a "chain," it is reasoned that the

“thousand years” must be spiritual and not literal.

Response to Objection Nine

For one thing, this is a misunderstanding of symbols, which refer to literal things.[124] Just as a stop sign refers to a literal road crossing, the “dragon” (v. 2) refers to a literal Satan.

For another, biblical symbols are usually interpreted so that the literal meaning they symbolize can be understood. John interpreted symbols—for instance, the “seven stars” were the seven messengers to the seven churches (symbolized as “seven golden lampstands,” 1:20)—and Jesus interpreted parabolic symbolism for the disciples (e.g., cf. Matt. 13:39).

Objection Ten: That the Old Testament Should Be Viewed in Light of the New

Amillennialism and postmillennialism avoid literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies to Israel in a millennial kingdom.[125] They use the Old Testament sacrificial system as an example, claiming that since Christ fulfilled it (1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 7–10), we should read the Old Testament through the lens of the Cross. Likewise, since they argue that the literal land- and kingdom-promises are fulfilled in Christ, interpreting them as having a literal future fulfillment is actually using the Old Testament to interpret the New.

Allis criticized dispensationalists by claiming that it “is a faulty and unscriptural literalism which, in the important field of prophecy, ignores the typical and preparatory character of the Old Testament dispensation.”

> The assertion that “Israel always means Israel” and that the kingdom prophecies enter the New Testament “absolutely unchanged” leads at once and inevitably to the conclusion that the “kingdom of heaven” which John the Baptist announced as “at hand” was an earthly, political, national kingdom of the Jews. (*PC*, 256)

Response to Objection Ten

First, that *is* precisely what “the assertion” means, as a normal, literal, commonsense hermeneutic demands.

Second, the assertion that Israel does not mean Israel, and that literal kingdom-prophecies can be made to mean a spiritual kingdom, leads at once and inevitably to amillennialism. (It also leads to “confusionism.”)

Third, the amillennial hermeneutic is both retroactive and unbiblical.

For one thing, it perpetuates a category mistake: Not all Old Testament predictions were types. The sacrificial system *did* point forward to Christ and *was* a type; that is, it was a symbol that anticipated the antitype who would fulfill it (cf. John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). By contrast, a covenant is *not* a type that points forward to its own fulfillment, and an unconditional covenant (such as the Abrahamic or the Davidic), unlike a conditional covenant (such as the Mosaic), will never cease to be in effect as foretold.

In addition, the Old Testament should *not* be interpreted in light of the New, because later writings, inspired or not, do not change the meaning of earlier writings.[126] Meaning is objective and absolute;[127] a text means what the author meant by it, nothing more and nothing less. Later authors can add more information on the same topic, but they cannot change the meaning of earlier texts.

Furthermore, regarding inspired writings, God can and does know more about the topic (and see more implications) than the human coauthor,[128] but they both affirm exactly the same thing in the same text.

Consequently, the retroactive hermeneutic is seriously misdirected as to Old Testament promises and prophecies about Israel—it is not exegetical but eisegetical. New Testament revelation does not change the meaning of these texts; it may give more implications than the original author had in mind, and it may give more information on the topic being discussed, but it cannot change the meaning so that what was meant for Israel is now fulfilled in the church.

This is *not* to say that writers can't search their own writings to find implications of which they were unaware when they penned them; scriptural authors could and did (cf. 1 Peter 1:10–12).[129] It *is* to say that what they said, God said, and what they meant, God meant: The one inspired text has one inspired meaning affirmed by both the divine and human authors. Therefore, the Old Testament is to be interpreted in light of *itself*; whatever it meant in that context by those authors who wrote to those people is what it still means.

Objection Eleven: That the New Covenant Is Fulfilled in the Church

> "The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*. It will not be like the [Mosaic] covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because *they broke my covenant*, though I was a husband to them" (Jer. 31:31–32).

Hebrews seems to say this covenant is said to be fulfilled in the church: “If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.… By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.” (8:7, 13)

Response to Objection Eleven

It’s not that the new covenant was *made* with Israel and fulfilled in the church; it was made with Israel and also *applied* to the church.[130] Again, that there are Gentiles who inherit God’s promised spiritual blessings through Abraham in no way cancels God’s unconditional material promises to his physical descendants.

Objection Twelve: That Taking Ezekiel 40–48 Literally Contradicts Hebrews 8–10

Ezekiel apparently says that in the messianic period the before-Christ Jewish sacrificial system will be reinstituted. Many premillennialists take this literally; indeed, to do otherwise would seem to be inconsistent with their own hermeneutic.[131] For the New Testament in general, and Hebrews in particular, is emphatic that Christ forever did away with the need for animal sacrifice; returning to this system would be a denial of the sufficiency of His once-for-all, final sacrifice, which fulfilled it:

> We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.… Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.… For if we sin willfully after we receive the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. (Heb. 10:10–14, 18, 26 NKJV)

Response to Objection Twelve

Premillennialists have responded in two basic ways to this objection: Some take it typologically, and others view it literally.[132]

The Typological Interpretation

Those who argue for typological interpretation claim that these sacrifices are

to be understood as symbols or foreshadowers of what was fulfilled in Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice (10:1–18). They give the following reasons.

First, since Christ literally fulfilled these *types*, they insist that typological interpretation, in this case, does not forsake literal historical-grammatical interpretation. Further, it does not open the door for further spiritualization regarding Israel and the church,[133] since those were *not* types fulfilled by Christ.

Second, it makes sense for Ezekiel to speak of the future temple in terms that the Israelites of his day would understand (which included animal sacrifices).[134]

Third, Hebrews teaches that Christ fulfilled and abolished the Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood (8:8–10); taking Ezekiel literally would contradict the New Testament.

Fourth, Revelation describes the future heavenly city with no temple or sacrifices, only Christ the Lamb (21:22ff.).

Fifth, Ezekiel portrays the Gentiles as excluded from Israel's temple, which is contrary to New Testament teaching that Jew and Gentile are one in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:12–22).

In *The Theocratic Kingdom*, George Peters defended the typological view of these sacrifices in Ezekiel:

> It is a figure of speech called … "hypocatastasis" by which one thing is employed as a substitute or equivalent for another. This figure is employed by the prophet to portray a future existing priesthood, using for this purpose the priesthood then known, just as future enemies of God are presented under the names Moab, Babylon, etc., of enemies then existing. (Peters, *TK* 3.89)

The Literal Interpretation

Premillennialists who take the Ezekiel animal-sacrifice references literally offer the following support.

First, not doing so violates the standard historical-grammatical hermeneutic[135] and engages in the same inconsistency they ascribe to nonpremillennialists.

Second, the typological view *does* open the door for further spiritualization of prophecy as amillennialists carry out in claiming that the New Testament church fulfills all promises made to Old Testament Israel.[136]

Third, the typological view illegitimately reads New Testament meaning back into the Old Testament text rather than understanding the Old Testament text as written.[137]

Fourth, the sacrifices foretold by Ezekiel[138] may point *back* to the Cross, just as the Old Testament types pointed *forward* to it.

Fifth, Ezekiel presents a highly detailed description, with numerous measurements and historical scenes that do not fit with an allegorical interpretation: "As regards the prophecies of a future temple service in time of Messiah, in numerous places they go into such detail that for every impartial reader a purely spiritual meaning is completely excluded" (Sauer, *EE*, 179).

Sixth, Ezekiel is not alone in making this prediction. Many other Old Testament passages speak of "offering sacrifices" *in the Millennium*.[139]

Seventh, even Jewish Christians in the New Testament church practiced temple worship (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:42), including animal sacrifices (21:26).

Eighth, if this passage is spiritualized, then on similar grounds most of the Old Testament prophecies could be spiritualized away, including the obviously literal ones about Christ's first coming. Because we know from their fulfillment that these were literal, the same applies to His second coming.

Ninth, again, Scripture distinguishes between Israel and the church (1 Cor. 10:32; Rom. 9:3–4). Promises unique to Abraham and his literal descendants (e.g., Gen. 12:1–3) are not fulfilled in the church but will be fulfilled in the future (cf. Rom. 11; Rev. 20).

Tenth, the picture in Revelation 21 is not that of the Millennium (cf. Rev. 20), but of the eternal state that follows. Ezekiel's prediction (40–48) will be fulfilled in the Millennium; later, in the new heaven and new earth, there will be no temple or sacrifices.

Eleventh, the Ezekiel sacrifices mentioned have no *atoning* significance;[140] they are *memorial* in nature. Like the Lord's Supper, they look back in remembrance at the accomplished work of Christ on the Cross.[141]

Twelfth, celebration of the Eucharist will end at the Second Coming (1 Cor. 11:26). After this, Israel will be restored (Rom. 11:25–27), along with her sabbaths and sacrifices, which will be with her during the Millennium.[142]

Thirteenth, the rest of Ezekiel's prophecy will be fulfilled in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:1–7), as He sits on a literal throne with His twelve apostles ruling alongside Him (Matt. 19:28). Accordingly, there is no reason not to take the prophecy about the sacrifices as literal also.

Fourteenth, as noted earlier, the Old Testament did not foresee *how* Jew and Gentile would be joined together,[143] but it did envision *that* the Gentiles would be blessed (cf. Isa. 11:10–16). Ezekiel's presentation does not exclude this later revelation.

Fifteenth, and finally, Hebrews (8–10) speaks of abolishing animal sacrifices

in an *atoning* sense, not as regards *memorial* observance. Otherwise, the use of bread and wine to symbolize Christ's body and blood would not be legitimate either—which it is, since it is commanded of church-age believers.[144]

> *Either* the prophet himself was mistaken in his expectations of a coming temple service, and his prophecy in the sense in which he himself meant it will never be fulfilled; *or* God in the time of Messiah will fulfill literally these prophecies of the temple according to their intended literal meaning. (Sauer, *EE*, 181)

Notwithstanding, either the typical or the literal interpretation would answer the objection that Ezekiel's predicted animal sacrifices are inconsistent with New Testament teaching, for they could be understood literally in a memorial (if not spiritual) sense.

> Certainly the Hebrews' epistle says, "Where forgiveness of sins is there is no more offering for sin" (10:18). But this in no way proves that there can be no more symbolic actions in Divine service after the redeeming work of Christ. (ibid., 183)

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper go beyond the merely symbolic and are associated with the reception of divine blessing (1 Cor. 19:16–21).[145]

Further, taking *these* prophecies spiritually as fulfilled in Christ does *not* violate a literal hermeneutic and open the door to other spiritualization; such a view preserves the literal interpretation in that *Christ literally and physically fulfilled these sacrifices*.[146] Hence, understanding Old Testament sacrifices as being filtered through the Cross and literally fulfilled in Christ's literal sacrifice is not a violation of the literal hermeneutic, regardless of how preferable the literal interpretation may be.

Objection Thirteen: That Acts 15:14–18 Is Contrary to Premillennialism

> [James said,] "Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' that have been known for ages."

Allis argued that this text poses a serious problem for premillennial dispensationalists, since it identifies the foretold time of Gentile blessing[147] with the church age: "If James' quotation refers to the Christian Church, the claim of Dispensationalists that prophecy skips over the Church age cannot be

maintained: it is directly refuted by this passage" (*PC*, 147). If it does not refer to the church, then "it is hard to believe that James would have beclouded the issue by quoting a passage from the Old Testament which had no bearing upon the question under consideration" (ibid., 148).

In summary, either rebuilding David's tent refers to the church age or it does not. If it does, then, contrary to traditional dispensationalism, the church is predicted in the Old Testament. If it does not, then rebuilding David's tent is seemingly irrelevant to the point James is making, namely, that Gentiles can be saved as Gentiles (without circumcision).

Response to Objection Thirteen

Dispensationalists have responded in several ways, depending on their perspective.

Progressive Dispensational Reply: Spiritual Fulfillment Now/Literal Fulfillment Later

The dilemma posed by amillennialism does not apply to progressive dispensationalism, which accepts that Christ is spiritually on the throne of David *now*[148] but will return later to fulfill the political aspects of the promise later.[149] While this is a possible explanation of Acts 15:16–18, progressive dispensationalism, as a system, has significant problems defending itself, both hermeneutically and biblically.[150]

Traditional Dispensational Reply: An Argument From Analogy

Some traditional dispensationalists take James's statement as a reference to Israel's future (millennial) blessing and note that it is simply an argument by analogy. For instance, if God can bless the Gentiles in the future kingdom (the Millennium), He can certainly do the same now. Some have pointed to "the words of the prophets are in agreement with this" (Acts 15:15) in support.

Others agree with *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Walvoord and Zuck), which makes several good points for a traditional dispensational understanding of this text:

> [First,] James did not say Amos 9:11–12 was *fulfilled* in the church; he simply asserted that what was happening in the church was in full agreement with the Old Testament prophets. [Second,] James' main point is clear: Gentile salvation apart from the Law does not contradict the Old Testament prophets. [Third,] the words *after this* are neither in the Masoretic text (Hebrew) nor in the Septuagint

[Greek OT]; both have “in that day” (2.394).

Therefore, the amillennial objection fails—there is no *after this* in the original text of Amos to indicate that he is foretelling the church age.

Modified Dispensational Reply: The Old Testament Predicted Gentile Blessing for This Age but Not the Mystery of the Church

Even if Acts 15:14–18 is a direct reference to the church age (rather than an argument by analogy), there is no real dilemma here for modified dispensationalism, since it does not deny that the church’s age (of which Paul spoke) was not previously known,[151] but only that the mystery of how Jew and Gentile would be in one body. In context, this passage appears to provide strong support for modified dispensationalism.

First, it begins with the statement that Peter showed how “at first [God] showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.” This was demonstrated in principle by Peter (Acts 10) and in practice by the action of the Jerusalem gathering (Acts 15).[152] The mystery as such was not predicted, just *that* Gentiles would receive salvation during this current age.

Second, the *after this*[153] could be James’s way of indicating that “in that day”[154] was pointing to a time after this age, namely, a time of tribulation to which Amos refers (9:8–10).

Third, “I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent” could be a reference to Christ’s second coming to restore the Davidic covenant in the Millennium.

Objection Fourteen: That the Millennium Would Have a Mixture of Mortal and Immortal People

According to premillennialism, the Millennium will have both mortals and immortals at the same time; some who are already resurrected and some who are not yet resurrected.[155] Those who are resurrected cannot have children (Matt. 22:30), while those who are not yet resurrected can and will (see Isa. 65). The resurrected ones will be perfect and sinless; the others will not. Amillennialists insist that this mixture is implausible and has no scriptural basis.

Response to Objection Fourteen

There is no reason immortals and mortals cannot mix together in the

Millennium. The immortals will have physical bodies and can eat and drink,[156] just as Jesus did after His resurrection (cf. Luke 24:36–43; Acts 1:3). Jesus also was sinless and lived for some thirty-three years with sinful people; if anything, it will encourage sinful mortals to live alongside sinless immortals, seeing what they will soon be realizing (cf. 1 John 3:1–3).

Some dispensationalists hold that the church will not reign with Christ during the Millennium but will be His heavenly servants who may (as angels have) visit the earth on divine missions. Verses 4 and 5 of Revelation 20, which speak only of the Tribulation saints being resurrected to reign in the Millennium[157] and the nature of the church as God's heavenly people,[158] are used to support this view, which is difficult to reconcile with other references to church-age believers reigning with Christ during the Millennium.[159]

Objection Fifteen: That Premillennialists Engage in Unbiblical Date-Setting

Some premillennialists have notoriously set dates for the Second Coming. Books about counting down to Armageddon have proven to contain myriad false predictions. Others have given (for instance) "88 reasons Christ will come in 1988" (He didn't); this is no better than cults that have repeatedly issued false prophecies about the Eschaton. There have even been premillennialists who've given up their jobs and ceased to plan for the future, convinced that Christ will come within a certain period of time.

Response to Objection Fifteen

First, we must acknowledge that some premillennialists have embraced unbiblical date-setting. However, many believe that since Christ's coming is *imminent* that this is inconsistent within their own view.[160]

Second, Jesus said that no one knows the "day," "hour," "times," or "seasons" (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7) of His return. This covers the entire group of "temporal" terms.

Third, some nonpremillennialists unfortunately have done the same: "Some postmillennial writers, as well as others, have fallen into error.… Dr. Snowden [in *The Coming of the Lord*], for instance, after showing so clearly the error of the premillennialist in date-setting and in assuming the near return of Christ, went on to make the same kind of error in assuming that the millennium was just

about to dawn" (Boetner, *MMFV*, 130).

Fourth, and finally, the abuse of any view does not itself prove the view false. An inconsistent premillennialist does not prove the falsity of consistent premillennialism.

CONCLUSION

The biblical, theological, and historical basis of premillennialism is solid.

Premillennialism is rooted in a consistent literal hermeneutic; so understood, the Bible, based in God's unconditional covenants with Abraham and David, points to a literal, political, earthly messianic kingdom. Jesus offered this kingdom to the Jews, but they rejected it; Jesus set up a spiritual kingdom (of which the church is a part), awaiting the day when He will restore the political kingdom to Israel as promised. This will occur at the Second Coming (Rev. 19), when He establishes a thousand-year reign (20), after which God will reign for all eternity in the new heaven and new earth (21–22). Denial of this position forsakes consistent application of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, and if the allegorical method were applied to other Scripture it would undermine the whole of evangelical Christianity.

Granted the hermeneutical importance of premillennialism, we note in closing that with the exception of extreme preterists,[161] all evangelicals, along with classical orthodoxy down through the centuries, East and West, confess that Christ will literally return to earth in the same physical body in which He died and ascended into heaven. This essential commonality should not be forgotten amid all the differences with regard to the order of events surrounding the physical Second Coming, one of the half-dozen great fundamentals of the faith.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE TRIBULATION AND THE RAPTURE

For the purpose of this discussion, the Tribulation is a seven-year period that will occur at the end of the age. There are many views on the Tribulation, and most, except preterism, are part of an intramural debate among premillennialists. The Tribulation is considered to be the unparalleled time of trial and judgment just before Christ returns to earth. The main question centers around the rapture of believers and whether it will occur before, during, or after the Tribulation.[1]

THE NATURE OF THE TRIBULATION

The nature of the Tribulation or, more properly, the "seventieth week" of Daniel, is based on a prophecy about a future seven-year period in Daniel 9. Speaking in the context of the seventy-year captivity in Babylon (9:2), Gabriel declares that "seventy sevens" (of years) will be determined on Israel (v. 24). Jesus referred to this passage in the Mount Olivet Discourse, giving a basic outline of its events (Matt. 24:4ff.), but only Revelation spells it out in detail.

Moses Foretold End-Time Tribulation for Israel

> Be careful not to forget the [Mosaic] covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not

> make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. *After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time—if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking him to anger … the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you.* There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.
>
> *But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul*. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then *in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God*; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath. (Deut. 4:23–31)

Herein are several elements of Israel's Tribulation period:

(1) It will come as a tribulation (v. 30) or punishment of their sins.
(2) It will come after their exile among the nations.
(3) It will be as a result of the wrath of the God who is a "consuming fire" (v. 24).
(4) It will involve a spiritual restoration (v. 30).
(5) It will involve a fulfillment of God's covenant with them (v. 31).
(6) It will be in the "later days" (v. 30).

The Seventieth "Week" of Daniel

The one Old Testament passage that lays out the time and basic nature of the Tribulation is Daniel 9:

> *Seventy "sevens"* are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One [Messiah], the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens," and sixty-two "sevens." It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.
>
> After the sixty-two "sevens," the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of *the ruler who will come* will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He *will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven."* [The last of the seventy "sevens."] *In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering*. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. (vv. 24–27)

As we've noted,[2] most conservative scholars agree that the first sixty-nine "weeks" or "sevens" are the 483 years between Cyrus's "decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" and the time "the Anointed One [was] cut off" (the Crucifixion).[3] This leaves a single seven-year period after the Crucifixion for the

personage of power to make a seven-year treaty with the Jews, rebuild their temple, and reinstitute sacrificial offerings. However, in the middle of this "week," he will cause the sacrifices to cease and pollute the temple with an "abomination." Preterism's claim that this was fulfilled by A.D. 70 contradicts many scriptural texts.[4]

Given that Jesus is speaking of a yet-future seven-year period, the following may be derived from Daniel 9:

(1) There will be a seven-year period (sometime after Christ's advent) in which the prophecies God gave about Jerusalem ("your holy city," vv. 24–25) will be completely fulfilled.
(2) This period will be established by a "covenant" (treaty) made between the Jews ("your [Daniel's] people" in the "holy city," v. 24) and "the prince who is to come" (v. 26 NKJV).
(3) A temple will be rebuilt in which animal sacrifices and offerings will again be made for the first half of the seven years (v. 27); the treaty will be broken after three and one-half years, and an "abomination" that causes "desolation" (v. 27) will occur in the temple.

Daniel's Elaboration on Antichrist

> His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.
>
> *The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed*, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price. (11:31–39)

While much of this refers to Antiochus Epiphanes (Antiochus IV [r. 175–164 B.C.]), an evil, ruthless Syrian invader, and was fulfilled in the second century B.C., some scholars believe that verse 36 on "the king will do as he pleases" is a reference to the end-time Antichrist. In any event, Antiochus is a precursor of

Antichrist; he did many things that Antichrist also will do during the Tribulation.[5]

From this passage we learn:

(1) A political power will abolish the daily sacrifice (v. 31).
(2) He will desecrate the temple by setting up an abomination there (v. 31).
(3) He will be resisted by a faithful remnant (v. 32).
(4) They will be persecuted for their stand (vv. 33–35).
(5) He will do as he pleases (v. 36).
(6) He will speak blasphemies against God (vv. 36–38).
(7) He will show no regard for any god, even the one women desire [Christ]? (v. 37).
(8) He will worship the god of military might (v. 38).
(9) He will divide the Land among those who honor him (v. 39).

The Time of Jacob's Trouble

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess.…

"Cries of fear are heard—terror, not peace. Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor, every face turned deathly pale? How awful that day will be! None will be like it. *It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it*.

"In that day … I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them. Instead, they will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.… I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid.

"I am with you and will save you.… *Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you*. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.… Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing.… All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you. I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many" (Jer. 30:3–14).

A number of facts emerge from this passage:

(1) Israel and Judah will be brought back from captivity (vv. 3, 10).
(2) They will then no longer be enslaved by other nations (v. 8).
(3) Before this, they will endure an unprecedented time of trouble (v. 7).
(4) They will be punished for their sins (vv. 12, 14).
(5) After this they will dwell peacefully and securely in their own land under King David (vv. 9–10).

The Mount Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24)

That the Mount Olivet Discourse is about a future time is clear from the questions that occasioned it: "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and *what will be the sign of your coming* and of *the end of the age*?' " (v. 3). He replied by delineating a series of consecutive tribulational events.

First Event: False Messiahs (vv. 4–5)[6]

"Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."

Second Event: Wars (vv. 6–7)[7]

"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

Third Event: Famines (v. 7)[8]

"There will be famines."

Fourth Event: Pestilences and Earthquakes (vv. 7–8)[9]

"[There will be] famines and earthquakes in various places. *All these are the beginning of birth pains*."

This appears to be the middle of the Tribulation, the first three-and-a-half years being called "the beginning of birth pains" and the second three-and-a-half being hard-labor birth pains or "the great tribulation" (v. 21 NKJV). If this is correct, then the fifth, sixth, and seventh seals of Revelation 6, as well as the trumpets and bowls that follow, will be the last half of the Tribulation. Since

Antichrist will erect his own image in the middle of the Tribulation (2 Thess. 2:3–4; Rev. 13:11–18) and attempt to kill all who refuse to worship it (7:13–14; 12:13; 13:10), the next event is understandably about martyrs.

Fifth Event: Martyrs (vv. 9–11)[10]

> Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

This event of martyrdom is connected with the abomination of desolation (v. 15; cf. Dan. 9:26), which occurs when Antichrist halts temple sacrifices and sets up his own image, demanding that all worship it.

Afterward, the Tribulation saints, known as the 144,000 Jews (Rev. 7:4–8), are scattered into the world, preaching "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 24:14) and winning "a great multitude" of others to Christ (Rev. 7:9). Those who endure until the end of the Tribulation will be saved (Matt. 24:13); unbelievers will be taken in the judgments (v. 39), and believers will be left to go into the Millennium alive (cf. 25:34).

Sixth Event: Cosmic Disturbances (Matt. 24:29)

"Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' "John added that after an earthquake, the sun went black and the moon red; the stars fell, the sky receded, and mountains and islands were moved (Rev. 6:12–14).

Seventh Event: Inauguration of the Second Coming (Matt. 24:30–31)

When the seventh seal is opened (Rev. 8:1ff.), it contains the seven trumpets, at the last of which we read: "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever' " (11:15). This signals the Tribulation's end and the beginning of the Millennium:

> At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Matt. 24:30–31)

THE TRIBULATION IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Premillennialist scholars generally agree that the actual Tribulation period is described in Revelation 6–18. There are two main positions with regard to the order of the series of seals, trumpets, and bowls: the simultaneous view and the sequential view.[11]

The Simultaneous View

According to the *simultaneous view*, each series—seals, trumpets, and bowls—is parallel to the others, covering the same basic ground and ending at the close of the Tribulation with the seventh in each series.[12]

First, there are similarities between parallel numbers in each series.

However, there are also significant differences; for example, many see no real alignment between the first, fifth, or seventh seals and trumpets. If this is true, there is no identity between them.

Second, the seventh judgment in all three series is said to end the Tribulation (cf. 6:16–17; 11:15; 16:17).

In response, the seventh seal is not actually the Second Coming itself,[13] but the anticipation of God's wrath. Further, there is no real parallel with the seventh in each series, since the trumpets flow out of the seventh seal, and the bowls flow out of the seventh trumpet. Even the first bowl indicates a completion of the judgments (15:1), so the bowls are better taken as a whole, indicating the final judgments flowing from the last trumpet.

Third, some see a direct parallel between the objects of the seven trumpets and seven bowls: on the earth, sea, waters, sun, beast, Euphrates, and earthly kingdoms, respectively.

In reply, opponents note that while the objects are the same, the nature and extent of the judgments are different, being more extensive in the bowls than in the trumpets. Accordingly, they seem not to be identical.

Fourth, proponents reason that many other sections recapitulate similar or identical events (e.g., cf. Rev. 7, 12, 13).

Conversely, it is observed that these are parenthetical chapters, not part of a numbered sequence. As such, we should not expect everything in them to be sequential to the series of seven judgments.

Fifth, some point out that each series ends with the same events—thunder, lightning, and an earthquake (cf. 8:5; 11:19; 15:5).

Nevertheless, these are not necessarily the same ending; what we know is that they are the same *kind* of endings, signaling the end of each.

To summarize the simultaneous view of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, there are similarities, but the differences are more crucial and determinative.

The Sequential View

The *sequential view* holds that the series of seals, trumpets, and bowls occur in order, one after the other. Arguments in favor of the sequential view include the following.

First, a plain reading of the text supports a sequential view; one numbered series after another would normally be understood as sequential.

Second, phrases like "I saw" and "I looked/heard"[14] and especially "after these things"[15] support sequential events. Even in the parenthetical passages, similar phrases indicate a sequence of events.[16]

Third, the bowls indicate sequence because they are called "the last" of God's wrath (15:1 NASB), in contrast to the earlier seals and trumpets.

Fourth, the trumpets and bowls cannot be at the same time, since the judgment is more extensive in the bowls, indicating that they are later. For example, the second trumpet will kill only a third of the sea creatures (8:9), whereas the second bowl will kill all living sea creatures (16:3).

Fifth, the fifth trumpet comes after the sixth seal, for the 144,000 are sealed in the sixth seal (7:1–8), and the judgments of the fifth trumpet come only on those who have not been sealed (Rev. 9:4).

Sixth, the ordinal numbers[17] indicate sequence within each succession. The next series does not begin with the next number, because it is a new series of events.[18]

Seventh, there is also a build-to-climax within each series. This leads to the anticipation that the next series will build upon it, which indeed it does; each series of judgments is more intense.

Eighth, the seventh seal has no object of its own; we would expect it to, *if* it was a parallel judgment in the series. The seventh seal and seventh bowl simply introduce the next series.

Ninth, and finally, the fourth seal is the beginning of birth pains (6:7–8; cf.

Matt. 24:8); it is not the great day of wrath (Rev. 6:17), which will come later, with the seven bowls (cf. 15:1).

The evidence favors some sort of sequence of events, one after the other, with each building on the next. Hence, our analysis begins with the seven seals.

The Seven-Sealed Book

The seven-sealed book is taken to be the title deed to the earth. As noted by Renald Showers (b. 1934):

> The sealed scroll of Revelation 5 is the deed of purchase for mankind's forfeited inheritance of tenant possession of the earth.… Through breaking the seven seals, Christ will instigate a tremendous bombardment of divine wrath or judgment against the domain of Satan and his forces for the last seven years before His Second Coming. (*MOLC*, 99)

Only Christ, the Lamb, is found worthy to open the books and release on the earth the judgments therein (5:1–7); only He has defeated Satan by His death and resurrection (Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14–15).

The First Seal: The White Horse (False Messiah)

> I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. (Rev. 6:1–2; cf. Matt. 24:4–5)[19]

The Second Seal: The Red Horse (Wars)

> When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword. (Rev. 6:3–4; cf. Matt. 24:6–7)

The Third Seal: The Black Horse (Famines)

> When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!" (Rev. 6:5–6; cf. Matt. 24:7).

The Fourth Seal: The Pale Horse (Death)

> When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth. (Rev. 6:7–8; cf. Matt. 24:7–8)

The Fifth Seal: The Martyrs

> When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed. (Rev. 6:9–11; cf. Matt. 24:9–11)

The Sixth Seal: Heavenly Phenomena

> I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face 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 can stand?" (Rev. 6:12–17; cf. Matt. 24:29).

The time up to the fourth seal is described as "the beginning of birth pains" (Matt. 24:8), and by the sixth seal "the great day of their wrath" will have arrived. The intensity of God's wrath will be increasing; once again, if God had not foredetermined to shorten these days there would be no flesh alive by the end of the Tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:22).[20]

The Seven Trumpets

The seven trumpets (Rev. 8–9; 11:15ff.) come out of the seventh seal (8:1), which, other than the trumpets, has no content of its own as the other six seals do. By the seventh *trumpet*, the end of the Tribulation will have come (11:15); that does not seem to be the case by the end of the seventh seal.[21] As far as the trumpets being distinct from the seals, elements occur in the trumpets that do not seem to involve the seals.

The Seven Bowl Judgments

While the bowl judgments (Rev. 15–16) are on the same objects as the trumpets, they are later and more extensive. For example, while with the trumpets only one-third of the object is inflicted, with the bowls the entire object is inflicted; apparently, then, the same objects are later revisited with intensified judgment. By the time of the last judgments, the end of the Tribulation will be reached, and when the sixth bowl is poured out, the battle of Armageddon is being described:

> The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.… Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. (16:12–16)

Earlier, in the sixth trumpet judgment, in preparation for Armageddon, God commanded:

> "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. (9:14–16)

No fewer than these facts are clear:

(1) At least the first four seal judgments parallel Jesus' words in the Mount Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24) and describe the beginning of the Tribulation.
(2) The judgments continually increase in severity. By the end of the seventh bowl judgment the Tribulation will be over.[22]
(3) Just before the last of the judgments, Armageddon will occur, involving all the earth's nations and two hundred million soldiers from the east who will come across the Euphrates into the Holy Land.
(4) Christ's return to earth (Rev. 19) will follow this last bowl judgment.

Other Selected Texts Describing These Final Events

Zechariah 12:2–3, 8–9

> I [the Lord] am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, *I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations.…*
>
> On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord going before them. On that day *I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.*

Zechariah 14:1–5, 7–9

> *A day of the LORD is coming* when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; *the city will be captured*, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.
>
> *Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives*, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley.…
>
> It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. *The LORD will be king over the whole earth.* On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

Several other pieces are added to the prophetic puzzle. At the end of the Tribulation, at the battle of Armageddon and after it, the following will occur:

(1) All nations of the earth will surround Jerusalem.
(2) Jerusalem will be captured.
(3) A remnant will flee through the valley created by an earthquake.
(4) Christ will return to the Mount of Olives.
(5) Christ will judge the nations.
(6) Christ will restore the “house of David.”
(7) Christ will reign “over the whole earth.”

This entire event is described as the day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10).

2 Thessalonians 2:1–10

> Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that *the day of the Lord* has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day *will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed*, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.
>
> Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but *the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way*. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. *The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,* and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

(1) The day of the Lord had not yet come when Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians; (2) it will not come until "the lawless one" (Antichrist) comes; (3) currently someone is restraining him. When the restrainer is taken out of the way, Antichrist will be revealed, performing signs that will mislead many (v. 4). This fits with the "abomination that causes desolation," making the Jewish "sacrifice and offering" to cease in "the middle of" the seven-year period (Dan. 9:27).

Revelation 13:1, 4–8, 11–14, 16–18

John speaks of this same event:

> I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.… Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"
>
> The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months [three-and-a-half years]. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. *He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.…*
>
> Then I saw another beast.… He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.… He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.
>
> This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

From this we can conclude:

(1) The beast (Antichrist) will claim to be God and demand that all worship be given to him *in the middle of the Tribulation*.
(2) He will perform impressive, successfully deceptive signs.
(3) He will persecute God's people.
(4) He will rule the world.
(5) He will not allow people to buy or sell without his mark (666).
(6) His reign will last forty-two months, designated by Daniel as half (the second half) of the seven-year Tribulation period.
(7) During this same time the "woman" (Israel) will flee into the wilderness to be preserved through the rest of the Tribulation, "1,260 days" (which is also three and one-half years, 12:6).

(8) Also during this time, 144,000 Jews—12,000 from each tribe—will be saved, and through them so will a great multitude of others (7:4–9; 14:1–5).

A Summary of the Tribulation

First, the Tribulation begins when a globally known political leader (Antichrist) makes a seven-year treaty with the Jews, allowing them to offer up sacrifices in a rebuilt Jerusalem temple (Dan. 9:27).

Second, during the first part of this period there are wars, famines, mass death by wars and natural disasters, and believers are martyred for their faith in Messiah (Matt. 24:5–11; cf. Rev. 6:1–11). This period is called "the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8 NKJV).

Third, in the middle of the Tribulation, Antichrist will cause the sacrifices and offerings to cease (Dan. 9:27). He will set up an image of himself in the temple (Rev. 13:14) and demand worship, sitting in the temple and claiming he is God.[23] The last half of this period is called "the great tribulation" (7:14), culminating in the judgment called "the day of the Lord" (2 Thess. 2:2).

Fourth, all who do not take the mark of the beast will be forbidden to buy or sell (Rev. 13:16–18). Great numbers of believers will resist Antichrist and be martyred for their faith (v. 14).

Fifth, a faithful remnant will flee into the wilderness, where they will be protected by God for the last half of the Tribulation (12:6). These will be alive at the end of the Tribulation and enter the Millennium in unresurrected bodies (Rom. 11:26); they will be able to produce children, which people in resurrected bodies cannot do (cf. Matt. 22:30). They are the "sheep" of Matthew 25:32–33.

Sixth, just before the end of the Tribulation, two hundred million soldiers from the east will come across the Euphrates (along with the other nations of the earth) to invade Israel (Rev. 9:13–21; 16:12–14). They will surround and capture Jerusalem (Zech. 12:1–3; 14:1–2), the faithful remnant having escaped and been protected by God for forty-two months (Rev. 12:6).

Seventh, God will miraculously intervene, save Israel from utter destruction (Zech. 12:4–8), and restore "the house of David" (v. 8). Christ will return to the Mount of Olives (14:4) and deliver His people.

Eighth, and finally, national Israel will recognize Christ as their Messiah when they look on Him whom they have pierced (12:10). Israel will be re-ingrafted into the redemptive line, the "times of the Gentiles" having been

completed (Luke 21:24). The New Covenant with Israel will be fulfilled (Jer. 31:31), as will the Abrahamic covenant, which guaranteed their Land forever (Gen. 12, 14–15), and the Davidic covenant, which gave assurance that they eternally would have a king on David's throne.[24]

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE RAPTURE TO THE TRIBULATION

Now that we've laid out the nature of the Tribulation, we'll endeavor to determine the relationship of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17) to this unprecedented time of judgment and wrath. Where does the rapture of the church fit into the events just described—before, during, or after? There are many reasons for concluding that the church is in heaven during the Tribulation period.

PRETRIBULATIONISM

Pretribulationism holds that the Rapture of the church occurs *before* the Tribulation, during which the church, Christ's bride, will be in heaven, standing before His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10) and preparing for His return to earth.[25] Pretribulationism holds that Christ's coming *for* His saints will be *in the air* and before the Tribulation; after the Tribulation, Christ will come *with* His saints and *to earth* to reign for a thousand years. Charles Ryrie (see *WYSKAR*), John Walvoord (1910–2002—see *RQ* and *BHT*), and Dwight Pentecost (see *TTC*) expound this view.

The Church Is Never Mentioned on Earth During the Tribulation

John addresses Revelation to the "the seven churches which are in Asia" (1:4 NKJV). The word *church(es)* is used nineteen times in the first three chapters, and then not once during the entire Tribulation (6–18). That it reoccurs after the Second Coming (19) and during the new heaven and new earth (22:16) is striking; similar exhortations earlier that had the phrase "unto the churches" (e.g., 2:7, 11 KJV) do not have them during the Tribulation, when, instead, John warns, "If anyone has an ear, let him hear" (13:9).

In fact, after the description of the seven churches (2–3), in chapters 4–5 the

scene shifts to heaven, where John is beckoned with a trumpetlike voice, "Come up here,[26] and I will show you things which must take place *after this*" (4:1 NKJV). Some see these words as reminiscent of Paul's statement that the Rapture will take place "with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God" (1 Thess. 4:16); others disagree.[27] In any event, like the church, from that point on John views the Tribulation from heaven. After a brief picture of the redeemed around God's throne (Rev. 4–5), from chapters 6–18 the Tribulation unfolds. In chapter 19 Christ returns to earth and then, after the "first resurrection," He reigns for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–7), which is followed by the new heaven and new earth (21–22). *Nowhere during the entire Tribulation period is there a word about the church being on earth.*

The Church (Bride) Is Mentioned in Heaven During the Tribulation

There is a reference to the church during the Tribulation—in heaven.[28] Near the end of the Tribulation, the fall of "Babylon the Great" is announced—this is the great apostate "church" on earth (18:2). Otherwise, the church, the *bride* of Christ, is not mentioned until after the Tribulation, when she is positioned *"coming down out of heaven"* (Rev. 3:12) where she has been prepared for the wedding. This fits with a pretribulation Rapture, where during the Tribulation the believers appear before the heavenly judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) to have their works purified by fire (1 Cor. 3:11–15) and to prepare them as a chaste virgin (2 Cor. 11:2) to meet the Bridegroom in the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7 NKJV).

"One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me [John], 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb' " (21:9). "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (19:7). "I [John] saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (21:2; cf. 22:17). All of this implies that she was in heaven, raptured before the Tribulation, being prepared to return to earth with her Husband at the end.

The Heaven-Dwellers

The other reference to the church during the Tribulation is in 13:6, where John speaks of "those who dwell in heaven" (NKJV); in contrast to human,

unsaved earth-dwellers (cf. 12:12; 13:8, 14), those raptured are human and saved. Further, they appear to have bodies, for the verb *dwell* is from the same word used for Christ's incarnation in human flesh (John 1:14) and for a believer's body (2 Cor. 5:1, 4);[29] it is never used of pure spirits (e.g., angels). This supports pretribulationism—that the saved are raptured before the Tribulation and given resurrection bodies in heaven.[30]

Saints, Apostles, and Prophets

At the very end of the Tribulation we read: "Rejoice over her, *O heaven*! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her [Babylon the great] for the way she treated you" (Rev. 18:20). Only the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,"[31] so this must be a reference to the church, already raptured into heaven. Soon after this, John tells of "the armies of heaven [who] were following him [Christ], riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean" (19:14). If they are coming with Christ at His return to earth,[32] again, they must have been raptured previously (1 Thess. 4:16–17).[33]

The Twenty-Four Elders

Some have taken the twenty-four elders of Revelation (4:4) to be angelic beings; these interpreters refer to King David's order of twenty-four priests in the earthly temple (1 Chron. 24). However, Gromacki maintains strongly that they cannot be angels: (1) They're sitting on thrones, which is what Jesus promised to believers (Rev. 3:21); (2) they have white robes, the same as believers (3:3, 18); and (3) they were given crowns, as believers are promised (2:10; 3:11). This triple identity delineates redeemed people, notably believers of the church age; they must have been raptured before the Tribulation to have this status in heaven (cited in Ice, *WTS*, 358–59).

Tribulation References to Earthly Believers Are Not About the Church

Posttribulationists[34] take the several Tribulation statements about "saints" and other believers on earth as references to the church.[35] This is a case of mistaken identity.

The 144,000

The "believers" mentioned twice during the Tribulation are Jewish converts from the twelve *tribes* of *Israel*.[36] The "great multitude" of others are those won to Christ by the 144,000 converted Jews (7:4–9; cf. 14:3).

The Tribulation Saints

The word *saints*, used several times during the Tribulation, need not mean "those who were believers in Christ before the Tribulation began." There were saints (godly ones) in the Old Testament (Ps. 85:8), there are saints today (1 Cor. 1:2), and there will be saints during the Tribulation (Rev. 13:7); this is a common word for believers of all ages. The identification of saints during the Tribulation is with either the 144,000 saved Jews or the myriad others converted through their efforts.

The Church Is Delivered From the Hour of Testing

Further, God promised to keep the church from the "hour of trial" (the Tribulation). John wrote to the faithful church of Philadelphia: "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (3:10).

God did not say He would keep the church *through*[37] the Tribulation, as posttribulationists argue (see Ladd, *BH*, 85–86), but *from*[38] it. Also, notice the word *keep*[39]—one can hardly be kept from something he is enduring. This is likewise supported by the use of *ek* in verses unrelated to the Tribulation.[40] When New Testament believers are asked to keep themselves "from" offensive practices (Acts 15:29), they clearly are not to participate at all (cf. James 5:20). Even a favorite posttribulational text—John 17:15, in which Jesus says, "My prayer is not that you [the Father] take them [believers] out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one"—supports a pretribulational Rapture, involving removal from the *world system*, as believers are transferred from Satan's domain to Christ's kingdom (Col. 1:13; cf. 1 John. 5:18).

In addition, the word *hour* supports pretribulationism, since the only way to be kept from a section of time, such as an *hour*, is not to go through any of it. The promise is not merely to keep them from *trials* but also from the *time* in which the trials occur. Believers cannot be kept from part of the hour, as with

midtribulationism[41] or the pre-wrath view,[42] or none of the hour, as with posttribulationism;[43] the only way to be kept from an hour is not to be in any part of the hour.

The Church Is Saved From God's Wrath

Just after speaking of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16–17), Paul encourages the Thessalonians with these words: "God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:9), *and* "to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1:10). As shown above, both halves of the Tribulation are characterized by God's wrath, which persistently intensifies; Daniel considered the whole "seventieth week" (of seven years) as part of the Day of the Lord, a day of wrath (Dan. 12:1, 7; cf. 9:24).

God's wrath cannot be separated from man's wrath; God's is often delivered through human and natural instruments, like wars, famine, and death.[44]

Further, the famine mentioned in the third seal (Rev. 6:5–6) is not totally man's wrath.[45]

Also, the fourth seal (v. 8) speaks of famine and the sword, both of which are part of God's wrath according to the background verse in Ezekiel (14:19); the Hebrew word for *fury* is *hema*, which means "anger" or "wrath" (cf. Isa. 13:6, 9; Ezek. 38:18–19).

Finally, even the unsaved under the sixth seal recognize the judgment as the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:15–16). *Salvation (deliverance) from God's wrath in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 means deliverance from the whole Tribulation period*.

The Church's Rapture Explains the Sudden Apostasy

Another indication that the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation is that it best explains the sudden apostasy by the removal of the restrainer (2 Thess. 2:3–7). The ultimate lawlessness of Antichrist (empowered by Satan himself) cannot be restrained by anyone short of God Himself. Thus, the restrainer of all sin is the Holy Spirit of God (Gen. 6:3; John 16:7–8). It cannot be even Michael the archangel, for he could not in his power restrain the devil (Jude 9). Nor can the restrainer be the Roman emperor (cf. Rom. 13:4), for Antichrist will himself be the world's political leader. The only restraint for Antichrist is the Spirit of Christ, ultimate holiness overpowering the ultimately unholy.

Accordingly, it again makes sense to posit the Rapture at the beginning of the Tribulation. The Spirit is the indweller of all believers (John. 14:16) and of the church (1 Cor. 3:17); when He and all believers are taken away, evil will naturally run rampant. The removal of salt and light will leave this world a very unsavory and dark place, one the lawless one will utilize to work against God.

A Realistic Concept of Imminence Implies a Pretribulation Rapture

An additional indication that the church will not go through the Tribulation is that the Rapture is a signless and imminent event. It may happen at any moment, and nothing needs to be fulfilled before it occurs, as numerous passages attest:

> Listen, I tell you a mystery: 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.[46]

As for the texts that say Christ is coming "quickly,"[47] A. T. Robertson said they should be translated "I am coming (imminently).… We do not know how 'quickly' is meant to be understood. But it is a real threat" (*WPNT*, 7.306). Noted New Testament scholar Leon Morris (b. 1914) commented, "The imminence of the coming is repeated" (*RSJ*, 258), and in his classic commentary on Revelation, J. A. Seiss (1823–1904) affirmed: "Everywhere the promised Apocalypse of the Lord Jesus is represented as close at hand, *liable to occur at any moment*" (*A*, 523, emphasis added). Further, "quickly" does not necessarily mean "soon," but "swiftly" (see Phil. 4:5 "at hand"; James 5:8 "at hand"; see also below under "Preterism").

The concepts of eagerly awaiting, coming quickly, and being near all encourage belief in Christ's imminent return.[48] As imminent, it will be signless, and as signless, it will have to be pretribulational, since once the Tribulation begins the end of the seven years could be predicted accurately.

The Church Is Not Destined to "the Time of Jacob's Trouble"

The Tribulation period is called "the time of *Jacob's* trouble" (Jer. 30:7 NKJV), and Daniel was told it is the week determined for *his people* Israel (9:24). Thus, there is no reason to suppose that when God resumes dealing with His chosen nation and fulfilling prophecy made to them[49] that this was designed

as a time of tribulation for the church: It was *not*, and there is no reason the church should be in it. Just as God took Enoch to heaven while allowing Noah to endure the Flood, even so God will deliver the church before the Tribulation and allow Israel to endure it. It is Israel's time of trouble and purification (cf. Zech. 12:6), the era that will prepare Israel to receive her Messiah (v. 10; cf. Rom. 11:25). This is a time of God's wrath on unbelievers, not on believers; Christ has already borne God's wrath for us.[50]

The Rapture's Purifying Hope Implies Its Pretribulational Nature

John declared that Christ's imminent return has a purifying effect on believers:

> Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:2–3)

For those with the expectation, this is a somber reminder, with a sanctifying effect, that the end of the age is at hand.

The Rapture's Blessed Hope Implies Its Pretribulational Nature

Paul affirmed:

> [God's grace] teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:12–13)

Two elements speak of imminence: First, we "wait" in constant expectation for Christ's return, and second, it is a blessed hope, which wouldn't be true if we had to go through part or all of the Tribulation in order to achieve it.

The Time of Believer's Rewards Implies a Pretribulational Rapture

"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12). That is to say, believers will be rewarded immediately after His return, and no

such event takes place on earth as is described in 1 Corinthians 3:11–15:

> No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

With the Rapture preceding the Tribulation, believers will receive their rewards in heaven while the Tribulation is occurring on earth.

The Difference Between Christ Coming *for* His Saints and Then Later Coming *With* Them Fits a Pretribulational Rapture

The difference between Christ coming *for* His saints and coming *with* His saints is best explained in this light. Before the Tribulation, Christ comes for His bride (1 Thess. 4:16–17; John 14:3); then, at the end of the Tribulation, He will return with all His saints. Jude wrote, "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones (v. 14; cf. Matt. 24:29–31). He cannot come *with* them until He has first come *for* them; we have identified the time interval between these events as seven years. Not only is there is no evidence that these events are at the same time, but when Christ returns in Revelation 19, there is no reference to the Rapture.[51]

The Sheep Nations Going Into the Millennium Supports a Pretribulational Rapture

According to Jesus, there will be "sheep" (believers) who survive the Tribulation and enter the Millennium:

> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world' " (Matt. 25:31–34).

The Tribulation's judgments will so severely diminish the world's population that were it to last longer no one would live through it (24:22). During the Millennium, children will be born (Isa. 65:20), and there will be innumerable

people by the end of it (Rev. 20:8).[52] People in resurrection bodies do not have children,[53] and according to posttribulationism, the resurrection will take place at the end of the Tribulation, just before the Millennium (v. 4); if this is the case, though, there will be no one in unresurrected bodies to populate the earth during Christ's reign. No such problem exists for premillennial pretribulationism, with the resurrection taking place before the Tribulation; many of the 144,000 Jews saved therein, *and* the great multitude of others they win (7:4, 9), will be alive on earth in unresurrected bodies. *These are the "sheep" of Matthew 25 who will replenish the earth during a thousand years of reproduction under perfect conditions*.

Posttribulationists have set forth speculations to avoid their dilemma, but they are just that—speculation, without demonstrable scriptural grounds. One such interpretation suggests that the 144,000 are not really converted during the Tribulation, and, hence, they will not be resurrected at the end (in a posttribulational rapture) and, thus, will still qualify to have children during the Millennium. In sharp contrast, Revelation 7 says they have "the seal of the living God" on them (v. 2) and that they serve God, not Antichrist (v. 3).

Posttribulationists are also "forced" (see Gundry, *CT*, 137) to move the judgment of the "goat nations" to the end of the Millennium, for if the Rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation, and all the "sheep" (saved) are taken to heaven, then there will be no saved persons left to populate the earth. The suggestion that some "goats" (unsaved) will enter the Millennium is without any textual support.[54] Jesus said "all" the goats will be judged when He comes (Matt. 25:32). The significant differences between the separation and the judgment are sufficient to show they are not the same.[55]

Sheep and Goat Separation	**Great White Throne Judgment**
No resurrection mentioned	Resurrection of the lost
No books opened	Books opened
Nations are present	Only individuals are present
Saved and lost are present	Only lost are present
Reward mentioned	No rewards mentioned
Occurs on earth	Does not occur on earth

Two destinies: heaven and hell	One destiny: hell

The Time Needed for God's Judgments, After the Rapture, at the End of the Tribulation, Supports Pretribulationism

Posttribulationists have a veritable logjam of events at Christ's second coming, at the end of the Tribulation. They believe that God's wrath must be held off until after the Rapture, but they also believe that the Rapture will be part of the Second Coming (with no significant intervening time). However, a number of events must occur, such as a time of peace and safety (1 Thess. 5:3), that scarcely fit the description of the Tribulation's end, when "all the nations" will converge on Jerusalem (Zech. 12:3; 14:2; Rev. 16:14). Contrary to Robert Gundry (b. 1935; see *CT*, 92), there isn't even a hint of lull in the wars surrounding Armageddon. Certainly, after all the terrible trumpet and bowl judgments, there will be no sense of "peace and safety." *This will be at the end of the most intense time of trauma and turmoil in the history of humankind*.

Charles Ryrie (b. 1925) notes, "The very form of the statement suggests that peace and safety will not be the actual conditions of the world preceding the Day of the Lord" (*WYSKAR*, 100). The related passages *contrast* peace and safety with destruction.

According to posttribulationism, the Day of the Lord will not begin until the judgments of Armageddon (at the Tribulation's conclusion) are poured out … but the Rapture occurs at the same time. This raises another question: "How can the rapture precede Armageddon and yet be a single event with the second coming, which puts a stop to Armageddon?" (ibid., 94). No such problems for pretribulationism, for with the Rapture before the Tribulation, there is plenty of time for all these judgments to take place before the Second Coming.

Coming in the Air vs. Coming to Earth Supports Pretribulationism

Along with the above discussion is the Rapture being described as Christ coming "*in the air*." Christ will later come *to earth* with the saints He will have previously raptured. These two events must not be confused, and *the time interval between them is the seven years of the Tribulation period*.[56]

> The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord *in the air*.

> And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thess. 4:16–17)

The Greek word for "rapture," translated *caught up*, is *arpadzô*, which is translated in the Latin Bible (the Vulgate) as *rapturô*, from which we get the word *rapture*. The term is used of Paul being caught up into heaven (2 Cor. 12:2–4), of Philip being caught up bodily by the Spirit and carried to another place (Acts 8:39), and of Christ's ascension (Rev. 12:5; cf. Acts 1:11). No such occurrence is anywhere described as being part of Christ's return to reign on earth at the Tribulation's end (Matt. 24–25; Rev. 19); the saints are not being *taken away* in Christ's return to reign but are being *brought back* to reign with Him. The posttribulationist idea that Christ comes in the air and then immediately turns around and returns to earth is not biblical, but simply a novel invention to avoid the clear separation of these events.

From 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18, Ryrie lists five characteristics that will be part of Christ coming in the air for the church:

(1) a *return* of Christ (v. 16);
(2) a *resurrection* of dead believers (v. 16);
(3) a *rapture* of living believers (v. 17);
(4) the *reunion* of believers with departed loved ones (v. 17); and
(5) *reassurance* or comfort as we look forward to this event (v. 18).

No such traits are attached to Christ's return at the Tribulation's end.

The Rapture As a Mystery Supports Pretribulationism

Paul said to the Corinthians,

> Listen, I tell you *a mystery*: 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. (1 Cor. 15:51–53)

Unlike Christ's return to earth, the Rapture will occur in an instant without warning, "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye" (v. 52; cf. 1 Thess. 4:17).

Like the church, a mystery once concealed but now revealed (Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:17), so the church's rapture was unknown. The fact of a future resurrection was known to Old Testament Jews,[57] but nowhere was it revealed

that a large body of believers who were neither Jew nor Gentile (Gal. 3:28) but a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) and "one new man" (Eph. 2:15) would be raptured to heaven without either dying or being resurrected from graves.

The Rapture As Not Part of "the Day of the Lord" Supports Pretribulationism

"The day of the Lord" and similar terms, as used of end-time events, refer to the Tribulation period (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2)[58] and on through the Millennium (2 Peter 3:10–13). Never once is the Rapture part of this day.

"Day of the Lord" occurs about twenty times in the Old Testament, often of end-time events. A parallel term, "the last days," has fourteen occurrences, always of the end times. "In that day" is used over a hundred times, generally of the same events. *Isaiah uses all three of the same event* (Isa. 1:2, 11–12), *but never once does the Old Testament refer to the Rapture*: "This omission from over one hundred passages seems hard to understand if the rapture is the first event of the Day of the Lord" (Ryrie, *WYSKAR*, 103).

Further, Paul tells the Thessalonians they will not go through "that day" (2 Thess. 2:3) and it will not overtake them; they will be delivered from it (1 Thess. 5:9) by the Rapture that comes before (4:16–17; cf. 5:1). *The Rapture is before the Tribulation period*.

Christ's Promise in John 14 to Return Supports the Rapture

> Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. *I am going there to prepare a place for you*. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come back and take you to be with me* that you also may be where I am. (vv. 1–3)

Several considerations of this text indicate that Christ's promise to His disciples is about rapturing us to heaven before the Tribulation rather than His return to (or, revelation on) earth after the Tribulation.

First, use of the present tense for a future event: "I *will* come back" ("I *am* coming back") indicates the event's present immediacy.

Second, that He will personally come back implies a separate event. At the end of the Tribulation, at the Second Coming, when Christ returns to earth, it is not He but His angels who will gather the elect (Matt. 24:31).

Third, Christ will take them to heaven to His Father's house, not keep them

on earth to go into the kingdom as at the end of the Tribulation (the Second Coming—25:34).

In summation, many future features point to a pretribulational Rapture, which best explains all the data in a consistent and comprehensive manner. Only a pretribulational Rapture fits the signless imminence conveyed in many New Testament passages, and no other model explains the clear difference between the two aspects of His return:

Rapture	**Second Coming**
Meeting them *in the air* (I Thess. 4:17)	Taking them *to the earth* (Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11)
Taking believers to heaven (John 14:3)	*Bringing* believers back to earth (Rev. 19:14)
Coming *for* His saints (2 Thess.2:1)	Coming *with* His saints (Jude 14)
Only believers see Him (1 Thess. 4:17)	All people see Him (Rev. 1:7)
No signs precede it (1 Thess. 5:1–3)	Many signs precede it (Matt. 24:3–30)
The Tribulation begins (2 Thess. 1:6–9)	The Millennium begins (Rev. 20:1–7)

Rapture Passages

There are numerous New Testament passages on the Rapture and also many on the Second Coming. Consider these on the Rapture: John 14:3; 1 Cor. 1:7–8; 15:51–53; 16:22; Phil. 3:20–21; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 4:13–18; 5:9, 23; 2 Thess. 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; James 5:7–9; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 1 John 2:28–3:2; Jude 21; Rev. 2:25; 3:10; 22:7, 12, 20.

Second-Coming Texts

Passages about the Second Coming, found in both the Old and New Testaments, include the following: Dan. 2:44–45; 7:9–14; 12:1–3; Zech. 12:1–9; 14:1–15; Matt. 13:41; 24:14–31; 26:64; Mark 13:14–27; 14:62; Luke 13:25–28;

Acts 1:9–11; 3:19–21; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:6–10; 2 Thess. 2:8; 2 Peter 3:1–14; Jude 14–15; Rev. 1:7; 19:11–20:6.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO PRETRIBULATIONISM

There are many objections raised against pretribulationism, but none is insolvable. Consider the following arguments based on specific passages.

The Objection From Psalm 110:1

"The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' "Some posttribulationists use this to suggest that Christ will not return until after the Tribulation, for it is not until then that He is completely victorious over His enemies. If He rises before this to come for the Rapture, He will not be seated until the end of the Tribulation.

Response

For one thing, sitting is a figure of speech; Christ has accomplished the work of redemption, and He is seated in a position of honor and power at God's right hand. God does not literally have a "right hand" (John 4:24), nor can He literally sit on a throne. There is also no literal "footstool." While it is literally true that Christ will be so exalted, these figures of speech are not literally true.

Furthermore, even taking "sit" in a literal sense would not mean Christ could never stand. Analogously, the world's monarchs have always been able to stand by their throne or move from it without losing their "seat of authority."

In addition, Christ has already "stood up" at least once, since He has been seated; when Stephen died, Jesus stood to receive him (Acts 7:56). If Christ can stand to receive one believer into heaven without losing His seat of authority, there is no reason He cannot stand to receive His bride (the church) into heaven at the Rapture also (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

The Objection From Matthew 24:29–30

> *Immediately after* the distress [tribulation] of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." *At that*

> *time* the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

Response

First, this does say Christ will return to earth after the Tribulation; however, this is not the Rapture, which occurs before the Tribulation.

Second, again, there is a difference between Christ coming *for* His saints (the Rapture) and coming *with* His saints (the Second Coming). At the Rapture we meet *in the air* (1 Thess. 4:16–17); here He is *coming to earth* where He will sit on a throne (Matt. 25:31).

Third, the Rapture is an imminent event preceded by no signs; here there will be "the sign" of His coming (24:30–32).

Fourth, and finally, the disciples' question that occasioned this discourse was about His return to earth, not His coming in the air: "When will these things be? And what will be *the sign of Your coming* and of *the end of the age*?" (24:3). This is not about the church's Rapture, but about Christ's return after the Tribulation to set up His kingdom.[59]

The Objection From Matthew 24:37–40

> As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be *taken* and the other left.

Some argue that since this is well into the Tribulation period, those "taken" in the Rapture are not taken before the Tribulation.

Response

The illustrated parallel indicates that those "taken" were not taken in the Rapture, but, rather, like those "taken" in the Flood, at the end of the Tribulation, taken in judgment. This is further supported by the parallel passage, where those "taken" were brought to a place of judgment. The disciples asked where they would go, and Jesus replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather" (Luke 17:37). Those "left" to go into the Millennium after the judgment of the Tribulation were the ones saved.

Also, that different Greek words for *taken* are used of the Rapture does not invalidate this conclusion but merely shows that there are synonyms used in Scripture, just as the same word being used of different events[60] does not prove they are identical. This is a common linguistic occurrence.

The Objection From 1 Thessalonians 5:1–9

> Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on *them* suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
>
> *But you*, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. *You* are all sons of the light and sons of the day. *We* do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let *us* not be like others, who are asleep, but let *us* be alert and self-controlled. For *those* who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since *we* belong to the day, let *us* be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. *For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Some who deny a pretribulation Rapture use this to imply that Paul is instructing the Thessalonians about the day of God's wrath (i.e., the Tribulation), which they will go through when Christ returns.

Response

First, Paul's use of *now* (Gk: *peri de*) indicates a new subject in every place he uses it in his writings.[61] Even sole use of the second word (*de*) has the significance of opening a new subject.

Second, the Thessalonians already had a "perfect" (accurate) understanding of the Day of the Lord (v. 2) but were ignorant concerning the Rapture (4:13); the one is not part of the other.

Third, the use of *we* for the Rapture (v. 17) and *they* for the Day of the Lord (5:3) indicates he is not talking about believers enduring the latter.

Fourth, he clearly disassociates believers from the Day of the Lord in verse 4 ("But you, brothers …"). The contrast between "we" (us) who will be delivered from that day and "those" who will go through it is unmistakable. The exhortations to believers (in vv. 6–9) are not to watch for signs, but to use these future events as motivation for godly living in the present (cf. 2 Peter 3:11).

Fifth, and finally, in verse 9 he clearly affirms that believers will not go through this period.

The Objection From 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3

> Concerning *the coming of our Lord* Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that *the day of the Lord* has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for *that day* [viz., the day of the Lord] will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.

Paul, in his previous letter, had spoken about the Rapture, when we will be gathered together with departed loved ones in heaven. Referring to believers here on earth after Antichrist has been revealed seems to argue against what he'd already taught.

Response

Both the context and flow of the argument favor a pretribulation Rapture. Some in Thessalonica were claiming revelations (v. 2) that the "coming of our Lord" and "our being gathered to Him" (the Rapture, 1 Thess. 4:16–17) had already occurred. Paul responds that the Rapture could not have already occurred, for "the man of lawlessness" had not been revealed. Thus, "the day of the Lord" (a common designation of a day of God's judgment) had not (and has not) come; i.e., the Tribulation has not started.

Further, this is supported by the comments that such a day will not come until "He who now restrains" this kind of evil is "taken out of the way" (v. 7 NKJV). As noted earlier, the only person capable of restraining the kind of evil to be unleashed by the satanically inspired Antichrist is the Holy Spirit of God, whose indwelling presence in the body of believers will be taken away at the Rapture, before this horrendous period of Tribulation begins.

The Objection From 1 Corinthians 15:51–52

> 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.

Some claim it is contrary to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic to assert that the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation when the only New Testament listing of trumpets puts the last trumpet at the Tribulation's end (cf. Rev. 11:15).

Response

First, this interpretation rejects the historical-grammatical hermeneutic by

equating “last trumpet” in one book by one author with “seventh trumpet” in another book by another author. This certainly does not come out of the context in 1 Corinthians 15.

Second, there are no reasons to believe the audience at Corinth knew about the seven trumpets; even an early date for Revelation (c. 68–69) is still well after 1 Corinthians (c. 55–56).

Third, if taken in the broader Old Testament context, a trumpet sound was a sign of God’s appearance (Ex. 19:16). Hence, it would be appropriate to refer to His final appearance at the Second Coming as the “last” trumpet.

Fourth, and finally, taken in the immediate context of the preceding chapter, Paul spoke of a “trumpet” that arouses soldiers “to *prepare* for battle,” implying another trumpet that would *call* them to battle. That would be the last trumpet and would parallel his thought in 1 Corinthians 15:51–53. In either case, one does not have to go outside the context of what the Corinthians would be expected to know in order to explain why the Rapture is not associated with the “seventh” trumpet of Revelation 11:15.

The Objection From Matthew 24:27

“As lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming [Gk: *parousia*] of the Son of Man.” All agree that this refers to Christ’s coming at the end of the Tribulation. But the same term, *parousia*, is also used of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:15), so posttribulationists reason that the Rapture must be at the end of the Tribulation.

Response

Parousia means “arrival” or “presence,” and it is biblically used of the arrival of human beings (see 1 Cor. 16:17) as well as of Christ. He will arrive and be present at the Rapture as well as at the Second Coming; nothing about the term limits it to one or the other.

The same is true of the word *revelation* (Gk: *apokalupsis*), which is used of both aspects of Christ’s return (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7); they will be an “unveiling” (revelation) of Christ to whomever and whenever He appears. Likewise, the word *manifestation* (Gk: *epiphanea*) is used of the believer’s hope of seeing the Lord (2 Tim. 4:8) and of the Second Coming (2 Thess. 2:8). Common words have usages in many contexts, and, as always, meaning is

discovered by context.[62]

The Objection From 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10

> God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Posttribulationists understand this text to assert that "Paul places the release of Christians from persecution at the posttribulational return of Christ to judge unbelievers" (Gundry, *CT*, 113).

Response

That conclusion does not fit the passage's context for several reasons.

First, it not only addresses the release of Christians at the Tribulation's end but also of the Thessalonians Paul addressed (v. 5).

Second, if release was Paul's chief concern, then why did he not mention death, which also releases a believer from tribulation? Indeed, only those believers living at the time will be released by the Rapture; the rest are released by death.

Third, the Rapture is not described in this text at all. Paul refers to judgment, paying back, trouble, blazing fire, punishment, and everlasting destruction, none of which is connected with Rapture passages.[63]

Fourth, and finally, *the subject of the passage is vindication* (release from any sense of injustice). Believers are to rest assured that God will judge unbelievers who trouble them (cf. Rev. 6:9–11).

The Objection From Revelation 7:4, 9; 14:1, 3

> Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.… After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.…
>
> Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.… And they sang a new song before

> the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

Some posttribulationists argue that if, as according to pretribulationism, the Holy Spirit is taken out of the world (2 Thess. 2:7) at the Rapture, then there would be no way all these people could receive salvation, for no one can be saved apart from the Spirit's regeneration.[64]

Response

Pretribulationists agree that no one can be saved apart from the *regenerating* work of the Spirit. However, they deny that this is contrary to believing the Spirit's *indwelling* in the church can be taken out of the world while people can still be saved. The Spirit is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7–12) and cannot be eliminated from anywhere; His special presence in believers, individually or collectively, is a work that ends on earth at the Rapture.

Old Testament believers were not permanently indwelt by the Spirit (Ps. 51:11; 1 Sam. 16:14), yet everyone who enters God's kingdom must be born again by the Spirit (John 3:3–7), and Old Testament saints are in God's kingdom (Matt. 8:11). The Spirit's regeneration is not identical to the Spirit's indwelling. Even though His restraining influence through indwelling believers will no longer be in the world, He will be present in the Tribulation to regenerate those who believe.

The Objection From Revelation 20:4

> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Some posttribulationists maintain that this is the only passage indicating the time of the Rapture—at the end of the Tribulation, just before the Millennium (see Ladd, *BH*, 165). They insist that the rapture is at the time of the resurrection (1 Thes. 4:13–18), but Rev. 20 places the first resurrection at the end of the tribulation.

Response

In reply, no Rapture is mentioned in this passage. There is not a word of anyone being "caught up" to meet Christ in the air (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16–17). The mention of resurrection is limited by the text itself to those who during the Tribulation "had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark." John is not speaking of those who will be resurrected before the Tribulation, when Christ returns for His bride, which is the first stage of the first resurrection.[65] All who die must be resurrected; those who die after Christ raptures His bride into heaven will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation.

The Objection That Pretribulationism Is a Late Doctrine

Many anti-pretribulationists see the relative lateness of pretribulationism as an argument against it. They claim it began with John Nelson Darby (1800–1882); Darby allegedly got it from Edward Irving (1792–1834), a heretic who was deposed from the Church of Scotland. Others claim it came from a mystic named Margaret MacDonald (c. 1830), and some trace it back a little further to Emmanuel Lacunza (1731–1801).[66] George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982) said, "We can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early Church; and no modern pretribulationist has successfully proved that this particular doctrine was held by any of the Church fathers or students of the Word before the nineteenth century" (*BH*, 31). Accordingly, the pretribulation model is assumed to be unbiblical. However, this conclusion does not follow for many reasons.

Response

These arguments are based on at least two fallacies.

The fallacy of chronological snobbery wrongly argues that truth can be determined by time—that is, since the doctrine is late in origin, it's assumed to be untrue. However, time has no necessary connection with truth; something can be new and true just as it can be old and false.[67]

Assuming that something is false or invalid because it came from an allegedly bad source is the genetic fallacy. The model for the molecular structure of benzene originated from a vision that the chemist August Kekule (1829–1896) had of a snake biting its own tail. The origin of the alternating current motor was derived from a vision Nikola Tesla (1856–1943) had while reading Johan Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), a pantheistic poet. No one rejects the validity of these on the basis of their weird sources.

What is more, some doctrines in the earliest church were false. Doceticism (the denial of Christ's humanity) existed even in New Testament times (1 John 4:1–6). An incipient form of gnosticism that denied Christ's deity was present in the Colossian church (Col. 2). Baptismal regeneration was taught by some early Fathers. *That these were early did not make them true, and neither does the relative lateness of a doctrine make it false*. If it did, then by the same token covenant theology, held by many who deny the pretribulationist and premillennial views, would be intrinsically false as well, since it didn't develop until nearly sixteen hundred years after the time of Christ by Caspar Olenianus (1536–1587) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669).[68]

Further, it fits with the overall progress of doctrinal development that eschatology was not a primary focus until modern times. As James Orr (1844–1913) noted in his classic *Progress of Dogma*, certain doctrines occupied different eras, with the doctrine of God coming first in the early centuries and the doctrine of last things coming last in modern times (20–30).

In addition, pretribulationism is not as late as once supposed, for it is now known to have existed in the fourth century. With the discovery of Ephraem of Syria's teaching (c. 306–373),[69] it has been established that pretribulationism was taught in the early church.

As already shown,[70] premillennialism, of which pretribulationism is a derivative, was taught in the early church from shortly after the time of the apostles. The imminence of Christ's return has been emphasized from the start, and pretribulationism is based on a realistic concept of imminence.

Lastly, for an evangelical, the primary question is not whether the doctrine was taught by the *early* church, but whether it was taught by the *earliest* church —the church of the apostles. As we have thoroughly established, there is ample New Testament evidence to support pretribulationalism.

The Objection From John 21:18–19

Jesus said to Peter,

> "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Those opposed to pretribulational imminence argue that if this event had to

happen before Jesus returned, then His coming was not imminent. The same would be true of Paul being informed by God in advance that he would have a great ministry at Corinth (Acts 18:9–11).

Response

It is true that for the brief time involved, Peter and Paul could conclude that Christ was not coming. Nonetheless, this does not destroy the doctrine of imminence. For one thing, these revelations were to individuals and did not affect the church at large. For another, it was limited to a short period in the first century and does not affect belief in imminence by subsequent believers.

The Objection That Pretribulationism Appeals to Unworthy Motives

The amillennialist Oswald Allis (1880–1973) attempted to refute pretribulationism under the heading "Pretribulationism Appeals to Unworthy Motives" (*PC*, 207). Gundry states that "sometimes the argument [for pretribulationism] is so stated as to be marred by an appeal to fear" (*CT*, 43).

Response

First, there is nothing wrong with fear as a motive if it is based in truth. Jesus repeatedly warned people of eternal hell.[71]

Second, most arguments for pretribulationism are not based on fear.

Third, misuse does not bar use. That is, even some arguments being incorrectly cast by some pretribulationists does not invalidate the proper use of the argument in particular nor of pretribulationism in general.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR PRETRIBULATIONISM

Most of the theological points have been made in the above biblical discussion. It remains here to pinpoint and separate them.

The Real Distinction Between Israel and the Church

Some arguments for pretribulationism are based on the theological teaching that Israel and the church are not the same,[72] and that, hence, prophecies for Israel are not fulfilled in the church. Since the Tribulation is Israel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27 NKJV) and is "determined" upon them (v. 24), there is no reason the church should be included.

The Divine Pattern of Not Judging the Righteous With the Wicked

In this fallen world, believers sometimes experience collateral damage from the evil actions of unbelievers (such as child abuse by an unbelieving parent); nevertheless, it is God's stated policy and practice not to judge believers with unbelievers (Gen. 18:25). God did not destroy Noah and his family with the wicked world (7–9), nor did He destroy the faithful Israelites with unbelievers but preserved Joshua and Caleb and the younger generation who had not been part of the rebellion (Num. 14). Likewise, Moses and the faithful were saved when Korah and his seditious followers were swallowed up in judgment (16). It is contrary to God's pattern to judge the church (believers) with unbelieving Israel during the Tribulation period.

The Wrath of God Fell on Christ for Us

Another theological principle behind a pretribulational Rapture is that Christ has already experienced God's wrath for believers. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5 NKJV); "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21); "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18); "There is now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Because Christ bore God's wrath for us, we do not have to endure it. The Tribulation will be an unprecedented time of God's wrath,[73] which there is no reason for the church to experience (1 Thess. 5:9).

God Provides Strong Impetus for Our Sanctification

It is clear from the beginning to the end of Scripture that God has a strong desire that we become like Him. He said repeatedly, "I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45; 11:15; 19:2). Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Hebrews exhorts, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity" (6:1), and we must "make every effort … to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (12:14). God is more interested in our holiness than our happiness. He wants us to "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

Given this theological truth, a pretribulational Rapture follows naturally, containing strong motivation for holiness in the here-and-now, knowing we may meet our Maker at any moment (1 John 3:2–3).

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives. (2 Peter 3:10–11)

PRETERISM

The preceding discussion is based on the premise that the Tribulation is yet future. However, some have adopted a view called *preterism*, which is derived

from the Latin word *preter* (*past*). Preterism claims that apocalyptic biblical prophecy—the events described by Jesus in the Mount Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25) and by John in the Revelation (especially 6–18)—have already been fulfilled. There are two basic forms of preterism: moderate (partial) and extreme (full).

Moderate (partial) preterism, represented by Gary DeMar (b. 1950—see *End-Times Fiction* and *Last Days Madness*), R. C. Sproul (b. 1939—see *The Last Days According to Jesus*), Hank Hanegraaff (b. 1950—see *The Last Sacrifice*), and Kenneth Gentry (b. 1953—see *Before Jerusalem Fell*), holds that the resurrection and the Second Coming are future, but that all the other prophesies made in Matthew 24–25 and in Revelation 6–18 were fulfilled in the first century, particularly in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Extreme (full) preterism maintains that *all* New Testament predictions are past, including those about the resurrection and the Second Coming, which likewise occurred in the first century. This model has been held by Max King (*The Spirit of Prophecy*), Ed Stevens (*Expectations Demand a First Century Rapture*), and John Noe (*Shattering the 'Last Behind' Delusion*).

Arguments for and Responses to Partial Preterism

Extreme preterism is heretical, denying two of the great fundamentals of the faith: the physical Resurrection and the literal Second Coming (see Geisler, *BR*). As we have already established that the Second Coming and the final resurrection (of all humankind) are future, physical events,[74] we will focus here on moderate preterism.

Argument One

Preteristic elements are said to exist in some early Fathers (e.g., Origen [c. 185–c. 254], Eusebius [263–340]), some Reformers (e.g., John Calvin), and some post-Reformation writers (e.g., John Owen [1616–1683], Milton Terry [1840–1914], B. B. Warfield [1851–1921], Loraine Boettner [1932–2000]).

Response

On the contrary, the vast majority of the earliest Fathers[75] openly opposed the idea that such prophecies had already been fulfilled; preterism is not even found

in the *medieval* Fathers. In fact, it was formulated by the Jesuit scholar Luiz de Alcazar (1554–1613) to counter the Reformation, drawing attention from the Reformers' critique of Roman Catholicism as a fulfillment of the Revelation prophecies about the beast. Furthermore, fragmentary support can be found in church history for many views, including some that are unorthodox and heretical. Such evidence is no definitive argument for preterism.

Argument Two

The repeated use of *you* in Jesus' apocalyptic teachings (e.g., cf. Matt. 24:38–25:3) is alleged to reveal that He was speaking only to His immediate disciples. Otherwise, it would have made no sense to urge His listeners to flee from Jerusalem when those things happened (cf. 24:15–16).

Response

Some predictions *were* fulfilled in A.D. 70, but some were for "the end of the age" (Matt. 20:3). The *you* is used here proleptically (in advance) in reference to those who will be alive in the times being described, when these events will be fulfilled. Paul similarly referred to "*we* who are still alive" at Christ's return (1 Thess. 4:17); at best this expresses a possibility and expectation (not a prediction) that he would be on earth during the Second Coming. Furthermore, Isaiah told King Ahaz, "The Lord himself will give *you* a sign" that "the virgin will be with child" (Isa. 7:14), which did not find its complete fulfillment until hundreds of years later in the Virgin Birth (Matt. 1:23). Also, the "blessed are you" (Matt. 5:11) in the Sermon on the Mount isn't limited to the first-century disciples, nor is the "you" who murdered the prophet Zechariah (Matt. 23:35) a reference only to New Testament Jews.

Argument Three

This generation, as in "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Matt. 24:34), shows that Jesus was speaking of the immediate future (viz., A.D. 70), not a distant-future tribulation. This is common New Testament use of the term,[76] and, further, Jesus said all His predictions here would come to pass on "this generation."

Response

As noted by lexicographers William Arndt (1880–1957) and Wilbur Gingrich (1901–1993), the word *generation* (Gk: *genea*) can mean "clan," "race," or "nation" (*GELNT*, 153), and this is supported by other New Testament usage (e.g., cf. Luke 16:8 NKJV). So taken, the phrase does not necessarily imply that Israel will pass away after the Second Coming; more likely, it means Israel will not pass away before the Second Coming. Also, the phrase may refer to a future generation of Jews alive during the Tribulation—that is, the end-time crisis will not be of indefinite duration.

Some take the verb translated *takes place* as meaning "begins to take place," namely, all these things began to take place in A.D. 70 but will not be completed until the Second Coming. Jesus did refer to these as "the beginning of birth pains" (Matt. 24:8). Whatever the case, clearly this cannot mean that all those things, including the Second Coming, were fulfilled by A.D. 70, for the many reasons given above.

Argument Four

Jesus seems to have said He would return before the disciples had evangelized all the cities of Israel (Matt. 10:17–23). This they did immediately, in Jesus' time or at least by A.D. 70.

Response

This text is not part of Matthew 24 (where He speaks of His coming "with power and great glory," v. 30), so it may not be about the Second Coming at "the end of the age" (v. 3). Rather, it may refer to His return to reunite with the disciples at the end of their evangelistic campaign through the cities of Israel, which He commissioned. Or, as in verses 15–31, Jesus may be speaking proleptically of His followers' final mission "at the end of the age," for during the Tribulation, just before His return, they will evangelize not only Israel but the world (Rev. 7:9).

Argument Five

Jesus said there were some of his followers "standing" there who would not

taste death until they saw Him return, "coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28). Therefore, this had to occur in the first century, while these contemporaries were still alive.

Response

Jesus was referring to His transfiguration (Matt. 17), which prefigured His second coming. Peter, James, and John *did* see Him "coming in His kingdom," power, and glory, as Peter confirmed (2 Peter 1:16–18). This transfiguration experience was a foretaste of Christ's final glorious appearance at the end of the age (24:30), when "the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (16:27 NKJV). Those who are raptured (1 Thess. 4:13–18) before this time of wrath (5:9; Rev. 3:10) will witness the Second Coming without tasting death.

In any event, Jesus could not have been referring to A.D. 70 for many reasons:

(1) He did not come with His angels at that time.
(2) He did not distribute the rewards at that time.
(3) "Some" (two or more) of the disciples standing were not still alive in A.D. 70, since all but John had been martyred by then.
(4) He did not set up a visible kingdom at that time, wherein He and His twelve apostles reigned on thrones (Matt. 19:28).
(5) There was no physical coming of Christ in A.D. 70; He and His angels promised they would "see" Him (24:30; Acts 1:10–11; Rev. 1:1).

Argument Six

If the Tribulation is to be worldwide, then it would have made no sense for Jesus to tell the disciples to flee to the mountains during it (Matt. 24:16).

Response

This was a specific warning to avoid the center of trouble (Jerusalem) and flee to the mountains, which is what the remnant will do at that time. There they will be safe from the general judgment falling on Jerusalem and the rest of the world. However, contrary to preterism, there is strong evidence that the general

Tribulation judgments will be worldwide.[77]

Argument Seven

These events all took place between 66 and 70 in the Jewish Wars with Rome and in the destruction of Jerusalem. Their fulfillment is recorded by Josephus (see *The Wars of the Jews*), so we need not look for any future fulfillment.

Response

These events did not all take place in the first century. For example, the glorious Second Coming did not occur (24:30), nor did Christ begin His literal enthroned reign in Jerusalem (25:34; cf. 19:28). There is also no evidence that all the astronomical events occurred, such as the stars falling from heaven and the heavens being shaken (24:29).

Argument Eight

Luke 21 is a parallel account to Matthew 24, yet even many futurists[78] hold that Luke 21 was fulfilled by A.D. 70. Why then should not Matthew's passage have also been fulfilled?

Response

Luke omits elements like "the abomination that causes desolation" (21:20), which is still future and is connected with the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15). The "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), which intervene between Christ's first and second comings, are still going on in the New Testament era (cf. Rom. 11:25) and will continue until Israel is restored to its ultimate promises.[79] Further, many scriptural predictions have a partial fulfillment now and a fuller fulfillment in the future.[80]

Argument Nine

Revelation is a book of symbols and should not be taken literally. So taken, it *has* been fulfilled in the history of the church.

Response

Once again, symbols refer to literal realities, and in the Revelation John gives literal interpretations (e.g., cf. 1:20). The whole Bible should be taken as literally true, but not all the Bible should be taken literally (e.g., cf. John 15:1).[81]

Argument Ten

That the biblical writers thought Jesus was coming soon is indicated by *many* passages, such as Romans 13:11–12; 1 Peter 4:7; James 5:8; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 1:1; and Revelation 22:12.

Response

The Bible teaches that Jesus may come at any moment (viz., imminently), but it does not teach the moment at which He is coming (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:6–7). This argument confuses imminency and immediacy.[82] There are many texts in which Christ's coming is said to be imminent, that is, at any moment.[83] Again, A. T. Robertson said, "*Quickly* should be translated 'I am coming (imminently).' … We do not know how *quickly* is meant to be understood. But it is a real threat" (*WPNT*, 7.306; cf. Morris, *RSJ*, 258; Seiss, *A*, 523). The word means "suddenly," not necessarily "soon."

Argument Eleven

John was told that Jesus would come "quickly" (Rev. 22:12, 20 NKJV), which points to an immediate event, not one in the distant future.

Response

If this were so, then it would support extreme (not partial) preterism, since it refers to the Second Coming, which has not yet occurred. Further, the Greek word *quickly* (*tachus*)[84] can and often does mean "swiftly, speedily, at a rapid rate." Thus, it does not necessarily refer to a *soon* event, but rather a *swift* one, when it occurs.

Argument Twelve

John refers to the events of Revelation as being “near” (Rev. 1:3; 22:10) and coming “shortly” (1:1; 22:6 NKJV). These events must have been fulfilled in A.D. 70, since two thousand plus years is a long time later.

Response

First, the word translated *shortly* (1:1; 22:6 NKJV) is *tachei*, which is from the same root as *tachu* and also means “swiftly” or “speedily.” As such, it refers to a *sudden* but not necessarily *soon* event.

Second, near (1:3) is translated from the word *engus*, which means “near” or “at hand.” This is a relative term like *short* and *long*, of which one can ask, how near? Compared to what? As measured by whom? What is long *to us* is short *for God* (2 Peter 3:8), and, furthermore, there are clear biblical examples where a “short” time was actually long *for us*. Hebrews 10:37, written almost two thousand years ago, says Jesus will come “in just a very little while” and He has not yet returned.[85]

Third, if preteristic reasoning is valid—that is, if these terms mean an event in the near future (e.g., A.D. 70), then moderate preterism is false, since it believes that the Second Coming and resurrection passages (Rev. 19–20) were not fulfilled in the first century.

Argument Thirteen

There is evidence that Revelation was written before A.D. 70 and was fulfilled at that time. Thus, supposedly, we need not look for any future fulfillment of these events.

Response

To the contrary, both external and internal evidence strongly support a later date for Revelation (c. A.D. 95). First, even if it was written before A.D. 70, it need not all have been fulfilled at that time. Partial preterists admit that not all had been fulfilled by then, acknowledging that the Second Coming and the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 19–21) are yet future.[86]

Further, the evidence for a later date (c. A.D. 95) under Domitian (r. 81–96) is strong, which, since Revelation is still predicting the Tribulation after A.D. 70,

would be additional evidence that preterism is wrong. (1) This date for Revelation was upheld by many of the earliest Fathers, including Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202), who said it appeared "not very long ago, almost in our own generation, at the close of the reign of Domitian" (*AH*, 5.30.3). This was confirmed by Victorinus (c. third century): "When John said these things, he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the mines by Caesar Domitian" (*CABJ*, 10:11). Eusebius (263–340) also confirmed the Domitian date (*EH*, 3.18). (2) Other early Fathers after A.D. 70 refer to the Tribulation and/or Antichrist, spoken of in Revelation, as yet future (see Commodianus [fl. between third and fifth centuries], *ICAGH*, 44, and Ephraem of Syria [c. 306–373], *OLTAEW*, 2). (3) The conditions of the seven churches (Rev. 2–3) fit this later period; the Ephesians, for instance, had lost their first love (2:4) and others, like the Laodiceans (3:14ff.), had fallen from the faith more seriously than reflected in earlier New Testament times (before A.D. 70). (4) It was not until the reign of Domitian that emperor worship as reflected in Revelation was instituted. (5) Laodicea appears as a prosperous city in 3:17, yet it was destroyed by an earthquake (c. A.D. 61) during the reign of Nero (r. 54–68), and would not have recovered so quickly (i.e., within just a few years). (6) John's exile on Patmos implies a later date, when persecution was more rampant (1:9). (7) The references to persecution and martyrdom in the churches reflect a later date (cf. 2:10, 13). (8) Polycarp's reference to the church at Smyrna (*EP*, 11.3) reveals that it did not exist in Paul's day (by A.D. 64) as it did when John wrote Revelation 2:8. (9) The Nicolaitans (cf. 2:6, 11) were not firmly established until nearer the end of the century. (10) The early date does not allow sufficient time for John's arrival in Asia (late 60s) and his replacement of Paul as the respected leader of the Asian church.

Argument Fourteen

That John was told to unseal the revelations he received about the future (22:10) indicates they were to be fulfilled in his day.

Response

John was clearly told there were things in the Revelation that were after his time—they were called "the things which will take place after this" (1:19 NKJV). Again, moderate preterists admit that some of it is future (e.g., 19–20),

and since the chapters on the Tribulation (6–18) form a unit with those that follow, there is no good reason why they too cannot be future.

Argument Fifteen

Matthew 24:1–2 clearly refers to the destruction of the temple (in A.D. 70):

> Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its building. “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

Response

First, futurists do not deny that this refers to the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70.

Second, in prophecy there is a principle of continuity, whereby, in this case, the temple can be destroyed and rebuilt and still be considered the same temple. For instance, Haggai refers to both Solomon’s temple and Zerubbabel’s rebuilt temple as “this temple” (cf. Hag. 2:3).

Third, the principle of multiple references demonstrates the same fact in which one prediction has two or more referents. For example, compare this with the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10—that the Jews will look on the One “whom they have pierced”—for this is applied to both the first (John 19:37) and second comings of Christ (Rev. 1:7).

Argument Sixteen

Preterists contend that futurist interpretation depends on positing a large gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks in Daniel’s prophecy (9:24–27) of the seventy weeks. They insist that no such gap can be found in the text.

Response

First, there clearly is a gap (or break); the prophecy refers to sixty-nine weeks before and “one week” after, separated by the middle in which the oblation ceases (ibid.).

Second, there are other time gaps in biblical prophecy. For instance, Malachi

3:1 foretells the coming of John the Baptist, followed by Christ's second advent, without mentioning the gap of at least two thousand years between the events. Likewise, Isaiah 9:6 speaks of Christ's birth, followed by His earthly reign, without referring to the same span; this is also true of Zechariah 9:9–10.

Third, the events of Daniel 9:24 have never been fulfilled for Israel, to whom they were foretold.

Fourth, and finally, Jesus spoke of the "abomination of desolation" as yet future, and there was a break of at least thirty-seven years between His crucufixion (in A.D. 33, which is the end of the sixty-ninth week) and A.D. 70.

Argument Seventeen

Matthew 26:64 records Jesus saying, "I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Preterists object that the only event that "all" to whom Jesus spoke could have seen occurred in A.D. 70.

Response

In reply, Jesus did not say when they would see His return; He only said it would be "in the future," which could be either the near future or the distant future. Plainly, it was not in the near future, since many of the accompanying events (noted above) did not happen in A.D. 70. Jesus must have been referring to the distant future, to His second coming, and thus the "you" should be taken proleptically.

The Basic Evidence

Opposing preterism are the *futurist* views,[87] which maintain that the prophecies about the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and a following kingdom (relating to the Millennium) are not yet fulfilled and are all future.[88] Favoring the futurist views is the following:

First, Revelation speaks of the Tribulation (6–18) in connection with Christ's Second Coming, the final resurrection, and the subsequent kingdom (19–22). They are an inseparable unit, and all orthodox Christians hold that they are yet future. To deny this is heresy (2 Tim. 2:18). Thus, the Tribulation must be future as well.

Second, there was no literal fulfillment in A.D. 70 for many of the events described in Matthew 24–25. To mention just a few: The stars did not fall from heaven (24:29); Jesus did not return "on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (v. 30); the Romans did not desecrate the temple with "the abomination of desolation" (v. 15 NKJV); Christ did not set up His kingdom, separating the sheep from the goats (25:34–41), sending the latter to hell (v. 41).

Third, most of the apostles' earliest followers upheld futurism. After A.D. 70 they referred not only to the Second Coming and resurrection as future but also the coming Tribulation and Antichrist.[89]

Fourth, again, there has never yet been a literal fulfillment of the unconditional Abrahamic promises that Israel would possess the Holy Land from Egypt to Iraq, including Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Syria.[90] Likewise, the unconditional Davidic promise that Messiah would sit on His throne and reign forever has never been fulfilled (cf. Ps. 89:24–37). God's promises cannot fail (Heb. 6:13–18).[91]

Fifth, nor has Jesus' promise been literally fulfilled that "at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). The only way to avoid the conclusion that this is a future literal kingdom is to deny literal biblical interpretation and to allegorize it away.[92]

Sixth, nor has the promise of Jesus to "restore the kingdom to Israel" (cf. Acts 1:6–8) ever been fulfilled, and certainly not in A.D. 70, since Israel as a nation in their land was decimated at that point. The same is true of Peter's offer of the kingdom to the Jewish nation (3:19–21).[93]

Seventh, Romans 11 was not fulfilled in A.D. 70 but awaits Christ's return (see Rom. 9:3–4; 11:24–26).

Eighth, the events of the Tribulation are not local to Jerusalem and surroundings, as preterists contend, but are universal as is indicated by

(1) the comparison with Noah's worldwide flood (Matt. 24:38–39; cf. 2 Peter 3:5–6; 1 Peter 3:21);
(2) the phrase "all the tribes of the earth" (Matt. 24:30 NKJV);
(3) the fact that "every eye will see him" (Rev. 1:7);
(4) the worldwide judgments listed in Matthew and in Revelation (e.g., Matt. 24:29);
(5) "the kings of the earth and of the whole world" (Rev. 16:14 NKJV) being

involved;
(6) judgments that kill “every living creature in the sea” (16:3 NKJV), and the like.

Ninth, the plagues predicted in Revelation have never been literally fulfilled. Just to mention a few: Neither in A.D. 70 nor since was “a third of mankind … killed” (9:18); two hundred million soldiers from the East have never invaded Israel (9:13–15; 16:12) for a battle at “Armageddon” (v. 16); nor has “every living creature in the sea died” (16:3 NKJV). Only by the most radical allegorizing of Scripture, which if applied to the Gospels would undermine our faith, can one avoid the conclusion that these have never yet been fulfilled.

Tenth, in Matthew 23:39 Jesus said, “I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”This “you” cannot refer to His immediate disciples, since they died before they “saw” Him coming. Futher, since the “you” is plural, neither could it refer to their seeing Jesus come spiritually in A.D. 70, because all except John were killed before then. Instead, this text implies that Israel’s repentance and acceptance of Christ as their Messiah will come before He returns (see also Zech. 14:3–11; Rev. 1:7). What is more, He could not have returned in A.D. 70 because they did not repent as a nation before then, nor have they yet.

Eleventh, in Matthew 24:14 Jesus told of when they would “see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel [9:27].” Jesus said there would be time to escape (Matt. 24:16), and this does not fit with the events surrounding A.D. 70, so the preterist view does not fit with His prediction. In addition, since Matthew related His words to Daniel’s prophecy, rather than relating this to anything that happened in the first century, it seems best to take this as a future act that will parallel the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes, which involved both pagan sacrifice and idolatry in the temple.[94]

Twelfth, in Matthew 24:21 Jesus said that “then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.” It is improbable that (as preterists suggest) this is hyperbole, for the phrase “never to be equaled again,” coupled with “no flesh” KJV, which elsewhere in the New Testament refers to all humanity,[95] argues for a unique future in the “great distress” (24:21). Certainly, Jews living in Judea in A.D. 70 were too limited a group to fulfill “all flesh.”[96]

Thirteenth, in Matthew 24:27 Jesus said that “as lightning that comes from

the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." Nothing so broad and visible literaly occurred in A.D. 70. This text is better taken as part of the "end of the age" and signs of His coming passage (24:3ff.), for both indicate a future (not immediate) fulfillment.

Fourteenth, when the Jewish high priest asked Jesus if He was the Messiah, He replied, "Yes, it is as as you say.… But I say to all of you: 'In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven' " (Matt. 26:64). As we have observed, contrary to partial preterism, the "you" cannot refer to His immediate disciples; Jesus did not come again during their lifetimes. It is heretical to hold (as do exteme preterists) that this refers to Christ's second coming having taken place in A.D. 70. Hence, this passage must refer either to Christ coming spiritually in a judgment (cf. Isa. 19:1) or, proleptically, to the literal yet-to-occur Second Coming "at the end of the age" (Matt. 24:3).

Fifteenth, in Luke 21:28 Jesus said, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." The great Bible commentator Alfred Plummer (1841–1926) stated, "The disciples present are regarded as representatives of believers generally. Only those who witness the signs can actually fulfill this injunction … at the Second Advent" (*CCGL*, 540–41). It is evident from Mark 13:32, where "that day" refers to the Second Coming, that these words point to the faithful's deliverance from distress at Christ's return.

THE PARTIAL-RAPTURE VIEW

The partial-rapture view, a combination of the pre- and postribulationist positions, is expressed in the writings of Witness Lee (1905–1997) and his Local Church movement. Based on the parable of the ten virgins,[97] the *faithful* saints are said to be raptured before the Tribulation; *unfaithful* saints are left to endure it.

Argument One

The final resurrection is a reward to be strived for;[98] only those who are worthy will be raptured.

Response

The Rapture is part of salvation, which is begun *and* completed by God (Phil. 1:7), not by our works (Titus 3:5–7; Eph. 2:8–9).[99]

Argument Two

The parable of the ten virgins indicates that only some were prepared for the Lord's coming (Matt. 25:1–13); the rest were left behind.

Response

The foolish (unprepared) virgins don't symbolize Christians, but rather unbelieving Jews during the Tribulation.

Argument Three

Those "taken" will be taken in judgment, like those taken in the Flood (see 24:36–41); they are *not* those who will be raptured (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Response

Jesus indicated that at His return some would be taken and others left behind (Matt. 24:40–51).

Argument Four

The New Testament emphasis on watching and waiting implies that not all believers will be raptured.[100] Believers must suffer before they can reign;[101] for some this is now, for others it is during the Tribulation.

Response

Believers work only for rewards (1 Cor. 3:11; Rev. 22:12),[102] not to participate in the Rapture, which is part of their salvation—the third and final part, called glorification.[103]

Argument Five

By sin a believer can forfeit his right to the Rapture and not enter the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:19–20; cf. Gal. 5:19–21).

Response

These verses say nothing about the Rapture. Other verses (1 Cor. 3:13–15; Heb. 12:14) speak of believers losing their rewards but not their resurrection.

Argument Six

Only watching and worthy believers are promised the Rapture (Rev. 3:10).

Response

All true believers[104] will persevere[105] and will be raptured. Only faithful believers will be rewarded (Rev. 3:11; 1 Cor. 3:11–14).

Argument Seven

Only believers who have received the power of the Holy Spirit are in Christ's body (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:13), so only those who have this power will be raptured (1 Thess. 4:16–17).[106]

Response

Because the Spirit's baptism places all believers in Christ's body,[107] all believers will be raptured, both the living and the "dead in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

MIDTRIBULATIONISM

According to midtribulationism, the Rapture will occur halfway through the Tribulation, after the "beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8 NKJV) and before the "great tribulation" (v. 21 NKJV). Proponents have included Gleason Archer

(1916–2004), J. Oliver Buswell (1895–1977), and Merrill Tenney (1904–1985).

Argument One

Midtribulationism has some advantages over both pretribulationism and posttribulationism. For example, it explains the verses that seem to place the Rapture *before* a time of great tribulation (e.g., 1 Thess. 4), and it also explains the verses where the Rapture appears to be *after* the Tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:29–30).

Response

Having advantages over opposing views does not itself make a view true. In addition, midtribulationism has a significant disadvantage: It loses the sense of imminence, for it has signs of the Rapture coming *before* it occurs; believers on earth could know when it was coming, which the New Testament rejects.

Argument Two

Paul affirms that there are signs prior to the Rapture: “That day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess. 2:3–4).

Response

The signs specified are not prior to the Rapture but during the Tribulation. The Rapture is referenced earlier, when Paul speaks of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” and our “being gathered to Him” (v. 1; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Argument Three

The church will be delivered from wrath (1 Thess. 5:9), which is the second half of the Tribulation period, but not from tribulation itself (the first half).

Response

Scripture does not distinguish between tribulation and wrath, for God's wrath can be delivered through human agency;[108] the church is delivered from *both*. There is *no* reference to the church being raptured in the middle of the Tribulation.[109]

Argument Four

The biblical emphasis on two three-and-one-half-year periods[110] supports midtribulationism.

Response

The division of the Tribulation into two periods is not because the church's rapture occurs there but because Antichrist is fully revealed there.[111]

Argument Five

The seventh trumpet is in the middle of the Tribulation (Rev. 11:15–19); Paul said the church would be raptured at the last trumpet (1 Thess. 4:16–17).

Response

The seventh trumpet is at the end of the Tribulation, when all earthly kingdoms crumble (Rev. 11:15). Further, the Rapture is nowhere called the "seventh trumpet"; it is the "trumpet of God" (1 Thess. 4:16–17 NKJV) and "the last trumpet" (1 Cor. 15:52).

Argument Six

Jesus placed His return before the end of the Tribulation: "*Immediately after the distress of those days* 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:29–30).

Response

Matthew 24 does refer to the end of the Tribulation but is not the same as the Rapture, which does not have signs associated with it.

Argument Seven

Midtribulationism allows for unresurrected saints living through the Tribulation to populate the Millennium (as Zechariah and Paul affirm).

Response

This argument is not unique; pretribulationism allows for the same;[112] The case must rest on other evidence.

THE PRE-WRATH VIEW

The pre-wrath view proposes that the Rapture will occur sometime between the sixth and seventh seals (Rev. 6:12–8:1). This will be near the end of the Tribulation, just before God pours out His wrath on the earth, prior to Christ's return. Robert Van Kampen (1940–2000) represents the pre-wrath belief,[113] as does Marvin Rosenthal.[114] Arguments for a pre-wrath Tribulation include the following.

Argument One

Pre-wrath proponents maintain a difference between "the Day of the Lord" and "the Great Tribulation." The Day of the Lord is at the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9–11); the Tribulation begins with the seventh seal (8:1). There is no wrath of God during the Tribulation period and no tribulation during the wrath period.

Response

Zephaniah 1:14–15 reveals that the Day of the Lord is both a day of wrath and a "day of trouble" (Heb: *tsarah*) or "tribulation."[115]

Argument Two

The Bible promises that believers will be delivered from God's wrath, not from tribulation (2 Thess. 1:5–10). Since the word *wrath* does not appear in Revelation until after the sixth seal, God's wrath will not be poured out until the seventh seal; hence, the Rapture is between the sixth and seventh seals.

Response

First, again, "wrath" and "tribulation" are not different periods.

Second, absence of a word does not prove absence of the concept. For example, the word *wrath* does not appear in Genesis, yet God's wrath was poured out during the Flood (6–8) and on Sodom and Gomorrah (19).

Third, Matthew 24:22 indicates that if the Tribulation were longer, all flesh, godly and ungodly, would be destroyed. This would have necessitated God's wrath also on the godly.

Fourth, Matthew 24:21 indicates that the Great Tribulation will be unparalleled in human history. This would not be possible without God's wrath; otherwise, an era with His wrath would be greater than the greatest.

Fifth, and finally, the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord have other common characteristics (e.g., both have tribulation, entail unparalleled trouble, ensure great trials, and contain Israel's repentance. See Showers, *PWRV*, 35).

Argument Three

God's wrath comes only with the seventh seal, so the only wrath in the first six seals will be the wrath of man, not of God.

Response

First, the seven seals are all part of the same sequence. The only differentiation between the seals is intensity; they all unleash God's judgment on the world.

Second, at any rate, God often uses humans to execute His wrath.[116]

Third, the warfare involved in the first six seals is an instrument of God's wrath.[117]

Fourth, famine, mentioned in the third seal, is not totally the wrath of man.[118]

Fifth, the fourth seal speaks of famine and the sword, both of which, according to Ezekiel, are part of God's wrath. The Hebrew word for *fury* (14:19), *hema*, which means "anger" or "wrath" (cf. 38:18–19; Isa. 13:6, 9), is also used of the Day of the Lord, which pre-wrath proponents take to mean a day of God's wrath (cf. Ps. 110:5; Rev. 19:11–21).

Sixth, the authority to inflict death given under the fourth seal (6:8) will come from God, who alone has that power (1:18; cf. Deut. 32:39).

Seventh, and finally, even the unsaved under the sixth seal will recognize the judgment as the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:15–16). Isaiah speaks of this day as the Day of the Lord (Isa. 2:12, 20–21).

POSTTRIBULATIONISM

Posttribulationists believe that the Rapture and the Second Coming are one event at the end of the Tribulation, wherein believers will meet Christ in the air and then return to earth immediately with Him to reign for a thousand years.[119]

Argument One

According to Matthew 24, the Rapture is preceded by clear signs. Christ's return is said to be "after the tribulation of those days" (v. 29 NKJV).

Response

These signs do not refer to the church's Rapture before the Tribulation, but to Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, when He will set up His millennial kingdom (cf. 25:34).

Argument Two

The parable of the wheat and the tares indicates that Christ's return will be at the end of the age (13:24) when the angels will separate out the tares (v. 40).

Response

This parable is speaking about Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation,

not to the Rapture at the beginning of it.

Argument Three

Revelation 20:4–6 indicates that all believers will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation, just before the Millennium, to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (v. 4).

Response

Revelation 20:4–6 is speaking of the believers who will have died during the Tribulation, not of those resurrected at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:1–17): “I saw the souls of *those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God*. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (v. 4).

Argument Four

The New Testament makes no distinction between the use of words like *coming* (Gk: *parousia*) for both the Rapture and the Second Coming.

Response

Pretribulationism is not dependent on a distinction between the Rapture and Second Coming based on the use of specific terms. *Parousia* is used of the coming of humans (1 Cor. 16:17), Christ, and even Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:9).

Argument Five

Revelation 3:10 can mean saved from Satan’s wrath while the Tribulation is going on.[120] It need not mean pretribulational rapture.

Response

In context, this statement about being saved “out of” (Gk: *ek*) the time of trial does mean saved from it (not through it). One cannot be saved from an entire

hour by being in any part of it.

Argument Six

The apostasy is a sign that will precede Christ's return: "The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:8).

Response

Paul is not speaking of any sign (e.g., apostasy) before the Rapture, but only of this sign occurring before Antichrist is revealed in the middle of the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:3–4).

Argument Seven

Much of Jesus' teaching about the end times is meaningless if it doesn't apply to the church, to whom the New Testament was being written (cf. Matt. 24:15–20); this is advice on how to perceive and handle these events.

Response

Jesus' discourse in Matthew 24–25 *does* make sense in context, since the disciples were asking him about "signs" and "the end of the age," which refer to His Second Coming, not the Rapture. The advice is given proleptically for those who will be alive on the earth when these events occur. Jesus said they would come at the time of His return (24:27), which did not take place in the first century.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR CHRIST'S IMMINENT RETURN

As we saw in the previous chapter, the evidence for premillennialism is early and strong. Likewise, even though the more refined and detailed position of pretribulationism does not enjoy widespread and early support, this is understandable in view of doctrinal progress. Being early does not make a view

true (there were early heresies), nor does being later make it false; the question is not one of time but of truth. At any rate, since at the heart of pretribulationism is the imminence of Christ's coming, it is interesting to observe the support for this concept down through the centuries, beginning with the first.

Clement of Rome (c. first century A.D.)

In these earliest apostolic Fathers the sense of imminence is found (see Ice, *WTS*, chap. 4). Consider the following from one believed to be an apostolic contemporary (cf. Phil. 4:3):

> Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, "Speedily will He come, and will not tarry;" and "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One for whom we look" (*FECC*, 23).

He forewarns us: "Behold, the Lord [cometh], and His reward is before His face, to render to every man according to his work." … Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those that wait for Him in order that we may share in His promised gifts. (ibid., 34–35)

Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110)

> Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit.… Be ever coming more zealous than what thou art. Weigh carefully the times. Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes. (*EP*, 1, 3)

The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. 70–130)

> The Day is at hand on which all things shall perish with the evil [one]. The Lord is near and His reward.… It therefore behooves us, who inquire much concerning events at hand, to search diligently into those things which are able to save us. (21)

The Shepherd of Hermas (c. early second century)

> Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly. Cast your cares upon the Lord, and He will direct them. Trust the Lord, ye who doubt, for He is all-powerful, and can turn His anger away from you, and send scourges on the doubters. Woe to those who hear these words, and despise them: better were it for them not to have been born. (1.4.2)

The Didache (c. 120–150)

"Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to God (Son) of David! If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen" (10.6).

"Watch for your life's sake.… Be ye ready, for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh" (16.1).

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)

> When in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, "There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be." For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome they are crowned with incorruption. (*AH*, 5.29)

Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)

"As yet those whom the coming of the Lord is to find on the earth, have not been caught up into the air to meet Him at His coming" (*TS*, 55).

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)

"Let us wait and look for the Lord's coming upon the clouds from heaven. Then shall Angelic trumpets sound; the dead in Christ shall rise first" (*CL*, 15.19).

Commodianus (fl. between third and fifth centuries)

> We shall arise again to Him, who have been devoted to Him. And they shall be incorruptible, even already living without death. And neither will there be any grief nor any groaning in that city. They shall come also who overcame cruel martyrdom under Antichrist, and they themselves live for the whole time, and receive blessings because they have suffered evil things; and they themselves marrying, beget for a thousand years … the earth renewed without end pours forth abundantly. (*ICAGH*, 44)

Larry Crutchfield (b. c. 1955) summarizes the early apostolic Fathers:

> The student of patristic literature quickly discovers that the position of the early fathers on the Tribulation and its relation to the saints and Christ's return is impossible to decipher and synthesize completely. Many of them, especially in the first century, make explicit statements which indicate a belief in the imminent return of Christ. The doctrine of imminence is especially prominent in the writings of the apostolic fathers.

However, later Fathers seem to combine imminence with a kind of posttribulationism:

> The reason for this peculiar hybrid is that, on the one hand, Scripture clearly teaches that Christ's coming could occur at any moment, and therefore the believer is to live his life in holiness and with an

expectant attitude.…

[On the other hand, the severe Roman persecutions before Constantine's Edict of Milan (313),] coupled with the belief that Christians must be tested and purified by fire … to make them fit for God's kingdom, led to something like the Thessalonian error (2 Thess. 2). The church, it was thought, was already in the Tribulation and could therefore expect the any-moment return of the Lord. (cited in Ice and Demy, *WTS*, 101–02)

In short, the seeds of pretribulationism were there; were it not for the Alexandrian allegorism brought on by Augustine (354–430), these could have matured into an even earlier pretribulational crop.

Medieval Fathers

Not only were most early Fathers premillennialists who believed in imminency, but some, like Ephraem the Syrian, were explicitly pretribulationists.

Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306–373)

We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent or overhanging. Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and signs, which have been predicted by the Lord, they have already been fulfilled, and there is no other that remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom.… All saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered together before the tribulation which is about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not be seen at the time of the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins. (*OLTAEW*, 2, as cited in Ice, *WTS*, 110–11)

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407)

He Himself shall speak the word at the last day, and all shall rise, and that so quickly, that "they which are yet alive, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep," and all shall come to pass, all run together "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (*HE*, 3).

Reformation and Post-Reformation Theologians

While the Reformers were amillennialists, they do refer to the Rapture, and, occasionally, mention imminence.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Though those who are surviving at the last day shall not die after a natural manner, yet the change which they are to undergo, as it shall resemble, is not improperly called, death, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," What does this mean? Their mortal life shall perish and be swallowed up in one moment, and be transformed into an entirely new nature. (*ICR*, 2.16.17)

“No other attitude is possible for believers but to await in keen vigilance His second coming” (*CR*, 83.274).

“[Paul] means by this [1 Thess 4:15] to arouse the Thessalonians to wait for it, nay more, to hold all believers in suspense, that they may not promise themselves some particular time” (*CFET*, 21.282).

“As he has promised that he will return to us, we ought to hold ourselves prepared, at every moment, to receive him, that he may not find us sleeping” (*CHE*, 17.163).

“He wished them to be uncertain as to his coming, but yet to be prepared to expect him every day, or rather every moment” (ibid., 17.156).

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)

“Shake off all carnal security and be always watchful, because [we] know not at what hour the Lord will come” (33.3).

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

> The apostles seem often to speak of the coming of Christ to judgment, as if they thought it near at hand.… Considering the scope of the apostle in these verses [1 Thess. 4:15–17], all that can be inferred from such a manner of speaking, is, that it might, for ought was then revealed, be while they lived.…
>
> It is but just to suppose that it was only the uncertainty of the time that was the ground of the apostle’s using such a manner of expression; because he, in this very context, speaks of the time as altogether uncertain.…
>
> That the apostle did not intend to be understood as though it were certain that Christ would come while they were living is evident, from what he himself says, speaking of those very words, and expressly denying that he intended any such thing; or that he supposed it to be certain, that the coming of Christ was at hand, in any such sense. (*MOITS*, 1.2.1–3)

George Whitefield (1714–1770)

> Perhaps today, perhaps this midnight.… Let that cry, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!” be continually sounding in your ears, and begin now to live as though you were assured that this night you were to go forth to meet Him. (in Silver, *LR*, 122)

John Wesley (1703–1791)

“Expect Him every hour. Now He is nigh, even at the doors” (in ibid., 161).

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

> The date of that coming is concealed. When he shall come, no man can tell. Watch for him, and be always ready, that you may not be ashamed at his [second] advent. (*SSC*, 134)
>
> The Scripture has left the whole matter, as far as I can see, with an intentional indistinctness, that

> we may be always expecting Christ to come, and that we may be watching for his coming at any hour and every hour.… He may not come for a thousand years; he may come tonight. (ibid., 137–38)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There is a wide gamut of views on the Tribulation, most of which are within the pale of orthodoxy. Nonetheless, a few concluding comments are in order.

First, extreme preterism is heretical, since it claims that the final resurrection and Christ's second coming have already occurred (cf. 2 Tim. 2:18). However, belief in none of the other views is a test of doctrinal orthodoxy, as judged either by being part of the great creeds or confessions of the early church or by its salvific importance.

Second, any particular view's degree of certainty on the Tribulation within orthodoxy falls significantly short of absolute or even moral certainty. There simply is not enough evidence to be beyond all doubt on this matter.

Third, it does seem, however, that one can attain a reasonable degree of probability on the matter, at least on the central points. This is what we have attempted above. Or, to put it another way, there does seem to be a best explanation of the many possibilities. By this is meant the view which, given all the biblical data, offers the most plausible explanation. It is in this context that we offer a pretribulational conclusion to the rapture question.

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APPENDIX ONE

ONLY THE APOSTLES SPOKE IN TONGUES AT PENTECOST

While it is widely held that all one hundred twenty in the Upper Room received the gift of tongues on the Day of Pentecost, Scripture nowhere says this. In fact, there is good evidence to indicate that the gift of tongues was limited only to the apostles or to those to whom they gave the gift. Of the unique "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV), the ability to resurrect was one (Matt. 10:8), and tongues-speaking was another, called a "sign" gift (1 Cor. 14:22).

At Pentecost the gift of tongues apparently was given only to the twelve apostles, not to all the disciples. This is supported by the following evidence.

First, only apostles were promised before Pentecost: "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). It is clear from the context that "you" refers to "the apostles" (v. 2).

Second, the "they" (2:1) on whom the Holy Spirit fell refers back to the previous verse, namely, the "apostles" (1:26).

Third, likewise, "they" and "them" (2:3) on whom tongues of fire fell refer to the same "apostles."

Fourth, further, the crowd heard "them" (the "apostles") speak in tongues (v. 6).

Fifth, also, those who spoke in tongues were "all … Galileans" (2:7), as the

apostles were; even the angel called them “men of Galilee” (1:11). The others present in the Upper Room were not all Galileans; some were from Jerusalem and Judea (vv. 12–14).

Sixth, the group that responded when “they” (2:13) had been accused of drunkenness was “Peter … with the Eleven” (v. 14). This again indicates that those speaking in tongues were the apostles.

Seventh, according to Gleason Archer (1916–2004), noted expert on biblical languages, the fifteen geographical areas listed (vv. 9–11) probably represent no more than twelve language groups, since some nations spoke the same basic language. So each apostle could have been speaking in one of the languages represented by these twelve language groups. Even if there were more than twelve languages represented, some apostles could have spoken in more than one language successively.

Eighth, since tongue-speaking was one of the “signs” unique to apostles (1 Cor. 14:22; 2 Cor. 12:12), initially giving it only to apostles makes sense.

Ninth, later, whenever anyone received the gift of the Spirit and/or tongues in the early church, it was only through an apostle (Acts 8, 10, 19). Acts 8:18 teaches explicitly that “the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands.”

Tenth, supernatural gifts were given in the early church by apostles, as Paul said to Timothy, “Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6; cf. 1 Tim. 4:14).

Eleventh, since the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20), the apostles used these special powers to convey supernatural gifts to the leaders of the churches they founded. In this way the early church had an authoritative basis on which to function in the absence of an apostle or written Scripture.

Twelfth, and finally, only some were apostles and only some spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 12:10). Paul said emphatically: “All are not apostles, are they? … All do not speak with tongues, do they?” (vv. 29–30 NASB).

CONCLUSION

This conclusion has significance for the whole debate about tongues. If tongues were only a sign gift to apostles and only apostles had the gift or could give it to others, this would be confirmation of its temporary nature in laying the

foundation of the church on the foundation of Christ's apostles. Thus, once this basis was established, it would be natural that the gift of tongues would cease—there being no more need for it. Indeed, this seems implied in the phrase "whether there are tongues, they will cease" (1 Cor. 13:8 NKJV), since it is in the middle voice and can be translated "They will cease of their own accord."

APPENDIX TWO

WERE TONGUES A REAL LANGUAGE?

Tongues at Pentecost were authentic languages, for everyone present from the various countries (Acts 2:9–11) heard the apostles speaking "in his own native language." Nevertheless, some claim that the gift of tongues spoken of in Corinthians was not the same as that experienced on the Day of Pentecost (2:1ff.); they believe that the tongues at Corinth were private tongues or prayer languages without necessarily having the linguistic pattern of a real language.

Arguments Given in Favor of Private Tongues

Several reasons have been offered by supporters of this "private tongues" view.

First, they argue that Corinthians was written later and speaks to a different situation.

Second, they contend that Paul speaks of these private tongues as "the tongues … of angels" (13:1), which are not a known language.

Third, they are called "unknown tongues" (14:2, 4, etc. KJV).

Fourth, Paul said he spoke "mysteries" (v. 2) in his spirit.

Fifth, they are called "groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8:26).

Sixth, "anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.…

no one understands him" (1 Cor. 14:2).

A Response to the Arguments in Favor of Private Tongues

First, Corinthians was not written later but *earlier* than Acts; the former was written in A.D. 55–56, while the latter was completed by about A.D. 62. Furthermore, the last Acts reference to tongues (Acts 19) is during the same time period of the Corinthian church (Acts 18), so there are no grounds for supposing that tongues in Corinth were a later and different experience.

Second, "tongues of … angels" (1 Cor. 13:1) is probably a figure of speech meaning "to speak most eloquently." Even if this is to be taken literally, every time angels spoke in the Bible they did so in actual language that people could understand.[1]

Third, the King James rendering of the Greek word for *tongues* (*glôssolalia*) as "*unknown*" tongues is misleading. Many readers do not understand that the italicized word *unknown* is not in the original language (the Greek text), and most modern translations correctly omit it.

Fourth, "mysteries" in the Bible are not unintelligible—as we have observed,[2] biblical "mystery" is something *once concealed but now revealed*. In fact, Paul speaks of a "mystery" as that of which "I have already written" (Eph. 3:3). He wrote it in Greek, a known language; "mystery" here is not an unknown, unintelligible, or inexpressible private language.

Fifth, when Paul speaks of "groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8:26), he is not speaking about tongues, a gift nowhere mentioned in this passage or anywhere in Romans, not even in the list of spiritual gifts (12:6–8). Furthermore, these "groans" "cannot be uttered," while the private tongues are something that people do utter, so they cannot be the same. Also, since the "groans" are expressed by the Spirit (op. cit.), there is no need for the believer to put them into words.

Sixth, Paul says an unknown tongue speaks to God but not to men because unless it is translated, only God can understand it. Hence, it is not unknown, unintelligible, or untranslatable—the very fact that he demands it be interpreted for the church (1 Cor. 14:10–19) reveals that it is a meaningful, translatable language.

Arguments for Tongues in 1 Corinthians Being Real Languages

In addition to the above responses to arguments for "private tongues" in Corinthians, there are several other indications that the spiritual gift of tongues mentioned in 1 Corinthians involved knowable languages.

First, as mentioned above, every time tongues appear in Acts they are real languages. In Acts 2 each foreigner heard the apostles speaking "in his own native language" (v. 8). Peter declares that the "tongues" in which Cornelius and the Italians spoke in Acts 10 were "the same gift as he gave us [in Acts 2]" (11:17). Acts 19, containing the only other mention of tongues in the book, says that the Ephesian converts had the same experience (receiving the Spirit and speaking in tongues). Thus, tongues *throughout* Acts (c. A.D. 33–62) were real languages. Since Corinthians was written during this same period (A.D. 55–56), there is no reason to believe it involved anything but real languages.

Second, even within the same context in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul compares tongues to real languages, saying, "There are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning" (v. 10). Obviously, then, the gift of tongues, with which he makes the comparison, has actual meaning.

Third, that these tongues of which Paul spoke could be "interpreted" denotes meaningful language; otherwise, it would not be "interpretation" but creation of meaning. The gift of "interpretation" (12:30; 14:5, 13) supports tongues utilizing language that could be translated for the benefit of all.

Fourth, when Paul says "tongues … are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers" (14:22), he quotes the Old Testament (Isa. 28:11–12): "With foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people" (v. 11). The "strange tongues" were real languages used by Israel's captors, the Assyrians.

Fifth, and finally, the positing of a "private language" is suspect because it is unfalsifiable—there is no way to test it. Furthermore, there is nothing unique about it, for anyone can speak in unintelligible gibberish, including people in cults and false religions. Even those who believe in the current existence of tongues acknowledge that unsaved people have such experiences.

One charismatic tells of an unsaved woman who "had a 'tongues experience'—nothing more." Because this woman "knew nothing about repentance and regeneration,"[3] the author concludes that "whatever has happened [to her] was not the Holy Spirit's work."[4] By contrast, there *is* something unique about speaking complete and meaningful sentences and discourses in a knowable language to which one has never been exposed. This is what the real New Testament gift of tongues entailed; anything short of this, like "private tongues," is not the biblical gift of tongues.

Are Today's "Tongues" Real Languages?

William Samarin, professor of anthropology and linguistics at the University of Toronto, wrote the first comprehensive book-length study of speaking in tongues.[5] In this work he takes Christian charismatic *glossolalia*—the common contemporary practice of speaking in unknown and unintelligible speech, which Samarin distinguishes from what he calls *xenoglossia* (the miraculous gift of tongues in which the speaker communicates in an unlearned human language)—and the "tongues" of other religions (including those of healers, occultists, and shamans) and compares them with known human languages. He concludes from his linguistic analysis that "glossolalia is a perfectly human, perfectly normal (albeit anomalous) phenomenon" (*TMA*, 235). If this is the case, then "speaking in tongues" as commonly practiced today is a creation of the human mind and not the miraculous, divine activity recorded in Scripture. Below is a brief summary of Samarin's seminal work.

Lexically Meaningless and Repetitive "Words"

When Samarin and other linguists attempted to transcribe recorded glossolalia, they found that they continually came up with different results due to the difficulty of finding thoroughly distinct words in the utterances:

> On analysis these transcriptions will always expose the linguistically deviant nature of a glossolaic discourse … notwithstanding a charismatist's claim that glossolalia is neither repetitious nor meaningless banality, no "jabber-babble or twattle-twaddle," but clear, distinct, precise, and uncluttered speech. (ibid., 78)

Samarin concludes from his analysis:

> The illusion of word-structure is destroyed when one tries to dissect all the breath-groups of a text. … So it is not surprising that a linguistically trained respondent was no more successful in "breaking down" her [the subject's] speech than I was. (ibid., 81)

This is not the case with a real language, and these results were not limited to the investigators. In a similar experiment with another "tongues-speaker," Samarin noted:

> When his [the subject's] own prayer was played back several hours later, he was unable to fulfill the function of the normal speaker of language. In other words, he could not, listening to his own speech,

repeat for me what he had just said. (ibid.)

The reason for this linguistic defect is that “there is no grammar for glossolalia, because it is a phenomenon, like a human language in general, and not like a specific language” (ibid., 73). Thus, when it comes to these supposed tongues, “nobody can learn a set of rules that would enable him to speak a ‘language’ that is the same as someone else’s. Even what one person speaks on different occasions is not the same in the linguistic sense” (ibid.).

Native Speech Patterns

Even in light of these apparently random “word salads,” we discover an interesting trend. When glossolaic verbal patterns are analyzed regarding the use of consonants, vowels, and other features, they are revealed as strikingly close to the speaker’s native language.

> The explanation for this similarity, to put it simply, is that [the subject] is “doing what comes naturally”! In other words, he and every other creator of extemporaneous pseudolanguage tends to use what is common in his native language.… What makes a person’s glossa different from his native language is how he uses its sounds. (ibid., 83, 87)

This is to be expected if tongues are the product of an intentional speaker. Because the speaker is making some form of syllabic selection,

> Glossolalia, even though it is lexically meaningless, is not a randomized collection of sounds and sound sequences. It is a derivative phenomenon. Its basic features depend on the linguistic competence and knowledge of each speaker. This will surprise no one who came to this study already convinced that glossolalia was some kind of gibberish. However, now he knows that it is not *simply* that.… It is on looking closely at glossas that their artificiality becomes apparent. This is as true of their construction as it is of their function. (ibid., 127, 121, emphasis original)

Artificial Function and Construction

As to function,

> Glossas and natural languages are responsive to the world outside the speaker in different ways. In normal speech it is content, and not merely manner of delivery, that changes constantly in response to topics, person, setting, time, and so forth.…
>
> In construction as well as in function glossas are fundamentally different from languages.… If glossas do not have grammatical structure, we might nevertheless expect them to be like languages phonologically, because they sound so much like languages. Even here we are deceived. The total number of different sounds appears to be smaller than one finds in most languages.
>
> Glossas are strikingly unlike natural languages in the rank frequency curves of the sounds.… This

cannot happen in normal language, because the occurrence of sounds is determined by the words in which they occur. (ibid., 122–26)

False Glossolalia

The implications of these findings are demonstrated by the possibility, in both the religious and secular senses, to fake the "gift of tongues." Samarin writes, "The possibility of false glossolalia, that is, something linguistically indistinguishable from genuine glossolalia but not inspired by God, puzzles many glossolalists" (ibid., 75). While some may state that they do indeed have the ability to distinguish between true and false use of glossolalia, "there is no claim, as far as we know, that the discernment is based on linguistic evidence." This leads Samarin to ask, "If glossolalists were tested for their ability to distinguish religious (to them, real) from imitation glossolalia entirely on auditory perception (using tape recordings, for example), would they be able to do so?"

> The only experiment I know of (by A. Carlson) used non-glossolalists as subjects, thirty university students in elementary psychology. They listened to twenty-two samples of pseudolanguage, half of which were religious and the other half imitation, with many different speakers in each group, and were asked to judge the resemblance of all the 45-second samples to real language, based on the sound content rather than style of delivery. The two groups of utterances were graded so much alike that Carlson concludes that there is potentially little difference phonologically between the two types of pseudolinguistic material, that is, religious and non-religious. (ibid., 76)

Today's "Tongues" Are Not Real Languages

After these and other analyses, Samarin concludes his investigation with these words:

> When the full apparatus of linguistic science comes to bear on glossolalia, this turns out to be only a façade of language—although at times a very good one indeed. For when we comprehend what language is, we must conclude that no glossa, no matter how well constructed, is a specimen of human language, because it is neither internally organized nor systematically related to the world man perceives. (ibid., 127–28)

In closing, he replies to the possible incredulity of charismatics:

> [Linguists] know enough to declare what is and what is not a language. We know as much as a mathematician, who can tell the difference between a real formula and a pseudo-formula—one that *looks* like mathematical language but does not *say* anything.… The glossolalist must grant this, because one of his proofs for the existence of God is orderliness in creation. A hodge-podge of DNA produces biological nonsense just as much as a hodge-podge of syllables produces linguistic nonsense. (ibid.,

234, emphasis original)

To argue (as some do) that these are coded forms of language fails; codes have meaningful linguistic patterns and can be broken, while tongues do not and cannot. Any other so-called code-without-pattern places a tongue out of the realm of the intelligible and into the unverifiable domain of the mystical.

Finally, Dr. Gary Maxey, longtime student of African religions and president of a large Nigerian seminary in Lagos, reports that glossolalia is present in pagan religions he has researched. Surely God would not be the cause of such a phenomenon, nor could it therefore be used to support the supernatural nature of Christianity.

APPENDIX THREE

HAS THE GIFT OF MIRACLES CEASED?

The intramural debate among those who accept biblical miracles (as to whether miracles have ceased since apostolic times) has special significance for Christian theology in at least two areas. First, if apostolic-type miracles exist today, how were biblical miracles unique in confirming the truth claims of the prophets and apostles?[1] Second, if there are contemporary miracles that confirm divine truth claims, then is normative divine revelation also still being delivered? Further, if they do, are these new revelations on a par with Holy Scripture?[2] If so, is the canon of Scripture closed, or is it still open to new revelation?[3]

Before proceeding further, the question at hand is not whether miracles are *possible* today—of course they are. As long as God exists, miracles are possible (see Lewis, *M*, 109). Nor is the question whether miracles are *actual* today. A miracle can and does exist whenever and wherever God decides (cf. Heb. 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:11). We cannot lock God out of His universe.

The question before us is: Does the *gift* of miracles exist today? Or, more specifically, do the supernatural powers given to the apostles exist today?

DEFENSE OF THE EXISTENCE OF MIRACULOUS GIFTS TODAY

Those who defend the present existence of miraculous gifts offer several arguments for their belief, foremost among which are the following.

God Has Performed Miracles Throughout History

Both sides of the dispute agree that God has performed miracles throughout redemptive history. Miracles begin in Genesis and continue through Revelation. Accordingly, why should we believe that they have now ceased? Why should they be cut off immediately after the apostles' lives ended?

God Has Not Changed

Further, God has not changed (Mal. 3:6). Jesus is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8 NKJV). The miracle-working God has not changed, so why should we maintain that miracles have ceased?

Jesus Promised Miracles Would Continue

Proponents argue that Jesus promised His disciples that miracles would continue: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

> These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (Mark 16:17–18)[4]

The Need for Miracles Still Exists

Miracles are performed to manifest God's greatness (Ex. 7:17) and glory (John 11:40), to deliver God's children in need (Dan. 3), and to communicate God's messages to His people (Ex. 4:8; Heb. 2:3–4). There are some two hundred fifty biblical occurrences of miracles, many of them involving multiple acts. Many of the *conditions* that occasioned scriptural miracles still exist today, so there is no reason to believe that the same God would cease to perform the *miracles*.

Apostolic-Type Miracles Occur Today

Finally, some argue that the same kinds of miraculous manifestations performed through the apostles still exist today. As evidence, they have pointed to the gift of tongues, to special healings, and even to people being raised from the dead (e.g., see Wimber, *PE*, 44).

THE CESSATION OF APOSTOLIC-TYPE MIRACLES

Many Christian scholars who accept all biblical miracles believe that the special apostolic gift of miracles has ceased.

Miracles of the Past Are No Proof for the Present

That God gave the gift of miracles in the past does not prove that this gift exists in the present. Logically, there is no connection; what happened in the past is past, and what happens in the present is present.

Historically, miracles occurred largely in clusters in three periods: the Mosaic, Prophetic, and Apostolic eras. Miracles were neither continuous nor unpurposeful in their manifestation.

Theologically, the three great periods of miracles had common elements that do not necessitate miraculous continuance: Each epoch was marked by declension, transition, and the giving of new revelation. Moses needed miracles to deliver Israel from Egypt (Ex. 4:8); Elijah and Elisha performed miracles to deliver Israel from idolatry (cf. 1 Kings 18); Jesus and the apostles utilized miracles to confirm the transition from the old covenant to the new (Heb. 2:3–4). That miracles occurred at special times in special places for special purposes doesn't show they will persist when such conditions no longer prevail.

God's Attributes Do Not Change; God's Actions Do

While God never changes, His program on earth does—there are different stages with different requirements.[5] For example, it is no longer true that God forbids us to eat the fruit of a particular tree lest we die, as with Adam and Eve

(Gen. 2:16–17). Nor are we required to offer a lamb as a sacrifice for our sins, as the children of Israel did, who were under the Mosaic Law (cf. Ex. 12).[6] Neither (as both sides of this dispute agree) do we have apostles in existence today, as they did in New Testament times. Such apostles do not exist, so do apostolic miracles exist? These miracles were called "the signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12 NKJV).[7]

Jesus' Promise About Miracles Was Given to the Apostles

Jesus did promise that miracles would continue after His time, but not after the time of the apostles. In fact, it was specifically to the apostles with Him in the Upper Room that He made His promise that they would do greater miracles than He did (John 14:12; cf. 13:5ff.). Even His promise to give the Holy Spirit's baptism[8] was given only to the apostles (cf. Acts 1:2–8), and only they received the fulfillment of this promise at Pentecost.[9] They gave the gift to no others after that time,[10] and there was no promise that miracles would exist after their time.

Some Non-Apostles Did Possess the Same Miraculous Powers

The cessationist argument does not depend on only the apostles possessing miraculous gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4–11)—the apostles themselves had power to grant them. The gifts emanate from Christ, and they were His authorization for the apostles to proclaim truth they had received directly from Him. To show their unique authority as the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20; Acts 2:42) they were given the ability to convey supernatural gifts to others; this was often done by the "laying on of the apostles' hands" (cf. 8:17–18; 2 Tim. 1:6) or in the personal presence of an apostle's proclamation (Acts 10:44; cf. 11:15). Paul's reference to the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) would make no sense if these gifts were possessed by anyone other than apostles or those to whom Christ and the apostles had given them.

The Desire for Miracles Does Not Prove Their Existence

First, not all felt needs are real needs—often what we think are real needs are actually desires. For example, Paul desired a miraculous healing that God never gave Him (2 Cor. 12), and though Joni Eareckson Tada (b. 1950) felt she needed a miracle (see *SF*), God, so far, has not decided to miraculously heal this

amazing woman (a quadriplegic as a result of a diving accident).

Second, when measured accurately against the real need for miraculous gifts that biblically prompted them, there is no actual need for them today. Miracles were used to confirm new revelation from God,[11] and God's special (scriptural) revelation is complete. Because the Bible is fully sufficient for faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16–18), there is no need for further miraculous confirmation of new revelation. Pentecost does not need to be repeated any more than Calvary or the resurrection of Christ needs to be repeated.

Third, even in the Bible, where miracles abound, not everyone who "needed" to be healed was miraculously healed. Job wasn't for some time. Paul wasn't (2 Cor. 12:12), and neither was Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:26). The same is true today: Many godly people with health conditions that are a great ministerial handicap have not been healed, such as the blind hymnist Fanny Crosby (1820–1915). Again, while miracles have been performed to manifest God's greatness (Ex. 7:17) and glory (John 11:40) and to deliver His children (Ex. 12), there are others ways He can and does accomplish these things. The heavens declare His glory and greatness (Ps. 19; Isa. 40). His spiritual deliverance is accomplished daily all over the world by the gospel's power (Rom. 1:16), apart from outward supernatural acts. He also works through both general and special providence without suspending any natural laws by providential timing and concurrence of events.[12]

Fourth, as regards divine intervention, there are some things for which God does not normatively intervene today, viz., delaying death from its appointed time (Heb. 9:27). Everyone is dying, and no amount of faith or prayer for miracles stops the process (Rom. 5:12). This does not mean God cannot or will never supernaturally intervene to meet this need; it simply means that He does not always do it in this life. He *will* eventually do it at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15); meanwhile, we are "waiting for … the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23 NKJV).

The claim that apostolic sign gifts are still in existence is subject to several heavy criticisms. For one, it fails to distinguish between the *fact* of miracles and the *gift* of miracles, a difference that can be summarized in this way:

Gift of Miracles	**Fact of Miracles**
In biblical times	At any time

Temporary	Permanent
Done through humans	Done without humans
Confirms new revelation	Does not confirm revelation
Apologetic value	No apologetic value

Confusion Between the Gift of Miracles and the Fact of Miracles

The view that the gift of miracles ceased with the apostles does not demand that God perform no miracle after the first century; it only argues that the *gift* of doing miraculous feats, possessed by the apostles and their associates, ceased once it was used to confirm their message's divine origin. The writer of Hebrews (c. A.D. 68–99) referred to these apostolic sign gifts as already past when he spoke of the message "*confirmed* [in the past] to us by those who heard him [namely, apostles]. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" (2:3–4). Jude, written possibly after A.D. 70, speaks of "the faith that was *once for all entrusted* [in the past] to the saints" (v. 3), exhorting his hearers to "remember the words which were spoken *before* by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17 NKJV). Here too the miraculously confirmed apostolic message was spoken of as past. In spite of the profusion of apostolic miracles up to the end of Acts (cf. 28:1–10), there is no record of any apostolic miracle in Paul's epistles after this time.[13]

This argument from the later and sudden *absence* of miracles after their earlier abundance is not to be confused with a fallacious argument from *silence*. The Bible is not silent on the nature, purpose, and function of these apostolic miracles (cf. Heb. 2:3–4; 2 Cor. 12:12), and this function (of confirming apostolic revelation) fits with their cessation, since they were not needed after the revelation was confirmed. They were the sign confirming the sermon; the miracle establishing the message; the confirmation of the new revelation.

That Paul was inflicted with a physical infirmity (Gal. 4:13) during the time God was still granting miracles (cf. 3:5) does not disprove this thesis. If Galatians was written early, his illness could have been a divinely inflicted infirmity resulting from his being blinded (Acts 9:17–18; cf. Gal. 6:11); or, if Galatians was written later, the affliction could have been simply to humble him after his exalted revelations (2 Cor. 12). Further, there is no New Testament

indication that those with the gift of healing exercised it on themselves; the gifts were given to confirm the truth of revelation to others (Heb. 2:3–4), not to benefit one's personal needs, and they were exercised only "according to His [God's] will" (ibid.; 1 Cor. 12:11). There is every evidence that the apostle-confirming miracles had ceased even before the apostles' deaths.

In short, cessationism does not eliminate the possibility or even actuality of God directly performing a miracle today. It merely concludes, based on both Scripture and history, that such extraordinary powers as the apostles had have not been possessed by any person since their time. That is, while the *gift* of miracles has ceased, the *fact* of miracles has not necessarily vanished; God can and does perform miraculous events anytime He chooses.

The Unique Nature of Apostolic Miracles

One of the reasons many wrongly believe that apostolic-type miracles are still in existence today is that they fail to recognize the unique character of such, so they incorrectly assume that other unusual events measure up to the standard of an apostolic miracle. Apostles were given certain unmistakable sign gifts (2 Cor. 12:12), including the ability to raise the dead on command (Matt. 10:8), immediately heal naturally incurable diseases (10:8; John 9:1–7), perform instantly successful exorcisms (Matt. 10:8; Acts 16:16–18), speak messages in languages they had never studied (2:1–8 cf. 10:44–46), and pass on supernatural gifts to others so that they could assist in their apostolic mission of founding the church (6:6; cf. 8:5–6; 2 Tim. 1:6). On one occasion they pronounced a supernatural death sentence on two people who had "lied to the Holy Spirit," and the two dropped on the spot (Acts 5:1–11); there is no evidence that anyone possesses these kinds of powers today. Given the media's penchant for sensation, if anyone had such powers it would be one of the world's most widely publicized phenomena. The people who do claim to have these supernatural powers are known to make false predictions, unmistakable evidence that they are not true prophets of God (cf. Deut. 18:22).

Apostolic miracles had at least three characteristics not found in the powers performed by any so-called miracle-worker today.

New Testament Miracles Were Instantaneous

When Jesus or the apostles performed a miracle, the results were always immediate. When Jesus saw the man with a lifelong infirmity, He said: " 'Get

up! Pick up your mat and walk.' *At once* the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked" (John 5:8–9). Likewise, Peter, "taking [a lame man] by the right hand, he helped him up, and *instantly* the man's feet and ankles became strong" (Acts 3:7). Paul instantly raised the young man Eutychus from the dead (20:9), as did Peter with Dorcas (9:40). Even the one two-stage scriptural miracle (Mark 8:22–25) took but a few moments, and each stage had the immediately intended results. There are no gradual healings that came as a sign of an apostle.

New Testament Miracles Always Lasted

Not only were apostolic miracles instantaneously successful, but there is no record that anyone who received one ever relapsed into his former condition. Given the penchant of their enemies to find fault, had there been any such relapse, the authorities surely would have seized upon it to discredit Jesus and/or the apostles.

Of course, those who were raised from the dead, like all other mortals (Rom. 5:12), physically died again; Jesus was the first to receive a permanent, immortal resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:20).[14] Permanent resurrection of believers will only occur at the Second Coming (vv. 52–53).[15] Immediacy and permanence cannot be attributed to the powers of any so-called contemporary healer, and the reason is simple: A miracle is a special act of God, and God cannot fail (Matt. 19:26).

New Testament Miracles Worked Even on Incurably Ill/Dead Persons

The miracles of Jesus and His apostles were effective on *everyone*, even people born blind (John 9) or lame (Acts 3) or who had died (John 11). On occasion, Jesus healed everyone in the area who was sick (Luke 4:40; cf. Matt. 10:8), as did Paul (Acts 19:11–12).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The arguments for the continuance of the apostolic gift of miracles miss the mark. While God does not change, His actions can be different at different times. The purpose of special signs and wonders was to confirm new revelation (Heb. 2:3–4; Acts 2:22), which ceased with the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13; cf. Heb. 2:3–4), as did the need for miraculous confirmation.

No one since the time of the apostles has possessed their unique miracle-working power to instantaneously heal incurably sick people and even raise the

dead. This does not mean that God cannot or does not do miracles today. The *fact* of miracles is always possible, even though the *gift* of miracles has ceased.[16] Of course, the fact of miracles is not connected with any truth claim,[17] and they are not a gift possessed by any individual, so whatever truly miraculous event that may occur today has no apologetic value to confirm a new revelation.

Jesus was the full and final revelation of God as predicted in the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1–2). Jesus informed the apostles that "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you *all things* and will remind you of *everything* I have said to you" (John 14:26); "when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into *all truth*. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (16:13). The apostles were the divinely authorized agents to proclaim this full and final revelation of God through Jesus Christ, God's Son.[18]

Indeed, the apostles claimed this very revelatory power, yet they, the final divinely and miraculously authorized channel of truth, all died in the first century.[19] Therefore, it follows that divine revelation ceased in the first century, and, consequently, there is no need for miraculous gifts today.

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APPENDIX FOUR

ULTRA-DISPENSATIONALISM

A summary of ultradispensationalism[1] is found in *Bible Truth: What We Believe and Why*, in which Charles Baker (1910–2002) argues that Peter's plan of salvation for Jews is different from Paul's message of grace. This appendix is largely a review of Baker's book.

Names of the Movement

Ultradispensationalists call themselves the grace movement. This is not to be confused with the free-grace view, led by Zane Hodges (b. 1932),[2] a moderate dispensationalist who stresses that salvation is an absolutely free gift from God with only one condition—faith. In opposition is the position of John McArthur (b. 1939),[3] who represents lordship salvation, viz., that one needs to accept Christ as both Savior and Lord in order to be saved.[4]

Ultradispensationalists also call themselves the Grace Gospel Fellowship, a grouping of Grace Churches that may loosely be called a denomination, though they would repudiate the title. The grace movement often uses the term *dispensationalists* to describe themselves; this, however, is confusing because less-extreme dispensationalists designate themselves by the same term.[5] Compared to even more moderate dispensationalists like John Walvoord (1910–2002) and Charles Ryrie (b. 1925), the grace movement is ultra- or hyperdispensational.

Proponents, Organizations, and History of the Movement

Charles Baker was a graduate of the nondispensational Wheaton College and of the moderately dispensational Dallas Seminary. Cornelius Stam (1909–2003) was longtime editor of *The Berean Searchlight*, one of the movement's popular literary organs. J. C.O'Hair (1877–1958) was pastor of North Shore Church in Chicago and board chairman of Grace Bible College and Grace Mission, the agencies that represent the movement's educational and missionary arms.

The Worldwide Grace Fellowship, organized in 1939, was renamed the Grace Gospel Fellowship in 1944. The following year, the Milwaukee Bible Institute organized, later called Milwaukee Bible College and now Grace Bible College (in Grand Rapids, Michigan). Their mission agency is currently called Grace Ministries International, and while their churches are generally called Grace Churches or "Grace Movement" churches, there are other (non-ultradispensational) churches that use the word *Grace* in their title or description.

Primarily, ultradispensationalists hold fundamental or conservative views on the central doctrines of the faith, including the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary Atonement, the bodily resurrection, and the Second Coming. However, they also have several distinctive teachings, one being that they accept only one ordinance for the church—the Lord's Supper.

The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper

Baker wrote: "The communion of the Lord's Supper as revealed through the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 is for members of the Body of Christ to observe 'until He comes' " (*BT*, 50). "There is no place in Scripture where the Lord's Supper and water baptism are linked together either as ordinances or as sacraments for the Church" (ibid., 51). Hence, water baptism is denied as an ordinance for the church today.

Earlier and more extreme ultradispensationalists, following E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913), rejected both baptism and the Lord's Supper, offering four basic reasons,[6] to which Baker then responded:

(1) It was not lawful for the uncircumcised to eat the Passover (Ex. 12:43, 45, 48). *Answer*: The Lord's Supper is not the Passover, which was initiated fifteen hundred years earlier.

(2) The Lord's Supper has to do with the new covenant, which is made only with Israel. *Answer*: It was given to Gentiles too (1 Cor. 12:2). In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul said he was a minister of the new covenant. Romans 15:27 says Gentiles partake of spiritual things (viz., the new covenant).
(3) It uses earthly elements (Col. 2:20); we seek only things above (3:1). *Answer*: This confuses standing and state—there is a difference between "earth" and "world." Bibles and church buildings are also earthly. Paul condemns carnal ordinances only because they denote an unfinished work, not because they are physical.[7]
(4) Paul said, "It is not the Lord's Supper you eat" (1 Cor. 11:20). *Answer*: He is speaking about it not being possible *in their divided and drunken state*. He affirms that they should do it, but do it properly.

Baker offered six reasons why the Lord's Supper is for today (*BT*, 55–56):

(1) The Supper was a specific part of Paul's commission to the Gentiles.[8]
(2) There is no set time or particular manner or ritual connected with it. It is simply "As oft as ye do this."[9]
(3) There is no magical transformation of elements, no idea of a sacramental means of grace, and no meritorious work connected with its observance.
(4) It is done for one reason: "This do in remembrance of Me."
(5) There is no promise of visions, ecstatic experiences, or other emotional reactions.[10]
(6) It is to be observed "till He come." If there is no place for its observance today, then there never was or ever will be a place for its observance.

The Doctrine of Water Baptism

> If anything is evident from the pages of the epistles it is that the ritual has given place to the spiritual. And that is exactly what we of the Grace Movement believe: that the ritual baptism has ceased, leaving us with the one baptism which is spiritual; not the Spirit's baptism in miraculous powers as at Pentecost, but the Spirit's baptism of believing Jews and Gentiles into the Body of Christ. (ibid., 32–33)

Baker listed various arguments against water baptism today:

(1) Ephesians says there is only "one baptism" (4:5), namely, into Christ, which is a saving baptism (Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col.

2:12).

(2) Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that he was not sent to baptize.

(3) Nowhere in Paul's epistles is water baptism mentioned. But they alone are the basis for the "body" truth of this dispensation (Col. 1; Eph. 1).

(4) Water baptism at its best was but a shadow of something far better. We have given up the shadow, but we have the reality. We have the Real Baptism. (*BT*, 60–61)

The Doctrine of Spirit Baptism

John the Baptist announced that Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11). This doubtless took place on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5). In the Spirit, baptism, which forms the Body of Christ, is not Christ baptizing with the Spirit, as happened at Pentecost, but the Holy Spirit baptizing into Christ. We must not confuse the Persons of the Trinity, and yet that is exactly what they do who make these two Spirit baptisms one and the same; for they have Christ baptizing into Christ. (ibid., 31–32)

The Doctrine of the Church

> We contend earnestly for the distinctive truth of the Pauline revelation. We see that it bears an important influence upon every doctrine of our Christian faith.…
>
> In the present dispensation there is only one true Church, which is called the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22–23; 3:6). The historical manifestation of the Body of Christ began with the Apostle Paul before he wrote his first epistle (1 Thess. 2:14; cf. Acts 13:45–46; Phil. 1:5–6; cf. Acts 16; 1 Cor. 12:13, 27; cf. Acts 18).…
>
> As long as one … fails to see the distinction between the church, which is His Body (Eph. 1:22–23), and the prophesied church of the kingdom in Matthew and Revelation, he is bound to bring great confusion into church doctrine for today. (ibid., 14, 35)

There Are Two Churches: An Early Jewish Church (Beginning at Pentecost) and a Later Gentile Church (Beginning With Paul)

These are the reasons given by ultradispensationalists in defense of earlier and later dispensations. The church in Matthew is part of the messianic kingdom to be set up when this age is over.

> But the fact that one of the groups is to be completed in heaven while the other is on earth and still functioning in the matter of growth is sufficient evidence to prove that there is a difference between them.…
>
> Perhaps the most evident distinction … is the fact that the church of Matthew and of Pentecost is one which was prophesied by the Old Testament prophets, whereas the church of Paul's epistles is specifically declared to be a part of a great body of truth which in former ages has been hidden in God and never before revealed to the sons of men (Eph. 3:5, 9; Col. 1:24–26). Psalm 22:22, as quoted in Hebrews 2:12, is evidence that there was a church predicted in the Old Testament scripture.
>
> The words of the Spirit-filled apostle in Acts 3:21, 24 show that everything that was happening at Pentecost and thereafter was in fulfillment of the prophets. Now if that which was spoken by the mouth

of all the prophets is identically the same as that which was hidden in God and never made known to the prophets, we can logically say the two churches under consideration are the same. [But] if the above language indicates a difference, then we must say that there is a difference. (ibid., 36)

Against the Bullingerites, they[11] argue:

According to this view the church in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians was a kingdom church, and only in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians do we find a reference to the church of this present dispensation. We wish to make it very plain that we do not in any sense of the word embrace any such teaching—in fact, we believe it is a dangerous error and we do all we can to combat it. We believe that the Body of Christ had its historical beginning with the ministry of Paul before he wrote his first epistle. (ibid., 38)

We recognize that there was a transition going on in the latter half of the book of Acts, from kingdom to Body dispensation, and we believe there is a significance to Paul's action in pronouncing blindness upon Israel in Acts 28. We believe that the end of Acts marks the end of the transition period, and the passing away, as far as God's designed program for the Body is concerned, of everything Israelitish including the sign gifts and water baptism. (ibid.)

[We have] shown from Scripture that the church of this present dispensation is separate and distinct from the churches of other dispensations (God has always had His church or called-out ones), and that it had its historical beginnings, not with Peter or on Pentecost but with Paul's ministry, and that the church to which Paul ministered during Acts was the same to which he ministered until his death and the same which still exists today … regardless of having had or not having had the ceremony of baptism practiced upon them. (ibid., 39)

The Doctrine of Salvation

Ultradispensationalists teach that Old Testament salvation included national deliverance from Israel's enemies (ibid., 18). The requirements of salvation differ in the New Testament (ibid., 19–20); Peter's plan of salvation for Jews (Acts 2:38) is different from Paul's message of grace (ibid., 20).

There is just no use in trying to reconcile Peter's preaching in Acts 2:38 with Paul's teaching for the Body of Christ, because they concern two different dispensations.… Salvation is given under Paul's gospel apart from all works of righteousness (Titus 3:5), apart from the law (Rom. 3:21), apart from covenants and Israel's intervention (Eph. 2:13), and apart from water baptism (1 Cor. 1:17). (ibid.)

Baker also offered thirty-three arguments for eternal security (*BT*, 5–28).

The Doctrine of Ministry Gifts

Some of these gifts were permanent in nature and some were to pass away.… Since the New Testament canon was completed through the ministry of Apostles and Prophets, we believe these two offices have been fulfilled and no longer exist. Likewise the sign gifts, such as tongues, miracles, and healing, which were addressed primarily to the nation of Israel (1 Cor. 14:22), have fulfilled their purpose and have passed away (according to 1 Corinthians 13:8–11).… [For instance,] compare 2

Timothy 4:20, which speaks of Paul leaving behind sick his most faithful worker. (ibid., 40, 42)

The Doctrine of the Church's Mission

There are a number of good reasons why we do not believe that the Matthew and Mark commissions are for us today: (1) It is the gospel of the kingdom (which did not have death and resurrection in it, cf. Luke 9:6; 18:31–34), not the gospel of grace. Peter's gospel was sad, not glad, as Paul's. It was not good news but one of guilt and condemnation. [We preach Christ's death as good news; Peter preached it as sad news. Peter preached the gospel of circumcision; Paul the gospel of uncircumcision.][12] (2) Peter's message required baptism, but Paul's did not. (3) [Signs followed Peter's gospel but not Paul's:] A further objection to applying this commission to us is the fact that it contains certain substantiatings which since Acts 28 do not accompany the preaching of the gospel of grace.[13] (4) Peter's gospel gave priority to the Jews only; Paul's was for Jew and Gentile. Peter's was local; Paul's was worldwide. (ibid., 68–71)

The Doctrine of the Second Coming

Baker attacks Bullinger's view that there is no Rapture for the mystery body of Christ (since 1 Thessalonians is supposedly for an earlier church).

The church of this dispensation will disappear from the earth by its members all dying. After the last member of the Body has died, then there will be the secret "out-resurrection" of Philippians 3:11, which will of course be unobserved by anyone upon the earth. (Bullinger, *TSSA*, 63)

Baker responded:

(1) If so, then no one alive can be sure he is a member of the Body, since the last member of the Body may have already died.
(2) Paul holds out the same hope to all believers in all his epistles (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 1:10; Col. 1:23; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:16). The latter Paul says explicitly he got by revelation, just as he did the "Body" truth.

Additional Beliefs/Statements of Ultradispensationalism

The following points are from ultradispensationalist J. C. O'Hair's *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*.

(1) O'Hair claims there are "different Gospels," which contradicts Paul (Gal 1:8; cf. 3:8): "No intelligent student of the Scriptures believes, or teaches, that there is only one gospel in the Scriptures" (*URC*, 97). The kingdom

gospel (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 9:35) is not the same as Paul's gospel (Rom. 16:25–26).

(2) The "Joint-Body" church of Ephesians 3:6 did not start at Pentecost; the former is Gentilish and the latter is Jewish (*URC*, 133–34).

(3) Peter supposedly said it is unlawful for Gentiles to be in the church (Acts 10:28).

(4) "After Saul became Paul, Israel was set aside. The ministry of reconciliation for Gentiles was committed to Paul" (*URC*, 136).

(5) Differences between the "Gospel of the uncircumcision and [the] Gospel of Circumcision" (ibid., 136) show it is not the same church.

(6) "In the first eleven chapters of Acts, the Lord, by the Twelve, presented a kingdom program different from the present 'Body' program" (ibid.).

(7) "James was the second one of the original twelve apostles to die. Judas was the first. Judas died and a successor was chosen. James died, and no successor was chosen." Hence, "God required twelve apostles from the day of Pentecost to the death of James. After Acts 13:2, God no longer required twelve apostles" (*URC*, 192). Why? So that "we should know that there was a Divine purpose in it, and that God was dealing with that Nation after the New commission of Acts 13:2. Then the new Divine movement was declared in Romans 11:15" (ibid.).

(8) "Let us always recognize the difference between the prophesied Kingdom of heaven and the unprophesied 'Body' of Christ: Ephesians 3:5–9 and Colossians 1:24–27" (*URC*, 194).

(9) Peter applied the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy to Israel, not the church (ibid., 215).

(10) Joel knew and said nothing about the church (cf. Eph. 4; ibid., 215).

(11) If "me" in Acts 9 proves it is the church, then "me" in Matthew 25:41 proves it is Israel (*URC*, 216).

(12) Admittedly, Galatians 1:13 proves the church began before Paul was converted (ibid., 216), but "church" is a reference to the Jewish church, not the Body of Christ.[14]

(13) Acts 5:31 says "they were added to the Lord," but not in the same relationship as to Christ as Head of the Body (ibid.).

(14) Peter opened the door to the Gentiles (Acts 11:15; 15:7), but this was not the Body of Christ (*URC*, 217).

A BRIEF EVALUATION OF ULTRADISPENSATIONALISM

Several ultradispensationalist doctrines call for examination; we'll evaluate two.[15]

Critique of the Idea That the Church Began With Paul

(1) This confuses the beginning of the *revelation* about the church with the beginning of the *church itself*.
(2) It makes *distinctions without real differences* (e.g., gospels of circumcision [Peter] and uncircumcision [Paul]). While these are different *audiences*, they are not different *gospels*.
(3) It creates distinctions where there are none (e.g., no signs with gospel of grace).
(4) It confuses Old Testament prophecies *that* Gentiles would be blessed with there being no predictions as to *how* they would be on the same level with Jews.
(5) It manifests gnosticlike tendencies, such as (A) avoiding "earthly" elements (e.g., water baptism) and (B) special, exclusive, in-group knowledge of the mystery of Christ's body.
(6) It unjustifiably assumes that there are two kinds of Spirit baptism.
(7) It fails to note that Gentiles were baptized into Christ in Acts 2 and 8, which defeats the argument that there was no joint-body before Paul's ministry.
(8) It claims "that there just was no joint-body until some Gentiles as such were saved, and we know that could not have been until the salvation of Cornelius at least" (*BT*, 32); there were Gentiles in Acts 2 and in Acts 6, well before Paul was saved (Acts 9).
(9) Its assertion that "we must not confuse the Persons of the Trinity, and yet that is exactly what they do who make these two Spirit baptisms one and the same; for they have Christ baptizing into Christ" (*BT*, 32) confuses the procession in the Trinity—Christ sent the Spirit to do His work for Him (John 15:26).
(10) It claims that "if anything is evident from the pages of the epistles it is that the ritual has given place to the spiritual" (*BT*, 32–33), but the Lord's

Supper involves a ritual using physical elements.
(11) It leads to unorthodox (works-based) soteriological views of the Old Testament and early New Testament, claiming that Peter's plan of salvation for Jews (Acts 2:38) is different from Paul's message of grace (ibid., 19–20).
(12) It claims there are "different Gospels" (*URC*, 97), which opposes scriptural teaching (Gal. 1:8; cf. 3:8).

Critique of the Idea That There Is No Water Baptism for the Church Age

(1) It overlooks that Paul practiced water baptism late in the book of Acts (19:1ff.), and this could not have been for Jewish believers, for they were rebaptized after they had John's Jewish baptism.
(2) It discounts Paul's own baptism with water, which was the commencement of his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 22).
(3) It fails to understand Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:17, in which he was not rejecting baptism but stressing his primary mission, preaching the gospel.
(5) It ignores water baptism in Paul's epistles (e.g., Rom. 6:3–4; Col. 2:14).
(6) It doesn't demonstrate that Ephesians 4:5 can't be about water baptism.
(7) It has a gospel of works (salvifically necessary baptism) for Jewish Christians.
(8) It marginalizes the Great Commission's inclusion of baptism, which is for us, since it is "to the end of the age."[16]
(9) It says "the Supper was a specific part of the commission of Paul to the Gentiles." Baptism was as well (Acts 22).
(10) That baptism and the Lord's Supper are not linked in any one passage doesn't mean they're not both ordinances.[17]
(11) Communion involves a ritual, but O'Hair rejects baptism because it is a ritual.
(12) It accepts the Lord's Supper because it has a special relationship to "Body" truth (*BT*, 56). Baptism also has this relationship (cf. Rom. 6; 1 Cor. 12).

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APPENDIX FIVE

DOES THE RESURRECTION BODY HAVE THE SAME PARTICLES AS BEFORE DEATH?

One of the objections to the resurrection body's material nature is a form of the old socinian contention that this would involve an absurdity: that the resurrection body has all the same particles it once possessed (cf. Harris, *RI*, 126). This seems clearly impossible; for example, consider a cannibal who ingests someone else's body—surely the particles cannot be part of both bodies at the resurrection.

While it is true that some defenders of the orthodox view have insisted that the resurrection body will have all the same material particles it had before death, other orthodox teachers have not. To clarify the issue, three views must be distinguished.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Orthodox View</th><th>Unorthodox View</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Material body</td><td>Immaterial body</td></tr>
<tr><td>Particle view (Every particle restored)</td><td>Substance view (Material body restored)</td><td>No material restored</td></tr>
</table>

First, there is a vast difference between the orthodox and unorthodox views. In fact, they are exact opposites—both cannot be true. The orthodox position holds that there is a literal, material resurrection body, and the unorthodox view denies it.

Second, the intramural debate within the evangelical camp does not affect the positions' orthodoxy. An omnipotent God can do anything that is not actually impossible, and such a God would have no difficulty in restoring every particle to its original owner at the resurrection.

Third, belief that every particle of the pre-resurrection body must be restored is not critical to the orthodox view. A person gets the same substantial material body he had before without holding that every particle of it will be restored in the resurrection. Just as there is identity and continuity in our material bodies that are continually taking on and giving off particles (molecules), even so the resurrection body can be the same material body without having all the same material particles as the pre-resurrection body.

As shown in chapter 8, we will be raised in the same physical bodies in which we died. At His resurrection, Jesus' body vacated the tomb, was physical and tangible, and even had crucifixion scars (Luke 24:3, 39–40). Our bodies will be like His body (Phil. 3:21).

First, what is left in the grave from the buried body will come out and be part of the resurrection body. Jesus said, "All who are in *the graves*" (i.e., bodily remains) will "come forth" (John 5:28–29 NKJV). Ezekiel spoke of the "bones" of the dead coming back together (Ezek. 37:1–6), and "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Dan. 12:2 NKJV). After Jesus was resurrected, "The 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" (Matt. 27:52–53).

Second, what was never placed in the grave or has been taken from the grave will either be reassembled by God from wherever it is or replaced with other particles by His omnipotent hands. God is not limited by scattered particles or in finding others.

Rejecting the view that the very same particles in the body at death will be in the resurrected body does not thereby argue in favor of the unorthodox view that we will not have the same physical body, made immortal, in the resurrection that we had before. *It can be the same material body without containing all the same particles*. Nonetheless, whatever remains will be used to reconstitute the

resurrection body. Belief in the material nature of the resurrection body and the empty graves of believers is rational and biblical.

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APPENDIX SIX

REINCARNATION

The word *reincarnation* means "to come again in the flesh." Christians speak of Christ's incarnation, because He came in the flesh (John 1:14; 1 John 4:1–2). *Re*incarnation means that after death the human soul returns to a body—another body—and lives another life. Of reincarnation's many forms, the most common spring from Hinduism and Buddhism and are based in the inexorable law of karma, which dictates that every action in this life has a reaction or consequence (either in this life or in the next).

Reincarnation is an ancient belief. Many scholars think its original source is the Hindu Vedas, from which the Buddhist, Jainist, and Sikhist forms seem to have been derived, as have the teachings of Transcendental Meditation and Hare Krishna. In the ancient Near East, the Pythagoreans, Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.), and Plotinus (205–270) were reincarnationists. More recently, psychic Edgar Cayce (1877–1945) and theosophist Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) also taught multiple lives. Several theologians have attempted to harmonize forms of reincarnation with Christianity; among these are Geddes MacGregor (b. 1909) and John Hick (b. 1922).

THE NATURE OF REINCARNATION

Plato taught that the immortal soul takes on a body only as punishment for some sin, for which he will suffer tenfold; hence, the soul is forced to leave the

ideal realm and enter into the material world.

> [Man is] a soul in a body, and his soul needs to grow toward the highest good, that it may no longer have to suffer continued rebirth but go into that state in which it may like God, behold and enjoy forever the hierarchy of ideal forms, in all their truth, beauty, and goodness. (Noss, *MR*, 52)

Before this final blissful state is realized, we may come back even as animals.

The similarities between Plato and the Hindu doctrine are striking, especially the "personal" system of Ramanuja (1017–1137). This school developed from the earlier "impersonal" view, but the key ingredients are the same for both. The soul, called *jiva* (or *jivatman*), survives death as a mental entity called the subtle body. This entity will enter a new embryo and bring along with it the karma of all its past lives. Karma is both the deeds done and the ethical consequences attached to them; if you do good deeds, you are born into a "pleasant womb," and if you do evil, your destiny will be proportionately less noble. You might even find yourself in a "foul and stinking womb," like that of an animal, vegetable, or mineral. The cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*) is often depicted as a wheel, with death as the gateway to new life. The goal is to escape from this cycle.

This escape is called *moksha*, and it is here that the difference arises between the personal and impersonal forms of reincarnation. The impersonal version says that once all karmic debt is eliminated, the soul loses all identity and simply becomes one with the One; the self merges with *brahman* (the divine, the impersonal force). The personal view says that the soul is simply liberated to be itself, fully devoted to *bhagwan* (the personal god).

Other forms of reincarnation differ on what happens at the point of death and on the nature of the ultimate state of *moksha*, but the general pattern is retained. Buddhists say that the unconscious soul (*vinnana*) continues, that the self (its intellect, emotions, consciousness, etc.) is obliterated at death, but its karma remains in cyclical *samsara*. The final state, wherein one is delivered from the cycles of reincarnation, is nirvana, the cessation of all striving, the final state of nothingness.

Most of the so-called Christian forms of reincarnation do not differ in their basic concept. During this life a decision is made about whether to accept or reject Christ. The simplest model has those who accept Christ going to be with God, while those who reject Him are reincarnated until they do recognize Christ; in this way, all will eventually be saved.[1] MacGregor's "Christian reincarnation theory" provides ultimate punishment for those who are lost causes, and the

"punishment" is annihilation.[2] Hick's theory is somewhat novel in that he supposes humans will be reincarnated to live on other planets.

REASONS OFTEN GIVEN FOR BELIEF IN REINCARNATION

Three of the most basic rationales given for reincarnation are belief in an immortal soul, psychological evidence of past lives, and the need for justice.

Immortality of the Soul

Plato's main reason for believing in transmigration of souls (i.e., the soul's movement from one body to another) was that he considered the immaterial part of man to be uncreated and indestructible. It exists before we are born, continues to exist after we die, and nothing, either good or evil, can corrupt it. Reincarnationists, then, argue that it is likely that the soul appears in the world in different bodies at various times—this is part of its perfecting process. Pantheistic philosophies[3] assume that all is eternal and divine, so the soul is equally incorruptible.

Psychological Evidence of Past Lives

Ian Stevenson (b. 1918), a parapsychologist and researcher of past-life recall, claims:

> The idea of reincarnation may contribute to an improved understanding of such diverse matters as: phobias and philias of childhood; skills not learned in early life.… [Reincarnation explains] abnormalities of child-parent relationships; vendettas and bellicose nationalism; childhood sexuality and gender identity confusion; birthmarks, congenital deformities and internal diseases; differences between members of monozygotic twin pairs; and abnormal appetites during pregnancy. ("EVIR" in *JNMD*, 305)

Past lives recalled during hypnosis or other altered-consciousness states have been helpful to some in explaining feelings that a patient cannot account for or overcome. By allegedly finding some such experience, many have been relieved of the feelings of fear, depression, or unwantedness. Though psychologists and hypnotists who work with past-life recall often don't actually believe the events recounted by their patients are real, they use it because it works. As one therapist said, "It doesn't matter if it is real or imagined if it helps someone make sense

out of their lives.… If it works, who cares?" (Boeth, "ISPL" in *DTH*).

The Need for Justice

For some people, the idea of having more than one chance at life seems to be the most equitable solution. If you do bad things, you pay the price; if you do good, you get a reward. Punishment is in proportion to how bad your karma is rather than "all or nothing." The idea of condemning someone to an infinite hell for finite sin sounds too harsh; karma is just. Suffering in this life can be justified if it is really an outworking of our karma from past lives, and this explanation eliminates the need to make God responsible for suffering in any way. All suffering can be explained as the outworking of bad deeds done in former incarnations.

Quincy Howe (b. 1934) observed, "One of the most attractive aspects of reincarnation is that it removes entirely the possibility of damnation" (*RC*, 51). If the doctrine of eternal punishment seems totally incompatible with God's love, reincarnation suggests a way in which God can punish sin (through the law of karma), demand faith in Christ (during at least one lifetime), and still ultimately save everyone. If someone rejects Christ, he gets a second chance, and a third, and so on, until he does believe. This even protects human freedom, because God does not coerce anyone to believe; He merely gives them more time to exercise their freedom. Moral progress and spiritual growth can also occur during successive lifetimes, which will allow individuals to better understand God's love. Indeed, some think that moral perfection cannot be attained without reincarnation.

Accordingly, reincarnation also makes salvation a personal matter between the individual and God. Instead of dealing with problems of imputed guilt from Adam's sin or being reckoned righteous by faith, everyone is responsible for taking care of his own karma. Howe, arguing that atonement by a substitute is no longer valid, says, "Man himself must make his peace with God" (ibid., 107). MacGregor explains, "My karma is particular to *me*. It is *my* problem and the triumph over it is *my* triumph." This eliminates the injustice of being punished, in any way, for Adam's sin and the injustice of Christ dying for sins that He did not commit. Instead, Jesus' death becomes our inspiration, "the perfect catalyst" for working out our salvation and assuring us "that one stands in the unfailing light of God's love" (*CK*, 4). Jesus died as our example, not as our substitute.[4]

Biblical Arguments Given for Reincarnation

Some have attempted to scripturally justify reincarnation, using several passages in this regard.

Job 1:21

Job cried, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there” (NKJV). Some reincarnationists take this to indicate the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*).

However, nothing of the kind is asserted in the text. This is simply a poetic expression of the truth that we bring nothing with us into this life and we take nothing with us when we die. The word *womb* (Heb: *shammah*) is often used figuratively of the earth.[5]

Jeremiah 1:5

God declared to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (TLB). This is sometimes taken to refer to the soul’s preexistence.

In response, the phrase “I knew you” does not refer to a preexistent state before conception, but to a prenatal state before birth. This state, referenced elsewhere in Scripture,[6] supports the humanity of the unborn, but not the preexistence of the soul before conception (let alone cycles of reincarnation after death).[7]

Matthew 11:14

“Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him” (NASB). This allegedly refers to Elijah being reincarnated as John the Baptist (cf. Mal. 4:5).

In response, the parallel passage in Luke demonstrates that John was not a reincarnation of Elijah; Jesus speaks of John coming “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (1:17). Elisha received this same anointing of Elijah’s “spirit” after Elijah went to heaven (2 Kings 2:9–18), but obviously he was not a reincarnation—he already had his own soul.

John 3:3

Some use Jesus’ statement “You must be born again” as support for reincarnation’s death-rebirth cycle.

Here too, though, the verse is taken out of context. Jesus is referring to the

new birth, that is, a spiritual birth. He explained this when He said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit” (v. 6 NKJV). Further, the Greek word for *again* (*anôthen*) is better translated “from above,” meaning a spiritual birth. There is nothing here about another physical birth after death.

John 9:1–3

Jesus’ words about the blind man not sinning before his birth is supposed to support the reincarnationist belief that one’s sins in a previous existence cause his fate in this life.

There is no such teaching in this context; Jesus was debunking a Jewish belief of the time that birth defects were due to prenatal sins in the womb. Further, if the reference is taken to refer to a preexistent state, then it is a strong condemnation of reincarnationist belief that sins in a previous state cause bad conditions in this life. Jesus rebuked those who held this: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned [before birth], [that he should be born blind], but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (v. 3 NKJV).

1 Corinthians 15:35–55

In this passage Paul says, “To each seed its own body” (v. 38 NKJV), which some take to be a Christian correlation to karma.

A close look at the context shows that Paul is not speaking of reincarnation but of resurrection. Resurrection is a one-time event into one’s own body, now made immortal; reincarnation is a many-time event into other bodies, all of which are mortal. Paul declared, “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (v. 53 NKJV).

AN EVALUATION OF REINCARNATION

Comments here fall into three categories: First, a response to arguments for reincarnation; second, some arguments against reincarnation; and finally, the biblical basis for rejecting reincarnation.

A Response to the Arguments for Reincarnation

In addition to the alleged biblical arguments for reincarnation, the other

arguments also lack any real foundation. At best they show only the possibility (not the reality) of reincarnation.

Immortality Does Not Prove Reincarnation

Even if one could demonstrate the platonic sense of the soul's immortality (i.e., indestructibility), it would not thereby prove reincarnation for two reasons: (1) The soul could survive forever in a disembodied form, or (2) the soul could be reunited with its body in a permanent immortal resurrection body.[8]

Past Life "Memories" Do Not Prove Reincarnation

There are other ways to explain so-called "memories" from supposed past lives.

For one thing, they may be false memories. Many "recollections" have been shown to be untrue. Some people have "remembered" things that were empirically false.

In addition, these "memories" of previous lives are more abundant among those who have been reared in cultures or contexts where they were exposed to the teaching of reincarnation, which suggests that they received these ideas when they were young and later revived them from their memory bank.

What is more, there are notable cases like that of Bridie Murphy, whose alleged memories of past lives turned out to be nothing more than stories her grandmother read to her when she was a little girl.

Finally, some false "memories" have been implanted by hypnosis (the power of suggestion) or guided imagery therapy during counseling or teaching sessions. False-memory syndrome is recognized by the field of psychology.

Reincarnation Does Not Solve the Issue of Justice

Rather than solving the problem of unjust suffering, reincarnation simply says that suffering is just after all: The innocent are not really innocent because the karma of their past lives is causing suffering in this life. Reincarnationists complain that when a Christian is faced with giving a reason to the grieving mother of a dying infant, he can only say, "I don't know." The law of karma can give her an answer: "Your sweet little angel was a demon in a previous life." This is not a *solution* to the problem but a *subversion* of it. Reincarnation doesn't *deal* with the difficulty but rather *dismisses* it.

Karma is not a moral prescription. Karma is a system of retribution only; it has no content that tells us what to do. It is enforcement but not law itself; it is a

penal system without a legislature. It is an impersonal, amoral principle of act/consequence relations.

Some Arguments Against Reincarnation

The Argument From the Lack of Moral Grounds

In pantheistic systems there is no source for the moral benchmarks that karma enforces. Why punish people if there is no ultimate standard of right and wrong? *Pantheistic morality is relative*! Alan Watts (1915–1973), a spokesman for Zen Buddhism, wrote,

> Buddhism does not share the Western view that there is a moral law, enjoined by God or by nature, which it is man's duty to obey. The Buddha's precepts of conduct—abstinence from taking life, taking what is not given, exploitation of the passions, lying and intoxication—are voluntarily assumed rules of expediency. (*WZ*, 52)

This poses real problems for reincarnation. Relativism is a self-obliterating ethical position. You can't say "Relativism is true" or even "Relativism is better than absolutism," because these statements assume an absolute value that contradicts relativism. C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) explains,

> The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures the two things is something different from either.… You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that real Right than others. (*MC*, 25)

In other words, in order to say that relativism is right, you have to assume that some absolute Right exists, which is relativistically impossible. Unless something is absolutely right, nothing can be actually right; and if nothing is right (or wrong), then karma has no business punishing anyone for it.

The Humanitarian Argument

Reincarnation is ultimately anti-humanitarian, generating no social compassion. Anyone who helps the millions of poor, crippled, maimed, homeless, and starving people lining Indian streets is working against the law of karma. People suffer to work off their karmic debt; if you help them, then they will have to come back again and suffer even more to work off that debt. Therefore, social compassion in India is largely the result of Christian influence.

The Psychological Argument

Reincarnation depends on the premise that an individual had highly developed self-consciousness before birth to receive, store, and recall information. By contrast, it is a scientific fact that this ability does not develop until a person is about a year-and-a-half old, which is why we don't remember our first year. That every human being somehow mysteriously "forgets" his/her highly developed consciousness and that most never regain it—unless trained and "enlightened" to do so—is highly implausible. The hypothesis is without foundation and entirely *Deus ex machina*.

The Scientific Argument

An individual, unique human life begins at conception, when the twenty-three chromosomes of a male sperm unite with the twenty-three chromosomes of a female ovum and form a forty-six-chromosome human zygote that has life (soul) and body.[9] To claim that this soul (life) existed in a previous body has no scientific basis. The biological evidence points to conception as the point of origin for an individual human being.

The Social Argument

If reincarnation were correct, society should be improving. After all, if we have had hundreds (even thousands) of chances to improve over countless millions (or billions) of years, there should be some evidence. The problem is, we have no evidence of such *moral* progress, even after thousands of years of recorded history. What we have improved is the means by which we can manifest hate, cruelty, and barbarism toward other human beings.

The Logical Argument

Putting guilt back one lifetime begins an infinite regress of explanations that never pays off with an explanation. If the suffering of each life depends on the sins of a former life, then how did it all begin? If there was a first life, from where did the karmic debt come to explain the suffering in that life? Is evil an eternal principle, right alongside God? We can't keep backpedaling forever to solve the problem of evil; the law of karma fails to resolve the conflict.

An infinite regress in time is not possible, since if there were an infinite number of moments before today, today would never have come. Today *has* come, so there was not an infinite number of previous lives.

On the other hand, if there were not an infinite number of lives before this one, then there must have been a first life in which a previous incarnation was not the cause of its evil. This is what theism holds, viz., that evil originated because of an individual's free choice in that first lifetime (e.g., the angel Lucifer and the man Adam).[10]

The Moral-Perfection Argument

Even on the reincarnationist assumption that there has been an infinite amount of time before today, the view faces another serious problem: In an infinite amount of moments, there is more than enough time to achieve the perfection of all souls. As such, all souls should have received oneness with God by now, if there had been an infinite amount of time to do so. They have not, and, hence, reincarnation has failed as a solution to the problem of evil. Further, if perfection has not been achieved in an infinite amount of time, then what reason do we have to believe that more time will help?

Further, if each incarnation is the result of evil done in a previous incarnation, then there was no way to get reincarnation going in the beginning; if there was no evil done to deserve the first incarnation, then there was no impetus to be punished by being incarnated in a body in the first place. Reincarnation does not explain the very first incarnation (punishment), and if it attempts to avoid the dilemma by positing another reason than karma, then it forsakes the very law that makes reincarnation necessary.

The Anthropological Argument

As was shown earlier,[11] humans are a soul/body unity. That it's wrong to claim that a human being *is* a soul and merely *has* a body is supported by Scripture, science, and reason. The human soul is united not only to *a* body but to *its own* body, and, alone, the soul is incomplete, naked, desiring to be "clothed" (2 Cor. 5:2), awaiting reunion with *its* body, not reincarnation into *a* body.

Biblical Arguments Against Reincarnation

Human Beings Are Created; They Are Not Eternal

The Bible is God's inspired Word,[12] with divine authority in whatever it teaches. According to Scripture, human beings were created (Gen. 1:27). Only God is eternal (1 Tim. 6:16); all other things were created by Him (John. 1:3;

Col. 1:15–16) and exist because God brought them into existence from nothing, *ex nihilo*.[13] This is not only true of Adam and Eve, the first humans, but of all others after them.[14] All humans since Adam began and begin at conception (Ps. 51:5; Matt. 1:20), before which they did not exist. Consequently, there can be no reincarnation—a soul has had no preincarnate existence.

The Intermediate State Is Disembodied

Upon death the soul leaves the body and goes into the spirit world, where it awaits resurrection back into its body.[15] God's Word contains not the slightest hint that the soul after death goes into another body.[16]

The State After Disembodiment Is Resurrection, Not Reincarnation

Reincarnation is the belief that, after death, the soul passes on to another body. By contrast, the Bible declares that, after death, the same physical body is made incorruptible at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:53). Rather than a series of bodies that die, resurrection makes alive forever the same body that died. Rather than a soul in a body, resurrection sees man as a soul/body unity. Reincarnation is a never-ending process toward so-called perfection; reincarnation is an intermediate state in which the soul longs to be disembodied and absorbed. Resurrection is a perfected state, the ultimate state, in which the whole person, body and soul, enjoys God's goodness. In reincarnation one is saved *from* his body; in resurrection one is saved *in* his body.[17]

Resurrection	**Reincarnation**
Happens only once	Occurs many times
Into the same body	Into a different body
Into an immortal body	Into a mortal body
A perfect state	An imperfect state
Salvation in the body	Salvation from the body
The ultimate state	An intermediate state
A reward	A punishment

Humans Die Only Once

According to Holy Scripture, human beings die once, followed by the judgment (Heb. 9:27). We are born once, we live once, and we die once. According to reincarnationism, we live many times, repeatedly born and reborn, which the renowned Hindu apologist Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) recognized as the definitive difference between Christianity and Hinduism (*HVL*, 118).

The Finality of Judgment Is Opposed to Reincarnation

Not only do human beings live and die once, followed by judgment, but the judgment is final, eternal—of salvation or of damnation.[18] If it lasts forever, there is no possibility of reincarnation into another body; we instead will be resurrected into our own bodies.[19]

Jesus Rejected Reincarnation

When asked whether a man's sin before birth was the cause of his sin, Jesus replied: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned … but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3). Whereas, again, this is a reference to the false Jewish belief that one could sin in the womb before birth, thus producing physical deformity, Jesus' reply fits reincarnationism's belief that pre-birth sins affect one's lot in this life. Elsewhere, Jesus made it emphatic that one person's unfortunate lot is not necessarily because of sin (Luke 13:4–5), which is true whether referring to early life, prenatal life, or the alleged preincarnate life.

Reincarnation Is Contrary to the Doctrine of Grace

Reincarnation is based in the doctrine of karma, an inexorable law with no exceptions. Sins cannot be forgiven; if one does not receive his due in this life, then he must get it thereafter.

The Christian gospel is that forgiveness is possible. Jesus forgave His enemies who crucified Him. Christians are to forgive as Christ forgave us (Col. 3:13). Grace renders reincarnation entirely unnecessary.

Salvation is a "gift"[20] received by faith.[21] Rather than working to merit God's favor, the believer is given grace, unmerited favor, by which he is pronounced righteous. God's justice is satisfied because Jesus was punished for the world's sins in His death.[22] Our sins were not ignored; Jesus paid for our guilt by bearing

it as our substitute.[23] All of this is profoundly contrary to karmic doctrine and crushes the need for reincarnation.

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APPENDIX SEVEN

THE GENERAL COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM

The earliest post-apostolic church Fathers held to the New Testament form of government, with a plurality of elders (bishops) and deacons in each independent, self-governing church.[1] By the middle of the second century, one person (called a bishop) had emerged as leader over the elders; later, a head bishop would assume authority over a whole region. Eventually, this led to the primacy of the bishop of Rome, the capital of the empire, in assumption of authority over the whole church; finally, in 1870, this bishop (the pope) was pronounced infallible when speaking officially on matters of faith and practice. Along with the increasing authoritarianism in the Roman Catholic Church, there was also a growing departure from orthodox biblical Christianity. Both of these emerged gradually and can be traced through the general church councils.

These councils, which played an important role in the development of monolithic Roman episcopalism, allegedly are councils involving the whole church, even though sometimes major portions of the church were only sparsely represented. Local councils were in specific geographical areas and are not

considered binding on the whole church unless affirmed by a later ecumenical (church-wide) council. The first eight councils were convened by emperors and the last thirteen by popes.

From the very first council (Nicea I, 325), called by Constantine (c. 274–337), there were forces moving toward authoritarian ecclesiastical structure. By the eighth (Constantinople IV, 869), this was becoming more evident, and from the twelfth council (Lateran IV, 1215) on, the structure of what is currently known as Roman Catholicism was taking shape. The counterreformational Council of Trent (1545–63) solidified Romanism, Vatican I (1870) infallibly permanentized imperial ecclesiastical Romanism, and the nineteenth and twentieth councils perpetuated Roman dogmas.

THE CHURCH COUNCILS

Christendom is divided over the number and nature of the ecumenical church councils. Roman Catholics accept twenty-one ecumenical councils; the Eastern Orthodox accept the authority of only the first seven; Protestants reject the authority of all but the first four; and many Free churches do not accept any church council as authoritative, though they concur generally with Protestants on the major doctrines stated in the first four councils. A survey of the councils is necessary before the pros and cons of these views can be examined.

(1) The First Council of Nicea (325)

The First Council of Nicea was called by the professing Christian Emperor Constantine, who desired to unite the church and solidify his empire. The council affirmed the Trinity and upheld the full deity of Christ as eternal and of the same nature as the Father. The council also formulated the famous Nicene Creed, a condemnation of the heresy of arianism (which denied Christ's deity and thereby divided Christendom).

In addition, Nicea set forth numerous canons that claim to be universally binding on the whole church. These include that bishops should only be appointed by other bishops (Can. 4), that excommunication is to be done by a bishop (Can. 5), and that bishops have jurisdiction over their own geographical areas (Can. 6).[2] Likewise, "it is before all things necessary that they [who convert to the church] should profess in writing that they will observe and follow

the dogmas of the Catholic and Apostolic Church" (in Schaff, *CC*, 19).

(2) The First Council of Constantinople (381)

The First Council of Constantinople was convened by Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379–395) to unite the church. It reaffirmed the Nicene Creed, proclaimed the deity of the Holy Spirit, and united the Eastern Church (which had been divided by the arian controversy). Theodosius is said to have "founded the orthodox Christian state. Arianism and other heresies became legal offenses, sacrifice [to pagan gods] was forbidden, and paganism almost outlawed" (in Cross, ed., *ODCC*, 1361).

The practices of Theodosius I were later codified by Emperor Theodosius II (404–450) into the "Theodosian Code" (proclaimed in 438). This was later superseded by the Justinian Code (539), which added the "Novella" that provides the classic formula for the relation of church and state, in which the church would take care of religious matters and the state, civil matters. This code was later expanded into the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (*Body of Civil Law*), and during the latter Middle Ages this became the basis for Western canon law (ibid., 771), considered binding on all churches under the Roman Church's administration.

(3) The Council of Ephesus (431)

Ephesus condemned nestorianism (which affirms two natures and two persons in Christ). Since Christ is one person with two natures, the council concluded that Mary was truly the mother of God, i.e., the God-bearer, the one who gave birth to the person (Jesus) who is God *and* man. Extracts from Cyril to Nestorius in Session I read:

> This was the sentiment of the holy Fathers; therefore they ventured to call the holy Virgin, the Mother of God, not as if the nature of the Word or his divinity had its beginning from the holy Virgin, but because of her was born that holy body with a rational soul, to which the Word being personally united is said to be born according to the flesh. (in Schaff, *SLNPNF*, 14.198)

(4) The Council of Chalcedon (451)

Chalcedon was called by Emperor Marcian (396–457) to deal with the eutychian (monophysite) heresy that merged the two natures of Christ, making a logically incoherent combination of an infinite/finite nature. Of five-hundred-

plus bishops present, only two were from the West (plus two papal delegates). Eutyches (c. 375–454) had said, “I confess that our Lord was of two natures before the union, but after the union I confess one nature” (in ibid., 258). The council agreed with Archbishop (Pope) Leo I (r. 440–461) to “anathematize” this as “absurd,” “extremely foolish,” “extremely blasphemous,” and “impious” (ibid.). They reaffirmed the decisions of all three previous general councils (in Session IV) as well as “the writings of that blessed man, Leo, Archbishop of all the churches who condemned the heresy of Nestorius and Eutyches, [to] shew what the true faith is” (ibid., 260). The presence of an archbishop (bishop over bishops) represents a new state in the long development of the Roman episcopal hierarchy, which eventually culminated in his supposed infallible authority at Vatican I (1870).

The council also asserted its authority in the excommunication of Bishop Dioscorus (d. 454), declaring, “On account of your disregard of the divine canons, and your disobedience to his holy ecumenical synod,” you are “deposed from the episcopate and made a stranger to all ecclesiastical order” (ibid., from Session III).

The most controversial canon (28) affirms that “Constantinople, which is New Rome … enjoys equal privileges with the old imperial Rome” and hence “should in ecclesiastical matters also be magnified as she is, and rank next after her” (ibid., 287). Though this was rejected by “Archbishop Leo” of the old Rome, of historic importance is the statement that gives the reason any primacy was given to Rome in the first place: “The Fathers rightly granted privileges to the throne of the old Rome, because it was the royal city” (ibid.). This confirms the interpretation of Irenaeus’s (c. 125–c. 202) statement that the primacy of Rome was reflective, not authoritative; that is, Rome was given more *respect* (not authority) because it was in the empire’s capital and, therefore, more reflective of the whole church than any other, since representatives from around the empire would naturally consort there. Louis-Sébastien le Nain de Tillemont (1637–1698) spoke to the point: “This canon seems to recognize no particular authority in the Church of Rome, save what the Fathers had granted it, as the seat of the empire” (in ibid., 288).

(5) The Second Council of Constantinople (553)

Constantinople II, convoked by Emperor Justinian I (c. 483–565), issued fourteen anathemas, the first twelve directed at Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–

428). A later insert places Origen's name in the eleventh anathema, which was accepted by later popes. Among the heresies condemned are arianism, nestorianism, eutychianism, and monophysitism (Stats. I-XI) and also adoptionism (XII). Mary's perpetual virginity was affirmed, she being called the "ever-virgin Mary, the Mother of God" (Stats. V and XIV).

Karl Joseph von Hefele (1809–1893) recorded that this "Fifth Ecumenical Council should strike the name of the reigning Pope [Virgilius] from the diptychs [double-leafed tablets] as the father of heresy" (in Schaff, op. cit., 305).[3]

(6) The Third Council of Constantinople (680)

Constantinople III, convened by Emperor Constantine IV (Pogonatus—r. 668–685), upheld the "five holy ecumenical councils" (ibid., 345). In addition, it reaffirmed that Christ had two natures united in one person and that he had two wills, one human and one divine, which had a moral unity resulting from the complete harmony between the two natures of the God-man (in opposition to the monothelites). The council also referred to Mary as "our Holy Lady, the holy, immaculate, ever-virgin and glorious Mary, truly and properly the Mother of God" (ibid., 340). Macarius, Archbishop of Antioch (d. c. 684), was condemned, along with "Honorius, some time Pope of Old Rome" (ibid., 342, Session XIII). Catholic apologists have not agreed on an explanation for the dilemma of how an allegedly infallible pope can err when teaching doctrine. One scholar (Pennacchi) thought the council erred and the pope was right. Another (Baronius) held, contrary to fact, that manuscripts have been corrupted—even most Roman Catholic scholars reject this, pointing to the manuscript and citation evidence.[4] Thus, most are left with the claim that Pope Honorius I (r. 625–638) was not speaking *ex cathedra* at the time; this, however, seriously undermines the claim of papal infallibility, since the pope *was* teaching on doctrine, and if his teaching was not infallible, then there is no meaningful distinguishable criteria as to when the pope is speaking *ex cathedra*. If a pope can be fallible sometimes when affirming doctrine, then how can we be sure he is really infallible at other times when affirming doctrine? In fact, *how can we be sure he was infallible when he pronounced his own infallibility in 1870*?

This council claimed to be not only "illuminated by the Holy Spirit" (ibid., 350) but also "inspired by the Holy Spirit" (ibid., 347), purportedly providing "a definition, clean from all error, certain, and infallible" (foreshadowing Vatican I

—ibid., 350). Notable from the church/state standpoint[5] is that following the council, the emperor posted an "imperial edict" in the church, noting "heresy" and warning that "no one henceforth should hold a different faith, or venture to teach one will [in Christ] and one energy [operation of the will]. In no other than the orthodox faith could men be saved" (ibid., 353). Punishments also were listed.

(7) The Second Council of Nicea (787)

Nicea II was called by the Emperor Constantine VI (r. 780–797) and Empress Irene (c. 752–803) and attended by legates of Pope Hadrian I (r. 772–795). Dealing with the iconoclastic controversy, it ruled in favor of venerating images:

> Receiving their holy and honorable reliques with all honor, I salute and venerate these with honor. … Likewise also the venerable images of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ … and of all the Saints, the Sacred Martyrs, and of all the Saints—the sacred images of all these, I salute, and venerate. (ibid., 533)

Further, "anathema to those who do not salute the holy and venerable images" and "anathema to those who call the sacred images idols" (ibid.). In zealous overkill, the council declared "to those who have a doubtful mind and do not confess with their whole heart that they venerate the sacred images, anathema!" (ibid.). They also encouraged prayer to Mary and the Saints, saying, "I ask for the intercession of our spotless Lady, the Holy Mother of God, and those of the holy and heavenly powers and those of all the Saints" (ibid.).

In theory, the council distinguished between worship of God and veneration of images, saying, "The worship of adoration I reserve alone to the supersubstantial and life-giving Trinity" (ibid., 539). However, *in practice* there is no real way to differentiate the two. Further, the Bible forbids making graven images of God or heavenly beings and bowing before them (Ex. 20:4–5).

The canons forbid the secular appointment of bishops, thus solidifying the independent authority of church over against state, and they emphasize the primacy of Peter and apostolic succession (ibid., Session II). In addition, "the holy Roman Church, which has prior rank … is the head of all the Churches of God" (ibid.).

The contemporary iconoclast's objections to the council's decisions are expressed in another council (the Iconoclastic Council of Constantinople [754]), which claimed to be the true seventh ecumenical council. They declared flatly

that “Satan misguided men, so that they worshiped the creature instead of the Creator” (ibid., 543). They argued that “the only admissible figure of the humanity of Christ is bread and wine in the holy Supper” (ibid., 544). Based on Exodus 20:4, “supported by the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers, we declare unanimously, in the name of the Holy Trinity, that there shall be rejected and removed and cursed out of the Christian Church every likeness which is made out of any material and colour whatever by the evil art of painters” (ibid., 545). The council concluded: “If anyone does not accept this our Holy and Ecumenical Seventh Synod, let him be anathema” (ibid., 546). They condemned Germanus of Constantinople (d. c. 740), calling him “the double-minded worshiper of wood!” (ibid., 547).

(8) The Fourth Council of Constantinople (869)

Constantinople IV, the last council to be called by an emperor, explicitly affirmed the Second Council of Nicea (787) and condemned the schism orchestrated by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople (c. 815–c. 897). Photius challenged the *filioque* (lit.: “and the Son”) clause of the Second Nicene Creed (which affirmed that the Holy Spirit also proceeded from the Son), which later became a gargantuan bone of contention between the Western and Eastern Churches (in 1054); again, the Eastern Church rejects the authority of any councils after the seventh.

(9) The First Lateran Council (1123)

Lateran I was the first council to be called by a pope (Callistus II [r. 1119–1124]), which signals a further step in Roman Church development. First Lateran confirmed the Concordat of Worms (1122), which granted the pope, not the emperor, the sole right to invest a bishop-elect with a ring and staff and to receive homage from him before his consecration.

(10) The Second Lateran Council (1139)

Lateran II, convoked by Pope Innocent II (r. 1130–1143) for reforming the Church, condemned the schism of Arnold of Brescia (c. twelfth century), a reformer who spoke against confession to a priest in favor of confession to one another.

(11) The Third Lateran Council (1179)

Lateran III was convened by Pope Alexander III (r. 1159–1181) to counter antipope Callistus III (John de Struma). The council affirmed that the right to elect the pope was restricted to the college of cardinals and that a two-thirds majority was necessary for the pope's election.

(12) The Fourth Lateran Council (1215)

Lateran IV, called by Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216), is considered by many to be a key turning point in the development of Roman Catholicism in distinction from non-Catholic forms of Christianity. The council pronounced the doctrine of transubstantiation, the primacy of the Roman bishop, and the dogma of the seven sacraments. It also gave the Church authority to set up the office of the inquisitors, which gave the Church authority to investigate heresy and turn suspects over to the state for punishment. This was exercised in the Inquisition of Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250) and continued in full force up to the Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century. Pope Innocent IV (r. 1243–1254) even allowed torture to break the resistance of the accused.

(13) The First Council of Lyons (1245)

The First Council of Lyons was convened by Innocent IV to heal the Church's "five wounds":

(1) moral decadence within the clergy;
(2) the danger of the Saracens (Arab Muslims against whom the Crusaders fought);
(3) the Great Schism with the Eastern Church;
(4) the invasion of Hungary by the Tartars; and
(5) the rupture between the Church and Emperor Frederick II.

Lyon I condemned and formally deposed Frederick II for his imprisonment of cardinals and bishops on their way to the council. It instituted minor reforms while leaving primary issues untouched.

(14) The Second Council of Lyons (1274)

Lyons II was called by Pope Gregory X (r. 1272–1276) to bring about union with the Eastern Church, to liberate the Holy Land, and to reform morals within the Catholic Church. Albert the Great (1206–1280) and Bonaventure (c. 1217–1274) attended, but Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) died en route. The council (1) unsuccessfully demanded affirmation of the double procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, which the Eastern Church rejects; (2) approved some newly founded monastic movements, including the Dominicans and the Franciscans; and (3) defined the procession of the Holy Spirit (the *filioque* clause). The Church's union with the East was short-lived, ending in 1289.[6]

(15) The Council of Vienne (1311–1312)

The Council of Vienne was convoked by Pope Clement V (r. 1305–1314) to deal with the Templars (a military order of the Church), accused of heresy and immorality. The council announced reforms, suppressed the Templars, provided assistance for the Holy Land, encouraged missions, and made decrees concerning the Inquisition (instituted formally in 1232 by Frederick II but claimed for the Church).

(16) The Council of Constance (1413–1418)

The Council of Constance was convened by John XXIII (1370–1419) in order to end the Great Schism (of having three simultaneous supposed popes), to reform the church, and to combat heresy.[7] Over two hundred propositions of John Wycliffe (1324–1384) were condemned. Reformer John Hus (c. 1372–1415), who held similar doctrines, refused to recant and was burned at the stake. The council proclaimed the superiority of an ecumenical council over the pope, declaring (in *Haec Sancta*, "Conciliar Decree"), "This Council holds its power direct from Christ; everyone, no matter his rank of office, even if it be papal, is bound to obey it in whatever pertains to faith" (cited in Cross, *ODCC*, 336–37). This ended the long history of increased authority for the Roman bishop that had begun in the second century with the emergence of one fallible bishop in each church and eventuated with one infallible bishop over all the churches.

(17) The Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence (1431–1445)

The Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence, called by Pope Martin V (r. 1417–1431), was a series of councils beginning with Basel (1431), moving to Ferrara (1438–1439), then Florence (1439–1443), and finally Rome (1443–1445). Its chief object was union with the Eastern Church, which sought support from the West against the Turks, who were nearing Constantinople. The controversy centered around double procession of the Holy Spirit, purgatory, and the primacy of the pope. By July 1439, there was East-West agreement on "The Decree of Union," but many bishops subsequently recanted, and the union ceased when the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453. The council and its members were later pronounced heretical.

(18) The Fifth Lateran Council (1513)

Lateran V was called by Pope Julius II (r. 1503–1513) to invalidate the decrees of the antipapal Council of Pisa (1409). Lateran V began a few minor reforms but did not treat the main issues of the coming Protestant Reformation. An Augustinian monk named Martin Luther (1483–1546) *did*, posting his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the church at Wittenburg (October 31, 1517).

(19) The Council of Trent (1545–1563)

The Council of Trent was called to counter the Reformation. Trent declared many of the characteristic doctrines of Roman Catholicism, including the equal validity of tradition with Scripture, the seven sacraments, transubstantiation, good works as necessary for justification, purgatory, indulgences, the veneration of saints and images, prayers to the dead (saints), and the canonicity of eleven apocryphal books. Many Protestants believe Rome apostatized at this point by a denial of the true gospel; others see it as a significant deviation from biblical and historic orthodoxy but not a total apostasy.[8]

(20) The First Council of the Vatican (1870)

Vatican I, called by Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878), denounced pantheism, materialism, and atheism. It also pronounced papal infallibility, rejecting Antoninus of Florence's (1389–1459) formula that the pope "using the counsel and seeking for help of the universal Church" cannot err. Instead, it ruled that the

pope's definitions are "irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church" when speaking *ex cathedra*, that is, as the pastor and doctor of all Christians.

(21) The Second Council of the Vatican (1962–1965)

Vatican II attempted ecumenicity (with Eastern Orthodox and Protestant observers), instituted ritualistic changes (like mass in local languages), pronounced reforms, declared inclusivism for "separated brethren," and accepted the salvation of sincere non-Christians.

In all of this, it is not difficult to see the parallel between increasingly authoritarian church government and the increase of unorthodox views.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH COUNCILS

Many consider the first seven councils as ecumenical, since they occurred before the East-West split between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. However, even some of these did not have strong representation from both sectors, and some affirmed doctrines many consider contrary to biblical teaching (such as the perpetual virginity of Mary and the veneration of images).

Further, many pronouncements of later councils did not attain to the benchmark affirmed by Trent, which demanded "the universal consent of the Fathers" as a doctrine's test for orthodoxy. Some councils pronounced dogmas that have little or no (let alone universal) consent in the early Fathers.

The Roman Catholic View

Roman Catholics maintain that all twenty-one of these councils are ecumenical and binding on the whole Christian church, arguing that it is inconsistent to accept some councils and reject others. However, there are serious problems with this perspective.

First, it entails the claim that the Roman Catholic Church is the only true church on earth. This exclusivistic claim is implausible on its face, since there was a church in the East before there was one in the West. Why, then, should Eastern Orthodoxy be excluded from the true church?

Second, it assumes incorrectly that the true universal church must be

identified with a single visible organization rather than with a general category of all individual churches confessing historic biblical Christianity.

Third, some councils accepted by Rome had inconsistent pronouncements. For example, the sixteenth (Constance) proclaimed an ecumenical council's superiority over the pope. By contrast, Vatican I claimed that when speaking *ex cathedra*, the definitions "of the Roman Pontiff *from himself*, but not from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable" (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 1840). Clearly, both cannot be true—either the pope can make infallible proclamations alone, or he cannot without the aid of a council.

Fourth, there are good biblical reasons to reject the proclamations of many councils, beginning with the fifth (see Geisler and MacKenzie, *RCE*, Part 2). These include the perpetual virginity of Mary (Constantinople II), the veneration of images (Nicea II), the pope's authority (Constantinople IV and Lateran I), the condemnation of not confessing sin to a priest (Lateran II), the authority of the college of cardinals to elect a pope (Lateran III), the primacy of the Roman bishop, the seven sacraments, transubstantiation (Lateran IV), and the condemnation of Wycliffe and Hus (Lyons I). This is to say nothing of the additional errors pronounced by Trent and later councils, including apocryphal works added to the Bible, prayers for the dead, veneration of saints, worship of the consecrated host, the necessity of works as a condition for salvation, papal infallibility, and the bodily assumption of Mary.

Fifth, and finally, there are no logical reasons why all twenty-one councils must be accepted. The history of many organizations reveals the same pattern as Rome; namely, they start out well and then deviate from their founders' teachings somewhere along the line. The U.S. Supreme Court's interpretations of the U.S. Constitution are a case in point; note particularly its interpretation of the First Amendment, which did not even contain the words "separation of church and state"; these have subsequently been taken out of context from a private letter (of Thomas Jefferson) in a revision of the framers' intention that "Congress" (the *federal government*) should make "no law respecting the establishment of religion."[9] Knowing it is not an uncommon occurrence of organizations to stray from their original intentions, other explanations of the councils must be examined.

The Eastern Orthodox View

The Eastern Church is sometimes called "the church of the seven councils,"

since those councils are believed to be infallible in their pronouncements. The Orthodox reject as heretical some Roman pronouncements, such as, for example, papal infallibility. They embrace the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. Whereas they consider the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, they also see it as part of the larger concept of tradition. As Eastern Orthodox theologian Timothy Ware (b. 1934) puts it, the Bible "must not be regarded as something set up *over* the Church, but as something that lives and is understood *within* the Church" (*OC*, 199).

Protestants reject the Eastern Orthodox view for several reasons.

First, councils five through seven accept some unbiblical teachings, such as the perpetual virginity of Mary and the veneration of images (a violation of the second commandment).

Second, the Orthodox position is a rejection of *sola scriptura*, affirmed by early Fathers and reaffirmed by Reformers (see Keith Mathison, *SSS*).

Third, the Eastern view is highly mystical, setting forth no objective criteria by which the Spirit's voice is discerned in the church traditions.

Fourth, contrary to the Eastern Orthodox view, the church did not create the canon (ibid., 227) but simply recognized the prophetic books that God, by His inspiration, determined to be canonical (see Geisler and Nix, *GIB*, Chap. 13).

Fifth, there are no objective criteria by which ecumenical and non-ecumenical councils are distinguished. Even Orthodox scholar Timothy Ware admits: "What it is that makes a council ecumenical is not so clear" (*OC*, 252).

Sixth, the Orthodox believe the Fathers are an inspired source of apostolic tradition. However, their justification of the mind of the Fathers is circular, using the mind of the Fathers to justify the mind of the Fathers on Scripture. The Bible doesn't say they were inspired, nor did the Fathers consider themselves inspired.

The Protestant View

Most Protestants, and many Anglicans, demur on the authority and catholicity of any ecumenical council after the fourth, though they may agree with individual statements of later councils. The primary criterion used to determine whether councils are correct is whether they agree with Scripture, since the Bible alone is infallible. Furthermore, as noted above, some councils (like Vatican I and Constance) made contradictory conclusions, and so-called infallible popes (such as Honorius) have taught views that even Rome considers heretical. Thus, many Protestants believe that the true church, the one heir to the pre-Roman

Catholic Church, is the Protestant church (the Roman Church having apostasized at Trent).

The Free-Church View (Including Anabaptists and Others)

Many churches in Christendom deny the authority of any council, though they agree with individual statements by them, particularly in the early ones. These churches insist strongly that only the Bible has binding authority, that all creeds and confessions are manmade, and, thus, that no authority is attached to any church councils, whether local or so-called universal.

This view is unfairly dubbed "solo scriptura" by some (see Mathison, *SSS*, 331) in contrast to the Reformed view of *sola scriptura*, since the latter read the Bible in light of the early Fathers and creeds, whereas the former do not.

However, by holding a free-church view, one need not deny there is *value* to the creeds and councils. In fact, all orthodox Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic, agree with the basic doctrines affirmed in the earlier so-called ecumenical councils, such as the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, Christ's deity, and Christ's hypostatic union (two natures in one person). The main point of the free-church view is simply that, whatever in them may be true, there is no *authority*, either divine or ecclesiastical, to the creedal and conciliar pronouncements.

The founders of the Anabaptist movement made confessions of their own even before the mainline Reformers did. For example, the "Eighteen Dissertations" of Balthasar Hubmaier (c. 1480–1528) took on a kind of confessional status among early followers, and the earliest formal confession was the Schleitheim Confession of Faith (1527).[10] The introduction to the former even speaks directly to the issue of confessions in a favorable way:

> Beloved men and brethren: it is an old custom to us from the times of the apostles, that when evil things befall concerning the faith, all men who wish to speak the word of God, and are of a Christian way of thinking, should assemble to search the Scriptures.… Such an assembly has been called the synod, or chapter, or brotherhood.

Anabaptists not only believed in confessions by synods of believers, but they believed this was a valid practice going back to apostolic times—many Anabaptists accepted the Apostles' Creed. However, they were likewise emphatic (to quote Hubmaier's introduction to his dissertations) that the confession must have "Scriptural foundations," which alone is the authority of our faith.

The Plymouth Brethren View (Darbyism)

A more radical view is found in the writings of John Nelson Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement. Darby not only rejected any authority for church councils, he denied that there was any church over which they could have authority, holding that the church Christ announced in Matthew 16 was ruined.[11] In short, the apostles failed in their mission, so there is no visible church of Christ, but instead there are assemblies of believers to break bread and edify one another. Because no single organization on earth can be identified as the visible church, no so-called church council is binding.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it took many centuries for authoritative episcopal church government to gradually emerge from the simple, self-governing, independent New Testament churches to authoritarian Roman Catholicism. Along with this development was an increasing acceptance of false doctrine and practices.

The seeds were found even in New Testament and apostolic times (cf. 3 John 9; John 21:22–23). False traditions could spring up from the start, and they could spread more easily without apostles there to squelch them. Tradition is neither authoritative nor reliable except insofar as it is accurately transmitted; written transmission (such as exists in Scripture and other writings based on it) are the only reliable source we have of apostolic teaching.

By the mid-second century apocryphal gospels were emerging. Due to the attacks on Christianity at the time, there was strong motivation to develop an ecclesiology that would provide a united front against divergent heretical groups, reflected in Irenaeus's emerging episcopal view of church government, which achieved a more mature form in Cyprian (by the mid-third century).

Even if some second-century writers *can* be shown to have favored the primacy of Rome as the center of Christianity, this does not support later Catholic pronouncements on papal infallibility. The early Fathers constantly appealed to the original "apostles" (plural) as the God-established authority, and Peter, at most a cofounder of the church at Rome, stressed biblical primacy, demonstrating that all ecclesiastical authority is based on Scripture, not the reverse.

If Irenaeus's words (in *AH*, 3.3.2) *are* understood to mean that "every Church should agree with this Church [at Rome]"in his day, it still does not follow that Rome could not later deviate and become an unreliable source for essential truth. This is precisely what Protestants believe, pointing to numerous Catholic teachings supported neither by Scripture nor the early Fathers (see Geisler and MacKenzie, *RCE*, Part 2).

Finally, Constantine's conversion and his use of state power to influence the emergence of an imperial church structure was a significant catalyst in the formation of monolithic episcopal government. This, combined with the natural penchant for power, produced the Roman Church with its claim to papal infallibility and other unbiblical teachings, well underway by Lateran IV, heightened in the doctrinal deviations of Trent, and culminating in the disastrous dogma of papal infallibility at Vatican I.

Where, then, is the true visible church? Organizationally, there is none, and in fact, there never was one except for a short time in Jerusalem after Pentecost. Rather, as shown earlier,[12] from the earliest times there was not one church but many independent, autonomous New Testament churches (Acts 14:23), each built on the authority of apostolic teaching (Eph. 2:20; Acts 2:42) as inscripturated in the New Testment. Other than the one invisible universal church known as the "body of Christ,"[13] the only real sense in which there ever was one universal *visible* church on earth was the first one in Jerusalem before anyone died. The apostles themselves started many churches that were not unified under one organizational structure. The only other way it is proper to speak of a universal visible church is as a generic generalization of the many individual self-governing churches that follow apostolic doctrine and practice.

The true visible church of Christ on earth is not in any single denomination or organization of churches, but in the collective body of believers who confess the basic saving truths of the Christian faith.[14] This spiritual brotherhood is composed of all true believers, whether Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, whether Protestant or Anabaptist; in Christ there is neither ethnic nor denominational difference, and rather than any organizational banner or denominational structure, Christ alone is the invisible Head of all visible churches. While they have *unity* in doctrine and practice, they have no uniformity in ritual or governmental form. The visible unity of believers is the result of their manifestation in the doctrine and deeds of their invisible Head (Christ), regardless of what label is on the local assembly to which they belong. (See William Nix, "The True Church and Its Message.")

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APPENDIX EIGHT

THE ROLE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT APOSTLES

Only certain persons were called apostles in the New Testament. The first group is called "the Twelve," the apostles directly chosen by Jesus while on earth. They are named in the Gospels and Acts.

The root meaning of the term *apostle* (Gk: *apostolos*) is "messenger" or "one sent." In this sense Jesus was called an "apostle" (or messenger—Heb. 3:1) from God. Also, some who were messengers, or representatives, of the church or of the apostles were called apostles (cf. 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25), as were some associates of the apostles who sent them on missions (Acts 14:14–15).

In addition to the title of "apostle," used by the Twelve,[1] an apostle was an elder by office (1 Peter 5; 2 John 1), but he was an apostle by gift (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28). The New Testament uses the terms *bishop* (1 Tim. 3:1–2 NKJV) and *overseer* (Titus 1:5, 7; Phil. 1:1) synonymously for *elder* (cf. Acts 14:23); as we noted in chapter 4, *elder* is of Jewish origin and *bishop* of Greek origin.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

In Matthew 10:2–4 the apostles' names are given as follows:

> Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;

> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him [Jesus].

In Luke 6:13–16, a parallel text, they are named thus:

> Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

In Acts 1:13 we read:

> Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

After Judas Iscariot's death, he was replaced by Matthias, who was "added to the eleven apostles" (v. 26).

If the lists are merged, we get the following twelve apostles:

(1) Simon (called Peter);
(2) Andrew (Peter's brother);
(3) James (the son of Zebedee);
(4) John (the younger brother of James);
(5) Philip;
(6) Bartholomew;
(7) Thomas;
(8) Matthew (also known as Levi);
(9) James (the son of Alphaeus);
(10) Thaddaeus (known as Judas, the son of James—John 14:22);
(11) Simon the Zealot; and
(12) Judas Iscariot (replaced after death by Matthias).

So two apostles were named James, two were called Simon, two were named Judas, two were gospel writers (Matthew and John), and then there were Bartholomew, Andrew, Philip, and Thomas.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

Another category of apostle is that of Paul. He was not chosen by the Twelve, nor was he a delegate of theirs: He was directly chosen by Christ (Gal. 1:1ff.)

and was an independent eyewitness of Christ.[2] Three main facts are of note.

First, Paul was a true apostle (1 Cor. 9:11; 2 Cor. 12:12). Though he was called independently of the Twelve, they confirmed his apostleship (Gal. 1–2).

Second, contrary to the claim of some, Paul was not "the twelfth apostle" as opposed to Matthias, who had been legitimately elected after prayer by a vote and was, according to the inspired text, "added to the eleven" (Acts 1:26; cf. 2:14).

Third, Paul is distinguished from the Twelve in many passages,[3] and his special apostleship was to the Gentiles (1 Tim. 2:7; Gal. 2:9).

The Prerequisites of an Apostle

Apostleship necessitated certain qualifications.

First, the Twelve were companions of Jesus.[4] Regarding this condition, Paul's situation was unique, since he was not an earthly companion of Christ.

Second, they were all (even Paul) directly called by Jesus.[5]

Third, they were all eyewitnesses of the Resurrection.[6]

Fourth, their message was supernaturally confirmed.[7]

There were, of course, some false apostles who did not meet these qualifications; their presence in the church was mentioned by both John (Rev. 2:2) and Paul (2 Cor. 11:13).

The Powers of an Apostle

The "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12) included the ability to perform certain supernatural acts (Acts 2:43; 5:12). Such special powers, held *only* by the apostles or those to whom the apostles gave them, included the following:

(1) the power to open the kingdom (Matt. 16:19; cf. Acts 2, 10).
(2) the power to bind and loose from sin (Matt. 18:18).
(3) the power to heal all (even incurable) sicknesses (Matt. 10:8; Acts 28:8–9).
(4) the power to exorcize demons (Matt. 10:8).
(5) the power to perform miraculous signs (Acts 5:12; Heb. 2:3–4).
(6) the power to raise the dead (Matt. 10:8; Acts 9:40; 20:9–10);
(7) the power to bestow the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues (Acts 8:14–

19; 10:44; 19:6).
(8) the power to give other spiritual gifts (Acts 6:6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6).
(9) the power of capital punishment (used on those who lied to the Spirit, Acts 5:9–10).

The Purposes of an Apostle

The apostolic purposes included the following:

(1) to proclaim Christ's kingdom (Matt. 10:7; Mark 3:14; 6:7; Luke 6:1–13; 9:1);
(2) to be the foundation of His church (Eph. 2:20);
(3) to give the Spirit and tongues to others (Acts 8:18; 19:6);
(4) to establish the church's doctrine (Acts 2:42; 15:1–29);
(5) to complete the canon for the church (John 16:13; Heb. 1:1; 2:3–4);
(6) to reveal the mystery of the church (Eph. 3:4–6);
(7) to give witness to the Resurrection (Acts 1:22; 4:33; 1 Cor. 9:1).

The Prominence of Some Apostles

Some Were Considered Different Due to Their Ministries

Certain apostles had prominent roles. For example, Peter had the "keys" to open the door of the gospel (Matt. 16:18–19), and these he used first for the Jews (Acts 2) and later for the Gentiles (Acts 10).

Among the Twelve, there was an inner circle of apostles composed of Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1); these same three were called "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9). While some were considered more eminent than others (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11), their prominence was by reputation due to their ministry (Gal. 2:2), not by official role. Peter was the apostle to the Jews, the "circumcised" (v. 7 NKJV), and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; 1 Tim. 2:7; Gal. 2:9).

All Were the Same in Authority and in Miraculous Power

Both Peter and Paul healed the sick and raised the dead (Acts 3, 9, 20, 28). Both could give the Holy Spirit and tongues to others (2, 8, 10, 19). All the Twelve were part of the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20; cf. Rev. 21:14), and had the power to bind and loose from sins (Matt. 18:18).

The Proxy of an Apostle (Apostolic Delegates)

Apostles were not without associates. Some of these associates are even called "messengers" (Gk: *apostolos*). They were sent out by an apostle or a church to aid in the work of the apostolic ministry.

Barnabas, an associate of the apostle Paul, was called an "apostle" (Acts 14:14; cf. 4:36). The same term is used of Epaphroditus, called "your messenger" (Phil. 2:25). Titus and other unnamed "brothers" also were called "representatives [Gk: *apostolai*] of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23).

Andronicus and Junia "were of note among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7). This may mean they were prominent in apostolic circles; whatever it means, they were not apostles, but rather messengers of the apostles or, specifically, of a church or of Paul.[8]

Although not all are called "apostles," many New Testament figures qualify under this broad sense of an apostolic messenger, including:

(1) Timothy,[9]
(2) Titus (Titus 1:5),
(3) Luke,[10]
(4) Silas (Silvanus—Acts 15:22, 32),
(5) John Mark (Acts 15:36–37),
(6) Tychicus (Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:2),
(7) Clement (Phil. 4:3),
(8) Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12–13),
(9) Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20),
(10) Demas (2 Tim. 4:10),
(11) Apollos (1 Cor. 3:6; Acts 18:24),
(12) Barnabas (Acts 1:14), and
(13) others.

These were delegates of the apostles (Phil. 2:25; 2 Cor. 8:23), so their authority was delegated also (Titus 2:15) rather than being inherent to their function. The actual office of apostle was limited to the Twelve and to Paul—those who were directly called by Christ, had seen Him after the Resurrection, and were given special "sign" gifts.

The Permanence of an Apostle

The ministry of the apostles was both temporary and permanent. While their office and function as founders of the church were completed in the first century, their influence lives on through the church and through their New Testament writings.

The Apostolic Office Was Not Continued

Other than replacing Judas with Matthias (Acts 1:26) to complete their number before receiving the Holy Spirit, the twelve apostles never appointed successors before or when they died. Once they had received the Holy Spirit, they and they alone composed the authoritative, foundational group that Christ made the basis of His church, Himself being the chief Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6). The apostle James is a clear case in point: When he died, no replacement was made (Acts 12:1–2). Instead, apostles appointed elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) in each church to oversee the work for which they had laid the foundation (Acts 2:42). Consequently, in this sense, there is no apostolic succession.

Apostolic Influence Did Continue

Almost all the apostles had died before the canon of Scripture was completed; during their lifetime they wrote the works that formed it. Paul spoke of exchanging inspired books with other churches (Col. 4:16) and cited Matthew 10:7 in 2 Timothy 1:9–12; Peter referred to a collection of Paul's writings as "scripture" (2 Peter 3:15–16). Not only does the apostles' influence live on in their writings, but the church, of which they laid the foundation, ever abides and is still being built (Eph. 2:21–22).

Apostolic Destiny

The apostles' influence also lives on in heaven, where they appear during the Tribulation (Rev. 18:20). After this, they will reign with Christ in the messianic kingdom (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:1–6) and, finally, will live with Him in the heavenly city—indeed, their names are on its gates (21:14).

Conclusion

While the apostolic office did not continue after the apostles' time, their written authority continues to exist in the New Testament, composed under their

direction. Jesus had promised to lead them into “all truth” and bring “all things” to their remembrance (John 14:26, 13). The only authentic record we have of their teaching is found in the New Testament’s twenty-seven books. As such, only these books are the divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:16) and infallible Word of God (John 10:35; cf. 2 Peter 3:15–16).

Since the apostolic signs died with the apostles, the special gifts of exorcizing demons on command, raising the dead, instant healing of even incurable diseases (Matt. 10:8), and speaking in tongues also died with them.[11] Even though the fact of miracles exists, since God can perform one whenever His chooses, there is no evidence that anyone alive today possesses these apostolic powers, which were necessary only then to confirm the new revelation and to establish the church’s foundation.[12]



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[1] The Septuagint, also abbreviated “LXX.”

[2] See also chapters 4–5.

[3] See chapter 2.

[4] See chapters 2–6.

[5] See chapters 8–9.

[6] Predicted in Matthew 16:18 and beginning on the Day of Pentecost (when believers were baptized into the body—Acts 1:5; 2:1–3; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

[7] See “Universal Church/Local Church(es)” table in chapter 4.

[8] As opposed to a lawful assembly; Acts 19:32, 39, 41.

[9] E.g., cf. Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12.

[10] See Volume 2, chapter 4.

[11] See Volume 3, chapter 7.

[12] 1 Peter 1:2 NKJV; cf. Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:11.

[13] See Volume 2, chapter 8.

[14] Ibid., chapter 23.

[15] See below, under “The Establishment of the Church on the Day of Pentecost.”

[16] While technically the church *as such* is not called a mystery (see Allis, *PC*, 92), the church involves at its heart the mystery of Jew and Gentile being united into one body (Eph. 3:6). Without this mysterious union, there would be no church.

[17] Some of the blessings are *not* the church’s heritage; see chapter 15; cf. chapters 13–14.

[18] Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25.

[19] The Old Testament predicts this; e.g., Gen. 12:3; Isa. 2:6; 49:6; 60:3.

[20] Eph. 3:6; Col. 1:26–27; Rom. 16:25.

[21] Some suggest it started with John the Baptist because Jesus said, “The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached” (Luke 16:16 NKJV). However, His statement

that even the least in the kingdom would be greater than John indicates that John was not in the church (Matt. 11:11). John was long dead before the One he said would (with the Spirit) baptize people into the body did so (1 Cor. 12:13). This baptism was yet future after John died and before the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:5).

22 See Volume 2, appendix 1.

23 Rather than the church not being revealed at all in the Old Testament.

24 Matt. 16:16–18; 18:18; Eph. 2:20.

25 As for the role of the apostles regarding the church's foundation, see chapter 4, under "The Special Role of Apostles in the New Testament Church."

26 Greek Old Testament.

27 Cf. 1 Cor. 10:32; Rom. 9:3–4; 10:1. We'll discuss this in more detail in chapter 13.

28 See Volume 1, chapters 25–26.

29 Other than Jesus' predictions in Matthew 16, 18.

30 See appendices 1–2.

31 See also appendix 4.

32 See chapter 15.

33 See above, under "The Church Began at Pentecost."

34 See Gen. 3 to Ex. 19.

35 See chapter 13.

36 Also known as hyperdispensationalism.

37 See chapter 5.

38 On "ages" (dispensations), see chapters 13 and 15; see also Volume 3, chapter 6.

39 See also appendix 4.

40 Some object to this reasoning, arguing that by the same logic the "me" of Matthew 25:3, 41 must be the church as well. This does not follow: The context in Matthew 25 seems to indicate reference to Jews in the Tribulation, just before Christ returns (cf. vv. 34, 46). What is more, Paul uses the term *church of God* in parallel passages when speaking about persecuting believers (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:22).

41 See Acts 11:15, below.

42 Some *dispensationalists* (see chapters 13 and 15; see also Volume 3, chapter 6) deny the Acts 2 event as being a fulfillment of Joel's oracle, arguing that Peter was only claiming that Pentecost was a *like phenomenon* of what would later occur at the Second Coming (see chapter 16), including the astronomical signs Joel mentioned in the same quote that did *not* occur at Pentecost (e.g., v. 20). That, however, is hard to reconcile with the clear statement of Peter that "this is that which was spoken by … Joel" (v. 16 KJV).

43 The term *last days* (Acts 2:17) can refer to any time between the first (Heb. 1:1) and second (2 Peter 3:10) comings of Christ.

44 Cf. 1 Cor.; John 17:5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; Heb. 1:2; Jude 25.

45 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

46 Cf. Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Ps. 102:25–27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 1:10–12; James 1:17.

47 See Volume 3, chapters 3 and 5.

48 See Volume 2, chapter 8; cf. Ps. 139:2–4; 147:4–5; Isa. 46:10; Matt. 6:8; 10:29–30; Heb. 4:13.

49 Acts 15:17–18; cf. Rom. 11:33; Ps. 139:17–18; Isa. 40:28.

50 See Volume 2, chapter 15.

51 Eph. 1:4 NRSV; cf. 5:25; John 10:15.

52 See Volume 3, chapter 6.

53 Jew and Gentile brought into one body in Christ (Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:26–27).

54 See Volume 2, chapter 9.

55 See chapter 15.

56 See Volume 2, chapters 23–24.

57 Job 42:2; cf. Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Prov. 21:1; Dan. 4:17; Rev. 19:16.

58 A figure of speech that uses the name of one thing in place of another thing with which it's associated.

59 See chapters 13 and 15.

60 See Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1917.

61 See John Walvoord *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Co., 1959) 232–37.

62 See Volume 3, chapter 9.

63 See chapter 15.

[1] See chapter 1.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See chapter 3.

[4] E.g., Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 12:13.

5 This is not to be transposed with universalism in the church—see Volume 3, chapter 13.

[6] I.e., Col. and Eph.

[7] Which they are; e.g., cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:1–2.

[8] This implies more than just the local church at Ephesus; Christ died for the whole church (His body) and for the whole world (1 John 2:2; Heb. 2:9; see Volume 3, chapters 9 and 12).

[9] Christ died even for the apostate (2 Peter 2:1), and His blood is sufficient to atone for the sins of all (1 John 2:2; cf. Rom. 5:18–19; 2 Cor. 5:14, 19).

[10] Cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:14.

[11] Cf. Rom. 5:6–8; 18–19; see also Volume 3, chapters 9 and 12.

[12] Cf. Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:29; Rev. 13:8; see also Volume 3, chapters 11–12.

[13] E.g., cf. Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 10:16–17; 12:12–27; Eph. 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15.

[14] See above, under “The Biblical Basis for the Nature of the Universal Church.”

[15] This outline is from Dr. Robert Culver’s class notes on ecclesiology.

[16] Cf. Volume 3, chapters 10–11, 16.

[17] 1 Cor. 2:7; cf. 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2.

[18] See chapter 3.

[19] For instance, see 1 Cor. 10:31; Luke 2:14; Rom. 11:36.

[20] Cf. Eph. 2:20; see also chapter 4.

[21] That is, the New Testament; see Volume 1, chapters 13–14, 17, 28.

[22] See chapter 4; cf. Acts 5:1ff.; 15:1, 3, 6, 22; 1 Cor. 5:1ff.; Titus 1:5.

[23] Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 John 4:6; Rev. 1:1–5.

[24] The adjective *catholic,* generically, means “general” or “universal,” from two Greek words (*kata* and *holou*) that mean “concerning the whole.”

[25] Gk: *ekklésiai, ekklésiais;* e.g., see Rom. 16:4, 16; 1 Cor. 7:17; 11:16; 14:33–34; 16:1, 19; 2 Cor. 8:1, 18–19, 23–24; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Gal. 1:2, 22; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4.

[26] See chapters 13–15.

[27] Matt. 16:18; see chapter 1.

[28] See Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:26; Rom. 16:25–26.

[29] LXX; cf. citations in Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12.

[30] Gen. 12:13–15; 15:18–21; see chapter 15.

[31] See chapter 13.

[32] This refers to the whole remnant left at the end of the Tribulation.

[33] See chapter 15 for further discussion of all these matters.

[34] See chapter 16.

[35] See chapter 13.

[36] See discussion in chapter 1.

[37] See Volume 2, chapters 4–8, 22.

[38] See Gen. 12:13–15; 15:18–21; see also chapter 15.

[39] See chapter 15; see also Volume 3, chapter 12.

[40] See chapters 14–15 for further discussion.

[41] See chapter 3.

[42] See chapter 15.

[1] Gk: *ekklésia, ekklésiai*.

[2] By an act of the Spirit, who baptizes believers into the church.

[3] In this context, *church* means an assembly of confessed believers in Christ; as seen in chapter 2, the Bible contains only a handful of connotative exceptions.

[4] See 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:14; 2 Thess. 2:1; Philem. 1:2.

5 Cf. Acts 6:1–7; 14:23; Phil. 1:1.

6 In chapter 5 we will treat this in substantial detail.

7 For instance, Rom. 16:4, 16; 1 Cor. 7:17; 11:16; 14:33–34; 16:1, 19; 2 Cor. 8:1, 18–19, 23–24; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Gal. 1:2, 22; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4; Rev. 1:11, 20; 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

8 As opposed to many; discussed above.

9 Since the question of whether the pope is the church's infallible visible head is the key to the rest, the bulk of this chapter will concentrate on this.

10 See chapter 4; cf. Phil. 1:1; Acts 1:23.

11 Cf. Acts 2:42; 2 Thess. 2:2; Eph. 2:20.

12 Cf. Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; Gal. 1:12; 2:2.

13 As stated, it was one local church appealing to the living apostles and elders at Jerusalem to resolve this doctrinal dispute.

14 See below, under "The Roman Catholic View of the Visible Church."

15 See below, under "Response to the Arguments for Papal Infallibility From Scripture," and appendix 8.

16 See chapter 4.

17 Ibid.

18 See chapters 4 and 10; see also Volume 3, chapters 10, 15–16.

19 This discussion closely follows that of *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, coauthored with Ralph MacKenzie (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), in chapter 11.

20 Conservatives appeal to Heinrich Denzinger (1819–1883), *Source of Catholic Dogma*, to support their position.

21 Eastern Orthodoxy is willing to accept the bishop of Rome as "first among equals," a place of honor coming short of the pope's total superiority.

22 See James R. White, *Answers to Catholic Claims* (Southbridge, Mass.: Crowne Publications, Inc., 1990), 104–08.

23 "You" singular.

24 There are also some non-Catholic scholars who believe this.

25 Many of the subsequent critiques are found in *Answers to Catholic Claims* by James R. White (b. 1962),

101–02.

26 Paul is referring here (2 Cor. 12:11) to true apostles like Peter, not to false ones as earlier (11:13–14), since he implies that, like him, they could do genuine miracles confirming their apostleship (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Heb. 2:3–4).

27 Paul also wrote about half of the New Testament, while Peter wrote two epistles.

28 One cannot (as do some Catholic scholars) dismiss this dominant focus on Paul upon the circumstantial fact that Luke wrote more about Paul because he was his travel companion. *The Holy Spirit inspired what Luke wrote* (see Volume 1, chapter 26).

29 See F. F. Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James, and John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 86ff.

30 Cf. Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:5–8.

31 Cf. Acts 11:15; 15:14; Heb. 2:3–4.

32 Acts 6:6; cf. 5:1–11; 8:5–6; 2 Tim. 1:6.

33 See appendix 3.

34 In spite of the many early apostolic miracles (cf. Acts 28:1–10), after the end of Acts (c. 60–61) there is no record of any apostolic miracles in Paul's later epistles. Indeed, when some of his trusted helpers were sick, Paul was apparently unable to heal them (Phil. 2:26; 2 Tim. 4:20), requesting prayer for them or recommending that they take medicine instead (1 Tim. 5:23). The special apostle-confirming miracles had apparently ceased even before their deaths.

35 Cf. Ex. 4; 1 Kings 18; John 3:2; Acts 2:22.

36 Cf. Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11–12; 1 Peter 5:1–2.

37 This is the literal rendering given in the Roman Catholic *New American Bible* of Galatians 2:11.

38 Some of this is admitted even by the Roman Catholic Church.

39 That Peter was asked whether he loved Jesus "more" than the others does not prove Jesus gave him more authority than they; this would imply that the amount of Peter's love is the basis for the amount of authority God granted. *God's grace is not conditioned on our works of love* (see Volume 3, chapters 10 and 16). Even Roman Catholics believe that God gave infallible authority to popes who were more evil than other people whom they maintain did not have such authority.

40 Many scholars take "Babylon" as a covert and symbolic term for Rome (cf. Rev. 18:2ff.), used perhaps to conceal Peter's location and protect his life. There is no record of Peter being in literal Babylon (Iraq).

41 See above, under "Roman Catholic Arguments in Support of Papal Infallibility."

42 See appendices 1 and 3.

43 See further discussion below, under “The Historical Basis for the Nature of the Visible Church.”

44 See John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). Also see Ott, *FCD*, 238.

45 Catholic apologists claim that there *are* objective tests, such as, was the pope speaking (1) to all believers, (2) on faith and morals, and (3) in his official capacity as pope? (see *FCD*, 207). These guidelines are *not* definite as to which pronouncements are infallible because: (1) there is no infallible statement identifying these criteria; (2) there isn’t even universal agreement on these criteria; (3) there is no universal agreement on how to apply these or any criteria to all cases.

46 Gk: *dekomai*, “welcome,” “receive.”

47 Gk: *ginôskô*, “know by experience.”

48 Cf. Romans 1:20; see Volume 1, chapter 4, and Volume 3, chapters 3–5.

49 See Volume 1, chapters 2 and 4.

50 See chapter 13; see also Volume 1, chapter 10.

51 See chapter 10; see also Volume 1, chapters 13–14, 27.

52 From Gk: *epistémé*, “to know”; epistemology is the study of knowledge (how we know); see also Volume 1, chapter 7.

53 In this case, claiming moral certainty or the guidance of the Holy Spirit will not help either position, since both can claim it, creating mutually self-canceling claims. Further, the claims would be subjective, without objective supporting evidence; objective evidence claimed in association would be only probable evidence.

54 See below, under “Historical Problems With Papal Infallibility.”

55 See above, under “Qualifications to Papal Infallibility.”

56 General, universal, fully representative.

57 See below, under “Historical Problems With Papal Infallibility.”

58 See above, under “The Problem of Heretical Popes.”

59 See F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

60 See Jaroslov Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Abingdon, 1959), 40.

61 Named for the astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543).

62 Although the Protestant Reformers were not directly involved in this controversy, they got it wrong: "Luther and Melanchthon condemned the work of Copernicus in unmeasured terms" (Herbermann, et al., CE, 344). Also, "Calvin and Luther accepted the Ptolemaic system, as did most astronomers in the decades following Copernicus" (Charles E. Hummel, *The Galileo Connection: Resolving Conflicts Between Science and the Bible* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986], 161). Even so, the problem is more acute for Catholics because, unlike Protestants, they claim infallibility for the Church's teaching magisterium.

63 Galileo, a believing Christian with high regard for Scripture, held that "the Holy Bible can never speak untruth—whenever its true meaning is understood" (Hummel, *GC*, 105). Even so, he did tend to undermine biblical inerrancy in favor of the Word's salvific purpose: "The Bible is written for 'the primary purpose of the salvation of souls and the service of God' and not to teach science" (ibid., 106). This is similar to the approach of contemporary liberal Catholics who deny scriptural inerrancy in scientific matters (cf. Volume 1, chapters 19–20, 27).

64 Hummel, ibid. See also "Discourse to Scientists on the 350th Anniversary of the Publication of Galileo's 'Dialoghi' " in J. Neuner, and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (London: HarperCollinsReligious, 1992), 68.

65 See William G. Most, *Catholic Apologetics Today: Answers to Modern Critics* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books and Publishers, 1986), 168–69.

66 See Volume 1, Part 2.

67 See chapter 4.

68 The *living* apostolic authority of the first century having been replaced by the *written* apostolic authority of the Bible.

69 Op. cit.

70 In English *or* in Greek.

71 See the expanded discussion in chapter 4.

72 Judas was replaced to fill out the twelve (Acts 1:22–26), but not a single one of the Twelve apostles was replaced when they died; e.g., the apostle James was martyred in Acts 12:2 and never replaced.

73 Cf. chapter 4.

74 See below, under "The Purposes of the Local Church."

75 Cf. the citation from Merrill Tenney in chapter 2.

76 Lord Acton (1834–1902).

77 See chapter 4.

78 Eph. 3:21 KJV; cf. 1:12; 2 Cor. 1:20.

79 See chapter 5.

80 While some take these commissions as directly to believers and not to the church as such, the church is made up of believers, and so in this sense cannot be separated.

81 First Corinthians 11:10 speaks of angels viewing the order in the local church (cf. 1 Tim. 5:21).

82 Fuller treatment is found in chapters 14–17.

83 See chapter 17.

84 Cf. Eph. 5:25–27; Rev. 19:6–9; 22:1ff.

85 See appendix 8.

86 See chapter 4.

87 See chapter 4.

88 See Volume 1, Part 2.

89 Op. cit.

90 See Volume 3, chapter 16.

91 See Volume 1, chapters 13–14, 28.

92 See Volume 3, chapter 9.

1 European Lutheran churches and some American Lutheran churches (e.g., the ELCA) have an episcopal form of government with a bishop. Others (e.g., the Missouri Synod) are more congregationally governed, with presidents serving in place of bishops.

2 See under “Church” by G. W. Kirby (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

3 Kirby, ibid.

4 See chapter 3.

5 Eph. 4:10–11; 1 Cor. 12:4–11, 27–28; Rom. 12:3–8.

6 They can be *recognized* by the church; see references in previous note.

7 Cf. 1 Cor. 11:34; Col. 2:5; Titus 1:5.

8 Again, *elder* (*presbuteros*) means “older,” “more mature,” or “wiser.”

9 For consistency of expression, the KJV (rather than the NIV) is the default translation in the rest of this

chapter.

10 Not “church*es*.”

11 The NIV translates the phrase “not by constraint” as “*not because you must*, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.”

12 “Profit” or “gain.”

13 Paul makes three statements about the role of women in the church: “I suffer [permit] not a woman to teach … but to be in silence. [1] For Adam was first formed, then Eve. [2] And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding [3] she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” (1 Tim. 2:12–15).

14 Note that these tasks are the same for elders and bishops.

15 See below, under “The Role of the Congregation in Local Church Government.”

16 Recall that elders were overseers (1 Peter 2:25); leaders (Heb. 13:17); shepherds (1 Peter 5:1–4); teachers (1 Tim. 3:2); apologists (Titus 1:9); arbiters of disputes (Acts 15); and watchmen of souls (Heb. 13:17).

17 As in 1 Corinthians 16:15—see Ryrie, *SBD*, 144–45.

18 John 16:13; 14:26 NIV.

19 Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1.

20 See Volume 1, chapters 26, 28.

21 The KJV’s “ye” indicates a plural in the Greek.

22 Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; 2 Thess. 3:6.

23 The dominant role of the Jerusalem church in this matter reveals two important facts. *First*, it was not Peter and the church at Rome but James and the apostles in Jerusalem who were the presumed leaders for the churches on these matters. *Second*, the decision of the Jerusalem church was sought as authoritative because it still had “the apostles” and “elders” they had appointed (see Acts 14:23).

24 There is a wide range of opinion as to the authority of this group in Jerusalem, all the way from “merely advisory” to “ecclesiastically authoritative.” Those who tend toward the latter end—most of whom come from episcopal or presbyterian church government—call this dispute “the first church *council*.” Earl Radmacher, representing congregational church government, sees it as a *conference* with an advisory status (*NC*, 348–49). However, since the appeal was to apostles, since the decision was from them (with their living authority), since it was called a “commandment” and “decrees to keep” (15:24; 16:4), and since it was sent to a group of churches (15:23), the determination appears to have been authoritative for all churches.

25 Cf. Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 10:11.

26 Cf. 1 Tim. 1:3; 2:1; 4:1; 5:1; 2 Tim. 4:1; Titus 1:5, 9.

27 Again, what we see instead is a group of independent, self-governing churches with elders as leaders, deacons as helpers, and the congregation to both choose them and to handle important issues. (There is, of course, a super-denominational and interreligious structure in the great apostate church, "The Mother of Harlots" [Rev. 17–18], which Christ will judge at His second coming [19].)

28 Having confirmed their message—cf. Heb. 2:3–4.

29 Again, thus replacing the authority of the living apostles with their writings.

30 See Rev. 2:5, 16, 21–22; 3:3, 16.

31 See chapter 2.

32 See chapters 3–4.

33 See chapter 5; see also Volume 3, chapter 16.

34 In chapters 1–2; see also Volume 2, especially Part 1.

35 See Volume 3, chapter 5.

36 I.e., the human bent toward maintaining control may explain some churches' or denominations' commitment to the episcopal form of government.

37 See appendix 8.

38 Also called "children of love and peace" (21). (Note: The number 21 here indicates the verse in the J. B. Lightfoot translation of this epistle. Other verses are indicated in parentheses as well throughout this section.)

39 J. B. Lightfoot rightly notes that "as late therefore as the year 70 no distinct signs of episcopal government have hitherto appeared in Gentile Christendom.… Early in the second century the episcopal office was firmly established" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians,* 201). However, his suggestion that the episcopal office developed between 70 and 90 under the tacit approval of "the latest surviving Apostle" is without foundation. Indeed, if there were incipient forms of it in John's day, it was without his approval and under his warning (cf. 3 John 9; Hermas 2.4; Irenaeus, *AH,* 4.26.2–5). Lightfoot defends episcopal government but admits that "something must be attributed to the frailty of human pride and love of power" in its development (ibid., 234).

40 Unless otherwise noted, as from A. C. Coxe (1818–1896) in the Philip Schaff edition, the quotations here are from the Lightfoot translations.

41 The order of the episcopate's development seems to have been as follows: First, an elder assumed leadership over the other elders, distinguished by the title of bishop. Next, this bishop assumed authority over the other elders in his church. Later, he attained authority over other churches in his area. Eventually, the bishop of Rome, by virtue of it being the seat of Roman government, assumed authority over all other bishops. Finally, he was pronounced infallible (in 1870).

42 See F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1107.

43 Cf. Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23; Philem. 1:1.

44 That Ignatius called Polycarp a bishop does not necessarily denote an episcopal form of government; as we have seen, these are different New Testament names for the same office (see 1 Tim. 3:1; cf. Titus 1:5, 7; Acts 14:23; cf. Phil. 1:1), and it may not have implied any special authority, only leadership.

45 I.e., Irenaeus is not stressing the *authority* of the medium, but the *accuracy* of it in transmitting the message of the apostles, who alone possessed the God-given authority.

46 The terms *bishop* and *elder* were used interchangeably in the New Testament (cf. Titus 1:5, 7), the former being the term Greeks used for leaders and the latter that which Hebrews used. Indeed, the qualifications are the same for both; the duties are the same; there was a plurality of both in even small churches (cf. Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1). Lightfoot confirms this conclusion (ibid., 191ff.). Thus, Irenaeus, writing nearly a century after the founding of the Church, is reflecting an emerging episcopal form of government not found in the New Testament.

47 Cf. Eph. 1:22; 1 Peter 5:4; Rev. 1–3.

48 See appendix 7.

49 See above, under “Eusebius.”

50 Cf. 1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:5, 7; Acts 20:17, 28; see also Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1.

51 Cited above, under “On the Church’s Authority.”

52 The ideas that the episcopacy organized around James and the desire to elect his replacement after the fall of Jerusalem are addressed by Lightfoot as inadequately founded (*AF,* 204).

53 Aquinas also held that the pope is “the vicar of Christ” (*ST,* 2a2ae.39.1), the “visible head of the Church” (31.8.7), and the one “who has the care of the whole Church” (2a2a3.89.9.3). But he never affirmed papal infallibility. Indeed, to the everlasting embarrassment of Roman Catholics, their greatest theologian, Thomas Aquinas, even called the Immaculate Conception, later pronounced infallible by papal authority, “unintelligible” (3a.27.4).

54 See chapter 3.

55 E.g., the so-called *Gospel of Thomas* (c. 140).

56 Of course, Ott believed that Irenaeus and others did “attest the decisive teaching authority of the Roman Church and of its Pontiff.” There are good reasons (given above) to believe this is a misinterpretation.

57 See Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), Part 2.

1 High Church (traditional) Anglicans are an exception, since they uphold the same seven sacraments as

Roman Catholics.

[2] "By the work that has been worked."

[3] Protestant baptism and the Orthodox church's Eucharistic Celebration may be exceptions, since they are recognized as legitimate by Roman Catholicism but not administered by the Church.

[4] For example, the supernatural life is said to be analogous with the natural life because it is *generated* by baptism, *brought to growth* by confirmation, *nourished* by the Eucharist, and *cured from the diseases and weaknesses of sins* by penance and extreme unction. And, "by the two social Sacraments of Holy Order and Matrimony the congregation is *guided*, and spiritually and corporeally *preserved* and increased" (ibid.).

[5] Remember that at this point we are still discussing the sacraments from a Roman Catholic perspective.

[6] Cf. Volume 3, chapter 16.

[7] Roman Catholics distinguish between material and formal heresy, the latter referring only to those who obstinately doubt or deny an article of faith and are thus morally culpable.

[8] Some Catholic scholars speak of the infant having implicit faith (see Volume 3, chapter 15), but it is very difficult to determine precisely what this means. How can they have faith when the faculties for believing (e.g., rationality and volitionality) are not yet developed? This cannot operate the way original sin operates, as some Catholic apologists suggest, since everyone inherits original sin, and we have no choice in the matter, but not everyone has faith, in which we do have a choice.

[9] See Volume 3, chapter 15.

[10] Some do affirm baptismal regeneration; see Volume 3, chapter 16.

[11] See below, under "A Response to the Catholic Defense of Transubstantiation."

[12] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[13] E.g., cf. Ps. 119:9, 11; Rom. 10:17; Rev. 1:3.

[14] See Volume 3, chapter 9.

[15] The Catholic view of "implicit faith" for infants is significantly different from the belief of many Protestants who hold that God elects infants apart from actual faith, knowing that they *will* exercise faith when their faculties are quickened by Him (presumably at death) so they can actually believe (see ibid., chapter 15). Further, it differs from the belief of Protestants who hold that God actually saves infants who *can't* believe (since their faculties are not yet developed), knowing that they *would have* believed if they could have. God sees the potential as well as the actual and can act accordingly, even in advance of actual events.

[16] See below, under "A Response to the Catholic Defense of Transubstantiation."

[17] See Volume 3, chapter 16.

[18] These critiques are offered from a Reformed/Baptistic perspective, which appears to be the most consistent Protestant model; the Lutheran/Anglican acceptance of baptismal regeneration causes serious tension with the principle of justification by faith alone (see ibid., chapters 9 and 16).

[19] Ibid.

[20] Repentance is sometimes mentioned (cf. Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), but the two are one: There is no true faith without repentance (a change of mind), and there is no repentance without faith (1 Thess. 1:8–9); see Volume 3, chapter 16.

[21] For example, see John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Acts 16:31.

[22] Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24.

[23] The intensity with which Jesus spoke when challenged no more proves that His words are to be taken literally than we should understand it physically when Jesus called the Pharisees “blind guides” (Matt. 23:24), or when Paul called the Judaizers “dogs” (Phil. 3:2), or when Jesus labeled Herod a “fox” (Luke 13:32). These are all strong metaphors.

[24] Catholic scholars do not take these to have a literal, physical referent.

[25] Ott’s argument that here “Christ does not reject the literal, but only the grossly sensual [Capernaitic] interpretation” is implausible for the reasons just given.

[26] Lit.: “God from the machine.”

[27] See below, under “Views on the Lord’s Supper.”

[28] Ibid. The Orthodox church permits but does not require that Real Presence be understood in terms of transubstantiation, which Roman Catholicism infallibly proclaims as the only proper way to understand it.

[29] See Volume 1, chapter 17.

[30] That which must be held as an obligatory article of faith.

[31] Catholic scholars speak of Christ being in only one body in two locations, holding to bilocation but not bicorporation. This is a distinction without a difference, since an essential property of a material earthly body (such as Jesus had here) is having one particular location in space as opposed to another.

[32] Catholics are quick to point out that some Protestants (e.g., Anglicans) and the Eastern Orthodox also venerate the host and genuflect before it. At best, this would not prove host worship to be correct; it would only show that these views are wrong also. However, there is a difference that makes the criticism more severe for Roman Catholicism, since they alone believe that the host is actually the body of Christ and that it can and should be worshiped as God. Others may believe that Christ is really present *in* the host, but this is very different from saying He *is* the host that should be worshiped as such.

[33] Cf. Volume 2, chapter 7.

[34] See Volume 1, chapter 7.

[35] See Volume 1, chapters 11, 16, and 26; Volume 2, appendix 1; and Volume 3, chapter 9.

[36] See Volume 1, chapter 3.

[37] Gk: *semeion, teras,* and *dunamis,* respectively; see ibid.

[38] Roman Catholics and Anglicans have issued a 600-word, five-point statement on common Eucharistic beliefs, including the Eucharist as a sacrifice (see Ott, "CAA" in *SC*), 10.

[39] It should be noted that Eastern Orthodoxy also agrees with Catholicism on this point: "At the Eucharist, the sacrifice offered is Christ himself, and it is Christ himself, who in the Church performs the act of offering" (Ware, *OC,* 292–93).

[40] Lutheran theology also rejects the concept of the mass as a sacrifice: "Since Christ died and atoned for sin once and for all, and since the believer is justified by faith on the basis of that, there is no need for repeated sacrifices" (Luther, *BC,* 140, quoted in ibid.).

[41] Lutherans likewise reject sacerdotalism: "The presence of Christ's body and blood is not a result of the priest's actions. It is instead a consequence of the power of Jesus Christ" (ibid.).

[42] While God granted human instruments (like Moses, Elijah, and the apostles) the power to do miracles, He never gave them power to transform wine into the blood of the Son of God.

[43] The Catholic observation that *immolate* does not necessarily mean "kill" (cf. Num. 8:11–21) but merely "to sacrifice" does nothing to counter the biblical point that affirms there is only *one sacrifice forever* (Heb. 10:10–14).

[44] We use the word most because this problem is also inherent in Lutheran theology with their belief that, in Communion, the physical body and blood of Christ is "contained in" or is "under" the communion elements (see below, under "Views on the Lord's Supper"). In spite of Lutheran "denials of various facets of the Catholic position, Luther insisted upon the concept of manducation. [For Lutherans,]there is a real eating of Jesus' body." (Erickson, *CT,* 1118).

[45] See Volume 2, chapters 7 and 10.

[46] See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1.

[47] Regarding Protestants, one can always find an unorthodox exception somewhere, such as Howard Erwin, a charismatic who claims to believe in transubstantiation. Then again, there are unorthodox Protestant charismatics who believe that the Father has a physical body and that Jesus was born again in hell! (see Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1993).

[48] Lutherans are a Protestant exception, retaining the Catholic view at this point but manifesting a great deal of tension between it and the doctrine of justification by faith alone (see chapter 12; see also Volume 3, chapter 9).

[49] See also appendix 4.

[50] See also chapter 1.

[51] On dispensations, see chapter 15; see also Volume 3, chapter 6.

[52] Viz., Eph., Col., and Philem.

[53] E.g., James, Philem., 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.

[54] See below, under “The Biblical Basis for the Lord’s Supper.”

[55] See chapter 1, under “Answering Objections to the Church’s Origin.”

[56] Part of the church’s foundation—see Eph. 2:20.

[57] Recall that in this window the emphasis of Acts shifts from Peter’s ministry to Paul’s.

[58] See chapters 14–15.

[59] See appendix 4; see also Harry Ironside, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* (New York: Loiseaux Brothers, Inc., 1950).

[60] See below, under “The Candidate for Baptism.”

[61] Baptism of those who have personally confessed faith in Jesus Christ; cf. Volume 3, chapters 15–16.

[62] See beginning of this chapter.

[63] See under “Views on the Lord’s Supper.”

[64] Christ permeates the elements.

[65] Christ is symbolically represented by the elements.

[66] Sacerdotalism. Regarding *sacrament* versus *ordinance*, see below, under “The Efficacy of the Ordinance.”

[67] See Volume 3, chapter 16.

[68] Cf. Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 12:13.

[69] See Volume 3, chapter 16.

[70] Ibid., chapter 15.

[71] Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16.

[72] I.e., “If you and your house believe, then you and your house will be saved.”

[73] E.g., Matt. 3; John 3; Acts 2, 8, 10, 19, et al.

74 See Volume 3, chapters 15–16.

75 John 3:18; cf. 3:36; 20:31; Rom. 10:9; etc.

76 Regarding infant *salvation*, see Volume 3, chapter 15.

77 The new fulfilling the old—cf. Ex. 29:20; Ezek. 36:25; Heb. 9:13; 11:28; 1 Peter 1:2.

78 Some immersionists allow for baptism by sprinkling (effusion) for persons incapable of undergoing immersion for health reasons, and, as noted above, sprinkling/pouring do symbolize saving acts.

79 Or the Eucharist.

80 Eastern Orthodoxy agrees that when the priests consecrate the elements, they become the actual body and blood of Christ. However, "while orthodoxy has always insisted on the reality of the change, it has never attempted to explain the manner of the change" (Ware, *OC*, 290).

81 For more details, see above, under "The Roman Catholic View of the Sacraments."

82 Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church in Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1943), 140. Some Lutheran theologians are uneasy with the term *consubstantiation*, which Luther himself never used (*consubstantiation* is of scholastic origin). Given his dislike of scholastic philosophy in general (he once called it a "whore") and to metaphysical formulations applied to theology in particular, he probably would be content to say that "the actual body and blood of Christ exist 'in, with, or under' the elements of bread and wine" (A. Skevington Wood, "Consubstantiation" in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960], 138; see also Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* [London and New York: Longman, 1981], 78). John Wycliffe (c. 1324–1384), one of the Reformation's forerunners, seems to have held a view that later would be characterized as consubstantiation (see Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. [New York:Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970], 269–70).

83 Cf. Luke 24:39; John 20:27; 1 John. 1:1.

84 Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran.

85 See A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 4.154.

1 2 Thess. 2:2; cf. Acts 6:6; Rom. 1:11; Eph. 3:5; 2 Peter 3:2; 2 Cor. 12:12.

2 See chapter 4.

3 Leadership that they themselves chose; see ibid.

4 At which gathering, as previously mentioned, James (the brother of Jesus) seems to have been in leadership.

5 See chapter 4.

6 See below, under “A List of All the Gifts in the New Testament.”

7 So claims Richard Foster (b. 1942) in the introduction to Wimber’s *Power Evangelism*.

8 Paul wrote 1 Cor. c. A.D. 55–56; Rom. c. 57; and Eph. c. 60–61.

9 We’ll focus specifically on the gifts of tongues and apostleship.

10 See Volume 1, chapter 28.

11 See below, under “The View That *Some* of the Gifts Exist Today (Cessationism).”

12 In contrast to the active voice, in which the subject performs the action, and the passive voice, in which the action is performed upon the subject, the middle voice means both that the subject performs the action *and* that the subject performs the action upon himself (or for his own benefit.

13 See Volume 1, chapter 10.

14 See appendices 1–2.

15 As is the rest of Scripture; see Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16–17.

16 For example, see Acts 2, 10, 19; 1 Cor. 12, 14.

17 See chapter 4; cf. Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1.

18 The word *apostle* also has a broader New Testament sense that included others (like Barnabas—Acts 14:14) who were sent by a church (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; Acts 14:4, 14). In this sense of “a sent one” (missionary), there could be apostles today, but not in the sense of one being an authoritative part of the church’s “foundation” (Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 2 Peter 3:2), who has seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1) and who exercises authority in the church confirmed by supernatural “sign” gifts (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3–4).

19 Note that tongues are called a sign gift.

20 See appendix 1.

21 See appendix 2.

22 Ibid.

23 See Neil Babcox, *A Search for Charismatic Reality* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1985).

24 See above, under “A List of All the Gifts in the New Testament.”

25 That is, to speak for God without His authority or blessing.

26 See Volume 1, chapters 15 and 27.

27 See Volume 1, chapters 4 and 27, and Volume 2, chapter 15.

28 See chapter 13; see also Volume 1, chapters 13–15.

29 For riveting testimony of a charismatic pastor and church that experienced biblical enlightenment on this issue and ceased practicing "tongues" and "prophecy," read Neil Babcox's *A Search for Charismatic Reality*.

30 This list is not necessarily exhaustive; other non-sign gifts may exist today (see list above).

31 See note 18 under "The Sign Gift of Apostleship Passed Away," and appendix 8.

32 See appendix 8.

33 Gk: *poimenas* and *didaskalous*.

34 By the coordinating conjunction *kai*, meaning "and."

35 See also chapter 4.

36 Cf. chapter 15.

37 See above, under "Women Are Equally Gifted With Men for Ministry."

38 See chapter 4 for context.

39 Meaning either "deacons' wives" or "deaconesses."

40 E.g., see also KJV and NKJV.

41 See chapter 4.

42 That Junia is said to be "of note among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7 KJV) need not indicate there were female apostles for many reasons: (1) Jesus chose only male apostles (Matt. 10; cf. Acts 2:7); (2) The Greek word for *Junia* (*Iunian*) can be either male or female; (3) the word *apostle* here (*apostolois*) could be used in the broader sense of "one sent," which included more than the Twelve; (4) "among the apostles" need not mean Andronicus and Junia were apostles but simply that "they were famous in the circle of the apostles" (see Robertson, *WPNT*, 4.427).

43 See above, under "The Argument That the New Testament Books Are Written for Believers."

44 E.g., see Luke 10; John 9, 11; Acts 3, 20.

45 See appendix 2.

1 See Volume 1, chapter 2, on moral law.

2 See Romans 1.

[3] See Volume 1, appendix 1.

[4] See ibid., chapter 4.

[5] See Volume 1, chapters 8 and 11.

[6] *Antinomian* literally means “against law” or “in place of law.”

[7] See also below, under “Names of the Movement.”

[8] *Theocracy,* meaning “rule of God,” took a different form in the Old Testament than it would after that time, for He was then ruling Israel by direct revelation through prophets. Even in later Old Testament times this was modified, since there were kings as well as prophets.

[9] On the early Augustine vs. the later Augustine, see his *On Christian Doctrine;* and see also Volume 3, chapters 3 and 7.

[10] See below, under “The Roots of the Movement” and “The Leaders of the Movement.”

[11] From Greek *theos* and *nomos*.

[12] Except the ceremonial law, which has been abolished (cf. Acts 10).

[13] One of the main differences between theonomy and biblionomy is that biblionomists do not believe that the Old Testament sins calling for capital punishment (except capital crimes) are in effect today. However, theonomists and biblionomists agree that the moral *principles* of the Old and New Testaments (which are the same) are the divinely appointed basis for civil governments and should be recognized as such by those governments.

[14] Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1973.

[15] See chapter 16.

[16] See “A Manifesto for the Christian Church” (July 4, 1986).

[17] See *Original Intent: The Courts, The Constitution & Religion* (Aledo, Tex.: WallBuilders, 1996).

[18] Including Pat Robertson, John Mears, Bob Mumford, Earl Paulk, and Dennis Peacocke.

[19] Like Mike Farris, Ron Jensen, Franky Schaeffer, Herbert Schlossberg, and John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute.

[20] In addition to the sources mentioned above, other significant theonomist publications include *The Chalcedon Report, Biblical Economics Today, Journal of Christian Reconstruction, Remnant Review,* and *Antithesis*. Many theonomist resources are published by Dominion Press in Fort Worth, Texas.

[21] See Volume 3.

[22] Again, except for the ceremonial code.

[23] See chapter 16.

[24] A passage that many Christians know as The Great Commission.

[25] See Volume 1, chapter 4.

[26] See chapter 13.

[27] See chapter 16.

[28] See Volume 3, chapter 9.

[29] See chapters 3–4.

[30] Cf. Lev. 18; Obad. 1; Ezek. 26; Ps. 147:20.

[31] There is nothing in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution that forbids the U.S. government from encouraging religion in general while not favoring one religion in particular; nor is there a constitutional issue with establishing a national morality founded upon timeless moral principles, such as those expressed in the Ten Commandments. Indeed, this is what America did until it was forbidden by Supreme Court decision (Stone v. Graham, 1980).

[32] See chapters 14–16.

[33] See Volume 1, chapter 4, and Volume 3, chapter 4.

[34] Further evaluations of theonomy (reconstructionism) from different perspectives are found in Rodney Clapp, "Democracy As Heresy" in *Christianity Today* (Feb. 20, 1987); Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1988); Norman L. Geisler, "A Premillennial View of Law and Government" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-Sept. 1985); Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *Legislating Morality* (Wipf and Stock, 2003); Thomas Ice, "A Critical Analysis of Theonomic Neopostmillennialism" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-Sept. 1988); Meredith Kline, "Comments on a Old-New Error" in *Westminster Theological Journal* (Winter 1981); Robert Lightner, "Theonomy and Dispensationalism" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Jan.-March 1986), "Nondispensational Responses to Theonomy" in ibid. (April-June 1986), and "A Dispensational Response to Theonomy" in ibid. (July-Sept. 1986); William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

[35] The difference between (1) early America and (2) America since the Supreme Court ruled in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) is that neither the federal government nor a state may have an established religion. In early America (as represented by the intent of the First Amendment, which says that "Congress [i.e., the *national* (federal) government] shall make no Law respecting an Establishment of Religion"), a *state* could (and many did) have established religions. Subsequent to *Everson,* states were no longer permitted to establish religion; the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment were applied to the First Amendment, and the intent of the First Amendment—to forbid only a national religion and allow state religions—was overturned. Five of the thirteen colonies that ratified this amendment had state religions at the time and were never required to disestablish them.

[36] See below, under “The Natural Law Is the Basis for Government.”

[37] See *African Religions and Philosophy* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1990).

[38] See Volume 1, chapter 4.

[39] The Roman philosopher Cicero (106–43 B.C.) also stated that “there is a true law, right reason in accord with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting.… There is one law … binding at all times upon all peoples” (*The Republic* 3.22, as cited in Paul E. Sigmund, *Natural Law in Political Thought* [Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1971], 22).

[40] See Volume 3, chapter 5.

[41] See Volume 1, chapter 5.

[42] See Volume 3, chapter 15.

[43] Ibid., chapter 2.

[44] See Volume 2, chapter 16.

[45] See Volume 1, chapter 4, and Volume 3, chapter 15.

[46] See a sampling of his conclusions below, under “The Argument From Common Moral Codes.”

[47] As with reconstructionism.

[48] As with secularism.

[49] See Volume 3, chapters 5 and 7.

[50] On divine voluntarism vs. divine essentialism, see Volume 3, chapter 12.

[51] See Volume 3, chapters 2–3.

[52] See Volume 1, chapter 4.

[53] See Volume 1, chapters 13, 27.

[54] The word *Bible* comes from the Greek term for “book” (*biblios*).

[55] E.g., see Deut. 22:11.

[56] “Religion (Church) and Government (State): Three Views.”

[57] See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 9.

[58] See Volume 2, chapter 4.

59 These essential principles are eternally unchanging because they flow from God's essence, which is immutable (see ibid.).

60 The first table addresses our duty to God. See Exodus 20.

61 *"or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"* (religion).

62 "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion."

63 Jefferson's famous phrase about a "wall of separation" (in his letter to the Danbury Baptist Church) referred to a barrier between the federal government and the individual states, which, again, were free to establish state religions (and many did).

64 See Volume 1, chapter 4.

65 See Volume 1, chapter 16.

66 Thus, it was not simply the "ministry" of Moses that has faded away but "the ministry that brought death … engraved in letters of stone."

67 Jeremiah 12:16–17 is not an exception. The mention of other countries learning the "ways" of Israel and "swearing" by their God is speaking about the future kingdom, "after" Israel is "brought back" to her own country (v. 15), when there will be a restored theocracy under the Messiah, a divine-law basis for civil government under the reign of Christ (see chapters 14–16).

68 E.g., the second table of the Ten Commandments.

69 See chapters 13 and 15.

70 See above, under "Reconstructionism: Church Over State."

1 Full preterism is actually an eschatological paradigm (concerned with more than simply the resurrection) based on the idea that all of the New Testament prophecies have already been fulfilled, including those on the resurrection of believers and the second coming of Christ. Partial preterists hold that predictions about the Tribulation have been fulfilled, but not those about the resurrection and the Second Coming. The word *preterism* means "past" or "bygone" (see chapter 17).

2 Called "soul survival."

3 There are two distinct phases in this resurrection (first and second—see below, under "The Biblical Basis for the Resurrection of the Human Body").

4 See Volume 3, chapter 2.

5 Ibid.

6 Abram was not yet called "Abraham"; see Gen. 17.

[7] Cf. Gen. 25:17; 35:29; 49:29, 33.

[8] Ps. 104:29; Eccl. 12:7; cf. Gen. 3:19; Job 10:9; Ps. 90:3; 103:14; Eccl. 3:20. See also Volume 3, chapter 2.

[9] Nor was Jacob reunited with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, in the bedroom where he died.

[10] See Volume 2, chapters 2 and 7.

[11] See Richard Abanes, *Journey Into the Light: Exploring Near-Death Experiences* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

[12] See Volume 3, chapter 2.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Cf. Rev. 19:20; see chapter 10.

[15] *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

[16] Cf. Luke 2:11; 4:21; 5:26; Acts 1:6; 3:18.

[17] See below, under "The Biblical Basis for the Resurrection of the Human Body."

[18] See Volume 3, chapters 1–2.

[19] Proponents of soul sleep maintain that the soul is in a limbo between death and resurrection; they do not necessarily advocate annihilationism (see chapter 12 and also Volume 3, chapter 13), which is a belief that those who reject God will be extinguished after they die (rather than suffering eternal separation from Him).

[20] See under Philippians 1:21, above.

[21] See chapters 16–17.

[22] See chapter 12.

[23] See above.

[24] See chapter 9.

[25] See chapter 10.

[26] When Jesus said "No one has ascended to heaven" (John. 3:13 NKJV), He meant "bodily," since He is the resurrection's "firstfruits" (1 Cor. 15:23), that is, the first to enter heaven in a body. The same is true of His statement to Mary after the Resurrection: "I have not yet ascended to My Father" (John 20:17 NKJV). His spirit went there between death and resurrection (Luke 23:43; John 19:30), but His body had not yet ascended (cf. Acts 1:9–11).

[27] See Volume 1, chapter 2.

28 See Volume 2, chapter 1.

29 See Volume 3, chapter 7.

30 See Volume 2, chapter 7.

31 Ibid., chapter 19.

32 Ibid., chapter 20.

33 Ibid., chapter 15.

34 Ibid., chapter 19.

35 See Volume 3, chapter 1.

36 Ibid., chapter 3.

37 See under “The State Between Death and Resurrection.”

38 See Volume 3, chapter 1.

39 Ibid., chapter 2.

40 See below, under “The Resurrection of the Body.”

41 See above, under “The Biblical Basis for the Soul’s Conscious Survival in the Intermediate State.”

42 “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

43 See Volume 3, chapter 2.

44 Ibid.

45 See above, under “The Biblical Basis for the Soul’s Conscious Survival in the Intermediate State.”

46 See chapters 9–10.

47 See Volume 3, chapter 2.

48 In this instance, Jesus did not speak about the duration of the events of that later time period (of the resurrections). That is left for John in the Apocalypse (Revelation), the last book of the Bible.

49 See chapter 16.

50 Ibid.

51 See chapters 10 and 16.

52 Rev. 20:4–6; see below.

53 Cf. 1 Thess. 4:13; John 11:11, 14.

54 See chapter 9.

55 See Volume 1, chapter 28.

56 Texts from the time between when God stopped giving revelation to the Old Testament prophets and when He began to speak again, just before the birth of Christ.

57 See chapters 9–10.

58 See chapter 16.

59 The unrighteous, the unbelievers.

60 In the second resurrection.

61 The resurrection of the righteous, the believers.

62 Eternal separation from God; cf. vv. 14–15.

63 I.e., indistinguishably.

64 See Matt. 28: Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21.

65 See appendix 5.

66 George Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus,* 115, 100, 127.

67 Murray Harris, *Raised Immortal* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 56.

68 Murray Harris, *Easter in Durham,* 17.

69 *Raised Immortal,* 47, 127, 44.

70 See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 610–11.

71 See *Raised Immortal,* 44, 100, 133, and *From Grave to Glory,* 194–95, 208, 237.

72 Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 1197.

73 See chapter 13.

74 Gk: *pneumatikos,* “spiritual.”

75 1 Thess. 4:13–17; see chapter 16.

76 The millennium (Rev. 20:1–6).

77 See chapter 10.

78 See chapter 16.

79 See chapter 9; cf. 1 Cor. 15:52–54; 2 Tim. 1:10.

80 Gk: *edzésan,* "lived again," from *zâo*.

81 Gk: *apolesai,* from *apollumi,* "destroy."

82 See chapter 12; cf. Volume 3, chapter 13.

83 See Volume 3, chapters 3 and 5.

84 See chapter 10; cf. Volume 3, chapter 5.

85 The intermediate state; see above.

86 See Volume 2, chapter 7.

87 Ibid., Part 2.

88 Ibid., chapter 15.

89 Ibid., chapter 16, and Volume 3, chapter 7.

90 Ibid., chapter 9.

91 See Volume 3, chapters 8–9, 12.

92 Ibid., chapter 9.

93 Ibid., chapter 6.

94 See Volume 2, chapter 19.

95 Ibid., chapter 14, and Volume 3, chapter 1.

96 See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 685.

97 Ibid.

98 See *Raised Immortal,* 46–47.

99 E.g., see Luke 24:34; Acts 9:17; 13:31; 26:16; 1 Cor. 15:5–8.

100 In terms of being visible rather than in terms of being found.

101 This is in the Greek aorist (tense) passive (mood).

102 See Edwin Hatch and Henry Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 2.105–07. For further references to *ophthé* being used of ocular vision, see Karl H. Rengstorf, *Die Auferstehung Jesu*, 2nd. ed. (Witten-Ruhr: Luther-Verlag, 1954), 93ff.; and Ronals Sider, "St. Paul's Understanding of the Nature and Significance of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians XV 1–19" in *Novum Testamentum* (April 1977), XIX:2, 124–41.

103 Arndt and Gingrich, 581.

104 Kittel, 5.356.

105 Fritz Rienecker, trans. Cleon Rogers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 439.

106 The usual term for having a "vision" is *orama*, not *horao* (see Matt. 17:9; Acts 9:10; 16:9). In the New Testament it always refers to seeing something that is essentially invisible, such as God or angels.

107 Murray Harris (b. 1940) does not use this point to support his position (see *Easter in Durham*, 23–24, and *Raised Immortal*, 61–62); Wolfhart Pannenberg (b. 1928) does (ibid., 93–95, 99). Harris's view, though, amounts to the same thing; he argues that the resurrection body was essentially immaterial (*ED*, 17) and could only be seen with the natural eye if a miracle occurred by which it "materialized." For all practical purposes, there is little difference between insisting that what occurred was a miracle of *materialization* or a miracle of *visualization:* Both views deny the essential materiality and physicality of the resurrection body. (Ironically, both views posit some kind of miracle required for it to become as such.)

108 Pannenberg, op. cit., 93.

109 The only possible reference to a resurrection *appearance* as a vision is in Acts 26:19, where Paul says: "I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven." Nevertheless, if this *is* a reference to Christ's Damascus appearance, it is merely an overlap in usage of the words *vision* and *appearance*, for Paul clearly calls this event an appearance (1 Cor. 15:8) in which He had "seen Jesus our Lord" and, hence, was given apostolic credentials (9:1; cf. Acts 1:22).

110 Ibid.

111 Named for Faustus Socinius (1539–1604); see Volume 3, chapter 8.

112 See appendix 5.

113 See above, under "Numerical Identity."

114 See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, XXX.13 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint from 1885 edition), I.357.

115 J. A. Schep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 204.

116 The "Markan appendix" refers to Mark 16:9–20.

117 See Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 486–89.

118 See also Volume 1, chapters 26–27.

119 He was not initially recognized by His disciples for different reasons at different times: (1) "Their eyes were restrained" (Luke 24:16 NKJV); (2) they were perplexed (vv. 17–21); (3) they were in sorrow (John 20:11–15); (4) it was still dark (vv. 14–15); (5) the distance was too great (21:4); (6) they were startled (Luke 24:36–37); (7) they were disbelieving (John 20:24–25); (8) they were spiritually dull (Luke 24:25–26).

120 Cf. Phil. 2.

121 Cf. Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15.

122 Luke 24:39; Acts 2:31; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7.

123 All emphasis added in these citations.

124 See chapter 16.

125 See chapter 9.

126 See chapter 10.

1 Luke 23:46 NRSV; cf. Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51.

2 Jesus was the first to enter heaven with a body (1 Cor. 15:22). Others, like Enoch and Elijah and the rest of the Old Testament saints, preceded him in a disembodied state (see chapter 8).

3 Acts 1:11; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16; see also chapter 16.

4 See Volume 2, chapter 7.

5 Even now we pray to God, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

6 That is, there are not seven Holy Spirits but one Spirit with a sevenfold ministry, a Spirit who can be described in seven primary ways: (1) the Spirit of wisdom; (2) the Spirit of understanding; (3) the Spirit of counsel; (4) the Spirit of power; (5) the Spirit of knowledge; (6) the Spirit of reverence; and (7) the Spirit of worship/awe. Cf. Rev. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.

7 See below, under "Heaven Is the Place of the Beatific Vision."

[8] See Ps. 16:11; 90:2; Isa. 57:15.

[9] Volume 3, chapter 9.

[10] "When We All Get to Heaven." Words by Eliza E. Hewitt. Music by Emily D. Watson (1898).

[11] "He the Pearly Gates Will Open." Words by Fredrick A. Blom (1917); trans., Nathaniel Carlson. Music by Elsie R. Ahlwen (1930).

[12] See Volume 3, chapters 10–11.

[13] For example, see *Summa Theologica,* 1a.2.1; 12.2; 1a2ae.3.8.

[14] See Volume 1, chapter 9.

[15] See Volume 2, chapter 8.

[16] Ibid., chapter 10.

[17] Ibid., chapter 15.

[18] Cf. Volume 3, chapter 3.

[19] Ibid.

[20] The ultimate act of a human being includes willing, knowing, and loving the absolute good (God). Since a person has will, mind, and emotion, *all* will be perfected in the Beatific Vision, for the infinite good is also known and experienced. In heaven, to know the good is to love the good; on earth, we can know what is good without loving it or doing it (cf. Rom. 7:15).

[21] See Volume 3, chapter 12.

[22] See Volume 2, chapters 4 and 14.

[23] See Volume 3, chapter 6.

[24] See Volume 2, chapters 13–17.

[25] Ibid., chapter 4.

[26] See Volume 1, chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapter 3.

[27] See Volume 2, chapter 2.

[28] Ibid., chapter 20.

[29] Ibid., chapter 22.

30 Ibid., chapter 23.

31 See Volume 1, chapter 3.

32 See Volume 3, chapter 16.

33 “Face to Face With Christ, My Savior.” Words by Carrie E. Breck. Music by Grant C. Tullar (1898).

34 See Volume 3, chapter 15.

35 See Volume 3, chapters 10–11.

36 The concept of differing degrees of heavenly blessing is also taught in other passages; e.g., Luke 19:17–19; John 14:2; 1 Cor. 15:41; Rev. 22:12.

37 See chapter 8.

38 Cf. Luke 24:30–31, 41; John 21:12–13; Acts 10:41; cf. Phil. 3:21.

39 Op. cit.

40 Cf. 1 Tim. 6:17; Ps. 16:11; Eccl. 3:12–13.

41 Cf. Matt. 23:37; see Volume 3, chapters 3 and 5.

42 See Volume 3, chapter 15.

43 Ibid., chapter 1 and appendix 1.

44 Op. cit.

45 Due to population explosion, an amazing percentage of all people who have ever lived are on the earth right now.

46 See Volume 3, chapter 12.

47 Cf. Heb. 11:6; see Volume 3, chapters 16–17.

48 Gk: *topos* (twice) and *hopou*.

49 See above, under “Heaven in the Future: The New Heaven and the New Earth.”

50 See chapter 16.

51 Presumably, babies who die in infancy will “grow up” in heaven before they see the Beatific Vision (see Volume 3, chapter 15).

52 See Volume 2, chapter 8.

53 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

54 Ibid., chapter 14.

55 See Volume 3, chapters 1–2; cf. Volume 2, chapter 5.

56 Op. cit., chapter 20.

57 Ibid., chapter 15.

58 See Volume 3, chapter 9.

59 See Volume 2, chapter 8, and Volume 3, chapter 3.

60 See Volume 3, Part 2.

61 See Volume 2, chapter 9.

62 See Volume 3, chapter 6.

63 Ibid., chapter 11.

64 Ibid., chapter 7, and Volume 2, chapter 7.

65 On “the elect,” see op. cit.

66 Cf. Volume 3, chapter 13, on universalism.

67 See Volume 3, chapter 3.

1 See chapter 12.

2 See below, under Ps. 9:17.

3 See Matt. 5:22, 29–30; 10:28; 18:8–9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6.

4 See Volume 2, chapter 12.

5 LXX, the Greek Old Testament.

6 Cf. Gen. 42:38; Ps. 141:7.

7 See chapter 8.

8 Cf. chapter 9.

9 The phrase “their worm will not die” in connection with the unquenched fire implies (a) that the punishment will be everlasting and (b) that it will involve the physical body.

[10] See Volume 1, Part 2.

[11] See Le Roy Froom (1874–1970), *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 1.674–75.

[12] See below, under Luke 16.

[13] See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1.

[14] Cf. Matt. 18:8–9.

[15] In the parable of the sheep and the goats; the goats, separated from the sheep, will be on God's left.

[16] See chapter 16; see also Volume 3, chapter 6; cf. Rev. 20:14.

[17] See Volume 2, chapters 13–14.

[18] See Volume 2, chapter 15, and Volume 3, chapter 3.

[19] See chapters 16–17; see also Volume 3, chapter 6.

[20] See Volume 2, chapter 23.

[21] See Volume 3, chapter 5.

[22] Ps. 14:1–3; Eccl. 7:20.

[23] Ps. 5:9.

[24] Ps. 140:3.

[25] Ps. 10:7.

[26] Isa. 59:7–8.

[27] Ps. 36:1.

[28] Rom. 3:19, 22–23.

[29] See Volume 3, chapter 3.

[30] See 1 Cor. 1:17–18; 15:3.

[31] Cf. Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45.

[32] See Acts 4:12; John 10:1, 9–10; Rom. 4:25; Heb. 10:14–15.

[33] Cf. Volume 3, chapters 8–9.

[34] Matt. 8:12; Jude 13; Jude 12; Mark 9:44–48; Rev. 20:1, 3; 1 Peter 3:19; Luke 16:28.

[35] See his *No Exit*.

[36] See chapter 13.

[37] See chapter 12; see also Volume 3, chapter 13.

[38] Matt. 25:41; cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20:10.

[39] See Luke 16:26; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9; 19:20; 20:10. See also chapter 8.

[40] See chapter 12.

[41] See Volume 2, chapter 15.

[42] Ibid., chapter 11.

[43] See Volume 3, chapters 3 and 13.

[44] See Volume 2, chapter 4.

[45] Hebrews 9:14 likewise speaks of the "eternal [Holy] Spirit."

[46] See Volume 3, chapter 15, and Volume 2, chapter 15.

[47] "The Rich Man and Lazarus," Luke 16:19–31.

[48] See Volume 3, chapters 9, 13, and 15; cf. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2.520.

[49] See Volume 3, chapter 3.

[50] See Volume 2, chapters 13 and 16.

[51] Ibid., chapter 16.

[52] See chapter 12; cf. Volume 3, chapter 13.

[53] See Volume 3, Part 1.

[54] If that were the case, then God would surely have shown them these miracles; cf. 2 Peter 3:9.

[55] See chapter 16.

[56] See Volume 3, chapter 6.

[57] See Volume 2, chapter 16.

58 Ibid., chapter 10.

59 See Volume 3, chapter 13.

60 Ibid., chapter 3.

61 Ibid., chapter 4.

62 Cf. 2 Peter 3:9; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30.

63 See Volume 3, Part 2.

64 Rom. 1:19–20; cf. 2:12–15. See also Volume 1, chapter 4, and Volume 3, chapter 15.

65 E.g., see Deut. 4:29; Prov. 8:17; Jer. 29:13; Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9.

66 See chapter 12.

67 See Volume 2, chapter 16, and Volume 3, chapter 3.

68 See Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2.84; cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*.

69 Op. cit.

70 Ibid.

71 See Volume 2, chapter 1.

72 The errors of annihilationists are discussed more fully in chapter 12. See also Volume 3, chapter 13.

73 See Volume 2, Part 1.

74 See Volume 3, chapter 3.

75 See above, under “Objection One”; see also Volume 2, chapter 16.

76 See above, under “Jesus’ Teachings on the Existence of Hell.”

77 See chapter 12.

78 See Volume 1, chapter 10.

79 These Justinian anathemas were adopted by a synod in Constantinople (see Wenham, *GG*, 28).

80 See Volume 3, chapter 6.

81 See chapter 11. The concept of a “second chance” must not be confused either with that of purgatory (for souls already saved) or of limbo (for souls already lost).

82 See chapter 12, and Volume 3, chapter 13.

83 See Volume 3, chapter 5.

84 See Volume 1, chapter 7.

1 This discussion is based upon chapter 16 of Norman L. Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

2 Fire was an early part of this Catholic theory; Catholics try to derive support from 1 Corinthians 3:12–15.

3 *A Catholic Adult Catechism* by the German Conference of Bishops, 347.

4 See Volume 3, chapter 10.

5 Cf. chapter 16.

6 An apocryphal work that is part of the Catholic Bible.

7 See Volume 1, chapter 28.

8 Ibid., Part 2, Sections I and III.

9 See 2 Esdras 7:105.

10 Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

11 See Volume 3, chapter 10.

12 Ibid.

13 The Greek word *misthos* means a “payment for work done” or a “reward” or “recompense given (mostly by God) for the moral quality of an action” (cf. 1 Cor. 9:17; 5:46; 6:1). See Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1957), 525.

14 Cf. 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 1:2; also op. cit., chapter 9.

15 This is not to say that being reviewed for rewards will not have a final impact on the believer’s character; it *will* be an awesome and character-impacting experience. The objective of this rebuttal is to point out that cleansing the soul from sins is what Christ did on the cross for the believer objectively—and this was also applied to the believer subjectively—at the moment of initial justification, when he was dressed in the alien righteousness of Christ. For more on the process/stages of salvation, including justification and sanctification, see Volume 3, Part 2.

16 Ibid., chapter 9.

17 Under “Protestant Reasons for Rejecting Purgatory.”

[18] Op. cit.

[19] Cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20:11–15; see also chapter 10.

[20] Cf. 1 Cor. 3:10ff.; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12.

[21] See chapters 8–9; see also Volume 3, chapter 6.

[22] Ibid., chapter 9.

[23] "Jesus Paid It All." Words by Elvina M. Hall, music by John T. Grape.

[24] Contrary to the claim of some Catholic scholars, there is no indication of a time gap between death and judgment in Hebrews 9:27; this is eisegetical (see chapter 13). Furthermore, again, many Catholic scholars deny that any real purgatorial time is involved, only "existential" time.

[25] The "longing" Paul describes (v. 2) is not for *immediate* bliss (which he "knows" he will have), but for being "clothed with our heavenly dwelling," as opposed to "this tent [in which] we groan" (v. 4).

[26] See chapter 8.

[27] See chapter 17.

[28] Catholic attempts to spiritualize this as a parable are wrongheaded. Nowhere is this story called a parable, nor do parables use real personal names (cf. v. 20). These words of Jesus are obviously describing an actual reality.

[29] These good works are called the works of supererogation, that is, works over and above those necessary for the ones who performed them.

[30] Regarding Mary's "atonements," Ott claims that Catholics do not deny the eternal "atonement" of Christ but merely emphasize temporal atonements of sins suffered by saints are available for others in the storehouse of merit.

[31] See Volume 3, chapters 9–10.

[32] Though Catholic scholars appeal to Revelation 19:8 to support this idea of a storehouse or collection of good deeds, taking the saints' heavenly white robes as the saints' righteous acts is a gross misunderstanding: (1) That this is a symbol is indicated by the text *itself* interpreting it for the reader and also proceeding to give and interpret other symbols (e.g., Rev. 1:20; 17:9, 15). (2) Revelation says simply that each person has his own works that follow him (22:12). (3) Holy Writ makes it clear that "each of us will give an account of himself" to God for his own works (Rom. 14:12; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). (4) As with Exodus 32, nothing in this text suggests that there are righteous acts of the saints available for others to draw upon for their lives.

[33] Just as He did in the case of Abraham (cf. Gen. 22).

[34] See Volume 3, chapters 9 and 12.

[35] For instance, see John 17:4; 19:30; Heb. 10:14. See also Volume 1, Part 2.

[36] As demonstrated in Part 2 of Volume 3, Christ's death is sufficient for all and efficient for all who believe.

[37] See Part 1.

[38] See Volume 3, chapters 10–11, 16–17.

[39] Eph. 2:8–9; cf. Rom. 4:4–5; Titus 3:5.

[40] Catholic scholars insist that an indulgence is not really bought, that a person gets it by simply making a donation to a charitable cause. *Whatever* it's called, an indulgence is an exchange of money for merit, however unequal the exchange may be.

[41] See Volume 1, chapter 17.

[42] See 1 Peter 2:22; 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:2; Col. 2:13–14.

[43] See chapter 16.

[44] Unless we assume that not even one of them, by Catholic standards, will have any unpaid consequences for his sins, which is absurd on its face.

[45] See Volume 2, chapter 16.

[46] See Volume 3, chapter 9.

[47] Cf. 2 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 6:7; Heb. 12:4–11.

[48] See Rom. 3:21–26; 5:18–19; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 2:2. As already established, the Atonement is sufficient for all, and efficient for all who believe (cf. Volume 3, chapter 12).

[49] See below, under "A Protestant Response to the Catholic Doctrine of Prayers for the Dead."

[50] See his *Fundamentals of the Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 248.

[51] See his *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on Romanism by Bible Christians* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 263. Much depends on Keating's definition of *fundamentalists*. Neither Kreeft nor Keating is averse to being characterized as *fundamental* in regard to theological matters, and both authors accept the authenticity of the terms in question.

[52] Cf. Rom. 12:4–5; 15:30; 1 Cor. 12:25–27; Eph. 6:18.

[53] "We Journey Through a Vale of Tears." Words by Bernard Barton, music by Berthold Tours.

[54] See Volume 1, chapter 28; see also above, under "A Protestant Response to Catholic Arguments for Purgatory."

[55] As mentioned earlier, at the same time 2 Maccabees was canonized by Rome, another apocryphal book,

2 Esdras, which opposes praying for the dead (see 7:105), was excluded from the Catholic canon.

[56] See below, under “Protestant Arguments Against Praying for the Dead.”

[57] Ibid.

[58] See chapter 3.

[59] See chapter 16; cf. Luke 16:26.

[60] See Volume 1, chapters 17–18, 27.

[61] Cf. 1 Tim. 4:1ff.; 2 Tim. 2:16–18; 1 John 4:1ff.

[62] Roman Catholics appeal to 1 Timothy 2:1 in support of praying for the dead, though Paul makes clear that he was urging believers to pray for the living, namely, “for kings and all those in authority” (v. 2). Catholics also erroneously put forward Moses and Elijah’s appearance with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17) to say we should pray to the dead. But the desciples never even spoke to them, let alone prayed to them; Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus (v. 3) and each other. “Peter [spoke] *to Jesus* (v. 4); at any rate, this was a miraculous contact, not representative of how we can be in contact with the departed.

[63] See above, under “Purgatory Is Contrary to the Immediacy of Heaven or Hell After Death.”

[64] The Catholic response that David only stopped because God turned down his request to keep the child alive, rather than because he believed praying for the dead was invalid, is unconvincing for several reasons. (1) David’s love for the child did not cease when the child died; the natural inertia from this love would surely have led him to continue to pray if he thought it was right to do so. (2) There is no record of any Old Testament believer praying for the dead on any occasion. (3) David states his reason for stopping—he knew he would be reunited with the child at the resurrection (2 Sam. 12:23; cf. Ps. 16:10). (4) This Old Testament hope of resurrection (cf. Job. 19:25–26; Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2) made prayer for the dead unnecessary; believers knew that God would resurrect them and that they would be reunited with their loved ones.

[65] Some have suggested that Jesus prayed for the dead in John 11, since just before He resurrected Lazarus, He acknowledged that God always hears Him. This text does not support the Roman Catholic doctrine of prayers for the dead. (1) Jesus did not pray that Lazarus be released from his sins, as Catholics believe we should (from 2 Macc. 12:45 [46]). (2) At most, this is a prayer for God’s power to resurrect the dead, not to deliver him from purgatory. (3) The whole thrust of Jesus’ prayer is directed toward the living, not the dead: “for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe” (v. 42).

[66] See chapter 12.

[67] 1 Tim. 2:5; cf. John 10:9; 14:6.

[68] This does not mean we cannot ask other believers on earth to pray to Jesus for us. In fact, we *should*. However: (1) We are asking other earthly believers to pray for us—we are not communicating with the dead (which the Bible forbids); (2) we are not asking these believers to give us grace or mercy (as Catholics do of Mary), but we ask God for grace; (3) we are not praying to other earthly believers but asking them to pray for us.

69 For example, Eph. 2:18, which says explicitly that our access in prayer is “to the Father,” not to the saints.

70 The dogma began to develop slowly in the fourth century.

71 See Volume 3, chapters 9 and 12.

72 Albert H. Boudreau, *The Born-Again Catholic* (Locust Valley: Living Flame Press, 1983), 139.

73 Ralph Martin, *Hungry for God* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 69–70. Martin (b. 1942) bemoans the effect that "cultural Catholicism" has had on faith (ibid., 137).

74 Eastern Orthodox theologians (for the most part) do not incorporate purgatory in their dogmatics.

75 See Volume 3, chapter 9.

76 See Volume 2, chapter 14.

1 See chapter 10.

2 Stott distinguishes the two views, noting that according to conditional immortality, "nobody survives death except those to whom God gives life … whereas according to [annihilationism], everyone survives death and will even be resurrected, but the impenitent will finally be destroyed" (*EE*, 316). For our purposes here the terms are used interchangeably, since both affirm the eternal nonexistence of unbelievers after judgment.

3 See chapter 16.

4 See *Life in Christ*.

5 See *The Righteous Judge*.

6 See *Life and Immortality*.

7 Many annihilationists do not claim to be evangelical, but we will examine both biblical and philosophical arguments for their position.

8 See chapter 10.

9 See *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*.

10 See Volume 1, chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapters 14 and 17.

11 E.g., 2 Thess. 2:8; Phil. 3:19; 1 Tim. 3:9; Luke 17:27, 29; John 11:16; Rom. 8:13; etc.

12 That is, one or more other interpretations are credible/plausible.

13 See chapter 8; cf. James 2:26.

14 See Volume 3, chapter 16.

15 See chapter 17.

16 See chapter 16.

17 See below, under “The Images of Burning.”

18 See above, under “The Words *Everlasting Destruction*.”

19 Cf. Volume 3, chapter 6.

20 See chapter 10.

21 “Whoever believes in him shall not *perish* but have eternal life.”

22 Cf. Rom. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:53–54.

23 Gen. 1:27; 9:6; James 3:9; see Volume 3, chapter 1.

24 See chapter 8.

25 E.g., see 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9.

26 See chapter 10.

27 Or spirit—see Volume 3, chapters 1–2.

28 See chapters 9–10.

29 A term that, again, implies a certain quality of everlasting life.

30 See chapter 10.

31 As well as having taken the form of man, Phil. 2:5–11.

32 Op. cit.

33 See the opening section of this chapter.

34 See Volume 1, chapter 2.

35 This is also known as the argument from disproportionate justice.

36 Cf. Volume 3, chapter 16.

37 See Volume 2, chapters 13 and 16.

38 See chapter 10, under “Response to Objection Two” and also under “Thomas Aquinas.”

39 See Volume 2, chapter 16.

40 Ibid., chapters 1–2, 17.

41 See Volume 3, Part 2.

42 See Volume 1, chapter 2.

43 Op. cit., chapter 2.

44 See Volume 2, chapter 19.

45 See Volume 3, chapters 3 and 5.

46 Op. cit., chapters 3–4.

47 See Volume 1, chapter 5 on the principles of logic, specifically, noncontradiction.

48 See chapter 10, under “Response to Objection Eight.”

49 See Volume 2, chapter 16.

50 Ibid., chapters 1 and 17.

51 See Volume 3, chapter 3.

52 Ibid., chapter 13.

53 Ibid., chapter 6.

54 Op. cit.

55 Ibid., chapter 12.

56 See chapter 10.

57 Matt. 8:12; cf. 22:13; 24:51; 25:30.

58 Cf. Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8.

59 See Volume 2, chapter 15.

60 See Volume 3, Part 1.

61 Op. cit., chapter 3, and Volume 3, chapter 3.

62 See Volume 2, chapter 9.

63 See Volume 3, chapters 3 and 5.

64 Cf. the words of Jesus in John 19:11; Matt. 23:23.

65 Heb. 9:27; Luke 16; Rev. 20; Mark 3:29; 2 Thess. 1:9.

66 Cf. chapter 10 on Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 38–40.

67 See Volume 3, chapter 13.

68 In chapter 10.

69 Ibid.

1 See chapter 16.

2 A "dispensation" (Gk: *oikonomia*) signifies an order of manner in which God deals with His people during a given period of time. Paul speaks of the present church age as the "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph. 3:2 NKJV) and of the coming age as "the dispensation of the fullness of the times" (1:10 NKJV). The previous, under Moses, is called the dispensation of law (cf. Gal. 4:2).

3 See Volume 1, chapters 10–12.

4 Ibid., chapters 10, 13–15.

5 See chapter 10.

6 I.e., that not everything in the Bible is true literally means that it is not necessarily a physical actuality or a tangible reality.

7 Application happens after interpretation, and it is critical that they be separate steps.

8 See Volume 2, chapters 2 and 5.

9 Cf. Heb. 7–8.

10 See chapters 1 and 4.

11 See chapter 16.

12 See Volume 3, chapters 4–5.

13 This method already allows for genre decisions, through looking at the text's literal meaning in both immediate and broader contexts.

14 See Volume 1, chapter 3.

15 See Volume 1, chapter 13.

16 See chapters 8 and 10; see also Volume 1, chapter 2; Volume 2, chapter 18; and Volume 3, chapter 6.

17 See chapter 16; see also Volume 1, chapter 26; Volume 2, appendix 1; and Volume 3, chapter 9.

18 See Volume 1, chapter 6.

19 Ibid., chapter 9.

20 See Volume 2, Part 1.

21 See Volume 1, chapters 10–11.

22 See chapters 16–17.

23 Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 93. Of course, dispensationalists (see chapters 14–15, and also Volume 3, chapter 6) dispute Gerstner's claim that "there are certain parts of [the Bible] which everyone, including the dispensationalist, admits are not to be construed literally" (ibid.). This charge is based on a misunderstanding of what a literal hermeneutic involves (see opening section of this chapter).

24 *Apparent* exceptions are treated below under "Answering Some Objections to the Literal Hermeneutic."

25 See chapter 16.

26 See Walter Kaiser's insightful treatment of this text in *Back Toward the Future: Hints for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 140–44.

27 Ibid., 23–24.

28 See below, under "The Traditional Covenantal View" and "The Modified Covenantal View"; see also chapter 16.

29 See below, under "The Progressive Dispensational Method of Interpretation"; see also chapters 14–15.

30 See chapters 14–15.

31 See an excellent article on this point by Robert L. Thomas, "A Critique of Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutics" in John Walvoord, *The End Times*.

32 See Volume 1, chapters 13–15.

33 See chapters 14–15.

34 Ibid.

35 See above, under "Biblical Prophecy: The Literal School of Interpretation."

36 See chapter 15.

37 See chapter 16.

38 Ibid.

39 See chapter 8.

40 See chapters 14–15.

41 See above, under “Biblical Prophecy: The Allegorical School of Interpretation.”

42 Amillennialism—see chapter 16.

43 See chapter 9.

44 See above, under “Response to Traditional Covenantalism.”

45 Again, this consistent literal interpretation is at the heart of dispensationalism.

46 Even though their standing in Christ is the same—see Part 1, and also Volume 3, chapter 12.

47 See chapter 3.

48 See Volume 1, chapter 6.

49 See chapters 8 and 16.

50 See quotes above, under “The Modified Covenantal View.”

51 See chapters 14–15.

52 See Volume 3, Part 2.

53 Op. cit.

54 See Part 1.

55 See chapter 1.

56 Cf. Eph. 3:3, 5; Col. 1:27; Rom. 16:25–26.

57 See chapter 2.

58 E.g., see Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism,* 27, 165, 173.

59 The following elements are similar to a nondispensational covenantal view.

60 I.e., the literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation held by classical dispensationalists.

61 See Volume 1, chapters 9–12.

62 See chapter 16.

63 See chapter 15.

64 Their former mentor, Bruce Waltke, did so not long after he left a premillennial ethos for an amillennial view. See chapter 16.

65 See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10.

66 See Volume 1, chapters 13–15, 27.

67 See Volume 1, chapter 4.

68 See chapters 14–17.

69 See Volume 2, appendix 1.

70 Cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6–7; Rom. 11.

71 See chapters 14–15.

72 See chapter 16.

73 See Volume 1, chapter 6.

74 See chapter 15.

75 See chapter 14.

76 See Gen. 3:15; 12:3; Isa. 2:6; 42:1, 6; 49:6.

77 See chapter 15.

78 See above, under “Biblical Prophecy: The Literal School of Interpretation”; see also Volume 1, chapter 10.

79 See chapter 6.

80 See chapter 16.

81 See chapter 15; see also Volume 3, chapter 16.

82 See chapters 14–16.

83 See chapters 15–17.

84 See Volume 1, chapters 5 and 12.

85 See chapter 15.

86 See Gen. 15:9–22; 17:7, 19.

87 Op. cit.

88 See Volume 1, chapters 13–15.

89 This is what the amillennial hermeneutic holds; see Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 48–49.

90 Op. cit.

91 See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10.

92 Ibid., chapter 4.

93 See chapter 16.

94 See Volume 2, chapter 4; cf. Heb. 6:18; James 1:17.

95 See Volume 1, chapters 3 and 7.

96 See Volume 1, chapter 6.

97 See chapters 14–17.

1 Matt. 12:26; Luke 11:18; Eph. 2:2.

2 Matt. 24:7; Mark 6:23; 13:8; Luke 21:10; Rev. 11:15; 16:10; 17:12.

3 Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:24; Luke 11:17.

4 Other variations on these can be added.

5 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

6 Ibid., Part 2.

7 Ibid., chapter 23.

8 Ibid.

9 Rev. 20:1–6; see chapter 16.

10 See chapters 9–10.

11 Op. cit.

12 See immediately below, under "*First*."

13 See immediately below, under "*Third*."

14 See Volume 1, chapter 26.

15 See Volume 3, chapters 11 and 16.

16 See, e.g., Ex. 12:15; Lev. 2:11; 6:17; 10:12; Matt. 16:6, 11–12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor. 5:5–7; Gal. 5:8–9.

17 See chapters 2 and 4 on evil in the visible church.

18 See Volume 3, chapters 16–17; see also Volume 1, chapter 8.

19 "God's Spiritual Kingdom (in the Broad Sense)."

20 See chapter 9.

21 See chapter 3.

22 See chapter 4.

23 See Volume 2, Part 2.

24 See Volume 2, chapter 23.

25 E.g., cf. 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25; Rev. 11:15.

26 See chapter 16.

27 See chapter 13.

28 See George Peters (1825–1909), *The Theocratic Kingdom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988) and Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950).

29 See chapter 15.

30 See chapter 7.

31 Beginning in 1 Samuel.

32 Ibid.

33 E.g., cf. Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Jer. 13:13; 29:16; 30:9.

34 See chapter 15.

35 See chapter 15.

36 "The kingdom of heaven"—cf. 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19–20; 6:10; 7:21; 8:11; etc.

37 See chapter 13.

38 Cf. 5:7, 11, 16, 28–29; 6:1, 3, 26.

39 On the decree of Cyrus, see 2 Chron. 36:22–23; Ezra 1.

40 See Harold Hoehner (b. 1935), *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).

41 See chapters 13 and 17; see also Volume 1, chapter 26, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

42 See also below, under "The Issue of 'Forever'. "

43 See Ps. 45:6 (cf. Heb. 1:8); Isa. 9:6–7 (cf. 32:1; 33:17).

44 See chapter 16.

45 Ibid.

46 E.g., as with Christ's first and second comings—Luke 4:18–20; cf. Isa. 61:1–2.

47 Op. cit.

48 See chapter 13.

49 See chapter 16.

50 See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1.

51 See Volume 1, chapter 25.

52 See above, under "Daniel 9:24–27"; see also Volume 1, chapters 25–26, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

53 See above, under "The Nature of and Biblical Basis for the Messianic Kingdom."

54 E.g., cf. Luke 4:18–31; 7:24–27; 20:41–44; Matt. 22:41–45; 26:64.

55 Cf. Luke 1:17, 32–33, 54–55, 67–79; 2:25–33, 36–38; Matt. 4:12–17; 12:15–16, et al.

56 E.g., cf. Isa. 7:14; Micah 5:2; Matt. 1:3; Isa. 35:5; Zech. 9:9; Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26; Ps. 16:10.

57 See chapter 16.

58 See above, under "The Nature of and Biblical Basis for the Messianic Kingdom."

59 See Volume 1, chapter 3.

60 See chapter 8.

61 The Advent; see Matt. 19:28; cf. Luke 12:32; 22:30.

62 Matt. 26:29; cf. Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16, 18.

63 Some, of course, claim this was all fulfilled just after Jesus' death. This *preterist* view will be considered in chapter 17.

64 See chapter 13.

65 See chapter 16.

66 See chapter 15.

67 The parenthetical numbers represent chapters in Matthew.

68 See chapter 15.

69 See chapter 16.

70 Eph. 3:3–5; see also Part 1.

71 Matt. 13:13–15; Mark 4:11–12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39–40; Acts 28:25–27.

72 Cf. Rom. 10:3; 2 Cor. 3:14–15; see also Rom. 11:25.

73 However, cf. Volume 3, chapter 15.

74 Ibid., chapters 16–17.

75 See Volume 3.

76 Ibid., chapter 17; see also Volume 1, chapter 4.

77 The church age; see Part 1 and also Volume 3, chapter 6.

78 See chapter 16.

79 See chapters 9–10.

80 See under "The Parables of the Kingdom."

81 Many dispensationalists believe this refers to faithful (five prepared) and unfaithful (five unprepared) Jews at the end of the tribulation (e.g., see Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2.80).

82 I.e., the nation of Israel as a whole.

83 See chapters 16–17.

84 See Volume 2, chapter 8.

85 See chapter 17.

86 E.g., Acts 2:22, 36; 3:12; 4:10, 27; 5:21, 31, 35, etc.

87 The discussion here follows McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 294–396.

88 See chapter 16.

89 See chapter 13.

90 Ibid.

91 See chapter 15.

92 Ibid.

93 See above, under "The Issue of 'Forever.' "

94 See Volume 3, chapter 6.

95 See chapter 8.

96 Both of which are part of the final resurrection.

97 See chapter 16.

98 See chapters 16 and 17.

99 See chapter 17.

100 See chapter 13.

101 See above, under "The Nature of and Biblical Basis for the Messianic Kingdom."

102 See above, under "The Parables of the Kingdom."

103 See chapters 9–10.

104 There are also later related statements; see Acts 1:6; 3:18–21; Rom. 11:15–36.

105 Some argue that this spiritual messianic kingdom supersedes the more literalistic Old Testament teaching (on a political messianic kingdom) either by fulfillment or by replacement. However, as the above passages show, this is contrary to consistent, literal interpretation of New Testament teaching from beginning to end. The complete promises for a literal, political messianic kingdom have never been fulfilled

up to and through the New Testament.

106 See chapter 16.

107 See below, under “Romans 14:17” (ff.).

108 See chapter 2.

109 Eph. 1:22–23; 2:11–12; Gal. 3:28.

110 See under “God’s Spiritual Kingdom (in the Narrow Sense).”

111 The claim of so-called “progressive dispensationalists” that the Davidic covenant (see chapter 15) has already begun to be fulfilled is without justification: (1) The fulfillment does not begin until Christ is physically reigning on a throne in Jerusalem; (2) this view compromises the consistency of the literal hermeneutic by interpreting part of these prophecies spiritually (see chapter 13); (3) this view confuses God’s current spiritual reign with Christ’s future political reign; and (4) this is implicit amillennialism, since if its hermeneutic were applied consistently it would lead to a denial of premillennialism (see chapter 16).

112 E.g., 1 Cor. 6:9–19; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; 4:1; 2 Peter 1:11; James 2:5.

113 Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23; in context, it seems highly unlikely that all these passages refer to the future messianic kingdom.

114 Col. 1:13; cf. Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 4:11.

115 Ex. 19:6; 1 Peter 2:7–9; cf. Rev. 1:6.

116 See chapters 8–9; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5.

117 See chapter 9.

118 See Volume 2, chapter 23.

119 See chapter 2.

120 See chapter 16.

121 See chapter 13.

1 In chapter 13.

2 There are other views (e.g., promise/fulfillment) that do not prefer these labels, but the main issues that all comprehensive views must address are included in the discussion under these basic categories.

3 See chapter 13.

4 See chapter 16.

[5] It is on these four covenants that we will focus in this chapter.

[6] See below, under “The Mosaic Covenant.”

[7] See Volume 3, chapters 16–17.

[8] Cf. Gen. 26:2–3; 46:3–4; Josh. 1:2–6.

[9] See below, under “The Davidic Covenant.”

[10] Cf. 26:19–26; 27:18–29; 28:10–16.

[11] See below, under “The Mosaic Covenant.”

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See below, under “Jeremiah 25:9–12.”

[15] And, again, even if they had been, Israel’s possession of the land did not last.

[16] See below, under “Romans 11:1–32.”

[17] See chapters 8, 16.

[18] See above, under “Joshua 21:43–45.”

[19] See chapter 16.

[20] See chapter 17.

[21] See chapter 13.

[22] See chapter 14.

[23] See chapter 16.

[24] See chapter 17.

[25] In the first resurrection—see Rev. 20.

[26] See chapter 8.

[27] See below, under “The New Covenant.”

[28] This is often true of later covenants that build on former ones.

29 See chapter 7.

30 I.e., the Holy Land, given under the Abrahamic covenant.

31 See Volume 2, chapters 13–17.

32 The Mosaic covenant was (1) initiated after the Abrahamic covenant and (2) had an ending point, as demonstrated above.

33 See chapter 14.

34 Cf. Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Jer. 13:13; 29:16; 30:9.

35 E.g., see 2 Sam. 7:28; 1 Kings 2:4, 24; 5:12; 8:20, 24–25, 56; 2 Kings 8:19; 2 Chron. 1:9; 6:10, 16–42; 21:7.

36 As these unconditional promises have not yet been literally fulfilled as they were given, their ultimate fulfillment is forthcoming. The covenantal views that deny this national restoration of Israel to their land under the rule of David's descendant are not based in a historical-grammatical hermeneutic, which, as we have seen (in chapter 13), undergirds other doctrinal essentials.

37 Although this text does not mention the new covenant by name, it contains some of the same promises as Jeremiah 31.

38 See chapter 13.

39 See chapter 8

40 The NIV and the Greek NU ("critical") text omit the word *new*.

41 See chapter 14.

42 See Volume 3, Part 2.

43 This parallels what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3 (see below).

44 For example, Jer. 31; Matt. 26:26–28; cf. 1 Cor. 11:23ff.

45 See Volume 3, Part 2.

46 Including church-age believers; see Rom. 4:11, 16; cf. Gal. 3:7.

47 See chapter 14; cf. Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:6–8; 3:19–21; 15:16–17; Rom. 11:1–33.

48 See chapter 13.

49 See chapter 16.

50 For further elaboration on this, see his discussion in *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4.315–28.

51 This is based on the estimate that there were four or five times as many people as adult males, who alone numbered over 600,000.

52 Except perhaps Luke and Acts.

53 See 1 Samuel (ff.)

54 See chapters 16–17.

55 See chapter 14, under "The Messianic Kingdom." See also Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).

56 Matt. 12:22–32; cf. 17:9; 21:42; 22–23; John 1:10–11; Ps. 118:26.

57 See Rom. 11.

58 In chapters 1–2.

59 Again, the Old Testament foretold a time of Gentile blessing but did not foresee the mystery of the church.

60 See Part 1; see also Volume 3, Part 2.

61 See Volume 2, chapter 23.

62 See chapter 14.

63 See Volume 3, chapter 12.

64 See Part 1.

65 See chapter 2.

66 E.g., cf. John 8:11; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:6.

67 Gen. 13:14–15; cf. 15:7–21; 17:1–8; 26:3–5; 30:10–12.

68 Cf. 2 Sam. 7:12ff.; Ps. 89:24–37; Isa. 2:3.

69 See chapter 13.

70 E.g., Col. 1:13; 3:1; Acts 5:31.

71 E.g., Rom. 1:1–4; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 3:7.

72 E.g., Rev. 22:16.

73 E.g., Acts 2:33; Heb. 1:3, 8; 4:14–15.

74 Which did not happen at the Ascension.

75 See chapter 16.

76 I.e., literally fulfilled the Davidic covenant.

77 This is not to say that physical birth as a Jew was the sufficient condition for entry into God's kingdom. It was not (cf. Rom. 9:6–9); it was, though, the necessary condition for him (upon believing) to receive the national blessings promised to Abraham and David.

78 See chapter 13.

79 See chapter 16.

80 Op. cit.

81 Op. cit; cf. Acts 1:11.

82 See chapter 8; see also Volume 1, chapter 26, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

83 See chapter 14; see also Volume 2, chapter 8.

84 See chapter 16.

85 See chapter 17.

86 See chapters 16–17.

87 See chapter 14, under "Explaining the Messiah's Rejection in the Epistles."

88 See chapter 13.

89 See chapter 17.

90 These attributes have already been discussed in more detail earlier—see chapter 1. See also Volume 2, chapters 1, 4, 7–9, 17, 23.

91 See chapter 13.

92 Since it overlaps with the evidence for premillennialism, the historical basis for unconditionality regarding the Old Testament covenants with Israel is discussed in chapter 16.

93 Op. cit.

94 Ibid.

95 See Matt. 19:28; Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6–7; Rom. 11.

96 See also chapter 14.

97 See chapters 14 and 16.

98 See also below, under “2 Corinthians 1:20.”

99 See below, under “Response to Modified Covenantal Arguments.”

100 It can refer either to an individual or to a collective group as one.

101 E.g., Acts 1:6–8; 3:21–27; Rom. 11.

102 On Abraham’s seed, see chapter 14; see also Volume 3, chapter 17.

103 This section is dependent on an excellent article by S. Lewis Johnson titled “Paul and ‘The Israel of God’: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost,* Stanley Toussaint and Charles Dyer, eds. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 181–96.

104 See chapter 16.

105 Cf. Volume 3, chapters 16–17.

106 Op. cit.

107 As reflected, for example, in the NASB, KJV, ASV, and NKJV.

108 See Volume 3, Part 2; see also Rom. 10:4.

109 See also chapter 14.

110 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

111 See chapter 16.

112 See chapter 8.

113 For instance, cf. Deut. 10:15; 26:19; Rom. 3:1–2; 9:4–5; Isa. 2:2–3; 45:14.

114 As we saw in Part 1, this was concealed and not revealed; that is, promises were made for Gentile salvation, but Old Testament believers did not understand the mystery of how Jews and Gentiles share the same footing in Christ’s body (see Eph. 3:3–6; Col. 1:25–27).

115 See chapter 17.

116 See chapter 16.

1 See chapter 13.

2 See chapter 15.

3 They interpret Rev. 20 spiritually or allegorically.

4 See chapter 15.

5 Cf. chapter 15.

6 Cf. chapter 13.

7 Cf. chapter 14.

8 Op. cit.

9 Cf. chapters 8 and 10.

10 Cf. chapter 15.

11 See chapter 7.

12 See Volume 3, chapters 15–17.

13 Cf. Volume 3, Part 1.

14 *Premillennialism* refers to dispensational premillennialism, traditional or progressive (see chapters 13–15), which have commonalities such as a literal millennium, two separate resurrections, and literal interpretation of Revelation 20.

15 Recall from chapters 8 and 14 that the final resurrection has two components: The first (of the righteous, before the Millennium) and the second (of the unrighteous, after the Millennium).

16 Ibid.

17 We've seen that some amillennialists admit certain Old Testament covenants as yet to be literally fulfilled; they argue that this will not occur in the Millennium, but in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21).

18 Ibid.

19 See chapter 17.

20 Premillennialists take this to be a literal binding. Amillennialists and postmillennialists spiritualize it to mean that "throughout the gospel age in which we now live the influence of Satan, though certainly not annihilated, is so curtailed that he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world"

(Hoekema in Clouse, *MMFV,* 164). Revelation 20 says no such thing; rather, it speaks of Satan being completely unable to "deceive" people for a thousand years (v. 8; cf. v. 2).

21 Premillennialism maintains two final judgments: one for believers before the Millennium, known as "the judgment seat of Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10) and another for unbelievers after the Millennium, known as "the Great White Throne judgment" (Rev. 20:11–14). See chapter 17.

22 See Matt. 24:3–14; Luke 18:8; 1 Tim. 4:1–5; 2 Tim. 3:1–7.

23 See chapter 17.

24 Together known as "the final resurrection."

25 See chapters 13–15.

26 See chapter 13.

27 See chapter 8; see also Volume 1, chapter 26; Volume 2, appendix 1.

28 And the messianic kingdom; cf. chapter 14.

29 Matt. 13:37–43; cf. 16:27; 24:30; 25:31.

30 See below, under "Only Premillennialism Employs a Consistent Hermeneutic."

31 See chapter 13.

32 See chapters 14–15.

33 Ibid.

34 As maintained by premillennialists.

35 Op. cit.

36 See chapter 15.

37 Cf. Luke 4:18–31; 7:24–27; 20:41–44; Matt. 22:41–45; 26:64.

38 Cf. Luke 1:17, 32–33, 54–55, 67–79; 2:25–33, 36–38; Matt. 4:12–17; 12:15–16.

39 See chapter 14.

40 See Volume 2, appendix 1.

41 Temporarily; cf. Luke 21:24.

42 Matt. 13:13–15; Mark 4:11–12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39–40; Acts 28:25–27.

43 Cf. Rom. 10:3; 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:14–15.

44 Some of the kingdom parables also contain this certainty.

45 See chapter 13.

46 Cf. Rom. 11:11–12, 15; 17–32.

47 See Volume 3, Part 2.

48 See chapter 17.

49 See under "The Issue of 'Forever' " in chapter 14, and also below, under "Use of the Term *Forever,*" on why this does not literally mean Christ's reign is temporal rather than eternal.

50 Nondispensational scholars, such as George Eldon Ladd (see Clouse, *MMFV*), have acknowledged that consistent literal interpretation of this text leads to a premillennial view.

51 Two *literal* resurrections (two parts of the final resurrection) fits with other passages on this topic (see chapter 8); cf. Dan. 12:2; John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15.

52 Ibid.

53 According to the Jewish (360-day) calendar.

54 See chapter 13.

55 1 Cor. 15:22–28; cf. "The Issue of 'Forever' " in chapter 14.

56 We'll see in chapter 17 that Rev. 6–18 covers the Tribulation; Rev. 19 opens Christ's return.

57 See chapter 17.

58 On the Rapture and the Tribulation, see ibid.

59 See chapters 8–9.

60 See chapter 9.

61 See chapter 10.

62 See Part 1, chapter 2.

63 Zech. 3:10; Isa. 65:21; cf. Amos 9:13–15; Isa. 11:6–9; Ezek. 34:25–29.

64 See chapter 17.

65 See Volume 2, chapter 1.

66 Ibid., chapters 4, 7–9, and 23.

67 See Volume 1, chapter 4; Volume 2, chapter 1; and Volume 3, chapters 15–17.

68 See Volume 2, chapter 19; and Volume 3, chapter 1.

69 See Volume 2, chapters 4 and 8.

70 1 Cor. 15:12–19; Luke 24:39–43; see chapter 8.

71 See above, under "The Millennium."

72 Death was *officially* defeated by the Crucifixion and Resurrection (Col. 2:14–15; 1 Cor. 15:54–55), yet death still reigns in that all still physically die (Rom. 5:12). Death will be *actually* defeated after the Second Coming (Rom. 8:22–23; 1 Cor. 15:50–54; Rev. 21:4). See Volume 3, chapter 6.

73 See Volume 1, chapter 4.

74 For example, when quoting a messianic passage from Isaiah in a synagogue, Jesus stopped in the middle of a sentence and pronounced it literally fulfilled (in the First Coming); He didn't finish the rest of the verse because it applies to the Second Coming and therefore was not yet fulfilled. Nonpremillennialism says the first part is literal but the second part is allegorical (cf. Isa. 61:1–2; Luke 4:18–21).

75 Again, the two are listed together in the same texts; both are said to involve the dead bodies of people coming out of graves—see chapter 8.

76 See Volumes 2 and 3.

77 See Volume 1, Part 2.

78 See chapters 13–17 and also Volume 1, Part 1.

79 See chapter 17.

80 On "early" and "later" Augustine, see footnote under "The Historical Basis for Adam's Free Will" in Volume 3, chapter 3; see also his citations under "The Historical Basis for an Unlimited Atonement" in chapter 12 of that same volume.

81 See chapter 17.

82 See chapter 13.

83 See chapter 4.

84 The donatists, who profoundly affected Augustine's soteriology (see Volume 3).

85 Once again, this is a highly improbable interpretation; Jesus spoke here of bodies coming out of the graves (v. 28); see chapter 8.

86 See Volume 3.

87 See chapters 8, 13–15.

88 Cf. 1 Cor. 15:25–27; Ps. 110:1; Isa. 24:21–23.

89 See chapter 15.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Gen. 18:17ff.; 22:18; 26:5.

93 Cf. Volume 3, chapter 16.

94 Ibid., chapters 10–11.

95 I.e., 430 years after God made the Abrahamic covenant, when He gave the law to Moses.

96 See Volume 3, chapter 16.

97 See chapters 14–15.

98 On conditions and causes, see examples in Volume 1, chapter 10, and Volume 2, chapter 21.

99 See Volume 2, appendix 1, and Volume 3, chapter 3.

100 See Volume 2, chapter 8, and Volume 3, chapters 3 and 12.

101 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

102 See chapter 15.

103 See above, under “The Millennium.”

104 See also chapter 15.

105 See chapter 15.

106 See chapters 13 and 15.

107 See chapters 14–15.

108 Cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6–7; Rom. 11.

109 See chapter 13; see also Volume 1, chapter 10.

110 For an expanded treatment of this passage, see chapter 15.

111 See Volume 3, Part 2.

112 Op. cit.

113 See chapter 13.

114 See chapters 13–15.

115 See chapters 14–15.

116 Ibid.

117 See above.

118 See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 9.

119 I.e., an indefinite period of time, which he later specifies (Rev. 20:4–6).

120 Cf. Dan. 12:2; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:4–6.

121 See chapter 8.

122 From *anazaô: ana,* "again," and *zaô,* "to live."

123 See Volume 3, Part 1.

124 See chapter 13.

125 See chapters 13–15.

126 See chapter 13.

127 See Volume 1, chapter 10.

128 See Volume 1, chapters 14–15, and Volume 2, chapter 10.

129 "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, *searched intently and with the greatest care,* trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. *It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you [church-age believers],* when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven."

130 1 Cor. 11:25; cf. Gen. 12:3; Isa. 11:10; 62:2; Amos 9:11–12; Rom. 4:9–11.

131 See chapter 13.

132 See Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 288–90; and John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1983), 1.1305.

133 E.g., the land-promises to Abraham—see Gen. 12, 15, 17.

134 For example, also consider primitive weapons of warfare being used to speak of literal future (modern) weapons (in Ezek. 39).

135 See chapter 13.

136 See chapter 15.

137 Op. cit.

138 These will be in effect during the Millennium; see "*Sixth*" and "*Twelfth*," below.

139 E.g., cf. Isa. 56:7; 66:20–23; Jer. 33:18; 33:15–22; Zech. 14:16–21; Mal. 3:3–4.

140 See Volume 3, chapter 9 and 12.

141 Ibid.; see also 1 Cor. 11:23–26.

142 See "*Sixth*," above.

143 See Part 1; cf. Eph. 3:4–6; cf. Col. 1:26–27.

144 See chapter 5.

145 Ibid.

146 By contrast, there is no sense in which the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were fulfilled in Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, for they demand a Millennium to fulfill them.

147 See Amos 9:11–12.

148 Since the Ascension; see Volume 2, appendix 1.

149 At the Second Coming; see above.

150 See chapters 13 and 14, respectively.

151 See chapters 1–2; cf. Eph. 3:3–5; Col. 1:26–27; Rom. 16:25.

152 See chapter 4.

153 Again, this is not in the original of Amos 9:11.

154 This *is* in the original text.

155 Cf. chapters 8 and 17.

156 See chapter 8.

157 See chapter 17.

158 See Part 1.

159 E.g., Matt. 19:28; Luke 19:19; 22:29.

160 See chapter 17.

161 See chapter 17.

1 The specific views on the Tribulation and the Rapture—preterism, pretribulationism, the partial-rapture view, midtribulationism, the pre-wrath view, and posttribulationism—will be addressed after we have examined the Tribulation and the Rapture.

2 See chapter 14, under “Daniel 9:24–27.”

3 For other specifics, see ibid.; see also Harold Hoehner (b. 1935), *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977). Hoehner calculates it as follows: 483 Jewish lunar years of 360 days is 173,880 days. Gregorian calendar years are 365 days (actually, 365.25, which is why we observe “leap year” every fourth year, except on the centennial); from March 5, 444 B.C. to March 30, A.D. 33 is 476 years (there is no year 0). Four hundred seventy-six Gregorian years of 365 days is 173,740 days. To this must be added 116 days for the leap years (119 - 3 for the centennial years that aren’t leap years) and twenty-four days between March 5 and March 30 (the beginning and ending days of the 483 years), which totals exactly 173,880 days.

4 See below, under “Preterism.”

5 Antiochus gave himself the name *Epiphanes,* which means “God made manifest” or “God revealed.”

6 Cf. the first seal (Rev. 6:1–2).

7 Cf. the second seal (Rev. 6:3–4).

8 Cf. the third seal (Rev. 6:5–6).

9 Cf. the fourth seal (Rev. 6:7–8).

10 Cf. the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9–11).

11 Some attempt to combine these views into one that’s more complex; for example, the series may start at different times while still ending together.

[12] Some argue that the seventh seal includes the Second Coming, because John says, “The great day of His wrath has come” (Rev. 6:17 NKJV). Grammatically, “has come” is an aorist (tense) indicative (mood) with the augment, which usually means a past event. However, as A. T. Robertson (1863–1934) noted, this may not be a divine wrath but could mean “a mistaken cry of men in terror caused by the portents which are bursting upon them” (*WPNT,* 6.347). Or, it may mean “that the wrathful Day of the Lord has already been in effect through the earlier seals, but it is not until the disturbances of the sixth seal, which obviously are caused by God, that the unregenerate recognize that what they have been experiencing with the earlier seals was actually the Day-of-the-Lord wrath” (Showers, *PWRV,* 79).

[13] See chapter 16.

[14] E.g., 5:1–2, 6, 11; 6:1–2, 5, 12; 7:2; 8:2; 9:1; 15:1–2; 17:3, 6; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11–12; 22:1.

[15] See 1:19; 9:12; 20:3.

[16] E.g., cf. 13:1, 11; 14:6, 14.

[17] As opposed to cardinal numbers.

[18] For instance, the first event after the seventh seal is not the *eighth* something but the *first* trumpet.

[19] This rider is not to be confused with Christ (cf. Rev. 19) because: (1) This is not the Second Coming, which is after the Tribulation; (2) Christ will come with a “sword,” the Word of God, not a bow; (3) At His return, Christ will not be “bent on conquest” but will be engaged in the final conquering; (4) By parallel with Matthew 24:4–5, this is a false Christ.

[20] Showers notes that *shortened* is augmented aorist indicative, indicating a past action God had made in advance (*MOLC,* 5).

[21] The statement following the sixth seal (6:17, see immediately above) could be taken to imply that the end is imminent.

[22] The seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15) seems to signal the end of the Tribulation as well. This may indicate an overlap in the endings of the two series or a short time for all seven bowls.

[23] 2 Thess. 2:4; cf. Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15.

[24] 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89:24–37; see chapter 15.

[25] See chapter 16.

[26] This same phrase “come up here” is said to the two resurrected witnesses killed during the Tribulation and then raptured bodily to heaven (Rev. 11:12).

[27] Robert Gromacki (b. 1935) notes that John did not hear the voice of the archangel and was not given a resurrection body; also, Christ did not descend from heaven and there were no believers meeting in the air (in Ice, *WTS,* 362).

[28] See below, under “The Heaven-Dwellers.”

29 From Greek *skénos* (noun) and *skénoô* (verb).

30 Cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–16; Phil. 3:21; see also chapter 8.

31 Eph. 2:20; cf. 3:5; see also chapters 1 and 4.

32 See chapter 16.

33 Arguing that these are heavenly spirits (not resurrected believers) would miss the point being made, namely, that the only Tribulation references to the church are about heaven, which supports the view that there is no church on earth during the Tribulation. Further, when they return with Christ, He is in His physical resurrected body (19:11ff.), ready to reign on His physical throne in Jerusalem, as are those with Him (Matt. 19:28).

34 Those who believe the Rapture will occur after the Tribulation.

35 E.g., 13:7, 10; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; cf. 7:4–9; 14:3.

36 See chapters 13 and 15.

37 Gk: *dia*.

38 Gk: *ek*.

39 Gk: *terein*.

40 E.g., see Josh. 2:13; Ps. 32:19; 56:13; Prov. 21:23.

41 See below, under “Midtribulationism.”

42 See below, under “The Pre-Wrath View.”

43 See below, under “Posttribulationism.”

44 Cf. Isa. 9:11–12; 10:5–6; 13:1–5, 9, 17–19; 51:17–20; 65:12; Jer. 50:9, 13, 25; 2 Chron. 36:16–17.

45 Cf. Jer. 21:5–7, 9; 44:8, 11–12; Ezek. 5:11–17; 7:3, 8, 14–15.

46 1 Cor. 15:51–52; cf. 1:7; 4:5; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; James 5:7–9; 1 John 2:28.

47 E.g., Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20 NKJV.

48 See chapter 16.

49 See chapters 13–15.

50 Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; see also Volume 3, chapters 7–9.

[51] The Second Coming—see chapter 16.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Matt. 22:30; see chapter 8.

[54] Zechariah 14:16 is sometimes used: “Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.” However, this refers to the millennial occupants who survived the judgments as *redeemed, not rebels*. They will worship the King; verses 17–21 go on to describe the later conditions when unsaved children are born; some will not worship Christ and will have to be punished.

[55] The following chart follows Ryrie’s contrast (see *WYSKAR*, 87).

[56] Cf. Dan. 9:27; Rev. 11:2–3; 12:6.

[57] E.g., cf. Job 19:25; Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19.

[58] The best Greek texts say “Lord,” as do most modern translations, including the ASV, NASB, and NIV.

[59] See chapters 14 and 16.

60 E.g., cf. Matt. 24:40–41; John 14:3.

[61] The discussion here follows Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr, N.J.: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 59.

[62] See chapter 13.

[63] Such as John 14:1–3; 1 Cor. 15:51–58; 1 Thess. 4:16–17; see also Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 52–54.

[64] John 3:5; Titus 3:6; Rom. 8:9.

[65] See chapter 8.

[66] See Ice, ed., *When the Trumpet Sounds* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995), 115.

[67] See Volume 1, chapter 7, on truth being what corresponds to reality.

[68] See Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 279.

[69] See below, under “The Historical Basis for Christ’s Imminent Return.”

[70] See chapter 16.

[71] See chapter 10.

72 See chapters 14–15.

73 Cf. Rev. 6:16–17; 11:18; 12:12; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15.

74 See chapter 16.

75 See note under “Argument Thirteen,” below.

76 See, e.g., Matt. 11:16; 12:41; Luke 7:31.

77 See below, under “Eighth” under “The Basic Evidence Against Preterism.”

78 See below, under the other primary views.

79 See chapters 15–16.

80 E.g., the new covenant—see chapter 15. Cf. John 19:37; Rev. 1:7.

81 See chapter 13.

82 See responses to “Argument Eleven” and “Argument Twelve,” below.

83 See 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:51–52; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; James 5:7–9; 1 John 2:28.

84 *Tachus* occurs thirteen times in the New Testament (Matt. 5:25; 28:7–8; Mark 9:39; 16:8; John 11:29; Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20). Arndt and Gingrich (*GELNT,* 814) say it means “quick, swift, speedy.” It is what happens “quickly, at a rapid rate.” Thayer (*GELNT,* 616) agrees, saying that it means “quickly, speedily.” Vine (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 913) concurs with “swift, quick … quickly.”

85 Haggai 2:6–7 says the time from his day (c. 500 B.C.) to the glorious rebuilt temple at Christ’s return is only a “little while.” Even to the First Coming this was five hundred years; the prophecy will not be completely fulfilled until the Second Coming, which is already over twenty-five hundred years.

86 See chapter 16.

87 See below, under “Pretribulationism,” “The Partial-Rapture View,” “Midtribulationism,” “The Pre-Wrath View,” and “Posttribulationism.”

88 Ibid.

89 See note under “Argument Thirteen” for preterism, above.

90 Gen. 13:15–17; 15:12–21; 17:7–8.

91 See chapters 14–15.

92 See chapter 13.

93 Op. cit.

94 The difficulty that preterists have in attempting to explain this text reveals the insufficiency of their position. They say it was (1) the occupation of the temple by Jewisn Zealots, or (2) the Idumaean intrusion into Jerusalem in A.D. 68, or (3) the Roman burning of the temple in A.D. 70, or (4) the temple's corruption by apostate Israel. None of these is actually parallel to Daniel's prophecy.

95 Cf. Luke 3:6; John 17:2; 1 Cor. 1:29; Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:20; etc.

96 Gk: *pasa sarx* (v. 22), rendered by the NIV as "on one."

97 Five prepared, five unprepared—Matt. 25:1–13.

98 See Matt. 19:28–29; Phil. 3:10–14; Rev. 2:11; 3:5.

99 See Volume 3, Part 2.

100 E.g., cf. Matt. 24:41–42; 1 Thess. 5:6; Heb. 9:28.

101 See Rom. 8:16–17; Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 1:4–5.

102 See Volume 3, chapters 10–11.

103 See Volume 3, chapters 6 and 9.

104 See Volume 3, chapters 16–17.

105 Ibid., chapter 11.

106 This discussion builds on that given by Wayne House (b. 1948) in *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 129–32.

107 See Part 1; see also Volume 3, chapter 16; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13.

108 See below, under "The Pre-Wrath View."

109 The reference to the "two witnesses" being killed, resurrected, and taken to heaven (Rev. 11) does not fit midtribulationism because: (1) These are Jewish witnesses, symbolized as two "olive trees" (v. 4; cf. Zech. 4) able to perform miracles like two great Jewish prophets, Moses and Elijah (vv. 5–6); (2) their work centers around the Jewish "temple" in Jerusalem (vv. 1–2, 8); and, most of all, (3) they are taken into heaven near the end of the Tribulation (v. 3; cf. 12:6).

110 E.g., Dan. 9:27; 12:7; Rev. 11:2–3; 12:3, 6, 14.

111 Cf. Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:3–4; Rev. 13.

112 Postribulationism presents a different fulfillment—see "Argument Three" under "Pretribulationism."

113 See *The Sign* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000).

114 See Marvin Rosenthal's *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990).

115 As is indicated by the Septuagint translation of this word as *tribulation* (Gk: *thlipis*); cf. Rom. 2:5, 9; 2 Thess. 1:7.

116 E.g., cf. Ex. 9:16; Zech. 11:15–17; Rom. 1:18–32; 2 Thess. 2:9.

117 Cf. Isa. 9:11–12; 10:5–6; 13:1–5, 9, 17–19; 51:17–20; 65:12; Jer. 50:9, 13, 25; 2 Chron. 36:16–17.

118 Cf. Jer. 21:5–7, 9; 44:8, 11–12; Ezek. 5:11–17; 7:3, 8, 14–15.

119 See chapter 16.

120 "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth."

1 E.g., cf. Gen. 19; Ex. 3; Josh. 5; Jude 13.

2 See chapters 1–2.

3 Cf. Volume 3, chapters 9 and 16.

4 Florence Bulle, *"God Wants You Rich" and Other Enticing Doctrines* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1983), 74–75.

5 *Tongues of Men and Angels* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

1 See Volume 1, chapter 3.

2 Ibid., chapters 13–16.

3 Ibid., chapters 4 and 28.

4 On the "Markan Appendix" (Mark 16:9–20), see under "Response to Objection Nine" in chapter 8.

5 See Volume 3, chapter 17.

6 On dispensations, see chapters 14–15; see also Volume 3, chapter 6.

7 It was God's pattern, from the time of Moses, to grant miracles to His servants to confirm that their revelations were from Him (e.g., cf. Ex. 4; 1 Kings 18; John 3:2; Acts 2:22).

8 With which came the gift of tongues—see appendices 1–2; see also chapter 6.

9 Cf. 1:26; 2:1, 7, 14.

[10] Cf. 8:14–18; 10:44–45; 19:1–6.

[11] Cf. Ex. 4:6; John 3:2; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3–4.

[12] See Volume 2, chapter 24.

[13] Cf. Phil. 2:26; 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20.

[14] See chapter 8.

[15] See chapter 16.

[16] During the Tribulation period (see chapter 17), when God's two witnesses give His Word to Antichrist, there will be a brief restoration of the gift of miracles so that God's message to Antichrist can be confirmed (see Rev. 11:3–5). This will complete the four great periods of miracles: the Mosaic, the Prophetic, the Apostolic, and the Apocalyptic.

[17] See Volume 1, chapters 3 and 7.

[18] See John 20:31; Acts 1:22; 2:42; 1 Cor. 2:13; 9:1; 15:5–9; Eph. 2:20; 1 Thess. 4:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 John 2:19; 4:6.

[19] See appendix 8.

[1] See also chapters 1 and 5.

[2] See Volume 3, chapter 16; cf. Volume 3, chapter 11.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Volume 3, chapter 16, also presented Charles Ryrie's (b. 1925) mediating (moderate) view.

[5] See chapters 13–15.

[6] See chapter 5.

[7] That is a gnostic belief, as is the special knowledge that ultradispensationalists claim to have of "body" truth.

[8] So was baptism (Acts 22), which they reject.

[9] There *is* a ritual.

[10] This is mentioned because some people have argued that the Supper must not be for today because they've never had any particular emotional experience while partaking of it.

[11] "They" meaning the less-extreme ultradispensationalists, or O'Hairites.

[12] Baker admitted that Paul asked people to repent.

[13] This is an attempt to create a distinction where none exists.

[14] Another distinction without a difference.

[15] We also touched on ultradispensationalism in chapters 1 and 5.

[16] This the same argument O'Hair uses for Communion—that it is "till I come" (Christ's return).

[17] Likewise, some Old Testament sacrifices were never linked in the same passage.

[1] Resulting in universalism—see Volume 3, chapter 13.

[2] See chapter 12.

3 See Volume 1, chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapter 18.

[4] Cf. Volume 3, chapter 9.

[5] E.g., cf. Gen. 3:19; Ps. 139:13, 15.

[6] Cf. Ps. 57:7; 139:13–16; Gal. 1:15–16.

[7] See Volume 3, chapters 1–2 and appendices 1–2.

[8] As orthodox Jews, Muslims, and Christians believe—see chapter 8.

[9] See Volume 3, chapter 1, and appendices 1–2.

[10] See Volume 1, chapter 2, and Volume 3, chapter 3.

[11] See Volume 3, chapters 1–2.

[12] See Volume 1, chapters 13–16.

[13] See Volume 2, chapter 19.

[14] Cf. Gen. 5:3; Eccl. 7:29; Ps. 139:13–16.

[15] See chapter 8; cf. 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9; 19:20; 20:10; Luke 23:43; Matt. 17:3.

[16] See chapter 8.

[17] Ibid.

[18] E.g., see Luke 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:9; Matt. 25:41; John 5:28–29; Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:1–15.

19 See chapters 9–10.

20 John 4:10; Rom. 3:24; 5:15–17; 6:23; 2 Cor. 9:15; Eph. 2:8; Heb. 6:4.

21 See Volume 3, chapters 16–17.

22 Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

23 See Volume 3, chapters 9–12.

1 See chapter 3.

2 The claim that this canon gives the bishop of Rome primacy over the whole church is without justification. The context makes clear that it speaks only about different bishops having jurisdictions in their respective areas, naming three centers—Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome. “Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis prevail, that the Bishop of Alexandria have jurisdiction in all these, since it is customary for the Bishop of Rome also. Likewise in Antioch and the other provinces, let the Churches retain their privileges” (see Schaff, *CC,* 15). As Karl Joseph von Hefele put it, “It is evident that the Council has not in view here the primacy of the bishop of Rome over the whole Church, but simply his power as a patriarch” (ibid, 16).

3 Virgilius (d. 610) subsequently recanted after the council condemned him; he died on the way home, but only after he approved of the action of the council, which he “by the [alleged] authority of the Apostolic See” had forbidden them to do (see Schaff, ibid., 321–23).

4 Philip Schaff (1819–1893) listed thirteen lines of evidence that the records are accurate (ibid., 351–52).

5 See chapter 7.

6 The Templars had been founded in 1118 to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land.

7 Catholics widely see John XXIII as antipope.

8 At the center of the debate is whether the total *sufficiency* of Christ’s sacrifice and the complete *necessity* of God’s grace (both of which Trent confesses) are sufficient to merit the label *orthodox,* or whether the Reformation doctrine of the *exclusivity* of faith (*sola fidei*) is necessary for soteriological orthodoxy (see discussion in Geisler and McKenzie, *RCE,* chapter 12).

9 See chapter 7.

10 These are found in William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, rev. ed., 1969).

11 Darby wrote: “It is not my intention to enter any great detail, but to show simply [that] in every instance there was total and complete failure as regarded man, however the patience of God might tolerate and carry on by grace the dispensation in which man has thus failed in the outset.” He pointed to the apostles’ supposed failure to keep the Great Commission, so “the church which was gathered has departed from the faith of the gospel, and gone backward, so as to be as bad or worse than the heathen” (“ASD”). This total and complete apostasy of the church from the very beginning leaves us with only the possibility of

gatherings and assemblies during the rest of this dispensation: “The church is in a state of ruin, immersed and buried in the world—invisible, if you will have it so; whilst it ought to hold forth, as a candlestick, the light of God” (“OFC”). Further, the church cannot be restored from this state. “What remains? The Holy Spirit is in our midst whenever two or three are gathered together.… Nowhere are we authorized choose elders or pastors—only God can give these gifts, effective whether there are organized churches or not.… In brief, the children of God have nothing to do but to meet together in the name of the Lord” (ibid.). “In speaking of the ruin of the church, we speak of it as down here, set to manifest Christ’s glory in unity on the earth” (“PRC”). “As regards the purpose of God the church cannot be ruined, but as regards its actual condition as a testimony for God on earth it is in ruin.… The church of the living God is the body of saints formed on earth in unity with Christ in heaven as the Head, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to form them into unity with Christ at the right hand of God” (ibid.). “What do I find people talking about? A visible and invisible church. Now this is Satan’s lie.… The so-called visible church is in fact the world, and cannot give any testimony at all for Christ.… Now what do I mean by the ruin of the church? A simple question will answer this. Who will show me the manifestation of the unity of the body of Christ? … Some years after the conversion of my soul I looked around to find where the church was, but I could not find it. I could find plenty of saints better than myself, but not the church as it was set up with power on the earth. Then I say the church as thus set up is ruined, and I cannot find a better word for it” (ibid.).

12 See chapters 2–4.

13 See chapter 2.

14 See Volume 3, chapter 17.

1 Matt. 26:14, 17; John 6:67; 20:24; 1 Cor. 15:5.

2 Acts 9; cf. 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8.

3 E.g., Gal. 1:17, 19; Acts 9:27; 15:2, 4, 6, 22.

4 Luke 1:2; John 15:27; Acts 1:22.

5 Matt. 10:1ff.; Acts 1:21–22; Gal. 1:1ff.

6 Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:5–8.

7 Matt. 10:8; Acts 2:43; 5:12; Heb. 2:3–4.

8 “Junia” can be either a male or a female name.

9 Phil. 2:19–23; 1 Tim. 1:2; 3:14–15; 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:9, 21.

10 Col. 4:14; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11.

11 Acts 2, 10, 19; cf. 1 Cor. 13:8.

12 Again, a person had to live in the first century to be an apostle, for an apostle had to have been a witness to Christ’s resurrection (Acts 1:22).

n Catholics are quick to point out that some Protestants (e.g., Anglicans) and the Eastern Orthodox also

venerate the host and genuflect before it. At best, this would not prove host worship to be correct; it would only show that these views are wrong also. However, there is a difference that makes the criticism more severe for Roman Catholicism, since they alone believe that the host is actually the body of Christ and that it can and should be worshiped as God. Others may believe that Christ is really present *in* the host, but this is very different from saying He *is* the host that should be worshiped as such.

n Many scholars take "Babylon" as a covert and symbolic term for Rome (cf. Rev. 18:2ff.), used perhaps to conceal Peter's location and protect his life. There is no record of Peter being in literal Babylon (Iraq).

n The terms *bishop* and *elder* were used interchangeably in the New Testament (cf. Titus 1:5, 7), the former being the term Greeks used for leaders and the latter that which Hebrews used. Indeed, the qualifications are the same for both; the duties are the same; there was a plurality of both in even small churches (cf. Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1). Lightfoot confirms this conclusion (ibid., 191ff.). Thus, Irenaeus, writing nearly a century after the founding of the Church, is reflecting an emerging episcopal form of government not found in the New Testament.

n The adjective *catholic,* generically, means "general" or "universal," from two Greek words (*kata* and *holou*) that mean "concerning the whole."

n The Roman philosopher Cicero (106–43 B.C.) also stated that "there is a true law, right reason in accord with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting.… There is one law … binding at all times upon all peoples" (*The Republic* 3.22, as cited in Paul E. Sigmund, *Natural Law in Political Thought* [Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1971], 22).

n There is nothing in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution that forbids the U.S. government from encouraging religion in general while not favoring one religion in particular; nor is there a constitutional issue with establishing a national morality founded upon timeless moral principles, such as those expressed in the Ten Commandments. Indeed, this is what America did until it was forbidden by Supreme Court decision (Stone v. Graham, 1980).

n Some *dispensationalists* (see chapters 13 and 15; see also Volume 3, chapter 6) deny the Acts 2 event as being a fulfillment of Joel's oracle, arguing that Peter was only claiming that Pentecost was a *like phenomenon* of what would later occur at the Second Coming (see chapter 16), including the astronomical signs Joel mentioned in the same quote that did *not* occur at Pentecost (e.g., v. 20). That, however, is hard to reconcile with the clear statement of Peter that "this is that which was spoken by … Joel" (v. 16 KJV).

n It should be noted that Eastern Orthodoxy also agrees with Catholicism on this point: "At the Eucharist, the sacrifice offered is Christ himself, and it is Christ himself, who in the Church performs the act of offering" (Ware, *OC,* 292–93).

n The difference between (1) early America and (2) America since the Supreme Court ruled in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) is that neither the federal government nor a state may have an established religion. In early America (as represented by the intent of the First Amendment, which says that "Congress [i.e., the *national* (federal) government] shall make no Law respecting an Establishment of Religion"), a *state* could (and many did) have established religions. Subsequent to *Everson,* states were no longer permitted to establish religion; the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment were applied to the First Amendment, and the intent of the First Amendment—to forbid only a national religion and allow state religions—was overturned. Five of the thirteen colonies that ratified this amendment had state religions at the time and were never required to disestablish them.

n The Catholic view of "implicit faith" for infants is significantly different from the belief of many Protestants who hold that God elects infants apart from actual faith, knowing that they *will* exercise faith when their faculties are quickened by Him (presumably at death) so they can actually believe (see ibid.,

chapter 15). Further, it differs from the belief of Protestants who hold that God actually saves infants who *can't* believe (since their faculties are not yet developed), knowing that they *would have* believed if they could have. God sees the potential as well as the actual and can act accordingly, even in advance of actual events.

n This method already allows for genre decisions, through looking at the text's literal meaning in both immediate and broader contexts.

n That Peter was asked whether he loved Jesus "more" than the others does not prove Jesus gave him more authority than they; this would imply that the amount of Peter's love is the basis for the amount of authority God granted. *God's grace is not conditioned on our works of love* (see Volume 3, chapters 10 and 16). Even Roman Catholics believe that God gave infallible authority to popes who were more evil than other people whom they maintain did not have such authority.

n Murray Harris (b. 1940) does not use this point to support his position (see *Easter in Durham,* 23–24, and *Raised Immortal,* 61–62); Wolfhart Pannenberg (b. 1928) does (ibid., 93–95, 99). Harris's view, though, amounts to the same thing; he argues that the resurrection body was essentially immaterial (*ED,* 17) and could only be seen with the natural eye if a miracle occurred by which it "materialized." For all practical purposes, there is little difference between insisting that what occurred was a miracle of *materialization* or a miracle of *visualization:* Both views deny the essential materiality and physicality of the resurrection body. (Ironically, both views posit some kind of miracle required for it to become as such.)

n That Ignatius called Polycarp a bishop does not necessarily denote an episcopal form of government; as we have seen, these are different New Testament names for the same office (see 1 Tim. 3:1; cf. Titus 1:5, 7; Acts 14:23; cf. Phil. 1:1), and it may not have implied any special authority, only leadership.

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n Lutherans likewise reject sacerdotalism: "The presence of Christ's body and blood is not a result of the priest's actions. It is instead a consequence of the power of Jesus Christ" (ibid.).

n We use the word most because this problem is also inherent in Lutheran theology with their belief that, in Communion, the physical body and blood of Christ is "contained in" or is "under" the communion elements (see below, under "Views on the Lord's Supper"). In spite of Lutheran "denials of various facets of the Catholic position, Luther insisted upon the concept of manducation. [For Lutherans,]there is a real eating of Jesus' body." (Erickson, *CT,* 1118).

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n There is a wide range of opinion as to the authority of this group in Jerusalem, all the way from "merely advisory" to "ecclesiastically authoritative." Those who tend toward the latter end—most of whom come

from episcopal or presbyterian church government—call this dispute "the first church *council*." Earl Radmacher, representing congregational church government, sees it as a *conference* with an advisory status (*NC,* 348–49). However, since the appeal was to apostles, since the decision was from them (with their living authority), since it was called a "commandment" and "decrees to keep" (15:24; 16:4), and since it was sent to a group of churches (15:23), the determination appears to have been authoritative for all churches.

n The only possible reference to a resurrection *appearance* as a vision is in Acts 26:19, where Paul says: "I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven." Nevertheless, if this *is* a reference to Christ's Damascus appearance, it is merely an overlap in usage of the words *vision* and *appearance,* for Paul clearly calls this event an appearance (1 Cor. 15:8) in which He had "seen Jesus our Lord" and, hence, was given apostolic credentials (9:1; cf. Acts 1:22).

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