

6. The Glory of the Kingdom

The hope of the Christ is intimately connected with the kingdom he will establish. This messianic kingdom is God's kingdom, or the "kingdom of God" (Mark 1:15 and parallels), because God is the one responsible for establishing it.¹ It is the "Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29), for it is the kingdom of which God the Father approves. It is the "heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18), for it is the kingdom which God will anoint with heavenly glory. It is the "kingdom of Christ" (Eph. 5:5)—that is, "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11), which believers inherit as "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Thus we long for "his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1), for it is "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14), whereby "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

The messianic kingdom is the culmination of biblical hope and expectation, for God will restore what he made in the beginning, and he will do it by means of his appointed Christ, establishing righteousness upon the earth within his everlasting kingdom. Christ's kingdom is the crowning doctrine of the Scriptures, to which all others ultimately gravitate.² Here is expressed *finally* the

¹ Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" is synonymous with the "kingdom of God," since "heaven" was often a Jewish circumlocution for "God" (see C. C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven," *DJG*, 417).

² So dispensationalist theologian Eric Sauer articulated, "The 'Kingdom' is the real basic theme of the Bible. It is the surrounding historical frame in which the whole course of revelation is being consummated. All ages and periods of the Divinely revealed ways; all groups and persons addressed, whether Israel, the nations, or the church; all temples, sanctuaries, and redeeming acts; all heavenly and demonic activities, whether in the foreground or background, stand in some way, either positively or negatively, in connexion with the history of the kingdom of God" (*From Eternity to Eternity: An Outline of the Divine Purposes*, trans. G. H. Lang [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954], 89).

Sauer could be understood as an early progressive (i.e., inaugurational) dispensationalist, as he continues, "The kingdom itself is the royal saving work of God to the carrying through of His counsels in creation and redemption. Therefore the most correct and inclusive translation of the Greek word *basileia*, used for 'kingdom,' is rather kingly rule than kingly realm. . . . It is the kingship of the Most High working salvation, that is, quite generally, it is the royal authority of the Saviour God, His government as a living and powerful Divine action, revealing itself in ever new forms of self-manifestation, in the course of many dispensations and periods" (*Ibid.*).

nature and character of God, the inheritance of Christ Jesus, the glory of the Holy Spirit, the destiny of humanity, and the restoration of all creation.

Though theological discussion concerning the messianic kingdom has devolved over the centuries into an endless web of polemical arguments, Christ's kingdom is a simple concept, backed by a simple scriptural testimony, exemplifying a simple Jewish eschatological hope.³ There is no sign in the New Testament of any confusion concerning the nature of the "kingdom of God."⁴ Like "Christ," the "kingdom of God" was commonly understood. No one questioned what kingdom John was preaching in the wilderness, nor did they question Jesus when he was "teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23). None of the disciples asked Jesus what the kingdom entailed when he sent them out preaching, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7), because it was commonly assumed to coincide with "the day of judgment" (v. 15), salvation (v. 22), the coming of the Messiah (v. 23), Gehenna (v. 28), and eternal life (v. 39).⁵

³ See Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. R. H. Hiers and D. L. Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971, first published in Germany 1892). Weiss's original thesis remains unchallenged: "The Kingdom of God as Jesus thought of it is never something subjective, inward, or spiritual, but is always the objective messianic Kingdom, which usually is pictured as a territory into which one enters, or as a land in which one has a share, or as a treasure which comes down from heaven" (Ibid., 133).

⁴ Contrary to the supposed "complex background" of kingdom language in second-temple Judaism (see D. C. Duling, "Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven," *ABD*, 4:49–56; and Michael Lattke, "On the Jewish Background of the Synoptic Concept, 'Kingdom of God,'" in *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton [London: SPCK, 1984], 72–91). Lattke egregiously presupposes the kingdom as the non-messianic "royal rule of God" (p. 75), reads that definition back into the Jewish literature, and concludes by separating "the scheme of the two ages, and the coming of the messianic king or judge" (p. 78) from the synoptic definition of the "kingdom of God." See a more realistic survey in G. E. Ladd, "The Kingdom of God in the Jewish Apocryphal Literature: Parts 1–3," *BSac* 109 (January 1952): 55–62, (April 1952): 164–74, (October 1952): 318–31.

⁵ As George E. Ladd acknowledged,

The kingdom of heaven must have reference to the kingdom which the Jews in particular expected, the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament, the earthly Davidic kingdom. Dr. Feinberg affirms: "There is no explanation offered as to the meaning of the 'kingdom' in his (John's) message, for the people knew what was implied by his words. . . . There was no need to describe the conditions and characteristics of the kingdom, for that had been done so repeatedly and minutely. Nor was it necessary to inform them that the kingdom could not and would not be established without the rightful King." "Nor does Christ explain what is meant by these words; His hearers knew full well their import. How unwarranted is the

Moreover, the stunning *lack of commentary* in the New Testament concerning the nature of the kingdom argues strongly for an unaltered Jewish apocalyptic view of the kingdom.⁶ Though the meaning of the kingdom is an endless source of contention today, the New Testament is generally unconcerned with its definition (focusing rather on the meaning and contention of the cross). The nature of the kingdom receives little exegetical attention, and when it does it falls in line with Old Testament and intertestamental views (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–55; 2 Tim. 4:1–18; 2 Peter 1:10–21).⁷ If the kingdom, which was the greatest hope of the

assertion, then, of those who find that Christ's ideas and conceptions of the kingdom involved something far removed from the thought of His hearers." . . .

It is true that Jesus never defined what he meant by kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven, and we can only assume that the announcement that the kingdom of God was near was full of meaning to his hearers. There is no evidence that they reacted with any measure of surprise to the announcement of either John or Jesus. The Old Testament frequently promised the coming of a time when the kingdom would be restored to Israel; and it is undoubtedly true that this is the meaning which the Jews attributed to Jesus' proclamation. (*Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], 112; quoting Charles L. Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1936], 87,89)

⁶ So George N. H. Peters,

To comprehend the subject of the kingdom, it is necessary to notice the belief and the expectations of the more pious portion of the Jews. This is the rule, covering doctrine, laid down by the ablest of writers; it is found in works introductory to the Bible or in defense of the Scriptures . . . as a leading one in the doctrinal interpretation of the Word; its importance and value are urged by various considerations as the only possible way to attain to a *consistent sense* of a doctrine. If the rule applies to doctrine in general, especially ought it to be observed in that of the kingdom.

Obs. 1. It is universally admitted by writers of prominence (e.g. Neander, Hagenbach, Schaff, Kurtz, etc.), whatever their respective views concerning the Kingdom itself, that the Jews, including the pious, held to a *personal* coming of the Messiah, *the literal* restoration of the Davidic throne and kingdom, the personal reign of Messiah *on David's throne*, *the resultant* exaltation of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, and *the fulfillment* of the Millennial descriptions in that reign. (*The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952, first published 1884 by Funk & Wagnalls], 1:183; italics in the original)

Though dated, the integrity of Peters' argument remains sound.

⁷ Again Peters well articulated,

On the face of the opening pages of the New Test. it is taken *for granted* that the Kingdom was something *well known, already the object of faith and hope.* Theologians generally, either unable to reconcile this with their church theories, or deeming it unimportant while acknowledging the fact, pass it by in silence, or give us some apologetics to account for it, which are derogatory to the age, to the believers then living, and to the Word. The destructive critics, seeing here a point of leverage insist upon it that this was evidence of

Jewish mind and heart, had now been “inaugurated,” “realized,” or “spiritually fulfilled” in some way, would not this grand event be the center of all thought and exhortation? Where is the *fanfare*? Where is the *hoopla*? If the kingdom had finally come, then it seems like a strangely inverted case of “little ado about much.”⁸

Rather, the “kingdom of God” is simply the *messianic kingdom*, to which the Jews commonly looked (as they do today) and to which the church sets its hope in the return of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Peter 2:11).⁹ The modern academy has shaped the kingdom of God in its own image, making it so complicated and obtuse that no one outside its esoteric circle can understand it or practically apply it, which makes George Buchanan’s oft-quoted characterization of historical research concerning the kingdom painfully true: “Scholars have internalized, de-temporalized, de-historicized, cosmologized, spiritualized, allegorized, mysticized, psychologized, philosophized, and sociologized the concept of the kingdom of God.”¹⁰ If an illiterate peasant (which is what most of the New Testament hearers were) cannot understand and immediately respond to the message of the kingdom, then it probably ought not be spoken in the first place!¹¹

the prevalence of “Jewish forms,” and scoff at it as a decided indication of weakness and failure. By us—for we make no apology, needing none—it is regarded as *prerequisite and essential* to the truthfulness and unity of our doctrine. (*Theocratic Kingdom*, 1:181; italics in the original)

⁸ Those who argue for a realized kingdom generally string together a number of *verses* pulled severely out of context (see the appendix). If the kingdom had finally come, we ought to see paragraph after paragraph, chapter after chapter, of triumphant jubilation in the spirit of Rev. 19:1–9. As Paul condemned a realized resurrection (2 Tim. 2:18) and a realized day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:2), it would stand to follow that he would condemn a realized kingdom (though 1 Cor. 4:8 would imply as much; see A. C. Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology at Corinth,” *NTS* 24 [1978]: 510–26).

⁹ William V. Crockett uses the same logic (contra annihilationism) concerning eternal conscious torment in Gehenna: “The important thing in interpreting any ancient text is to give proper weight to the meaning of words in the time period in which they are used. . . . So our task is to determine the everyday perspective concerning the fate of the wicked during the first century” (“The Metaphorical View,” in *Four Views of Hell* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 70). It is this “everyday perspective” of a common first-century Jew that ultimately justifies a simple messianic interpretation of the “kingdom of God.”

¹⁰ George W. Buchanan, *The Consequences of the Covenant* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 55.

¹¹ Endless are the warnings of oversimplifying the supposed theological complexity of the kingdom of God; e.g., “The relation of Jesus to the kingdom of God is such that no single formula can do justice to it. We will do well to adopt a fuller vocabulary to represent its nature” (G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 145). In common fashion Beasley-Murray

Most of the confusion concerning the nature of the kingdom is the result of two things: linguistics and Platonism. The latter will be addressed at the end of the chapter. The former is rather simply resolved. The linguistic problem derives from the fact that the phrase “kingdom of God” (Gk. *basileia tou theou*) exists only in the New Testament. Thus the linguistic phrase is either a new theological idea or the summation of an old one. From Origen on, many have believed it to be a new spiritualized and/or universalized kingdom. Its common assumption throughout the New Testament, however, suggests that it is simply the summation of the older messianic kingdom idea.

The linguistic problem is further complicated by the general use of “kingdom” (Heb. *mal'kût*) in the Old Testament referring to God’s governance over creation as a whole (cf. 1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 103:19; 145:11–13; Jer. 10:7; Dan. 4:3,34). Therefore the “kingdom of God” spoken of in the New Testament is often assumed to be a phrase referring to divine sovereignty in general. However, the conflation of the two has no exegetical basis. The “kingdom of God” was phraseology developed during late second-temple Judaism, simply signifying the Jewish messianic kingdom.¹² Most scholars acknowledge this, but then go on to argue that Jesus and the apostles changed or added meaning to the phrase. As we will see, though, nothing suggests that the apostolic witness sought to change its meaning.¹³

The linguistic problem consequently produces a variety of seemingly contradictory linguistic dualisms, which have become commonplace in the debate over the nature of the kingdom. Scholars argue whether the kingdom involves “rule” versus “realm,” or whether it is “abstract” versus “concrete,” or “present” versus “future,” or “eternal” versus “temporal,” or “universal” versus “local”; whether it relates to God versus the Messiah; whether its locus is in

goes on to base this statement on a poor exegesis of Matt. 11:12; 12:28; Luke 17:21; etc. (see the appendix).

¹² “Although the term ‘kingdom of God’ is rare in Judaism, the idea is almost ubiquitous, either explicitly as the kingdom of the Messiah or implicitly in descriptions of the messianic age” (C. C. Caragounis, “Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven,” *DJG*, 418). See also Kaufmann Kohler, “Kingdom of God,” *JE*, 7:502–3; and Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 46–51.

¹³ Thus the phraseology of the “kingdom of God” should be treated like other socio-historically relative terminology in the NT—e.g., “cross” (Matt. 27:32; Phil. 2:8), “centurion” (Matt. 8:5; Acts 10:1), “tax collector” (Matt. 5:46; Luke 19:2), “God-fearing” (Acts 10:22; 13:26), “whitewashed” (Matt. 23:27; Acts 23:3), “stadia” (Rev. 14:20; 21:16), etc. Though such terms are not used in the OT, nor are they used today, we understand their historical context and interpret them accordingly.

heaven versus on earth; and so on and so forth.¹⁴ To sort out the confusion, it is helpful to delineate between the *universal* “kingdom” of God, which rules eternally over all of creation, and the *messianic* “kingdom of God,” which will rule eschatologically upon the earth.¹⁵ This kind of distinction is often made to help distinguish between general-divine sovereignty and eschatological-messianic governance.¹⁶

¹⁴ See a summary in G. E. Ladd, “Kingdom of God,” *ISBE*, 3:23–29.

¹⁵ Though dispensationally motivated, Alva J. McClain articulated well the need for a delineation:

In a preliminary survey of the very extensive array of Biblical references to the Kingdom of God, especially in the Old Testament, the investigator will be impressed by a series of differences which at first sight may seem to be almost contradictory. Some of the more important of these differences may be stated as follows:

First, certain passages present the Kingdom as something which has *always* existed; yet other places it seems to have a definite historical *beginning* among men. (Compare Ps. 10:16 with Dan. 2:44.)

Second, the Kingdom is set forth in Scripture as *universal* in its scope, outside of which there is no created thing; yet again the Kingdom is revealed as a *local* rule established on earth. (Compare Ps. 103:19 with Isa. 24:23.)

Third, the Kingdom sometimes appears as the rule of God *directly*, with no intermediary standing between God and man; yet it is also pictured as the rule of God through a *mediator* who serves as channel between God and man. (Compare Ps. 59:13 with 2:4–6.)

Fourth, it has been noted that often the Bible describes the Kingdom as something wholly *future*; whereas in other texts the Kingdom is said to be a *present* reality. (Compare Zech. 14:9 with Ps. 29:10.) . . .

Some of the above distinctions, if not all, have been noticed by Biblical scholars and attempts have been made to explain them; sometimes by asserting the existence of one kingdom with two aspects or phases; or by the assumption of two kingdoms. . . .

In one sense it would not be wholly wrong to speak of *two kingdoms* revealed in the Bible. But we must at the same time guard carefully against the notion that these two kingdoms are absolutely distinct, one from the other. There is value and instruction in thinking of them as *two aspects* or phases of the one rule of our sovereign God. In seeking for terms which might best designate these two things, I can find nothing better than the adjectives “universal” and “mediatorial.” These are not exactly commensurate terms, of course, but describe different qualities; the first referring to the *extent* of rule, the latter to the *method* of rule. Nevertheless, in each case the designated quality seems to be the most important for purposes of identification. (*The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959], 19–21)

¹⁶ As E. R. Craven originally articulated,

The phrases “Kingdom of God,” “Kingdom of Heaven,” do not indeed occur in exact form in the Old Testament; cognate expressions, however, appear, which may be divided into two classes—(1) Those which refer to the natural Kingdom of God over the universe, Dan. 4:3,34, 6:26; Ps. 145:12,13; (LXX Dan. 3:33, 4:31, 6:27; Ps. 144:12,13). (2) Those in which the then future Basileia of the Messiah was predicted, Dan. 2:44, 7:14,27, (LXX as Heb.); allied to the prophecies from which these citations are made, are Isa. 11,

This kind of delineation is ultimately derived from the distinction made in the Scriptures between the heavens and the earth, and the *two thrones* therein. God rules from the heavens (Ps. 2:4; 113:5; Isa. 40:22), while man rules upon the earth (cf. Gen. 1:28; Deut. 32:8; Ps. 8:6). In other words, “The heavens are the LORD’s, but the earth He has given to the human race” (Ps. 115:16, HCSB). In the beginning God sat enthroned in the height of the heavens (Gen. 2:2; Isa. 40:22), after enthroning Adam upon the earth (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:6). And in like manner he will enthrone the Messiah at the end of the age when he restores all things (cf. Matt. 19:28; 25:31). God’s kingdom rules from the highest heaven over all of creation for all time, while the Messiah’s kingdom is initiated at the day of the Lord and established upon the earth with its locus in Jerusalem.¹⁷ Such delineations can be applied to the *who, what, when, and where* of the kingdom—all of which are clarified by a universal versus messianic distinction (see figure 6.1).

32, 59:20—66:24; Ps. 2, 72, etc. There can be no doubt that *the Basileia* foretold in the latter class was the one contemplated by Jesus, especially in view of the distinct reference to the prophecies of Daniel, and the quotations therefrom, in His great eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives. (“Excursus on the Basileia,” in J. P. Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Revelation*, trans. E. Moore, ed. E. R. Craven [New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1874], 97–98)

¹⁷ Unfortunately, this distinction was obfuscated by the early dispensationalists who adopted a dualistic soteriology, delineating between the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God” (cf. *Scofield Reference Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1909], 996, 1003, 1226; Lewis Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 7 [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993], 223–24; Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism*, 194; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* [Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1958], 144). Thus the universal kingdom is relegated to the immaterial Gentile plan of salvation, while the messianic kingdom is relegated to the material Jewish plan of salvation. There are not two plans of salvation, but rather two thrones within creation.

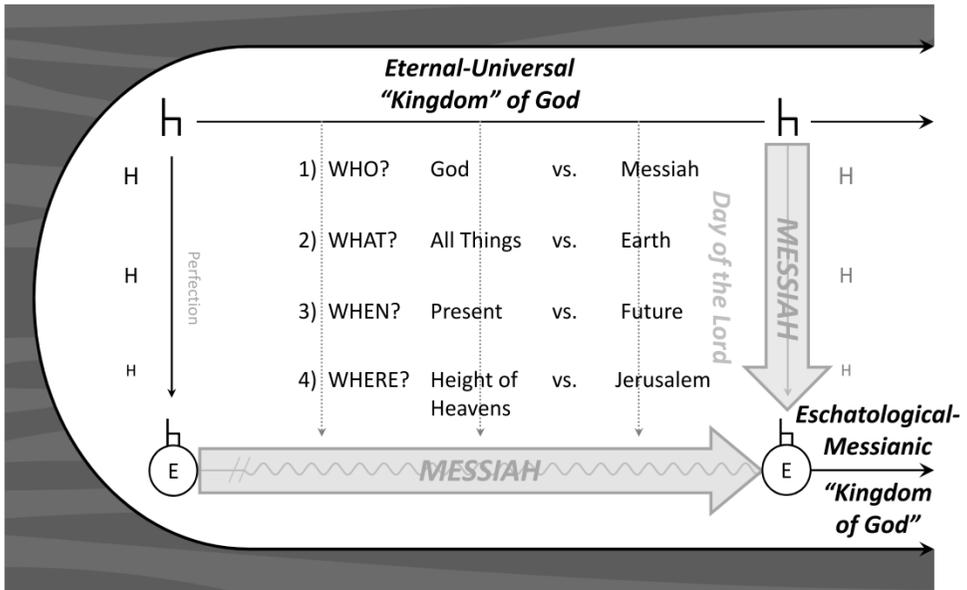


Figure 6.1 – Eternal Universal Kingdom vs. Eschatological Messianic Kingdom

Thus both are true: “The LORD has established *his throne* in the heavens, and *his kingdom* rules over all” (Ps. 103:19), and “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the *throne of David* and over *his kingdom*, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore” (Isa. 9:7).¹⁸ Unfortunately, if one’s protology and worldview are skewed, this simple observation is impossible to accept. Far from being a theological imposition upon the Scriptures, the delineation between a universal and messianic kingdom is fully in accord with the reality of our existence, its original design, and its intended destiny.¹⁹

Moreover, the divine and messianic thrones are in no way disconnected or autonomous. As God ruled over Eden before the fall, and as he rules over all of

¹⁸ “The NT combines this emphasis on God’s universal kingship with another no less important OT theme, that of the Messiah of the house of David, the Son of Man, the Savior-King who is to come in the eschatological future. God’s transcendent supremacy is thereby linked with the prophetic expectation that God’s rule will be established in this world under the Messiah-King” (Carl F. H. Henry, “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” *JETS* 35, no. 1 [March 1992]: 40).

¹⁹ Though Jesus presently sits enthroned at the right hand of God ruling over all of creation (cf. Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20f.; Phil. 2:9; Col. 1:16f.; 1 Peter 3:22), this does not invalidate or nullify the earthly Davidic throne which he will take up upon his return (cf. Luke 1:32; Acts 2:30; Rev. 22:16). The reality of the universal kingdom only reinforces the reality of the messianic kingdom, as is Paul’s clear logic in 1 Cor. 15:24–28, esp. v. 27 and its application of Ps. 8:6.

humanity's rebellious kingdoms of men now (cf. Dan. 4:32; John 19:11; Rom. 13:1)—though they may not recognize or appreciate it—so also will he rule over the Messiah's kingdom in the age to come.²⁰ The two are intimately and organically related—indeed they are functionally “one,” as we might say a husband and wife are “one”—but we cannot conflate them into a single homogenous reality, wherein the two lose their individual identities.²¹ So the hope of creation lies in the governance of the Trinity and its distinctive-oneness, whereby the Father will anoint the Son in the power of the Spirit to execute judgment upon the nations of the earth, as Psalm 2 summarizes: “The One

²⁰ So Paul describes the interaction between the divine and messianic thrones in the age to come: “Then comes the end, when *he delivers the kingdom to God the Father* after destroying every rule and every authority and power. . . . When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that *God may be all in all*” (1 Cor. 15:24–28). The phrase “all in all” (Gk. *panta en pasin*) means “everything in every way” (Eph. 1:23, NIV), referencing the heavens and the earth and all the goings-on therein. Through his Messiah, God will bring the rebellion of Adam to an end, and in this way the disharmony between the throne of God and the thrones of fallen human beings will finally be resolved. Thus God the Father will be honored as the ultimate source of life, sustenance, and salvation from everlasting to everlasting—he will be all in all.

²¹ So the inaugurational schema proves inadequate by consolidating the two into one semi-Platonic system of “manifestation” or “realization,” involving spiritual/abstract vs. physical/concrete divine sovereignty—e.g., George Ladd:

Although God is now King, other references speak of a day when he shall become King and shall rule over his people (Isa. 24:23; 33:22; 52:7; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:9ff.). This leads to the conclusion that while God is the King, he must also become King, i.e., he must manifest his kingship in the world of human beings and nations. . . . While there is considerable diversity in the description of the Kingdom in the Old Testament, it always involves an inbreaking of God into history when God's redemptive purpose is fully realized. . . .

The coming of the Kingdom for which we pray in the Lord's Prayer means that God's will be done on earth, i.e., that his rule be perfectly realized (Mt. 6:10). The “kingdom” that Jesus appointed for his disciples (Lk. 22:29) is “royal rule.”

This is important for the interpretation of Jesus' message, for one of the major problems is that of how the Kingdom of God can be both future and present. If the Kingdom is primarily the eschaton—the eschatological era of salvation—it is difficult to see how this future realm can also be present. However, we have seen that both in the Old Testament and in rabbinic Judaism, God's Kingdom—his reign—can have more than one meaning. God is now the King, but he must also *become* King. This is the key to the solution of the problem in the Gospels. (*A Theology of the New Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 58–61)

The “key to the solution to the problem” of present vs. future sovereignty is not a two-stage inaugurational system. The solution lies in recognizing a twofold governance—a righteous universal kingdom presently ruling over wicked human kingdoms, which will become a righteous messianic kingdom eschatologically, as it was protologically.

enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill’” (vv. 4–6, NIV).²²

CHRIST’S KINGDOM: THE GLORY OF THE NATIONS

The messianic Seed of Adam will establish a kingdom that, because it will incorporate the righteous from all of Adam’s progeny, will be ethnically diverse. Moreover, the messianic kingdom will involve the redemption of humanity as it is at the time of eschatological deliverance, which will entail many “nations/ethnicities” (Heb. *gôyim*, Gk. *ethnē*). Thus it will be a *multiethnic, transnational kingdom* (see figure 6.2). Had the day of the Lord come before the Tower of Babel, as Enoch probably expected (see Jude 14–15), then the kingdom would have been singular in its ethnicity. In the age to come, however, the Messiah’s kingdom will include “a great multitude that no one could number, from *every nation*, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9). For Jesus will return to glorify Jerusalem, and “By [the city’s] light will the *nations* walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. . . . They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the *nations*” (Rev. 21:24–26).

²² Note that “installed” (Heb. *nāsak*) refers to the *anointing* of a king (as one poured out into a cast image of a god); see HALOT, 703.

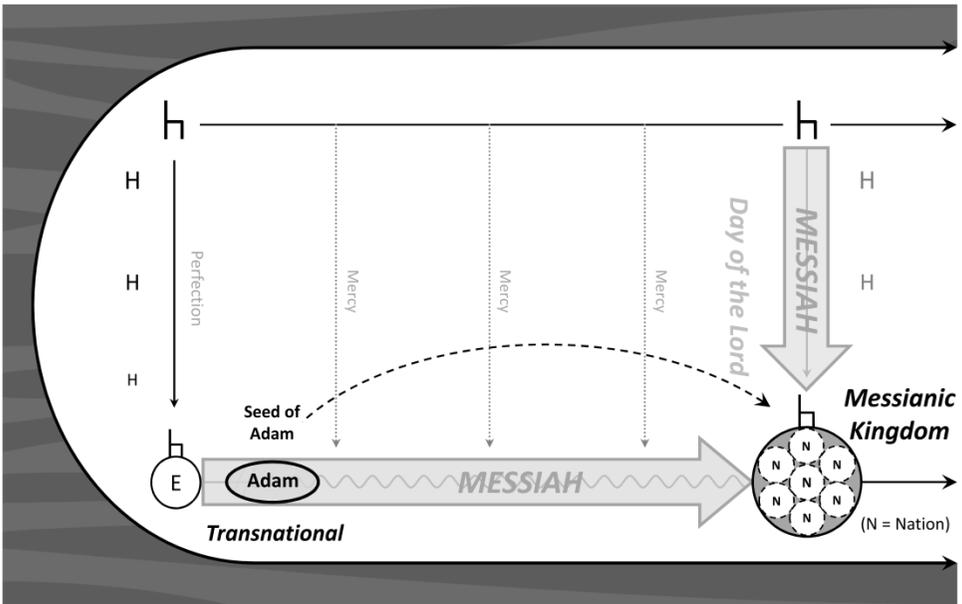


Figure 6.2 – The Adamic, Transnational Messianic Kingdom

The transnational nature of the kingdom is self-evident in most of the common messianic passages. In the last days, the Messiah “shall judge between the *nations*,” and thus “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isa. 2:4). After he strikes the earth “with the rod of his mouth” (Isa. 11:4), “The root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the *peoples*—of him shall the *nations* inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious” (v. 10). For “The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the *nations*, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God” (Isa. 52:10). Indeed, “*Nations* shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isa. 60:3).²³ After the suffering of the Messiah, “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the *nations* shall worship before him” (Ps. 22:27, NRSV). For God has eternally decreed, “My name will be great among the *nations*, says the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 1:11).

Moreover, when establishing the kingdom, God speaks to the Messiah, “Ask of me, and I will make the *nations* your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps. 2:8, NIV). For it is destined that “all kings will bow down to him

²³ Isaiah 60 seems to expound upon the covenant God makes with Israel (59:21) in context to “a Redeemer will come to Zion” (59:20). Thus “your” (60:1ff.) would refer to 1) the Redeemer 2) [in] Zion 3) [in] Israel.

and all *nations* will serve him” (Ps. 72:11, NIV), and in this way “all *nations* will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed” (v. 17, NIV). The Messiah is seen in Davidic terms as “the head of the *nations*” (Ps. 18:43) and “a leader among the *nations*” who will “command the *nations*” (Isa. 55:4–5, NLT). When the Messiah comes, “Many *nations* shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people” (Zech. 2:11). As the agent of God Almighty, the Messiah and his kingdom will be the means by which “the LORD will be king over *all the earth*” (Zech. 14:9). And through the Messiah God will receive the promised praise of the nations:

Clap your hands, all you *nations*;
shout to God with cries of joy.
How awesome is the LORD Most High,
the great King over *all the earth*! . . .
God reigns over the *nations*;
God is seated on his holy throne.
The nobles of the *nations* assemble
as the people of the God of Abraham,
for the kings of the earth belong to God;
he is greatly exalted. (Ps. 47:1–2,8–9, NIV; cf. Ps. 67:3–7; 96:1–10; 98:2–9;
117:1–2)

As the most defining Old Testament passages concerning the messianic kingdom, Daniel 2 and 7 also portray the Messiah’s global reign.²⁴ In Daniel 7, four kingdoms are presented (vv. 1–8), the last of which incurs divine judgment (vv. 9–14) and is “annihilated and destroyed forever” (v. 26, NASB). In this context, “one like a son of man” (v. 13) is given “dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (v. 14). As coheirs with the Messiah, “The dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall

²⁴ Note the centrality of the book of Daniel (esp. chap. 7) during NT times in Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.11.7; see also Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012); and Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 26–35.

be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them" (v. 27).²⁵

Similarly, Daniel 2 presents a series of transnational kingdoms (vv. 31–33), which incur divine judgment (v. 34) and which result in the establishment of an eternal messianic kingdom that fills and rules over "the whole earth" (v. 35). At the end of this age, "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever" (v. 44). Moreover, as Nebuchadnezzar was "the king of kings" (v. 37) in his day, ruling over a multiethnic kingdom, so also the Messiah will be hailed "the king of kings and lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16; cf. 1 Tim. 6:15), ruling over a benevolent global empire.

Therefore the Scriptures present the messianic kingdom as ethnically diverse and transnational rather than as an *indiscriminate homogeneous assemblage*, as is often the case in the various Christoplatonic perversions. It will be a real kingdom with a real king on a real earth ruling over real nations with real ethnicities. As its source, God takes ethnicity seriously; and indeed he will redeem it, because he is "the God of the whole earth" (Isa. 54:5), "the Lord of the whole earth" (Mic. 4:13; Zech. 4:14), and "the Lord of all the earth" (Ps. 97:5; Zech. 6:5).

Ethnic distinctions in the age to come are based upon the nature of God himself, his design, and his ordained destiny. Thus Jesus concludes his eschatological discourse, "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. . . . Then the King will say to those

²⁵ In such a light, Paul takes for granted that Jesus will return "with all his saints" (1 Thess. 3:13) and that in the age to come "the saints will judge the world" (1 Cor. 6:2), though conversely "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 9). For as the Messiah destroys "every rule and every authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24) and reigns "until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (v. 25), so too will he give to the saints "authority over the nations" (Rev. 2:26)—i.e., "the authority to judge" (Rev. 20:4)—because they have been made "a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

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, NIV).²⁶

CHRIST’S KINGDOM: THE GLORY OF ISRAEL

Not only will the messianic kingdom be universal and multiethnic in scope, but it will also make a *functional distinction between ethnicities* based upon the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; 15:18–21; 17:3–21; 22:16–18). As the Seed of Abraham, the Christ will rule over one nation—Israel—which in turn will mediate the glory of God to the rest of the nations. God has bound himself ethnically in the unfolding of redemptive history. Though God is “the King of all the earth” (Ps. 47:7), he has revealed himself over three hundred times as “the God of Israel” (including variants “God of Abraham,” “God of your fathers,” etc.).²⁷ The messianic Seed will be “the King of *Israel*” (Matt. 27:42; Mark 15:32;

²⁶ Some mistake this passage as a parable (often referred to as “the parable of the sheep and the goats”). However, “The pericope as a whole is not therefore a ‘parable’ like those of 24:45–51; 25:1–13 and 25:14–30. Its genre is closer to the majestic visions of divine judgment in the book of Revelation than to synoptic parables” (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 960). It is the simple conclusion of Jesus’ chronological presentation of eschatological events in 24:4–31. The Messiah will come on the clouds of heaven (24:30), send out his angels to gather the elect (v. 31), and then “he will sit on his glorious throne” (25:31) and gather all the nations for judgment (vv. 32ff.).

²⁷ Though God reveals himself through different names in the OT—e.g., “LORD-Hosts/Armies” (Heb. *yhvh šēbā ’ôt*; cf. 1 Sam. 1:11; Ps. 24:10; 80:4; Isa. 1:24; 6:5; Jer. 9:15; 48:1; Hos. 12:5; Amos 3:13; Mic. 4:4; Hag. 2:6; Zech. 1:3); “LORD-Shepherd” (Heb. *yhvh rā ’ā*; cf. Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Ezek. 34:2); “LORD-Heals” (Heb. *yhvh rāpā*; cf. Ex. 15:26; Jer. 3:22; Isa. 30:26; Ps. 103:3); “LORD-Jealous” (Heb. *yhvh qannā*; cf. Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; Josh. 24:19); “God-Almighty” (Heb. *’ēl šadday*; cf. Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 49:25; Ex. 6:3; Num. 24:4; Ruth 1:20; Job 6:4; Ps. 68:14; 91:1; Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 1:24; 10:5; Joel 1:15); “God-Supreme” (Heb. *’ēl ’elyōn*; cf. Gen. 14:18ff.; Ps. 7:17; 47:2; 57:2; Dan. 7:18ff.); “God-Everlasting” (Heb. *’ēl ’ōlām*; cf. Gen. 21:33; Ps. 90:1ff.; Jer. 10:10; Isa. 26:4); “God-Living” (Heb. *’ēl hay*; cf. Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10; Ps. 42:2; 84:2; Jer. 10:10); “God-Salvation” (Heb. *’ēl yēša*; cf. 1 Chron. 16:35; Ps. 65:5; 79:9; 85:4) [as well as some infrequent names, e.g., “Lord-Peace” (Judg. 6:24), “Lord-Provide” (Gen. 22:14), “Lord-Righteousness” (Jer. 23:6; 33:16), etc.]—no name is more prominent and central to the revelation of his nature and character than “LORD/God-Israel” (Ex. 5:1; 24:10; 32:27; 34:23; Num. 16:9; Josh. 7:13,19f.; 8:30; 9:18f.; 10:40,42; 13:14,33; 14:14; 22:16,24; 24:2,23; Judg. 4:6; 5:3,5; 6:8; 11:21,23; 21:3; Ruth 2:12; 1 Sam. 1:17; 2:30; 5:7f.,10f.; 6:3,5; 10:18; 14:41; 20:12; 23:10f.; 25:32,34; 2 Sam. 7:27; 12:7; 23:3; 1 Kings 1:30,48; 8:15,17,20,23,25f.; 11:9,31; 14:7,13; 15:30; 16:13,26,33; 17:1,14; 22:53; 2 Kings 9:6; 10:31; 14:25; 18:5; 19:15,20; 21:12; 22:15,18; 1 Chron. 4:10; 5:26; 15:12,14; 16:4,36; 17:24; 22:6; 23:25; 24:19; 28:4; 29:10; 2 Chron. 2:12; 6:4,7,10,14,16f.; 11:16; 13:5; 15:4,13; 20:19; 29:7,10; 30:1,5; 32:17; 33:16,18; 34:23,26; 36:13; Ezra 1:3; 3:2; 4:1,3; 5:1; 6:14,21f.; 7:6,15; 8:35; 9:4,15; Ps. 41:13; 59:5; 68:8,35; 69:6; 72:18; 106:48; Isa. 17:6; 21:10,17; 24:15; 29:23; 37:16,21; 41:17; 45:3,15; 48:1f.; 52:12; Jer. 7:3,21; 9:15; 11:3; 13:12; 16:9; 19:3,15; 21:4; 23:2; 24:5; 25:15,27; 27:4,21; 28:2,14; 29:4,8,21,25; 30:2; 31:23; 32:14f.,36; 33:4; 34:2,13; 35:13,17f.; 37:7; 38:17; 39:16; 42:9,15,18; 43:10; 44:2,7,11,25; 45:2; 46:25; 48:1; 50:18; 51:33; Ezek. 8:4; 9:3;

the land of Canaan itself is a prophetic oracle, of sorts, inherently prophesying the age to come, and the Jews were and are stewards of that oracle (cf. Matt. 21:33; Rom. 3:2).

The Messiah will be the King of Israel because God himself is “the King of Israel” (Isa. 44:6; Zeph. 3:15). Indeed, the God of the Bible is “the Creator of Israel” (Isa. 43:15). The point that *God* created the nations and *God* created Israel is often overlooked. Why? Was it a benign consequence of the debacle of Babel? No. Was it a temporal necessity for the novelty of the incarnation? No. It was by divine foreknowledge and wisdom with eternal repercussions, which brings us to the crux of the issue—the very point of contention and offense: *God is an ethnicist*. In regard to sin and righteousness, he shows no favoritism or partiality toward any nation or ethnicity (though one could argue that God has actually been harder on the Jews than the Gentiles, as a father might hold his oldest son to a higher standard). However, he has chosen to orchestrate redemptive history in this age (i.e., in the giving and stewarding of the oracles) according to the Jews, and he will administrate redemptive history in the age to come (i.e., in the giving and administering of eternal life) according to the Jews. Though commonly rejected, ignored, or overlooked, this is a plain fact of the Bible, and the de-ethnicization of the Scriptures borders on hermeneutical schizophrenia.

To most Gentiles, the binding of salvation to Jewish ethnicity is incredibly offensive, since we Irish (as a personal example) fancy ourselves as the “saviors of civilization.”³⁰ But so also do the Koreans, the Egyptians, and the French—and likewise historically the Romans, Mongols, and Germans. Indeed, it is the divine choice concerning one ethnos that offends every other ethnos. Furthermore, it is the divine choice concerning one man, Jesus of Nazareth, that offends every other human being. Why not me? Why not you? Why not the Irish? Why not the Chinese? *Because God chose*. The sovereignty of God simply cannot be overruled on this point.

now, would be realized in the powerful reign of the coming one, whose renown was to spread throughout the world. Indeed the usage of the phrase “the ends of the earth” in the Judean royal ideology implies a universal empire. A motif of ancient Near Eastern royal claims, it is employed in the royal psalms to indicate high hopes for the Davidic king. (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 347)

³⁰ See Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

The Jewish Birthright

In such a light, it was commonly assumed that the messianic kingdom would be an Israelitic kingdom that would benevolently govern the world to come,³¹ an idea which has been called “Jewish restoration eschatology.”³² But we must consider the basis of this governance and administration. Many scholars have commented on Israel’s “special relation” to God and “special function in history,”³³ or “the priority of Israel in salvation-history.”³⁴ However, such generality is ambiguous and ultimately unhelpful.

The theological driver behind the uniqueness of the Jews is their ethnic “firstborn” position—that is, their “birthright” (Heb. *bēkōrâ*, Gk. *prōtotokia*), which was commonly understood as the “inheritance rights as the oldest son” (Heb. 12:16, NIV).³⁵ In technical terms, this is known as *primogeniture*, the legal right and role of the oldest son for administering the inheritance of the family estate.³⁶ The practice has been common throughout time and across cultures because its origin is in the Godhead itself. We delineate between sons in the distribution of our

³¹ Though generally preterist in assumption and terminally unbelieving (concerning an Israelocentric eschatological kingdom), many historical Jesus scholars share the view that the teaching and mission of Jesus can only be understood in terms of a nationalistic restoration of Israel; see E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2009); and Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

³² “The same main themes—the redemption of Israel (whether politically or in a new world), a new or renewed temple, repentance, judgment, admission of the Gentiles—crop upon in numerous places in Jewish literature and in the New Testament. . . . Thus the existence of ‘Jewish restoration eschatology’ is supported by the New Testament, and Jesus fits believably into that world-view” (Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 335).

³³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 581–82. Cranfield is to be commended for his acknowledgement of “the ugly and unscriptural notion that God has cast off His people Israel and simply replaced it by the Christian Church,” for “These three chapters [Rom. 9–11] emphatically forbid us to speak of the Church as having once and for all taken the place of the Jewish people” (Ibid., 448).

³⁴ J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 90.

³⁵ “Birthright” (Gen. 25:31ff.; 27:36; 43:33; 1 Chron. 5:1f.; Heb. 12:16) is simply “the right of the firstborn” (Deut. 21:17), derived from “firstborn” (Heb. *bēkôr*, Gk. *prōtokos*); see John N. Oswalt, “244 בָּכָר (*bākar*),” *TWOT*, 108–10; and “πρωτοτόκια, πρωτότοκος,” *BDAG*, 894.

³⁶ For an overview of the practice of primogeniture in the Bible, see J. M. Wilson and R. K. Harrison, “Birthright,” *ISBE*, 1:515–16; and Anne K. Davis, “Israel’s Inheritance: Birthright of the Firstborn Son,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 13, no. 1 (2008): 79–94.

inheritance because God will delineate between sons in the distribution of his inheritance.

Though in modern times we infer little more than birth order to the term “firstborn,” its application in the Scriptures clearly implies primogeniture, which in relation to Israel has received little appreciation or attention historically.³⁷ Yet the Scriptures declare, “Thus says the LORD, Israel is my *firstborn* son” (Ex. 4:22), and “I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my *firstborn*” (Jer. 31:9).³⁸ The idea of Jewish sonship (cf. Deut. 14:1; Isa. 1:2; Hos. 1:10; Mal. 1:6) assumes a theology of birthright, since the Israelites were the first people to be given the privilege of calling the Creator of the heavens and earth “Father” (cf. Deut. 32:6; Isa. 64:8; Mal. 2:10). As God said, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called *my son*” (Hos. 11:1).³⁹ And so Israel prayed, “You, O LORD, are *our Father*, our Redeemer from of old is your name” (Isa. 63:16).

Intertestamental literature also echoes this view (cf. Sirach 36:17; *Psalms of Solomon* 13:9; 18:4), as Ezra supposedly prayed, “O Lord, these nations, which are reputed to be as nothing, domineer over us and devour us. But we your people, whom you have called your *firstborn*, only begotten, zealous for you, and most dear, have been given into their hands. If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so?” (2 Esdras 6:57–59, NRSV).

As Israel is the firstborn among the nations, so also the Messiah is “the *firstborn*, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:27). As the firstborn of all humanity and the ultimate “executor of the estate,” so to speak, the Christ will rule over all of the earth and administrate the glory of the age to come. Thus the New Testament identifies Jesus as “the *firstborn* of all creation” (Col. 1:15), and as

³⁷ Though lacking primogeniture language, see the substance of a Jewish birthright theology in R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), esp. 109–55.

³⁸ “Israel is called the Lord’s firstborn (Ex 4:22; cf. Jer 31:9) to show that though it was the youngest of the nations, it occupied the position of leadership and privilege over them” (Oswalt, “*bākar*,” *TWOT*, 109). Note the glaring lack of commentary concerning Jewish birthright in most of the major modern commentaries on Ex. 4:22 and Jer. 31:9.

³⁹ The messianic recapitulation of this verse (cf. Matt. 2:15) ought only to *reinforce* Jewish primogeniture, since the Messiah is the king of the Jews (cf. figure 6.4)—contrary to the common supersessionist claim to a “new exodus,” realizing the Jewish eschatological hope. Rightly, Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 197–98.

such he is “appointed the heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2). Moreover, he is “the *firstborn* from the dead, and the *ruler* of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5, NIV), so that “in everything he might be *preeminent*” (Col. 1:18).

Though all the redeemed are “sons of God,” and thus “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), the supreme role of the administration of the divine inheritance will be upon the shoulders of this one man (cf. Isa. 9:6; Ps. 2:8; 72:17). Hence we seek to be found “in Christ.” For “In him we have obtained an *inheritance*. . . . In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our *inheritance* until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:11–14).

Similarly, the Messiah, as “the King of Israel,” will administrate the glory of God to all the nations through the firstborn nation. This administration will also be reflected in the distribution of the land of the new earth according to ethnicity (see figure 6.4). It was God himself who determined the lands in which the different ethnicities settled in this age (cf. Gen. 10; Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26), and so too will he determine them in the age to come, according to the mantric promise of the Jewish inheritance of Canaan as “an everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8; cf. 12:7; 13:5; 26:3; 28:13; 48:4; Ex. 33:1; Num. 32:11; Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 30:20; Ps. 105:10).⁴⁰ Such an arrangement of messianic and Jewish primogeniture is exemplified in Psalm 72:

Endow the king with your justice, O God,
 the royal son with your righteousness. . . .
He will rule from sea to sea
 and *from the River to the ends of the earth*. . . .
May his name endure forever;
 may it continue as long as the sun.
All nations will be blessed *through him*,
 and they will call him blessed.
Praise be to the LORD God, *the God of Israel*,

⁴⁰ All attempts to reinterpret or mitigate this most basic of Abrahamic promises are baseless. For example, “Christified holy space” (W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974], 368); similarly Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: How the New Testament Transformed “Holy Land” Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).

who alone does marvelous deeds.
 Praise be to his glorious name forever;
 may the whole earth be filled with his glory. (Ps. 72:1,8,17–19, NIV)

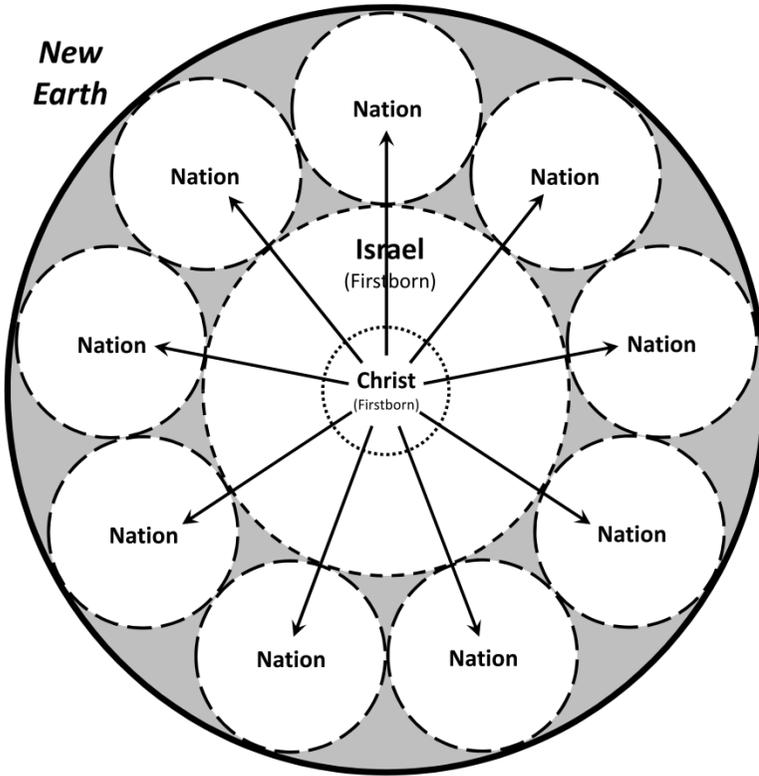


Figure 6.4 – Messianic-Israelitic Primogeniture in the Age to Come

Gentiles often disregard or conflate ethnicity when studying redemptive history because they feel somehow slighted, as though they are less loved by God or will not receive equitably from God in the inheritance to come. Indeed, in their depravity Jew and Gentile alike exacerbate this lie from both sides. However, primogeniture is simply a governmental and legal administrative mechanism, devoid of partiality or favoritism.⁴¹ Being the oldest son, I

⁴¹ “The purpose of primogeniture then was the systematic and orderly transference of social, legal, and religious authority within the family structure. The firstborn male was made the principal heir and was given a sizeable portion of the estate because it was he who was to perpetuate the family name and lineage and who was to bear the chief burden for the continuance and welfare of the family” (Barry J. Beitzel, “The Right of the Firstborn [*Pi Shnayim*] in the Old Testament [Deut. 21:15–17],” in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, ed. W. C. Kaiser Jr. and R. F. Youngblood [Chicago: Moody, 1986], 180; quoted in Davis, “Israel’s Inheritance,” 85). Thus the “double portion,” so often associated with

administrated the inheritance of my father's estate when he passed away some years ago, and I can personally testify that the birthright is as much a burden as it is a privilege. Not once did my sister ever think to herself, *I wish I could deal with all of that!* Moreover, though our roles were different, she shared equally in the inheritance. I was *honored* to do the work, and she was *grateful* to be served.

Likewise, no Gentile will envy the role of the Jews in the age to come, for they will serve the nations under their King, who will be revered as "the servant of rulers" (Isa. 49:7; cf. "the one who serves," Luke 22:27). Though it will be a great honor to be "the chief of the nations" (Jer. 31:7) and thus to "judge between the nations" (Isa. 2:4), the result will be universal gratitude to the "Lord of all" (Rom. 10:12), akin to the work of the Spirit in this age—"so that as grace extends to more and more people it may *increase thanksgiving*, to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 4:15).⁴²

New Testament Affirmation

At this point we must question whether or not the New Testament seeks to revoke or rescind the birthright of Israel.⁴³ To say it clearly: Jesus and his disciples never would have dreamed that the God of Israel would forsake the people of Israel (a conclusion that ought to be somewhat self-evident).⁴⁴ Jesus assured his disciples, "In the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of *Israel*" (Matt. 19:28). It was understood that the Messiah would sit on his glorious throne, administrating the renewal of all

primogeniture (cf. Deut. 21:17; Isa. 61:7), is given to assist the older son in performing his responsibility of leadership for the welfare of the whole. In such a light, Israel will receive "the wealth of the nations" (Isa. 60:5,11; 61:6) in the age to come.

⁴² Indeed it will be an "economy of mutual blessing" between Jew and Gentile; see Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, esp. 109–40. "God's peace with Israel comes not at the nations' expense, but to their benefit. . . . God's history with Israel and the nations is ordered from the outset toward a final reign of shalom in which the distinction between Israel and the nations is not abrogated and overcome but affirmed within a single economy of mutual blessing. . . . God's historical fidelity toward Israel is the 'narrow gate' that opens on the new creation. There is no shortcut to the eschaton that bypasses or overrides God's fidelity toward the Jewish flesh and the permanent historical distinction between Jew and Gentile" (Ibid., 132–33; italics in the original).

⁴³ In technical terms, this is known as "supersessionism" or "replacement theology" (to be discussed further in chapter 7); see Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*; and Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic, 2004).

⁴⁴ See G. B. Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone Press, 1965).

things and eternal life through the people of Israel. Moreover, Jesus' calling and sending of "the twelve" (Mark 3:16) is most clearly understood as a sign of his ministry to "the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6) in light of their destiny in the age to come.

Likewise, during the Last Supper Jesus promised his disciples, "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of *Israel*" (Luke 22:28–30, NASB).⁴⁵ Here again the context is the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God (vv. 16–18), which is understood simply to be Israelocentric.⁴⁶ The issue in both of these situations is not the kind of kingdom that would be inherited but rather the kind of people who would inherit it.⁴⁷ The Jewish heirs loved this life more than eternal life (Matt. 6:2; 23:25; Luke 16:14), which made them act like the Gentiles (Matt. 6:31–33; Luke 22:24–26) rather than like true children of God (cf. Matt. 3:9; Luke 6:35).

⁴⁵ Therefore, "The gospel and the table fellowship it founds *confirms* rather than *annuls* the difference and mutual dependence of Israel and the nations" (Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 169). Unfortunately, "What began in Jesus' name as Israel's hospitality toward Gentiles as Gentiles, ended as the Gentiles' inhospitality toward Jews as Jews" (Ibid).

⁴⁶ As Caird says,

Jesus did not intend to found a new religious organization, nor even a new religious community. He intended to bring into existence the restored nation of Israel, promised in the Old Testament prophecies. It was to this end that he accepted baptism at the hands of John, to this end that he appointed the Twelve to be his intimate associates, instructing them that their number was a symbol of their relation to the twelve tribes of Israel. This was why he spoke of his followers as a "little flock"—a word already used in the Old Testament to denote the Israel of the messianic age (Mic. 5.4; Isa. 40.11; Ezek. 34.12–24). (*Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, 16)

⁴⁷ Indeed, the Gospels are little concerned with the nature of the kingdom, focusing rather on the quality of person who will inherit the kingdom. The driving message of both Jesus and John the Baptist was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17), echoing the prophets' proclamation that "the day of the LORD is at hand!" (Isa. 13:6, NKJV; cf. Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7,14) Such phraseology was tremendously fearful, since the day of the Lord was understood to initiate the kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 10:14f.; Luke 10:11f.). Thus many came out to receive John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). The question was never about the nature of the kingdom, but rather about who would be "*considered worthy* to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead" (Luke 20:35). Such was the general tenor of Jesus' preaching (cf. Matt. 5–7; 10:5–40; 11:7–30; 12:25–45; 15:3–20; 16:23–28; 18:3–35; 21:28–44; 23:1–39; 24:4–25:46).

Similarly, Jesus warned his followers, “Many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the *heirs of the kingdom* will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11–12, NRSV).⁴⁸ Here again the kingdom is centered around the Jewish patriarchs, with the threat of expulsion from the messianic feast (cf. Isa. 25:6–9; Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24).⁴⁹ At another time Jesus even goes so far as to refer to the Jews as “children” and the Gentiles as “dogs” (Mark 7:27 and parallels), thus emphasizing Jewish preeminence at the divine table of redemptive history. The affirmative response of the Canaanite woman—“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Matt. 15:27)—then evokes Jesus’ declaration, “O woman, great is your faith!” (v. 28).

Various other incidents affirm Jewish peculiarity in the New Testament—for example, Zechariah spoke of God remembering “his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father *Abraham*” (Luke 1:72–73); Simeon “was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of *Israel*” (Luke 2:25); and Jesus’ followers walking on the road to Emmaus “had hoped that he was the one to redeem *Israel*” (Luke 24:21).⁵⁰ No evidence, however, is more conclusive than Jesus’ own postresurrection teachings. For forty days he appeared to his disciples, “speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Surely the apostles would have had many questions after such in-depth teaching, yet the *singular question* that gets recorded is “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to *Israel*?” (v. 6). If Jesus was introducing a nonethnic, spiritualized kingdom, it seems he was a fairly obtuse

⁴⁸ The Lukan parallel adds the frightful statement, “Behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (13:30). Those who believed they would be first in the kingdom, i.e., the Pharisees and teachers of the law, would actually be thrown out of Jerusalem into the fiery furnace of Gehenna.

⁴⁹ “The presence of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lifts this above any ordinary meal; Jewish tradition not surprisingly gave them a leading role at the messianic banquet (*b. Pesah.* 119b; *Exod. Rab.* 25:8). The imagery of the messianic banquet derives from Isa 25:6 (cf. 65:13–14) and was elaborated in Jewish literature both in the apocalyptic and the rabbinic traditions, but whereas in Isaiah it was a feast ‘for all peoples,’ Jewish tradition soon made it a blessing specifically for Israel” (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 317).

⁵⁰ Note esp. “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) before the day of the Lord and the Son of Man coming in glory and power (vv. 25–28), which only holds meaning if there are “times of the Jews,” so to speak, which follow (cf. v. 31).

teacher.⁵¹ Again, if it cannot be said clearly in forty days, then it probably ought not to be said. But Jesus *did* say it, and he confirmed it by saying, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (v. 7).⁵² The Israelitic-messianic kingdom would come, and its timing was “fixed,” or “set” (Gk. *tithēmi*), by the Father.⁵³ Before that day, though, the disciples would receive power from the Holy Spirit to be “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (v. 8).⁵⁴

Therefore it is this hope in the Israelitic, messianic kingdom which the early church consistently proclaimed (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 20:25; 28:31)—that is, the “same hope” (24:15, NIV) as the unbelieving Jews (cf. 26:7), only the church sought to attain it by faith in an atonemental interpretation of Jesus’ death (cf. Rom. 9:30–10:4; Gal. 3:21–29; Phil. 3:8–11). Thus Paul clearly maintains Jewish preeminence in the administration of “the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom. 2:5). For “There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: *first for the Jew*, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: *first for the Jew*, then for the Gentile” (vv. 9–10, NIV). Paul never would have entertained the repudiation of Jewish election. Rather, being sent to the Gentiles, he simply questioned, “Is God the God of Jews *only*? Is he not the God of Gentiles *also*?” (Rom. 3:29–30).

Moreover, in light of Jewish election, priority was given in the preaching and administration of the gospel: “*to the Jew first* and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). This approach is seen throughout Acts (cf. 18:5–6; 19:8–9; 28:23–28) and is

⁵¹ By contrast, Bruce K. Waltke: “To be sure, prior to Pentecost the unenlightened apostles were still asking when the Lord would restore the national kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:7). The church, however, must not be guided by ignorance. . . . Christ’s answer is consistent with the Lukan emphasis that Christ must pass through earthly Jerusalem and its cross on his way to inheriting in heaven David’s throne, from which he builds his church through the Spirit while dismantling earthly Jerusalem” (“Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988], 273).

⁵² See esp. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 62–67. “Jesus’s reply in verses 7–8 does not reject the premise of the question, that the kingdom will one day be restored to Israel” (p. 62).

⁵³ The Greek *tithēmi* can also mean “to bring about an arrangement” (BDAG, 1004). In this case it is assumed that the arrangement involves the divine restoration of the Israelitic kingdom (v. 6).

⁵⁴ Note the concentric parallel between the “witness of mercy” in this age (“in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”) and the execution of divine justice through the Israelitic kingdom in the age to come.

exemplified by Paul's declaration to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch: "It was *necessary* that the word of God be spoken *first to you*. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Such a missiological pattern was not adopted for reasons of efficiency or pragmatism, but rather on the grounds of covenantal obligation.⁵⁵ Since the older brother will receive first in the divine inheritance, he ought also to receive first in the good news of the sacrifice which guarantees the promised eternal inheritance.

Furthermore, in Romans 9–11 Paul settles any and all discussion concerning the possible abrogation of the Jewish birthright.⁵⁶ Concerning "my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites" (9:3–4, NASB), Paul emphatically declares, "As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are *irrevocable*" (11:28–29). It is this "irrevocable calling,"⁵⁷ according to the covenants made with the forefathers, which Paul has in mind when he asks, "Has God *rejected* his people?" (11:1). To which he clearly answers, "By no means! . . . God has *not rejected* his people whom he foreknew" (vv. 1–2).⁵⁸ Though they rejected their Messiah, this was by divine foreknowledge, so that "through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous" (v. 11). Yet this "stumble" is by no means a "fall" (v. 11), for the

⁵⁵ Contrary to the pragmatic approach of most Gentiles—e.g., Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours* (London: R. Scott, 1912); and Donald A. McGavran, *Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: Friendship Press, 1955).

⁵⁶ For a cogent introduction, see Daniel C. Juster, *The Irrevocable Calling: Israel's Role as a Light to the Nations*, 2nd ed. (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007). See also Horner, *Future Israel*, 253–309.

⁵⁷ "Irrevocable" (Gk. ἀμεταμέλητος), lit. "feeling no remorse, having no regret" (BDAG, 53). God feels no regret for making covenants with Abraham and his offspring, in spite of their rebellion. This would have seemed obvious to a first-century Jew since Israel already had a long history of waywardness without covenantal abrogation, as Jeremiah made clear: "If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will *reject* the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will *restore* their fortunes and have compassion on them" (Jer. 33:25–26, NIV; cf. 30:11; 31:37).

⁵⁸ "As Biblical scholarship makes ever more clear that Jesus and Paul taught a future for national Israel in the eschatological plan of God, the legitimacy of a supersessionist reading of Scripture grows ever more dim to the point of vanishing altogether" (Craig A. Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *JETS* 44, no. 3 [September 2001]: 439).

“mystery” (v. 25a) in all of this is not a rejection of Jewish primogeniture but a simple chronological “partial hardening” of the Jews “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (v. 25b). Then, indeed, “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26a); and in fulfillment of Isaiah 59:20ff., “The Deliverer will come *from Zion*” (v. 26b).⁵⁹

So “the myth of an undifferentiated humanity,”⁶⁰ both in this age and in the age to come, is soundly dismissed.⁶¹ The Bible is clear. As Barry Horner puts it, “God does have a distinctive, ongoing, covenantal regard for Israel after the flesh as beloved enemies (Rom. 11:28).”⁶²

Gentile Unity and Inclusion

If redemptive history is differentiated on the basis of ethnicity, how then do we understand Paul when he says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28)? Or elsewhere—“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all”

⁵⁹ According to the analogy of tree-grafting (vv. 17–24), Gentiles have been “grafted in” (vv. 17,19) to the Jewish olive tree, while unbelieving Jews have been “broken off” (v. 17). However, God is faithful to his promise to the forefathers, and they will one day “be grafted back into their own olive tree” (v. 24). Such unbelieving Jews are who Paul has in mind when he says, “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom. 9:6), and similarly, “No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly” (Rom. 2:28). Paul simply has in mind that God accounts as heirs of salvation those who are Jewish, both according to the flesh *and* according to faith (see figure 6.5). Those who “walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had” (Rom. 4:12; cf. John 1:47) are the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). Paul nowhere entertains a nonethnic “spiritual Israel,” so commonly held in the church today (see Horner, *Future Israel*, 253–90).

⁶⁰ Blaising, “Future of Israel,” 444.

⁶¹ Contrary to the common supersessionist conclusion—e.g., F. F. Bruce: “In all that Paul says about the restoration of Israel to God, he says nothing about the restoration of an earthly Davidic kingdom. Without trying to construct an argument from this silence, we may insist that what Paul envisaged for his people was something far better” (*Romans*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985], 217). Why is an ethnically undifferentiated kingdom in the age to come “far better” than a differentiated one?

⁶² *Future Israel*, 68. So Horner concludes concerning Jewish election: “This universal kingdom on a glorified earth will incorporate a blessed unity with diversity, that is, the regenerate nation of Israel will inhabit the fruitful promised land under the reign of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem surrounded by regenerate Gentile nations. In this setting of heaven come to earth, Israel and the Jewish people will be fulfilled (Rom. 11:12), not superseded, and the Gentile nations will happily submit to this divine order as engrafted wild olive branches. To this end was the gospel sent forth (Zech. 14:9; Acts 3:19–21; Rom. 8:18–23)” (*Ibid.*, 252).

(Col. 3:11)? Many take such verses as proof of the revocation of Jewish election, that God no longer regards ethnicity.⁶³ Paul was not saying this, however. He was simply commenting on the commensurate *quality of salvation* and the subsequent unity of faith.⁶⁴ Jew and Gentile alike will enjoy the glory of the new earth and will be richly blessed in the resurrection by their common Lord and Father. Therefore Paul summarizes, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the *same Lord* is Lord of all, *bestowing his riches* on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be *saved*’” (Rom. 10:12–13).

Though Jew and Gentile are “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6), the divine inheritance will still delineate different *roles of salvation*.⁶⁵ Different children can be fellow heirs and members of the same house yet hold different roles according to birthright and parental commission. So too with the church. Jew and Gentile alike are “fellow citizens” (Eph. 2:19), yet their citizenship is still in relation to “the

⁶³ Such a face-value reading would likewise lead us to conclude that men and women have essentially become androgynous in God’s sight. As Ronald Y. K. Fung observes,

The statement that there is no “male and female” in Christ does not mean, as was believed in later Gnosticism, that in the new era mankind is restored to the pristine androgynous state; nor does it mean that all male-female distinctions have been obliterated in Christ, any more than that there is no racial difference between the Christian Jew and the Christian Gentile. “In Christ Jesus” emphasizes that Paul views the elimination of these antitheses from the standpoint of redemption in Christ, while the context clearly shows that the primary emphasis of the verse is on *unity* in Christ rather than on equality. (*The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 175–76)

⁶⁴ Such unity between Jew and Gentile is also likened to different appendages of “the same body” (Eph. 3:6; cf. 2:16; 4:4), and to siblings with the same father in “the household of God” (Eph. 2:19; cf. 3:15; 4:6), and to different branches grafted into one “olive tree” (Rom. 11:17).

⁶⁵ So Michael J. Vlach concludes,

If one recognizes that there are nations in eternity with specific roles and identities, why would there not be a special role and identity for the nation Israel? . . .

The concept of nations in eternity does not contradict passages that speak of unity among God’s people (see Rev 5:9–10). Nations can coexist in harmony with the equality of salvation and spiritual blessings of which all believers partake. In regard to salvation, there is one people of God, but this concept does not rule out all ethnic, geographical, or gender distinctions. . . .

God appears to have a future plan for nations. One of these nations will be Israel. The final eternal state, thus, will see the final and complete fulfillment of Gen 12:2–3 in which God’s plan for Abraham and Israel is to bring blessings to all the families of the earth. (*Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* [Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010], 175–76; italics in the original)

commonwealth of Israel” (v. 12). Paul is simply battling against the alienation and “hostility” (v. 14) that had grown between Jew and Gentile (as an older and younger sibling might become antagonistic toward one another).

Such animosity between Jew and Gentile was part of a larger trend within late second-temple Judaism. In an attempt to guarantee that Israel would not become apostate (and thus receive a renewed exilic punishment), Jews sought an ever-stricter adherence to the law – which, combined with growing Roman provocation, expressed itself in a progressive condemnation of and separation from the Gentiles.⁶⁶ Different groups within Judaism (cf. Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes) held different positions concerning the Gentiles, but the stricter of the Pharisees (i.e., the House of Shammai vs. the House of Hillel⁶⁷) rejected the idea that the Gentiles would participate in salvation.⁶⁸ Gentiles would only be blessed *in Abraham* (Gen. 12:3, et al.) if they “became Jews” (Est. 8:17, NASB) and thereby “join themselves to the LORD” (Isa. 56:6; cf. Deut. 23:8; Jer. 50:5; Zech. 2:11).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ This animosity came to a head in the violent enactment (with the aid of the Zealots) of “the restrictive propositions of the Shammaites, known in the Talmud as ‘The Eighteen Articles.’” (S. Mendelsohn, “Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai,” *JE*, 3:116) These ordinances (c. 20 AD) are never listed in the rabbinical sources, but it is assumed they are the basis of the stringent separation between Jews and Gentiles referenced in the NT (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:3; Gal. 2:12).

⁶⁷ As any Jewish schoolboy knows, Hillel and Shammai (c. 60 BC–20 AD) were the last of the *Zugot* (“pairs” of scholars), the forefathers of the *Tannaim* (“teachers,” c. 10–220 AD), who produced the Mishnah and much of the Talmudic literature. See an introduction in Mendelsohn, “Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai,” 3:115–16; and Craig A. Evans, “Hillel, House of,” and “Shammai, House of,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 496–98 and 1106–7. See also Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70*, 3 vols. (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1971); and J. H. Charlesworth and L. L. Johns, eds., *Hillel and Jesus: Comparisons of Two Major Religious Leaders* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

⁶⁸ “The rabbis had mixed feelings toward proselytes. Some, like Hillel, were disposed to welcome proselytes and were even inclined to relax the requirements a bit at the outset so that the newcomer could perceive the true spirit of Judaism (Mish *Aboth* i.12; TB *Shabbath* 31a). On the other hand, Shammai viewed proselytes with some suspicion and demanded that they be thoroughly examined before admittance. . . . Indeed, some rabbis argued that proselytes were like a scab that adhered to the Jewish people (TB *Yebamoth* 47b, 109b; *Kiddushin* 70b)” (T. R. Schreiner, “Proselyte,” *ISBE*, 3:1008).

⁶⁹ Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod describes how a Gentile becomes a Jew according to the flesh in God’s sight:

We must start with the insight that conversion to Judaism should not be possible. . . . And yet, conversion to Judaism is possible. How? By means of a miracle. A gentile who converts to Judaism miraculously becomes part of the body of Israel. This is far more than merely sharing Jewish beliefs and practices. To become a Jew, a gentile must become seed of the patriarchs and matriarchs and that is what she becomes, quasi-physically, miraculously.

Those who became Jews were known as “proselytes” (Matt. 23:15; Acts 2:11; 6:5; 13:43),⁷⁰ and their conversion was confirmed by “circumcision, baptism, and the offering of a sacrifice in the temple.”⁷¹ Those who forsook their pagan idolatry but refrained from becoming Jews were known as “God-fearers” (cf. Acts 10:22; 13:26; 17:4). Such Gentiles were expected to follow the universal laws of God,⁷² which were later termed “the Noahide Laws.”⁷³ There was debate

The Talmud speaks of the convert as being born, or reborn, as a Jew. . . . A gentile mother and her son or a brother and a sister who convert to Judaism and then marry each other do not violate the biblical prohibition against incest. This is so because, in the process of conversion, they were reborn and are therefore no longer mother and son or brother and sister. Fortunately, such marriages are rabbinically forbidden. . . . This does not, of course, imply that the biological miracle that accompanies a conversion can be observed under the microscope as changes in the DNA of the convert. It is a theological-biological miracle. . . .

This has to be so because being a Jew requires descent from Abraham and Sarah, and if conversion to Judaism is to be possible, then the convert must become a descendant of Abraham and Sarah. Only a miracle can accomplish this feat. (*The Body of Faith: God and the People Israel*, 2nd ed. [Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996], xviii–xix; italics in the original)

⁷⁰ Though there is much debate concerning the Heb. *gēr* in the OT—i.e., the “sojourner” (Ex. 12:19; 20:10; Lev. 17:15; Deut. 16:11; 29:11; etc.) or “stranger” (Ex. 12:48f.; Lev. 16:29; 19:33f.; Num. 9:14; etc.)—it was generally understood by NT times that they were proselytes, since they were circumcised (Ex. 12:44,48; Josh. 5:5; cf. Gen. 17:12f.), as reflected in the LXX translation of Heb. *gēr* with Gk. *proselytos*; see E. G. Hirsch, “proselyte,” *JE*, 10:220–24; and K. G. Kuhn, “προσῆλυτος,” *TDNT*, 6:728–31.

⁷¹ K. G. Kuhn notes,

The rite [for the reception of proselytes] consists of three parts: circumcision, baptism, and the offering of a sacrifice in the temple. . . .

As the Israelites in the wilderness had to fulfil three conditions before the conclusion of the covenant, namely, circumcision (cf. Ex. 12:48), sprinkling with water (Ex. 19:10) and an offering (Ex. 24:5), so proselytes must fulfil the same three conditions on entering the covenant. . . .

The non-Jew received thus into Judaism was regarded after conversion “in every respect as a Jew,” b. Jeb., 47b. This means in the first instance that like every Jew he is under obligation to keep the whole Jewish Law. In keeping is the saying of Paul in Gl. 5:3. (“προσῆλυτος,” *TDNT*, 6:738–39)

⁷² The earliest attestation to such proto-Noahide laws is found in *Jubilees* 7:20–21: “And in the twenty-eighth jubilee Noah began to command his grandsons with ordinances and commandments and all of the judgments which he knew. And he bore witness to his sons so that they might do justice and cover the shame of their flesh and bless the one who created them and honor father and mother, and each one love his neighbor and preserve themselves from fornication and pollution and from all injustice. For on account of these three the Flood came upon the earth” (*OTP*, 2:69–70).

⁷³ Formulated in later rabbinic tradition as seven commandments (derived from Gen. 9:1–7) which are binding on all of humanity (the “children of Noah”): “The prohibitions against (1) idolatry, (2) blasphemy, (3) bloodshed, (4) incest and adultery, and (5) robbery; (6) the injunction to establish

within Judaism at the time, though, as to whether or not God-fearing Gentiles would inherit eternal life or be condemned to Gehenna.⁷⁴

The book of Acts seems to indicate that the general sentiment of the early apostolic church was that God-fearers would *not* be saved. Thus the scandal of Acts 10 is understood: Cornelius was a “God-fearing man” (v. 22), yet “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” (v. 45, NIV). Similarly, when Peter returned to Jerusalem, “the circumcised believers criticized him” for eating with “uncircumcised men” (11:2–3, NRSV). However, when Peter explained his vision and the granting of the gift of the Holy Spirit, they praised God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life” (11:18).

The Jerusalem council (Acts 15) is best understood in the same light.⁷⁵ Some of the stricter Pharisaical believers were adamant: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you *cannot be saved*” (v. 1). But Peter countered, “God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made *no distinction* between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith” (vv. 8–9). Thus the Gentiles were shown to be sealed for eternal life apart from becoming Jews, which was deemed to agree (Gk. *sumphōneō*)⁷⁶ with the prophets (vv. 15–17, cf. Amos 9:11–12)—Gentiles

courts of law; and (7) the prohibition against eating flesh cut from a living animal” (Nahum M. Sarna, “Excursus 3: The Noahide Commandments,” in *Genesis*, JPSTC [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 377). See also the definitive study by David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: The Idea of Noahide Law*, 2nd ed., ed. Matthew LaGrone (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011).

⁷⁴ See the relationship between the *prosēlutos* and the *phoboumenoi ton theon* in Kuhn, “προσήλυτος,” *TDNT*, 6:741–44. “The attitude of the primitive Palestinian community to σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν was based on that of Palestinian Judaism. The only non-Jew to have a part in the salvation effected in Jesus was the one who had first become a member of the Jewish people by the acceptance of circumcision and of the obligation to keep the whole Jewish Torah. Otherwise the non-Jew remained a Gentile and as such he would fall victim to God’s wrath in the Last Judgment” (p. 743).

⁷⁵ For an introduction concerning the issues surrounding the apostolic “consultation,” see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 486–93.

⁷⁶ In no way does Gentile faith *fulfill* (Gk. *plēroō*) the hope of the restored Davidic kingdom—contrary to the common Reformed sentiment; e.g., Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945), 145–50; and Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 209–10.

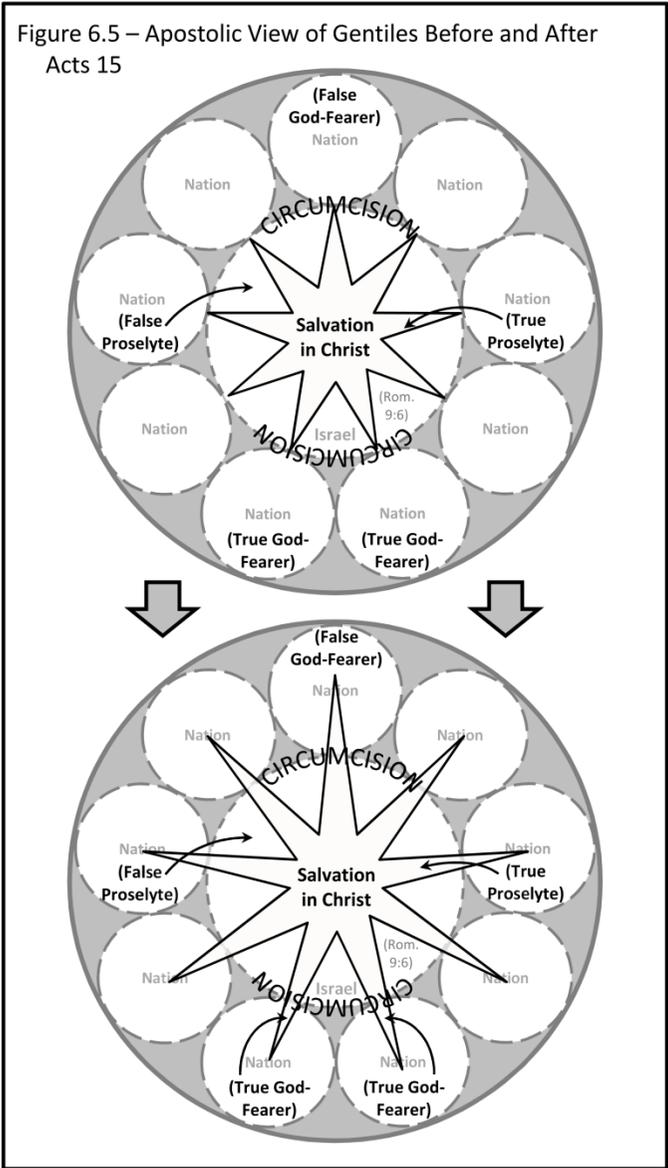
would inherit eternal life *as Gentiles*.⁷⁷ To be included in the body of faith, they did not have to become Jews (see figure 6.5).⁷⁸ A supersessionist reading of this text according to realized eschatology seems particularly inane.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Debate concerning agreement with the prophets seems to stem from the announcement of the *universal destruction* of the Gentiles on the day of the Lord (cf. Isa. 63:1–6; Joel 3:1–3; Zeph. 2). Thus, to be saved from the coming wrath against the nations, it might seem necessary to become a Jew, so as to be found in the company of the righteous (cf. Pss. 1 and 2).

⁷⁸ Note a similar conclusion in David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007), 154–57. See a congruous diagram in Dan Gruber, *The Church and the Jews: The Biblical Relationship* (Hanover, NH: Elijah Publishing, 1997), 131.

⁷⁹ For example, Kim Riddlebarger finds this passage exemplary of the supposed apostolic “reinterpretation” of the OT: “James saw the prophecy as fulfilled in Christ’s resurrection and exaltation and in the reconstitution of his disciples as the new Israel. The presence of both Jew and Gentile in the church was proof that the prophecy of Amos had been fulfilled. David’s fallen tent had been rebuilt by Christ” (*A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013], 53).

Figure 6.5 – Apostolic View of Gentiles Before and After Acts 15



As such, it was deemed that the Gentiles would continue to be Gentiles, observing the proto-Noahide laws (vv. 19–21), and the Jews would continue to be Jews, observing the Torah.⁸⁰ This straightforward approach to the Jerusalem

⁸⁰ As Soulen states,

This view of the church underlies the decision of the so-called Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–21; Gal. 2:1–10). Those present take it for granted that Jewish followers of Jesus remain obligated to the Torah; at the same time they rule that Gentile followers of Jesus

council (and the issue of Jew and Gentile at large in the New Testament) is further reinforced in Acts 21, where Paul is accused of encouraging Jews to forsake Torah observance (v. 21). Paul silences such criticism, proving his own “observance of the law” (v. 24) and reinforcing the dissimilar standard for Gentiles (v. 25). So Paul concludes simply, “Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord *assigned to him* and to which God has *called him*. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised” (1 Cor. 7:17–18, NIV).⁸¹

Jew and Gentile alike will be saved from the wrath to come on the basis of faith in Christ crucified (cf. Rom. 3:30; 4:9–12; 9:30–32). However, Jews should “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:8) according to the Torah, while Gentiles should do likewise according to the Noahide laws. Since the former is an expansion of the latter,⁸² both are perfected in love and humility (cf. Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14), and accordingly both have the same broad pattern of discipleship (cf. Rom. 15:5–9; Eph. 4:1–6; Phil. 2:1–13).⁸³ Paul was generally contending against pride, which approached works of the Torah as *the basis* of eschatological salvation (cf. Rom. 4:2; 11:6; Eph. 2:9). This same pride could also pervert Gentiles (cf. Rom. 11:20; 1 Cor. 1:29), seeking justification on the basis of

are obligated to observe only the Noahide law. In back of this decision is the belief that what God has done in Jesus engages Jews as Jews and Gentiles as Gentiles. . . .

The church, for its part, should repent of having turned its back upon the original determination of the Council of Jerusalem, where the Jewish obligation to maintain Jewish identity was universally presupposed. (*The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 170–71)

⁸¹ In this regard, see Mark S. Kinzer’s balanced work, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

⁸² See Menachem Elon, *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, trans. Bernard Auerbach and Melvin J. Sykes, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 190–207.

⁸³ Paul generally seeks unity of faith amidst diversity of election. Consequently he exhorts believers in Rome, both Jew and Gentile: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such *harmony* with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that *together* you many with *one voice* glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:5–6; cf. 1:16; 2:9f.; 3:29f.; 4:11f.; 6:15; 9:30f.; 10:12; 11:13f.; 14:5; 15:1). This exhortation is based upon the reality that “Christ became a servant to the *circumcised* to show God’s truthfulness, in order to *confirm the promises given to the patriarchs*, and in order that the *Gentiles* might glorify God for his mercy” (vv. 8–9). The distinction between Jew and Gentile (and their respective callings) is here plainly assumed, and Paul goes on to quote Ps. 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Ps. 117:1; and Isa. 11:10, all of which prophesy Jew and Gentile worshipping together under a common messianic Lord in the age to come (cf. Isa. 2:2–4; Dan. 7:14; Rev. 21:24), thus substantiating the present exhortation to unity amidst diversity.

the Noahide laws, or some other Gentile standard (see chapter 8). Rather, God “will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith” (Rom. 3:30, NRSV).

CHRIST’S KINGDOM: THE GLORY OF JERUSALEM

Not only did Jesus’ followers believe that he would “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6), but they also expected him to inaugurate a specific kind of Israelitic kingdom: “the coming kingdom of our father *David*” (Mark 11:10). Since the Messiah is the “son of David” (Matt. 1:1; 22:42), God will give him “the throne of his father *David*, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33). Thus the kingdom of God was expected to be a Davidic-Israelitic, messianic kingdom.

This expectation was simply derived from the Davidic covenant, in which God promised, “I will raise up *your offspring* after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish *his kingdom*. . . . And I will establish the throne of *his kingdom* forever” (2 Sam. 7:12–13). As discussed in the last chapter, Psalm 89 reiterates the surety and eternity of this covenant: “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ‘I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations. . . . I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me’” (vv. 3–4, 35–36).

Similarly, Isaiah prophesied, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. . . . Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of *David* and over *his kingdom*, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore” (Isa. 9:6–7). And again, “In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of *David*—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness (Isa. 16:5, NIV). So too Jeremiah said, “In those days and at that time I will raise up for them a righteous descendant of *David*. He will do what is just and right in the land. . . . For I, the Lord, promise: ‘David will never lack a successor to occupy the throne over the nation of Israel’” (Jer. 33:15–17, NET; cf. Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–25).

The Scriptures therefore assume continuity between the historical Davidic kingdom and the eschatological Davidic kingdom: “The former dominion will be

restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem" (Mic. 4:8, NIV). So Amos prophesied explicitly: "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" (9:11–12, NIV).

The Messiah will thus sit on David's throne. He will not sit on Nebuchadnezzar's throne—nor Alexander's, nor Augustus', nor Charlemagne's, nor Suleiman's, nor James', nor Washington's. Establishing this simple idea in the mind of a modern believer is tantamount to casting a mountain into the sea (cf. Matt. 21:21). Such is the condition of Gentile depravity that it seems to take a miracle from God wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit to break apart the stronghold of ethnocentrism.

The centrality of the Davidic throne in the prophetic oracles consequently gives rise to the *centrality of Jerusalem*.⁸⁴ Because God led David to establish his throne in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6–12; 1 Chron. 11:4–9), the Messiah will take up his throne there, for it is "the city of our God . . . the city of the great King" (Ps. 48:1–2), which Jesus himself reaffirms (cf. Matt. 5:35).⁸⁵ Therefore, in accord with the Davidic covenant, God will make new heavens, a new earth, and a *new Jerusalem*, as Isaiah outlines:

Behold, I will create
 new heavens and a *new earth*.
The former things will not be remembered,
 nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
 in what I will create,
for I will create *Jerusalem* to be a delight
 and its people a joy.
I will rejoice over *Jerusalem*
 and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying

⁸⁴ Thus Jerusalem is "the center of Old Testament eschatology"; see Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: T & T Clark, 2000), esp. 4–20.

⁸⁵ Note the salvific arrangement and hierarchy that is assumed when Jesus quotes this verse: "Do not take an oath at all, either *by heaven*, for it is the throne of God, or *by the earth*, for it is his footstool, or *by Jerusalem*, for it is the city of the great King."

will be heard in it no more. (Isa. 65:17–19, NIV)

God will reign through the Messiah on the very mount within Jerusalem where David built his palace, “the fortress of Zion, the city of David” (2 Sam. 5:7; 1 Chron. 11:5, NIV). “Mount Zion” is a literal hill in the southeast of Jerusalem.⁸⁶ It is here that God prophesied, “I have set my King *on Zion*, my holy hill” (Ps. 2:6).⁸⁷ It is “*the mount* that God desired for his abode, yes, where the LORD will dwell forever” (Ps. 68:16)—“For the LORD has chosen *Zion*, he has desired it for his dwelling: ‘*This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it. . . . Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one*’” (Ps. 132:13–17, NIV). Indeed, “The LORD Almighty will reign *on Mount Zion* and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously” (Isa. 24:23, NIV). And “He will swallow up *on this mountain* the covering that is cast over all peoples. . . . He will swallow up death forever” (Isa. 25:7–8). Hence the relationship between Israel and the nations in the age to come is further specified by its locus in Jerusalem:

Many nations will come and say,
“Come and let us go up to *the mountain* of the LORD
And to the house of the God of Jacob,
that He may teach us about His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For *from Zion* will go forth the law,
even the word of the LORD *from Jerusalem*.
And He will judge between many peoples
And render decisions for mighty, distant nations. (Mic. 4:2–3, NASB)

⁸⁶ Though its exact location is disputed and has varied historically; see J. D. Levenson, “Zion Traditions,” *ABD*, 6:1098–1102; and Bargil Pixner, *Paths of the Messiah: Messianic Sites in Galilee and Jerusalem*, ed. Rainer Riesner (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 320–22.

⁸⁷ This is in fact the general tenor of the Psalms, as summarized in Psalm 2. “It is worthwhile to re-emphasize that this psalm appears to have been set together with Psalm 1 as an introduction to the entire Psalter. As a result the theme of how Yhwh’s *mashiah* will conquer all opposition and rule the world from Zion must be considered as one of the broad, overarching themes of the Psalms, in whose light all the ensuing lyrics, including the royal psalms, should be interpreted” (David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1997], 245).

In this way, the messianic kingdom will be “Jerusalocentric.” That is, the center of the new earth will be the New Jerusalem.⁸⁸ God will administrate the restoration of all things through the Messiah reigning on Mount Zion as King of Israel, reigning over all the nations. Thus the Son of David will rule a Jerusalemic kingdom in the age to come (see figure 6.6)—“The LORD will extend your mighty scepter *from Zion*; you will rule in the midst of your enemies” (Ps. 110:2, NIV).

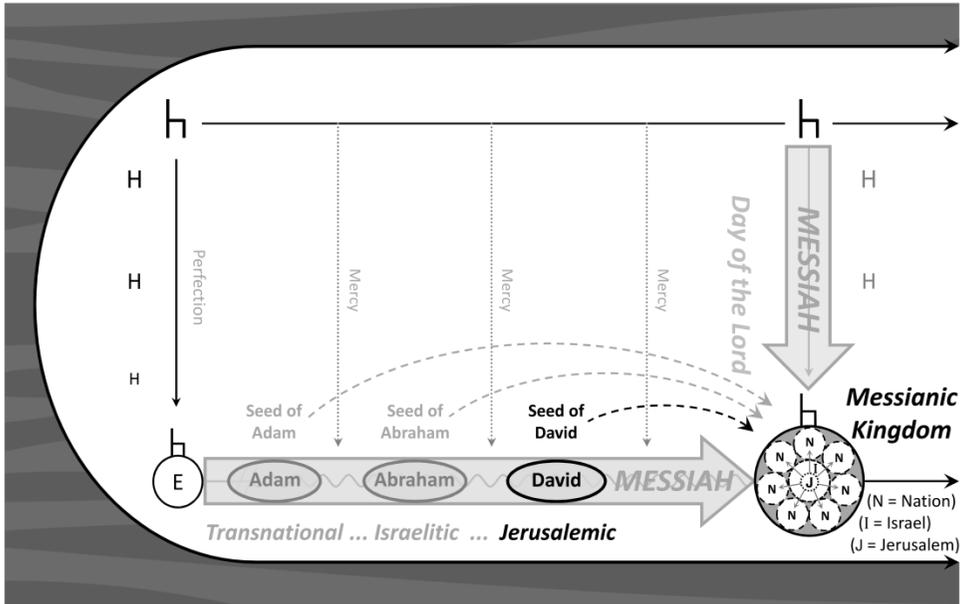


Figure 6.6 – The Davidic, Jerusalemic Messianic Kingdom

Within this covenantal arrangement, the prophets ring in chordal fashion concerning Jerusalem and its future. As Isaiah says, “In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious. . . . Then the LORD will create over all of *Mount Zion* and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night” (Isa. 4:5, NIV). Likewise, Micah concludes, “The LORD will reign over them in *Mount Zion* from this time forth and forevermore” (Mic. 4:7). And Jeremiah, “At that time *Jerusalem* shall be called the throne of the

⁸⁸ So McClain notes the earth’s Jerusalocentric geography: “Certainly, if there is ever to be a Kingdom of God on earth, no more appropriate place for its world center could be found than the place hallowed by the sacred memories of the One who there suffered and died for the sins of the world. Furthermore, in this ancient city we have literally the crossroads of the world, joining the three great continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Ezekiel speaks appropriately of the location as the ‘navel of the earth’ (38:12, ASV margin)” (*Greatness of the Kingdom*, 230).

LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in *Jerusalem*, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart” (Jer. 3:17). And Joel, “The LORD roars from *Zion*, and utters his voice from *Jerusalem*, and the heavens and the earth quake. . . . So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in *Zion*, my holy mountain” (Joel 3:16–17). And Zechariah, “Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in *Jerusalem* and to entreat the favor of the LORD” (Zech. 8:22). Moreover, “On that day living waters shall flow out from *Jerusalem*, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. . . . And the LORD will be king over all the earth” (Zech. 14:8–9).

The restoration of the Davidic throne (cf. Amos 9:11; Mic. 4:8) therefore involves the restoration of Jerusalem. As the psalmist declares, “The nations will fear the name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. For the LORD will rebuild *Zion* and appear in his glory. . . . So the name of the LORD will be declared in *Zion* and his praise in *Jerusalem* when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD” (Ps. 102:15–22, NIV). Similarly, Isaiah describes the “good news” (Isa. 52:7) of Jerusalem’s redemption:

The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
the return of the LORD to *Zion*.
Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of *Jerusalem*,
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed *Jerusalem*.
The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God. (Isa. 52:8–10)

Thus David cries, “Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of *Zion!*” (Ps. 14:7; 53:6), in accordance with the divine decree: “Out of *Zion*, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth” (Ps. 50:2, NKJV). For God has promised, “I will grant salvation to *Zion*, my splendor to Israel” (Isa. 46:13, NIV). And he has prophesied, “Awake, awake, O *Zion*, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your

garments of splendor, O *Jerusalem*, the holy city. . . . Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O *Jerusalem*” (Isa. 52:1–2, NIV). So Isaiah intercedes,

For *Zion’s sake* I will not keep silent,
and for *Jerusalem’s sake* I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.
The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give. (Isa. 62:1–2)

God will always “set watchmen,” both Jews and Gentiles, who will “give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth” (Isa. 62:6–7). For it is in the establishment of Jerusalem *by the hand of God* that all things will be made new. Because no human hand can restore Jerusalem, we “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:6), for “*there* thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David” (v. 5). Jerusalem’s destiny in the age to come informs our prayers in this age. We long for the day when “the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to *Zion* with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa. 35:10; cf. 51:11).

Jerusalem may be a “barren woman” in this age, but she will “break forth into singing” (Isa. 54:1) when she gives birth to the righteous in the age to come. At that time she will be adorned by God in glory like a bride:

For your Maker is your *husband*—
the LORD Almighty is his name—
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
he is called the God of all the earth.
The LORD will call you back
as if you were a *wife* deserted and distressed in spirit—
a *wife* who married young,
only to be rejected. . . .
O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted,
I will build you with stones of turquoise,
your foundations with sapphires.

I will make your battlements of rubies,
your gates of sparkling jewels,
and all your walls of precious stones.
All your *sons* will be taught by the LORD,
and great will be your *children's* peace. (Isa 54:5–6,11–13, NIV)

Such prophetic descriptions were engrained in New Testament believers,⁸⁹ and they inform our understanding of the future of Jerusalem, especially in relation to Revelation 21–22. God will establish “the holy city, new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2; cf. Isa. 52:1; Dan. 9:24), “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2; cf. Isa. 54:5–6; 62:4–5). It will be “the dwelling place of God” (Rev. 21:3; cf. Ps. 132:13; Ezek. 37:27), where he will “wipe away every tear” (Rev. 21:4a; cf. Isa. 25:8) and where “mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Rev. 21:4b, NRSV; cf. Isa. 65:18). It will be adorned with jewels and precious metals (Rev. 21:11–21; cf. Isa. 54:11–12; 62:3), and the glory of God will cover it (Rev. 21:23–27; cf. Isa. 4; 60; 62:2). In it will be “the river of the water of life” and “the tree of life,” which will be for “the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1–2; cf. Ezek. 47:1–12; Zech. 14:8).

To a Jewish believer in the early church, John’s vision would have aligned perfectly with the New Jerusalem described by the aggregate of prophetic oracles. No one would have spiritually reinterpreted the Old Testament and its straightforward prophecies in light of such a vision. Rather, the vision with its figurative language and symbolic elements would have simply reinforced the covenants and their derivative prophecies.⁹⁰

Jerusalem was commonly understood to be “the city of the great King” (Ps. 48:2; Matt. 5:35). Hence believing Jews welcomed Jesus *by faith* into the city with

⁸⁹ On the intertestamental view of the New Jerusalem, see esp. Tobit 13:16–18; 14:5; 1 *Enoch* 90:28–29; 4 *Ezra* 8:52; 10:27–59; 2 *Baruch* 4:2–4; 32:2–4.

⁹⁰ So Gregory Beale comments concerning the “new” heavens and earth, “The allusions to Isaiah . . . in 21:1, 4–5 probably understand Isaiah as prophesying the transformation of the old creation rather than an outright new creation *ex nihilo*. . . . Indeed, *καίνος* (‘new’), as we have seen, refers predominantly to a change in quality or essence rather than something new that has never previously been in existence. This usage of *καίνος* is especially found in NT contexts describing eschatological or redemptive-historical transitions” (*The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 1040). The same logic applies to the “new” Jerusalem (though Beale strangely rejects this: “The image of the city is probably figurative, representing the fellowship of God with his people in an actual new creation” [Ibid., 1045]).

palm branches (a sign of victory and fulfillment),⁹¹ saying, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!” (John 12:13, NRSV). And evoking the pastoral imagery of the Messiah (cf. Jer. 23:4–6; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24; Mic. 5:4), Jesus cried out, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:37).

This cry was then followed by two prophecies: the destruction of the temple (“Your house is left to you desolate,” v. 38), and thereafter the ultimate fulfillment of the messianic coronation psalm hailed at the triumphal entry: “I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (v. 39; cf. Ps. 118:26). Thus Jesus assumes that Israel *will* see him again; they *will* acknowledge his messiahship; and Jerusalem *will* be gathered under his wing, so to speak. Likewise, Jesus prophesied, in accord with Daniel 7:25 and 9:26: “Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24), implying the messianic rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Son of Man returns (vv. 25–28).

In light of such a commonly understood destiny, how did believers relate to Jerusalem and the land of Israel in this age? Why did God bring the Jews into the land of Canaan? Why did David conquer Jerusalem? Why did Solomon build the temple? Why not just wait for the day of the Lord and the coming of the Messiah while living among the nations? Why not tarry in dispersion? These questions probe to the heart of Jewish calling, and they apply equally to historical as well as modern Israel. The common Christoplatonic answer is that Israel entering and occupying Canaan and Jerusalem was merely typological,⁹² illustrating 1) the greater metaphysical entrance and occupation of the immaterial land and heavenly Jerusalem, or conversely, 2) the greater expression of manifest sovereignty through Christendom and her various centers of power.

Neither of these answers reflects the biblical description of Israel’s calling in this age, which is essentially a stewardship of the oracles of God. A theology of stewardship is inherent in the biblical narrative as a whole, and it is summarized

⁹¹ See 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7; 14:4; see also W. R. Farmer, “The Palm Branches in John 12:13,” *JTS* 3 (1952): 62–66.

⁹² The nature and purpose of biblical typology will be discussed further in chapter 7.

as such in the New Testament (cf. “steward/manager” [Gk. *oikonomos*], Luke 12:42; 16:1–8; 1 Cor. 4:1–2; 1 Peter 4:10; etc.). Human beings were created to manage the earth (cf. Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15), and we will give an account on the day of judgment for our management (see figure 6.7). If humanity’s dominion had ever been lost or lifted (as is often argued in various theologies of manifest sovereignty), then there would be no reason for judgment. Rather, people are held to account on the day of judgment for how they steward their lives in this age (cf. Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).

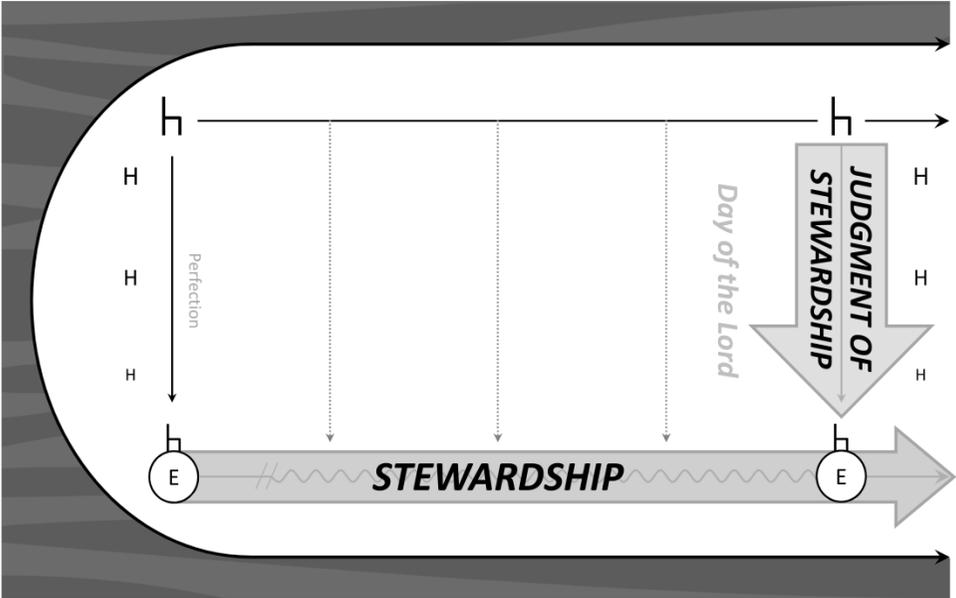


Figure 6.7 – Biblical Stewardship of the Earth in Light of the Day of the Lord

Since stewardship was commonly understood as fundamental to the human constitution, an application of that theology naturally would have carried over to the land of Canaan, the city of Jerusalem, the throne of David, and the temple of the Lord in light of the day of the Lord (see figure 6.8). These things were not ends in themselves, but rather tarrying mechanisms, designed to strengthen hope and faith in God for the age to come.

The steward/tenant relationship between God and Israel concerning the land of Canaan is explicitly stated in Leviticus: “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and *my tenants*” (25:23, NIV). Consequently God has chosen Canaan as “his land” (Joel 2:18),

because it is the land destined for his glory, the land where he will “gather all the nations and . . . enter into judgment with them there” (Joel 3:2). Though he has repeatedly disciplined his tenants, even removing them from the land altogether, “the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem” (Zech. 1:17).

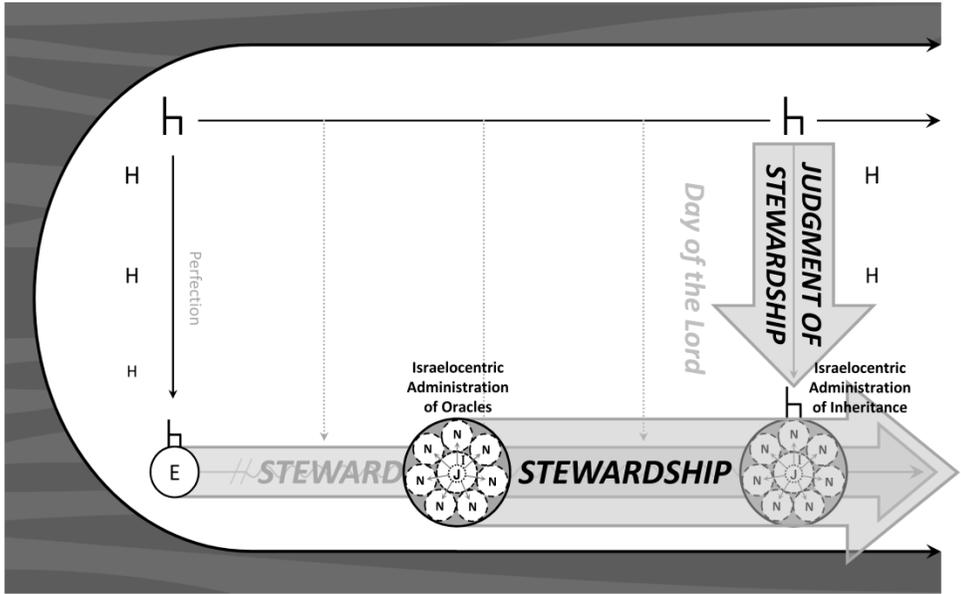


Figure 6.8 – Biblical Stewardship of Israel and Jerusalem in Light of the Day of the Lord

Akin to the land, the Davidic dynasty was considered a stewardship from the Lord. God himself “set up the throne of David over Israel” (2 Sam. 3:10); and because one of David’s own descendants would one day sit upon that very throne (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; Isa. 9:7; Luke 1:32), the Davidic dynasty was essentially “proleptic” —that is, anticipating a future messianic coronation.⁹³ Thus historical Davidic kings were the “anointed” of the Lord (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 6:42; Ps.

⁹³ Thus the Davidic coronation banquet is also a “proleptic enjoyment of the eschatological banquet in the afterlife,” i.e., the messianic banquet: “This tradition is reflected in the description of the victory/coronation banquet of David in 1 Chr 12:38–40, a passage with strong messianic overtones. Here, the warriors gather and celebrate with their new king, the prototype of the Messiah. The nations come bearing gifts in tribute, and ‘there was joy in Israel’ (v 40). This description reflects the form of the banquet of the end time, which is given a classic description in Isa 25:6–8” (Dennis E. Smith, “Messianic Banquet,” *ABD*, 4:789). In like manner, “This suggests that one of the ways in which early Christians interpreted their communal meals (both Eucharist and agape) was as a messianic banquet being celebrated proleptically in the presence of the risen Lord” (Ibid., 790).

18:50; 28:8; 89:38), who like Solomon “sat on the throne of the LORD as king in place of David his father” (1 Chron. 29:23; cf. 1 Kings 2:12).

The throne of the Lord, however, was ultimately designed to accommodate the final “Anointed One” (Ps. 2:2–6; 89:20–37; 132:17; Dan. 9:25), who would establish the Israelitic kingdom in true righteousness and justice (cf. Ps. 72:2; Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Jer. 23:5). Accordingly David prayed at the end of his life, “We are *sojourners* before You, and *tenants*, as all our fathers were” (1 Chron. 29:15, NASB). In this way the historical Davidic kingdom was understood as “the kingdom of the Lord” (1 Chron. 28:5; 2 Chron. 13:8), which was to be kept and stewarded until the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the everlasting kingdom.⁹⁴

Such a mindset of stewardship is evidenced in Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his cleansing of the temple, which evoked the question of the chief priests and elders: “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” (Matt. 21:23). Jesus responded with a parable about tenants (vv. 33–44). The land of Israel, God, and the Jews are like a vineyard planted by a *master* which is leased to *tenants* (v. 33). The master sent servants (prophets) and his son (the Messiah) to collect the land’s fruit (repentance in light of coming judgment; cf. Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20). The tenants killed them, however, for an illegitimate inheritance (reward in this age; cf. Matt. 6:2; 23:5–7). The primary question is then, “When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” (v. 40). Indeed, he will “put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants” (v. 41). Though the parable was intensely convicting, no one questioned its overall framework. The Jews are indeed called to be tenants, stewarding the land in light of final judgment.

Similarly, Paul affirmed the gamut of Jewish stewardship, saying, “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” (Rom. 9:4). Though interpreting such

⁹⁴ Here it is important to point out that though the Davidic kingdom was of the same substance as the age to come, so to speak (cf. Heb. 2:4; 6:5), it was *not* the age to come, nor was it the messianic kingdom. The equation of the two, so critical to the dispensational schema, sees the church age as an “intercalation” between the OT kingdom of God and the eschatological kingdom of God. It is believed that the kingdom of God existed substantially in Israel (though the timing of its inauguration is disputed) until the time of the exile and would be restored eschatologically; see Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, 1:207–49; Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism*, 33–58; and McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 41–129.

a list is difficult,⁹⁵ its most straightforward reading implies that Jews are entrusted with a unique birthright (“adoption”) established by the covenants unto an apocalyptic glory. Moreover, their calling in this age involves the stewardship of the oracles (“promises”), which include the land, law and temple (“worship”). Indeed some Jews lack faith, and their labors and stewardship will be for naught. But others “earnestly worship night and day” (Acts 26:7), being “zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20), and they will receive their due reward according to their faith.⁹⁶

Such a theology of stewardship weighs heavily in the discussion of the role of the Jews in the land of Israel today. Many argue vehemently that the Jews no longer have a role or calling in the land.⁹⁷ Others say the Jews retain a unique calling to steward the land.⁹⁸ We must heartily affirm the latter. Though many in the land today are indeed apostate, that too was the case before the exile (cf. Isa. 3:9; Jer. 2:19) and before the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 7:51; Rom. 11:25). Though the Jews have always fallen short (as have all Gentiles!), ought we not support their divine right to promulgate the oracles, of which the land itself stands at the forefront (cf. Ps. 72:8; Zech. 9:10)?

Moreover, just because the Jews cannot steward all of the oracles (e.g., the Davidic dynasty, temple service, etc.), should they not steward as many as possible? Modern Israel engages in many objectionable practices, of course, but should we not support *righteous stewardship* rather than the rejection of Jewish election altogether?⁹⁹ If God chooses to discipline his stewards yet again and remove them from the land (as seems anticipated in Isaiah 11:12, Daniel 12:7,

⁹⁵ For an overview of the complexities of this passage (Rom. 9:1–5), see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 555–68.

⁹⁶ The Jewish stewardship of the law (cf. Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2) seems to be the background of the apostolic “stewardship” of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:17; Col. 1:25), which is entrusted to Jew and Gentile alike, i.e., “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1), “approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel” (1 Thess. 2:4; cf. 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 6:20; Titus 1:3).

⁹⁷ See Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 2004); and Gary M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2013).

⁹⁸ See Horner, *Future Israel*; and Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*

⁹⁹ Contrary to Burge’s supersessionist conclusions after his vitriolic itemization of Israel’s sins in *Whose Land?*, 135–64 (see also Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?*, 141–238).

Zechariah 14:2, Luke 21:20–24, etc.), so be it.¹⁰⁰ But woe to those who presume upon divine mercy and election.

CHRIST'S KINGDOM: THE GLORY OF THE TEMPLE

Not only will the Messiah be the King of Israel, and not only will he rule from Mount Zion in Jerusalem, but he will also build the temple of the Lord. At the heart of the Davidic covenant is the building of a temple, or “house,” for God. David’s decision to build a temple for the ark of the Lord provided the context for the pronouncement of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:2; 1 Chron. 17:1). Thus the Lord spoke concerning the Davidic offspring, “He shall build a *house* for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:13; cf. 1 Chron. 17:12).

The prominence of the Jerusalemic temple in the Scriptures cannot be overstated. Because it was the culmination of prophetic history, the “house of the LORD,”¹⁰¹ or the “house of God,”¹⁰² was the nucleus of Israel’s life. So Solomon summarized at its dedication:

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to David my father, saying, “Since the day that I brought my people out of the land of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a *house*, that my name might be there, and I chose no man as prince over my people Israel; but I have chosen *Jerusalem*

¹⁰⁰ See Dalton Lifsey, *The Controversy of Zion and the Time of Jacob’s Trouble: The Final Suffering and Salvation of the Jewish People* (Tauranga, New Zealand: Maskilim Publishing, 2011).

¹⁰¹ 1 Kings 3:1; 6:1,37; 7:12,40,45,48,51; 8:10f.,63f.; 9:1,10,15; 10:5,12; 14:26,28; 15:15,18; 2 Kings 11:3f.,7,10,13,15,18f.; 12:4,9ff.,16,18; 14:14; 15:35; 16:8,14,18; 18:15; 19:1,14; 20:5,8; 21:4f.; 22:3ff.,8f.; 23:2,6f.,11f.,24; 24:13; 25:9,13,16; 1 Chron. 6:31f.; 9:23; 22:1,11,14; 23:4,24,28,32; 24:19; 25:6; 26:12,22,27; 28:12f.,20; 29:8; 2 Chron. 3:1; 4:16; 5:1,13; 7:2,7,11; 8:1,16; 9:4,11; 12:9,11; 15:8; 16:2; 20:5,28; 23:5f.,12,14,18ff.; 24:4,7f.,12,14,18,21; 26:19,21; 27:3; 28:21,24; 29:3,5,15ff.,20,25,31,35; 30:1,15; 31:10f.,16; 33:4f.,15; 34:8,10,14f.,17,30; 35:2; 36:7,10,14,18; Ezra 1:3,5,7; 2:68; 3:8,11; 7:27; 8:29; Neh. 10:35; Ps. 23:6; 27:4; 92:13; 116:19; 118:26; 122:1,9; 134:1; 135:2; Isa. 2:2; 37:1,14; 38:20,22; 66:20; Jer. 17:26; 20:1f.; 26:2,7,9f.; 27:18,21; 28:1,5f.; 29:26; 33:11; 35:2,4; 36:5,10; 52:13,17,20; Lam. 2:7; Ezek. 8:14,16; 10:19; 11:1; Hos. 8:1; 9:4; Joel 1:9,14; 3:18; Mic. 4:1; Hag. 1:2,14; Zech. 7:3; 8:9; 11:13; 14:20f. Note also the Mosaic tabernacle (Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 23:18; Josh. 6:24; Judg. 19:18; 1 Sam. 1:7,24; 3:15; 2 Sam. 12:20).

¹⁰² 1 Chron. 22:2; 23:28; 25:6; 26:20; 28:12,21; 29:7; 2 Chron. 3:3; 4:11,19; 5:1,14; 7:5; 15:18; 22:12; 23:3,9; 24:7,13,27; 25:24; 28:24; 31:13,21; 33:7; 34:9; 35:8; 36:18f.; Ezra 1:4; 2:68; 3:8f.; 4:24; 5:2,13ff.; 6:3,5,7f.,12,16f.,22; 7:24; 8:36; 10:1,6,9; Neh. 6:10; 8:16; 11:11,16,22; 12:40; 13:7,9,11; Ps. 42:4; 52:8; Eccl. 5:1; Dan. 1:2; 5:3; Matt. 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4. Likewise in reference to the Mosaic tabernacle (Judg. 18:31; 1 Chron. 6:48; 9:11,13,26f.).

that my name may be there, and I have chosen *David* to be over my people Israel." (2 Chron. 6:4–6)

The temple in Jerusalem was also understood to be God's "footstool" (1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 99:5; Lam. 2:1; cf. "the place of my feet," Isa. 60:13). As such it was *the sign* of his present sovereignty and governance over creation, pointing to his future execution of divine judgment through his appointed Messiah. As Psalm 132 vividly portrays,

Let us go to *his dwelling place*;
let us worship at *his footstool*—
arise, O LORD, and come to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might. . . .
The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath that he will not revoke:
"One of your own descendants
I will place on your throne." . . .
For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling:
"*This is my resting place* for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it." . . .
"Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one." (Ps. 132:7–8,11,13–14,17, NIV)

The temple was understood as God's "dwelling place" (2 Chron. 36:15; Ezek. 37:27) and "resting place" (cf. 2 Chron. 6:41; Isa. 11:10), the place where he would ultimately come and take up residence forever through his Messiah. Thus the prophetic writings assume the primacy of Jerusalem and Mount Zion, because the eschatological house of the Lord would be built there. So Isaiah describes his vision:

Now it will come about that
In the last days
The mountain of *the house* of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,
And will be raised above the hills;
And all the nations will stream to it.
And 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;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths."
For the law will go forth *from Zion*
And the word of the LORD *from Jerusalem*.
And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples. (Isa. 2:2–4, NASB)

As seen in this passage, most references to Zion generally assume the presence of the house of the Lord. Hence Joel would be understood: "The day of the LORD is near. . . . The LORD roars *from Zion*, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake" (Joel 3:14–16; cf. Ps. 110:2). Likewise David, "The LORD will extend your mighty scepter *from Zion*; you will rule in the midst of your enemies" (Ps. 110:2, NIV).

In this way Zion and the temple were viewed as the *redemptive epicenter* of the age to come, wherein God would administrate the nations through the Messiah (see figure 6.9).¹⁰³ Thus Isaiah describes, "A voice of uproar from the city, a voice *from the temple*, the voice of the LORD who is rendering recompense to His enemies" (Isa. 66:6, NASB). Yet upon the "holy mountain" the redeemed will be made joyful and will receive the blessing of God, "for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7, NIV).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Similarly, the apocryphal book of Sirach says, "Have mercy, O Lord, on the people called by your name, on Israel, whom you have named *your firstborn*, Have pity on the city of *your sanctuary*, Jerusalem, the place of *your dwelling*. Fill Zion with your majesty, and *your temple* with your glory. Bear witness to those whom you created in the beginning, and fulfill the prophecies spoken in your name" (36:17–20, NRSV).

And again the apocryphal book of Tobit:

But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will *rebuild the temple of God*, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfillment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it *the temple of God will be rebuilt*, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth. They will all abandon their idols, which deceitfully have led them into their error; and in righteousness they will praise the eternal God. (14:5–7, NRSV)

¹⁰⁴ The eschatological context of this passage is set in the preceding chaps. (54–55) and is confirmed in v. 1, "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed" (NIV).

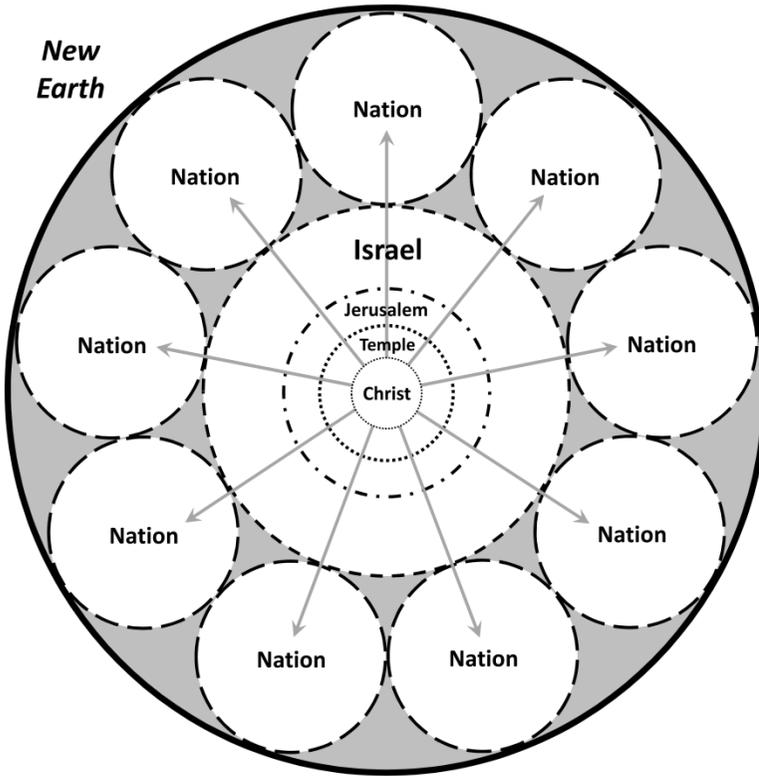


Figure 6.9 – The Administration of Divine Glory in the Age to Come

Like the land and the monarchy, the temple was also understood as a stewardship unto the coming of the Messiah and the day of the Lord. The Christ will come to Jerusalem “to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint *the most holy place*” (Dan. 9:24, NASB). And “the Redeemer will come to Zion” (Isa. 59:20, NIV), which will result in the glory of the Lord rising upon it (60:1–2), the nations coming to its light (60:3–12); and their offerings “shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify *my beautiful house*” (60:7). Furthermore, the gates of the New Jerusalem will be “open continually . . . that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations. . . . The glory of Lebanon shall come to you . . . to beautify the place of *my sanctuary*, and I will make the place of my feet glorious” (60:11–13; cf. Rev. 21:23–26).

Likewise, Ezekiel ties the resurrection of the dead (37:1–14) and the restoration of Israel (vv. 15–23) to the installation of the Davidic King (vv. 24–25) and the establishment of the eternal divine sanctuary (vv. 26–28): “David my servant shall be their prince forever. . . . And I will set them in their land and

multiply them, and will set *my sanctuary* in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when *my sanctuary* is in their midst forevermore” (Ezek. 37:25–28).

Ezekiel goes on to describe the glory of this sanctuary in chapters 40–47, wherein the continuity between the temple in this age and the temple in the age to come is accentuated.¹⁰⁵ Just as “the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kings 8:10) at its dedication, so also in Ezekiel’s vision “the glory of the LORD filled the temple” (Ezek. 43:5). Moreover, as the temple is God’s “footstool” in this age (1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 99:5; Lam. 2:1), so also in the age to come God says, “This is the place of my throne and *the place of the soles of my feet*, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever” (Ezek. 43:7). Rather than undermining the hope of a future messianic temple, the many similarities between the historical and eschatological temples simply ought to reinforce the stewardship role of the historical temple in preparation for its eschatological glory.

In this regard, the postexilic prophets were chiefly concerned with the establishment and righteous stewardship of the temple. In the book of Haggai, the Jews who had returned to Israel were busying themselves with their own houses while the house of the Lord lay in ruins (1:1–11). They obeyed the voice of the Lord, however, and “came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts” (1:14). Though the second temple was “as nothing” compared to the “former glory” of Solomon’s temple (2:3), the Lord commanded Zerubbabel and Joshua to “be strong” (2:4). For “in a little while” (2:6), “I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill *this house* with glory, says the LORD of hosts” (2:7). Thus the prophets envisioned three temples: the former Solomonic, the present postexilic, and the eschatological messianic—the present being stewarded unto its eschatological filling. Therefore “the latter glory of *this house* shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts” (2:9). This latter glory is understood within the common expectation of the day of the Lord (cf. “on that day,” 2:23), in which God will “shake the heavens and the earth” (2:21) and “overthrow the throne of kingdoms” (2:22).

¹⁰⁵ See John W. Schmitt and J. Carl Laney, *Messiah’s Coming Temple: Ezekiel’s Prophetic Vision of the Future Temple*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014).

Similarly, the book of Malachi represents a strong prophetic rebuke concerning poor stewardship of the temple. The priests showed contempt for the name of the Lord (1:6) by bringing sick and lame offerings (1:8), which had become a burden to them (1:13) because of their lack of faith in God as the “great King,” who would ultimately “be feared among the nations” (1:14). The priests had violated the covenant with Levi (2:8) by their lack of faith, and Judah “profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves” (2:11) by being “faithless” (2:16) toward God and toward one another.

All of this “wearyed the LORD” because of their root of unbelief, which was ultimately expressed in the question “Where is the God of justice?” (2:17). To this unbelief God answered, “Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come *to his temple*; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure *the day of his coming*, and who can stand when he appears?” (3:1–2).

From the temple this messianic Lord would refine and purify the Levites (3:3–4) and judge the wicked of the land (3:5). This wickedness is ultimately expressed in a lack of temple stewardship (3:7–12), which is rooted in unbelief: “It is vain to serve God” (3:14). But God reassures, “Once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. . . . For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble” (3:18–4:1). Consequently we have a holistic view of the relationship between the temple in this age, the coming of the Messiah, and the execution of “the great and awesome day of the LORD” (4:5).

In the same light, the temple priesthood was also understood as a stewardship. Accordingly Joshua, “the son of Jehozadak, the high priest” (Zech. 6:11), was crowned proleptically in anticipation of “the Branch” (6:12) to come. “And he will branch out from his place and build *the temple* of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be *a priest on his throne*. And there will be harmony between the two” (Zech. 6:12–13, NIV).

Thus there is an organic relationship between the Davidic monarchy and the Levitical priesthood, which retains continuity between this age and the age to

come based upon stewardship.¹⁰⁶ In this way the prophetic reassurance through Jeremiah is both logical and practical, since it was assumed that the Messiah would restore and glorify the Jerusalemic temple and its priesthood:

David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, nor will *the priests, who are Levites*, ever fail to have a man to stand before me. . . . If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant—and my covenant *with the Levites* who are priests ministering before me—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. (Jer. 33:17–21, NIV)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Many complain about the preservation of a Jewish priesthood, especially in the age to come, yet why should such a distinction be offensive? Akin to the delineation between God and humanity, male and female, Jew and Gentile, etc., God ordained Levitical and priestly roles for the shared benefit of all (Num. 6:22–27; Deut. 21:5; 1 Chron. 23:13), in keeping with Soulen’s theology of mutual blessing:

Significantly, the Scriptures consistently portray the Lord’s blessing in inextricable connection with relations of difference and mutual dependence among God’s creatures. In the primeval sagas (Gen 1–11), God’s blessing is connected with difference and mutual dependence within the natural world. This is evident in the relation of the human family and the rest of the created realm, and then again within the human family itself in the relations of male and female, of parents and children, of one generation and the next. In the sphere of covenant history (Gen 12 and forward), God’s blessing is connected with the difference and mutual dependence of Abraham and Sarah’s chosen children and all the other families, clans, and nations of the earth. *God’s work as Consummator, it seems, consistently presupposes and entails economies of mutual blessing between those who are different. . . .*

Difference and mutual dependence are not extrinsic to the supreme good that God appoints for creation but are “intrinsic to the goal itself.” The Lord’s blessing is available only through the blessing of an other. (*The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 116–17; italics in the original)

¹⁰⁷ The issue of the sacrifices in the age to come (as seen in v. 18, “to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever”) has a long history of contentious debate, with proponents viewing them as a “memorial” (cf. John L. Mitchell, “The Question of Millennial Sacrifices, Part 1,” *BSac* 110, no. 439 [July 1953]: 248–67; Mitchell, “The Question of Millennial Sacrifices, Part 2,” *BSac* 110, no. 440 [October 1953]: 342–61; and Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 517–531) and critics dismissing them as typologically obsolete (cf. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*; and Curtis Crenshaw, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* [Memphis: Footstool, 1989]). At the heart of the debate is the efficacy of the atonement (cf. Ezek. 45:15,17,20). Those who reject a sacrificial system in the age to come do so based upon a typological interpretation of OT sacrifices, which places them in a difficult hermeneutical position concerning the actual efficacy of OT sacrifices (cf. Lev. 1:4; 4:20; etc.). The answer seems to lie in delineating between the purification of the flesh vs. purification of the conscience (cf. Acts 13:39; Heb. 9:13ff.) in the context of a *transitional messianic age* wherein death and sin still exist (see Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48,” *BSac* 152, no. 607 [July 1995]: 279–89).

Moreover, as discussed in chapter 2, humanity was designed with a priestly nature in the beginning, which will find fulfillment in the age to come (cf. Rev. 5:10; 20:6). As humanity was created to “serve/work” (Heb. *‘abad*) and “guard/keep” (Heb. *šamar*) the garden (Gen. 2:15), so also the Levites were charged to “serve” and “keep” the tabernacle (Num. 3:7; 8:25–26; 18:5–6) and the temple (1 Chron. 23:32; 26:20).¹⁰⁸ Likewise, in the New Jerusalem we will “serve him day and night in his temple” (Rev. 7:15), for “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him” (Rev. 22:3, NIV).¹⁰⁹ Thus, being the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45; cf. Rom. 5:14), the Messiah will build the final temple and righteously reestablish humanity’s eternal priesthood (see figure 6.10), which is in full accord with the Jewish expectations seen in the New Testament.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ G. J. Wenham notes,

עבד “to serve, till” is a very common verb and is often used of cultivating the soil ([Gen.] 2:5; 3:23; 4:2,12, etc.). The word is commonly used in a religious sense of serving God (e.g., Deut 4:19), and in priestly texts, especially of the tabernacle duties of the Levites (Num 3:7–8; 4:23–24,26, etc.). Similarly, שמר “to guard, to keep” has the simple profane sense of “guard” ([Gen.] 4:9; 30:31), but it is even more commonly used in legal texts of observing religious commands and duties ([Gen.] 17:9; Lev 18:5) and particularly of the Levitical responsibilities for guarding the tabernacle from intruders (Num 1:53; 3:7–8). It is striking that here and in the priestly law these two terms are juxtaposed (Num 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6), another pointer to the interplay of tabernacle and Eden symbolism already noted (cf. *Ber. Rab.* 16:5). (*Genesis 1–15*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1998], 67)

¹⁰⁹ When John “saw no temple [Gk. *naos*] in the city, for its temple [Gk. *naos*] is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22), he was simply referencing the lack of a functional inner sanctuary, echoing Jer. 3:16–17: “In those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart.” In contrast to the temple complex as a whole (Gk. *hieron*), *naos* was commonly associated with the sanctuary (see “ναός,” BDAG, 665–66; and “Temple,” NIDNTT, 3:781–94).

¹¹⁰ Though ultimately arguing for a realization of “Jewish restoration eschatology,” Michael F. Bird summarizes well the Jerusalemcentric tenor of Jewish hope during the time of Jesus: “Generally speaking, the basic contours of Jewish restoration eschatology included the re-establishment of the twelve-tribes, the advent of a messianic figure (or figures) to defeat Israel’s enemies and reign in righteousness, a new or purified temple, the establishment of pure worship and righteous people, the return of Yahweh to Zion, abundant prosperity, a renewed covenant and the subjugation or admission of the Gentiles” (*Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* [London: T & T Clark, 2007], 27).

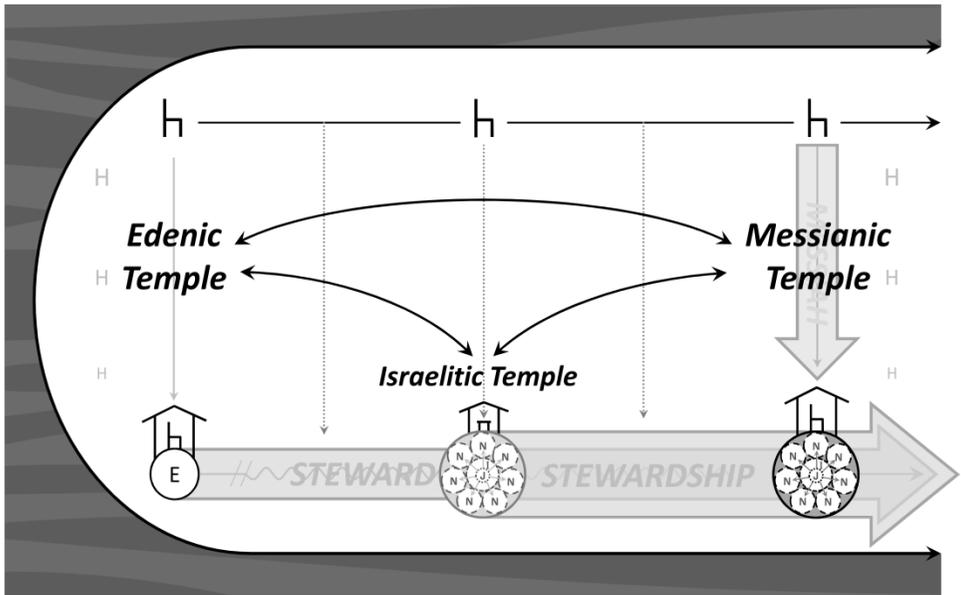


Figure 6.10 – The Apocalyptic Framework of the Temple/Tabernacle

The absolute centrality of the temple in Jesus’ day is generally accepted.¹¹¹ Anything that takes “forty-six years to build” (John 2:20) implies a great deal of value, meaning, and ambition. Such meaning was simply derived from the Old Testament and its development of messianic expectation, and that *without question or pretense*. Unfortunately, many assume that Jesus and/or the apostles

¹¹¹ See esp. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), chaps. 5–8; and Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002). As N. T. Wright summarizes,

The Temple was the focal point of every aspect of Jewish national life. Local synagogues and schools of Torah in other parts of Palestine, and in the Diaspora, in no way replaced it, but gained their significance from their implicit relation to it. . . .

But the Temple was not simply the “religious” centre of Israel. . . . The Temple combined in itself the functions of all three – religion, national figurehead and government – and also included what we think of as the City, the financial and economic world. . . . When we study the city-plan of ancient Jerusalem, the significance of the Temple stands out at once, since it occupies a phenomenally large proportion (about 25%) of the entire city. Jerusalem was not, like Corinth for example, a large city with lots of little temples dotted here and there. It was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city round it. (*The New Testament and the People of God* [London: SPCK, 1992], 224–25)

taught “a complete repudiation of the whole temple-idea.”¹¹² However, there is simply no scriptural evidence for such a claim.¹¹³

It was in the temple that Zechariah saw his forerunner vision (Luke 1:22) while performing his priestly duty (v. 8). Likewise, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple “to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22). There Simeon, who was “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (v. 25), was led by the Spirit into the temple to prophesy Jesus’ messianic destiny (v. 34). So too, Anna, who “did not depart from the temple” (v. 37), blessed him and spoke of him to all “who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (v. 38). And when Jesus as a boy was found in the temple, he simply responded, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (v. 49). Surely there was no divine guise involved in the temple being the context of all of these early interactions, which held such strong messianic overtones.

Similarly, after Jesus’ baptism, Satan questioned his messiahship three times, culminating in the Lukan account with the quoting of Psalm 91:11–12 at the pinnacle of the temple (Luke 4:9–11). Never in question were the temple, the coming of angels for trampling the serpent underfoot (Ps. 91:13), the inheriting of all the kingdoms of the earth (Ps. 2:8), or the transformation of the earth’s stony ecology (Isa. 35:1–2; 55:12–13). It was only the timing and presumption of messianic anointing that was at stake.

While cleansing the temple, Jesus referred to it as “my house” (Matt. 21:13) and “my Father’s house” (John 2:16) without the slightest pretense or equivocation. Jesus was actually zealous *for* the temple (John 2:17), not against it. He cleansed it because he cared about it, not because he disparaged it. Moreover,

¹¹² G. E. Wright, “The Significance of the Temple in the Ancient Near East,” *BA* 7, no. 3 (September 1944): 43. G. Schrenk mentions “the general apostolic conception that the new temple is the new community,” adding that “the temple is here an image of the community which through Jesus becomes the temple after the destruction of the earthly sanctuary” (“τὸ ἱερόν,” *TDNT*, 3:244, 247). The same basic logic drives Gregory Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 169–393; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 489–528; Michael Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, 125–77; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 138–92; and T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole, eds., *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004), chaps. 7ff.

¹¹³ Though relegating the temple to a subaltern Jewish plan of salvation, the modified dispensationalists at least preserve a place for a messianic temple in the age to come (see Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 309–15; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 512–531; and McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 247–254).

his reference to the resurrection of “the temple of his body” (John 2:21) ought only to *reinforce* the expectation of his establishing an eschatological temple, for it was in response to the question, “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” (v. 18, NIV). Therefore Jesus’ resurrection simply proved his authority to sit on his glorious throne in the eschatological Jerusalemic temple.

As previously discussed, the parable of the tenants (Matt. 21:33–46) was addressed to the chief priests and elders in light of Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. Though the “vineyard” represented Israel as a whole, the heart of the parable concerned the leaders who were chiefly responsible for stewarding the temple (v. 45). Again, there is no evidence that Jesus questioned the validity of the temple or its purpose for existence. Rather, what was in question was Jesus’ messianic “authority” (v. 23) over the temple.

Likewise, when Jesus said, “Something greater than the temple is here” (Matt. 12:6), he did not mean that the temple, “the house of God” (v. 4), had been existentially superseded. He was simply referring to his own authority and exalted position before God (akin to being “above the law,” so to speak), which deemed him “guiltless” (v. 7), just as David and the priests were guiltless due to their exalted position (vv. 3–5).

In Jesus’ teaching “day after day in the temple” (Luke 22:53; cf. 20:1; 21:37), there is never any record of condescension or controversion toward the temple itself but only toward those who officiated it (cf. Matt. 23:16–22; Luke 20:19). If Jesus was teaching a new supersessionist, self-realized temple, surely this would have been explicitly recorded somewhere! Yet we read nothing of the sort. Furthermore, when the children were “crying out in *the temple*, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’” (Matt. 21:15), Jesus only affirmed their declaration by quoting Psalm 8 (commonly interpreted in messianic terms, cf. 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:6–8).

What is more, the entire Olivet Discourse took place “opposite the temple” (Mark 13:3), implying that the temple is the ultimate referent for the entire eschatological drama. Thus the “throwing down” of the stones of the temple (cf. Matt. 24:2 and parallels) does not imply its abrogation or annulment.¹¹⁴ Akin to

¹¹⁴ So Sanders argues, “On what conceivable grounds could Jesus have undertaken to attack—and symbolize the destruction of—what was ordained by God? The obvious answer is that destruction, in turn, looks towards restoration. . . . Thus we conclude that Jesus publicly predicted or threatened the destruction of the temple, that the statement was shaped by his expectation of the arrival of the

the wilderness wanderings or the exile of Israel, the AD 70 destruction of the temple (and the eschatological destruction of the temple) only reflects temporal discipline upon rebellion and hardness of heart. The Jews were not disinherited because of their idolatry and murdering of the prophets, nor was the temple abrogated because of its perversion and spiritual prostitution.¹¹⁵

The strongest evidence of continued messianic expectation in relation to the temple is the response of the disciples to Jesus' ascension. When the angels appeared and told them Jesus would return "in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11), they returned to Jerusalem and "stayed continually at *the temple*, praising God" (Luke 24:53). In addition, "Every day they continued to meet together in *the temple*" (Acts 2:46, NIV), assumedly observing the traditional hours of prayer (e.g., "going up to *the temple* at the hour of prayer"; Acts 3:1).

Similarly, it was without any sense of guise or subversion that Peter obeyed the angel of the Lord who commanded him, "Go stand in *the temple* and speak to the people all the words of this Life" (Acts 5:20). This was the common practice of the apostles, for "every day, in *the temple* and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (5:42). Nowhere does this messianic preaching undermine the existence of the temple, though this was the charge brought against them (e.g., "This man never ceases to speak words

eschaton, that *he probably also expected a new temple to be given by God from heaven, and that he made a demonstration which prophetically symbolized the coming event*" (Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 71, 75; italics added).

Though criticism of Sanders' approach is manifold (esp. his gratuitous form criticism and his Schweitzerian conclusion that "Jesus was a visionary who was mistaken about the immediately future course of events," p. 327), he does argue convincingly for the centrality of the temple to first-century Judaic life and the common expectation for a messianic temple (cf. pp. 61–90).

¹¹⁵ This rests upon the larger assumption that Israel's calling by God has not been superseded in the NT. In spite of the clear apostolic declaration that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29), many hold to the idea that one generation's rebellion abrogates the entire covenantal framework of the OT. Take Ladd, for example:

*The rejection of the Kingdom meant judgment for Israel as a nation in history. . . . The temple would be forsaken by God (Matt. 23:38 = Luke 13:35), razed to the ground (Mark 13:2), the city destroyed (Luke 21:20–24). Because Israel rejected the Kingdom, God has rejected the nation and will choose others to be the people of his vineyard (Mark 12:9). In view of the fact that Jesus saw his disciples as the true Israel, the secondary Matthean saying that God will take the Kingdom from Israel and give it to another people (Matt. 21:43) is a correct interpretation. (George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], 1974, 321–22; italics in the original)*

against this holy place"; 6:13, cf. 21:28; 24:6). Unfortunately, the church went on in the centuries following to become guilty of this very accusation — instead of being God's "holy place" and the epicenter of redemptive history, the temple was viewed as a carnal Jewish husk to be discarded in lieu of the spiritual kernel of the church militant/triumphant.

Like the other apostles, Paul revered the temple. After his conversion, he immediately "returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple" (Acts 22:17), where he fell into a trance and received his call to the Gentiles (v. 21). Again, there is never any sense of renunciation of the temple in his mission to the Gentiles, but rather it was the locus of all such ministry.¹¹⁶ Moreover, Paul clearly refuted the accusations of temple and Torah abrogation when for seven days "he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them" (Acts 21:26). The fact that Paul did this without pretense is evident in his later defense before Felix: "I went up to worship in Jerusalem. . . . I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in *the temple*, without any crowd or tumult" (24:11,17–18). Likewise, Paul tells Festus, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against *the temple*, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense" (25:8).

Paul's emphasis on justification by faith in no way contradicts the assumed eschatological program upon which the New Testament hope is based. Paul's references to "the temple service" (1 Cor. 9:13) and the Antichrist taking his seat "in the temple of God" (2 Thess. 2:4) are evidences of this assumption. His reference to the individual believer (cf. 1 Cor. 3:17; 6:19) and to the church as a whole (cf. Eph. 2:21) as a temple is simply analogous, since both contain the Holy

¹¹⁶ Note how in Rom. 11:13–15 Paul ultimately relates his ministry to the Gentiles unto the greater Jewish narrative: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow *to make my fellow Jews jealous*, and thus save some of them. For if *their rejection* means the reconciliation of the world, what will *their acceptance* mean but life from the dead?" A similar logic of Jewish centrality lies behind Paul's exhortation to the Gentiles in Rome: "Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed *they owe it to them*. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings" (Rom. 15:26–27). The Jewish narrative, with the temple at its center, remains true and unchanged throughout the NT.

Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 6:16).¹¹⁷ If Paul was making a radical supersessionist reinterpretation, one would assume he would devote to it more than a few sporadic verses.¹¹⁸ The present filling of the believer with the Holy Spirit was simply understood as a “deposit” (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5, NIV), “guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession” (Eph. 1:14, NIV). Thus the filling of the individual believer does not annul or minimize the importance of the temple, but rather confirms the future glory which will envelop the Messiah, his people, his temple, and the whole earth in the resurrection.¹¹⁹

Neither does the fulfillment of sacrifice in the new covenant (cf. Heb. 8:13; 9:23; 10:1) annul the purpose of the temple. The temple is not a husk carrying the kernel of sacrifice, so to speak. It is primarily a “footstool” (1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 99:5; Lam. 2:1)—that is, an earthly throne room. Though the presence of God demands sacrifice in this age for the remission of sin, the ultimate royal design of the temple endures eternally (cf. Ps. 132:7–18; Isa. 60:13; Ezek. 43:7).¹²⁰ Such logic, in light of Christ’s other royal-eschatological encouragements to the churches in Revelation (cf. Rev. 2:7,11,26; 3:5,21), drives the promise to the Philadelphian

¹¹⁷ Likewise Peter was not supplanting the temple when he referred to believers being “built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). He was simply referencing the ultimate purpose of the temple, i.e., “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (v. 9). To read supersessionism into these verses is akin to reading Jesus’ rejection of the Decalogue into his command not to hate, lust, covet, etc. (cf. Matt. 5:17–42).

¹¹⁸ It is generally agreed that there is no real pre-Pauline support for the temple-supersession view—e.g., “It is only from the time of Paul that we have certain evidence for the conception” (G. Schrenk, “τὸ ἱερόν,” *TDNT*, 3:247).

¹¹⁹ Contrary to Beale’s conclusion: “This expectation of a nonliteral temple is, for the most part, a break with Judaism, which consistently affirmed the hope of a final, material temple structure on a scale greater than any before. . . . These Jewish precursors [cf. Qumranic] are parallel to the early Christian hope, which went further and saw God and the Messiah as definitively replacing the temple” (*Revelation*, NIGTC, 1091–92).

¹²⁰ Contrary to G. E. Ladd: “While the New Testament clearly affirms the salvation of literal Israel, it does not give any details about the day of salvation. . . . As we have already pointed out, New Testament exegesis (Hebrews 8) makes it difficult to believe that the Old Testament prophecies about the ‘millennial temple’ will be fulfilled literally. They are fulfilled in the New Covenant established in the blood of Jesus. . . . So a nondispensational eschatology simply affirms the future salvation of Israel and remains open to God’s future as to the details” (“Historic Premillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. Robert Clouse [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977], 28).

Can’t a “nondispensational eschatology” (i.e., non-dualistic soteriology) hold to “the salvation of literal Israel” without jettisoning the very heart of Jewish messianic expectation?

church: “The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in *the temple* of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *the new Jerusalem*, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name” (Rev. 3:12).

In summary, we find the New Testament in basic conformity with the common Jewish expectation of the day concerning a future messianic temple. The assumption that Christ and the church have realized and superseded the Jerusalemic temple is unfounded. Jesus will return as the prophets have spoken, executing the day of the Lord, punishing the wicked, rewarding the righteous, ruling over Israel and the nations, raising up Jerusalem and Mount Zion, and sitting on his glorious throne in the house of the Lord.

CHRIST’S KINGDOM: THE GLORY OF THE MILLENNIUM

So far we have presented a simple Jewish apocalyptic view of the Scriptures—a linear approach to history within an integrated creation (i.e., heavens and earth), wherein this age is delineated from the age to come by the day of the Lord. This day will bring about the judgment of the heavens and earth by fire, restoring it to its original state of perfection and righteousness. This judgment is executed by God’s agent of salvation, the Christ, who will raise the dead corporeally, punish the wicked with everlasting torment, and bless the righteous with everlasting life. This blessing is worked out by means of the messianic kingdom (i.e., the kingdom of God), which is the practical framework within which the age to come and the new earth are administrated. This administration is also Israelocentric, executed upon the basis of primogeniture. Moreover, the Christ will rule in heavenly glory from his throne within the Jerusalemic temple raised up on Mount Zion. In this way the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as it was in the beginning (cf. Ps. 72:19; Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14).¹²¹

¹²¹ As N. T. Wright summarizes, “‘Day of YHWH,’ ‘Kingdom of God,’ victory over evil and pagan rulers, rescue of Israel, end of exile, the coming of the Messiah, the new Exodus, and the return of YHWH himself; and, in and through all of this, the resurrection of the dead. This is the combination of themes which characterizes the first-century Jewish expectation of the future” (*Paul: Fresh Perspectives* [London: SPCK, 2005], 135; cf. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 615–31).

Unfortunately, Wright goes on to “rethink,” “rework,” “redefine,” and “reimagine” this eschatology as spiritually fulfilled/realized in the first coming (*Paul*, 135–50; cf. *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 631–53). This is all much akin to Albert Schweitzer’s original conclusion: “The Messianic secret of Jesus is the basis of Christianity, since it involves the de-nationalising and the spiritualisation of

Even among those who readily accept this basic redemptive framework, there remains the sticky issue of chiliasm (belief in a thousand-year messianic reign, derived from the Gk. *chilias*, meaning “a thousand”). Indeed, the question of whether or not there will be a transitional aspect to the age to come demands an answer. When Jesus returns, will he immediately inaugurate the final state of redemption, or will he progressively make his enemies a footstool for his feet? This is the underlying issue of the “millennial controversy”¹²² (“millennialism” is essentially a synonym for chiliasm, since it derives from the Latin *mille* and *annus*, meaning “thousand years”).¹²³

It is generally agreed that the early church was chiliastic, believing that Jesus would inaugurate a transitional kingdom which would rule from Jerusalem for a thousand years before the final restoration of creation. Such an approach was most often deduced from a plain reading of Revelation 20:1–6: “They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (v. 4). Moreover, such a view was buttressed by kingdom passages with a progressive aspect (e.g., Isa. 2:3; 9:7; Dan. 2:35; etc.), in which the culmination of human rebellion is brought increasingly under messianic submission in the age to come, as Paul described:

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every 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. . . . When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24–28)¹²⁴

Therefore we see a progressive transitional time after the Lord comes and before the final overturning of death—the day when all things will be in perfect

Jewish eschatology” (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery, 2nd ed. [London: A. & C. Black, 1911], 283).

¹²² Referencing the “Asiatic theory” concerning the locus of chiliasm in the early church (Asia Minor being a stronghold of chiliasm against the spiritualizing tendencies of the Alexandrian school); see Martin Erdmann, *The Millennial Controversy in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005).

¹²³ As discussed in chapter 3, I refrain from using the categories of pre-, post-, and a-millennialism since they lead to more confusion than clarity, as seen in Darrell L. Bock, ed., *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

¹²⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of this passage from a chiliastic point of view, see Wilber B. Wallis, “The Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom in I Corinthians 15:20–28,” *JETS* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1975): 229–42.

submission to God (see figure 6:11). Though chiliasm was a minority belief in first-century Judaism,¹²⁵ the Revelation of John was understood to confirm its truth, just as the resurrection of Jesus confirmed the truth of Jewish apocalypticism in general.

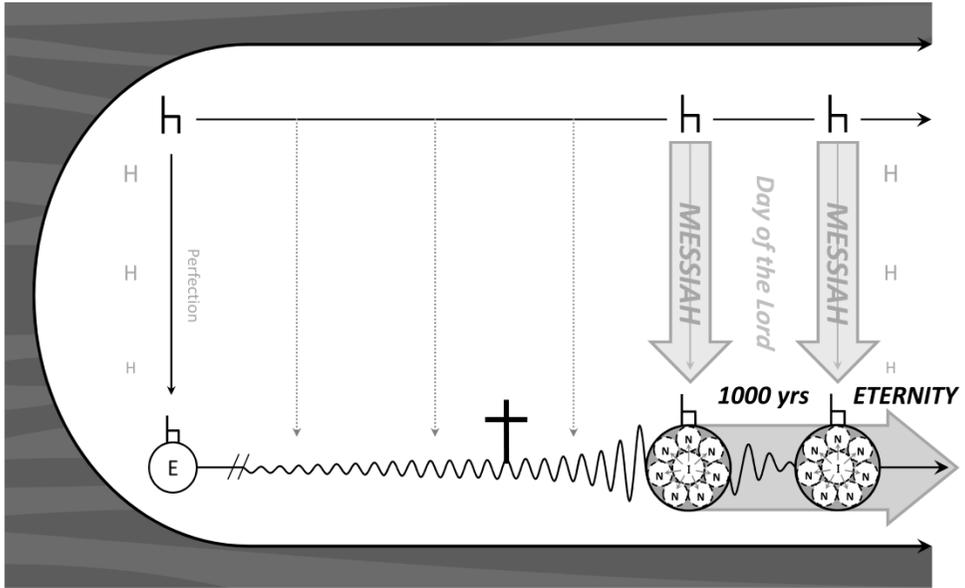


Figure 6.11 – The Chiliastic Transition of the Messianic Kingdom

Revelation 20:1–6 has been shown to stand on its own exegetically,¹²⁶ but this was not the real basis of chiliasm in the early church. Millennial thought at the time was ultimately based upon the “cosmic week” or “creation-day world-age” theory, in which each day of creation represented an era of one thousand years of

¹²⁵ See a survey in D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC–AD 100* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 285–97.

¹²⁶ See G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 259–274; Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God*, 133–50; and Jack S. Deere, “Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4–6,” *BSac* 135, no. 537 (January 1978): 58–74. The oft-quoted words of Henry Alford deserve repeating: “If, in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain *psychai ezēsan* [“souls came to life”] at the first, and the rest of the *nekroi ezēsan* [“dead came to life”] only at the end of a specified period after that first,—if in such a passage 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 in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything” (*The Greek Testament*, vol. 4 [Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872], 732).

redemptive history.¹²⁷ Hence there would be six days (i.e., six thousand years) of divine work before the final day (i.e., one thousand years) of divine rest.¹²⁸ In this way, “The seventh day is a sign of the resurrection, the rest of the coming age” (*Life of Adam and Eve* 51.2).¹²⁹ After seven thousand years of existence, then comes the “eighth day” (2 *Enoch* 33.1) and the final new creation.¹³⁰ Consequently God has given “seven days of ages for repentance” (*Sibylline Oracles* 8.357) before the conclusion of redemptive history.¹³¹

This chronological formula may sound quaint to the modern ear, but it was based upon substantial biblical exposition, primarily concerning Genesis 2:17: “For *in the day* that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Since Adam ate and died short of one thousand years, then “the day” assumedly meant one thousand years by God’s reckoning. Thus the pseudepigraphic *Jubilees*:

¹²⁷ See E. Lohse, “*χιλιάς, χίλιοι*,” *TDNT*, 9:466–71; cf. E. Lohse, “The Cosmic Week and Cosmic Sabbath,” *TDNT*, 7:19–20); and Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity: The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicea* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 396–404.

¹²⁸ Note also the references to the “millennial banquet” in *Testament of Isaac* 6.13,22; 8.10 (*OTP*, 1:910–11); cf. Matt. 8:11; 22:2; Luke 14:24; Rev. 19:9.

¹²⁹ So ends the *Life of Adam and Eve*: “After this [the death of Eve], all her children buried her with great weeping. Then, when they had mourned for four days, the archangel Michael appeared to them and said to Seth, ‘Man of God, do not prolong mourning your dead more than six days, because the seventh day is a sign of the resurrection, the rest of the coming age, and on the seventh day the LORD rested from all his works.’ Then Seth made the tablets” (51.1–3 [*OTP*, 2:294]).

¹³⁰ The pseudepigraphic 2 *Enoch* contains short titles for each chapter, and the chapters are sometimes referred to (in the original manuscripts) as a “word”:

After Adam’s transgression. God expels him into the earth from which he had been taken. But he does not wish to destroy him in the age to come. Word “28.”

“And I said to him, ‘You are earth, and into the earth once again you will go, out of which I took you. And I will not destroy you, but I will send you away to what I took you from. Then I can take you once again at my second coming.’ And I blessed all my creatures, visible and invisible. And Adam was in paradise for 5 hours and a half. And I blessed the 7th day which is the sabbath in which I rested from all my doings.”

God shows Enoch the epoch of this world, the existence of 7000 years, and the eighth thousand is the end, neither years nor months nor weeks nor days. Word “29.”

“On the 8th day I likewise appointed, so that the 8th day might be the 1st, the first-created of my week, and that it should revolve in the revolution of 7000; so that the 8000 might be in the beginning of a time not reckoned and unending, neither years, nor months, nor weeks, nor days, nor hours like the first day of the week, so also that the eighth day of the week might return continually.” (2 *Enoch* 32.1–33.2 [*OTP*, 1:154])

¹³¹ *OTP*, 1:426.

And at the end of the nineteenth jubilee in the seventh week, in the sixth year, Adam died. And all of his children buried him in the land of his creation. And he was the first who was buried in the earth. And he lacked seventy years from one thousand years, *for a thousand years are like one day in the testimony of heaven* and therefore it was written concerning the tree of knowledge, “In the day you eat from it you will die.” Therefore he did not complete the years of this day because he died in it. (4.29–30)¹³²

It was in this light that Psalm 90, the “prayer of Moses,” was commonly understood:

Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
You turn men back to dust,
saying, “Return to dust, O sons of men.” [cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:19]
*For a thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.*
You sweep men away in the sleep of death;
they are like the new grass of the morning—
though in the morning it springs up new,
by evening it is dry and withered. (Ps. 90:2–6, NIV)¹³³

Peter thus quotes verse 4 in reference to the coming of God and “the day of judgment” (cf. 2 Peter 3:4–8).¹³⁴ Moreover, the use of “[Sabbath] rest” in Hebrews 3–4 fits comfortably within the cosmic-week framework.¹³⁵

¹³² OTP, 2:63–64; italics added.

¹³³ In regard to Adam and his sons returning to the dust, I assume that Moses received the millennial idea by tradition handed down to him (rather than by revelation given directly from God)—and furthermore, that this tradition was based upon real events concerning Adam’s death.

¹³⁴ Whether Peter was quoting this as a timing indicator or just as a generic justification for God’s delaying of the day of the Lord is debatable. The early church worked off the chronology of the LXX (though variations exist between manuscripts), which is approx. 1500 years ahead of the Masoretic Text (MT). Thus the first-century church would have seen Christ’s birth c. 5500 AM (Latin *Anno Mundi*, “in the year of the world”) based on the LXX, vs. c. 4000 AM in the MT (cf. M. Cogan, “Chronology: Hebrew Bible,” *ABD*, 1:1002–10; and J. N. Oswalt, “Chronology of the OT,” *ISBE*, 673–85). For example, Hippolytus:

Belief in the cosmic week was common in the early church.¹³⁶ *The Epistle of Barnabas*,¹³⁷ Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*,¹³⁸ Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*,¹³⁹

Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that 6,000 years must be fulfilled. And they are not yet fulfilled, as John [in Revelation] says: "five are fallen; one is," that is, the sixth; "the other is not yet come."

In mentioning the "other," moreover, he specifies the seventh, in which there is rest. But some one may be ready to say, How will you prove to me that the Saviour was born in the year 5500? Learn that easily, O man. . . .

From the birth of Christ, then, we must reckon the 500 years that remain to make up the 6000, and thus the end shall be. (*Commentary on Daniel*, 2.4–6 [ANF, 5:179])

Hence "The Christians had believed firmly that Jesus Christ would rise again soon after the world entered the sabbatical millennium. The larger the age of the world, the sooner appeared the New Age. Christian chronographers, therefore, beginning with Clement of Alexandria, Judas, Julius Africanus, Hippolytus, and Eusebius, accepted the Septuagint version as authentic" (Ben Zion Wacholder, "Biblical Chronology in the Hellenistic World Chronicles," *HTR* 61, no. 3 [July 1968]: 453).

By the time the MT was adopted and used in Jerome's translation of the Latin Vulgate (c. 405), chiliasm had been largely abandoned. On second-temple chronography, see Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 53–196; and Wacholder, "Chronomessianism: The Timing of Messianic Movements and the Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975): 201–18. For a general introduction to biblical chronography, see Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998).

¹³⁵ "An eschatological understanding of 'my rest' in Ps 95:11 is presupposed in [Heb. 4:1] and is fundamental to the exhortation to diligence to enter God's rest in 4:1–11. It is possible that the hearers were already familiar with this concept through their past association with the hellenistic Jewish synagogue. The principle that unbelief invited exclusion from God's rest (3:19) remains valid in the present and assumes profound significance when rest is understood in this eschatological sense" (William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1998], 98).

¹³⁶ For an excellent overview of the progression of chiliastic thought in the early church, see Hans Bietenhard, "The Millennial Hope in the Early Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (1953): 12–30.

¹³⁷ *The Epistle of Barnabas*, chapter 15:

The Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the creation thus: "And God made in six days the works of His hands, and made an end on the seventh day, and rested on it, and sanctified it." Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, "He finished in six days." This implieth that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years. And He Himself testifieth, saying, "Behold, to-day will be as a thousand years." Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished. "And He rested on the seventh day." This meaneth: when His Son, coming again, shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the sun, and the moon, and the stars, then shall He truly rest on the seventh day. (ANF, 1:146)

¹³⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 81:

"For Isaiah spake thus concerning this space of a thousand years: 'For there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, or come into their heart.' . . . For as Adam was told that in the day he ate of the tree he would die, we know that he did not complete a thousand years. We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, 'The day of the Lord is as a thousand years,' is connected with this subject. And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place." (*ANF*, 1:239–40)

¹³⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.28.3:

For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded. And for this reason the Scripture says: "Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their adornment. And God brought to a conclusion upon the sixth day the works that He had made; and God rested upon the seventh day from all His works." This is an account of the things formerly created, as also it is a prophecy of what is to come. For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years; and in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousand year. (*ANF*, 1:557)

¹⁴⁰ Commodianus, *Instructions*, chapter 35:

Adam was the first who fell, and that he might shun the precepts of God, Belial was his tempter by the lust of the palm tree. And he conferred on us also what he did, whether of good or of evil, as being the chief of all that was born from him; and thence we die by his means, as he himself, receding from the divine, became an outcast from the Word. We shall be immortal when six thousand years are accomplished. The tree of the apple being tasted, death has entered into the world. By this tree of death we are born to the life to come. (*ANF*, 4:209)

And Commodianus concludes, "This has pleased Christ, that the dead should rise again, yea, with their bodies; and those, too, whom in this world the fire has burned, when six thousand years are completed, and the world has come to an end" (ch. 80 [*ANF*, 4:218]).

¹⁴¹ Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, 2.4:

For as the times are noted from the foundation of the world, and reckoned from Adam, they set clearly before us the matter with which our inquiry deals. For the first appearance of our Lord in the flesh took place in Bethlehem, under Augustus, in the year 5500; and He suffered in the thirty-third year. And 6,000 years must needs be accomplished, in order that the Sabbath may come, the rest, the holy day "on which God rested from all His works." For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they "shall reign with Christ," when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse: for "a day with the Lord is as a thousand years." Since, then, in SIX days God made all things, it follows that 6,000 years must be fulfilled. (*ANF*, 5:179)

¹⁴² Methodius, *Extracts from the Work on Things Created*, 9:

Institutes,¹⁴³ and Augustine's *City of God*¹⁴⁴ all clearly reflect a chiliastic understanding of redemptive history based upon the creation-day world-age idea—and that often resting upon a chiliastic interpretation of Genesis 2:17.¹⁴⁵ Thus the kingdom of God in the early church was understood apocalyptically, messianically, Israelitically, and chiliastically (see figure 6.12)—as Irenaeus summarized:

But if any one should prefer to differ in these points, let him first say, whether a period of time be not easily reckoned from the creation of the world, according to the Book of Moses, to those who so receive it, the voice of prophecy here proclaiming: "Thou art God from everlasting, and world without end.... For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing that is past as a watch in the night." For when a thousand years are reckoned as one day in the sight of God, and from the creation of the world to His rest is six days, so also to our time, six days are defined, as those say who are clever arithmeticians. Therefore, they say that an age of six thousand years extends from Adam to our time. For they say that the judgment will come on the seventh day, that is in the seventh thousand years. (*ANF*, 6:381)

¹⁴³ Lactantius, *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, chapter 70:

But since the things which have been spoken concerning the end of the world and the conclusion of the times are innumerable, those very things which are spoken are to be laid down without adornment, since it would be a boundless task to bring forward the testimonies. If any one wishes for them, or does not place full confidence in us, let him approach to the very shrine of the heavenly letters, and being more fully instructed through their trustworthiness, let him perceive that the philosophers have erred, who thought either that this world was eternal, or that there would be numberless thousands of years from the time when it was prepared. For six thousand years have not yet been completed, and when this number shall be made up, then at length all evil will be taken away, that justice alone may reign. (*ANF*, 7:253)

¹⁴⁴ Though he "once held this opinion," Augustine argues against the chiliastic position, describing it as such:

Those who, on the strength of this passage [cf. 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, a holy leisure after the labors of the six thousand years since man was created, and was on account of his great sin dismissed from the blessedness of paradise into the woes of this mortal life, so that thus, as it is written, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," there should follow on the completion of six thousand years, as of six days, a kind of seventh-day Sabbath in the succeeding thousand years; and that it is for this purpose the saints rise, viz., to celebrate this Sabbath. (*City of God*, 20.7.1 [*NPNF1*, 2:426])

¹⁴⁵ For example, Irenaeus: "And there are some, again, who relegate the death of Adam to the thousandth year; for since 'a day of the Lord is as a thousand years,' he did not overstep the thousand years, but died within them, thus bearing out the sentence of his sin" (*Against Heresies*, 5.23.2 [*ANF*, 1:551]). Though uncommon in modern times, the interpretation of Gen. 2:17 as physical death within a millennial-day framework stands, contrary to Hamilton (NICOT), Mathews (NAC), Wenham (WBC), Sarna (JPSTC), and esp. Westermann (CC).

But when this *Antichrist* shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit *in the temple at Jerusalem*; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous *the times of the kingdom*, that is, the rest, *the hallowed seventh day*; and restoring to *Abraham* the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that “many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”¹⁴⁶

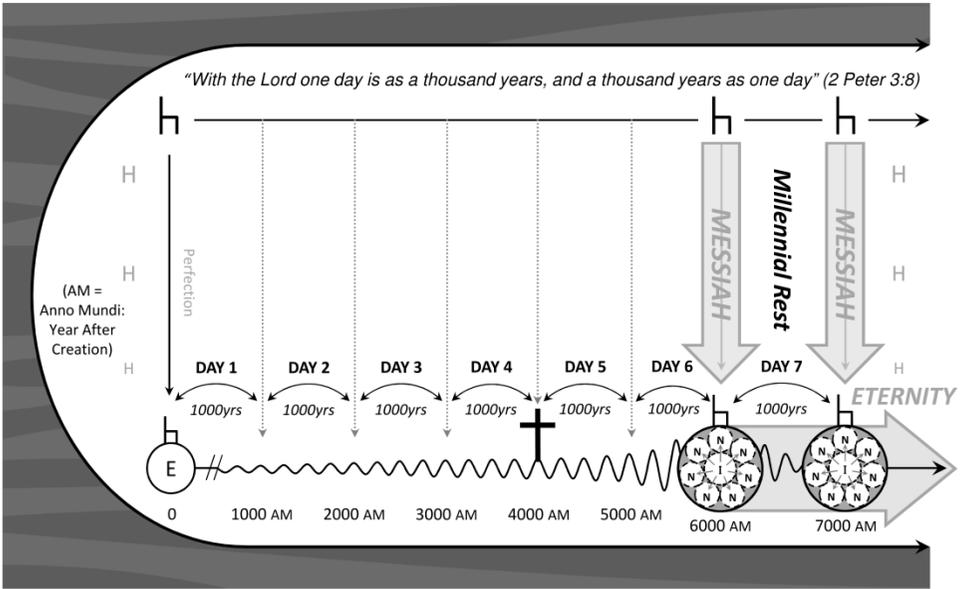


Figure 6.12 – The “Cosmic Week” and the Millennial Sabbath

Such millennial hope suffered greatly during the Constantinian revolution of the fourth century, and Augustine’s reinterpretation of Revelation 20 nearly ended all expectation that Jesus would reign upon the earth in the future.¹⁴⁷ So Stanley Grenz summarizes, “By the time of Augustine’s death, the

¹⁴⁶ *Against Heresies*, 5.30.4 [ANF, 1:560]; italics added. See also, “These rewards for the righteous are to take place in the times of the kingdom, that is, upon the seventh day, which has been sanctified, in which God rested from all the works which He created, which is the true Sabbath of the righteous” (Ibid., 5.33.2 [ANF, 1:562]).

¹⁴⁷ It has been increasingly argued that chiliasm was not the dominant view of the early church (e.g., Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001]). However, the basic thesis that chiliasm appeared during the second century defies reason in light of so many NT (as well as Jewish intertestamental) references and allusions.

nonmillenarian theology of Alexandria and Rome had engulfed the millennialism of Antioch and Ephesus. As a result, at the Council of Ephesus A.D. 431 the church condemned as superstition the belief in a literal, future thousand-year reign on the earth."¹⁴⁸

Though the Middle Ages were dominated by Augustinian theology, a number of marginal monastic sects, as well as a few Orthodox theologians, sustained the chiliastic heritage.¹⁴⁹ Most of the Protestant Reformers held the Augustinian line, though various Anabaptists, Huguenots, Bohemian Brethren, and English Puritans returned to millennialism.¹⁵⁰ During the Enlightenment, many German Pietists as well as English evangelicals were chiliastic.¹⁵¹ Though dominionistic zeal overtook and nearly choked out millennial hope during the nineteenth century, dispensationalists spread a novel form of chiliasm in England and America, which took root by the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁵²

Since that time the dispensational bias has been progressively purged, restoring to the modern church its apostolic foundation, such that "[millennialism] is today stronger and more widely spread than at any time in history."¹⁵³ Though refraining from a dogmatic statement concerning chiliasm, I heartily affirm the millennial hope of the early church—believing *chiliastic cruciform-apocalypticism* to be the closest approximation of New Testament faith,

¹⁴⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Opinions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 44.

¹⁴⁹ On the interpretation of Revelation and the millennium during the Middle Ages, see *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), 3–158; and Richard K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981).

¹⁵⁰ See Peter Toon, ed., *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology, 1600 to 1660* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1970); see also the insightful overview of Puritan millenarianism by Richard W. Cogley, "The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the restoration of Israel in the 'Judeo-centric' strand of Puritan millenarianism," *Church History* 72, no. 2 (June 2003): 304–332.

¹⁵¹ See a summary in "Millenarianism," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1093–94; see also the fascinating populist account by J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979).

¹⁵² See Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1880–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); and T. P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875–1982*, enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

¹⁵³ So concludes Robert K. Whalen, "Premillennialism," *The Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, ed. Richard A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2000), 588.

which was personally delivered to the apostles by our resurrected Lord (cf. Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:3–8; Gal. 1:12; Rev. 1:1). As Justin Martyr, the second-century Christian apologist, asserted: “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.”¹⁵⁴

THE CHRISTOPLATONIC KINGDOM

As Christianity lost its Jewish apocalyptic moorings during the third and fourth centuries, the “kingdom of God” became increasingly associated with immaterial heaven. With Origen, “the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven” is equated with “the departure of the saints from that earth to those heavens,”¹⁵⁵ wherein the “pure in heart” will “quickly ascend to a place in the air, and reach the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁵⁶ Thus Neusner and Chilton summarize Origen’s theological impact:

Origen clearly represents and develops a construction of the Christian faith in which eschatology has been swallowed up in an emphasis upon transcendence. The only time which truly matters is that time until one’s death, which determines one’s experience in paradise and in the resurrection. *“Heaven” as cosmographic place now occupies the central position once occupied by the eschatological kingdom of God in Jesus’ teaching.* That, too, occurs on the authority of progressive dialectics, the refinement of Pauline metaphysics.¹⁵⁷

Though a “new creation model” has always persisted,¹⁵⁸ this escapist vision has undoubtedly been the dominant understanding of the kingdom throughout the majority of the church’s history. On the other hand, the dominionist view of manifest sovereignty has also held great sway—resulting in the assumption that

¹⁵⁴ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80 (ANF, 1:239).

¹⁵⁵ *On First Principles*, 2.3.7 (ANF, 4:275).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.11.6 (ANF, 4:299).

¹⁵⁷ Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, *Jewish and Christian Doctrines: The Classics Compared* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 183; italics added.

¹⁵⁸ See a historical survey in Craig A. Blasing, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium*, 162–92.

whether God uses kings or popes, he establishes his messianic kingdom through the (Gentile) political powers of this age.

The progress from Origen to Augustine is well documented,¹⁵⁹ and it was Augustine's teachings on the kingdom of God that "formed the center of the official teaching of the church on the matter through the Middle Ages."¹⁶⁰ The kingdom is both the church triumphant and the church militant—"The Church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven,"¹⁶¹ though God will ultimately "confer on the human body a property which shall enable it to pass into heaven and dwell there."¹⁶² Though the means of attaining the kingdom (i.e., justification by faith) found great renewal during the Reformation, the perverted hope of the kingdom changed little.¹⁶³ Thus, for the majority of church history the interpretation of the kingdom of God has been twofold according to

¹⁵⁹ See György Heidl, *The Influence of Origen on the Young Augustine: A Chapter of the History of Origenism*, 2nd ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009). The great historian Norman Cohn summarized,

The third century saw the first attempt to discredit millenarianism, when Origen, perhaps the most influential of all the theologians of the ancient Church, began to present the Kingdom as an event which would take place not in space or time but only in the souls of believers. For a collective, millenarian eschatology Origen substituted an eschatology of the individual soul. What stirred his profoundly Hellenic imagination was the prospect of spiritual progress begun in this world and continued in the next; and to this theme theologians were henceforth to give increasing attention. Such a shift in interest was indeed admirably suited to what was now an organized Church, enjoying almost uninterrupted peace and an acknowledged position in the world. When in the fourth century Christianity attained a position of supremacy in the Mediterranean world and became the official religion of the Empire, ecclesiastical disapproval of millenarianism became emphatic. The Catholic Church was now a powerful and prosperous institution, functioning according to a well-established routine; and the men responsible for governing it had no wish to see Christians clinging to out-dated and inappropriate dreams of a new earthly Paradise. Early in the fifth century St Augustine propounded the doctrine which the new conditions demanded. According to *The City of God* the Book of Revelation was to be understood as a spiritual allegory; as for the Millennium, that had begun with the birth of Christianity and was fully realized in the Church. This at once became orthodox doctrine. (*The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970], 29)

¹⁶⁰ Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 44.

¹⁶¹ *City of God*, 20.9.1 (NPNF1, 2:430).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 22.11.1 (NPNF1, 2:492).

¹⁶³ See a history of Reformed theology and its strict adherence to Augustinian eschatology in Horner, *Future Israel*, esp. 147–78.

its respective messianic expectation: materialized-sovereignty now and immaterial-heaven upon death (see figure 6.13).

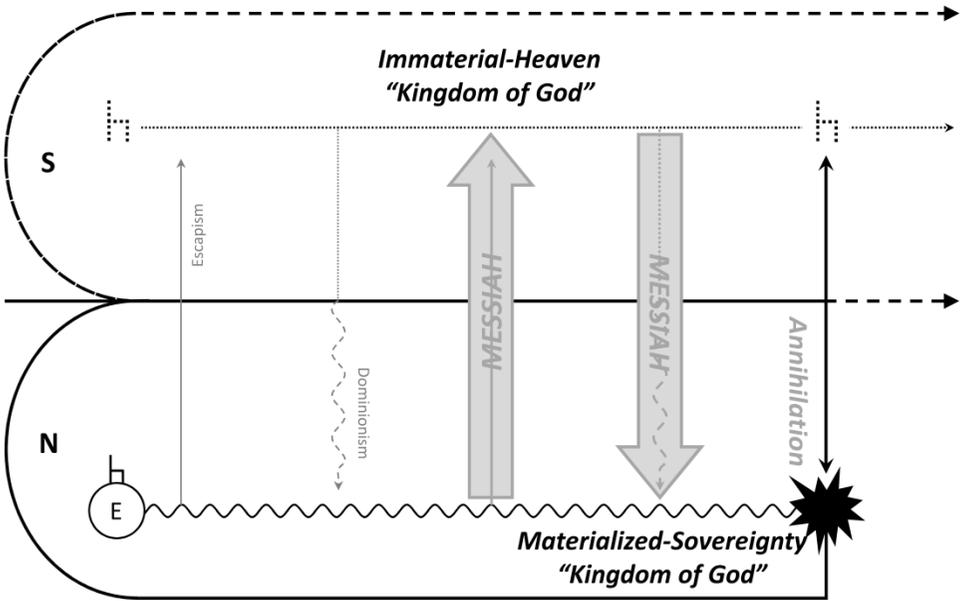


Figure 6.13 – The Conflicted Messianic Kingdom of Augustinian Christoplatonism

As discussed in chapter 4, the idea of an immaterial-heavenly kingdom is difficult to relate to since it has no practical connection to our earthly existence. Though immateriality retains a hope for existence without sin, death, pain, etc., it leaves believers without a concrete hope. Humans were made to rule righteously upon the earth, not in immaterial heaven. Moreover, all ethnic distinctions are erased in the context of immateriality, thus abrogating the basic covenantal framework of the Scriptures.

On the other hand, the dominionistic kingdom idea has led to incalculable damage and disillusionment.¹⁶⁴ Indeed it constitutes an earthly hope, yet it is bound by the depravity of humanity. Moreover, Christendom erases the Israelocentric focus of the Bible, replacing it with an ethnocentrism of whichever

¹⁶⁴ For a highly critical yet comprehensive history of ecclesiastical abuse, Karlheinz Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums* [The Criminal History of Christianity, no English trans.], 10 vols. (Reinbek, Germany: Rowohlt Verlag, 1986–2013).

nation or people happens to hold the money, land, and power of their day.¹⁶⁵ Dominionistic theology also robs believers of the sharp edge of their witness concerning the return of Jesus (cf. Acts 3:21; 10:42; 17:31; etc.).¹⁶⁶ Alva McClain well articulated the inevitable consequences:

The identification of the Kingdom with the Church has led historically to ecclesiastical policies and programs which, even when not positively evil, have been far removed from the original simplicity of the New Testament *ekklesia*. It is easy to claim that in the “present kingdom of grace” the rule of the saints is wholly “spiritual,” exerted only through moral principles and influence. But practically, once the Church becomes the Kingdom in any realistic theological sense, it is impossible to draw any clear line between principles and their implementation through political and social devices. For the logical implications of a present ecclesiastical *kingdom* are unmistakable, and historically have always led in only one direction, i.e., political control of the state by the Church. The distances down this road traveled by various religious movements, and the forms of control which were developed, have been widely different. The difference is very great between the Roman Catholic system and modern Protestant efforts to control the state; also between the ecclesiastical rule of Calvin in Geneva and the fanaticism of Münster and the English “fifth-monarchy.” But the basic assumption is always the same: The Church in some sense is the Kingdom, and therefore has a divine right to rule; or it is the business of the Church to “establish” fully the Kingdom of God among men. Thus the Church loses its “pilgrim” character and the sharp edge of its divinely commissioned “witness” is blunted.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ “It is a fact of history that the Augustinian concept of a Christian theocracy is closely linked with the anti-Semitic attitudes of the medieval church and unbelievably harsh treatment of the Jewish people. Thus it is not surprising that the traditional claim of Christendom to embody the promised messianic kingdom is an embarrassment to Christians involved in dialogue with Jewish people” (Diprose, *Israel and the Church*, 168).

¹⁶⁶ For example, dominionist David Chilton concludes by resting the burden of restoration upon the church: “This world has tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years of increasing godliness ahead of it, before the Second Coming of Christ. . . . He has placed us into the great war for world history, with the absolute guarantee that we will win. Even if He has to make the whole universe stand still for us (Josh. 10:12–13), the day will last long enough for us to achieve victory. Time is on our side. The Kingdom has come, and the world has begun again. Now: Get to work” (David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* [Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1985], 221–22).

¹⁶⁷ McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 438–39.

With the advent of dispensationalism, the messianic kingdom took on a dualistic nature, according to the dispensational schema of two redemptive plans. The “kingdom of heaven” relates to the earthly Jewish kingdom (spoken of only in Matthew’s Gospel), while the “kingdom of God” relates to the heavenly Gentile kingdom.¹⁶⁸ The kingdom of heaven substantially existed in Israel until the exile.¹⁶⁹ Jesus “offered” the kingdom to the Jews, but they rejected it, which resulted in the kingdom being “postponed.”¹⁷⁰ This postponement set into motion a Gentile “intercalation,” which will continue until the second coming (pretribulational rapture), at which time the Jewish program will recommence and the kingdom will be reestablished after the final tribulation (see figure 6.14). The complexities of this schema are manifold.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ See *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), 996, 1003, 1226; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:223–25; and Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 144.

¹⁶⁹ See Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, 1:207–49; Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism*, 33–58; and McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 41–129.

¹⁷⁰ See Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, 1:375–91; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:265–67, 5:333–58; and McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 304–84.

¹⁷¹ To add to the confusion, between Pentecost and the second advent Christendom is also understood as the “mystery form” of theocracy and dominionistic sovereignty; see Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:45 and 5:352; *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), 1014; and J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God’s Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises Throughout History* (Wheaton: Victor, 1990), esp. chaps. 19–20. So Chafer concludes, “The present conditions in Christendom are a mystery form of the kingdom. Since the kingdom of heaven is no other than the rule of God on the earth, He must now be ruling to the extent of full realization of those things which are termed ‘the mysteries’ in the New Testament and which really constitute the new message of the New Testament” (*Systematic Theology*, 7:224).

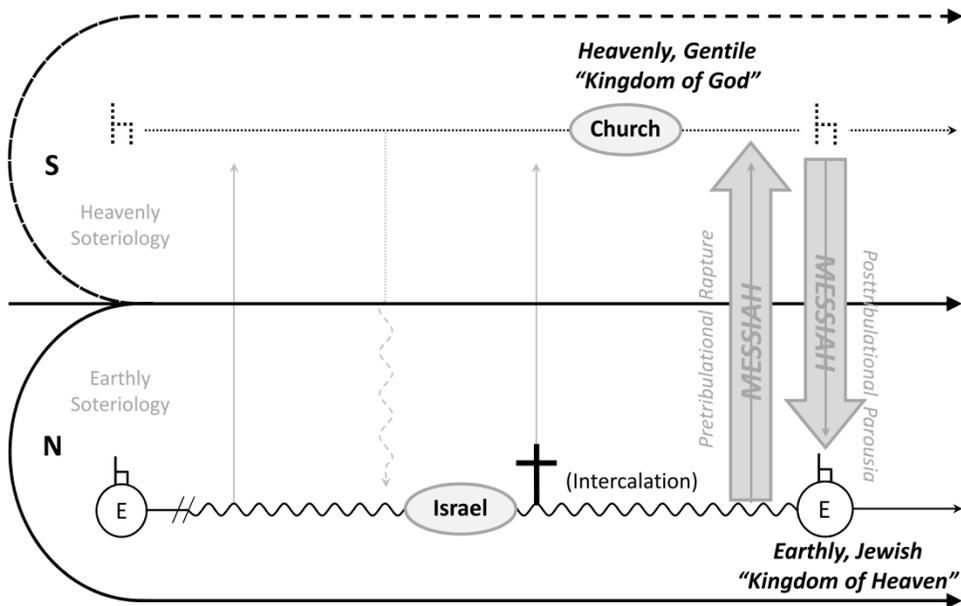


Figure 6.14 – The Dualistic Messianic Kingdom of Dispensational Christoplatonism

As inaugurationalism gradually engulfed the academy during the twentieth century, discussions concerning the kingdom of God became increasingly dominionistic in tone (as opposed to socio-liberal or escapist). This trend is due to the fact that the inaugurationalist kingdom is quite similar to its Christendom ancestor, except it finds its referent in the spiritual realization of the Jewish messianic kingdom. Ultimately, the difference is minor, and history will prove that its application is the same.

At the first coming, heaven began to invade earth, and the conflation of the two will conclude at the second coming (except for those inaugurationalists who still hold to chiliasm, which demands an extra phase of conflict). George Ladd, the great evangelical systematizer of inaugurationalism, describes:

This is why the Second Coming of Christ is necessary—to complete the work begun in his Incarnation. There are, in other words, two great events in God’s conquest of the powers of evil, two invasions of God into history: the Incarnation and the Second Coming. One scholar has illustrated this by an analogy from World War II. There were two steps in the victory over Nazi Germany: D-Day and V-Day. Once the allies had launched a successful invasion upon the continent and the allied armies had secured a foothold and started their drive across France, the tide of battle turned. The allies were

There is no immaterial world seeking to manifest itself in materiality. Rather, God sits enthroned over the heavens and earth, waiting in mercy to judge the living and the dead. This age remains this age (Gal. 1:4; Titus 2:12), essentially characterized by the cross (Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19–21); and the age to come remains the age to come (cf. Eph. 1:21; Heb. 2:5), essentially characterized by judgment (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1). *Where in the Scriptures does the messianic kingdom ever precede the day of judgment?*¹⁷⁴ Rather, divine judgment always initiates the kingdom (cf. Ps. 2; Isa. 24; Dan. 7; Amos 9; Hab. 2–3; Zeph. 2–3; Zech. 12–14; Mal. 3–4).

The day of the Lord is no insignificant or peripheral event that can be easily spiritualized; it is *the defining event* of redemptive history (see chapter 3). The holy trinity of Jewish eschatology, so to speak, was the day of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, and the messianic kingdom. No observant first-century Jew would dare to sunder what God had so prophetically joined together! Yet this is exactly the effect of realized eschatology: Jesus and the apostles inaugurated the kingdom and the resurrection before the divine judgment of the last day.

So prominent has inaugurationalism become in the academy that deviation from it is nigh to heresy, as Craig Blomberg insinuates: “One might observe that if a theological perspective is held jointly by such a diverse but impressive array of scholars as Trilling, Kümmel, Jeremias, Ladd, Marshall, Beasley-Murray, Saucy and Blaising, it must almost certainly be true.”¹⁷⁵ However, the nearly

unseen and unrecognized by the world” (“Historic Premillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, 32). On the contrary, we find throughout the NT that Jesus begins his messianic kingdom at his parousia (cf. Matt. 13:43; Luke 22:29f.; Acts 1:6; 1 Cor. 15:50; Eph. 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Peter 1:11; Rev. 11:15).

¹⁷⁴ A point originally made by Johannes Weiss (*Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, 96–97), and recently reiterated by Stanley Toussaint: “If the kingdom began in the ministry of Christ, where is the prophesied judgment in the Gospels? Were the Old Testament prophets and John incorrect in their message? . . . After the prophesied judgment, the kingdom will come” (“Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999], 231–32). Unfortunately, Toussaint regresses to the old dispensational conclusions concerning a postponed kingdom and ecclesial parentheses.

¹⁷⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, “A Response to G. R. Beasley-Murray on the Kingdom,” *JETS* 35, no. 1 (March 1992): 32. Indeed, an even wider array might be included in the academic “consensus,” e.g., Cullmann, Ridderbos, Hoekema, Waltke, Poythress, Bock, Fee, Carson, Schreiner, Beker, Dunn, Wright, etc. See also Ladd’s baronial list in *Presence of the Future*, 38–39, n. 161.

universal adoption of a theological system does not guarantee correspondence with the truth. Liberalism dominated the academy one hundred years ago; Reformed dogmatics two hundred years before that; and medieval empiricism three hundred years before that.

Though inaugurationalism has received relatively little mainstream criticism, many remain skeptical. Not only are many dispensationalists unconvinced,¹⁷⁶ but many liberals (unbiased by the pressures of tradition) judge the inaugurational schema “a hermeneutical castle built upon exegetical quicksand.”¹⁷⁷ As Christopher Rowland describes, “Supporters of the view that Jesus thought of the kingdom as present as well as future point to Luke 16.16 but particularly to sayings like Matthew 11.5f. and to Luke 11.20 and 17.21b. Despite the fact that the consensus of New Testament scholarship accepts that Jesus believed that the kingdom of God had already in some sense arrived in Jesus’ words and deeds, the fact has to be faced that the evidence in support of such an assumption is not very substantial.”¹⁷⁸

Liberals find all such spiritual realization to be a form of hermeneutical “trickery,”¹⁷⁹ an attempt to deliver Jesus and the apostles from the

¹⁷⁶ See Elliott Johnson, Stanley Toussaint, Mike Stallard, Michael Vlach, Thomas Ice, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, etc.

¹⁷⁷ Clayton Sullivan, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 65. See Sullivan’s list of prominent liberal theologians who “believe the theory that accords best with New Testament evidence is the hypothesis that ‘Kingdom of God’ was Jesus’ distinctive way of referring to this Golden Age for which first-century Jews were expectantly waiting” (Ibid., 61).

¹⁷⁸ Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2002), 133; italics added. See also Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 152–69.

¹⁷⁹ Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 169, n. 279. Sullivan describes it as a theological “bait-and-switch” maneuver between two different definitions of the kingdom:

Proponents of this theory [inaugurationalism] always use the term *Kingdom* in the singular (not the plural). They do not say, “The Kingdoms were present and future.” Rather they assert, “The Kingdom was present and future.” This singular usage suggests that *Kingdom* has *one referent*, and that the *same referent* was both present and future. At this point the mediating theologians play a trick upon themselves and upon others. They are guilty of an unrecognized language error (that is, *a shift in referents*). They fail to perceive that consistent eschatologists and realized eschatologists define the Kingdom of God *differently*. Both use the term *Kingdom* but they use *different referents*. For consistent eschatologists, the referent for Kingdom was the imminent Golden Age of Jewish eschatological hopes; for realized eschatologists its referent was the curative, exorcistic power operative in Jesus. To consistent eschatologists the Kingdom is a place; to realized eschatologists the Kingdom is a power. . . .

embarrassment of Jewish apocalypticism, intentionally avoiding an “at-face-value interpretation” of their words.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, concerning realized eschatology, we must agree. Yet we find *no embarrassment* concerning the Jewish hope of the Law and the Prophets. Liberals simply have no faith (generally due to their naturalistic bias), yet without faith they will be destroyed on the day of his appearing (Heb. 10:37–39).¹⁸¹ Moreover, liberals have a *chronic lack* of cruciform theology. Assuming that Paul was the primary inventor of an atonemental interpretation of the cross, liberals grossly misunderstand the apostolic tradition.

Not only do dispensationalists and liberals question the inaugurational dogma, but Jewish scholars also find it revolting. The idea that Jesus realized the Old Testament hope without actually doing it is simply ludicrous. All such

Once you and I recognize that Kingdom is assigned two different referents, we are then in a position to perceive that for years the mediating theologians have been allowed to get away with an unjustifiable “bait-and-switch” maneuver. They “bait” us with one conception of the Kingdom, that is, the conception of the Kingdom as a curative power that was present in Jesus. The mediating theologians (appealing to Matthew 12:28, Luke 11:20) look us in the eye and declare, “The Kingdom was present in Jesus’ exorcisms.” While still looking us in the eye and mesmerizing us with discussions on how *basileia* is to be understood in terms of *malkuth*, the mediating theologians go one step further and affirm, “And by the way, this Kingdom we have told you was present was also future.” But in this future claim they abandon their bait’s referent to the Kingdom (a curative power) and switch to an entirely different referent (the eschatological interpretation found in Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer). This bait-and-switch maneuver is, I contend, a deceiving manipulation of language. The mediating theologians who use this bait-and-switch maneuver are like crafty Jacob about whom we read in Genesis. Jacob tried to combine his voice and Esau’s hands. Yet Jacob’s voice and Esau’s hands did not belong together. Similarly, the mediating theologians try to combine Dodd’s view of the Kingdom with Schweitzer’s view of the Kingdom. But, like Jacob’s voice and Esau’s hands, these two views do not belong together; indeed, they contradict each other and cannot be juxtaposed as mediating theologians attempt to do.

Moreover, having conceded that a futuristic conception of the Kingdom is present in Jesus’ teachings, the mediating theologians quietly abandon this awkward conception, allowing it to fade into oblivion. They subsequently switch back to the bait and focus on the conception of the Kingdom as a curative power present in Jesus’ ministry. They *assume* this curative power is still present and is somehow operative within the Church. Curiously they fail to cite illustrations of contemporary healings and exorcisms that would prove that the *basileia* is in fact operative in our day. (*Rethinking Realized Eschatology*, 46–48; italics in the original)

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 60; see also chapter 1, n. 77; and Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141–62.

¹⁸¹ So McClain declared concerning Schweitzer, who typifies modern liberalism: “It should go without saying that in no Biblical sense can Dr. Schweitzer be called a Christian, and his conclusion regarding our Lord and His Kingdom is an appalling thing” (*Greatness of the Kingdom*, 13).

hermeneutical gymnastics are both unbiblical and *unrealistic*.¹⁸² Ask any devout Jew if the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, and he/she will laugh at you and point to the temple mount as proof of your Gentile ignorance. The world is obviously unredeemed. Truly, it takes a great amount of inaugurational indoctrination to believe that the new heavens and new earth are already happening. Indeed, the question of realized eschatology has fundamentally divided Jews and Christians historically, as Jewish theologian Martin Buber said:

The church rests on its faith that the Christ has come, and that this is the redemption which God has bestowed on mankind. We, Israel, *are not able* to believe this. . . . We know more deeply, more truly, that world history has not been turned upside down to its very foundations—that the world is not yet redeemed. We *sense* its unredeemedness. The church can, or indeed must, understand this sense of ours as the awareness that *we* are not redeemed. But we know that that is not it. The redemption of the world is for us indivisibly one with the perfecting of creation, with the establishment of the unity which nothing more prevents, the unity which is no longer controverted, and which is realized in all the protean variety of the world. Redemption is one with the kingdom of God in its fulfilment. An anticipation of any single part of the *completed* redemption of the world—for example the redemption beforehand of the soul—is something we cannot grasp, although even for us in our mortal hours redeeming and redemption are heralded.¹⁸³

Of course the New Testament never says that such a redemption of the world has come—only that a greater sacrifice has been made before eschatological salvation (Heb. 9:28), that messianic suffering has come before

¹⁸² See the discussion in Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 1–37.

¹⁸³ Martin Buber, *Der Jude und sein Judentum* (*The Jew and His Jewishness*, no English trans.), Cologne, Germany: J. Melzer, 1963), 562; translated and quoted in Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 28–29; italics in the original. Note also the pointed declaration of Jewish scholar Schalom Ben-Chorin:

The Jew is profoundly aware of the unredeemed character of the world, and he perceives and recognizes no enclave of redemption in the midst of its unredeemedness. The concept of the redeemed soul in the midst of an unredeemed world is alien to the Jew, profoundly alien, inaccessible from the primal ground of his existence. This is the innermost reason for Israel's rejection of Jesus, not a merely external, merely national conception of messianism. In Jewish eyes, redemption means redemption from all evil. Evil of body and soul, evil in creation and civilization. So when we say redemption, we mean the whole of redemption. Between creation and redemption we know only one caesura: the revelation of God's will. (*Ibid.*, 29)

messianic glory (Luke 24:26), that a propitiation has been put forward before the wrath to come (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 4:10), that justification has been secured in anticipation of the final judgment (Rom. 5:9; Titus 3:7), that a ransom has been offered before the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30; 1 Tim. 2:6). Such a message, devoid of realized eschatology, was readily received by many first-century Jews. The same cannot be said after the church rejected the Jewish eschatological hope in place of an *ersatz* Platonic gospel.

CONCLUSION

In light of the coming kingdom, how then do we relate to the activity of God in this age? As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, God's temporal blessings and curses are understood in light of his eternal blessings and curses. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are likewise understood as a firstfruits of the final harvest, a guarantee of what is to come. Though the firstfruits are essentially of the same substance as the harvest (cf. Rom. 8:23; Heb. 6:5), no one in their right mind would equate the two, for in doing so you might jeopardize the task at hand: the labor necessary before the harvest.

More specifically, let us use the analogy of an *inheritance*, since the kingdom is so often described as such (cf. Matt. 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; James 2:5). As a father grooms his child for the ultimate inheritance of the family estate, so also is God grooming the church for its inheritance of the world to come. To speak of the inheritance as a purely future event in no way precludes the involvement of the Father beforehand. What earthly father would declare to his son the futurity of his inheritance, and on such grounds say, "I guess I'll talk to you in thirty years!"¹⁸⁴ Ridiculous. The father's encouragement and discipline *along the way* are absolutely necessary and only reinforce the final passing on or denial of the estate.

The various forms of encouragement and discipline (e.g., an allowance or corporeal punishment) are indeed of the same substance as the final event. However, to refer to the allowance as the inheritance is simply confusing and detrimental to the main point: *The mission of the child is different before and after the inheritance.* The allowance is given for the sake of training and schooling, which

¹⁸⁴ This is the common claim of many inaugurationalists, who say a declaration concerning the futurity of the kingdom negates the activity of the Spirit in this age.

qualifies the child for the inheritance. So it is with our inheritance in the kingdom of God. We have received our “allowance” of the Holy Spirit (along with our discipline of hardship and trials; cf. Heb. 12:7) for the purpose of training *in the way of the cross*.

Those who endure the training of the cross will then inherit the kingdom (cf. Matt. 16:24; John 12:26). Those who reject the path of the cross will inherit the lake of fire (cf. Matt. 16:23; 25:41; Gal. 1:8; Phil. 3:18). To conflate the activity of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in this age with the activity of God and the kingdom in the age to come confuses the most basic tenet of Christian discipleship: We are not called to receive the kingdom in this age; we are called to take up our cross in this age. Simply put, those who seek their inheritance in this age disqualify themselves for the eternal inheritance (cf. Matt. 16:25; John 12:25).

But it is precisely at this point that inaugurationalism ultimately destroys the faith of the common believer. When the inaugurational doctrine is pressed upon the mind of a believer, the cross generally fades into the background of consciousness.¹⁸⁵ This is due to simple theological and chronological logic. God cannot execute the age to come and wait for it at the same time (though much theological wrangling is exercised to prove this to be true). The return of Jesus is something like a “hostile takeover” of the earth. When Christians digest inaugurational doctrines, they inevitably begin to *already* take over that which Jesus will *not yet* take over until his second coming. Hence unknowing Christians progressively lose sight of the true nature of the cross, perverting it as the means of an inaugurated kingdom in this age, generally in the same theological manner as historical Christendom.¹⁸⁶

Rather, Jesus is simply waiting to make his enemies his footstool (cf. Acts 2:35; Heb. 10:13), patiently seeking the repentance of the wicked (cf. Rom. 2:4–5; 2

¹⁸⁵ This was previously noted in Ladd’s writings (chapter 3, n. 162). See the same general pattern in the writings of Dodd, Cullmann, Caird, Moltmann, Fee, etc.

¹⁸⁶ As Chilton describes, “*The center of Christian reconstruction is the Church. The River of Life does not flow out from the doors of the chambers of Congresses and Parliaments. It flows from the restored Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church of Jesus Christ. Our goal is world dominion under Christ’s lordship, a ‘world takeover’ if you will; but our strategy begins with the reformation and reconstruction of the Church. From that will flow social and political reconstruction, indeed a flowering of Christian civilization (Hag. 1:1–15; 2:6–9, 18–23).*” (*Paradise Restored*, 214; italics in the original)

Peter 3:9) and calling the church to proclaim and demonstrate the mercy of God in the cross (cf. Luke 24:47; Acts 10:43; 1 Cor. 2:2; Col. 1:24). Paul thus summarizes our response:

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: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. . . . Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (2 Tim. 4:1–2,5, NIV)

Common logic that corresponds to both reality and the Scriptures argues for a simple chronological progression of events which culminates in the day of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, and the Jewish messianic kingdom. This was the primal expectation of the early church, as patristic scholar Everett Ferguson summarizes: “The characteristic second-century understanding of the kingdom of God was no threat to Rome because it was heavenly, angelic, and altogether future.”¹⁸⁷ Moreover, “The overwhelming usage of ‘kingdom’ in second-century Christian literature is eschatological. . . . The kingdom is almost uniformly future, heavenly, and eternal.”¹⁸⁸

Even Ladd himself acknowledged, “For Christians of the first three centuries, the Kingdom was altogether eschatological.”¹⁸⁹ Unfortunately, he goes on to argue that they were simply ignorant of their new inaugurated status as “a new people of God who are to take the place of Israel.”¹⁹⁰ This logic is absurd. The early church simply had no such concept of realized eschatology, so why do we read it back into the New Testament?

The theological gravity of the messianic expectation of the early church, especially during the second century, is rarely appreciated. As seen in the Muratorian Fragment, it was the second-century church that primarily

¹⁸⁷ Everett Ferguson, “The Terminology of Kingdom in the Second Century,” in *Studia Patristica*, ed. E. A. Livingstone, vol. XVII (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 670.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Presence of the Future*, 243; cf. Benedict T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 32–38.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

formulated the canon of the New Testament.¹⁹¹ If those who stewarded what we regard as the very oracles of God believed the kingdom to be “altogether future” and “altogether eschatological,” then it seems completely inappropriate (and possibly arrogant) to interpret such oracles as portraying an inaugurated kingdom. These men handed to us the very apostolic fountain of truth from which we drink. If they were stewarding the apostolic witness, and believing in the kingdom as such, should we assume their hope to be naïve and their hermeneutic primitive? God forbid! Rather, the second-century witness was simply in accord with the first-century witness, to which we vigorously hold.

The New Testament seeks no new revelation of the kingdom of God, but rather preserves the simple expectation of a Jewish messianic kingdom. The New Testament is primarily concerned with the means of attaining the hope of the kingdom (cf. Acts 26:7; Rom. 9:30; Phil. 3:11; etc.). The new covenant is concerned with the sacrifice of the cross, in contrast to the sacrifices of the old covenant (cf. Rom. 3:25; Heb. 8–10; 1 Peter 3:18; etc.). The “promised eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15) of the kingdom is never in question (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Peter 1:11; etc.). The New Testament presents a straightforward account of the suffering of the Messiah as an atonement for the forgiveness of sins before the coming of the Messiah in glory for the establishment of his Israelitic kingdom (cf. Luke 24:26; Heb. 9:28; 1 Peter 1:11).

¹⁹¹ Traditionally dated to about 170, the Muratorian Fragment lists the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen epistles of Paul, Jude, two epistles of John, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Johannine Apocalypse as divinely authoritative, thus revealing the formative nature of the second century to the NT canon. See F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), chap. 12; and Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Significance, and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 191–201.