

# MAGNIFYING GOD IN CHRIST

A Summary of New Testament Theology

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# Introduction

## Why Study New Testament Theology?

Studying NT theology is valuable because NT students are inclined to see the parts and neglect the whole. We may spend considerable time interpreting individual texts or books of the NT without reflecting on larger themes, so that we fail to step back and survey the landscape as a whole. Naturally our vision of the whole will be distorted if we do not attend diligently to the parts. In-depth exegesis must function as the foundation of the larger picture. At the same time, if we fail to look at the NT through a wider lens and view it only through the narrow lens of intensive exegesis, we may end up making mistakes in our exegesis as well. For looking at the whole assists us in understanding the parts.

Thus NT theology surveys the landscape. What is the NT all about? What are the major themes? How do they fit together? Not all scholars think that the NT has a coherent message. I would argue that there is a beauty and coherence in what is now called the NT canon. When we survey the landscape, we see the same central themes in the various writers, even though they addressed different situations and communities. So NT theology helps us understand the message of the entirety of the NT, and surely it is the desire to understand the message of the NT that motivates us to invest time in studying it.

## How Should We Study New Testament Theology?

How should a NT theology be written? For readers who are interested in a more in-depth discussion of this matter historically and in terms of method, I recommend the appendix from the larger volume (see Schreiner 2008: 867–88).

I have chosen a thematic approach in this work because a thematic structure has some advantages. The coherence and the unity of NT theology are explained more clearly if a NT theology is presented thematically. Is a study of each individual writer truly a NT theology, or is it a theology of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, and so forth? I am not saying, however, that a study of each book separately is illegitimate. Such an approach opens vistas onto the text that are obscured, at least in part, by a thematic approach. I reject the claim that there is one correct way to write a NT theology. The subject matter of NT theology is too vast and comprehensive to be exhausted by any single approach. Barr (1999: 61) rightly says that “there can be no such thing as the one appropriate method for biblical theology” (see also his remarks at 1999: 342). No NT theology will ever do justice to the complexity and beauty of the NT. Each of the various approaches and perspectives casts a different light upon the NT, and in that sense having a number of different approaches is helpful. Fruitful NT theologies could be written from the standpoint of eschatology, the people of God, Christology, ethics, and so on.

### In Defense of a Thematic Approach

I believe, however, that a thematic approach is particularly needed today, with the proviso that it is truly rooted in biblical theology. Many NT scholars shy away from such an approach today, fearing that it too closely resembles systematic theology. They worry about domesticating the text by our own categories. A thematic approach runs the danger of domesticating the text and squeezing out the diversity of the NT. Still, it is a risk worth taking. Our Western world is worried about metanarratives, and hence much of the work in NT studies examines a small part of the NT, or even a single verse in the NT. It is safer to present one’s conclusions on a single verse than it is to say what the entire NT is about. Perhaps it is saner as well! And no NT theology is helpful if the writer has not “gotten dirty” by studying the text inductively, piece by piece.

And yet there is another side to the story. We understand each of the pieces in the NT by our understanding of the whole, by our worldview, by our own metanarrative. We can fall into the illusion that if we study a part, then we are dealing with just the “evidence,” “the hard phenomena” of the text. But our understanding of any piece of evidence is also affected by our standpoint, our worldview. We do not assess any piece of evidence from a neutral and objective standpoint. Hence, there is a dialogue between the inductive and deductive that constantly occurs. If we do not venture to consider NT theology as a whole, we are in danger of skewing the particular piece of evidence that we study. Examining the NT thematically, then, may assist us in understanding the pieces that make up the NT.

I have already noted the benefit of considering each writer individually. But there is another liability in studying each writer individually. We need to recall that none of the NT documents claims to be the “theology” of the writer in question. This is particularly obvious in the case of the Epistles. The Epistles are occasional writings directed to specific situations and circumstances in the lives of churches. It is somewhat distorting, then, to write a theology of, say, Jude or James. We can hardly claim that they have packaged the whole of their theology into such short letters. Yet Paul is different in that he wrote thirteen Letters, and so we have a larger corpus from which to construct his thought.<sup>1</sup> But even in Paul’s case we do not have a complete map of his convictions. Some holes still exist.

In the same way, more can be said about Matthew and Mark, Luke-Acts, and the Johannine writings than can be said about Jude. Useful studies of the particular emphases of these writings have been produced. We need to remember, however, the constraints under which the Gospel writers composed their works. At this juncture, I am assuming that they were historians *and* theologians. They were not free, in other words, to construct a theology sundered from the actual words and works of Jesus. When we compare John with the Synoptic Gospels, it is obvious that the different perspectives add tremendous richness to our understanding of Jesus Christ. The diversity of perspectives indicates neither a lack of interest in history nor the presence of a freeness to compose in accord with one’s desires. We have four Gospels because the depth and breadth of Jesus Christ could not be captured by a single writer.

The Gospels, then, are theological history, containing an interpretation of the works and words of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, they are *Gospels*, which bear witness to Jesus Christ and his historical work. They are located at a certain juncture in the history of salvation. When considering the theology of the Gospels, we must attend to the location of the writer on the redemptive-historical timeline. Some matters in the Gospels remain undeveloped because God’s promises are not realized until the death and resurrection of Christ. Hence, the Gospels conclude with the expectation and promise that the Spirit will be poured out on God’s people. This blessing of the Spirit is not given, however, in the Gospels themselves. In this sense, the rest of the NT should be located in a different place in salvation history than the Gospels.

In summary, none of the NT writings contains the whole of what is taught in the NT. They are accurate but partial and fragmentary witnesses. They witness truly but not exhaustively to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, a the-

1. In my judgment, all the letters attributed to Paul are authentic. The Pastoral Epistles are the first to be contested, but solid reasons exist to support authenticity. See Mounce 2000: lxvi–cxxix; Knight 1992: 21–52; Ellis 1992.

matic approach to NT theology is invaluable because it attempts to capture the whole of what is taught by considering all twenty-seven books.

### The Question of a Center

Is there a single center for NT theology? The question of a center has long been debated, and many different centers have been proposed. I think it is safe to say that no alleged center will ever become the consensus. In one sense, having several different centers is useful, since NT theology can be studied helpfully from a number of different perspectives. Since the various perspectives are interlocking and not mutually exclusive, there is a diversity of ways by which the NT can be explored. Furthermore, examining the NT from different angles allows new light to be shed upon the text. Since the subject matter of NT theology is God himself, we are not surprised to learn that none of our scholarly endeavors ever exhausts the subject matter.

It is illuminating to consider NT theology from a twofold perspective. First, God's purpose in all that he does is to bring honor to himself and to Jesus Christ. The NT is radically God-centered. We could say that the NT is about God magnifying himself in Christ through the Spirit. We could easily fail to see the supremacy of God and the centrality of Christ in the NT precisely because these themes are part of the warp and woof of the NT. Sometimes we fail to see what is most obvious, what is right before our eyes. Any NT theology that does not focus on what God has done in Christ, however, fails to see what is fundamental to and pervasive in the text of Scripture.

Second, the centrality of God in Christ leads to abstraction if it is not closely related to the history of salvation, to the fulfillment of God's promises. In the Scriptures, we have the story of God's saving plan (which includes judgment). The NT unfolds the fulfillment of the promises made in the OT. One of the striking themes in the NT is that of the "already-not yet." God has inaugurated his kingdom, but he has not consummated it. He has begun to fulfill his saving promises, but he has not yet completed all that he has started. No one can grasp the message of the NT if redemptive history is slighted. Redemptive history is fundamental to grasping the message of the NT. God's ultimate purpose is reflected in the fulfillment of his plan. He must have a purpose, an aim, a goal in such a plan. Here the purpose of all of salvation history emerges. God works out his saving plan so that he would be magnified in Christ, so that his name would be honored.<sup>2</sup> Hence, contrary to what some have said, God's glory and humans' salvation are not in conflict. Rather, God is glorified in the salvation of his people.

2. In most instances when citing a text from the Synoptic Gospels for which there are parallels, I cite only Matthew. No significance should be ascribed to my citation of Matthew.

## A Short Tour of the Book

Every NT theology has its own distinctive slant. My goal in this book is not to argue a novel thesis but to attempt to discover inductively what was most important to NT writers. The book begins in chapter 1 with the already-not yet theme in the NT. The OT closes with unfinished business. The Lord made promises that were not yet fulfilled for his people and for the world. When we read the NT, we find that God's saving promises are fulfilled, and yet these promises are realized in a surprising fashion. There is an already-but-not-yet character to the fulfillment. Hence, the kingdom is inaugurated but not consummated. Believers enjoy eternal life now, and yet they will enjoy the fullness of such life only on the day of resurrection. Understanding the tension between the inauguration and consummation of God's promises is indispensable for grasping the message of the NT.

Chapters 2 through 8, which represent the heart of the book, focus on the Father (chap. 2), Jesus Christ (chaps. 3–7), and the Holy Spirit (chap. 8). Again, we are asking the question: what is the NT fundamentally about? The promises of God come to fruition through the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are the main actors in the drama, and hence praise goes to them for their saving work.

We shall see in chapter 2 that the Father is the sovereign creator and the merciful Lord. He works out both his saving and judging purposes in history. Chapters 3 through 7 examine the Christology of the NT. The subject is vast, for surely Jesus Christ is the central character of the NT witness. God's saving promises become a reality through him. Virtually the whole NT answers the question: who is Jesus Christ, and what has he accomplished? We shall see that the identity of Jesus Christ cannot be captured merely by his titles, and yet the titles given to him are of great significance. He is the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Lord, and the Logos. The Gospels all culminate with the story of the cross and resurrection, indicating that God's salvation is secured through Jesus' death and resurrection. The Epistles and Revelation continue to focus on the identity of Jesus Christ. We see Paul's high Christology in Phil. 2:5–11 and Col. 1:15–20. The high Christology of Hebrews is apparent in Heb. 1:1–14. And Jesus as the Lamb of God is regularly accorded the same status as God in Revelation. The significance of the cross is featured throughout the NT. In the Synoptics, Jesus explains his death at his last Passover meal with his disciples, and Paul practically bursts at the seams in using a variety of terms to describe what God has accomplished in Christ: justification, sanctification, propitiation, redemption, reconciliation, and so on. The centrality of the cross is also featured in 1 John, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation. There is little doubt that we have found a main artery in NT teaching.

The work of the Holy Spirit is explored in chapter 8. The Gospels emphasize that Jesus is anointed by the Spirit, and Luke in Acts teaches that this same

Jesus who was filled with the Spirit also pours out his Spirit on his disciples, so that they are empowered to bring the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth. A consistent theme throughout the NT is that the Spirit has come to honor Jesus Christ, that he is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Hence, the Spirit's ministry is not an independent one. He empowers and sanctifies God's people so that Jesus Christ will be praised.

Chapter 9 steps back and asks why the great saving work of the Father, Son, and Spirit is needed. The NT answer is that human beings are in desperate straits. Human beings have failed to honor God as they should. The Synoptics emphasize that we are rotten trees. Paul teaches that we have not praised and thanked God as we should, and John teaches that sin is lawless rebellion (1 John 3:4). The salvation accomplished is astonishingly great, for it overcomes human rebellion.

How should human beings respond to what God has accomplished in Christ through the Spirit? The NT proclaims that we must believe and obey. In chapter 10, I argue that both of these themes are pervasive in the NT. Faith and obedience may be distinguished, but they are inseparable. No one will enjoy final salvation without believing and obeying. A careful examination of the NT reveals that all obedience flows from faith, and that there is no salvation apart from a changed life.

The already—not yet theme and the call for obedience raise the question of the place of the OT law in the life of believers. Now that Jesus Christ has come, what is the relationship between the covenants? How do believers in Jesus Christ relate to the laws of the Sinai covenant? In chapter 11, I defend the notion that there is both discontinuity and continuity with the OT law. Believers are no longer under the Mosaic covenant, but they now observe the law of love, which is the law of Christ.

The call to faith and obedience should not be understood individualistically. God always intended to bless the whole world (Gen. 12:3), to form a new community for his own glory and praise. So in chapter 12, I explore what the NT says about the church of Jesus Christ. Finally, God will consummate his purposes. The not-yet will not last forever. Jesus will return and reward those who obey him and punish those who resist him. A day of resurrection is coming. The new exodus, the new creation, and the new covenant will be fulfilled. And believers will praise and honor God forever.

# 1

## The Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises

### *The Already–Not Yet*



**T**he thesis advanced in this book is that NT theology is God-focused, Christ-centered, and Spirit-saturated, but the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit must be understood along a salvation-historical timeline; that is, God's promises are already fulfilled but not yet consummated in Christ Jesus. We will see that the ministry of Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit are fundamental for the fulfilling of God's promises. The coming of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit are the prime indications that God is beginning to fulfill the saving promises made to Abraham.

I will argue for the centrality of God in Christ in the concrete and specific witness of the NT as it unfolds God's saving work in history. Another way to put this is that God will receive all the glory for his work in Christ by the Spirit as he works out his purpose in redemptive history. Furthermore, redemptive history is characterized by inaugurated but not consummated eschatology; thus the glory that belongs to God has not yet reached its zenith, but it will.

In this chapter, the already-but-not-yet theme in the NT will be explored. What is quite remarkable is that inaugurated (but not yet consummated) eschatology pervades the NT. We shall see in this chapter that in the Synoptic Gospels the kingdom of God comes to the forefront: the kingdom is present

in Jesus' ministry, and yet at the same time there is a future fulfillment. The Johannine writings emphasize that believers now enjoy eternal life, but the physical resurrection still awaits believers. Similarly, the already-not yet theme pervades the Pauline writings. Believers are saved now, and yet salvation will be fully realized in the future. Believers are now redeemed but await the resurrection of their bodies on the last day, and so forth. In the same way, the other writings in the NT maintain the tension between the present fulfillment of God's promises and the future realization of those promises. For instance, the author of Hebrews proclaims that atonement has been secured through the death of Christ, but his severe warnings to believers demonstrate that the promises are not yet fully realized. The signature of the arrival of the age to come is the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, believers await the final resurrection, indicating that the Spirit is a foretaste of greater things to come. Before examining the theme of the already-but not yet in the NT, we must consider briefly the OT background.

### The Old Testament Backdrop

Before surveying the NT witness, we need to take a cursory look at the OT. We could summarize the OT under the rubrics of creation, fall, and redemption. The centrality of God is featured in the fact that he is the creator of all. God's sovereign creation of the universe is a pervasive theme in the OT, indicating that he is Lord of the cosmos and the central actor of the OT story. He made human beings in his image so that they would display his glory, reflect his character, and rule the world for God (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:15-17). Adam and Eve rejected God's lordship and struck out on their own. God's judgment of Adam and Eve also communicates his lordship and is a preview to the pervasive theme of judgment in the OT. Every act of God's judgment demonstrates that he is sovereign and Lord. Still, the story line of the OT concludes not with judgment but with the promise of redemption.

The OT is animated with an eschatological hope. Thus Gen. 3:15 forecasts a day when the seed of the woman will triumph over the seed of the serpent. Subsequent history appeared to mock the promise, for the seed of the serpent ruled over human beings during the days of Noah so that evil reigned over the world. God revealed his lordship over history by destroying those who rebelled against him with a flood, but the tower of Babel illustrated that human beings had not fundamentally changed. God's promise of blessing for the whole world focused thereafter upon one man, Abraham. The Lord promised Abraham and his descendants land, seed, and a blessing that would encompass the entire world (e.g., 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:17-18; 26:3-4; 28:14-15; 35:12-13). The promise began to be fulfilled in the days of the patriarchs and Moses, for the people of Israel multiplied in accord with God's promise. Then the promise of the

land of Canaan became theirs during the days of Joshua. It seemed that the nation was poised to become the vehicle for worldwide blessing, but a cycle of sin and judgment ensued in the days of the judges. David's accession as king and the everlasting covenant made with him (2 Sam. 7) demonstrated that universal blessing would become a reality through a Davidic descendant. But the story of the kings of Judah, not to mention the kings of Israel, sadly disappointed. The nation spiraled downward until it was carried into exile by Babylon in 586 BC. Yahweh promised through the prophets, however, the dawning of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34), a coming kingdom (Obad. 21), a rebuilding of David's fallen booth (Amos 9:11–15), a new day for Jerusalem and Zion (Joel 3:15–21; Zeph. 3:15–20), a pouring out of God's Spirit (Joel 2:28), a day when the Lord would give his people a new heart and Spirit so that they would obey him (Ezek. 36:26–27), a new exodus when God would liberate his people once again (e.g., Isa. 43:5–9), and a new creation (Isa. 65:17–25; 66:22). None of these promises were fulfilled during the OT era, and so this brings us to the NT witness.

### Kingdom of God

In considering the already-but-not-yet theme, we begin with the kingdom of God, which certainly is of prime importance in NT theology. Goldsworthy (2000: 618) remarks, "The idea of the rule of God over creation, over all creatures, over the kingdoms of the world, and in a unique and special way, over his chosen and redeemed people, is the very heart of the message of the Hebrew scriptures."

The Synoptic Gospels make it apparent that the kingdom of God is central to Jesus' teaching. The importance of the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching is also apparent by the location of the sayings about the kingdom. Both Matthew and Mark introduce Jesus' teaching ministry with pregnant sayings about the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14–15). Jesus proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom, the fulfillment of the good news that God would redeem his people. This promise of good news (*euangelion*) reaches back to Isaiah, where the good news is the new exodus from Babylon, the return from exile (Isa. 40:9; 52:7). The importance of the kingdom is also attested by the summary statements that epitomize Jesus' ministry and prominently feature the kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Luke 4:43–44; 8:1; 9:11). Jesus' ministry in Galilee consisted of teaching, healing, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. The healing of every disease signifies that the old order is passing away and a new era has arrived.

How should we understand what Jesus meant by the "kingdom of God"? The expectation of a future rule of God in which he fulfills his promises to Israel and subjugates his enemies is found in both the OT (Isa. 24:23; Dan.

2:44; 7:14, 18, 23, 27; Amos 9:11–15; Obad. 21; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:9) and in Second Temple literature (T. Mos. 10.1; 2 Bar. 73.1–7; Pss. Sol. 17–18). Interestingly, the desire for Israel to triumph and to see surrounding nations defeated is expressed in a thoroughly Jewish way in Luke 1–2, indicating Luke’s faithful rendering of early Jewish piety before the coming of the Messiah (Luke 1:52–55, 68–75).

When we turn to the teaching of Jesus, we see that he too expected a future kingdom, an end-time kingdom where God would fulfill his saving promises. This is evident from the Lord’s Prayer, in which believers are to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10). Jesus also speaks to the disciples of the day when he will come “in his kingdom” (16:28; cf. Luke 23:51), which clearly refers to the future fulfillment of the kingdom promise. When the kingdom comes, the judgment will commence, and all will be appraised for the way they have lived (Matt. 25:31–46). The coming kingdom can be described as a great end-time feast in which the righteous will rejoice but others will be cast out into the darkness (8:11–12; 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 14:15; 22:16, 18, 29–30; cf. Isa. 25:6–8). The futurity of the kingdom is evident in the call to “inherit the kingdom” that has been prepared by God from the beginning (Matt. 25:34). Jesus did not believe that the kingdom had come in its fullness in his day; he envisioned a future day when he would enjoy the messianic banquet in God’s kingdom (Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). Clearly, Jesus anticipated a period of time in which believers awaited the fulfillment of God’s saving promises and the unleashing of his terrible judgments.

The kingdom of God cannot be restricted to the future in the ministry and teaching of Jesus. It is also a present reality. Yet there is a sense in which God always and invariably rules as king over all. This is illustrated by Ps. 103:19: “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” God reigns at all times and in all places over all that occurs in history (cf. Pss. 47:8; 93:1; 97:1; 99:1). Nevertheless, the unique element in Jesus’ teaching about God’s kingdom is its presence in Jesus’ ministry. In other words, the OT promises of a new covenant and a new creation and a new exodus were beginning to be fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. How does the presence of the kingdom in Jesus’ ministry fit together with the prayer for the kingdom to come? Why pray for the kingdom to come if it has already arrived in the person of Jesus? Many scholars now agree that the kingdom of God in Jesus’ teaching is both present and future. In other words, the kingdom is already inaugurated but not yet consummated.

One of the most remarkable statements in the Gospels is found in Matt. 12:28, where Jesus says, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” What is remarkable is that Jesus saw in his exorcisms a sign that the kingdom of God had broken into history. Matthew indicates that the eschatological Spirit promised in the OT was active in Jesus’ ministry. Here we have evidence for the already–not yet

tension that informs the NT. The kingdom had already arrived in the person and ministry of Jesus, but God's enemies had not yet been entirely removed, and the people of God did not yet possess all the blessings pledged to them in the OT.

The kingdom of God was present also in Jesus' miraculous signs and preaching. A programmatic text is Luke 4:16–30, for here Luke portrays the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry and almost certainly relates Jesus' customary message. Jesus began by citing the OT Scriptures and claiming that they reach fulfillment in his person and ministry (cf. Isa. 61:1–2; 58:6; 29:18). The good news of release from exile had now been realized through him. The year of the Lord's favor and the liberty of God's people had arrived. It does not appear here that Jesus merely states that these promises will be fulfilled at the consummation of all things. Even now, through his healing ministry, the blind were receiving sight. The gospel that he proclaimed means that the poor were hearing the glad tidings in the present. Indeed, Jesus skipped over the line in Isa. 61 that speaks of the Lord's vengeance and referred only to the time of his favor. This suggests that the era of Jesus' ministry was not a time of vengeance but the day of salvation.

A text that points in the same direction is Matt. 11:2–6. John the Baptist voiced doubts about Jesus, presumably because he languished in prison, and his expectations regarding the kingdom were not being realized. John perceived that the political impact of Jesus' ministry was relatively inconsequential and so began to question whether he was truly “the coming one.” Jesus did not reply to John's messengers directly but pointed them to what was being accomplished in his ministry: the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, and the dead raised. Indeed, the good news was being preached to the poor. Once again Jesus cited texts in Isaiah that related what the Lord would do when he freed his people from exile (35:1–10; cf. 40:9; 42:6–7; 52:7). What stands out is that many of the prophecies found in Isaiah remained unfulfilled in Jesus' ministry. Israel did not reside in Jerusalem with everlasting joy, nor were they free from their enemies. The Romans were still menacingly present in Jesus' day. No vengeance was meted out to Israel's enemies. The world was not transformed into a new creation. All of these facts must have contributed to John's doubts about whether Jesus was truly the coming one.

Jesus responds by instructing John about the nature of his ministry. His work among the blind, the lame, the deaf, and the poor reveal that God is fulfilling his promises in Jesus. The new exodus and return from exile promised by Isaiah are a reality for those who respond to Jesus' message—the good news of the gospel is being proclaimed. And yet Jesus himself recognizes that the fulfillment astonishes. He says, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (Matt. 11:6). The prophecies of Isaiah are beginning to be fulfilled, but they are not yet fulfilled in their totality. The kingdom really is present in Jesus' ministry, and yet all that God has promised to do has not become a

reality. If John had eyes to see, he would perceive the eschatological tension. Something unexpected has arisen. The promises were not coming to pass in the way John or anyone else expected. God was working remarkably in Jesus' ministry, and yet only some of what was predicted had been realized. The kingdom had arrived, and yet Israel must await the day of vengeance and the completion of all that God promised (cf. also Luke 17:20–21).

In Matt. 13:11 Jesus says that the parables reveal the “secrets” or “mysteries” of the kingdom. The parable of the four soils (13:1–9, 18–23) teaches a number of different truths. What we are seeking here is what it teaches about the kingdom of God. A striking feature of the parable is that when the kingdom is proclaimed, not all accept its message. There are four different kinds of soil, and only the last bears genuine fruit. All the other soils do not continue to bear fruit, and they represent people who are unsaved on the day of judgment. One of the mysteries of the kingdom communicated here is that the word of the kingdom will not immediately have overwhelming success in this world. Many will reject the good news about the kingdom, but they will not be judged instantly. The Jews expected the kingdom to arrive in apocalyptic power, sweeping away all opponents. But this parable reveals that the message of the kingdom does not operate initially in this manner. In and through the preaching of Jesus, the kingdom is successful only in some hearts. The whole world is not changed dramatically, and yet the kingdom is at work; it is operating in the world, transforming hearts through Jesus' message (cf. Mark 4:26–29; Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43).

The nature of the kingdom is captured well by the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (Matt. 13:31–33). These parables likewise present the mystery of the kingdom. Again we must remind ourselves that the Jews thought that the kingdom would demolish their enemies, arrive with overwhelming force, and be evident to all. Jesus, however, taught that the kingdom does not arrive as a massive tree that holds sway over the earth, like the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4). The kingdom's coming is as inconspicuous and small as a mustard seed—the smallest known seed of Jesus' day. The parable of the leaven should be interpreted like the parable of the mustard seed, and its placement immediately after the latter suggests that the two make basically the same point. The kingdom does not arrive manifestly and clearly but rather is nearly invisible, like leaven in flour. In other words, the watching world does not perceive the presence of the kingdom. Still, Jesus maintained that the kingdom had arrived in his ministry even though it was hidden and obscured. Jesus contrasted what the kingdom is like in this present age with its consummation in the age to come. Only at the end will the kingdom rule over all, and then it will be as comprehensive and complete as leaven permeating dough.

Even though the kingdom is nearly invisible, it is incomparably precious. The value of the kingdom is communicated in the parable of the hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44). Jesus concluded the parables in Matt. 13 by comparing the

kingdom of heaven to a scribe “who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (13:52). Here Jesus considered the OT, the many prophecies about the kingdom of God. The disciple of Jesus, however, must interpret the prophecies in light of what is new, the dawning of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. The wise disciple, then, both grasps the meaning of the OT prophecy and discerns its fulfillment in Jesus. The new and the old are rightly related and correlated to one another. The new is not imposed upon the old, nor does the old squelch the new. Both the new and the old have their proper place, but the old, ultimately and finally, can be grasped only by those who understand the newness present in Jesus.

The inauguration of the kingdom is manifested by signs, wonders, and healings. Jesus' miracles are not just the promise of the kingdom; they are themselves the actualization, at least in part, of the kingdom. In many texts in the Synoptic Gospels, the proclamation of the gospel is accompanied by physical healing and the exorcism of demons (e.g., Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:7–8; Luke 9:11; 10:9, 17; 11:20). Jesus' exorcisms instantiate his victory over Satan and demons, indicating that the kingdom is now present and that Jesus has triumphed over the reign of evil. Indeed, we see from Isa. 35 that such healings are indications of the presence of the kingdom—of the kingdom already exerting its power in this present evil age.

Adherents of rationalistic liberalism denied the reality of the miraculous because of their Enlightenment worldview, which denied the intervention of God in the cosmos. Their problem with miracles arose from their philosophical standpoint and cannot be derived from a study of the text. It is clear that the Gospel writers believed that the miracles truly occurred. The miracles are not merely spiritual realities that can be reduced to spiritual lessons or moral truths. Indeed, there are sound reasons for believing that the miracles actually occurred in Jesus' ministry, that the stories go back to the historical Jesus.

Meier (1994: 630) says about the miracles “that total fabrication by the early church is, practically speaking, impossible”; and, “the tradition of Jesus' miracles is more firmly supported by the criteria of historicity than are a number of other well-known and often readily accepted traditions about his life and ministry. . . . Put dramatically but with not too much exaggeration: if the miracle tradition from Jesus' public ministry were rejected *in toto* as unhistorical, so should every other Gospel tradition about him.” Indeed, Meier (1994: 773–873) does not shrink back from saying that, as far as one can determine matters historically, there are solid grounds for believing that Jesus raised people from the dead.<sup>1</sup> The miracles, then, testify to the already–not yet character of the kingdom. They demonstrate that the kingdom has

1. Meier (1994: 968) is not claiming that these accounts are actually miracles but only that what occurred was thought to be miraculous by some of Jesus' contemporaries. It is not my purpose here to examine Meier's philosophical approach, which is, I think, too limiting. My point is simply that even within the bounds of his criteria, solid reasons exist to believe that

entered into this world, and yet not everyone is healed, which shows that the kingdom is not yet consummated. Death and evil still cast their long shadow over the world.

The kingdom of God is a central theme in Jesus' ministry, and the meaning of the concept must be discerned from the OT because Jesus nowhere defines it. When Jesus referred to God's kingdom, he had in mind God's saving power, the fulfillment of his saving promises. When God's saving promises become a reality, then those who are God's enemies will be judged. Still, Jesus called attention to God's saving work on behalf of his people. The surprising element in Jesus' teaching on the kingdom is its ambiguous character. The kingdom can be explained in terms of the already-not yet. The kingdom was inaugurated in Jesus' ministry but not yet consummated. It had arrived, but the full salvation and judgment promised had not yet come to pass.

### Eternal Life and Eschatology

One of the primary themes in John's Gospel is life. Life in John is not an abstract entity but is rooted in John's Jewish worldview. Life belongs to the age to come, which is inaugurated by the resurrection. What is remarkable in reading John is his emphasis on the gift of life now. He does not focus on the future age, when the resurrection will occur. He fixes his gaze on what believers in Christ possess even now through faith in Jesus as the Christ. The gift of life in the present age is available only because Jesus is the resurrection and the life (11:25). The life of the age to come has dawned because Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the dead (John 20). In the resurrection of Jesus, the coming age has invaded the present age. Life has penetrated where only death reigned. Light has dawned where darkness shrouded all. Truth has arrived to conquer falsehood.

The triumph over death is achieved in Jesus' resurrection, and in John the resurrection of Jesus is rooted in history. John does not hang his teaching about life upon a gnostic hope of life in some ethereal sphere. He does not conceive of life as spiritual over against the material. Life is inaugurated in the space-time sphere by the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The emphasis on the present fulfillment of God's promises in John is rooted in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence, those who enjoy eternal life now eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood (6:53–54). Life in the age to come is available only through Jesus, who possesses life in himself (5:26) and is the way, the truth, and the life (14:6). Participation in life does not stem from abstract faith in God but rather comes by a faith that eats Jesus' flesh and drinks his blood. In other words, the life of the age to come becomes a reality as one trusts in the work of Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord.

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Jesus performed many miracles. Incidentally, Meier (1994: 874–1038) is more skeptical about the historical reliability of the nature miracles, except for the miraculous feedings.

In Jesus, life has been introduced into the world, and that life shines in the darkness (1:4–5). He is the light of life (8:12) and came so that people could have life (10:10). The life of the age to come is, therefore, radically Christ-centered. Eternal life comes by knowing Jesus Christ and by knowing the one true God (17:3). Human beings must come to Jesus in order to enjoy life (5:40). Indeed, the purpose of this Gospel is enunciated in the claim that one must believe in Jesus in order to obtain eternal life (20:30–31). We are not surprised to learn that John frequently emphasizes that those who believe enjoy life eternal (3:15–16, 36; 5:24; 6:47). The teaching of 1 John is similar.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is the life, and the life was manifested in history through the incarnation (1 John 1:1–2). The promise of eternal life is realized in him (2:25), and such life is secured by his death (3:16), in which he yielded up his life for others. Hence, all those who believe in the Son enjoy eternal life now because such life is bound up with Jesus and his self-revelation (5:11–13). As the epistle says in closing, Jesus himself “is the true God and eternal life” (5:20).

First John 2:8 demonstrates that the new age has arrived, for “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” The overlap between the present and future age is evident in this verse, for the darkness and light exist concurrently. The age to come has arrived by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ, but its arrival does not spell the immediate removal of evil and darkness. The Jews expected that when the coming age dawned, the evil age would be set aside immediately. The fulfillment of the OT promises is realized, however, in a surprising way. The light shines without instantaneously quenching the darkness. We would be mistaken, though, to conclude that light and darkness are now equivalent, as if the two balance each other with equal force. John emphasizes the defeat of evil (it is passing away) and the triumph of the light (it is shining). Ultimately the light that has dawned in Christ will shine triumphantly over all.

A similar theme is communicated powerfully in John 5:24–25. The final judgment is reserved for the future, and yet those who believe in the Son will never face such a judgment, for they have already entered into life. They face the day of reckoning with confidence because of their trust in the Son. Interestingly, 1 John 3:14 communicates the same truth: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.” The same verb (*metabainō*) is used in John 5:24, again conveying the truth that believers currently possess life. The great transaction has occurred so that the reign of death has ended, even though believers still await physical death. Nevertheless, they have now passed into life and abide in life, and hence the age to come is now a reality. As Jesus declares in 10:28,

2. With most scholars, I maintain that the author of the Gospel of John and 1–3 John is the same person.

“I give them eternal life.” Such life is not reserved for a future time but is the present gift of the Son of God to his sheep.

The age to come has arrived since believers are forgiven of their sins and know God (1 John 2:12–14), and therefore they are assured that they are his children (3:1–3). The world still exists and continues to allure believers. And yet believers now enjoy victory over the world by faith (5:4–5). The Synoptic Gospels emphasize the fulfillment of God’s promises by speaking of the kingdom of God, but in John the focus is not on God’s kingdom but on eternal life. Still, the two notions are remarkably similar. As Köstenberger (2004: 123) says, “That the expressions ‘kingdom of God’ and ‘eternal life’ are essentially equivalent is suggested by their parallel use in Matthew 19:16, 24 pars.” John particularly emphasizes that this life is available now for those who believe in Jesus; conversely, those who do not put their trust in Jesus stand under God’s judgment even now.

### Inaugurated Eschatology in Paul

The tension between inaugurated and consummated eschatology identified in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Johannine literature also informs the remainder of the NT. Indeed, the prominence of the already–not yet in Paul confirms that eschatological tension was a characteristic feature of NT theology.

Jewish thought distinguished between this age and the age to come. This age is marred by sin, disease, and death, whereas the age to come brings life, abundance, and joy (2 Esd. 2:36, 39; 4:27; 7:113; 9:18–19). The distinction between the two ages, as we have already observed, is found in the Gospels. Matthew contrasts “this age” with “the age to come” (12:32). Mark and Luke place eternal life in the age to come (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). Jesus contrasts the “sons of this age” who marry with those who “attain” the coming age, where marriage is no longer practiced (Luke 20:34–35). Those who belong to “this age” are consumed with wealth (Luke 16:8 NRSV), and hence Jesus speaks of the worries and concerns that animate people during this age (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19). Since there is an age to come, the present age is temporary and will come to an end (Matt. 13:39–40, 49; 24:3; 28:20).

The term “kingdom” and the phrase “kingdom of God” are not common in Paul, and yet the instances where they do occur indicate that the already–not yet theme, so characteristic of the teaching of Jesus, is present in these Pauline texts as well (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9–10; 15:24, 50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13; 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18). In most instances the “kingdom of God” refers to the future kingdom that awaits believers (see esp. 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:24; Eph. 5:5), but in Col. 1:13 believers are now transferred to God’s kingdom, and Rom. 14:17 suggests that the power

of the kingdom is now at work because believers enjoy the gift of the Spirit, and hence righteousness, joy, and peace are theirs.

Paul also believed in two ages: this present evil age and the coming age of righteousness. The clearest example is found in Eph. 1:21, where he specifically differentiates between “this age” and “the one to come,” claiming that Jesus rules over all during the present age and will continue his reign in the coming era.

Paul often contrasts the values and behavior of those living in this age with those of the coming one. Satan is described as the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), indicating that those under the dominion of the devil engage in false worship. Since Satan rules as the god of this age, it follows that unbelievers live in accord with the standards of this world (Eph. 2:2). The impact of the old world order displays itself in the domain of scholarship and the intellect. The rhetoricians and debaters of this age are celebrated (1 Cor. 1:20). Those endowed with rhetorical ability are deemed wise (1:20; 3:18–19). But Paul was unimpressed with the dazzling skills of orators because the rulers of this age, with all their so-called wisdom, crucified the glorious Lord (2:6, 8), demonstrating their failure to grasp true wisdom.

Paul taught that Christians live in between the times inasmuch as the present evil age lingers, even as the new age has invaded history. “The ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11 NRSV), signifying the fulfillment, at least in part, of God’s saving promises. The cross and resurrection of Christ are the turning point in history. Believers have been set “free from the present evil age” by virtue of the death of Christ (Gal. 1:4 NRSV). The form of this present world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:29–31), so that the activities of everyday life are relativized in light of the coming eschaton. Joy and sorrow, buying and selling, marriage and education—all must be viewed in light of the shortness of the time, the temporary character of human history (see Schreiner 2008: 755–801). Therefore, Paul did not criticize riches per se, but he did warn the rich in the present era not to pin their hopes on that which is fleeting (1 Tim. 6:17).

Christians live in, so to speak, the twilight zone, for they have experienced the saving power of the age to come, and yet they still reside in the present evil age. Even now Jesus reigns, but the consummation of his rule and the destruction of every enemy have not yet occurred (Eph. 1:21; 1 Cor. 15:26–28). Because of the cross of Christ, believers are a new creation (Gal. 1:4; 6:14–15; 2 Cor. 5:17), and yet the redemption that they enjoy (Rom. 3:24) is not yet completed, for they endure the anguish of death and await the redemption of the body (8:23; cf. Eph. 1:14). In the meantime, as believers inhabit the interval between inauguration and consummation, they must resist the blandishments of this world (Rom. 12:2). The world allures and captivates even those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, but those in whom the Spirit dwells must surmount fleshly desires and live in the realm of the Spirit (8:13).

The Spirit constitutes the “firstfruits” of God’s work (Rom. 8:23). Just as Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), guaranteeing the physical resurrection of believers, so the gift of the Spirit ensures that God will fulfill the remainder of his saving promises. The Spirit constitutes a pledge (*arrabōn*) that God will redeem the bodies of believers by raising them from the dead on the last day (Eph. 1:14; cf. Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22). All of this fits with the main point being argued here: the presence of the Spirit indicates that the new age has dawned, but believers have not yet obtained all that God has promised.

The inauguration of the new creation in the present age (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) points forward to the future, for Christians anticipate with confidence and joy the life of the age to come, when they will enjoy eternal life (e.g., Rom. 2:7; 5:21; 6:23; Gal. 6:8; Titus 1:2). As the messianic and Davidic king (Ps. 110:1), Jesus now rules over every enemy (Eph. 1:19–23; 1 Cor. 15:26–28). But the fullness of his power will be evident on the final day of judgment and salvation. Then believers will celebrate and commemorate forever the grace bestowed on them in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7).

### The Gift of the Spirit in Acts

The gift of the Spirit signals the arrival of the eschaton. According to the prophet Joel, God pledged to pour out his Spirit (Joel 2:28). Joel anticipated the day of the Lord, when Yahweh would reverse the fortunes of Israel by vindicating his people and punishing the nations that opposed Israel (Joel 3). Those who curse Israel would be cursed, and those who bless Israel would be blessed, in accordance with God’s promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Joel prophesied about the day when Jerusalem would become holy, and the land would burst with fruitfulness as wine and milk flow in abundance and a fountain springs up from the Lord’s house (Joel 3:17–18).

The signature of such promises is the dispensing of the Spirit; according to Acts, Peter proclaimed that the day of fulfillment had come (Acts 2:16–21). The Spirit was poured out by Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord (2:33), for at his exaltation he was crowned as Lord and Christ (2:36), and he granted the Spirit to his people. The enthronement of Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Christ fulfilled the Davidic covenant, indicating that he reigns as the Davidic king (cf. 2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17; Pss. 89; 132). As the messianic king, he confers the Spirit on his people, and the gift of the Spirit indicates that God’s promises are now being fulfilled. Luke, however, did not envisage the coming of the Spirit as the completion of all of God’s promises. History will reach its culmination and climax at the coming of Jesus Christ, when God will fulfill everything promised in the prophetic writings (Acts 3:20–21). Jesus now reigns, and the Spirit now indwells the hearts of believers, but in the in-

terim before Jesus comes again, he rules from heaven. The apostles' question to Jesus about when the kingdom would be restored to Israel (1:6) should not be dismissed as a mistaken departure into nationalistic ideology. Jesus' promise of the Spirit naturally precipitated the question, since in the OT the restoration of Israel was indissolubly joined with the promise that God would pour out his Spirit (cf. Isa. 32; 44:1–5; Ezek. 36–37). The disciples did not yet comprehend the already–not yet tension that informed Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus answered the question by implying that the restoration of Israel and the fulfillment of all of God's promises are not coterminous with the granting of the Spirit (Acts 1:7–8). An interval exists between the gift of the Spirit and the consummation.

## Hebrews

At first glance, it seems that Hebrews does not share the same eschatological viewpoint evident in the rest of the NT. The linear eschatology found elsewhere in the NT appears to be replaced by a vertical contrast between what is below and what is above. Indeed, Hebrews could be interpreted along Platonic lines, with the earthly representing the heavenly, so that the latter is the archetype of the former. The true tent was not the tabernacle erected by Moses (8:2), for the earthly tent points to and represents the very presence of God in heaven (9:24). The holy place and the inner sanctum of the temple (the holy of holies) are merely copies and anticipations of God's dwelling. The author of Hebrews drew upon Exod. 25:40, where Moses was instructed to make the tabernacle in accord with the pattern revealed to him on Mount Sinai. The earthly articles of the tabernacle (Heb. 9:1–5), it seems, mirror heavenly reality. Similarly, the sacrifices and gifts offered, along with the various regulations relating to foods and drinks and washings, relate only to the physical and symbolic sphere (9:8–10). They point to something greater and higher, for they cannot effect forgiveness of sins. The earthly sacrifices purify the copies of the heavenly things, but they fail to secure forgiveness in God's very presence (9:23–24). Only the sacrifice of Christ truly and definitively achieves full atonement for sin. Just as the tabernacle and the articles in it point to a vertical reality, so also the earthly priests from the tribe of Levi anticipate a superior priesthood, a Melchizedekian one. The priests “serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (8:5; cf. 10:1). Hence, the ritual duties of the priests symbolize access into God's presence (9:6–8). The holy of holies may be entered only once a year by priests, signifying the unavailability of regular and unhindered admission to God.

Even though Hebrews has superficial affinities with Platonic thought, the “vertical” language of the letter should be plotted into its eschatological worldview. The already–not yet tension found elsewhere in the NT permeates He-

brews as well. The focus on eschatology surfaces in the opening verses of the letter, where “these last days” have arrived with the coming of God’s Son (1:2) and the fulfillment of OT prophecy (1:5–14). Final and definitive forgiveness of sins has been accomplished by the work of Christ (1:3; 10:12); the power of the coming age has invaded this present era (6:5). Forgiveness of sins must be understood eschatologically, along the lines of promise and fulfillment. The author of Hebrews argues that forgiveness signals the fulfillment of the new covenant (8:6–13; 10:16–18; cf. Jer. 31:31–34). Inevitably, therefore, the old covenant has become obsolete and is no longer in force for Christians. The contrast between the old and new covenants certifies that the timeline of redemptive history is crucial for the author.

The eschatological cast of the author’s mind is apparent in Heb. 9:26 as well. Christ “appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” The “end of the ages” is another way of speaking of “these last days” (1:2). The forgiveness of sins “at the end of the ages” confirms the fulfillment of the new-covenant promises found in Jeremiah. The end of redemptive history has dawned by virtue of the work of Christ. The author fixes our attention on the work of Christ that is featured at the beginning of the letter, where after accomplishing cleansing for sins, Christ sat down at God’s right hand (1:3). The author’s thought cannot be restricted to vertical categories; it also operates horizontally, on a redemptive-historical timeline. Hebrews does not dismiss OT revelation as a mistake or substandard but conceives of history in terms of promise and fulfillment. The OT sacrifices point toward and anticipate the sacrifice of Christ. God ordained the Aaronic priesthood but never intended it to last forever. The Aaronic priesthood functions as a type of the Melchizedekian priesthood, which is superior because it is based on God’s oath (7:11–28). The old covenant prepares the way for and even prophesies the coming of the new.

We might conclude that Hebrews swallows up the not yet into the already because it emphasizes Jesus’ reign and final forgiveness of sins. Hebrews, however, maintains the same eschatological tension as is found in the rest of the NT witness. Jesus now reigns, but enemies still remain and have not yet been subjected under his feet (1:13; 10:12–13; cf. Ps. 110:1). Christ has dealt with sin definitively once for all, and yet the day of judgment has not yet commenced; believers await Jesus’ return, when he will complete the salvation already accomplished (Heb. 9:26–28). Psalm 8 reflects upon humanity’s role in the universe—the high honor of ruling the entire world for God. Hebrews 2 engages in a commentary on the psalm, acknowledging that the world is not ruled by human beings the way it should be (2:8). We know that the world has gone awry because of death (2:14–15), and death can be traced to the wickedness of human beings. Jesus, however, succeeded where Adam and the rest of humanity failed. As the sinless one, he lived as the perfect “Adam” (4:15; 7:26). Moreover, because of his suffering and death, he is exalted and now

“crowned with glory and honor” (2:9). The already–not yet tension infuses Heb. 2. Jesus reigns as the second Adam, but the work of his reign is incomplete. He has defeated death for believers, and yet believers are not exempted from physical death (2:14–15).

The believing recipients of Hebrews have been forgiven; they have been sanctified once and for all by the sacrifice of Christ (10:14), and yet the whole of Hebrews indicates an eschatological reserve. The readers are urgently warned not to forsake the salvation that they have embraced. They must not drift away from “such a great salvation” (2:1–4; 3:12–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–12:3; 12:25–29). Homiletical warnings permeate the letter, demonstrating that believers inhabit the period between the already and the not yet. Salvation is eschatological, and believers await its consummation, and hence they are called to believe, obey, and endure in the interval. The heavenly city and country have not yet arrived (11:10, 13–16). Believers in Christ do not find a lasting city on this earth (13:14). The tension between what has already been received and the final reception of salvation is reflected well in the teaching on entering God's rest. Hebrews 4:3 claims that those who believe in Christ have already entered God's rest. Furthermore, the use of the word “today” (4:7) emphasizes the present realization, at least in part, of the promise. And yet 3:12–4:11 emphasizes repeatedly that the promised rest still remains for God's people (4:1, 6). The rest is fundamentally eschatological since those who rest cease from their works as God ceased from his (4:10). When believers enter the heavenly city, they cease activity because the day of striving has come to an end.

### Soundings from the Rest of the New Testament

The already–not yet theme is not as pervasive in the rest of the NT (James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation). The purpose and occasional nature of the documents furnish an adequate explanation. The book of Revelation, being a prophetic-apocalyptic work, naturally focuses on the day of future judgment and salvation when God vindicates his people and condemns the wicked. During the present age the church suffers and dies for its witness to Jesus, and the beast and Babylon oppress the people of God. Still, believers should shun fear and embrace hope because the beast's hour of triumph will not endure. Satan's opportunity to persecute Christians is limited to three and one-half years (12:14)—that is, forty-two months (11:2; 13:5) or one thousand two hundred and sixty days (11:3; 12:6). Scholars dispute whether the interval of time should be construed literally or whether the number is symbolic. The latter seems more likely because the number “seven” symbolizes perfection and completeness, as in 1:4, where the seven spirits stand for the Holy Spirit. One-half of seven denotes a time in which evil dominates and rules over the world, the time when Satan has been cast from heaven to earth after

the victory accomplished by Christ at the cross (12:7–12). He persecutes the people of God during this interval (12:14); it thus seems that the evil period designated by half of seven years refers to the entire era between the cross of Christ and his return.

Since believers suffer in the interval between the cross and resurrection, Revelation looks forward to the consummation of God’s purposes, to the day when Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are consigned to the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10), when Babylon will be overthrown (17:1–19:5), when the blood of the saints will be avenged (6:9–11)—the day when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ (11:15–19). At the consummation God will introduce a new heaven and earth, and he will fulfill his covenant and dwell personally with his people (21:1–22:5).

The book of Revelation fixes our attention on the completion of God’s covenantal promises, but the “already” theme is not entirely absent. Christ has delivered believers “from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (1:5–6). The decisive battle for believers has been won. They conquer “by the blood of the Lamb” (12:11). Their robes are glistening white by virtue of Jesus’ blood as God’s Lamb (7:14). Jesus has expelled Satan from heaven (12:9) and has been exalted to the right hand of God and his throne (12:5) by virtue of his work on the cross. As God’s slain Lamb, he has opened the scroll with seven seals (5:1–14), so that the definitive and irrevocable work in salvation history has been done. In the interim period in which Satan attacks believers, they must endure suffering (3:10; 13:10; 14:12) and “conquer” (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 15:2; 21:7) to obtain the final reward. The already–not yet schema is present in Revelation. The cross of Christ is the fulcrum of history; he has redeemed believers from sin. Still, they must suffer and endure until Jesus returns and recompenses their enemies.

The letters of James and 1 Peter are addressed to believers undergoing trials and/or persecution. Again, we must recall the occasional and circumstantial character of both letters, since neither constitutes a treatise on Christian theology. Both authors intend to strengthen believers facing difficulties that could quench their faith. James regularly considers the day of judgment as the time when believers will be exalted and unbelievers will face judgment. The “poor” (AT), a term used virtually synonymously with “believer,” will be exalted at the judgment, whereas the “rich” will perish (James 1:9–11). The one who shows mercy to others and desists from partiality, particularly to the economically well-off, will obtain mercy on the last day (2:12–13). The wealthy who oppress their workers and deny them their wages in order to live sumptuously are storing up judgment against themselves on the day of reckoning (5:1–6). The righteous should exercise patience because the Lord will come soon, even if his delay seems inordinately long (5:7–8). Since ethical exhortation dominates the letter, the lack of emphasis on realized eschatology is unremarkable.

Still, two texts seem to point toward a realized eschatology. First, there is 1:18: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” Despite some good arguments supporting a reference to physical creation, it is probable that James speaks of the spiritual birth of his readers—their new life in Christ. Even though believers await the judgment of the final day, they are the firstfruits of God’s promised work in all his creation. Ultimately, he promises new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22), and the new life of believers testifies that they are the first installment of the blessing intended for all of creation. The second indication of realized eschatology is in James 2:5: even now God has chosen that the poor would be “rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.” In this present era they are God’s people and trust in him, and yet they await the eschatological gift of the kingdom.

In his First Letter, Peter addressed suffering believers, encouraging them to persevere in their troubles because of the promise of end-time salvation. Sufferings cause grief and represent God’s purifying judgment of his flock, but their sorrows are short-lived compared with the final inheritance that believers will receive when Jesus returns (1:4–7; 4:17; 5:10). Peter emphasized the future character of salvation in describing it as an inheritance that believers will receive in the future (1:4). Both husbands and wives share the same destiny as “co-heirs of the grace of life” (3:7 AT). Presently God fortifies believers so that they will obtain a salvation that will be revealed only when Jesus comes again (1:5, 7). In one sense, salvation is incomplete, for believers await “the outcome of” their “faith,” which is “the salvation of” their “souls” (1:9), and elders shepherding the flock anticipate receiving a glorious and permanent reward when Jesus appears (5:4). In speaking of loving life and seeing good days (3:10), Peter likely referred to life in the eschaton—the future reward awaiting the righteous. Supporting this interpretation is the judgment awaiting the wicked according to 3:12, for the Lord’s face will turn against them forever on the last day.

Peter did not confine himself to future eschatology, for God has caused believers to be born again by means of the word of the gospel (1 Pet. 1:3, 23). Their eschatological hope is grounded in the new life that they have already received (1:3). God has ransomed believers from their vain and futile life by means of Christ’s blood (1:18–19). The decisive and fundamental change has already occurred in their lives, so that the redemption that they possess anchors their future hope. The remarkable text about the OT prophets in 1:10–12 verifies that believers live on the fulfillment side of the promise. The prophets searched diligently, wondering when the prophecies about the Messiah would be fulfilled. They discovered that their ministry was not intended for their own times; they prophesied for the sake of the believers of Peter’s day. Clearly, the readers should appreciate that they live during the age of fulfillment, in the

era when God's promises are coming to pass. The last times have arrived, and their commencement is attested by the coming of Jesus the Christ (1:20).

The letters of 2 Peter and Jude respond to licentious false teachers in the churches. Both of them, therefore, emphasize the eschatological judgment of such opponents. The adversaries in 2 Peter may have collapsed the not yet entirely into the already, so that they deny the second coming of Christ (3:1–13). The transfiguration (1:16–18) functions as a proleptic anticipation of Christ's return, and his coming will commence the day of judgment, when scoffers will be destroyed. Neither Peter nor Jude said much about the already, doubtless because of the circumstances encountered in their churches in responding to teachers who deny a future judgment. Still, Jude reminds believers that they are beloved by God and kept by Jesus Christ (1). Peter taught that believers even now share in the divine nature and have escaped the world's corruption (2 Pet. 1:3–4; 2:20). Both authors proclaim that God keeps those who are his, and that he will guard them from the onslaughts of the false teachers until the last day (2 Pet. 2:9; Jude 24–25).

## Conclusion

The tension between the already and the not yet permeates the NT. The authors address the theme in a variety of ways, and hence there is not a set terminology. In some instances we have a contrast between this age and the coming one. Other texts speak of a new creation, of the coming of the kingdom, or of eternal life. The word "salvation" is used to denote both the present fulfillment of God's promises and the final fulfillment. Some pieces of literature (e.g., Revelation) focus on final fulfillment, whereas others (e.g., Ephesians and Colossians) put the emphasis on realized eschatology. The variation is likely accounted for by the purpose of the author and the situation of the readers. Still, in every case we find that God has begun to fulfill his saving promises in Jesus Christ, and yet believers still await the completion of what God has promised. The promises made to Abraham have been fulfilled in a decisive way through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the end of history has not arrived. To use an illustration from the theater, the opening curtain has risen on the play announced so long ago by the OT, but the final curtain has yet to come down on the last act.

## Pastoral Reflection

Does the already–not yet emphasis of the NT make any difference in Christian life and ministry? First, we must beware of political utopian schemes. Marxism is a Christian heresy that promises heaven on earth by guaranteeing that the not yet will become a reality now. We must never become satisfied with

this world, and yet we must not think that we can ever make it like heaven either. Second, believers *say* that churches are imperfect, but they often live as if they expect them to be perfect, and hence in the Western world they often migrate from church to church, looking for the perfect fit instead of learning to love the brothers and sisters and pastors God has given them. Third, many marriages fall apart because we expect our marriages to satisfy all our needs. Practically, we forget about the not yet, and we expect more of our marriages than they can deliver. Too often the perfect becomes the enemy of the good. Fourth, we can fall into a fundamentalism as Christians where we demand perfection from our children, while forgetting about the log in our own eyes. I have seen too many children rebel against the Christian faith because their parents placed unrealistic demands upon them. Fifth, an overemphasis on the already can lead to perfectionism in our view of the Christian life, and hence we can become overly discouraged about how far we fall short.

Finally, each of the examples above can be reversed. We can so overemphasize the not-yet that we compromise with this sinful world. Or we become comfortable in our churches and lose a passion to see Christ glorified in them. So too, we may become too lax with our children and fail to discipline them wisely. In the same way, we may rationalize sin in our lives. Clearly, the already-but-not-yet theme has many practical ramifications.