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The Missing Messianic Kingdom

Review

When we accept Christ, we become restored men and women of God in fellowship with our Creator. But we also become children of God the Father destined for eternal life on the new earth. In heaven, we will no longer be male or female, and we will no longer experience marriage and reproduction. When studying the Bible, I discovered that God's plan of redemption is based on these two creations and their corresponding kingdoms of the triune God:

- **The Adamic order of being** corresponds to the Son's 1,000-year restoration of the human experience on the restored Genesis earth.
- **The new creation as sons of God** corresponds to the Father's new heavens and new earth as the eternal home for the glorified sons of God.

Theologians have done a poor job of differentiating between the two orders of being and the two kingdoms of the triune God when formulating their theology of the future. This may explain why a consensus has never been reached on God's endgame.

Sharing the Gospel

When we share the gospel, I believe we should include a presentation of the Son's messianic kingdom as well as the promise of eternal life in the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven. Whenever I get a chance to share the gospel with a non-Christian friend, I always like to start with Genesis, which is the foundation to any biblical house of ideas. It not only reveals the origin of human life, but it also reveals the origin of sin and death, which is something we all need to understand.

Some theologians mate Darwinian evolution with the Genesis account of creation. But this creates a corrupted form of creation and Christianity. Darwin has humans surviving in a hostile environment with limited resources in a life-and-death struggle for the survival of their species. In stark contrast, in the garden of Eden, God has mankind thriving without death in a peaceful paradise with an abundance of food for all creatures. Darwin views death as the essential means of eliminating weaker organisms and advancing the evolution of man, while God says he imposed death on mankind as a result of the fall. The two versions of creation are polar opposites and cannot be blended. The hybrid views of creation are not only unbiblical, they are also irrational.

Although Genesis was written in the ancient world before modern science, that makes it no less historically accurate. Once the earth is created, Genesis reads like a history book, chronologically recording historical events beginning with Adam and Eve, then progressing to Cain and Abel, Seth and Enoch, Abraham and Sarah and ending with the life and death of Joseph. The last verse of the book states, "So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt" (Gen. 50:26). The way in which Adam and Eve lived and died is treated in the same manner as the way in which Joseph lived and died. They are not treated as mythical figures.

Moreover, the garden of Eden is not presented as a fantasyland, like C. S. Lewis's Narnia. Rather, it is presented as an actual historical place, just like Egypt is presented as a real place. The garden of Eden has identifiable rivers that the ancient world would have been familiar with: "A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. . . . And the fourth river is the Euphrates" (Gen. 2:10–14). This is similar to the description of the land when Abraham and Lot were parting ways:

And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere *like the garden of the LORD*, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (Gen. 13:10)

The land of Egypt was real, the Jordan Valley was real, and so was the garden of Eden. Some theologians seem embarrassed by the depiction of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. But the book of Genesis does not give us the option of treating Abraham and Lot as real people living in a real place and treating Adam and Eve as fictional characters living in a fantasyland.

I begin my presentation of the gospel with Adam and Eve living in fellowship with their Creator in the garden of Eden. As God ruled over them, they were to rule over and manage his wonderful creation. As they multiplied and developed the untamed regions of the earth, the garden of Eden would have spread to the whole world as an earthly paradise. The world would be God's wonderful kingdom on earth.

Paradise Lost

I then describe Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve to get them to reject God's dominion over them and set up their own autonomous kingdom. They succumbed to this temptation, which led to their subsequent insubordination, insurrection, and rebellion against God's rule over them. And they became isolated from their loving Creator.

This rebellion infuriated God and brought about his wrath and curse on mankind and the earth itself. Adam, Eve, and all their descendants would now experience a good bit of misery on a degenerate earth until their bodies died and decayed in the dirt. God also allowed Satan to enter our world and he became the false god of the world, usurping God as the true Lord of this creation. With this regime change, the world became Satan's dominion, and it has never been the same.

I then explain to my friend that Christians believe there are four fundamental problems with this world because of the fall:

Sinful humanity: Because we are all sinners, we all experience the loss of spiritual life that comes from the fact that we are disconnected from our Creator, who is Life. And our sinful nature affects all aspects of human behavior, civilization, and every occupation on this earth. There are wedding photographers, and there are photographers of

pornography. There are doctors who help us give birth to children, and doctors who use their skills to abort children.

Unrighteous rulers: As sinful humans rise to positions of authority in government, unrighteous men and women rule the world. Some rulers are much worse than others, but they all have shortcomings. I then invite my friend to identify some of the worst characters in power in the world today, such as those leading countries like North Korea or Somalia.

A satanic world: Satan continues to be the false god of this fallen world, and his demons have a significant influence on the affairs of sinful mankind. Surprisingly, my non-Christian friend finds this reference to the presence of demons in this world credible. It helps explain some of the extreme inhumanity throughout history.

A cursed creation: The Genesis earth remains under God's curse, which is why there are so many natural disasters and humans experience so much hardship, sickness, and death.

My non-Christian friend can easily recognize that it is not paradise on the earth today. Yet, we all realize that, given the right circumstances, life on this earth can be deeply fulfilling. But people know that life on this cursed earth can be very fragile and circumstances can and will change over time. As we grow old, our bodies deteriorate. And the disparity between those who are blessed with good health, a great family, and prosperity and those who do not experience the good life is remarkable. But we will all experience death, which ends whatever joy and prosperity we may have obtained.

A lot of us are fortunate to experience times of great joy and beauty in our lives. But I believe we all subconsciously miss the garden of Eden. And if we take the time to assess our lives in this fallen world, we will realize that many of our human aspirations for a fulfilling life will go unfulfilled on this earth no matter how prosperous and fortunate we think we are. At any given time, circumstances in life can change dramatically.

My friend and I then identify many of the things that can go wrong in this world. Sudden earthquakes can cause massive destruction and generate gigantic tidal waves. Hurricanes like Katrina, Harvey, and Irma devastated the Gulf Coast and Caribbean islands. There are active volcanos around the world and hard-to-control forest fires. There are severe droughts in many parts of the world, as well as all kinds of diseases, some leading to horrible epidemics.

But natural disasters are not the only cause of our misery. There are numerous manmade disasters. Horrific terrorist attacks are occurring throughout the world, often where peaceful and festive crowds are gathered. Industrial pollution remains a problem when government leaders are not held accountable to their people. Many people are living in entrenched poverty, with more than 900 million people going to bed hungry and malnourished every night.

Yet, some people believe they can achieve an idyllic life. But we are only one heartbeat away from the end of life on this earth. And then there is the second death on Judgment Day, which I tell my friend he needs to avoid at all costs.

Deep down we wish the world was like the garden of Eden when it was God's kingdom on a good earth and mankind did not experience such misery and death.

The Promised Messiah

But I explain to my friend that because God so loved mankind, he initiated a plan of redemption immediately after the fall when he promised a redeemer who would one day crush Satan and restore humanity to its original glory. His plan continued to be revealed when he used Abraham as his means to bring the Jewish nation of Israel into existence and bring hope to all nations. And from the Jewish King David would come a son who would be the Messiah, who would restore the world to its Edenic paradise and create an age of righteous humanity once again. He surely did not use the Egyptian pharaohs or the pagan Babylonians to bring salvation to all humanity. The Jewish prophet Isaiah foretold of the coming Messiah and his messianic kingdom:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the *government* shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of *Peace*. 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. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isa. 9:6–7)

According to the Jewish prophets, the Messiah will usher in God's kingdom once again as it was in the beginning, and Israel and the whole world will be characterized by peace, justice, righteousness, and abundant prosperity. The Messiah will establish a paradise on a restored earth during an age of righteous humanity.

When the Messiah came into this world, however, the Jews rejected him and had him crucified by the Romans. But he was resurrected, and instead of overthrowing the tyrannical Roman Empire and establishing his messianic kingdom on this earth as his disciples expected, he left this world and ascended into heaven. As my son likes to say, he split and left us in this rotten world!

As a result, the world remains characterized by strife and war instead of peace, unrighteousness instead of righteousness, injustice instead of justice, and systemic poverty instead of abundant prosperity. We continue to experience an age of unrighteous humanity on a cursed earth. And the world remains full of demons and the cosmic forces of evil.

The Son of God Incarnate

I further explain to my friend that Jesus Christ, as the human Jewish Messiah, was also the Son of God incarnate who created this Genesis creation. I then describe some of the many miracles Jesus performed to demonstrate his deity and his compassion for those suffering in this fallen world. He created food for thousands. He controlled nature at will and calmed a nasty storm on the Sea of Galilee with a simple command. He restored to health people who were diseased, blind, deaf, or paralyzed. He easily raised people from the dead. And he cast out legions of demons with merely a command.

My friend may then ask, so if Jesus of Nazareth is the Jewish Messiah, then why hasn't he established his messianic kingdom of peace, justice, and prosperity on this earth? And if he is God incarnate who created the heavens and the earth as you claim, then why hasn't he used his divine power to restore this Genesis earth to its Edenic paradise? Why aren't we experiencing an abundant life today?

I explain to my friend that this is one reason why many of the first-century Jews rejected Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. He refused to overthrow the tyrannical Roman rulers, liberate Israel, and set up his

messianic kingdom, returning Israel to power and prosperity. He also claimed to be God, which they found highly offensive.

But his disciples, after listening to his extraordinary teachings and witnessing his amazing miracles, became convinced that he was indeed the Messiah and eventually understood that he was God incarnate. Yet they, too, were initially befuddled by his refusal to set up his kingdom in their lifetimes and were shocked by his eventual crucifixion and ascension to heaven. The disciples soon learned that his crucifixion and resurrection were critical to our redemption from our sinful nature and the restoration of true spiritual life with God.

As the prophets foretold, the sinless Christ had to first be sacrificed for our sins in order to reconcile us to a holy God and bring us back into his righteous kingdom. Through the cross, God devised a way to justify the ungodly so that we could be reconciled to our Creator and become members of his righteous kingdom again. If we are to spend eternity with a holy God in his paradise in heaven, then we first have to be made holy and righteous, as Christ was holy and righteous. Christ's death and resurrection give us that opportunity. We all need to repent of our sins, accept Christ and his sacrifice for our sins, be raised from spiritual death, and reconnect with our Creator, who is Life. The disciples eventually understood the necessity of Christ's crucifixion. But they still expected Christ to set up his messianic kingdom after his resurrection.

We live in a secular society that knows very little about the Bible. But the disciples lived in a deeply religious nation with priests, rabbis, Pharisees, and teachers of the law. The Jewish disciples grew up attending synagogues, where they were exposed to the prophecies of the coming Messiah and his messianic kingdom. And even though many of them were simple fishermen, they knew their Jewish Scriptures. Read what Philip said about Christ when he first met him:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." . . . Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:43–45)

Philip and the disciples expected the Messiah to be a descendant of David, who would overthrow the tyrannical Roman authorities and become the king and ruler of Israel, restoring them to an abundant “promised land.” And based on the following prophecy from Jeremiah, they expected Christ to set up his messianic kingdom in their lifetimes:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: . . . “For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, . . . I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, . . . I will break his yoke from off your neck, . . . and foreigners shall no more make a servant of him. . . . I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David [the Messiah], and ***he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*** In those days Judah will be saved, and ***Jerusalem will dwell securely.***” (Jer. 30:1, 3, 8–9; 33:14–16)

Jeremiah is not just speaking of the Messiah providing for the spiritual salvation of Israel. He is also describing the messianic kingdom, with real consequences on this earth. The Messiah will bring them back to the land promised to Abraham. He will liberate Israel from foreign occupation. He will establish justice and righteousness in the land. He will create peace in Jerusalem; they will “dwell securely,” without fear of invasion by hostile enemies. The Messiah, by definition, will establish a messianic kingdom on this earth. The disciples’ excitement and anticipation for his coming reign must have been quite intense. But the coming of the messianic kingdom did not go exactly as they thought it would.

John the Baptist’s Confusion

One of the saddest events in the New Testament occurred when John the Baptist became so confused because of his imprisonment by King Herod that he began to have doubts that Jesus was the Christ. John baptized Christ and had the extraordinary experience of hearing God the Father’s voice from heaven. Jesus even claimed to be a fulfillment of the prophecies found in Isaiah. At the beginning of his public

ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus read from the book of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me *to proclaim liberty to the captives* and recovery of sight to the blind, *to set at liberty those who are oppressed*, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18–19)

Israel had been conquered by the pagan Romans, and the Jews were oppressed by their tyrannical rule. The Roman overlords appointed rulers such as Herod to impose their unjust regime over Israel, levying heavy taxes on the Jews to enrich themselves. But the Lord's favor had arrived with the coming of the Messiah, who had the power of the Holy Spirit to heal the blind, free prisoners, and liberate the oppressed!

Yet, while Christ was preaching the good news and demonstrating remarkable supernatural power through incredible miracles, John the Baptist remained imprisoned by a political tyrant ruling with only earthly powers. He must have been profoundly sad and disillusioned while he sat in prison thinking about these Scriptures. Where was the "liberty to the captives" that went along with this miraculous power? Where was the messianic kingdom predicted by the prophets? Perplexed and despondent, John the Baptist eventually sent his disciples to inquire of Jesus:

"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." (Matt. 11:3–5)

I am sure Jesus' answer was reassuring. But if he was the Messiah, then why didn't he exercise his authority and liberate John from prison? Instead, during Herod's birthday party, John was killed and his head presented to Herod's illegitimate wife on a platter. It was this kind of tyranny and gruesome evil that the Messiah was supposed to put an end to. All these prophecies seemed fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth—except the part where he would bring forth justice to the

nations, starting with “liberty to the captives.” Both Rome’s rule and King Herod’s treatment of John were surely unjust. So where was the prophesied reign of justice?

The Disciples Were Also Confused

John the Baptist was not the only one confused by the missing messianic kingdom. The disciples were so convinced that Jesus was going to break the bonds of the Roman yoke, liberate Israel, and establish the messianic kingdom described by the prophets, that they made fools of themselves by jockeying for power in what they thought was the imminent reign of Christ. During the Last Supper, before his crucifixion, they even argued over who would have the most prestigious position in his impending reign: “A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest” (Luke 22:24). But perhaps the most embarrassing episode illustrating their misunderstanding of the timing of Jesus’ messianic reign is when the mother of James and John (known as the sons of Zebedee) asked Christ to appoint her two sons to leading positions of authority in his upcoming kingdom:

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” (Matt. 20:20–23)

The mother of James and John was looking forward to her sons ruling with Christ in his messianic kingdom—with all the implied power, prestige, and wealth that comes with positions of authority in a worldly empire. Ironically, little did she know that for her sons to be on his right and left sides in the circumstances at that time, would have placed them on the two crosses flanking Christ’s cross in the impending crucifixion!

When these two disciples embarrassed themselves by sending their mother to secure high positions of authority in his anticipated reign, Christ gently rebuked them for their self-serving lust for power. But at the same time, he amazingly affirmed the legitimacy of the positions they were requesting. There will indeed be positions of authority and leadership when he establishes his kingdom and rules the world. But those positions will be decided by the Father: “To sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father” (Matt. 20:23).

In effect, rather than telling the mother and her sons that the request itself was wrong, Christ answered by saying that even though their motives were wrong and their timing was off, they were simply asking the wrong person for positions of authority in his messianic kingdom. God the Father makes those decisions.

Christ also promised the disciples that they would assist him in ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel when he does eventually rule the world. In fact, they will experience a real paradise on this earth as a reward for sacrificially following him:

Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world [the restored Edenic earth], when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne [and rule the world], you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel [assisting Christ in governing Israel]. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold [reward when the earth is renewed] and [in addition] will inherit eternal life [in the Father’s heavenly kingdom in the age to come].” (Matt. 19:28–29)

When Christ, as the Son of God, rules over his restored creation, the disciples will then inherit a hundredfold reward and an abundant life on the restored Edenic earth. And they will have prominent positions of authority over Israel—before they inherit eternal life in the age to come.

After Jesus was resurrected, the disciples were still confused about when Christ was going to establish his kingdom and they would assist him in ruling over Israel. Maybe they had missed the part about the

Messiah being crucified for their sins, even though Isaiah had predicted as much. But with his resurrection, he was invincible to the Romans! So why not establish his glorious messianic kingdom now?

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” (Acts 1:6–7)

Notice that Jesus does not rebuke them for asking the question or for being slow to understand. He knew exactly what Philip and the disciples were asking him. He affirmed there would be a restoration of Israel, but it was not for them to know the time, for the Father has set the time when it will occur; just as the Father will determine who will have positions of authority in his kingdom. It is not a question of *whether* the restoration occurs when the Son of Man rules the world, but *when*.

In the meantime, Christ instructed them to be evangelists, preaching throughout the world that he was indeed the Messiah:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (Acts 1:8–9)

The Messiah’s sudden departure and ascension to heaven must have left the disciples utterly bewildered. The Messiah, born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, was supposed to liberate Israel, restore the nation to glory, and even rule the world—and now he is gone! He was supposed to establish God’s kingdom on this earth such that it would be characterized by peace, justice, righteousness, and prosperity. Instead, he left his followers in this fallen, demonic world. Indeed, as the apostles evangelized the world, it would take the Holy Spirit to convince people that Jesus was the Messiah, given his missing messianic kingdom.

Christ sent the Holy Spirit to comfort his people, but the world remains Satan’s dominion of darkness, with evil prevalent throughout

the affairs of man. It is definitely not paradise on earth, and the world remains heavily influenced by demons. As the apostle John teaches: “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19 NIV). If Christ was currently sitting on his throne governing the world, then it would be under the control of the Holy One, and it would be paradise on earth.

Revelation

Finally, we consider the difficult book of Revelation written by the apostle John, who continued to experience Roman oppression as he was exiled on the island of Patmos for preaching the gospel. John not only affirms that one day Christ will rule the world when Satan is removed, but also that his reign will last for a thousand years. John teaches that the saints will inherit the Son’s earthly kingdom, as promised by Christ:

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and *they shall reign on the earth.*” (Rev. 5:9–10)

Notice John teaches that the ransomed people of God will inherit a messianic kingdom that will be “on the earth.” In line with the prophets, John is distinctly referencing God’s people from all nations inheriting a kingdom that is on the restored earth—before they inherit the eternal new heavens and new earth after this earth perishes.

But Philip, Peter, and the majority of the ransomed people of God have already died, so how on earth will they inherit Christ’s millennial kingdom? John reveals that the solution to this dilemma is that there will be a resurrection of the departed saints at the beginning of the millennium. John specifically identifies those martyred during the Great Tribulation as experiencing this first resurrection. But one can easily conclude that all the departed ransomed people of God, including the disciples, will experience this resurrection so that they can “reign on the earth” during Christ’s millennial kingdom. John revealed:

They [the ransomed people of God from all nations] came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years [on the earth]. . . . This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years [on the restored earth]. (Rev. 20:4–6)

This first resurrection will enable the departed saints to inherit Christ's 1,000-year messianic kingdom, which is described by the prophets as an Adamic paradise, with men and women getting married and continuing to fill an Edenic earth with their offspring. This would fulfill Christ's promise to the disciples that they would inherit the restored Edenic earth as a hundredfold reward in this Genesis age *before* they inherit eternal life in the age to come.

After the saints have experienced this Edenic paradise for a thousand years, John teaches that the Genesis creation perishes. This is the end of this creation, or the Omega, when Christ sits on his Great White Throne to judge all mankind. The sons of God will then experience the final resurrection of their immortal bodies so that they can inherit eternal life in the Father's kingdom, or the eternal new heavens and new earth. At the same time, unbelievers will inherit the lake of fire. John revealed that Christ taught:

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done [on Judgment Day]. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning [of this Genesis creation] and the end [of this Genesis creation]. (Rev. 22:12–13)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, . . . And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new [Christ creates the new earth as the eternal habitat for the sons of God]." (Rev. 21:1–5)

When we believe in Christ, we become restored men or women of God *and* children of God. John reveals that as men and women of God, we are destined to experience the first resurrection so that we can inherit the Son's restored Edenic earth. He also taught that as children

of God, we are destined to experience the final resurrection, so we can inherit the Father's eternal new earth.

Today's Confusion over Christ's Second Coming

But at this point in my presentation of the gospel to my non-Christian friend, I must admit that evangelical theologians today do not agree on God's plan of redemption. Evangelical theologians agree that the followers of Christ will inherit eternal life in heaven and will not experience the wrath of God on Judgment Day, but, unfortunately, they remain deeply divided as to whether there is a restoration of this Genesis creation to its Edenic condition for a thousand years before the eternal kingdom.

The current views on God's endgame can be extremely complicated and confusing because theologians have done a poor job of answering the following questions:

When does Christ return?

- Does he return to this earth at the beginning of the millennium to establish his messianic kingdom on this earth, as claimed by premillennialists?
- Or does he return on the last day to destroy this earth and take the immortal sons of God to heaven for eternity, as claimed by amillennialists and postmillennialists?

Where is Christ if, and when, he rules the world?

- Does he physically return to this earth to rule the world, as claimed by premillennialists?
- Or does he rule the Christianized world from his throne in heaven, as claimed by postmillennialists?

What is the nature of the first resurrection?

- Is it of the spirits of believers upon conversion and/or of their spirits to the celestial realm of heaven upon mortal death, as claimed by amillennialists and postmillennialists?
- Or is it of the raptured, immortal bodies of the sons of God, as claimed by premillennialists?
- Or is it of the natural, mortal bodies of the men and women of God, as claimed by the early millennialists?

When does the rapture of the saints occur?

- Does the rapture of the immortal sons of God occur *at the first resurrection* so that the glorified saints can inherit the restored earth, as claimed by premillennialists?
- Or does the rapture occur *at the final resurrection* so that the sons of God can inherit the eternal new earth, as claimed by amillennialists and postmillennialists?

Evangelical theologians have not been able to provide a coherent answer to these basic questions, which is a great disservice to people like my non-Christian friend. He is drawn to spending eternity as a child of God with a loving Father in heaven. But because he and his wife have not been able to have children, he is also drawn to living in a human paradise on this earth where all his aspirations for an abundant life as a husband, father, and grandfather would be fulfilled.

The disciples were befuddled by the fact that Christ did not establish his earthly kingdom during his first coming. And they may have embarrassed themselves by jockeying for power in what they thought was his imminent reign. But today, biblical scholars and theologians remain equally befuddled about what transpires at Christ's second coming. And they should be thoroughly embarrassed by their failure to provide simple, logical answers to these basic questions.

Many of these scholars and theologians have spent decades studying and teaching the Bible at prestigious seminaries. And many have written numerous articles and scholarly books on the subject. Yet, none can provide a rational and coherent understanding of God's plan of redemption to those who want to know more about God's plans for the future. Are we just going to heaven? Or do we first inherit a restored paradise on this earth for a thousand years? How can we have faith in God and share our faith with others if we do not know what to hope for?

During the Reformation, many of the Catholic Church's flawed doctrines on salvation were corrected by theologians who reexamined God's Word. But that was more than five hundred years ago, and since that time, little progress has been made in correcting the church's confusing doctrines of eschatology. The time has come for theologians to go back to the Scriptures and correct their flawed doctrines on God's

endgame. When these theologians are right, they are right. But when their teachings plainly contradict the Scriptures, they are wrong.

Premillennialists claim that because Christ did not establish his messianic kingdom the first time he came to this earth, he must return to this earth once again at the beginning of the millennium to finally establish his earthly kingdom. He is the Messiah, after all. But as amillennialists point out, this is highly problematic, for Christ and the apostles teach that when Christ comes again, he destroys this earth, and the raptured sons of God are destined for the Father's imperishable kingdom of heaven—not the Son's restored Genesis earth. Numerous verses support this assertion.

But if premillennialism is biblically flawed, then so is amillennialism. Amillennialists claim that there is no messianic kingdom on this earth as described by the prophets. This present evil age continues right up until the last day, and there is never an age of righteous humanity on this earth. Our human aspirations for an abundant life on this earth as male and female human beings are never fulfilled. The saints only inherit the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven when Christ returns to rapture the immortal sons of God.

But Christ himself *confirmed* to his disciples on several occasions that there would indeed be a future restoration of Israel, as described by the prophets. He even promised the disciples that they would assist him in ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel. He also promised them that their human aspirations for an abundant life on this earth will be fulfilled a hundredfold when the earth is restored to its Edenic condition. Amillennialists have a Messiah without his *promised* messianic kingdom.

Postmillennialists, like amillennialists, also teach that Christ's second coming occurs on the last day. But they believe we can usher in a golden age of Christianity on this earth if we are faithful in evangelizing the nations. Yet, they admit that the curse on the earth is never removed, and Satan remains operational in this world until the last day. So even if we do disciple all nations, it still will not be paradise on this earth.

All the current versions of God's endgame have some merit. But they all have major flaws because they contradict some important Scriptures. This may explain why a consensus has never been reached on the subject and the debate rages on.

Postrestorationism

I will present an alternative version of God's plan of redemption that can hopefully resolve the confusion about Christ's missing messianic kingdom. This approach affirms the assertion by amillennialists and postmillennialists that Christ's second coming is on the last day. It also affirms the assertion by premillennialists that there must be a literal 1,000-year restoration of this Genesis creation to its Edenic condition before the saints inherit the eternal new heavens and new earth. And it affirms the assertion by postmillennialists that Christ, as the Son of God, can rule the world from his throne in heaven without having to return to this earth.

The solution is elegantly simple, and I am surprised that modern theologians have never considered it. It is a view that the early church millennialists held for more than four hundred years, with a few important corrections and modifications. Like modern premillennialists, the early millennialists believed that Christ will return at the beginning of the millennium to establish his messianic kingdom. But unlike modern premillennialists, they believed that the *first resurrection will be of the natural bodies* of the departed saints, not of the raptured bodies. The resurrected saints will experience marriage and procreation as they fill an Edenic earth, as described by the prophets. That is because the ransomed people of God are destined to inherit the restored natural earth for a thousand years—a natural body for a restored natural earth.

They compare the first resurrection to the resurrection of the natural body of Lazarus by Jesus. Lazarus was regenerated into a natural body, and he could have gotten married and had children, for all we know. His second experience of life on this earth, however, was probably not any more pleasant than his first, for he came back to life on a cursed earth that was still under Satan's dominion. But when Lazarus and all the saints come back to life during the millennium, it will be paradise on earth because Satan will be removed, Christ will be ruling the world, the earth will be restored to its Edenic condition, and righteous men and women will be ruling the nations on Christ's behalf.

Furthermore, the early millennialists believed the *final resurrection* on the last day is when the saints are raptured into their eternal bodies not given in marriage. That is because the immortal sons of God are destined to inherit the eternal new heavens and new earth. To inherit

eternal life in the Father's eternal kingdom, one needs an eternal body like Christ's resurrected body. According to the early millennialists, the rapture is not pre-trib, mid-trib, or even post-trib. Rather, they taught that it is post-millennial, or *after* the millennium *at the final resurrection on the last day*.

In their writings, they make a good biblical case for this understanding of the two resurrections. They also claim that these teachings on the nature of the two resurrections come directly from Jesus and John. Yet, no current view on God's endgame has even considered this understanding of the nature of the two resurrections. In fact, you will not find a single reference in any modern commentary on Revelation to the possibility that the first resurrection could be of the natural body. This is a glaring omission by biblical scholars, given that it was a view held by these early church millennialists for more than four hundred years. Moreover, it was a logical interpretation by these early church fathers, given how easily Christ resurrected Lazarus with a simple shout at his tomb. John seems to be describing a similar shout by Christ from heaven that is heard around the world that enables all the departed saints to come to life in their natural bodies to inherit his millennium kingdom. Chapters 21–24 are devoted to the very important teachings of the early church millennialists.

I agree with the early church millennialists' interpretation of these two resurrections because it is historical, logical, and conforms to the Scriptures. But I believe the Scriptures teach that instead of Christ returning to this earth to establish his millennial kingdom, Christ rules the world during the millennium from his throne in heaven at the right hand of the Father. As the Creator of this world, the Son of God does not need to return to this earth to rule over his own creation.

The ascended Son of God already has the authority and power to rule over his creation from his throne in heaven. But he is waiting on the Father to determine when his millennial reign will begin. During the millennium, he simply uses this divine authority and power to reclaim his creation and rule the world from his throne in heaven.

Summary

This version of God's endgame is called postrestorationism and can be summarized as follows:

- When Satan is removed from this world, Christ, as the Son of God, rules over his restored Edenic earth during the millennium from his throne in heaven.
- The first resurrection at the beginning of the millennium will be of the Adamic bodies of the departed saints in order for the ransomed people of God to inherit the Son's kingdom—natural bodies for a restored natural earth.
- Christ returns *after* (post-) the 1,000-year restoration of this Genesis creation on the last day to rapture the saints and usher in the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven.
- The final resurrection will be of the immortal bodies of the sons of God so that they can inherit the Father's imperishable kingdom of heaven—eternal bodies for the eternal new earth.

This is a simple solution to understanding God's plan of redemption. It is a well-designed and well-constructed house of biblical ideas, for it has all the major biblical components of the house, and they are all properly arranged. The fact that it is similar to the eschatology of the early church millennialists, who had access to the oral teachings of the apostles, also gives it credibility. Most important, it conforms to all the relevant biblical data, as this book will demonstrate.