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A Case for Postrestorationism

Review

In chapter 5, I developed a chart of God's endgame outlining the major events of the Bible—past, present, and future. Unfortunately, theologians do not agree on how to interpret and understand this biblical data. Premillennialists place Christ's second coming at the beginning of the millennium. They believe Christ returns to this earth, ushering in the first phase of the eternal age to come. The first resurrection will be of the raptured saints to reinhabit the regenerated earth. But as demonstrated in the critique of this view in chapter 6, the Scriptures plainly teach that Christ's second coming to rapture the saints occurs at the final resurrection on Judgment Day, when the glorified sons of God inherit the Father's eternal paradise in heaven—not the Son's restored earth.

Amillennialists assert that there is no millennial reign of Christ on this earth before the eternal age and that the millennium only exists in the celestial realm. They believe the Son of God's earthly paradise was lost at the fall and is never restored. We will remain on a demonic and degenerate earth until the end of this evil age on the last day. There is never an age of righteous humanity. The second coming occurs on Judgment Day and ushers in eternal paradise on the new earth for believers and eternal punishment in the lake of fire for unbelievers.

But the Son has a divine right to remove Satan and rule this world that was created through him and for him. Amillennialists also ignore the unconditional covenant between the Father and the Son in which the Father promised his Son that one day he would remove all his enemies and restore this Genesis creation to him.

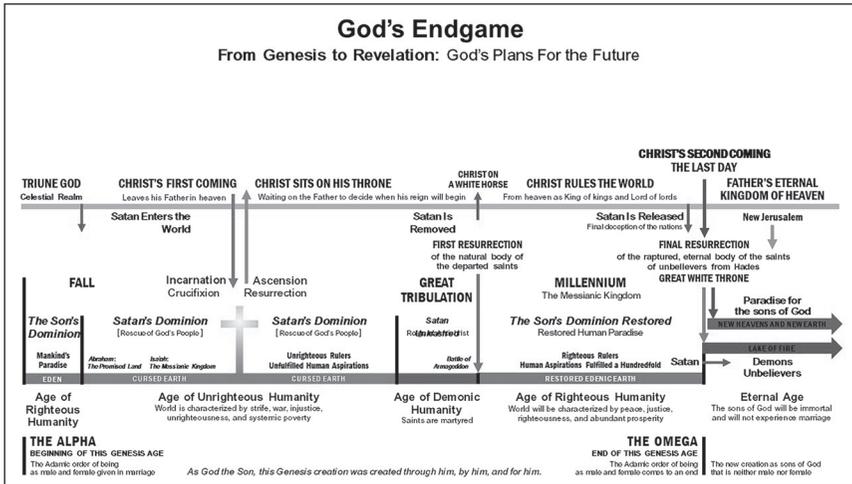
Postmillennialists, like amillennialists, believe the second coming and the rapture of the saints occur on the last day. They believe paradise will be partially restored on this earth when the nations are Christianized through effective evangelism. But postmillennialists also acknowledge that the earth remains under a curse until the last day. And without a first resurrection of the actual bodies of the departed saints, there is no way these saints can inherit a golden age of Christianity. They will only inherit eternal life, even though Christ promised his followers that they would inherit a hundredfold reward on the restored Edenic earth for sacrificially following him *before* they inherit eternal life in the age to come.

It is evident that none of the current views on God's endgame correspond well with all the biblical data, which may explain why evangelical theologians have never reached a consensus on eschatology. The subject of God's endgame needs a fresh analysis and reformulation. Maybe it is time that we continue in the tradition of the Reformers and reexamine God's Word concerning his plans for the future. Let's see if there is a better way to interpret and organize the biblical data.

There are two basic questions that need to be answered to correctly understand God's endgame:

1. Where is Christ when he rules the world?
2. What is the nature of the first and final resurrections?

Postrestorationism



Postrestorationism proposes that when Satan is completely removed from this realm, Christ will rule the world from his throne in heaven. As the Son of God, he does not need to return to this earth to rule over his own creation. As our Creator, he will regenerate the earth to an Edenic paradise. And in order for the departed saints to inherit this paradise on earth, they will experience the first resurrection of their natural, Adamic bodies. Christ will come again *after* this 1,000-year restoration at the final resurrection on Judgment Day. The sons of God will then be raptured to their eternal bodies so they can inherit the eternal paradise in heaven. Thus, the name *postrestorationism*.

In chapters 3 and 4, I explained my method of interpreting and organizing the Scriptures into a logical biblical theology of the future. God's plan of redemption is structured around two orders of being: the Adamic order of being that began in Genesis, and the new order of being as sons of God that began with Christ. In the Adamic order of being, we are male and female with natural bodies designed for marriage and reproduction. In the new order of being as sons of God, however, we will have immortal bodies that are neither male nor female. When we are resurrected and taken to heaven in our immortal bodies, we will no longer experience marriage and reproduction. My wife will no longer be my female partner in marriage. The Adamic order of being comes to an end, and we will all be fellow children of God.

I further explained how the Scriptures reveal a Trinitarian eschatology that revolves around these two orders of being. There are two kingdoms of the triune God: one on the earth during the millennium for a restored humanity and the other in heaven on the eternal new earth for the eternal sons of God.

Postrestorationism is based on the two orders of being and the two corresponding kingdoms of the triune God:

- **The Adamic order of being** corresponds to the Son's thousand-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.

The triune God is one being with one will and at the same time three persons, each with a distinctive role in God's plan of redemption. For example, sometimes the Son is described as ruling this world. But his reign would also include the Father's will and rule. Likewise, heaven is sometimes described as being the Father's reign over his heavenly kingdom. This would also include the Son's everlasting reign. Both the Son's kingdom on this earth and the Father's kingdom in heaven compose the triune God's kingdom. But the Scriptures do differentiate between the Father's kingdom and the Son's kingdom.

The Scriptures also emphasize the fact that this creation was uniquely created through, by, and for the Son of God. Thus, before the fall, the world was the Son's kingdom on earth. After the fall, his kingdom was usurped when Satan entered the world. When Satan is removed from this world during the millennium, one would logically expect this earthly kingdom to be identified as the Son's kingdom restored.

Another important consideration in discerning God's endgame is Christ's dual nature as both the son of man and the Son of God. As the son of man, he was the son of David and was the Jewish Messiah. As the son of David, one would expect him to rule the world *from this earth* through Israel after he establishes his messianic kingdom. But he was also the Son of God incarnate, and he is often referred to by theologians as the God-man. As the Son of God, however, one would expect him to rule over his Genesis creation from his throne in heaven. Now

risen to heaven where he sits at the right hand of God, he is the infinite Son of God who somehow remains in a glorified body as the Christ. As Paul taught, “He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10).

Seated at the Right Hand of God

During his first coming, the eternal Son of God left his Father in heaven and became incarnate as a human being to dwell with mankind on this earth. During his trial before the high priest, Jesus taught that after his crucifixion and resurrection, he would return to his Father in heaven: “But *from now on* the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:69). Being seated at the right hand of God the Father is not an inferior position of power. Rather, it is a position that is coequal with the Father. The Jewish rulers understood this was a claim of deity, and they accused him of blasphemy and sent him to Pontius Pilate to be crucified.

Most important, Christ taught that after his ascension to heaven, he would from then on relate to this world from his exalted position in heaven. He would “*from now on*” be seated at the right hand of God. Therefore, God’s endgame will unfold while Christ remains in heaven.

In this chapter, I will make the biblical case that Christ *remains seated on his throne in heaven*:

- As he ***waits*** on the Father to say when it is time for him to remove Satan and reclaim his Genesis creation
- When he ***governs*** the world during his messianic kingdom
- When he comes again to ***judge*** mankind at the Great White Throne judgment
- When he ***creates*** the new heavens and new earth as the eternal home for the sons of God

These four forms of sitting on his throne in heaven can be defined as follows.

1. Sitting and Waiting

Since he has ascended to the right hand of God, Christ, as the God-man, now has all the authority and power necessary to rule this world:

And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he [the Father] raised him from the dead and *seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, *not only in this age but also in the one to come* [the eternal age]. (Eph. 1:19–21)

According to Paul, after Christ ascended to heaven, he remains seated at the Father's right hand in heaven throughout this Genesis age and the eternal age to come. If we combined Christ's teaching with Paul's, it would read as follows:

But *from now on* ["not only in this age but also in the one to come"] the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God ["far above all rule and authority and power and dominion"]. (Luke 22:69)

But when will Satan be removed and Christ use his authority and power to govern the world? This is where the relationship within the Trinity between the Father and his Son plays an important role in determining when this regime change will take place. Christ is waiting on the Father to decide the time when he will use his divine power to rule the world:

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, *he sat down* at the right hand of God, **waiting** [on the Father] from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. (Heb. 10:12–13)

Christ informed the disciples right before his ascension:

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel [establish the messianic kingdom]?" 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)

Christ also taught, “The Lord [the Father] said to my Lord [the Son], ‘Sit at my right hand [in heaven], *until I* [the Father] put your enemies under your feet” (Matt. 22:44). Within the Trinity, the Son is waiting on the Father to determine when his reign over this world will begin.

Paul taught that until then, despite Christ’s sovereignty and the divine power available to him, the world will remain Satan’s dominion:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, *against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* (Eph. 6:11–12)

Christ’s reign over this world will not begin until Satan and these demonic forces of evil are removed from this realm.

In the book of Daniel, God the Father is referred to as the Ancient of Days. The son of man, or Christ, is portrayed as ascending into the clouds to the Ancient of Days, where he is given dominion over this world. But he must wait on the Ancient of Days to say when it is time to bring the Great Tribulation to an end, to remove Satan, and to begin his reign:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man [Christ ascends in the clouds], and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is . . . everlasting . . . and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13–14)

Daniel further taught:

Until the Ancient of Days came [God the Father], . . . *and the time came* when the saints possessed the kingdom [as determined by the Father]. . . . But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion [Satan and the Antichrist’s] shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the

dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High [his reign begins]. (Dan. 7:22, 26–27)

The son of man was given dominion over this world after he ascended in the clouds to the Father. But the saints will not experience his righteous kingdom until the Father decides it is time for Satan's dominion to be taken away.

As the letter to the Hebrews reveals, Christ does not currently fully exercise the authority and power at his disposal:

“You made him [the Son] for a little while lower than the angels [during the incarnation]; you have crowned him with glory and honor, *putting everything in subjection under his feet*” [after his ascension to the right hand of God]. Now in putting everything in subjection to him [as Paul says, he is “above all rule and authority and power and dominion”], he left nothing outside his control [he is the sovereign Lord of the world]. *At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.* (Heb. 2:7–8)

These verses can be summarized as follows. After his ascension, Christ was given dominion over this world by the Father. He now reigns supreme by his position of authority at the right hand of God. He has all the divine power necessary to rule the world and subject this world to his righteous will. At present, however, he does not fully use his authority and power to establish his messianic kingdom. That is why the world remains a demonic realm filled with spiritual forces of evil. In his sovereignty, he allows evil to operate on this earth against his righteous will, but the evil deeds practiced by sinful mankind are not his will for mankind. He allows evil, but he is not the author of evil.

Some theologians claim that Christ is already the ruling King of this world. Christ is the declared sovereign King of this world by the Father, but there is a big difference between Christ *having* the power to rule this world and Christ *using* that power to establish his righteous will on this earth. We daily see the activities of Satan and depraved humanity. Mankind remains in a state of rebellion against God, with evil prevalent throughout human affairs.

Christ did not use his authority and power to prevent his arrest and crucifixion, and he does not prevent Satan from harassing and persecuting his followers today. In fact, when we suffer he also suffers. When Paul terrorized Christians before his conversion, Christ asked him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4). We remain in hostile territory, and every day we battle Satan, who attacks us with what Paul calls flaming arrows. That is why we must continually pray to the Father, asking him to deliver us from evil and that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

When Stephen was about to be unjustly stoned to death, he saw the ascended Christ at the Father’s right hand:

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God [with all the authority and power of God].” (Acts 7:54–56)

If Christ had wanted to prevent Stephen’s death, he could have easily intervened with supernatural power from heaven. He could have just said the word, or sent an angel, and these unrighteous men would have been killed the moment they picked up the first stone. Christ chose not to intervene, and he allowed Stephen to be murdered.

David and Saul

The story of David and King Saul is a good illustration of this concept of Christ waiting on the Father to remove Satan so that his reign can begin. When King Saul disobeyed God, the kingdom of Israel was given to David, a man after God’s own heart. Subsequently, the prophet Samuel found young David as a shepherd and anointed him as the king of Israel.

There was one problem, however. Saul was still ruling as king at the time David was anointed king. David did not rule Israel at that time; he had to wait until God removed Saul as king. In the meantime, Saul persecuted, hounded, and harassed David for years.

One day as Saul was pursuing him, David and his small army caught Saul and his men off guard and asleep. One of David's men wanted to take the opportunity to kill Saul so David could begin his reign. But David said:

“Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?” And David said, “As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish.” (1 Sam. 26:9–10)

Even though David knew God had anointed him to rule over Israel, he refused to set the time and season of his reign by killing Saul when he had the opportunity. Eventually, the Lord decided it was time for Saul's reign to come to an end, and he was killed in battle. David, the anointed one, then began his reign as king.

The prophets foretold a day when out of Bethlehem will come a son of David, whose origins are from eternity, who will sit on the throne of David. He will establish a kingdom in Israel and rule the world with justice and righteousness. The word *Messiah* means “anointed one.” But there is one problem. Satan remains the current ruler of this world, and he continues to persecute Christ and his followers, just as Saul harassed David and his followers. Christ has been anointed king, but his reign has not yet begun.

The day will come, however, when the Father will determine it is time for Satan to be removed. Then the anointed Christ, the son of David, will use his great power to begin his rightful reign over this world. Just as David, the anointed king of Israel, waited on God to remove Saul so his reign could begin, so, too, Christ, the anointed king of the world, is waiting on God the Father to remove Satan so his reign can begin.

The difference, of course, is that David was a human king who ruled over Israel from this earth; whereas the son of David is also the Son of God who ascended to heaven, and he will rule the whole world as God from his throne in heaven. As Daniel revealed, Christ's dominion and kingdom will include “all peoples, nations, and languages.”

2. Sitting to Govern

For the true God of this world to reclaim and rule over his creation, Satan must be removed. Toward the end of the Tribulation, Christ will appear in the celestial realm on a white horse, and he will say the word and the Antichrist and his army will be destroyed. Satan will then be completely removed from this world by an angel, and his tyranny of evil will come to an end. From his throne in heaven, Christ will fully exercise his authority and use his divine power to reign over this world. He will bring everything on this rebellious earth under his control and establish an age of righteous humanity.

After the battle of Armageddon, the Son of God's dominion over this earth will be restored:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. (Rev. 20:1–3)

The “bottomless pit” is also translated “abyss” (NIV) and is described in the Gospels as a special prison for fallen angels or demons. Satan is bound and thrown into this prison, which is securely sealed for a thousand years. In our world, when a particularly bad criminal is arrested, we lock him up in a maximum security prison. This makes it impossible for him to escape back into the world to harm anyone during his confinement. John is quite graphic in his description of Satan's imprisonment and removal from this world. He wants to make it very clear that during Christ's reign, Satan and his demons will not be able to have any contact with mankind whatsoever. Satan will no longer be able to deceive the nations. This is the regime change we have been waiting for.

As a result of Satan's removal, there will be monumental changes in every conceivable aspect of life on this earth. All the cosmic powers of darkness and spiritual forces of evil that Paul described will be totally removed from this world. Satan will not even be around to tempt

mankind, as he was in the garden. The Father's righteous will can finally be established on earth as it is in heaven. Christ's long-promised messianic kingdom will at last be implemented on this earth. He will rule the world as King of kings and Lord of lords, and the government of this world will finally be on his shoulders.

But most important, Christ does not need to return to this earth to rule over his creation. As the Son of God, he can simply rule the world from heaven. John foresaw the day when Christ, *as God Almighty*, would *use* his immeasurable power to rule this world:

And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, *Lord God Almighty*, who is and who was, *for you have taken your great power and begun to reign* [over the earth from his throne in heaven at the right hand of God]." (Rev. 11:16-17)

The prophet Isaiah, too, alluded to the fact that the physical son of David is also God, who will one day rule over his 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. (Isa. 9:6-7)

When Christ as God rules the world, it will no longer be characterized by evil. Instead, the world will experience peace, justice, and righteousness.

Christ described the day when he would use his power as God to govern the world from heaven:

Truly, I say to you, in the new world [the restored Edenic earth], when the Son of Man *will sit on his glorious throne* [in heaven at the Father's right hand], you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matt. 19:28)

The disciples will even assist him in governing the affairs of Israel.

This concept of sitting on a throne to govern is like the way an emperor in the Roman Empire ruled over his people. The emperor would enter a large government hall and might casually interact with government officials until he sat down on his throne to begin the process of ruling over the affairs of state. The issue could be a new construction project such as a new aqueduct to bring spring water to a city like Antioch, or it could be to settle a dispute between two Roman cities. Once the emperor sat on his throne, he governed the affairs of his kingdom. Likewise, when Christ sits on his throne in heaven, he will begin to govern the affairs of this world.

In fact, if Christ did physically return to this earth to rule over the nations, it would be logistically difficult and inefficient. If he ruled from Jerusalem, one could only imagine the long line of diplomats and leaders from around the world seeking his assistance to settle longstanding border disputes and other sources of friction between nations. Even when Christ was on this earth, the crowds were often oppressive and overwhelming.

But ruling from heaven as “Mighty God,” Christ will use his divine omniscience to communicate directly with his appointed leaders from around the world. Communicating through the Holy Spirit, he can assist them in settling disputes anywhere in the world. And what better person to properly manage the affairs of mankind than Jesus Christ? Not only does he know what it means to be a human on this earth, but from his exalted throne in heaven as God, he has infinite awareness, understanding, and insight into the affairs of the whole world.

John described Christ ruling the world with authority and power during his millennial reign: “From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15). In Christ’s day, shepherds used a rod as a staff to protect their sheep from predators. To rule “with a rod of iron” refers to the destruction of the armies that attack Christ at the end of the Great Tribulation, and Christ ruling the world with complete authority and power to protect mankind from evil behavior.

It is important to realize that only the armies of the Antichrist are killed at the battle of Armageddon. Many civilian unbelievers not engaged in the battle will survive the Tribulation and will enter the millennium. These unbelievers will still have sinful natures, and even

without Satan in the world to tempt them, they can have evil thoughts that left unchecked may lead to sinful actions. Although unbelievers may have evil thoughts, I do not believe Christ will allow any resulting evil actions to occur. I believe he will use his supernatural powers, or his rod of iron, to prevent evil thoughts from turning into evil actions. He will prevent violence between nations as well as violence within households. No longer will a greedy dictator terrorize a nation, or an ill-tempered husband abuse his family. Christ will intervene from heaven before anyone can commit a crime or act of violence. Without the tyranny of evil, we will be able to enjoy life on the earth to the fullest.

Christ's Inaugurated Kingdom

Many theologians like to say that Christ's kingdom has already been inaugurated, but they believe his actual reign over his kingdom will not occur until it is consummated when he comes again. The concept of an "inaugurated kingdom" is misleading, however, because it implies that his reign as Lord over this world has already begun. And the word "consummated" is a poor choice of words because it means "to bring to a completion or an end." The start of the millennium represents the beginning of his kingdom reign, not its conclusion. His second coming *after* the millennium represents the conclusion of his reign. This, in turn, will be the inauguration of the Father's eternal kingdom for the sons of God, which has no end.

A better way to describe his future reign would be to say that today, he is Lord-elect of this world. His inauguration as Lord of this world will begin when Satan is removed and he takes office. His Lordship over this world will be consummated after his one thousand years in office are completed, when he comes again, destroys this Genesis creation, and turns his kingdom over to the Father.

Paul alluded to this extraordinary sequence of events in his letter to the Corinthians. Christ comes again after he has destroyed all his enemies during his reign over this world. We learn from Revelation's expanded view on God's endgame that his enemies include the false prophet, the Antichrist and his armies, the group of sinful mankind who rebel at Gog and Magog, and, of course, Satan himself, who is finally sent to the lake of fire for eternity. The very last enemy to be

destroyed is mortal death itself, which is overcome when Christ comes again and the saints are given immortal bodies like his. The sequence of events in this passage is somewhat jumbled, so I will outline the sequence immediately following the passage:

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming [the consummation] those who belong to Christ [the raptured sons of God]. Then comes the end [of his reign *and* the world], when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father [the inauguration of the Father's eternal kingdom] *after* destroying every rule and every authority and power [accomplished during his millennial reign]. For he must reign [over this world as the Messiah] until he [the Father] has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death [when the saints are raptured into immortal bodies and taken to heaven]. (1 Cor. 15:23–26)

This sequence of events that Paul describes can be outlined as follows:

- Christ is currently Lord-elect of this fallen world.
- He will be inaugurated into office when the Father puts “all his enemies under his feet.”
- During his reign, he will destroy “every rule and every authority and power” that stand against God’s will.
- When he comes again, the saints will be raptured: “then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”
- Then the consummation will take place: “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father.”

President-Elect

Christ’s dominion and reign as King over his people has begun, but the implementation of his reign over this evil dominion of darkness has not. By way of another illustration, consider the way in which a president of the United States is elected. We elect our president every four years on Election Day in November. The winner of the election is referred to as “president-elect.” The president-elect does not take office until he is inaugurated in January of the following year. In the

meantime, the sitting president remains in office and continues presiding over the nation.

But the president-elect is not idle while waiting to take office. During this interim period, he is busy selecting people to join his administration. He selects key advisors such as the fifteen members of his Cabinet and thousands of other government officials to assist him in ruling the nation. On Inauguration Day, the sitting president steps down, and the president-elect takes office and begins governing the nation with his Cabinet and other members of his administration.

Likewise, Satan's term of office will one day come to an end when he is removed as the false god of this world. Christ will then be inaugurated into office to begin his millennial reign and will govern mankind as the true God of this world. John revealed that he will be dressed for the occasion: "On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16). Instead of Satan's sinful men and women ruling the nations, men and women of God from around the world will be appointed by Christ to rule over their respective nations. The twelve disciples also will be a part of his administration, and they will be raised at the first resurrection to assist him in governing Israel. John described this future administration: "Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed" (Rev. 20:4). Nations such as Russia, North Korea, Iran, and Somalia will be ruled by godly leaders who will serve their people as Christ served us.

3. Sitting to Judge

Upon completion of his millennial reign, the next major eschatological event will be Christ's second coming on Judgment Day. This Genesis creation will come to an end, and the final resurrection will take place. Christ will sit on his throne and judge all mankind at the Great White Throne judgment. This form of sitting on his throne on Judgment Day also occurs from heaven, where he said he would be "from now on":

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him [his second coming], then he will sit on his glorious throne [in heaven]. Before him will be gathered all the nations [the final resurrection—all rise], and he will separate people one

from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats [on Judgment Day]. And he will place the sheep on his right [to inherit the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven], but the goats on the left [to go to the eternal lake of fire]. (Matt. 25:31–33)

Christ taught that “when the Son of Man comes in his glory” on Judgment Day, “all the nations” will be resurrected at the final resurrection. He will separate the believers from the unbelievers. His people will inherit the Father's kingdom, and unbelievers will inherit the lake of fire. This description of his second coming to “*sit on his glorious throne*” to judge mankind corresponds to the *Great White Throne* judgment, which occurs after the millennium on the last day:

Then I saw a *great white throne and him who was seated on it*. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them [the end of this Genesis creation]. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead [the sheep and the goats] were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. (Rev. 20:11–12)

Or as Jesus revealed:

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

The Scriptures plainly teach that Christ's second coming is on Judgment Day at the end of the world. After Christ ascended to heaven, he never leaves his throne in heaven.

4. **Sitting to Create**

The final form of Christ “sitting” on his throne in heaven is when he creates the new heavens and new earth as the eternal home for the immortal sons of God. John wrote:

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.” (Rev. 21:1–5)

The Son of God is the unique person of the Trinity who created this Genesis heavens and earth. And the Son of God is also the person of the Trinity tasked with creating the new heavens and new earth as the eternal home for the sons of God. But he accomplishes this task while seated on his throne in heaven!

There will certainly be continuity with this Genesis creation given that the eternal kingdom will be new versions of the current heavens and earth. Paul taught that the current creation is groaning to transcend its current “bondage to corruption” and become a part of the eternal kingdom:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God [in the eternal kingdom]. (Rom. 8:20–21)

This earth may perish on the last day, but just as our natural bodies will be transformed and taken to the new earth as immortal children of God, so, too, this Genesis creation will also transition to the eternal new earth. How this will all play out in the end remains a mystery. But John does make it clear that the new earth will not be a continuation of the current natural earth inhabited by natural human beings.

In short, all four forms of Christ sitting on his throne occur from heaven at the right hand of God:

- He sits on his throne in heaven while he *waits* on the Father to say when it is time for him to rule the world.
- He sits on his throne in heaven when he *governs* this world during the millennium.
- He sits on his throne in heaven when he *judges* mankind at the Great White Throne judgment.
- He sits on his throne in heaven when he *creates* the new heavens and new earth as the eternal home for the sons of God.

As Jesus taught, after his departure from this world, “But *from now on* the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:69).

The First Resurrection

Now that it has been established that Christ rules the world during the millennium from his throne in heaven, the next major question that must be answered is, what is the nature of the first resurrection at the beginning of the millennium? John taught that one day all the ransomed people of God will inherit Christ’s earthly kingdom:

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)

But how are the ransomed people of God going to reinhabit the restored earth if they have died before his reign begins? How are the departed disciples going to inherit their hundredfold reward on the regenerated earth in this Genesis age that Jesus promised?

John taught that they would experience the first resurrection:

I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life [on the earth] and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. . . . This is 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. (Rev. 20:4–6)

John specifically identifies those saints martyred during the Great Tribulation as experiencing this resurrection. But it is a fair extrapolation that all the ransomed people of God from all nations throughout history will be included in this resurrection so that they can reside on the earth when Christ rules the world.

This doctrine can be outlined as follows:

The “ransomed people for God” = “you have made them a kingdom” = “they shall reign on the earth” = “they will reign with him for a thousand years” through the first resurrection.

But what is the nature of this first resurrection? Premillennialists claim that the first resurrection represents the rapture of the saints into their eternal bodies not given in marriage. But the Scriptures link the rapture directly to Christ’s second coming, which occurs *after* the millennium at the *final* resurrection when Christ takes the transformed sons of God to their citizenship in heaven.

Amillennialists claim that the first resurrection is of the souls of the saints upon conversion, or of their spirits when their mortal bodies die and their spirits are raised to the celestial realm of heaven. But how can a person’s spirit reside on the earth without a body? Furthermore, John is aware that the departed spirits of the saints have already risen to heaven after they died, for he often described them in heaven as singing and praying while they wait for justice and Christ’s reign.

Instead of the spirits of the saints rising to heaven, John specifically stated that it is the souls of the saints that come to life on the earth through the first resurrection so that they can physically reside on this earth during Christ’s millennial reign: “I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus . . . They came to life [on the earth].” John was describing a real bodily resurrection, just as he described the final resurrection as a real resurrection of the bodies of believers and unbelievers.

But what is the nature of the first resurrection if it is not of the raptured, eternal body? The answer is simple. If the millennium is a restored human paradise when our human aspirations are fulfilled a hundredfold on a restored Edenic earth during an age of righteous humanity, then it logically follows that the ransomed people of God would come back to life on this earth in human bodies of flesh and blood. Therefore, the first resurrection would be of the natural bodies of the departed saints, who could then marry and reproduce.

This will be a resurrection like the resurrection of Lazarus’s natural body. It will not matter if the saints have been dead for four days like Lazarus or for four years, four hundred years, or four thousand years.

And it will not matter how many saints are resurrected. It could be four million saints, four billion saints, or all the departed saints since Abel. With the divine power of resurrection, Christ can reward the whole cloud of witnesses in heaven by having their spirits come back to the restored Edenic paradise on this earth in regenerated human bodies in order to live out the human experience as it was originally intended before the fall. The millennium is the Son's dominion over his Genesis creation restored, so it only makes sense that the saints would return to this earth as restored human beings in the image of God as male and female.

When trying to understand John's vision, it is critical to remember the following prophecy in Isaiah 65 in which the messianic kingdom is described as an Edenic paradise with humans experiencing marriage and reproduction:

I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. . . . They shall build houses and inhabit them [human habitats]; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit [agricultural fields]. . . . They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them [marriage and reproduction]. (Isa. 65:19–23)

Isaiah is describing the messianic kingdom as a restored humanity on a restored Edenic earth. The joyous people of God will live in houses, grow abundant crops, and have large extended families.

The first resurrection described by John can also be linked to the type of resurrection described by the prophet Ezekiel. Through Ezekiel, God promised the Jews that one day they would be restored to a glorious promised land during the messianic kingdom. But the Jews in Ezekiel's day knew they were going to die in captivity, so how could this promise be fulfilled? When describing the restored nation of Israel in the messianic kingdom, Ezekiel taught that for the departed Jewish saints to inherit this kingdom, they would be resurrected into their natural bodies:

Thus, says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live [resurrection of the natural body], . . . And I will bring you into the land of Israel. . . . They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children . . . And I will set them in their land and multiply them [marriage and reproduction]. (Ezek. 37:5–12; 25–26)

Ezekiel is clearly describing a resurrection of the natural bodies of the departed Jewish saints because he states that their families will multiply after they are resurrected. Ezekiel and Isaiah are describing the messianic kingdom as an Adamic paradise on this restored Genesis earth with God's people experiencing marriage and reproduction. They are not describing heaven, when the immortal sons of God will no longer experience marriage and reproduction.

The Resurrection of Lazarus

To better understand the first resurrection, it would be helpful to examine Christ's resurrection of Lazarus. After the resurrection of his mortal body, Lazarus could have married, had children, and lived for another twenty years. But the problem with his return to this earth in his natural body was that the world was still under a curse, and the world remained Satan's dominion. Lazarus was also still living under the tyranny of the pagan Romans and the unrighteous Jewish leaders, who were trying to kill him. His second experience of life on this earth was probably not any more pleasant than his first one.

During Christ's millennial reign, however, life for Lazarus and all the resurrected saints will be vastly different. Satan will be removed, and righteous men and women will be ruling the nations on Christ's behalf. The curse will be removed, and the Genesis earth will be restored to its Edenic condition. It will be a human paradise on earth, as it was in the beginning. When Lazarus and the saints come back to life in the millennium, they will be able to marry and have all the children and grandchildren they desire. Our human aspirations for an abundant life on this earth will be fulfilled a hundredfold—just as Jesus promised.

Leaving the Paradise of Heaven

One issue that often comes up when I am describing the return of the departed saints at the beginning of the millennium is why we would want to return to this earth if we have gone to heaven and tasted of the heavenly paradise. It is important to remember that the departed saints are only spirits made perfect in heaven. As perfected spirits, they experience the joy and peace of God's presence, but they have not yet received their immortal bodies. Nor have they received their final inheritance in the new heavens and new earth because our eternal home has not yet been created.

Moreover, John emphatically says it is a real blessing for the saints who have tasted of heaven to come back to the restored earth through the first resurrection: "Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!" (Rev. 20:6). If John teaches that it is a blessing for the holy saints to leave heaven and return to this earth to experience the Son's kingdom, then it would not be retrogressive. Our departed spirits may experience paradise in heaven, but when we return to this earth in resurrected natural bodies, we will experience a paradise on earth as restored human beings. We were always meant to be embodied creatures, not just perfected spirits in heaven.

It is also important to remember that the millennium will not be only for our joy and pleasure. It will also be for the glory of the Son of God, who will get to enjoy his good Genesis creation as it was intended in the beginning before the fall. Sinful humanity has fallen far short of the glory of God. But when we live godly lives on this earth during the millennium, we will bring him the glory and joy he deserves as the Creator of this wonderful creation.

Another interesting question I am often asked when I present this view of the first resurrection is, will we have the same spouse in the millennium as we have today? In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he taught that if a spouse dies, the marriage bond is broken and the surviving spouse is free to marry again. Likewise, when the departed saints come back to life in their natural bodies, they will be free to marry whomever they wish. Some may want to marry the same person they deeply loved, while others may welcome the opportunity to find a more suitable spouse.

Another frequent question is, since the resurrected saints are in their mortal bodies, can they die again during the millennium? The reason we experience death is because we have sinful natures and continue to sin. But the Scriptures teach that when we die, our spirits in heaven are described as an assembly of “spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Heb. 12:23). Notice that John describes the returning saints at the first resurrection as having a nature that is holy: “Blessed and *holy* is the one who shares in the first resurrection!” (Rev. 20:6). In other words, when we return to this earth, we will no longer have sinful natures that cause us to sin. If we do not sin, then there is no reason we would die again.

John also indicates that the holy saints who experience the first resurrection will live for the entire millennium: “They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4). We would therefore be alive when Christ returns at the final resurrection to transform our mortal bodies into eternal bodies.

Unbelievers who survive the Great Tribulation and who become Christians during the millennium, however, will continue to have sinful natures. Therefore, they can still sin and die, even though Isaiah says that a sinner who dies at a hundred years old will be considered a mere youth. These believers will be asleep when Christ returns on the last day.

Two Resurrections and Two Kingdoms of God

Because God's people are destined to inherit two kingdoms of the triune God, there are two resurrections. As men and women of God, we will inherit the Son's restored earth through a resurrection of natural, Adamic bodies—natural bodies for a restored natural earth. After the millennium, we will experience the final resurrection. As sons of God the Father, we will inherit the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven through a resurrection of eternal bodies like Christ's glorified body—eternal bodies for an eternal new earth. God's divine power of resurrection is the key to understanding how he will fulfill his promises.

Abraham understood this power. God had promised Abraham that through his son Isaac, all the nations of the world would be blessed. Yet God tested Abraham and told him to sacrifice Isaac. But if Isaac was killed as a young man before he had produced any heirs,

then how could God possibly fulfill this promise? Abraham's faith in God to fulfill his promise led him to trust in God's divine power of resurrection as the solution to this dilemma:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (Heb. 11:17–19)

In Abraham's mind, if God was going to keep his promise, then it was essential that he raise Isaac from the dead. Likewise, when Christ promises his people that one day they will inherit the restored earth when he is ruling the world, then it is imperative that they somehow be resurrected.

Christ also promised that one day his followers will inherit eternal life in his Father's house. Paul described how Christ will use his divine power to bring this sinful world under his control and then use this same power to transform our natural bodies into eternal bodies adapted for heaven:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, *by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control* [during his reign as God], will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body [into glorified eternal bodies adapted for the eternal kingdom in heaven]. (Phil. 3:20–21 NIV)

The Scriptures portray God's divine power as fundamental to his plan of redemption:

- As the Son of God, he used his divine power to create this Genesis creation.
- During his incarnation, he manifested his divine power when he demonstrated a complete mastery over nature, sickness, physical death, and demons.
- During the millennium, he will use his divine power to regenerate this earth to its Edenic condition.

- He will use his divine power to regenerate our natural bodies at the first resurrection.
- When he comes again at the final resurrection, he will use his divine power to transform our natural bodies into eternal bodies.
- He will also use his divine power to destroy this Genesis creation.
- And he will use his divine power to create the new heavens and new earth, which will be the eternal home for the sons of God.

Now that is the divine power of God!

Summary

Jesus Christ was the Jewish Messiah. But he was also God incarnate. As God the Son, this creation was created through him, by him, and for him. Before the fall the world was the Son's kingdom, or his dominion. When Adam and Eve sinned, however, God allowed Satan to enter the world, and it became Satan's dominion. God also put a curse on this earth.

The Father sent his Son into this world as the human Messiah. Through the cross, he instituted a way to justify the ungodly and reconnect sinful man to his Creator. When we believe in Christ, we become restored men and women of God. But we remain in a demonic and cursed creation.

After his resurrection and ascension to heaven, the next phase of Christ's mission is to restore redeemed mankind for a thousand years. On a day set by the Father, he will use his divine power and authority to rule the world from his throne in heaven. For the departed saints to inherit the restored Edenic earth during the millennium, we will experience the first resurrection of our natural Adamic bodies. As we marry, reproduce, and fill an abundant earth, we will experience our full humanity as originally intended in the garden of Eden before the fall.

As the true God of this world, the ascended Christ has a divine right to restore this earth, remove Satan, and reclaim his creation. The Father promised his Son that one day Satan and all his enemies will be

removed and his kingdom and creation will be restored to him. This is an unconditional covenant between the Father and the Son.

Once this mission of redemption and restoration is complete, Christ's mission as the Messiah will be complete. It will be time for the Son to return, bring this Genesis creation to an end, and inaugurate a new eternal kingdom of the Father for the sons of God. After the millennium, Christ will come again on the last day of this creation at the final resurrection on Judgment Day. The saints will be raptured into eternal bodies to inherit the Father's eternal new heavens and new earth, and unbelievers will be resurrected from hades, judged, and sent to the lake of fire.

The key to understanding God's endgame is understanding the two kingdoms of the triune God as they revolve around these two orders of being. The Son's millennial kingdom is a restoration of this creation for the Adamic order of being. The Father's eternal kingdom of heaven is for the sons of God who are new creations that have no sexual distinctions.