

## **Session 9: Hope**

***Faith, Hope, and Love: Rediscovering the Essentials of Christianity***

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### **The Basics of Hope**

1. As we looked at in our last session, the New Testament uses a simple, 3-fold discipleship framework to exhort Christians and measure maturity - *faith*, *hope*, and *love*. Along with *faith*, *hope* is a concept central to the Biblical story and fills the writings of the New Testament.

**“For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.”  
(Galatians 5:5 ESV)**

**“having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you”  
(Ephesians 1:18 ESV)**

**“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”  
(Hebrews 10:23 ESV)**

2. *Hope* can be defined generally as “a feeling of expectation or a desire for a thing to happen”. When we are eager, optimistic, and expectant for something to come to pass, we are living with *hope*.
3. Disappointment is one of the challenges of this present evil age. We often experience this feeling when we earnestly desire or dream about something and it does not come to pass as we had hoped. At that point, we usually conclude that our *hope* was ill-founded or misplaced. And sadly, when this happens several times and we don't recognize that our hope was misplaced, disillusionment often results.
4. In a world of dashed hopes and unfulfilled dreams, the Bible calls us to a wholly-future focused hope that will *not* disappoint us. A central, unifying hope has been given to us and its fulfillment has been *guaranteed* by God Himself through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**“For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”  
(Romans 8:24–25 ESV)**

**“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”**  
(Romans 5:1–5 NIV)

### The Context of Biblical Hope: The Biblical Story

1. As we examine the Bible’s understanding of *hope*, we must not forget that the authors of the New Testament were living in a story that had not yet been brought to its conclusion. Just as we saw how the Bible’s use of *faith* found roots in the overarching narrative, so too does *hope*. All that humanity is longing for and hoping in is bound up in God’s faithfulness and covenantal loyalty to His promises to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.
2. Thus it may be said that the *Biblical hope is an Israelocentric hope*. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, professed a hope that was *no different* from the Pharisees and the Jewish authorities.

**“I [Paul] believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men [the Jews], that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”**  
(Acts 24:14–15 NIV)

**“And now I [Paul] stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers [the covenants], to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!”**  
(Acts 26:6–7 ESV)

**“For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I [Paul] am wearing this chain.”**  
(Acts 28:20 ESV)

3. The Biblical story holds out a hope of *restoration* (Acts 3:21), *renewal* (Matthew 19:28), *regeneration* (Matthew 19:28), *resurrection* (Acts 24:15), and *redemption* (Romans 8:23, Ephesians 4:30). Put simply, to cling to the hope of the Scriptures is to *eagerly expect a return to the way things were in the*

*beginning* before the fall. This singular, all-consuming hope is what the New Testament calls us to cling to without division.

**“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”**  
(Acts 3:19–21 NKJV)

**“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully [completely, NASB] on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**  
(1 Peter 1:13 ESV)

## The Age to Come and the Day of the LORD

1. As we discussed back in Session 1, the Bible presents an ordered, two-age approach to time and history. The day of the LORD is the “dividing line” between *this age* and *the age to come*. It is the future, apocalyptic, cataclysmic day where God will bring low the pride of man, cleanse the heavens and the earth of all unrighteousness, and restore creation to its original glory.

**“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar... and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed... But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”**  
(2 Peter 3:9–13 ESV)

**“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.””**  
(Revelation 21:1–5 ESV)

2. The Day of the LORD is the most important and most prominent event prophesied from Genesis to Revelation. After the events of the Day of the

LORD, a new order will prevail in the heavens and on the earth – an order of *righteousness*. The Bible makes clear distinctions between the nature and character of this age versus that of the age to come:

<b><i>This Age</i></b>	<b><i>The Age to Come</i></b>	<b><i>References</i></b>
“Night”	“Day”	Romans 13:11f; 1 Thessalonians 5:2ff
“Evil”	“Righteous”	Galatians 1:4; Acts 2:40; 2 Peter 3:13
“Death”	“Life”	Romans 5:17; 1 Corinthians 15:21f
“Mortality”	“Immortality”	1 Corinthians 15:53f; Romans 2:7
“Perishable”	“Imperishable”	1 Corinthians 9:25; 15:42; 1 Peter 1:23
“Sufferings”	“Glory”	Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17
“Not seeing”	“Appearing”	2 Corinthians 4:18; 1 Peter 1:7; 1 John 3:2
“Time of exile”	“Time of restoring”	1 Peter 1:17; Acts 3:21
“Sojourning”	“Ruling”	1 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 11:13; Revelation 5:10
“Things of the flesh”	“Things of the Spirit”	1 Corinthians 3:1ff; Romans 8:5; Colossians 3:2f
“Treasures on earth”	“Treasures in heaven”	Matthew 6:19; 19:21; Luke 16:11
“The world”	“The kingdom”	John 18:36; James 2:5; Revelation 11:15

**“The new creation model of eternal life draws on biblical texts that speak of a future everlasting kingdom, of a new earth and the renewal of life on it, of bodily resurrection (especially of the physical nature of Christ’s resurrection body), of social and even political concourse among the redeemed. The new creation model expects that the ontological order and scope of eternal life is essentially continuous with that of present earthly life except for the absence of sin and death. Eternal life for redeemed human beings will be an embodied life on earth (whether the present earth or a wholly new earth), set within a cosmic structure such as we have presently. It is not a timeless, static existence but rather an unending sequence of life and lived experiences. It does not reject physicality or materiality,**

**but affirms them as essential both to a holistic anthropology and to the biblical idea of a redeemed creation.”<sup>1</sup>**

3. This apocalyptic upheaval of the unrighteous order of the earth is part of God’s plan to *renew* and *restore* creation, not *annihilate* it. The flood, typological of the day of the LORD, *cleansed* the earth of unrighteousness with water. So too will fire burn away the “elements” (Gk. *stoicheion*, the “sinful ways” and “principles” – cf. Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8,20; Hebrews 5:12) on the Day of the LORD (2 Peter 3:1-15). The heavens and the earth will endure this destruction and will become the “home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13), just as the earth endured the destruction of ungodly men during the flood.
4. Because Jesus of Nazareth is not only the *Christ* but also the *LORD* (Acts 2:36), He will be the one to administer and execute the events of the Day of the LORD. This is why the New Testament also refers to the future Day as “the day of Christ”. Therefore, the “coming” (1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:1), “revealing” (1 Corinthians 1:7; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:5), and “appearing” (1 Timothy 6:15; 2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13) of Jesus is the anchor of New Testament hope (Romans 5:2; Ephesians 1:18; Colossians 1:5).

**“prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory”  
(Philippians 2:15–16 NAS95)**

**“so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,”  
(Philippians 1:10 ESV)**

**“who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”  
(1 Corinthians 1:8 ESV)**

**“just as you did partially acknowledge us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.”  
(2 Corinthians 1:14 ESV)**

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<sup>1</sup> Craig A. Blasing, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999], 162

## The Resurrection, Eternal Life, and Immortality

1. The promised *renewal* will also include the restoration of *immortality* and *eternal life* to humanity. Death was part of God's *curse* (Genesis 3:19) to humble prideful man towards repentance (Psalm 73:3ff; Romans 8:20). But for those who put their *faith* in the sacrificial death of Jesus, God will dramatically overturn the curse of death in the *resurrection of the dead* (Matthew 22:31; Acts 23:6; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 42; Hebrews 6:2) and grant the gift of *immortality*.

**He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."**

**(Isaiah 25:8–9 ESV)**

**"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"**

**(Job 19:25–27 ESV)**

**Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:**

**"Death is swallowed up in victory."**

**(1 Corinthians 15:51–54 ESV)**

**"but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling... who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"**

**(2 Timothy 1:8–10 ESV)**

2. Therefore, the Biblical hope and the promise of *blessing* is the overcoming and "swallowing up" of death. Those of faith will be raised to *eternal life* – literally, to live forevermore in a human body on this earth. The heavens and the earth will be a restored paradise, just as Eden was in the beginning (Revelation 2:7; 22:1ff; Isaiah 51:3ff) and we will once again have access to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22; Revelation 22:2) and we will live forever. Paul articulates this hope in Romans 8:

**“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 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. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.”**  
**(Romans 8:18–24 ESV)**

3. The LORD of glory and long-awaited king of Israel died as a substitute for our sins and will come a second time to save those of faith in Him from the penalty of their sins, namely, death. For while “the wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). This is the glorious message of the grace of God: “Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit *eternal life*.” (Titus 3:7 NLT) The hope and reward of the believer is to receive “the *crown of life* that the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). He “will give *eternal life* to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and *immortality* that God offers” (Romans 2:7 NLT). Thus, those “whose names are in the *book of life*” (Philippians 4:3), who are heirs of “the *grace of life*” (1 Pet. 3:7), “await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring [us] *eternal life*” (Jude 1:21 NLT).
4. Jesus is the “firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5) and as believers in His resurrection, we have the promise of being “conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). At His return, Jesus “will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body” (Philippians 3:20-21). The apostles understood the resurrected Jesus as the “firstfruits” of the final harvest (Matthew 13:39; Mark 4:29) when believers would be granted immortality. Jesus’ resurrection is the assurance and *guarantee* (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22) of ours.

**“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ... The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”**  
**(1 Corinthians 15:20–23 ESV)**

## The Kingdom of God

1. The promised *restoration*, including the overturning of the curse and the “head crushing” of the serpent, would be accomplished through a seed of Eve. As we have seen, the *blessing* would come through Abraham’s family and ultimately through David’s lineage where *a king* would reign from Jerusalem on David’s throne. His everlasting kingdom would establish righteousness upon the earth and bring *blessing* to the nations, just as God had promised in His covenants with the fathers.

**“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.”**  
(Isaiah 9:6–7 ESV)

**“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him... but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.”**  
(Isaiah 11:1–4 ESV)

**“He will judge Your people with righteousness, And Your poor with justice... In His days the righteous shall flourish, And abundance of peace, Until the moon is no more. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth... Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him. His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed... And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.”**  
(Psalms 72:2, 7–8, 11, 17, 19 NKJV)

**“Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding... And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another**



**people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,”**  
(Daniel 2:20–21, 44 ESV)

**“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”**  
(Luke 1:31–33 ESV)

**““When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”**  
(Matthew 25:31–32 ESV)

**“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 ESV; cf. Daniel 2:44)

2. Jesus, as *the promised son of David and the rightful king of Israel* (Gk: *christos*, “christ”, Hb. *mashiyach*, “messiah”), will reign over all the nations from a real kingdom on a real earth with real nations and real ethnicities. This is what Gabriel spoke to Mary about her son Jesus (Luke 1:31-33). As David’s descendant, Jesus (as the *son of God*) will lead Israel (who was given the role of Adam as the *son of God*) and will bring to pass the reversal of the curse of death. As we have discussed, God *elected* Israel as His *firstborn* nation to administer the *blessing* to the rest of the nations of the earth (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; Romans 1:16; 2:5,9-11; 3:29-30; 11:28-29). An Israel-centered, Jerusalem-based kingdom was what the early church in the book of Acts constantly proclaimed (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 28:31). *This was their story.*

**“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”**  
(Acts 8:12 ESV)

3. During his ministry to Israel at His first coming, Jesus often taught about this final, future kingdom. He and the apostles spoke about who would inherit it (Matthew 25:34; Luke 3:7-8; Romans 2:5; 1 Corinthians 15:50; Hebrews 6:12), how it will be established (Luke 17:1-18:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2:1-4), and confirmed when it would be established (Matthew 13:30; Luke 24:26;

cf. Acts 1:6-8). Some of those things Jesus spoke were corrective to their assumptions, yet He never *redefined* the Jews' understanding of what the kingdom actually was.

**There is no sign in the New Testament of any confusion concerning the nature of the “kingdom of God”. Like “Christ,” the “kingdom of God” was commonly understood. No one questioned what kingdom John was preaching in the wilderness, nor did they question Jesus when he was “teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Mt. 4:23). None of the disciples asked Jesus what the kingdom entailed when he sent them out preaching, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 10:7), because it was commonly assumed to coincide with “the day of judgment” (v. 15), salvation (v. 22), the coming of the Messiah (v. 23), Gehenna (v. 28), and eternal life (v. 39).<sup>2</sup>**

4. The hope of believing Jew and Gentile alike is that Jesus will return, reign from Jerusalem, and establish His eschatological kingdom of justice. From Israel, He will rule all the nations (Psalm 2). As Gentiles, this is our hope because it means “life from the dead” (Romans 11:15).

**“And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”**

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing [believing that Jesus will come to rule over the nations], so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope [an eager desire for His messianic kingdom to be established].”**

**(Romans 15:12–13 ESV)**

### Platonic Distortion of Biblical Hope

1. Most of the ancient and modern distortions of Biblical hope come from the introduction of Greek philosophy and Platonism into Christianity. Beginning with Augustine’s “spiritual” hermeneutic and later dubbed “Christoplatonism” by pastor and author Randy Alcorn, the belief in *two distinct realms of existence* has led to several common errors regarding “the hope of the Gospel” (Colossians 1:23).
2. Platonic cosmology has undermined the truths of the restoration of all things, the resurrection of the body, and the kingdom of the Messiah in the modern mind. Instead of one unified creation (“the heavens and the earth”), a dualistic perception of reality (“heaven and earth”, “natural and

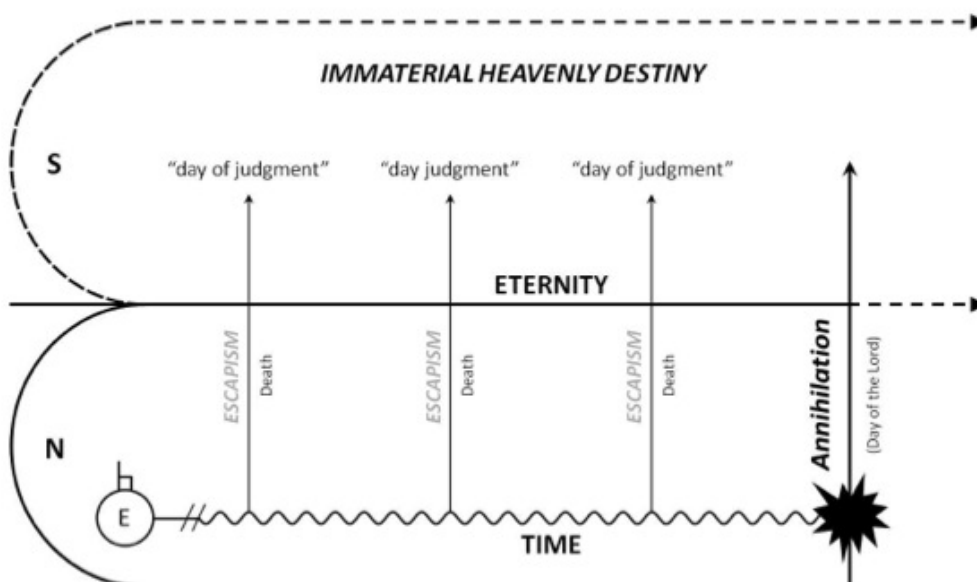
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<sup>2</sup> Harrigan, John, *The Gospel of Christ Crucified*, pulled from <http://www.gospelofchristcrucified.com/book.html>, chapter 6, p. 2

supernatural”, “God’s space and man’s space”) has *changed the story*. Using the analogy we developed early on in this study, when we are on the wrong field, we cannot play the right game. It is impossible to play soccer on a tennis court.

3. We must recall the Platonic separation between immateriality and materiality called everything in the “supernatural”/”heaven” realm as *good* and everything the “natural”/”earth” realm as *evil*. Two general distortions of Biblical hope have emerged because of this separation:
  - a. Escapism
  - b. Dominionism
  
4. The *escapist* hope is the most common among Western Christians today.
  - a. As Platonic dualism was accommodated into the church, the linear view of time was abandoned. Hope for a restored Earth was transformed into a hope for an ethereal “heaven” and “a better place”. The hope of the resurrection of the body and the gift of immortality was replaced with the concept of *the eternal existence of the soul*.
  - b. This hope (an *immaterial heavenly destiny*) is achieved through enlightenment and ultimately *death*. In this scheme, the Day of the LORD was changed from the restoration of all things to the annihilation of materiality. This distorted hope actually *glorifies death* instead of seeing it as God’s enemy to be defeated.

**“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”**  
**(1 Corinthians 15:26 ESV)**



- c. *Eternal life* was thus relegated to mere knowledge and “encounter”. The more one grew in enlightenment and practiced asceticism, the more one experientially knew what was truly eternal life. Adherents to this line of thought often pulled on John 17:3 (“this is eternal life, that they may know You...”). A better meaning of the verse would be:

**“And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.”  
(John 17:3 NLT)**

- d. Many scholars and authors have recognized the errors of the escapist hope, a “spiritual” resurrection, a disembodied existence, and an immaterial heaven:

**“Though earliest Christianity may have conceived of the eternal future in terms of a restored earth, a second Eden, over the following centuries the Christian afterlife was, largely, interpreted in terms of a heavenly domain. Christian theology, iconography, patterns of worship, the very existence of Easter and its religious celebration, and funerary rites came to speak of human life as a journey through life to the heavenly city. This journey beyond has dominated Christian cultures ever since.”<sup>3</sup>**

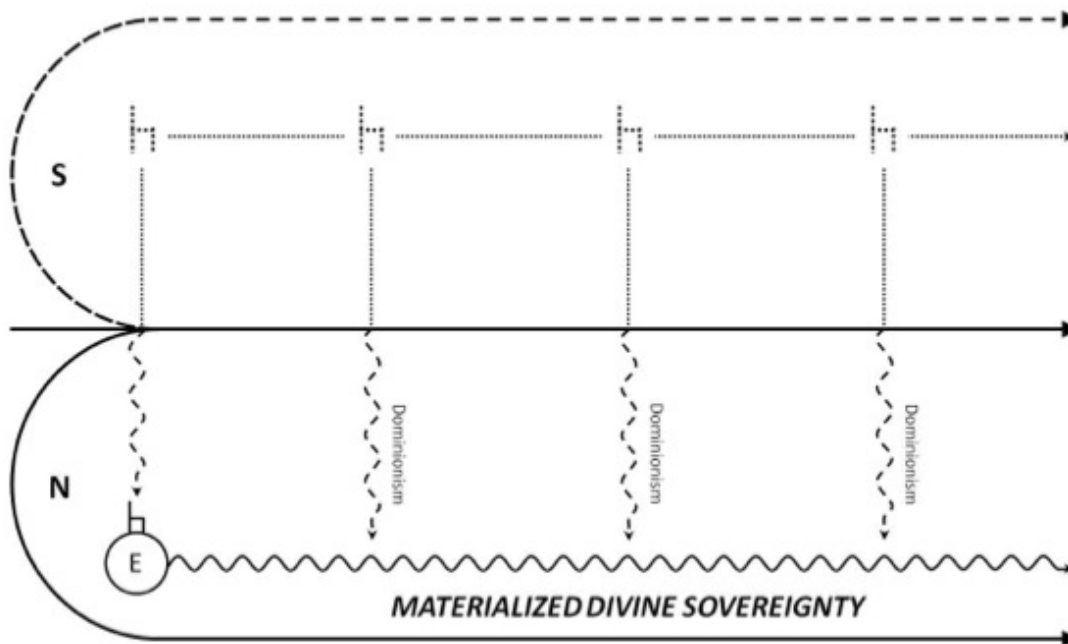
**“The early Christians hold firmly to a two-step belief about the future: first, death and whatever lies immediately beyond; second, a new bodily existence in a newly remade world... within early Christianity there is virtually no spectrum of belief about life beyond death... whereas the early Christians were drawn from many strands of Judaism and from widely differing backgrounds within paganism, and hence from circles that must have held very different beliefs about life beyond death, they all modified that belief to focus on one point on the spectrum... We have plenty of evidence of debates about all sorts of things, and the virtual unanimity on resurrection stands out. Only in the late second century, a good 150 years after the time of Jesus, do we find people using the word resurrection to mean something quite different from what is meant in Judaism and early Christianity, namely, a spiritual experience in the present leading to a disembodied hope in the future. For almost all of the first two centuries, resurrection in**

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *A Brief History of Death* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 7.

**the traditional sense holds not just center stage but the whole stage.”<sup>4</sup>**

5. The *dominionist* hope is more common in Charismatic circles.
  - a. Platonic dualism once again shaped another view of the Biblical story, highlighting the issue of *divine sovereignty*. Instead of an immaterial escape to heaven, the dominionistic hope emphasizes *the manifestation of God’s immaterial reign* into time and history. This theology is reflected in words and phrases like “manifestation”, “break in”, “heaven invading earth”, “supernatural breakthrough”, “kingdom invasion”, and the like.
  - b. Those with this hope believe that God is “regaining dominion” of the physical world and “manifesting His kingdom” on the earth through the church and Christianized politics. Modern outworkings of various forms of dominionism include the “seven mountains” theology, “spiritual warfare” for “breakthrough”, various theologies of intercession, and revivalism.



- c. In dominionism, the church often takes on the role of the Messiah and is the one who controls God’s rule over materiality through prayer and fasting. In this scheme, the cruciform theology of suffering before glory is quickly abandoned for a “victorious”, conquering eschatology.

<sup>4</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), .41-42

- d. This theology is exemplified by a well-known Dominionist, C. Peter Wagner:

**“Acts 3:21 talks of Jesus being in heaven ‘until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.’ Restoration also means ‘transformation,’ and this dates back to the beginning, when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. Even though Jesus came and changed history, He is waiting for us to do our part in bringing restoration to pass in real life. Meanwhile, He is reigning through us until ‘He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet’ (I Corinthians 15:24-25).”<sup>5</sup>**

### Platonic Distortion of the Kingdom of God

**By and large the future apocalyptic dimension of Paul’s thought has been misinterpreted in the history of the church. The interpretation of futurist eschatology in the church has been one long process of its transposition into a different key. Especially under the influence of Origen and Augustine future eschatology was made to refer either to the spiritual journey of the believer or to the church as the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>6</sup>**

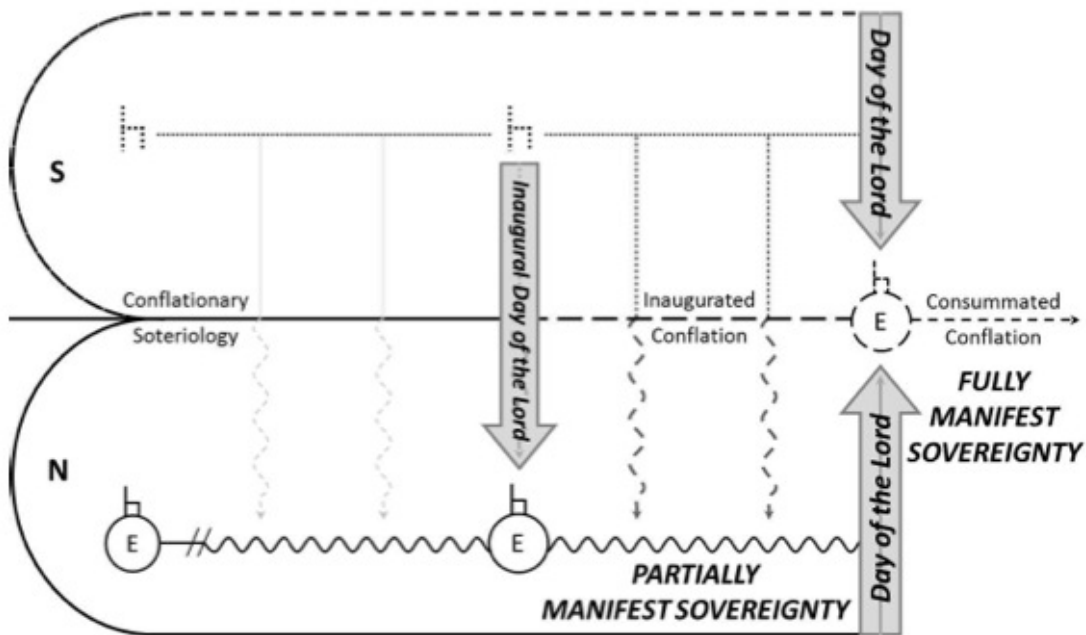
1. Linguistics and Platonic cosmology are the main causes of confusion concerning the New Testament phrase “the kingdom of God” (and the Gospel of Matthew’s “kingdom of heaven”). The phrase “kingdom of God” is only used in the New Testament, and is largely assumed to reference the same “kingdom” as the Old Testament. However, *this is not the case*. With biblical cosmology in view, it is helpful to delineate between the *universal* “kingdom” of God (which has ruled eternally over all creation – Psalm 103:19; Psalm 29:10; 1 Chronicles 29:12; Daniel 4:35) and the *messianic* “kingdom of God”, which rules eschatologically on the earth from Jerusalem (Psalm 2; Psalm 72; Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44; Daniel 7:14; Acts 1:6-7, etc).
2. This misunderstanding has led to the doctrine of *inaugurationism* – the widely-held belief that the kingdom of God has been *inaugurated* (“already”) but not *consummated* (“not yet”) – is an idea largely based on linguistic confusion and Platonic dualism. In this scheme, the *firstfruits* of the Spirit is

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<sup>5</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* [Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2008], 73)

<sup>6</sup> *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 61.

seen as proof that the kingdom has begun and the age to come was redefined and launched by Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.



- a. This error is once again based on a dualistic cosmology, conflating God's perpetual, eternal rule over everything created (from a *throne* in the height of the heavens) with the Messiah of Israel's eschatological rule on the earth (from a *throne* in Jerusalem). *Inaugurationism wrongly brings these two thrones together into one*. This scheme purports that Jesus reigns in heaven *now* and the promised kingdom of God has begun its rule over the earth. Jesus is seen as having brought forth a redefined, reworked "age to come" through a new people of God (often called "agents of the new creation"), and will one day return to bring forth the "fulness of the kingdom" and complete the process of making all things new.
- b. Inaugurationists refer to "the kingdom" as "God's rule" or "the reign of God", fusing the *universal* kingdom to the *messianic* kingdom. However, if God began His rule at the death and resurrection of Jesus, who was in charge beforehand? And if the promised eschatological kingdom had launched, why don't we see page after page of the New Testament filled with rejoicing and shouts of praise, honor, blessing, and glory?
- c. Moreover, inaugurationists affirm in varying measures that Jesus "realizes" the Jewish expectations of the Day of the LORD and the age to come within himself (and later through the church). This approach, called "realized" or "inaugurated" eschatology, modifies the

simple Biblical timeline to reflect the erroneous notion of what some call “already fulfilled” and “not yet” portions of Scripture.

- d. Nowhere in Scripture did the Apostles indicate that the “hope of the Gospel” (Colossians 1:23) was realized, redefined, inaugurated, or modified as a result of Jesus’ first coming. Instead, we do see them saying that the hope of Israel (and thus all the nations) as spoken through the prophets had been *made more certain* because of what Jesus had done through His death and resurrection.

**“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. [the Transfiguration – Matthew 17, etc.] And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star [Gk: phosphoros – “clothed with light”, cf. Matthew 24:27] rises. In your hearts above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:16–21 NIV)**

3. There are many common assumptions about *the messianic kingdom* (“*the kingdom of God*”) that have come from Platonic thought and inaugurationalism:
  - a. Assumption: “*Luke 17:21 says that ‘the kingdom of God is within you’, so that means the kingdom is God’s reign in the heart of believers*”.

This is based on Platonism (“God’s rule/reign”) and is a simple misunderstanding of the verse – Jesus is speaking to unregenerate Pharisees who are looking for Jesus, as the king of Israel, to rise up in an insurrection and defeat Rome. Jesus tells them that they will not observe the kingdom’s beginnings but that it will come *suddenly*, just as was spoken by the prophets. This is why Jesus then turns to His disciples and explains what His coming will be like (Luke 17:22-37) and exhorts them to continue in prayer in light of that Day (Luke 18:1-8).

- b. Assumption: “*Jesus redefined what the kingdom was through the parables He spoke.*”



Jesus spoke in parables as a judgment upon the hard-hearted in Israel (Matthew 13:13-15; cf. Isaiah 6:9-10). He explained all of his parables privately to His disciples (Mark 4:34), who continued to believe in a future messianic kingdom based in Jerusalem even after Jesus had died and raised from the dead (Acts 1:6-7).

- c. Assumption: *“The kingdom of God is another name for the church.”*

Nowhere in Scripture is “the kingdom” equated with “the church” or “the body of Christ”. Through faith in Jesus, we will be richly welcomed (2 Peter 1:11) as *citizens* of the coming kingdom (Philippians 3:20).

- d. Assumption: *“Because I’m a Christian and I’m in the kingdom, I will have life more abundantly.”*

Jesus is not yet reigning from Jerusalem, and humanity still returns to the dust (Hebrews 9:27). Contextually, the “abundant life” Jesus is referring to in John 10 is about the age to come and *eternal life* (John 10:10, 28). Inaugurationism and any measure of “kingdom now” doctrine negates a theology of the cross. If the kingdom is *now* in some measure, why rejoice in persecution, why lay down our lives, why forsake living for this age, why set our hope *fully* on the grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus?

- e. Assumption: *“Jesus manifests his kingdom when people get saved, healed, and delivered or when revival happens.”*

The work of the Holy Spirit is not “the kingdom”, nor should signs and wonders be sought after as if they were “the kingdom”. The Holy Spirit was given to those of faith as the *firstfruits* and *guarantee* of what is to come, and thus the *gifts of the Spirit* are meant to *confirm* the hope of the gospel and assure those of faith unto salvation on the Day of Christ.

**“even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm (ESV: “sustain”) you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**  
**(1 Corinthians 1:6–8 NAS95)**

- i. The gifts of the Spirit are critical to sustain the faith, hope, and love of the church. The gifts must never turn into the *hope* or

the *goal*. This is part of what Paul is correcting in his letter to the Corinthians.

- ii. Signs are given by God *to testify to the truth about Jesus and anchor the heart in the age to come*. Signs are just that – *signs*. On a drive to Chicago, we don't stop at the sign that says "Chicago, 200 miles" and call the sign "Chicago". To call signs "the kingdom" is to stray from the language and truth of Scripture and to rest our hope on something far less than what the Scripture promises.

**Though physical healings were a common sign of the resurrection, no one mistook them for the resurrection itself. Though the paralytic was healed (Lk. 5:25; Acts 3:7) and the dead man raised (Jn. 11:44; Acts 20:9f), they were still "destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27, NIV).<sup>7</sup>**

**"The activity of the Holy Spirit in this age is designed to help us in the weakness of our mortality until the coming of the Messiah when immortality will liberate us from the tyranny of a body of death (cf. Rom. 7:24f). Moreover, God is working out our struggles with mortality in this age for the good of our resurrection when we will be conformed to the image of his Son "in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5). Thus we experience the mechanics of faith, so to speak. The captivity of mortality in this age is designed to drive us to depend upon God who is the only one able to deliver and save us unto immortality. So God works small deliverances throughout our lives to make us believe in the big Deliverance to come, and conversely he allows (and sometimes orchestrates, e.g. Deut. 4:27; Dan. 11:33; Lk. 22:31; 2 Cor. 12:7) small captivities in our lives to make us come to terms with our big Captivity to sin and death. This causes us to cry out to him by the groan of the Spirit within us, and he works it all out for our good in the age to come. Thus, temporal captivity and deliverance (i.e. salvation) point to their protological introduction and eschatological conclusion."<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Harrigan, John. The Gospel of Christ Crucified, pulled from <http://www.gospelofchristcrucified.com/book.html>. Chapter 4, page 16

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* Chapter 4, page 20.