

# 3



## Inaugurated Eschatology Outside the Gospels

The purpose of this chapter is to show that the tension between inaugurated and consummated eschatology identified in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Johannine literature also informs the remainder of the NT.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the prominence of the already–not yet in Paul confirms that eschatological tension was a characteristic feature of NT theology.<sup>2</sup>

Jewish thought distinguished between this age and the age to come. This age is marred by sin, disease, and death, whereas the age to come brings life, abundance, and joy.<sup>3</sup> Those who belong to God should “flee from the shadow of this age” (4 Esd. 2:36 RSV), and “those who have departed from the shadow of this age have received glorious garments from the Lord” (4 Esd. 2:39 RSV).<sup>4</sup> The author remarks that “this age is full of sadness and infirmities” (4 Esd. 4:27 RSV). Jacob and Esau

1. In defense of this, see the fundamental work of Cullmann 1964.

2. In this respect, Paul’s theology matches the theology of Jesus. See Kümmel (1973: 141–51), who sees continuity between Paul and Jesus. The compatibility of Paul and Jesus has been rightly set forth in the important work of D. Wenham 1995.

3. Meier (1994: 363n43) points out that the OT typically speaks of the coming of God’s kingdom. The language of “this age” and “the age to come” belongs to later Jewish literature and cannot be traced definitely to the NT period.

4. Most scholars agree that chapter 2 derives from a later Christian hand, but we likely see here the influence of Jewish eschatology even in the Christian redaction.

represent righteousness and evil, and so the author remarks, “Esau is the end of this age, and Jacob is the beginning of the age that follows” (4 Esd. 6:9 RSV). The coming age is clearly delineated from this present age, “But the day of judgment will be the end of this age and the beginning of the immortal age to come, in which corruption has passed away” (4 Esd. 7:113 RSV). The present age is evil and corrupt (4 Esd. 9:18–19 RSV).

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

## Two Ages in Paul’s Letters

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

Paul also believed in two ages: this present evil age and the coming age of righteousness.<sup>6</sup> The clearest example is found in Eph. 1:21, where he specifically differentiates between “this age” and “the one to come,”

5. For a study of kingdom in some of these texts, see Donfried 2002: 233–52. Donfried sees the already–not yet theme and maintains that continuity exists here with the teaching of Jesus.

6. For a recognition of the fundamental nature of the already–not yet tension in Paul, see Keck 2006: 112–13.

claiming that Jesus rules over all during the present age and will continue his reign in the coming era.<sup>7</sup>

Paul often contrasted the values and behavior of those living in this age with those of the coming one. Satan is described as the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), indicating that those under the dominion of the devil engage in false worship.<sup>8</sup> Since Satan rules as the god of this age, it follows that unbelievers live in accord with the standards of this world (Eph. 2:2).<sup>9</sup> The impact of the old world order displays itself in the domain of scholarship and the intellect. The rhetoricians and debaters of this age are celebrated (1 Cor. 1:20). Those endowed with rhetorical ability are deemed wise (1 Cor. 1:20; 3:18–19).<sup>10</sup> But Paul was unimpressed with the dazzling skills of orators because the rulers of this age, with all their so-called wisdom, crucified the glorious Lord (1 Cor. 2:6, 8), demonstrating their failure to grasp true wisdom.

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

Christians live in, so to speak, the “twilight zone,” for they have experienced the saving power of the age to come, and yet they still reside in the present evil age. Even now Jesus reigns, but the consummation of his rule and the destruction of every enemy have not yet occurred (Eph. 1:21; 1 Cor. 15:26–28). Because of the cross of Christ believers are a new creation (Gal. 1:4; 2 Cor. 5:17), and yet the redemption that they enjoy

7. The importance of eschatology in Pauline theology is rightly emphasized in Ridderbos 1975; see also Pate 1995. The thought of Beker (1980) runs along similar lines, and he posits that the apocalyptic triumph of God is the central theme in Paul.

8. For a reference to Satan here, see Garland 1999: 210–11.

9. The term used here is *aiōn* rather than *kosmos*.

10. For the view that the Corinthians estimated Paul and Apollos according to their rhetorical ability, see Litfin 1994; Winter 1997.

11. Martyn (1997: 91) rightly sees the apocalyptic nature of Paul’s theology here, which he emphasizes throughout his Galatians commentary, but he mistakenly excludes salvation history, postulating a false either-or between apocalyptic and salvation history instead of seeing a both-and.

(Rom. 3:24) is not yet completed, for they endure the anguish of death and await the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23; cf. Eph. 1:14). In the meantime, as believers inhabit the interval between inauguration and consummation, they must resist the blandishments of this world (Rom. 12:2). The world allures and captivates even those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, but those in whom the Spirit dwells must surmount fleshly desires and live in the realm of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13).

Despite the lingering presence of the present evil age, the age to come has dawned by virtue of the death of Christ (Gal. 1:4). The death and resurrection of Christ inaugurate the age to come, and the emblem of its advent is the gift of the Spirit. The promise of the Spirit in Isa. 44:3 is tucked into a context in which Yahweh promises a new exodus in which he will deliver his people from Babylonian exile and return them to their own land: “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.”<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 40–66 pledges not only return from exile but also the fulfillment of all of God’s promises to his people. Isaiah envisions a new creation where the wilderness will bloom and waters will flow in the desert. God will create a new heavens and new earth where joy will redound and peace will reign, even between the wolf and the lamb (Isa. 65:17–25; 66:22). The Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:26) is a reality even now for believers, though they await the eschaton.<sup>13</sup>

Paul alluded to the prophecy of Isa. 44:3 in Gal. 3:14, and the latter functions as the conclusion and main point of Paul’s dense and crucial argument in Gal. 3:10–14. Here I quickly sum up Paul’s argument. God’s curse remains on all who rely on works of the law, since the law requires perfect obedience and no one keeps it without fail. The only way to be right with God is by faith in Christ, since observance of the law leads to a curse. The curse pronounced upon lawbreakers is removed by the cross of Christ, wherein Christ took the curse deserved by sinners upon himself. Therefore, Gentiles receive the promise of “the blessing of Abraham” and the “promise of the Spirit” (Gal. 3:14 NRSV) by faith. It is likely that “the blessing of Abraham” and the “promise of the Spirit” refer to the same reality in Gal. 3:14.<sup>14</sup> Paul contended that Gentiles did not need to receive

12. Surprisingly, Childs (2001: 341–42) says nothing about the promise of the Spirit here.

13. Rightly Lincoln 1981: 21–22, 25, 29. This fits with Phil. 3:20, where the believer’s “state and constitutive government is in heaven” (so Lincoln 1981: 100), and we have a prime example of realized eschatology here, for believers are now part of a heavenly commonwealth but await (Phil. 3:21) the future resurrection (see Lincoln 1981: 101–3). See also Fee 1995: 378–80.

14. So Matera 1992: 120; Dunn 1993: 179; Longenecker 1990: 123; Martyn 1997: 321; contra H. Betz 1979: 152.

circumcision in order to belong to the people of God, for the gift of the Spirit testified that they were God's children. They received the miracle-working presence of the Spirit by faith and not by works of law (Gal. 3:1–5). The Galatians gladly and confidently called God their Father because they were his children, and that sonship was certified by the Spirit.

Galatians 3:14 mentions both “the blessing of Abraham” and “the promise of the Spirit” (NRSV), drawing us into the orbit of Isa. 44:3. In the Isaiah text the blessing and the Spirit, and indeed the water in the desert, describe the same reality with different terminology. We can conclude the same in Gal. 3:14. The end-time blessing sworn to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3) reaches its fulfillment in the gift of the Spirit. To put it another way, the blessing of Abraham *is* the promise of the Spirit. The allusion to Isa. 44:3 also leads us to the conclusion that the promise of the Spirit is God's eschatological gift—the fulfillment of his promise to vindicate his people. Israel returned from exile to Babylon in 536 BC, but that return did not constitute a fulfillment of all that was pledged in Isa. 40–66.<sup>15</sup> Early Christians believed that the promises in Isaiah were being fulfilled in their days, particularly in the gift of the Spirit. Still, everything promised in Isa. 40–66 had not become a reality. The new heavens and new earth had not yet arrived. The Spirit, then, constitutes the “firstfruits” (*aparchē*) of God's work (Rom. 8:23). Just as Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), guaranteeing the physical resurrection of believers, so the gift of the Spirit ensures that God will fulfill the remainder of his saving promises. The Spirit constitutes a pledge (*arrabōn*) that God will redeem the bodies of believers by raising them from the dead on the last day (Eph. 1:14; cf. Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22). All of this fits with the main point being argued here: the presence of the Spirit indicates that the new age has dawned, but believers have not yet obtained all that God has promised.<sup>16</sup>

## New Creation

The eschatological granting of the Spirit portends the arrival of a new creation. We see this clearly in Isa. 32:14–18:

15. What we see here is a typological understanding of fulfillment. For a classic discussion of this theme, see Goppelt 1982a, and for an even more helpful treatment overall, see Davidson 1981.

16. If the Spirit is the gift of the new age, then the term “flesh” in Paul should be understood in terms of redemptive history. For a survey of the various understandings of the term “flesh” in Paul, along with an emphasis on salvation history in understanding Paul's distinctive use of the term “flesh,” see Ridderbos 1975: 64–68, 100–107; Dunn 1998: 62–73. Russell (1993; 1995) also has argued that “flesh” in Paul must be understood in terms of redemptive history, though he underestimates the anthropological dimension of the term.

For the palace is forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks; until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

The granting of the Spirit is accompanied by the renewal of creation, so that the wilderness blossoms with fruit. In Isaiah return from exile cannot be sundered from a transformation of creation. When Israel returns from Babylon, mountains, hills, and trees will rejoice, and instead of thorns and briars there will be myrtles and cypresses (Isa. 55:12–13).

God pledges to transform the natural world as we know it: “I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together” (Isa. 41:18–19). Elsewhere in Isaiah God renovates the world so that it becomes a new creation (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). According to Paul, the new creation has dawned. Believers in Jesus Christ are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).<sup>17</sup> In the context of 2 Cor. 5 this new creative work of God is centered in the reconciling work of Christ on the cross, whereby transgressions are not counted against those befriended to God through Christ. Nor does the arrival of the new creation spell the consummation of all of God’s promises, for in 2 Cor. 5:1–10 the resurrection of the body is reserved for the future. Paul’s “new creation” theme, then, fits with the already–not yet tension observed elsewhere.

The theme of new creation surfaces in Gal. 6:15 as well.<sup>18</sup> The Jewish teachers insisted that Gentile converts submit to circumcision to become part of Abraham’s family (Gal. 5:2–6; 6:12–13). Paul emphatically rejected

17. For a careful analysis of the verse, see Harris 2005: 430–34. Harris (2005: 432) contends that the background here is “anthropological and personal, not cosmological and eschatological.” For an emphasis on the new cosmos and world order, see Barrett 1973: 173; R. Martin 1986: 152. Hubbard (2002: 11–76) argues that the Jewish background indicates that the new creation is both anthropological and cosmological. So also Garland 1999: 286–87; Furnish 1984: 314–15, 332–33.

18. The “new creation” theme, according to some, focuses not on the anthropological change inside a person but on God’s new work in the world that he created (so Weima 1993: 102; Dunn 1993: 342–43). But Hubbard (2002) rightly argues that the anthropological notions are actually at the forefront here in Paul’s theology, and that his new-creation theology is intimately related with the new-age work of the Spirit. Longenecker (1990: 295–96) seems to hold a view similar to Hubbard’s. For the new creation in Galatians, see also Martyn 1997: 570–74.

imposing circumcision on Gentiles because it diminishes Christ's work on the cross (Gal. 1:4; 2:19–20; 3:1, 13; 4:4–5; 5:11; 6:14) and focuses on human accomplishment.<sup>19</sup> The only emblems needed on Paul's body are the marks (*stigmata*) of the cross (Gal. 6:17). Paul boasted only in the cross, refusing to put any credence in the standards of the world (Gal. 6:14). The cross, then, effects the new creation. Paul drew attention to the soteriological dimensions of God's creative work, excluding human works as the basis for right standing with God. Circumcision in and of itself is irrelevant—nor should anyone take pride in being uncircumcised. Boasting in uncircumcision falls prey to the same trap as boasting in circumcision, since both manifest pride in human performance. The new creation fixes our attention on the cross of Christ, where salvation has been definitively accomplished.

When we think about the term “creation” in Paul, its background must be sought in the OT, especially on God's work in creating the heavens and earth. The term “creation” features God's sovereignty and unrivaled power. As we noted, the “new creation” theme in Paul centers on the cross of Christ, where God's saving and gracious work for human beings was effected. Invariably the creation motif in Pauline writings has a soteriological cast. Satan blinds unbelievers so that they do not see the stunning beauty of God in Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). Paul compared the work of conversion to that of creation, in which the same God who summoned light out of darkness shines his light in human hearts so that they perceive God's glory in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Unbelievers, according to Eph. 2:1–4, live under the dominion of sin, insensitive to the things of God and lacking any desire or ability to change. God's grace, however, breaks through the hardness of human hearts and grants life, so that believers are raised and seated with Christ (Eph. 2:5–10). This gracious work of God is also said to be his creative work.<sup>20</sup> God's work of new creation is nothing other than the power of his grace, reflecting his sovereign work in bestowing life on those who are dead (cf. Rom. 4:17). Later in Ephesians God's gracious work is described in terms of the creation of “the new self” (*ton kainon anthrōpon* [Eph. 4:24]). The “new man” is Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:15 my translation; cf. Col. 3:11), and Jews and Gentiles form one body in Christ. In Eph. 4:24 Paul calls upon believers to be what they are in Christ, focusing again on God's gracious and redeeming work.

The inauguration of the new creation in the present age points forward to the future, for Christians anticipate with confidence and joy the life of the age to come, when they will enjoy eternal life (e.g., Rom. 2:7; 5:21;

19. Borgen (1980) argues that the cross functions as the replacement for circumcision in Galatians. See also Borgen 1982.

20. See Lincoln 1990: 114; Best 1998: 230; Hoehner 2002: 347–48.

6:23; Gal. 6:8; Titus 1:2). As the messianic and Davidic king (Ps. 110:1), Jesus now rules over every enemy (Eph. 1:19–23; 1 Cor. 15:26–28). But the fullness of his power will be evident on the final day of judgment and salvation. Then believers will celebrate and commemorate forever the grace bestowed on them in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7).

### **The Gift of the Spirit in Acts**

The gift of the Spirit signals the arrival of the eschaton. According to the prophet Joel, God pledged to pour out his Spirit (Joel 2:28). Joel anticipated the day of the Lord, when Yahweh would reverse the fortunes of Israel by vindicating his people and punishing the nations that opposed Israel (Joel 3). Those who curse Israel would be cursed, and those who bless Israel would be blessed, in accordance with God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Joel pointed forward to the day when Jerusalem would become holy, and the land would burst with fruitfulness as wine and milk flow in abundance and a fountain springs up from the Lord's house (Joel 3:17–18). We note again here the language of a new creation. God will avenge himself on nations that resisted him, whereas Jerusalem will become a peaceful habitation.

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

21. "That the events he describes were the fulfillment of Scripture is a central part of Luke's understanding of them" (Barrett 1994: 135). Fitzmyer (1998: 252) rightly argues that Luke saw a fulfillment of the Joel prophecy here and the inbreaking of the last days. Jervell (1984: 99–104) rightly detects continuity between the OT and NT relative to the Spirit but significantly downplays the newness coincident with the gift of the Spirit in Luke-Acts.

1:6) should not be dismissed as a mistaken departure into nationalistic ideology.<sup>22</sup> Jesus' promise of the Spirit naturally precipitated the question, since in the OT the restoration of Israel was indissolubly joined with the promise that God would pour out his Spirit (cf. Isa. 32; 44:1–5; Ezek. 36–37). The disciples did not yet comprehend the already–not yet tension that informed Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus answered the question by implying that the restoration of Israel and the fulfillment of all of God's promises are not coterminous with the granting of the Spirit (Acts 1:7–8). An interval exists between the gift of the Spirit and the consummation.

### The Resurrection of Jesus

If we can speak of the giving of the Spirit as the arrival of the eschaton, we should note that before the coming of the Spirit, Jesus was raised from the dead.<sup>23</sup> The resurrection of Jesus is one of the central themes of Acts (Acts 1:22; 2:24–36; 3:13–15, 21–26; 4:2, 10–11, 33; 5:30–32; 7:37; 10:40–41; 13:30–37; 17:18, 31–32; 23:6–8; 24:15, 21; 26:8), and it cannot be sundered from his exaltation to God's right hand. We find the background for the theme of resurrection in the OT.<sup>24</sup> Ezekiel 37 looks forward to the day when Israel and Judah will be reunited.<sup>25</sup> The Lord will place his Spirit in his people (v. 14), return them from exile (v. 21), form them into a united people (v. 22), cleanse them from their sins (v. 23), and grant them the ability to keep his commands (v. 24). In other words, God will fulfill his long-standing covenantal promises to his people (vv. 26–27), so that his sanctuary will be among them, and he will be their God and they will be his people. God's saving purposes will be realized when a new David arrives (vv. 24–25) who will lead them as their prince. Ezekiel used a startling and vivid picture to describe the future union of Israel and Judah: resurrection from the dead. The restoration of Israel is portrayed in terms of the resurrection of corpses, as if the nation in its present state is nothing more than a collection of bones in a valley

22. Barrett (1994: 76–77), for example, does not clearly draw the connection between the question and the fulfillment of the OT promises. For the connection, see Polhill 1992: 84; Turner 1996: 299; Penney 1997: 69–71.

23. The crucial work on the resurrection is Wright 2003. Wright (2003: 32–84) demonstrates that in the Greco-Roman world there was no expectation of or hope for a bodily resurrection, and hence the NT hope is grounded in the OT view of the body.

24. For a fine survey of resurrection in the OT and Second Temple Judaism, see Wright 2003: 85–206. Wright (2003: 123) thinks that the hope of the resurrection began with the servant texts in Isaiah.

25. See especially Block 1998: 383–92, 399; Wright 2003: 119–21.

that needs flesh and life.<sup>26</sup> Such new life comes from the breath of the Spirit, who will animate all Israel and unify them, fulfilling the promises originally made to Abraham.

Space forbids us from considering all the complex issues that arise in Ezek. 37. What is clear, however, is that resurrection signifies the fulfillment of God's promises, the inauguration of the age to come—the restoration of exile and the return of Israel. We see the same emphasis in Isa. 26. The Lord will judge and destroy the human city that mistreats the poor and flows with evil. In its stead he will establish an impregnable city of salvation for the righteous, for those who trust in Yahweh. Amazingly, this future hope is not limited to the living, and Isaiah declares that the dead will rise; they will awake and sing for joy in the fulfillment of God's promises (Isa. 26:19).<sup>27</sup> Daniel 12 runs along the same lines, placing the resurrection of the dead at the time of the end when God will vindicate his people and judge the wicked.<sup>28</sup> In every instance the resurrection signals the onset of the new age, the time when God's saving promises are finally realized.

Hence, the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection in Acts—one of its most prominent themes—means nothing less than the arrival of the coming age of salvation. For Jews, resurrection could mean only one thing: the old age has passed away and the new has come. God's promise to vindicate his people and restore Israel was no longer a word about the future; the threshold had been crossed with the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Incidentally, this suggests that Jesus is the true Israel (a theme that we will examine in due course). Still, the arrival of the resurrection and the new age contained a surprise inasmuch as the present evil age continued to exist and did not vanish immediately. The new and old ages coexist simultaneously now that Jesus has been raised from the dead. The new has come, but the old persists. The new certainly will triumph, but not without an interval in which death remains. Luke concentrates on the resurrection of Jesus in Acts because it is the emblem of the new age, the signature of God's promises.

We find in Paul a similar emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus, although, because of problems in the churches, he explains more clearly the interval between Jesus' resurrection and that of believers.<sup>29</sup> The resurrection of Jesus spells his exaltation to God's right hand as the powerful

26. Wright (2003: 124) correctly observes that restoration from exile and future resurrection are often intertwined and difficult to separate from one another.

27. Childs (2001: 191–92) rightly argues that it is a false dichotomy to ask whether the promise is for restoration of the nation or a future resurrection. See also Wright 2003: 116–18; Motyer 1993: 218–20.

28. See Wright 2003: 109–15; Baldwin 1978: 204–5.

29. For resurrection in Paul, see Wright 2003: 209–76.

Son of God (Rom. 1:4).<sup>30</sup> Jesus as the resurrected and exalted one now reigns over every angelic power (Eph. 1:19–23). The fundamental nature of Jesus' resurrection for Christian belief is apparent from its presence in confessional statements that briefly summarize the elements of the gospel (Rom. 4:25; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:1–11). Those who reject the resurrection of Jesus deny the gospel, for justification and salvation are available only for those who confess that Jesus was raised from the dead. The resurrected Christ will deliver his people from God's wrath on the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:10).<sup>31</sup> The text just cited from 1 Thessalonians confirms the same eschatological tension noted in Acts. The age to come has arrived now that Jesus has been raised from the dead, but believers live between the times. They await the final day of judgment, when God will inflict his wrath on those who have not placed their trust and faith in Jesus. Jesus' resurrection testifies to the inauguration of the age of fulfillment, but God's promises are not yet consummated, for Jesus is coming again, and on that day he will spare his people from "the wrath to come."

A similar note is sounded in Rom. 8:11. The Spirit of the resurrected Jesus indwells his people. We have already seen that the indwelling Spirit signifies the gift of the new age, and here the gift of the Spirit is connected closely to the risen Christ, which is scarcely surprising since the Spirit is given when Christ is exalted. Two indications of the new age coalesce here: Christ's resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. The arrival of the age of promise, however, does not mean that the era of evil has ceased. Even though Christ has been raised and has poured out his Spirit, Christians still die—the age of evil is defeated, but it still kills Christians in its last gasp. Yet, the indwelling Spirit of the resurrected Christ guarantees that believers will be raised on the last day. Death will not have the last word for believers; it represents the last painful but ultimately ineffective attack against Christians. Believers live in the interval between Christ's resurrection and theirs with the sure confidence that they will live because Christ lives.

Understanding the interlude between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers is no trivial matter. Those who proclaim that the physical resurrection of believers has already occurred "have swerved from the truth" of the gospel (2 Tim. 2:18).<sup>32</sup> Those who collapse

30. The resurrection here signals the arrival of the age to come. See Schreiner 1998: 44–45.

31. See Wanamaker 1990: 88. The present tense of the participle *rhyomenon* in 1 Thess. 1:10 should not be pressed to say that Jesus is protecting believers even now (contra Best 1972: 84).

32. The opponents likely believed that the only resurrection that believers experienced was spiritual and that it occurred at baptism (so Marshall 1999: 751–54; W. Mounce 2000:

the not yet into the already have deviated from orthodoxy. Perhaps those questioning the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15 were similar to the opponents in 2 Timothy. In insisting that there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12), they probably taught that a future physical resurrection was a fantasy (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35).<sup>33</sup> They may have believed that the only resurrection that believers receive is the spiritual resurrection in which believers are raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1), dismissing a future physical resurrection because such a notion was repulsive to the Greek mind. Conceivably, they identified themselves as spiritually exalted even now as possessors of “wisdom” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17–2:16; 3:18–23; 4:6–7; 6:5), and their spiritual maturity is confirmed by the spiritual gifts operating in their midst, particularly speaking in tongues like the angels of heaven (1 Cor. 12:14–30; 14; see esp. 13:1).<sup>34</sup> They were reigning as kings, and so what need could there possibly be for a future physical resurrection (1 Cor. 4:8)? Their distorted conception of the resurrection may have contributed to their defense of sexual sin (1 Cor. 6:12–20), as some may have argued that what we do with our bodies is irrelevant.

For Paul, belief in the future resurrection of believers is nonnegotiable. Those who reject the future physical resurrection of believers also deny the physical resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:13, 15–16), even if they claim to support the latter. The two are inseparable for Paul, so that one cannot trumpet the resurrection of Christ and at the same time dismiss the future resurrection of believers. Interestingly, Paul did not *argue* for the inextricable connection between the resurrection of Christ and believers; he *assumed* dogmatically that anyone who writes off the resurrection of believers cannot and does not believe in Christ’s resurrection. He pressed the matter further. Those who set aside Christ’s resurrection have believed in vain and have not received forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). Indeed, believers who have died will perish eternally if Christ is not risen (1 Cor. 15:18).

What is fundamental for Paul, then, is grasping the interval between Christ’s physical resurrection and ours. Christ is already resurrected, but believers are not yet raised. Christ is the “firstfruits” of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), so that his resurrection guarantees the same for all his people. Still, the resurrection of Christ does not secure the immediate resurrection of those who believe. Christians have the Spirit and are raised spiritually with Christ, but they will not be raised physically until

---

527–28). Less likely is the idea, defended by Dibelius and Conzelmann (1972: 112), that such a view can be ascribed to Gnosticism.

33. For a summary of the discussion, see Thiselton 2000: 1169–78. Wright (2003: 316) thinks that they denied the resurrection for pagan reasons, not because they held to an overrealized eschatology.

34. So Fee 1987: 10–15.

Jesus comes again (1 Cor. 15:23). Death as the last enemy still manifests its power in this world (1 Cor. 15:26), signaling that all things are not yet subjected to Christ (1 Cor. 15:27–28). The resurrection of Christ, then, reveals that the new age has broken in, and yet the consummation of all things has not occurred, for believers will not be raised until Christ returns. Meanwhile, Christians live in the awkward time period between the inauguration and the completion of God's promise.<sup>35</sup>

## Hebrews

At first glance, it seems that Hebrews does not share the same eschatological viewpoint evident in the rest of the NT. The linear eschatology found elsewhere in the NT appears to be replaced by a vertical contrast between what is below and what is above. Indeed, Hebrews could be interpreted along Platonic lines, with the earthly representing the heavenly, so that the latter is the archetype of the former.<sup>36</sup> The true tent was not the tabernacle erected by Moses (Heb. 8:2), for the earthly tent points to and represents the very presence of God in heaven (Heb. 9:24). The holy place and the inner sanctum of the temple (the holy of holies) are merely copies and anticipations of God's dwelling. The author of Hebrews drew upon Exod. 25:40, where Moses was instructed to make the tabernacle in accord with the pattern revealed to him on Mount Sinai. The earthly articles of the tabernacle (Heb. 9:1–5), it seems, mirror heavenly reality. Similarly, the sacrifices and gifts offered, along with the various regulations relating to foods and drinks and washings, relate only to the physical and symbolic sphere (Heb. 9:8–10). They must point to something greater and higher, for they cannot effect forgiveness of sins. The earthly sacrifices purify the copies of the heavenly things, but they fail to secure forgiveness in God's very presence (Heb. 9:23–24). Only the sacrifice of Christ truly and definitively achieves full atonement for sin. Just as the tabernacle and the articles in it point to a vertical reality, so also the earthly priests from the tribe of Levi anticipate a superior priesthood, a Melchizedekian one. The priests "serve a copy and shadow

35. Even in Colossians, which often is seen as advancing only a realized eschatology, we see, in Col. 3:4, eschatological reservation and the recognition that the future has not yet arrived in its fullness (rightly Lincoln 1981: 129, 131–34; see also O'Brien 1982: 168–69; Dunn 1996b: 207–8; cf. Lohse 1971: 134–35). Lincoln (1981: 165–67) likewise argues that although Ephesians emphasizes realized eschatology, future eschatology is held in tension with the present fulfillment of God's promises. Best (1998: 52–55), on the other hand, maintains that the perspective in Ephesians is incompatible with what he deems the genuine Paul.

36. The Platonism would be of the sort found in Philo's work. However, Platonic or Philonic influence has been shown by Williamson (1970) to be quite unlikely.

of the heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5; cf. 10:1). Hence, the ritual duties of the priests symbolize access into God’s presence (Heb. 9:6–8). The holy of holies may be entered into only once a year by priests, signifying the unavailability of regular and unhindered admission to God.

Even though Hebrews has superficial affinities with Platonic thought, the “vertical” language of the letter should be plotted into its eschatological worldview.<sup>37</sup> The already–not yet tension found elsewhere in the NT permeates Hebrews as well.<sup>38</sup> The focus on eschatology surfaces in the opening verses of the letter, where “these last days” have arrived with the coming of God’s Son (Heb. 1:2) and the fulfillment of OT prophecy (Heb. 1:5–14). Final and definitive forgiveness of sins has been accomplished by the work of Christ (Heb. 1:3; 10:12); the power of the coming age has invaded this present era (Heb. 6:5). Forgiveness of sins must be understood eschatologically along the lines of promise and fulfillment.<sup>39</sup> The author of Hebrews argues that forgiveness signals the fulfillment of the new covenant (Heb. 8:6–13; 10:16–18; cf. Jer. 31:31–34). Inevitably, therefore, the old covenant has become obsolete and is no longer in force for Christians. The contrast between the old and new covenants certifies that the timeline of redemptive history is crucial for the author.<sup>40</sup>

The eschatological cast of the author’s mind is apparent in Heb. 9:26 as well. Christ “appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” The “end of the ages” is another way of speaking of “these last days” (Heb. 1:2). The forgiveness of sins “at the end of the ages” confirms the fulfillment of the new-covenant promises found in Jeremiah. The end of redemptive history has dawned by virtue of the work of Christ. The author fixes our attention on the work of Christ that is featured at the beginning of the letter, where after accomplishing cleansing for sins, Christ sat down at God’s right hand (Heb. 1:3). The author’s thought cannot be restricted to vertical categories, as it also operates horizontally on a redemptive-historical timeline. Hebrews does not dismiss OT revelation as a mistake or substandard but conceives of his-

37. The view that Hebrews represented the Hellenistic Judaism typified by Philo has been supported by some, especially Spicq (1952–1953: 1:39–91). This view is scrutinized carefully and rejected by Williamson (1970). For the eschatological character of Hebrews, see Peterson 1982: 131; Michel 1966: 288–89. The view of Käsemann (1984) that Hebrews is gnostic has won few adherents, for scholars, particularly in light of the Qumran manuscripts, have recognized the Jewish character of the letter. See also the careful discussion of the background of the letter, both Christian and non-Christian, in Hurst 1990. For a discussion of the socio-rhetorical perspective, see deSilva 1995.

38. See the classic argument by Barrett (1954) on eschatology in Hebrews. See also Rissi 1987: 125; Scholer 1991: 122–23, 143, 205.

39. On the significance of promise in Hebrews, with attention to its eschatological (both present and future) character, see Käsemann 1984: 26–37.

40. The newness of the new covenant in Hebrews is captured well in Lehne 1990.

tory in terms of promise and fulfillment. OT sacrifices point toward and anticipate the sacrifice of Christ. God ordained the Aaronic priesthood but never intended it to last forever. The Aaronic priesthood functions as a type of the Melchizedekian priesthood, which is superior because it is based on God's oath (Heb. 7:11–28). The old covenant prepares the way for and even prophesies the coming of the new.

The “vertical” themes in Hebrews, then, should be integrated into a redemptive-historical schema. The earthly tabernacle not only mirrors a heavenly tabernacle (God's very presence) but also became passé when Christ arrived and secured access to God. The Aaronic priesthood and regulations serve as copies and shadows of what is heavenly, and the heavenly reality manifests itself in history when Christ arrives as the Melchizedekian priest and fulfills the OT shadows and types. Hebrews 10:1 captures well the relationship between the vertical and horizontal in the letter: “The law has but a shadow of the good things to come.” The substance and very image of the realities portrayed by the law is Christ himself. Still, the law points to Christ, just as a shadow represents the substance of a body. The author locates the law along the redemptive-historical timeline, in that it anticipates what is to come. The “vertical” motifs in Hebrews cannot be identified as Platonic, since they are earthed in history, being placed by the author into the stream of salvation history.

The age of fulfillment has arrived, since Jesus has accomplished purification of sins (Heb. 1:3) in fulfillment of the new-covenant promise. “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). Jesus now reigns as the messianic king in fulfillment of Ps. 110:1 (Heb. 1:3, 13; 10:12). We might conclude that Hebrews swallows up the not yet into the already because it emphasizes Jesus' reign and final forgiveness of sins. Hebrews, however, maintains the same eschatological tension as is found in the rest of the NT witness. Jesus now reigns, but enemies still remain and have not yet been subjected under his feet (Heb. 1:13; 10:12–13; cf. Ps. 110:1). Christ has dealt with sin definitively once for all, and yet the day of judgment has not yet commenced, and believers await Jesus' return when he will complete the salvation already accomplished (Heb. 9:26–28). Psalm 8 reflects upon humanity's role in the universe—the high honor of ruling the entire world for God. Hebrews 2 engages in a commentary on the psalm, acknowledging that the world is not ruled by human beings the way it should be (Heb. 2:8). We know that the world has gone awry because of death (Heb. 2:14–15), and death can be traced to the wickedness of human beings. Jesus, however, succeeded where Adam and the rest of humanity failed. As the sinless one, he lived as the perfect “Adam” (Heb. 4:15; 7:26). Moreover, because of his suffering and death, he is exalted

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

The believing recipients of Hebrews have been forgiven; they have been sanctified once and for all by the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:14), and yet the whole of Hebrews indicates an eschatological reserve. The readers are urgently warned not to forsake the salvation that they have embraced. They must not drift away from “such a great salvation” (Heb. 2:1–4). They must stoke the fires of faith and obedience, so that they do not harden their hearts and fail to enter God’s rest (Heb. 3:12–4:13).<sup>41</sup> They must shake off lethargy and dullness so that they do not fall away and fail to obtain the promise (Heb. 5:11–6:12). They must hold fast the confession of faith and continue believing God’s unseen promises, for those who fail to trust in God will experience his vengeance (Heb. 10:19–12:3). They must heed the voice of the one speaking, for God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:25–29). Homiletical warnings permeate the letter, demonstrating that believers inhabit the period between the already and the not yet. Salvation in that sense is eschatological, and believers await its consummation, and hence they are called to believe, obey, and endure in the interval. The heavenly city and country have not yet arrived (Heb. 11:10, 13–16). Believers in Christ do not find a lasting city on this earth (Heb. 13:14). The tension between what has already been received and the final reception of salvation is reflected well in the teaching on entering God’s rest. Hebrews 4:3 apparently claims that those who believe in Christ have already entered God’s rest.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the use of the word “today” (Heb. 4:7) emphasizes the present realization, at least in part, of the promise. And yet Heb. 3:12–4:11 emphasizes repeatedly that the promised rest still remains for God’s people (Heb. 4:1, 6). The rest is fundamentally eschatological since those who rest cease from their works as God ceased from his (Heb. 4:10). When believers enter the heavenly city, they cease activity because the day of striving has come to an end.

### **Soundings from the Rest of the New Testament**

The already–not yet theme is not as pervasive in the rest of the NT (James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation). The purpose and occasional nature of the documents furnish an adequate explanation. The book of

41. France (1996: 271–72) rightly argues that the rest here refers to heavenly rest.

42. So Attridge 1989: 126; Lincoln 1982: 210–13; Lane 1991a: 99; against this, see Scholer 1991: 202–4.

Revelation, being a prophetic-apocalyptic work, naturally focuses on the day of future judgment and salvation when God vindicates his people and condemns the wicked. During the present age the church suffers and dies for its witness to Jesus, and the beast and Babylon oppress the people of God. Still, believers should shun fear and embrace hope because the beast's hour of triumph will not endure. Satan's opportunity to persecute Christians is limited to three and one-half years (Rev. 12:14)—that is, forty-two months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5) or one thousand two hundred and sixty days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6). Scholars dispute whether the interval of time should be construed literally or whether the number is symbolic.<sup>43</sup> The latter seems more likely because the number “seven” symbolizes perfection and completeness, as in Rev. 1:4, where the seven spirits stand for the Holy Spirit. One half of seven denotes a time in which evil dominates and rules over the world, the time when Satan has been cast from heaven to earth after the victory accomplished by Christ at the cross (Rev. 12:7–12). He persecutes the people of God during this interval (Rev. 12:14), so that it seems that the evil period designated by half of seven years refers to the entire era between the cross of Christ and his return.<sup>44</sup>

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

The book of Revelation fixes our attention on the completion of God's covenantal promises, but the “already” theme is not entirely absent. Christ has delivered believers “from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (Rev. 1:5–6). The decisive battle for believers has been won. They conquer “by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11). Their robes are glistening white by virtue of Jesus' blood as God's lamb (Rev. 7:14). Jesus has expelled Satan from heaven (Rev. 12:9) and been exalted to the right hand of God and his throne (Rev. 12:5) by virtue of his work on the cross. As God's slain lamb, he has opened the scroll with seven seals (Rev. 5:1–14), so that the definitive and irrevocable work in salvation history has been done. In the interim

43. Walvoord (1966: 178) takes it literally, while Osborne (2002: 414–15) thinks that it refers to a limited time near the end of history.

44. So Beale 1999b: 565–68, 669. For further discussion, see Aune 1998: 609–10.

period in which Satan attacks believers, they must endure suffering (Rev. 3:10; 13:10; 14:12) and “conquer” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 15:2; 21:7) to obtain the final reward. The already–not yet schema is present in Revelation. The cross of Christ is the fulcrum of history; he has redeemed believers from sin. Still, they must suffer and endure until Jesus returns and recompenses their enemies.

The letters of James and 1 Peter are addressed to believers undergoing trials and/or persecution. Again, we must recall the occasional and circumstantial character of both letters, since neither constitutes a treatise on Christian theology. Both authors intend to strengthen believers facing difficulties that could quench their faith. James concentrates on parenesis, exhorting his readers to live in a way that pleases God while encountering trials.<sup>45</sup> He regularly considers the day of judgment as the time when believers will be exalted and unbelievers will face judgment. The “poor” (my translation), a term used virtually synonymously with “believer,” will be exalted at the judgment, whereas the “rich” will perish (James 1:9–11). The one who shows mercy to others and desists from partiality, particularly to the economically well-off, will obtain mercy on the last day (James 2:12–13). The wealthy who oppress their workers and deny them their wages in order to live sumptuously are storing up judgment against themselves on the day of reckoning (James 5:1–6). The righteous should exercise patience because the Lord will come soon, even if his delay seems inordinately long (James 5:7–8).<sup>46</sup> Since ethical exhortation dominates the letter, the lack of emphasis on realized eschatology is unremarkable.

Still, two texts seem to point toward a realized eschatology. First, there is James 1:18: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” Some scholars maintain that James contemplates our physical birth as human beings.<sup>47</sup> The verb “brought forth” (*apokyeō*) designates physical birth elsewhere.<sup>48</sup> Further, the preceding verse speaks of God’s generous gifts to all, focusing on the creation of the sun, moon, and stars (James 1:17). Human beings could be described as “the firstfruits” of God’s creation in that they are, according to Gen. 1, the crown of creation—the only creatures made in God’s image. Despite some good arguments supporting a reference to physical creation, it is probable that James speaks of the spiritual birth of his readers—their new life in Christ.<sup>49</sup> The goodness

45. Bauckham (1999b: 25–28) is likely correct in suggesting that James is an encyclical letter written to the Jewish Diaspora in both the East and the West.

46. See also James 5:3 (see L. Cheung 2003: 252).

47. So Elliott-Binns 1956.

48. See the entry in BDAG.

49. Dibelius 1975: 103–7; Davids 1982: 88–90; Moo 2000: 79–80. Laws (1980: 75–78) argues that both physical creation and new life in Christ are included.

of God is celebrated in James 1:13–18, with the emphasis that he does not tempt anyone to sin but instead lavishes his goodness on all. Writing to Christians, James climaxed his tribute to God's beneficence by reminding them that God granted them new life. An important piece of evidence tilts the scales to spiritual birth: the means used to grant new birth was "the word of truth." In Paul the phrase "word of truth" invariably refers to the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15). Unfortunately, James did not use the expression elsewhere, but the term "word" (*logos*) appears three times in the next paragraph to denote the message that he proclaimed (James 1:21–23). For instance, in James 1:21 the "implanted word" is able to "save" their souls. Both verses of James 1:22–23 stress that the readers must not only hear the word but also put it into action. It seems likely, then, that the "word of truth" in James 1:18 refers to the gospel.<sup>50</sup> Even though believers await the judgment of the final day, they are spiritually the firstfruits of God's promised work in all his creation. Ultimately, he promises new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22), and the new life of believers testifies that they are the first installment of the blessing intended for all of creation. The second indication of realized eschatology is in James 2:5: even now God has chosen that the poor would be "rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom." In this present era they are God's people and trust in him, and yet they await the eschatological gift of the kingdom.

In his first letter Peter addressed suffering believers, encouraging them to persevere in their troubles because of the promise of end-time salvation.<sup>51</sup> Sufferings cause grief and represent God's purifying judgment of his flock, but they last briefly compared to the final inheritance that believers will receive when Jesus returns (1 Pet. 1:4–7; 4:17; 5:10). Peter emphasized the future character of salvation in describing it as an inheritance that believers will receive in the future (1 Pet. 1:4). Both husbands and wives share the same destiny as "co-heirs of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7 my translation). Presently God fortifies believers so that they will obtain a salvation that will be revealed only when Jesus comes again (1 Pet. 1:5, 7). In one sense, salvation is incomplete, for believers await "the outcome of" their "faith," which is "the salvation of" their "souls" (1 Pet. 1:9), and elders shepherding the flock anticipate receiving a glorious and permanent reward when Jesus appears (1 Pet. 5:4). In speaking of loving life and seeing good days (1 Pet. 3:10), Peter likely referred to life in the eschaton—the future reward awaiting the righteous. Supporting this interpretation is the judgment

50. This is because the word that saves in James 1:21 refers to the gospel (so Laws 1980: 82; Davids 1982: 95; Moo 2000: 79–80), though Laws does not see the implication for James 1:18.

51. Dryden (2006) rightly emphasizes the inseparability of theology and ethics in 1 Peter, showing that Peter is fundamentally concerned about the virtuous lives of Christians.

awaiting the wicked according to 1 Pet. 3:12, for the Lord's face will turn against them forever on the last day.

Peter did not confine himself to future eschatology, for God has caused believers to be born again by means of the word of the gospel (1 Pet. 1:3, 23).<sup>52</sup> Their eschatological hope is grounded in the new life that they have already received (1 Pet. 1:3). God has ransomed believers from their vain and futile life by means of Christ's blood (1 Pet. 1:18–19). The decisive and fundamental change has already occurred in their lives, so that the redemption that they possess now anchors their future hope. The remarkable text about the OT prophets in 1 Pet. 1:10–12 verifies that believers live on the fulfillment side of the promise. The prophets searched diligently, wondering when the prophecies about the Messiah would be fulfilled. They discovered that their ministry was not intended for their own times; they prophesied for the sake of the believers of Peter's day. Clearly, the readers should appreciate that they live during the age of fulfillment, in the era when God's promises are coming to pass. The last times have arrived, and their commencement is attested by the coming of Jesus the Christ (1 Pet. 1:20).

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

## Conclusion

The tension between the already and the not yet that we saw with respect to the kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels and regarding eternal life in John permeates the remainder of the NT as well. The authors address the theme in a variety of ways, and hence there is not

52. Dryden (2006: 64–89) describes God's saving work in 1 Peter in terms of the "narrative worldview" and "meta-history" that ground parenthesis.

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