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A Hopeful Eschatology and the Role of the Ekklesia Prior to the Parousia

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A HOPEFUL ESCHATOLOGY AND THE ROLE OF THE EKKLESIA PRIOR TO THE
PAROUSIA

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INTRODUCTION

When Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, He did not leave the earth or abandon His mission. Rather, He gave His disciples a commission to go into all of the world and proclaim Gospel of the Kingdom to all creation (Mark 16:15). He gave them an assignment that was impossible to accomplish without the empowerment and enablement of His Spirit. While giving them such a high command, He also gave them beautiful promises about the hope of the resurrection and the coming new heavens and new earth. This future hope motivated them to engage His realities in the age of the Spirit and to help speed up the Parousia where Jesus will be revealed in all of His splendor and heaven and earth will join together as one.

Jesus told His beloved apostles about the present glories in the age of the Spirit and the glories to come at His final unveiling. These realities shaped the apostle's motivation and gave them constant inspiration to do all that Jesus required of them. A hopeful eschatology, built upon God's desire to restore the earth and all that is in it, provided them with the framework to partner with God's restorative work in creation before Parousia. Their understanding was that the work of Jesus continued through them and that their role was to join His work through the power and enablement of the Spirit.

The purpose of this paper is to use Scripture to explore the hope-filled reality of the coming new heavens, new earth, and the resurrection, and to use that eschatological hope to reaffirm the present possibilities and responsibilities of the *ekklesia* in the age of the Spirit. The central research question I will answer is, "How does a hopeful eschatology provide a framework for the *ekklesia* to engage God's restorative work in the present age of the Spirit?"

In the first section of this paper, I will discuss God's desire to restore and redeem creation, which includes the material world and the saints' physical bodies. In this section, I will

explore the hopeful anticipation of the coming new heavens and new earth in 2 Pet 3:6-13 and the transformative power of the resurrection for both the saints of God and all of creation. I will provide a framework for understanding the present possibilities and responsibilities of the church within the age of the Spirit, which is the main theme of the next section of the paper.

In the second section of the paper, I will provide interpretative comment on Isa 65:17-25, explore the ever-increasing nature of God's Kingdom in the earth, and explain how He is in the process of creating new heavens and a new earth. With that understanding as an outline, I will explore Acts 3:19-21 and explain how the restoration of all things began at the appearing of Jesus and the outpouring of His Spirit and show how it continues through the work of the church today.

In the final section of the paper, I will examine Haley Goranson's exegetical work on Rom 8:28 and give modern-day examples of communities that are engaging the realities of the Spirit through prayer and good deeds. Then, in conclusion, I will explore how the present engagement of the *ekklesia* in the world can speed the coming of the day of God and use that as an invitation for the saints of God to join the ageless song of the Spirit in Rev 22:17. All of this will affirm how a hopeful eschatology provides a framework for the *ekklesia* to engage God's restorative work in the present age of the Spirit.

SECTION I: RESTORATION AND REDEMPTION

Destruction Precedes Restoration

One of the first and most important things for Christians to understand about eschatology is that God wants to restore the earth. Considering this, I will provide interpretative comment on one of the most controversial eschatological passages: 2 Pet 3:6-13. In light of the great complexities within 2 Pet 3:6-13 about what happens to the world, there is also a wide range of interpretations for the text.

Grant R. Osborne argues that the destruction of the present world is a prerequisite to the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth.¹ While he believes that the “elements” Peter refers to in 2 Pet 3:10 and 13 might be a reference to the spiritual powers that Paul writes about in Col 2:8 and Col 2:20, he believes that the best interpretation of “elements” indicates the elements that make up the universe.² He argues that the elements include both the heavens and the earth and that the elements are linked to the natural world.³

Considering this, his viewpoint is that the fire in 2 Pet 3:10 will bring a literal destruction to the natural world.⁴ However, as with most scholars, he agrees with the translation that the earth “will be found” in judgment rather than burned up.⁵ He suggests that the judgment will deliver creation from the bondage of sin and death and that the destruction of evil must come first “so that newness and life can replace the death that now dominates.”⁶ While he supports the translation of “will be found” instead of “will be burned,” Osborne argues that the passage refers

¹ Robert Mulholland and Grant R. Osborne, *James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, Revelation* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2011), 341.

² Mulholland and Osborne, *James, 1-2 Peter*, 341.

³ Mulholland and Osborne, *James, 1-2 Peter*, 341.

⁴ Mulholland and Osborne, *James, 1-2 Peter*, 341.

⁵ Mulholland and Osborne, *James, 1-2 Peter*, 341.

⁶ Mulholland and Osborne, *James, 1-2 Peter*, 341.

to a complete destruction of the natural world to make room for the grandiose new heavens and new earth.⁷

Along with Osborne, Ruth Anne Reese argues that the elements refer to the basic elements of the earth, which are “water, air, fire, and earth.”⁸ She believes that the fire of judgment will remove the basic elements and that after the destruction, all that is left will be “holy, pure, and righteous.”⁹ According to her argument, it seems that the “water, air, fire, and earth” must be impure if God is going to destroy them.¹⁰ While making this point about the destruction of the earth, she believes that there will be certain things that survive the fire.¹¹ In other words, while she believes the fire will bring destruction to the earth, it must not refer to complete destruction because it “will leave the earth and the things that have been done upon it to be discovered by God.”¹²

The problem with Osborne and Reese’s argument is that both of them concentrate on the destruction of the earth when that is not the point that Peter communicates in 2 Pet 3:6-13. In the passage, Peter writes about a world that once existed (2 Pet 3:6), a world that exists (2 Pet 3:7), and the coming new heavens and new earth (2 Pet 3:13).¹³ All three descriptions represent the same world within different periods of time.¹⁴ When considering the future judgment coming to the world, Peter alludes back to the judgment that occurred within the time of Noah when God flooded the earth with water.¹⁵ He uses this as a reference to describe the future judgment that

⁷ Mulholland and Osborne, *James, 1-2 Peter*, 341.

⁸ Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 171.

⁹ Reese, *2 Peter*, 170-71.

¹⁰ Reese, *2 Peter*, 170-71.

¹¹ Reese, *2 Peter*, 171.

¹² Reese, *2 Peter*, 171-72.

¹³ Albert M. Wolters, “Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10,” *WTJ* 49 (1987): 408

¹⁴ Wolters, “Worldview,” 408.

¹⁵ Wolters, “Worldview,” 408.

will occur when God brings destruction using fire.¹⁶ However, just as the earth still remained after the destruction brought upon it with water, so the earth will remain during the judgment of fire.¹⁷ Wolters writes, “Just as the second world is the first one washed clean by water, so the third world will be the second one even more radically purged by fire.”¹⁸ Along with Wolters, Heide believes that these elements of the flood are prophetic pictures of the coming future judgment of fire.¹⁹ Just as the earth remained after the flood, so it will remain after the fire.²⁰ To support his point, Heide explains that life continued to flourish after the flood.²¹ Plants and animals remained, and the fish were spared from the harmful effects of the flood.²² However, the difference between the judgment of water and the judgment of fire is that after that judgment of fire, all unrighteousness and the bondage of sin will be removed once and for all.²³ All that is lost in sin “will be found” in Christ Jesus and will dissipate at His unveiling.

With these thoughts in mind, rather than focusing on the destruction of the earth, Heidi focuses on the judgment that Peter describes for the unrighteous in 2 Pet 3:7.²⁴ This is the opposite of what Reese proposed in her argument, with her focus being on the destruction of the earth. In contrast with Reese, Heidi explains that the destruction of ungodliness is a reoccurring theme in Scripture and that the annihilation of sin is described in “cosmic language” to depict how it has “permeated the whole of creation and because of the comprehensives of judgment.”²⁵

¹⁶ Wolters, “Worldview,” 408.

¹⁷ Wolters, “Worldview,” 408.

¹⁸ Wolters, “Worldview,” 408.

¹⁹ Gale Z. Heide, “What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” *JETS* 40 (1997): 54.

²⁰ Heide, “What is New,” 54.

²¹ Heide, “What is New,” 53.

²² Heide, “What is New,” 53.

²³ Heide, “What is New,” 54.

²⁴ Heide, “What is New,” 50.

²⁵ Heide, “What is New,” 50.

To Peter, the judgment of fire does not refer to the destruction of creation.²⁶ Rather, it refers to the purging of evil throughout creation so that there might be new heavens and a new earth.²⁷

As mentioned though, God's creation still remained after the flood.²⁸ Before God ever sent the floodwaters, He commanded Noah to preserve the animals in the ark and He allowed Noah and his family to live and repopulate after the period of judgment.²⁹ Considering this, when God uses the "language of total devastation" in Gen 6:17, it is not to be taken in a literal sense.³⁰ He still found a remnant of people to sustain life and to rule over His creation following the judgment. In the midst of great judgment, there was still an element of great hope for the future of creation. Even after the flood and the destruction of creation, God makes a promise that He will never do that again (Gen 8:21).³¹

Kreider sees a biblical parallel between the first judgment of water and the coming judgment of fire. Just as Noah and his family repopulated the earth after the destruction of the earth following the floodwaters, so the redeemed children of God will populate the restored creation following the judgment of fire.³² In the restored creation, the righteous will dwell in "a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:13). Considering this, the best interpretation of the judgment of fire is the purging of evil throughout creation so that there might be new heavens and a new earth where the righteous dwell with the Lord forever.³³

²⁶ Heide, "What is New," 50.

²⁷ Heide, "What is New," 50.

²⁸ Glenn R. Kreider, "The Flood Is as Bad as It Gets: Never Again Will God Destroy the Earth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171 (2014): 424.

²⁹ Kreider, "The Flood," 424.

³⁰ Kreider, "The Flood," 424-425.

³¹ Kreider, "The Flood," 425.

³² Kreider, "The Flood," 434.

³³ Heide, "What is New," 50.

To support this point further, Wolters explains that the Greek words that Peter uses for “burn” in 2 Pet 3:10 and 12 do not refer to a sense of “burning up” or being obliterated.³⁴ Rather, the Greek words most often refer to an “intense heat” like when someone is “‘burning’ with fever, or a piece of metal is red hot.”³⁵ Wolter suggests that Peter borrows from Mal 3:2-4 about how God is like “a refiner’s fire” and how “he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver” when He comes.³⁶ He explains that in Malachi’s vision, the fire comes to burn “until the purification is accomplished.”³⁷

Rather than obliterating the earth, both Peter and Malachi’s vision talk about the fire bringing destruction upon the wicked (2 Pet 3:7 and Mal. 4:1-2). However, while Malachi’s vision is limited to the “Israelite priesthood,” Peter’s vision extends to include the entire cosmos being “renewed and purified” to bring about glorious new heaven and earth.³⁸ In other words, the destruction that Peter describes reveals the promise of God’s restoration for the earth. The fire is not to burn up or obliterate the cosmos. Rather, it is to bring purification and healing to it.

Along with this, it is important to understand that in 2 Pet 3:10, Peter distinguishes what happens to the elements from what happens to the earth. He explains that the elements will be “dissolved with fire” and that the earth and all that is done on it “will be disclosed” or found. The KJV of 2 Pet 3:10 reads, “The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” The Greek word that the KJV translators used, *katakaesētai*, is translated from the Textus Receptus.³⁹ The older and more reliable transcripts of the Bible, including the Codex Vaticanus and the

³⁴ Wolters, “Worldview,” 408.

³⁵ Wolters, “Worldview,” 409.

³⁶ Wolters, “Worldview,” 409.

³⁷ Wolters, “Worldview,” 409.

³⁸ Wolters, “Worldview,” 409-10.

³⁹ Richard J. Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 161.

Codex Sinaiticus use the Greek verb, *heurethēsetai* which means “will be found.”⁴⁰ More modern Bible translations like the NIV, the NRSV, and the ESV translate 2 Pet 3:10 using *heurethēsetai* rather than *katakaesētai*.⁴¹

David Wenham supports the translation of “will be found” and uses multiple scriptural references to defend his position. He explains that there are numerous times in Jesus’ parables when He refers to “the returning lord ‘finding’ his servants.”⁴² He cites examples from places like Luke 12:43, Matt 24:46, and Mk 13:36.⁴³ The parables refer to the Master leaving His servants with specific tasks to do while He is gone.⁴⁴ Wenham also cites 2 Cor 5:3 as another passage with similar language about people’s works being found.⁴⁵ He suggests that the phrase “being found naked” in 2 Cor 5:3 is similar language to Jesus’ parables when He admonishes His disciples to be “dressed” when their Master returns.⁴⁶ Being dressed indicates an active state of watchfulness and readiness for the return of the Lord rather than one of unpreparedness.⁴⁷ Wenham uses these examples to prove his point that the earth and its works being found is the best translation for the eschatological passage in 2 Pet 3:12.⁴⁸

Considering this, the fire consuming the elements in 2 Pet 3:10 is not a fire consuming the earth. Peter clarifies this when he writes, “and the earth.” He switches thoughts from talking

⁴⁰ Middleton, *A New Heaven*, 161-162; About this, Albert M. Wolters explains that “With the rise of modern textual criticism” the use of *katakaesētai* “was soon rejected.” He writes, “This was due especially to the discovery and publication of Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, the two great fourth-century uncials, both of which read *heurethēsetai*, “will be found,” see Wolters, *Worldview*, 405. He explains that the best manuscripts read, “will be found,” see Wolters, *Worldview*, 407.

⁴¹ Middleton, *A New Heaven*, 162.

⁴² David Wenham, “Being ‘Found’ on the Last Day: New Light on 2 Peter 3:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:3,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 477.

⁴³ Wenham, “Being ‘Found,’” 477.

⁴⁴ Wenham, “Being ‘Found,’” 477.

⁴⁵ Wenham, “Being ‘Found,’” 478.

⁴⁶ Wenham, “Being ‘Found,’” 478.

⁴⁷ Wenham, “Being ‘Found,’” 478.

⁴⁸ Wenham, “Being ‘Found,’” 477.

about the elements to talking about the earth.⁴⁹ The Greek word for “elements,” *stoicheia*, can carry three different meanings including, “water, air, fire, earth,” the “heavenly bodies (sun, moon and stars)” or “angelic powers presiding over nature.”⁵⁰ With a fresh understanding of 2 Pet 3:10 in light of *heurethēsetai*, the elements cannot refer to water, air, fire, or earth because Peter explains that the earth is going to be found rather than burned up. If the earth will be found, or disclosed to the power of God, then God’s ultimate purpose is to restore it rather than obliterate it.⁵¹ Peter affirms this in 2 Pet 3:13 when he writes, “looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.” Therefore, Peter’s words about the destruction of the “elements” conclude with a promise of the earth’s restoration.

To add more to this thought, Wolters notes that Peter uses the phrase “to be found” in 2 Pet 3:14 after using “will be found” in 2 Pet 3:10.⁵² The “to be found” in 2 Pet 3:14 refers to the character of the church within the present age of the Spirit. In other words, Peter calls the church to live their lives with an eternal perspective and to keep the Lord’s coming at the forefront of their minds.⁵³ Just as the earth will be found, so will their deeds. Peter urges the church to be found “spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

The reason this is important to understanding the eschatological passage is because there will be a time of testing for all believers where the Lord judges their works with fire (1 Cor 3:13-

⁴⁹ Middleton, *A New Heaven*, 195.

⁵⁰ Middleton, *A New Heaven*, 190-191; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 315-316; Also see Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), chap. 3, sec. 1, para. 7.

⁵¹ Barbara R. Rossing concludes that 2 Peter 3:10 is problematic because it seems to indicate the “burning of the planet,” see Barbara R. Rossing, “Hastening the Day When the Earth Will Burn? Global Warming, Revelation, and 2 Peter 3,” in *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend*, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Michael Hardin (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers 2011), 93. She reads 2 Peter 3:10 as a text about “an end to the earth and the whole created world,” see Rossing, *Hastening the Day*, 95. The problem with her interpretation is that it is a misreading of the biblical text. At a first glance, 2 Peter 3:10 might seem like evidence as destruction for the earth. However, it is clear in 2 Peter 3:13 that Peter’s point is the earth’s restoration, not destruction.

⁵² Wolters, “Worldview,” 410.

⁵³ Wolters, “Worldview,” 410.

14).⁵⁴ With this in mind, Wenham concludes that *heurethēnai* can also mean “to have stood the test” or “to have proven genuine.”⁵⁵ He compares 1 Pet 1:7 with 2 Pet 3:10 and shows that the Greek word *heuriskō* in 1 Pet 1:7 and *heurethēsetai* in 2 Pet 3:10 both appear to refer to “the eschatological result of a purification process.”⁵⁶ With this in mind, “to be found” is best understood as a sign of God finding the earth in its corrupted state and revealing it to the intense heat and purification of His fire. This once again shows that the fire of His judgment is redemptive.

Douglas Harink compares the elements in Col 2:20 and Gal 4:3, 8-9 to the elements that Peter refers to in 2 Pet 3:10.⁵⁷ He suggests that the elements might be the spiritual elements that oppress creation and hold it in bondage to sin and death.⁵⁸ He believes that the destruction of these elements will release a sense of wholeness and order into creation where the glorious sons and daughters of God will walk in the fullness of all that God has promised and prepared for them.⁵⁹ He explains that this elemental burning will prepare the righteous to experience new life in the new heavens and the new earth.⁶⁰

Along the same lines as Harink, Juza notes that the “elements” are paired together with the “heavens” in 2 Pet 3:12 and believes that the two share a close association with one another.⁶¹ In 2 Pet 3:12, the heavens are “dissolved with fire” and the elements “melt with heat” (CSB). Juza explains that both the heavens and the earth share similar language in that both

⁵⁴ Wolters, “Worldview,” 410.

⁵⁵ Wolters, “Worldview,” 410.

⁵⁶ Wolters, “Worldview,” 410.

⁵⁷ Douglas Harink, *1 and 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 184.

⁵⁸ Harink, *1 and 2 Peter*, 184.

⁵⁹ Harink, *1 and 2 Peter*, 184.

⁶⁰ Harink, *1 and 2 Peter*, 184-85.

⁶¹ Ryan P. Juza, “Echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of the Lord: Intertextuality and Tradition in 2 Peter 3:7-13,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 24 (2014): 237-238.

experience the effects of an intense fire.⁶² Along with that, Isa 34:5 shares similar language to 2 Pet 3:12 where the prophet declares that “all the powers of the heavens will melt.”⁶³

Whenever Isaiah prophesied about the destruction of the heavens, it implied the destruction of the spiritual powers because, in the ancient mind, the sun, moon, and stars shared the same space as the spiritual powers.⁶⁴ Moshe Weinfeld explains that the celestial bodies were considered to be objects of worship and adoration in the ancient world and that the worship of the sun, moon, and stars as deities was a regular ancient practice.⁶⁵ As a result, the foreign nations “worshipped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever” (Rom 1:25 NET).

In the ancient Jewish understanding, the foreign nations were under the rulership of the stars or the “divine beings” while Israel was subject to YHWH.⁶⁶ Rather than following in the practice of worshipping the sun, moon, and stars, God called the Israelites to worship Him and Him alone. Considering this, the destruction of the powers of the heavens in Isa 34:5 refer to the destruction of the evil principalities and powers of darkness that lead the nations into sin and compromise.⁶⁷ This understanding of Isa 34:5 helps aid in interpreting Peter’s understanding of the elements in 2 Pet 3:10. About this, Middleton writes that the “melting of *stoicheia* in 2 Pet 3

⁶² Juza, “Echoes,” 238.

⁶³ Juza, “Echoes,” 238.

⁶⁴ Juza, “Echoes,” 238.

⁶⁵ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, AB 5 (Broadway, NY: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1991), 206.

⁶⁶ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 206; see Deut 4:19 (NET).

⁶⁷ Juza, “Echoes,” 238; with this in mind, also see Deut 4:19 (NET emphasis mine), “When you look up to the sky and see the sun, moon, and stars—the whole heavenly creation—you must not be seduced to worship and serve them, *for the LORD your God has assigned them to all the people of the world.*” However, it is clear in Isa 34:5 that the powers in the heavens are opposing God’s will and therefore must be evil principalities and powers of darkness.

makes sense of multiple levels, including judgment on demonic powers (thus purging the heavens of evil).”⁶⁸

Along with Harink and Juza, Bauckham acknowledges the “hostile spiritual powers” as one of the possible meanings for elements in 2 Pet 3:10.⁶⁹ However, he states that it is an additional meaning to the text rather than the central focus.⁷⁰ I would argue that the interpretation of “hostile spiritual powers” is much more than an additional meaning to the text. Considering Harink, Juza, and Weinfeld’s research, I propose that the interpretation of elements as the “hostile spiritual powers” compliments the text and highlights the central meaning of it. Since God’s ultimate desire is to restore creation rather than obliterate it, it seems best to stress the association of demonic powers with the sun, moon, and stars. As discussed, God’s fire will purge the earth of evil rather than burn it up or obliterate it. With this in mind, it would not make sense for God to purge the earth of evil but not purge the heavens of it. Hence, Peter concludes with a promise of “*new heavens* and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (CSB emphasis mine).

Considering the historical evidence and the textual evidence, I propose that the best interpretation of the elements are the sun, moon, and stars and their association with the demonic spiritual powers.⁷¹ To appreciate this conclusion, it is important for Christians to understand that the whole world is under the control of the devil right now (1 John 5:19). Although Jesus “disarmed the powers and authorities” (Col 2:15) there is still a present struggle against the darkness (Eph 6:12). However, the devil cannot harm those who are born of God (1 John 5:18b) and he flees from those who resist him (James 4:7). John the beloved sums up the present

⁶⁸ Middleton, *A New Heaven*, 199.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 316.

⁷⁰ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 316.

⁷¹ Juza, “Echoes,” 238; Middleton, *A New Heaven*, 199.

conflict well when he writes, “The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining” (1 John 2:8b).

In this cosmic tension, there is hope: the earth “will be found” rather than obliterated.⁷² God will find it in its corrupted state and transform it. The earth will experience a full disclosure to the reality of Heaven. Rather than standing at a distance and watching the world burn, God will come and dwell among His people. In the collision of God’s power with the earth, there will be a destruction of the inferior “elements” and a release of God’s grace and peace throughout the cosmos. God’s dwelling place will be among His people and righteousness will be at home.

Resurrection Brings Liberation to Creation

Now with a firm foundation of God’s desire to restore the earth, I will discuss the hope-filled reality of the resurrection and how it goes hand in hand with the restoration of creation. God desires to restore the earth and all that is in it, which includes the saints and their bodies. Resurrection is the hope by which believers are saved (Rom 8:24). It is more than wishful thinking or hopeful optimism. The hope of the resurrection is the foundation of Christian theology.⁷³ Paul makes this clear in 1 Cor 15:13-14 when he writes, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”

⁷² Middleton, *A New Heaven*, 162; Contrary to Barbara R. Rossing’s view of 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation and 2 Peter do not “represent two very different eschatological perspectives on the *end*,” see Rossing, *Hastening the Day*, 95. Both Peter and John affirm the coming new heaven and new earth, but Peter describes the process of destruction leading up to it while John describes the consummation of it. Along with that, both John and Peter use fire to describe the destruction of God’s enemies rather than a destruction of the earth (Rev 20:9 and 2 Pet 3:7, 10).

⁷³ In his book, *In God’s Time*, Craig C. Hill writes, “The conviction that Christ had been raised by God animated the early Christians and gave great dynamism to their faith. Christians claimed that in the resurrection they had seen the end of history placarded in the midst of history ... They had a powerful assurance that the things they wished to be true really were true, and in that confidence they led thousands of others to faith,” see Craig C. Hill, *In God’s Time: The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 6.

N.T. Wright explains that the early Christian hope centered on the hope of the eternal resurrection rather than life in heaven after death.⁷⁴ While Paul affirmed heaven to be a real place for believers, early Christians saw it as a holding place of bliss before the resurrection rather than their final destination.⁷⁵ Their hope centered around the redemption of their bodies rather than an escape from their bodies.⁷⁶ This hope for a restored creation put them in direct contrast with the Gnostics who deemed the material world as evil and focused on escaping from it.⁷⁷ Along with that, the Christian hope of the resurrection separated them from the rest of the Greco-Roman world that did not have hope for life after death. In a passage about the resurrection, Paul comforts the church in Thessalonica and reminds them not to “grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). Theocritus, a pagan philosopher in the ancient Greco-Roman world sums up the pagan belief of the afterlife when he writes, “Hopes are for the living; the dead are without hope (*Idyll* 4.42).”⁷⁸

Resurrection is an eternal state of glorification with Jesus. Paul describes the state of resurrection in Phil 3:21 when he writes that Jesus “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” It is clear then that, “The risen Jesus is both the model for the

⁷⁴ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 41.

⁷⁵ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 41.

⁷⁶ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 45.

⁷⁷ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 44, 90; the attitude of Gnosticism permeates much of the Christian doctrine today, see Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 90. It focuses on escaping from the body and leaving behind the “irrelevant” and dark “created world” for a true home in heaven, see Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 90. Passages like “Romans 8:18-25” about the resurrection of the saints are often overlooked or misinterpreted as referring to a future home in heaven see Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 90. Notice the hope of the Gospel for all creation in Jesus’ commission in Mark 16:15. Also see Col 1:23 where Paul talks about the Gospel being proclaimed in “all creation under heaven.” The power of the Gospel is that through Jesus Christ, God reconciles “to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20 ESV). A Gnostic worldview is a direct contradiction of the realities of God’s Kingdom and the hope of the Gospel.

⁷⁸ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 218.

Christian's future body and the *means* by which it comes about."⁷⁹ John sums it up in 1 John 3:2 (emphasis mine) when he writes, "But we know that when Christ appears, *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is." Just as the earth will be unveiled to the power of God, so will the bodies of His saints. In 1 Cor 15:52, Paul explains that this transformation will happen in an instant.

This means that humans will not undergo a state of continued development after the resurrection, as Waddell suggests in his article. He writes that "the infinity of God and the finitude of humanity requires that in the new creation, human beings will be in a continual state of growth and development, "being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18).⁸⁰ I disagree with Waddell's proposition here because he does not take into consideration 1 John 3:2 or 1 Cor 15:52, which both describe an instant glorification rather than a continual state of transformation into the image of Jesus.⁸¹ It also seems strange that Waddell uses 2 Cor 3:18 to describe life in the new creation when Paul uses it to describe the present age of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:1-18).⁸² Paul writes, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, *are being transformed* into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, *who is the Spirit*" (2 Cor 4:2). Paul describes a present transformation through the power of the Spirit, not a future glorification.

With this in mind, the saints' resurrected bodies will be in their best state the moment the trumpet sounds and will remain in their best state forever. It is essential to understand that the

⁷⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 149.

⁸⁰ Waddell, "Revelation," 47.

⁸¹ About this, N.T. Wright writes, "Jesus will not declare that present physicality is redundant and can be scrapped. Nor will he simply improve it, perhaps by speeding up its evolutionary cycle," see Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 25.

⁸² Waddell, "Revelation," 47.

resurrection will be a resurrection of the same bodies that went into the grave.⁸³ Rather than starting over with a new framework or design, God will raise the same bodies from the grave that were buried in the grave.⁸⁴ For an example of this, remember Jesus' resurrected body and how His disciples were able to recognize Him after His resurrection.⁸⁵ In fact, Jesus' scars still remained on His resurrected body. As Waddell suggests, this is a prophetic allusion of God's emphasis to restore creation rather than to obliterate it.⁸⁶ If Jesus' resurrected body is a model for all the saints of God, then the hope is that the saints will be able to recognize one another in their restored bodies in the restored creation.

The resurrection of the saint's physical bodies is a prophetic picture of what will take place in all of creation.⁸⁷ It does not make sense for God to redeem the saint's physical bodies, but not restore the earth.⁸⁸ It is clear in Rom 8:19-23 that the restoration of creation will happen right alongside the restoration of the saint's physical bodies. For example, in Rom 8:21, Paul writes that when the saints of God are glorified, the creation will experience freedom from bondage and corruption.⁸⁹

Considering this, the children of God, along with the earth, are in a transient state, waiting to be unveiled to God. N.T. Wright explains this more when he writes, "This new life, which the Christian possesses secretly, invisible to the world, will burst forth into full bodily

⁸³ Kreider, "The Flood," 430.

⁸⁴ Kreider, "The Flood," 430.

⁸⁵ Kreider, "The Flood," 430.

⁸⁶ Waddell, "Revelation," 42.

⁸⁷ Kreider, "The Flood," 431.

⁸⁸ Heide, "What is New," 48.

⁸⁹ About Romans 8:18-27, Haley Goranson Jacob writes, "Here the hope of God's people and the hope of creation are aligned," see Haley Goranson Jacob, *Conformed to the image of His Son: Reconsidering Paul's Theology of Glory in Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 241. Considering Romans 8:21, she explains that the glorification of God's children is a prerequisite to the liberation of creation from its bondage, see Jacob, *Conformed*, 241. Also consider Ps 115:16 (NIV), "The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to mankind."

reality and visibility.”⁹⁰ At the resurrection, the children of God will be disclosed for who they really are, and their unveiling will release the earth into its fullness too. Until their unveiling, the earth is groaning and will remain in a futile state.⁹¹

With this in mind, the resurrection is not just hope for the children of God. It is hope for all creation. It is the hope that all things will be “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).⁹² The veil between heaven and earth will be removed and the saints of God will reign with Him “for ever and ever” (Rev 22:5). All of creation will be found, restored, and come into perfect agreement with Heaven. The creation will be restored along with God’s children. All things that are disfigured will be reconfigured with the power of God and take on His perfection.

In a sense, the end arrived in Jesus and provided the apostles with a glimpse of what was to come.⁹³ His resurrection was the proclamation of the ultimate end for the saints of God.⁹⁴ This, in turn, provided the apostles with a framework of hope to interpret their present circumstances and to respond to the needs of the world around them. It encouraged them, through the power of the Spirit to partner with God’s transformative work in the earth before the return of the Lord.⁹⁵ The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead filled them and was a present reminder of their status as God’s children and the ultimate guarantee of their future triumph over death.

⁹⁰ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 149.

⁹¹ Wright writes, “God’s future inheritance, the incorruptible new world and the new bodies that are to inhabit that world, are already kept safe, waiting for us, not so that we can go to heaven and put them on there but so that they can be brought to birth in this world or rather in the new heavens and new earth” (Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 152).

⁹² Robby Waddell, “Apocalyptic Sustainability,” in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies*, ed. Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 102.

⁹³ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 46.

⁹⁴ Hill, *In God’s Time*, 6.

⁹⁵ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 46.

The Spirit provided a foretaste of their future resurrection, animating their lives with power in the present age, and securing their hope for the future. N.T. Wright clarifies this when he writes, “the spirit is given so that those who are ‘in the Messiah’ can *anticipate*, in present behavior, the life of the coming age.”⁹⁶ With this in mind, I will use the framework of God’s desire to restore the material realm as a foundation to discuss the present possibilities and responsibilities of the *ekklēsia* in the present age of the Spirit. I will begin this task with a thorough look at the prophet’s vision in Isa 65:17-25.

⁹⁶ N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1106.

SECTION II: THE POSSIBILITIES OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Isaiah 65 and God's Ever-Increasing Kingdom

The NIV translates Isa 65:17 as, “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” Considering the broader context of Isa 65:17-25, it might seem that the NIV makes explicit what is implicit in the text: the new heavens and new earth have not come. However, “the use of the particle ‘here’ (*hinnēh*) and the participle brings the action before the hearer’s eyes as something that is in effect happening now.”⁹⁷ In other words, the prophet declares that God is in the process of creating new heavens and a new earth. Considering this, the ESV, NASB, and the NLT provide more accurate translations of the verse, explaining that the new heavens and the new earth are in the process of being created.

In the context of Isa 65, the new heavens and the new earth refer to Jerusalem and its people.⁹⁸ The prophet clarifies this in Isa 65:18 when he replaces the new heavens and new earth with “Jerusalem” and “its people.”⁹⁹ However, this does not mean that their sphere of influence in this passage is limited to Jerusalem and its people. Rather, the prophet explains that “it is in them that the renewal of creation is to happen.”¹⁰⁰ The restoration of Jerusalem cannot be separated from the renewal of creation.

About this, G.K Beale writes, “God ‘creating Jerusalem’ in verse 18 is an equivalent way of saying in verse 17 that he ‘creates ... a new earth,’ since in the OT and some sectors of Jewish eschatology Jerusalem was to become expanded to cover the entire earth at the end of the

⁹⁷ John Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, ICC (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 467.

⁹⁸ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 469.

⁹⁹ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 469

¹⁰⁰ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 469

age.”¹⁰¹ In other words, the picture of restoration happening in Jerusalem reflects God’s desire for the nations of the earth.¹⁰² Some of the images of that restoration include people living extended lives, enjoying fruitful labor, building houses, and experiencing the Lord’s blessing in prayer. Considering all of this, the prophet uses a wide range of images in Isa 65:17-25 to communicate a picture “for a transformation of the way life works out for the community.”¹⁰³ Jerusalem in Isa 65 is a prototype of a community transformed by the grace of God.

In his article “Revelation and the (New) Creation,” Robby Waddell raises some important thoughts about Isa 65:17-25. There is some discussion and debate as to whether the “new heavens and new earth” that the prophet describes refer to the same new heavens and new earth that John describes in the book of Revelation or whether it has a separate meaning. Waddell does not seem to take a side on this issue. However, he points out the obvious differences between Isaiah’s depiction of the new heaven and the new earth and John’s depiction of it.¹⁰⁴ He explains that Isaiah’s depiction seems to represent a better version of Israel’s former life while John’s depiction introduces the element of eternal life.¹⁰⁵ While John writes, “death will be no more” (Rev 21:4), the prophet writes, “the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child.”¹⁰⁶ Considering these explicit differences, I will explore different interpretations regarding the timing and fulfillment of Isa 65:17-25.

¹⁰¹ G.K. Beale, “An Amillennial Response to Premillennial view of Isaiah 65:20,” *JETS* 61 (2018): 465.

¹⁰² Gerald R. McDermott writes, “God is on a mission to redeem the world (the universal) through Israel (the particular). It is not a matter of *either* the particular *or* the universal, but the universal *through* the particular,” see Gerald R. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently about the People and the Land* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2017), 47.

¹⁰³ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 468.

¹⁰⁴ Waddell, “Revelation and the (New) Creation,” in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 40-41.

¹⁰⁵ Waddell, “Revelation,” 40-41.

¹⁰⁶ Waddell, “Revelation,” 41.

Alec J. Motyer believes that Isa 65:17-25 is a future promise of a New Jerusalem and that the prophet “uses aspects of what we know to create impressions of what is to come.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, the prophet uses metaphors to describe a picture of the future in terms that his audience can relate to.¹⁰⁸ So, whenever the prophet uses the phrase, “never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,” it does not mean that there will still be death in the New Jerusalem.¹⁰⁹ Motyer writes, “This would contradict *for ever* (18), *no more* (19) and the death of death in 25:7-8. It simply affirms that, over the whole of life, the power of death will be gone”¹¹⁰

While Motyer takes a future tense stance on Isa 65:20, John Goldingay argues that the phrase, “a nursing infant will no longer live only a few days” is a manifestation of the promise in Exod 23:26.¹¹¹ Exod 23:25-26 reads, “Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.” Considering the covenant promise of Exodus 23:26, extended life was not a stretch of the imagination for the prophet or for his audience. Rather, it was a promised blessing for those who remained faithful to God’s covenant.

While Motyer believes that “forever” refers to the eternal status of the people in Jerusalem, it is important to note that when the prophet uses the phrase “forever,” he applies it to the people’s rejoicing, not the end of death. Goldingay explains, “It will not be surprising if the appropriate response is then one that can ‘last forever.’ This responsive rejoicing and joy replace

¹⁰⁷ Alec J. Motyer, *Isaiah*, TOTC 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 450.

¹⁰⁸ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 450-451; Along the same lines, Sam Storms writes, “The best and most intelligible way that the original author of this prophecy could communicate the *realistic future* glory of the new heaven and new earth, to people who were necessarily limited by the progress of revelation to that point in time, was to portray it in the hyperbolic or exaggerated terms of an *ideal present*.” see Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 35.

¹⁰⁹ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 451.

¹¹⁰ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 450-451.

¹¹¹ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 451.

the community's mindfulness of the former troubles."¹¹² The prophet's main point is that Jerusalem will become a joy and that will be their state of being throughout generations.¹¹³

In contrast with Motyer who believes that all of Isa 65 is a future-tense prophecy, Claus Westermann believes that certain portions of the passage are a present reality while others refer to the future. He argues that verses 17b and 25 might "represent later additions to this oracle of salvation" and that if that is true, it helps modern readers distinguish the prophet's message "of salvation addressed to Judah and Israel" with "the description of a transformed world."¹¹⁴ He believes that there is a subject change between verses 17 and 18, one that announces a new heaven and a new earth while the other announces salvation for Jerusalem.¹¹⁵ He concludes that Isa 65:17b and Isa 65:25 "do not suit the description of a new salvation for Jerusalem."¹¹⁶ However, Westermann's view about a subject change between verses 17 and 18 is unpopular. Other scholars agree that the new heavens and the new earth are one and the same as the Jerusalem that the prophet describes.¹¹⁷

While Westermann does not give a specific time frame for verses 17 and 25b, he refers to the other verses in the bulk of the passage to a time called "the era of salvation."¹¹⁸ He concludes that the activities of building houses and enjoying fruitful labor are "in no sense thought as lying beyond space and time. It remains within the limitation imposed by existence in history, part of which is work."¹¹⁹ Considering this, he believes that the effects of extended life

¹¹² Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 469.

¹¹³ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 470.

¹¹⁴ Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, OTL 20 (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1969), 411.

¹¹⁵ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 408.

¹¹⁶ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 408.

¹¹⁷ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 469; Motyer, *Isaiah*, 450; Beale "An Amillennial Response," 465.

¹¹⁸ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 409.

¹¹⁹ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 410; Consider Isa 65:23 in light of Westermann's proposition. The prophet describes a time where women give birth to children. Jesus explains in Matt 22:30 that "when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage."

refer to this salvation period as well.¹²⁰ He writes, “Unlike Isa 25:8, even in the era of salvation death still remains. It is only premature death, death that cuts off in the midst of the years or at the beginning, that is no more.”¹²¹

Westermann raises an important point in his discussion about Isa 25:8 where the prophet writes that the LORD “will swallow up death forever.” He contrasts Isa 65:17-25 with Isa 25:8. In Isa 25:8, the prophet affirms the hope of eternal life and uses language similar to Rev 21:1-4. However, in Isa 65:17-25, the prophet introduces the element of death. In contrast with Westermann, Motyer believes that if one were to take the element of death in Isa 65:17-25 as a literal interpretation, it would contradict Isa 25:8.¹²² He is right in saying that it is a contradiction of the passage because it is clear that the prophet is introducing the element of death in Isaiah 65:17-25 while he is explaining the eradication of it in Isa 25:8. However, he is not right in using that contradiction as a reason to interpret Isa 65:17-25 as a passage referring to the future new heavens and new earth that John describes.

Considering Isa 25:8, it seems that if the prophet wanted to describe the eradication of death in Isa 65:17-25, he could have. Language about an eschatological hope concerning the end of death would have been accessible to the prophet. As mentioned, the prophet uses language in Isa 25:7-8 that is similar to Rev 21:1-4. He describes a future where the LORD will swallow up death forever and “wipe away the tears from all faces” which is similar to what John writes in Rev 21:1-4. Considering this textual evidence, the best interpretation is that the prophet describes a literal element of death in Isa 65:17-25 rather than a metaphorical picture of eternal life. To

¹²⁰ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 409.

¹²¹ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 409.

¹²² Motyer, *Isaiah*, 451.

sum it up, “there is no suggestion that death will have been abolished, as 25.8 may imply, another indication that the prophecy does not think in apocalyptic fashion.”¹²³

With this perspective in mind, I will now explore Isa 65:20. The prophet writes, “the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed” (Isa 65:20). There is some discussion as to whether the prophet means that the one who fails to reach a hundred is a sinner or whether even the sinners will enjoy the privilege of reaching a hundred years old.¹²⁴ John Goldingay states that Isa 65:20 is best translated as “Because the youth will die as a person of a hundred years // and the sinner will be belittled as a person of a hundred years.”¹²⁵ His reasoning behind this is that, “The structure of the colon is the same, and Vg and Tg are surely right to assume that the two cola have parallel meanings.”¹²⁶ Considering this, “the idea that the sinner (*hôte*) is someone who ‘falls short’ of a hundred years” gives “the word an unusual meaning as well as compromising the parallelism of the line.”¹²⁷

Considering Goldingay’s suggested translation, the prophet describes a time when even a sinner who does not worship God will reach a hundred years. In doing this, the prophet uses a controversial thought to make an extravagant point.¹²⁸ With that said, according to the prophet, “the one who dies at a hundred will be thought of a mere child” (Isa 65:20). Considering this, the expected lifespan during the period that the prophet describes far surpasses a hundred years.¹²⁹

¹²³ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 471.

¹²⁴ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 471.

¹²⁵ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 470-71.

¹²⁶ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 471.

¹²⁷ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 471.

¹²⁸ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 471.

¹²⁹ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 471; Michael J. Vlach argues that the time period Isaiah describes in 65:20 does not refer to “the Eternal State” because in that state there will no longer be “sin, death, or curse (Rev. 21:4, 22:3),” see Michael J. Vlach, “Premillennialism and the Kingdom: A Rationale for a Future Earthly Kingdom,” *TMS* 29 (2018): 214. Rather, he states that it refers to a period distinct from “our current period.” His conclusion is that “there must be an intermediate kingdom, or what we call a millennium,” see Vlach, “Premillennialism,” 214. I am not arguing that Isa 65:17-25 refers to the millennium period that John describes in Rev 20:6. Rather, I am arguing that Isa 65:17-25 is a picture of the possibilities of God’s ever increasing Kingdom in the earth and an invitation for this generation and future generations to explore all that it entails through the power of the Spirit, see Paul Hartwig,

Goldingay writes, “the presupposition is that in general, however, people will live the kind of life-spans that people lived in Genesis before the flood.”¹³⁰ During this time period, living to a hundred will be considered normal.

Considering the research, those who worship God in this time period will receive the blessings and privilege of living long, full, and prosperous lives while enjoying the fruit of their labor. However, during this time, death will still be present. The prophet “does not think in apocalyptic fashion. In contrast to Daniel 12, the prophecy envisages a prolonging of earthly human existence not a compensation for its shortening.”¹³¹ The research shows that God is in the process of creating new heavens and a new earth. It seems that while He is doing that, there will be an increase in the lifespan, fruitfulness, and health of mankind. Considering the possibilities that the prophet describes in Isa 65:17-25, it is clear that humankind has not reached the fullness of all that was prophesied. With that said, there is hope that the status of life is improving worldwide and that humanity is on the right track.

About this, J.D. King writes, “Statistics confirm that people have gradually enjoyed longer lifespans over the centuries.”¹³² For example, “Individuals in Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire could only enjoy a life expectancy of eighteen to twenty-five years of age. As late as 1720, the average European still only lived thirty years.”¹³³ He concludes, “In less than a century, global life expectancies have expanded and are approaching eighty years of age ... Confounding common assumptions, analysts suggest that life expectancy in wealthier nations

“The Obedience of the Church as a Prelude to the Parousia: Ecclesial and Temporal Factors in New Testament Eschatology,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 383 (2005): 393.

¹³⁰ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 471.

¹³¹ Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66*, 471.

¹³² J.D. King, *Why You’ve Been Duped Into Believing that the World is Getting Worse* (Lee’s Summit, MO: Christos Publishing, 2019), chap 4, sec. 2, para 6.

¹³³ King, *Why You’ve Been Duped*, chap 4, sec. 2, para 7.

will surpass one hundred years of age in a few decades.”¹³⁴ Along with that, the infant mortality rate is decreasing. King writes, “In the early nineteenth century, 40 percent of children died before the age of five ... Today, only half of one percent (0.5) of kids in the United States and Europe are dying. When compared with the past, this is indeed a golden age.”¹³⁵

Considering the evidence, there is hope that the health of humanity is improving. I conclude that Isa 65:17-25 provides a framework for this hope and that it taps into the possibilities of God’s ever-increasing kingdom in the earth.¹³⁶ Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven like a mustard seed that begins as the smallest of all seeds and that grows to become “the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree” (Matt 13:31-32). Again, in Isa 9:7 the prophet declares, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.” From the research and evidence described, I believe humanity is beginning to see the first stages of God’s ever-increasing Kingdom throughout the earth and that the saints of God are privileged to partner with God’s redemptive work in creation until the consummation of all things. Considering the possibilities, I will now explore Acts 3:19-21.

What is Now? What is Not? The Theme of Restoration in Acts 3:19-21

As discussed in Isa 65:17-25, God is *in the process* of creating new heavens and a new earth. Acts 3:19-21 also explores the implications of what that restoration entails and provides the saints of God with a framework to join Him in His redemptive work throughout creation. One of the first and most important things for Christians to understand about Acts 3:19-21 is the

¹³⁴ King, *Why You’ve Been Duped*, chap 4, sec. 2, para 10-11.

¹³⁵ King, *Why You’ve Been Duped*, chap 4, sec. 3, para 4, para 6.

¹³⁶ About this, Hatwig writes, “A time will come when the present kingdom has worked its way throughout the whole world, extruding and characterising nations.” He refers to this as an “*intensification* in movement. This is expressed by Jesus in his parables of organic growth of the kingdom from incipient character to apical outgrowth (wheat, seed, leaven, mustard seed,” see Hartwig, “The Obedience of the Church,” 393.

significance of the word for restoration that Peter uses in Acts 3:21. In the passage, Peter addresses “fellow Israelites” who are in Solomon’s Colonnade.¹³⁷ He refers to his audience as “heirs of the prophets and of the covenant” (Acts 3:25).¹³⁸ This context helps provide an appropriate lens for interpreting the passage and the meaning of the word “restoration.” Peter is addressing the Jewish people about the inbreaking hope of the Gospel.

It is well accepted among Biblical scholars that one of the meanings of the restoration that Peter speaks of refers to the restoration of Israel or the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel.¹³⁹ Gerald R. McDermott explains that the word that Peter uses for “restoration,” is *apokatastasis*, which is the same word used in the Septuagint to refer to the returning of Jews to the land of Israel.¹⁴⁰ McDermott explains that “First-century Jews used this word to refer to the age to come that the Messiah would bring and that all the righteous would enjoy. The whole earth would be renewed, so that many nations of gentiles would enjoy the entire world.”¹⁴¹

Considering this, one of the meanings of *apokatastasis* is the restoration of Israel. This, however, does not mean that the restoration is limited to the land of Israel. Rather, as discussed in Isa 65:17-25, the restoration of Israel and creation go hand in hand. About this point, Craig S. Keener explains that cosmic renewal and Israel’s cannot be separated.¹⁴² He alludes to John’s vision in Rev 21:1-2 of “a new Jerusalem alongside the new creation.”¹⁴³ Along the same lines,

¹³⁷ James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Epworth Commentaries (Peterborough, England: Epworth Press, 1996), 43.

¹³⁸ Dunn, *The Acts*, 43.

¹³⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1112; Peter Goeman, “Implications of the Kingdom in Acts 3:19-2,” *TMS* 26, (2015): 79; Gerhard Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 105; Dunn, *The Acts*, 43-44; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 182.

¹⁴⁰ McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 76.

¹⁴¹ McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 76.

¹⁴² Keener, *Acts*, 2:1112.

¹⁴³ Keener, *Acts*, 2:1112.

N.T. Wright explains that “the call of Israel has as its fundamental objective the rescue and restoration of the entire creation . . . If the Gentiles, and the ultimate divine purpose for them, are ignored, then Israel’s claim to be the one people of the one creator god is itself called into question.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, it is impossible to separate the hope of Israel’s restoration from the hope of a renewed creation and the inclusion of the Gentiles. Once again, as with Isa 65, both Jews and Gentiles are included in God’s redemptive plan for creation. Considering this, Peter’s use of the word for restoration has implications for both Israel and all of creation.

One of the discussions surrounding Acts 3:18-21 is about the timing of the restoration and the times of refreshing that Peter prophesies about. Stanley D. Toussaint and Jay A Quine believe that the times of refreshing will occur in the future when Christ returns.¹⁴⁵ Their belief is that the kingdom of God is postponed because Israel rejected Jesus and that it will come once again when Israel repents of their sins and turns to the Lord.¹⁴⁶ Their view is that the times of refreshing will happen in the future when all of Israel repents of their sins.¹⁴⁷ However, it is important to remember that Peter speaks to a particular group of fellow Israelites in Solomon’s Colonnade. He is not addressing the entire nation of Israel all at once. Therefore, it is wrong to assume that Peter’s statement about the times of refreshing is a future promise that will happen when all of Israel repents.

Along with that, it is evident in Acts 2:38 that repentance and baptism bring an immediate transformational effect in the lives of Jesus-followers.¹⁴⁸ In Acts 2:38, Peter does not postpone the receiving of the Spirit to a future event. Instead, he describes it as a present gift

¹⁴⁴ N.T Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 268.

¹⁴⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint and Jay A. Quine, “No, not yet: the contingency of God’s promised kingdom,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 142-143.

¹⁴⁶ Quine, “Not, not yet,” 131, 145.

¹⁴⁷ Quine, “Not, not yet,” 142.

¹⁴⁸ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts*, Hermeneia (Edmonds, WA: Fortress Press, 2009), 108.

from the Lord. Richard I. Pervo states that if Acts 2:38 is taken as a base for understanding the times of refreshing in Acts 3:19, it is best to consider those times as “the present eschatological blessings enjoyed by the baptized, followed—at some unspecified point—by the Parousia.”¹⁴⁹ He explains that Peter’s speech in Acts 3:19-21 communicates “the Christology of the speech in Acts 2, which states that because Jesus has gone to the realm of God he can bestow the Spirit.”¹⁵⁰ In other words, Jesus’ ascension was not His departure. He is just as present with His children through the gift of His Spirit.

Along the same lines as Pervo, Gerhard A. Krodel states that the “times of refreshing stretch from the time of Jesus (Luke 4:18-21) and the time of the Spirit (Acts 2:17) up to and including the time of the Parousia.”¹⁵¹ He also believes that the times of restoration began at the appearance of Jesus and the outpouring of His Spirit.¹⁵² He concludes that the times of restoration will continue until the church’s impact reaches “the end of the earth,” and the kingdom is restored to Israel.¹⁵³ He believes that the “restoration of the kingdom to Israel is part of the establishing (Greek, *apokatastasis*) of all of God’s promises found in the Scriptures.”¹⁵⁴

Along the same lines as Krodel, David G. Peterson states that “the restoration of all things has begun and will continue until it is consummated at Christ’s return.”¹⁵⁵ He explains that the literal translation of the phrase *achri chrōn apokatastaseōs pantōn* in the Greek is “until the times of restoration of all things.”¹⁵⁶ Peterson states that the outpouring of the Spirit and the signs and the wonders in Acts 2 and 3 depict the first signs of the restoration of Israel and that

¹⁴⁹ Pervo, *Acts*, 108.

¹⁵⁰ Pervo, *Acts*, 108.

¹⁵¹ Krodel, *Acts*, 105.

¹⁵² Krodel, *Acts*, 105.

¹⁵³ Krodel, *Acts*, 105.

¹⁵⁴ Krodel, *Acts*, 105.

¹⁵⁵ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 182.

¹⁵⁶ Peterson, *The Acts*, 182.

Jesus' return will mark the "climax and dramatic conclusion" of it all.¹⁵⁷ He explains that the process of restoration began at the ascension of Jesus and will continue until He returns.¹⁵⁸

Considering Krodel and Peterson's interpretation of Acts 3:21, a certain degree of "the restoration of all things" will be manifest before the consummation of all things at the return of Jesus. If Heaven must receive Jesus "until the time all things are restored," (NET) the implication is that God must be inviting the saints to join Him in the restorative work He is doing in creation. As discussed in Isa 65, God is *in the process* of creating new heavens and a new earth. Considering this, Acts 3:21 invites the *ekklesia* to explore the possibilities of what that present restoration entails and to join God's restorative work in creation through the power of the Spirit. To gain a greater understanding of these implications, I will examine Haley Goranson's exegetical work on Rom 8:28.

¹⁵⁷ Peterson, *The Acts*, 182.

¹⁵⁸ Peterson, *The Acts*, 182.

SECTION III: THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EKKLESIA

Prayer and Good Deeds: God's Redemptive Plan for Creation

In her book, *Conformed To The Image of His Son*, Haley Goranson explains that Rom 8:28 is not disconnected from Rom 8:19-22 where Paul talks about the suffering creation.¹⁵⁹ Rather, Rom 8:28 is an extension of that passage and is a picture of God's desire to work hand in hand with His children in the process of restoring creation.¹⁶⁰ The NIV of Rom 8:28 (emphasis mine) reads, "And we know that in all things God *works for the good* of those who love him." In the NIV, the recipient of the good are those who love Him. In contrast to this, the RSV reads, "We know that in everything God *works for good with those* who love him."¹⁶¹ The RSV invites the saints of God into His restorative work in creation.

Goranson explains that the literal meaning of the word συνεργέω is "work with' or 'cooperate with' someone or something."¹⁶² The same Greek word is used four other times in Scripture to refer to "a working partnership or cooperation between two entities."¹⁶³ Considering this, God's purpose is to work with believers to bring good to all things in the world around them "in part by action and in part by prayer."¹⁶⁴ In other words, believers have the privilege of engaging in God's redemptive work in the earth before the consummation of all things. As Goranson explains, both prayer and good deeds work hand in hand for the process of restoration throughout the world. Considering this, I will now explore modern-day stories of Christians who are engaging God's transformative work in their communities and cities through the work of prayer and good deeds.

¹⁵⁹ Goranson, *Conformed*, 247.

¹⁶⁰ Goranson, *Conformed*, 245, 247.

¹⁶¹ Goranson, *Conformed*, 247.

¹⁶² Goranson, *Conformed*, 248.

¹⁶³ Goranson, *Conformed*, 248.

¹⁶⁴ Goranson, *Conformed*, 250.

Stories of Transformation

Kiambu, a community in East Africa, used to be trapped under the burden of severe violence, alcohol abuse, and economic oppression.¹⁶⁵ However, when a group of intercessors in Kiambu committed themselves to fervent prayer for their community, the atmosphere over the city began to change and people began to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.¹⁶⁶ As a result, the population began to increase in the city, the crime rate became one of the lowest in the country, the economy started booming, and new buildings started being built.¹⁶⁷

The dark spiritual cloud over Kiambu lifted as the saints of God partnered with God through the work of prayer and good deeds.¹⁶⁸ For example, one of the couples on the prayer team decided to begin a church in Kiambu.¹⁶⁹ Over time, the people of Kiambu began to receive healing and salvation on a regular basis and the church grew to have about four thousand people.¹⁷⁰ The pastors that were once divided in the city now gather together in prayer and fellowship to seek the Lord.¹⁷¹ The story of Kiambu is an example of the saints of God partnering with the work of God through prayer and good deeds and the power of His grace to bring healing and reconciliation to a city in dysfunction.

Another notable story of community transformation through the work of good deeds and prayer occurs in the Fiji village of Nuku.¹⁷² After seeing the transformative work of God in regions throughout the world, Pastor Vuniani gained an earnest desire to partner with God in his

¹⁶⁵ George Otis Jr., *The Twilight Labyrinth: Why Does Spiritual Darkness Linger Where It Does?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1997), 296.

¹⁶⁶ Otis Jr., *The Twilight*, 295, 298, 297.

¹⁶⁷ Otis Jr., *The Twilight*, 298.

¹⁶⁸ Otis Jr., *The Twilight*, 297.

¹⁶⁹ Otis Jr., *The Twilight*, 297.

¹⁷⁰ Otis Jr., *The Twilight*, 297-98.

¹⁷¹ Otis Jr., *The Twilight*, 298.

¹⁷² Geoff Waugh, ed., *Great Revival Stories from the Renewal Journal* (Australia: Renewal Journal Publications, 2014), chap 10, sec. 4, para. 1.

own land back in Fiji.¹⁷³ He began seeking the Lord and felt compelled to start working with the Lord in Nuku.¹⁷⁴ One of the main degrading problems in Nuku was the water pollution.¹⁷⁵ The pollution caused fish and grass in the area to die and created great fear among the people of Nuku.¹⁷⁶ Considering the difficult circumstances in Nuku, Pastor Vuniani and his team began to pray and intercede for the healing of their land with local churches across denominations.¹⁷⁷ During their time of prayer, the people of Nuku began to confess the sins of their ancestors who once participated in cannibalism and witchcraft.¹⁷⁸ Families, clans, and tribes repented of their sins and experienced God's healing work of reconciliation as a result.¹⁷⁹

Due to past conflicts in Nuku, people left the village and the population declined.¹⁸⁰ However, as a sign of their repentance, the inhabitants of Nuku sent out apologies to the people who left Nuku and invited them to return.¹⁸¹ Along with social reconciliation, God also did transformational work in the land of Nuku.¹⁸² On the third day of their prayer meeting, "some women came running and shouting into the village, announcing that the water in the stream had become pure again. It is still pure today."¹⁸³ Since the miraculous healing of the water, fish are beaming once again in the waters and some people have claimed that the water demonstrates "healing properties."¹⁸⁴ The story of Nuku is a wonderful example of God partnering with His

¹⁷³ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 3, para 11.

¹⁷⁴ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 1.

¹⁷⁵ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 2.

¹⁷⁶ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 3-4.

¹⁷⁷ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 5.

¹⁷⁸ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 7.

¹⁷⁹ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 9.

¹⁸⁰ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 11.

¹⁸¹ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 11.

¹⁸² Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 10.

¹⁸³ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 10; also see 2 Kgs 2:19-21 and Ex 23:25.

¹⁸⁴ Waugh, *Great Revival Stories*, chap 10, sec. 4, para 13.

sons and daughters through the work of prayer and good deeds to restore creation and reclaim an area under the oppression of sin.

Finally, a real-world example of churches joining the work of God to partner with His restorative work in creation are the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches in Zimbabwe.¹⁸⁵ The AAEC recognized the destruction happening to the environment and concluded that it was a direct result of the “human failure to care for the earth (Gen. 1:26).”¹⁸⁶ Today, their pneumatological interpretation of the conditions in the environment inspires “appropriate socioeconomic processes through development, agricultural projects, and education.”¹⁸⁷

Their belief is that “the Spirit who convicts humans of their sins enables confession of ecological sins: chopping down and not replanting; overgrazing; destroying river banks; neglecting the construction of contour ridges; and causing soil erosion through irresponsible farming.”¹⁸⁸ Their pneumatological worldview positions them to engage the needs of the world around them through the power of the Spirit and partner with His healing work in their environment and communities.¹⁸⁹

Responsibilities of the *Ekklesia*

Considering Isa 65:17-25, Acts 3:21, Jacob’s exegesis on Rom 8:28, and the real-world stories of transformation, it is clear that God partners with the *ekklesia* through the power of the Spirit to begin the process of restoration in the earth. Amos Yong describes the work of the Spirit as being something that “turns the world upside down (cf. Acts 17:6), who breaks the established

¹⁸⁵ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 61.

¹⁸⁶ Yong, *The Spirit*, 62.

¹⁸⁷ Yong, *The Spirit*, 62.

¹⁸⁸ Yong, *The Spirit*, 62.

¹⁸⁹ Yong, *The Spirit*, 64.

habits of sin and replaces them with the living realities of Christ, and who opens us up to the transcendental, uncanny, and eschatological in-breaking of the kingdom.”¹⁹⁰ The work of Jesus continues through the *ekklesia* in the present age. Luke hints at this in Acts 1:1 when he writes, “I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.”

The implication in Acts 1:1 is that Jesus’ ascension was not His departure.¹⁹¹ His work continues through the saints of God, empowering them to be His living representatives in the culture. Amos Yong sums this up when he writes, “Life in the Spirit is ultimately about life in this world, our world, God’s world.”¹⁹² In other words, Christians are not disengaged from reality. The stories of Kiambu, Nuku, and the AAEC provide prophetic pictures of the possibilities for transformation when the *ekklesia* engages the world around them through the power of the Spirit.

Amos Yong defines the church as the “organic, dynamic, and eschatological people of God called after the name of Jesus and constituted in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹³ This concise definition of the church provides shape to a Christian’s perspective in the present age of the Spirit and also gives them permission to embark on the journey of discovering all the possibilities it entails. Along the same lines of Yong, Bill Johnson writes, “But *ekklesia* is different because it is mobile. It moves. It is wherever the people of God are. And they are

¹⁹⁰ Yong, *The Spirit*, 299.

¹⁹¹ Chris E.W. Green, “In My Flesh I Shall See God’: (Re)Imagining Parousia, Last Judgment, and Visio Dei,” *JEPTA* 33 (2013): 178; Also see Eph 4:10-16. Paul writes, “He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph 4:10 ESV). After making this statement, Paul proceeds to describe the different gifts that Jesus gave to the church, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. In other words, Jesus’ ascension was not His departure. His work continues in the earth through the saints of God and He uses them to fill the earth with His glorious image, establishing His church as a living witness of His power in the culture.

¹⁹² Yong, *The Spirit*, 299.

¹⁹³ Yong, *The Spirit*, 300.

governmental representatives, infusing the DNA of God’s world into this one.”¹⁹⁴ In other words, the *ekklesia* is not stagnant. Rather, she is the living, breathing, moving expression of Jesus in the earth and she has the privilege of introducing the culture the reality of His love, mercy, compassion, and justice.

About this, N.T. Wright writes, “Such a church will also seek to bring wisdom, and freshly humanizing order, to the rhythms of work in offices and shops, in local government, in civic holidays, and in the shaping of public life.”¹⁹⁵ Wright’s picture of the church could be a practical illustration of what Jesus means when He calls His disciples the “salt” and “light” of the earth. The earth is starving for the flavor of God. The earth is groaning for the sons and daughters of God to be revealed. To sum it up, “The redemption of the creation is the work of the Spirit, and we have our roles to play in this process ... Hence not just the bride but the Spirit says, ‘Come,’ and invites our contribution to the eschatological fountain of life (Rev 22:17)”¹⁹⁶

Hastening the Day

Now with a clear understanding of the role of the *ekklesia* to partner with God’s restorative work in creation, I will conclude with the passage with which I began: 2 Pet 3:10-13. As discussed at the beginning of this paper, the destruction happening is not a destruction of the earth, but of the unrighteousness and evil that permeates the earth and the inferior elements of sin and death that hold the world in bondage. The fire of God’s judgment will consume all that interferes with His perfect plans and purposes for the cosmos. With this as a framework, I will now provide interpretive comment on the second half of the passage, 2 Pet 3:11-12 (ESV emphasis mine) and explore the implications of, “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved,

¹⁹⁴ Bill Johnson, *The Way of Life: Experiencing the Culture of Heaven on Earth* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2019), 97.

¹⁹⁵ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 266.

¹⁹⁶ Yong, *The Spirit*, 300.

what sort of people ought you to be *in lives of holiness and godliness*, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.”

When Peter writes for the church to live lives of holiness and godliness, he encourages them to live lives that reflect the coming age where righteousness will dwell rather than the present age of sin that is coming to an end.¹⁹⁷ He calls them to embrace the living power of the Spirit and to become a pure reflection of Jesus in the culture. As mentioned, the Spirit is the inbreaking hope of the coming new heavens and new earth, empowering the saints of God to live the kind of lives that honor God in the present while also giving them a foretaste of the future.¹⁹⁸ About this, Matthew Thompson writes, “The Spirit both promises the new creation and gives us access to its powers in the here and now.”¹⁹⁹ In other words, the Spirit prepares the church for the return of their Groom. Rather than submitting to the patterns, values, and ideas of the Greco-Roman world, Peter calls the church to live with an eternal perspective so that when the fullness of time comes at the return of the Lord, the church will be able to recognize the righteousness and holiness of the new creation.²⁰⁰ In other words, Peter describes a church that is living in holiness to welcome the Lord at His glorious return at the Parousia.

The perspective that Peter describes aligns with the cultural images surrounding the Parousia.²⁰¹ For example, In 1 Thess 4:17-8, Paul illustrates a picture of the Parousia where the saints of God meet the Lord in the air at His coming. The Greek word for that Paul uses for “meet” can refer to “the cultural expectations associated with formal receptions of a king coming

¹⁹⁷ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 288.

¹⁹⁸ Wright, *Paul*, 1106.

¹⁹⁹ Matthew K. Thompson, “Eschatology as Soteriology: The Cosmic Full Gospel,” in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies*, ed. Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 193

²⁰⁰ Kuhn, “2 Peter 3:1-13,” 312.

²⁰¹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 132-133.

to claim his kingdom in triumph.”²⁰² Those with special status and honor would meet the emperor and escort him back to his domain.²⁰³ Both Wright and Johnson suggest that this is a picture of the saints of God welcoming their Lord Jesus back to earth.²⁰⁴

However, as Johnson explains, those with the highest status and honor in the Kingdom of Christ will be those with “cruciform character” or those who are “blameless in holiness” as Paul writes in 1 Thess 4:13.²⁰⁵ In other words, the saints of God who live their lives subject to the values of the Kingdom will welcome their King home to establish the fulness of all that He promised. With the coming of God’s glorious Kingdom at the forefront of his mind, Peter calls the saints of God to let His Kingdom values dominate their lives. Peter describes the same kind of character in 2 Pet 3:12 (NET) that Paul describes in 1 Thess 4:13 when he admonishes the church to conduct their lives “in holiness and godliness.” Their cruciform lives, while countercultural, were a perfect fit for the coming new heavens and new earth. This image of being prepared to welcome the Lord home dominates 2 Pet 3:10-13 and invites the church to explore all of what it entails.

Peter’s writings about a righteous church before the Parousia also align with the other apostle’s writings. For example, both John’s revelation of a pure and spotless Bride in Rev 21:7-9 and the ecclesial hope described in Paul’s other writings both affirm Peter’s perspective.²⁰⁶ The apostle’s writings about the Parousia complement one another and provide a framework of possibilities for the church within the age of the Spirit.²⁰⁷ In both 1 Thess 3:11-13 and 5:23-24, Paul describes a church that is blameless before the Lord at His coming and one that is

²⁰² Andy Johnson, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 132.

²⁰³ Johnson, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 132; Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 133.

²⁰⁴ Johnson, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 132; Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 133.

²⁰⁵ Johnson, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 132.

²⁰⁶ Hartwig, “The Obedience of the Church,” 390, 388.

²⁰⁷ Hartwig, “The Obedience of the Church,” 388.

established in holiness.²⁰⁸ He sees this mature and blameless church as a prerequisite to the Parousia, rather than a direct result of it.²⁰⁹ Once again, Eph 4:12-14 illustrates Paul's "expected ecclesial perfection and hope" where the Bride of Christ reaches a mature state and will no longer need the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, or teachers.²¹⁰ Considering the Scriptures, Paul's ecclesial hope, along with John's revelation of the pure and spotless Bride, invite the church to engage their responsibilities and the possibilities of the Spirit before the Parousia.

When Peter uses the phrase "waiting for" in 2 Pet 3:11-12, he does not describe a passive or disengaged action.²¹¹ Rather, he describes a sense of watchfulness and alertness.²¹² The same phrase is used in other places of Scripture like 1 Pet 5:8 to describe an active alertness and readiness.²¹³ The author of Hebrews seems to capture the same attitude of waiting in Heb 9:28 (ESV) which reads that Christ will appear a second time "to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him." Peter describes what this active waiting looks like when he writes about living lives of holiness and godliness. As mentioned, this is the posture Peter describes that the saints of God will have at the Parousia. He encourages them to embrace that posture in the present to help "hasten" the coming of the day of God.

One of the intriguing elements in 2 Pet 3:12 is that the saints of God can speed up the coming of the Lord. The context of 2 Pet 3:10 seems to indicate that how believers live their lives can influence the coming of the day of God.²¹⁴ So, while God is sovereign and has set the

²⁰⁸ Hartwig, "The Obedience of the Church," 388.

²⁰⁹ Hartwig, "The Obedience of the Church," 388.

²¹⁰ Hartwig, "The Obedience of the Church," 388.

²¹¹ Karl Kuhn, "2 Peter 3:1-13," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 60 (2006): 312.

²¹² Robert W. Harvey and Philip H. Towner, *2 Peter & Jude* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 290.

²¹³ Harvey and Towner, *2 Peter*, 290.

²¹⁴ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 290.

date in place for Jesus' return, the promises "are contingent upon the active faith and obedience of believers."²¹⁵ While God is able to restore the earth in a moment, He chooses to partner with His people to accomplish His plans and purposes in the earth. Ps 115:16 sheds some light on this: "The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to mankind." Considering this, the church has the privilege of participating in "active co-cooperation with God in the redemption of society. Our era between the advent is the age of grace, the age of the Spirit, the age of evangelism."²¹⁶

Along with living lives of holiness and godliness, there are also Scriptures that shed some light on the church's responsibilities in the age of the Spirit and all that it entails. For example, Jesus teaches in Matt 24:14 explains that the gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed throughout the whole world before the end comes. Hartwig suggests that the church is living in the intermediate point before the Parousia and that the gospel of the Kingdom is spreading across the earth and that the role of the church is to preach this gospel to all.²¹⁷ Considering the broader context of Scripture, it seems that the church can hasten the day of the Lord through the work of both good deeds and prayer.²¹⁸ Considering that the fine linen in Rev 19:8 represents the good deeds of the saints, there is an open invitation for the church to explore all of what that entails.

Paul Hartwig describes the progressive increase of the Kingdom of God throughout the earth prior to Parousia.²¹⁹ He explains that as the Gospel increases throughout the earth and as the sons and daughters of God fill the earth, there will be a clear line drawn between light and darkness.²²⁰ In other words, it will not be hard to distinguish those who are followers of Jesus

²¹⁵ Hartwig, "The Obedience of the Church," 393-94.

²¹⁶ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 153.

²¹⁷ Hartwig, "The Obedience of the Church," 393.

²¹⁸ Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, 153; Goranson, *Conformed*, 250.

²¹⁹ Hartwig, "The Obedience of the Church," 390.

²²⁰ Hartwig, "The Obedience of the Church," 390.

and those who are not.²²¹ Hartwig explains that the church will reach a climactic point, as John describes in Rev 19:7-9, where the Lord finds a pure and spotless bride dressed in good deeds and waiting with anticipation for His arrival.²²²

While Jesus gives such a high command to His saints, He does not give it without the enablement of His Spirit. There is great hope for the world because Jesus is just as present as He was when He walked the earth. The difference is that now He is present on the earth through the church. Chris Green sums this up when he writes that Christ “has not been and is not now absent, but is by the Spirit present in a way fitted to this time between Pentecost and the consummation of all things. Ascension and Pentecost brought Christ *nearer* to us.”²²³ He works hand in hand with His surrendered saints through the power of His Spirit to bring about healing and transformation in a world that is under the oppression of sin and death.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to use Scripture to explore the hope-filled reality of the coming new heavens, new earth, and the resurrection, and to use that eschatological hope to reaffirm the present responsibilities and possibilities of the *ekklesia* in the age of the Spirit. The central research question I answered was, “How does a hopeful eschatology provide a framework for the *ekklesia* to engage the work of God in the present age of the Spirit?” In the first section of the paper, I answered the research question by discussing God’s desire to restore and redeem creation, which includes both the material world and the saint’s physical bodies. I explored the hopeful anticipation of the coming new heavens and new earth in 2 Pet 3:6-13 and explained how the restoration of the saint’s physical bodies and the liberation of creation go hand in hand.

²²¹ Hartwig, “The Obedience of the Church,” 390.

²²² Hartwig, “The Obedience of the Church,” 390.

²²³ Green, “In My Flesh,” 178.

The first section of the paper provided a framework for understanding the material I presented in section two and three about the present possibilities and responsibilities of the church in the age of the Spirit. In the second section of the paper, I explored how the *ekklesia* can partner with God's restorative work in creation through good deeds and prayer. As a foundation to that argument, I provided interpretive comment on Isa 65:17-25, explored the ever-increasing nature of God's Kingdom in the earth, and explained how He is in the process of creating new heavens and a new earth. With that understanding as an outline, I explored Acts 3:19-21 and explained how the restoration of all things began at the appearing of Jesus and the outpouring of His Spirit and showed how it continues through the work of the church today.

In the final section of the paper, I examined Haley Goranson's exegetical work on Rom 8:28 and gave modern-day examples of communities that are engaging the realities of the Spirit through prayer and good deeds and that are partnering with God's restorative work in creation. Finally, I explained how the message of 2 Peter 3:10-13, along with the modern-day examples, provoke the *ekklesia* to engage their responsibilities before the Parousia and help speed the coming of the day of God. All of this affirms how a hopeful eschatology provides a framework for the *ekklesia* to partner with God's restorative work in the present age of the Spirit.

As discussed in this paper, a hopeful eschatology shapes how Jesus' disciples see, respond to, and interact with the world around them. It is more than a theological idea. It is a reality that give Christians permission to engage the world with the hope of the Gospel.²²⁴ A hopeful eschatology invites the church to join God's restorative work in creation and help speed up the coming of the day of God. While God is sovereign and has a date set for the final

²²⁴ Considering this, Robby Waddell writes, "The Christian mission, indeed the mission of God (*mission Dei*), is indivisible. In other words, eschatology and social ethics inevitably go hand-in-hand," see Waddell, *Apocalyptic Sustainability*, 102.

appearing of His Son, He chooses to work through His sons and daughters and use them to bring healing and justice to a world under the oppression of sin and death.

The 1st-century church understood that there would be a generation that lived to see the appearing of the Lord. In 1 Cor 15:51 (NIV), Paul writes, “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” Furthermore, in 1 Thess 4:15, Paul writes, “We tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.” This thought should stir the Bride of Christ to join the ageless song of the Spirit, “Come!” (Rev 22:17) in addition to provoking the present and future generations to “take the free gift of the water of life” until earth and heaven become one and the Bride joins her Groom forever at the restoration of all things (Rev 22:17).

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