

# MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

Inaugurated Eschatology *for the* Life of the Church

BENJAMIN L. GLADD AND MATTHEW S. HARMON

*With an Introductory Chapter by G. K. BEALE*

  
**BakerAcademic**  
*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Academic  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gladd, Benjamin L.

Title: Making all things new : inaugurated eschatology for the life of the church / Benjamin L.

Gladd and Matthew S. Harmon ; with an introductory chapter by G. K. Beale.

Description: Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Academic, 2016. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015037626 | ISBN 9780801049606 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Eschatology. | Eschatology—Biblical teaching. | Pastoral theology. | Christian leadership. | Church. | Kingdom of God. | Jesus Christ—Kingdom.

Classification: LCC BT821.3 .G54 2016 | DDC 236—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015037626>

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16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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To our students  
—past, present, and future—  
who are called to lead God’s people  
in the latter days

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# Preface

This is not your ordinary book on eschatology. Usually when people hear that term, they think of the events connected to the future return of Jesus Christ and the very end of history. As a result, topics such as the rapture, the tribulation, and the millennium take center stage. Such an approach is often reinforced by systematic theology textbooks, which usually treat eschatology as a separate chapter focusing on these issues. But we believe that this understanding of eschatology is too narrow when it comes to what the Bible teaches.

Our English term “eschatology” comes from two Greek words: *eschatos* (“last”) and *logos* (“word”). So, eschatology is the study of the “last things.” But as we will try to demonstrate, eschatology is not limited to the events connected to the return of Jesus Christ. According to the NT, the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus have ushered in the “latter days,” as promised in the OT. Therefore, the “latter days” encompass the entire time period between the first and second comings of Christ. As a result, eschatology is not limited to the “last chapter” of what God will do in this world but rather frames all that God has done and will do in Jesus Christ.

Among biblical scholars and theologians this understanding has come to be known as “inaugurated eschatology.” The word “inaugurated” reflects the observation that while the latter-day new-creational kingdom has begun with the work of Jesus, it has not yet been consummated in all its fullness. Another way of referring to this phenomenon is to use the expression “already—not yet.” God’s kingdom has already found its initial fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the formation of the eschatological people of God. But the kingdom has not yet been realized in all its fullness. Stated differently, God’s promises have found their initial fulfillment while still awaiting their complete and final consummation.

This understanding of eschatology has been widely recognized and embraced within the academic study of the NT, but it has yet to make a significant and widespread impact on the life of the church. In the pages that follow, we attempt to explain how the already–not yet framework informs our understanding of the life and ministry of the church. While we believe that all Christians can benefit from this book, our focus is on pastors and those aspiring to be in the pastorate. As leaders of the church, they set the tone for how the congregation should live as the people of God. We have not tried to provide a complete picture of pastoral ministry or interact with the many helpful books on the subject. Instead, our goal is to explain how understanding and applying the already–not yet perspective significantly enriches several key aspects of the life and ministry of the church. It is not our intention to provide all the answers (not that we have them!) but to start a conversation about how inaugurated eschatology enhances pastoral ministry.

This project builds on the work of several scholars who have gone before and sketched the already–not yet framework of the NT. We are not seeking to lay this foundation again but to build on it. We will therefore interact only with those portions of Scripture that we deem relevant to the topic at hand. In order to make this project more accessible to the church, particularly its leaders, we have limited our interaction with secondary sources (commentaries, monographs, journals, etc.).

While a number of scholars have done important work in the area of inaugurated eschatology, few have so thoroughly integrated it into their approach to biblical theology and interpretation as G. K. Beale. Every page from his prolific pen flows out of this conviction.<sup>1</sup> Both of us had the privilege of studying under Dr. Beale while earning our doctoral degrees at Wheaton College. Ben wrote his dissertation under Beale’s supervision, while Matt frequently consulted with Dr. Beale on his own dissertation. Not only were Beale’s passion for the Lord and his knowledge of the Scriptures infectious, but also his explanation of the already–not yet nature of God’s new-creational kingdom

1. Beale’s work in this area has come to full fruition with the publication of the following: G. K. Beale, “The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology,” in *“The Reader Must Understand”: Eschatology in the Bible and Theology*, ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1997), 11–52; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008); G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

was compelling. Therefore, in many respects this book is an extension of Beale's project, an attempt to flesh out in practical terms how inaugurated eschatology should shape pastoral ministry and the life of the church. Thus we are especially grateful that Dr. Beale agreed to set the stage for this book by writing chapter 1, which summarizes his understanding of the already-not yet viewpoint.

Of course, whenever the subject of eschatology comes up, division is usually not far behind. Debates between dispensationalism and covenant theology show no sign of ending anytime soon, although the past thirty years have seen an increasing number of scholars searching for a middle ground.<sup>2</sup> As authors, we come from different ends of this spectrum: Matt teaches at a dispensational school (Grace Theological Seminary), and Ben teaches at a covenantal school (Reformed Theological Seminary). So naturally we still differ on how specific details will work themselves out!<sup>3</sup> But we are convinced that the perspective on eschatology that we are arguing for in this book is able to transcend the traditional divide between dispensationalism and covenantalism and to provide not only a framework for understanding the NT but also a foundation for the life and ministry of the church.<sup>4</sup>

A word about how to read this book: part 1 lays the theological foundation for the project. The lead chapter by G. K. Beale ("The End Starts at the Beginning") serves as the theological framework for the entire project; it is a thumbnail sketch of key portions of his *New Testament Biblical Theology*. We strongly recommend that those unfamiliar with Beale's book read his introduction to our project carefully. If more discussion is desired, please consult his larger work. Chapter 2 focuses on the corporate nature of the church as the end-time people of God, and chapter 3 describes how individual believers

2. From one end of the spectrum, this has led to what has come to be known as progressive dispensationalism; see, e.g., Darrell L. Bock, Walter C. Kaiser, and Craig A. Blaising, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); and Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: BridgePoint, 1993; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). From the other end, the result has been what is sometimes called new-covenant theology or progressive covenantalism; see, e.g., Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

3. Although the book expresses our shared vision, and we interacted with each other in the writing of each chapter, the primary writing responsibilities were divided as follows: Matt wrote chaps. 2, 4, and 7–9, and Ben wrote chaps. 3, 5–6, and the conclusion.

4. It is true that inaugurated eschatology has traditionally been associated with covenant theology, but in a panel discussion of his book *A New Testament Biblical Theology* at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (2012), Beale himself indicated that he believes the already-not yet framework of biblical theology can work within both progressive dispensationalism and the various forms of covenant theology. It is, however, difficult to see how it could fit within either classical or traditional dispensationalism.

live within the overlap of the ages. A good grasp of the contents of part 1 is essential for getting the most out of the remainder of the book.

Although the entire book is oriented toward pastors and those preparing for church ministry, part 2 is specifically focused on pastoral leadership. Because the ministry of the Word is central to pastoral ministry, chapter 4 centers on feeding God's people through preaching and teaching. Chapter 5 addresses guarding the flock from false teaching. Concluding part 2, chapter 6 focuses on guiding the eschatological people of God as they live in the tension of the already—not yet.

In part 3, we turn our attention to other key areas of the life of the church as the temple of God, specifically worship (chap. 7), prayer (chap. 8), and missions (chap. 9). The concluding chapter summarizes the main themes of the book and urges pastors to lead the church in embracing its identity as the end-time people of God.

As seminary professors, we have the privilege of training people for service in God's kingdom. We long for the day when God will consummate his kingdom in a new heavens and new earth, bringing final fulfillment to every single one of his promises. As we wait for that great day, we want to see the church experience all that God has already done for us through his Son, Jesus Christ. It is our prayer that God will use this book to explain what that looks like as we await the day when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).

Benjamin L. Gladd  
Matthew S. Harmon

# Acknowledgments

This project is the fruit of countless conversations with friends, students, and pastors. I stand in their debt. I am also grateful for Reformed Theological Seminary, who graciously provided a grant to finish this book. Nikki, my wife, is a well of encouragement and grace. Above all, I thank Christ for equipping me and energizing me to complete this task.

To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 25)

BLG

A number of people have helped make this book a reality. Grace Theological Seminary granted me a reduced course load that enabled me to finish this project. A number of students, pastors, and colleagues read through parts or all of the manuscript and provided helpful feedback. I am especially grateful for my pastors at Christ's Covenant Church for striving to embody what this book teaches. My wife, Kate, and our two sons, Jon and Jake, are not only a source of great joy in my life, but they also enthusiastically embrace God's call on my life to help people see the beauty of Christ in Scripture and follow him faithfully. But most of all, I am grateful for God's eschatological Spirit opening my eyes to see the beauty of Jesus Christ, "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)

MSH

# Abbreviations

## General and Bibliographic

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AD	anno Domini
AT	author's translation
BC	before Christ
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, [1907].
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CahT	Cahiers Théologiques
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
<i>DJG</i>	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992.
<i>DLNT</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i> . Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997.
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.
ed.	editor(s); edited by; edition
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
esp.	especially
ESV	English Standard Version

ET	English translation
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
exp.	expanded
Gk.	Greek
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IVPNT	IVP New Testament Commentary Series
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>J SPL</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters</i>
lit.	literally
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
marg.	marginal reading
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NETS</i>	<i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplement Series
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTT	New Testament Theology
OT	Old Testament
par(s).	parallel(s)
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
repr.	reprint
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJTOP	Scottish Journal of Theology: Occasional Papers
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76.
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

## Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	Song	Song of Songs
Exod.	Exodus	Isa.	Isaiah
Lev.	Leviticus	Jer.	Jeremiah
Num.	Numbers	Lam.	Lamentations
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Ezek.	Ezekiel
Josh.	Joshua	Dan.	Daniel
Judg.	Judges	Hosea	Hosea
Ruth	Ruth	Joel	Joel
1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel	Amos	Amos
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings	Obad.	Obadiah
1–2 Chron.	1–2 Chronicles	Jon.	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Mic.	Micah
Neh.	Nehemiah	Nah.	Nahum
Esther	Esther	Hab.	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Ps(s).	Psalms	Hag.	Haggai
Prov.	Proverbs	Zech.	Zechariah
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Mal.	Malachi

## New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	1–2 Thess.	1–2 Thessalonians
Mark	Mark	1–2 Tim.	1–2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philem.	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb.	Hebrews
Rom.	Romans	James	James
1–2 Cor.	1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Pet.	1–2 Peter
Gal.	Galatians	1–3 John	1–3 John
Eph.	Ephesians	Jude	Jude
Phil.	Philippians	Rev.	Revelation
Col.	Colossians		

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## Part 1

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# Theological Foundation

### *Grasping the Already–Not Yet*

In the first part of this project, we articulate the theological framework for ministering within the NT’s conception of the already–not yet. Professor Beale paints the general landscape of the already–not yet in chapter 1 (“The End Starts at the Beginning”), and chapters 2 and 3 develop his work on two levels. Chapter 2 (“The Nature of the End-Time Church”) explains how the people of God span the two Testaments, with special emphasis on how the already–not yet informs our view of the identity of the church. Moving from the corporate to the individual, chapter 3 (“Life in the Overlap of the Ages”) drills down into some of the specifics of living in the inauguration of the overlap of the ages.

For those wishing to read only select chapters of the book, we ask that you first become familiar with the theological foundation articulated in the first three chapters. These early chapters serve as the backbone of the project, and the remaining chapters assume a firm grasp of their content.

One of humanity’s strongest desires is to determine identity. Who are we? The Bible addresses the issue of identity by connecting it to the people of God, especially in the inauguration of the “latter days.” Christian identity is forged within the furnace of eschatology, but identity produces action. As the end-time people of God in the inaugurated new creation, Christians are required to live in light of their identity and renewed existence.

# 1

## The End Starts at the Beginning

G. K. BEALE

Theologians generally define “eschatology” as the study of “last things,” an investigation and systematization of events that take place at the very end of history. This general definition is often understood on a popular level to mean that eschatology refers *only* to the future end of the world directly preceding Christ’s final coming. This popular notion, which some scholars still hold to, needs radical adjustment. On a scholarly level, NT research over the past decades has made great strides in increasing our understanding that the beginning of Christian history was perceived by the first Christians as the *beginning* of the end times but not their *consummation*.<sup>1</sup> New Testament scholarship has still been atomistic enough to prevent serious broad theological reflection on the already–not yet eschatological<sup>2</sup> perspective of the entire NT corpus (though there are significant exceptions, such as N. T. Wright’s work).

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This chapter is adapted from “The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology,” in *“The Reader Must Understand”: Eschatology in the Bible and Theology*, ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1997), 11–52; and *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Transformation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

1. For articles and relevant bibliography on the eschatology of the Gospels, Paul, and the remainder of the NT, see respectively Dale C. Allison Jr., “Eschatology,” *DJG* 206–9; Larry J. Kreitzer, “Eschatology,” *DPL* 253–69; G. K. Beale, “Eschatology,” *DLNT* 330–45. See also David E. Aune, “Early Christian Eschatology,” *ABD* 2:594–609.

2. I use the adjective “eschatological” to refer to events that were prophesied to occur in a discrete period known as the “latter days” (see below).

The apostles understood eschatology not merely as futurology but as a mind-set for understanding the present within the climaxing context of redemptive history. That is, the apostles understood that they were already living in the end times, and that they were to understand their present salvation in Christ to be already an end-time reality. William Manson has well said,

When we turn to the New Testament, we pass from the climate of prediction to that of fulfillment. The things which God had foreshadowed by the lips of His holy prophets He has now, in part at least, brought to accomplishment. . . . The supreme sign of the Eschaton is the Resurrection of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church. The Resurrection of Jesus is not simply a sign which God has granted in favour of His son, but is the inauguration, the entrance into history, *of the times of the End*.

Christians, therefore, have entered through the Christ into the new age. . . . What had been predicted in Holy Scripture as to happen to Israel or to man in the Eschaton, has happened to and in Jesus. *The foundation-stone of the New Creation has come into position.*<sup>3</sup>

Every aspect of salvation was to be conceived of as eschatological in nature. To put this another way, the major doctrines of the Christian faith are charged with eschatological electricity. Just as when you put on green sunglasses, everything you see is green, so Christ through the Spirit had placed eschatological sunglasses on his disciples so that everything they looked at in the Christian faith had an end-time tint. This means that the doctrine of eschatology in textbooks should not merely be one among many doctrines that are addressed but should be the lens through which all the major doctrines are best understood. Furthermore, eschatology should not be placed at the end of NT theology textbooks or at the end of chapters dealing with the different NT corpora because it purportedly describes only the very end of the world as we know it. Rather, the doctrine of eschatology could be part of the title of such a textbook because every major theological concept breathes the air of a latter-day atmosphere. For the same reason, books on pastoral ministry must integrate eschatology into their discussions. It is important to say that our understanding of most of the traditional doctrines is not so much changed as radically enriched by seeing them through end-time lenses. For us to appreciate the NT understanding of eschatology, we must first discuss the basic story line of the OT and its conception of a discrete period of time known as the “latter days.”

3. William Manson, “Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *Eschatology: Four Papers Read to the Society for the Study of Theology*, SJTOP 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), 6, italics added. Although this sounds like “overrealized eschatology,” Manson qualifies it by saying, “The End has come! The End has not come!” (ibid., 7).

## The Basic Story Line of the Old Testament

Grasping the OT's view of the very end of history rests squarely on its basic plotline. That is, the events that are to occur at the end of history are deeply related to the OT's larger plotline. Succinctly, the story line of the OT is *the story of God, who progressively reestablishes his eschatological new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption, resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this kingdom and judgment (defeat or exile) for the unfaithful, unto his glory.*

Genesis 1–3 lays out the basic themes for the rest of the OT, which are essentially end-time or “eschatological” themes. We can speak of Genesis 1:28 as the first “Great Commission,” which was repeatedly applied to humanity. The commission was to bless the earth, and part of the essence of this blessing was God's salvific presence. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were to produce progeny who would fill the earth with God's glory being reflected from each of them in the image of God (1:26–28). After the fall, a remnant, created by God in his restored image, was to go out and spread God's glorious presence among the rest of darkened humanity. This witness was to continue until the entire world would be filled with divine glory. Thus Israel's witness was reflective of its role as a corporate Adam, which highlights the notion of missions in the OT.<sup>4</sup>

Without exception, the reapplications of the Adamic commission are stated positively in terms of what Noah, the patriarchs, Israel, and eschatological Israel or its king should do or were promised to do. Always the expression is that of conquering the land, increasing and multiplying population, and filling the promised land and the earth with people who will reflect God's glory. Never is there a hint that this commission is to be carried out by what we might call a negative act—that is, by death. Of course, Isaiah 53, Daniel 9, and Zechariah 12 (and a handful of typological Davidic texts such as Ps. 22) prophesy the Messiah's death as crucial to achieving Israel's restoration, but these texts are the minority, and they are never directly associated with the repetitions of the Adamic commission. The Adamic expectations and promises of obedience for Israel's patriarchs, the nation, and its king are always stated in positive terms of what they are to do or are promised to do.

The main strands of this biblical story in the OT books are those of Israel (and its king) being commissioned to fulfill the Adamic commission to reign

4. For elaboration of this, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

over a renewed earth but repeatedly failing to do so (e.g., 1 Kings 4:30, 34; 8:1–6; 1 Chron. 29:10–12).<sup>5</sup> As a result of this failure, Israel suffers judgment and exile, and these patterns of renewal and failure become typological patterns of the true, final end-time rule in a new creation that will inevitably come (e.g., Isa. 51:1–3; 54:2–3; Jer. 3:16; Ezek. 36:10–12). Promises of future restoration in a new creation continue to be reiterated in the OT narratives.

One significant aspect of the biblical narrative beginning also in Genesis 1–3 is God’s glorious tabernacling presence with his priestly people in a sanctuary as the goal of God’s redemptive work. Adam was not only a king but also a priest in Eden, a primordial sanctuary of sorts (Gen. 2:15). Functioning as a priest in the Eden temple was essential to carrying out the commission of Genesis 1:26–28. The Adamic commission often is combined with the notion of priestly service in a temple when it is repeated to Noah, the patriarchs, Israel, and in the promises to end-time Israel.<sup>6</sup>

The major episodes of OT history were seen to be reiterations, to varying significant degrees, of the pattern of beginning kingship in a beginning new creation. These subsequent episodes in the OT appear to commence an end-time process that is never completed. In the postfall sinful cosmos, in contrast to prefall Eden, it seems more understandable that the beginning process of restoration from sin would be charged with notions of a commencement toward an end-time consummation. This is the case with Isaiah’s prophecy of new creation, which is portrayed as a part of Israel’s return from exile (though Isaiah portrays it as an apparently single event and not an extended new-creational process).<sup>7</sup> The prophecies of Israel’s restoration from exile are said explicitly to take place “in the latter days” (Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Hosea 3:5; and possibly Jer. 23:20; 30:24, the latter especially in light of 31:1–40).

## The “Latter Days” in the Old Testament

Now that we have outlined the basic story line of the OT, we will focus our attention on the final phase of that story line and sketch the OT conception of the “latter days.” The phrase “latter days” occurs at points throughout the OT to refer to the culmination of history from the various writers’ perspectives (e.g., Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Hosea 3:5; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20;

5. For a broad thumbnail sketch of this theme but from somewhat different angles than traced in this chapter, see T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 74–89.

6. On which see Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 93–121.

7. On which see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 527–55.

Dan. 2:28–29, 45).<sup>8</sup> In other words, the “latter days” (and other synonymous expressions) are “eschatological” in that they represent a specific period of time that occurs at the very end of history. All the events that take place within this period, whether acts of judgment or restoration, are eschatological. Although earlier OT authors have more vague or “thicker” prophetic portraits of the latter days, all authors include reference to a future period that represents an irreversible radical break with a former period. I define these uses of “latter days” to be overtly eschatological because *all refer to a permanent and radical break with the preceding historical epoch*. A filling out of “the latter days” occurs as the OT writings develop and revelation progresses, like a seed germinating, sprouting, growing into a small plant, and then developing into a full plant.

The following conditions represent the conceptual thrust of the eschatological discontinuity between the two epochs.

1. After a final, unsurpassed, and incomparable period of tribulation for God’s people instigated by an end-time opponent who deceives and persecutes, in the face of which they will need wisdom not to compromise, they are
2. delivered and
3. resurrected, and their kingdom is reestablished.
4. At this future time, God will rule on earth
5. through a coming Davidic king, who will defeat all opposition and reign in peace in a new creation over both
6. the nations and
7. restored Israel,
8. with whom God will make a new covenant, and
9. upon whom God will bestow the Spirit, and
10. among whom the temple will be rebuilt.

In various OT contexts these ten ideas compose the essential content of the expression “the latter days” (and its near equivalents in Daniel [10:14; 11:27; 12:1, 10, 13]). The notions of kingdom, king, and rule over nations are sometimes developed in connection with the fulfillment of the Adamic-patriarchal promises of blessing.

8. See John T. Willis, “The Expression *be’acharith hayyamim* in the Old Testament,” *ResQ* 22 (1979): 54–71. Willis argues, unpersuasively in my view, that every use of “latter days” in the OT, Dead Sea Scrolls, and NT refers to mere indefinite future. This position is held by no one else whose work I have surveyed.

In this connection, Genesis 1–3 reveals the expectation that Adam should have reigned as a consummate eschatological priest-king in God’s perfect image.<sup>9</sup> His failure to accomplish this end-time reign left open the necessity for another Adam figure to accomplish the first Adam’s commission. Subsequent chapters of Genesis, and indeed of the OT, show repeated allusion to Genesis 1:28 and hope for such an eschatological figure. No significant fulfillment occurs, though. It had to await another who would come after the formal close of the OT period of expectation.<sup>10</sup>

### The Basic Story Line of the Old Testament in Relation to the New Testament

With the basic story line of the OT in view, and particularly the time period known as the “latter days,” we now turn to the NT’s continuation of that same story. *All that the OT foresaw would occur in the end times has begun already in the first century and continues on until the final coming of Christ.*<sup>11</sup> This means that the OT end-time expectations of such things as the great tribulation, God’s subjugation of the gentiles, deliverance of Israel from oppressors, Israel’s restoration, Israel’s resurrection, the new covenant, the promised Spirit, the new creation, the new temple, a messianic king, and the establishment of God’s kingdom have been set in motion irreversibly by Christ’s death and resurrection and the formation of the Christian church. Of course, other eschatological themes are present, but they tend to be subsets of the preceding ones listed.

This already—not yet eschatological concept may be pictured in the following manner:<sup>12</sup>

9. For the eschatological sense of Gen. 1–3, see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 29–46.

10. Some scholars view the expression “in the latter days” as referring to the indefinite future. Others acknowledge this meaning in some cases, but also see, at times, an overt eschatological nuance to the phrase (e.g., BDB 31; H. Seebass, “אֲחֵרֵי הַיָּמִים ‘*ach’rith*,” *TDOT* 1:207–12; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, AB 21B [New York: Doubleday, 2004], 197. Lundbom understands this to be the consensus among commentators). The focus of the expression “in the latter days” refers to a period at the end of history, but it also includes secondarily what we may call “protoeschatological” or apparent “semieschatological” events (e.g., tribulation, return from exile) that occur at points in the OT epoch before the climactic world-ending happenings and are inextricably linked to and lead up to such final happenings.

11. Earlier I have qualified this exclusively futuristic assessment of the OT by contending that some of the expressions there later find apparent inaugurated fulfillment still within the OT period itself (e.g., Israel’s end-time restoration begins at the time of the return of the remnant from Babylon: see Deut. 4:30; 31:29), yet these were not “true” inaugurated eschatological fulfillments, since these apparent fulfillments did not involve irreversible conditions.

12. Illustration adapted from Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 20.



We should think of Christ's life, trials, and especially his death and resurrection as the central events that launched the latter days. These pivotal events are eschatological in particular because they launched the beginning of the new creation and kingdom. This already—not yet, end-time, new-creational kingdom has not been recognized sufficiently heretofore as of vital importance to understanding the essence of NT theology and especially its application to pastoral ministry.

The OT prophesied that the destruction of the first creation and the re-creation of a new heavens and earth were to happen at the very end of time. Christ's work reveals that the end of the world and the coming new creation have begun in his death and resurrection: 2 Corinthians 5:15 and 17 says Christ "died and rose again . . . so that if any are in Christ, they are a new creation, the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." Revelation 1:5 refers to Christ as "the firstborn from the dead," and then Revelation 3:14 defines "firstborn" as "the beginning of the [new] creation of God."<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Colossians 1:18 says that Christ is "the firstborn from the dead" and "the beginning," so that "he himself might come to have first place in everything." In Galatians 6:14–15 Paul says that his identification with Christ's death means that he is a "new creation."

Indeed, the resurrection was predicted by the OT to occur at the end of the world as part of the new creation. God would make redeemed humanity a part of the new creation by re-creating their bodies through resurrection (cf. Dan. 12:1–2). Of course, we still look forward to the time when our bodies will be raised at Christ's final parousia, and we will become part of the consummated new creation. Christ's resurrection, however, placed him into the beginning of the new creation. The resurrected Christ is not merely spiritually the inauguration of the new cosmos, but he is literally its beginning, since he was resurrected with a physical, newly created body. Recall that when Matthew 27:50 narrates Jesus's death, Matthew immediately adds in verses 51–53, "the earth shook; and the rocks split, and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." These strange phenomena are recorded by Matthew to signal to his readers that Christ's death was the beginning of the end of the old creation and the inauguration of a new creation. Likewise, 1 John 2:17–18 can say "the world is passing away; . . . it is the last hour." Hence, Christ's death is not

17. For the notion of new creation in the 2 Cor. 5 and Rev. 3 texts, see G. K. Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5–7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6.14–7.1," *NTS* 35 (1989): 550–81; and G. K. Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Rev. 3.14," *NTS* 42 (1996): 133–52.

just any death but rather the beginning of the destruction of the entire world, which will not be consummated until the very end. Likewise, 1 Corinthians 15:22–24 says the resurrection launched in Christ will be consummated when he returns, when resurrected saints will become a part of the final form of the eternal new creation.

### **The Use of the Phrase “Latter Days” (and Synonyms) in the New Testament**

In order for us to grasp more firmly the story line of the NT, we will now consider its conception of “latter days.” The NT repeatedly uses precisely the same phrase “latter days” as is found in the OT prophecies, though other, synonymous expressions are also employed (“last days,” “last time,” “last hour,” etc.). Many of these uses may be echoes of the OT expression, and some uses appear to be specific allusions to some of the “latter day” OT texts. The eschatological nuance of the phrases is generally identical to that of the OT expression, except for one difference: in the NT the end days predicted by the OT are seen as beginning fulfillment with Christ’s first coming and culminating in a final consummated fulfillment at the very end of history.

All that the OT foresaw would occur in the end times has begun already in the first century and continues on into our present day. This means that the OT prophecies of the great tribulation, God’s deliverance of Israel from oppressors, God’s rule over the gentiles, and the establishment of his kingdom have been set in motion by Christ’s life, death, and resurrection and the formation of the Christian church. The resurrection marked the beginning of Jesus’s messianic reign, and the Spirit at Pentecost signaled the inauguration of his rule through the church (see Acts 1:6–8; 2:1–43). On the other hand, persecution of Jesus and the church indicated the beginning of the final tribulation. What the OT did not foresee so clearly was the ironic reality that the kingdom and the tribulation could coexist, to this extent, at the same time. For example, John says in Revelation 1:9 (NASB), “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus. . . .” Therefore, the latter days do not take place only at some point in the future . . . but occur throughout the whole church age, which means that we in the twenty-first century are still experiencing the latter days.

The first time the wording “last days” appears in the NT is Acts 2:17. Here Peter understands that tongues at Pentecost are a beginning fulfillment of Joel’s end-time prophecy that a day would come when God’s Spirit would gift not merely prophets, priests, and kings but also all of God’s people. Peter

says, “For these men are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all mankind’” (Acts 2:15–17a; cf. Joel 2:28).

In 1 Corinthians 10:11 Paul says that the OT was written to instruct the Corinthian Christians about how to live in the end times, since upon them “the ends of the ages have come.” And in Galatians 4:4 (NASB) he refers to Jesus’s birth as occurring “when the fullness of the time came,” in fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. Likewise, in Ephesians 1:7–10 (NASB) (esp. in view of 1:20–23) “the fullness of the times” alludes to when believers were redeemed and Christ began to rule over the earth as a result of his resurrection. The expressions “the last times” and “end days” in 1 Timothy 4:1–3 and 2 Timothy 3:1–5 refer to the presence of tribulation in the form of false, deceptive teaching. That the “latter days” in 1 and 2 Timothy is not a reference only to a distant, future time is evident from recognizing that the Ephesian church is already experiencing this latter-day tribulation of deceptive teaching and apostasy (see 1 Tim. 1:3–4, 6, 7, 19–20; 4:7; 5:13–15; 6:20–21; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16–19, 25–26; 3:2–9).

In his opening two verses, the author of Hebrews proclaims that in his own day, “in these last days,” Jesus had begun to fulfill the Psalm 2 prophecy that God’s Son would judge the evil kingdoms and receive the earth as an inheritance from his Father (cf. Ps. 2:1–12 with Heb. 1:2–5). In like manner, in Hebrews 9:26 (NASB) he says, “At the consummation of the ages He [Christ] has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” And James 5:1–9 warns readers not to trust in riches because the “last days” have already come. James attempts to motivate his audience to trust in Christ and not worldly possessions by imparting to them a comprehension of what God has accomplished through Christ in these “last days.”

In identical fashion 1 Peter 1:19–21 (NASB) says that Christ has died as a sacrificial lamb and been resurrected “in these last times.” Second Peter 3:3 (NASB) also pronounces that “in the last days mockers will come with their mocking” (see 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1). That this is not mere prophecy of the future in 2 Peter 3 but description of the present is clear from noticing that Peter recognizes that the mockers are presently spreading false teaching in the church that he is addressing (2 Pet. 3:16–17; note the imminent threat of false teachers in 2:1–22). Jude 18 has exactly the same idea (cf. Jude 4, 8, 10–13). In a similar context of false teaching, 1 John 2:18 says, “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.” These “antichrists” were manifesting themselves by attempting to deceive

others through erroneous teaching (see 1 John 2:21–23, 26; 4:1–5). Indeed, one of the indications that the latter-day tribulation is continuing during the present interadvent period is the pervasive presence of false teaching within the purported covenant community.

The last days predicted by the OT began with Christ's first coming, although there is other terminology besides "latter days" in many other passages that could also be adduced as further evidence (e.g., see Paul's use of "now" in 2 Cor. 6:2; Eph. 3:5, 10). Also, many passages convey end-time concepts but do not use technical eschatological expressions.

Christ's life, death, resurrection, and establishment of the church community have ushered in the fulfillment of the OT prophecies of the tribulation, the Messiah's conquering of gentile enemies, Israel's deliverance, and the long-expected kingdom. In this initial phase of the end times, Christ and the church begin to fulfill the prophecies concerning Israel's tribulation and end-time kingdom, because Christ and the church are seen by the NT as *the true Israel* (see Rom. 2:25–29; 9:6, 24–26; Gal. 3:29; 6:15–16; Eph. 2:16–18; 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 3:9; 5:9–10).<sup>18</sup> This notion of inaugurated fulfillment is best expressed by 2 Cor. 1:20: "For as many as may be the promises of God [in the OT], in him [Christ] they are yes."

Of course, there are passages in the NT that speak of the future consummation of the present latter-day period. That is, there are still aspects of many end-time prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled but will be when Christ returns a second time, such as the bodily resurrection of all people, the destruction of the present cosmos, the creation of a completely new heavens and earth, the final judgment, the eternal Sabbath, and so on.

Therefore, the apostles understood eschatology not merely as futurology but also as a mind-set for understanding the present within the climaxing context of redemptive history. The apostles grasped that they were already living in the end times and that they were to perceive their present salvation in Christ as already an end-time reality. Every major doctrine of the Christian faith is eschatological in nature and must be seen through the lens of the inauguration of the latter days. Pastoral ministry, too, should not relegate eschatology to the fringes but should attempt to integrate it fully into faith and life.

Most pastors rarely connect eschatology to their pastoral ministry. When properly understood, eschatology is central to all facets of church ministry. The gospel itself is saturated with eschatology: Jesus experienced selective end-time tribulation throughout his ministry, climaxing in the absolute tribulation of

18. See further H. K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983); and esp. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 649–749.

death on the cross; by the power of the Spirit, Jesus's resurrection from the dead initially launched the latter-day kingdom and the new creation. At the heart of the Christian message lies an event that is eschatological at its core. If the gospel is eschatological, then, by extension, so is pastoral ministry.

That is why I am excited about the present book. In the pages that follow, Benjamin Gladd and Matthew Harmon explore how inaugurated eschatology should shape pastoral ministry and the life of the church. As former students of mine, they understand and have embraced my approach to biblical theology. In many respects this book is a natural extension of my own work *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, so I am very happy to have a small part in this book. I pray that God will use this book to help pastors lead the eschatological people of God to live out his mission in this world in the power of the Spirit so that God's glorious presence may extend to the ends of the earth.