

Union with the Resurrected Christ

**Eschatological New Creation
and New Testament Biblical Theology**

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Introduction

The thesis of this book is that Christ's resurrection and ascension place him as the beginning of the eschatological fulfillment of the new-creational kingdom.¹ Therefore, and more specifically, he is the beginning fulfillment of the following OT end-time expectations (which are addressed in the chapters listed): (1) the resurrected Christ is the Last Adam, Son of God, and true Israel (chap. 3), (2) he is the temple (chap. 4), (3) he was true Israel (chap. 5), (4) he was justified (declared to be righteous), holy (perfectly sanctified), and redeemed (chap. 6), (5) he was a king-priest who had the status of having successfully endured the end-time tribulation (chap. 7), (6) he was a mission-oriented returnee from exile who sends his word throughout the earth; and he was reconciled to God (chap. 8), (7) Christ comes to be identified with the Spirit, filled and led by the Spirit (chaps. 9–10), (8) Christ achieves righteousness, fulfilling the law (chaps. 11–12), (9) Christ is identified with glory (chaps. 13–14), (10) Christ is God's image and one separated from the world (chap. 15), (11) the resurrected (regenerated) Christ is a new creation (chaps. 16–17).² Christ became these things at his resurrection, though he began to fulfill them even in his earthly ministry.³ At his ascension, what he was functionally during his earthly ministry (Son of God, Last Adam, messianic king, filled by the Spirit, etc.) was escalated.

1. Paul sometimes blurs the distinction between the resurrection and the ascension. The two are technically distinct but not separate; they “are best viewed as being of a piece with a broader theology of Christ's exaltation” (so Crowe, *Hope of Israel*, 112, though Crowe speaks here of Luke's perspective in the book of Acts). On the relationship of resurrection to ascension, see further below under “The Relationship between Christ's Resurrection and His Ascension.”

2. A number of these expectations are discussed in Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology* (hereafter *NTBT*), 115; others listed above but not explicitly mentioned there are, for the most part, related as subcategories.

3. There may be more of these eschatological realities, but these are the main ones, which will be the focus in this book.

A further part of the thesis is that the preceding inaugurated eschatological realities have been attributed to believers through identification (or union) with the *resurrected* and *ascended* Christ. What is true of Christ in his end-time resurrection and ascension is true of believers in their union with his resurrection.

This relationship between Christ’s resurrection and believers’ union with him in his resurrection can be depicted as a diamond: the diamond represents Christ’s resurrection as the beginning of the end-time kingdom and new creation. The facets of the diamond are the specific eschatological realities that Christ became⁴ and that also accrue and are attributed as benefits to believers in union with the resurrected Christ:

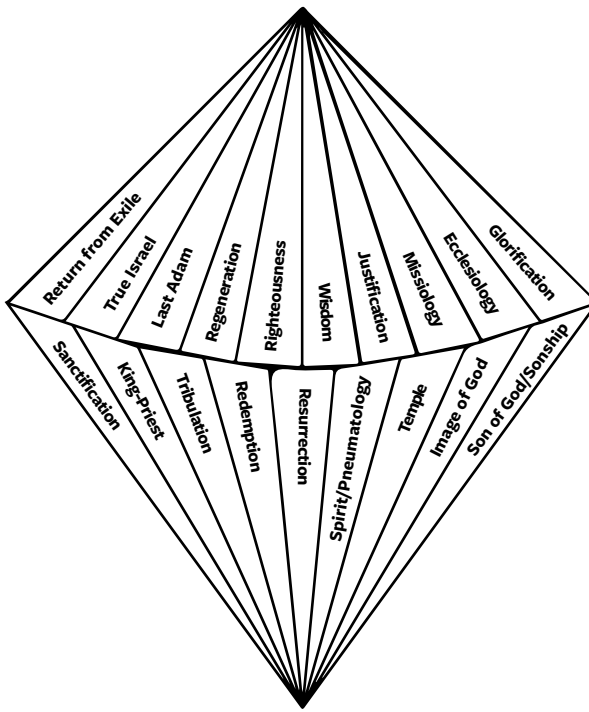


Figure 1.1 The reality and benefits of fulfillment in Christ’s life, death, and especially resurrection as the beginning of the eschatological new-creational kingdom

When believers come into union with Christ, they are imprinted with all the benefits that Christ possessed at his resurrection/ascension. To use a mixed

4. Though the diamond has more than nineteen facets, it is hard to be precise about how many “facets” there are that represent what Christ became at his resurrection.

metaphor, the facets of the diamond (= the attributes of Christ at his ascension) are imprinted on believers as the facets of a seal are imprinted on a surface. This is not an inanimate impression but an impression that consists of a lively union with Christ.

Alternatively, the relation of Christ’s attributes that are passed on to believers could be pictured as a wheel with spokes emanating from its hub. The hub is the resurrected Christ as the new-creational core from which each spoke originates, each spoke corresponding to a facet of the diamond. The hub is subdivided into the above inaugurated eschatological realities as pictured in the facets of the diamond, and each spoke comes out of one of these realities and is applied to the believer.

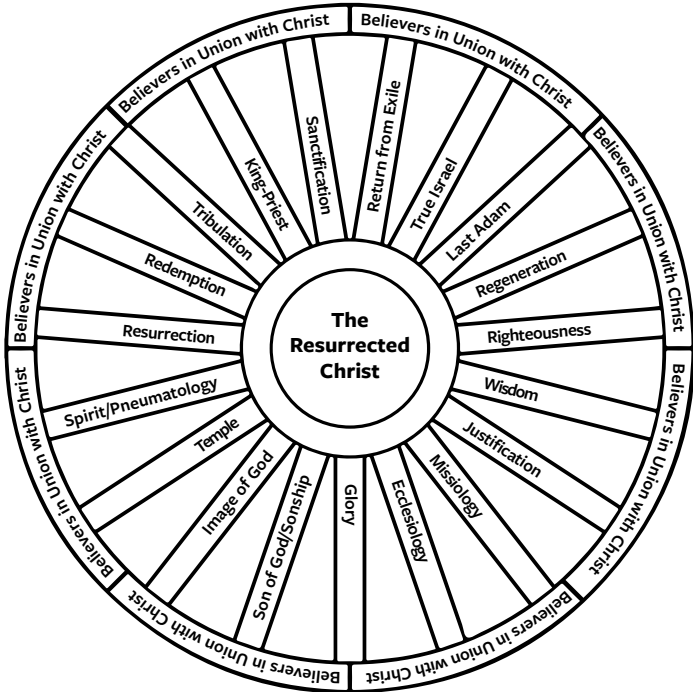


Figure I.2

Both diagrams viably represent the thought of this book. They each have their advantages and disadvantages. The facets of the diamond show more clearly who Christ is in himself. The wheel diagram shows the actual relationship of Christ and his attributes to believers. However, the diamond diagram will be used throughout the rest of the book. At the beginning of each chapter,

I will summarize what facets of Christ's attributes have been covered in preceding chapters and then introduce what will be discussed in the chapter of focus. The diamond image will be introduced at this point in each chapter. The facets of the diamond covered in preceding chapters will be in darker shading. The facet(s) to be covered in that given chapter will be in lighter shading. The facets to be covered in subsequent chapters will be unshaded. The purpose of repeating the diamond image in this manner is to better help the reader follow the argument of the book and not get lost in the details of the various chapters.

In this respect, I have been influenced by Richard B. Gaffin's seminal idea about Paul's thinking concerning Christ's resurrection. Gaffin argues that Paul viewed Christ's resurrection as his "redemption"—that is, deliverance from death. Furthermore, he argues that "justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification as applied to Christ are not separate, distinct acts; rather, each describes a different facet or aspect of the *one act*" of having been raised and redeemed from the dead.⁵ When believers are identified with and come into union with the resurrected and ascended Christ (who is represented, e.g., by the diamond and its facets), they are also identified with the diamond and with these same facets of the diamond.⁶ In fact, these facets of the diamond form the chapters of the book or major parts of chapters in the book. Most books and articles on "union with Christ" do not focus specifically only on union with Christ's *resurrection*, though Gaffin (however briefly) is one of the very few who have focused on this. His brief insight on this topic is immensely helpful.

The Main Point of This Book

Michael Horton, in a review of one of N. T. Wright's books, has well summarized the key idea of the thesis I am trying to propose in the present book:

It was liberating to learn that Christ was the beginning (first-fruits) of the new creation; that, united to him in his circumcision-death, everything that happened to him has happened, is happening, and will happen to me; and that my salvation is wrapped up in the redemption of a people—the Israel of God—and a place, the renewed creation where righteousness dwells.⁷

The major tweak that I would make in Horton's excellent statement is that it is not only in being "united to him in his circumcision-death" but *also, espe-*

5. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 127.

6. See Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 114–34, for the fuller argument.

7. Horton, "N. T. Wright Reconsiders the Meaning of Jesus's Death."

cially, in being united to him in his resurrection that “everything that happened to him” happens to us in our past, is happening, and will happen to us. Some passages will focus on believers’ union with an attribute of Christ whereby the believer is seen to be *represented by Christ in such a way that the believer is fully identified with that attribute of Christ*; in other words, what Christ is, the believer (in union with Christ) is. For example, we will see that in the case of the classic doctrine of justification (declaration of believers’ righteousness), when believers come into union with the resurrected Christ, they are credited with his perfect righteousness; that is, they are represented by the perfectly righteous, ascended Christ and are considered and seen to be perfectly righteous. Or, in the case of sanctification (believers’ separation from the world), when believers come into union with the resurrected Christ, they are considered as completely separated from the world as Christ was completely separated from the old world by his resurrection. On the other hand, we will see that when people become united with Christ, because of their link with Christ’s resurrected, sanctified status, they experience a definitive and irreversible break with the old world; that is, they experience not perfect but definitive sanctification. Also, when people become united with Christ, they begin to experience an ongoing or progressive aspect of sanctification whereby believers are progressively sanctified or set apart from the world. So sometimes believers’ union with an attribute of the resurrected Christ accomplishes a complete or perfect status with that perfect attribute. But sometimes the union with an attribute of Christ brings about a definitive beginning experience or progressive experience of that attribute.

I will be trying to expand this seminal notion of the various things that union with the resurrected Christ accomplishes in the remainder of this book, though I will explore themes beyond that of redemption, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification, which have been briefly discussed by Gaffin. I will also explore beyond Pauline material, since part of this project is to show that the Pauline notion of “union with the resurrected Christ,” and the resulting attributions to the believer entailed in that union, occur at points throughout the NT, though not as frequently or formally in other parts of the NT as in Paul (e.g., “in Christ” will not usually be found, but the concept will be).⁸ I will be going beyond the “in Christ” or “with Christ” terminology to other kinds of language conveying the “union with Christ” concept. Part of the reason for this is that some past studies on this theme have been restricted too much to the technical language of “in Christ” or “with Christ” and

8. Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, has attempted to do something similar, but his work, while helpful, is on the brief side with respect to actual exegetical analysis of NT texts.

have thus verged on making the “word-concept” mistake. I will not attempt to be exhaustive but to give selective examples of each topic, which should suffice to prove the point. There will not always be examples from every NT author, but whenever there are, the examples will be discussed as much as possible.

Clarification about What *Union* with the Resurrected Christ Means

Constantine Campbell has summarized “the state of the union” concept well. He refers to the believer’s close “relatedness” to Christ as being best conveyed through four terms: union, participation, identification, and incorporation. *Union* gathers up faith union with Christ, mutual indwelling trinitarian, and nuptial notions. *Participation* conveys partaking in the events of Christ’s narrative. *Identification* refers to believers’ location in the realm of Christ and their allegiance to his lordship. *Incorporation* encapsulates the corporate dimensions of membership in Christ’s body.⁹

There is no perceivable temporal or logical sequence of attributes to which believers become identified.¹⁰ They happen all at the same time, when one comes into union with Christ at the inception of belief. For myself, I think “union with Christ” is an umbrella term for or has overlap with the concepts of “participation with Christ,” “incorporation into Christ,” and “identification with Christ.” I will be using these expressions at various points throughout the book, where I see that they are most suitable or applicable. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish these terms, as in the case of “identification,” which can be defined as “the making, regarding, or treating of a thing as identical *with* . . . another or of two or more things as identical with one another. . . . The becoming or making oneself one with another in feeling, interest, or action.”¹¹ Thus, “union with” and “identification with” can easily overlap semantically and conceptually. We will see that in some cases there are OT backgrounds for the “union” concept, and I suspect that there are also backgrounds in some sectors of Judaism and possibly in Greco-Roman background.¹² In particular,

9. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 413.

10. Contra Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 414.

11. *OED*, s.v. “identification,” the definitions of which given above are among other ranges of meaning also given.

12. See Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 415–17, who sees some OT background but does not see any background in apocalyptic Judaism or in Greco-Roman thought. I have not been able to survey Judaism sufficiently to say definitively that there is some Jewish background. I think the most potential sector of Judaism to explore here is Qumran, which can be considered part of apocalyptic Judaism. As far as I can discern, Greco-Roman background does not appear to contribute much

in some of the exegetical studies in the following chapters, we will see specific OT background for some of the union concepts discussed. When participation, incorporation, or union is not clear, then sometimes there is only a general sense of identification, though likely one of the other notions is implicitly entailed even in these cases.

One aspect that Campbell does not emphasize (indeed, if he mentions it at all) is that union with Christ entails *a vital, living relationship* with Christ, which some may call “mystical” union. “It is nothing less than a life-union, a union in life shared with Christ . . . a union in life with Christ, [which] is also Spiritual,” because it is effected by the enlivening work of the Spirit in the Christian.¹³ Galatians 2:20 highlights this: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (likewise Col. 3:4: “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory”).¹⁴ There is no idea in this union of “a mixture of natures, only a personal union, like that of husband and wife (cf. Eph. 5:31–32),” which is a “mystery.”¹⁵ Thus, this personal union does not entail a participation in Christ’s human nature but includes participation in his identity, position, and history.¹⁶

Another aspect of union with Christ has been recently proposed by Kevin Vanhoozer. He says that when believers come into union with Christ, they “commune” with him—that is, come to “communicate intimately with him. . . . To be in Christ is to commune with Christ and other communicants in the commune that *is* Christ Jesus.”¹⁷ “Commune,” Vanhoozer thinks, is a good term that includes “the ‘doing’ of participation and the ‘being’ of union.”¹⁸ Vanhoozer’s proposal is a worthy proposal to consider for understanding union with Christ.

These facets of union discussed above we deem to be the central features of “union with Christ,” but there are certainly more that could be included and discussed.

to the concept of union (though see Jipp, “Sharing the Heavenly Rule,” 269, 271, for an example in which such background may come into play).

13. Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, 287.

14. These two texts are adduced in support of vital union by Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, 287, 290. I would add also Eph. 2:5 (“Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ”) and Rom. 8:2 (“For the law of the Spirit of [or leading to] life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of [or leading to] sin and of [or leading to] death”).

15. Vanhoozer, “From ‘Blessed in Christ’ to ‘Being in Christ,’” 8, which is part of his summary of Calvin’s view on union with Christ.

16. Vanhoozer, “From ‘Blessed in Christ’ to ‘Being in Christ,’” 26, who follows Hans Burger here.

17. Vanhoozer, “From ‘Blessed in Christ’ to ‘Being in Christ,’” 28.

18. Vanhoozer, “From ‘Blessed in Christ’ to ‘Being in Christ,’” 28.

The Relationship between Christ's Resurrection and His Ascension

One other important issue to discuss is the relationship between the resurrection and ascension. We have noted earlier that Paul sometimes blurs the distinction between the resurrection and the ascension. Though the two are distinct, they are not separate but are part of the one concept of Christ's exaltation. That the two are often merged in the NT is apparent, for example, from Romans 1:1–4:

¹Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, ⁴who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Clearly, “resurrection” here is merged with “ascension,” since Jesus's being declared the “Son of God” is something that was true of his ascended state also.¹⁹ The phrase “declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead” probably alludes to Psalm 2:7 (“You are My Son; today I have begotten You”).²⁰ This is consistent with the introductory “promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures” (Rom. 1:2). Likewise, Acts 13:30–39 appears to merge the two as well:

³⁰But God raised Him from the dead; ³¹and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. ³²And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, ³³that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, “YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU” [quoting Ps. 2:7]. ³⁴*As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: “I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.”* ³⁵Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*, “YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.” ³⁶For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; ³⁷but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. ³⁸Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

19. E.g., see Heb. 1:2–6.

20. See Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 48, who also says “Rom. 1:4 probably alludes to this Psalm verse (2:7).”

Acts 13 portrays Jesus's *resurrection* from the dead as fulfilling the Psalm 2:7 prophecy of God declaring him as the Messiah to be his Son. Yet it is clear elsewhere that Jesus's exaltation to the office of the Davidic king and Son of God, especially in fulfillment of Psalm 2:7, is something that was true of his ascension. For example, Hebrews 1:2–5 expresses this:

²In these last days [he] has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things [alluding to Ps. 2:7–8], through whom also He made the world. ³And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

⁵For to which of the angels did He ever say,

“YOU ARE MY SON,
TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”? [Ps. 2:7].

And again,

“I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM
AND HE WILL BE A SON TO ME”? [2 Sam. 7:14, alluded to in Ps. 2:7].

The Psalm 2 prophecy of God declaring the Messiah to be his “Son” is applied here to Jesus's ascension. In fact, the NT typically assigns Jesus's fulfillment of the Psalm 110:1 prophecy of messianic kingship to Jesus's ascension. For example, Colossians 3:1 says, “Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, **where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.**” Here Jesus is identified with, and thus seen as fulfilling, the prophecy of Psalm 110:1:

The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at My right hand
Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

(So, likewise, e.g., Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12.) Acts 2:33 also places Jesus's fulfillment of Psalm 110:1 at the time of his ascension. Yet Acts 2:32–33, in describing Jesus's fulfillment of Psalm 110:1, so closely relates Jesus's resurrection with his ascension that the latter should be seen as a climactic stage of the former, so that the two are of one piece:

This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God [Ps. 110:1], and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Jesus “poured forth” the “Spirit” on the basis that he was resurrected (v. 32) and on the basis that he was “exalted” and “received . . . the promise of the . . . Spirit.” The resurrection and ascension here are inextricably linked. I will use “resurrection” and “ascension” synonymously in this book, keeping in mind the distinction just made. But virtually everything in this book will deal precisely with the ascension, the climax of the resurrection. Christ’s resurrected existence on earth for forty days was a transient period, awaiting a greater state, as is evident from John 20:17:

Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’”

While ascension is the climax of resurrection, “resurrection is the first step in Christ’s exaltation.”²¹ It was at the climax of the resurrection that Jesus received the full, escalated eschatological blessings that he only began to receive during his earthly ministry and during his forty-day resurrection ministry. Thus, “the ascension denotes the movement of Christ’s exalted body from earth to heaven.”²² His full glorification occurred at the ascension,²³ at which time such blessings as his kingship were climactically escalated. By saying “climactically,” we mean that these blessings had reached an irreversible point and that they were eternally permanent²⁴ and indissoluble, in line with Ephesians 1:4 (“just as He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world”).²⁵

In fact, the end-time expectations discussed at the beginning of this introduction were blessings upon Jesus during his earthly ministry and postresurrection existence on earth. I would argue that most of these blessings were escalated at the time of Jesus’s ascension, among the least of which are (1) his glorious kingly Adamic image; (2) his Sonship; (3) his messianic kingship; (4) possession of God’s wisdom; (5) his being true Israel; (6) his reconciliation to God; (7) his being the temple; (8) his receiving of the Spirit, being transformed by the Spirit, and being sent by the Spirit to his followers; and (9) his sending of his word to the ends of the earth (mission to the gentiles). More will be elaborated on in this book. These are all escalated blessings upon some functional aspect of Jesus’s messiahship (e.g., his kingly function, his role as a priest,

21. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:419.

22. P. Schreiner, *Ascension of Christ*, 109.

23. On which see P. Schreiner, *Ascension of Christ*, 6. The whole book is a good presentation of the distinction between the resurrection and the ascension, though it focuses on an analysis of the latter.

24. Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, 418.

25. Following Gaffin, “Work of Christ Applied,” 282–83, 287.

his role of receiving²⁶ and sending the Spirit, and his role as the true Israel). The exaltation was not a change in his divine being or person (an ontological change) but “a real change, a state gained as a reward of his obedience”²⁷ as the Last Adam. The exaltation is an intensification of

the glory of his mediatorial work. . . . Christ enters a new state; as the mediator he is now at the right hand of glory. Though he was truly God in his state of humiliation, the glory was hidden. In the state of exaltation, the divine glory radiates outward for all to see, and all who see must confess Jesus as Lord.²⁸

Therefore, the ascension represents not only an escalation in Jesus’s *functional* mediatorial work but also a greater revelation to believers of who Jesus now is. If Jesus had not ascended, his Spirit would not have been sent to his followers (see John 14:18, 28;²⁹ Acts 2:32–33 in the full context of Acts 2). The coming of greater blessings on Jesus and on his followers is apparent in John 14:12: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.” What work did Jesus not do while on earth? He did not send out his Spirit to fill his people with gifts during his earthly ministry, and, related to this, he did not himself spread the gospel to the gentiles. The whole book of Acts is about this aspect of “the greater works” Jesus did after his ascension: through the Spirit the gospel was spread throughout the world,³⁰ although it should be recalled that at the very end of Jesus’s earthly postresurrection ministry he did command his followers to “make disciples of all the nations” because already “all authority [had] been given to [him] in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18–19).

The point about the relevance of Christ’s ascension for believers needs further refinement. It has significance that is truly existential or experiential. “For believers, the ascension means nothing less than the relocation of the actual life of the believer [i.e., from an unbelieving person residing only on earth].”³¹ Since Christ is now exalted, the believer shares in that exalted-resurrection

26. Jesus certainly received the Spirit to empower his earthly ministry (Luke 3:21–22), which was an enhancement of the Spirit he already received at conception (Luke 1:35). At Pentecost he “received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:33; see also John 7:39!) in beginning fulfillment of Joel 2:28–29. Christ’s reception of the Spirit at his heavenly ascension represents a further intensification or escalation of Spirit-gifting from the time of his earthly ministry (on this see Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, 122–24).

27. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:418.

28. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:419.

29. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:33–34.

30. See also P. Schreiner, *Ascension of Christ*, 37. For further discussion of the ascension see also Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:442–47, 475–82.

31. Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, 288.

life. This is a vertical dimension of their existence in union with Christ, though this cannot be found in the Bible's earthly dimension. Christians are really and actually in the same location as is the ascended Christ in heaven because he is there and they are in union with him.³²

This introductory section on union with the resurrected Christ can be summarized well by Richard Gaffin:

This union is so central, so pivotal, that without it the saving work of Christ, the once-for-all redemption he has accomplished, “remains useless and of no value.” Union is the all-or-nothing reality on which everything depends in the application of salvation. I must have Christ or I have nothing—that underlies and gives rise to everything else. Without union, the benefits that flow from it are otherwise nonexistent or irrelevant.

This union, further, is not partial union, as if one can share in some benefits without others. Unless I share in all of his benefits, I share in none of them. If I do not have the whole Christ, I have no Christ. Or, as Calvin puts it memorably elsewhere, Christ “cannot be divided into pieces.” . . .

This, then, is the core of salvation applied, the heart of the *ordo salutis*: union with Christ by Spirit-worked faith.³³

The Redemptive-Historical Context of This Book

As noted in the preface, a significant amount of the material in this book has been gleaned from my *New Testament Biblical Theology*, and somewhat less of it from other of my writings. In most of these cases, while a core has been retained, it has been either reconfigured or reallocated or revised or summarized with a view to seeing how much of it applies to the theme of *union with the resurrected Christ*, which I typically did not point out or highlight in *A New Testament Biblical Theology* or elsewhere. The revisions are aimed at focusing on this theme. As I have gone back to much of what I have written, I have found that the concepts involved bear upon this theme. Readers would not be able easily to go back to *A New Testament Biblical Theology* and find these discussions, since some are buried in the crevices of in-depth discussions throughout the book and in other of my writings. Part of the motivation for writing this sequel is to show how this original material bears directly on the notion of union with Christ—more particularly, *union with the resurrected Christ* as the beginning of the eschatological new-creational kingdom. On the other hand, this book also contains new studies and explorations of this theme in Paul and elsewhere in

32. Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, 288.

33. Gaffin, “Work of Christ Applied,” 284–85.

the NT. Some passages may not express a notion of “union” but rather “identity” with Christ, so that what is true of the ascended Christ is attributed to the believer. This is not precisely “union,” but it is close, and, I think, union probably underlies the identification, even if it is not explicitly expressed. Therefore, this book represents a further development in my thinking, which uses my *New Testament Biblical Theology* as the springboard.

Our main task, therefore, is to study in the NT the theme of *union with the resurrected Christ as the beginning of the eschatological new-creational kingdom*. Before addressing the various expressions of this theme in the NT, we need to review what sets us up to study this topic and, indeed, has led us to this study. I have been led to this subject as a result of tracing the biblical-theological storyline of Scripture. I did a study of the biblical-theological storyline in *A New Testament Biblical Theology* and then studied aspects of that storyline as it was found in the NT. In particular, the themes composing the OT storyline found in chapters 2–3 of my book became the basis for the NT storyline, which was stated in chapter 6. The NT plotline was a transformation of the OT storyline through developing it and fulfilling its prophetic features. The components of the NT storyline served as the organizing outline of the remainder of the earlier book (chaps. 7–28). Each chapter discussed and traced throughout the NT a thematic component of the storyline.

The OT storyline that I posited as the basis for the NT storyline was this: *The OT is the story of God, who progressively reestablishes his 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 in blessing and in judgment (defeat or exile) for the unfaithful, unto his glory*. The inductive basis for the formulation of this statement is found in chapters 2–3 of the earlier book. There we studied the commission to Adam, how he failed in that commission, and how it was passed on to others (Noah, the patriarchs, Israel) after him but with no success. We also saw how the concept of “the latter days” was a key OT theme, prophesying the coming of an Adamic king who would fulfill Adam’s commission.

The NT transformation of the storyline of the OT that I proposed was the following: *Jesus’s life, trials, death for sinners, and especially resurrection by the Spirit have launched the fulfillment of the eschatological already–not yet new-creational reign, bestowed by grace through faith and resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this new-creational reign and resulting in judgment for the unbelieving, unto the triune God’s glory*. Crucial in formulating this storyline was a study of already–not yet eschatology in the NT (especially the study of phrases like “in the latter days”). What the OT prophesied, the NT sees beginning to be fulfilled. We also saw that the major hinge or core of the NT storyline was

Jesus's death and resurrection by the Spirit as launching his inaugurated eschatological and new-creational reign. I then contended that the major theological ideas in the NT gain their fullest meaning within the framework of this overriding eschatological plotline of the new creation and kingdom and are but facets of it. It is from this eschatological “principle [and] point of view . . . that all the separate themes of Paul’s preaching can be understood and penetrated in their unity and relation to each other.”³⁴ I even appealed to the image of a diamond through which to understand NT theology. I noted that

we can think of Christ’s life, particularly his death and resurrected kingship, as a diamond that represents the new-creational reign. The various theological ideas are the facets of the diamond, which are inseparable from the diamond itself. This book is an attempt to give some of the most significant examples of how this is so and how the eschatological enhancement of the various doctrines also gives insight into the practical application of these doctrines to the lives of Christians.³⁵

This book is an attempt to refine, sharpen, and develop this aim in the first book. In particular, our main task is to focus on and analyze in the NT the theme of *the believer’s union with the resurrected Christ as the beginning of the eschatological new-creational kingdom.* In addition, we will focus on what aspects of the resurrected Christ are attributed to those who come into union with him. Although the theme of union with the resurrected Christ and what was consequently attributed to believers was not focused on in the first book, this will be the focus of this book. Many books and essays on union with Christ have been published recently, but most have focused on Paul and most have discussed union with Christ in general, not focusing on the resurrected and ascended Christ.³⁶ These books cannot be elaborated on here. *In contrast to other books on union with Christ, the major passages to be discussed in the chapters of this book will pertain to union as it is directly related to the resurrected Christ and the believer’s*

34. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 44, 57.

35. Beale, *NTBT*, 24.

36. For a very recent book on union, see Gorman, *Participating in Christ*, who, as the title indicates, prefers the word “participation” over “union.” Gorman (xvi–xxiv) also lays out a helpful history of interpretation concerning “participation,” especially in recent modern scholarship beginning with the landmark work of E. P. Sanders, as well as, among others, the works of James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, Richard Hays, Douglas Campbell, Todd Billings, Grant Macaskill, and Constantine Campbell. For other recent works on union, see also Thate, Vanhoozer, and Campbell, “*In Christ*” in *Paul*, and the essays therein; see likewise Vanhoozer, “From ‘Blessed in Christ’ to ‘Being in Christ,’” who lists more recent works on union. It would be a project in itself to compile all the recent books and essays on union with Christ. I will not pretend to have read all of these works. A forthcoming book on the topic is Bowsher, *Life in the Son*, which looks promising but, unfortunately, I have not had time to interact with in this book.

link to some facet of the resurrected Christ. Also, unlike the chapters of the first book, the chapters of this one will usually have a section on practical “application” of the particular aspect of “union with Christ” that has been focused on. These applications to Christian living will appear toward the end of each chapter with few exceptions.

The Relationship of Christ’s Redemptive Death to His Resurrection

It is clear from the preceding part of this introduction that this book will mainly focus on Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Some who have read prepublication forms of this book have asked why Christ’s redemptive death is not given equal treatment, since it is so important throughout the New Testament. For example, Paul summarizes the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Here he gives more treatment to Christ’s death than to his resurrection, but in the following verses he narrates Christ’s various resurrection appearances (1 Cor. 15:5–8). Generally speaking, Paul sees both Christ’s death and his resurrection as the core of the gospel. The two are inseparable, as Romans 4:25 makes clear: “*He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” Why are we narrowing down our focus to Christ’s resurrection in this book?

The reason is that from medieval times to the present church, theologians have emphasized the theology of the atonement much more than the theology of the resurrection. They have produced many studies on aspects of the atonement: some have articulated the difference between expiation and propitiation;³⁷ the church fathers developed the ransom theory. The word “salvation” has virtually been equated with Christ’s atoning death. When the resurrection has been focused upon, especially in the twentieth century, it has been typically for apologetic and not theological reasons.

My focus on the resurrection does not call into question in any way the expiatory and propitiatory nature of Christ’s atonement, nor is it an attempt to de-emphasize it. Nor is it an attempt to call into question the apologetic value of the resurrection. However, research on the theological implications

37. Was the atonement merely an expiation, whereby sin was sent away, or was it also a propitiation, whereby Christ’s death was a penal substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of people?

of the resurrection has been lacking. So this book is an attempt to bring out the theology of the resurrection.³⁸

One major exception to the long trend of focusing primarily on Christ's atonement is Richard Gaffin, whose first published book on the theology of the resurrection appeared in 1978 (a minor revision of his Westminster Theological Seminary doctoral dissertation).³⁹ He has followed up and developed this book in further publications in journals and a couple of books.⁴⁰ Likewise, Seyoon Kim has shown that Paul's theology was spun out of his experience with the resurrected Christ on the Damascus Road.⁴¹ My book *A New Testament Biblical Theology* also attempted to show the centrality of the resurrection in the NT, especially with respect to its being a facet of the eschatological new creation. As noted above, I looked at how various doctrines and concepts were facets of Christ's resurrection as a new creation (e.g., justification, reconciliation, sanctification, the temple, the Spirit, true Israel). And, as also noted above, this book is an attempt to refine and develop my earlier book.

A Note about How to Read This Book

I am aiming at a broad audience in this book. The book is mainly aimed at serious Christian readers, whether they be people in the church who are not scholars or college or graduate theology students or teachers. I also hope the book will be of some interest to scholars and that it makes some kind of contribution to a better understanding of NT biblical theology. I hope that I have supplied enough argumentation to support the various arguments that I make without making lay Christian readers feel overwhelmed. Those who want to concentrate more on the broad argument of each chapter may feel free to omit reading the footnotes. I hope that readers will find biblical and theological principles that can aid in living in the midst of an emerging new creation that is overlapping with this old, hostile creation.

I recommend that readers of this book have their Bible handy at their side as they read, since I often refer to Scripture for explanations and illustrations, and sometimes I do not quote or fully quote these Scripture texts. If one looks up some of these Scripture texts that are only cited and not quoted, then one will better be able to follow my arguments.

38. These last two paragraphs have been inspired by Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, 302–3.

39. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*.

40. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, and, most recently, *In the Fullness of Time* in 2022.

41. S. Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel*.

This book is also a kind of encyclopedia of union with the resurrected Christ. The introduction and first two chapters provide the foundation for the rest of the book. It would be preferable for readers to begin with those chapters. The rest of the book (chapters 3–17) represents biblical-theological topics about different facets of the believer’s union with the resurrected Christ (there are around twenty such topics). These chapters do not build on one another, with the result that one can pick and choose what to read after the foundational first two chapters. Thus, one does not need to read straight through the book but can read selectively. In this respect, the book is a kind of tool to be used for better understanding the believer’s union with the resurrected Christ. One can then return to the book again and again to review the different aspects of union with the resurrected Christ. The book functions somewhat like a book on systematic theology, though it contains a biblical theology of union with the resurrected Christ.

PART 1

The Biblical-Theological
Storyline Related
to Resurrection,
New Creation, and
Union with Christ

1

The Biblical-Theological Storyline of the Inaugurated End-Time Resurrection and New-Creational Kingdom as a Framework for New Testament Theology, Part 1

I referred to the biblical-theological storyline of Scripture in the introduction. This chapter is a summary of how I formulated the biblical-theological storyline of the Bible in my *New Testament Biblical Theology*. It is crucial to review this, since it sets up the theological framework for the rest of the present book on union with the resurrected Christ.¹

I. The Redemptive-Historical Storyline of the Old Testament

A. Adam's Commission

In *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, I presented cumulative evidence from various angles that Adam would have experienced heightened conditions of a permanent and irreversible nature if he had been faithful to the covenant obligations imposed on him by God. I referred to these obligations as a “covenant

1. See Beale, *NTBT*, 29–185, and see there for supporting footnotes as well.

of works.” The commission of Genesis 1:26–28 involves the following elements, especially as summarized in 1:28: (1) “God blessed them”; (2) “be fruitful and multiply”; (3) “fill the earth”; (4) “subdue” the “earth”; (5) “rule over . . . all the earth.”

It also appears that God’s making of Adam in his “image and likeness” is what enables Adam to carry out the particular parts of the commission. God’s creation of Adam in his image as the crown of creation is probably to be seen as the content of the “blessing” at the beginning of verse 28. The “ruling” and “subduing” “over all the earth” expresses Adam’s kingship and is plausibly part of a functional definition of the divine image in which Adam was made. This functional aspect is likely the focus of what it means that Adam and Eve were created in God’s image. Such a functional view of the image is suggested by images of gods in the ancient Near East, which neither represented the actual form of the god nor indicated primarily the attributes of the god (though this sometimes was included) but rather were the place through which the god manifested his presence and conveyed his blessings. When an ancient Near Eastern king was conceived to be an image of a god, the idea of the god’s subduing and ruling through that king is in mind, and this appears to be the best background against which to understand Adam as a king and in the image of God in Genesis 1:26–28. And to be in the image of a god meant that the king reflected the god’s glory. Thus, ancient Near Eastern kings’ being said to be in the image of their gods was part of the official establishment of kingship, forming the ideas of a divinely instituted rule and the ideal attributes of the king. Therefore, the king as the image of God was understood as a royal figure who represented his god in his kingly office and was depicted as acting like his god in specific ways.

J. Richard Middleton concludes,

The description of ancient Near Eastern kings as the image of a god, when understood as an integral component of Egyptian and/or Mesopotamian royal ideology, provides the most plausible set of parallels for interpreting the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1. If such texts . . . influenced the biblical *imago Dei*, this suggests that humanity is dignified with a status and role vis-à-vis the nonhuman creation that is analogous to the status and role of kings in the ancient Near East vis-à-vis their subjects. Genesis 1 . . . thus constitutes a genuine democratization of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology. As *imago Dei*, then, humanity in Genesis 1 is called to be the representative and intermediary of God’s power and blessing on earth.²

Likewise, when ancient Near Eastern kings set up images of themselves in various parts of their territories, their image generally represented their

2. Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 121.

sovereign presence and rule over that particular area. This probably provides insight into God setting up Adam as his image on the territory of the earth: Adam represents God's sovereign presence and rule on earth.³

Nevertheless, there is likely an additional ontological aspect of the "image" by which humanity was enabled to reflect the functional image. For example, Adam was made in the volitional, rational, and moral image of God, so that, with regard to the moral image, he was to reflect moral attributes such as righteousness, knowledge, holiness, justice, love, faithfulness, and integrity (for the first three attributes as part of the divine image, see Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), and above all he was to reflect God's glory.

Some commentators have noticed that Adam's role in Eden is part of the initial carrying out of the mandate given to him in Genesis 1:26–28. Just as God, during his initial work of creation, subdued the chaos, ruled over it, and, further, created and filled the earth with all kinds of animate life, so Adam and Eve, in their garden abode, were to reflect God's activities in Genesis 1 by fulfilling the commission to "subdue" and "rule over all the earth" and to "be fruitful and multiply" (1:26, 28). Thus, the focus of the divine image in Adam in Genesis 1–2 is on how Adam's activities copy God's, though there is the underlying assumption that Adam was created with attributes that reflected God's attributes. Adam's commission to "cultivate" (with connotations of "serving") and "guard" in 2:15 as a priest-king is probably part of the commission given in 1:26–28. Hence, 2:15 continues the theme of the subduing and filling of the earth by humanity created in the divine image, which has been placed in the first temple.

Adam was to be God's obedient servant in maintaining both the physical and the spiritual welfare of the garden abode, which included dutifully keeping evil influences from invading the arboreal sanctuary. In fact, the physical and spiritual dimensions of Adam's responsibilities in relation to the Genesis 1 commission are apparent from the recognition that Adam was like a primordial priest serving in a primeval temple. Adam was to be like Israel's later priests, who both physically protected the temple and spiritually were to be experts in the recollection, interpretation, and application of God's word in the Torah. Accordingly, essential to Adam and Eve's raising of their children was spiritual instruction in God's word that the parents themselves were to remember and pass on, which the Genesis 2–3 narrative implies.

In this respect, it is apparent that knowing and obeying God's word were crucial to carrying out the task of Genesis 1:26, 28 (and disobedience to it led to failure [cf. 2:16–17 with 3:1–7]). Thus, knowing God's will as expressed in his word of command (2:16–17) is part of the functional manner in which

3. Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 104–8.

humanity was to reflect the divine image (1:26, 28), which assumes that Adam was created with the rational and moral capacities to comprehend and carry out such a command. The first two humans were to think God's thoughts after him. Thus, Adam's and his wife's "knowledge" of God also included remembering God's word addressed to Adam in 2:16–17, which Adam's wife failed to recall in 3:2–3. After God puts Adam into the garden in 2:15 to serve him, he gives Adam a positive command, a negative command, and a warning to remember: "From **any** tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge [LXX: infinitive of *ginōskō*] of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (2:16–17).

When confronted by the satanic serpent, Adam's wife responds by quoting Genesis 2:16–17 but changes the wording in at least three major places (3:2–3). It is possible that the changes are incidental and are a mere paraphrase still retaining the same meaning as in 2:16–17. It is more likely, however, that she either failed to remember God's word accurately or intentionally changed it for her own purposes. The telltale sign of this is that each change appears to have theological significance. First, she minimizes their privileges by saying merely, "We may eat," whereas God had said, "You may eat freely"; second, she minimizes the judgment by saying, "You will die," whereas God said, "You will surely die"; third, she maximizes the prohibition by affirming, "You shall not . . . touch," whereas God originally said only, "You shall not eat."⁴ Eve's misquotation of what God said in 2:16–17 was the first sign of sin. Either she failed to remember or intentionally changed God's word, or Adam, as the chief priest, failed to communicate God's word to her or failed to help her remember it. This was the beginning of a process of sin that would culminate in Adam and Eve's overt partaking of the forbidden fruit. Adam is blamed by Paul for the sin in the garden of Eden because he was the ultimate authority in the garden.⁵

Adam's obedience would have led to some irreversible escalated eschatological blessings: (1) defeating and ruling over the evil serpent; (2) reflecting the character of God, which included mirroring the divine glory; (3) irreversibly possessing spiritual life; (4) experiencing unending eschatological "rest"; (5) being permanently protected from bodily corruption; (6) living on an earth that, likewise, would have been secured forever from corruption; (7) enjoying a consummated end-time relationship with God as his bridal people, a relationship that seems to be foreshadowed in the marriage relationship of Adam

4. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 134–35, has observed these three differences in Eve's quotation of Gen. 2:16–17. In excursus 2 in chap. 11, I elaborate in more depth on why Eve's changes to God's word were sinful changes.

5. See further excursus 2 in chap. 11.

and Eve and in the marriages of all their progeny; and (8) permanently ruling as kings over the earth.

However, Adam failed in his task and did not receive these escalated blessings. Adam's failure in the task with which he was commissioned includes his permitting entrance into the garden to an antagonistic and unclean being. Although Genesis 2–3 does not explicitly say that Adam's "ruling and subduing" task was to guard the garden from the satanic snake, this is likely conceptually in mind in light of the following two considerations: (1) Adam was commissioned in 1:26, 28 to subdue and rule over every creature that "creeps on the earth"; (2) Eden was a temple in which Adam was placed as a living image of God and as God's priest who was to guard the sanctuary from unclean creatures. Thus, Adam did not rule well because he did not guard the garden, allowing entrance to a foul snake that brought sin, chaos, and disorder into the sanctuary and into Adam's and Eve's lives. He allowed the serpent to "rule over" him rather than "ruling over" it and, as an obedient priest, casting it out of the garden.

Rather than extending the glorious divine presence of the garden sanctuary, Adam and Eve were expelled from it and excluded from the eternal life for which they were designed. Consequently, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's mandate in Genesis 1:28, and they did not inherit the more intensified stage of blessings that full faithfulness would have entailed.

As we will see below, after Adam's failure to fulfill God's mandate, God raised up other Adam-like figures to whom his kingly and priestly commission was passed on. We will find that some changes in the commission occurred as a result of sin entering into the world. Adam's descendants, like him, however, fail. Failure would continue until there arose a "Last Adam" who would finally fulfill the commission on behalf of humanity.

*B. The Passing On of Adam's Commission to His Descendants*⁶

Some commentators have noticed that Adam's commission was passed on to Noah, to Abraham, and to his descendants. The following observations of the repeated application of the mandate are made on the basis of discerning actual allusions back to Genesis 1:28 or one of its subsequent reformulations:⁷

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

6. This section is based for the most part on Beale, *Temple and the Church's Mission*, 93–96.

7. Bold font represents lexical and conceptual parallels.

Genesis 9:1, 7 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. . . . Be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.”

Genesis 12:2–3

“And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
 And make your name great;
 And so you shall be a blessing;
 And I will bless those who bless you,
 And the one who curses you I will curse.
 And in you **all the families of the earth will be blessed.**”

Genesis 17:2, 6, 8

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you,
And I will multiply you exceedingly. . . .

I will make you exceedingly fruitful. . . . I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan.”

Genesis 22:17–18 “Indeed **I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed** as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his [singular pronoun] enemies. In your seed **all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,** because you have obeyed My voice.”

Genesis 26:3 “Sojourn in this land and I will be with you **and bless you,** for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham.”

Genesis 26:4 “**I will multiply your descendants** as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants **all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.**”

Genesis 26:24 The LORD appeared to him the same night and said,

“I am the God of your father Abraham;
 Do not fear, for I am with you.
I will bless you, and multiply your descendants,
 For the sake of My servant Abraham.”

Genesis 28:3–4 “**May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you,** that you may become a company of peoples. May he also give you **the blessing** of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham.”

Genesis 28:13–14 “I will give it [the land] to you and to your seed. **Your seed will also be like the dust of the earth,** and you will spread out to the west

and to the east . . . ; and in you and in your seed shall **all the families of the earth be blessed.**"

Genesis 35:11–12 God also said to him,

"I am God Almighty;
Be fruitful and multiply;
 A nation and a company of nations shall come from you,
 And **kings shall come forth from you.**
 The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac,
 I will give it to you,
 And I will give the land to your descendants after you."

God thus gave the essence of the commission of Genesis 1:28 to Abraham (12:2; 17:2, 6, 8, 16; 22:18), Isaac (26:3–4, 24), Jacob (28:3–4, 14; 35:11–12; 48:3, 15–16), and Israel (see Deut. 7:13 and Gen. 47:27; Exod. 1:7; Ps. 107:38; Isa. 51:2, the latter four of which state the beginning fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in Israel).⁸ Recall that the commission of Genesis 1:26–28 involves the following elements, especially as summarized in 1:28: (1) "God blessed them," (2) "be fruitful and multiply," (3) "fill the earth," (4) "subdue" the "earth," and (5) "rule over . . . all the earth."

The commission is repeated, for example, to Abraham: "I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly **multiply your seed . . . and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies** [= "subdue and rule"]. In your seed all the nations of the **earth shall be blessed**" (Gen. 22:17–18). God placed Adam in a garden, and he promised Abraham a fertile land. God expresses the universal scope of the commission by underscoring that the goal is to "bless" "all the nations of the earth."⁹ It is natural, therefore, that in the initial statement of the commission in 12:1–3 God says to Abraham,

"Go forth from your country. . . .
And so be a blessing. . . .
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Gordon Wenham observes in this respect that "the promises to Abraham renew the vision for humanity set out in Genesis 1–2," so that "he, like Noah before him, is a second Adam figure" or a "new Adam."¹⁰

8. This was first brought to my attention by Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 21–26, though others had made virtually the same observation (on which see Beale, *NTBT*, 47–48).

9. See Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 37.

10. Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 37.

The same commission repeatedly given to the patriarchs is restated numerous times in subsequent OT books to Israel and eschatological Israel. Like Adam, Noah and his children failed to perform this commission. Accordingly, after the majority of the book of Genesis reiterates the promissory application of the Genesis 1:28 commission to the patriarchs, it is portrayed as beginning to be fulfilled in the nation of Israel in Egypt:

Genesis 47:27 Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and **were fruitful and became very numerous**.

Genesis 48:3–4¹¹ “God . . . **blessed me**, and He said to me, ‘Behold, **I will make you fruitful and numerous**, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting **possession**’” [in partial application to Joseph’s sons].

Exodus 1:7 But the sons of Israel were **fruitful and increased greatly**, and **multiplied**, and became exceedingly mighty, so that **the land was filled with them**.

Exodus 1:12 . . . the more they **multiplied** and the more they **spread out** . . .

Exodus 1:20 The people **multiplied**, and became very mighty.

Numbers 23:10–11

“Who can count the dust of Jacob,
Or **number** the fourth part of Israel?” . . .

Then Balak said to Balaam, “. . . Behold, you have actually **blessed them!**”

But after the events of Israel’s rebellious attitude in Egypt and at the event of the golden calf, it becomes clear that the promise is not consummated in the first generation of Israel, since it does not fully obey the commission. Moses prayed that, nevertheless, God would fulfill the promise (Exod. 32:13). And so the promise that the nation would fulfill the commission at some point in the future is reiterated, as it was to the patriarchs in Genesis:

Leviticus 26:9 “I will turn toward you and **make you fruitful and multiply you**, and I will confirm My covenant with you.”

Deuteronomy 7:13 “He will love you and **bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb** . . . in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you” (cf. Deut. 6:3; 8:1).

Deuteronomy 15:4, 6 “**The LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess**. . . . **For the**

11. The remainder of this section is based on Beale, *NTBT*, 48–52.

LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you. . . ; and **you will rule over many nations.**”

Deuteronomy 28:11–12 (LXX) “And the Lord your God will multiply you with respect to good things concerning **the offspring** of your womb . . . to **bless** all the works of your hands. . . . And **you will rule over many nations**” (AT).

Deuteronomy 30:16 “I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and **multiply**, and that **the LORD your God may bless you** in the land where you are entering to possess it” (cf. Deut. 30:5).

2 Samuel 7:29 (LXX) “And now **rule and bless** the house of your servant . . . and now from your **blessing** the house of your servant **will be blessed forever**” (AT).

Despite the promise of future blessing, at various points throughout the succeeding history of Israel the language of the Genesis 1:28 commission is reapplied to individual Israelites or the nation to indicate some degree of beginning fulfillment:

1 Chronicles 4:10 Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that You would **bless me indeed and enlarge** my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep *me* from harm that *it* may not pain me!” And God granted him what he requested.

1 Chronicles 17:9–11, 27 [God speaks through Nathan.] “I . . . will plant them [Israel]. . . . And I will **subdue** all your enemies [LXX adds “**I will cause you to increase**”]. . . . And I will establish his kingdom.” [David affirms initial realization.] “And now it has pleased You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You; for You, O LORD, have **blessed, and it is blessed forever.**”

Psalms 8:5–8

Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
 And **You crown him with glory and majesty!**
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
 All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
 Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

[Although some commentators would place Ps. 8 in this category, which is possible, it better fits into an overt eschatological category directly below.]

Psalm 107:37–38

And sow fields and plant vineyards,
And gather a fruitful harvest.
Also **He blesses them and they multiply greatly**,
And He does not let their cattle decrease.

Isaiah 51:2–3

“Then I **blessed him [Abraham] and multiplied him.**”
. . . And her [Israel’s] wilderness He will make like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the LORD.

[Note that the concluding wording is a promise for the future, which is repeated below.]

However, sinful events occur that make it clear that the king and nation only partly accomplish the commission. Ultimately, they also fail in attempting to do what Adam and their ancestors had failed to do. Therefore, there is reiteration of the promise that eschatological Israel and their end-time king will finally succeed in fully accomplishing the Adamic commission:

Psalm 8:5–8

Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And **You crown him with glory and majesty!**
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

Psalm 72:8, 17, 19

May he [the end-time king] also **rule** from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth. . . .
And **let men bless themselves by him;**
let all nations call him blessed
[allusion possibly to Gen. 12:2–3; 28:14, and above all to 22:18]. . . .
And **may all the earth be filled** with His glory.

Isaiah 51:2–3

“Then I **blessed him [Abraham] and multiplied him.**” . . .
Her [Israel’s] wilderness He will make like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the LORD.

Isaiah 54:1–3

“The sons of the desolate one **will be more numerous**. . . .
 Enlarge the place of your tent;
 Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings. . . .
 Lengthen your cords
 And strengthen your pegs.
 For you **will spread abroad to the right and to the left**.
And your seed will possess the nations.”

[The last two sentences are an allusion to Gen. 28:4, 13–14, which is part of the inner-biblical network of allusions to 1:28 and 12:20.]

Jeremiah 3:16, 18 “It shall be in those days when you **are multiplied and increased** in the land . . . the land that I gave your forefathers as an inheritance.”

Jeremiah 23:3 “Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their pasture, and **they will be fruitful and multiply**” (cf. Jer. 29:6; 30:19; 33:22).

Ezekiel 36:9–12 “You [the promised land] will be cultivated and sown. **I will multiply men** on you [the land]. . . . **I will multiply on you** [the land] **man** [Israel] and beast; and **they will increase and be fruitful . . . and possess you**” (cf. Ezek. 36:27).

Daniel 7:13–14

“With the clouds of heaven
 One like a Son of Man was coming. . . .
 And to Him was **given dominion** . . .
 That **all the peoples, nations** and *men of every language* . . .
 [will] serve him.”

[His rule will replace that of the “beasts.”]

Hosea 1:10 Yet **the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered**. . . . “You are the sons of the living God.”

C. Conclusion on Adam’s Commission¹²

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. After the fall, a

12. This section is based on Beale, *NTBT*, 57–58.

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 reflected its role as a corporate Adam, which highlights the notion of missions in the OT.

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 actual conquering of 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.¹³ Therefore, 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 were to do or were promised to do.

One important observation from the analysis so far in this chapter can be made: Genesis 1:28 has more inner-biblical connections with the rest of Genesis and the remaining OT books than any other text in Genesis 1–11, and this is an initial pointer to it being the most formal thread from that initial section of Genesis being developed elsewhere in the OT.

D. The Repeated New-Creational Expectation of an Adamic King throughout the Old Testament

The Genesis 1:26–28 notion of the Adamic king of the new creation forms the central storyline that is threaded throughout all the various books of the OT to one significant degree or another, especially as this relates to the establishment and demise of kingship in Israel in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. I found in *A New Testament Biblical Theology*¹⁴ that at various stages in the OT the engine of the new creation gets started again, and its new missional expansion seems to begin but stalls and ultimately breaks down because of sin. The theme of this kingship can be traced in the Psalms, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets.

The main storyline of the OT that can be distilled from the foregoing discussion is that Israel (and its king) was commissioned to fulfill the Adamic commission to reign over a renewed earth but repeatedly failed to do so, consequently

13. The coming Messiah's death is suggested early on by the mention of "bruise" in Gen. 3:15.

14. Beale, *NTBT*, 63–88.

suffering judgment and exile. Nevertheless, a promise of future restoration in a renewed creation continued to be reiterated.

*E. The Eschatological Storyline of the Old Testament*¹⁵

The preceding section attempted to summarize how I traced the major themes of Genesis 1–3 throughout the OT, especially kingship in an inaugurated renewed creation that pointed to a consummated creation. The themes explored were essentially of an eschatological nature. That is, Adam was established as a priest-king in a pristine creation, but his kingship and the creation itself did not reach their destined goal of victory over evil and ultimate security against sin, against corruption of the body, and against corruption of the creation itself. This goal was eschatological in nature, since it is apparent that the eternal state would have commenced for Adam and creation once this objective was reached, and final judgment would have been pronounced and executed upon the primordial antagonist. Thus, in Eden there was the commencement of the first sinless world order, which was yet incomplete and still needed consummation. At the beginning of this chapter, I referred a few times to the notion that Adam's goal as a priest-king was to rule in a consummated eschatological creation in which the blessings of Eden would reach a final escalation. A bit more reflection is needed on the meaning of eschatology as it relates to Adam's goal.

In that Adam's establishment in the Eden temple as a priest-king¹⁶ reflecting God's glory was the beginning of the first created order, may we not say that it was also the very beginning of a process that was never eschatologically completed? Genesis 1–2 represented a condition of creation that was subeschatological or even contained within it the seed that would sprout eschatologically. Thus, in Eden there was a beginning establishment of a priest-king in a sinless world order who was to be faithful and obedient to God *until that first creation was consummated*. On the one hand, the beginning of the first creation, untainted by sin, would be the inception of a process to be eschatologically completed through final glorification in incorruptibility. On the other hand, eschatology after Eden and the sin of humanity was to be redemptive eschatology, consisting of both restoration from sin and consummation.¹⁷ In this respect, the beginning of restoration from sin is often portrayed later as a restoration of Eden and a beginning new creation, which becomes an eschatological notion, as in, for example, Isaiah 65:17; 66:22, as well as in Revelation 21:1–22:5. This

15. This section is based on Beale, *NTBT*, 88–112.

16. On the notion of Eden as a temple and Adam as a priest-king, see chap. 7, secs. I.A–E.

17. Here I follow Vos, *Eschatology of the Old Testament*, 74–75.