

Paradise Restored is a literary response to John Milton's epoch poem, Paradise Lost. **The effect of generations of Rapture eschatology seems to be that many Christians are characterized by despair, defeat, retreat, and doomed to failure. Christians cannot win.** Until Jesus returns and rescues us, Christians will steadily lose ground to the enemy.

The teaching of the Bible is quite different and the Spiritual Man does what the Bible says (Rom 8:4-8). Spirituality means dominion, with the basic confession of faith that *Jesus is Lord* (Rom 10:9-10); that before the Second Coming of Christ, the gospel will be victorious throughout the entire world. The Hope of worldwide conquest for Christianity has been the traditional faith of the Church through the ages.

St. Athanasius, the great Church Father of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, summarized world history to that point, *the Word had become flesh, conquering the devil, redeeming mankind, flooding the world with Light which the darkness could not overcome*. The Church's eschatology of dominion radically shaped the history of Western civilization. Old cathedrals, constructed over decades and sometime generations, were built to last for centuries—and they have. But modern evangelical churches are usually built to last for a generation at most.

Columbus, in his extensive journals, credited his discoveries not to the use of maps, but to the Holy Spirit, who was bringing to pass what Isaiah had foretold (Isa 2:2-5; 9:2-7; 11:1-10; 32:15-17; 40:4-11; 42:1-12; 49:1-26; 56:3-8; 60:1-22; 21:1-11; 62: 1-12; 65:1-25; 66:1-24). We must remember that America had been discovered numerous times by other cultures; yet successful colonization and development took place only in the age of exploration begun by Columbus. Why? Because these explorers were bearers of the gospel, and their goal was to conquer the world for the kingdom of God.

The whole rise of Western Civilization—science and technology, medicine, the arts, constitutionalism, the jury system, free enterprise, literacy, increasing productivity, a rising standard of living, the high status of women—is attributable to one major fact: *the West has been transformed by Christianity*. Some of the greatest hymns and carols of the faith recount this, (A mighty Fortress is our God; Stand up, Stand up for Jesus; O come, O come Emmanuel; Hark! The herald angels sing; God rest you merry, gentlemen; Joy to the world; It came upon the midnight clear; etc.) The Psalms are inescapably Kingdom-oriented and full of conquest, victory and the dominion of the saints (22:27; 37:9-1; 46:-10; 47;1-3; 66:4; 72:8-11; 86:9; 124:4-5; 149:5-9).

What difference does it make? **The eschatological issue centers on the fundamental point: Will the gospel succeed**

**in its mission, or not?** The various Rapture schools of thought are solidly lined up to agree that *the gospel of Jesus Christ will fail*. The revival of the 1970s has largely entered evangelical and charismatic churches and adopted the *fact* that Jesus was going to rapture His Church *at any moment*. Some of the “Jesus People” were even counseled not to marry and raise families. There was no time for that sort of thing, since the Rapture was coming and any work for dominion would be useless. The “Rapture Ethic” of those years led many to leave school, jobs, families, and responsibility in general; flocks of Jesus People wandered aimlessly around the country, with no clear goal beyond the next Christian rock concert. It was years before many of them woke up and years more to put their lives together again.

You will not work for the transformation of society if you don't believe society can be transformed. **It was the utter confidence in the victory of the Christian faith that gave courage to the early missionaries, who fearlessly strode into the farthest reaches of pagan Europe as if they were at the head of an army**, preaching the gospel, driving out demons, smashing idols, converting whole kingdoms, bringing vast multitudes to their knees at the feet of Christ. **They knew they would win**. God honored their faith in His promises. When God's people disobey and slip back into unbelief, the Church begins losing battles to Satan. Matt 5:13-16 is nothing less than a mandate for the complete social transformation of the entire world. Jesus condemns *ineffectiveness*, failing to change the society around us. If the Church is obedient, the people and nations of the world will be disciplined to Christianity.

My personal journey toward the eschatology of dominion began when I was struck by the fact of those teaching other positions unable to develop their views *organically* from the Bible and part of the *Story* which the Bible tells. I began to realize that the way to recover Biblical eschatology must be through the understanding of the Biblical Story, to understand patterns already there. In contrast to a puzzle-solving, mystical interpretation, which tends to be speculative, the Bible is God's revelation of Himself to His covenant people. The symbolism is meant to be read visually, with images rising in succession to evoke a response in our minds and hearts. Thus, when the Bible speaks of water, it is like a *buzzword* to evoke a host of associative concepts, a complex of Biblical images that affects our thinking about water. The *Story* is an exercise in God's progressive revelation of salvation.

Salvation restores man to his original purpose (Gen 1:26-26) to have dominion. Salvation was *definitively* accomplished in the finished work of Christ; it is *progressively* applied during this age; and it will *finally* be achieved in its

highest fulfillment at the end of history on the Last Day. God's people were given the area of Goshen, which was the best in all Egypt (Gen 45:18; 37; 5, 6, 11, 27). In the Edenic location they were fruitful and multiplied (Ex 1:7). The Promised Land was *like the Garden of Eden* (Joel 2:3). The entrance to the Garden of Eden was on the east (Gen 3:24, Song of Sol 4:12). The entrance to the Tabernacle was from the east side (Ex 27:15-16); to enter God's presence through redemption is a gracious re-admittance to Eden. Wise men brought gifts from the east (Matt 2:1-11).

The Flood drastically altered the geography of the world, and 2 of the 4 rivers (the Pishon and the Gihon, Gen 2:10-14) no longer exist. The common source for these 4 rivers was probably in the area of Armenia and the Black Sea. Eden, as the source of water, was thus the source of blessing for the world. For this reason, water became an important symbol in Scripture for the blessings of salvation. Eden's location was on a mountain, probably a plateau on the mountaintop. This follows from the fact that the source of water for the world was in Eden. That Eden was the original *holy mountain* explains the significance of God's choice of mountains as sites for His redemptive acts and revelations.

The heathen served as a buffer between the covenant people and the wild animals (Ex 23:29-39; Dt 7:22). Edenic imagery of trees, planting and fruit is used throughout Scripture to describe God's work of salvation. The High Priest was a living symbol of man fully restored to fellowship with God in the Garden. The number of the original nations of the earth was 70, as listed in Gen 10. The Feast of Tabernacles (Ex 23:16) was forgotten by the Jews until their return from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh 8:13-18). During this period of renewal and restoration, God enlightened the minds of the prophets to understand the significance of this feast as an acted-out prophecy of the conversion of all nations to the true faith. Israel was to be the means of bringing the blessings of the Garden of Eden to the world: Scripture goes out of its way to portray this when it tells us twice (Ex 15:27; Num 33:9) of Israel camping at Elim where there were 12 wells of water (12 tribes of Israel) and 70 palm trees (70 nations of the world). God thus organized Israel as a small-scale model of the world, giving it 70 elders (Ex 24:1) and Jesus followed this pattern by sending out 70 disciples. The Garden of Eden, the Mountain of the Lord, will be restored in history before the Second Coming, by the power of the Gospel; and the desert will rejoice, and blossom as the rose (Is 35:11). God controls the heathen by withholding food and water. To understand the misery of the "3rd world," we need to look first at its ungodly religion and culture. The Edenic blessing of abundance will never be theirs until they repent and believe the Gospel. Chris-

tian cultures, especially the countries of the Reformation, are blessed with food that is relatively cheap and abundant.

**The Biblical ideal is for every man to own property**—a place where he can have dominion and rule under God. **Capitalism—the free market—is a product of Biblical laws**, in which a high priority is placed upon private property, and which condemns theft of all kinds (including theft by the State). To unbelieving economists, professors, and government officials it is a mystery why capitalism cannot be exported. Considering the obvious and proven superiority of the free market in raising the standard of living for all classes of people, why don't pagan nations implement capitalism into their social structures? The reason is: *Freedom cannot be exported to a nation that has no marketplace for the Gospel*. The Golden Rule (Mt 7:12) is the ethical foundation for the free market.

God's obedient people have never been nomads; instead, they are marked by stability and have dominion. The Bible calls us pilgrims, but a pilgrim has a home, a destination. People become nomads only through disobedience (Dt 28:65). As the Curse functions in history, nomadism becomes widespread, and the wilderness increases. As the Curse spreads, the water dries up. God now sends us water by rain (rain is much easier to turn off and on than pre-deluvian springs and rivers are).

God's saving of His people through the Exodus was a re-enactment of the history of the Creation: In saving Israel God was constituting them a New Creation. As in the beginning, the Spirit-Cloud hovered over the creation. (Gen 1:3; Ex 14:20; Jn 1:3-5). The architecture of the Tabernacle and the Temple were modeled as copies, not only of the Garden of Eden, but of the original heavenly Temple; the Cloud-Canopy (Heb 8:5; 9:11, 23-24).

Daniel says Christ is going *up*, not *down* (7:13-14). The Son of Man is going to the Ancient of Days, not coming from Him. He is not descending in clouds to the earth, but ascending in clouds to his Father. Daniel is not predicting the Second Coming, but rather the climax of the First Advent, after which the Lord ascended on the clouds of heaven to be seated on His glorious throne. Jesus told his disciples *there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of man coming in His Kingdom* (Mt 16:28). If Christ is seated now above all rule and authority and power and dominion, if all things are now under His feet, why are some Christians waiting for His Kingdom to begin? (Eph 1:20-22) The Bible says the Kingdom has arrived (Col 1:13). Jesus is the King, and His Kingdom has arrived, although things will never be "perfect" before the Last Judgment. Although the Kingdom was established *definitively* in the finished work of Christ, it is established *progressively* through history until it is established *finally* on the Last day in a similar pattern to our

personal salvation. The Kingdom is like leaven (Mt 13:31-33) The Kingdom will grow in size, spreading everywhere, until the knowledge of God covers the earth, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

The Kingdom was to be taken from the Jews and given to a new nation (Mt 21:40-43). *You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who were once not a people, but are now the people of God; who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy* (1 Pt 2:9-10). What had once been true of Israel, Peter says, is now and forever true of the Church. *For 3 years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree and find none* (Lk 13:6-9). Jesus, the Lord of the Vineyard, spent 3 years of His ministry travelling through Israel seeking fruit. *All these things will come upon this generation (Mt 23-29-36). The generation that crucified the Lord and persecuted His apostles was the “terminal generation.”* Israel, as the Covenant People, was to be destroyed, finally and irrevocably.

The most basic principle for an accurate understanding of the Bible’s message is that *Scripture interprets Scripture*; it is our highest authority. *This generation will not pass away until all these things take place (Mt 24:34). Everything Jesus spoke of in this passage up to verse 34 applied—the witnessing to all nations, the Tribulation, the coming of Christ on the clouds, the stars falling—everything.* Some have sought to get around the force of this text by saying that *generation* means *race*. But not once do the other 27 *generation* references in the gospels speak of the Jewish race over thousands of years; all use the word in its normal sense of *those living at the same time--contemporaries*. *The Great Tribulation ended with the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 (Lk 21:5, 6). The disciples understood the significance of this, that it would signal the end of the age, and the coming of a new era in world history—Jesus Christ’s New World Order. In the new Covenant Order sanctuaries are established wherever true worship exists, where the sacraments are observed and Christ’s Presence is manifested. In Mt 24:5-18 Jesus gives the signs of the end of the age of the pre-Christian era—false messiahs, wars, natural disasters, persecution, apostasy, worldwide evangelization (testified to in Col 1:23, Rom 1:8, and 10:18), and the abomination of desolation. Per Luke 21:20-22, the latter was to be the armed invasion of Jerusalem. The Great Tribulation of AD 70 was an absolutely unique event, never to be repeated. Josephus’ account of the fall of Jerusalem details every item of Mt 24 in sickening fulfillment. Most Christians have never read this account or compared Jesus prophecy with the historical record. More than a million Jews were killed in the siege of Jerusalem; close to a million more were sold into*

slavery throughout the empire, the whole of Judea lay in smoldering ruins.

Immediately after the tribulation, Mt 24:29-31 describes the sun, moon, and stars, etc., the same expressions and symbolism in Gen 1:14-16 where the sun, moon, and stars (“the powers of the heavens”) are spoken of as heavenly lights which “govern” the world. Later in Scripture, these heavenly lights are used to speak of earthly authorities and governors, prophesying the fall of Babylon in Is 13:9-10; the fall of Edom in 34:4; the doom of Samaria in Amos 8:9; and the destruction of Egypt in Ez 32:7-8. What Jesus is saying in Mt 24 is immediately recognizable by His disciples—the light of Israel is about to be extinguished. Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven (Mt 24:30). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church and the destruction of Israel are the same event, for they were intimately connected theologically. The prophet Joel foretold both the Day of Pentecost and the destruction of Jerusalem in one breath in 2:28-31. *How often I wanted to synagogue your children together...Behold, your House is being left to you desolate* Mt 23:37-38. Because Jerusalem apostatized and refused to be synagogued under Christ, her Temple would be destroyed, and a New Synagogue and Temple would be formed. The Church. The New Temple was created on the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came to indwell the Church. But the fact of the New Temple’s existence would only be made obvious when the scaffolding of the Old Temple and the Old Covenant system was taken away. The Christian congregations immediately began calling themselves “synagogues” (James 2:2). *They lived in anticipation of the Day of Judgment upon Jerusalem and the Old Temple, when the Church would be revealed as the true Temple and Synagogue of God.* Because the Old Covenant system was obsolete and ready to disappear (Heb 8:13), the writer to the Hebrews urges them to have hope, *not forsaking the synaguing of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the Day approaching* (Heb 10:25; 2 Thess 2:1-2).

In the words of St. Athanasius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, *the plain fact is that the...whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and the Gentiles, now forsaking atheism, are now taking refuge in the God of Abraham through our Lord Jesus Christ.* The early Church was also the scene of the most dramatic outbreak of heresy in world history. It was characterized not only by faith and miracles, but by increasing lawlessness, rebellion, and heresy from within the Christian community itself—just as Jesus had foretold in Matthew 24. The word *antichrist* never occurs in the Book of Revelation and is unrelated to the figure known as *the Beast* and 666. *Antichrist* only occurs in 1 Jn 2:18, 19, 22, 23, 26; 4:1-6; 2 Jn 7-11. There was not just one, but many antichrists and he was already working

(1 Jn 2:18). Antichrist was a system of unbelief which fits with what the rest of the New Testament tells us about the age of the terminal generation of the nation of Israel, which ended with the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. The apostle John said that antichrist had already come and that his presence was proof that he and his readers were living in the last hour.

The period spoken of as *the last days, last time, or last hour* is the period between Christ's birth and the destruction of Jerusalem. The early church was living at the end of the old age and beginning of the new. This whole period must be considered as the time of Christ's First Advent, including judgment on Jerusalem, bringing in His Kingdom and creating His new Temple (Dan 9:24-27). Christianity has been gradually and steadily winning battles since the days of the early church; and as Christians continue to make war on the enemy, the time will come when the saints possess the Kingdom (Dan 7:22, 27). Per Rom 8:28-39, the End came, and God's anger was unleashed. Those (the Jews) who had brought tribulation upon the Church were cast into the greatest Tribulation of all time. The Church's greatest enemy was destroyed, and would never again pose a threat to her ultimate victory.

The distinguishing mark of the Last Day is that the dead will be raised (Jn 5:20; 6:39, 40, 44, 54). Resurrection is the interpretive key. There is one resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. Since the Resurrection coincides with the Last Judgment, we know that Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming will be on the Last Day, at the Judgment (1 Cor 15:20-26). Christ's present reign, which began at His Resurrection and ascension, continues *until He has put all His enemies under His feet* (Ps 110:1). We know that at Christ's ascension He did sit at the Father's right hand (Mk 16:19; Lk 22:69; Acts 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20-22; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:13; 1 Pet 3:22). He will not return until the last enemy has been defeated at the Resurrection on the Last Day. The Bible speaks of salvation in terms of the definitive-progressive-final pattern. Definitively, all things were placed under Christ's feet at His ascension to His heavenly throne. **Progressively, He is now engaged in conquering the nations by the gospel. Finally, the Day will come when Christ's actual conquest of the world is complete.** Resurrection occurs at the end of the Millennium. The events of the Last Day include the Second Coming, the Resurrection, and the "Rapture." The Bible does not teach any separation between these events. Throughout the history of the Church no one ever heard of "pre-tribulation Rapture" until the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it did not become widespread until post WW2. Recently, as younger generations have begun to recognize the lack of Scriptural foundation for this novel view, a move toward a more Biblically grounded eschatology has begun.

Prophecy is poetry. The Biblical standard for interpretation is the Bible itself. The book of Revelation depends on the Old Testament much more than does any other New Testament book. Scriptures used in teaching and worship in the early church were primarily from the Old Testament. Our modern failure to appreciate this fact is the main cause of our inability to understand what John was talking about. The Mark of the Beast references Ex 28:36; Dt 6:6-8; and Ez 9:4-6 in which the servants of God are marked on the hand and forehead with the law of God, and thus receive blessing and protection in His name. The followers of the Beast, on the other hand, receive *his* mark of ownership: submission to ungodly, statist, antichristian law. The mark in Revelation is not meant to be taken literally. It is an allusion to an Old Testament symbol which spoke of a man's total obedience to God, and it stands as a warning that a society's god—whether it be the true God or the self-deified State—demands complete obedience to his lordship.

Revelation is meant to be understood. But it will not be understood by those who have no time to study the Bible. John's Revelation can be easy: all its symbols are either obvious natural ones, or else have their roots planted in the Old Testament poets and prophets and the figurative language of Jesus and his apostles. The apocalyptists have always said, *the world is coming to an end: Give up!* The Biblical prophets said, *the world is coming to a beginning: Get to work!* No Biblical writer ever revealed the future merely for the sake of curiosity: the goal was always to direct God's people toward right action in the present.

Revelation was written sometime before or around AD 68. This timing hangs on the fact that Jerusalem is spoken of as still standing and the Emperor Nero is still alive—and Nero died in June 68. A prior teaching in Dan 9:24-27 says that all special revelation ended by AD 70. God stayed His hand of judgment until the writing of the New Covenant was complete. Then He dramatically terminated the kingdom of Israel, wiping out the persecuting generation (Mt 23:24-36; 24:24; Lk 11:49-51). Jerusalem's destruction (Rev 11) was the last blast of the trumpet, signaling that the *mystery of God* was finished (Rev 10:7).

After Julius Caesar died (29 BC), a temple honoring him as god was built in Ephesus. The Caesars who followed him didn't wait for death to provide such honors, and, beginning with Octavian, they asserted their own divinity, displaying their titles of deity in temples and on coins. *Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved* (Christ and the Caesars, Westminster, p 88). The Caesars would not tolerate the worship of one God only. It was counted as treason. John's primary concern in writing the book of Revelation was to

strengthen the Christian community in the faith of Jesus Christ's Lordship, to make them aware that the persecutions they suffered were integrally involved in the great war of history. The subject of the Revelation was thus *contemporary*. It was written to and for Christians who were living at the time it was first delivered. **Those who interpret the book "futuristically" always seem to focus on their own era** as the subject of the prophecies. Convinced of their own importance, they are unable to think of themselves as living at any other time than the climax of history. **John stated that his book was intended for the seven churches which are in Asia (1:4), and we must assume that he meant what he said.** He writes that the book concerns *the things which must shortly take place* (1:1), and warns that the time is near (1:3). The book of Revelation is *not* about the Second Coming. Contrast the words of the angel in 22:1, *for the time is near*, with Daniel's *Conceal the words and seal up the book until the time of the end* in 12:4.

The Bible is God's revelation about His covenant with His people. It was not written about the Common Market or world banking. The Beast of Revelation is clearly the Roman Empire. The New Testament gives the definite impression that most of the churches fell apart and abandoned the faith; under Nero's persecution, the Church seemed to have been stamped out entirely. Per Rev 11:7, Israel sided with Caesar and the Empire against Christ and the Church. The Beast was given authority to act for 42 months (13:5), to make war with the saints and to overcome them (13:7). **Nero's persecution of the Church lasted 42 months ending June, 68.** Compare 1 Chron 24:1-9 with Rev 4:4. Solomon (a Biblical type of both Christ and the Beast) received 666 talents of gold in one year, at the height of his power and glory (1Kings 10:14; 2 Chron 9:13). That number marks both the high point of his reign and the beginning of his downfall. Solomon breaks the 3 laws of godly kingship recorded in Dt 17:16-17: against multiplying gold (1 Kings 10:14-25); against multiplying horses (1 Kings 10: 26-20); and against multiplying wives (1Kings 11:1-8). For Hebrews, 666 was a fearful sign of apostasy, the mark of both a king and a State in the Dragon's image. In Hebrew, each letter of the alphabet is also a numeral. The numerical values of the Hebrew letters in *Nero Caesar* are 666. Nearly all early Christian writers connected the Roman Empire and Nero with the Beast.

Most of the language describing Babylon is taken from the Biblical descriptions of Jerusalem. *The great Harlot* (Rev 17:1-2; Isaiah 57; Ez 16, 23) is seated on the beast (Rev 17:3), representing her dependence upon the Roman Empire for national existence and power. (Rev 17:9-10) The 7 mountains again identify the Beast as Rome, famous for its 7 hills; but these also correspond to the line of Caesars. *5 have fallen*: the first 5 Caesars were Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula,

and Claudius. *One now is*: Nero, the sixth Caesar was on the throne as John was writing the Revelation. *The other must remain a little while*: Galba, the seventh Caesar reigned for seven months. The Church's celebration of Communion is the *Marriage supper of the Lamb* (Rev 19:7-9). **We Postmillennialists say that the Millennium refers to the period between the first and Second Advents of Christ: the Millennium is going on now, with Christians reigning as kings on earth.** The First Death is this Spiritual death (Eph 2:1). And thus the First Resurrection is Spiritual as well: *Christ...raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus* (Eph 2:4-6; cf. Col 2:11-13; 1 Jn 3:14). We who believe in Him are *now* partakers in the First Resurrection. Revelation describes those in the First Resurrection: they are blessed and holy; the Second Death has no power over them; they are priests; and they reign with Christ (Eph 1:20-22; 2:6; Col 1:13, 1 Pet 2:9). The First Resurrection is taking place now, and this means that the Millennium is taking place now as well. The binding of the Dragon stresses that Satan was definitively defeated in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The specific sense in which Satan is said to be bound refers to his ability to deceive the nations. Before the coming of Christ, Satan controlled the nations. But now his death-grip has been shattered by the gospel, as the good news of the Kingdom has spread throughout the world Acts 26:18; Rom 15:12). The 1000 years of Rev 20 represent a vast, undefined period of time, which has already lasted over 2000 years and will probably go on for many more. **Jesus is reigning now (Acts 2:29-37; Rev 1:5) and He will remain in heaven until the Last Judgment (Acts 3:2). Our rule is going on now, on the earth (Mt 19:29; Lk 18:28-30; 22:29-30; Eph 2:6), and the extent of our rule coincides with the progress of the gospel.** The war of Gog and Magog takes place at the end of the millennium (Rev 20).

**The New Jerusalem is a present reality; it is said to be coming down from heaven because the origin of the Church is heavenly.** We have been "born from above" (Jn 3:3) and are now citizens of the Heavenly City (Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20). The River of Life is flowing *now* (Jn 4:14; 7:37-39), and it will continue to flow in an ever-increasing stream of blessing to the earth, healing the nations, bringing an end to lawlessness and warfare through the application of Biblical law (Mic 4:1-3). Christ's command is that we disciple the nations. The kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of Christ, *until He has put all enemies under His feet* (1 Cor 15:25). The River of Life flows from the restored Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church of Jesus Christ! The forces of evil sense that their time is running out (Rev 12:12). History is working toward our objectives. Every day brings us closer to the realization of the knowledge of God covering the whole world. The

earth will be changed, restored to Edenic conditions; and people will be blessed with long and happy lives—so long that it will be unusual for someone to die at the young age of 100 ( I s a 6 5 : 2 0 ) .

Jesus prayed, in fact, that we would not be “raptured.” *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one (Jn 17:15).* And this is the constant message of Scripture. Christ declares that He will gather first the tares for destruction; the wheat is “raptured” later (Mt 13:30). The wealth of the sinner is stored up for the just (Pr 13:22). We shall inherit the earth (Ps 37). He gives us the world, and turns it into the Garden of Eden.

The effect of generations of Rapture eschatology seems to be that many Christians are characterized by despair, defeat, retreat, and doomed to failure. Christians cannot win. The eschatological issue centers on the fundamental point: Will the gospel succeed in its mission, or not? It was the utter confidence in the victory of the Christian faith that gave courage to the early missionaries, who fearlessly strode into the farthest reaches of pagan Europe. *All these things will come upon this generation (Mt 23-29-36).* The generation that crucified the Lord and persecuted His apostles was the “terminal generation.” The Great Tribulation ended with the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 (Lk 21:5, 6). The disciples understood the significance of this, that it would signal the end of the age. The period spoken of as *the last days, last time, or last hour* is the period between Christ’s birth and the destruction of Jerusalem. Progressively, He is now engaged in conquering the nations by the gospel. Finally, the Day will come when Christ’s actual conquest of the world is complete. John stated that his book was intended for the seven churches which are in Asia (1:4). We Postmillennialists say that the Millennium refers to the period between the first and Second Advents of Christ: The Millennium is going on now, with Christians reigning as kings on earth. Jesus is reigning now and He will remain in heaven until the Last Judgment. Our rule is going on now, on the earth, and the extent of our rule coincides with the progress of the gospel. The New Jerusalem is a present reality; it is said to be coming down from heaven because the origin of the Church is heavenly. Jesus prayed that we would not be “raptured.” *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one (Jn 17:15).*

The key to understanding prophecy is to know the language, symbols, and context of the speaker and hearers, rather than speculation based on current perspectives and imagination. As I’ve embraced this clearer understanding of the Millennium, it is replacing a shadow of defeatism in me (of which I was unaware) with one of hope and certainty of increased blessing and victory, a higher trajectory of my own story and that of the world’s. A good deal of modern Raptureism should be recognized as an error that is teaching God’s people to expect defeat instead of victory until the Lord returns. [This defeatism has gained sway among evangelicals who have gathered into the Republican Party, and may contribute to a shadow behind the outlook for some spokesmen and prophets who have absorbed that particular political bent.]