



## THE MEANING OF THE INTERCESSORY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST ON HUMANITY'S BEHALF IN THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY

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**T**he intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary is a core teaching of Seventh-day Adventism. Jesus's mediatory work is made possible only because of His exceptional, unselfish, and once-for-all death for humanity (Heb. 9:28). The view of Christ's mediatorial work in heaven does not in any way diminish what happened on the cross as a unique, unparalleled, non-repeatable, and unprecedented divine act of salvation (Heb. 10:12, 14) from which all benefits flow to humans.<sup>1</sup> Nothing can improve or supplement it, and no one can add anything to Christ's extraordinary sacrifice. Salvation on the cross is indeed complete (Rom. 3:21–6; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23–24; 2:2; Gal. 2:16, 21; Eph. 2:4–10). Adventist theology differentiates

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1. Everett Ferguson underlines that Jesus's "atoning death was [a] unique and unrepeatable work for human salvation (Heb 10:12, 14). Jesus' sacrificial death, therefore, was a ministry that the church cannot continue. . . . Jesus' redemptive sufferings were complete and cannot be added to," Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 282.

Ellen G. White explains: "The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. . . . There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected," *The Great Controversy* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950), 489.

between the “complete” atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross, and the “completed” atonement in relationship to His intercessory ministry in heaven on humanity’s behalf.<sup>2</sup> Atonement-salvation is therefore not completed, because we still live in a sinful world. Christ’s ministry involves the security of the entire universe as He applies His work of redemption to individual believers (Dan. 7:9–10, 13–14; 9:24–27; Eph. 1:7–10; Rev. 12:7–12).<sup>3</sup> A lasting solution to the problem of evil, however, is complex, involving Christ’s mediatory work in heaven over a long period of time.

## A DIFFICULT PUZZLE

Theologians encounter seemingly unsurmountable problems regarding the meaning of Jesus’s work on earth today. Philip Yancey eloquently declares:

I have concluded, in fact, that the Ascension represents my greatest struggle of faith—not whether it happened, but why. It challenges me more than the problem of pain, more than the difficulty of harmonizing science and the Bible, more than belief in the Resurrection and other miracles. . . . For me what has happened since Jesus’ departure strikes at the core of my faith. Would it not have been better if the Ascension had never happened? If Jesus had stayed on earth, he could answer our questions, solve our doubts, mediate our disputes of doctrine and policy.<sup>4</sup>

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2. See, for example, the statement of the former dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Dr. W. G. C. Murdock, at the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas: “Seventh-day Adventists have always believed in a complete atonement that is not completed,” quoted in Morris L. Venden, *Never Without an Intercessor: The Good News About the Judgment* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 140.

The full at-one-ment (i.e., the complete harmony between God and His creation) will be reached when sin is eradicated and evil is no longer present (1 Cor. 15:24–28; Eph. 1:10). This full harmony will be restored at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 21–22).

3. “Christ is mediating in behalf of man, and the order of unseen worlds is preserved by His mediatorial work,” Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1930), 254. “Not only men, but angels, will ascribe honor and glory to the Redeemer, for even they are secure only through the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the inhabitants of unfallen worlds have been guarded from apostasy. Not only those who are washed by the blood of Christ, but also the holy angels, are drawn to him by his crowning act of giving his life for the sins of the world,” Ellen G. White, “The Home Missionary,” May 1, 1897.

4. Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 229.

He adds: “By ascending, Jesus took the risk of being forgotten.”<sup>5</sup> God’s distance and invisibility disturbs humanity. His obvious physical absence frustrates humans, especially in view of atrocities such as war, rape, exploitation, natural disasters, death, suffering, and pain. People often ask, Where is God now, and what is He doing?

## BIBLICAL AFFIRMATION

The Bible powerfully declares that Jesus Christ is in heaven (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:9–11) and is interceding for humans (hinted at in Rom. 5:10–21, but explicitly taught in Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1). This fundamental teaching attests that Christ’s intermediary role is needed to accomplish the plan of salvation. Jesus Christ is humanity’s Intercessor, Mediator, and High Priest, in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 4:15–16; 8:1–2). The author of Hebrews presents an elaborate picture of Jesus Christ as our High Priest and Mediator-Intercessor who is alive and makes intercession for sinners (Heb. 7:25). The Old Testament points to God Himself as a heavenly Witness or Advocate (Job 16:19–20; cf. 33:23), and explains that the Servant of the Lord makes “intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12).<sup>6</sup> This Suffering Servant, whom the early church identified as Jesus Christ (Acts 8:27–35), died for humans on their behalf, forgives their sins, and gives them His righteousness. Thus, His work bestows the benefits of His substitutionary death to sinners (Isa. 53:3–12).<sup>7</sup>

According to the book of Daniel, at the time of the end, Michael will stand for His people in order to deliver them from oppression (Dan. 12:1–2). Likewise, Jesus was standing for Stephen when he was stoned to death (Acts 7:55–56). Standing at the right hand of God is biblical imagery for the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> Numerous biblical scholars and

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5. *Ibid.*, 230.

6. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Italics in Scripture quotes reflect emphasis added by author.

7. There are five songs of the Servant of the Lord in the book of Isaiah (42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; 52:12–53:12; 61:1–3).

8. A difference exists between standing and sitting at the right hand of God. “Standing” points to intercession, whereas “sitting” refers to the rulership, victory, authority,

theologians confirm the biblical teaching that Jesus Christ is humanity's Intercessor,<sup>9</sup> but what does it mean? What does the Bible want to convey by this terminology? What difference does it make for everyday problems that He "always lives to intercede" (Heb. 7:25) for humanity?

## WHAT CHRIST'S INTERCESSION DOES NOT MEAN

Before describing the current role of Jesus in heaven, it is first necessary to underline what the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary does not mean. It does not imply that Jesus must (1) plead with the heavenly Father or beg Him to forgive our sins; (2) appease an angry God; (3) change the Father's attitude toward us; (4) nor reconcile God to humanity. Jesus and the Heavenly Father are not involved in a celestial arm-wrestling match to ascertain who is stronger in order to show either favor or anger toward humans.

The Scriptures clearly explain the reasons for these conclusions. First, Jesus does not need to implore our Heavenly Father to love us. He Himself declared it: "In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (John 16:26–27). Second, Jesus does not need to change the Father's attitude toward us—"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Christ died for us, because the Father loved humans. Finally, humans must be reconciled to God, not vice versa. This is our message of reconciliation

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and kingship of Christ's ministry (Matt. 26:64; Mark 16:19; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 12:2; cf. Ps. 110:1). *Standing* also refers to the action of the judge who is ready to pronounce the legal verdict regarding the indicted person. Thus, the verdict brings deliverance and victory or condemnation.

9. See, for example, Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. and enl. ed. (repr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979); G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965); Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1947); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2013); Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); Edward Heppenstall, *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1972).

as God's ambassadors: "Be [you people] reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Sinners need to be brought back to Him; God is constantly searching for the lost (Gen. 3:9).<sup>10</sup>

If Jesus Christ needed to appease an angry heavenly Father, then He would not differ from pagan gods that require pacification and the expiation of their anger through sacrifices and gifts. One cannot buy God's favor; thus Jesus does not need to plead with the Father on our behalf, but satisfies God's righteousness-justice in dealing with sin. Thus, He is both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26, NKJV). Our Heavenly Father loves people (Deut. 33:3); He and Christ are fully united in their efforts to save humanity (Eph. 1:3–10).<sup>11</sup>

## NECESSARY PREREQUISITE

The essential precondition for Christ's mediation is the oneness of His being God and man (i.e., the divinity and humanity of the person of Jesus Christ). He came to save fallen humanity. The incarnation of Christ and His atoning death on Calvary are foundational qualifications that opened the way for His intercessory ministry. The cross was a necessary prerequisite for His salvific mediatory work for humanity (Rom. 3:23–26). His victory over sin (Matt. 4:1–11; Rom. 8:3) and His voluntary and substitutionary death for humanity qualified Him to be their Intercessor.

The intercessory ministry of Jesus puts into practice the results of the cross by expanding the efficacy of Calvary. Jesus became sin and a curse for humanity (Isa. 53:3–6; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). What was accomplished on the

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10. Romans 5:10 states: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (NKJV). Regarding a sense in which God was reconciled to humanity in order that His justice could be satisfied through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, and His wrath propitiated (Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:18), see point no. 4 in the section "Linguistic Connotations."

11. Ellen G. White notes: "The atonement of Christ was not made in order to induce God to love those whom He otherwise hated. . . . We are not to entertain the idea that God loves us because Christ has died for us, but that He so loved us that He gave His only-begotten Son to die for us," *The Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1895. "The atonement of Christ was not the cause of God's love, but the result of that love. Jesus died because God loved the world," *The Review and Herald*, September 2, 1890. "The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, August 1, 1892.

cross nearly two thousand years ago must now be applied, actualized, and incorporated into the lives of men and women for them to be restored to His image and have abundant life (John 10:10). He is the God-Man, the Mediator of humanity, because He “gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Tim. 2:6; cf. Mark 10:45). He is humanity’s Mediator because He is their Savior. His intercession is a continuation of His saving activity on humanity’s behalf, the realization and integration of His work for all people on the cross. Every person needs His death and life in order to be spiritually alive (Rom. 3:24–25; 5:10; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; 2 Cor. 5:14–17; Eph. 2:1, 4–6; Col. 3:3–4).

Raoul Dederen emphasizes the role of Christ’s death on the cross: “While His sacrifice for sin was made once for all on the cross (Heb. 7:27; 9:28; 10:11–14), the ascended Christ is making available to all the benefits of His atoning sacrifice.”<sup>12</sup> At the moment sin entered the world, Jesus reached down from heaven and stepped in as humanity’s Intercessor in anticipation of His victory at the cross. This proleptic reality is best described in the book of Revelation: “The Lamb who was slain from the creation [or better ‘foundation’; Greek: *katabolē*] of the world” (13:8).

## CHRIST’S TWOFOLD MINISTRY

Christ’s role as Intercessor is twofold: (1) revealing and ministering the mysteries of God’s goodness and richness to humankind; and (2) presenting humanity’s existential needs to God and securing their salvation. In other words, His intercessory ministry is both a revelatory and redemptive process for humanity, forming one unit that cannot be separated. Alister McGrath correctly explains that “the presence of God in Christ is intended to mediate between a transcendent God and fallen humanity. This idea of ‘presence as mediation’ takes two quite distinct, yet ultimately complementary, forms: the mediation of revelation on the one hand, and of salvation, on the other.”<sup>13</sup>

First of all, Jesus being divine (John 1:1–3; Rom. 9:5; Col. 1:15–18) represents the Godhead. As the Mediator, meaning communicator, of the

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12. Raoul Dederen, “Christ: His Person and Work,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 187.

13. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 346–347.

divine, He reveals the Father, His character, and all the values of the Godhead (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:14–18; 17:6). Because He and the Father are one (John 10:30), Christ also discloses the Holy Spirit by explaining the Spirit's ministry (John 14:16–17; 15:26–27; 16:7–15) and interceding (*entynchanein*) for the saints (Rom. 8:27).<sup>14</sup> With the entrance of sin (Gen. 3:1–10) and the ensuing distortion of God's character, Christ's birth and sacrifice on the cross for humanity demonstrates, credibly and convincingly, that God is the God of love, truth, and justice (2 Chron. 15:3; Ps. 31:5; 89:14; Jer. 10:10; John 1:14; 3:16; 14:6; Rom. 1:17; 3:21; 5:5–8; 1 John 4:16).

Proverbs 8:22–31 hints at the special role Jesus took upon Himself as Mediator and Communicator between the triune God and created beings. From the moment God began to create beings in the universe,<sup>15</sup> Christ was presenting the principles of love, government, and the will of the Godhead to the created worlds.

When the New Testament uses the term *mesites* (Gal. 3:19–20; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) or *mesiteuein* (Heb. 6:17), it denotes what God is doing for humans through Jesus Christ. He came from above to be with us, Emmanuel (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20–23), a movement from God toward humanity, not the reverse. He came to live among humankind as a fragile human being to reveal God's values, truth, teachings, and how God hates sin and evil. He never stands on the side of the oppressor, but on the side of the oppressed. In humanity's suffering and distress, He suffers with humanity (Isa. 63:9). Jesus is the optimal self-revelation of God, the revealer of truth, because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6; cf. Exod. 34:6–7). He not only reveals God and proclaims the Word of God, but is Himself the revelation and personified Word of God in the flesh (John 1:1–3; Col. 2:9). In His humanity, He served as an exegete (*exegeomai*) by imparting a right interpretation of the true character of His Heavenly Father (John 1:18). Upon this existential knowledge depends eternal life (John 17:3). He desires to unveil the lies regarding the Godhead and rebuild a loving and trusting relationship between Himself and humanity.

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14. In the case of the Spirit, the Greek word *mesites* (mediator) is not used.

15. See on this point a seminal article by Richard M. Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 33–54.

Second, by experiencing true humanity, Jesus Christ (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 2:52; John 1:14; Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:5–11; Col. 2:9; 1 John 1:1–2; 4:2–3) understands humanity's struggles (Heb. 4:15–16) and thus, as their Representative (1 Tim. 2:5), can efficiently mediate on their behalf between the Holy Father and sinful humanity. The remainder of this chapter focuses on this aspect of Jesus's role as humanity's Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary and pursues a clearer understanding of His ministry.

## LINGUISTIC CONNOTATIONS

The Scriptures attest that Jesus Christ intercedes (*entynchanein*) on humanity's behalf before the heavenly Father (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and that He is humanity's Advocate (*parakletos*, 1 John 2:1). A careful study of the biblical vocabulary related to Christ's intercessory ministry can assist a serious student of Scripture in discovering the meaning of Jesus's function as our Intercessor.

The Hebrew word for "intercede" is *paga'* which means basically "to meet" or "encounter" (Gen. 23:8). Another verb is *palal*, translated as "to pray" or "intercede" (1 Sam. 2:25; 7:5). Also, the term *khalah* (II; only in *piël*) means to "pacify," "appease," or "intercede" (1 Kings 13:6).

The Greek verb *entynchano* means also "to meet" or "encounter," and as its Hebrew counterpart it conveys according to the context whether this meeting is positive or negative (Acts 25:24; Rom. 11:2).

The notion of *parakletos* literally means "someone who is called (to help or to stand by)," thus "Helper," "Advocate," "Intercessor." Jesus Christ, as well as the Holy Spirit, is called *parakletos* (John 14:16 [the Holy Spirit]; 1 John 2:1 [Jesus Christ]), which means, "He is Someone called to help" or "Someone to stand by." He can effectively help in every person with his or her daily struggles.

Jesus Christ is a *hilasterion* (atonement, expiation, propitiation) according to Romans 3:25. The Hebrew equivalent of this expression is *kapporet* (a mercy seat; see Lev. 25:17; 16:15–17).<sup>16</sup> Christ is a reconciling or atoning

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16. A significant debate exists among New Testament scholars regarding whether the correct translation of the word *hilasterion* means "to expiate" or "to propitiate." See James E. Allman, "*hilaskesthai*: To Propitiate or to Expiate?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 (July–September 2015): 335–355; C. H. Dodd, "*hilaskesthai*, Its Cognates, Derivatives, and Synonyms, in the Septuagint," *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1930–31): 352–360; Leon Morris, *The*



sacrifice (Greek: *hilasmos*; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). He experienced God's wrath because He became sin for humanity (2 Cor. 5:21) and took upon Himself the curse for humanity's transgressions (Gal. 3:13–14) that humans may live and have eternal life (John 5:24–25; 11:25). The biblical understanding of the Lord's anger or wrath (Rom. 1:18) is God's antagonistic, irreconcilable, and burning reaction toward sin. It is His passionate attitude toward everything that is irreversibly associated with evil because sin destroys what is good, valuable, and beautiful. God cannot tolerate evil because it opposes His good nature (Ps. 107:1). God is love by definition (Deut. 7:9; 1 John 4:16) and is only perceived as wrathful in revealing His uncompromising attitude toward sin and anything that destroys life. The Triune God devised a very costly solution to the problem of sin: Christ Himself. His sacrifice of love bestows reconciliation and peace with the Godhead (Rom. 5:9–11; 2 Cor. 5:18–19; Col. 1:19–20). He is the mercy seat, the atoning sacrifice who covers all repentant sinners with His righteousness, thus removing the cause of God's wrath (2 Cor. 5:18). All sinners who admit they have transgressed His Word, the law of God, openly, honestly, and sincerely confess their sins, and accept Christ as their Savior are forgiven; God is their righteousness (Ps. 32:1–2; 51:1–12; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:16; Rom. 3:26; 1 John 1:7–9). Michael Bird states: "We might say that when sin is expiated, then God's wrath is propitiated. When sin is removed, God's wrath is appeased."<sup>17</sup> However, unrepentant sinners remain under God's wrath (John 3:36).

God's wrath is revealed against all iniquity, but Jesus Christ is a *hilasterion*, a mercy seat, a *kapporet*.<sup>18</sup> The cross was a revelation of God's love and

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*Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955): 144–213; Roger Nichol, "C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (May 1955): 117–157; Valentin Zywietz, "Representing the Government of God: Christ as the *Hilasterion* in Romans 3:25" (MA thesis, Andrews University, 2016).

17. Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 406–407.

18. In the sanctuary, the *kapporet* covered the ark of the covenant under which was the law of God, the Decalogue (see Exod. 25:17–22). In the Septuagint, the *kapporet* is translated as *hilasterion* (see, for example, Exod. 25:17, 20–21; 31:7; Lev. 16:13–15; cf. Heb. 9:5). This mercy seat or covering lid represented Jesus Christ, His atoning sacrifice on the cross. He was the sacrifice of atonement that God provided in order to cover sinners and give them transforming grace. Paul identifies Jesus as a mercy seat—"hilasterion" or "*kapporet*" (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 4:15). Jesus makes propitiation or atonement (*hilaskomai*—Heb. 2:17), and is the

justice (Pss. 85:10; 101:1). By the cross, God demonstrated that He is just, while justifying “those who have faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26) and accept Christ as the Mercy Seat (Rom. 3:25). His righteousness is manifested through His ultimate sacrifice of life.

Jesus Christ is humanity’s only Intercessor (1 Tim. 2:2–6). This assertion by Paul was intended to counter the Gnostic teaching of his time, a world teeming with diverse intercessors.<sup>19</sup> But Paul assures his listeners that no other power can come between God and this world, and that Christ is fully God and fully human. He is humanity’s Intercessor because He gave Himself for humanity in order to redeem humanity. No one and nothing on earth or in the entire universe can separate humanity from God’s love (Rom. 8:35–39).

## WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE INTERCESSORY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST ON OUR BEHALF?

### Christ Meets the Father in Order to Help

Jesus Christ and the heavenly Father meet (*paga’* and *entynchano*) together in order to help (*parakletos*) humans with their everyday problems and enable them to be victorious Christians. All heaven—the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit—is united in helping humans in their struggle with sin, Satan, and temptation. Without His assistance, people are powerless and cannot resist evil, change, or grow spiritually (John 15:5; cf. Phil. 4:13).

The first tangible result of the meeting after Christ’s ascension was the sending of the Holy Spirit to believers (Acts 2). Everett Ferguson rightly states:

God gives help in living out one’s salvation (Phil. 2:12) in the Christian way of life. The Holy Spirit provides the link between baptism and the Christian life. The Holy Spirit not only sanctifies (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:2) but also gives new life in baptism (John 3:5) and takes up residence in the one converted (Acts 2:38; 5:30; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19). The Holy Spirit provides the

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propitiation or the atoning sacrifice for sins (1 John 2:2; cf. “an offering for sin”—Isa. 53:10).

19. Thus, for example, Ivan T. Blazen in his article “Jesus: Priest and Coming King,” in *The Essential Jesus: The Man, His Message, His Mission*, ed. Bryan W. Ball and William G. Johnsson (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2002), 251.

continuing present benefits of God's one-time action in the cross and the one-time commitment in baptism (there is "one baptism"—Eph. 4:5). He is the power of the Christian life.<sup>20</sup>

Because humanity now has free access to God, people can approach Him directly through Christ without the need of any human mediation (Heb. 4:16; 10:19). "Christ has made direct access to God in the heavenly sanctuary possible. That access is also related to the Holy Spirit. 'For through [Christ Jesus] both [Jew and Gentile] have access in one Spirit to the Father' (Eph 2:18). The Holy Spirit provides a life that in some measure already participates in the future life (Eph 1:13–14; Heb 6:4)."<sup>21</sup>

John's comment: "Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:39) needs to be correctly understood.<sup>22</sup> This proclamation does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not present, active, and engaged during the Old Testament period (ample evidence testifies against this popular standpoint),<sup>23</sup> but signifies that the Spirit of the Lord could only work proleptically during Old Testament times and was acting in anticipation of Christ's glorification, (i.e., Jesus's

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20. Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 204. Consider also the following statements of Ellen G. White: "By a union with Christ, by living faith, we are privileged to enjoy the efficacy of His mediation. We are crucified with Christ, buried with Christ, risen with Christ, to walk in newness of life," *Signs of the Times*, October 11, 1899. "Everyone who will break from the slavery and service of Satan, and will stand under the blood-stained banner of Prince Immanuel will be kept by Christ's intercessions. Christ, as our Mediator, at the right hand of the Father, ever keeps us in view, for it is as necessary that He should keep us by His intercessions as that He should redeem us with His blood. If He lets go His hold of us for one moment, Satan stands ready to destroy. Those purchased by His blood, He now keeps by His intercession," MS 73, 1893, in Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 6:1078.

21. Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 217.

22. See Luke 24:49; John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:8. See also seven New Testament statements about the "baptism of/with/in/by the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 3:11–12; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16–17; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor. 12:13). Compare with Luke 1:15 (John the Baptist); 1:41 (Elizabeth); 1:67 (Zechariah)—all these Old Testament saints were filled with the Holy Spirit before Pentecost or Jesus's glorification.

23. John Goldingay, "Was the Holy Spirit Active in Old Testament Times? What Was New About the Christian Experience of God?" *Ex Auditu* 12 (1996): 14–28; Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

victory on the cross, His resurrection and ascension). James Hamilton states: "The sense in which the Spirit is yet to be given is that *believers* are about to receive Him at the glorification of Jesus."<sup>24</sup>

The cross historically validated the Spirit's activities. Jesus's glorification (see John 13:31–32; 17:1–5)<sup>25</sup> was the seal authenticating the involvement of the Holy Spirit's work during Old Testament times and onward. Thus, the triumphant death of Jesus was the prerequisite for giving the Spirit of God to the world. And, at the same time His activity was real, in the justification and affirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament dispensation.<sup>26</sup>

Jesus's intercession is also compared to His praying for us. By praying for His followers, He helps them become strong in faith and united in love and truth (see John 17). Jesus's intercessory prayer for His disciples and successive generations of His followers is that they be a model of unity and faithfulness. A good example of this is Jesus praying for Peter: "I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail" (Luke 22:32, NKJV). He wants believers to know Him (John 17:3; 2 Pet. 3:18); be victorious in Him (Rev. 3:5, 21); love each other (John 13:34–35); and be His

24. James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 62, emphasis in original. See also, Geoffrey W. Grogan, "The Experience of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments," *Vox Evangelica* 5 (1967): 12–17; Sidney H. Hooke, "The Spirit Was Not Yet (John 7:39)," *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963): 372–380.

25. By the sacrificial life and victorious death for sinners, Jesus Christ glorified His Father and saved humanity. Each believer in Him has eternal life, the glorious result of His ultimate sacrifice for humanity. The Father glorified Jesus, that is, resurrected Him to life and restored Him to His previous position of glory (John 17:5; Acts 2:32, 36; 5:30–31; Phil. 2:8–9).

Christ's death started not only a new dimension of His ministry, but also approved and authenticated all that was previously accomplished in Old Testament times.

26. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (2010): 315, "The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a most significant work wherein the Spirit arrived in state, visibly and dramatically, thereby showing in time and space what had been experienced all along in the Old Testament was not unreal, but was fully part of the whole plan of God." He also asks a pertinent question: "How could all of these old covenant persons have believed and been enabled to live sanctified lives if the Spirit of God did not dwell in them?" To prove the point, he provides examples of Old Testament believers such as Enoch, Noah, Joseph, Job, Bezalel, and David, *ibid.*, 309.

bold and courageous disciples (Matt. 14:27; Acts 4:13, 29; 23:11; 27:22, 25; 28:31; Phil. 1:20).<sup>27</sup>

Through Christ's mediatory work, the Intercessor purifies the actions, prayers, worship, obedience, and praises of believers who seek to express their gratitude to God. All need His purification. Ellen White powerfully comments on this aspect:

Christ, our Mediator, and the Holy Spirit are constantly interceding in man's behalf, but the Spirit pleads not for us as does Christ who presents His blood, shed from the foundation of the world; the Spirit works upon our hearts, drawing out prayers and penitence, praise and thanksgiving. The gratitude which flows from our lips is the result of the Spirit striking the cords of the soul in holy memories, awakening the music of the heart.

The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin, ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary; but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the intercessor who is at God's right hand presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censor of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censor the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned.

O, that all may see that everything in obedience, in penitence, in praise and thanksgiving must be placed upon the glowing fire of the righteousness of Christ. The fragrance of this righteousness ascends like a cloud around the mercy seat.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, as Intercessor, Jesus Christ helps His followers to be connected to Him and be active in His Church. "To be in Christ is to be in the church, and

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27. Exodus 32:31–32 provides an excellent example of such a praying ministry where Moses intercedes for the people of God who have sinned against Him by making a golden calf. Moses asks for God's forgiveness and even offers his own life for them.

28. Ellen G. White, MS 50, 1900, in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1077–1078. See also Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1958), 353.

to be in the church is to be in Christ.”<sup>29</sup> Ferguson fittingly comments: “One is not ‘in Christ’ because of being ‘in the church,’ but one is ‘in the church’ because of being ‘in Christ.’ . . . To be saved is to be in Christ, and to be a Christian is to be a member of the church.”<sup>30</sup> Jesus gives His followers the Holy Spirit in order to be His faithful witnesses: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

## Christ Saves

Jesus Christ justifies and saves (Zech. 3:1–7; Rom. 8:1). Consequently, believers identify with Him (Rom. 6:1–4; Eph. 2:4–10). He is their Substitute and Representative because He died for their sins (1 Cor. 1:30; 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21). His substitutionary death brought victory over the evil forces and Satan. He defeated death (Rom. 6:24; 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 26, 54–55), which is why He can now give His followers eternal life (John 5:24–25; 11:25).

According to Hebrews 7:25, Jesus “is able to save completely.” Humanity’s Intercessor saves all who come to Him as they are, confessing their sins. Christ the Intercessor reflects the Old Testament function of the priest and high priest who made atonement for the people (Lev. 16:19, 30) and reconnected the sinner with the holy and gracious God. However, Jesus gave Himself as an ultimate sacrifice for humanity (Heb. 9:25–26, 28), and His blood purifies all from their sins (Heb. 5:9; 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18–19). Believers are perfect in Him, “*en Christo*,” and Paul strongly emphasizes their dwelling in Christ (Rom. 6:23; 8:1; 9:1; 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:30; 4:15).

Jesus Christ identifies with His people individually, and this identification is so close that it is compared to the most sensitive part of the body: the pupil of the eye. “For this is what the LORD Almighty says . . . ‘whoever touches you touches the apple of his [Lord’s] eye’” (Zech. 2:8). “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’” (Matt. 25:40). Additional biblical examples demonstrate how Jesus closely unites Himself with His followers: “He will reply, ‘Truly, I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me’” (Matt. 25:45). “He fell to the ground and heard

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29. Claude Welch, *The Reality of the Church* (New York: Scribner’s, 1958), 165.

30. Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 205.

a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied” (Acts 9:4–5). “Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

Jennings rightly comments:

Jesus interceded in the course of sinfulness itself. . . . He took on himself our terminal condition in order to conquer, overcome and cure. ‘Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows’ (Is 53:5 NIV 1984). Yes, Jesus became one of us in order to reverse all the damage sin has done to his creation and to restore us, his children, back to unity with God. Jesus came to crush the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15)—to destroy Satan and eradicate the sin infection from this world (Heb 2:14).<sup>31</sup>

Jesus takes each person into the very presence of God the Father and applies the results of the cross (Eph. 2:5; Heb. 9:24). Ellen White powerfully summarizes the biblical teaching:

If you give yourself to Him [Jesus Christ], and accept Him as your personal Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.<sup>32</sup>

Make friendship with Christ today. Put your case in the hands of the great Advocate. He will plead your cause before the Father. Though you have transgressed the law, and must plead guilty before God, Christ will present his precious blood in your behalf, and through faith and obedience, and vital union with Christ, you may stand acquitted before the Judge of all the earth, and he will be your friend when the final trump shall sound, and the scenes of earth shall be no more.<sup>33</sup>

Because Jesus Christ is humanity’s Intercessor, all people can come to Him with full confidence, assurance, and boldness (Heb. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35; 1 John 2:28; 4:17). People can come to Him without fear, doubt, or wavering, for in Him they have hope (Heb. 6:19; 7:19; 10:23; 1 Pet. 1:3). He is highly and uniquely qualified to be humanity’s Intercessor since He is one of

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31. Timothy R. Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 82–83.

32. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1956), 62.

33. Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 27, 1888.

them, their older Brother, and He was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Heb. 4:15; cf. 2:17–18). He is the Source of salvation for everyone who comes to Him (Heb. 4:16; 5:7–9), and “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ” (Rom. 8:1).

## Christ Changes and Transforms

Salvation means healing (Pss. 6:2; 41:4; Jer. 17:14; Hos. 14:4) and transformation (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Thess. 5:23–24). Jesus Christ did not come to save humanity “in” sin but “from” sin (Matt. 1:21). He desires the sanctification of each person (1 Thess. 4:3–4; Heb. 12:14; 13:12) as he or she walks humbly with the Lord (Mic. 6:8), persevering (Rev. 12:14), and living with eyes fixed on Him (Heb. 12:1–2). In this way, each believer will ever more fully reflect the character of God (2 Cor. 3:18).

Hebrews 4:16 eloquently spells out why humans need the intercessory ministry of our High Priest:<sup>34</sup> “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” As broken and fragile human beings, people are constantly in need of Jesus and totally dependent upon Him. Each believer is crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:5–6) in order to live a new life (Rom. 6:4; 8:11; Eph. 1:15–21; 2:1–10). Being a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) does not mean that believers no longer have a sinful nature (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 7:14–20), but that their sinful desires are under the control of His Spirit (Rom. 6:11–14; 8:1–4). Christ lives in each person (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21). The sinful nature will be changed only at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:50–54; Phil. 1:6; 3:20–21; 1 John 3:1–3).

Jesus proclaimed: “Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NKJV). Paul confesses: “I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13). To fight against temptation, overcome sin, fight a successful fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7), and bear lasting good fruit are impossibilities without Christ or His Spirit. Christ alone is able to keep believers from falling (Jude 24), because His intercession breaks the power of sin, gives freedom, and liberates from addictions and slavery to

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34. The book of Hebrews explicitly states nine times that Jesus Christ is the High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14–15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11), and implies such twice (Heb. 7:28; 8:13). In the same book, Jesus is called the Priest six times (5:6; 7:16–17, 21).



evil. He saves believers from the consequence of sin—eternal death, but He also enables them to live new lives according to His will (Ezek. 36:26–29; Rom. 8:13–14). Only He can transform believers by His grace so that they may replicate His loving, compassionate, and serving character. He wants to change each person by the power of His Word, Spirit, and grace in order to rid each person of selfishness, self-centeredness, self-justification, and striving to be the strongest. “Godly love is at war with the survival-of-the-fittest principle.”<sup>35</sup> He desires believers to be governed by the Spirit, experience His fruit, against which there is no condemnation (Gal. 5:22–23).

### **Christ Vindicates/Defends His People**

Jesus Christ vindicates His children against the accusations of Satan. The book of Job offers insight into Satan’s charges against God’s followers (Job being a typological figure for them), and how God stands against Satan and for His people (Job 1:8–9; 2:4; 42).<sup>36</sup> The book of Revelation presents God as humanity’s defender, describing His victory on the cross:

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.” (Rev. 12:10–12)

Jesus Christ personally withstood Satan’s accusations when He defeated Him on the cross (John 8:31; 16:11; Rev. 12:7–10). He was the victor, and His followers can be victorious only because of Him. His victory is His gift to His children. Jesus Christ not only opposes Satan, the powers of darkness, and the principalities of evil (Eph. 6:10–13), but He also defends His children against Satan’s accusations (Rev. 7:1; 12:10–12). Jesus places a hedge of protection around His people (2 Kings 6:17; Job 1:10; Ps. 34:7; 91:1–3; 103:1–5).

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35. Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, 83.

36. For details, see my article “The God of Job and Our Adversary,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 104–117.

Thus, the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ means that He personally stands against Satan to defend His children and to silence their accuser.

Jesus Christ as Intercessor vindicates His people before the whole universe (Dan. 7:9–10, 13–14, 22; Eph. 3:10–11). He is simultaneously both Advocate and Judge, so His children can look forward with bold assurance and without fear to the day of judgment (1 John 2:28; 4:17). For who He is, for what He accomplished, and for what He does, He deserves to be eternally praised (Rom. 9:5; Rev. 5:9–10, 12–13).

Jesus Christ is His children's Intercessor until the close of probation (Rev. 15:7–8; 22:11). However, this does not mean that after this time, believers live without the help of the Holy Spirit or without Christ (though He ends His specific role and ministry as their Intercessor). Believers will never live on their own, independent of Him. This dependence will be maintained throughout eternity (Rev. 22:1–4). The Holy Spirit will be with His people and carry them through the last short period of time, when they will live without the intercessory ministry of Christ. His intercessory ministry will no longer be necessary because He has saved them completely, begun in them the process of powerful transformation, and vindicated them before the universe (for details, see Matt. 25:1–10; 28:20; John 15:5; Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 1:6; 3:12–15; 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Thess. 3:3; Jude 24, 25; Heb. 12:1, 2; Rev. 3:10).<sup>37</sup> During this short period before the second coming of Christ, between the close of probation and His children's glorification, true believers will need to be covered by the results of the cross, the atoning merits of Christ, because of their sinful natures. Believers will still need a "constant dependence upon the atoning blood of Christ."<sup>38</sup>

An incredible pattern is observed throughout the Bible regarding Christ's intercessory ministry for His people. He is for them, never against them, and wants to save them. This crucial ministry is indispensable, as the following statement indicates:

*What does intercession comprehend? It is the golden chain which binds finite man to the throne of the infinite God. The human agent whom Christ has died to save importunes the throne of God, and his petition is taken up by*

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37. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1962), 431; White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 86; idem, *Great Controversy*, 615, 623.

38. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 352.

Jesus who has purchased him with His own blood. Our great High Priest places His righteousness on the side of the sincere suppliant, and the prayer of Christ blends with that of the human petitioner.<sup>39</sup>

Ellen White properly explains the vast efficacy of Christ's intercessory ministry:

All blessings must come through a Mediator. Now every member of the human family is given wholly into the hands of Christ, and whatever we possess—whether it is the gift of money, of houses, of lands, of reasoning powers, of physical strength, of intellectual talents—in this present life, and the blessings of the future life, are placed in our possession as God's treasures to be faithfully expended for the benefit of man. Every gift is stamped with the cross and bears the image and superscription of Jesus Christ. All things come of God. From the smallest benefits up to the largest blessing, all flow through the one Channel—a superhuman mediation sprinkled with the blood that is of value beyond estimate because it was the life of God in His Son.<sup>40</sup>

His children can go to Jesus with full confidence because whatever He does, He does for their salvation. His actions are transparent to them, as well as to the entire universe. He is a great communicator with His created beings because He wants all to understand who God is, as well as His character, purposes, and will. He does not hide His purposes from His created beings; on the contrary, He opens Himself and His thoughts, feelings, actions, and the future to all who want to know and understand. Christ's intercessory ministry is twofold: He reveals God's character and His values to humanity, and presents their needs, struggles, and issues to God. The Triune God closely collaborates in this double mission.

## CONCLUSION

A decision for Jesus Christ means complete salvation—eternal life (John 5:24), and He is always ready to help (Heb. 4:15–16; 7:25; 1 John 2:1; 1:8–9). The following summarizes the four main functions of Jesus Christ as

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39. Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1964), 78, emphasis added.

40. Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1979), 22, emphasis added.

our Intercessor. First, on Jesus Christ's return to heaven, He and the heavenly Father met together in order to help humans in their everyday struggles with evil. The first tangible result of that meeting on humanity's behalf is that the Holy Spirit is given to believers—see Acts 2. All heaven is united in helping believers in their struggles with sin, Satan, and temptation (John 15:5; Phil. 4:13). Jesus prays for His children (John 17; Luke 22:32). They are covered by Christ's perfect life and atoning sacrifice and are enabled through His power to witness to others. Second, Jesus Christ saves completely and identifies with His children when they give their lives to Him (Zech. 2:8; Matt. 25:40, 45; Acts 9:4–6). Jesus Christ saves, justifies, sanctifies, and changes believers into His image (Zech. 3:1–7). Because of His goodness (Rom. 2:4; Eph. 1:7) His children identify with Him (Rom. 6:1–4; Eph. 2:4–10). Third, Christ's intercessory ministry transforms His followers into His likeness; they grow in Him and His grace, and become increasingly more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 1:25–28; 2 Pet. 1:3–4; 3:18). Finally, Jesus Christ vindicates His children against the accusations of Satan (Rev. 12:10–12; Job 1:8–9; 2:4; 42). He personally stands up against them; and because He is the victor, His children's victory is secure in Him when they accept Him as the Lord of their lives.

Knowing this magnificent work of Jesus Christ “for” and “in” each individual, one cannot do otherwise but give Him glory. Doxology is the only proper response to His kindness: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Eph. 3:20–21).

## **AT-ONE-MENT FOREVER IN GOD'S NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH**

*Roy E. Gane*

**T**he canonical record of the Bible began with God's flawless Creation on planted Earth (Gen. 1–2). Then came the disloyalty of the first humans in failing to observe a boundary set by their Creator, which precipitated a cluster of devastating consequences, culminating in death, which would afflict them and subsequent generations. These consequences include estrangement from the divine presence, lack of harmony between people, pain, exhausting labor for survival, as well as suffering and death throughout the natural world that God created as the dominion of the human race (Gen. 3; cf. Rom. 5:12, 14, 17–19; 8:19–23). Nevertheless, God promised the eventual destruction of the source of evil, namely, the one who had deceived Adam and Eve and led them into sin (Gen. 3:15). This implied that God would undo the effects of evil and restore the perfection of His Creation so that the end would be like the beginning.<sup>1</sup>

The last chapters of the Bible prophesy the final fulfillment of the divine promise of deliverance: Satan, his followers, death, and all evil will be destroyed (Rev. 20), and then God will re-create our world (Rev. 21–22). This destruction and re-creation mirror the initial Creation and Fall in chiastic order:

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1. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 14.

A. Creation (Gen. 1–2)	B. Fall into Evil (Gen. 3)
B'. Destruction of Evil (Rev. 20)	A'. New Creation (Rev. 21–22)

The chiasm is not merely a literary construct. Evil, including the evil beings that marred the original Creation, must be removed before God makes the New Creation. When Peter referred to the “period of restoration [*apokatástasis*] of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3:21),<sup>2</sup> he did not mean that all human or angelic beings would be restored. This is clear from the fact that the “holy prophets,” whom Peter cited, did not teach universal salvation, even in their eschatological writings (cf. Isa. 66:24). Furthermore, Peter subsequently referred to the utter destruction of those who would not heed Jesus (Acts 3:22–23; cf. Deut. 18:15, 18–19). Peter preached that people needed to repent (Acts 3:19; cf. v. 26) in order to be saved (cf. 2:21, 38–40). Thus, he understood the biblical teaching of dual fates: life for those who accept salvation through Christ, and death for those who persist in rebellion (cf., e.g., John 3:16–18; Rom. 6:23).<sup>3</sup> The restored cosmos, with everything and everyone in it, will be perfect according to the Creator’s original plan—after the removal of all evil.

Between the slim bookends of Genesis 1–3 and Revelation 20–22, the rest of the Bible deals with God’s epic struggle to liberate earth from evil in order to fulfill his plan for it. Just as the reign of evil began with a fracture of the relationship between humans and their Creator, the New Creation must commence with the difficult process of divine-human relational reconciliation to reintegrate planet Earth into the community of God’s universe on the corporate and individual levels (2 Cor. 5:17–21). Other aspects of reconciliation (human-human) and physical healing follow.

A common English word for the divinely provided basis of reconciliation is *atonement*, etymologically derived from “at-one-ment” (i.e., reintegration). Vast amounts of scholarly research have been devoted to the

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2. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Italics in Scripture quotes reflect emphasis added by author.

3. The term *apokatástasis* (often transliterated *apocatastasis*), which appears in Acts 3:21 in the sense of “restoration,” is associated with the teaching of universal salvation in patristic theology, especially of Origen (c. 185–251 AD). See John R. Sachs, “Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 617–40.

process of atonement through the death of Christ, which is equivalent to the death of all humans as the penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:14), because He is the Creator/Father of all (Isa. 9:6 [Heb. v. 5]; Luke 3:38; John 1:1–3, 14; Heb. 1:2), and therefore all are in Him (cf. Heb. 7:9–10). However, relatively little attention has been paid to the ultimate goal of atonement: an eternally reintegrated, restored state of harmony with God and all of His Creation.<sup>4</sup> This is the topic of the present chapter.

To discuss the goal of atonement, the scope of this word must be delineated in order to determine what is to be reintegrated and restored. Christians tend to think of atonement primarily in terms of what Christ accomplished through His death on the cross to make it possible for God to forgive humanity's sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10), and secondarily as the symbolic efficacy of Israelite animal sacrifices that typologically foreshadowed and taught about the sacrifice of Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In Old Testament texts regarding animal sacrifices, "make atonement" is a common translation of the Hebrew verb *kipper*. However, this rendering is imprecise. In contexts of divine-human interaction, *kipper* denotes removal of an impediment to the relationship (NJPS Lev. 4:20, 26, 31: "make expiation") that is required before completion of reconciliation. So that which *kipper* accomplishes is more limited than what "make atonement" would indicate, given that *atonement* refers to reconciliation as a whole, which would also include forgiveness.<sup>5</sup>

Because *kipper* represents a crucial step in the reconciliation process, its usage is instructive regarding the scope of atonement. The basic sense of *kipper* does not include substitution. Rather, someone accomplishes *kipper* for the community by destroying those who disrupt the relationship between God and His people (Num. 25:13). In this sense, the final destruction of those who persist in rebellion against God (Rev. 20) can be regarded as *kipper* that cleanses the cosmic community.<sup>6</sup>

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4. See, e.g., Daeggeuk Nam, "The New Earth and the Eternal Kingdom," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 947–968 and the brief but helpful treatment by Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary: Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1993), 146–148.

5. Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 194.

6. Cf. *kipper* on the goat of Azazel (Lev. 16:10), which represents Satan, who bears his own responsibility with regard to the sins of God's people; see Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*,

Substitution adds a special dynamic: An innocent party dies in place of sinners. The Israelite sacrificial system illustrates this: The blood of an animal victim applied to God's altar ransomed the life of the one bringing the sacrifice (Lev. 17:11).<sup>7</sup> The life of an animal owned by a human was not really an adequate substitute for human life (Heb. 10:1–4, 11; cf. Ps. 49:7–8 [Heb. vv. 8–9]), but offering it signified acceptance by faith of Christ's ultimately efficacious sacrifice (Heb. 10:5–18). Those who accept (now without animal sacrifice) the sacrifice of the divine Lamb of God are ransomed to enjoy eternal life in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 5:6–14; 21:22–27; cf. John 1:29; 3:16).

Substitutionary *kipper* through animal sacrifices pointing to Christ's sacrifice remedied two basic kinds of problems:<sup>8</sup>

First, it was relational. Such *kipper* could serve as a token payment of "debt" to compensate for moral faults (i.e., sinful actions) that damaged the divine-human relationship, prerequisite to divine forgiveness (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31).

Second, it was physical. Sacrificial *kipper* could provide purification from severe physical ritual impurity (Lev. 12:7–8; 14:19), which had to be kept away from the sphere of holiness connected to the God of life (7:20–21; 15:31), because impurity represented the birth to death cycle of physical decay and mortality (i.e., the state of sinfulness) that results from sinful action (Rom. 6:23).<sup>9</sup> *Kipper* could also symbolize removal of an agent of deterioration, analogous to human physical impurity, that had affected a house (i.e., in the human environment; Lev. 14:53).

In light of the scope of effects of Christ's sacrifice reflected by these functions of sacrificial *kipper*, this chapter analyzes the outcome of atonement in the new heaven and new earth for (1) divine-human and human-human relationships, and (2) physical conditions of humans and their environment. Each section explores evidence for the goal of atonement from Revelation 21–22 and other eschatological passages, along with indirect evidence of comparison with the initial Creation order and what changed at the Fall (esp. Gen. 1–3).

NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 290–291, 295–297.

7. Cf. *ibid.*, 302–304.

8. Gane, *Cult and Character*, 49–50, 198–202.

9. Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 49; cf. esp. 31–32, 48, 50, 207–208; Gane, *Cult and Character*, 201.



## RELATIONAL RESTORATION AND RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

### In Eschatology

Revelation 21:3 announces the restored state of divine-human relations: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them." Verse 7 emphasizes this idea with language of adoption for individuals who have overcome in the battle with evil: "I will be his God and he will be My son."<sup>10</sup> Paul describes how this victory is achieved by God's children allowing the Spirit to control them (Rom. 8:6, 9). The Spirit living in them brings life and makes them God's children, heirs of God (Rom. 8:11, 15–17). The unity expressed in Revelation 21 culminates realization of the "Immanuel" ("God is with us") principle that binds together the successive phases of the divine covenant throughout salvation history (e.g., Gen. 17:7–8; Exod. 25:8; Isa. 7:14; Jer. 31:33).<sup>11</sup>

Restoration of divine-human unity, which Adam and Eve initially enjoyed but then lost, was foreshadowed by the residence of God's presence among His chosen people in the Israelite sanctuary/temple (Exod. 25:8).<sup>12</sup> The difference is that the New Jerusalem needs "no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev. 21:22). The point is not that God will be homeless; in fact, Revelation 7:15 says that those who are saved will serve God "in His temple." But in the New Jerusalem there will be no need for a temple in the sense of a place of restricted, incomplete, and mediated access to God that would allow interaction with Him by faulty, mortal people in such a way that they would not be consumed by His unveiled glory (Exod. 33:20; Lev. 16:2; Heb. 12:29). Freed from sin and consequent mortality, God's people will enjoy full access to Him: "they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads (Rev. 22:4). Just as the incarnate Christ, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), dwelt among humans (1:14) as a temple (John 2:19–21), with

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10. Rev 21:7. Cf. Hosea 1:10; 2:23; contrast with the language of rejection in 1:9.

11. Cf. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyte-rian and Reformed, 1980), 45–46.

12. Cf. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 20–25, 190–91.

no barriers between Him and them, so the glorified Lamb and “the Lord God the Almighty” (Rev. 21:22) will serve as the unrestricted focus of worship for His glorified people.

The fact that the people of God will dwell with God inside the New Jerusalem, which is a holy city (Rev. 21:2, 10), indicates that they will be holy as He is holy. Long ago, God commanded His covenant people to emulate Him in holiness (which requires purity) by living according to his principles (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26) because they were to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). But the God-initiated holiness of the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem and their access to God will be greater. The fact that their white robes are purified by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:13–14) qualifies them for priestly service in God’s temple “day and night” (v. 15). There are several indications that their entire city will constitute an especially holy space, and in this sense it will serve as a temple—a temple city.

First, the entire New Jerusalem will be a temple city, corresponding to the holy of holies in the Israelite temple, in that “its length and width and height are equal” (Rev. 21:16; cf. 1 Kings 6:20). This implies that its people will dwell in the eschatological equivalent of the holy of holies, as confirmed by the fact that “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in” the city (Rev. 22:3). Whereas only the Israelite high priest was permitted to enter the most holy apartment of the sanctuary, where the divine Presence was enthroned, and then only once per year on the Day of Atonement and with special rituals (Lev. 16), all of God’s people will be able to maintain a level of proximity to Him that would have been lethal to them before their glorification.<sup>13</sup>

Second, the main material of the New Jerusalem is gold (Rev. 21:18, 21), the metal that covered the interior of the tabernacle and its furniture (Exod. 25; 26:29; cf. 1 Kings 6:20–22, 28, 30).

Third, twelve kinds of gemstones adorning the foundation stones of the city wall, on which are the names of the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:14, 19–20), are reminiscent of twelve kinds of jewels mounted on the high priest’s breastpiece, which were engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel, so that he carried their names over his heart (Exod. 28:17–21, 29). It is as

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13. Fiorenza, Beale, and Mounce, quoted in Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 588, 600; cf. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 20, 139.

though the entire city constitutes a massive breastpiece on the heart of God to signify His love for His people, represented by the apostles.

Fourth, the names of the twelve tribes are written on the twelve gates of the city, three gates at each of the four directions (Rev. 21:12–13; cf. Ezek. 48:30–34), just as three tribes at each of the four directions were camped around God's sanctuary in the wilderness (Num. 2).

Fifth, an angel stationed at each gate of the city (Rev. 21:12) recalls the cherubim that God appointed to bar Adam and Eve from the entrance to the Garden of Eden, which was like the holy New Jerusalem in that it contained the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). By contrast, however, the angels at the New Jerusalem represent the ongoing security of humans inside its sacred space, even after all threats from evil forces will have been eliminated (Rev. 21:8; cf. Rev. 20) so that its gates can always remain open (Rev. 21:25; contrast Ezek. 44:2). There is much more to the new earth than the capital city of the divine King, but the names of the tribes (representing God's people) on its gates indicate that the city is theirs (cf. Num. 17:2–3 [Heb. vv. 17–18]) and they are entitled to enter there any time they wish and enjoy access to the tree of life (Rev. 22:2, 14). The curse that for so long estranged them from God and kept them from the source of eternal life (Gen. 3) will be gone (Rev. 22:3), removed by Christ's forgiveness (Rom. 5:1–2), and by the Spirit of Christ living in them (Rom. 8:9), and by the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8:22–23).

Sixth, "nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into" the city (Rev. 21:27).<sup>14</sup> Impurity is excluded from the sacred space, because holiness, connected to the Creator of life, and impurity, associated with the domain of death, are antithetical.<sup>15</sup> Impurity must not be allowed to defile things that belong to the holy sphere centered at the sanctuary (cf. Lev. 15:31) in order to protect God's reputation from association with the state of mortality, which results from sinful action (Rom. 6:23). Thus, Israelites were forbidden to contact holy things while in a state of physical ritual impurity (e.g., Lev. 7:20–21) and seriously impure individuals were sent outside the wilderness camp, where God dwelt in their midst in His sanctuary

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14. Cf. the purity of the entire eschatological Temple City in the *Temple Scroll* from Qumran, 11Q19. However, the concern in this text is with exclusion of physical ritual impurity; see Hannah K. Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations*, SBL Dissertation Series 143 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 55–58.

15. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, Anchor Bible 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 731–3.

(Num. 5:1–4). The fact that Revelation 21:27 refers to those who practice abomination and lying, as opposed to those “whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life,” implies that the impurity in view here is moral rather than physical ritual in nature. In Pentateuchal law, moral impurities that result from serious sinful actions (e.g., sexual immorality, idolatry, murder), rather than from physical states, are irremediable and ultimately lead to exile from the Promised Land (Lev. 18, 20, 26; Num. 35:31–34).<sup>16</sup> In Christ, even these sins are forgiven for those who want His forgiveness (Jer. 31:34; 1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 5:1, 6). In Revelation, those who ultimately refuse to give up the moral impurities that separate them from God, who knowingly cling to cherished sin and absolutely refuse Christ’s forgiveness, will be irrevocably barred from the ultimate Promised Land, the new heaven, new earth, and New Jerusalem.

Seventh, Revelation 22:1–2 prophesies regarding the New Jerusalem habitat for humanity:

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

These verses allude to Ezekiel 47:1–12, which predict that water would flow toward the east from under the threshold of a future ideal temple. The volume of water would grow to become a life-giving river. “By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing” (v. 12). The source of the water in Ezekiel is the temple residence of God; in Revelation it is the place of divine enthronement in the holy city where God dwells with His people.<sup>17</sup>

The eternal reign (Rev. 22:5) of God’s dependent people over the lost dominion (Gen. 1:26–28) that Christ reclaims for them (Dan. 7:13, 14, 18, 22, 27; Rev. 3:21), which they inherit as children of God (Rev. 21:7), will always be

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16. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, Anchor Bible 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1326; Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially 21–31; Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 139–53.

17. Cf. water flowing from Jerusalem in verse 8 of the eschatological oracle of Zechariah 14.

under His supreme sovereignty and they will serve Him (Rev. 7:15; 22:3). "His name will be on their foreheads" (22:4; cf. 14:1), signifying that they belong to Him. But the fact that "they will see His face" (Rev. 22:4; i.e., have access to his presence) means that they will be high-ranking servants in His kingdom (cf. 2 Kings 25:19; Esther 1:14—literally, "those who see the king's face").

Human service for God will always be voluntary. He saves human beings by first empowering their freedom of choice. Without this freedom, they could not love Him.<sup>18</sup> Those who "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4; cf. 7:17) will do so in the new earth because they formed the habit of depending upon Him before the eradication of sin. Empowered by grace (Rom. 5:20–21) and filled with the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16), they will have kept themselves "chaste" (Rev. 14:4), totally honest, and blameless (v. 5).<sup>19</sup> In spite of extreme challenges ("great tribulation"), the saved "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). It is evident that God's law of love (Matt. 22:37–40) is in their hearts, put there by God himself (Jer. 31:33), because they love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5). The fact that they no longer sin does not mean that there is no room for further moral growth; their love for Him and for other created beings will expand throughout eternity as they learn and experience more of His grace.

## By Comparison with the Initial Creation Order and the Fall

The fact that the New Creation restores what was lost at the Fall (Gen. 3) implies that humanity can learn about the eschatological scenario from the protological one. In the earlier perfect world, God created the first humans in His image to exercise benevolent dominion as His representatives (1:26–28). They would work to maintain order in their garden (2:15), but not to laboriously provide food for survival (contrast 3:17–19). They were permitted to freely eat from the "tree of life" (2:9, 16), could be in God's immediate presence (vv. 19–22), and needed no clothes to prevent shame (v. 25).

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18. Cf. Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 50–57. However, Boyd also points out that God has established limits to the ability of His angelic and human creatures to continue exercising freedom to rebel against him, Boyd, *God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 287.

19. Cf. the Suffering Servant (Christ) of Isaiah 53, who was slaughtered like a lamb and there was no deceit in his mouth (vv. 7–9).

The fact that God met with them in their Eden home and it contained the tree of life (like the holy New Jerusalem in Revelation) indicates that Eden was holy space. Like Ezekiel's temple and the New Jerusalem, it had a river flowing from it (v. 10).

The only restriction on the first couple was the prohibition to eat the fruit of a certain tree (Gen. 2:17; 3:3). When they were deceived into disobedience, they experienced shame of their nakedness and fear of God (3:7–10). When God confronted Adam, the man indirectly blamed God, who had given his wife to him (vv. 11–12). The divine-human relationship was fractured. No longer could morally impure Adam and Eve benefit from the tree of life or enjoy God's presence in holy Eden (vv. 23–24). Moreover, planet Earth came under the destructive control of Satan, the mighty fallen being who usurped human dominion by deceiving our first parents into following him (Rev. 12:7–9), thereby establishing himself as the ruler of this world (John 12:31). Humans were now controlled by chaos and alienation in relation to themselves, others, and God, and this affected them physically, socially, and spiritually.<sup>20</sup>

In light of Genesis 1–3, restoration to full harmony and happiness by the end of the process of atonement would first require healing of the estrangement between humans and their Creator. This process is initiated by God because of His great love and mercy (Gal. 3:15–16; Eph. 2:4–5). It requires humble admission of guilt and a divinely provided remedy for sin, guilt, shame, and fear (cf. Rom. 5; 1 John 1:9). Those who would accept the remedy could return to God's presence and the tree of life in holy space, and they would recover the lost dominion of earth. The process of atonement accomplishes all these things, climaxing in Revelation 21–22. However, the new paradise is a city rather than a garden, there is no forbidden tree, and its occupants are countless descendants of Adam and Eve, rather than just the original pair. As Desmond Alexander points out, “while *Endzeit* [the end] resembles *Urzeit* [the beginning], there is progression. Whereas Genesis presents the earth as a potential building site, Revelation describes a finished city.”<sup>21</sup>

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20. Graham McFarlane, “Atonement, Creation and Trinity,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement*, eds. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 196–197.

21. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 14. It also appears that whereas Adam

## RECONCILIATION WITH HUMANS

### In Eschatology

There are several indications that relations between humans in the new earth will be harmonious. In the New Jerusalem there will be no troublemakers—“the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars”—because they will have been destroyed (Rev. 21:8; cf. Rev. 20; 21:27; 22:15). There will be a vast diversity of nations and ethnic groups (5:9; 21:24, 26), but there will be no conflicts or racism; all will dwell together in peace under the rule of the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6–7 [Heb. vv. 5–6]). The fact that the gates of the New Jerusalem will never be closed shows that there will be no danger of attack (Rev. 21:25). The massive walls and gates, with an angel stationed at each gate, signify the grandeur and absolute security of the royal capital of the omnipotent divine King, whose presence provides ultimate protection (cf. Zech. 2:5), but all threats will have been vanquished (Rev. 20).

There will be no bad neighbors there. Everyone in the city will have deep love for Christ in appreciation for what He has done for them. Forgiven and empowered by God, they have allowed God to transform their characters. They are “those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27), who voluntarily belong to God (22:4), because they have felt their need of His free grace (21:6; 22:17). They are not “cowardly and unbelieving” (21:8), but have overcome by faith (v. 7).<sup>22</sup> Righteousness and holiness involve keeping God’s law of love in all relationships and interactions, both toward Him and toward those whom He has created (cf. 1 Thess. 3:12–13).

### By Comparison with the Initial Creation Order and the Fall

Human society began with the creation of Eve and her marriage to Adam. The first couple was united as “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) in God’s image to

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and Eve were naked before the Fall (Gen. 2:25), saved humans in the new earth will wear clothes (Rev. 7:9).

22. Cf. 2 Peter 3:13—“But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

equally co-rule the earth (1:26–28).<sup>23</sup> But when Adam admitted eating the forbidden fruit, he directly blamed his wife: “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate” (3:12). Happy harmony in the home was gone; rapture had given way to rupture of relationship. As part of the negative result of leading her husband into sin (cf. v. 6), God informed her: “Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (v. 16). Marriage remained, but the full equality intended by God was destroyed. This was not a command, per se, but a description of a new situation that the woman would face in a fallen world.

The Big Bang of the Fall blew human relationships apart. To blaming was added murder (Gen. 4:8, 23) and many other kinds of moral evils. Already by Genesis 6:5, God’s assessment of humanity is hopelessly negative: “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Divine healing of human relationships, which is absolutely necessary for God’s people (cf. Mal. 4:5–6; Eph. 4:32), requires restoration of unselfish love in harmony with His character of love (1 John 4:8), as demonstrated by Christ (John 13:34; 15:12). Christians who receive divine love into their hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), so that God’s law of love for Him and for other people (Matt. 22:37–40) is written on their hearts (Jer. 31:33), can go a long way toward realizing the Creation ideal for human relationships. This includes enjoyment of tightly bonded, egalitarian marriage that represents the image of the triune God (cf. John 17:21–23; Col. 1:19; 2:9). But complete renewal of human society awaits the *eschaton*, when sin and its curse and temptation will be removed by God (Rev. 20; 21:8, 27; 22:3, 15) and sorrow will be no more (21:4).

## PHYSICAL RESTORATION

### In Eschatology

Revelation 21 begins with the stunning observation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea” (v. 1). This is nothing less than a total New Creation of planet Earth and its atmosphere after the destruction of all evil,

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23. On the full equality of the sexes at Creation, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 22–35.



decay, and pollution (Rev. 20). Unlike Genesis 1–2, Revelation 21 does not describe the process; it simply announces the result. In Genesis 1, seas remained after dry land appeared (v. 10), but the eschatological new earth will have no sea to separate and reduce the habitable areas of its terrestrial inhabitants. The multitude of saved people (Rev. 7:9) will be able to spread out, and God has plenty of dwelling places for everyone (John 14:2).

In the New Jerusalem divine glory will provide constant daylight (no urban nightlife or danger after dark!), with no need for light from the sun or moon (Rev. 21:23, 25; 22:5). This does not mean that the sun or moon will have ceased to exist or that their day-night cycles of light will not occur elsewhere on earth (cf. 7:15—"day and night"). Rather, the point is to emphasize the brilliance and permanence of God's Presence. Days, weeks, and months will continue, as indicated by the fact that new moons and Sabbaths will be special times of worship (Isa. 66:23; cf. Rev. 22:2 on the monthly cycle of the tree of life).<sup>24</sup>

God will transform the life experience of His creatures, which was devastated by the Fall. After evil and death are finally eradicated (Rev. 20:9–10, 14–15), all of the former physical and emotional suffering (hunger, thirst, scorching from sun, excessive heat, tears, mourning, crying, pain) will be gone in the new earth (7:16–17; 21:4). This will be the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of "new heavens and a new earth," where "the former things" will not even be remembered, but will be replaced by joy, long life, satisfaction, safety, blessing, and peace (Isa. 65:17–25).<sup>25</sup> In Revelation 7,

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24. Cf. Emmanuel Uchenna Dim, *The Eschatological Implications of Isa 65 and 66 as the Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah*, Bible in History (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 196, on Isaiah 66:23—"Thus, as the first creation culminated in the institution of the Sabbath (Gen 2,2–3), so will this new creation culminate in the reinforced observance of the same Sabbath."

25. The apocalyptic prophecy of Revelation, in which there is a more definitive break between the present era and the next, goes beyond Isaiah, where long life does not exclude death (Isa. 65:20; on this verse, see Dim, *The Eschatological Implications*, 107–110). In the historical foreground, Isaiah 65–66 appears to be hyperbolically providing hope for a grand renewal of Judah after the Babylonian exile. For example, see Daniel K. Bediako, "Isaiah's 'New Heavens and New Earth' (Isa 65:17; 66:22)," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 11.1 (2008): 1–20. However, the universal creation language in Isaiah 65:17–25 (with affinities to Gen. 1) evokes a more radical picture of eschatological transformation, including re-creation of the cosmos. For example, see Wann M. Fanwar, "Creation in Isaiah" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2001), 134–7. On the telescoping of chronologically distinct but spiritually related aspects in Isaiah 65:17–25, see John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, New International

the fact that people can serve God “day and night” (v. 15) also implies that fatigue will be no more.

The absence of death does not mean that human life will be independent of God, who alone possesses unborrowed, inherent immortality (1 Tim. 6:16). Glorified humans will continue to depend on the Creator for their life-support.<sup>26</sup> The “river of the water of life . . . coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1) is for their benefit (cf. Rev. 7:17; 21:6; 22:17), as is the “tree of life” that receives the divinely provided water, which regularly bears fruit for food and its leaves are “for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2; cf. Ezek. 47:12).<sup>27</sup> God’s people will also receive their light from Him (Rev. 22:5).

The fact that glorified humans will need water and food indicates that they will have been resurrected from the temporary “sleep” of the first death (Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:13–15) to live forever in bodily form, not with the present natural/unspiritual (Greek *psuchikos*) body (*soma*) that decays and dies, but with the body (*soma*) that is immortal because it is spiritual (*pneumatikos*; 1 Cor. 15:44; cf. the context in vv. 42–43, 45–54). The body is changed (v. 52), but the person does not become a disembodied spirit. Paul’s contrast here is between mortality versus immortality, not between material versus nonmaterial. So there is no contradiction with Luke 24:39, where the post-resurrection state of Jesus includes “flesh and bones.”<sup>28</sup> Interpreting aspects of life in the new earth—water, tree, fruit—to be metaphorical expressions rather than material entities would create more problems than it would solve. If there is no real “river of the water of life” (Rev. 22:1), should the reality of the throne of God, from which the river flows, or the city street down which it flows (vv. 1–2) also be discounted? What about the whole city itself, or the new earth? These elements are interlinked and interdependent, and

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Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 656–662.

26. Cf. Daniel 5:23—“the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways.”

27. On possible explanations for this “healing” function of the leaves in Revelation 22 (in the new earth, where suffering is gone: 21:4) and its background in Ezekiel 47, see, Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 156; Jacob Milgrom and Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel’s Hope: A Commentary on Ezekiel 38–48* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 233; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 585–593.

28. John C. Brunt, “Resurrection and Glorification,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 361–362.

there is no textual indication that they are metaphors. "Western Christendom has inherited an allegorical view of heaven from the Platonism of some of its early interpreters, but the New Testament emphasizes resurrection for bodily existence, ultimately on the new earth."<sup>29</sup> "The earth may be purged or recreated, but it remains 'the earth, not a transcendent realm beyond it.'"<sup>30</sup>

The "tree of life" in the New Jerusalem appears to have the same function as the tree with the same name in the Garden of Eden: to continually sustain life (Gen. 3:22; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14). In Eden, the perfect lives that were to be sustained were those of Adam and Eve, whose descendants (us) are carbon-based. So it appears that glorified humans will also have carbon-based bodies. It is true that God, the Sovereign of the New Jerusalem, is intrinsically immortal spirit (John 4:24; 1 Tim. 6:15–16) and therefore does not depend on food (e.g., Ps. 50:13). However, He can appear to and interact with those of His creatures who are limited to bodily form (e.g., Gen. 18).

The fact that perpetuation of human life will depend on the tree of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:14) indicates that anyone denied access to it there would die. Therefore, the fact that "Outside are the dogs<sup>31</sup> and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying" (v. 15) means that such individuals, who reject God, will perish. There is no indication that their lives will be sustained in an eternally burning hell so that the redeemed must witness their writhing and endure their shrieking throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. There are several major problems with the notion of an ever-burning hell:

1. Would God feed fruit from the tree of life to the wicked to keep them alive in hell? If so, this would contradict the biblical teaching that only those who are saved enjoy the right to this fruit (Rev. 22:14). Consider Genesis 3, where God barred sinful Adam and Eve from the tree of life

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29. Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 502.

30. Ibid., 502n80, quoting Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1963), 69; cf. Nam, "The New Earth and the Eternal Kingdom," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, 957.

31. Cf. Deuteronomy 23:18.

precisely to prevent them from living forever (vv. 22–24), and as a result, they died (Gen. 5:5 regarding Adam's death).

2. In Revelation 20, the "lake of fire" that destroys the wicked covers a vast area on the surface of the earth around the New Jerusalem (vv. 8–10). There is no indication in Revelation 21–22 that the molten "lake" remains as a feature of the new earth.
3. Those who are thrown into the "lake of fire" suffer the "second death," which is the last death (Rev. 20:14–15; 21:8). Therefore, they die; they do not go on living eternally in infernal misery. Language of eternal torment (20:10; cf. 14:10–11) means that they are tormented without relief until they are completely burned up. This fire is "forever" in the sense that its results are eternal (cf. Jude 7 re: Sodom); it is the death from which there is no return.<sup>32</sup>

## By Comparison with the Initial Creation Order and the Fall

Genesis 1–2 records the Creation of heaven/sky and of earth, on which there were rivers, trees, and other kinds of vegetation, precious metal and stones, as well as many kinds of living creatures. Initially there was no rain, but mist watered the earth's surface. The first humans were to tend the Garden of Eden (2:15), but they did not need to till the ground. For food, it appears that they simply picked from seed-bearing plants and fruit-trees (1:29; 2:9, 16). Animals and birds were to eat green plants (1:30). There is no evidence of predation here.

The Fall did not disrupt the overall cosmology of planet Earth. However, the curse on the ground because of Adam appears to have reduced its fertility and brought about undesirable plants, so that considerable effort would be required to till the ground in order to grow food outside

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32. Cf. Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 239–52; Boyd, *God at War*, 288–90. Isaiah 66:24 is commonly adduced as support for eternal torment. For example, see Dim, *The Eschatological Implications*, 197—"Thus, though dead, the rebels will continue to suffer forever, all on account of their obstinate rebellion," but here the rebels are "corpses" who suffer permanent shame, not unending pain. For more on this topic, see Edward W. Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 32–33 versus 130–133.

the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:17–19, 23).<sup>33</sup> Genesis 3:21 implies the first death(s) in recorded history: “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.” These garments of animal hides would cover their nakedness and keep them warm, needs they did not have before they sinned. Humans created in the image of God to have dominion over the earth (1:26–28) were now dependent on the lives of lower creatures.

The great Flood, which was due to radical expansion of human sin, had a much greater impact on the surface of the earth (Gen. 7–8) than did the immediate aftermath of the Fall. The Flood deepened the effects of the Fall upon the surface of the earth and may have changed the distribution of land versus sea. Since then, human population growth, exploitation of natural resources, and pollution have damaged our environment, including the earth’s atmosphere, at an accelerating rate.

Therefore, God’s remedy needs to be comprehensive: re-creation not only of a new earth, but also of a new heaven (Rev. 21:1). Undoing the natural effects of the Fall involves removal of death (1 Cor. 15:54–55; Rev. 20:14), sickness, hunger, thirst, excessive heat (Rev. 7:16), need for artificial means of warmth or laborious agriculture, and physical harm and predation by humans or by animals, which will again be vegetarian (Isa. 11:6–9; 65:25). There will be restoration of access to the fruit of the “tree of life” (Rev. 2:7), renewal of earth’s fertility, and pure rivers (22:1). Then the lives of humans will be dependent on the life of another, but this time the life will be that of the divine Lamb (21:22–23, 27; 22:1, 3).

## CONCLUSION

The goal of at-one-ment through Christ’s sacrifice is ultimate fulfillment of God’s original plan for relational harmony and physical well-being on planet earth after the deadly detour caused by sin. Having defeated the evil deceiver and his hosts in the Great War, God will bring His salvific, covenant purposes to fruition by restoring the lost dominion of Adam and Eve and a multitude of their descendants in a perfect new world and a resplendent city where God Himself dwells.

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33. Cf. covenant curses on rebellious Israelites through negative effects on the natural world in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

The eschatological visions of John in Revelation and of other prophets in earlier biblical books reveal God's character and give humanity hope by unveiling the contours of His goodwill toward humans, which are greater than anything humans could imagine (1 Cor. 2:9). This God-given hope motivates humanity to accept God's gift of salvation and to work with Him in extending the Gospel invitation to all others so that they too can enjoy Paradise with the loving Creator. Even now, in a broken, groaning world that anticipates unprecedented alienation, upheaval, and suffering (e.g., Dan. 12:1), the followers of Christ form a new temple by their access to God through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2). Therefore, His children are to live together in unity "as citizens of the New Jerusalem."<sup>34</sup>

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34. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 191.