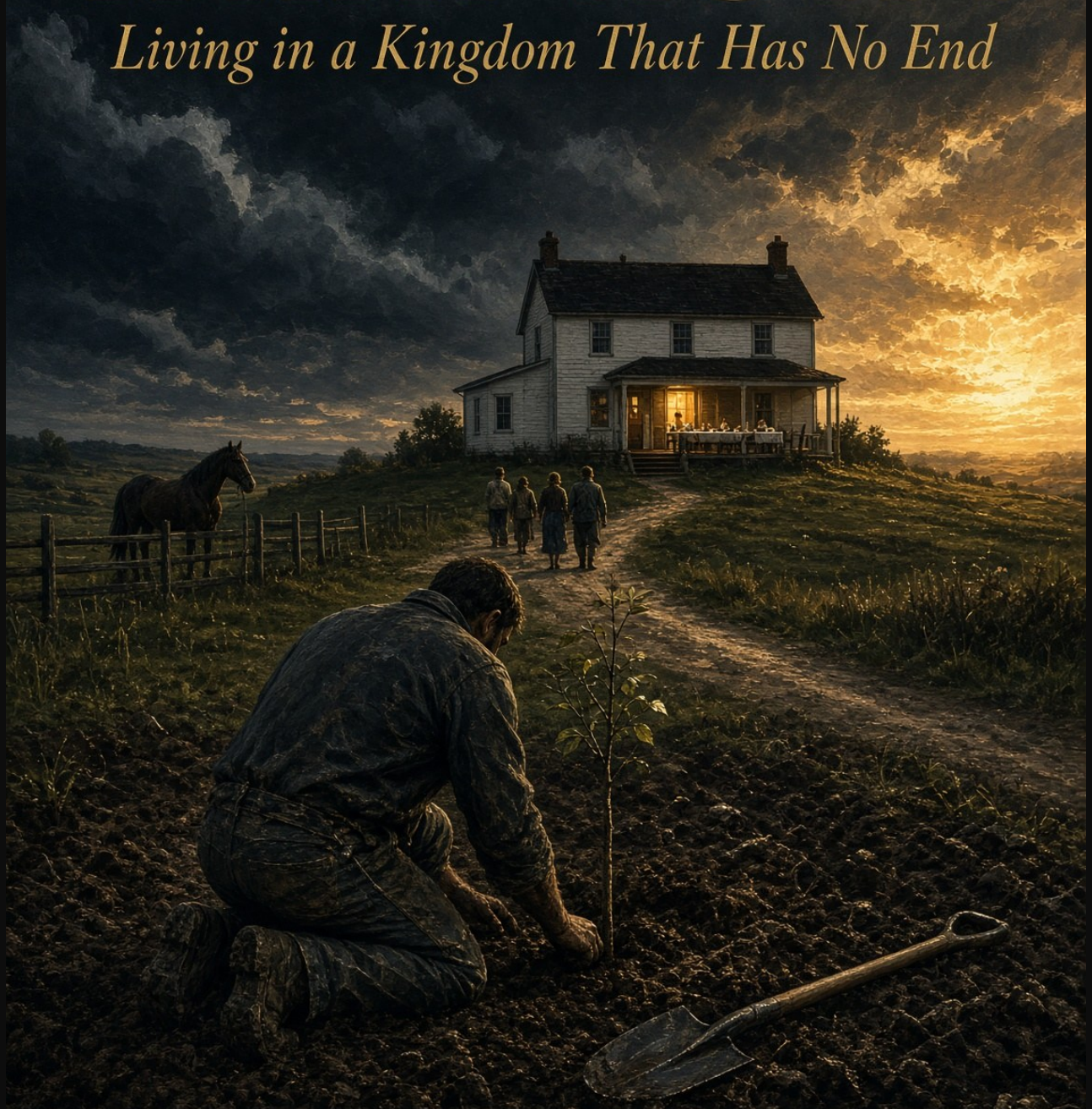
WHAT NOW?

Living in a Kingdom That Has No End



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What Now?

Living in a Kingdom That Has No End

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WHAT NOW?

LIVING IN A KINGDOM THAT HAS NO END

Matt Behrens

Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

CHAPTER 1: IT'S FINISHED. SO WHAT NOW?

I was sitting on the sidelines in the pre-tribulation dispensational worldview for thirty-eight years. I didn't know anything else existed. A rapture, seven years of tribulation, one more temple, and a thousand-year reign on earth were simply what I was taught, and I read Revelation newspaper by newspaper, the way the people around me did. My faith had a countdown built into it. When I sat down with Matthew 24 and read it the way the disciples heard it, the countdown didn't survive. Jesus told the men standing in front of Him that the Temple would come down, "*there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down*" (**Matthew 24:2**), and He told them when: "*Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place*" (**24:34**). The stones came down in AD 70. A man who was twenty when Jesus said it was sixty when it happened.

When the system I had inherited came apart, I felt free. Then a new question showed up, one nobody had prepared me for. It's the one I get more than any other now, from people who have just been through the same thing. If it's all fulfilled, what now? What am I waiting for? What happens when I

die? What happened to the people I've already buried? Why do I still go to church? What's the point of praying?

This book is my answer to those questions, as clearly as I can give it. I'm writing for the believer who has already seen the timing and is now standing in the kitchen at midnight wondering what it means for Tuesday morning. If you're still weighing the timing itself, I've written about that elsewhere and I'll point you to it. In these pages I want to talk about what comes after.

START WITH WHAT ACTUALLY FINISHED. The New Testament writers didn't leave the timing vague. Jesus said, "*there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*" (**Matthew 16:28**). Many readers take that as the transfiguration six days later. I read it with the verse before it, where He comes with His angels to repay each person, and chapter 11 says why. John was told to leave his book open, "*for the time is near*" (**Revelation 22:10**), when Daniel, centuries before, had been told the opposite: "*seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now*" (**Daniel 8:26**). Hebrews says Christ "*has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*" (**Hebrews 9:26**), and the same letter says the first covenant was "*becoming obsolete and growing old*" and "*ready to vanish away*" (**8:13**). These writers lived at the end of something, and they knew it.

What ended was an age, the long era of the old covenant with its Temple, its priesthood, and its sacrifices. When the Temple burned, that whole order went with it, the way Jesus said it would. The prophecies that came with a deadline were tied to that ending. I believe every prophecy with a deadline on it was fulfilled by AD 70, because the deadlines were set by men who meant what they said, and the God who inspired them keeps His word on time.

THE KINGDOM NEVER HAD A DEADLINE. This is the part I missed for years, and I think a lot of people miss it the first time through. The prophets dated the end of the old age. They never dated the end of the kingdom, because they said it wouldn't have one.

Isaiah saw a child born with the government on His shoulder, and he said, "*Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore*" (**Isaiah 9:7**). Daniel watched one like a son of man come to the Ancient of Days, and he said, "*his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed*" (**Daniel 7:14**). The angel told Mary the same thing about the child she would carry: "*of his kingdom there will be no end*" (**Luke 1:33**).

Isaiah says the increase has no end, not only the government. A kingdom that keeps increasing is one that started somewhere and is still growing. He didn't describe a finish line. He described a beginning that keeps going forward.

That's the difference this whole book rests on. The judgment had a date. The kingdom has a direction. When people hear "it's all fulfilled," they often hear "it's all over." Scripture says close to the opposite. What was passing away has passed. What would never pass is here, and it's ours.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET SOUNDS LIKE A CORONATION. In Revelation 11, at the last trumpet of the book, loud voices in heaven said, "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever*" (**Revelation 11:15**). The kingdom "has become" His, and He reigns "forever and ever." The age John watched close opened onto a reign with no end date.

Jesus talked the same way. Right before He sent the apostles out, He said, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*" (**Matthew 28:18-19**). The authority was already His when He said it. The going was theirs, and now it's ours. He sent them because there was work to do, and there still is.

Paul gave God glory "*in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever*" (**Ephesians 3:21**). Generation after generation, with glory in the church in every one of them. That's the world I believe we live in.

WHAT "FINISHED" DOESN'T MEAN. There are two ways to get this wrong, and I've watched people fall into both.

The first is to decide that since the prophecies are fulfilled, nothing is left to do. Faith goes flat. Prayer feels pointless. Church turns into a habit. If that's where you are, I understand it, and I'd ask you to hold on through the next few chapters. The Christians who lived on the other side of AD 70 didn't stop praying or gathering or telling people about Jesus. They had more reason to keep going, not less.

The second is to decide that since the kingdom has come, the world must be fixed. It isn't, and Scripture never says it would be by now. The kingdom started small and it grows. People still sin and suffer and die. The gospel still has to reach people who haven't heard it. I don't believe in a finished world. I believe in a King on His throne and a church with work to do. People who love the Bible don't agree on how fast that growth comes or what it looks like in any one century, and I'll say so when we get there.

WHAT THE REST OF THIS BOOK ANSWERS. These pages take the questions people actually send me, one at a time.

Chapter 2 is about the kingdom you live in right now, what it is and where it is. Chapters 3 and 4 are about death: what happens when a believer dies, and how to grieve someone you love without a countdown to hold onto. Chapter 5 goes back to the first century to ask what happened to the dead who were waiting when Jesus came. Chapter 6 takes up the body, the question I hear most after "What about Grandma?" Chapter 7 is about judgment, because the fulfilled view doesn't make sin smaller or make hell go away. Chapter 8 is about what the church still does, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and the mission. Chapter 9 is about what all of this did to my own life. Chapter 10 asks whether history ever ends. Chapter 11 is the honest chapter, where I lay out the texts that are hardest for my view and how I answer them. Chapter 12 is about reading these passages for yourself, so you don't have to take my word, or anyone's, for any of it.

I won't pretend every question has a neat answer. Some don't, and where I can't prove my reading, I'll tell you. What I can promise is that I'll start with the text every time, and I'll quote it so you can check me.

The writer of Hebrews wrote to believers who had been told that God would shake the old order once more (**Hebrews 12:26-27**). He didn't tell them to brace for the end of everything. He told them, "*let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe*" (**Hebrews 12:28**). They were receiving it then. We have

received it now. That's where "what now?" starts, with gratitude and worship inside a kingdom nothing can shake.

Go deeper: "Did Jesus lie? Three promises. One deadline." at TheHereticalHorseman.com/posts/did-jesus-lie

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CHAPTER 2: THE KINGDOM YOU LIVE IN

For thirty-eight years I thought of the kingdom as a place I was waiting to go, or a thing I was waiting to see land. Both pictures put it somewhere else. The New Testament puts it where the believer already is.

Paul told the Colossians that God "*has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*" (**Colossians 1:13**). He wrote that to living people in a small town in Asia Minor, and he put it in the past tense. They had been moved. Nobody in Colossae saw a throne come down out of the sky. They had changed kingdoms the day they believed.

Jesus said to expect that. The Pharisees asked Him when the kingdom of God would come, and He answered, "*The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you*" (**Luke 17:20-21**). A kingdom you can't spot by watching for it is a different kind of kingdom than the one I was taught to wait for.

THE KINGDOM STARTS SMALL AND GROWS. Jesus said, "*The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and*

becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches" (**Matthew 13:31-32**). He chose a seed on purpose. A seed is small, it's put in the ground, and it grows where it was planted until other creatures live in it.

Daniel was shown the same thing in a different picture. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream a stone struck the statue of the world's empires, and "*the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*" (**Daniel 2:35**). Daniel told the king what it meant: "*in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed*" (**2:44**). The stone hits first and fills the earth afterward. The filling takes time, and Daniel never says how much.

That's the shape of the kingdom in both Testaments. It arrives in the days of the Roman emperors, it starts with a handful of people in one province, and it spreads. Chapter 1 quoted Isaiah's promise that the increase of His government has no end. The mustard seed and the stone are that promise in pictures.

YOU HAVE COME TO THE CITY. This was the verse that turned the lights on for me. The writer of Hebrews, writing before the Temple fell, told his readers where they stood: "*you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*" (**Hebrews 12:22-23**). He didn't say they would come to it one day. He said they had come. The same letter

also says, "*here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come*" (**Hebrews 13:14**). They had arrived, and the arriving wasn't finished.

Paul said the same to the Galatians: "*the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother*" (**Galatians 4:26**). The city believers belong to was already a mother with children in the first century.

When John sees that city at the end of Revelation, an angel tells him what he's looking at before he looks. "*Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.*" Then John writes, "*he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God*" (**Revelation 21:9-10**). The angel promises to show him a Bride and shows him a city. The city is the Bride, and the Bride is the people of Christ. John sees no temple building in it, "*for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb*" (**21:22**). God lives with His people directly. "*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people*" (**21:3**).

I used to read those chapters as a description of heaven after the world ends. I read them now as a description of the church after the old covenant ended, with God dwelling in His people and no building between them. Not everybody reads it that way, and chapter 4 takes up the hardest verse in that passage. What moved me was reading what John says is still going on around the city.

READ WHAT IS STILL OUTSIDE THE GATES. If Revelation 21 and 22 were a picture of a finished world, there would be nothing left outside the city

and nothing left to do. John describes the opposite. "*By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it*" (**21:24**). Its gates "*will never be shut by day*" (**21:25**). There are still nations, and they're still coming in. "*Nothing unclean will ever enter it*" (**21:27**), which tells you there is still something unclean to keep out. In the middle of the city stands the tree of life, and "*the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*" (**22:2**). Nations that need healing haven't been healed yet.

That's a city with open gates and a world around it that needs what's inside. It reads like a mission field with a church in the middle of it, which is what we see when we look out the window.

I don't want to oversell this. The kingdom is here and it's growing. It isn't finished growing, and nothing in these chapters tells me next year will be easier than this one. Christians still suffer. Whole regions that once had churches on every corner have lost them, and other regions that had none are full of them now. The promise is about the throne and the direction. It doesn't come with a schedule.

THE KING GAVE HIS PEOPLE A JOB. Paul describes the church's work in one sentence: "*in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*" (**2 Corinthians 5:19-20**).

An ambassador lives in one country and speaks for another. He doesn't wait for his king to show up and do the talking. He has been sent because the king is on his throne at home and has something to say. That's the believer's position in the world. We aren't refugees waiting for an airlift. We're the King's representatives in a place that still needs to hear from Him.

This changed my ordinary days more than I expected. When I thought the world was a sinking ship, there wasn't much reason to care what happened to it. If the kingdom is a seed that grows where it's planted, then the place I've been planted matters. My family, my work, my church, and my town are the field. The leaves of that tree get carried out through the gates by people, and you're one of them.

That leaves the question people usually ask me first. If the kingdom is here and I'm in it, what happens to me when I die? That's the next chapter.

Go deeper: "The day a 15-year-old helped me stop believing my own timeline" at TheHereticalHorseman.com/posts/new-jerusalem

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CHAPTER 3: WHEN A BELIEVER DIES

The question usually comes late at night and it usually comes in one line. “If the resurrection already happened, where is my husband?” “Did my mom miss it?” “What happens to me?”

I’ll give the answer first and then show where I get it. A believer who dies today goes to be with the Lord, whole and at home. There is no waiting room and no long sleep, because the thing the first Christians were waiting for has come.

Most Christians already believe half of that. They say a believer who dies is with Christ now and will get a body later, when the graves open at the end of history. I respect that view. It’s what I held, and it has the creeds behind it. Where I differ is on the “later,” and I want to show you why from Paul himself.

PAUL EXPECTED TO BE WITH CHRIST, AND HE WAS STILL WAITING FOR SOMETHING. Paul wrote Philippians from prison, not knowing whether he’d be released or executed. He said, “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (**Philippians 1:21**), and he told them what he meant by gain: “*My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*” (**1:23**). Stephen

expected the same. As the stones were hitting him he prayed, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*" (**Acts 7:59**).

A believer who died in Paul's day was with Christ. I hold that without any hedge.

The same Paul also said those believers were waiting. He called them "those who are asleep" and promised that "*the dead in Christ will rise first*" (**1 Thessalonians 4:13, 16**). They had died in Christ, and their rising was still ahead. He wrote to the Corinthians that he would rather be "*away from the body and at home with the Lord*" (**2 Corinthians 5:8**). Four verses earlier he says what he was groaning for: "*not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life*" (**2 Corinthians 5:4**). He didn't want to be found unclothed. He wanted the house from God put on.

John saw the same thing from heaven's side. He saw the souls of those who had been killed for their testimony, and they cried out asking how long it would be. "*They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer*" (**Revelation 6:11**). Those are Christians who died after the cross. They are with the Lord, and they are told to wait a little longer. A critic will point at the robe and say they were clothed already. I don't think a robe handed to a soul that is told to keep waiting is the house from God that Paul longed for. It's an honor given to those who are still waiting.

Jesus had told the disciples to expect a wait. "*I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*" (**John 14:3**). He was going away, and He would come again to bring them where He was.

Put those together and you get the condition of the first believers who died. They were with Christ, and that was far better than anything here. They were also still waiting, asleep in Paul's word, resting a little longer in John's, not yet clothed. Where exactly they waited, Scripture doesn't say, and I won't guess.

THE WAIT HAD AN END. Paul told the Corinthians when the waiting would be over. "*For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed*" (**1 Corinthians 15:52**). He told them what would be true from that moment. "*When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'*" (**15:54**).

Christ won that victory at the cross and the empty tomb. "*Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (**15:57**). Paul says it would "come to pass" at the trumpet. The victory was won at one point and delivered at another.

I believe that trumpet sounded at the end of the old covenant age, in the events of AD 70, and chapter 5 gives my reasons. If that's right, the believers who had fallen asleep were raised then, together with the faithful of Israel who had died

before Christ. They were clothed with what Paul had longed for. The souls under the altar stopped waiting.

JOHN HEARD THE TURN. In the middle of Revelation, a voice from heaven tells John to write something down. "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.*" The Spirit answers, "*Blessed indeed, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!*" (**Revelation 14:13**).

"From now on" marks a change, and I read that turn as the end of the age. Before it, the dead in Christ were told to rest a little longer, until something else was finished. After it, the voice puts no "until" on their rest. The verse doesn't say "no wait" in so many words. I draw it first from what John sees next. The very next scene is the harvest, where one like a son of man is told, "*the hour to reap has come*" (**Revelation 14:15**). I draw it second from the missing "until." I could be wrong about that, and chapter 11 comes back to it. Everything on this side of it is "from now on," and that includes your husband, your mother, and you.

THE HOUSE IS READY. That's why I can say a believer who dies today is whole. Paul wrote, "*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*" (**2 Corinthians 5:1**). He calls the body we have now a tent. Tents are for traveling, and they wear out. When the tent comes down, there is a house. Chapter 6 is about what that body is, as far as Scripture tells us.

The Christian who holds the traditional view agrees with me that Grandma is with the Lord. We differ on what she has. On that view she has waited, unclothed, since the day she died, and she'll go on waiting until history ends. My question is whether Paul, who groaned to be further clothed and wrote as though the day was close, expected that state to last two thousand years. I don't think he did.

NOTHING GETS BETWEEN. Paul made a list once of everything that might come between a believer and God, and death is the first thing on it. "*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (**Romans 8:38-39**).

I'll say this as simply as I can to the person who asked the question at midnight. If your husband died in Christ, he is with Christ, and he isn't waiting on anything. If your mom trusted the Lord, she didn't miss anything. She may have spent her whole life expecting to see Jesus come in the sky, and she may have been wrong about how that would go. She wasn't wrong about Him. Nobody is saved by having the sequence right. If she trusted the Lord, the Lord received her.

When your day comes, the same will be true of you. You'll go where Paul wanted to go, to be with Christ, which is far better, and you'll be clothed.

I should tell you where this is hardest for me. “Depart and be with Christ” sounds like there was nothing left for Paul to wait for, even in his own day. I’ve given my reasons for thinking there was, from Paul’s own letters. A careful reader may weigh those verses differently, and chapter 11 comes back to it.

That doesn’t mean we don’t grieve. We do, and Scripture makes room for it. The next chapter is about how.

Go deeper: Tough Verses, “What about Grandma?,” at TheHereticalHorseman.com/hard-texts#post-70-dead

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CHAPTER 4: DEATH, GRIEF, AND HOPE NOW

A view like mine can sound cold at a funeral. If the resurrection is behind us and death has been defeated, somebody is bound to ask why we're all standing around a casket crying. I've had people tell me that my reading takes away the one comfort they had, the thought of a morning when the graves open and everybody they've lost walks out.

I understand that, and I don't want to take anything from a grieving person that Scripture gives them. What I want to do in this chapter is show what Scripture does give, because I think it's more than they were told.

JESUS WEPT AT A GRAVE HE WAS ABOUT TO EMPTY. When Lazarus died, Jesus waited two days before He set out, and by the time He reached Bethany Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. He knew what He was going to do. He had already told the disciples He was going to wake Lazarus up. He saw Mary crying, He asked where they had laid him, and John gives us the shortest verse in our English Bibles: "*Jesus wept*" (**John 11:35**).

He knew how the story ended, and He cried. That settles the question of whether a Christian with good theology is allowed to grieve. If the Lord of life wept at a death He was minutes from undoing, then tears at a graveside aren't a failure of faith.

Paul felt the same way about his own friends. When Epaphroditus nearly died, Paul wrote that God had mercy on him, "*and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow*" (**Philippians 2:27**). This is the same Paul who said that to depart and be with Christ is far better. He believed that with his whole heart, and he still would have been crushed to lose his friend. Both things were true in the same man.

WE GRIEVE, AND WE GRIEVE WITH HOPE. Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians is the one most people know. "*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope*" (**1 Thessalonians 4:13**). He doesn't tell them not to grieve. He tells them not to grieve the way people do who have nothing ahead of them.

The Thessalonians were afraid their dead had missed out. Paul's whole answer is that they hadn't. Chapter 3 said who those sleepers were and when they rose. The purpose of the passage was comfort: "*encourage one another with these words*" (**4:18**). The believer's dead are safe, and we will be with them and with the Lord.

Jesus said it to Martha in clearer words than anyone has since. "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes*

in me shall never die" (**John 11:25-26**). He says two things there. The believer who dies will live. The believer who lives will never die. Both are promises about the person who trusts Him, and He asked Martha right then, "Do you believe this?"

I think about that sentence a lot. "Though he die, yet shall he live" admits the death. Jesus doesn't pretend the funeral isn't real. Then He says the believer's death isn't the kind that wins.

WHAT DEATH LOST. Paul explains it at the end of his long chapter on resurrection. "*O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*" Then he tells us what the sting was. "*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (**1 Corinthians 15:55-57**).

Christ won that victory at the cross, and chapter 3 showed that Paul expected it to be delivered at the last trumpet. A bee that has lost its stinger can still land on you. It can't do what it used to do. Death still comes to every one of us. What Christ took out of it is the sting, the sin that made death a sentence. For the person in Christ, death has become a door. It still hurts to watch someone we love go through it, because we're on this side and they aren't. It doesn't have the power to keep them from God, and it won't have the power to keep us.

Paul also wrote, "*The last enemy to be destroyed is death*" (**1 Corinthians 15:26**). On my reading that was done at the trumpet, when death lost its sting and Hades gave up its dead, and people have gone on dying ever since. Paul uses the same Greek word in **2 Timothy 1:10**, where Christ

"*abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*" People were still dying when he wrote that. Abolishing death can't mean nobody dies. I read the last enemy as the death that kept God's people in Hades. Most readers will still say an enemy that takes everyone has not been destroyed. That is one of the hard places for my view, and I would be hiding it if I didn't name it here.

That's how I read John's great promise in Revelation. "*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away*" (**Revelation 21:4**). I'm not going to tell you that verse is easy for me. We still mourn, and we still hurt. Most people read that verse, look at the world, and say it hasn't happened.

What helps me is knowing where John got the words. He's drawing on Isaiah in two places. In **Isaiah 25:8** God swallows up death and wipes away tears. In Isaiah 65 God creates new heavens and a new earth and says of Jerusalem, "*no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress*" (**Isaiah 65:19**). The very next verse says, "*the young man shall die a hundred years old*" (**65:20**). In Isaiah's new earth, the weeping is gone and people still die. The same verse also says no infant will live only a few days, and infants still die in our world. I can't claim Isaiah's picture matches everything we see. My point is smaller. In his own picture the end of weeping and the presence of death stand side by side. I take John to be saying that the old order has

passed away, the one where death held God's people at a distance. Isaiah could say weeping was over and still speak of people dying. I can't tell you for sure how far John goes beyond Isaiah. The words I can't fully account for are "nor pain anymore," and I won't pretend I can.

THE LORD IS NOT INDIFFERENT. The psalmist wrote, "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*" (**Psalm 116:15**). Precious is a word for something costly and closely watched. God doesn't lose track of His people when they die. Each death of one of His own matters to Him.

That shapes how the church should treat grieving people. Paul's rule is short: "*weep with those who weep*" (**Romans 12:15**). He doesn't say to correct them or hurry them along. If you've come to the fulfilled view and someone in your church buries a child, your job isn't to explain eschatology at the visitation. Your job is to sit down and cry with them. The time for teaching will come, and they'll listen to someone who wept with them first.

WHAT I'D SAY AT THE GRAVESIDE. People sometimes ask me what a full preterist can say at a funeral. I'd say what Scripture gives a Christian to say, and I'd mean every word. This person belonged to Christ, and is with Christ. Death didn't win, because Christ took its sting. We'll see them again, because we're going where they went. We're sad because we love them and they're gone from our table, and God isn't ashamed of our tears.

Most pastors would add that the body will be raised from the grave on the last day, and I understand why they say it. It's the church's

historic confession. I wouldn't say it, because I believe the day Paul was waiting for has come, and those who die in the Lord from now on don't wait. They aren't waiting on anything. We're the ones who wait, for our own turn to go home.

Go deeper: Tough Verses, "There's still death, so we're not in Revelation 21," at TheHereticalHorseman.com/hard-texts#no-more-death

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CHAPTER 5: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DEAD

The last two chapters were about believers who die now, and chapter 3 touched on the first Christians who died. This one goes further back, because the resurrection the apostles preached was first of all a promise to Israel, and most of us were never told that.

THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS DIED WAITING. Hebrews 11 is the roll call of faith. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, David, and the prophets are all there, and the chapter ends with a sentence that should stop us. "*And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect*" (**Hebrews 11:39-40**).

They believed, God commended them, and they did not receive the promise. They were waiting for something, and the writer says they would not receive it apart from "us." I take "us" to mean what it meant when he wrote it, the believers of his own day.

The Old Testament tells us where they waited. When Jacob thought Joseph was dead, he said, "*I shall go down to Sheol to my son,*

mourning" (**Genesis 37:35**). Sheol was the place of the dead. David, centuries later, sang, "*you will not abandon my soul to Sheol*" (**Psalm 16:10**). The Greek word for the same place is Hades. Peter says David was speaking of Christ there, since David died and his tomb was still in Jerusalem (**Acts 2:29-31**). Of David himself Peter says, "*David did not ascend into the heavens*" (**Acts 2:34**). Paul adds that Christ was the first to rise from the dead (**Acts 26:23**).

That's the background for the word resurrection in the New Testament. When Paul stood trial, he said what he was on trial for. "*I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers*" (**Acts 26:6**). He called it the hope of Israel, and he told Felix it was "*a resurrection of both the just and the unjust*" (**Acts 24:15**). The resurrection Paul preached was the old promise to the fathers, that God would bring His people up out of the place of the dead.

DANIEL TIED IT TO A TIME. Daniel was told about that day. "*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*" (**Daniel 12:2**). Both groups rise in the same event. Daniel heard someone ask how long it would be, and the answer came with an oath: "*when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished*" (**12:7**).

I read "the shattering of the power of the holy people" as the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in AD 70. I don't know another event in Israel's history that fits those words as well, and

it's the event Jesus tied to His own generation. If that's right, Daniel puts the resurrection of the dead at the end of the old covenant age.

Jesus spoke of the same event. "*An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment*" (**John 5:28-29**). He has the same two groups Daniel has, in one hour.

John saw it happen in his vision. "*The sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done*" (**Revelation 20:13**). Hades gave up its dead. The holding place was emptied, and those who had waited there stood before God.

That's what I believe happened at the end of the age. Abraham, Moses, David, and the faithful of Israel who had died waiting received what they'd been promised. The first Christians who had fallen asleep, the ones chapter 3 described as with Christ and still waiting, were raised with them. Paul had said "*the dead in Christ will rise first*" (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**). The faithless were raised to judgment, as Daniel and Jesus both said. Hebrews said the saints of old would not be made perfect apart from "us," and as I read it they weren't. They were made perfect together.

NOBODY FOUND AN EMPTY CEMETERY. I should say what I'm not claiming. I'm not saying bodies came up out of the ground around Jerusalem in AD 70. No historian records that, and I don't think the

texts require it. The dead Paul and John are talking about had already left this world, and they were raised and clothed. It happened in the unseen realm, the way Christ's enthronement at the Father's right hand did. Christ's enthronement wasn't a public sight either. The apostles watched Him go up until a cloud took Him (**Acts 1:9**). Stephen was given a look into heaven, and later John was too. Most of the church never saw Him on the throne. They believed it on the apostles' word and on the Spirit He poured out (**Acts 2:33**).

This is where many Christians part ways with me, and I understand why. The church has confessed a resurrection of bodies from graves for a very long time, and "all who are in the tombs" sounds like graves to most readers. I take that up in chapter 11. For now I'll just say how I got here. Daniel ties the resurrection to the shattering of the holy people, Jesus tied His coming to His own generation, and I couldn't find a way to keep those ties and move the event.

THE TOMBS THAT DID OPEN. Someone will bring up Matthew 27 here, and they should. When Jesus died, "*the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many*" (**Matthew 27:51-53**). I take every word of that as written. Those were real tombs and real bodies, and people in Jerusalem saw them.

Look at what Matthew says and what he leaves out. He says “many,” and he doesn’t say all. He says they came out “after his resurrection,” which keeps Christ first. He doesn’t say what became of them, and I won’t guess.

I believe Matthew is showing us a firstfruits offering. When Israel came to the harvest, the first sheaf cut from the field went to the priest: “*he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it*” (**Leviticus 23:11**). A sheaf is a bundle of stalks taken from the field ahead of the rest. It’s a sample of the harvest and a promise that the rest is coming. Jesus rose on the day after the Sabbath. Paul calls Him “*the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (**1 Corinthians 15:20**), and he gives the order: “*Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ*” (**15:23**). The saints of Matthew 27 came out after He did, a handful of stalks from Israel’s field, shown in the holy city. Matthew’s “many” is Daniel’s word for those who would awake (**Daniel 12:2**). The harvest itself came at His coming, when Hades gave up its dead.

A critic will press me here, and he has a point. A sample ought to look like the harvest. These saints came out of tombs in bodies people could see, and I’ve just said the harvest happened out of sight. My answer is that the sample and the harvest match in what happened, the dead raised to life, and differ in where it was seen. I can’t prove that, and few teachers of any view claim to be sure about this passage. It does show one thing. Tombs opened

and the dead were raised in the days of Pilate, and history went on. No other cemetery emptied, and no other writer we have mentions it.

RESURRECTION HAS THREE SIDES. People sometimes accuse my view of turning resurrection into a metaphor, a change of status and nothing more. I don't hold that. I see three sides to resurrection, and all three are real. The New Testament uses resurrection language for the first two. The third is what I believe follows from them.

The first is corporate. Paul tells the Ephesians that God "*made us alive together with Christ*" and "*raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (**Ephesians 2:5-6**). That's said to living people. The whole body of Christ was brought from death to life in Him.

The second is historical. This is the event this chapter has been describing. Israel's faithful dead in Hades and the first believers who had fallen asleep were raised together at the end of the age, at a point in history, once.

The third is individual. I believe every believer who dies now goes to be with the Lord and is clothed with the house Paul wrote about. The New Testament doesn't call that a resurrection in so many words. I draw it from **2 Corinthians 5:1** and **Revelation 14:13**, as chapter 3 explained. Since that day, each of His people passes through death into life, one at a time.

Christ Himself is the root of all three. Paul calls Him "*the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*" (**1 Corinthians 15:20**). Firstfruits are the first part of a harvest, the proof that the rest is coming. He went into death and came out, and everyone who belongs to Him follows.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOU. If you're new to all this, take this much from the chapter. God kept His promise to Abraham and to the saints who died before Christ. They aren't still waiting. The long line of people who trusted God and went down to the grave without seeing the promise has been brought home. When you die in Christ, you join them. You go to a place that has already been opened and filled with people.

Go deeper: Tough Verses, "The saints came out of their tombs," at TheHereticalHorseman.com/hard-texts#matthew-27-52

CHAPTER 6: WHAT KIND OF BODY?

Once people accept that a believer goes to be with the Lord at death, the next question is usually about the body. Will I be a ghost? Will I know my wife? Is there anything to me at all once this body is in the ground?

The Corinthians asked Paul the same thing, and he didn't think much of the question. "*But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish person!*" (**1 Corinthians 15:35-36**). He answered it anyway, and his answer is the best help we have.

START WITH A SEED. Paul reaches for the same picture Jesus used for the kingdom. "*What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen*" (**15:36-38**).

A kernel of wheat and a stalk of wheat are the same life. Nobody looking at the stalk would say the kernel was lost. Nobody would say the stalk is the old kernel put back together either. Paul says both things on purpose. What comes up is "not the body that is to be" in its old form, and God gives it a body. There is continuity, and there is real change, and the new is better than the old.

That already rules out two mistakes. One is that the life to come is bodiless, a soul floating free. Paul says God gives a body. The other is that God must collect the same atoms that went into the grave. Paul says what you sow is not the body that is to be.

A SPIRITUAL BODY IS NOT A GHOST. A few verses later comes the phrase that causes most of the trouble. "*It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body*" (**15:44**). Many readers hear "spiritual body" and think of something made of mist. That isn't what the word means, and Paul's own letter shows it.

He uses the same two words earlier in 1 Corinthians, for people. "*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God,*" he writes, and then, "*The spiritual person judges all things*" (**2:14-15**). A spiritual person in chapter 2 is a flesh-and-blood Christian in Corinth who is led by the Spirit of God. The natural person is run by ordinary human life and nothing higher.

The words mean the same in chapter 15. A natural body is a body animated by ordinary human life, the kind that wears out. A spiritual body is a body animated and governed by the Spirit of God. The word tells you what powers the body. It doesn't tell you the body is made of nothing.

CHRIST'S BODY IS THE PATTERN. We aren't left to guess what that looks like, because one man has already been raised. On the evening of the resurrection, Jesus stood among His frightened disciples and said, "*See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit*

does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (**Luke 24:39**). Then He asked for something to eat, and they gave Him a piece of broiled fish, "*and he took it and ate before them*" (**24:42-43**).

Jesus Himself says He is not a spirit. He could be touched, and He ate. He was also changed. He came into a locked room (**John 20:19**). Mary took Him for the gardener until He spoke her name (**John 20:14-16**). His body was real and it was glorified, and Paul told the Philippians that Christ "*will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body*" (**Philippians 3:21**). He wrote that to people waiting for the Savior to come from heaven, and I believe He came. I take His risen body as the pattern for what His people are given.

That's the side I come down on. Some who share my view of the timing go further than I can and say the raised are spirits without bodies. I can't square that with Jesus saying a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as He has. The real disagreement among Christians here isn't physical against spiritual. It's between a glorified body you could touch and no body at all, and I hold the first.

I should be equally plain about what I don't know. Paul never tells us what the glorified body is made of. He says it is imperishable, glorious, powerful, and governed by the Spirit (**1 Corinthians 15:42-44**). He doesn't give us its chemistry, and I won't invent it. I know the kind of body it is. I don't know the details, and neither does anyone else.

WHAT ABOUT "FLESH AND BLOOD"? Paul also wrote, "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the*

imperishable" (**15:50**). Some take that to mean no body of any kind. The second half of the sentence explains the first. "Flesh and blood" is Paul's phrase for mortal human life as we have it now, perishable and dying. That kind of existence can't inherit what lasts forever. It has to be changed. Paul has just spent fifteen verses saying God gives a body, so he can't mean the kingdom has none.

WHEN DOES THE BELIEVER RECEIVE IT? Chapter 3 quoted Paul's answer to the same church in his next letter. When the earthly tent is destroyed, "*we have a building from God,*" and he longs to be "*further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life*" (**2 Corinthians 5:1, 4**). The first believers who died were clothed with it at the trumpet, as chapter 3 said. I read Paul's words as what a believer receives at death from then on. The tent comes down, and the house is there.

The chapter opened with a husband's question about his wife. I can't give you a verse that answers it in those words. I can tell you that Jesus was still Jesus after He was raised. He knew His friends, called Mary by her name, and carried the marks of His own history in His hands. Moses and Elijah were still Moses and Elijah on the mountain. Everything Scripture shows us about the life to come has persons in it who are still themselves. I expect to know the people I love, and I expect them to be more themselves than I ever saw them here.

THE PART THAT IS HARDEST FOR MY VIEW. I'd be hiding something if I stopped there. In the same chapter Paul says, "*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet*" (**1 Corinthians 15:51-52**). He's talking about believers who would be alive when the trumpet sounded. If that trumpet sounded at the end of the age in AD 70, I owe you an account of the Christians who were alive that day. They didn't vanish, and their bodies weren't visibly transformed.

My reading is that the trumpet was one event for two groups. The dead were raised, and the living were changed. The living were taken out from under the covenant that gave death its sting, since "*the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law*" (**15:56**). The building from God is put on when each one's tent comes down. I think that fits what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5. I also know "in the twinkling of an eye" sounds like something more sudden and more visible than that, and it's the most exposed point in everything I believe. Chapter 11 comes back to it.

There's a second hard place, and it's about the tomb. I've called Christ's risen body the pattern for ours, and His rising left a tomb empty. On my reading, the bodies of believers stay in the ground. A harvest normally looks like its firstfruits, and a critic is right to press me on that. Paul says God "*will also give life to your mortal bodies*" (**Romans 8:11**), which sounds like the body in the grave. **Philippians 3:21** says Christ will transform "our lowly body," which also sounds like the one we have now. Peter and Paul both prove Jesus rose by

pointing at a body that did not decay. David "*saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption*" (**Acts 13:36-37**, and Peter says the same in **Acts 2:29-31**). That weighs against me, and I won't dress it up. What I can say is smaller. Every Christian's body has decayed, on my view and on the traditional one, and His never did. His rising was unlike ours in that one respect, whatever you believe about the rest.

What I'm sure of is smaller and sturdier. You will not be a ghost. You will not be nothing. God gives a body as He has chosen, and Christ's own risen body is the pattern.

Go deeper: "The resurrection already happened. Here's what changed for the people who didn't die." at TheHereticalHorseman.com/posts/which-body

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CHAPTER 7: JUDGMENT STILL MATTERS

The most common charge against my view, after "heretic," is that it turns into universalism. The reasoning goes like this. If the judgment already happened, then nobody is judged anymore, and if nobody is judged anymore, everybody must be fine.

I don't believe that, and I want to be as clear in this chapter as I know how to be. Sin is real, judgment is real, and there are two destinies. The fulfilled view doesn't shrink any of that.

TWO JUDGMENTS, AND BOTH ARE IN THE TEXT. Scripture speaks of judgment in two ways. One is the great judgment at the end of the age, the scene Jesus describes with the sheep and the goats and John describes at the white throne. I believe that judgment took place at the end of the old covenant age, when the dead were raised, as chapter 5 laid out. Its verdicts were permanent. "*These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*" (**Matthew 25:46**). I don't soften either half of that sentence.

The other is the judgment every person faces. "*It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*" (**Hebrews 9:27**). The writer

states that as the rule for human beings. We die once, and judgment follows. Nothing in that sentence expired when the Temple fell.

The court that sat at the end of the age didn't close when the age did. Each of us still stands before the same King. Paul told the Corinthians, "*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil*" (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). I read that as what every person meets at death.

JOHN'S GOSPEL PUTS JUDGMENT IN THE PRESENT TENSE. People sometimes think judgment is only a date on a calendar. John's Gospel describes it as a condition a person is already in. "*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God*" (**John 3:18**). The chapter ends the same way: "*whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him*" (**3:36**).

Condemned already. The wrath remains. That's the state of a person outside of Christ today, and it was true before AD 70 and after. What changes a person's standing is what has always changed it. Paul calls the gospel "*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*" (**Romans 1:16**). "Everyone who believes" is still the door, and it's the only one.

THE CITY HAS AN OUTSIDE. Chapter 2 walked through John's picture of the new Jerusalem with its open gates. That same picture also speaks

against universalism, because John describes who isn't in the city. Nothing unclean enters it, "*but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life*" (**Revelation 21:27**). In the last chapter he says it more bluntly: "*Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood*" (**22:15**).

John does not picture a world where the outside has emptied. He puts people there, and earlier in the same vision he says where the unrepentant end: "*their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death*" (**Revelation 21:8**). The gates are open, which is mercy. They're still gates.

I'll be straight about the size of this part of my case. Most of the big judgment passages in the New Testament are about the end of the age, and I've placed those in the first century. What I have for the person who dies today is a shorter list: **Hebrews 9:27**, **John 3:18** and 3:36, **2 Corinthians 5:10**, and the outside of the city in Revelation 21 and 22. I think that list is enough to stand on. It's shorter than the other one, and a sharp critic will notice, so I'd rather you hear it from me.

SIN IS STILL SIN. Some who have held views near mine concluded that since the law has passed, sin has passed with it, and believers no longer sin at all. I reject that. John wrote to Christians, "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to*

cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (**1 John 1:8-9**). Believers sin, confess, and are forgiven. That's the normal Christian life in every century.

What the believer doesn't carry is condemnation. "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (**Romans 8:1**). When a Christian stands before the judgment seat, he stands there as one whose sins were already answered for at the cross. That should make us grateful and serious about how we live. It shouldn't make us careless.

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO NEVER HEARD? I get this question often, and for years I didn't have a settled answer. I had this one tested hard before I put it in a book, because I wanted what Scripture says and not what I'd like to be true.

Scripture tells me how anyone is saved, through Christ alone. "*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (**Acts 4:12**). Jesus said, "*No one comes to the Father except through me*" (**John 14:6**).

It tells me no one is innocent. Paul says of people who never had the Scriptures that God's "*eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse*" (**Romans 1:20**). "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (**3:23**). Every person has sinned against the light he had.

It tells me the Judge does right. Abraham asked, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*" (**Genesis 18:25**). Jesus taught that more is asked of the one who was given more: "*Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required*" (**Luke 12:48**).

It doesn't tell me that ignorance saves anyone, and it doesn't hand me the list. I won't say everyone is saved, because Scripture speaks of two destinies. I won't name who is lost, because that seat belongs to Him.

What Scripture does hand me is a job. "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*" (**Romans 10:17**). At the very end of the Bible the invitation is still going out: "*The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come*" (**Revelation 22:17**). The Bride is the church. If people haven't heard, the answer Scripture gives is for us to go and tell them.

WHY THIS BELONGS IN A BOOK ABOUT HOPE. I've put a chapter on judgment in the middle of a book meant to comfort people, and I did it on purpose. The comfort of chapters 3 and 4 is for those who are in Christ. I'd be doing you no kindness if I let you think it applies to everyone no matter what they do with Him.

If you've read this far and you aren't sure where you stand, the invitation in **Revelation 22:17** is for you. The gates are open today.

Go deeper: Tough Verses, “All the nations gathered before Him,” at TheHereticalHorseman.com/hard-texts#matthew-25

CHAPTER 8: WHAT WE STILL DO

When the timeline I'd been taught came apart, some of the ordinary things Christians do started to look uncertain to me. I had always been told we take the Lord's Supper "until he comes." I had prayed "Your kingdom come" since I was a boy. I had been told the reason to share the gospel was that time was almost up. If He came, and the kingdom came, what was left of any of it?

I've heard from people who quit church over those questions. I think that's a mistake, and I think Scripture shows why. The Christians we have records from on the far side of AD 70 kept gathering, praying, and taking the meal.

THE CHURCH STILL GATHERS. Luke's summary of the earliest church is one sentence long. "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (**Acts 2:42**). There are four things in that list: teaching, fellowship, the meal, and prayer. None of them depended on the Temple, though the first believers in Jerusalem still prayed there (**Acts 2:46**, 3:1). They were the life of the new covenant people, and that covenant is the one we're in.

Chapter 2 said the city in Revelation is the Bride, the people of Christ. A city is a gathered people by definition. A Christian who believes he lives in the new Jerusalem and never meets with its citizens has misunderstood where he lives.

WHY WE STILL TAKE THE LORD'S SUPPER. This is the question with the sharpest edge, and it comes from one verse. Paul wrote, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (**1 Corinthians 11:26**). If He has come, some conclude, the meal is over.

I see why they say it. "Until he comes" does sound like an endpoint, and I won't pretend otherwise. I don't think it's the right conclusion, and my reasons come from the table itself.

When Jesus gave the cup, He said what it was. "*This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*" (**Luke 22:20**). The meal belongs to the new covenant. Hebrews calls that covenant eternal, speaking of "*the blood of the eternal covenant*" (**Hebrews 13:20**). A covenant that doesn't end doesn't lose its meal.

He also said what would happen to the meal. Before the cup, He told them, "*I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God*" (**Luke 22:16**). He didn't say the Passover meal would be abolished when the kingdom came. He said it would be fulfilled there. When something is fulfilled it comes into its full meaning.

Paul treats the meal as something that makes and shows the church's unity. "*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread*" (**1 Corinthians 10:16-17**). The church is still one body, and it still needs to say so at one table.

Passover itself helps me here. Israel didn't stop keeping Passover once they were out of Egypt. They kept it afterward, year after year, as the memorial of a rescue that was finished. Paul's churches took the Supper looking ahead to His coming. We take it looking back, the way Israel kept Passover after the exodus. We still proclaim His death. We aren't waiting anymore.

Jesus said one more thing that night. "*I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom*" (**Matthew 26:29**). I read that as a promise about this table, that when the kingdom came He would share it with His people. Others read it as a single feast at the end. I can't prove my reading from that verse alone, and I don't rest the case on it.

The churches we have records from after AD 70 kept taking the meal. Justin Martyr, writing in Rome around the middle of the second century, describes Christians gathering on Sunday, hearing the Scriptures read, praying, and sharing bread and a cup. Those Christians didn't hold my view of prophecy, and I'm not claiming them for it. I'm

pointing out that we have no record of a church after the Temple fell deciding the Supper had expired, and Paul never told anyone to stop.

WHY WE STILL PRAY "YOUR KINGDOM COME." Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (**Matthew 6:10**). When they first prayed those words, they were asking for the kingdom to arrive. "Come" is arrival language, and I think that's what they meant.

It did arrive, and I still pray it. When I pray those words now, I'm asking for what Isaiah promised in chapter 1, that the increase of His government would have no end. A kingdom that keeps increasing keeps arriving in new places. Jesus talked that way while He was still on earth. After He freed a man from a demon, the Pharisees accused Him, and He answered, "*if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*" (**Matthew 12:28**). The kingdom had arrived in that place, in that moment, in front of the men who were against it. It can arrive in a life, a household, or a town.

The next line of the prayer shows what we're asking for: His will done here the way it's done there. Anywhere His will isn't being done yet is a place to pray that line over.

Paul prayed this way and asked his churches to. Chapter 2 quoted him telling the Colossians they had already been transferred into the kingdom of God's Son. Three chapters later he asks the same people, "*pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word*" (**Colossians 4:3**). They were

in the kingdom, and they were still praying for it to reach further. We pray the same way. I'll admit this applies the disciples' words in a way that goes beyond what they first meant. I think it's faithful to them, because the kingdom they asked for is one that grows.

WHY WE STILL TELL PEOPLE. I was raised to share the gospel because the clock was running out. That reason is gone for me, and a better one has taken its place. Chapter 1 quoted Jesus sending the apostles out on the strength of authority He already had. He rules now, and people who don't know Him are living in His world without knowing their King.

Chapter 7 gave the reason in Paul's words: faith comes from hearing. Nobody is born knowing the gospel. Every generation has to be told, and the telling is ours to do. The deadline I was raised on did me no good anyway. It made me pushy and it made me give up on people. Knowing that Christ reigns and His kingdom grows makes me patient. I can plant something today that I won't see finished.

A NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE. If you're new to the fulfilled view and wondering what your week should look like, it should look like the Christian life has always looked. Go to church. Take the bread and the cup. Pray, including the prayer Jesus taught. Read your Bible. Love your neighbor, raise your kids in the faith, and tell people about Christ. None of it was cancelled. All of it rests on something finished, and I've found it's easier to do from there.

Go deeper: “They wanted a King to take back the land. He gave us a Kingdom to take back the world.” at TheHereticalHorseman.com/posts/king-vs-kingdom

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CHAPTER 9: THE VIEW FROM INSIDE THE KINGDOM

Everything up to now has been about what the Bible says happened. This chapter is about what I did with it, because what a man believes about the end decides what he does with his Monday.

My business was booming going into 2015. Then the rapture fever of the next three years got hold of me. I was in studies with pastors and men's group leaders, and I was being handed theories and predictions, and I pushed them on other people. The headlines looked daunting. Evil seemed to be everywhere. The wars and the signs were on my mind all the time, and fear was shutting me down. I wanted to withdraw. I stopped building. I just wanted to leave.

It cost me. It cost me relationships with friends, with family, and with employees. The business went flat and stayed flat until I got back to work after 2018.

I spent those thirty-eight years on the sidelines, wanting to escape my duties when I should have been living for Him. That ends now.

WHAT I SEE NOW. Today I see peace. I have surrendered control to Christ. I am the spiritual leader my wife always wanted me to be. We sit down as a family every week and go through

Scripture verse by verse, and I get to help them see how far what Christ did for us reaches, and the victory He won. Blessings are everywhere. There are still challenges, and there always will be. My eyes are on Him and off the news. They are on love and hospitality, where they used to be on fear. I am helping grow His kingdom, where I used to be trying to get out of a kingdom I didn't recognize.

I need to be fair here. My story proves nothing about what the Bible means. A man can find peace in a wrong idea, and the earlier chapters have to carry the argument, with the verses. Plenty of Christians who expect a future coming work hard, love their neighbors, and aren't hiding from anything. Many of them already say Christ reigns now. I am telling you what the escape view did to me, and I doubt I was the only one.

FEAR WAS NEVER THE ASSIGNMENT. Paul told Timothy, "*for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control*" (**2 Timothy 1:7**). The King James has "a sound mind" for that last word. Either way, fear is the one thing on the list we were not given.

Jesus said it to the disciples the night before the cross. "*In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world*" (**John 16:33**). He didn't tell them the trouble would stop. He told them who had already won.

That is why I don't believe we need to fear the events of today, or the people who live next door, whoever they are. Jesus named the second great commandment: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (**Matthew 22:39**). The apostles kept

adding one particular way to do it. Paul wrote, "*seek to show hospitality*" (**Romans 12:13**). Hebrews says, "*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers*" (**Hebrews 13:2**). Peter says to do it "*without grumbling*" (**1 Peter 4:9**). It's hard to set a table for a neighbor while you're packed and waiting to leave. It comes easier once you know you live in the King's city.

Chapter 2 showed that city with its gates open. The last page of the Bible gives the invitation that goes with them. "*The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'*" (**Revelation 22:17**). The Bride is the church, and that makes the invitation ours to give. We get to know God, be present with Him, glorify Him, and invite other people in through faith in Jesus Christ. I can't think of a better purpose. It is a winning message, and for years I carried a losing one.

WHAT I EXPECT. I trust that Christ will bring revival. I believe it is time for our voices to proclaim the good news of what He did, boldly and without fear.

I won't put a date on that. I spent three years passing along predictions, and I'm not going to hand you a new one with a happier ending. Chapter 1 gave you Isaiah's promise that His government keeps increasing. Scripture doesn't tell me how fast, or what next year looks like. I trust the King. I don't have His calendar.

WE DIE ONCE. Fear shut me down for three years. Chapter 7 quoted Hebrews, that we die once and after that comes judgment. Revelation names a second death, and it says who is safe from it. "*The*

one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death" (**Revelation 2:11**). "*Over such the second death has no power*" (**Revelation 20:6**). His people still die once. Twice is not appointed for them. A man who believes that can read the news without it running his house.

TO THE PASTOR. Some of you believe Christ reigns now and still expect everything I've said is finished to happen later. I'd say this to you with respect. Defend it. Go find where we are in the story, and don't settle for the words you were given at seminary. A pastor ought to have more questions than anybody in the room.

A pastor told me once that he was ignorant about the end times. He said he had no idea why he believed we were living in them, other than that it was what he had always believed. He had been sure of it for more than sixty years. Then he told me to keep asking questions, and I am going to.

Start with the chapters that tell us what time it is: Isaiah 65 and 66, and Revelation 21 and 22. Chapters 2 and 4 of this book walk through them. See whether the new heavens and new earth in those pages look like the end of the world or like the world you are living in.

If you find you taught it wrong, say so. It's okay. Some people will leave. Some will be mad. I think most will thank you for being human and for showing them you are still learning. Many people are waking up to this, and many have reached out to me. Some are guiding their congregations through it now.

WHERE CHANGE STARTS. I'm not going to say much about governments and politics. I'll say only that changes in our leaders start with His people leading through the chaos and carrying that winning message. Change starts in our hearts and our minds. Then it moves to our families, our communities, our cities and counties and states, our country, and the world.

It starts with love, and with wanting to produce what Paul called the fruit of the Spirit: "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (**Galatians 5:22-23**). The other kind of fruit is death. Which one we grow is a choice, and so is whether we keep looking away from what Scripture says.

I made the wrong choice for a long time. I'm done with the sidelines.

Go deeper: "My Story" at TheHereticalHorseman.com/my-story

CHAPTER 10: DOES HISTORY END?

Sooner or later someone asks me whether the world just goes on forever. If no prophecy is left to be fulfilled, does that mean the earth never ends, people keep being born and dying without limit, and nothing ever wraps up?

One man who left full preterism said this was among his reasons. He described it as a dogma of the view that history and childbearing can never, ever end. I don't hold that, and I want to say exactly what I do hold.

GOD CAN DO WHATEVER HE WANTS. God is in control of all things, and to Him be the glory. I don't say He can't end the world. He can judge it and leave a remnant, as He did in Noah's day. He allows earthquakes, floods, and asteroids. The earth could end in any number of ways, and He would be within His rights in every one of them. My view puts no limit on what God may do.

What I've looked for and haven't found is a verse that promises the end of humanity. The claim I'm making is that narrow. I'm talking about what Scripture predicts. What God is able to do is a different question, and the answer to that one is anything He pleases.

WHAT SCRIPTURE DOES SAY ABOUT THE FUTURE. The verses I can find that speak about the earth's future talk about things that continue. After the flood the LORD said in His heart, "*While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease*" (**Genesis 8:22**). The Preacher wrote, "*A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever*" (**Ecclesiastes 1:4**). The psalmist said God "*set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved*" (**Psalm 104:5**).

Chapter 1 quoted the promises about the kingdom: no end to its increase, an everlasting dominion, glory in the church through all generations. Paul's line has generations in it, one after another, and Isaiah and Daniel speak of a rule that does not stop. Chapter 2 pointed out that the city's gates stay open and the nations keep coming in to be healed. That's a picture of history continuing under Christ's reign.

I'll be careful with those Old Testament verses. "Forever" in Hebrew poetry doesn't always mean endless time, and a futurist can fairly say that **Genesis 8:22** begins with "while the earth remains," which leaves room for a day when it doesn't. I grant that. I'm not claiming these verses prove the earth can never end. I'm saying they're what the Bible says when it looks ahead, and none of them announces a last generation.

THE VERSES THAT SOUND LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD. A futurist will answer with a list of his own, and it's a serious list. "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass*

away" (**Matthew 24:35**). "*The heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved*" (**2 Peter 3:10**). In John's vision, "*earth and sky fled away*" from the one on the throne (**Revelation 20:11**).

Peter's chapter has two sentences I have to face. He compares the fire to come with the flood, when "*the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished*" (**2 Peter 3:6**), and the flood was no figure of speech. He also says, "*with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you*" (**3:8-9**). Many read that as Peter stretching the timetable. I read it as Peter telling scoffers in his own day that the Lord's patience was mercy toward his readers, and he goes on to tell those same readers they were "*waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God*" (**3:12**). That is a reading. The other one is fair, and these are the best verses the long-delay view has.

I read those as the prophets' way of describing the fall of a world order, and I read them that way because the prophets used the same words for events we can date. Isaiah wrote an oracle about Babylon and said, "*the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light*" (**Isaiah 13:10**). Babylon fell to the Medes, as that chapter says it would (**13:17**). The stars kept shining. Of Edom he wrote, "*All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like*

a scroll," and then he named the target: "*behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom*" (**34:4-5**). Edom is gone. The sky is still up.

When Jesus and Peter and John use that language, I hear them speaking the way Isaiah spoke. The heaven and earth that passed away was the old covenant world with the Temple at its center. Each of those verses deserves more than a paragraph. I've written about them at length elsewhere. Folks who know their Bibles land in different places here, and I'd rather tell you that than pretend the question is closed.

WHAT MY VIEW COSTS. There's a price to holding this, and it's fair to name it. If generations go on, people keep dying, and every one of them is judged at death, as chapter 7 said. That puts Jesus' words about "all who are in the tombs" back in front of me, because there are a great many tombs now that weren't there in AD 70. Chapter 11 faces that directly.

There's another cost. A Christian who believes the world will end soon has a kind of urgency that's hard to replace, and a Christian who believes history may run on for thousands of years can drift into thinking nothing is pressing. Scripture corrects that without help from a doomsday clock. Your life is short whether or not the world's is. James says, "*you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes*" (**James 4:14**). Each of us has one life and then stands before God. No one needs the planet to end to feel that pressing.

There's a third cost, and Jesus Himself supplies it. He told the Sadducees, "*The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore*" (**Luke 20:34-36**). I believe the age He called "that age" arrived in AD 70, and people in it still marry and still die. A critic will say an age is a time everyone in it shares. My answer is the phrase "and to the resurrection from the dead." The Sadducees asked about eight people who had died, and I take Jesus to be describing those who reach that age by being raised from the dead. The living still marry and still die, and He held both together when He told Martha, "*Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die*" (**John 11:25-26**). That is a reading. It doesn't close the gap all the way.

HOW TO LIVE WITH AN OPEN FUTURE. I've come to like not knowing. For most of my life I thought I knew roughly how the story ended and about when, and I was wrong. Now I know who reigns, and I know His kingdom doesn't end, and I don't know the rest.

That changes how a person builds. If you think the house is coming down next year, you don't plant trees. If you think your great-grandchildren may live here, you do. I want to be the kind of Christian who plants trees. I'd like to leave a church, a family, and a body of work that are still useful a

hundred years from now, and I think that's a better way to honor a King whose government only increases.

If God ends the world tomorrow, He'll be right to, and I'll have no complaint. If He lets it run for another fifty thousand years, the kingdom will be that much larger. I'm at peace with both. What I won't do is tell you that a verse promises one or the other when I can't find it.

Go deeper: Tough Verses, "If everything was fulfilled, history can never end," at TheHereticalHorseman.com/hard-texts#history-end

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CHAPTER 11: WHERE WE DON’T ALL AGREE

I promised in chapter 1 that this book would have an honest chapter. This is it. Every view of the last things has texts that fit it easily and texts that don’t, and a teacher who only shows you the easy ones is selling something.

These are the places where I feel my view most exposed. They aren’t the only ones. Chapter 4 faces “the last enemy” and “death shall be no more.” Chapter 6 faces the empty tomb. Chapter 10 faces Peter’s fire and Jesus’ words about an age with no marrying and no dying. I haven’t settled the thousand years of Revelation 20 in this book, and I won’t say I have. I’ll state each objection as strongly as I can, tell you how I answer it, and tell you how much weight I think my answer will bear.

THE CHURCH HAS NOT READ IT THIS WAY. I’ll start with the heaviest one. No church father taught what I believe. The creeds confess a future coming, a future resurrection, and a future judgment. The view in this book, as a complete system, can be traced to the nineteenth century, and as a movement to the 1970s. I’m asking you to consider that the church misread the timing of these texts for a very long time, and that is a great deal to ask.

I can’t argue that weight away, and I’ve stopped trying. What I can say is narrower. Reading the siege and tribulation parts of Jesus’ Olivet prophecy as fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem is old and was once common. Eusebius, the church historian of the fourth century, read those parts that way (Church History 3.7). He still looked for a coming of Christ in the future. What the early church didn’t do was connect the resurrection texts to that same event. The creeds also quote the promises of His coming and leave out the time statements attached to them.

That’s my answer, and I know it isn’t a knockout. A reading that almost nobody held for eighteen centuries ought to make the person who holds it humble. I would rather carry that burden than set aside the time statements of Jesus and the apostles. You’ll have to decide which burden you’d rather carry.

“ALL WHO ARE IN THE TOMBS.” Jesus said, “*an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out*” (**John 5:28-29**). Chapter 5 placed that at the end of the age. The objection is simple. Billions of people have died since AD 70. If “all who are in the tombs” were raised then, what about everyone since?

This is the strongest objection to my system as a system, and I feel it. My answer has two parts. The resurrection Jesus spoke of was the raising of the dead who were waiting when He came, the event I believe Daniel dated. Since then those who die in the Lord don’t wait, as chapter 3 argued from “from now on” in **Revelation 14:13**. Every person

is judged at death, as chapter 7 argued. On my reading, Jesus' words were completely fulfilled for everyone they described at the time, and what they opened has stayed open.

A critic will say I've turned one great public event into an unseen event followed by a long series of private ones. That's a fair description of what I believe, and I can see why it sounds thin next to the picture of graves opening. I hold it because of the dates I find in Jesus and Daniel. If those dates could fairly be read another way, this would be the first thing I'd give up.

"THE RESURRECTION HAS ALREADY HAPPENED." Paul warned Timothy about two men "*who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some*" (**2 Timothy 2:17-18**). Nearly every critic brings this verse, and it's the closest thing in the Bible to a sentence aimed at me.

The only thing Paul reports about their teaching is its timing. They said it had already happened. Paul wrote that in the middle 60s, with the Temple still standing. On my reading the resurrection was still a few years off, so those men were wrong when they said it, and Paul was right to call it a swerve. A statement about timing can be false in one decade and true in a later one.

The other reading is serious. It says these men had turned the resurrection into a purely inward, spiritual experience and denied any resurrection still to come, and that anyone who places the resurrection in the past stands where they stood.

Teachers like that did exist in the next century. If that's what Paul was condemning, the verse lands on me. I don't think it is, because Paul names their error as "already" and nothing more. I can't prove what they taught beyond that word, and neither can my critics.

THE LIVING WHO WERE CHANGED. Chapter 6 ended on this one. Paul said the living would be changed "*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet*" (**1 Corinthians 15:52**), and that "*this mortal body must put on immortality*" (**15:53**). Christians who were alive in AD 70 went on living ordinary lives and then died. Nothing visible happened to their bodies.

I gave my reading in chapter 6. The trumpet was one event for two groups. The dead were raised, and the living were changed by being taken out from under the covenant that gave death its sting. Each of them put on the building from God when his own tent came down. I draw that from Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5. Many readers take the building from God in that chapter to be the body given at a resurrection still to come, and on that reading my answer here falls.

It's the weakest joint in my view, and I say so without being pushed. Anyone reading 1 Corinthians 15 straight through sees one sudden bodily change for the dead and the living together. I don't find a break in Paul's sentence that separates them. I get my reading by bringing in what Paul wrote elsewhere, and I know that's what I'm doing.

WITH CHRIST, AND STILL WAITING. Chapter 3 said the first believers who died were with Christ and were also still waiting to rise. The verses that are hardest for that are the ones I quoted for the first half. "*To depart and be with Christ*" (**Philippians 1:23**) and "*at home with the Lord*" (**2 Corinthians 5:8**) sound like nothing was left to wait for. Hebrews tells its readers they had come to "*the spirits of the righteous made perfect*" (**Hebrews 12:23**), which sounds as though the righteous dead were already perfected before the Temple fell.

My answer is that the same writers say both things. Paul, who wanted to depart and be with Christ, also called the dead in Christ asleep and said they would rise. Hebrews, one chapter before, says the faithful dead would not be made perfect apart from his readers (**11:40**), and a few verses after, says they were "receiving" the kingdom (**12:28**). I take "you have come" as an arrival that was under way. That's a soft spot, and I'd rather show it to you than have you find it.

I also can't tell you where the first-century dead in Christ were while they waited. Scripture says they were with Him, and it says they waited. It doesn't draw the map.

The turn itself rests on less than I'd like. I date the end of the waiting from "from now on" in **Revelation 14:13**. That verse says the blessed dead "rest from their labors," and rest is the same word John uses for the souls who were told to wait. It doesn't say the waiting is over. I get that mainly from what follows. The next thing John sees is the

harvest of the earth (**14:14-16**), and a blessing on the dead placed right before the harvest reads to me like the turn. I get it second from the missing "until." A critic will say "from now on" is comfort for believers about to die under the beast (**14:9-12**) and says nothing about the state of the dead. That reading is fair, and I can't rule it out from the verse alone.

"THIS JESUS WILL COME IN THE SAME WAY." The angels told the disciples at the ascension, "*This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*" (**Acts 1:11**). They had watched Him go with their eyes. The natural sense is that He'd come back the same way, visibly and in person.

I don't treat this as an easy verse. My answer is that He left in a cloud (**1:9**) and that Jesus Himself said He would come in clouds within that generation, using the prophets' language for God coming in judgment. That's a defensible reading. It isn't a refutation of the other one, and I don't rest my case on it. I rest it on the time statements taken together.

THE PARTIAL PRETERIST. Many careful Christians agree with me about a great deal and stop one step short. They read most of Jesus' prophecy on the Mount of Olives and most of Revelation as fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem. Some of them read the whole of Matthew 24 that way, and others see Jesus turn to the end of history at verse 36. All of them still look for a future

coming, a future resurrection, and a future judgment. That view is called partial preterism, and it's the closest neighbor I have.

The partial preterist has real advantages. He stands with the creeds. He can take **Acts 1:11** and "all who are in the tombs" just the way they sound. He doesn't have to explain where the first-century dead waited or what happened to the living at the trumpet. If you find his position more convincing than mine, you're in good company.

I couldn't stay there, for three reasons from the text. Daniel is told about a time of trouble "*such as never has been,*" then about the dead awaking, and then is told when "*all these things would be finished*" (**Daniel 12:1-2, 7**). The tribulation and the resurrection are in one answer with one end point. Jesus says the Son of Man will send His angels with a trumpet to gather His elect (**Matthew 24:31**), and Paul writes to the Thessalonians about "*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him*" (**2 Thessalonians 2:1**). I read that gathering as the same one Paul describes when the dead in Christ rise and the living are caught up with them (**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**). Jesus says He will come with His angels and "*repay each person according to what he has done,*" and in the next sentence that some standing there would live to see it (**Matthew 16:27-28**). A coming that repays each person sounds like the judgment, and I read the next sentence as putting it inside a lifetime. Many readers take that next sentence as the transfiguration, which three of the men standing

there saw six days later. I don't, because "will not taste death" is a strange thing to say about the following week. It is an old reading and a fair one.

The partial preterist trades one difficulty for another. He makes gaps, and he splits the time texts away from the coming and the judgment they're attached to. That leaves him with a coming at Bethlehem, a coming in AD 70, and a third coming still ahead. It takes the meaning out of texts that belong together. I've looked for the verse that tells him where to make the cut, and I can't find it.

The partial preterist answers each of those. Some agree that Daniel 12 and the gathering of **Matthew 24:31** belong to AD 70 and read them as pictures of the church being formed, with the resurrection of the dead still ahead. On Matthew 16 some put the repayment at the end of history and the next sentence in the first century. I've read the answers, and they didn't hold me. They do hold people I respect.

WHAT TO DO WITH A LIST LIKE THIS. You may be wondering why I'd hold a view with this many soft spots. The answer is that every view has a list like this, and I think the futurist's list is longer and harder. He has to explain "*this generation*" (**Matthew 24:34**), "*some standing here*" (**Matthew 16:28**), "*the time is near*" (**Revelation 1:3**), "*the end of all things is at hand*" (**1 Peter 4:7**), and many more, and he has to explain them all in the same direction, away from what they seem to say. I'd rather have trouble with a handful of texts about how it happened than

with that many about when. The partial preterist doesn't carry that whole list, and it's only fair to say so. He keeps most of the time statements where they are. He still has things to explain. Paul wrote "*we who are alive*" (**1 Thessalonians 4:15**) and "*we shall not all sleep*" (**1 Corinthians 15:51**) as a man who expected to see it, though an expectation isn't a guarantee. He also has to say why the repayment in **Matthew 16:27** and the awaking in **Daniel 12:2** are a different kind of event from the verses beside them.

I can't set aside the whole story Scripture tells in favor of a few verses that sound like they might not fit. It all leads up to one thing. The Old Testament ties everything together and points to it. The New Testament writers expected it, and their expectation grows more urgent the closer they get to AD 70. The verses on this list are argued over by a great many people, and each one has several possible meanings. The fair way to handle a verse like that is to weigh it against the verses that speak to the same subject and take the meaning that fits them best. That's what I've done in this book. When I weigh the time statements, the parables, the nearness the apostles wrote with, the order of events, the latter days prophecies, and even the new heavens and new earth chapters, I believe my view leaves fewer verses in dispute than any other view of the last things. I believe preterism is the most faithful reading of Scripture, mainly because I found it by reading, before I knew there was a label for it.

That’s a judgment call, and you’re free to make it differently. Some of the best Christians I know look at the same two lists and stay where they are. I don’t think they’re fools, and I hope they don’t think I’ve left the faith. We confess the same Christ, crucified for our sins and raised on the third day. I can live with being wrong about how the signs line up. I’ve been wrong about that before. Being wrong about the resurrection is heavier, and Paul’s words to Timothy are the reason I’ve tested this as hard as I have.

Go deeper: “The Tough Verses, one at a time” at TheHereticalHorseman.com/hard-texts

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CHAPTER 12: HOW TO READ FOR YOURSELF

I don’t want you to believe any of this because I said it. I spent thirty-eight years believing a system because the people I trusted taught it to me, and they were sincere, and they were wrong about a great deal. If you swap their authority for mine, you’ve changed teachers and learned nothing.

Luke praised the people of the synagogue in Berea for the way they listened to Paul. “*They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so*” (**Acts 17:11**). They were eager, and they checked. They did both with an apostle standing in front of them. You should do at least that much with me.

This chapter is the short version of how I read prophecy now. None of it takes a degree. It takes a Bible and patience.

ASK WHO IS BEING SPOKEN TO. Every book of the Bible was written by someone, to someone, at some time. That sounds too obvious to say, and it’s the thing I ignored for most of my life. I read “you” in the Gospels and the letters as though it meant me.

Try it with one verse. Jesus said, “*when you see the abomination of desolation… then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains*” (**Matthew**

24:15-16). I don't live in Judea. The people He was talking to did. Once I asked who "you" was, half the chapter came into focus.

The Bible was written for us. Paul says so: "*whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction*" (**Romans 15:4**). It was not written to us, and keeping those two words apart will save you from a lot of mistakes. A letter to the church at Corinth is God's word for me. To hear it rightly I first have to hear it as a Corinthian would have.

TAKE THE TIME WORDS AT FACE VALUE. When the New Testament says something is near, soon, or at hand, read it the way you'd read those words anywhere else. If a friend writes that he'll be there shortly, you don't expect him in two thousand years.

I was taught a set of explanations for why those words don't mean what they say. God's time isn't our time. Soon means suddenly. Near means near in importance. The first of those has a verse behind it, and I owe it more than a shrug. Peter wrote, "*with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*" (**2 Peter 3:8**). I read him as saying the Lord's patience is mercy, in a letter that still tells its readers they are waiting for the day (**3:12**). Others read it as a rule for every "near" in the New Testament. Chapter 10 says more. Each explanation sounded reasonable alone. The trouble is how many times you have to use them. A reading that needs the same kind of excuse over and over, always pushing in the same direction, is a reading that should be questioned.

I'll add a caution from my own mistakes. A single word seldom settles anything. I've leaned too hard on one Greek word or one verb tense before and had to take it back. The case for the timing rests on the whole collection of time statements taken together, and it's strongest where the statement can be checked, such as Jesus saying the Temple would fall within a generation.

LET THE OLD TESTAMENT EXPLAIN THE NEW. Most of the strange pictures in New Testament prophecy aren't new. The sun going dark, stars falling, the Lord riding on a cloud, a city called Sodom, a beast from the sea: these come from the prophets, and the prophets used them for the rise and fall of kingdoms in ordinary history.

Isaiah wrote, "*Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt*" (**Isaiah 19:1**). Nobody in Egypt saw the Lord on a cloud. What they got was civil war and a harsh ruler, as the next verses say. Coming on a cloud was how a prophet said that God was arriving to judge a nation. When Jesus tells the council they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds (**Matthew 26:64**, where the "you" is plural in the Greek), He's speaking as one of Israel's prophets to men who were raised on the prophets.

Before I decide what a symbol means, I look in four places, in this order. I look at what the passage itself says about it. I look at how the same book uses it elsewhere. I look for where it appears in the Old Testament. I ask what job it does in the

story being told. Most of the time the Bible has already told me what its own pictures mean, and I didn't need a newspaper.

KNOW HOW SURE YOU ARE. This one took me longest to learn. Not every claim I make deserves the same confidence, and I try to sort them before I open my mouth.

Some things the text says outright. "*This generation will not pass away until all these things take place*" (**Matthew 24:34**) is a sentence in the Bible. Some things follow closely from what the text says, the way the Temple's fall in AD 70 follows from Jesus' words and the historical record. Some things are readings, where I think I'm right and I know careful people disagree. Much of chapters 5 and 6 belongs there. Some things are guesses, and I try to leave those out or label them.

When you listen to any teacher, me included, ask which kind of claim you're hearing. Be wary of anyone who delivers a reading with the confidence that belongs to a quotation. Be most wary when the word "every" or "all" or "never" shows up. I've had to correct myself on that more than once.

CHECK THE QUOTATION. Open the verse. Read the verses before and after it. Make sure the words in quotation marks are in your Bible. Make sure the verse is about what the teacher says it's about. You'd be surprised how often a famous proof text turns out to be about something else when you read the paragraph it lives in. I've tried

to quote the ESV accurately throughout this book and give you the references so you can do this to me.

The same goes for history. When someone says Josephus recorded this or the church fathers taught that, ask where. A real quotation has a book and a section number. I've been corrected on details I repeated without checking, and I'm grateful to the people who caught them.

HOLD THE GOSPEL TIGHTLY AND THE TIMELINE LOOSELY. The center of the Christian faith is not a view of the last things. Paul said what he handed on "as of first importance," namely "*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*" (**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**). A person can be wrong about the signs and the sequence and be right with God. I was, for thirty-eight years. The resurrection is weightier, as Paul's warning to Timothy shows, and that's why chapter 11 exists.

Read with other Christians, including ones who disagree with you. Read the people who think I'm wrong. If my view can't survive your reading its critics, it doesn't deserve to survive.

KEEP TESTING IT. I encourage you to test these things for yourself. I have much more free material on many of the subjects in this book, and a whole section devoted to answering the tough verses. The home page shows where I'd start and the order I'd read in. You can find all of it at www.TheHereticalHorseman.com.

WHAT NOW? This book started with that question. My answer, after everything, is simple enough to say in a breath. Christ reigns. His kingdom is here, and it grows. If you belong to Him, death will take you home to Him. Until then you have a church to belong to, a table to come to, a prayer to pray, and neighbors who need to hear. You don’t have to watch the sky. You can get on with living as a citizen of a kingdom that cannot be shaken (**Hebrews 12:28**).