

Paul's Apocalyptic Interpretation of Reality: A Case Study Analysis of Ephesians 1:15–23

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Abstract

This journal article builds on the work of an earlier essay (Lioy 2014a) to undertake a case study analysis of one representative passage in Paul's writings, through the prism of its apocalyptic backdrop. The major claim is that the apostle's eschatological worldview exercised a controlling influence on his writings, both directly and indirectly. The corresponding goal is to validate the preceding assertion by exploring the apostle's end-time interpretation of reality in Ephesians 1:15–23.

1. Introduction

In an earlier essay (Lioy 2014a), I maintained that new creation theology was a defining characteristic in Paul's letters, and 2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2 was analysed as a representative passage to demonstrate this assertion. One could also examine the apostle's writings through the comparable prism of its apocalyptic backdrop. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Pearsall 2014), the adjective 'apocalyptic' is derived from the Greek noun *apokalypsis*, which is usually translated 'revelation', 'disclosure', or 'unveiling' (cf.

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1 Cor 1:7; Gal 1:12; Rev 1:1). Pitre (2013:23–4) identifies three interrelated categories of thought associated with the preceding terms: (1) a 'genre of literature in existence' from around 250 BC to AD 250; (2) a 'social and religious worldview' prevalent during this general period; and (3) a preoccupation with the 'catalysmic end of the cosmos'.

Concerning the apocalyptic genre, Collins (1992b:283) defines it as 'revelatory literature' that has a 'narrative framework' and in which a 'revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient'. Collins additionally elucidates that 'over several hundred years', the preceding literary category neither 'remained static' nor was 'consistently uniform'. De Boer (2002:22) clarifies that the eschatological horizon 'encompasses' both the 'present age' and the 'one to come'. Aune, Geddert, and Evans (2000:46) advance the discussion by explaining that an apocalyptic interpretation of reality focuses on the Creator's 'imminent intervention into human history'. God does so in a 'decisive manner' to rescue the righteous remnant and 'punish their enemies'. The process includes 'destroying the existing fallen cosmic order' and 'restoring or recreating the cosmos in its original pristine perfection'.

The above outlook reflects the 'eschatological expectation characteristic of early Jewish and early Christian apocalypses' (Aune, Geddert, and Evans 2000:46). Collins (2000:43) points out that even though the 'New Testament only contains one apocalypse, the book of Revelation', an 'apocalyptic worldview' was 'much more widespread' among the New Testament writers. As de Boer (2002:33) observes, they believed that from 'beginning to end', the 'whole of God's saving activity' in the Messiah was 'apocalyptic'. It stands to reason, then, that the multivalent nucleus of Paul's teaching was situated against an end-time scenario, and that taking the latter into account is a useful heuristic tool to clarify

and illumine the metanarrative of his theological discourse (cf. Aune 1993a:30; Branick 1985:664; Bronson 1964:287; Collins 1992a:290; Keck 1984:241).² By way of example, in his letters the apostle directed believers not to pattern their behaviour after the beliefs, morals, and values of this present, depraved era (cf. Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:6, 8; 3:18; Gal 1:4; Eph 2:2; 1 Tim 6:17; 2 Tim 4:10).³

In keeping with the preceding observations, the major claim of this journal article is that Paul's eschatological worldview exercised a controlling influence on his writings, both directly and indirectly. This includes, as the analysis of Schreiner (2013:579) demonstrates, the apostle's view of 'salvation, redemption, justification, reconciliation, adoption, triumph over evil powers', and other categories of thought. The corresponding goal is to validate the latter assertion by exploring Paul's apocalyptic interpretation of reality in the following representative passage in his letters: Ephesians 1:15–23.⁴ The choice of

² For a deliberation of the apocalyptic character of Paul's theology, cf. Beale (2011:249–316); Beker (1982:29–53; 1990:19–36, 61–103; 2000:135–81); Gaventa (2007:79–82, 137–47); Guthrie (1981:803–10, 828–40, 856–63, 879–81, 890–1); Ladd (1997:402–3, 595–614); Macky (1998:1–14); Marshall (2004:421–60); Martyn (1997:85–156); Ridderbos (1997:29–32); Schreiner (2001:31–4, 55–60, 78–85; 2013:543–80); Vos (2000:299–304); Wenham (1995:321–6); Wright (1992:2–7).

³ Admittedly, the prevailing view within academia is that Paul wrote seven of the thirteen letters attributed to him (i.e. Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon). Supposedly, the remaining six (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, and Titus) were authored by an unnamed admirer and imitator of the apostle. On the one hand, in the biblical world, pseudonymous writing was common; yet, on the other hand, the unique literary features found in the disputed Pauline letters may be due to their distinctive purposes and to the timing and conditions of their writing. Furthermore, numerous early Christian writers unanimously ascribed these epistles to Paul. For these reasons, it is sensible to affirm the traditional view that the apostle wrote all thirteen letters attributed to him (cf. Carson, Moo, and Morris 1992:231–5; deSilva 2004:685–9; Gundry 2012:384–7).

⁴ Due to the limitations of space in this essay, only one of numerous passages within the Pauline corpus is the focus of the case study analysis appearing in section 4;

this text is motivated, in part, by the recognition that, as stated by Barth (1986:170), it focuses attention on the 'political and cosmic relevance' of the Son's 'resurrection', both for the present age and for the coming one. Specifically, his triumph over the grave establishes a 'new and good order' over the 'whole universe'.

The above perspective has the advantage of accommodating—rather than clashing with or marginalising—an array of corresponding theological views found within the Pauline corpus.⁵ For example, in keeping with my own confessional Lutheran tradition, Paul's apocalyptic interpretation of reality mirrors the important distinction Lutherans make between law (which was especially central during the era of the old covenant) and gospel (which is the premier expression of God's grace in the era of the new covenant; cf. John 1:14–17; Bayer 2003:58–66; 2007:71–74; Forde 1997:23–48; Mueller 1934:44–7). Indeed, Bayer (2007:30) clarifies that 'for Luther an apocalyptic understanding of history, time, and existence is central'.

A short synopsis of two Pauline passages helps to illustrate the foregoing introductory remarks. To recap the analysis put forward in Lioy (2014a:68–79), Paul's apocalyptic interpretation of reality is

nonetheless, for the sake of argument, the remainder of the discourse in section 1.0 illustrates the validity of the journal article's major claim by providing a short synopsis of the apostle's eschatological view found in two other representative passages.

⁵ Beker (1990:19) affirms that 'Jewish apocalyptic motifs dominate Paul's thought'. Furthermore, Beker (2000:135) maintains that the 'coherent center of Paul's gospel is constituted by the apocalyptic interpretation of the Christ-event', namely, the Messiah's 'death and resurrection' (p. 148); nonetheless, Beker's latter claim seems too sweeping, for as Branick (1985:675) surmises, 'what Paul's apocalyptic means ... remains an open field of theological reflection'. More generally, there currently is no scholarly agreement regarding a possible overarching theme or theological nucleus to Paul's writings. For a candid assessment of the prominent, representative views, cf. Thielman 2005:219–33.

brought into sharp relief in 2 Corinthians 5:17–19. Specifically, the believers’ spiritual union with the Saviour results in their becoming a ‘new creation’ (v. 17).⁶ The implication is that when repentant sinners trust in the Son, they are regenerated. God brings about this inner recreating of the believers’ fallen nature. Indeed, he is the sole author of this second creation, just as he was of the first (v. 18). Furthermore, with the advent of the Messiah, a new era has begun in which the conversion of individual believers is part of God’s larger plan to bring about the renewal of the entire universe, concluding with the new heavens and new earth (cf. Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1). Paul responded to this profound display of God’s mercy by becoming a minister of reconciliation. This consisted of announcing to the world that the Son’s redemptive work made it possible for the lost to be forgiven of their trespasses and restored in their relationship with the Father (2 Cor 5:19).

The analysis appearing in Lioy (2011:128–42) dealing with Romans 5:12–21 also indicates how heavily it was influenced by Paul’s salvation-historical metanarrative. In particular, he declared that in the primordial garden, Adam introduced sin and death into the world by transgressing God’s command. All human beings, as descendants of Adam, are under the dominion of sin and death. In order for God’s redemptive plan and salvific promises to be fulfilled, a new humanity is necessary, starting with a new (or second) Adam. He is none other than the Lord Jesus, the suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:13–53:12. According to Paul, whereas Adam introduced the old era of death, the Messiah introduced the new era of resurrection and eternal life (cf. 1 Cor 15:21–22). At the Saviour’s Second Advent, the present age with its evil and futility will end and a new age of life and joy will blossom (cf. Rom

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from scripture are taken from the 2011 NIV.

8:18–25; Gal 1:14). Even now, the new epoch has appeared, for the Son's resurrection has made the believers' resurrection a reality (cf. Rom 1:4). Indeed, Jesus' resurrection signals that the end-time resurrection promised in Ezekiel 37 has arrived.

An examination of the above-mentioned passages indicates that, as Schreiner (2013:543) infers, an 'already but not yet' 'tension characterizes Paul's thought', that is, one involving an inaugurated or partially realised eschatology. After all, believers right now are simultaneously saints and sinners (in Latin, *simul justus et peccator*). Moreover, they still die and await a future resurrection (cf. Bayer 2007:202–3; Marshall 2004:459–60; McGrath 1993:195). While Jesus' followers have not yet been physically resurrected as a result of trusting in him, Romans 8 reveals that they wait in eager anticipation for the arrival of that future day when their redemption is fully completed (cf. Lioy 2011:142–51). In the interim, with the Son exalted to the right hand of the Father, believers have the abiding presence and power of the life-giving Spirit. In turn, he guarantees that the physical resurrection of believers will occur in the future (cf. Rom 8:21–25; 2 Cor 1:21–22; Eph 1:13–14). By virtue of belonging to the second Adam, believers can rest assured that they will triumph over death on the last day. Then death, as the last enemy, will be destroyed (cf. 1 Cor 15:26; Lioy 2011:152–68).

2. Paul's Apocalyptic View of Reality against the Backdrop of Diverse Cultural Contexts

Before dealing with the diverse cultural contexts prevalent in Paul's day, it is important to articulate the scope and substance of his apocalyptic view of reality. As illustrated in the previous section and dealt with at length in the following section, this end-time perspective formed the foundation and superstructure for the apostle's writings. The

consummation of the ages also provided the starting point, trajectory, and end point for his thinking. Longnecker (2002:89), in his overview of current ‘scholarly interest’ in ‘Paul’s epistolary discourse’, calls attention to the ‘narrative features’ of the apostle’s ‘theology’, along with his ‘symbolic universe’ (p. 93), ‘thought world’, ‘worldview’, and the like. These sorts of referents denote the presuppositions that formed the basis of Paul’s apocalyptic ‘beliefs and convictions’ about reality. In turn, the apostle articulated his theological views by utilising various literary genres found within his writings.⁷

In this essay, I operate under the supposition that five key premises arise from Paul’s eschatological mindset, and form the building blocks of his narrative discourse, as follows:

1. Since the dawn of time, the forces of darkness (i.e. Satan, sin, and death) have threatened to undermine the cosmic order, including humankind.
2. The Father has triumphed over these malevolent entities through his Son’s redemptive work on the cross.
3. Believers, through their baptismal union with the divine-human Son, are co-participants in his victory won at Calvary.

⁷ Paul communicated his understanding of the drama of salvation-history using a variety of conventional literary forms, including the following: (1) blessings and doxologies (e.g. liturgical prayers); (2) creeds (i.e. confessions of faith or formal statements of belief); (3) hymns and poetry (i.e. songs of praise); (4) vice-and-virtue lists (which were not meant to be systematic or exhaustive); (5) household codes (i.e. lists of duties within the context of household relationships; e.g. between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves); and (6) chiasm (i.e. reverse parallelism for rhetorical effect theological emphasis). For an overview of these multifarious narrative techniques, cf. Brown (1997:409–21); Gray (2012); Klauck 2006:299–354; Matthews (1992:290–3); O’Brien (1993:550–3); Stowers (1986); Weima (2000:640–4).

4. Because the Son reigns supreme over every aspect of the believers' life, all their thoughts, feelings, and actions must be submitted to his rule.
5. Believers are a foretaste, down payment, and guarantee of the Father fulfilling his promise to reclaim and restore the entire created realm, all of which will be finalised at the second advent of his Son.

In keeping with observations made in the first section of this essay, along with those appearing in Lioy (2014a:59), the apocalyptic metanarrative found within Paul's letters did not arise in isolation; rather, it shows strong affinities with the eschatological literature written during the period of Second Temple Judaism.⁸ The unmistakable consequence is that the apostle's thinking and reasoning were firmly rooted within mainstream Jewish thought. Specifically, in the Old Testament, the Lord declared through his prophets that he would enact a new covenant in which his people would be given the desire and ability to keep his law (cf. Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–27). The prophets also pointed to the day when God would bring to pass the universal blessing promised to Abraham (cf. Pss 22:27; 47:1–9; 72:17; 86:9; 96:1–13). The covenantal mercies pledged to David would also include Gentiles (cf. Isa 55:3–5; cf. Lioy 2011:233–7).

To summarise the discourse found in Lioy (2014a:59–68), in the first century AD the Jews still awaited the fulfilment of God's saving promises, the coming of his kingdom, and the worldwide blessing that was pledged to Abraham. Some religious factions in Judah, such as the

⁸ For a synopsis of the background information from relevant Old Testament passages and extra-canonical Jewish writings, cf. Lioy 2014:59–68. Also, for a listing of representative scholarly sources having pertinent background information, cf. the entries contained in fn. 8 (pp. 59–60).

Pharisees and the Qumran community, devoted themselves tirelessly to keeping the Mosaic Law, presumably to usher in the fulfilment of what God promised long ago to Israel. The burning hope was for a day when the Romans (or whoever the oppressor might be at the time) would be ousted, giving God's chosen people complete control of the Promised Land, Jerusalem, and its temple.

In stepping back from the preceding observations, it is clarifying to recognise that the Spirit enabled Paul to move beyond the distorted convictions of the religious elite of his day and view the created order through a set of Christocentric and Christotelic lenses. Regarding the latter, Wright (2013:46) opines that while Paul 'remained a deeply Jewish theologian', he 'rethought and reworked every aspect of his native Jewish theology' as a result of his encounter with the risen Saviour. Accordingly, in the apostle's evangelistic outreach to Jews and Gentiles, he taught that the new creation had dawned and a new Israel of God had been formed (cf. Gal 6:15–16).⁹ In this new era of redemptive history, repentant, believing Gentiles are incorporated into the people of God and made fellow citizens with believing Jews in his kingdom (cf. Eph 2:13; 3:6; Lioy 2010:97–100). Such a unity has occurred because God's saving promises to Abraham are even now becoming a reality.

⁹ Galatians 6:16 contains a closing benediction, in which the referent of the Greek phrase *Israél tou theou* ('Israel of God') remains debated. One option is to take the preceding *kaí* as a simple connective meaning 'and', so that the corresponding phrase specifically refers to Jewish believers (in contrast to Gentile Christians). A second option interprets *kaí* as functioning epexegetically (i.e. in an explanatory way) and carrying the meaning 'even' or 'that is'. In this case, *Israél tou theou* denotes the newly constituted people of God, which includes both regenerate Jews and Gentiles. Given Paul's remarks in 4:26–28 and 6:15, the second option has stronger contextual support (cf. Pss 125:5; 128:6; Rom 2:29; Phil 3:3; Bruce 1982:274–5; Edwards 2005; Guthrie 1984:152; Hendricksen 1968:246–7; McKnight 1995:302–4; Silva 1996:184; Rapa 2008:638; Ridderbos 1984:227).

Paul's apocalyptic outlook not only engaged the diverse metanarratives within Second Temple Judaism, but also the polymorphic views of reality that prevailed throughout Greco-Roman culture. The importance of recognising this cosmology—especially the eschatological or teleological beliefs of Rome—is thrown into sharp relief by the recognition Kim (2008:xii) made that there is a deficit of 'recent commentaries on the Pauline epistles' which seriously consider the 'imperial cult and ideology' of Rome. Aspects of this pagan worldview were characterised by emperor worship and a veneration of a pantheon of gods and goddesses (especially at public festivals and civic rituals). Also, the dogma promulgated by the Roman imperial court taught that it was the focal point of unending peace and prosperity. Moreover, it was alleged that the emperor was divine and reigned absolutely over an enduring dynasty.

The good news Paul heralded sharply contrasted with the above propaganda and its variegated political and religious narratives. According to Crossan and Reed (2004:x), the nature of the 'clash' remained 'nonviolent'. Against the backdrop of imperial Rome's narrative world, the apostle declared that there is one Creator and Lord of the cosmos, namely, the God of Israel. Paul also taught that forgiveness, peace, and eternal blessing came through union with Israel's promised, incarnate Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, the apostle maintained that ultimate reality was centred in the crucified and risen Lord. Indeed, Paul believed that the Redeemer would one day return to vindicate the righteous and judge the wicked (cf. Lioy 2003:150–1; 2010:7–11, 89–94; 2011:227).

On the one hand, White (2009:305) maintains that within the Pauline corpus there is a 'lack of explicit statements' concerning Rome that could be interpreted as being either 'subversive' or 'anti-imperial'; on the other hand, Wright (2009:79) concludes from his examination of the

Pauline corpus that within it there are ‘more than just echoes’ of the ‘rhetoric of imperial Rome’. Wright (2013:1306) is even more incisive when he deduces from his analysis that Paul sought to outmanoeuvre, discredit, and eclipse Rome’s ‘grandiose claims’. Burk (2008:321), though, cautions that whatever ‘challenge’ Paul’s letters offered to Rome’s ‘pagan pretensions’, it did not arise explicitly from the apostle making ‘some conscious intention to mimic the language of imperial propaganda’; instead, it was more of a conclusion drawn implicitly from what he wrote.

Admittedly, there is no scholarly consensus on whether the nature of the preceding confrontation was either predominately implicit or explicit. That unresolved debate notwithstanding, the following chart identifies the pronounced disparities existing between Roman imperial ideologies in the first century AD and the counter-cultural message Paul proclaimed (revised and augmented from Longenecker and Still 2014:336–8):¹⁰

¹⁰ Roman imperial ideologies were neither monochromatic in their beliefs, nor monolithic in their discourse, nor uniform in their practices. For differing approaches concerning the imperialistic and polytheistic ideations of ancient Rome, especially in relation to the monotheistic religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity, cf. Ando (2000:19–48; 2009:1–18); Aune (1993b:786–96; 2000:917–26); Brown (1997:83–93); Crossan and Reed (2004); Elliott (2004; 2008:25–57); Georgi (2009); Horsley (2004); Kim (2008); Oakes (2005); Price (2004); Wright (2009:59–79; 2013:279–347).

Roman Imperial Ideologies	Paul's Counter-Cultural Message
<p>Religious syncretism (or the merging of differing religious beliefs into one system) holds sway. All religious pathways lead to an idyllic afterlife and no single group has the right to an exclusive claim on truth.</p>	<p>There is only one God, who is the Creator; and there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the Architect of the universe and the Author of life. Moreover, only through faith in the Son does anyone have access to the Father in heaven (cf. Rom 5:1–2; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:4–6).</p>
<p>The emperor, Augustus (whose name means 'the exalted one'), is 'son of the deified' (in Latin, <i>divi filius</i>) and 'son of god' (in Latin, <i>dei filius</i>; i.e. the adopted son of Caesar, who himself is a god).</p>	<p>Jesus, the messianic 'seed of David', is the true 'Son of God' (cf. Rom 1:3–4; 2 Cor 1:19; Gal 2:20; Eph 4:13).</p>
<p>The emperor is the 'Saviour' and supreme ruler of the world.</p>	<p>Jesus is the one and only Saviour of the world and the exalted Lord of the cosmos (cf. Phil 2:9–11; 3:20; Col 2:9–10).</p>
<p>The emperor is to be worshipped.</p>	<p>Only the God of Israel is to be worshipped. All other objects of veneration constitute idolatry (cf. 1 Cor 8:4–6; Gal 4:8–11; 1 Thess 1:9–10).</p>

<p>The pantheon of gods and goddesses favour Rome and bring the world under Rome's control.</p>	<p>The Father is bringing the entire created order and the whole of history under the control of His Son (cf. 1 Cor 15:23–28; Eph 1:20–23; Phil 3:20–21; Col 1:15–20).</p>
<p>The Roman Empire is sovereign, a reality decreed by the chief deity, Jupiter, and actualised for endless ages to come by the three female personifications of destiny, the Fates.</p>	<p>Only the God of Israel is sovereign and eternal. All other claimants to sovereignty will be eliminated, and all the nations will become obedient to the Son's unending reign (cf. Rom 1:5; 15:12; 16:26). Accordingly, people are summoned to repent and become citizens of God's kingdom (cf. Col 1:13; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5).</p>
<p>The birth of a miraculous child named Augustus inaugurates a new era. It is a golden age in which Rome transforms society into a utopia characterised by universal justice and peace.</p>	<p>The entire universe languishes under the curse of physical decay and moral chaos. Only Jesus' life, death, and resurrection inaugurate a new era of righteousness and reconciliation between sinful humans and the justifying God (cf. Rom 5:9–11; 8:18–23; 2 Cor 5:17–21).</p>

<p>The Roman Empire is the guarantor of tranquillity, affluence, and security throughout the world.</p>	<p>The Messiah's atoning sacrifice at Calvary is the only basis for true harmony and everlasting blessing for redeemed humanity (cf. Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16).</p>
<p>The new era involves the unification of the nations under the emperor's rule.</p>	<p>The Son brings together the nations within his spiritual body, the church (cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14–18; Col 3:11).</p>
<p>Crucifixion is one means the Roman government uses to eliminate any miscreants who threaten the imperial vision for a perfect society.</p>	<p>The Father raised his crucified Son from the dead, and in doing so overturned the unjust verdict rendered by the potentates of the world (1 Cor 2:6–9).</p>
<p>Rome's cultural heroes are renowned for their wealth, fame, and power. The latter are seized by brazen self-interest, ruthless competition, and savage violence.</p>	<p>Jesus' followers live in ways that are cruciform in nature. Indeed, the Cross is the premier expression of God's power and wisdom, both during the present age and for all eternity (cf. Rom 6:3–8; 1 Cor 1:18–25; 2 Cor 4:10; Gal 2:20; 5:22–26; 6:14; Phil 2:1–8; 3:10; Col 2:11–12, 20).¹¹</p>

¹¹ For a thorough deliberation of this point, cf. my forthcoming journal article titled, 'Paul's theology of the cross: a case study analysis of 2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10'. In the latter essay, I examine one representative passage in Paul's writings through the prism of his crucicentric thinking (especially in dialogue with a confessional Lutheran perspective).

3. Paul's Apocalyptic Interpretation of Reality in Ephesians 1:15–23

The preceding section helps to establish the broader narrative framework and theological context in which Paul's apocalyptic interpretation of reality was embedded. This holds true for Ephesians 1:15–23, the representative passage from the apostle's letters to be examined in the present section.¹² To pave the way (so to speak), it is worthwhile first to consider several important introductory matters in the following paragraphs. To begin, when Paul wrote, he was no longer an evangelist on the move; instead, the references in 3:1 and 4:1 to the apostle being a 'prisoner' (*désmios*) and in 6:20 to his status as an 'ambassador in chains' (*presbeúo en halúsei*), indicate he was incarcerated in Rome (perhaps around AD 60).¹³ According to Acts

¹² In this section, the latest editions of the Nestle-Aland / United Bible Societies' *Novum Testamentum Graece* have been used. Also, unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are my personal translation of the respective biblical texts being cited. Moreover, I have intentionally refrained from filling every paragraph and page in this portion of the journal article with an excessive number of formal citations from secondary sources. So, for the sake of expediency, the following are the lexical and grammatical sources I consulted in the researching and writing of the corresponding discourse: *A dictionary of biblical languages: Greek New Testament* (J Swanson); *A grammar of the Greek New Testament* (N Turner, JH Moulton, and WF Howard); *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (FW Danker, ed.); *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament* (H Balz and G Schneider, eds.); *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains* (JP Louw and EA Nida, eds.); *Greek grammar beyond the basics: an exegetical syntax of the New Testament* (DB Wallace); *Greek New Testament insert* (B Chapman and GS Shogren); *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (D Mangum, et al., eds.); *New international dictionary of New Testament theology and exegesis* (M Silva, ed.); *The Lexham discourse Greek New Testament* (S Runge, ed.); *The new linguistic and exegetical key to the Greek New Testament* (CL Rogers); *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (G Kittel and G Friedrich, eds.); and *Theological lexicon of the New Testament* (C Spicq; JD Ernest, ed.).

¹³ The scholarly literature on Ephesians is extensive. Also, the majority of relevant exegetical and theological works frequently convey the same sort of information on

28:30–31, even though Paul was kept under house arrest, he had the freedom to receive visitors, as well as to write and send letters. Most likely, the apostle's first Roman imprisonment did not end with a death sentence passed by the despotic Nero; instead, it seems that Paul undertook one more missionary journey before being rearrested and executed in Rome about AD 62–67.

The church to which Paul directed Ephesians was not opposing him and his teaching; rather, it was by and large a thriving congregation that was ready to receive advanced instruction in theology and ethics. The apostle's colleagues, Tychicus and Onesimus, could have dropped off one letter at Ephesus while on their way to deliver two other epistles in Colosse (cf. Eph 6:21–22; Col 4:7–9; Phlm 1:10–12). Hoehner (2002:248) addresses the claim that Paul did not write this letter by noting that it had been 'five or six years' since he was in Ephesus, including extended periods of incarceration (cf. Acts 24:27; 27:9; 28:11, 30). Most likely, there were 'many new believers' whom the apostle personally knew. Furthermore, if Ephesians was a 'circular letter', he would not have met 'many in the satellite churches in western Asia Minor'. The general nature of the majority of the teaching in Ephesians may indicate that from the start Paul intended it to be an encyclical communique that would be read by a network of congregations dispersed over a wide geographical region. This may explain why there were no greetings directed to specific individuals and why the apostle did not seem to have firsthand knowledge of the epistle's recipients (cf. 1:15; 3:2; 4:21).

this Pauline passage. So, for the sake of expediency, the following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the discourse: Abbott (1979); Allen (1986); Arnold (2010); Barth (1986); Best (1998); Bruce (184); Edwards (2005); Foulkes (1979); Haberer (2008); Hendricksen (1967); Hoehner (2002); Howard (1974); Jeal (2000); Kuhn (1968); Lenski (1961); Lincoln (1990); Perkins (2000); Robinson (1979); Thielman (2007; 2010); Wood (1978).

Ephesians contains two distinct, though related, parts. Chapters 1–3 reminded readers of their privileged status as members of the Messiah’s spiritual body, the church, which occupied an important place in the Creator’s plan for the universe. Chapters 4–6 appealed to the readers to conduct themselves in a way that was consistent with their godly calling, rather than conform to the pagan society in which they lived. Throughout the first chapter, Paul maintained that God has given Jesus’ followers, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status, every spiritual blessing. Moreover, the Creator’s grand design is to bring everything in the cosmos together—whether in heaven or on earth—under the Messiah’s authority. God also planned that all believers—Jews as well as Gentiles—not only will receive an eternal inheritance, but also will become the Father’s prized possession based on the Son’s atoning sacrifice at Calvary.

Verses 4–6 focus on the Father’s selection of repentant sinners in eternity past, while verses 7–12 deal with the Son’s death on the cross in space and time to redeem the lost. In verses 13–14, Paul shifts the focus to the activity of the Spirit in designating Jesus’ followers as his own special possession. The adverbial use of *kaí* (‘also’) plus the pronoun *hymeis* (second person, nominative, plural; ‘you’), along with *kaí* plus the participle *pisteúantes* (aorist, active, plural; ‘after believing’), signalled the apostle’s inclusion of his non-Jewish readers to his discourse. Succinctly put, they too were incorporated into the Son’s spiritual body. Put another way, Jewish believers and Gentile Christians formed one united church.

Furthermore, the two nominative participial clauses—introduced by *akoúsantes* (aorist, active, plural; ‘after hearing’) and *pisteúantes*, respectively—established the context for the sealing ministry of the Spirit. The latter included the two-stage process the Father used to bring

about the regeneration of pagan Gentiles. First, they listened attentively to evangelists such as Paul heralding an eternally relevant, historically grounded, and factually accurate message. This truth-filled oracle (*lógon tes aletheías*) was none other than the good news revealing how the Ephesians could be saved (*to euaggélion tes soterías*). Second, they responded by putting their faith in the Son, with the result that they experienced the new birth. In turn, the Creator identified the converts as his own by bestowing on them the promised Holy Spirit (in which *epaggelías* is understood to be an attributive genitive; cf. Luke 24:49; John 14:16; Acts 1:4–5; 2:33, 28–39; Gal 3:14; 4:6).

As an aside, Bayer (2003:50–5; 2007:126–34) observes that when viewed through the prism of speech–act theory, the good news is understood to be a performative utterance, namely, one that conveys a specific promise or assurance.¹⁴ Also, the declaration of the gospel is efficacious, in that it actualises for the first time a reality that did not previously exist. To be precise, God uses the heralding of the good news to initiate, establish, and preserve a relationship between himself and the unsaved. Furthermore, the declaration of the gospel makes the presence of faith operative within them, whereas before unbelief prevailed. Faith is not considered a work, but merely a response of the broken heart to the saving work of God.

According to Bayer (2003:258), ‘God’s Word is *verbum efficax*, an efficacious Word. It never returns void, but does what it says’ (cf. Isa 40:6–8; 55:10–11; Heb 4:12; 1 Pet 1:24–25). Bayer (2007:63) also notes that the ‘scriptures are not simply printed words to be read off a page’; more importantly, they are ‘life-giving words that stimulate our

¹⁴ Bayer’s application of speech–act theory to the proclamation of the gospel is based, in part, on the work of the British philosopher and linguistic analyst, J.L. Austin, especially the posthumous publication of his lectures titled *How to do things with words* (1975). Austin presented the latter in 1955 at Harvard University.

senses and emotions, our memory and imagination, our heart and desires'. So, with respect to the 'Christian life' (p. 22), 'God is the active subject'; in contrast, the 'Christian is the object of God's action'. Wright (2014) echoes the preceding mindset when he points out that the 'theology of the word' articulated by Paul is a 'life-transforming energy', one that 'immediately results in a new community, not just new ideas'. Moreover, in keeping with the apostle's apocalyptic view of reality, the Spirit works through the proclamation of the gospel to bring about a 'new creation' in 'fulfilment' of the 'age-old divine purpose' foretold in the Old Testament.

Expressed differently, when the promise of salvation is made, the Spirit uses the divine pledge to bring about the salvific reality being articulated. Previously unregenerate hearers are enabled to believe the good news and experience the inner vivification of their fallen human nature. In a sense, God's creative word is an eschatological declaration that has invaded the present age, with the result of ushering believers into the divine kingdom. Correspondingly, the new birth is the result of God's gracious action. The Father sovereignly brings it about (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Titus 3:5) when people put their faith in the Son for eternal life (cf. Eph 1:13; 2:8–9). It is a new start for believing sinners, who are transformed by the Spirit in their volition, emotions, and actions (cf. Rom 12:1–2). This inner renewal is neither the result of people, apart from the Spirit, willing themselves to change by acquiring knowledge, nor the consequence of one's own insular, private monologue; instead, the new birth is entirely the work of the triune God, and becomes a reality when people receive the Son for salvation

through the heralding of the good news (cf. John 1:12–13; 3:6; Titus 3:5; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23; 1 John 4:10).¹⁵

Returning now to the main discussion, by using the Greek verb *esphragísthete* (aorist, passive, indicative; ‘were sealed’; Eph 1:13), Paul may have raised a number of images in the minds of his readers (cf. Esth 3:10; Dan 6:17; 2 Cor 1:22). At that time, seals (made from precious metals and hard stones) were put on documents to vouch for their authenticity. Seals were also tattooed on soldiers and slaves, branded on livestock, and attached to goods (such as sacks of grain or fruit) being shipped to indicate right of possession and safeguard protection. Sometimes seals represented an office in the government. Any of these uses of seals might symbolise a part of the Spirit’s work in the lives of those who trusted in the Messiah. In short, the apostle indicated that the Father’s gift of the Spirit (received by divine grace) identified Jesus’ followers as God’s spiritual children.

In Ephesians 1:14, Paul figuratively referred to the Spirit as the believers’ ‘guarantee’ (*arrabón*; or ‘pledge’) that they belonged to the Father and that he would do for them what he had promised in his Son (cf. 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5). In the apostle’s day, a deposit was an initial payment assuring a retailer that the full purchase price would be forthcoming. The Spirit’s abiding presence confirmed that at the end of

¹⁵ A teaching known as ‘decision theology’ tethers assurance of salvation to one’s self-initiated choice to believe. In this view, the actions of the penitent (namely, what they perceive, reason, intuit, and experience) are what convince them they have enough faith to be saved. Put another way, their confidence is based on independent acts of their will, including their decision to believe, their consciousness of their belief, and their awareness of their conversion experience. Ironically, the outcome is not assurance, but a crisis of faith. The latter is characterised by unending bondage due to the presence of nagging inner doubts about the reality of their spiritual status (cf. the Lutheran notion of the *Anfechtung*, or a terrifying dread of God’s condemnation and judgment; Bayer 2003:182–4, 252–3; 2007:104–6; Cary 2005:448–50; 2007:266–7; McGrath 2011:224–8; Scaer 1983:15–8).

the age, believers would receive the final instalment of their eternal ‘inheritance’ (*kleronomías*; Eph 1:14; cf. Ezek 36:26–27; Joel 2:28–30). By this Paul meant that the Creator would bring to completion the ‘redemption’ (*apolútroisin*; Eph 1:14) of those whom he acquired (*peripoiéseos*) as a result of Jesus’ death on the cross. In keeping with what Paul stated in verses 6 and 12, he once more noted that the Father’s plan of salvation would bring him unending honour and splendour.

As with verses 3–14, verses 15–23 are one compound sentence in the original. Paul had discussed at length God’s eschatological plan of redemption centred in the Messiah, and the apostle was convinced his readers were truly regenerate. He indicated his certitude by means of the conjunctive phrase *diá touto* (‘because of this’; v. 15). Furthermore, the apostle’s adverbial use of *kagó* (‘even I’ or ‘I in particular’) shifted the focus back to himself. The inclusion of the nominative participial clause—introduced by *akoúsas* (aorist, active, singular; ‘having heard’)—established the context for his statement in verse 16.

Specifically, Paul was enthused to learn about the steadfast ‘faith’ (*pístin*; v. 15) of his readers in the Saviour, along with the ‘love’ (*agápen*) they regularly displayed toward their fellow believers (‘*hagíous*’; i.e. those in a saving relationship with God). Even though the apostle founded the congregation in Ephesus, as noted earlier, he had not seen the believers for several years, due to his imprisonment; nonetheless, Paul could receive visitors and mail, and through one or both of these means, he heard encouraging news about the Ephesians’ spiritual health. In response, whenever the apostle prayed (*proseuchon*; v. 16), he not only remembered (*mneíon*) his readers, but also never stopped (*pauíomai*; present, middle, indicative) thanking (*euchariston*; present, active, participle) God for the Ephesians.

Next, through the use of the conjunction *hína* ('that'; v. 17), Paul introduced the nature of his petition to God, whom the apostle referred to as the 'glorious Father' (taking the phrase *ho patér tes dóxes* as an attributive genitive).¹⁶ Specifically, Paul asked that the majestic Creator would increase the Ephesians' discernment and deepen their insight in their spiritual understanding of Him, in which *sophías* ('wisdom'; i.e. sagacity and prudence) and *apokalýpseos* ('revelation'; i.e. something fully disclosed) are taken as attributive genitives of *pneuma* ('spiritual').¹⁷ The apostle's readers were already God's children as a result of their trust in the Son; but Paul wanted the Ephesians to receive a heightened awareness concerning their relationship with the Lord. The latter required more than just intelligence or hard work; according to Colossians 1:9, it was provided by the Spirit (especially, as noted earlier, through the ministry of God's Word; cf. John 14:26; 16:13).

Ephesians 1:18 and 19 detail some of the specific ways Paul wanted his readers to grow in their knowledge of God. The apostle used the figurative expression *toús ophthalmoús tes kardías* ('the eyes of the heart'; v. 18) to refer to the capacity of the believer's mind to understand.¹⁸ In Jewish thinking during the first century AD, the heart was viewed as the centre of one's personality, feeling, and faith, as well as the source from which one's words and actions originated (cf. Ps 10:11, 13; Prov 2:2; 22:17; 23:12; Matt 12:34; 15:19; 22:37; John 14:1; Rom 10:10). Paul asked God to flood the light of his truth into the Ephesians' souls. The apostle's request echoed the truth of Isaiah 60:19,

¹⁶ Cf. Exod 24:17; Isa 4:2; 35:2; 60:2, 13.

¹⁷ Cf. Exod 28:3; Deut 34:9; Zech 12:10; Wis 7:7; 1 Cor 4:21; Gal 6:1.

¹⁸ Arnold (2010:106) thinks Paul 'created' the 'metaphor' appearing in Ephesians 1:18, since prior to the apostle the expression cannot be found in any 'Jewish or secular literature'. In contrast, Thielman (2010:98) maintains that Paul used 'imagery that was common in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds for gaining religious knowledge and insight'.

in which the Lord not only promised to redeem his people, but also to be their everlasting light, especially through the work of his Servant (cf. Isa 49:6; 51:4; Rev 22:5). As a result of God's transforming grace at work in the Ephesians' lives, they would more fully grasp the implications of their salvation. Colossians 1:10 adds that, in terms of everyday living, the regenerate would learn how to become increasingly fruitful, pleasing to God, and honouring to him.

The apostle's petition in Ephesians 1:18–19 contained three elements (signalled by his threefold use of the Greek interrogative pronoun *tís*). First, Paul prayed that his readers would have a sharpened awareness of the 'hope' (*elpís*; or 'confident expectation') associated with God's summons (*kléseos*) of them to eternal life (cf. Col 1:5, 27). Second, the apostle asked that the Ephesians would more fully appreciate the 'wealth' (*ploutos*; Eph 1:18) connected with the Lord's 'inheritance' (*kleronomías*) of them (cf. Col 3:24). The latter included the glorious (*dóxes*; Eph 1:18) certainty of their being citizens with all God's 'holy people' (or 'saints'; *hagiois*) in heaven. Third, Paul requested that his readers would truly grasp the many ways God freely and sovereignly operated to achieve his purposes in their lives (v. 19). According to Colossians 1:11–12, the Creator especially wanted his children, when faced with affliction, to remain steadfast (or persevering), patient (or emotionally calm), joyful, and thankful.

To intensify his point rhetorically in Ephesians 1:19, Paul used three Greek synonyms in tandem: the verb *hyperbállon* (present, active, participle), which denotes what is extraordinary, immeasurable, or incomparable; the noun *mégethos*, which points to what is infinitely enormous; and the noun *dynámeos*, which referred to what is absolute and supreme in power. The apostle emphasised that Jesus' followers were the object and beneficiaries of the Creator's limitless strength (*tou*

krátous tes ischyúos), which he demonstrated (*enérgeian*) above all in the Messiah's resurrection and exaltation. Edwards (2005) draws attention to the paradox that 'God's incomparable power' is unveiled in the ignominy of the Son's death on the cross.

Paul's use of the Greek verb *enérgeken* (perfect, active, indicative; 'brought about') in verse 20 conceptually links it to his use of the lexically related noun *enérgeian* ('working') in verse 19. When the Son died on the cross, his enemies thought they had ended his existence; yet, the bonds of death were broken as a result of the Father raising the Son immortal from the grave. For a period of 40 days, Jesus ministered on earth to his followers (cf. Acts 1:3). Then, as Paul explained in Ephesians 1:20, the Son ascended into the sacred abode of heaven and assumed his place of highest honour and authority at the right side of the Father's throne (cf. Exod 15:6; Pss 16:8; 48:10; 110:1; Isa 41:10; Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 16:19; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 3:22).

The dominion of the Son—who is God incarnate (cf. John 1:1, 14, 18; Col 1:15, 19; 2:9)—extended over all entities throughout the cosmos (cf. Col 2:10). In the first century AD, speculation about spiritual beings (including angels and demons) was common among both Jewish and pagan writers.¹⁹ Elaborate theories were devised about these entities. Also, they were arranged in various hierarchies, assigned supernatural powers, and venerated as if they were divine (cf. 1 Enoch 60:10–12; 61:10; 2 Enoch 20–22; Jub 2:2; 2 Macc 3:24; T Levi 3:14–22; Col 2:8, 16–18). Paul was aware of such attempts to understand the metaphysical realm; yet, without agreeing with the preceding speculations, the apostle affirmed that no creature, whether on earth or in heaven, and whether natural or supernatural, exceeded the Saviour's majesty and rule, for he was preeminent over all creation (cf. Col 1:15).

¹⁹ For an analysis of what scripture teaches about Satan and his minions, cf. Lioy 2014b:4–7.

In Ephesians 1:21, Paul stressed that from God's transcendent throne room in heaven, Jesus reigned supreme over the following four supernatural forces: *arches* ('ruler'), *exousías* ('authority'), *dynámeos* ('power'), and *kyriótetos* ('dominion'). Furthermore, the apostle declared that the Messiah alone controlled the destiny and actions of all angelic and demonic powers, both in the present era and in the one to be inaugurated at his Second Advent. Verse 22 added that the authority of the risen Messiah was not merely over celestial beings, but encompassed every aspect of creation, including temporal human powers.

When considering the discourse in section 2 above about Roman imperial ideologies, it is useful to stress the affirmation made by Hoehner (2002:279) that while there is in Ephesians 1:21–22 a 'definite influence from Jewish sources', it is also important to take into account the widespread 'pagan environment'. Best (1998:175–8) concurs that the Judaic and Hellenistic cultural contexts (i.e. 'political, social, and economic') are both important to consider. Thielman (2010:106) adds that Paul's use of 'terminology' is a 'skillful blend of language' derived from the Hebrew sacred writings and the 'Greco-Roman environment' prevalent at Ephesus and elsewhere. Perkins (2000:383) goes further in surmising that 'when Ephesians is read over against the ideology of the Roman imperial cult', the letter's homage to the risen and glorified Messiah 'appears to copy the style of speeches in praise of the emperor'. Even so, it is prudent to be mindful that, as Burk (2008:322) notes, 'Paul's gospel' expressed more of an 'implied' (rather than an unequivocal) censure of Rome's 'imperial pretensions'.

In an allusion to Psalm 8:6, Paul revealed that the Father brought everything in the universe under the Son's total control (*hypétaxen*; aorist, active, indicative; Eph 1:22; cf. Gen 1:26; 1 Cor 15:27–28; Heb

2:6–9). Furthermore, it was for the benefit of the ‘church’ (*ekklesiá*; Eph 1:22) that the exalted Lord ruled preeminently (*kephalén*; ‘head’) over everyone and everything (cf. Eph 4:15; Col 1:18). Lincoln (1990:67) describes the ‘church’ as the ‘Christian community in its totality’. Similarly, Paul referred to the redeemed corporately throughout the world as the Saviour’s metaphysical ‘body’ (*soma*; Eph 1:23; cf. 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:4, 12, 16; 5:30; Col 1:24). One interpretive option, as noted by Bruce (1984:276), is that the exalted Son fills the church with his ‘life, attributes, and powers’. Correspondingly, as Edwards (2005) observes (reflecting the view of several early church leaders), the ‘risen Christ is the soul of the church’.

Paul added that the Messiah’s presence and power not only includes believers, but also that he exercises dominion over the whole universe. Because he is the eternal, self-subsistent Creator, every aspect of contingent reality depends on him for its existence (see Ps 36:9; John 1:3–4). Thielman (2007:816) posits that the ‘hegemony God intended humanity’ to exercise over the entire created realm is being brought to fulfilment through the ‘Messiah’s kingly rule’. Paul accentuated this truth by pairing the Greek noun *plérōma* (‘fullness’; Eph 1:23) with the verb *plerouménou* (present, middle, participle; ‘fills’),²⁰ and putting together two forms of the adjective *pas* (*panta*, accusative plural, with *pasin*, dative plural; cf. Col 3:11). In sum, believers found all their spiritual needs completely satisfied, not by participating in the pagan teachings and secretive rituals of the mystery religions, but only in union with the Redeemer (cf. John 4:13–14; 6:35).

²⁰ For an extensive listing of scholarly works deliberating the challenging exegetical and interpretive issues connected with Ephesians 1:23, cf. Hoehner (2002:294). Also, for an assessment as to why *plerouménou* is best understood to be a middle, rather than a passive, participle, cf. Arnold (2010:116–20); Howard (1974:351–4).

With respect to Paul's apocalyptic interpretation of reality in Ephesians 1:15–23, Allen (1986:104) discerns that the Son's 'exaltation above all the powers of the universe' is the grounds for the 'believers' resurrection and enthronement'. They have been freed from 'death in sins', the 'powers of this world', and the 'passions' of their sinful state. Against this backdrop, Marshall (2004:451) opines that Jesus' followers 'live in a new situation', one that is 'determined by the fact of Christ, crucified and risen'. Ladd (1997:596) extends the preceding thought by adding that the 'new life of the Age to Come' signifies the soil in which Christians are planted, grow, and thrive. Beale (2011:303) takes the analysis further by clarifying that since believers are the 'actual beginning of the end-time new creation', it is imperative for them to 'act the way new creatures act'. The latter includes 'viewing all of reality from the perspective' of Jesus' 'word', rather than the depraved 'viewpoint of the world' (cf. Rom 12:1–2; Gal 5:24–26).

4. Conclusion

This journal article builds on the work of an earlier essay (Lioy 2014a) to undertake a case study analysis of one representative passage in Paul's writings through the prism of its apocalyptic backdrop. The major claim is that the apostle's eschatological worldview exercised a controlling influence on his writings, both directly and indirectly. The corresponding goal is to validate the preceding assertion by exploring the apostle's end-time interpretation of reality in Ephesians 1:15–23.

To accomplish the latter objective, a short synopsis of two Pauline passages—2 Corinthians 5:17–19 and Romans 5:12–21—is undertaken in the introductory first section. One relevant insight arising from these texts is that there is an 'already but not yet' dynamic tension in Paul's writings. As Romans 8 reveals, while Jesus' followers have not yet

been physically resurrected as a result of trusting in him, they wait in eager anticipation for the arrival of that future day when their redemption is fully completed.

In the second section of the journal article, the scope and substance of Paul's apocalyptic view of reality is articulated. Specifically, five key premises are noted as forming the building blocks of his eschatological discourse. It is then observed that the end-time metanarrative found within the apostle's letters did not arise in isolation; rather, it shows strong affinities with the apocalyptic literature written during the period of Second Temple Judaism. That said, the Spirit enabled Paul to move beyond the distorted convictions of the religious elite of his day and view the created order through a set of Christocentric and Christotelic lenses. Another finding is that Paul's future-oriented ethos engaged the polymorphic views of reality that prevailed within Greco-Roman culture. Indeed, the good news the apostle heralded contrasted sharply with the latter propaganda.

The background information presented in the second section helps to establish the broader narrative framework and theological context in which Paul's apocalyptic interpretation of reality was embedded. This holds true for Ephesians 1:15–23, the representative passage from the apostle's letters examined in the third section of the journal article. A thoroughgoing analysis of this text indicates that an eschatological mindset pervades Paul's theology. For instance, in keeping with what was noted earlier, there is a tension between the 'already and the not yet'. Specifically, the salvation of believers has already been inaugurated, but not yet fully consummated. In addition, the future hope of salvation is an anchor for all of life, for it represents ultimate reality and the certain destination of believers.

An analysis of Ephesians 1:15–23 indicates that themes Paul deliberated there resonate with the broader theological discourse found in his other New Testament writings. To illustrate, when the Creator’s end-time promises are realised, he will be glorified, honoured, and praised as God (cf. 2 Cor 1:30). Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (cf. Phil 2:10–11). The entire cosmos will be reconciled to the Son (cf. Col 1:20), and the Father’s plan to sum up all things in his Son will be completed (cf. Eph 1:10). Moreover, Paul made it clear that believers will marvel at and enjoy God’s grace for endless ages (cf. Eph 2:7; 3:10; 2 Thess 1:10). In turn, the missionary task that animated Paul and other believers down through the centuries will be completed, and God’s eschatological plan of including Jews and Gentiles in his kingdom will have reached its consummation (cf. Rom 9–11; Eph 2–3).

As affirmed by this essay’s deliberation of Ephesians 1:15–23, the suffering of the present era one day will be just a memory, the agonies that prevail now will seem small compared to the beauty that has dawned, and the glorification God promises will be a reality (cf. Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:16–18). Furthermore, the supremely exalted and risen Lord of Ephesians 1:20–23 will return to judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous. Those who are in union with the Son by faith will be raised from the dead to worship the triune God in heaven for all eternity. In contrast, unbelievers will be punished forever, God’s saving work in believers will be finished, and any talk of ‘not yet’ will be passé. Finally, the structures of the present cosmic order will cease, and a world of endless joy will commence.

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