

## “Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Timothy 2:18

### Misaiming concerning God’s Desire to Dwell on the Earth (Rev. 21:2)

**Misaiming:** “That the new city came *out of heaven from God* is natural enough for the new order, but that it came to earth is somewhat puzzling, as is the fact that John envisages a new earth at all. Certainly he is not thinking of the new earth as the place of people’s felicity, in distinction from the new heaven as God’s dwelling-place....Perhaps John has in mind that there is already a sense in which God’s people experience the heavenly city. It is this that is their bliss in the presence of a multitude of earthly distractions and difficulties” (Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Revised Edition, 2000, p. 237).

**Truth:** The traditional notion that heaven is the final destination of God and His redeemed runs up against an immovable wall in Revelation 21:2: “And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Truth is unyielding, and this verse forces expositors to earnestly seek an interpretation that would accommodate the preconceived idea of going to heaven. Many readers of the Bible assume that the many mansions (Gk., *abodes*) in John 14:2 refer to eternal dwelling places *in heaven*. Yet in Revelation 21:1-2 John also tells us that God’s dwelling place with man, the New Jerusalem, *comes down out of heaven* to the new *earth*.

Throughout the Bible, God’s focus is resolutely earthward. Zechariah 12:1 tells us that God created the heavens as a setting for the earth and the earth as the environment for man, who is the object of His eternal purpose. When God succeeded in establishing a dwelling place among men in the Old Testament, He was called the God of heaven *and* earth (Ezra 5:11), but when He had no dwelling here, He was simply called the God of the heavens (Dan. 2:18-19, 37, 44). With this view in mind, the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth” (Matt. 6:10). God’s kingdom and His will are inextricably bound up with the earth because it is through the church, which exists on the earth, that His eternal purpose is accomplished (Eph. 3:9-11). In the light of these and many other verses, Revelation

21:2 is an entirely consistent conclusion to the Bible’s revelation. We are misled if we regard going to heaven as the source of our “felicity,” the panacea for our personal shortcomings and the church’s deficiencies. Our individual and corporate felicity in this age issues from our full participation in God’s purpose and plan while on the earth, and our eternal felicity will be with our Lord on the *new* earth, not in heaven.

### Misaiming concerning Christ as the Only Begotten Son

**Misaiming:** “When we speak of the Lord Jesus Christ as being the only Begotten we have to remember that Jesus never had a beginning....So we have to identify this terminology, *only Begotten*, as the time of His incarnation, His virgin conception and virgin birth in Bethlehem. That’s when He became the only Begotten (Transcription of a lecture on Revelation, Cassette #2, by Dr. Tom Rodgers, Trinity College and Seminary, Newburgh, Indiana: C.E.E., Inc., n.d.).

**Truth:** The Lord Jesus Christ has always been, and is eternally, the only Begotten. He did not simply become the only Begotten at the moment of His human birth. Rather, He eternally exists as the only begotten Son, the second of the Trinity. John 1:14 alludes to this eternal relational condition in identifying Christ as “the only Begotten from the Father.” Here John uses the Greek preposition *para* which denotes not only *from*, but also *with*. That is, when the only Begotten came to us, He came simultaneously *from* and *with* the Father. A careful reading of 1 John 4:9 corroborates Christ’s existence as the only Begotten *before* His incarnation: “God sent His only begotten Son into the world.” God did not send His Son to *become* the only Begotten; rather, He sent Him *as* the only Begotten. Christ, from eternity past to eternity future is known through His relationship with the Father. He eternally exists by virtue of the Father’s eternal begetting. This interpretation sheds light on John 3:16, which tells us that God “gave His only begotten Son.” When Christ was incarnated, that was not His *inauguration* as the only Begotten; it was God’s *giving* of His only Begotten to us. Hence, verse 17 continues the thought of God *sending* His Son into the world. Thus, Christ was already in the relational condition of being the only

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Begotten when He was sent into the world by the Father through incarnation.

It is important to make this distinction because one of the most serious ancient heresies, Arianism, denied the eternal coexistence of Christ the Son by misconstruing the term *only Begotten*. Although Arius admitted to the preexistence of the Son prior to incarnation, he negated His eternal sonship by insisting that the term *Begotten* necessitates a beginning. He reasoned that if one is begotten, then that one cannot also be eternal, for by definition he has a beginning. The Arian heretics were fond of saying, “There was a time when Christ was not.” This controversy provoked the convening of the Council of Nicea where theologians, led by Athanasius, responded to this heresy with Isaiah 9:6, which identifies God as the “eternal Father.” They reasoned that one is not a father until he begets; one may be a husband, but he cannot be called a father until he has begotten a child. Yet this verse calls God the *eternal* Father. This title signifies that from eternity past, God has always existed both as God and as Father, not merely becoming a Father at the moment of creation or of Christ’s incarnation. Orthodox scholars at the council of Nicea refuted Arianism with the maxim, “Always a Father, always a Son.”

Christ’s existence as the only Begotten does not hinge upon an event in time; rather, it points to an eternal relationship within the Trinity. God’s being the eternal Father speaks of His eternal dispensing of His divine life and nature, while Christ’s being the only begotten Son speaks of His eternal receiving from the Father as well as His eternal expression of the Father. For this reason, Hebrews 1:3 speaks of the Son as the effulgence, the out-raying, of God’s glory. Christ, in His eternal status of only Begotten, is the perpetual, eternal going forth of God the Father. A proper understanding of Christ as the eternal only begotten Son reveals yet another precious facet of God’s eternal economy, His marvelous plan to dispense all that He is in the Son to the members of His household.

### Misaiming concerning the New Jerusalem

**Misaiming:** “This is the capital city of heaven, a place of perfect holiness....This is the city where the saints will live (cf. John 14:1-3)....The whole city, occupied by all the saints, is called the bride, so that all saints must be finally included in the bride imagery and bridal blessing” (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, 1997, p. 2022).

**Truth:** The error here is that of considering the New Jerusalem a physical place rather than a spiritual sign. Revelation opens by identifying itself as a book of signs (1:1), and its greatest sign is the New Jerusalem,

whose details comprise the final two chapters of the Bible. As this passage correctly states, the entire city is called the wife of the Lamb (19:7). Yet it is absurd to imagine that Christ would marry a physical city—just as absurd as it would be to regard Christ as a literal lamb-husband. Nevertheless, this passage perpetuates the fallacious notion that the New Jerusalem is a physical city, even the capital city of heaven. This misaiming wrongly states that the New Jerusalem is a city “*where* the saints will live.” In contrast, the Bible consistently describes God’s people *as* His building. For example, Hebrews 12:22-23 tells us that to come to the church is to come to the heavenly city. Ephesians 2:22 tells us that we are being built up as God’s dwelling place, and 1 Corinthians 3:9 tells us that the believers, the church, *are* God’s building, not *in* God’s building. Therefore, it is consistent with the rest of the Scripture that John does not describe any inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, for God’s redeemed *are* the New Jerusalem, signifying that God and His redeemed are built up as a mutual abode and corporate expression for eternity.

### Misaiming concerning the Distinction between Soul and Spirit in Hebrews 4:12

**Misaiming:** “The author of this poem [Hebrews 4:12] may have wanted to distinguish between the spirit (*psychē*) which constituted physical breath that keeps animate beings alive, and the holy breath or spirit (*pneuma*) that provided religious life with its necessary basis. Philo said ‘spirit is the essence of the soul’ and ‘he names the soul of man, *spirit*’” (*The Anchor Bible: To the Hebrews*. Translation, Comment, and Conclusions by George Wesley Buchanan, 1972, p. 75).

**Truth:** This passage is riddled with errors. First, and most central, is the conflict between the thought it conveys—that the spirit and the soul are the same—and the actual text of Hebrews 4:12, which says, “For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” This verse makes it clear that the word of God functions to divide the soul from the spirit. The contrary thought expressed in the above passage, however, stems from a traditional notion that the *soul* and the *spirit* are synonymous. But if these are indeed the same, why, according to this verse, do they need to be *divided*? The fact that the word’s piercing operation is needed to distinguish between the two proves that, while the soul and the spirit are close, even intertwined, they are also divisible. According to the Bible, the human soul is man’s psychological being, comprised of his mind (Prov. 24:14; Psa. 139:14), emotion (S. S. 1:7; 2 Sam. 5:8), and will (Job 7:15; 6:7), while the human spirit is

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man's innermost part, the faculty by which he contacts and receives God (John 3:6; 4:24) and where the indwelling Christ makes His residence (Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22). Each has its distinct function.

Second, this passage also errs in translating the *psychē* as "spirit." The Greek word *psychē*, or *psuchē*, is consistently translated "soul"; it is in fact the root of *psychology*, the study of the soul. Third, and even more confusing, this passage refers to *psychē* as "physical breath," implying that what the word of God divides is our physical breath from our human spirit. There certainly is no need for the word's keen dividing work to help us know the difference between physical air in our lungs and our human spirit. But because our soul and our spirit are both intangible and as close as the "joints and marrow," we do need the word's sharp operation to enable us to discern between our soul and our spirit. Finally, the writer of this passage appeals to Philo in support of his notion that man's spirit is equivalent to his soul. Yet Josephus, a contemporary Jewish historian, says concerning Genesis 2:7, "that God took dust from the ground, and formed man, and inserted in him a spirit and a soul" (25). A footnote to this text says, "We may observe here that Josephus supposed man to be compounded of spirit, soul, and body, with St. Paul (1 Thess. V. 23) and the rest of the ancients" (Kregel, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, 25). Still, it would have been far more fitting to take as the final authority the apostle Paul's New Testament word that man has "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thes. 5:23), since it is Scripture and not a mere historical record.

### Misaiming concerning Christian Stewardship

**Misaiming:** "Christians are called to fulfill the 'cultural

mandate' that God gave to mankind at creation (Gen. 1:28-30; Ps. 8:6-8). Humanity was created to manage God's world, and this stewardship is part of the human vocation in Christ, with God's honor and the good of others as its goal. The Protestant 'work ethic' is essentially a religious discipline, the fulfillment of a divine 'calling' to be stewards of God's creation" (*New Geneva Study Bible*, 1995, p. 1889).

**Truth:** The Christian's heavenly, spiritual calling is much more sublime than to simply "manage God's world" by living according to the Protestant work ethic. Peter tells us that Christians are stewards of the highest order; they are in fact "stewards of the varied grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). Paul echoes Peter's view of our calling, speaking of "the stewardship of the grace of God" (Eph. 3:2) and of our service in the church as "the stewardship of God" (Col. 1:25).

When we are filled with Christ by partaking of His rich divine life and nature, we become genuine New Testament stewards, dispensing the grace we have received from Him to God's household. Thus, the scriptural Christian mandate, our divine calling, is to dispense as stewards the riches of the grace of Christ to mankind as the gospel and to the members of His Body for the building up of the church, His Body, consummating the New Jerusalem. It is this holy city, the bride of Christ, the mutual abode of God and man—not the Protestant work ethic—that is the believers' high calling and highest goal. This unique and ultimate goal is our divine calling and the sole aim of every aspect of our Christian stewardship.

*by the Editors*

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### Footnotes from the Recovery Version of the New Testament on Hebrews 4:12

"For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of **soul** and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

**soul:** As the marrow is concealed deep in the joints, so the spirit is deep in the soul. The dividing of the marrow from the joints requires mainly the breaking of the joints. In the same principle, the dividing of the spirit from the soul requires the breaking of the soul. The Hebrew believers' soul, with its wondering mind, its doubting concerning God's way of salvation, and its considering of its own interests, had to be broken by the living, operative, and piercing word of God that their spirit might be divided from their soul. Our soul is our very self (Matt. 16:25; cf.

Luke 9:25). In following the Lord we must deny our soul, our very self (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23). Our spirit is the deepest part of our being, a spiritual organ with which we contact God (John 4:24; Rom. 1:9). It is in our spirit that we are regenerated (John 3:6). It is in our spirit that the Holy Spirit dwells and works (Rom. 8:16). It is in our spirit that we enjoy Christ and His grace (2 Tim. 4:22; Gal. 6:18). Hence, the writer of this book advised the Hebrew believers not to stagger in the wandering of their soul, which soul they had to deny, but to press on into their spirit to partake of and enjoy the heavenly Christ that they might participate in the kingdom rest of His reign in the millennium. If they staggered in the wandering of their soul, they would miss God's goal and suffer the loss of the full enjoyment of Christ and the kingdom rest. (Note 2)