

THE TRINITY AND ESCHATOLOGY

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Just as the members of the Trinity were actively involved in the creation, so too they are actively engaged in matters pertaining to the end, or what is often referred to as eschatology. The purpose of this article is to highlight how the various members of the Trinity are active in events still to come.

Introduction

The relationship of the Trinity to eschatology has often been overlooked with few works directly addressing this topic.¹ In this work we will survey how the three Persons of the Trinity are involved with events still to come. In doing this we acknowledge that several areas of eschatology have come to fruition already because of Jesus' first coming. For example, Jesus the Son has appeared as the ultimate Son of David (see Matt 1:1). Jesus' atoning death as the Suffering Servant of the Lord has occurred. As Acts 3:18 tells us: "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled." Also, Jesus has been exalted as Messiah and is currently seated at the right hand of the Father waiting to rule over His enemies (see Ps 110:1 and Heb 10:12–13). His priestly ministry for His people is occurring. The New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit is already taking place as the Holy Spirit indwells believers today. Thus, there are several areas where Old Testament eschatology has occurred as a result of Jesus' first coming. Yet there are still major areas of eschatology that have not occurred yet. Our focus here will be on those eschatological events still to come and how the members of the Trinity relate to these events.

¹ By "eschatology" we mean the study of the last or end things with the focus being on events still to come from our current standpoint in history.

Three Ways to Look at the Trinity's Role in Eschatology

There are various ways to look at the Trinity's role in eschatology. We will highlight three of them. *First, we can examine Bible passages where the members of the Trinity are explicitly mentioned together in matters related to eschatology.* For example, we can look at passages where we see the following together:

Father-Son-Holy Spirit
Father-Son
Father-Holy Spirit
Son-Holy Spirit

Second, one can categorize areas where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have primary roles in regard to a specific eschatological function. By "primary" we mean areas where a member of the Trinity is stated to have a specific role in regard to an eschatological event or purpose. For example, the Father is singled out as the One who initiates and determines the timing of the fulfillment of eschatological events such as the Day of the Lord and the return of Jesus. The Son is singled out as having a primary role in regard to reigning on the earth and judging mankind. The Holy Spirit is the One who indwells believers so they can serve God as they should. This is not to say that the other members of the Trinity have no part whatsoever in these roles, but the areas mentioned appear to be specifically linked with one member in particular.

Third, one can examine how the Trinity relates to eschatology by era or event. For example how do the members of the Trinity relate specifically to the coming Tribulation Period? Or, what are their roles in the millennium and the eternal state?

Eschatological Passages Where Members of the Trinity are Explicitly Present Together

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

First, we will examine passages where the members of the Trinity are explicitly mentioned together. There is a passage in Revelation where we see the three members together in an eschatological context.

Revelation 4–5 (Heavenly Throne Scene)

The three persons of the Trinity are present together in the heavenly throne room scene of Revelation 4–5. This section presents the backdrop for the releasing of God's wrath upon the earth and the return of Jesus to earth to establish His kingdom. How fitting it is that the scene that leads to the defeat of the forces of evil and the coming of God's righteous kingdom involves all three members of the Trinity.

As Revelation 4 begins, John is invited to a heavenly scene where he is told "Come up here" and is shown things that will take place (Rev 4:1). The text mentions that John was "in the Spirit." Some take this as a reference to the Holy Spirit and if

this is the case, then this is an explicit reference to the presence of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, some hold that “in the Spirit” refers to the fact that John is in a spiritual ecstatic state or trance.²

Immediately after this statement John states that he saw “a throne . . . standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne” (4:2b). This “One” who is sitting on the throne must be the Father since He is the One who receives worship from those in heaven (Rev 4:9–11), and He is distinguished from the Son who will soon enter this throne room scene. Yet before the Son is introduced the Holy Spirit is present in 4:5: “And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” The concept of the “seven spirits” is also found in Rev 1:4 and most likely refers to the Holy Spirit.³ Thus, the Holy Spirit is present with this scene.

With Revelation 5 the Father is shown holding a book in His right hand. John weeps greatly because no one appears worthy to take the scroll from the hand of the Father. Yet this sorrow is ended by the presence of the Son who is described as “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah” and “the root of David” (Rev 5:4–5). He is the One worthy to take the book from the hand of the One sitting on the throne (Rev 5:9). This book is linked with the title deed to the earth and the unleashing of divine wrath that culminates in the Son’s reign over the earth. The Son (Lamb) unleashes the seal judgments in Revelation 6. At the time of the sixth seal the inhabitants of the earth realize that these judgments of wrath are the result of both “Him who sits on the throne” and the “Lamb” (Rev 6:16–17).⁴ Thus, in the important throne room scene of Revelation 4–5, the scene that precedes the wrath of God, all three members of the Trinity are explicitly present.

The Father and the Son

There are a cluster of eschatological passages that show the Father and the Son together. Here we will focus on four—Psalm 2; Psalm 110; Dan 7:9–14; and 1 Cor 15:24–28. All three of these show that it is the Father’s will to establish the Son as the king and ruler of this world.

² This is the view of Thomas who states that “in the spirit” “is descriptive of the prophetic trance into which the prophet’s spirit entered.” Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 338. Yet even this is connected with the Holy Spirit, when Thomas says that “This miraculous ecstatic state [was] wrought by the Spirit of God” (Ibid.).

³ The references to “seven spirits” found in Rev 1:4 and 4:5 probably goes back to Zech 4:1–10. Thomas points out “Zechariah 4:2, 10 speaks of the seven lamps (cf. Rev. 4:5) that are ‘the eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the whole earth.’” Thomas, 68.

⁴ Yarbrough observes, “Father and Son are shown in Revelation to mean (in addition to much else) ‘royal ruler’ or ‘king.’” Robert W. Yarbrough, “The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Matthew and Revelation,” in *The Kingdom of God*, eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 96.

Psalm 2

Psalm 2 shows the sinful nations in their rebellion against the Father and His Messiah (the Son). We know that God's King is Jesus the Son since later portions of Scripture apply Psalm 2 to the Messiah and His reign (Rev 2:26–27). Also, Ps 2:12 speaks of the necessity of doing “homage to the Son,” an act of worship that is only true of a divine person and not a mere man. Thus the picture of Psalm 2 includes both God the Father and God the Son.

The nations of the earth do not want God to rule over them (2:1–3). But God the Father laughs and scoffs at these rebellious nations from heaven and lets them know that He will establish His “King” and His reign on the earth (4–5). The realm of their rebellion will be invaded with the reign of the righteous Messiah. It is the Father's desire to give the Son the nations as an inheritance and the Son will rule over them with authority (7–9). Thus, the nations should stop their foolishness and submit to the Son because His wrath is coming (10–12).

Psalm 2 reveals two important things. First, God the Father intends to establish His Son as King over all the earth and the nations. And second, the Son will come with wrath and reign over the nations with authority. We can know that the fulfillment of Psalm 2 is future since Jesus uses this passage as motivation for the church for faithful service now in Rev 2:26–27:

He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father.

Psalm 110

Psalm 110 has much in common with Psalm 2, as it also discusses the Father's plan to establish the Son as King over the earth. It starts with David being privy to a conversation between the Father (*Yahweh*) and the Son (*Adonai*) who is also David's Lord (“The LORD says to my Lord”). The message from the Father to the Son is that the Son, who is David's Lord, the Messiah, is to have a session in heaven at the right of the Father.⁵ But this session is only for a limited period of time (“until”). When His session at the right hand of the Father is over, God the Father will give the Messiah (the Son) victory over His enemies from Zion in Jerusalem:

The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, *saying*, “Rule in the midst of Your enemies” (Ps 110:2).

The Son will shatter kings in the day of His wrath and will judge the nations (5–6). So again, as was the case in Psalm 2, it is the Father's plan for the Son to reign over

⁵ This seems to indicate that the Messiah goes from earth to heaven for a time before returning to Jerusalem to reign (see Ps 110:2).

the nations of the earth. This will occur with Jesus' second coming to earth as described in Matthew 24–25 and Revelation 19–20.

Daniel 7:9–14

An important eschatological scene involving the Father and the Son is also found in Dan 7:9–14. Verses 9–10 describe a glorious scene of God the Father who is called “the Ancient of Days.” We are told His vesture “*was* like white snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool” (9). His throne is ablaze with flames and thousands were worshiping Him. Then verses 13–14 describe the Son, who is referred to as a “Son of Man,” coming before the Father:

“I kept looking in the night visions,
 And behold, with the clouds of heaven
 One like a Son of Man was coming,
 And He came up to the Ancient of Days
 And was presented before Him.
 “And to Him was given dominion,
 Glory and a kingdom,
 That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language
 Might serve Him.
 His dominion is an everlasting dominion
 Which will not pass away;
 And His kingdom is one
 Which will not be destroyed.

Here we see the Son before the Father, for the purpose of a kingdom being given to the Son. This passage has many parallels with the throne room scene of Revelation 4–5 and again emphasizes the plan of the Father to have the Son rule the earth with “an everlasting dominion.”

1 Corinthians 15:24–28

Another passage that discusses the relationship of the Father and the Son to eschatology is 1 Cor 15:24–28. Here Paul discusses the Father and the Son in relation to the coming kingdom:

then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.²⁸ When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

The immediate context of this passage is Paul's discussion of the order of God's resurrection program. After the third stage of the resurrection program at the time of "the end," Jesus will hand the kingdom over to God the Father (24). This shows that Jesus' messianic reign has a termination or transition point to it. When it is over He "hands over the kingdom" to the Father. But this will not occur until Jesus reigns over His enemies and abolishes death. Thus, Jesus' kingdom ends or transitions with a crushing, dominating reign of the Son. When "all things are subjected" to the Father, "then the Son Himself also will be subjected to" the Father ("the One who subjected all things to Him").

The picture here is beautiful and presents Jesus as God's trusted and chosen instrument to restore the fallen creation to the will of God. Verse 27a links the Son's reign with the creation mandate given to man—"For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET." Jesus as the ultimate Man fulfills the creation mandate. Man was created to rule and subdue the earth (see Gen 1:26–28), yet this mandate was scorned when Adam decided to do things his way and disobey God. Neither Adam nor any mere human being could fulfill this mandate, but the Father chose Jesus, the ultimate Man, to do this. It is as if the Father told the Son, "Bring this sinful world back into conformity with My perfect will," and the Son does it. And not only does the Son succeed splendidly, He presents this kingdom to the Father so that the Father may have the glory. The purpose of this reigning and restoring of the Son is that the Father "may be all in all." Every square inch of God's creation is brought into perfect submission to the Father. At this point the will of the Father will be done on earth perfectly as it is in Heaven (see Matt 6:10). And when the Son finishes His task of defeating all enemies and restoring the creation, He subjects himself to God the Father.

In sum, these four passages teach us that the purpose of the Father in eschatology is to make sure the rebellious creation is brought back into perfect conformity with His will. And the purpose of the Son is to make sure the Father's desire happens. He is sent as the Father's instrument with full authority and power to rule over and restore all of the created order. As we survey Psalm 2; Psalm 110; Dan 7:9–14; and 1 Cor 15:24–28 we see that it is God the Father's intent to establish a kingdom reign of the Son (Jesus) on the earth to bring this fallen planet back into conformity with the will of the Father.

The Father and the Holy Spirit

In addition to the Father-Son connection with eschatology, there are also passages that relate to the Father-Holy Spirit relationship. This often takes the form of the New Covenant, of which the Holy Spirit's role is central. God the Father will grant the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit to His people.⁶ This will involve the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. For example, Ezek 36:22–27 states:

⁶ We acknowledge that there is a present aspect of the Holy Spirit's New Covenant ministry with believers today (see Heb 8:8–13), yet there is a coming role for the Holy Spirit as He works in saving the nation of Israel (see Zech 12:10 and Rom 11:26–27).

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. . . . For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. *I will put My Spirit within you* and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.’”⁷

There are many important truths found in this passage, but for our purposes we are noting that this section includes the promise of a coming day in which God the Father will put His Spirit within His people—“I will put My Spirit within you . . .” This is the promise of the New Covenant that would someday be given to and mediated through Israel. Isaiah 59:20–21a also promises the sending of the Spirit from the Father: “‘A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,’ declares the LORD. ‘As for Me, this is My covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit which is upon you . . .’” Other passages that discuss the role of God the Father and the Holy Spirit in regard to the New Covenant include Zech 12:10 and Joel 2:28–32.

At the time these passage were written, the coming of the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit was still future. The death of Jesus established the New Covenant with His blood (see Luke 22:20) and thus the promises of a new heart and the indwelling Spirit are being fulfilled in this present age. Yet the physical and national promises of the New Covenant await the second coming of Jesus. Zechariah 12:10 states that Israel will join the New Covenant in connection with the last days of the Tribulation and the return of Jesus. Paul connects the New Covenant passage of Isa 59:20–21 with the promise that “all Israel will be saved” (see Rom 11:26–27).

In sum, the relationship between the Father and the Holy Spirit in regard to eschatology seems to be this: The Father promised that He would give the Holy Spirit to His people via the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit comes and indwells the people of God. That ministry of the Holy Spirit is occurring for believers today, and will involve Israel at the time of the nation’s salvation and restoration. Also, as will be shown later, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is also a guarantee of future reward and resurrection.

The Son and the Holy Spirit

In addition to the passages that discuss the Father and the Holy Spirit, there are also sections of Scripture that mention the roles of Jesus the Messiah and the Holy Spirit together in regard to eschatology. Jesus the Messiah is the agent who baptizes His people with the Holy Spirit. With Matt 3:11–12, John the Baptist declares:

⁷ Emphases are mine.

“As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

When John speaks of “He who is coming after me,” he is referring to Jesus. The strategic statement here is that Jesus the Messiah “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” As the Messiah comes, His role includes bringing both New Covenant blessings for His people (baptism with the Holy Spirit) and Day of the Lord wrath (baptism with fire) for His enemies. As salvation history plays out, a time gap will exist between the outworking of these two aspects of His ministry. His baptizing ministry with the Holy Spirit will begin with the events of Acts 2, but the Day of the Lord judgment awaits the future (see 2 Thessalonians 2 and 2 Peter 3).

The Son’s baptizing ministry intersects with the Holy Spirit in that the Son baptizes with the Holy Spirit. John 1:32–34 also speaks of this relationship:

John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

With the Matthew 3 account, the Father also appears, as Matt 3:16:17 indicates:

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”

While our emphasis here has been on the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit, the affirming presence of the Father in this passage again shows all three members of the Trinity present as Jesus begins His official public ministry.

Primary Roles for Members of the Trinity in Regard to Eschatology

The last section emphasized passages where the members of the Trinity are explicitly mentioned together in eschatological texts. At this point, we now shift to examining the roles of the Trinity in eschatology from a different angle. Here we will highlight primary roles of each member of the Trinity in regard to events to come.

The Father's Role in Eschatology

Timing of Certain Eschatological Events

God the Father has a primary role in regard to the *timing* of coming eschatological events. On two occasions Jesus the Son stated that only God the Father knows the timing of events to come. In His Olivet Discourse Jesus gave detailed answers concerning the temple, His coming, and the end of the age. Then in Matt 24:36 He declared:

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”

Here Jesus is referring to the events of the Day of the Lord that culminate in His personal return to earth. Thus, this is an explicit statement that the Son does not know the day or the hour concerning the Day of the Lord's arrival, but the Father alone does. This is significant, since Jesus indicates that the timing of future events belongs only to the Father.

Next, on the day of Jesus' ascension into heaven the apostles asked Jesus a question concerning the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel: “So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’”(Acts 1:6). Again, Jesus answered that only the Father knows the timing of the kingdom's establishment:

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7).

Jesus indicates that knowledge of the timing of the kingdom belongs only to the Father. Significantly, Jesus did indicate that He knew the timing of the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:4–5 states: “Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ *He said*, ‘you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” So when it came to the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus did know the timing—in a few days. But when it came to the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to national Israel, this is known only to God the Father.

Establishment of the Messiah's Reign on the Earth

As discussed earlier, God the Father will not permanently tolerate a rebellious planet. He must restore His “very good” creation that has been marred with sin. Several passages indicate that He will install His King, His Son and Messiah, upon the earth. This will happen in accord to the truths of the passages we surveyed previously—Psalm 2; Psalm 110; Dan 7:9–14 and 1 Cor 15:24–28. The Father's goal is for His Son and King to rule over the realm in which the realm of the rebellion has

taken place. And when the Son has accomplished His righteous reign, this kingdom will be handed over to God the Father and the Eternal State will commence (see 1 Cor 15:28).

The Son's Role in Eschatology

The Son is identified as having several major roles in regard to eschatology.

Restoring the Creation to the Father

The Son's primary role in eschatology is to be One who restores the fallen creation to the Father (see Psalm 2; Psalm 110; Dan 7:9–14; and 1 Cor 15:24–28). This occurs in two main phases. First, the Son is the One who unleashes the divine wrath of God which starts with His direct opening of the seal judgments of Revelation 6. Revelation 4–5 revealed Jesus as the One worthy to take the book from the hand of the Father. And with Revelation 6, He is the one who opens it unleashing its contents upon the earth. At the time of the sixth seal with its cosmic signs and earthquake, the people on the earth realize that they are facing the wrath of the Lamb and the One who sits on the throne (see Rev 6:12–16). The second main aspect of the restoration involves the Son's rule as Davidic King over the earth. The angel Gabriel told Mary concerning her son: "the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32–33).

Resurrection Program

The Son also has a significant role in the resurrection program. Since Jesus rose from the dead He is "the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). Thus, His resurrection body is a prototype of the resurrection bodies believers will have some day when He returns again. According to Phil 3:20–21 Jesus will transform our bodies into conformity with His resurrected body:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Judgment

Another major eschatological role for the Son involves judgment. Jesus said the Father has given the Son authority to execute judgment:

For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did

the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment (John 5:26–29).

As a result, all will have to stand before the Son for judgment. For those alive at the time of the Son's second coming this includes the judgment of the nations where He separates the sheep (believers) from the goats (unbelievers). The sheep will inherit the kingdom while the goats will enter eternal fire. For the Christian this means standing before the "judgment (*bema*) seat of Christ so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). At the end of the millennial kingdom all of the unsaved dead will appear before the Great White Throne for sentencing to the lake of fire (Rev 20:11–15).

The Holy Spirit's Role in Eschatology

New Covenant Ministry

The Holy Spirit's main role in eschatology concerns His indwelling presence in believers who are participants in the New Covenant. That was the Father's promise in Ezek 36:27: "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." In the Old Covenant era, the Holy Spirit abided with believers but He did not indwell them. But Jesus promised His disciples that the Spirit's role would move to indwelling:

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you (John 14:16–17).

What is especially significant about the Holy Spirit's indwelling of New Covenant believers is the empowerment it brings. The previous Mosaic Covenant was good and holy, but it did not empower the saints to obey God as they should (see Rom 7:14–25). But the Holy Spirit frees the believer to obey God properly (see Rom 8:2–4).⁸

Resurrection

The Holy Spirit is also involved in raising people from the dead. Romans 8:11 indicates that the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead and will raise believers from the dead as well:

⁸ Gaffin states, "It is Paul, however, that the eschatological aspect of the Spirit's work is most pronounced and unmistakable," Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "The Holy Spirit and Eschatology," *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 4, no. 3 (Dec 1989): 15.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.⁹

So not only does the Holy Spirit indwell believers at the time of salvation, He is involved with the resurrection program. God gives life to our mortal bodies “through His Spirit.”

Pledge of Coming Inheritance and Glorification

While the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit is one aspect of eschatology that is being fulfilled now, the current sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit guarantees and looks forward to our eschatological inheritance to come. As Eph 1:13–14 declares:

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

The believer's “inheritance” is a future reward. And for Christians, the Holy Spirit is given to us as “a pledge of our inheritance.” Thus, one role of the Holy Spirit is to act as a guarantee for future reward.

In a similar way, in 2 Cor 5:1–5 Paul discusses our coming glorified body in which “what is mortal will be swallowed up by life” (5:4). But he then appeals to the work of the Holy Spirit who guarantees our coming glorification: “Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge” (5:5). Again, the presence of the Holy Spirit guarantees what God will do for believers in the future. Romans 8:23 also indicates that the present possession of the Holy Spirit is linked with the coming glorification of the body:

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

The Trinity's Role in Eschatology by Era and Event

The purpose of this section is to highlight the roles of the Trinity members by era and events.

⁹ “For the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit is in fact God's agent in the resurrection of the dead,” 259. Scott Brodeur, *The Holy Spirit's Agency in the Resurrection of the Dead: An Exegetico-Theological Study of 1 Corinthians 15, 44b–49 and Romans 8, 9–13* (Rome, Italy: Gregorian University Press, 1994), 259.

The Rapture

In 1 Thessalonians Paul devotes a significant section to the topic of the Day of the Lord (see 1 Thess 5:1–11). The Day of the Lord is a time of wrath that will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night, upon the world (see 1 Thess 5:2). Yet one of the Son's roles is that of delivering His church from this coming wrath of the Day of the Lord:

and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10).

For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 5:9).

Paul's message in 1 Thessalonians is consistent with what the apostle John told the church at Philadelphia:

Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth (Rev 3:10).

In His sovereign plan and purposes, God has deemed that His church will not experience the wrath of the coming Day of the Lord. The church will be rescued and kept from this time period. How will this occur? It will occur as the Son snatches His church to Heaven before the Day of the Lord occurs:

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:15–17).

Thus, one important role of the Son in regard to future events is to rescue His church from the coming Day of the Lord wrath that will come upon the whole world.

Tribulation Period and Second Coming

The Bible tells of a coming period of trial and tribulation both for Israel and the world. Jeremiah spoke of a coming "time of Jacob's distress" that would precede Israel's restoration (see Jer 30:2, 7). Paul told the Thessalonians of events that would take place when the Day of the Lord arrived (see 2 Thess 2:1–12). The apostle John had already experienced and heard of severe tribulations for the church when he

wrote Revelation in the 90s A.D., but in Rev 3:10 Jesus said there would be “an hour of testing” that would come upon the whole world.

The coming Tribulation Period involves all the members of the Trinity. Above we discussed that Jesus the Son will rescue His church from the coming Day of the Lord. With Revelation 6 we see that both the Father and the Son are involved with the divine wrath poured out during this period. The Son is the One who opens the first seal which is the opening salvo in the outpouring of God’s wrath: “Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals” (Rev 6:1). At the time of the sixth seal the people on the earth realize that their experiences are the wrath of both the Father and the Son. They say, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev 6:16–17). Thus, the Father and the Son are actively involved in the unleashing of wrath that judges the enemies of God and ushers in the kingdom of the Son.

In addition to His pouring out divine judgment on the earth, the Son will also destroy the evil powers that oppose God. For example, 2 Thess 2:8–10 reveals that the Son will destroy the man of lawlessness who has been revealed during this time period:

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Revelation 19–20 gives more detail concerning Jesus’ role in defeating the enemies of God at the end of the Tribulation Period. Revelation 19:19–21 tells of His defeat of the kings and armies of the earth who opposed God, and the beast and false prophet:

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Then the ring leader of the false Trinity—Satan, is captured and thrown in the prison of the abyss:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not

deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

As for the Holy Spirit, 2 Thessalonians may indicate that the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit is removed for the coming Tribulation Period:

Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way (2 Thess 2:6–7).

While this passage does not explicitly mention the Holy Spirit, there is a good chance He is the restrainer that Paul is referring to. During this current era we live in, the Holy Spirit restrains the depravity of man, yet with the coming Tribulation Period and the revealing of the man of lawlessness, the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry may be removed for a while. This again shows God's sovereignty over events to come. The man of lawlessness is coming but it is based on God's timetable. When the Holy Spirit removes His restraining influence then the era of the man of lawlessness can begin.

At the time of the second coming of Jesus, the Holy Spirit also will be involved with the salvation and restoration of the nation Israel. This takes place in the context of the Lord's rescue of Jerusalem while under siege from the nations. This also occurs in the context of Israel's repentance and belief in the Messiah:

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo" (Zech 12:10–11).

The Millennial Kingdom

The Scripture explicitly teaches a coming kingdom of one thousand years in duration that comes after the second coming of Jesus and before the Eternal State (see Rev 19:11–21:8). The emphasis on this period is on the reign of Jesus the Messiah. At the time of Jesus' second coming to earth, Rev 19:15 tells us:

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and *He will rule them with a rod of iron.*¹⁰

According to this verse, which is in the context of Jesus' second coming, Jesus is coming to "rule" the nations. The future tense —"He will rule them" indicates that

¹⁰ Emphases are mine.

the rule occurs as a result of the second coming. The Son must reign until all His enemies have been placed under His feet. In Matt 25:31 Jesus said that assumption of His throne would occur when He came in glory and all the angels with Him, and it is at this time that He begins His Davidic reign over Israel and the nations from Jerusalem (see Luke 1:32–33). The world that rejected Him at His first coming must now be subject to Him at His second coming. The Son will be settling disputes among nations (Isa 2:4). He will also grant kingdom authority to those who belong to Him (Rev 2:26–27).

The Holy Spirit is active as well during the millennium. He will indwell the people of Israel and empower Israel to obey God as the basis for enjoying spiritual and physical blessings in the land of promise (Ezek 36:25–30). The Holy Spirit also appears to be a dynamic and active presence for the kingdom. In Matt 12:28 Jesus stated, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”¹¹ This shows a strong link between the work of the Messiah and the work of the Holy Spirit. In this case, as Jesus does an act of the kingdom—removing evil spiritual powers, this is attributed to the kingdom work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it appears valid to believe that when the kingdom of God is established on earth at the time of Jesus’ second coming, the kingdom will be characterized by the active dynamic of the Holy Spirit. With Heb 6:4–5, the writer indicates that those who have been made “partakers of the Holy Spirit” have “tasted” “the powers of the age to come.” A miraculous demonstration of the Holy Spirit, even in this age, is a taste of what the Holy Spirit will do in the age to come after Jesus returns. So the Holy Spirit will be an active and dynamic element for kingdom conditions.

Eternal State

The Eternal State that follows the millennial kingdom is most discussed in Rev 21:1–22:5. At this point the Son has completed His successful reign over the earth, including His enemies. The Father and the Son are mentioned to be residing in the New Jerusalem, which is the capital city of the New Earth:

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty [Father] and the Lamb [Son] are its temple (Rev 21:22).

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 22:1).

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it (Rev 22:3a).

No explicit mention is made of the Holy Spirit in Revelation 21–22, although Rev 21:10 says that John was “carried . . . away in the Spirit” to the see the New Jerusalem coming from heaven. Some view the “Spirit” as a reference to the Holy

¹¹ See also Luke 11:20: “But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Spirit while others do not. While the Holy Spirit's presence is not explicitly mentioned in Revelation 21–22, the third member of the Trinity most certainly is there and involved. Perhaps the Holy Spirit's main role continues to be His New Covenant ministry of indwelling God's people.

Conclusion

The three members of the Trinity are actively involved with bringing God's purposes to completion. By looking at the roles each member has, we gain a greater appreciation of how the Godhead is pursuing the restoration of all things. It also heightens the necessity of being ready for His coming and motivates us to share the Gospel with others so that they may flee the wrath to come and enjoy the coming kingdom blessings.