

# **TOWARDS EXEGETICAL ESCHATOLOGY**

*A Study On the Key Passages of Prophecy*



Seminary Lecture Notes

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## TOWARDS EXEGETICAL ESCHATOLOGY 2.2



**Upgraded Seminary Lecture Notes**

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# Preface

Confused about end-time events? You are not alone. End-time schemes abound in church circles.

Christians that want to know how the world will end are susceptible to authoritative end-time schemes based on the perspective of a trusted teacher. However, most of these teachers merely adopted a view from their teachers. Few have thought through the passages. Rather, they bring forth proof texts for their position.

Moreover, men perform according to their theology whether it be right or wrong. Therefore, a good student will take the time to work out an eschatological position so he can live accurately.

Eschatology teachers can prove anything by compiling verses together. Therefore, a good student will demand an exegesis of an eschatological passage and not just accept proof texts as evidence of a theological position.

When I first started teaching eschatology, I adopted all the notes I could from dispensationalism. It became so confusing and contradictory; I literally picked up my lecture notes and threw it in the trash. I started another study based on an exegesis of eschatological passages in order to limit my conclusions based on the breath and depth of the passage and not on the Baconian method of cataloging verses to support a particular end-time view.

You have to force modern prophecy teachers to exegete their “proof text” rather than just cataloging verses together. These notes are included here to empower your understanding of Biblical eschatology so that you may be holy.

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This brief is an unedited compilation of the Notes from Dr. Stockton’s Exegetical Eschatology Course.

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# A STUDY ON THE KEY PASSAGES OF PROPHECY



## TOWARDS EXEGETICAL ESCHATOLOGY

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# Importance of Eschatology

Eschatology is a field of study within Christian theology. The word *eschatology* is combination of two Greek words *ἔσχατος* meaning "last" and *-λογία* meaning "words of." Thus, eschatology is a study of last things, the end of the world, what happens after death, the Second Coming of Christ and those subjects associated with the end of history and beyond.

Men perform according to theology whether it is right or wrong. All men, Christians and non-Christians, have a belief about where history is headed and what the future holds. Even atheists are religious because they possess beliefs about what happens at death and what values should control government. Thus, all men perform consistently with what they really believe about where history is headed. The question is whether those beliefs are true or false; good or evil; real or fantasy.

Historically, eschatology views have centered around three systems known as historic premillennialism, amillennialism, and post-millennialism. But, since the Zionist Movement in the late 1800s, Christian Zionism operating through Scofield's dispensationalism, and the formation of the Zionist State called "Israel," eschatology has been turned upside down. Scriptural passages on last things have been strained, stirred, shaken, and baked in an oven heated by modern conflicts in the Middle East in ways truth is no longer recognizable. Confusion abounds. Ashkenazi Jews, protagonists and guardians of anti-Logos, are now called God's chosen people. The modern state of "Israel" is considered a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy—even an heir to the land grant promises. The genocide of Palestinians is accepted because in the Christian mind these poor people are like the Canaanites and deserved to be murdered. Crimes of the Zionist State are either ignored or pushed under the rug because they are "God's people." Biblical passages related to eschatology are interpreted in light of some dispensational scheme so that student of Scripture has no clarity or political perspective. The average Christian doesn't see the uniqueness of the Logos, fails to see the church as the chosen people of Logos and agent of good in the world, and has given up on politics to let evil prevail,

Furthermore, the means of forming these end-time schemes and creating a dooms-day frenzy, has been a Baconian method of Bible study; that is, modern day prophecy teachers are famous for quoting tons of verses to prove a particular eschatological view. You can prove anything by compiling a list of verses together. Anything! Thus, there is a need for a return to exegesis of Bible passages related to eschatology; that is, conclusions about eschatological positions should come from exegetical studies on Biblical passages, limiting and delimiting their interpretation, so that clarity on the subject of eschatology can be gained. After all, our goal is to be true to Scripture, and not use Scripture to prove end-time speculations.

Thus, this work is called "Toward Exegetical Eschatology" because it is my attempt to exegete and interpret passages on eschatology without trying to cram a particular system down the reader's throat. This work contains errors. It is not the final say on any passage, but it is an honest attempt to limit and delimit an interpretation. Further, some interpretations end up affirming some element of premillennialism, or amillennialism, or postmillennialism. Some interpretations support preterism, other interpretations strongly eliminate preteristic positions. That is, if the reader is looking for total support from some eschatological position, the reader will be disappointed; but, if the reader is looking for light, hopefully he will find it here. Ultimately, we all agree that in the end the kingdom of God will be established through Christ for the glory of God.

# Genesis 3:15

## *The Protoevangelium*

♦ The *protoevangelium* is the Mother Promise of all prophecy which contains the coming of the Messiah and the crushing of the anti-god forces of history.

**Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.**

The "I" is God. The "thee" is a reference to the serpent and the spirit behind the serpent, Satan himself. The woman is Eve, Israel, and Mary the mother of Christ all rolled into one.

"Thy seed" refers to evil men, the anti-God, anti-Logos, anti-Christ forces and all its political forms that arise during history. The "seed" of the serpent is "Cain," "Nimrod," Babylon, Jezebel, Athaliah, Assyria, Rome and its scorpion children. "Her seed" is the Son of God, the son of Mary, the Christ-child, the Logos of the Greeks and the Messiah of Israel. Women do not have "seed." Only men have seed. Thus, the "seed" of Eve refers to virgin birth and her impregnation by the Spirit of God. Jesus is God's new creation.

The term "bruise" refers to injury, wounds, and a crushing defeat. Before us is the imagery of man crushing the head of the serpent with his foot. God is telling us that a Champion will be born among men, the seed of a woman, who will smash Satan, reverse the effects of eating the fruit from the Poisonous Tree, and cleanse the planet of evil.

The phrase "thou shall bruise his feet" is a reference to an injurious, serpent-smashing Champion will be wounded in the confrontation between good and evil. We know this Champion as Christ, and the wounds he received at the cross.

All of prophecy is about the conflict between good and evil, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, Christ and Satan, God's children and the Devil's seed, true

Israel and the anti-God forces. All prophecy tells one truth: the wicked will be crushed and destroyed and God's children will be saved by the woman's Seed, the Prince of Peace, the Son of God, the Arm of the Lord, the Messiah of Israel, and the Christ of God. This is the protoevangelium, the first Gospel!

In Genesis 3:15, we have a Messianic Promise to the whole world.

In Genesis 12:1-3, God gives the Messianic Promise to Abraham, the Father of the Nation of Israel.

In Genesis 49, the promise narrows to a tribe within Israel. The Messiah would come through Judah.

In 2 Samuel 7, the promise is given to a family, the family of David; that is, the Messiah would come through King David's descendants (See Matthew 1 and Luke 3).

# Genesis 12

## *Scofield's Distortion of the Abrahamic Promises*

♦ Genesis 12 is the foundation of all prophecy, and one of the most abused passages by English theologians. Lots of spiritual capital is invested in this text. Let's take a look at some facts and some current theological issues related to this passage.

**Genesis 12:1-3** Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. 4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him;

**Abrahamic Covenant:** This passage has been properly called the Abrahamic Covenant. But, the covenant promises come in stages. Genesis 13, 15, and 17 complete the promises.

**Four clauses:** This promise can be broken down into four parts as long as the parts are not disassociated from the whole purpose and intent of the promise.

- The national clause: "I make thee a great nation."
- The personal clause: "I will bless thee and make thy name great."
- The international clause: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee."
- The spiritual clause: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

**Interpretive Errors:** Because of modern day distortions of Scripture, we must address the following errors. The 1967 Scofield Bible produced by Oxford Press, an organization under the control and influence of Zionism, inserts a page and a half of textual notes proposing the promises given to Abraham are "unconditional;" that the modern State

“Israel” has a claim on the land belonging to the Palestinians based on the Abrahamic land grant promises; and that a curse is “laid upon those who persecute [modern unbelieving] Ashkenazi ”Jews.

Modern Zionists use this passage as a hammer to pound on those who object to the military land grab by modern Christ-rejecting, Ashkenazi “Jews” – Khazarian Jews who have committed racial genocide against the Palestinian people. These Zionists are so clever, they use the wallets of Christians to raise money for the antichrist, murderous regime in Tel Aviv.

You are not antisemitic if you don’t support the land grab of modern Ashkenazi Jews because they are not Semitic. They are Ashkenazim from modern Ukraine.

The whole idea that modern Jewry must arm themselves with guns and tanks to seize and steal Palestinian land as an “everlasting possession” is malicious theological *hocus pocus* -- a magician’s trick – a devil’s deception -- modern, Jewish propaganda. And, the American Evangelicals have fallen for it hook, line, and sinker (John 8:44).

**The Nature of the Covenant:** The Abrahamic Covenant has been wrongly labeled “an unconditional covenant,” a convenient tool that leads to the unconditional support of Jewish criminal activity around the world.

Before us is a contract offer by the LORD God and its acceptance by Abraham. While the intent is to bless, it is NOT unconditional.

The word “unconditional” is not in the text or in the Bible. It is a fiction, a ruse, a gimmick, a hoax, a ploy by early Zionists introduced to the American church by C. I. Scofield and the Jewish Oxford Press.

The whole idea that Abraham would have received the benefits of this contract offer without fulfilling the obligations of the covenant is patently offensive. The LORD God informed Isaac that the covenant promises became effective “*because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*” (Genesis 26:3-5).

The Covenant Promise is to Abraham, not modern Jews: The pronoun “thee” refers to Abraham, not the Jews. The term “Jews” is not in the text. The first mention of the term

“Jew”<sup>1</sup> in the Bible is 2 Kings 16:6 where it refers to men from the Tribe of Judah. Abraham did not know what a Jew was or would become. Furthermore, the promise extended to the twelve sons of Jacob, not just to Judah.

For Zionist Christians to claim these promises belongs to modern so-called “Jews” is a violent distortion of the text and of theology. It is a modern deception and a result of Jewish propaganda. It is like saying Chinese Muslims have a real estate right to own and rule Mecca.

The Covenant Promise is to Abraham, not the modern State of Israel a.k.a. “the other Israel.”

The whole idea that a group of Ashkenazi gentiles, falsely claiming to be Semitic Jews, have a right to take land belonging to Palestinians by force and murder (1948, 1967) is twisted, sick, vile religion at work.

To call this land grab a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy is treachery and treason to the law of the LORD God. While ancient Israel was a temporary beneficiary of the Abrahamic promises, modern Christ-rejecting, atheistic “Israel” has no righteous claim on the Abrahamic promises or the land of Palestine! None! Zero! Zilch! It is deception – a modern day ruse; and, Western Civilization has come under its spell.

The modern State of Israel is the result of clever, sustained political chicanery during the twentieth century by Marxist Jews. [See Benjamin Freedman’s: *Warning to America*].

To claim that God will bless those who bless modern Christ-rejecting “Jews” who are not even Semitic Jews and curse those who don’t support the lusty Zionist land grab is deception at its best. Pillage, and looting of Palestinians is a sad political tragedy -- a product of men listening to the hissing snake in the American Zionist media and not the LORD God.

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<sup>1</sup> [\[1\]](#) The term “Jew” today is a loaded term: It can refer to ancient Jews, men from Judah, the nation of Israel as made up primarily of men from Judah during the post exilic period, the religion of Judaism, men who follow Talmudic Judaism, Gentiles of the Ashkenazi Empire who converted to Judaism, men who are racially Ashkenazi, or men with an Ashkenazi Jewish mother. Jesus was not a Jew because he did not follow Judaism, but he was a Jew in the sense He was from the tribe of Judah. Jesus was anti-Jewish in the religious sense of the word and was crucified because He confronted the lusty, lying Jews of His day.

The “seed promise” (12:7) refers to Jesus Christ and not to Jews. In verse seven, the LORD said to Abram, “Unto thy seed will I give this land.”

The word “seed” is singular and refers to the Lord Jesus Christ and **not** modern Jewish impostors.

The apostle Paul is quick to identify the promise as “in Christ” and not “in Jewry” in Galatians 3:16-19. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the “seed.” He is the true Israel of God and in Him all the nations of the earth are blessed. Jesus was not a Jew in the sense of being religiously Jewish. He was from the Tribe of Judah, but He was never an advocate or practitioner of Judaism. Judaism was a cult that opposed Christ and plotted his death. He did **not** follow Judaism. Rather, He advocated men follow Torah.

Men are commanded to believe in Jesus; not modern day Israel; Men are asked to bless Christ, and not modern day Jews. Men are blessed “with all spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” when they believe the gospel (Ephesians 1:3-7). When men believe, they are placed “in Christ” the true Israel of God and become “the sons of Abraham.” Those who reject Christ, the true Seed of Abraham, are under the curse; that is, modern day Christ-rejecting Jews are under a curse and can never, ever, for any reason be blessed (Galatians 3:10-14).

When men believe, they become de jure citizens of Heavenly Jerusalem, not carnal Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22; Philippians 1:20). Believers should pray for Christians who are members of true, spiritual Jerusalem conducting the work of the gospel on earth and NOT be praying for the rancid political ambitions of Jewish Zionists in carnal Jerusalem hell bent on a Middle East land grab, which was only a type or shadow of heavenly Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Hebrews 13:18)

Men should pray for the peace of Christians around the world who are de jure citizens of the kingdom of God; Christians who have the keys of the kingdom; Christians who are the people of God and not for the prosperity of Jews who are twisted sons of the evil one. (John 8:42-48).

Men are **not** blessed because they believe in modern Israel, but because they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 20:29). The blessings and curses of the Abrahamic promise applied to Abraham and not modern Jewry. Eternal blessings and curses are connected to one’s faith in Christ or rejection of Him – not faith in modern so-called “Israel.” Those who believe in the Son are blessed; and those who reject the Son are under the curse (John 3:36). Correct?



Modern Jews are not God's chosen people. When Christians believe in Jesus, they learn that they are God's chosen people. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus, the Seed of Abraham, the "true Israel," are said to be "in Christ;" and are, therefore, the true Israel of God, beneficiaries of the commonwealth of Israel, a holy priesthood, a holy nation, and a people used to build up the fallen tent of David. Christians are the true sons of Abraham. Further, Christians are not "spiritual brothers" with modern day Christ-rejecting so called "Jews." Christians have nothing spiritually in common with modern Ashkenazi Jews (Galatians 6:16, Ephesians 2:11-3:10; Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:2; 2:5-9; Acts 15:16; Revelation 2:9, 3:9).

The modern "Jew" is from the area of Ukraine and has NO HEBREW BLOOD IN THEM! Even if they did, they would be disqualified from inheriting any blessing from God due to their unbelief!

The land grant promises of Genesis 12-13: God did promise Abraham the land. But, Paul interpreted these promises as a promise the believing sons of Abraham, including Christians, would inherit the world.

Romans 4:13 For the promise, **that he should be the heir of the world**, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

In conclusion, the misinterpretation and misapplication of Genesis 12 by Zionist Christians have given modern militaristic Israel a license to murder Palestinians and loot Palestinian land to which they have no Biblical or lawful claim. The human tragedy is beyond words; and, the spiritual debacle is an embarrassing blight on Christianity—a view not shared by historical Christianity and a view not embraced by the majority of Christian in the world today.

# Psalm 2

## *Kiss the Son All Ye Nations*

♦ We live in times of political chaos where madmen grip the helm of government. Against the backdrop of surf and foam of political strife is the source of peace and prosperity. Before us is the reason for all political conflict in the world today, and the solution to every political problem in seed form.

### The Psalmists Speaks

#### **KJV Psalm 2:1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?**

The word "why" is an interrogatory that can be translated "how" or "what" or "how much." It is a question asked for our benefit.

The word "heathen" should be translated "nations." The word "go'em" is translated "people" and "nations" in Genesis 10:5. In Jewry, the term *goy* is a derogatory term for non-Jews, but that is not the case here. Jews are part of the rebellion.

The verb "rage" ("*raqash*") is only used here, and it means to be in "tumult" or "commotion." The psalmist is asking, "Why are the nations always in a furor, a frenzy, a constant state of irritation, full of madness and hostility?"

The word "imagine" is the imperfect Hebrew verb "*hagah*." It is translated "roar" or "moan" or "growl" in Isaiah 31:4 of a lion roaring over its prey. It is translated "plot" in the ESV and "meditate" in Psalm 1:2.

The word "vain" is the Hebrew verb "reek," used adverbially. It is translated "armed" in the KJV and "led forth" in the ESV in Genesis 14:14. It is translated "the seven empty ears" blasted with east wind which is a reference to the seven years of famine in Genesis 41:27; and, "emptied their sack" in Genesis 42:35. The idea here is of kings "emptying theirs nets" of destruction and mercilessly killing people. We need only look at the madness of the Bolsheviks, Lenin, Stalin and others to grasp the harvest of this rage against God.

Before us is the question of the ages: Why can't nations live in peace? Why are they always at war, always in an uproar, always in the surf and foam of the sea of conflict?

As we listen to the news, it seems that there is invariably a regional dispute, a political debate, an infringement, a group of rebels protesting some perceived violation of human rights, a nation in political chaos ravaged by civil war. Some nation somewhere is "emptying his net" aggressively shelling another country for power, wealth, revenge, or defending itself against rocket fire with weapons of mass destruction.

## **2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,**

The kings have set themselves against the LORD. The name "LORD" is the Tetragrammaton and clearly refers to God's sovereignty and authority. The title "anointed" is the Hebrew name for Messiah, *mashiyach*, meaning "anointed"--a reference to Christ, the Son of God.

Several facts about the verb "set" needs to be noticed.

First, the verb "set" (*tithyetsebu*) is a Hebrew Hithpael, reflexive verb; that is, the kings of the earth are perpetually stirring themselves up to resist the Lord. The hostility clearly resides in the kings who are constantly declaring war against the LORD God; that is, they want to be gods among men and the only sovereigns on earth.

Secondly, the verb "set" is in the emphatic position in the sentence and clearly emphasizes the intense, independent, rebellious nature of kings.

The preposition "against" is properly translated, but could also be worded "upon" or "over" the LORD; that is, the kings of the earth have stationed themselves as masters over men, and they claim sovereignty over matters reserved for the God. The rulers of the earth do not recognize the authority of the LORD and His Law-word over them. They see themselves as the only sovereigns.

When Chief Justice Roy Moore placed the Ten Commandments in the corridor of the Alabama courthouse and explained that it represented the need for all Judges to surrender to the authority of the LORD God and His Law-word, the federal judge would have nothing to do with it. The D.C. Court declared that, "the state may not acknowledge the sovereignty of the Judeo-Christian God" [morallaw.org; that is, the Court forced its atheistic religion down the throats of the people of Alabama.

Before us is a continuation of the question: "Why have the kings of the earth set themselves up as lords and masters in opposition to the sovereignty of God and His anointed King, the Lord Jesus Christ?"

### **The Rulers of the Earth Speak**

#### **3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.**

Now the kings speak to one another. The Hebrew Piel, plural verb "let us break" is cohortive in form and meaning . . . and it is in the emphatic position. The Piel verb communicates intense determination to break from Puritan Christianity. Being in the emphatic position this verb clearly communicates the excessive vigor and profound madness of political leaders united in a new world order that incites rebellion against the Triune God and His law-order.

The term "their bands" is a feminine plural, a modest inference to the Trinity. "Their" would be a reference to the "us" of Genesis 1:26-28. The words "bands" and "cords" refer to chains or ropes that tether animals. These terms designate the Claim the Creator-God has on all the people of the earth. The plural nouns are used metaphorically of the sovereignty of the LORD God and the absolute binding authority of His law over mankind.

The new world order encourages rebellion against the authority of Christ and His Law-word, and is hell-bent on bringing in a new global world order to build the utopia of kings --wealth, power, and control of man's destiny.

We are unaware of kings who have taken an oath to the LORD God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to uphold His law and to honor Christ save one -- the Queen of England. But, she has so violated her oath, she has committed treason against God and the British people. At best, kings take oaths to uphold the laws of man -- which by the way, are almost always hostile to God's law-order.

### **Heaven's Reaction to the Rebellion**

#### **4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.**

To an informed Christian the hostility of congressmen and our nation's leaders is like a burr under the saddle. We are constantly irritated and agitated by the insanity of our political leaders. Rightly so. Thus, we pray, "Hallowed be thy name; thy Kingdom come"; that is, may men surrender to your law-order now.

How does God respond to the psychotic, sociopathic madness of kings? Well, He certainly isn't threatened by any . . . or all of them! "He laughs!" The term "laugh" (*shachaq*) is translated "to make sport of" in Judges 16:25. It is a term of contempt. The word "derision" (*la-ag*) means "to mock" and is translated "laughed thee to scorn" in 2 Kings 19:21. The temporal power of weak, proud rulers is no threat to the omnipotent power of the eternal God.

### **5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.**

What is the future of the rebel kings? He has a message for them. The verbs "speak" (Piel) and "vex" (Piel) in Hebrew poetry are complementary terms. Both clearly state intense energetic action. The word "vex" is translated "troubled" (Genesis 45:3), "dismayed" (Exodus 15:15) and "terrified" (ESV 1 Samuel 28:21). God is not some sweet, indulgent passive Mother Hubbard type figure. Before us in the image of deliberate, controlled, intense action of an angry God.

The word "wrath" and "sore displeasure" are also complementary terms. The Hebrew word for "wrath" is "nostril" (*aph*); that is, when a man feels wronged, his nostrils flare. The Hebrew word for "sore displeasure" means "heat" or "burning anger." The imagery before us is that of an angry dragon with flared nostrils blasting balls of fire upon his adversaries. The sudden stroke and death of Lenin (1924) after his order (1922) to starve five million Russian peasants comes to mind.

To put it bluntly, God is not happy with rebel nations. Today, is there any government committed to His law-order? Consequently, He opposes the proud, humanistic states. It is not His will that any of them perpetually succeed. All will fail. He will vex them in His wrath.

### **The Father Speaks**

### **6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.**

**The Father speaks:** "I have set" is the Hebrew Qal perfect verb *nacak* which means "to pour out." The imagery before us is that of a metallurgist heating iron ore in a blast furnace at a smelting plant to pour hot iron into a mold to make steel. The Father emphatically states that He has His king, and He has installed him permanently on His holy hill.

The "holy hill" is a reference to the Heavenly Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the assembly of the saints, the heavenly Jerusalem of which carnal Jerusalem was a type.

This is a decree "written in stone" sort of speak! It is an iron-clad, perpetual, indisputable fact.

In contrast to antlers that fall off every season among deer and elk, are permanent horns of power like that of a ram.

In contrast to the changing winds and the sands of time are the eternal shores; in contrast to the fading grass on the prairie are the mighty rocks and boulders of the earth.

In contrast to the fragile tents of man are the pyramids of Almighty God.

In contrast to fragile, weak, temporal rulers is God's eternal, immutable, anointed King.

In contrast to the weak, flawed egotists that arise to power out of the sea of politics to ride the wave of temporal power to the sand castles of nations is God's chosen King, the Lord Jesus Christ, established forever on God's holy, eternal mountain. God rules, not man!

Before us is the SOLUTION to all political disputes -- recognition of and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ as Head of the Nations. Oh, that the kings of the earth were humbly submitted to the authority of Christ, under oath to obey His Law-word. How different the evening news!

### **The Son Speaks**

**7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee.**

The Son speaks. A public notice is given. The term "decree" refers to a resolve, order, or statute. The first usage of the word "decree" (*choq*) is in reference to land given to the priests by Pharaoh which Joseph, Vice-regent of Egypt, was not permitted to seize or sell (Genesis 47:22); that is, Pharaoh's decree was set in stone. His decree was absolute and permanent. It is like an executive order, but more firm and unbending. Thus, God's decree to the Son is absolute, permanent, forever, immutable, and unchangeable.

The decree is one of relationship. The Son is very God of God, eternal from the beginning. But, at a point in time, if we dare use the term "time," the Father declared His

relationship to the Second Person of the Triune God as that of a father to a son. He is now "The Son." The term "begotten" does not refer to an actual birth, but the genesis of a legal relationship. In the movie "Ben Hur," Ben Hur wins the affection of a Roman Senator, is declared a son, and receives his freedom. Ben Hur existed before the declaration. The decree did not initiate his existence; only a new status. Likewise, between the Father and the Son! The Second Person of the Triune God was declared a Son.

**8 Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession. 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.**

Favored by the Father, the Son is granted special favors. All He has to do is ask, and the nations are His. This is the Spirit's way of informing us that Christ claims jurisdiction over all men and their institutions. Both the right and power to rule the nations belong to Christ: "Who is the head of all rule and authority" (Colossians 2:10). But, Christ has done more than ask. He has purchased the nations with His own blood, the currency of the spirit world. The iron sceptre is in nail pierced hands. The nations are as fragile as pottery. The One who made a whip and cleansed the temple will use His rod of iron to smash the nations. Rebels who will not bow the knee will be broken into hundreds of pieces.

### **The Spirit Speaks**

**10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.**

The Spirit of God gives sweet counsel to the rulers of the earth. The subjects of instruction are kings, presidents, parliaments, public officials in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. They are exhorted to be wise and receive the following instruction. Unfortunately, however, the nations seems to be in the hands of fools and madmen.

**11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.**

The word "serve" means "to work" or "to labor" or "to obey." The kings of the earth are exhorted to serve the LORD; that is, to obey His Law-word. The command "rejoice" refers to voluntary service. Holy fear must mix with joy and the privilege of serving the LORD God. Governments are in place to serve the interest of Heaven and the law of the

LORD God; to protect human rights and freedom; and, to punish those who infringe on the rights of others.

The phrases "with fear" and "with trembling" is a call to careful and precise obedience to His commands and purpose (Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; 8:6; 10:12, 20; 13:4; 17:19; 19:20).

The Spirit is calling for allegiance to the Word of God, **not** allegiance to a political party or the new world order or to the U.S. Constitution. Oh, what a different place the world would be if we had Christian leaders committed to the will of God and served His purposes to the best of their knowledge and ability. Today, however, it seems we have madmen ruling nations who are hell bent on serving their own lust or Marxist agenda of the new Zionist world order.

**12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish *from* the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all they that put their trust in him.**

"Kiss" refers to the ancient tradition of subjects kissing the ring or sceptre of a king; that is, of demonstrating devotion and loyalty to the crown. Kings take no pleasure in rebels. To arouse the wrath of a king is to perish like Haman before Xerxes. After the Earl of Essex "half" drew his sword against Queen Elizabeth, she had him executed.

**All the kings of the earth all called to "kiss the Son:"**

Kiss Him as the Son of God, the historical Christ who appeared in Bethlehem.

Kiss Him as the Creator for "by Him all things are Created."

Kiss Him as the King of the rulers of the earth.

Kiss Him as the only Lawgiver, King, Priest, and Prophet.

Kiss Him as the Savior King Who gave His life to save His people from their sins.

Kiss Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Kiss Him as the Gateway to God.

Kiss Him as the Mediator between Heaven and Earth.

Kiss Him as the Lamb of God, the Sin-bearer.

Kiss Him as the Way of Salvation.



Kiss Him as the True Israel of God, the fulfillment of all OT promises.

Kiss Him as the Head of the Church.

Kiss Him as the risen, ascended Savior and Lord sitting at the Right hand of God.

Kiss the Son lest He be angry and you perish in the way.

Kiss the Son that you may be truly blessed of God with eternal life and enter His kingdom.

Kiss the Son is equivalent to invitation terms like "receive Christ as Lord and Savior," "believe," "repent," "bow the knee to Christ," and "Confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raise him from the dead" (Romans 10:9).

The psalmist is telling us to "look to Christ" and be saved. To reject Christ is to perish, for "whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18).

The term "blessing" refers to salvation. To "kiss the Son" is to be reconciled to God and to possess eternal life and the blessings of the age to come.

A blessing is promised to rulers and all those who put their trust in him. Trust here is more than an occasional glance toward heaven, but a genuine commitment to trust and obey. "In God we Trust," is our nation's motto. Oh, that it would be more than mere words. Oh, that we might acknowledge there is only one God and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

The schism between the United States and Russia or between Hamas and Israel are the result of the nations rejecting God's Law-order. The solution between the United States and Russia and between Gaza and Israel is for all parties to "kiss the Son." There is peace at the cross. If Jews and Gentiles can find peace at the cross, so can Arabs and Jews, Americans and Russians.

Before us is the reason for all political conflict in the world today, and the solution to every political problem known to man in seed form. The problems are not political, but spiritual; likewise, the solution is not political diplomacy or war, but confession of and surrender to the Son. Kiss the Son and be reconciled to God.

# Psalm 110

## *The Coronation of God's King Priest*

♦ Before us is a royal psalm. Its importance is staggering seeing that it is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13; 7:11, 15, 17; 8:1).

It has been said the first duty of man is not to submit to authority, but to question authority. The writ that challenges authority is called a *quo warranto* requiring an individual claiming authority to produce in writing his writ of authority to exercise certain powers. This is Jesus' response to any man's *quo warranto*. It is proof of claim that He was called to be Ruler.

Before us is the glorious coronation of Messiah to the office of king and priest. A contract with offer and acceptance is announced. The acceptance of the appointment to office contains rights and privileges, and imposes duties and responsibilities on the Messiah. Here the powers of government and the obligations of a king priest are conferred upon this human agent, the Messiah. The Psalm serves as constructive notice of His appointment a thousand years before He walked the earth.

### Messianic Appointment as King

**Psalm 110:1-2 <A Psalm of David.> The LORD (YHWH) said unto my Lord (Adonai), Sit (yashab) thou at my right hand, until I make (shiyth) thine enemies thy footstool (hadom). The LORD shall send the rod (matteh) of thy strength out of Zion: rule (radah) thou in the midst of thine enemies (oyeb).**

Five persons are introduced in the first three verses: David, LORD, Lord, the enemy, and thy people.

When the Pharisees quibbled with Christ and tried to trap him in a contradiction, He queried them about the identity of the "Lord" David mentioned in this psalm, "If David then called him 'Lord,' how is he his son?" (Matthew 22:41-46).

**David:** When David wrote this psalm He was God's duly anointed king. The word "anointed" means "messiah." A messiah is someone with *olive* oil poured over them. In Israel, kings and priests were anointed with oil as a symbol of their divine appointment. David was God's de jure messiah. But, in this psalm the anointed One is not David, but "the Lord." The only reference to David is in the inscription and the word "my" when he referred to "my Lord." In the New Testament, the Greek word *christos* means "anointed." Consequently, our Lord Jesus was called "the Christ" or the "Anointed One." This psalm, therefore, is not about David, but about the coronation of the Lord Jesus Christ and His commission as king and priest.

**LORD / Lord:** The name "LORD" (YHWH) is the Tetragrammaton meaning "I Am." This is God's official name and the covenant name whereby God made His contract with Israel. Jesus taught us to address the LORD as "our father." The title "**Lord**"<sup>2</sup> in lower case letters means "master" or "owner." The word *Adon* comes from a Ugaritic word meaning "lord" or "father." The plural form, *Adonai*, is like the plural form *Elohim* which is regularly used with singular verbs and modifiers. It is proper to construe the Name as an "emphatic plural" or "plural of majesty." The plural form occurs over 300 times in the Old Testament, and it always refers to God. Adonai is our Lord Jesus Christ.

That the LORD is the supreme authority over all creation was unquestioned in Israel by virtue of the fact the LORD is the Creator (Genesis 2:4), and that He is the Redeemer of the nation (Exodus 20:1; Isaiah 41:14; 43:14). Because He is sovereign, he rules: because He loves His people, He redeems. He rules His people's with their needs on his heart; that is, Israel's God is a benevolent, Sovereign.

"**Sit**" is an imperative. It is YHWH that summons Adonai and bestows on Him the duties and privileges of the Messianic office at His right hand. He was commissioned because of His virtue and competence. "**Right hand**" is a Middle Eastern symbol of authority and power. It is a position or throne whereby Messiah exercises jurisdiction over His dominion. "**Footstool**" or "under feet" is an idiom for conquest over enemies.

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<sup>2</sup> "The plural form *Adonai*, like the plural form *Elohim*, is regularly used with singular verbs and modifiers, so it is best to construe the Name as an "emphatic plural" or "plural of majesty." When the plural is formed using a singular possessive ending ("my Lords"), it always refers to God, and occurs over 300 times in the *Tanakh* in this form" (Source: [http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Names\\_of\\_G-d/Adonai/adonai.html](http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Names_of_G-d/Adonai/adonai.html)).

"**Rod**" or "staff" is a scepter, a symbol of authority. Today we use stamps and embossers and seals to declare the authority of a written instrument. In Biblical times, a king's staff represented His authority. "**Zion**" is Jerusalem, the residence of King David, and where the God ruled over the nation from the tabernacle / temple. But, this coronation does not occur in carnal Jerusalem, but in the presence of Almighty God in Heavenly Jerusalem, the place of God's eternal rule (Psalm 87).

**Rule:** The term "rule" (*radah*) is an imperative; i.e., we have here a grant of authority to execute the duties of the Messianic office. The term "enemies" means that not everyone accepts this king or grant of authority. Many rebels against God's law-order resist his rule. The duties of Messiah include at least two obligations: to save His people from their enemies and to crush the enemies of God.

**Enemies:** God's enemies (*oyeb*) are proud and foolish men who reject His rule over them. Anyone who refuses to surrender to His King is an enemy. Terms like "wicked," "unbeliever," and "antichrist" come to mind.

Luke 19:27 But those mine **enemies**, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.

### **Messiah's Appointment and the Consent of the People**

**3 Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.**

In this verse we have a lovely description of the King's people using rich and refreshing metaphors of morning dew sparkling in the sunshine of the unveiled Christ.

"**Thy people**" refers to God's covenant people; those who confess Him as their King, Lord, and Master; those who surrender to His law-order and live out a life of love. We call them "coverts," "the elect," or "believers," or "Christians." Jesus called them "friends" (John 15:13-14; Romans 10:9-10; Matthew 11:28-29; Luke 18:7).

"**Willing**" (*nedabah*) refers to consent. It is a word connected with free-will offerings, something voluntary and not mandatory. In order to experience the benefits of the contract (salvation), one must consent to be ruled by the Lord King. Everyone in God's kingdom is there because they want to be there. These are people with "no king, but King Jesus."

"**Day of power**" is a reference to the day the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ will be unveiled to mankind. It is the day of the Lord and the day of resurrection. The New Testament calls it the "apocalypse" (2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 1:1).

"**in the beauties of holiness:**" God's people are seen dressed in holy garments. Justified and sanctified in Christ, the saints shine "in the beauties of holiness." In contrast to His enemies, the church sparkles with devotion to their King. The "**womb of the morning**" is glorious reference to the arrival of the Eschaton. The long night of distress, disease, and death is over. The "**dew of thy youth**" is a lovely description of the bodily resurrection of the holy dead. These holy ones are described as the morning dew that refreshes the meadow after a long summer drought. This is an ideal picture of God's people robed in the holy garments of kings and priests. Raised from the dead (spiritually and bodily), they sparkle and shine like fresh crystals of dew on grassland.

### **Messiah's Appointment as Priest**

**4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.**

We have a second pronouncement: The public declaration that God has made His selection for the office of priest, and installed Adonai to be not only a king, but a priest. This coronation is a grant of power and authority by God to Messiah to enter heaven's sanctuary in order to mediate the needs of mankind to the LORD God. The oath verifies the acceptance of Christ as man's representative in Divine affairs. What an advantage to have one man who loves us and Who represents our concerns before Almighty God. Glory! We have a competent king priest that rules, and represents us before the Father (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 5)!

**Sworn:** Because no man has a duty to perform public service unless he is commissioned to do so and voluntarily accepts the appointment, assignments to office require a public oath. The wording in *Hale v. Henkel* 201 U.S. (1906) declares a political truth: the citizen "has no duty to the state or his neighbors to divulge his business . . . his rights are such as existed by the law of the land ***long antecedent*** to the organization of the State . . ." Because a man has no duty to the State, upon acceptance of the commission to serve the public, the man must *take an oath to faithfully perform the duties of public office*. Likewise, every contract requires an oath or promise to faithfully perform the duties of a contract. Thus, we have in this verse the LORD's oath appointment of Messiah to the office of the Melchizedek priesthood.

**Will not repent:** This appointment of Messiah as king priest is irrevocable and unalienable.

**"Thou art a priest"** means that the Messiah is not only a king that kings, but a priest that priests. Before us is an ideal king--a king that mediates the affairs of God to man; and, a priest that mediates the concerns of man to God. He is God's representative to men as King; and man's representative to God as Priest. He serves God and dispenses justice as a king, but he serves mankind and shows mercy as a priest. We have here for the first time in history a King that serves the law of God, but also a King Priest that serves the needs of the people. What a concept - a benevolent King - a King that cares - a King that executes justice toward the wicked, but mercy towards kingdom citizens! He purges society of evil men; and, He saves sinners to the uttermost.

**"Melchizedek:"** The title "Melchizedek" means "king of Salem." One of the unique features of Melchizedek is that He appears suddenly in the Genesis record. His origin is shrouded with mystery as the Spirit reveals nothing about his human ancestry. The writer of Hebrew used this strange feature to signify the eternal nature of the Melchizedek priesthood with which our Lord is identified. He was the first king priest mentioned in the Bible and was either a Theophany of Christ or an ideal king / priest to the people living near Jerusalem at the time of Abraham. He refreshed Abraham after Abraham's return from pursuing the five kings that had captured Lot by supplying him with bread and wine. So great was Melchizedek, that Abraham tithed a tenth of his equity to this king priest. Melchizedek was not a Jewish priest ministering in the carnal temple with sacrifices that can never take away sins. Rather, He was a true king priest that used his resources to meet the needs his people, and specifically, Abraham. Our Lord's kingly priesthood is the archetype of the Melchizedek priesthood.

### **Messiah's Conquest, Triumph, and Rest**

**5-6 The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill *the places* with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.**

**The Lord at thy right hand:** Before us is an apocalyptic pronouncement of bone-crushing victory over stubborn and rebellious kings that have resisted God's rule by Adonai, God's appointed king priest. This is not "sweet Jesus," but the Lord Christ, the Skull-crusher.

**Strike** (machats): The word "strike" means "to smite, shatter, or wound severely." Here is represents the Messiah faithfully executing the duties of his office to punish evil doers and to purge society of evil men. This is the "day of the Lord."

**Kings:** The "kings" refer to proud and defiant rulers on earth that shake their fist at God and maliciously and recklessly violate the rights of man. These are rulers who defy the law of the LORD God and rule lawlessly as tyrants over men. All presidents, sultans, prime ministers, Caesars, emperors, dukes, generals, and government officials included in this word "kings."

**Wrath:** The word "wrath" (aph) means "nostril" in Hebrew. An angry man has his nostrils flared and is an appropriate expression for wrath. This is "eternal wrath," the wrath of the Eschaton, the wrath associated with the Last Judgment. This is "sinners in the hands of an angry God." This is the day of vengeance and "baptism of fire" mentioned by Malachi and John the Baptist (Malachi 4:1-2; Matthew 3:1-12).

**Dead bodies and wounded heads:** Before us is imagery of the Skull-cracker smashing and squashing the enemies of God littering an ancient battlefield with bleeding, broken bodies. The psalmist assures us that the enemies of God will suffer ultimate, eternal defeat.

### **7 He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.**

On this canvas of Holy Writ, the Holy Spirit sketches a scene of the Champion King Priest returning home as a Victor from a fierce battle. With blood on his garments and sweat on His brow, He stops by a stream to refresh himself with a drink of water and to reflect on the marvels of this victory. With His enemies defeated, and His people safe, He holds his head high with honor and joy.

The battlefield was Calvary wherein our Lord faced man's fierce threefold enemy: Satan, sin, and death. Having given His all to save His people, He returns to the Father as Heaven's Champion. This is the King Priest of the psalm; the Lion-lamb of Revelation chapter five.

# Isaiah 2:1-5

## *Where is History Headed?*

♦ With all of science's technology, one might think that mankind is improving with time. But, listening to the evening news is nothing but a police report on the latest criminal activity. Reading the newspaper is no better. It's kind of like going to a cemetery and studying gravestones. There are daily reports of terrorists activities, international conflicts, local murders, and unending disputes between donkeys and elephants. It's totally depressing. Is there any good news? Where is history headed?

Every man has a dream about what an ideal society looks like. The Word of God describes its hope in terms of the kingdom of God. The term "kingdom of God" is not in the Old Testament, but its footprints are everywhere. The word "kingdom" is *malkuw* in Hebrew and *basilea* in Greek. In both cases it refers to a rule and jurisdiction of a king. When Isaiah says, "Thy God reigneth," he is referencing God's kingdom. History is not cyclical, nor is it going around in circles. The Scripture informs us that the *terminus ad quem* of history is the kingdom of God. God's kingdom program was the major message of Isaiah, of John the Baptist, of Christ, of Philip the evangelist, and of Paul, Peter, and John (Isaiah 2, 65; Matthew 1-12; 4:17; Acts 8:12; Acts 28:, 23, 31; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 1:9, 12:10, 16:10, 17:12, 17).

### **Isaiah 2:1 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.**

Isaiah begins his ministry informing his listeners of the prophetic "word" (*hadavar*) he received regarding the final outcome of God's work in Judah and Jerusalem. Things were in such a state of decay, spiritual optimism in Jerusalem was as rare as a smile on seaman apprentice. But, God constructed a lighthouse so His nation could sail their vessel around the rocky shores of the Levant in the turbulent sea of politics.



**2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.**

**Last days:** The "last days" is a prophetic marker taking us to the final chapter of history. It may refer to remoteness rather than finality (Ellicott).

The "mountain of the Lord" refers to the temple multiplex. This is not a prophecy about building a third temple. Rather, it refers to men recognizing the supremacy of the Lord and His accomplishments of the gospel in the hearts of men – the goal of Biblical revelation.

The temple area was not only a religious center but the seat of Israel's government. What Washington D.C. is to Americans, Jerusalem was to the Hebrew people. There, the king met with his cabinet to conduct their civil ministerial duties. YHWHY was not only Israel's Savior, but Israel's Lawgiver, Judge, and King. His throne was called the "Ark of the Covenant" in the holy of holies. Israel's earthly king, a servant of YHWH, met with Israel's leaders a few meters from the temple proper to administrate the affairs of state; that is, they were compelled to perform government duties under the eye of God.

**The mountain:** Jerusalem is a city surrounded by hills. While Mt. Zion was the center of the nation's concerns, it was an insignificant actor in the drama of international politics. God's work has always played second fiddle in the screeching band conducted by secular heads of state. But, here Israel's King conducts the orchestra.

In the last days, the mountain of the Lord will be the headquarters of world government for the benefit of all – most likely a metaphor rather than a geographical prediction – a message to the people of Isaiah's day that the work of God surrounding ancient Jerusalem will have world-wide influence.

While the temple mount was where priests conducted the ministry of reconciliation<sup>3</sup>, the emphasis here is upon international relationships. Isaiah informs us that the apex for international development will be the LORD's Mountain, the Lord's work, the ministry of reconciliation to the Creator. Like the United Nations in New York, a day is

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<sup>3</sup> Keep in mind the temple complex was heavily guarded by Levitical armed guards; that is, the civil / religious center was not an amusement part. The work was serious, and heavily policed.

coming where Jerusalem will be the place where nations will assemble to negotiate their business -- not today's carnal Jerusalem, but the seat of government represented by Heavenly Jerusalem.

Isaiah sees thousands of pilgrims traveling from all the nations streaming to this city of justice to consult the LORD and to work out their conflicts under the light of God's Law-order. Again, this is not literal or geographical. It is a spiritual reality. Modern carnal Jerusalem murdering its neighbors could not possibly be what Isaiah had in mind.

**3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**

The expression "mountain of the LORD" was Mt. Zion on which the temple was constructed. The term "house" is a reference to the temple. Solomon's temple was the dwelling place of the "God of Jacob," a title expressing grace and kindness. A trope of a future reality as a result of gospel proclamation.

Can you imagine a time when men will delight in going to church to hear sermons on the Word of God? Isaiah shows us that day. "Many people" refers to a mass movement where the international community will invite people to go to learn about God's law-order. The word "come" is an imperative. It is an invitation term. The people of the nations are bursting with optimism and assurance that answers to their political dilemmas are in (Heavenly) Jerusalem. "His ways" and "His paths" are a reference to God's law-order; that is, civil rulers will learn how to govern by God's law and not plunge into the wave and surf of legal mischief (Psalms 94:20).

To the original readers, the temple was the center of national life. In the Christian era, the church is the temple of the Lord -- a spiritual construction which is totally superior to the bricks and stones of that ancient house (Ephesians 2:12ff). Isaiah saw a time when devoted men would encourage rulers and politicians, friends and neighbors, to seek the Lord God and to learn his ways. The major course at (Heavenly) Jerusalem University will be law, not how to experience the warm fuzzies. "Think not that I have come to destroy the law," stated Jesus. The graduates at this institution will be experts on love, for "love is a fulfillment of law" (Romans 8:13).

**4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.**

In his vision, Isaiah sees Israel's Lawgiver governing international affairs. On that day, rulers will take orders from the King of the nations (Jeremiah 10:7). Men will serve One God and His law-order. Governments will be forced to expunge idolatrous, liberal man-made statutes and govern according to the law of the LORD God. When every nation adopts one God, one law, and One Source of law, harmony prevails! Peace reigns! The image of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks suggests closure of the military industrial complex. West Point and the U.S. Air Force Academy will shut their doors. Cadets will no longer learn war and prepare for military careers. Rather, the bravest and brightest will master skills where peace and goodwill come to men through Jesus Christ.

**5 O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.**

Since this is what the future holds and where history is headed, Isaiah invites his own people living under the midnight of political chaos to walk by the starlight of this prophecy.

Let us take courage that our service to God, whether it be sweeping kitchen floors or teaching a Sunday school class or holding a sign at some abortion clinic is not in vain. Every brick laid contributes to God's grand program known as the kingdom of God. We can't build the kingdom because its growth is of God (Mark 4:26-29). But, we can live in light of it.

# Isaiah 9:1-6

## *The Champion that Ushers in the Golden Age*

♦ How do you describe the kingdom of God without being dreamy and idealistic? In this passage, Isaiah describes the Golden Age in the context of war and the impending invasion of Assyria, one of Israel's most fierce and cruel enemies.

Isaiah receives his revelation at the threshold of the Syro-Ephraimite War while Israel and Syria were pressing Judah to form an alliance to resist Assyrian expansion (Isaiah 7:1ff). These were dark, depressing days where the black scarecrow of fear plucked hope out of hearts. Two groups of people emerged: (A) the people driven by fear, the neglect of God, and defiance (Isaiah 8:4, 9-16; 21-22); and, (B) Isaiah and the faithful who feared God and waited on Him during the midnight hours when God hid his face from Jerusalem (Isaiah 8:12, 17, 20).

The chapter divisions in the Bible are not "inspired!" The message in chapter nine should not be separated from the context of chapter eight. Chapter nine is a continuation of God's revelation of "what the LORD said to me (*Isaiah*)" beginning in chapter eight verse one. Chapter eight is the stormy midnight of the nation; chapter nine is the light of dawn.

### **Isaiah's Gospel: the End of Horror**

**Isaiah 9:1 Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. (Ellicott's translation: Surely there is no gloom to her that was afflicted. In the former time he brought shame on the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter he bringeth honour on the way by the sea, beyond Jordan, the circuit of the Gentiles).**

Isaiah contains the most sophisticated Hebrew in the Old Testament and is at times tough to translate even by the most competent Hebrew scholars. This is the case here. Therefore, Ellicott's translation is provided.

Chapter eight closes with a description of spiritual darkness wherein afflicted people, cursed their earthly king and the God they neglected (8:21). In fact, the last verse in chapter 8 describes the nation's political crisis in terms of doom and gloom: "trouble," "darkness," "dimness," "anguish," and "darkness." "Darkness" is used twice to emphasize how the sounds of death whistled in the midnight storm upon the nation (7:2).

Northern Israel was the region from where rapacious armies<sup>4</sup> invaded Samaria and Judah. Consequently, the northern tribes like Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to feel the sting of war. In New Testament terminology, Zebulun and Naphtali represent the upper and lower region of Galilee.

The first expression in chapter nine begins with "no more" gloom and anguish for the afflicted nation. This is Isaiah's gospel! No more darkness for the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. No more death and destruction and despair. The Sun has risen. What a comfort!!

But, questions remain like "how" "when" "where" and by "who?"

### **The Dawn Appears**

**2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.**

"The people that walked in *the* darkness" of terrifying invading armies are Zebulun and Naphtali. A great light appears. It is contrasted with the dark clouds of war. The Sun peaks over the mountains, and its rays of light spread hope on the land of graveyards and broken dreams. That "great light" is the life and ministry of Christ in Galilee. The perfect tense is used. "The light shined," as if it were already a fact! And, it was a fact -- in the mind of God.

### **Joy of Victory**

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<sup>4</sup> Syria, Assyria, Babylon, and later the Greeks.

**3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.**

A silver age occurred in Israel under the reign of Solomon, but for some reason, joy was lacking -- maybe because of Solomon's public works and heavy taxation of the people. At his death, the northern tribes had had enough and petitioned Rehoboam to slash taxes. When Solomon's son refused, the ten tribes seceded from the union of tribes. Kind of like the South seceding from the Union prior to the Civil War over the Morrell tax levied on Southern trade by the North. The miserable result was national autonomy, idolatry, lawlessness, war and devastation. And, Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to feel the sting of God's chastisement on the northern tribes for their idolatry.

A Golden Age is announced. Joy enters the nation once more. The picture is one of happiness and celebration at the end of the harvest. Isaiah provides a second illustration of jubilation -- the joy of a victorious army dividing the spoils of war. This is true joy, spiritual felicity in contrast with the temporal and outward prosperity under Solomon and King Uzziah.

**4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.**

Reasons for the ecstasy are announced. "Thou" refers to the LORD." A "yoke" refers to bondage. God launched a freedom movement, and it is described as breaking the yoke of tyranny and oppression of a tyrant; as breaking the rod of police enforcement by a cruel and greedy dictatorship. He compares the joy and festivity to the day when Gideon freed the nation from the rapacious despotism of the Midianites. The sudden change of circumstances from oppression to prosperity and from slavery to freedom gave birth to the joy of independence.

**5 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. (Elliot: "Every boot of the warrior that tramps noisily, and the cloak rolled in blood, are (i.e., shall be) for burning, (as) fuel for fire).**

War is a nasty affair! Before us are images of panic, confusion, broken bodies, and blood-soaked robes! The imagery of victors gathering the spoils of war off corpses continues. With the victory won and peace assured, the weapons of war and bloody garments are collected and burned. Here, God's people are seen as victors not victims (1 John 5:4).

Why such optimism? What kind of leadership could provide anemic Judah with such a victory? How could such a small nation not only survive, but thrive against such a cruel, superior force represented by the Assyrians? The answer is in the next verse.

### **Introduction of the Champion**

**6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.**

There can be no flock without a shepherd; no Kingdom without a King; no victory without a victor; no triumph against powerful enemies without a wise, powerful champion. No ordinary military officer could pull off such a victory and usher in the Golden Age as described in 9:1-5. Something else is going on.

How could such a dynamic victory be achieved against such a monstrous foe? Isaiah asserts it was because of a gift -- a very special gift -- the gift of a child! A little boy was born to lead the campaign against Israel's arch enemy. This was no ordinary boy. He was a Son -- a gift of God. The pual verb "given" (יָלַד) emphasizes the intense, extraordinary character of this gift. "For a child was born . . . but a Son was GIVEN!!"

To whom was this great gift delivered? Isaiah says it was given "to us," the survivors of judgment, the faithful remnant, the elect of God.<sup>5</sup>

What did this Gift achieve? The noun "government" is used only here and could be translated "dominion" or "rule" or "campaign." The text says, "the government was upon his shoulder." The verb "shall be" (יָהָיָה) should be translated "was upon."<sup>6</sup> Why did survivors enjoy such a stupendous victory? Because the entire campaign against Israel's terrifying enemy was upon the shoulders of this Commander Son!

The Hebrew word "shoulder" is singular which depicts the strength of this Champion. In not saying "shoulders" (plural), Isaiah hints at the ease this Commander has in ruling the nations.

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<sup>5</sup> In this passage, the Golden Age is painted as a victory on an ancient battlefield. At all times relevant, the reader must keep in mind that Isaiah is describing the kingdom of God and the achievements of the Son of God at Calvary in the context of a military campaign led by their Davidic King.

<sup>6</sup> The verb is an imperfect, but the vav changes the imperfect to a perfect tense or completed action.

Isaiah introduces us to this Champion. He has a name bearing lofty titles. Ellicott informs us that, "The kings of Egypt and Assyria with whom his nation had been brought into contact delighted in long lists of epithetic names (e.g., 'the great king, the king unrivaled, the protector of the just, the noble warrior.' Inscription of, Sennacherib in Records of the Past, i. p. 25).' Thus, the series of titles composing the name are designed to show us the excellencies of this Champion. Four titles are given, but they compose one Name. Each title takes us deeper into the majesty and mystery of this Hero.

### **Wonderful-Counselor:**

This title could be translated "wonderful in counsel" or "the secrets of a competent counselor." The emphasis is upon the wisdom and strategy that broke the back of the enemy and ushered in the Golden Age. Isaiah doesn't simply want us to merely respect this Champion, but to admire and adore the wonder of His wisdom.

### **The Mighty God (El Gibbor):**

This is a title that describes the power and strength of this Champion. It is one thing to know what to do, and another thing to have the resources to do it. All our struggles are the result of not knowing what to do, or knowing what to do and not having the ability to do it. Here, this Leader seems to possess the power of the gods. He knew what to do and had the power to do it. The title, however, is not "Elohim" but "El," that is, the Champion not only has the power of a god, He is God (El)!

### **The everlasting Father" or "Father of Eternity" (אבי עולם):**

This appellation is problematic in that Christian theology does not permit us to blend personalities in the Godhead; that is, Christianity teaches there is only one God in substance, but three personalities in the Divine Being. Isaiah steps on the toes of Christian theologians a little bit here as he does not seem shy about calling the Son "Father." But, we can resolve this difficulty by the context. Isaiah is not thinking like a Trinitarian theologian. This Messianic Figure is a father in the sense He is the source and creator of all things. Isaiah is not making our Lord equivalent to the First Person of the Trinity. Jesus is the everlasting Father in the sense He is the Source, Creator, Root, Founder, and Author of all things.

Moreover, this Champion is not all muscle and no heart. He is not a head of state out of touch with the concerns of the people. This Commander and Chief led His flock like a



loving, caring father would provide and protect His children. As Father of the survivors (the remnant), He led with compassion. The expression "everlasting" emphasizes His perpetuity; that is, this Champion is the ultimate, final Leader-Father-figure that saves the people of God.

### **Prince of Peace (שֶׁר-שָׁלוֹם):**

This banner can be translated "Captain of Peace." When He entered the war, enemies represented by the Assyrians were devastated and the survivors saved. Peace was obtained because this Prince of Peace was first of all a savage, bone-crushing, sword-swinging Warrior that filled coffins with broken bodies of rebels against God. With the war ended, peace was in the air.

"Peace," what a wonderful word! Everyone wants peace, but there is no peace without the Prince of Peace. Peace and goodwill to men come through Jesus Christ, not the work of the United Nations or acts of state. He is the Prince of Peace because He treads down proud men in rebellion against God's law-order, and gives grace to repentant sinners. *Shalom* is not just the absence of conflict, but restoration to God and His law-word. The *shalom* here is a result of political unity organized around this Captain and His command. There will never be world peace as long as there are rebels against God's law-order and His Son. But, peace is available to those who surrender to His authority now (cf. Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21-22; John 16:7, 13; Romans 10:9, 10).

**7 Of the increase of *his* government (rule) and peace (shalom) *there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this***

Isaiah's presentation of Judah's Champion is delivered to us in imagery of ancient warfare. This Champion is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who single handedly defeated man's triple enemy: Satan, sin, and death. The vision is delivered to us in the perfect tense as if in Isaiah's time the final battle had already been fought and the Golden Age achieved. Because Isaiah was able to enter the mind of God to read the last chapter of history, Isaiah presents the Davidic King and His reign of peace as a fact. Because we can look back from this side of the cross, we understand that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. With our Lord resurrected from the dead and sitting in session at the right hand of God, this passage makes tremendous sense.

The "increase of his government" and "peace" is a reference to eternal blessings of our Lord's reign procured by His victory at the cross.

"Upon the throne of David" communicates to us that this Champion is the "son of David," the "Messiah," "the King of Israel," the rightful Heir to the throne. This is Christ the King reigning on the throne of true Israel. But, this is a prophecy wherein the fulfillment is greater than the promise! Christ, by virtue of His resurrection life received the ultimate commission to rule at the "right hand of God." Israel's Prince is not only Israel's King, but "King of the Nations" and Supreme "Ruler of kings on earth" (Acts 2:34; Psalms 110; Jeremiah 10:7; Revelation 1:5).

The expression "to order it" is a reference to moral qualities of the Ruler and His ability to govern with sensibility rather than out of sheer force and might; that is, this is a Captain that exercises true justice. He is the incorruptible Judge, Lawgiver, and King (Isaiah 33:22). With Christ enthroned at the right hand of God, justice is achieved. "from henceforth even forever" is a reference to the eternal character of His reign. This Golden Age is nothing less than the kingdom of God. Though Isaiah speaks in the past tense as if this has already happened, he completes his prophecy in the imperfect tense, "The zeal of the LORD of hosts shall accomplish this."

"The zeal of the LORD" is holy jealousy at work to preserve that which is precious to Him. His people are His treasure, and He will usher in this Golden Age so their joy may be full. The title "LORD of hosts" is a reference to all the armies of God and the resources of Heaven. Let us not forget that when God sent His beloved Son to the cross to wage war against Satan, sin, and death, it cost Him His Precious All.

In conclusion, Isaiah paints the Davidic King on the canvas of an ancient battlefield as a Champion crushing Israel's enemies and saving the survivors of judgment. The cruel Assyrians that spread death, destruction, and misery on earth are appropriate symbols of the real enemies of man: Satan, sin, and death. The Champion that arises out of this nation to crush the adversaries of man is none other than the Son of God. This mysterious personality is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Gift, the Son given to save sinners from their sins. Thus, Isaiah's masterpiece was fulfilled on the landscape of Israel beginning around 29 AD. John explains it this way:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

# Isaiah 11:1-12

## *Paradise Restored Through the Reign of the Lord Christ*

♦ Before us is the ultimate vision of the kingdom of God and the reign of the Lord Christ. This is the Word of God and you can “take it to the bank!” It will happen!

History is headed toward the day when the wicked will be judged, the righteous rewarded, and nature is transformed into an Edenic Paradise. On that day, God will purge the arrogant politicians and corrupt power brokers from His kingdom, and the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

There is a shift from a local temporal deliverance from the Assyrians under Hezekiah to a universal, eternal deliverance by the Branch. The same One who humbles the mighty boughs of Lebanon and the thick forests of Assyria will arise in history to transform nature from its cruel bent under sin to the harmonious era of peace.

Because we live in a negative world with daily reports on criminal activity, Isaiah rescues us from pessimism by helping us see the end of history and the glorious reign of the Root and Branch of Jesse.

He assures his people that Assyria, the most powerful nation in the world will be hacked down like woodland never to flourish again; that though they will be severely humbled in history, God will make a new Israel. A Champion wiser than a tree full of owls will spring out of the “stump of Jesse” to create Paradise Restored.

**Isaiah 11:1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:**

Before us is a ghastly scene. The mighty tree of Jesse from which the Messiah must come has been chopped down. All hope for a king that will bring peace and righteousness to mankind fell in the middle of the forest. Only a stump remains.

But, Isaiah draws our attention to a tiny, green Branch growing out of the ancient stump. The Branch is not impressive, but it is strong enough to unite the nations. To the

surprise of all, this is the hope of the world—a green sapling growing out of this fallen, rotten tree. This is the *choter*, the one who will regenerate Israel, the nations, and nature itself. It is none other than the Branch, the Root of Jesse, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We would do well to reflect on the genealogy of Christ and remind ourselves that all that remained of King David's princely dynasty was Joseph a carpenter and Mary an unknown handmaid. It is such a tragedy to see kings reduced to beggars, but this is how Christ entered the world. But, out of the humbled house of King David came their greatest King. From the *shoresh* (root) came the *choter* (the branch), one having life in himself (John 1:4).

**2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;**

This little shoot that appeared as nothing but a trivial growth on a forest pine turns out to possess seven gifts of the Spirit. Out of the flawed, crushed stump of David arises a bulging, healthy, green Branch. The One perfect in spirit will heal and regenerate the nation.

The term “rest” implies permanence. This is the eternal, ultimate home of the Spirit.

The spirit of wisdom refers to the faculty of knowing a proper course of action.

The spirit of understanding implies knowing the reasons for a course of action.

The spirit of counsel refers to the ability to execute a course of action.

The spirit of might involves the power and resources to complete a course of action.

The spirit of knowledge commands the detail required to complete an action successfully.

The "spirit . . . of the fear of the Lord" means all actions are consistent with the law of the LORD God as revealed in Torah. Before us is a righteous King who has the ability to get things done and to do it right.

**3. And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:**

The expression “quick understanding” means to be *quick scented*; i.e., prompt to comply with the law of the LORD God. This Branch is like a bloodhound on the trail of righteousness in politics. The word “judge” refers to the reign of the Lord Christ. The Branch is not subjective and emotional. He is not deceived by the masks men wear, the tricks they pull, or the lies they tell. He is a Judge and Ruler that is not decoyed by the duplicity of men and their false flags.

**4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.**

After describing what the Messiah does not do, Isaiah describes the positive attributes of Messiah's administration. He will do justice to the *dallim* (poor) and the *anav* (meek), the weak and helpless, by adopting incorruptible righteous policies towards their oppressors. Here, the humble seem to be special objects of care in His administration. His judgments are righteous and consistent. Decisions are impartial; that is, he is not prejudiced by wealth or poverty. The rich cannot find protection behind their wealth, and the poor will not need wealth to obtain justice. Further, wealth will not be taken from the rich to give to the poor just because they are poor. This is not a wealth redistribution program.

The word “reprove” refers to a judge's decision. In this case, it is with “equity;” i.e., it is fair and impartial as God defines “fairness.” In equity, all litigants, whether plaintiff or defendant, should have equal status before the law. Without equity the machinery of law becomes an engine of tyranny by the powerful over the powerless. In contrast to our present judicial system that grants privileges and immunities to public officials but brings down the anvil of the law on the heads of poor sap citizens, the fear of the Lord will be applied righteously to all during His session. The wicked and evil doer will not be able to hide behind a badge or office in government. This Court will not give prosecutors State privileges that will arm them with special advantages. In his first coming, Christ veiled His deity; in His Second Coming, He will veil His humanity and disclose His deity. He slays the wicked with the “blasts” of his mouth. The lawless will feel the full force of his penal righteousness. His very word is an iron rod that smashes the stubborn rebel.

**5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.**

A girdle or belt holds garments together. Righteousness as a cummerbund refers to the consistency in which the Branch executes justice. Faithfulness pertains to His adherence to God's law as the canon for judgments; i.e., unlike judges today who are plastic in their equity judgments, His decisions are in harmony with the precepts contained in God's Law.

**6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.**

Having described the character of the Ruler and his veiled power, Isaiah turns our attention to the full affect of His reign. Before us is the end of history, the Golden Age, the reign of the Lord Christ. The kingdom of God is not only about the redemption of man, but the redemption of creation. As an example of how nature itself will be transformed, the Spirit shines his light on terrifying beasts. The wolf will not prey on the lamb, the leopard on the goat, or the lion on new born calf. Like a shepherd leads a flock of sheep, youth will exercise dominion over these fearsome predators as Adam ruled over the animal kingdom in the Garden of Eden. This is Paradise Restored.

**7-8 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.**

In Adam's fall, nature fell with him. The fall not only impacted man physically, it impacted creation. The anatomy of many animals changed. The dental structure of lions and bears altered so dramatically they became carnivores. But, when the new Adam returns, nature will be restored to its former balance. All of creation will be renewed to pre-fall conditions. The nature and anatomy of lions and bears will change from eating flesh to grazing on straw and grass. Even rattlesnakes and cobras will be transformed from deadly predators into harmless pets.

**9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.**

We are permitted to see glories of the eschatological kingdom—a “city set upon a hill.” The Mountain of the Lord has become a holy Paradise and Eden revived. The “holy mountain” that was the center of Jewish life is now the hope of all life. The knowledge of the LORD which was local and esoteric has now become stellar and universal.

The law of the kingdom is peace and all the nations look to this mountain for light and healing. The expression do “not hurt or destroy” is as good description of common law as any: do your neighbor no harm; i.e., *do not injure people or damage property*.

When the law of the LORD God is conscientiously applied, men treat people and property with respect. Where men know the LORD there is peace and harmony. For, the law of the LORD God is not about what man must do for God, but *how man is to treat his fellowman!* The final state of redeemed humanity is a state where all creation knows the LORD. The fruit of this knowledge is that all men are safe. Even the animal kingdom abides by this rule. Fearce beasts are no longer violent. In Paradise Restored, all animals will be domesticated.

**10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.**

Modern people look to acts of the State and the passage of man-made-laws to build man’s utopia. But, the State is a parasite that always sucks life out of its people, stealing freedom, and committing acts of oppression. But, the Bible warns about trusting in government (Psalms 118:8-9).

“In that day” refers to the age of regeneration when the Root of Jesse will heal the nations. We learn in this verse that Jesus is not only a Branch from the stump of Jesse, but the Root that supports the Davidic line. Not only is He the God of Israel, but the King of the Nations (cf. Jeremiah 10:7). The tiny, insignificant twig has become the largest tree in the forest. What an expanded vision! No only do the people of Israel follow the Root of Jesse, Isaiah anticipates a day that Gentiles own Him as their Lord and Savior. Here He is proclaimed as the “ensign” or “banner” that saves the nations and unites them under His glorious reign. Only the “glories” of Christ are strong enough to unite the nations. The expansion of the knowledge of God to the nations is a common theme in Isaiah designed to enlarge the vision of compressed, tapered Israel (Isaiah 2:2; 19:22-25; 25:6; 27:13, etc.).

**11-12 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.***

Before us is a prediction of future glory, a second exodus of the nation of Israel. The expression “ensign” refers to a flag or banner -- an icon that unites people around a righteous cause. A key word here is “assemble” or “gather.” The dispersed of Judah and their gathering from the “wings of the earth” is in focus.

The first restoration took place when God delivered His people from Egypt under Moses in 1446 B.C. (cf. v. 16).

The second recovery took place when God delivered a remnant of Judah from the shackles of Babylon under Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. During this period, Cyrus permitted God’s people to return to Palestine from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros (upper Egypt), Cush (North Africa or Southern Egypt), Elam or Persia, Shinar or Babylon, and Hamath or Syria and to build his temple (cf. Ezra 1:1ff; Jeremiah 32:37).

In one sense, due to the scattering of the apostles to preach the gospel, God is still calling and assembling His people from among the nations to build again the fallen tent of David (cf. Acts 15:16). Peace is offered to men, not through acts of the State or religious rites, but through Christ. Only his glorious personality could hold the twelve disciples together, and only Christ is strong enough to unite Ephraim and Judah, Jews and Gentiles, blacks and whites, male and female, Jews and Arabs. Only Christ is capable of uniting such diverse peoples. He brought the kingdom of God to men in a first-fruits way and is now gathering his people from all the nations of the world to build the New Israel of God, the church of Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 15:15-18; Romans 11:12-28; Galatians 5:13-16; Ephesians 2:11ff).



# Isaiah 24-26

## *The Destruction of the Earth*

♦ Having denounced all the great and powerful nations of his time, Isaiah declares the final destruction of the Earth. This is the Last Judgment, the conditions of the Earth prior to the Final Day.

**Isaiah 24:1-3 Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him. The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word.**

The word "earth" is used no less than sixteen times in this section. Expressions like "maketh empty," "maketh waste," "turneth upside down, and "scattereth abroad" is a prelude to the final demolition of the Earth and equivalent to the prophecy of Zephaniah 1:2-3 where the LORD consumes all things off the face of the Earth. The term "spoiled" should be translated "plundered" as an image of armies seizing their spoil.

The reference to people, priests, servants, masters, maids, buyers, sellers, lender, borrowers, and the banking establishment is God's way of telling us that there is going to be demolition of class distinctions and social structures. No one will escape the Last Judgment. Status and wealth cannot purchase immunity or a stay of execution.

**4-6 The earth mourneth *and* fadeth away, the world languisheth *and* fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant .Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.**

The "earth" may be the same as land – a possible reference to the possessions of Jacob but more likely a reference to the whole earth.

Expressions like "mourneth," "fadeth," "languisheth," and "fadeth away" describe the dynamic, global catastrophe that is coming on the Earth.

The reasons for this judgment are threefold: (A) transgression of God's moral law (lawlessness) because of bloodshed (Numbers 36:33; Jeremiah 3:1-2, 9) (B) modifying the covenant requirements; and (C) guilt regarding the breaking of the Everlasting Covenant in Genesis 9:16. The notation to transgression of the laws is a reference to man's violations of the Ten Commandments and relevant case law.

One God means one Lawgiver and one, absolute law--His law. The Everlasting Covenant proscribes two political acts of mankind: First, it forbids the shedding of innocent blood whether it be individual murder or the wholesale slaughter and genocide by terrorist gangs and imperialistic states. Condemned are the murders, rapes, looting, and plundering of innocent people like what took place after the Kaliningrad Germans surrendered to the Russians. Second, it condemns permissiveness and the refusal of societies to "put to death" criminals, recalcitrant youth, and murderers. Both the saving of life and the taking of life is a duty of man. The acts condemned are not unlike what the lawless liberal element promotes in modern societies where innocent, preborn babies are merciless murdered, and convicted murderers are protected by the wickedness of State statutes (cf. Genesis 9:5-7; Exodus 23:1, 7; Deuteronomy 19:9-10, 12-13; 21:8-9).

**Burned:** Isaiah tells us that the instrument of judgment is fire ("inhabitants of the earth are burned"), and is consistent with what Peter says about the Earth being destroyed by fire. There is no reason to consider this fire as symbolic as Peter's account must be taken literally (2 Peter 3:12).

**Curse devours the earth:** As history approaches its end, even the Earth becomes hostile to life. The word "desolate" refers to ruin and injury. Before us is a description of decimation, a depopulation of Earth on a scale worse than the Black Plague of Europe in the 14th century.

**7-13 The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merryhearted do sigh. The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The city of confusion is broken down: every house is shut up, that no**

man may come in. *There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction. When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done.*

**New wine that mourns:** Wine is mentioned three times in this section. Wine is a symbol of prosperous times and all those artificial stimulants (drugs) used to incite laughter and stir inhibitions associated with revelry. In this passage narcotics fail to calm the anxiety raging in men. Before us is the midnight of what doomsday preppers fear ~ collapsing cities and towns, social chaos, food distribution failures, men hiding behind bolted doors, closure of bars and pubs and movie theaters, and cancellation of concerts. The condition of cities are compared to the violent shaking of fig trees or grape vines at harvest time. Before us is the description of violent earthquakes that topple houses, skyscrapers, and disrupt of commerce. Multitudes stagger through the streets in despair weeping and mourning.

**14-15 They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the LORD in the fires, even the name of the LORD God of Israel in the isles of the sea.**

Before us is a *prolepsis* where Isaiah forces us to take a break from the chaos and suffering. Looking away from the wickedness and horror of those days, we see the saints in heaven -- the remnant on Earth singing praises to God. A command from heaven reaches the ears of the saints dwelling in the islands of the sea" "Glorify ye the LORD in the fires." Even in judgment there are reasons to praise God. Judgment has a way of purging society of evil people. The remnant rejoices because justice delayed is now being executed upon proud, autonomous man.

**16 From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.**

In the middle of our contemplation about the joyful praise coming from the righteous remnant, the Lord sprinkles salt on Isaiah's wounds (leanness) to increase Isaiah's pain; that is, to escalate his awareness of the wickedness of the wicked and the deceitfulness of the deceitful. The term "treacherous dealers" refers to the lawless leaders at the end of

the age who plunder the poor and kill their adversaries. Men like Marx, Jacob Schiff, Leon Trotsky, Yakov Sverdlov, Lenin, Stalin, and the Rothchilds are now exposed.

**17-20 Fear, and the pit, and the snare, *are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.***

This passage reminds us of Amos 5:19 where a man runs from a lion only to be thrashed by a bear. Like Adam and Eve, God does not commute the sentence of the High Court upon Adam's race. Man has an appointment with judgment and he shall not escape.

The expression "windows from on high . . . and the foundation of the Earth do shake" remind us the great deluge during the days of Noah. Thus, this is a description of the cosmic disturbances that disrupt and destroy society at the end of the world.

Expressions like "utterly broken," "clean dissolved," "moved exceedingly," "reel to and fro like a drunkard," and "moved like a cottage," describe the collapse of society and the demolition of Earth. Phrases like "it shall fall, and not rise again" inform us this ruination is terminal, absolute, and irreversible.

**21-23 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.***

The "**host of the high ones on high**" is associated with the "**kings of the earth**" and must be a reference to the governments of men described so clearly by Daniel in his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the demolition of the statute by the Stone carved out of the mountain. Oh, how we agonize over the wickedness and schemes of proud politicians and government officials. Their taxation policies and plunder of the people leaves mankind staggering under the weight of their oppression.

Much to the joy of the righteous, these rapacious tyrants are singled out for judgment. "The pit" and the "prison" are a reference to the eternal chains of judgment.

"**After many days**" indicates a long time and may refer to the present Christian era or the one-thousand years mentioned in Revelation; that is, the dispensation of grace. The rulers between the first advent and the second advent who seem to rule with impunity will on "that day" be captured, indicted, exposed, tried, and sentenced by the King of kings to whom they are now accountable (cf. Revelation 6:11; 12:6; 12:12-14; 20:1-6).

**Ashamed:** This Final Judgment will not only disrupt society and cause the Earth to tremble with fear, the moon and the Sun shall be ashamed and embarrassed by the majesty and glory of the LORD and his armies ruling on Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion and Jerusalem here is not carnal Jerusalem, but the dynamic unveiling of Heavenly Jerusalem from where Christ rules, and from whom the proud shall not escape (cf. Hebrews 12:22)

Oh, how this passage humbles us all. Like the publican, we must beat our breasts and cry, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." For "a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume *His* adversaries" is coming on the Earth (cf. Hebrews 10:27).

### **The Great Banquet and Feast for All God's People**

Having received insight about the final chapter of the history and the terrifying horror coming upon the Earth, Isaiah retreats to the sanctuary and the promises of his God. He announces his claim on the Lord, realizing his judgments are terrible, but righteous (25:1-2); and, that his God is a city of refuge from the fiery storms of judgment upon the nations of the world (25:3-5). After announcing the horrific famine and chaos coming on the world of the wicked, Isaiah turns on the light and shows us the feast God has prepared for those "cities that fear God" (25:3), the "poor" and "needy in distress," those without shelter from "the storm" and the "heat" of ruthless governments, fraudulent merchants, and oppressive rulers (25:3-5).

**Isaiah 25:6-9 And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the**

**LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.**

Isaiah announces a feast prepared by the LORD of hosts for all people. He explains the wonders of God's salvation in terms of a banquet sponsored by the King of true Israel. People from every nation are invited to this glorious festival. This the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the kingdom of God, and the Age of Regeneration explained in terms of a colossal banquet.

**"This mountain"** is a reference to the Lord's Mansion on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, His Rule, and the place where men are reconciled to Him. This is Heavenly Jerusalem, the City of the Great King (cf. Psalms 48:2; Hebrews 12:22). In the banquet hall, Isaiah stares at the dinning table and attempts to describe the wonders of this heavenly feast;" that is, the glories of God's salvation in sensual, culinary terms.

**Fat things:** This is not a poor man's lunch, but a rich man's feast. "Fat things" speak of the quality and tastiness and flavors of the precious oils and sauces provided.

**A feast of wines on the lees:** Lees strengthen the flavor and intensity of the wine. This is not cheap watered-down Sherry, but biting rose wines fermented to perfection.

**Of fat things full of morrow;** This is God's way of telling us that no expense has been spared, no shortcuts taken, no delicious *entrée* omitted. This is a feast with sweet clclimates, potatoes au gratin with a Parmesan crust, buttery shrimp pasta, brie bread, ginger-me-up chicken based in a cucumber garlic sauce, pimienta-stuffed olives, crepes with marinated rum sauce, and chocolate mousse.

**Of wine on the lees well refined:** Here are creamy white wines, tart and tasty red wines from lushious grapes, pomegranates, cherries, strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, and raspberries. These are elegant wines not big, not fruity, not opulent, and not bold. On the table will be chardonnays and sauvignon blanc, vintage wines to delight the most sophisticated tastes. If you desire it, it will be there.

**The veil:** On God's Holy Mountain the black veil that covers all nations is the horrors of death, the dark coffin, and the midnight grave. This is a shroud over all nations . . . for, there is not one city in the world that does not have a cemetery and a mortician. Death is an enemy; but, a victory is announced! The LORD God will defeat this foe and replace the mourner's dress with tailored clothes fit for kings and queens. In this banquet hall,

life reigns! Death defeated! This is the Eschaton, the age of regeneration. It began at the resurrection of Christ.

**Wiping away tears:** These are the tears of grief caused by the loss of loved ones. In this banqueting hall, there will be no red eyes, no tears on the cheek, no sorrows, no pain, no grief, no thoughts of distress and anguish. In the presence of His Majesty, all rejoice. No mourning is permitted. All the problems of mankind have found their remedy at Calvary on Mt. Zion.

**The rebuke of the people:** This expression "reproach of all people" refers to the sentence of death pronounced on Adam and the shame that followed his descendants throughout history.

**A toast is given at the feast:** All the resurrected saints will tip their wine glasses and say, "Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he *has saved* us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Imagine the scene! Millions of redeemed people from all walks of life throughout history who have trusted, waited, suffered, and died without receiving the promises now raise their glasses of wine in honor of their Champion, "It was worth it all! What a God! What a King! What a Savior to save a wretch like me. I don't deserve to be here, but I'm glad I belong! Praise be to our God!!"

**In summary,** Isaiah describes the horrible judgment coming on the Earth, and the wonderful banquet God prepared for the nations. The culinary delight is eternal salvation due to the victories of our Champion on that first Easter Morning. This is the kingdom of God. This is the Eschaton, the Age of Regeneration and Resurrection. It is a feast offered to all . . . but, only enjoyed by those who repent and believe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Two destinies are before us: judgment or salvation. The holy huckster and town crier in Isaiah still shouts on the street corner selling his tickets to this banquet--tickets that can be bought without money and without price.

Isaiah 55:1-2 "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

## **The Tale of Two Cities**



Just as there are two types of people, the righteous and the wicked, sheep and goats, wheat and tares with two different destinies, salvation and judgment, there are two cities, the City of God and the City of Man.

### The City of God

**Isaiah 26:1-6 In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.**

Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH *is* everlasting strength:

"**That day**" is a sign that Isaiah is discussing the final chapter of history (the Eschaton) as it relates to the Messianic Kingdom. Few passages in Scripture surpass the comfort provided by this imagery. This chapter is a prolepsis, the anticipation of the rejoicing that will occur at the Banquet Prepared for All People. It is still future to us. The redeemed break into a song of praise about the great salvation God has provided for His people (26:1-8) and the triumph of God over their most fierce enemy, the dragon of death (26:9-12).

"**The land of Judah**" is a reference to gospel territory, Calvary, Mt. Zion and the eternal Jerusalem all rolled into one. Carnal Jerusalem never became a safe haven for the people of God. It was merely a bump in the road for kings with imperial designs. But, all the Judah represented and hoped for will be in this New City.

"**The strong city**" is not a city on Earth nor is it carnal Jerusalem. This is our beautiful heavenly city, **the City of God** where the King rules and the people of God rejoice (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 22:3ff). This is Jerusalem Above where righteousness reigns, where equity prevails, and all the redeemed enjoy the benefits of salvation. Because its walls and bulwarks are the salvation of God, men are eternally safe and secure. This is a city where repentant sinners can find shelter from the wrath of God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:9). This is the Messianic Kingdom.

"**Open the gates**" is an imperative. God commands the gatekeepers to open the doors to this City of God and to invite the nations in. This is gospel ground, an invitation: "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, I will give your rest" Matthew 11:28). This is the city of the elect, of true Israel, of those called among the nations, of those God



chose to spend eternity with Him, of men who by the grace of God responded to a gospel invitation by a gatekeeper (Ephesians 1:3-4; 1 Peter 1:1-3).

**Peace:** Earthly Jerusalem has been called the "city of peace," but scores of warring armies have charged its gates. More wars have been fought there than any other place on Earth. National Geographic (10/24/2004) says Jerusalem has been the sight of 118 conflicts and its walls have been besieged twenty-three times.<sup>7</sup> However, Isaiah peers into the future and sees a New Jerusalem bustling with redeemed humanity. This is not just repentant believing Hebrews, but men and women from all the nations.

**"Keep in perfect peace"** actually reads "peace, peace" or *shalom, shalom* in the original text. The peace here is not limited to "peace in the heart" during the storms of life, but total, comprehensive peace: peace with God, peace with man, peace and safety and assurance of well being that comes to men who believe and trust the promises of God for salvation.

The promise of peace is followed by another imperative: "Trust in the Lord" (26:4). Who has peace? The one who trusts Christ and enters through "the door" (John 10:9, 10). How does one enter the City of God? Hear His gospel. Believe His Word. Trust His Christ! Not everyone enters the City of God when they die, only those who come to Him for salvation.

### **The City of Man**

**5-6 For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, *even* to the ground; he bringeth it *even* to the dust. The foot shall tread it down, *even* the feet of the poor, *and* the steps of the needy.**

The proud "lofty" city that is laid low is the carnal, worldly city of man. It is not a real city. It is man's ideal city, man's utopia represented by cities like Nineveh, Babylon, Thebes, and Rome. Modern cities like Los Angeles, London, and New York come to mind. These are merely applications of man's dream city. This city is a carnal, lawless permissive city without Christ, without the Ten Commandments, and without Christian men. This is a city of inequity where the powerful exploit the poor; where man's value is determined by his contribution to the collective good. This is a megalopolis with

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<sup>7</sup> Online resource:

[http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/10/1028\\_041028\\_jerusalem\\_conflict.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/10/1028_041028_jerusalem_conflict.html)

adulterers, thieves, Sodomites, and feminists that exploit their pleasures. But, in the final chapter of history God will bring down the proud, permissive City of Man and assign it to the garbage bins of history.

**7-10 The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just. Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. 9 With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.**

**The just:** Isaiah qualifies the kind of people who are permitted to enter God's City. The term "weighed" means "to make level." Citizens of this City are good and upright men who have turned from their crooked ways and come to Christ for healing and salvation. They are not perfect men, but they are people committed to righteousness and growing therein.

**O Lord:** The righteous speak and in so doing reveal their character: "O Lord" informs us of their relationship. These are people who have turned from their personal autonomy to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. These are people and who have surrendered to His authority and accept His law-order.

**"We have waited for thee"** is another way of saying they believed and trusted Christ for their salvation. Those destined to the City of God are here marked by an intense desire to know God and to "remember" and reflect on the greatness and mystery of the Creator. These are Bible people, verse memorizers, church goers, and communion takers.

**"My spirit . . . seek thee early"** identifies a regenerated spirit, a heart that longs to know God and walk with Him. He is on their minds at night, and their first thought in the morning. These are a people with a passion for relationship with their Creator, to be right with Him and to please Him. The term "night" refers to the suffering of these Kingdom citizens. These are not pampered sheep, but men and woman who have picked up the cross and followed Christ on cobbled trees near the City of Man.

**Judgments:** The righteous anticipate the judgment. There is hope in judgment because judgment reveals the righteousness of God's Court and purges society of evil men. With

society cleansed of proud humanist and controlling tyrants, the nations can learn about God's law-order. Righteousness is what God requires of the nations. It is, therefore, essential that all men learn God's Law-word. But, since men are in rebellion against God's law-order, the only way they learn righteousness is by severe judgment.

The expression "**Let favored be showed the wicked yet he will not learn righteousness**" means that hardened men can't learn from mercy; that is, preaching the gospel of grace is ineffectual to them. When mercy is shown the wicked, they cannot learn from it! They have no desire to learn what is right. Because the wicked are lawless, they have no capacity to appreciate the loftiness of God's law. Because they will not surrender to His law-order, they have no place in God's kingdom, and will, therefore, "NOT behold the majesty of the LORD."

**11 Jehovah, thy hand is lifted up, yet they see not: but they shall see thy zeal for the people, and be put to shame; yea, fire shall devour thine adversaries.**

"**Thy hand is lifted up**" is, more than likely, the hand of Jehovah signaling for men to come to His gates, accept His cleansing and His authority so they can enter the City of God. If they will not accept the gospel of salvation, they will experience the terrifying, bone-crushing judgment of YHWH and be put to shame. This is warning for Christ-rejecters. Fire will devour those who will not acknowledge the authority of the King.

**19-21 Thy dead *men* shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.**

In contrast to the wicked who snub their nose at the gospel of grace, are the righteous who have responded to the call of Christ. We have here one of the clearest statements regarding the physical, bodily resurrection of the righteous in the Old Testament, "Together with my dead body shall they rise."

Isaiah does not linger to explain the details of this eschatological event or the age of regeneration. Rather, he moves forward with and immediate exhortation to the people of God to seek shelter in "thy chambers" and to "shut thy doors" and to "hide thyself" until the dark, thunder clouds of God's wrath rain on the wicked. Faith is a private

matter. The believer would do well to clothe himself in holiness and to hide in the City of God until the judgment of God falls on City of Man (cf. Exodus 12:22; Matthew 6:6).

Our Lord spoke of the resurrection of the just and unjust. In Isaiah we are dealing with ultimate realities, the eternal salvation of the righteous and their enjoyment in the City of God, and eternal condemnation of the City of Man and judgment upon grace-rejecters (cf. John 3:36; John 5:24-29).

# Isaiah 51-52

## *Isaiah's Gospel: The Arm of the LORD*

♦ In the first section of Isaiah, he exposes the sin of the people and announces God's judgment on Israel, the nations, and the earth. But, he also shows us that a day is coming when God will comfort and save his people through a mysterious personality called "the Messiah," the root of Jesse," and " of the Lord." Salvation is compared to marvelous feast prepared for all people (25). That feast is the Eschaton, the Age of Regeneration and Resurrection. It is the Day of Salvation for God's people. With this hope burning in the soul of Isaiah, he prays that the LORD would wake up and reveal his bone-crushing strength, save His people, and usher in the kingdom of God.

### A Second Captivity Acknowledged

**Isaiah 52:2 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, *and* sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.**

All through the Book of Isaiah Israel eats dust under the oppression of Assyria. Babylon is conjoined as an oppressor. The march of Assyrian soldiers around Jerusalem stirred up a dark cloud of dust that choked hope out of the nation. The northern kingdom was invaded and taken captive (722 BC), and the chains of servitude rattled and clattered in Judah. Fear gripped Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:17-20; 8:4, 7, 10:12-16; 36:1-18; 37-39; 45; 47:1, 14, 20; 48:14, 20).

However, as horrifying as the political oppression was, it did not compare with the nation's bondage to sin. The Book of Isaiah opens up with calling Israel a "sinful nation" wherein God pleads with his people to denounce their transgressions and accept the duties of law in their contract with God (Isaiah 1:4-6; 18-20; 5:8-30). Thus, the bondage of Israel to Assyrian and Babylon, as serious and real as it was, became a type of Israel's peonage to sin. Like a dream, Isaiah's prophecy shifts between images of a Second Exodus that offers freedom from taskmasters and the chains of captivity.

### Deliverance Promised

**Isaiah 30:30 And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of *his* anger, and *with* the flame of a devouring fire, *with* scattering, and tempest, and hailstones.**

A promise is given. Terms like "**lightening**," "**fire**," "**scattering**," "**tempest**," and "**hailstones**" remind us of Israel's deliverance from their bondage in Egypt wherein God smashed the nation with plagues and delivered them from Pharaoh's armies at the Red Sea by the power of Lightning and Thunder coming from His Arm.

Isaiah anticipated another great deliverance like the one in Egypt where God's power would be revealed like a bolt of lightning down "his arm." The Arm of the Lord, therefore, is a title for God's omnipotence and power. For this reason, Isaiah prays that the LORD would be their "arm" every morning (cf. 51:5).

**33:2 O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble.**

Isaiah prays for Israel's deliverance. The oppression of Assyrian touched every man. People pleaded for deliverance. But, the sins of the nation impeded their relationship to God wherein the Lord refused to listen to their pleas: "your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear . . ." (Isaiah 59:2-6).

The silence and hiding of God, tested Isaiah and weighed heavily on his soul (Isaiah 1:15; 8:17). But, he had confidence a day was coming when the silence would be broken and "the LORD shall cause his voice to be heard" (30:30).

"**On that day**" is a prophetic time marker. It refers to the time when sin's spell over the nation would be broken and God would act (Isaiah 2:11, 17; 11:10-11; 25:9; 31:7; and 52:6)

**Isaiah 40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.**

**Isaiah 40:3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

The first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah are like charcoal-gray clouds hanging over the nation sprinkled with a few days of sunshine peaking through the darkness to spread its warmth and rays of hope. In the second half of the book (40-66), God calls for comfort for His weary people who had been chastised by their Assyrian oppressors. But

there is more than mere consolation, there is double assurance, "Comfort, Comfort." Help is on the way. The LORD is coming. Like runners before a king's chariot, the LORD calls Israel to prepare the way for Him, to fill in the holes (sins of omission) and remove the boulders protruding on the road (sins of commission) the King is traveling to meet with His people.

Mark begins his gospel about the LORD's coming and applies it to Jesus; that is, Jesus is Jehovah, the LORD, the God of Israel, the Promised Seed (Mark 1:1-3). Jesus is YHWH but, not all of YHWH is in Christ.

**Isaiah 40:10-11 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong *hand*, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.**

Again, Isaiah announces help is on the way. He does not send a squadron of soldiers or even His Green Berea angels.

**The Lord God** (YHWH Elohim; Kurios Theos) Himself comes to rescue His people and to take command of the war against them. This is not a social visit. He comes / came in power to conquer, subdue, and to rule. His muscular Arm shall save His people and extend His dominion. Furthermore, He has rewards, wealth and riches, to give to the faithful of the nation. He brings food and supplies to feed His flock like a shepherd. The weak and helpless lambs among his people will be gathered to him by his Arm! He will carry His sheep and their burdens next to His chest. And, He will gently lead the young and tender so as not to exhaust them. This is the Son given, the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the "Arm of the LORD" taking command to assure victory for His elect (Isaiah 9:6-7).

#### **A Prayer Prayed to the Arm of the Lord**

**Isaiah 51:9-10 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. *Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?***

**"Awake"**: From Isaiah's standpoint, the soldiers in the battle for good over evil (righteousness over sin) were taking a beating. The nation as a whole wandered from the law of the LORD God and rebelled against Him. Divorce proceedings were afoot

(Isaiah 50:1-2; 53:6). Ordered to stay at their post, the faithful experienced battle fatigue, and needed relief (Isaiah 50:10; 51:1, 2). The LORD announced He would come (Isaiah 40:1-10), take command of the battle, comfort the weary (Isaiah 51:3), establish His law (Isaiah 51:4), and by His Arm and His power judge the people who had been oppressed by lawless, arrogant imposters (Isaiah 51:5-7). The LORD commanded the faithful not to give into evil but to bear it. His everlasting righteousness and the bone-crushing strength of His Arm that brings salvation was near (Isaiah 51:7-8). Isaiah expected the kingdom to appear and the Arm of the Lord to pick up His anvil and to smash the wicked; and for the Arm of the Lord to touch and comfort His attack lambs standing guard over His flock.

In Isaiah's mind, there was another Giant Slayer from Jesse, another Bone-Crushing Samson, another Heavenly Hercules like Moses among His Heavenly Hosts who could slay the dragon and lead Jerusalem through a roaring sea to the land of milk and honey: "Put on strength, oh Arm of the LORD."

But, Isaiah waited and waited and waited. Nothing happened! God's silence sucked hope out of the nation . . . and wore down Isaiah.

Weary and out of patience, Isaiah screamed, "**Awake, Awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!**" (Isaiah 51:9). Why the delay? Was God asleep? Was he taking a nap? Why hasn't He arrived on the battle field? Doesn't he know the Assyrians are at our throats? The anvil-beating, hammer pounding Arm of the Lord appeared to be resting. "Awake" shouts Isaiah, "Awake, as in the days of old. Pick up your battle-ax and smash the Assyrians." God had crushed Rahab (Egypt) when the ten plagues of lighting bolted from the Arm of the Lord upon their oppressors. Surely, God could restrain the lions of Assyria.

There, pursued by the tiger claws of the Egyptian army, the Arm of the Lord went to work and harnessed the untamed "dragon" of the sea. In an amazing display of power, God's helpless lambs scurried between two walls of water on dry land to safety. This was the first exodus (Isaiah 51:9-10).

**Now, Isaiah calls for a new exodus (52:2).** Again his people are captives and held hostage to leviathans and dragons. A new exodus is needed: "Awake as in the day of old" as in the days of Israel's bondage in Egypt where they were slaves to a foreign power and serfs on the king's land. "Rain down your plagues, strike the first born, take us through this new Red Sea, and bring us the land of Zion where You reign," begs the



prophet. He prays directly to the Arm of the LORD expecting bolts of lightning and claps of thunder to break the silence and stun the enemy.

Isaiah had prayed that God would wake up and commit to a new exodus (59:9-10). That prayer is now answered.

### **A New Exodus Promised**

**Isaiah 51:11 Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.**

The "**therefore**" tells us the prophet's prayer was accepted. A New Exodus is promised. When the LORD does wake up to engage the enemies of mankind, and the elephant stomping, lion biting, sword-swinging Arm of the Lord engages the enemy, bones will be crushed, and the redeemed shall return to Mt. Zion, the home of the righteous. With heads high, God's people will burst into cheering chants with everlasting gladness.

On "**that day**" of their victory, the sunshine of joy will warm every soul like a cloudless day.

**12-13 I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?**

A **new exodus** is coming though the power of God lay dormant, God exhorts his people not to look for help from another, "I am he that comforts you" and brings salvation to the battlefield. Manage your fears, cries the LORD. "Why are you afraid of man that grows and withers like grass," He asks? "Don't fear" the railing and insults of proud and powerful kings (Isaiah 51:7). "They are close, but not upon you."

Marching armies, drummers drumming, and war cries echoing, the enemy had not yet raised its battle ax.

"**Where is the fury of the oppressing army,**" the Lord asks (Isaiah 51:13)? It's dark, but don't forget the LORD your God because forgetfulness multiplies fears (Isaiah 5:13).

**14-15 <sup>ESV</sup> He who is bowed down shall speedily be released; he shall not die and go down to the pit, neither shall his bread be lacking. I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar- the LORD of hosts is his name.**

**The captive exile:** God holds the reigns of nations. A promise is given. That "he may be loosed" means that the exiles will soon be set free. A freedom movement is afoot. An emancipation is coming. The captives will not die in the dungeon, nor die of starvation. This is God's way of telling us that when His salvation is realized, the terrors of death and judgment will not touch God's elect.

Why all this optimism? It's a message from the LORD thy God, **that "stirs (divideth) the sea"** (Isaiah 51:15). Though this generation faced a different enemy than their forefathers in Egypt, God had not changed. He is the great "I Am!" He is "**the LORD of hosts**," the LORD of the Armies, the LORD of infinite power and love. The God who split the Red Sea and escorted the Hebrew slaves through the roaring walls of water would deliver these captives from a greater enemy than the chest pounding gorillas and growling crocodiles of a Pharaoh. A new exodus is promised wherein men will escape their historic enemy that lives near the Poisonous Tree: the hissing snake, his venomous bite, and the paralysis of death.

In Isaiah 51:7-23; 52:1-4 Isaiah pleaded to God to wake up and go to work to save his people, but in this passage, God calls his people to wake up because He is going to stun their adversaries and cause them to stagger under the fury of His wrath. Furthermore, the good news of peace was coming to Jerusalem. There Zion would know that "Your God reigns."

### **The Gospel of Redemption Proclaimed**

**52:6-7 Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore *they shall know* in that day that *I am* he that doth speak: behold, *it is I*. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!**

**The promise is renewed.** God Himself speaks. Salvation is coming. "That day" is prophetic time marker announcing the arrival of the King to rescue His people. The imagery before us is that of a military postman running with news about the King coming to rescue Jerusalem surrounded by Assyrian-like adversaries. A victory is

announced. God's people shall personally see and experience liberation from their brutal captors. On "that day" they will know the thundering power of His deliverance.

**The Lord reigns:** Until then that victory, a special blessing is given to the encouragers, the hopers, and the moral leaders throughout the ages. In the night when prisoners are cold and hungry, there is a glow of beauty and dignity around those who are unbroken and who believe that damp, dark nights do not define God's love for them. When cold and hungry strike, it takes golden faith to say, "The Lord reigns." "He knows our suffering, and he has delayed his invasion of this prison for a greater good." He reigns during the night as well as during the day, in the valley as well as on the mountain, in rough seas as well as calm seas, in prison as well as when teeth chew on the bread of liberty.

Salvation is promised. He is coming, and blessed are the watchman that proclaim "**Thy God reigneth.**"

### **The Watchmen Announce the Coming of the Champion**

**8-9 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.**

The imagery before us is that of **the watchmen** on the walls searching the horizon for the arrival of the Lord's army to rescue them from the siege of a vast army of enemy soldiers. The prophet had prayed the Arm of the LORD might arrive to rescue his people. Like a dream, the imagery changes. The watchmen shout. In the distance they see the Arm of the LORD riding toward them to fight their enemy camped outside their gates.

A command is given to assemble the cadets and to sing military hymns of cheer and victory – "Break forth into joy." "redeemed" is in the past tense (perfect) – an accomplished fact.

This is Isaiah's way of reassuring us that the Lord is coming on a white stallion to tread down Israel's enemies like grapes in a vine vat. In his hand is a terrible two-edge sword. Into the middle of the enemy's camp He rides, slashing and whacking foreign armies as if they were toy soldiers on a chess board. But, then comes the dragon.

## Reflection of the Cost of Victory

**10-11 The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean *thing*; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.**

**The LORD:** This Champion that smashes steel columns and crushes the serpent's head in front of the nations is called "the Arm of the LORD." The Iron Man who sounds the trumpet and never calls for retreat in this eschatological, apocalyptic battle is the mountain-moving, zombie-zapping, sky walker that brings salvation to His people.

**Made bare his arm:** The word "**made bare**" is in the emphatic position in the sentence. It means "to strip." The focus is on the price of victory and the cost of this war.

This victory is no ordinary sword-slashing battle because this enemy is no ordinary adversary. As the Lord commands the waters to part in the Second Exodus, a Dragon appears out of the roaring sea (Isaiah 27:2). This hideous reptile is the corral serpent that poisoned Adam's race (Genesis 3), the sea serpent that attempted to swallow up God's lambs at the Red Sea (Isaiah 51:9), the spirit behind the Assyrian invasion (Isaiah 8), the snorting, fire-breathing, red-eyed dragon that hunted down Eve, Israel, and Mary (Revelation 12:1ff). This seven-headed monster comes out of the sea of politics to hunt the saints and to rule the nations (Revelation 13). This red-yellow Dragon with giant claws, unreflective platinum turtle-shell scales, a thick neck, unforgiving mirror eyes, and a head with horns crushes the nations and devours Adam's race. He has never been tamed or defeated. As long as this beast roams the planet there is no peace. A voice in heaven is heard, "whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8). Isaiah volunteered, but he was no match for this monster.

The LORD God did not send a fleet of swift seraphim or sword-wielding cherubims to fight the red flame-thrower and his sting of death. God sent **His Champion, the Arm of the LORD**.

When the trumpet blew, this Battle King charged into this battle sword swinging against the flame-throwing Dragon. The victory was won, and the Dragon's head crushed . . . but in the contest, the Captain of the Lord of Hosts was mortally wounded. So terrible was the fiery blasts of the Dragon, his appearance was "marred more than any man" (Isaiah 52:14).

**Depart and touch no unclean thing:** The command to depart is mentioned twice leading no doubt about the order.

It was said about Robert E. Lee that his orders were written in perfect penmanship so that his commands could never be misunderstood. This double command is also for clarity. It is issued to those who carry the vessels of the LORD; that is, to priests and Levites. In light of the coming of the Arm of the LORD, it behooves servants of the LORD to separate from evil in the conduct of holy service. Judgment must begin at the house of the Lord. This being the case, it places an onus on Christian men to live separated, holy lives, and to avoid the tackiness of the age.

# Isaiah 53:1-6

## *The Arm of the Lord Unveiled*

♦ In the previous chapters, God announced a new exodus out of bondage and entrance into the Messianic Age. The Champion who leads this exodus and accomplishes this mighty redemption is called "**the Arm of the LORD**" (זְרוּעַ יְהוָה; zerowa yahweh). Like a spokesman of a corporation offering a new product, Isaiah pulls back the curtain and unveils the mystery of this Champion and His salvation.

**Isaiah 53:1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?**

**Believed:** So important the contest, so courageous the challenger, and so decisive the victory, Isaiah questions whether anyone will believe his story.

**Arm of the LORD:** A second question is asked. The "arm" here is a reference to the hand, forearm, biceps, and shoulder of a mighty warrior. It is a metaphor for the strength and power of the LORD God. By this point in the book, Isaiah expects his readers to understand the Arm of the Lord is God's Dragon Slayer, the Bone-crusher from Beersheba, the Heavenly Hulk from Hebron, the Giant-slayer from Jesse, the Guardian of the Galaxy.

Isaiah now knows that the Arm of the LORD is not an anatomical feature, a literal physical arm, brut power, or an irresistible force. While the prophet had expected to see the titanic explosion of an atom-splitting, star-crushing gladiator go forth to crush his enemies, what he saw amazed Isaiah. He did **not** see a war-like angel or a roaring lion or even a muscular man. He gazed upon a baby-- an ordinary child with little hands and feet and dark brown eyes. The Arm of the LORD was a child! A child destined to slay the dragon and usher in Kingdom of God, the Messianic Age, and the Eschaton that Isaiah mentioned so frequently in his prophecy.

On this side of the cross, we know this mysterious figure as "Jesus," the "Son given" (Isaiah 9:6). To Isaiah's surprise, this bone-breaking giant slayer called "the Arm of the

LORD" is the innocent Babe of Bethlehem. No wonder Isaiah threw up his hands and asked, "**Who will believe us?**"

**Our:** Furthermore, the Arm of the LORD was not revealed to the Pharaohs or the great kings of Babylon or to the prestigious nations of the world. He was revealed to Hebrews; i.e., to the smallest and most insignificant nation in the Levant -- to an ordinary country with no great rivers or lakes or mountains -- a land full of rocks, hills, and trees -- to ordinary, common people who had proven to be great sinners among Adam's race.

"**Who,**" inquires Isaiah, "**will believe our story?**" Like a thespian who has mastered his craft, Isaiah shares his account of the Greatest Story Ever Told.

**2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.**

This armor-piercing, anvil-smashing figure called "the Arm of the LORD" is a Hebrew child. He is compared to a "tender plant" with human sensitivities and vulnerabilities; and, as a water-dependent "root" growing up in a dry desert.

The desert analogy is a symbolic reference to human depravity, godlessness, and the dearth of God-seekers in the Palestine theater. The expression "fish out of water," "land without sunshine," and a "sheep among goats" comes to mind.

"Tender plant" and "root" inform us that God did not send a super-ripper Komatsu D575 Bulldozer to save us, but a living soul. Though this figure was not even a large grain of salt in the eyes of men, he was "the Arm of the LORD with thunder" in his biceps (Isaiah 30:30).

**No beauty** (mar'eh): The first usage of beauty is in reference to the beautiful trees God planted in the Garden of Eden that were "pleasant to the eyes" (mar'eh). Before Adam were the Maui Wedding Flower, the Fuji Apple Tree, the Wisteria of Japan, the Japanese Maple, the Rainbow Eucalyptus. But, the prophet testifies that this tender seedling of a man had no outstanding physical attributes or social status common to men of power and the Genghis Khans of history; that is, this figure was the envy of no man.

Physically, he was an ordinary man lacking the dashing good looks of 6'2" Nicola Tesla with light silvery blue eyes. Geographically, he was from the trampled land of Zebulon

and Naphtali (Isaiah 9:1). Socially, Isaiah identified this figure as a survivor from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). This is Isaiah's way of telling us that he would not have made it on the front cover of "Sports Illustrated," "Newsweek," or "People's Magazine."

**3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

Isaiah continues as if to say, "You aren't going to believe what we did next."

**Despised and rejected:** Isaiah's report about of the Arm of the LORD and agent of deliverance doesn't improve. Not only was this mysterious figure an ordinary man, he had none of the "pizazz," "chutzpah"<sup>8</sup> and "good-guy swagger" that men admire.

Furthermore, he was despised and rejected; that is, he was a *schmuck*<sup>9</sup> among Jews. He walked alone in his cause. This is Isaiah's way of telling us that this figure would not have his name inscribed in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem (Wall of Honor) in Jerusalem. But, not only this, Israel had a dirty little secret.

**Man of sorrows:** Sorrows is a translation of the Hebrew word for "pain." The LXX translates "sorrows" as "plagues," "blows," "beatings," and "wounds." And, the word "grief" is a translation of the term "sickness" or "disease."

Who among us aspires to be a man of sorrows? By all accounts, men long to be happy. They have no room for grief. Robert Hazzard's song, "Girls just want to have fun," expresses the desire of humanity. Even the modern gospel is about health and wealth, and not about how to suffer well.

Isaiah, however, describes the Arm of the LORD, not as a buoyant, jovial fellow seeking thrills, but a figure whose bread and butter was suffering and grief. He wasn't an adventurer that climbed Mount Kilimanjaro or sailed the Seven Seas. He would never make it as a standup comedian or late night talk show host. He could say the foxes have dens and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20).

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<sup>8</sup> Chutzpah ~ admirable or excessive self-confidence.

<sup>9</sup> Schmuck ~ a derogatory term for self-made fool.



Notice the plural: "**man of sorrows.**" In Pali, the word for "sorrow" is *dukkha* which communicates an array of human emotions such as *pain, suffering, loneliness, stress, and inward pressures of all kinds.*

The Hebrew word for "**sorrow**" is *makob* which also includes the theater of human suffering. Here is a man that agonized over chronic evil and the crippling, raw weaknesses of humanity. Having "no place to lay his head," he enjoyed none of the comforts of ordinary men. Ministering among the sick and the poor, he emptied his vault of treasures on behalf of the afflicted. Philip Bliss (1875) said it best,

Man of sorrows what a name  
for the Son of God, who came  
ruined sinners to reclaim:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
in my place condemned he stood,  
sealed my pardon with his blood:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Guilty, helpless, lost were we;  
blameless Lamb of God was he,  
sacrificed to set us free:  
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

**We hid our faces:** The "we" here refers either to the nation of Israel or the elect of God. Because the Arm of the LORD had none of the weaknesses of his contemporaries or material ambitions common to men, Jews treated him like some kind of mutant border bandit.

**He was despised and we esteemed Him not:** "Despised" is used a second time. The emphasis is on the nation's response to this Champion called "the Arm of the LORD."

The word "**despised**" (*bazah*) is used of Esau despising his birthright (Genesis 25:34), of rebels who despise the law of God (Numbers 15:31), of the hometown mocking of Saul by the men of Gibeah after he was appointed king (1 Samuel 10:27), of the shellacking the Philistines gave young David when he stepped on the battlefield to face Goliath (1 Samuel 17:42), of Michal disparaging David when he danced before the Lord which generated a curse on her womb (2 Samuel 6:16).

Isaiah is telling us that when the Arm of the LORD appeared in history, his own people not only undervalued Him but hated Him. Like the *aza'zel* (scapegoat) that was led into the wilderness on *Yom Kippur* and pushed over a cliff, the Jews rejected Jesus (Leviticus 16). Like the Grinch that stole Christmas in Whoville, the Jews despised the birthright of their King.

**“Esteemed him not”:** The word "esteemed" (*chadel*) is an accounting term. It is translated "reckon" in regard to Abraham's justification (Genesis 15:6), of Judah concluding Tamar was a prostitute because she covered her face (Genesis 38:15), of the evil planned against Joseph by his malicious brothers (Genesis 50:20); of the abomination of uneaten peace offerings (Leviticus 7:18); of bloodguilt imputed to a man (Leviticus 17:4).

Isaiah is telling us that when the Jews evaluated Christ in the calculator of their minds, they considered him nothing but “bubkes”<sup>10</sup>. When King Herod weighed Christ in the balances, his men of war "set him at nought"<sup>11</sup> zero, zilch, nada (Luke 23:11).

Though this figure was announced the prophecy, the Jews rejected their Champion like Joseph's brothers rejected the favored son; like Israel rejected Moses; like the builders rejected the chief cornerstone. No wonder Isaiah asked if anyone would believe his report. Jews have a term for crazy and foolish. How *meshuga*<sup>12</sup> does a people have to be to murder God's gift to their people? But, they did! (Genesis 39; Exodus 2; Psalms 118).

The defects of our age are not due to a lack of self-esteem, but want of Christ esteem. The fundamental issue in our nation is not jobs, or the economy, or getting the rich to pay their fair share, but a nation seeking “the good life”; that has neglected the Son of God; a country where fathers no longer know the Holy Scriptures; a nation led by humanist politicians who like Herod have set Christ as “nought” (Luke 21:11).

**4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.**

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<sup>10</sup> Bupkes or bobkes, a Jewish term of contempt for "goat droppings."

<sup>11</sup> Nought (*exoutheneo*) means "to despise, to show contempt, to value as nothing."

<sup>12</sup> Meshuga. A Yiddish slur for crazy and foolish.

After Isaiah recorded the stunning character of this Champion called the Arm of the LORD and the embarrassing response of the nation to God's gift, he presented the glorious accomplishments of this mystery figure.

**He hath born our griefs:** The term "**griefs**" can be translated "sicknesses" or "diseases." "Griefs" and "sorrows" is plural. The term "born" (na'saw) is the same word used of the *aza'zel* on the Day of Atonement: "And the goat shall bear (na'saw) upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited" (Leviticus 16:22) Not only did the Arm of the LORD bear his own burdens, like a pack mule, he bore the sinful baggage of the nation and the suffering it caused on his own shoulders.

**"We did esteem him stricken":** The "**we**" here is referring to the elect who perceived that the suffering this Messianic figure endured was not due to a personal flaw, but that his affliction was vicarious<sup>13</sup>. He was the Lamb whose throat was cut for the sins of the nation. On him fell the lightning and thunder of heaven's wrath against sinners. He was not only struck by men, but smitten and crushed by the Father-God.

**5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.**

**Transgressions:** The word "**transgressions**" (pe'sha) is plural and refers to our many violations of God's law. It is translated "rebellion" in Job 3:7, Proverbs 17:11, and Jeremiah 28:16. Transgress is a deliberate, intentional rejection of God's law-order.

**Wounded:** The word "**wounded**" (chalal / khaw'lal) can be translated "polluted, profaned, or defiled," even "tormented." The word is used to describe the defilement of the altar of the LORD (Exodus 20:25); defiling the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14); and of profaning His Holy name (Leviticus 19:12). Before us is the punishment of the Lamb.

The prophet goes deeper and deeper into the mystery of the Arm of the Lord and the New Exodus promised. This "**tender plant**" and "**root out of dry ground**" and "**man of sorrows**" was the mighty Arm of the LORD who was afflicted by God for the transgressions of His people. The defilement and profaning that Israel was forbidden to do, but actually did, and deserved to be punished for found its way on to the back of the Lamb whose throat was cut.

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<sup>13</sup> Vicarious: for the benefit of others, and not due to personal wrongdoing.

All this wounding and bruising and suffering was because God laid on Him the iniquities of the nation; but, not only the chastisement due to disobedient Israel, but the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29).

**Healing:** The word "**healing**" (ra'pha) is the same Hebrew word used in the title, *Jehovah-ra'pha*, the Lord our Healer (Exodus 15:26). The salvic blessing of justification, regeneration, reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, and the bodily resurrection from the grave are all rolled into one word--"healing! (ra'pha)."

**Bruising;** The expression "**bruising**" (daka) means "to be smashed and broken." It is the same word used to describe crushed testicles in Deuteronomy 23:1. It refers to our Lord's agony and death at Calvary. And, by His bruising as the sin-bearer, true Israel experienced a New Exodus, release from guilty, the escape from the Dragon, liberation from the bondage of sin, and peace with God (cf. Romans 5:1ff). In this way, the strength and power of the Arm of the Lord brought deliverance and healing to the elect of God.

Chastisement of our peace: the term "chastisement" (moo'sawr) means "correction or discipline."

"**Peace**" (shalom) is the wonderful result at the end of conflict. How does a man at war with God obtain *shalom* with an offended Adversary? This text informs us of the means used to effect peace. The righteous Judge punished His Lamb. With sins properly punished, God is able to extend an offer of peace to the sinner based on the death of Another.

If God could have forgiven men when they say, "I am sorry," He would not have needed to send His Son to die on the cross. But, there was no other way! The debt had to be paid! For this reason, Christianity calls for sinners to negotiate terms of peace through Christ, the Mediator between God and man (Romans 3:17; 5:1-11).

**6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

The reason for all this bruising and blood shedding is now addressed

**Sheep gone astray:** The expression "**gone astray**" (taw'awh) is the same word used to describe Abraham's journey from Haran to Beersheba (Genesis20:13); of Hagar's departure from the House of Abraham (Genesis21:14); of Joseph being lost in the hills

searching for his brothers (Genesis 37:15); and, of Manasseh's seduction of Israel when he led the nation away from the law of the LORD God (2 Kings 21:9).

Isaiah preached against the sins of his people from the beginning of his ministry. He now expands his message to its broadest application. All men, like sheep, have wandered away from God's pasture in search of their own pleasures. This is Isaiah's way of telling us that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God;" that all men have rejected God's government over them and rebelled against His law-order.

**"Turned to his own way,"** is an expression regarding man's personal autonomy and independence from God wherein men have adopted their own law-order. The Bible calls man's lawlessness **"iniquity."** Theologians know it as "human depravity," the "transgression of Eve," the sin of Adam, and "the fall" of the human race that took place when man ate fruit from the Poisonous Tree.

**Laid on him the iniquity of us all:** The term **"iniquity"** (a'von) is translated "punishment" in Genesis 4:13 and is a general term for guilt. The expression "laid on him" is the Hebrew word *pa'ga*. It is a hiphil verb meaning "to cause to fall upon;" i.e., The Father caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon the Arm of the LORD. This is doctrine of imputation.

Israel understood all this transfer of iniquity and throat slitting in terms of the Passover Lamb who was slain as a substitute for their firstborn on the eve of their exodus from Egypt. We understand this expression in terms of the cross of Calvary.

Since blood is the currency of the spirit world, and Christ paid for our sins with His own precious blood, the elect are blood-bought men who are safe from the destroyer (1 Peter 1:19). The dragon's head has been crushed, and men are free from bondage and the fear of death. The Arm of the LORD has been unveiled, and a New Exodus has begun. With the blessings of the salvation now secure, the redeemed can enjoy the first fruits of Eschaton now in advance of its consummation at the end of history.

# Isaiah 59:20

## *The Redeemer*

**“The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,” declares the LORD.**

♦ This verse is quoted in Romans 11:25, and it refers to our Lord’s first coming and not his second – to His coming in the flesh to save sinners by his death on the cross – His elect which repent and believe the gospel (see John 14:15-23).

Jews are redeemed throughout history as they believe. When Jewish person believes they are grafted into vine to enjoy the benefits of His care.

It would be an error to apply this to His future return. There is no such thing as “double prophecy” – a slippery hermeneutic applied by those with an end time Jewish scheme.

A distinction is made between carnal Zion and the True Zion, between Jacob and true Israel, which is marked by repentance from their sins.

**The Redeemer** is sent as a consequence of the covenant. The Spirit is upon Him as He speaks His Word to the redeemed (v. 21).

# Isaiah 65:17-25

## *Isaiah's New Heavens and New Earth*

♦ Jews and some Christians have traditionally taken this section quite literally. Many understand this to be equivalent with Peter's account of a literal new heaven and new earth. Premillennialists generally identify this section with the alleged millennium. Some see this as a description of life after the return of the Jews from Babylon in 536. Most likely, however, this is Isaiah's presentation of the Messianic Age in very earthly terms to his agrarian audience.

Writing is a craft. Isaiah doesn't tell, he shows. He doesn't dispense data, he creates images in peoples' minds. He's not a Greek; he is a Hebrew. He's not an engineer; he's an artist. He doesn't lawyer up and present a legal brief on the Messianic Kingdom, he sets up his easel, combines poppy seed oil with two parts sunflower oil, mixes colors on his palette, selects his brushes, sketches his scene, and applies his paints to create a work of art.

Isaiah is the Michael Angelo of the prophets, rich in illustrations. Before us are poetic impressions of the Eschaton on canvas for the ancient Hebrew mind to ponder. Use the left side of your brain and analyze this passage like a mathematician or an electrical engineer and you'll sterilize Isaiah's presentation of the kingdom and deprive it of its power and force.

In this chapter, as well as in the bulk of the Book of Isaiah, the Lord addresses the problems of humanity: rebellion (Isaiah 65:2), provocation (Isaiah 65:3), violation of kosher law (Isaiah 65:4), iniquity (Isaiah 65:7), and apostasy (Isaiah 65:11). Two destinies are repeated: the salvation of the righteous, and the judgment of the wicked (Isaiah 65:13-16).

In light of ultimate realities, God ordered his people to wake up, to stop living in an alternative universe, and to embrace His truth and His law.

Before us on Isaiah's canvas is an image of a transformed universe. It is a poetic prolepsis, and we are not required to press down on literalness.

**17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.**

Weary of the sins of his people, and exhausted by waiting on God, Isaiah had prayed, "Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down . . . and to look now on all of your people" (Isaiah 64:1, 9).

This is the cry of all God's holy ones. In the loneliness of a dark night, the warm light of a familiar voice whispers, "Behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth." Like a seed, hope is planted. Out with the old, in with the new! The stained rags are folded up, and a dazzling new cosmos is unveiled. So glorious is the latter creation, the former world is forgotten. This planetary system with its sun, moon and stars is as if it never was!

**18-19 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever *in that which I create*: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.**

For those grieved by constant parades of mourners in funeral processions and the madness around them, the LORD God issued a command, "**Be glad and rejoice, in what I create.**"

The light at the end of the tunnel is greater than the darkness in the burrow. The morning of God's promises follows the night of man's losses. The glories of the Messianic Age eclipse the worries of this age. The bitter past where God agonized over Jerusalem and was grieved with His people disappears, and a future where God rejoices in His people burst forth like spring flowers. Like the new heavens and new earth, this is New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12) where rejoicing and happiness replace weeping and sadness; and, where spontaneous dancing triumphs over the melancholy of the funeral march.

**20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner *being* an hundred years old shall be accursed.**



**No more infant of days:** The reason for the transformation from sadness to gladness is because the shroud that covers all nations has been removed (Isaiah 25:6-9). In the Messianic age, there will be no fatal diseases, no premature deaths, no funerals, and no coffins. In fact, there will be no death! But, how can this be since this passage mentions sinners and alludes to death?

There is no need here to put a square peg in a round hole; that is, to take this passage and conclude God is announcing an earthly millennium where people must get sick and die. To squeeze down on a literal hermeneutic would be to commit the same error the disciples committed when they took our Lord's warning about the "leaven of the Pharisees" literally as a reference to biscuits and bread (Matthew 16:6-8).

Expressions like "**a child shall die at a hundred**" is a figurative metaphor for the reign of life in God's kingdom. Condescending to the viewers limitations, Isaiah cleanses the walls of the Hebrew mind to replace mutant pterodactyls with butterflies, and the terrors of death with the laughter of rope-skipping daughters. Here the fear of death with all its cancers and heart-stopping diseases are mocked and taunted. "Death at a hundred? What a curse!"

The prophet speaks indirectly. For Isaiah to state directly that there is no death in the Messianic Kingdom might have blown the fuses in these Hebrew minds and caused them to pull the plug on Isaiah's microphone. Isaiah condescends to address the inexplicable in terms his audience could accept and appreciate; and, in so doing expanded their faith and hope in God's eschatological surprise at the end of history.

**Isaiah's problem is our problem.** How can any man discuss the kingdom of God and the Messianic Age without appearing fantastic, dreamy, and idealistic? You do it by condescending to the limitations of your audience while pushing upward and outward. Expression like "**infant of days**," "**old man**," "die ahundred years old," and "**sinner**" are terms condescending to the mental constraints of Isaiah's original audience. Who among them could hope or think in terms of a life without sin or death?

Concepts like "eternal life" and "resurrection" were developed in the New Testament era after the foundations of the eternal blessing were laid down in metaphors to Old Testament people. Even then, minds struggled to grasp the teaching of Jesus.

**The literary features of Isaiah** are quite puzzling to us, but they were perfectly intelligible to the original viewers. The Spirit-inspired expressions expanded the faith of these ancient people as well as confirmed to them that the Messianic Age was a reality

to accept, not a fantasy to forsake. Remember, this is an artist's fresco not a mathematician's accounting formula; impressionism, not realism; a Monet, not an architect's technical, slide rule blueprint of the age to come.

**21-23 And they shall build houses, and inhabit *them*; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree *are* the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they *are* the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them.**

John the revelator, also an artist, painted the New Jerusalem like "a rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal," a city of pure gold (Revelation 21).

**Isaiah's theme is agrarian.** Before us are centenary vineyards, olive orchards, and villas with bricked-paved courtyards. Rows of green vines with luscious red grapes begging to be harvested and enjoyed. Absent are disease and robbers that steal the harvest leaving the vine grower distressed and destitute. Labor is rewarded. Here the grape vines and olive trees have an extended life cycle enriching the farmer and delighting his heart. This is the age of regeneration where the curse on the ground has been removed and life flourishes. This is Paradise Restored (Luke 20:34-35).

The expression "**for as the days of a tree are the days of my people**" is a hyperbolic metaphor describing the reign of eternal life. Isaiah is careful to paint the kingdom of God in oils and with brush strokes that produce a landscape painting around Hebrew values. Knowing his people did not speak in terms of "eternal life," he condescends to the perspective of his people to describe the Eschaton in terms a farmer could most appreciate.

**24-25 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust *shall be* the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.**

One of the laments of Isaiah is that God hides himself in times of trouble (Isaiah 45:15-17; 37:17). At times on the pilgrim journey, God seems deaf to us. Our prayers for help often appear to go unanswered (Isaiah 59:2). We live in an age of darkness, where sin is a huge detriment to an effective prayer life before a holy God. Unanswered prayer causes us to grope like blind men, growl like bears, and moan like doves (Isaiah 59:10,

11). But, in the Messianic age, all impediments to answered prayer are removed. "Before they call, I will answer" says the LORD God.

This is an ideal age, the Age of the Eschaton, the reign of the Lord Christ where the present laws of nature are quashed; where the wolf and lamb feed in the same field; where sabre tooth tigers and bone crushing lions eat straw like cattle; where feared serpents eat dust instead of flesh.

This is Paradise Restored with the curse of sin removed, where there is no injury or bloodshed, where the law of life makes men whole, and where personal, injury lawyers are out of business.

In scientific terms, Isaiah describes the new heavens and new earth as an ecosystem that maintains a biological equilibrium referred to as homeostasis. Who can envision a universe where there is no entropy, no threats to health and safety, no violence and no death? But, Isaiah says there is such a world. This is the new heavens and new earth that the LORD will create. It is the Messianic Age, the kingdom of God, the Age of Regeneration where life reigns.

But, Isaiah's presentation of a new cosmos is not without application. Our Lord announced that the kingdom of God has come unto you (Matthew 12:28). We live between an inaugurated Kingdom where Christians can enjoy the benefits of redemption in a first fruits way, and the consummation of the kingdom where God's people will experience the full benefits of the Age of Regeneration; that is, on this side of the cross, there are hopes to be gained and promises to be claimed from Isaiah's presentation of Paradise Restored.

# Jeremiah 16:15

## *Back to the Land*

**“But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.”**

♦ This prophecy refers to the return of the Jews to the land of Palestine in 536 BC and **not** to some alleged return of German / Russian Jews to Israel in 1948.

Modern Ashkenazi Jews use this prophecy to prop up their theft of the “Holy Land” and their genocide of Palestinians that began after WWII.

This passage has a context and the context is the Babylonian Captivity (606-536 BC).

Because the Jews killed the Messiah in 32 A.D., rejected the gospel, the nation of Israel was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. – never to be rebuilt again. In 70 A.D., Titus destroyed the infrastructure of the nation and those who survived (9,000) were assimilated into the nations where the Jews lost their genealogies and genetic distinctiveness.

The alleged second “return” of the “Jews” to the “Holy Land” in 1948 is a ruse, a trick, a scam on the world, and a commercial enterprise. These people are not real Jews with a genetic connection to Abraham. They have no Hebrew blood in them – zero, zilch, nada. They are Ashkenazi gentiles from Kazaria or modern Ukraine – a pagan nation that adopted Judaism as its national religion around 800 B.C. As political strife grew, these Gentile converts to Judaism scattered into Russia, Poland, and Germany. These so called “Jews” became communists, bankers, actors, and pornographers. Hitler fought communists, not the Jewish religion. T

**he Balfour Declaration** was a ruse to make a land grab in Palestine. Thus, these fake Jews stole the land from the Palestinians in 1948 and declared themselves a nation called “Israel” – a record of lies, deceit, and treachery.

This would be like Chinese Muslims claiming Mecca belongs to them and not the Arabs.

That this is a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy is propaganda and Evangelicals in America fell for it like flopping fish on a sandy beach.

# Ezekiel 37

## *The Valley of Dry Bones*

♦ This discussion deals with one concern: Does Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones apply to the events of Cyrus's decree for volunteers among the captives in Babylon to return to their land to rebuild their temple in 536 BC, or did Ezekiel see an alleged return of European "Jews" to the land after WWII?

This passage has been so abused by modern pop-prophecy teachers in Christian Zionism that its abuse cannot be corrected by a proper exegesis of the passage. Rather, this author appeals to common sense; that is, for Christians to consider the context of Ezekiel's vision (597-536 BC).

A reasonable, open mind must conclude that this passage applies to near events; that is, to the return of the Jews under Zerubbabel in 536 BC, and that the passage has no application to the modern, military conquest of Palestine by European Zionists that began in 1948 AD.

**Ezekiel 37:1-3 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which *was* full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, *there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.* And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.**

Ezekiel is part of the post-exilic prophets. He was taken captive to Babylon in 597 and lived in a settlement long the River Chebar (1:1), *Nar-kabari*, the "great canal," in a village called *Tel-abib* which is translated "corn's ears"(3:15).

He wrote his work during Israel's early captivity in Babylon. His book contains three visions and numerous sermons and predictions on the destinies of the nations including Israel (12-39). The three movements in the book are Judgments Against Jerusalem (4-24), Future Perspective on the Nations (25-39), and the Final Temple, Its People, and Its City Jerusalem (41-48).

- Important Dates:
  - 606 BC ~ Israel subjugated. First Deportation to Babylon. (2 Kings 24:8-16; Daniel 1:1-4).
  - 597 BC ~ Second Deportation by Babylon. First Year of Zedekiah's secession to king. Ezekiel along with ten thousand Jews taken captive.
  - 592 BC ~ Ezekiel received his first vision from God. He was 30 years old (1:1-2).
  - 591 BC ~ Ezekiel received his second vision in the sixth year (8:1) which is found in chapters 8-11.
  - 586 BC ~ Final sack of Jerusalem and its destruction.
  - 572 BC ~ Fourteenth year after Jerusalem was destroyed Ezekiel receives his third vision of the New Temple (40:1).
1. Ezekiel's tools for preaching are metaphors and symbols that should not be taken literally. For example, in his message on the Valley of Dry bones neither the bones (37:1) or the sinews (37:5) or the two sticks (37:19-20) are literal; rather they represent a truth or reality related to events of Israel's Babylonian Captivity.
  2. The stirring vision of the Valley of Dry Bones was written after the destruction of Jerusalem during the nadir of the exile to Babylon. Nine hundred miles from Jerusalem, scattered among the Babylonian provinces, wilted like a flower, the Jews had lost all hope for a future state in their beloved city Jerusalem. A scattered people in a pagan land, they were the dry, sun-bleached bones sticking out of the earth on an ancient battlefield in the Valley of Death.
  3. Consider the extremity of Israel's plight in Babylon. Israel had experienced political reversals and wonderful revivals in the past. Their history was replete with mighty deliverances from God during periods of spiritual weaknesses. But, their captivity in Babylon was different. They were not in the Land of Israel; they were in Babylon nine-hundred miles from their homeland; they weren't free or even huddled together as captives; they were scattered, disorganized exiles. They weren't merely weak; they were a dead nation without a land, without a capital city, without a temple, and without a king or a military. For Ezekiel to preach directly that these people would return to the land circa 536 BC, rebuild the temple, and to construct a nation out of archaeological ruins would have mocked the intelligence of the captives, made fun of their misery, and denied the facts of their suffering. But, his preaching on the Valley of Dry bones acknowledged Israel's extremity, but also revealed that the LORD is the God of the IMPOSSIBLE!

4. The Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones was designed to inject hope into the hearts of these people. Ezekiel's sermon taught the remnant that God was able to revive a dead, bone-dry nation, and to open their hearts to receive the stunning command of Cyrus for volunteers from among the captives to return to their land and to rebuild their temple due the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1).
5. The Vision refers to the resurrection of the nation of Israel in 536 BC out of Babylon. It does not refer to nor does it even remotely apply to the Zionist invasion of Palestine in 1948 AD. To preach that this vision of resurrection of dry bones applies to the modern, Gentile Zionist State is to grant the modern state called "Israel" Biblical authority to exist as a Biblical entity IT DOES NOT HAVE! Biblical Israel did not become a nation again in 1948. Modern Jews are not Semites. They are Gentile Ashkenazi converts to a form of Talmudic anti-Logos Judaism, and or, a political philosophy known as Zionism. Zionism is revolutionary philosophy that controls the world through usury and gain from those who practice gain from surplus value for labor. One does not have to be Jewish to be a Zionist (VP / Pres. Joe Biden). The formation of a nation by European Ashkenazi Gentiles and the genocide against Palestinians by the Zionist is perhaps, the greatest fraud in modern times. Modern "Israel" is no more a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy than a claim by Chinese Moslems that Mecca belongs to Asians.
6. The modern State of Israel (1948) is not a miracle or a fulfillment of prophecy, it is the result of a clever ruse by international Zionism, a political movement, to steal land from Palestinians and give it to European socialist Jewry. Furthermore, it is a cloak of deception foisted on the Christian community by C.I. Scofield and his followers.
7. It was Zionist Theodor Herzl that conceived the Zionist conspiracy to wrestle this ancient land away from control of the Turks and settle European Jews in the region. His motto was, "A people without a land (Jews), and a land without people (Palestine)." It was true that millions of European, Ashkenazi Jews in Europe and across Russia did not have a land, but it was not true that the land of Palestine did not have a people. The European Jews evicted the Arab Palestinians at the point of a bayonet to flee Palestine, murdered them, or forced march them into the world's largest ghetto in Gaza.
8. Furthermore, modern American and European Christians have "had the wool pulled over their eyes" because of unbiblical preaching that somehow this wrestling away



of power from the Palestinians and land-grab by Zionists is somehow related to the Abrahamic promises. Nonsense! Such a view is nothing short of preposterous. God's naive people have bit into it like a fish chasing a lure. The reader would do well to study Zionism and its modern delusions foisted on Europe and the Americas.

In conclusion, the entire context of Ezekiel 37 and the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones applies to the events between Cyrus and the people of Israel in 536 BC, and has nothing to do with the modern, military conquest of Palestine by European Jews financed by the Rothschild International Bankers in 1948 until now.

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### **A Spiritual Application for Our Times**

While this passage applies directly to ancient Israel, it has an indirect application to the modern church.

Look at the mess we are in. The government subsidizes murder (abortion) and Sodomy. The Zionist media clings to the Washington like barnacles on a whale. A Muslim army camps within our borders with more recruits (refugees) coming. We are hopeless in debt under IMF currency schemes. Christians are hated, persecuted, killed, and imprisoned. Pastors are in jail. The church is so blind, it couldn't see the elephant of truth through a barbwire fence; that is, the Valley of Dry Bones could be stamped on Western Christianity. Can the bones of true Christianity live in this dry valley? (37:3). The Lord knows answered the prophet.

First, God ordered Ezekiel to preach to the bones, "Hear the Word of the Lord." Many a good preacher has felt that he was preaching to a graveyard of Christians. Hear? God's people today can hear the radio, sports broadcasters, and the liberal media, but they have little desire as to what the Bible says? The dead are incapable of hearing. To many, the Bible is just an ancient relic. As deaf as dinosaur skeletons in the British Museum, the modern church has little tolerance for Biblical preaching. Nevertheless, Bible preaching was the means of life.

Second, if God doesn't breath on the cemetery church, a preacher's preaching is in vain. Do you ever chuckle over church signs that read, "Revival Next Week." Only God can give life. Three times in Psalm 80, the song writer prays, "(You) revive us, O LORD!" Revival is of God, not man.

Third, we have a statement, “I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them.” Here we have the results of good preaching without the breath of God on it. Men can hear good preaching, and they can change certain habits, rearrange their priorities, and imitate life without actually having the life of God in them. Have you ever noticed how many Christians love to rearrange the chairs at church? Christians are constantly straightening and aligning these padded comfort chairs. But, rearranging the chairs is not the same as having the life of God in God’s house. Rearrange chairs, a better bulletin, and a rock band can’t produce life. Beware of pseudo revival; pseudo Christianity; and pseudo-spiritual preachers.

Fourth, when God gives life, the church becomes militant: “the breath came into them (the dry bones), and they came to their feet, an exceeding great army.” When God gives life, his church becomes his battle ax (Jeremiah 51:20). Praise is in their mouth, and a double edged sword in their right hand to “bind their kings with chains” (Psalm 49:5-9).

Fifth, the bones that came to life represented ancient Israel. Today, the church looks like ancient Israel: “dry . . . hope perished . . . and cut off” (37:11); that is, powerless, hopeless, with much loneliness. But, there is hope. He is the God of the impossible. He can raise up children of Abraham out of those who are as dead as a rock (Matthew 3) (See Psalm 79; Isaiah 26:19).

Sixth, it may get worse before it gets better. When God came to his enslaved people in Egypt and Moses said, “Let my people go,” Pharaoh took away their straw and filled their lives with business gathering straw and making bricks for government projects. Just before “revival,” insane and psychotic rulers may come into power to enslave and oppress believers. God ordains it this way so Christians may know that “. . . that I am the Lord;” that salvation is of God, not man (37:14). Christians can have their victory, but God must have the glory.

Seventh, notice that this mighty resurrection from the dead was corporate, not individual; that is, when God moved, he acted on the nation as a whole, not one person at a time. The issue of revival is not about the “me” among God’s flock, but about “us,” the whole of God’s people.

# Ezekiel 38-39

## *The Battle of Gog & Magog*

### Introduction

♦ Ezekiel 38 & 39 was penned around 572 BC to the exiles scattered throughout Babylon to encourage the exiles and instill hope to a subjugated people.

However, because of the eschatological nature of this passage, it has been a subject of much debate (38:8). Futurists have attempted to use this passage to support an elaborate literal end-time battle by world super-state against modern Ashkenazi, Zionist Israel.

European Zionist, banking "Jews" paid for the displacement and immigration of Jews to settle in modern Palestine. Since they arrived by the thousands, Jews waged war on those sand dunes against the peaceful Palestinians living there. In 1948, these Europeans declared themselves to be Semites, with a Biblical right to Palestine. Consequently, naive interpreters have abused this passage to declare that modern Ashkenazi, Zionist Gentile Israel is somehow a fulfillment of prophecy. Gullible Christians fell for it like starving dogs on a carcass. Such a view is utter nonsense.

Further, these prognosticators extrapolate that Gog & Magog is modern Russia; that at some time in the future (soon), Russia will invade Zionist Israel to launch a literal battle called "Armageddon" against "Jews." Using other passages, these interpreters predict China, Egypt, and a Ten nation confederation from Europe will join the chaos. There, the nations of the world will witness the greatest military defeat in history because the Rider on the white horse will appear to defeat the little horn called the Beast.

Since this passage does not seem to have an historical corollary, the futurist's doomsday view seems to trump all others. However, this is not the kernel of truth in this passage. It is the husks of speculative minds. Rather, the Spirit gave Ezekiel this passage in the form of a mythological battle to inform the remnant that the exiles and their work for God would never be defeated despite the power of alleged enemies.

## **Problems with the Literal View**

Futurists tend to be literalists, i.e., they seek to use the literal method of hermeneutic consistently. And, normally, this is the method that we should use unless the text demands another approach. There is much to be said for the literal interpretation of this passage:

- Real names are used: Gog, Meshech, Tubal, Cush, Put, Togarmah.
- The use of “after many days” is an eschatological sign.
- A narrative style is used. It reads like a prophetic documentary.
- The geographical location of the battle is in Palestine, a real place.
- Israel is a passive, but real political entity.

But, there are some problems with the literal approach. **First**, the passage employs apocalyptic imagery which should be interpreted and not taken literally (38:20-22; 39:9-19); **Second**, if this battle is future to our time, and one insists on applying the literal hermeneutic consistently, then this battle is not one with guns, planes, and tanks but one with bows, arrows, shields, spears, horses, and cavalry (39:3, 10). The wooden weapons are used for fuel for seven years. It is difficult to understand how modern military equipment could be in view here. **Third**, if this passage is the final act of history as we know it, then the first task in the new millennium will be spent burying corpses. The first seven years will be spent burning guns, tanks, and military equipment for use as fuel for homes, which, by the way, were all destroyed by the great earthquake (38:20).

Therefore, it would be a great error to read this passage with unbending, steel-trap literalness.

There is another approach and that is to interpret this passage symbolically *as a mythological battle that seeks to convey a literal truth about Israel's future*. This is the approach taken here.

## **Outline of Chapter 38**

Description of Gog and her Confederacy (38:2-9)

Motivation of Gog (38:10-13)

Military Operation of Gog (38:14-16)

Divine Intervention against Gog (38:17-22)

Interpretation (38:23)

Outline of Chapter 39

The Slaughter of Gog (39:1-8)

The Spoiling of Gog (39:9-10)

The Burial of Gog (39:11-16)

The Complete Devouring of Gog (39:17-20)

The Restoration of Israel from Babylon (39:21-29)

### **Evidence for a Mythological Interpretation**

*First, we must consider the historical facts about Gog & Magog.* While many worthy scholars have done their best to identify Gog and Magog on the map, no one has been completely successful in locating a population group or geographical location called *Gog or Magog*.

The title *Gog* or *Magog* is generally assigned to regions north of Israel (Scythians). Israel knew nothing of Russia or the Baltic states. Using modern political tension to interpret *Gog* as Russia is pesh<sup>14</sup> interpretation and not sound hermeneutics. Identifying *Magog* or *Meshech* as Moscow is a malicious twisting of Scripture that needs to be exposed and condemned.

A better approach is to consider *Gog & Magog* and their international alliances as a symbol of all of Israel's ancient enemies: Syria, Assyria, Babylon, et al. Since Israel's traditional enemies during the Iron Age invaded Israel from the north, *Gog & Magog* are an appropriate, general title representing Israel's foes — *a symbolic representation of all those nations that Israel feared*.

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<sup>14</sup> Pesh interpretation is an approach to prophetic passage in Scripture that utilizes current events recorded in newspapers and magazines as the authority on how the passage should be interpreted. While a Biblical passage may apply to current events, using current events to interpret a passage is the quick route to utter deception.

*Second, we must consider the purpose of the prophecy.* The prophecy about Gog and Magog was given to surviving exiles deported into Babylon from ancient Israel. Judah was defeated; Babylon was victorious. The Jews were captives; the Babylonians were masters. Israel's crushing defeat was still fresh, even painfully branded on their bewildered souls.

For what twisted purpose would God be telling these conquered people about another massive, military invasion into their country two and a half millennia removed from their time? What relevance would this have to these people and why should they even care? The literal-prophetic view tends to make God some kind of sadistic monster.

The message of Gog is teleological reaching beyond the ages. It shows the reader **an ultimate truth: *the wicked will perish, and the righteous will live!***

The purpose of this prophecy was motivated by YHWH's compassion to inform Israel that they were going to return from captivity (39:25) and *that He was going to reverse their destiny; that they would be blessed; that their work would endure to the end of time.* In the past, they were defeated by their northern enemies, but in the future, God was going to defeat her foes in such a way that the imagery of cleansing the land of corpses would inspire his people with hope that their future was secure and safe.

Consider the depressed state of the exiles. What could possibly motivate these deported captives to return to the land of Israel since they were enjoying a relatively peaceful lifestyle in Babylon? Canaan was a war zone. Lusty generals understood the importance of this land bridge between Africa, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia. Israel was used as cannon fodder in these wars. Why would the exiles even consider a return unless they had confidence that the God who severely judged their nation in 586 B.C. would vigorously defend them and defeat future enemies? The Battle of Gog and Magog communicated one truth: **God loves Israel and will destroy her enemies!** *This fact would inject courage into the captives to reinvest their lives in the promises of God.*

*Third, consider Gog and Magog in light of kingdom theology* (Matthew 3). When John the Baptist preached his kingdom message, he announced two possibilities: the baptism of fire and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John's interpretation of the kingdom was twofold: (a) when the kingdom appeared, God would judge His enemies (the baptism of fire), and (b) God would bring salvation to His people (the baptism of the Spirit). When the Eschaton appeared, God would crush the wicked and give the blessings of regeneration to the righteous.

In looking at Ezekiel 38 and 39, we see both of these truths mightily presented: We see a scene where the LORD destroys Israel's enemies (39:1-6), and bestows on his people salvic blessings, namely the Holy Spirit (39:29). Ezekiel's Gog & Magog Message is consistent with kingdom truth which reveals judgment on Israel's foes and salvation for God's people (Isaiah 2, 11, 25, 35, 65, 66; Zechariah 12-14; Malachi 4).

*Fourth, we need to explore the apocalyptic imagery presented in the prophecy of Gog and Magog.* Some interpreters reject an apocalyptic interpretation of this passage. But, the apocalyptic is used in these two chapters. The use of apocalyptic language with mythological proportions suggests that this battle is not to be taken literally, but to be taken symbolically. That is, it is not an historical prediction, but a mythological battle using apocalyptic language and hyperbole to convey a powerful, spiritual truth—*that though Israel was defeated by Babylon, Israel will one day witness the utter destruction of her enemies.* This interpretation is consistent with the bulk of kingdom theology.

Note the use of **apocalyptic language**, hyperbole, and dramatic presentation:

38:9 Like a storm, like a cloud (simile)

38:19 A great earthquake that rattles fish, birds, animals, and every creature, and every person on the face of the earth.

38:20 Mountains are overturned, cliffs crumble, and every wall tumbles to the ground.

38:22 Plagues and bloodshed are ordained.

38:22 Torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning suffer reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom are declared.

39:6 Fire falls even on those in distant lands.

39:9 Weapons used as fuel for seven years.

39:12 The burial takes seven months.

39:14 The burial takes longer than seven months.

39:17 Vivid imagery of scavengers gorging themselves on human flesh.

The key section in these chapters has to be the imagery of massive death and destruction. Could this imagery be literal? Yes, it could. Could God literally destroy

nations in this way? Yes, He could. However, the seven-month burial campaign and daily occupation with retrieving cadavers does not appear to be a literal battlefield with literal dead bodies scattered on a literal country side from a literal war.

We must ask, (A) “Is a literal Gog with a literal army being defeated in literal Israel with literal Sodom-like destruction three millenniums in the future what God intended the exiles living in Babylon in 572 to understand?” Or, (B) “Is Gog and Magog a mystery designed to instruct the exiles (and us) that even though God’s elect suffered a temporary setback in the Babylonian theater, in the end all of God’s people will be victorious and God’s enemies will suffer permanent defeat?” The latter makes more sense. Further, this interpretation is consistent with the message of other apocalyptic prophetic passages.

A literal seven-month campaign to cleanse the land of corpses seems unusually long for a modern people. Even WWII Russia could dispose of corpses faster than is suggested in this campaign.

There is another approach: Look at the prophecy of Gog & Magog as a powerful, figurative account of a mythological, Herculean war – a giant hyperbole. When we say it “cost him an arm and a leg” we do not mean this literally. The point is “it cost him a bunch” and not that he paid for something with a literal arm and literal leg.

Ezekiel uses military imagery to communicate in vivid, sensual military terms referring to the complete demolition of Israel’s foes to provoke faith emotionally. This hope was communicated in terms ancient Israel understood and could appreciate! The Spirit was seeking to impress upon His elect the massive defeat of their enemies.<sup>15</sup> This is similar to the message in 1 Thessalonians 5 where destruction comes on the wicked like birth pains.

Why would God employ the apocalyptic in this section? Possibly this: The God of Israel was seeking to stir the imagination and to impress on the exile mind that when He arises to defend His people He works dynamically, vigorously, and explosively to defeat their enemies. In other words, when God goes to work, “He rolls up his sleeves and punches their lights out.” Note that rolling up “sleeves” and “punching lights out” is also a modern metaphor for intense work and sobering conquest not unlike what God

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<sup>15</sup> Man’s ultimate enemies, Satan, sin, and death, were crushed by Christ at Calvary.



intended to communicate when Ezekiel spoke his prophetic message. It appears that God wants his people to understand one powerful truth: *In the end, God's people will be victors who witness the total defeat of their enemies.*

This enormous mythological battle conveys several important lessons:

- Israel is so protected, that God must hook and pull Israel's enemies against her.
- Those who intend to harm His people arouse God's anger (38:18).
- When God acts to defend His people the effects are cataclysmic, catastrophic, convulsive, and complete.
- Israel's enemies will be totally destroyed and Israel will be totally saved under God's work for them (38:4).
- The spoils of war teach us that God's people will "inherit the earth." God's people will not be plundered, but they shall enjoy the fruits of God's salvation including a "new heavens and new earth."
- The burial imagery and the carrion feast conveys the truth that defeat of Israel's enemies will be thorough and final.
- In Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" the fictitious Queen shouted, "Off with their Heads" – Carroll's use of military hyperbole to show intensity and to provoke fear.

Fifth, this passage provided certainty and security.

The use of the term *Israel* is prominent. There is no doubt that Ezekiel is addressing historic, geo-political Israel. The landscape is also Palestine. While God could have used a different landscape to convey the same thoughts, God used the landscape familiar to the exiles to assure them of His personal superintendence over the affairs of His people.

The massive battle expanded Israel's hope. *Familiarity provided assurance and comfort the message was real and true.* If God had employed terms of modern warfare familiar to the modern mind, and modern concepts of the victorious, post-Calvary church, Ezekiel's audience would **not** have believed him. Ezekiel's message would have seemed incredible, farcical, and fantastic.

Though Ezekiel is addressing a literal Israel and a mythological battle on Palestinian real estate, it is not limited to that geographical location. In other words, a literal Israel in a literal Palestine in a literal war is not necessary to convey the truth that God's

enemies will be defeated and God's people will be victorious. This grand battle and interplay of Gog with Israel does not substantiate the dispensational scheme of a global, physical, military invasion of Israel future to our time.

We must remember that God is addressing the OT mind and conveying truth to the exiles in terms and images familiar to them.

Consider the exiles in 573 B.C. possessed a shriveled, narrow, near-sighted view of what God was going to do in history. They had no understanding of rebuilding their temple, of Jesus, the cross, the resurrection, and the incoming of Gentiles into the family of God. They had no idea that from the exile survivors would come the Christ and that through gospel proclamation Gentiles would embrace the LORD; that the true Israel would be composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. What kind of words could Ezekiel marshal to describe the vicious war against man's enemies and the colossal bloody conquest Christ achieved at Calvary?

Sixth, this passages teaches God is for the remnant and against her enemies.

The taunt of Gog announces God's love for Israel. The whole passage says, "I love you, Israel. I care for you. I will revive you. I will strengthen you. I will bring you back to this land. No enemy can prevail against you. The work of the church is invincible. It will not only survive, but thrive."

Gog represents all of Israel's enemies. The prophecy is addressed to Gog. No truce is offered. The LORD scowls at Gog and announcing its utter defeat. It's kind of like a modern boxer taunting his opponent while announcing a total knock out: "In round one, Gog will fall down; and his face, will be smashed on the ground!"

God's promises, however, are broader than the exiles. *It is for all believing Israel, the true vine, the true people of God, the church of Jesus Christ.* YHWY wants His people in all ages to know they are safe under his guidance. Historic Israel is addressed to convey this universal truth for all to enjoy. Believers all over the world will prevail. Our ultimate enemies are Satan, sin, and death. These will be permanently destroyed. Because of our Champion, in the last chapter of redemption, Christians will stand victorious on the earth with all their enemies totally, completely defeated: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

### **Revelation and the Battle of Gog and Magog**

**Revelation 20:7-9** And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

John's presentation confirms the mythological interpretation of this passage. John places the Battle of Gog and Magog at the end of the millennium; that is, the Christian era (Revelation 20:7-9). Such a presentment does not fit well with modern dispensational schemes that predict a Second Coming of Christ, a geo-political revival of ancient Israel, a seven-year tribulation period, WWIII or WWIV over Jerusalem which is a literal fulfillment of Gog & Magog, an alleged millennium, and second battle called Gog & Magog at the end of the alleged millennium.

**Consider the following possibility:** At the end of the church age before the consummation of history, Satan will be set free from his chains in order to deceive the nations one last time. We are not given much detail, but we assume this war will be global and not limited to a particular piece of real estate in the middle east; that it will be a political crusade and not necessarily a military campaign; that Satan's assault will be against the entire Messianic, Christian community and the gospel they proclaim; that the nations will once again become hostile to exclusive Christianity; assaults on the church will increase in frequency and intensity. Men under the control of Satan will work feverishly to demolish the gospel—not unlike what is happening in universities and the media today. The city of God is not Jerusalem, but the people of God as a whole, the true church of Jesus Christ with its capital city in heaven. The age will end with the Second Coming of Christ, the rapture of the Saints, and the ruin of the wicked (1 Thessalonians 4:17ff), the out-pouring of the wrath of God upon the unbelieving (1 Thessalonians 5:1-9); and, the destruction of the earth by fire (Revelation 20:9; 2 Peter 2:10ff).

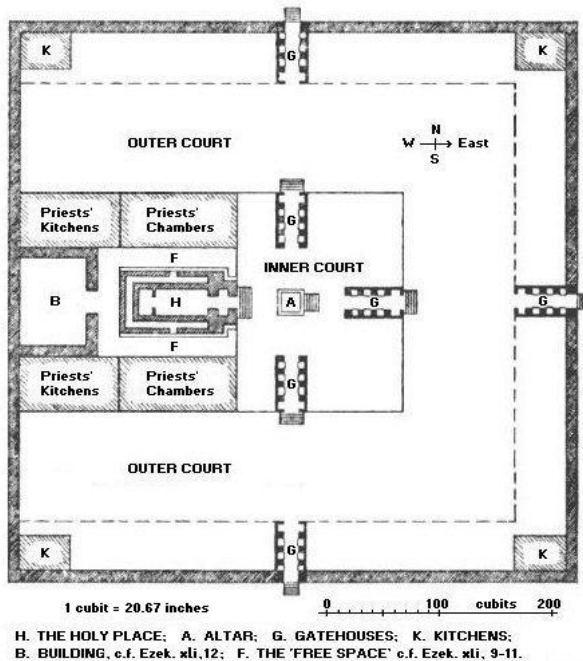
In conclusion, the Battle of Gog and Magog appears to be a mythological story of grand proportions designed to impress the sixth century mind with God's ability to judge Israel's enemies and to save His people. God uses the imagery of a military battle combined with apocalyptic language as the vehicle to communicate God is against the wicked and for the righteous. The invasion is not a detailed account of a future battle, but an inspired, mythological story which conveys a central truth: *God loves His people*

*and in the end, true Israel will be saved. In the end, God's anger will fall upon Israel's enemies who will be utterly destroyed.* With this comfort, the remnant exiles could return to Palestine to rebuild their temple clinging to the promises. With this comfort, God's people today have the assurance that no enemy will prevail against the church. God will be there to protect his people. *There will be conflict till the end, but in the end, God's people will be safe and secure.*

And finally, no battle imagery or apocalyptic war could prepare people for what God did to save His people and to defeat their enemies through Christ. When God sent His Son to die on a literal cross, he rolled up his sleeves and went to work to destroy our enemies: sin, death, and Satan. So defeated are our enemies and so victorious are we that Paul declares, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). Like Israel in this account, we passively behold the work of Another. The Defeat of Gog and Magog is a reminder of how God destroys our adversaries, and how we can enjoy the spoils of the war that took place on Calvary. In Christ, there is salvation. Outside of Christ, there will be utter destruction.

# Ezekiel 40

## *Ezekiel's Temple: Literal or Symbolic?*



♦ In Ezekiel's third vision, he sees a temple and a city for the future. But, how should we interpret this massive temple and the enormous city?

### Observations About Ezekiel's Temple

1. It is not a description of Solomon's Temple (597 B.C.).
2. It is not a description of the Second Temple built by Zerubbabel (536-516 B.C.)
3. It is not a description of Herod's Temple (70 B.C.).
4. No temple has existed in Jerusalem for the past 2000 years.
5. It would be inappropriate to spiritualize this temple as a symbol of the church as the temple of God.
6. It could be a literal description of the Millennial Temple, or it could be a symbol of the final temple in the city of God.

### Proposition

There is good reason to interpret this temple symbolically rather than literally?

Normally, the Bible interpreter should take a passage literally unless the content of the passage demands a symbolic interpretation. Interpreting symbolism is not liberalism nor is it modernism. The genre of literature will determine the rules of interpretation. In

this case, we are dealing with apocalyptic literature, and as such, images are means of communicating a spiritual reality – a literary tool to convey a literal truth.

### **Reasons to Interpret this Vision as Symbolic**

7. The “outer court” (40:15-20) is 500 reeds<sup>16</sup> (a reed = 10 feet) or about 1 mile by one mile. This court would be bigger than the whole city of ancient Jerusalem and larger than all of Mount Zion. Josephus estimated the circumference of Jerusalem in Herod’s day to have a circumference of about 4 miles.
8. The sacred area or area of “oblation” is a square measured at 25,000 reeds (48:20) or about 47 miles north to south and 47 miles east to west which is as large as Los Angeles and all her surrounding cities. As the crow flies, it is about 40 miles from Tel Aviv to Jericho; 50 miles from Jerusalem to Megiddo; 42 miles from Jerusalem to Beersheba; 45 miles from Jerusalem to the south end of the Dead Sea; and 45 miles from Jerusalem to Amman Jordan. If this temple was literal, it would swallow up a huge section of Israel, all of modern Jerusalem, a healthy portion of Jordan, the Gaza, and Samaria.
9. In this sacred area, 47 miles by 19 miles is reserved for the priesthood alone (45:3-4). The Levites were allotted about the same amount of land (45:5).
10. A third area is designated as “the city” (45:6) with an area of 5,000 reeds by 25,000 reeds or a city with a circuit of about 38 miles.
11. A fourth area, unmeasured, is assigned to the “prince” (45:7).
12. It is impossible to fit the sacred area (47 miles) into the present physical boundaries of the Holy land unless the River Jordan is moved about seven miles eastward. While “all things are possible” with God, even the moving of Jordan, a literal interpretation appears fantastic and not what was intended to be communicated by the dimensions in this blue print.
13. Another problem with these measurements is that the 47 X 47 mile sacred area does not include the city of Jerusalem! If this site is literal, then Jerusalem must fit outside the sacred area or completely surround it. If Jerusalem is to be the capital of the new world order, where is it in Ezekiel’s vision? Proportionately, the city must be at least

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<sup>16</sup> A reed is about 6 cubits long. A short cubit is 18 inches; a long cubit is 20 inches.

10 times bigger than the sacred complex to support the vast structure. This means that the Jerusalem would be outside the sacred area and would have to encompass the sacred area. Jerusalem, therefore would extend from south of Beersheba to northern Galilee, from the Mediterranean into the desert beyond the present State of Jordan.

14. Thus, we must conclude the dimensions are communication the existence of a literal, tangible geographical structure, but are in place to enlarge the reader's faith and hope of what God will accomplish in history through his work at Calvary by the Son.

### **Additional Challenges**

15. The river flowing out of the temple area is impossibility because the river increases in depth as it flows from the temple area (47:1-10). Rivers cannot increase in size — unless they have tributaries. This one does not have tributaries. The river is ideal and symbolic, not literal. This water brings life to the nations — a giant, hyperbolic metaphor of eternal life in the kingdom of God.
16. Another problem with the literal interpretation is that the walls of the temple are only TEN feet high. This would be out of proportion to the rest of the complex (40:5).
17. A theological problem exists which appears to make a literal interpretation impossible is the reinstitution of animal sacrifices (43:13-27). Our precious Lord, having offered himself up as the last sacrifice, the perfect sacrifice renders the reinstitution of animal sacrifices obsolete, vulgar, and pointless. Dispensationalists extract a commemorative value out of the reinstitution of sacrifices, but it appears to this writer that reinstituting animal sacrifices is not only unnecessary, but totally without merit and virtue--a denial of the efficacy of the gospel.

### **An Explanation of Ezekiel's Vision**

Ezekiel was a priest. The Hebrew nation lost their temple in 586 BC in the Babylonian invasion. Without a doubt this was a period of introspection and a time of deep national soul-searching, not only about God's love for them, but about God's purpose for the nation, if any. Without a land, without a capital city, and without a temple, there was no nation! Simply put, the Jewish hope and their place in the world shriveled up under the noon-day's heat of the exile.

To expand their shriveled vision of what appeared to be a hopeless, meaningless future, God gave this vision of a vast, expanded temple to His people to enlarge their hope and faith. Ezekiel's temple and Herculean measurements are symbols which teach the transcendent greatness of the final temple and holy city. Its cubes represent divine perfection. Its river represents the fullness of eternal life to the nations. Its sacrifices communicate the purity of the final worship of God's people in sacerdotal images meaningful to the exiles. The return of glory shows us that God will one day dwell with men in perfect fellowship.

In order to communicate the glories of the Eschaton, God condescended to explain the "New Jerusalem" where "the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and Lamb" (Revelation 21:22) in terms which these ancient people could understand and appreciate.

Thus, the whole purpose of the vision was to encourage a defeated people to believe God; that their exile was not the end of the nation; that the Lord still had a plan for them; and, to infuse them with hope that they would contribute to God's redemptive plan for the nations.



# Daniel 2:36-46

## *The Four Empires*

♦ Before us is the unveiling of history -- of four kingdoms that will dominate the world stage in Herculean imagery. The statue of gold, silver, bronze and iron represent four empires that will arise in history to dominate the landscape of politics. When these federations have run their course, Messiah will appear in dynamic, catastrophic fashion to disrupt history, to smash man's institutions, and to establish His eternal kingdom. The dream informed Israel that they would be under the dominion of Gentiles until God sends his Rock to smash man's secular institutions. Afterward the saints would receive the kingdom.

In chapters seven and eight, and eleven through twelve, Daniel records three more of his own visions that take the reader deeper into the world empires and their character until the appearance of the Messianic kingdom. His answer to prayer in Daniel nine stands alone. Daniel's revelations act like a kaleidoscope providing more information about these dominions as one moves through the book.

The unveiling of Nebuchadnezzar's vision and the interpretation proved to his contemporaries that Daniel is an interpreter of dreams and a man of unquestionable integrity.

In chapter seven and eight, he has his own dreams. His character having been established in Daniel 2, the validity of Daniel's revelations in later chapters is not in question. We must believe and trust the vision in the second half of the book. However, to the modern reader, the interpretation of these dreams and their application to our times remains a challenge.

Furthermore, the reader would do well to keep in mind the critical question of God's people in Babylon at the time of Daniel's revelations. Since they were judged by God and taken to Babylon where they were ruled by the jurisdiction of the Babylonians, these people wanted to know how long the kingdom of God would suffer at the hands

of foreign powers? The answer is provided in Isaiah 2:44, 7:18, 7:27; 12:1-13. Four alien empires would arise in history and run their course. At the end of the fourth empire, one like the "son of man" would appear and usher in the Rule of God.

### **The Interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream**

#### **36 This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.**

Having finished telling Nebuchadnezzar his dream, Daniel announced his intention of providing the interpretation. But, who is the "we"? Possibly, Daniel includes his three friends or the whole of the Jewish Remnant in Babylon as the source of Divine secrets and illumination.

**37-38 Thou, O king, *art* a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou *art* this head of gold.**

The title "king" and *shar-sharani* (king of kings) is ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar (cf. [Ezekiel 26:7](#)). He was normally referred to as *sharru-rabbu* ("great king"), but here the technical term is applied to him. We are not left in doubt as to what is meant by the first of the four empires. The head of gold is the Babylonian Empire, of which Nebuchadnezzar was in every sense the representative head, being the actual founder of it, and its chief executive during his long reign of forty-three years. The Greek word for kingdom is *basilea*, which refers to the authority of a ruler over a realm. His appointment and the acumen to preserve his dominion and the glories of it was not due to his own political prowess, but is announced as a gift of the God of Heaven.

The four parts of the image symbolize four kingdoms; but Nebuchadnezzar, both in reality and in the memory of posterity, so eclipsed prior monarchs of the first dynasty, that he is identified as possessing all the power and glory of Babylon the Great.

**39 And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.**

After Babylon, three more great empires are announced. **The second kingdom** with the silver torso follows Babylon. In all probability, it represents Media and Persia. The home of the Medes was in the mountainous country north to northeast of Babylon we now call Iran. The Medes are often mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions beginning in

the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. They were first consolidated into an important power by Cyaxares around 624–584 B.C., during whose reign (607), they were the main military power bringing about the destruction of Nineveh. Cyaxares was succeeded by Astyages, whose soldiers deserted en masse to Cyrus circa 549 B.C. Consequently, the empire of the Medes came under the jurisdiction of the Persians. Their name was memorialized by the Greeks for they regularly referenced the Persians as Medes (cf. Daniel 5:28, 6:8; 6:12, 15). However, Daniel is wisely brief and careful not to tell Nebuchadnezzar that the second kingdom would destroy the Babylonian Empire.

**The third kingdom** is identified by Biblical scholars as Greece. It is universally known that Alexander the Great subdued the Medes and Persians. This prince is said, by the author of the first book of Maccabees, “to be the first that reigned over Greece, after having smitten Darius the king of the Persians and Medes; to have made many wars, won many strong holds, and slain the kings of the earth; also to have gone through to the ends of the earth, and taken the spoils of many nations.” It is reported this mighty general “built more than seventy cities, twelve of which, or, as Curtius intimates, eighteen, he named Alexandria; that his soldiers, though unarmed, were never afraid, while he was with them, of any armed forces. He engaged no enemy which he did not defeat, besieged no city which he did not take, and made attacks on no nation which he did not entirely subdue.”

Alexander himself ordered the publication of his own appellation, “The king of the entire world.” Though he did not really conquer the whole world, Alexander did control the region around the Mediterranean, Europe, Asia, and Africa. He is the leopard in Daniel 7 with four wings that conquered Asia, Palestine, Syrian, Egypt and Persia in only ten years. Following Alexander's short life, his successors Hellenized the Levant creating the cultural conflicts that existed during the Maccabean Era.

**40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.**

Iron is less valuable than gold, silver, and bronze, but more abundant . . . and stronger. Further, its utilitarian usages and strength far surpasses the precious metals. The image of iron conveys power, force, and invincibility. And this is its usage here. Iron anvils yield to nothing. It is indomitable, enduring, and obstinate. Much more is said about the fourth kingdom than all the others.

This kingdom breaks all others.

The word “break” (deqaq) means “to shatter into pieces.” The word “subdueth” (chashal) is a Piel verb meaning “to crush violently.” Daniel describes this kingdom as iron, and then compares it to iron that “breaketh” all the former kingdoms. Again, he uses a Piel verb to emphasize the terrifying crushing, shattering power of this kingdom.

The four metals signify four different nations. As the gold signified the Babylonians, the silver the Persians, and the brass the Greeks, so the iron must necessarily denote some other nation. Of the second and third empires, each borrowed something from that which preceded it. The fourth empire introduces a powerful new system, and a new imperial, dominating civilization. Without a doubt, this is the indomitable Roman Empire with its democratic form and all its iron-fisted military Caesars, kings, and parliamentarians.

**41-43 And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And *as* the toes of the feet *were* part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.**

The emphasis upon the feet and toes made of iron and clay communicate several realities:

A powerful but imperfect confederation of states.

Political power and conflict.

Diversity, multiculturalism, and multiracialism.

Divisions, fractures, subdivisions, sectional solidarity.

Use of the word “iron” speaks of unyielding political power. Clay speaks about weakness and an inability to assimilate and unite. This is a kingdom that resists conquest and replacement, but it has difficulty with solidarity.

Rome was a powerful centralized government that crushed its opponents with raw police power. A government of consolidated states that maintained a certain unity

around language, religion, and ethnicity, the empire was subject to hegemony and political discontent. The expression “seed of men” indicates conquest, immigration, and a mixing of the different races. The phrase “partly strong” and “partly broken” communicates political strength as well as political strife, civil war, and internal discord. Regimes attempt political unity, but solidarity will NOT be complete or lasting. Conjunction of the Romans with the conquered nations, and afterward with the Goths, Vandals, and other barbarians, who subverted the empire, seems to be here intended. Multiculturalism is not a strength, but a weakness to overcome.

Before going further, one would do well to reflect on the history of the west. Europe, Great Britain, the Baltic States, Australia, South America, Canada, and the United States are products of the Roman Empire.

**44-45 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.**

This is the first mention of kings in the vision, and it is plural. Each toe must represent a different jurisdiction over which some monarch reigns. The fourth kingdom contains many jurisdictions, powers, and realms. While this fourth kingdom still contrives to exist in some modified form, and while its component parts are in a state of war and turmoil, the kingdom of God burst on the scene to crush man’s empires and to set up His eternal kingdom.

The mountain was not mentioned as a detail in Daniel 2:34 but is now brought into focus. In the language of prophecy, it refers to the archetype of Mount Zion, which appears in other passages to be closely connected with the Messiah and His iron-grinding kingdom (cf. Psalms 1:2; Isaiah 2:2; Hebrews 12:22).

The entrance of the kingdom into history is not gradual and progressive, but dynamic, powerful, cataclysmic, and irresistible. The image before us is that of a huge monolithic stone that tumbles off Mount Zion to crush the image and terminate the kingdoms of men.

The dream reveals a day when God's rule will intervene in human history, disrupt all society, and usher in the dynamic, cataclysmic reign of a Messiah ( Daniel 2). This age would begin with a powerful, global judgment--a separation of the wicked from the righteous (Isaiah 24; Malachi 4:1-4; Matthew 3:12).

**46-47 Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him.**

The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth *it is*, that your God *is* a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.

With the dream disclosed and its basic interpretation explained, King Nebuchadnezzar, in state of awe and wonder, does what any man in his position ought to do. He falls in humble adoration before Daniel to honor Him and announce his new revelation about Daniel's God. Of a truth, your *God is a God of gods* not only because there is no other, but because He is above all gods in ability; over all gods in rank and authority. As *Lord of kings* all rulers derive their power from Him and are accountable Him. Daniel's God is the supreme Governor of the world and Ruler of all the kings and kingdoms in it (cf. Revelation 1:5).

As a Revealer of secrets, He determines the narrative of history and brings to light its hidden secrets. The fact that Daniel could reveal the matter was proof of claim to Nebuchadnezzar that God had taken Daniel into his counsels. Subsequently, the king made Daniel a great man; that is, he honored and magnified his name. While accepted by Daniel, there was little the king could do to improve his favored status seeing that God had already made Daniel great by conferring on Him the gifts of revelator.

Modern civil rulers would do well to reflect on the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned, that Daniel's God is the God of gods and the King of kings. Not all religions are the same nor do all deserve the same protection. Scripture reveals there is one absolute God and one absolute law-order. Serve Him!

Furthermore, just as Jesus is Head of the Church, He is King of the kings of the earth. Accountable to Him, governments ought to conduct their administration under His law for His purposes; that just as the citizens should surrender to the authority of a legitimate regime, every regime ought to surrender to the Lord God and obey His law. History is headed toward the kingdom of God and the governments of this world are destined to be crushed by the Stone from Mount Zion. Furthermore, all would do well

to remember that the Stone from God's Holy Mountain entered history quietly in advance of the terminal, cataclysmic judgment of these kingdoms to save men and bring men under the first fruit-blessings of his eternal Kingdom.

# Daniel 7:7-9

## *Daniel's Little Horn*

♦ There is a change in revelation in this chapter. In Daniel two, Nebuchadnezzar was the dreamer and Daniel the interpreter. In Daniel 7, Daniel is the dreamer and a standing angel is the interpreter. Because Daniel was able to recall Nebuchadnezzar's dream and interpret it for him in the company of his staff, Daniel's competence as a diviner is not in question. Trust has already been established.

The dream in Daniel seven is like a kaleidoscope in that it takes us deeper into the revelation of the four kingdoms that will arise in history before the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Daniel seven takes us deeper into nature and character of the four world empires that will rule the world prior to the coming of the "Stone" mentioned in Daniel chapter two. The difference being that in Daniel seven the kingdoms are not introduced to us as precious metals, but as ferocious beasts. The imagery of four beasts represent four empires that will arise in history prior to the establishment of the kingdom. Our interest is in the fourth beast.

The lion with a human mind and wings plucked represents the ferocity and power and attributes of Babylon as well as its demise (7:4). Possibly, the reference *to plucked wings, and made to stand like a man* is a reference to Nebuchadnezzar's power, his depravation of mind, and his restoration to power after he returned to his senses ( Daniel3).

The bear on two sides with three ribs in its mouth represents the kingdom crushing power of Media-Persia. Possibly, the three ribs refer to the conquest of the Babylonians, the Lydians, and the Egyptians.

The leopard with four wings represents Greece and the division of Alexander's empire under his four generals.

There is no lack of theories about Daniel's "**little horn.**" Interpretations include Antiochus Epiphanes, a future antichrist, the papacy, Islam's expansion in Europe, and even America. Who is Daniel's "little horn?"



**7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it *was* diverse from all the beasts that *were* before it; and it had ten horns.**

The fourth beast is so unique, it is not compared with any creature in the animal kingdom. Further, it has no name. Daniel leaves the image to our imagination. We are told, however, that this beast is "**terrifying**," "**dreadful**," and "**exceedingly** strong."

The description of the destructive might of this monster is heightened by the mention of "**iron teeth**," "**brazen claws**" (7:19) that "**devoured**" and "**brake in pieces**," "**stamped the residue**" under its feet and *made war* "**against the saints**" (7:21).

The "**ten horns**" represent some kind of federation. Is the "ten" literal? Could be. This is a bone-breaking, nation-crushing, gospel-smashing empire. It is the same kingdom described by Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's dream as having legs of iron and toes of iron and clay. It is the Roman Empire.

Some suggest that the beast's ten horns are but a figurative representation of the political descendants of the old Roman Empire and thus the numeral is not to be pressed (Young 1980, 149)<sup>17</sup>. Others assert that when Rome fell in 476 AD, the empire split into ten literal states. Thomas Newton<sup>18</sup>, citing Whitson, says that "the number of the kingdoms into which the Roman empire in Europe . . . was originally divided . . . was exactly ten" (1831, 234).

**8 I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn *were* eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.**

Particularly challenging, however, is how to interpret the ten horns, the three horns, and the little horn that plucked up three by its roots? There is no want of interpretations for this imagery. Ellicott says it is a person; Cambridge Bible says it is an empire.

The fact this little horn has a "**eyes like a man**" and a "**mouth speaking great things**" augurs well that this is some kind of super-leader controlling a super-nation. The

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<sup>17</sup> Young, Edward. 1980. *The Prophecy of Daniel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

<sup>18</sup> Newton, Thomas. 1831. *Dissertations on the Prophecies*. London, England: Blake

Roman mind dominated the world through military might and rule by law. That imperialistic instinct is with us today.

The historical candidates for the "**little horn**" are Rome that conquered Egypt, Asia, and Greece. The beasts and "little horn," which waged war on the saints, could not help but remind the men of the Old Testament of Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar and, later of course, Antiochus Epiphanes. But their hope was in judgment which means doom for the foes of the covenant and deliverance for its friends. So Daniel said that in this final act "the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire" (Daniel 7:11, NIV). Then the saints were delivered and the kingdom given to them. The Punic, Macedonian, and Mithridtic Wars provide support for this view.

Some see the "little horn" as Antiochus Epiphanes (167 BC), but he was connected with the Greeks and not the Romans. Modern candidates for the "little horn" include such possibilities as the papacy and the Jesuits and their war against Protestants; an Islamic Caliphate; America; a future maniacal Antichrist, or some new world order super federation germane to Europe. Zionists come to mind.

Some other facts about the fourth beast and its mutations need to be noted.

1. **Different:** It was "**different**" (7:7) from the other beasts. The word "was different" (mashan'ah) is a Piel verb meaning "changed, altered, or perverted."
2. **Iron teeth:** The fourth beast had iron teeth and claws of bronze (7:19). This could be a reference to military might (iron teeth) and legal, legislative domination (bronze claws).
3. **Eyes:** Having the "**eyes of a man**" suggest "cunning," "deceit," "craft" and political prowess. This could refer to Western corporations energized by man and their insentient existence.
4. **Mouth:** Having a "**mouth that spoke great things**" (7:8, 20) suggests propaganda, blasphemy, political marketing, subversion, psychological warfare, mind control, brainwashing, reeducation, and coercive persuasion.
5. **Devours the whole earth:** This is a political figure in control of a state, not an ecclesiastical super cleric. The fact the beast was "larger" (7:20) than his fellows suggest enormous political power, endurance, and longevity as well as massive geographical dominion. Since the 4th beast "**devours the whole earth**" (7:23), we

must conclude the final government is intent on global expansion. Benevolent imperialism, global reach, immigration, colonization, extermination, exploitation, assimilation, and conquered territories come to mind. This empire believes in its exceptionalism and has international imperial aspirations.

6. **I saw:** The verb "**I saw**" is a Piel participle meaning "as I was captivated." The fact that Daniel kept staring intently at the beast (7:7) may indicate the prolonged life and expansion of this kingdom.
7. Rome and its legions not only subjugated the Mediterranean world, its military might and democratic forum is the foundation of Western Civilization. Since this is the final kingdom in history before the kingdom is given to the saints, the 4th beast must endure in some form till Christ returns. The ten horns, three horns, and little horn may model how Roman dominion has morphed its way through history even into the present world order. Russia, Europe, Britain, North America, South America, South Africa, and Australia bear the marks of the Roman Empire in the soul of these nations. Western governments have iron teeth, and law is used as a weapon to crush opponents. Lawfare comes to mind.
8. **Until the ancient of days came** (7:22): There are two good reasons to look for fulfillment and identify of the "little horn" in the future:
  9. (1) Since Daniel's dream morphed while meditating on the fourth beast into an image of a little horn growing from obscurity to a place of crushing dominance of three Roman states, we must consider the whole of the Roman history which includes its mutations through Western Civilization.
  10. (2) Since the kingdom is given to the saints after the "Stone" in chapter two crushes the metal image and the Ancient of Days sets up his judgment in chapter seven, the fourth beast is the last empire. In whatever form it mutates, the 4th beast must continue to exist until the end of history. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that toward the end of this age there will arise a super-power "waging war on the saints" to overpower them (7:21).
11. At a time locked in the mind of God, the Ancient of Days will set up His Kingdom, destroy the "little horn" and the fourth beast. This will end history as we know it.
12. **War against the Saints** (7:21): The little horn wages war against the saints (7:21).

13. Who are the "**saints**" (qade'shin)? This is **not** "the Jews!" The term "Jew" is mentioned only twice and that in Daniel three.
14. The term "**saints**" is used six times in Daniel Seven and comprise the followers of Christ in the Christian era at the end of history.
15. The "**little horn**" is a lawless man that will persecute lawful ones. Since Christians acknowledge "no king, but King Jesus" (Pastor Jonas Clark), it is reasonable to see how a maniacal, glory seeking "little horn" would be flustered by Christians who do not acknowledge the authority of tyrants nor comply with their man-made, godless statutes.

Since this head of state persecutes Christians, then he is antichrist. Since no specific persecution is described, we can assume that it includes all the tactics of a tyrant.

16. **Prevail over them** (7:21): The "little horn" prevails against the saints until the Lord gave a judgment on behalf of his people (7:21).
17. The word "**prevail**" or "**overpowering**" is a Piel verb implying a powerful capacity to dominate and subdue relevant Christians. While the gospel will succeed in this age, true Christians should expect periodic hostility toward the Christian faith. The modern day secular state that silences Christian and regards them as irrelevant is without a doubt a product of the spirit that empowers the "little horn."
18. **Wearing down the saints** (7:25): This "**wearing down**" is expressed by another Piel verb (bela) which means "to harass." It speaks of public policy hostile to the Christian law-order as well as legal and judicial tyranny against non-conformists. But, his persecutions and successes are limited. He will not eradicate the gospel. Before us are persecuted saints of a quality different than the effeminate, compliant Christians of our time. True Christians will not escape the legal monopoly and judicial tyranny operating in this government, but the gospel as a whole will succeed. John call this the "patience" of the saints (Revelation 13:10).
19. **Change the times and laws** (7:25): This speaks of a legal revolution, the effort to overthrow the Christian law-order and to set up an alien law-order.
20. The expression "**he shall subdue**" (7:24) is masculine singular referring to the beast as a whole or an individual who will tumultuously and radically transform the entire legal-religious, calendar system and to mold it into a tool for conquest. Law

will be used as a weapon to abuse Christians. Tyrants preach the "rule of law" while practicing "**rule by law!**"

21. **Times:** The expression "**times, time, and half a time**" (7:25) refer to a specific period in history, limited in duration.

Who is the "**little horn**?" We know the nature of the 4th beast and the uniqueness of the "**little horn**" captured the attention of Daniel. We can safely conclude the "**little horn**" is a head of state with imperial aspirations who arises out of the Roman Empire that is hostile to Christianity. But, since we do not know where we are in history, it is difficult to identify the "little horn" as an historical figure or future entity with absolute certainty. Neither Antiochus Epiphanes, or the early Roman Empire, or the papacy, or an Islamic Caliphate as the "little horn" satisfies the particulars here. His identify appears to be hidden until the final hour of Christian history; that is, it is O.K. to say "I don't know." In fact, it is not our duty to know the future. But, we are permitted to see through a glass dimly.

**9. I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.***

The verb "**beheld**" (hava) is a Piel participle meaning to "stare constantly and intensely." Four kingdoms will arise in history. The rest of Daniel seven provides insights into the final government that will rule the world.

It informs us that history will end after the global expansion of the 4th beast and the final holocaust against the saints (Christians) (7:25). During the reign of the "little horn," God will terminate history, disrupt society, and destroy the final empire. Afterward, the Ancient of Days will set up his glorious kingdom.

The Ancient of Days is described as having garments "**white as snow**." This speaks of authority, purity, righteousness, and holiness; hair as "pure wool" speaks of judicial wisdom and knowledge; "throne like the fiery flame" reminds us of judicial light, power, and eternal judgment;

"**wheels as burning fire**" takes us to Ezekiel's vision and the operations of Divine Providence. The title "Ancient of Days" is translated plural, but in the Hebrew the term "**Days**" is singular (yom). Since the term "days" is singular and the vision so similar to

the image John saw in his vision, we must conclude that Daniel saw the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Notes on the Little Horn**

1. The fact that Antiochus lived during the Hellenistic Period and was dead for a hundred years before the fourth beast comes to power eliminates him as a viable candidate for Daniel's "little horn."
2. That Christ came in the middle of history while Rome was controlling Jerusalem must be a consideration in interpreting this passage. The kingdom entered history in the person of Christ without disrupting the political structures to create "sons of the kingdom." That Christ will return to demolish man's institutions and to rescue his Christian "saints" must be conceded.
3. That the "**little horn**" is the papacy has some compelling arguments. The papacy is in Rome; has ruled over kings; has a militant Jesuit order dedicated to controlling states; possesses a papal bank in London that controls more wealth than any corporation; and, has instigated persecutions against Protestants (e.g. French Huguenots). But, these are 16th century arguments.
4. Further, the "little horn" appears to be a head of state and not a religious leader. Because the "little horn" does morph out of the Roman Empire, and is in existence at the end of the age. Identifying the "little horn" with Medieval popes has difficulties.
5. That the "little horn" is an Islamic Caliphate is of interest since Islam did conquer North Africa and much of the Levant. Further, since we are bombarded by news reports about Islamic terrorists operating in Europe, the idea that the final persecutors will be Moslems is also compelling. But, it is difficult to conceive how an Islamic Caliphate relates to the "little horn" which arises out of the Roman Empire as a head of State.
6. That the fourth beast is a confederation of nations with political mutations is true to the text; and, that the "little horn" is a specific human personality has merit. Thus, the text suggests the fourth beast is an entity, a political structure ruled by a single man.
7. The fact that the fourth empire is a beast reveals its cruel, callous, unconscionable character not unlike government (GMO) corporations operating in commerce today.

Beasts kill, devour, and mutilate their victims. Modern states are powerful, dead, fictional corporations energized by men capable of crushing opponents to achieve global dominion. Living souls have little chance of survival in the arena where judges and BAR attorneys act in favor of a Marxist Roman legal system. They have no conscience. Agencies like NSA, FEMA, IRS, U.S. District Courts, the FBI comes to mind.

8. That the "little horn" is associated with America or the United Nations is compelling because we are aware of present day politics, the new world order, the domination of the American military, indoctrination into statism, and the hostility of the "system" against Christianity. When we see changing laws like promotion of abortion, gay marriage, removal of pronouns like "he" and "she," and woke politically correct speech, hasn't America taken on the character of the "little horn" that makes "alterations" in "law" (7:25)? But, pesher<sup>19</sup> interpretation, while extremely interesting, is a poor tool for accurate interpretation of a Biblical passage.
9. That the "**little horn**" is a future head of state is compelling. Since the fourth beast is in existence when the kingdom of God arrives, a mutation of the fourth beast must be morphing its way through the political machinery in our time. While we may not be able to identify the "little horn" with specificity, we have no difficulty conceiving of how a maniac can get elected to office through the Roman, democratic process. While our country was founded as a republic, it is the Roman doctrine of democracy that is preached as gospel among the nations. Modern politicians and media personalities are obsessed with liberal, Marxist-democracy and hold it up as the hope of mankind. But, with law in the people, and not the Lord God, democracy is merely a tool for antichrist imperialism.
10. That the "little horn" is an unidentified future antichrist is compelling because the context supports the rise of a superpower out of the fourth beast that is in existence till the appearance of God's kingdom. While there is a unity to the prophetic word, grabbing a "little horn" from Daniel, an "abomination" from Matthew, a "man of sin" from Paul, an "antichrist" from John and a "beast" from revelation and forming an absolute end-time scheme appears bold and unstable to this student of Scripture.

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<sup>19</sup> Pesher interpretation starts with current events as the basis of interpreting a Bible passage rather than considering the historical context of a passage.

11. The judgment in Daniel 7 is deferred to the Messianic Figure, and this Figure who judges their adversary is Israel's hope. This presentation is typical of all apocalyptic literature which dwells on the final judgment that will vanquish Israel's foes and bring deliverance to God's people. The picture is always painted in black and white. There are no gray areas between the enemies of God and the people of God. God destroys the wicked and saves the righteous.
12. The imagery in 7:13-14 is that of the Son of Man ascending into the presence of the Ancient of Days, not descending from His Presence. We have here a coronation; that is, the arrival of the Son of Man before the throne -- the commencement of His reign – not unlike the ascension of Christ in Acts 1.



# Daniel 9:24-27

## *The Seventy Weeks*

♦ Daniel 9:24-27 is important because it is a prophecy that deals with time frames and events of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. It is so specific, it provides evidence of Divine foreknowledge regarding the Messiah.

However, this passage has been called the "**Swamp of Old Testament Criticism**" and rightly so. It is perhaps the most difficult passage in the Bible to interpret correctly. While all agree it is a reference to Christ and His work in history, not all are agreed on how the passage should be interpreted.

An accurate interpretation of Daniel 9 requires a competent knowledge of Biblical literature, of Biblical languages, particularly Hebrew, the details of Hebrew grammar, a competent knowledge of the post-exilic writings, a thorough and adequate knowledge of the entire Book of Daniel, a knowledge of history, and conservative systematic theology. Further, getting the interpretation correct requires radical curiosity, tons of patience and humility, and the honesty of a mirror.

There was a T.V. series called the "Myth Busters" and at the end of each show they warn the audience, "Don't try this at home." The same is true in this passage. Don't try and interpret this passage in between coffee breaks at home. In other words, it takes a sack of PhDs to work through the difficulties in this passage.

Further, if the interpreter approaches this passage with an end-time agenda and wants to use this passage to prove his treasure chest of eschatological insights, he will find it here; that is, you can prove almost any end-time scheme you want from this passage. Such an approach takes no scholarship and no integrity. This passage is filled with bear traps and it would not be wise to use this as pillar for an end-time theory. Rather, the interpreter needs to be humble and do his best to work through the difficulties of the passage and limitations of his own scholarly capacities. Though most Biblical scholars are honest and are doing their best to interpret the passage, all have linguistic and

literary limitations that make it difficult to shuffle the cards and to come up with a full house in this passage. Having said this, I highly recommend the reader get hold of Peter Gentry's work on this passage, Southern Baptist Seminary, as he deals with the issues with scholarly integrity in a comprehensive way.

**24 Seventy weeks (שבעים שבועים ) are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.**

This message is a direct, Divine answer to Daniel's prayer about the end of Jewish captivity in Babylon ( Daniel 9:1-23). In Daniel's mind, as he studied Jeremiah writings, the seventy years of exile that Jeremiah announced had a completion date.<sup>20</sup> Since Babylon had fallen (539 BC), and Darius the Mede ruled in the land, Daniel thought the *terminus ad quem* of Israel's seventy years of punishment was imminent. Israel had broken God's covenant (Exodus 19-24), and He exiled them to Babylon. But, God appeared to have a plan for restoration (Deuteronomy 30:10). And, since Isaiah **referenced both a physical return and spiritual return**, Daniel prayed for insight and understanding as to his times and the destiny of the people with whom his soul was bound (Jeremiah 25:1-15; 29:1-23; 1 Kings 8:33-34; Lam. 2:2-5; Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

**Before us is a two-stage return.** (A) a return to the land by a remnant that occurred during the reign of Cyrus (537-535 BC) (Isaiah 45; Ezra 1-6), and (B) a return to covenant blessings which included forgiveness and reconciliation under a Leader called "the Messiah" by the angel Gabriel (9:25) and "the Servant of the Lord" by the Prophet Isaiah. This Servant, a.k.a. the "arm of the Lord," would lead a new exodus out of transgression leading to reconciliation with God and a restoration of God's righteous law-order. But, between the first physical return (537 BC) and the spiritual second return or the new exodus there would be a longer period of time of seventy weeks (Isaiah 42:18-43; 43:22-44:23; 51:1- 53: 12).

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<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah 25:11-12 "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations." Jeremiah 29:10 "For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."

The word "weeks" is *shabu'im*, and the word "seventy" is *shab'im*. The "seven" or "weeks" are periods of seven years measuring a sabbatical period of seven years. Hence, the "seventy sevens" reference ten jubilees ( $10 \times 7 = 70$ ), the last of which would be the ultimate jubilee, the establishment of the kingdom of God on a renewed earth ( Daniel 7:18, 27; Isaiah 11:1-9; Isaiah 65:17-25).

Daniel was expecting the seventy years of exile to end and for Israel to be wholly restored. But, God announces to Daniel that the complete restoration is going to take seventy-sevens or 490 years. This date, if calculated correctly, brings us to the death of Christ between 30-33 AD. The death of Christ is the ultimate jubilee because His work frees men from the dominion of sin and their debt to God.

**"to finish the transgression"** ~ The word "finish" means "to restrain" unrighteousness. It is a reference to the rebellion and transgression of law by Israel that caused God to judge the nation with the exile and that continued to work among them. The idea here is to keep lawlessness from spreading. Transgression will be throttled. Thus, God gave His people  $70 \times 7$  years to repent or 490 years. Jesus may have been referring to this in his discourse to Peter on forgiveness, forgive "until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21).

**"to make an end of sins"** ~ a reference to ending the Levitical sacrificial system because the death of Christ is the final solution to man's sin problem.

**"to make reconciliation for iniquity"** ~ a reference to the work of Christ on the cross that reconciles men to God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

**"to bring in everlasting righteousness"** ~ either a reference to Christ the righteous One, or to justification, or to the restoration of God's law-order among men, or a reference to the righteousness of God's reign among men.

**"to seal up the vision and prophecy"** ~ Narrowly, it could refer to a completion of Jeremiah's 70 years of judgment, or more broadly a reference to the completion of the age of prophecy in the Christ, the fulfillment of all prophecy, or even and possibly a reference to the termination of prophecy altogether in the NT era.

**"to anoint the most Holy"** ~ "Messiah, the most holy" (Elliot). If this be the case, this is a reference to Christ as the true Temple of God, the Holy of Holies, which is parallel to "Messiah the Prince" in 9:25.

Who cannot help but stand back and admire such the disposals of Providence and the wisdom of him who has *determined the times before appointed*. The difficulties that arise about these seventy weeks for the Bible student are the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* regarding the times appointed in this section.

**25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah (x;vyiäm'-d[;]) the Prince (dygIën") shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.**

Daniel is concerned about time of restoration. When will Israel be restored?

The first return was commission by Cyrus and in effect between 537-535 BC. But, the commission by Cyrus had several amendments attached to it by his successors including the command by Darius in 519 to finish the temple proper, and the commission by Artaxerxes to complete God's legal requirements for temple services issued to Ezra in 457 BC (Ezra 7:13)<sup>21</sup>. Thus, the *terminus a quo* for 69 weeks works out well with **457 BC**. Furthermore, 457 BC is the *terminus a quo* of the Seventy Weeks.

**Allowing for all the chronological uncertainties**<sup>22</sup>, the completion of the 69 weeks time frame would direct our minds safely to the beginning of the ministry of Christ sometime around 27-29 AD.<sup>23</sup> The completion of the 70 weeks would be somewhere around 34-36 AD. It was during the middle of the 70th week that Christ was crucified ( Daniel 9:27) which occurred sometime between 31-33 AD.

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<sup>21</sup> Ezra 7:13 I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

<sup>22</sup> John the Baptist began his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius (Luke 3:1). Tiberius became Caesar on August 19, 14AD. The inauguration of Tiberius is one of the most documented certain dates in history. Nevertheless, there is some dispute as to whether Tiberius was co-regent with Caesar Augustus earlier than this (12-14 BC). If we take the late date of 14 AD date, John began his ministry sometime around 29 AD. And, Christ began his ministry in the fall of 29 AD. If we take the early date for the beginning of Tiberius's reign, John's ministry could be dated as early as 27 AD. If Jesus was born in 4 BC near the death of Herod (4 BC), and then he was baptized in 27 AD at the age of 30.

<sup>23</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible, LL.D., F.S.A., (1715-1832): "Mark 1:15 The time is fulfilled - That is, the time appointed for sending the Messiah; and particularly the time specified by Daniel, Dan\_9:24-27."

Who is "**Messiah the Prince**?" The English term "**Messiah**" is the Hebrew word "meshiyack" or "anointed one." The title "**the Prince**" comes from the Hebrew word *nagid* which can be translated "ruler." Here the *meshiyack* and *nagid* refer to the same person. Due to numerous considerations, a reasonable conclusion is that this is the Messiah, **the Lord Jesus Christ** and **not** Antiochus or the High Priest Onias III active during the Maccabean Period (167 BC) or some alleged super antichrist at the end of history. Thus, the title *Messiah* and *Ruler* belong to Jesus.

There is a problematic lexical and syntactical issue in this passage that only a competent Hebrew scholar can unravel.<sup>24</sup> There is a clause division between the "seven weeks" and the "sixty-two weeks;" that is, there is a 49 year work of rebuilding the wall and Jerusalem that takes place roughly between 457 and 407 AD, and a period of 62 weeks or 434 years where nothing significant happens that begins in 407 BC and terminates around 27- 30 AD.

Further, we must keep in mind that the Hebrews did not think linearly like the Greeks. And, this is seen in verses 25 and 26 where it appears we have a recursive, parallel literary structure as follows:

26a- a reference to the meritorious work of Christ,

26b- a reference to ruination of Jerusalem by the Jewish people.

27a- A reference to the meritorious accomplishments of Christ

27b- A reference to Jewish abominations resulting in the destruction of the city.

26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof *shall be* with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

Note the word "**after**." After the "**seven weeks**" of completing the reconstruction of Jerusalem (457-407 AD), there would be "**sixty-two weeks**" or 434 years till the Messiah would be cut off. This takes our minds to the ministry of Christ (27-34 AD). The expression "be cut off" is a reference to the death of Messiah. This is a reference to Jesus' crucifixion. He would die after the 69th week (27 AD) and in the middle of the

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<sup>24</sup> See Peter Gentry's discussion on the two clauses, p. 30.

seventieth week between (27-35 AD). The end of the 70th Week takes us to 34-35 AD which is usually associated with the martyrdom of Stephen and his admonition for the nation to repent (Acts 7:54-60). "Not for himself" means that he did not die a criminal. Rather, his death was vicarious--a reference to his six works mentioned in verse 24.

Part B of verse 26 is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. The "Prince" is Christ. **"The people of the prince"** is a reference to the Jewish people. It is the Jewish people who were the cause of Jerusalem's downfall. The rebels in Jerusalem during 70 AD taunting the Romans were the cause of its ruin and destruction. The "sanctuary" is a reference to the Jewish temple and Jerusalem which was destroyed by John, Simon, and Eleazar, leaders of the Jewish Revolt in 70 AD (Josephus).

The **"end"** and **"flood"** and **"war"** and **"desolations"** are terms of catastrophe and termination. The Jewish people continued their revolt against God until Jerusalem was leveled and burned by their radical apostate leaders in 70 AD.

**27 And he shall confirm the covenant ( וְהִתְקַדֵּשׁ בְּרִית לְרַבִּים ) with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease<sup>25</sup>, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make *it* desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.**

There is no basis for interpreting the **"he"** as some illusive future antichrist. The **"he"** in verse 27 is a reference to Christ, the Prince, the Messiah. Though not without difficulties, the expression **"confirm the covenant"** describes the formation of a covenant. This appears to be a reference to Christ inaugurating the "new covenant" by his blood spilt at Golgotha.

**"With many for one week"** appears to be a reference to the seventieth week and our Lord's death after three and one half years of ministry.

The expression **"he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease"** is a reference to Christ ending the Levitical sacrificial system making the system no longer necessary because of His death as the Lamb of God on Calvary.

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<sup>25</sup> When Jesus, the Lamb of God, died on the cross, He became our one and final perfect sacrifice and nullified the need for the Levitical temple system. This was signified by the temple curtain been ripped from top to bottom. Matthew 27:51 *"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;"*

The phrase "**overspreading of abominations**" is translated "**wing of abominations**" in the ESV. This appears to be a reference to Christ ending the extent of abomination being produced in Jerusalem by apostates controlling the temple.

"**The consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate**" is a reference to the Jewish revolt which became the *terminus ad quem* of the desolations; that is, the rebellion of the protagonist of anti-Logos reached its climax during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Thus, the fall of Jerusalem terminated the abominations wrought by the desolators ruining their capital city.

### **An Interpretive Translation**

24 Seventy weeks (ten jubilees or 490 years) are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city (Jerusalem), to finish the transgression (to end the rebellion), and to make an end of sins (bring an end to the sacrificial system by the death of Christ), and to make reconciliation for iniquity (Christ's death is the reconciliation), and to bring in everlasting righteousness (Christ and His Law-order), and to seal up the vision and prophecy (to fulfill all Messianic prophecy in Christ), and to anoint the most Holy (Christ as the Holy One).

25 Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem (an eighty-year period from Cyrus's decree (537 BC) to Artaxerxes decree in (457 BC)) unto the Messiah the Prince (Christ) *shall be* seven weeks (49 years), and threescore and two weeks (434 years): the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times (457-407 BC).

26 And after (after not during) threescore and two weeks (after 27 AD) shall Messiah (Christ) be cut off (killed), but not for himself (a vicarious death): and the people (Jewish rebels leading the revolt in 70 A.D.) of the prince (Christ is the Ruler) that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary (rebel Jewish people are the cause of Jerusalem's destruction); and the end thereof *shall be* with a flood (restored Jerusalem to be devastated), and unto the end of the war desolations are determined (a reference to the Jewish Revolt culminating in the destruction of restored Jerusalem in 70 AD by Vespasian / Titus).

27 And he (Christ) shall confirm the covenant (make a strong, new covenant) with many for one week and in the midst of the week (circa 27-34 AD): he (Christ) shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease (By virtue of His death), and for the overspreading (wings or extremes) of abominations (the rejection of Christ and the

sacrilege by John, Simon, and Eleazar for control of Jerusalem in 70 AD) he (Christ) shall make *it* desolate (destruction of Jerusalem), even until the consummation (70 AD), and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (Jewish rebels leading the revolt in 70 AD).

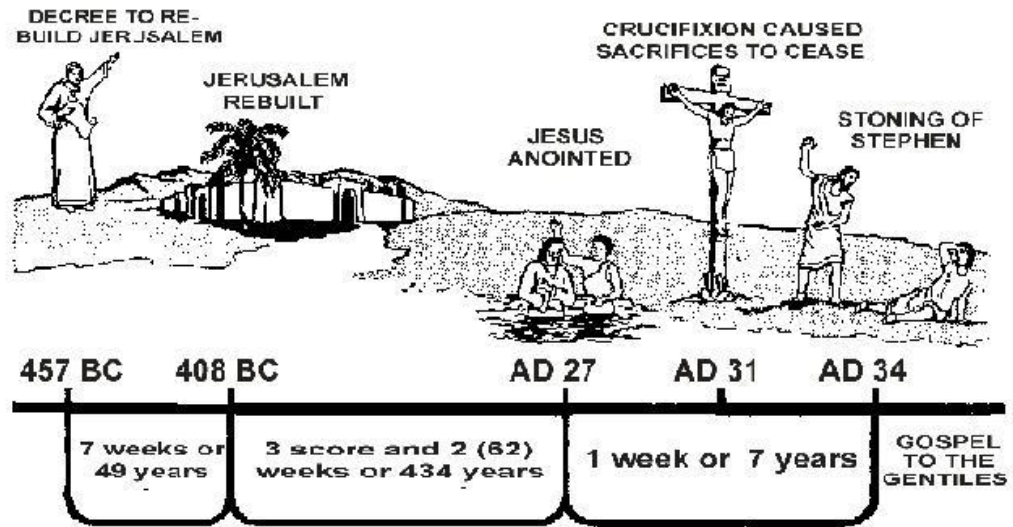
#### Notes on Daniel 9:24-27

1. Important Dates: (Remember, there are different calendar systems used by ancient Israelites and their neighboring countries).
2. 605- 606 BC ~ Beginning of Israel's 70 year captivity (Jeremiah 25). Battle of Carchemish. Daniel taken captive after this
3. 596-597 BC ~ Second Deportation
4. 589 BC ~ Beginning of Israel's devastations
5. 586 BC ~ Destruction of Jerusalem
6. 539 BC ~ Persian conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great
7. \*536 BC ~ Cyrus decree to allow the Jews to return home to reconstruct the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). The work ceased in 534-535 because of false allegations (Ezra 4:6-17). This decree would have amendments attached to it by Cyrus' successors.
8. 520 BC ~ Reconstruction of the temple was renewed under Darius (Ezra 6:8-12). Post Exilic prophets motivate the Jews to complete the temple project.
9. 516 BC ~ The initial phase of temple reconstruction complete.
10. \*457 BC ~ Artaxerxes orders Ezra to complete the temple services according to Biblical law. This is an amendment to Cyrus' decree and the *terminus a pro* of the 70 years of Daniel as well as the *terminus a pro* of the 69 weeks.
11. 457-407 BC ~ The reconstruction of Jerusalem is completed during this period. This is the "7 weeks" or 49 years of reconstruction mentioned in Daniel 9:25: " the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."
12. 445 BC ~ Artaxerxes grants permission to Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1).

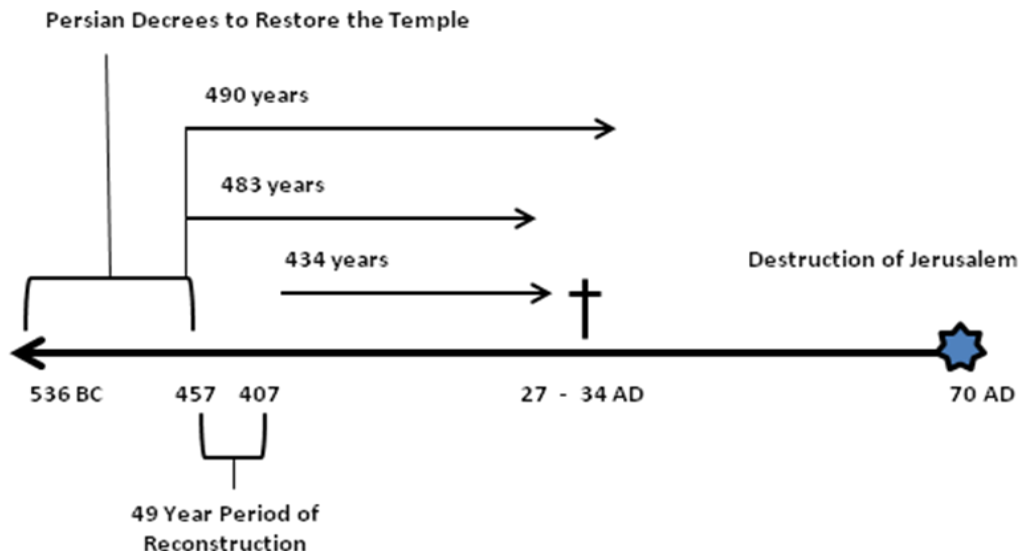


13. **\*407-408 BC** ~ Basic restoration of Jerusalem complete. Malachi completes his ministry. The "Silent Years" begin. Daniel's 62 weeks begin.
14. 2-4 BC ~ Christ was born before the death of Herod.
15. There is no "0" BC or AD. Dating goes from 1 BC to 1 AD.
16. 12-14 AD ~ Tiberius becomes a Caesar.
17. 27-29 AD ~ John the Baptist begins his ministry (Luke 3:1).
18. **\*27-29 AD** ~ Jesus begins his ministry. The 69 weeks of Daniel end with the beginning of the ministry of Christ. The seventieth week of Daniel starts with the commencement of Christ's ministry.
19. 30-32 AD ~ Christ dies in the middle of the seventieth week.
20. 34-35 Stephen stoned.
21. 48-49 AD Paul begins his ministry.
22. 48-69 All books of the New Testament are written.
23. **\*70 AD** the Destruction of Jerusalem
24. Abuses of Daniel 9:24-27 include modernism which denies the prophetic aspects of Daniel leading them to conclude this passage is about Antiochus Epiphanes and his abominations in 167 BC. The second abuse of this passage is the dispensational view that Daniel's 70th week is a reference to an Antichrist, a renewed contract with Jews in a modern Israel, and a third destruction of Jerusalem future to our time. The passage is difficult enough without inserting a two-thousand year gap between verse 26 and verse 27 and auguring for a 3rd temple, a renewed Levitical system, and a future invasion of a rebuilt Jerusalem. Dispensationalism has an eschatological agenda and engage in radical eisegesis by reading into this passage an end-time scheme that is just not in the text.
25. Daniel 9:24-27 has proved difficult, not only for the average reader, but for scholars as well. A proper interpretation of this text needs to consider the (A) the historical setting, (B) the linguistic and textual data, (C) the literary structure of the text, (D) comparison of prophetic portions of Prophets, and (E) theological considerations (See Peter Gentry: "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus."

# 490 YEARS



## Daniel's 70 Weeks



# Joel 2:28-32:

## *The Last Days and the Spirit of the Eschaton*

♦ When one reads the Book of Joel, he sees wrath leaking from the throne of God upon disobedient Judah. A terrible locust plague is announced (Joel 1:6-7; 2:2-10).

It is published as “**the day of the Lord**” (2:1). Joel calls the elders of Judah (1:2), the drunkards (1:5), the priests of the temple (1:8-10), and to farmers (1:11) to consecrate a fast, to blow trumpets in the temple, and to cry out to the LORD to avert the plague (1:14; 2:1).

So terrible will be the devastation of crops, declared Joel, the agrarian nation is going to tremble with terror (1:10-12). God queries the nation, “**Who can endure it** (2:11)?

God is seeking sincere and deep repentance accompanied with humility and weeping (2:12). He even tells the priest how to pray and what to say (2:16-17). A promise is given. God will have pity on the nation when its ministers petition heaven and the people repent (2:18-27). A full and abundant harvest is still possible (2:21-26).

There is no evidence the plague came upon Judah. Apparently, the people did as they were told, and the plague was averted.

The Book of Joel shows us one reason bad things happen to God’s people, and what can happen when people repent of their sins and seek the LORD God with sincerity and truth.

Prophecy contains two grand themes: judgment and salvation, the baptism of wrath and the baptism of the spirit (Matthew 3:7). Before us is a glimpse of the age of salvation and a preview of the judgment to come.

**Joel 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, *that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: 29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.***

**“After this”** is a prophetic code that takes us to the last days, the days of the coming of Messiah. Peter quotes this passage to describe the marvelous infusion of the Holy Spirit on believers on the Day of Pentecost in the Christian era (Acts 2:17). What was **not** revealed to the prophets was that the Messiah would appear in the middle of history before the climax of history to be judged on the cross for the sins of men, and to gift repentant men with the first fruits of salvation.

The locust plague announced by Joel (a national curse) was a precursory judgment on the nation in advance of the ultimate judgment on men for their sins.

In one sense, the Lord Jesus Christ entered history to stand between us and the curse (plague) (Galatians 3:13). Jesus’ death was Realized Eschatology in that the eschatological judgment belonging to the last days so powerfully typified in Joel fell on Jesus at Calvary. Furthermore, because Christ endured God’s wrath for sins, believers enjoy the precursory blessings of salvation, blessing belonging to the age to come as a gift of God (Ephesians 1:3-14: 2:8-9).

On the Day of Pentecost, to the shock and surprise of all, the eschatological Spirit that will regenerate the earth (Isaiah 11) fell on believing men to be empowered and enjoyed now in advance of the terrible “Day of the Lord” mentioned in Joel 2:30-32.

**“All mankind”** informs us that God’s salvation belongs to all the nations, not just the nation of Israel. “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (2:32). The cross eliminates racial distinctions. And, on the Day of Pentecost the Spirit of the Eschaton fell on the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Jews, Cappadocians, people of Pontus, of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Rome, Crete, and Arabia, who were residents at Jerusalem at that time. Men were given the gift of languages not only as a sign that the Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled, but to expedite gospel proclamation to the nations by the first-century church.

**“Son and daughters”** informs us the gifts of salvation are **without gender distinctions**. “Prophecy” is mentioned because it is the mostly easily identified gift belonging to prophets. It must be interpreted in its broadest sense; that is, spiritual gifts unique to the prophets are the property of believing men and women. This is not talking about church roles, but spiritual gifts.

**“Old men”** and **“young men”** informs us the gifts of the Eschaton are **without age discrimination**.

**“Dreams”** and **“visions”** refer to the circumstances in which the Word of God came to the prophets. His message came to them while they were sleeping and when they were awake. That prophetic word now complete with the New Testament, old and young have access to the oracles of God in the Holy Scriptures. God does **not** speak “in little voices” to men today. All must look to the written Word for instruction, inspiration, and intelligent guidance.

**“Male and female servants”** informs us that benefits of redemption are **without class distinctions**. God’s gifts are for the rich and the poor, the high and the low, but . . . not many nobles are called (1 Corinthians 1:26).

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

The outpouring of the Eschatological Spirit in advance of the Eschaton does not mean, however, that the gifts of salvation nullify God’s law order in this present evil age. Salvation is for all, but roles and duties remain in this present evil age. Spirit-filled wives are still required to surrender to their husband’s God-given authority; and, gifted women are not permitted to teach men (Colossians 3:18; 1 Timothy 2:12).

**2: 30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. 32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.**

The great and terrible **“Day of the Lord”** mentioned in verse 31 is history’s Armageddon. There is a day coming when “the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!” (2 Peter 3:12). Terms like **“blood”** and **“fire”** and **“pillars of smoke”** and **“darkness”** and **“the moon into blood”** are apocalyptic language describing the terror accompanying the end of the cosmos.

**Blood Moons:** This has nothing to do with the many lunar eclipses known as “blood moons” that occur periodically in solar cycles other than the fact the phenomenon reminds us that history has a *terminus ad quem*. Those fever-pitched, doomsday prophets who use “blood moons” to predict the end of the world conveniently neglect to tell their audience that when the final blood moon appears, the stars will be extinguished like a candle (Joel 2:10, 31).

*The Spirit uses apocalyptic language to describe a political catastrophe.* We see this kind of language used in Isaiah 13:10 wherein the Spirit describes the defeat of Babylon with eschatological imagery: “Stars of the heaven . . . not giving their light . . . the sun will be dark, and the moon will not give her light.”

On the day Babylon fell, none of these things literally happened. But, politically, on the day Babylon fell to the Persians, the world of the Babylonians collapsed. On that day, figuratively speaking, the stars did fall, the Sun did not shine, and the moon did not give her light. But, this does not appear to be the case in this passage. Joel’s description of the Day of the Lord, the *terminus ad quem* of history is literal. Just before the final hour of history the constellations will shiver and fall as described here.

Having described the Day of Judgment, Joel announces the Day of Salvation. **“Deliverance”** is available to those who **“call on the name of the Lord.”**

The term **“call”** is not a one-time prayer for “fire insurance,” but a fixed, perennial devotion to the Lord God, a bona fide spiritual application by a repentant man to be received as a citizen in God’s kingdom with the intent to live under His kingdom law (Psalm 97:10; Romans 8:9-10; Philippians 3:29; Luke 6:46); that is, to be domiciled in heaven. Here we have the doctrine of free will; but, it is quickly enjoined with the doctrine of election, “Those who escape . . . survivors whom the Lord calls.” Salvation is linked to Jerusalem and Mount Zion. Salvation is from the Jews (Judah); that is, through Jesus Christ who was a Judahite descended from David, Judah, Abraham, and Adam. Salvation is in a divine person, **not** a place; in Christ, **not** modern so-called Israel (Psalm 27:1).

Our Lord appeared in the middle of history, not to judge men for their sins, but to give His life a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6). On Mount Zion in Jerusalem, Jesus endured the eschatological wrath associated with the Day of the Lord on the cross of Calvary. On that day, figuratively speaking, the Sun did not shine, nor did the moon give her light because the Son of God was punished for our sins. Having risen from the dead, He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be delivered from the wrath to come, and receive the Spirit of the Eschaton as a down payment of eschatological blessings associated with the kingdom of God (1 Thessalonians 5:9; Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 2:10-12).

# Amos 9:11-15

## *God's Promise to Raise Up the Fallen Tent of David*

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this

♦ The word "**tabernacle**" means "tent" or "booth." Here it is a reference to the true work of God in and through the nation of Israel a.k.a. the "remnant."

This text has a direct application to the rebuilding the temple after the Babylonian Exile. It should not be applied to an alleged third temple.

James, however, applied this text to incoming of the Gentiles into the fold to build the true Israel (the church) through gospel preaching; that is, there is realized eschatology taking place in the church movement.

Acts 15:14-16 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 'After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:'

"**In that day**" is a prophetic time marker referring to a glorious, future restoration of Israel near the Eschaton.

"**That day**" is contrasted against the "transgressions" of Israel" (2:6) and the impending defeat of the Northern Kingdom (Samaria or Israel) by Tiglath Pileser and the dreaded Assyrians. "That day" shines like a diamond in juxtaposition to the black velvet of Israel's corruption -- corruption that consisted of greed, fraud, prostitution, kidnapping, slave trading, bribery, predatory lending and land seizures (cf. 2:4-16).

Because Assyria was fighting on Syria's northern front, Israel and Judah were untouched by the ravages of war. For a short time, both kingdoms enjoyed a period of economic prosperity. In contrast to the temporal wealth was the nation's lasting spiritual poverty. Because of the idolatrous calves at Dan and Bethel and the nation's departure from God's law-order, the wealthy rulers oppressed the poor (4:1), practiced hemlock justice (5:7; 6:12), and plunged into wantonness, self-indulgence, and frothy materialism (6:1-8). Consequently, God ordered the demolition of the Northern Kingdom (9:7-10).

Within thirty years after the death of Rehoboam II (753 BC), the Assyrians conquered Samaria and deported survivors into the regions of Assyria (722 BC). Within a hundred years Judah's kings were nothing but puppets under the control of alien powers. In 605-606 BC, Babylon began its first of three deportations. By 586 BC, Jerusalem was sacked and their cities totally demolished. Thus, David's tent collapsed; that is, the conquest of the twelve tribes is compared to disintegration of a Bedouin tent in an Arabian sand storm. With all this judgment, destruction, and ruin of sinners (9:10), Amos must have asked, "Is there any hope?"

The answer is a thundering "Yes!" God promised to rebuild David's collapsed tent, not the refurbished palace of Solomon, but to increase the godly population in the house of Israel. He did this in saving Gentiles and bringing them into the fold.

**"And close up the breaches"** does not refer to the repair of a physical temple, but healing and reconciliation among God's people.

**Raise up its ruins:** This text is quoted in the New Testament by James during the First Jerusalem Counsel circa 50 AD wherein the apostles were trying to grapple with how to manage the Jewish rite of circumcision during the progress of the gospel among the Greeks.

Acts 15:14-16 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the **tabernacle** of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.



It is clear that the promise given by Amos was fulfilled during the apostolic era due to the conversion of the Gentiles (Goyim); that is, because Christ, David's greater Son, died on Calvary and rose from the dead, the salvation of men and the restoration of Israel's hopes and promises became possible. As God added saved Gentiles to the Messianic Community, the true Israel of God, He rebuilt the fallen tabernacle of David. It is impossible to escape the fact that the salvation of Jews and Gentiles during the Christian era is the fulfillment of the promise given by Amos.

Furthermore, how can anyone deny that the church is the true Israel of God, the antitype of the tabernacle and Israel? It is Christians that make up David's fallen tent and that is a fulfillment of Amos, not the land grab by the other Israel in 1948. Christians are the chosen people of God, not Ashkenazi imposters who "say they are Jews, and are not" (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).

**"That they may possess the remnant of Edom"** does not remotely resemble the Zionist quest to control the world and bring in a one-world government, but spread of the gospel that conquers hearts and enables men to enter the Messianic Kingdom.

**13 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.**

**Plowman and the treader of grapes:** Like Isaiah (65:17ff), Amos describes the Messianic Age in agrarian terms. With the tent of David restored, Amos draws our attention to a regenerated earth where the curse is removed and the environment restored to its Edenic glory. Since Eve's transgression and the bite from the fruit of the Poisonous Tree, creation has been subject to frustration and the laws of entropy. Here is a picture of Paradise restored where reapers overtake the sowers, and the harvesters overtake the plowman.

**Mountains shall drop sweet wine.** Before us is an image of abundance, of wine flowing down mountains like rivers. Even the hills shall flow with wine. This is a regenerated earth free of the curse; the Age of Regeneration; the Messianic Age, the glories of the kingdom of God.

**14-15 And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them**

upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.

**Bring again the captivity of my people Israel:** Israel went into captivity in 722 BC and Jerusalem fell in 586 BC. The reference here is to the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the restoration of Israel in 536 B.C. There is no historical account of the restoration of the northern ten tribes, but we know from the post-exilic books, that Judah began a small return to Palestine in 536 BC. This prophecy could allude to the return under Cyrus. But, the problem with this view is the promise "shall no more be pulled up out of their land." Because Jerusalem was completely demolished in 70 AD, this prophecy could not refer to the return under Zerubbabel.

This restoration could refer to the addition of Gentile believers to spiritual Israel during the Christian era, but the "**building of waste cities**" and "**planting vineyards**" and drinking "**wine**" and making "**gardens**" does not seem to fit.

This has **nothing** to do with the Zionist land grab in 1948 by post WWII Europeans who call themselves "Jews, but are not." These Ashkenazi people are not related to Abraham and have no lawful Biblical claim upon that region of the world.

Rather, this restoration in Amos best fits the Eschaton and the Age of Regeneration associated with a new heavens and a new earth announced by Isaiah (65:17). The Messianic Age is the antitype, and the return under Zerubbabel was only a faint shadow of what is to come at the consummation of this age.

# Zechariah 12-14

## *Hermeneutic Considerations*

### The Interpretive Challenge

♦ A struggle for the Bible interpreter, these passages (12-14) have been the subject of debate between several schools of thought. The literalist interprets this section as a depiction of an end-time conflict and deliverance. The historicist interprets the passage in light of some historical battle in Israel. Others interpret the passage symbolically.

### Keys to the Interpretive Process

**First**, the normal rule for interpreting Scripture is advanced by the literal method of interpretation. This rule should be followed unless the context demands variation from it. The fact that Zechariah uses red horses, craftsmen, a wall of fire, the divestiture of Joshua, two olive trees, a woman in a basket taken back to Babylon, days without nights, and immovable rocks demands the interpreter consider this passage symbolically in proximity to the apocalyptic literary style which Zechariah employs as a vehicle to convey truth. C.H. Dodd affirms this view:

The second half of the Book of Zechariah, chs. ix-xiv, has the character of an apocalypse, and while its component visions (like those of many apocalypses) are not easy to bring into consistent scheme, it can be understood as setting forth a whole eschatological program (Dodd, C.H. 1965. *According to the Scriptures. The Sub-structure of the New Testament Theology*. London: William Collins Sons, p. 64).

Zechariah presents new truth to encourage his people, but new truth can agitate as well as clarify. To avoid shock and a discarding his prophecy in the graveyard of idealism, Zechariah employs references with which his audience was familiar: Jerusalem, Mount of Olives, Benjamin Gate, Feast of Tabernacles, Temple pots, Egyptians and Canaanites. These familiar places are not to be taken literally. They are merely vehicles to convey ultimate realities.

**Second**, Zechariah ministers around 520 BC during the post exilic period, fifteen years after the return, and four years before the completion of the second temple. His congregation is small, defeated, greatly discouraged, and struggling to survive seventy years of the seventy-year devastation. The need of these people, their struggles, their fears, and their limitations must be considered in interpreting this passage.

**Third**, the interpreter should avoid putting on futuristic glasses that have been grounded in laboratories noted for their elaborate end-time schemes. Zechariah does not appear to be drawing a roadmap to the future as much as he is pointing out ultimate realities. Visions of Armageddon, an Antichrist, and an invasion by Russia seem totally inappropriate. The use of this text to prove an invasion by an antichrist, a ten nation coalition, the slaughter of thousands by an atomic bomb, the splitting of the Mount of Olives, a gushing artesian well that travels in two directions, the literal leveling of mountains around Jerusalem, a rebuilt temple, airplane shuttle buses, punishment by drought, and destruction by atomic bombs has more to do with pesher interpretation than Biblical exegesis.

Zechariah's audience was recovering from a war and a crippling seventy year exile. Back in the land, they were struggling for reasons why they should defy the Persians and rebuild a temple structure that was inferior to Solomon's. A discussion about some proposed end-time invasion of literal Jerusalem would have completely defeated these people. Zechariah's message was designed to give hope about the future and inspire courage to continue to work toward the completion of the temple. He did this by letting the workmen know that their effort to build the second temple, as feeble as it was, was part of a plan that would culminate in a glorious, Theo-centric, new world order.

Before we begin to try to unravel the threads of truth in this section, we must consider the correct hermeneutic to interpret this chapter correctly.

(A) we have the perspective of history: the history of the Maccabean Era; the life of Christ and God striking His Shepherd; the destruction of Jerusalem and the formation of the church which is the true Israel of God; and, the control of Jerusalem today by Gentile, Ashkenazi Zionists which are not Semitic; and, the fact that the people of God today are not Jews but Christians; i.e., it is Christians who follow the Shepherd.

(B) We must consider the need of the original hearers and the purpose of this prophecy. The prophet presents his truth in a language and on a landscape with which the original

readers were familiar. This was necessary so the message would be received as valid and not fantastic.

(C) We must understand that the genre of literature is not narration but apocalypticism. Principles of interpreting apocalyptic literature require that we see the language, not with rigid literalism, but with the eye of an artist. *Before us are pictorial images designed to convey literal truth.* If we take this passage literally, we must declare the final battle will be with horses and chariots attacking the “tents” of Judah. The message is literal, but the vehicle of that truth acts like a holy, political cartoon that resembles political satire we see in daily newspapers.

(D) Further, we must consider the truth that Jerusalem is a type of the Heavenly Jerusalem or the church which Christians serve today. The final battle is not going to be against carnal Jerusalem but the true people of God (cf. Hebrews 12:22).

To understand Zechariah 12-14, we must question why God would send Zechariah to preach a message about warfare to the dejected Jews of the Return. Jerusalem was an archaeological ruin. Opponents of the remnant outnumbered the supporters. Twelve years before Zechariah was commissioned, King Artaxerxes ordered the Jews to cease work on the reconstruction of the temple. The deflated remnant had all but given up on the project. Only a handful of people bothered to live in the rubble. To say the people were depressed and struggling to rebuild the infrastructure of the nation would be an understatement. Why would God send His prophet to preach about another future siege on the nation’s broken down capital?

# Zechariah 12-14

## *The Burden for Jerusalem*

♦ How do you encourage exhausted, burned-out workers?

Zechariah did it by predicting the final invasion upon Judah and Jerusalem wherein the LORD would be her walls. Zechariah preaches about the end of history. With the eyes of faith, he sees a final mythological battle. Through the fire and the smoke of prophetic imagery, the prophet sees Jerusalem standing tall and proud striking horse and rider with madness.

The nations of the world are baffled by Jerusalem's indomitable strength and power. Zechariah encourages the remnant by letting them know that their contributions to rebuilding the temple were not in vain; that their labor was contributing to the triumph of their faith over the enemies of the LORD God. His message was pure truth: "In the end, we win!"

This is an eschatological passage where Zechariah takes us to the end of history, even into the kingdom of God. Since the New Testament controls the interpretation of the Old, the interpreter must allow for two-thousand years of Christian history and the Jerusalem Above to shed light on Zechariah's prophecy (Hebrews 10:22).

**Zechariah 12:1 The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.**

Like an elephant on the chest, a "**burden**" (*masa*) is something weighty. God saw His fatigued people and was burdened to help them. They were exhausted, but their weariness was not just physical. It was spiritual. Like a good coach, the LORD had to "kick start" his worn-out team. He did it by forecasting a victory in the final game of the season, sort of speak.

Though they felt dead-dog tired, God was not dead. The One who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundation of the earth and formed the spirit of man was with them and on their side. If the Lord is on your side, who cares what the opponent looks like? The fact that this creative, sustaining God was with them infused new energy into the nation to continue their work.

**2 Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah *and* against Jerusalem.**

During Zechariah's day, it was the remnant in Jerusalem who was trembling from the total destruction of their city by the Babylonians. The prophet announced the end result of their reconstruction. Their neighboring adversaries would tremble with fear and astonishment at the indomitable, unyielding strength of the Holy City.

It is an error to conjure up images of carnal Jerusalem built by the money of NY Ashkenazi Zionists to be represented here. That the final battle will be around modern-day Jerusalem is a result of spiritual diplopia and the failure to see the church as the apple of God's eye. It is the church, not carnal, "Israel" that is the true people of God and the hope of the world.

Modern Christian having been drinking too much porridge from modern-day Zionist newspapers. Because Jewish newspapers almost never report the death of Christian martyrs, believers are not cognizant of the savage persecution of Christians in modern times. Zionist want the world to be focused on their struggles, not the afflictions of true Christian men and women.

In 2001, David Barrett and his colleague Todd M. Johnson started collecting statistics on martyrs. In their seminal work, *World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), they assessed that up to the year 2000 there had been some 70 million Christian martyrs, of which 45 million were concentrated in the 20th century. The book explained the methodology used, and defined Christian martyrs as believers in Christ who have lost their lives prematurely, in situation of witnesses, as a result of human hostility. The murder and rape of millions of Christian Germans after WWII comes to mind. (Source: <http://www.cesnur.org/2011/mi-cri-en.html>).

**3 And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.**

The eschatological expression “**that day**” is used about 25 times in chapters twelve through fourteen. The analogy of Jerusalem’s strength changes from a cup containing a stupefying beverage to an immovable stone. Young men in every culture love to prove their strength by moving stones, but here is one that even Hercules can’t budge. Jerusalem is portrayed as a huge monolithic mountain which breaks the back of the nations. All who try to displace her will be crushed to pieces. Even if all nations with their weapons of war attempt to conquer her, their attempts will meet with utter defeat.

**4 In that day, saith the LORD, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness.**

The scene shifts into full battle mode. Into focus comes **a huge cavalry** rushing towards Jerusalem with warriors shouting and scimitars swinging. Before they reach the gates, Israel’s Protector strikes the horses with blindness tossing their riders into the air only to be broken on the rocks beneath their feet. The warriors stagger as if injured with a concussion. In delirium, they are completely vulnerable to a defensive assault by bowmen on top of Jerusalem’s walls.

**5-6 And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem.**

In battles past, rural Judah was the first to suffer the ravages of war. Jerusalem did not provide support because the urban center was preparing its own defenses. But, here the prophet shows us that not only is eschatological Jerusalem safe, it is a support to the rural families of Judah.

Jerusalem’s victory assured the leaders of Judah that God was not only with this walled city, but a present help to all the cities of Judah. The prophecy shows leaders of Judah as a fire igniting the kindling. Zechariah educates his audience. Jerusalem’s spiritual strength shall be adopted by all the families of Israel, and they shall consume their invaders like a fire among sheaves. Not only is Jerusalem invincible, the smaller cities in the nation have become fierce fighting machines that thrash all enemies on the right and on the left.



This vision is not literal, but symbolic of the fact that nothing shall dislodge the people of God in the eschatological Kingdom. Displacement has ended. This is a story on the landscape of Israel familiar to the original readers designed to enlarge their hope. An eschatological age composed of regenerated Jews and Gentiles would have seemed fantastic at this point in history. The remnant had a dwarfed understanding of where history was headed and God was using Zechariah to expand their vision of God's purposes.

**7 The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify *themselves* against Judah.**

The “**tents of Judah**” were confident in the LORD God but subordinate to Jerusalem, Zechariah announces that surrounding villages shall be the first to experience God's saving power. In order that Jerusalem may know that they share the LORD together with their brethren in rural Judah, God declares the salvation of Judean villages; that is, the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be able to boast of any ascendancy over their fellow Jews because God loves all His people. The Lord's Prayer comes to mind wherein we are taught to pray: “OUR Father Who art in heaven . . . Give US our daily bread. Forgive US of OUR sins . . .”

**8 In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David *shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them.***

David the giant slayer was Israel's greatest military hero. “**In that day,**” the feeble will possess the strength of David. The entire clan shall be like the armies of heaven because “**the angel of the LORD**” (Jesus Christ) leads them.

**9-10 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his only son*, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for *his firstborn.****

Zachariah does not leave his audience with any doubt. In “**that day,**” God will defeat all His enemies, and He will save all His people. This is nothing less than the arrival of the kingdom of God in history. John described it as a baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire

(cf. Matthew 3:11). Zechariah emphasized a special out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the house of David.

The **“house of David”** refers to all those who confess Christ as Lord and surrender to His authority. “Supplications” is plural. This is the age of Spirit wherein the Spirit regenerates men and dispenses gifts to them (cf. Ephesians 4:3-7).

**“They shall look on me whom they have pierced”** is a quote from the LORD. Metaphorically speaking, the Jews (as well as all men) pierced (grieved) Him by their negligence and rebellion. Literally speaking, they pierced Him in the Person of His Son upon the Cross.

Furthermore, we have a description of salvation coming upon men: **“Look upon me”** refers to enlightenment and faith in what God has done for men through Christ.

**“Mourning”** refers to conviction of sin and grief over the pain it caused. This is an OT description of **“repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”** mentioned by Paul in Acts 20:21.

Looking on the smitten Shepherd is the same as looking upon the brass Serpent in the middle of the camp (Numbers 21:8; John 3:14-16).

**“Look”** is an invitation term. The repentant turn their eyes away from their idols and look to the Smitten Savior to heal their soul. “Look unto me and be saved,” decreed the LORD (Isaiah 45:22).

**11-14 In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.**

The theme of mourning continues, but the bitterness of their grief shifts from a private affair to a public one. Zechariah takes us to the battlefield of **Hadadrimmon** in the Valley of Megiddo where Israel’s great revival king, King Josiah, was grievously slain by Pharaoh-necho. When the light of this bright candle was snuffed out, the nation plunged into doubt and despair which led to its defeat by the Babylonians and the state of lamentations recorded by Jeremiah (cf. 2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:22-27).

*We have here a picture of deep repentance.* The entire family of David including his lesser son, Nathan, seclude themselves to personally grieve over the One they pierced. Even Levi and Shemi, the highest and lowest of the priestly order, the most religious of the nation, find it necessary to lament and rue over their sin and the piercing of the Son of God (cf. Numbers 3:18, 21).

**“That day”** is the Day of Salvation and only the repentant enter into it. It is also a day of mourning for the wicked because they are thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42).

To enter the kingdom of God, one must repent of their sins and place their faith in the redemption of Christ. Before us is a model of repentance: godly sorrow, mourning, seclusion, thoughtful reflection, corrective thinking, renewed obedience, and a seeking of his power to walk uprightly.

**In summary**, this is a sensual description of the kingdom of God using the landscape of Jerusalem as the backdrop of revelation. Using imagery familiar with the original readers convinced them that the vision was true and not fantastic. From our perspective, “that day” is a description of “the age to come” — a day where the wicked will be delivered over to wrath and the righteous will be saved. The emphasis is upon genuine repentance and faith. It is an age of regeneration where the Holy Spirit will be poured upon men who see the pierced Son and mourn over the horrible sin of the neglect of God.

# Zechariah 13:1-9

## *The Fountain that Cleanses and Revives a Nation*

♦ This is a chapter about the refinement of God's people. It is a literary snapshot of what a real revival looks like.

Many take this passage literally rather than figuratively. Best follow the rules of the apocalyptic when interpreting this chapter.

**Zechariah 13:1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.**

Zechariah continues his sensual description of the age of salvation. “**That day**” is a reference to the kingdom of God and the Age of Regeneration. Into focus comes a fountain capable of cleansing the worst of sinners. In reality, there is no holy water on earth that can purify the defiled. If there were, there would be no need for God to have sent His Son.

This imagery is a reference to the cross of Christ and His shed blood. This fountain is none other than the “Lamb of God” that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Blood is the only currency accepted in the spirit world, and Jesus provided it (1 Peter 1:19).

There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains:  
Lose all their guilty stains,  
Lose all their guilty stains;  
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.

**2 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, *that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.***

“**That day**” is not only the inauguration of the Day of Salvation, it is Judgment Day. When the kingdom comes, the righteous will be saved and the wicked will be destroyed. Purging the land of idols, false prophets, and unclean spirits is Zechariah’s way of describing the great and terrible Day of the Lord. Malachi saw this day also: “. . . the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble” (Mal 4:1). In John’s terms, this is the baptism of wrath (Matthew 3:11).

By “**cutting off the names of idols**,” God severs the taproot of Israel’s problems. Israel’s historic difficulties stemmed from a violation of the First and Second Commandment; that is, the toleration of polytheism and competing legal systems. The phrase, “no gods before me” orders the nation to have no god, no desire, no moral code, no source of law, no duty, no contract, no allegiance, no oath, and no loyalty above the duty of obeying the one true God. Zechariah declared that polytheism and multiculturalism are marked for destruction.

Since gods are the source of law, this cleansing restores devotion to the Law of the LORD God. By purging the land of “false prophets,” He targets those men that energize idolatry. Sin is not in the environment, it is within men. Evil remains in us. In this world, each of us must bear this fact constantly in mind: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1.8). Sin is not a feeling, it is a violation of God’s law.

In reflecting on “**false prophets**,” the modern reader would do well to expand his understanding of these hostile provocateurs to include politicians, media personalities, college professors, and social engineers behind the revolution and demoralization of a nation. Zionists in Hollywood and Washington D.C. comes to mind

**3 And it shall come to pass, *that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.***

Salvation is not only deliverance from the penalty of sin, **it is restoration to a life of obedience to God’s law-order** (cf. Romans 8:4; 13:8). *Lex rex* must replace *rex lex*. To clarify the purity of salvation on “that day,” Zechariah provides an illustration of a

family that applies strict law to a disobedient son. He takes us to Deuteronomy 13 which instructs lawful men to execute idolaters. No society can survive if it tolerates an assault on its Source of law. Before us is a family with a spiritual delinquent who has eaten the fruits of the Poisonous Tree. A rebel son against the First Commandment, he promotes following a different god and an alien law-order. He is not just remiss in his duties to true religion, he is a revolutionary seeking to overthrow God's law order and replace it with man-made system. Lenin and the Bolsheviks come to mind.

Putting principle ahead of personality and the love of the Lord before love for family members, both mother and father bring their son before civil authorities for judgment. These are not permissive parents, but practitioners of true religion. As accusers and witnesses of apostasy, they cast the first stone (sword) during the execution of their rebel son (Deuteronomy 13:10).

Thus, we have example of true salvation and renewed vigor in obedience to God's law. Both the saving of life and the taking of life is a duty of man. The Age of Salvation will be a restoration to the rule of law—God's law. For there is only One Lawgiver and one absolute law (James 4:12).

**4-5 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive: But he shall say, *I am* no prophet, *I am* an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.**

Today, we live in an age of apostasy where everyone seems to be an expert on religion. Autonomous men live in their own universe devoted to their own law-order. But, in that day when true religion is restored, the apostates will be humbled and silenced. No longer will proud men pound the drums of multi-culturalism and preach "diversity is our strength."

The description of men **not wearing a garment of a prophet** and returning to the rigorous life of a farmer is Zechariah's way of telling us that on the Day of Salvation men will be true. Duplicity and pretense will vanish. There will no longer be self-proclaimed experts on religion.

**6-7 And *one* shall say unto him, *What are* these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, *Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD***

**of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.**

Zechariah continues his illustration of true religion. Before us is a godly confrontation of an apostate by a devoted follower of the truth.

Apparently, a former false prophet has been confronted and is forced to explain his **wounds—wounds** that occurred during a stoning or sword slashing from which he barely escaped. The interrogator, in his zeal against apostates, is still not satisfied. Observing the wounds on the apostate, the examiner declares that his wounds are evidence of guilt. The interrogator regards them either as self-inflicted in the service of idols (1 Kings 18:28), or as given him by his parents, from whose righteous indignation he escaped wounded when they sought to faithfully execute him for his transgression (13:3).

The accused provides an answer: His wounds were **“received in the house of my friends.”** If this be a confession of guilt, we must understand it to mean that the accused person now admits the charge brought against him; “Yes, it is true that I did participate in the apostasy, and these wounds are the result of faithful punishment inflicted on me by those who truly loved me.” If this be a denial of guilt, we must understand it to mean that the accused person denies participation in revolution; that he attributes the wounds to some accident in the company of friends.

Zechariah now takes us to the cross where the true Shepherd was smitten of God. Revival is Christo-centric.

**“Smite”** (*nakah*) is an imperative. The execution of Christ was not a fortuitous act. It was an order from God. In contrast to the faithful execution of a false prophet, we have the archetype wherein Christ, the true prophet of God, was falsely accused by an unfaithful jury for being a false witness about the true God. On the day the Shepherd was afflicted for the sins of the people, the sheep scattered (cf. Matthew 26:31). In one sense, Christians are still scattering, but not out of fear, but out of love in an effort to tell others of the glories of the cross. The expression “turn my hand upon the little ones” is a reference to the special attention God pays to those poor in spirit; that is, the smiting of the Shepherd became an opportunity for those humble enough to call upon the Lord for salvation to enter the kingdom (13:9).

**8-9 And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third**

part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

The whole of the parts refers to the nation of Israel. The dispersion is both judgment, and an opportunity for salvation. Not all will embrace Christ, the true Shepherd. But, a portion of Israel will attach themselves to this Savior by confessing, “**The LORD is MY God!**” This is the true Israel God—a Messianic community of redeemed Jews and Gentiles (cf. Ephesians 2:11-16; 3:1-8).

Use of the expression “**fire**” and “**tried**” as silver and gold is a reference to the fierce suffering that the true Israel of God will be forced to endure—a rigorous sanctification process of the faithful that they may be true men. Those He loves truly, He bruises deeply that they may go deeper into Christ and commune with Him in His suffering.

Hast Thou No Scar

by Amy Carmichael

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?

I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,

I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,

Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?

Yet, I was wounded by the archers, spent.

Leaned me against the tree to die, and rent

By ravening beasts that compassed me, I swooned:

Hast thou no wound?

No wound? No scar?

Yet as the Master shall the servant be,

And pierced are the feet that follow Me;

But thine are whole. Can he have followed far

Who has no wound nor scar?

In a real revival, God uses his scrub brush to refine his people. Revival begins with grief and judgments of sins, a looking to the Smitten Savior for healing, restored confidence



in the shed blood of Christ, a renewed commitment to obey God's law, and voluntary surrender to the path of affliction and the road to sanctification.

# Zechariah 14

## *Ultimate Realities*

♦ This passage does not have a correlation in history. It should **not** be applied to 70 AD in or to any other battle. Nor should this passage be treated as a prophecy about some supposed end-time battle like Gog and Magog.

**It is a message of hope** using the apocalyptic, narrative style to convey truth about the in-breaking of the Messianic age. It applies through all of time because it shows the reader an ultimate teleological truth: the wicked will perish, and the righteous will live.

This passage is connected with the “**burden**” (מַשָּׂא, massa) in chapter 12, and the refinement of God’s people in chapter 13. A burden is something difficult to carry. This can be true for bad news as well as good news. Zechariah’s message was a heavy burden for the anti-God forces. He compared it to trying to remove a giant boulder from a farmer’s field (12:3). For the people of God, Zechariah’s message was a burden because it appeared “to be too good to be true.” For people living in a dark cave, the noon day Sun is too bright. Zechariah’s vision allows for this weakness and therefore delimits his message.

### The Perpetual Conflict of God’s People

**Zechariah 14:1 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.**

The word “**behold**” (הִנֵּה, heneh) means “to stop and look.”

“**The day of the Lord**” (יוֹם־בָּא לַיהוָה, yom ba layavah) should be translated, “a day come to the Lord.” It is not the “day of the Lord” (יוֹם־יָבוֹא, yom yavah) as found in other passages such as Zephaniah 1:14.

The conclusion is stated first, “**thy spoil shall be divided.**” Before us is the truth that God’s people are always under assault and are viewed as *spoil* by the ungodly. Men bartered even for our Lord’s garments when they cast lots for his only possession.

In modern times, we notice that God’s people are still the object of criticism and verbal assault. No doubt, hostility against God’s people will continue to the end of this evil age. Short of the ideal, this picture would be accepted by the Zechariah’s audience made up of Hebrew realists.

### **The War on God’s People**

**2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.**

Before us is the imagery of an invasion. The nations are the hostile populations of the earth. The detail impresses upon us the seriousness and severity of the siege. The attack **sets the stage** for the next act where we see God’s marvelous deliverance of his people.

Two observations need to be made:

(a) God’s rule is so absolute and God’s people so protected that they cannot be attacked unless God triggers it;

(b) hostile efforts will sometimes be successful as suggested by the fact that half of the city is defeated. The numbers here are not literal because in chapter 13:8 the remnant is declared to be 1/3 of the population. If the author intended literalness, only 1/6 of the remnant would remain. This defeat, however, is for the glory of God because the next verse reveals God’s mighty deliverance of His people.

### **The Salvation of God’s People**

**3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.**

“**Then**” is a time marker for deliverance; that is, after a period of suffering then . . .

This is not a literal, geo-political, material Armageddon, nor is it a literal military campaign conducted against Israel in the last days. The image brought before us uses the language of a military invasion as a vehicle to convey the truth that God’s people are always under assault. But, it is not an actual, historical attack that Zechariah

envisions. It is mythological and representative of the spiritual war against God's people.

The godly have many enemies and are always under siege. Zechariah comforts his people by letting them know that the LORD sees their conflicts, knows about them, and takes action by coming from his dwelling (Micah 1:3), to go forth (יָצָא, yatsa), to save his people. He does this by preparing a highway of deliverance for them.

Use of the waw consecutive may add a linguistic touch that just as the waw reverses the tense, so God reverses the predicaments of his people.

This statement “**the day of battle**” presents to us the eternal truth that God will fight for his people today as he fought for his people in times past. The future of God's people is glorious because God will save them. Though His methods may vary, His concerns and attentions to his people do not.

**4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.**

This passage is **not** a description of our Lord's ascension **nor** of Christ's second coming though it may extend to the day our Lord comes in history to take His people up in the air to be with himself for ever.

*This passage depicts a general truth in very specific terms.* In anthropomorphic language, Zechariah presents a coming of God to provide the means of deliverance for his people. The apocalyptic language adds interest and shows us God's dynamic salvation. If necessary, God will split seas and mountains to provide a way of escape and to bring his people into the promised land<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Dale Allison draws a strong parallel between Mark 14 and Zechariah 13:7-14:4. In Zechariah, the prophet predicted the shepherd would be smitten (13:7), the sheep scattered (13:7), a time of great testing (13:9) and fleeing would come (14:4), the Lord would arrive on the Mount of Olives (14:4; Mark 14:26) and there would be a resurrection (an old interpretation of Dodd: 14:4, 5). In Mark, Jesus arrived on the Mount of Olives (14:26), he was struck (14:27), the sheep scattered (14:27, 50), testing arrived, men fled (14:50-52), he rose from the dead (14:28; 16:1-8). Consequently, Mark's presentation challenges not only to interpret Zechariah apocalyptically, but Christologically (Allison, D.C. 1985. The end of the ages has come. Fortress Press.)

Historically, the **Mount of Olives**, east of Jerusalem, was the place generals set up their command center to plan the destruction of Jerusalem. Furthermore, many of Israel's enemies came from the east (Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Persia). Therefore, Zechariah directs his people to look over the wall to the east. What do they see? Invading armies? No, they do **not** see armies ready to destroy them, they see the LORD coming to deliver them. He is present on the Mount of Olives.

With apocalyptic imagery, the LORD's coming is described as **splitting the mountain** in two to form a highway of escape. The way of escape is called "**my mountain valley**" (גִּיאַת הָהָר, verse 5). The imagery reminds us of YHWH's deliverance at the Red Sea when Israel escaped from Pharaoh's armies. Before us is the ultimate exodus!

The splitting of the mountain from east to west and then north to south is merely to define which direction the valley runs, a marvelous sign, the mode of God's deliverance, the extreme measures God uses to save His people.

**5 And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.**

"**And you shall flee to my mountain valley**" means that God's people shall find safety by utilizing his means of escape.

The word **azal** (אֶל-אָצַל) is difficult to translate and may simply mean "in reference to" or "by the side of." That is, the escape route is in reference to God's mountain valley.

Apparently, the peoples' mad dash to safety from tumbling houses in the day of Uzziah's earthquake left such an impression, Zechariah uses it to describe the character of the flight of God's people during this pictorial calamity. So terrible is this hostile invasion, that God's people sprint into the valley to escape the horrors of this threat.

Angels do not perform this deliverance. God himself acts to save His people. What a sight! Instead of seeing armies surround Jerusalem, the people look up and see. The Lord leads His armies and prepares to fight for Israel's deliverance. Zechariah is so proud of God's performance and the privilege of being under His command, Zechariah calls him, "**The LORD my God**" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי)! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Again, Zechariah is not presenting a literal battle, a literal earthquake, or a literal highway. Apocalyptic language is employed to stimulate the imagination and the wonder of God's salvation for his people. Local considerations (Jerusalem, Mount of Olives, the Mediterranean Sea) do not predict a restored Israel sometime in the future; rather, local color is used to add a touch of familiarity to assure the people of His personal, dynamic deliverance. Familiarity makes God's salvation tangible and immanent rather than distant and transcendent.

Zechariah may be using the metaphor of the highway to point us to the cross as God's means of salvation and way of entrance into the kingdom of God. No amount of apocalyptic imagery can compare with the reality of God Incarnate dying for the sins of humanity on the cross.

### Glories to Come for God's People

**6-7 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.**

Use of the phrase "**that day**" (בַּיּוֹם, ba yom) directs us to a new state of affairs, a new world order, the Messianic age of salvation, the kingdom of God.

Use of the word "**light**" (אוֹר, ore) suggests the replacement of natural phenomenon by the phenomenon of the new heavens and the new earth. Heat by day and cold by night will not exist in the new age. The apocalyptic imagery of failing luminaries (Joel 4:15; Isaiah 13:10; Matthew 24:29) suggest the new creation has arrived in history. The result is shown first. The reason for the new order is shown second -- **a day "known to the Lord."**

**8 And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.**

Switching metaphors from light to water, Zechariah builds upon Ezekiel's (40-48) presentation of flowing waters but with much less detail. Light and water are necessary to sustain life.

"**hinder sea**" = the Western Mediterranean; "**former sea**" may refer to the Persian Gulf. Living waters starts in the east and goes to the west.

The rivers of water flowing east and west are not a description of a natural phenomenon, but a description of a spiritual reality—eternal life flowing from the wells of salvation. Water is a necessity of life; and eternal life is the necessity of the age to come. This is an ideal water system not limited to weather conditions, and it highlights at least two truths: (a) God’s salvation is universal (running east to west), and (b) it is magical and mystical. It never ends.

In John’s revelation, the final scene is water flowing from the throne of God in the celestial city (Revelation 22). This is John’s way of saying eternal life will dominate existence in the age to come. Ezekiel, Zechariah, and John use the image of flowing water to present the conquest of life over death – regeneration and eternal life.

Again, gross literalism detracts from this marvelous lesson.

**9 And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.**

Salvation is now expanded from Jerusalem to all the earth. The hope given to Abraham is fully realized (Romans 4:13). God’s purpose is universal and global rather than local and esoteric.

The LORD has always been king, but now there is universal acknowledgement of this fact. What Moses taught about the oneness of God is now universal knowledge (Deuteronomy 6:4).

**10 All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's winepresses.**

Turned into a plain and a leveling of this mountain range is not literal, but symbolic of ease and simplicity.

**Geba** was the northern boundary of Judah and **Rimmon** was the southern boundary of the state. The Benjamin gate was in the middle of the northern wall. The “first” gate was apparently in the northeast corner of the northern wall. The “**tower of Hannel**” was at the northeast corner.

The “**kings wine press**” was located at the southeast corner of the city. Zechariah’s measurements communicate to the people of his day Jerusalem’s total restoration to its

former glory. It would be as looming and glorious as it ever was. In NT terms, Zechariah is describing the Jerusalem above.

The leveling of the mountains and the geological exaltation of Jerusalem is not literal any more than the city of Jerusalem is literally implied. Leveling of the mountains is apocalyptic imagery painted for emphasis. **Before us are spiritual realities rather than geographic transformation.** The hyperbolic, figurative imagery suggests the removal of hostile forces and their idolatrous systems that compete with the truth of one God and His way of salvation. Jerusalem, the dwelling place of Israel's God, the interest of God's people, the home of the righteous, will be the center of attention in the Eschaton as John's final presentation of Jerusalem in Revelation 22.

**11 And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.**

Again, it is the **New Jerusalem** of the new order, not the Jerusalem of the old order that is in view here. Zechariah wants his readers to know that the City of God will one day be inhabited by men (eschatologically) and that it will endure all attacks throughout history. The eschatological Jerusalem will be a place of safety and rest and joy for God's people for all eternity.

This would be of great encouragement to the people of Zechariah's day. Erecting a new city out of that pile of rubble must have seemed hopeless and without purpose at times during the reconstruction phase in the post exilic period (536-516 B.C.). Just knowing that their tedious assignment contributed to the ultimate purpose of God in the Messianic Age must have inspired them with hope and infused hammer-pounding energy into their bones. In the end, Jerusalem stands!! Likewise, every Sunday school teacher, church janitor, and weary pastor who performs even the most mundane tasks of church work for the glory of God today contributes to the glory of new Jerusalem.

### **God's Judgment on the Anti-God Forces**

**12-15 And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth. 13 And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the LORD shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbor, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbor. And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the heathen**



round about shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance. And so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague.

Having shown the reader the marvelous end for God's people, a question arises about the end of the anti-God forces: "What will happen to those who oppose God's people and God's purpose throughout history?" Employing the apocalyptic, Zechariah paints a ghastly picture describing the end of the wicked.

Zechariah is **not** predicting dates **nor** describing events to come. He is **not** describing a nuclear war. Banal literalism detracts from the main message. He presents a general truth and uses the detail to enhance his message. Those who resist God's people and God's purpose on earth inherit a horrible fate. The plague is not literal anymore than the feet and hands are literal. This rotting away of flesh is a graphic presentation designed to stimulate the mind about the horrible fate of God's enemies. Though this description of the death of the wicked is not intended as a prophetic statement, a literal destruction and greater agony than any apocalyptic vision can describe is planned for those who resist God. Hell and the Lake of Fire comes to mind.

**"Everyman seizing his neighbor"** is imagery describing the confusion that comes during military campaigns. Many will fall by friendly fire.

**Judah is foreseen as coming to the aid of Jerusalem.** By this, Zechariah shows the unity of God's people.

**The gathering of the spoils of war** (gold and silver) highlight another truth that the "meek shall inherit the earth." Those who amass wealth will leave it for God's people to enjoy. In the end, God's people will enjoy the riches of the earth.

The **plague upon horses and mules** shows us how thoroughly God's judgment comes on the sinner and all that he has.

### **Absolute Unity in the New World Order**

**16-19 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not**

up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

This section is not literal and should not be used to support an elaborate millennial scheme. Rather, **it describes ultimate realities** in terms understood by the OT mind.

What Israelite living in 520 BC could imagine an age where every person and every nation would rejoice over Jerusalem and acknowledge the truth of God? What Israelite could even imagine an age where there were no hostilities? They could not! God, therefore, recognizing the limitation in the minds of his people delimited the glories of the coming age to fit within the boundaries of Israel's shriveled imagination.

The Feast of Tabernacles shadowed the glorious Messianic Age where men would know God and enjoy him forever. Zechariah's description presents one glorious truth: From among the nations of the world, God's enemies have been converted from foes to friends.

A waw conversive is employed in verse 16 and the phrase "**shall even go up**" should be translated "these shall go up" year to year to worship the king.

**The punishment of the nations** that do not worship is not intended to depict an age where there would be actual resistance to YHWH. Quite the opposite! Verse nine already proclaimed the fruit of victory--universal acknowledgement of the LORD. To come out and say "the whole world will be bonded together in universal worship of YHWH" was too bold a statement and too bright a light to those having come out of the dark storm of divine chastisement in the exile. It was impossible for them to see in their mind's eye a world where everyman would worship the LORD. Zechariah claims this "dumbing down" of the universal acceptance of YHWH in the coming age. He allows for his people's limitations and concedes that if there were any that did not worship Him, the LORD would be in such control that He would set matters straight.

Egypt, Israel's historic foe, is singled out to demonstrate that God's grace will be so effective that even Israel's former enemies will be among those who acknowledge the LORD and worship Him. Again, the argument of striking the Egyptian people with a plague does not appear to be literal or consistent with the context, but rather, follows the argument of 16 & 17 that delimit God's presentation of this marvelous age to fit the narrow understanding of his people. It was simply too bold of a promise to make to

these people recovering from exile. The bold truth of the matter is, however, that in the age to come all men will love the LORD and His Son.

Reading elaborate millennial schemes into this passage fail to consider the OT mind, its limitations, and God's condescension to the weakness of His people. The idea of shuffling billions of people by airplanes and shuttle buses into a proposed millennial Jerusalem to visit a gigantic temple is not what Zechariah is teaching.

### **Holiness in the Coming Age**

**20-21 In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD'S house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.**

This section presents the glorious conclusion of God's salvation history.

This is not literal for we are not going to be riding horses in the age to come. But, holiness is true. Holiness is a beautiful word -- a term of beauty and virtue. A holy thing was rare and therefore valuable to the one pursuing God. However, in OT terms, only instruments connected with the tabernacle that were dipped in blood and water were deemed holy.

In the coming age, ordinary pots and pans in the temple will be holy. Even minutiae, like bells on horses will be consecrated to the Lord. To emphasize this further, Zechariah presses the truth that all the pots and pans in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy. Everything in the lives of God's people will be dedicated to Him. Who can imagine such a day?

The last statement concludes the divine revelation. In that age, no Canaanite will be present. This is not a racial statement. Canaanites were deemed people of gross iniquity. At one time Israel's leaders were declared to be of Canaanite stock (Isaiah 1:10). Moral pigs, Canaanites and sodomites and the like will not be present in the Eschaton. The age to come is an age prepared for God's people.

In conclusion, this passage teaches a truth that Adam's energies are an assault on God's people. More rough times are ahead, but God will be there and He will prepared a way of salvation. In the end, God's enemies will be destroyed, and God's people will be safe

and secure in a new creation. This mythological battle of deliverances stretches the reader's imagination, but nothing could prepare his people for the mountain-splitting, ax-crushing work of Christ and the river salvation that flows out of Calvary.

# Malachi 3:1-6

## *The Messenger*

♦ The last prophetic writing in the OT, the LORD concentrates the hope of true Israel in the coming Messiah.

As a precursor to this kingdom event, the Spirit directed the remnant to look for a forerunner (a malachi) who would introduce the nation to the Messenger of the Covenant: “Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the LORD.”

This torch of hope unifies the Old Testament which begins with the promise of “the seed of the woman (Genesis 3) and ends with a prophetic promise. He shall come! He comes! He comes! Look for Him!

**Malachi 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.**

“**Behold**” is a dynamic particle of injection commanding the attention of the elect.

Consider the work of God and the amount of detail required to have John the Baptist arrive in history to introduce Christ as the Lamb of God to the nation! Lineage, parenting, training . . .

“**send**” is a masculine participle as a prophetic present – “I am sending . . . “

“**my messenger**” (malachi) – a play on words as the author’s name (Malachi) means “messenger” – a sure way of gaining the author’s attention.

“**he shall prepare the way**” draws us to Isaiah 40:3 where the prophet Isaiah announced the ministry of the forerunner, a man of the desert (wilderness) we know as John the Baptist who would identify and prepare the nation to receive the Messiah. “The messenger,” Isaiah’s voice (Isaiah 40), and “Elijah” (Malachi 4:5-6) appear to be the same person – a perfect fulfillment in John the Baptist – the last of the Biblical prophets (Luke 16:16).

The Coming One is none other than the Lord Jehovah (YHWH). The word “**Lord**” is translated eight times with the definite article “the” and a reference to “God” -- a divine title except here.

See Exodus 23:17; 34:23; Isaiah 1:24; 3:1; 10:16; 10:33; 19:4, The Gospel of Mark opens us the claim that Jesus is the LORD of whom John the Baptist prepared the way.

“**I**,” “me,” “Lord” (Adonai) and “**LORD of Hosts**” refer to the LORD God because he comes to “his temple.” “My messenger” is to come, and to “prepare the way before Me.”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word with God; and, the Word was God.” (John 1:1).

“**the Messenger of the Covenant**” is a reference to the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ – the beam of hope shining throughout the OT. He is foreshadowed by a forerunner, a messenger, a master of ceremonies sort of-speak. He is the “**LORD**” (YHWH) and “**the Lord**” (Adonai). Many prophets came before Christ, but Malachi announces a special personage, the last of the prophets, who would precede the Messenger of the Covenant -- Christ the Lord. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:9-10).

The word “**covenant**” probably refers to the “new covenant” of Jeremiah 31:31.

“**he shall come**” announces the final OT promise. In the darkness of the Maccabean Period, Malachi holds up a torch to give light in the shadows of that age. He shall come. He comes! He comes! Look for Him.

“**whom ye delight**” and “whom ye delight” refers to Israel’s positive awareness of God. Whether sincerely or artificially, truly or superficially, national life pivoted around Jehovah. That the Lord is coming is presented as a present prophetic fact; but, whether the nation was prepared for His entrance into history remained an uncertainty – thus, the need for Malachi 3:2-5.

Note the play on Hebrew words. Malachi’s name means “Messenger” -- the prediction that John the Baptist would be a “messenger” of the Ultimate Messenger, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:**

We know that “**his coming**” refers to that period of history beginning in 2 B.C. and ending in 70 A.D.

The “**but**” (a vav) with a “mi” introduces a question: You delight (superficially) in the day of the Lord’s coming, but who is spiritually prepared for that day? He shall come, but who can stand?

Malachi employs the metaphor to describe the nature of His coming. Here the prophecy is judicial and not kingly -- a refiner's fire.

The first characteristic of that day is that “**he**,” **the Messenger of the Covenant**,” is like a refiner or smelter Who crushes the rock, separates the ore, dissolves pebbles and powder into ashes,

heats up the metal extract, and refines it through a cupellation process until the character of the casting is pure silver. Thus, the Lord sends his yielded ones through a scalding, purification process.

The second characteristic of that day is that “he” is like fuller’s soap – a lye that cleanses garments of dirt and stains -- a violent process of dipping, squeezing, and wringing -- like an antique washer with a ringer.

The great question is, “who is able to stand and endure these processes of purification and cleansing?” Many wish to be close to God, but who is prepared for the Refiner’s fire? Men want his blessings, but who wants his cleansings? Scrubbings? Refining? Many covet His prosperity, but who desires his purity?

All want faith that moves mountains, but only a few accept the fire that leads to sanctification. All dream of a King's blessing, but who dreams of coming before a refiner judge who practices rigorous purification and relentless vine-pruning (John 15)?

John 12: 20-25 And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus . . . And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

**3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.**

“**he shall sit**” refers to the administration of an installed Messiah-Judge. Malachi informs us that the Messiah’s management shall resemble a refiner and purifier of silver. The following language is germane to the age in which the Levites served.

The “**sons of Levi**” were temple servants. They are mentioned because of their careless and reckless service to the Lord (Malachi 1). Not all would be purified as some dross is left behind. Judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). Levites are mentioned, but the focus is on the new priesthood, the church of Jesus Christ –those precious believing souls that are purified and chastened by life's trials.

“**offering in righteousness**” refers to refinement of character and perfection of the Levites rather than to the “offerings” which they placed on the altar. Holy service must come from holy men.

**4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.**

The Lord anticipated a day when holy men would serve Him with a spirit of excellence. Much like American patriots reminisce about the early intentions a Constitution created by the Founding Fathers, Malachi patronizes the beginnings of the Aaronic ministry.

“**The days of old**” is difficult to define, but probably refers to the early work of Aaron and Phinehas, son of Eleazar.

**5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.**

“**... come near to you to judgment**” refers to restoration of justice – a sweet sound to godly men who anguish over the promotion and progress of evil in their age.

The following social, cultural crimes are addressed – crimes prohibited by law:

- Sorcery and deception ([Exodus 22:18](#)),
- Adultery ([Exodus 20:14](#); [Leviticus 20:10](#); [Deuteronomy 22:22](#)),
- Perjury and slander ([Leviticus 19:12](#)),
- Fraud or withholding of wages ([Leviticus 19:13](#); [Deuteronomy 24:14-15](#)),
- Oppressing the poor -- widows and orphans ([Exodus 22:22-24](#)),
- Injustice to aliens ([Deuteronomy 24:17](#); [Deuteronomy 27:19](#)).

**6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.**

The 12 tribes were in a constant state of change from good to bad and from bad to worse. The only reason they were not destroyed is because God’s holy, merciful character did not change. Life is in a state of flux, and in the midst of cultural “change” we must learn to rest on the unchangeableness of God.



Note on the Kingdom of God: The main message of John the Baptist and Jesus was “the kingdom of God is at hand.” John preached a gospel that the kingdom of heaven was at hand wherein the Messiah would baptize the nation with fire (judgment) and the Holy Spirit (salvation).

But as the Lord Jesus executed his ministry John’s response to Christ was not only one of wonder and admiration, but perplexity and frustration (Matthew 11:1-6). John sent an envoy to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who should come, or do we look for another?" (Luke 11:1-6)

The OT presents a kingdom that would be dynamic, irresistible, and universal -- a forceful, energetic, judicial rule . . . but, Jesus acted more like a sower of the gospel than a grinder of wheat. John asked the “why” question.

John was not wrong in his interpretation of Scripture, but what He did not understand was the Christ came in the middle of history, not to pulverize the wicked and to pluck them from society, but to offer men His salvation and to create "sons of the kingdom." The judicial part of His reign begins at His second coming. Our Lord will come a second time, not to save, but to judge the wicked (1 Thessalonians 5:1-12; and, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10).

The cross became the battlefield for the souls of men wherein the Lord fought man's greatest enemies: Satan, sin, and death. There He experienced the eschatological judgment for the sins of men. Moreover, Calvary became the place of purchasing believers by His own blood -- a redemption qualifying ordinary men to enter the kingdom of God.

# Malachi 4:1-6

## *Rise of the Sun of Righteousness*

**Malachi 4:1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.**

♦ **“The day”** is identified in verse five as the “great and dreadful day of the Lord.” It comprises two great events, the destruction of the wicked (4:1), and the salvation of the righteous (4:2). Pride and arrogance mark the unregenerate man. The *zed* (*proud*) who seemed so well off are now as bad off as they can be (3:15). They are compared to kindling (“stubble”) made for the fire. “burn” expresses that agony judgment. “Neither root nor branch” expresses total ruin of apostates.

**2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.**

The righteous are identified as those that **“fear my name.”** The Messianic-Savior takes the title “Sun of Righteousness” because He alone is without sin and has the light of life (cf. John 1:2-3).

The age of salvation arrives at the appearing of the Sun of righteousness Who will have **“healing in his wings.”** The “wings” are a metonym for sunbeams warming the earth.

The image before us is the ultimate sunrise that dispels darkness by spreading its rays of life. The age of darkness and death (this age) yields to the age of light and life (the age to come) (cf. Luke 20:34).

**“Going forth”** as **“calves of the stall”** refers to physical resurrection. The resurrection of the righteous is compared to the romping and jumping of frisky calves released from the cubicle of death (John 5:29).

**3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do *this*, saith the LORD of hosts.**

The “**you**” (ye) is a reference to believers in the Messiah, the Sun of Righteousness, who will usher in the Day of the Lord. On Judgment Day YHWH will crush the wicked so they will be like cold coals underfoot.

Earlier in the Book of Malachi, things were upside down. The wicked were prospering, and the righteous were suffering (3:15). Now, the wicked are called “ashes” under feet. Judgment is typified as fire wherein the wicked are burned to cinders.

“**Saith the LORD of hosts**” assures the reader that the destruction of the wicked is as certain as the Promises of God.

“**LORD of hosts**” is a reference to the armies of heaven and His arsenal of destruction. On that day, the God of Wrath will unleash His bloody weapons of war to crush proud, lawless man.

**4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, *with the statutes and judgments.***

“**Remember**” (zakar) is a command from the LORD of Hosts to His people. It is not an option. It is a order from the Commander of the Armies of Heaven. The great sin of God’s people is the neglect of God’s law – antinomianism, lawlessness, and trespasses. He does not ask them to remember grace, but law. The kingdom of God is about the restoration of law and it should be the main concern of the faithful.

Further, the opposite of law is **not** grace, but lawlessness. Grace empowers men to obey the law, and it is law-keeping that marks the people of God. In fact, the fear of God is obedience to His law. If Christ met with Congress today, he would say, “Remember the Law of Moses.” (cf. Romans 8:4; 13:8; 1 John 5:1-3; Deuteronomy 13:4).

Little did the nation know that Malachi was the last prophet and that all they would have over the next few centuries was the scrolls which contained the precious Word of God. There were no more revelators in Israel’s history until the arrival of Jesus the Messiah.

**5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.**

When will the Day of the Lord come? Not until Elijah appears in history to “Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.” (cf. 3:1; Matthew 3:3). Both Matthew and Mark apply the title “Messenger” to John the Baptist; and, Mark unmistakably refers to Jesus as the LORD.

The messenger’s ministry is described as confronting neglectful fathers and disobedient sons; that is, he restores the original order of the family. “Honoring mother and fathers” by children is the mark of a godly home. Obedience to law is the ultimate act of love. Attention to law is the key mark of a Christian father; and, honoring parents by adult children is the most outstanding feature regarding a Christian home. And, neglect of parents by adult children is a grievous sin in the eyes of the LORD. See the Marks of Revival in Zechariah 13.

The Old Testament ends, not with a blessing, but a curse (cherem). The term “**curse**” is the last word in the OT. Unwilling to obey, the Book of Malachi ends with a dark cloud hanging over the nation of Israel.

The first word in the Sermon on the Mount is “blessed;” that is, the Sun of Righteousness appeared in the middle of history, not to judge men, but to secure the salvation of the elect and to bring them the blessings of the age to come in advance of the terrible Day of the Lord. The last verse in the New Testament is a benediction of grace to those that have placed their faith in the Sun of Righteousness.

# Matthew 3:1-12

## *The Kingdom is at Hand*

♦ Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist, the austere, acetic country preacher, and his central message.

For four hundred years the voice of prophecy had been mute. No prophet arose in Israel. The prophetic voice was silent to the mystery of all. But, now there was a man of God on the scene speaking the prophetic word in the wilderness. His message? The kingdom of God is at hand! He does not explain it. He assumes people understand the prophets and that they are familiar with the term, the "kingdom of God."

Moreover, John was a Levite, a son of Aaron. His father Zechariah was a high priest and His mother was a pure blood daughter of Aaron, the first high priest. John was not only the messenger predicted by Malachi, John was the authentic, approved high priest who introduced Jesus to the nation as the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

**Matthew 3:1-2 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.**

John organized his message around kingdom themes. The kingdom of God was the major message of Isaiah, Daniel, Malachi, and now John. The expression "Kingdom of Heaven" is unique to Matthew and its usage has a Hebrew flair to it. But, there is no difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of God as Scofield suggested (1909; 1967). By kingdom of Heaven John refers to the in-breaking of the rule of God into history. This is the irresistible, dynamic, cataclysmic kingdom anticipated by the prophets that would interrupt history, smash and crush the wicked, and bring salvation to the righteous (Daniel 2; Malachi 4).

**What is meant by "It is at hand?"** Though not without challenges, it is difficult to deny that John was expecting Daniel's Stone to enter history tumbling off a mountain to crush secular governments and to establish the kingdom of God on earth. From John's perspective, the inauguration of God's kingdom was imminent. The kingdom that

would disrupt society squashing the wicked and saving the righteous was just around the corner. Prepare for it.

In light of nearness of the kingdom of Heaven, John called for one action: Repentance.

**Repentance** means to change course. John summoned men to repent of their neglect of God, of going their own way, of their personal autonomy, of their pride and independence from God, of rejecting God's law-order and adopting their own religion. "The rule of God is here. Surrender to its authority," commanded John.

**3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.**

Matthew informs his readers that John was no ordinary preacher. His seminary was the Judean desert. Alone, away from the amusements of man, he heard the voice of God. His commission was grounded in prophecy wherein Isaiah predicted that before the appearance of Messiah, God would send a man to prepare the nation for His reception. John was that man. The image before us is that of runners sent before a king's entourage to remove rocks in the road and to fill in the potholes. John exposed the sins of commission (mountains) as well as the sins of omission (valleys) that hindered the spiritual development in men (cf. Isaiah 40:4).

**4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.**

Just **John's appearance** drew crowds. What a sight--a rugged bearded, Nazarite figure about thirty-years old wearing a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt around his waist! What a contrast between John and the stylish politicians in Jerusalem! John's garment was the clothing of the poorest of the poor and it invoked images of Elijah, the head of the prophets. His diet was simple: bugs and wild honey. John was an ascetic that foraged for food—a man that enjoyed none of the luxuries of ordinary life. His looks, his lifestyle, and his messaged challenged even the most conservative of men to judge their sins and to turn from them. Here is a man that lived fully for the will of God, not valuing possessions, comfort, or status.

**5-6 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.**

John preached on the outskirts of Jerusalem and up down the shore line of the Jordan.

In preaching repentance, John called men to identify their sins and to confess them. He wanted men to come clean, to surrender to God's law-order, and to express it by submitting to his baptism of repentance—a symbolic action of once-for-all forsaking one's sins and coming under the authority of the LORD God. Jews had a moderate tradition of baptisms and required Gentiles to get baptized when converting to Judaism. But, John treats Jews as if they were filthy *goy* calling them to turn from their sins and to turn to God on the same terms they believed God demanded of Gentiles.

To Western Christians that enjoy so many of the luxuries of life and attend church to figure out how to obtain more prosperity from religious faith, everything about John appears strange and radical. Because modern Christians are attune to a religion that costs nothing, treats the kingdom cheaply, and preaches health and wealth doctrines, Western Christianity has little appreciation for a John the Baptist. True repentance is costly: the kingdom "demands a response -- a radical, dynamic, deep-rooted decision. "Nominalism is the curse of modern western Christianity" (Ladd 1978, p.100).

**7-9 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.**

Most preachers would feel honored to have politicians attend their church service, but not John. Instead of mellowing his message for maximum inclusivity, John revved it up a notch. Before us is a confrontation by John, the pure child of God, and synthetic representatives from the leaders of the nation -- **the corrupt Pharisees**, who sought to change the world through rabbinical law; and, the worldly Sadducees who maintained powerful commercial ties with Rome. There is nothing wishy-washy about John. Direct and edgy, he called them a "**den of vipers**"; that is, these politicians were as nasty as a sack full of snakes.

In asking the question, "**Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?**" John announced that the kingdom of God was coming to crush the wicked and to purge society of twisted Jews like the Sadducees and Pharisees. Further, John informs these legislators of his message on how to enter the kingdom was not for them. In fact, they were banned from the kingdom as the designated objects of God's wrath. Fury was burning and these snakes were destined for the fire.

In saying, “**bring forth fruit meet for repentance**,” John demanded production, not profession; actions, not talk; substance, not form.

In saying, “**do not say to yourselves we have Abraham for our father**,” John confronted the false theology rotting in the graveyard of Judaism.

Because Jews errantly thought all the sons of Abraham would enter the kingdom, John confronted this error. Salvation is by grace, not race; by repentance and faith, not pomp and circumstance.

The fact that God could raise up children of Abraham from stones was a warning to the Jews that they were not to take their genetic ancestry too seriously. The whole notion that Jews are the people of God merely because they are Jews is patently offensive to Biblical truth. God has no grandchildren.

Further, that God has covenant children or that his saving grace runs in the lines of generations (covenant succession) is also unbiblical. The piety of our upbringing cannot save us if we are not personally committed to Christ. Even depending on some dynamic past religious experience is hazardous.

Relying on some utterance of the sinner’s prayer in the past while ignoring the Word of God now is precarious. His people are made up of repentant sinners from all nations who surrender to the authority of His kingdom. Want to be saved? Surrender to King Jesus.

**10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.**

John returns to his main theme on the kingdom. In John’s mind, the irresistible, dynamic, cataclysmic kingdom that would interject itself into history to disrupt society was knocking at the door. The Day of the Lord was near.

The expression “**axe laid unto the root of the trees**” communicates terminal justice.

“**Fire**” is a metonym of eternal judgment. Most Jewish people in Palestine expected a time of impending judgment against the wicked and deliverance for the righteous. But most expected judgment to come on the *goy* and not Jews that formed the religious establishment in Israel (cf. *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1; E. Sanders 1985:96);



Many of John's contemporaries believed that hell was only temporary (for example, *t. Sanhedrin* 13:3, 4), but John specifically affirmed that judgment involved eternal torment, drawing on the most horrible image for hell available in his day.

**11-12 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**

**John clarifies his ministry.** He informs the people he is not the Messiah. He is the forerunner preparing the way for the Stone that would crush civilizations. His baptism was formal and external, but one coming after him would usher in the kingdom of God.

**Baptizing in the Spirit** is a reference to salvation; that is, ushering in the age of regeneration. Baptizing with fire is a reference to the destruction of the wicked. It has nothing to do with "spiritual fervor" as some insinuate.

John warns that the wicked will be burned, just as farmers destroy useless products after the harvest. When threshers tossed grain in the air, the wind separated out the lighter, inedible chaff. The most prominent use of chaff was fuel for ovens. But while chaff burned quickly, John depicts fire consuming the wicked as *unquenchable*.

**In summary,** John saw himself at the end of history and the beginning of a new era. He announced the contiguity of the kingdom of God. The dynamic, irresistible Kingdom that smash man's institutions, slay the wicked, and reward the righteous announced by the prophets was at hand. He was the nation's tutor that prepared them to receive its coming King. Repentance was the order of the day.

Within months, Jesus began His ministry preaching the same message as John commanding men to repent and surrender to the rule of God.

# Matthew 11:2-12

## *John's Quandary About the kingdom*

**Matthew 11:2-3** Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples. And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

♦ Because John denounced the adulterous marriage of Herod Antipas to Herodias the wife of his brother Philip, Herod arrested John and put in prison (14:3). It is hard to imagine the extreme suffering of this man who lived free and enjoyed the nomadic life in the great outdoors.

Not only was his captivity a severe trial, it was a test of his theology. John's imprisonment was not a spiritual crisis where he descended into the pit of despair. He was not a doubter.

Rather, **he sought clarity of faith**. He understood the prophets, but questioned whether Jesus the Nazarene was the Agent of God's kingdom program that they had predicted. If he had understood God's prophetic agenda, the bone-crushing power that would purge society of evil men would occur with the arrival of the Messiah. If Jesus was the Christ, where was the dynamic, irresistible fiery judgment that would devour the chaff? Consequently, to relieve his theological frustration, he sent two of his disciples to query Christ.

**4-5 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.**

Jesus did not rebuke John or reprimand his disciples. He did not challenge John's theology, preach to him, or send him a "trust God" letter. The brevity and clarity of his message is nothing short of stunning. He sent his followers back to report on the messages and miracles of Christ.

The fact that “**the blind receive their sight**” and “**the lame walk**” is a reference to Isaiah 35 which describes (A) the destruction of the wicked, and (2) salvation of the righteous (35:4). But, Jesus intentionally left out the day of vengeance and began his quote with “the eyes of the blind will be opened.” Thus, His miracle were His credentials.

The fact that Jesus’ healing powers were of the same character prophesied by Isaiah would have encouraged John that the kingdom he had announced was present in and through the ministry of Christ. Indeed, the kingdom was present in Jesus’ ministry, but not with irresistible, crushing, military force.

John was not wrong in his theology! He just did not know where he was in history. He thought he was living near the final judgment. But, in reality, he was in the middle of history witnessing the blessings of salvation in Christ.

#### **6 And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me.**

The Old Testament prophets were not wrong in their predictions, and John certainly had not misinterpreted them. But, there was a difference between OT presentation of the kingdom and what was occurring in the ministry of Christ. While the prophets announced the expunging of the wicked by Messianic authority, there was no crushing of the lawless or separation of the goats from the sheep occurring in the ministry of Christ. Rather, our Lord demonstrated the salvic powers of the kingdom of God emerged without judicial cleansing.

A study of **kingdom theology** in Matthew reveals that Christ came in the middle of history, not to destroy mankind, but to bring men the first fruits of the kingdom of God in advance of the cataclysmic judgment at the end of history. Because the kingdom was present in and through the ministry of Christ, and because his presentation of the judicial aspects of the kingdom were postponed until the end of this age, he pronounced a blessing on the thoughtful student of Scripture who was not bewildered by His salvic quest midway in history.

John was not wrong about the kingdom, but he did not know where he was in the timing of God’s prophetic program. He was not ministering at the end of history, but in the midmost of history as the forerunner of Christ who brought Kingdom powers, not to destroy men, but to save men. Our Lord administration invited men into the kingdom to share in its blessings in a first fruits way now, in advance of the cataclysmic destruction of the wicked at the end of the church age.

Jesus then gave a mini-sermon on John, his greatness, and his importance.

**11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.**

Jesus took the question and answer session as an opportunity to teach his audience, not only about the greatness of John, but about kingdom truth.

Jesus stated that **John was greater than all men**, but in what way? He certainly wasn't a great businessman, engineer, or artist. He wrote nothing, and we only understand a portion of his ministry. Maybe, the best way to think of John's greatness is the privilege he had of actually seeing Messiah the prophets had predicted and the privilege he had of introducing Christ to the Jewish nation. John was a kingdom citizen, the de jure high priest of Israel, and a man of the Spirit. However, John did not have the perspective the average Christian has in looking at Christ from this side of the cross. John did not see or experience the fullness of kingdom blessings provided by Christ as a result of His accomplishments on the cross. In this way, the "least in the kingdom" is greater than John.

**12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.**

What is meant by the "kingdom of heaven suffereth violence?"

The kingdom was indeed present in and through the ministry of Christ, but its powers were limited to the presence and actions of Christ the King. The kingdom had invaded planet Earth quietly and surreptitiously in advance of its full, complete manifestation planned for the climax of history. It was as if the King was disguised and on a secret mission to save as many people as possible before the planned demolition of the planet.

Thus, a door of salvation had opened up. *It was a violent opportunity, and it required a violent decision to experience its powers*; that is, the kingdom was present in the ministry of Christ in a bold and dynamic way; and, it took a bold and dynamic response to enter into it. The loud, resolute, dogged, insistent pleading of blind Bartimaeus comes in to view here (Mark 10:46-48).

# Matthew 12:23-32

## *The Arrival of the Kingdom*

**24 But when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, This *fellow* doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.**

♦ No one, not even the opponents of Christ could deny the divine character of Jesus' miracles. To defeat our Lord politically, the nation's shifty politicians cast aspersions at Christ attributing his powers to Beelzebub, the prince of pagan devils. This was a psy-ops operation designed to demonize Jesus and to discredit him in the eyes of the public.

**25-27 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.**

Possibly, Jesus did not hear the breathy defamations being spread in the rumor mill, but the discerners of the thoughts and intents of hearts knew the lies told about him. Their logic was non sequitur; i.e., it was an inference that could not logically follow from the premises. How can an invading army that attacks itself win the battle? If Satan attacks Satan, how can he prevail. Because the premise was invalid, the conclusion was wrong.

Further, it was hypocritical in that the sons of Pharisees claimed to cast out demons. Following their logic, their children must be casting out demons by the power of Satan. Their specious argument was simply hollow and non sequitur.

**28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.**

**Jesus corrects their logic.** He is an opponent of Satan and a Representative of the kingdom of God. If Satan was being defeated by the salvic powers of Christ, then the

kingdom was present among men. A shift surfaces in our Lord's ministry. Previously, Jesus announced the imminence of the kingdom by saying, "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:19). But here, Jesus says the kingdom of Heaven has come.

**The verb** (ἐφθασεν) is a present, active, aorist indicative; i.e., an action completed in the past. The kingdom announced by the prophets had arrived in some way in and during the ministry of our Lord.

**29-30 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.**

Jesus compares his ministry to a highwayman entering a home to steal property. The house here is the kingdom of darkness. The strong man or owner of the house is Satan, the protector of the property. The "goods" are people. The noble thief is the Lord Jesus who has come to steal men away from the power of Satan and to bring them safely into His kingdom. Those who are against His mission are against Him; i.e., they are dividers practicing the politics of division.

George Eldon Ladd introduced the concept that the kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry acted like **a strategic invasion into the territory of Satan to liberate men from the powers of darkness**. He was correct. Jesus landed on earth to establish a beachhead to defeat Satan and to rescue men from the wrath to come. His life and death were necessary to bring men under the blessings of the age to come. He defeated Satan in the middle of history before the appearance of the dynamic kingdom at the end of the age.

**31-32 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against the Holy Ghost* shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come.**

The term "**world**" is the Greek word *aeon* which should be translated "age." The expression "this world, neither in the world to come" refers to "this age," from Adam to the Parousia which is characterized by sin and death, and "the age to come" which refers to the age of the Spirit which is characterized by life and resurrection (cf. Luke 20:34-36).

Because **blasphemy** has such a harsh sentence, we need to understand the term. The Greek word is translated by two Anglican words, *blapto* meaning “to injure,” and *pheme* meaning “to speak.” The term “blasphemy” refers to injurious, scurrilous speech.

But, we must get to the heart of this grave sin from the context. In the context of this passage, Jesus cast out demons. The people concluded Jesus must be the “son of David.” In order to discredit Christ, the Pharisees declared that Satan was Jesus’ source of power.

Therefore, **blasphemy of the Spirit** is attributing good works to the Devil and accusing Christ of being evil. Blasphemy is not merely a “slip of the tongue,” an ill spoken word, or even an intellectual discussion that entertains harsh criticism of Christianity. It does not include the horrible sins of adultery, murder, theft or even ugly homosexuality. Blasphemy is a settled political position that regards Christ as an imposter, a child of the Devil, and the Spirit that operated with him as evil. Blasphemy, therefore, must be looked at as ultimate rejection of the gospel of Christ, and any attempt to discredit the Lord Jesus Christ in a public forum. The modern depictions by Hollywood to belittle Christ by calling him a homosexual or having illicit lovers is nothing short of blasphemy. If one rejects Him, there is no savior; and, no sacrifice for sin that can cleanse the sinner.

**In conclusion**, this passage is important to the subject of eschatology because it reveals the progress of the kingdom. It was no longer “at hand,” but present and active in and through the ministry of Christ.

Theologically, the kingdom did arrive in Christ, but its powers were limited to His presence. Such a view challenges our understanding of the “present form” of the kingdom, if any; and, its final manifestation at the conclusion of history. But, the answer to this question cannot be found here in this passage.

# Matthew 13

## *Interpreting the Kingdom Parables*

♦ The following interpretation is contrasted with dispensationalism because dispensationalists are devote Bible students and because dispensationalism dominates the minds and hearts of Bible readers. However, that does not mean that dispensationalists have interpreted the parables correctly.

Classical Dispensationalists (CDs) consider the parables as representing “Christendom” and the difficulties of gospel proclamation in this present time. Their theories are built upon the belief that Jesus offered the kingdom to the Jews and then postponed the kingdom until the Millennial Age. Scofield said the parables relate to the sphere of profession and that the mysteries of the kingdom is “Christendom” (Scofield, 1917; Walvoord J., *The Rapture Question*, 1957))

The following presentation is a contrast between a general dispensational understanding of the parables and Ladd’s interpretation of the parables. To the credit of Dwight D. Pentecost, he adopted Ladd’s interpretation of the kingdom in his second great work on eschatology—but in doing so, departed from classical dispensationalism (Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 1974).

**THE SOWER AND THE SEED:** Dispensationalists treat this parable as the contemporary opposition to gospel proclamation in this age. Bill McDonald, former president of Emmaus Bible school, says Jesus coming out of the house represent Israel and that the seaside represents the Gentiles. He calls the parables an “interim form” of the kingdom in this age and perceives the parable as referring to the resistance of gospel here and now (McDonald, 1974).

**Ladd:** The kingdom of God was present in the person and ministry of Jesus, but not with irresistible power. His ministry was characterized by sowing. It worked quietly and secretly among men. It did not force itself on man in an irresistible way nor did it act like a stone grinding an image to powder. In fact, the kingdom of God could be



resisted. Men could reject it. The kingdom will not achieve uniform success. The varying responses were dependent on the varying conditions of men's hearts. Who can resist God? Who can resist His power? Yet, this is what this parable teaches. *The kingdom was present and men could resist it!* As emissaries of the kingdom, therefore, while we must speak with authority, we plead, not demand; persuade, not compel men to accept the rule of God in their lives. To one who knew the OT this was something brand new in theology.

**Mine:** The OT Prophets presented a dynamic, irresistible Stone ( Daniel 2) that would suddenly enter history, disrupt all of society, smash Gentile authorities, and establish God's kingdom on earth forever more. But, God sent his Son to earth in the middle of history, not to smash civil authority and to crush the wicked, but to quietly sow the seed of the Word of God that men might be saved. The parable of the Sowers shows the varying responses of men to Christ's ministry.

**THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES:** Dispensationalists understand this parable to represent two diverse responses among men: true believers (wheat) and professors (unbelievers) in this present dispensation.

**Ladd:** The kingdom of God has entered this age, not to purge out evil among men, but to create "sons of the kingdom" who will enjoy its blessing now. Society will not be disrupted by the presence of the kingdom; in fact, the sons of the evil one and the sons of the kingdom are to live together during this age. Society will be disrupted, but not until the end of the age. At that time there will be a severance of the wicked from the righteous. To one who knew the O.T., this was an amazing announcement. Jewish Bible students understood that when the kingdom arrived, the wicked would be destroyed.

**Mine:** The OT prophets presented the arrival of the kingdom as a force that would crush the wicked. The kingdom was truly present in Christ's ministry in advance of the climatic judgment at the end of history but in a way not explained by the prophets. In his secret mission, Christ was present, not to destroy men, but to create sons of the kingdom through gospel proclamation. The seed here is not the Word of God, but true Christian men who have tasted the regenerative powers of the kingdom in their own soul.

**PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED:** Dispensationalists teach that this kingdom represents the humble beginnings of the church/kingdom and that when it was small, it was pure as a result of persecution; but, with the patronage and protection of the state,

it suffered abnormal growth and became a haunt to false teachers. The birds, to a dispensationalist, represent evil, even Satan himself, that finds a nesting place in church.

Just because the birds represent evil in the first parable does not mean we should interpret them as evil in this parable.

**Ladd:** The kingdom of God was present in the person and ministry of Christ. It seems insignificant, unimportant, and tiny, but from the seed of his work will come the great kingdom as pronounced by the prophet Daniel. Though Jesus' ministry was small, the disciples were not to let its insignificance deceive them. Do not despise it. Though it has humble beginnings, it will one day be the fulfillment of blessing and hope for the entire world as predicted in the OT. Growth is not the point of this parable. This parable is not about the future manifestation of the kingdom. One truth is announced: The kingdom of God which shall one day fill the earth is here among men now in the Person and ministry of Christ, but in a form which was not announced in the OT.

**THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVENED BREAD:** Scofield taught that the kingdom was the meal and that leaven representing corruption invaded "Christendom" through a woman (false teachers) introducing "false doctrine" turning it into an "apostate church." McDonald saw it as warning against corrupting influences in the church, particularly the leaven of evil doctrine. The woman as a false prophetess (Scofield, 1917).

The problem is that dispensationalists identify leaven as evil when in fact the Lord Jesus said the kingdom is like leaven—and, the kingdom is good, not evil!! Though leaven is a symbol of evil in some parts of Scripture, it is not an absolute symbol of evil. Here, leaven is symbol of the kingdom. "Adam" became a symbol of sinful humanity, but the second "Adam" represents Christ, the new holy humanity. A "serpent" is a symbol of evil in Genesis three, but is also a type of the Christ (John 3:14). Leaven in the exodus was not a symbol of evil, but a symbol of haste. Israelites did not have time to leaven bread because they were leaving immediately.

**Ladd:** This parable is not about growth nor is it about corruption introduced into the kingdom. This parable represents no symbolism of evil. Dough swallows up the leaven so that one is hardly aware of its presence. It is unobservable and imperceptible in how it works. It illustrates the truth that the kingdom in Jesus' ministry seemed insignificant and small. The world did not recognize it or perceive it . . . but it was here . . . among

men blessing humanity. The kingdom of God is working among men in Christ, though relatively unknown and hidden, it will one day be universally unchallenged so that no rival exists.

**THE PARABLE OF THE HID TREASURE:** Dispensationalists see the man in this parable as Jesus and the treasure as the godly remnant of believing Jews such as those that existed at the time of Christ. To many dispensationalists this treasure represents believing Jews scattered throughout the world.

**Ladd:** The treasure is not Jews, but the kingdom. The pearl does not mean we can purchase the kingdom. The kingdom of God is extremely valuable, but it is hidden in history. Though it may cost all one has to possess it, it is a small price to pay considering the value it holds and the joy it brings.

**THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL:** Dispensationalists see the pearl as the church formed under the pressures and irritations of persecution.

**Ladd:** Though the kingdom of God is undetected by most, when found, it is worth whatever sacrifice is necessary to obtain it. It is a wise investment, and prudence demands its possession.

**PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET:** Dispensationalists see the “sea” as the nations and the fish as men caught in gospel proclamation.

**Ladd:** The kingdom of God is pictured as a giant sweep designed to catch men. False and true subjects are caught in the great net of gospel proclamation. It is not a pure state. Evil men will find their way into the fellowship of kingdom citizens. A great severance will take place, but not until the end of the age.

**THE PARABLE OF GROWING SEED (Mark 4:26):** Many interpreters see this parable as having to do with the growth of the kingdom or man’s effort to expand the kingdom.

The parable shows the supernatural character of the kingdom: it is of God, not man. Man can sow the seed, but he cannot contribute to the growth of the kingdom. The growth and expansion of the kingdom belongs to God and to God alone!

**Ladd:** The kingdom is like a seed, which has resident power within itself. It grows independent of man’s work and effort, even while men sleep. Man can sow (preach) the kingdom, but only God can make it succeed. Both seedtime and harvest are supernatural works of God.

**Summary definition of the mystery of the kingdom:** The kingdom which will one day transform the entire external order entered this age in advance of its cataclysmic, dynamic, irresistible appearance to bring men and women into the blessing of the Age to Come without transforming the old order.

### **The Supernatural Character of the Presence of the kingdom**

The question is, “What can man do to make the kingdom grow?” or “Can man do anything to further the kingdom of God?” Since verbs define action, we need to look at key verbs associated with the kingdom.

- (is): The kingdom can be near men (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15), and men can be in the kingdom (Matthew 5:19; 8:11; Luke 13:29).
- (come): The kingdom can come (Matthew 6:10; Luke 17:20).
- (arrive): The kingdom can arrive in history (Matthew 12:28).
- (appear): The kingdom can appear be (active) among men (Luke 19:11; Matthew 11:12).
- (give; take): God can give and take the kingdom to and from men (Matthew 21:43), but men cannot take it away from other men. But they can prevent men from entering into it.
- (enter): Men can enter the kingdom, but they cannot build or erect or establish the kingdom (Matthew 5:20; 7:21; Mark 9:47; 10:23).
- (receive, inherit, possess): Men can receive (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17), inherit (Matthew 25:34), and possess the (Mark 5:4), but they cannot build the kingdom.
- (reject): Men can reject the kingdom (Luke 10:11), refuse to enter the kingdom (Matthew 23:13), but they cannot destroy God's kingdom.
- (seek, look): Men can seek the kingdom (Matthew 6:33), and look for the kingdom (Luke 23:51), but men cannot bring it or make it appear.
- (preach): Men can preach the kingdom (Mark 10:7; Luke 10:9) and do things for the kingdom, but only God can give the kingdom to men (Luke 12:32).

**In summary**, the kingdom of Jesus is not of this world; i.e., its origin and organization is from heaven. It is not from man (John 18:36). For this reason, Jesus' disciples did not take up arms and fight to establish the kingdom or to try to overthrow the Roman government, or any government for that matter. God's kingdom is of a higher order

than the world. It is from God. It is related to men and it can work in and through men, but it is never subject to men. It remains the kingdom of God. The kingdom does not come when men receive the kingdom or preach the kingdom. The kingdom came with the presence of Jesus and was inherent in Jesus' mission, bringing men into the Messianic era. The presence of the kingdom requires a human decision, even though it remains a divine act. It can be received and acknowledged, but only God can make it grow.

# Matthew 16:27-28

## *The Son of Man Coming in His Glory*

**Matthew 16:27-28** For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

♦ This passage more than any other touched off the debate on the subject of the kingdom of God (KOG) in the twentieth century. For those who are not familiar with the history of the work done on this subject, the players, and their theological positions, the following is provided.

### Various Theological Perspectives on the Kingdom of God

The subject of the kingdom of God was the major message of Isaiah, John the Baptist, Christ, Philip, Paul, Peter, and John. But, understanding it has been a task of scholarship. Here is a rough sketch of the thinking concerning the kingdom of God.

**Augustine of Hippo** (354-430 AD) identified the kingdom as the church, and the church's mission as Christian duty to transform the world into the kingdom of God.

At first, Augustine asserted a natural interpretation of the kingdom of God, but came to reject the earthly nature of a millennial reign in favor of the view that the kingdom is realized in the hearts of men as the believing soul shares the life of Christ and reigns with Him. He was the first to teach that the Catholic Church was the kingdom of Christ and the City of God.

Following Augustine, the medieval church identified the kingdom with the ecclesiastical system and banished the millennial interpretation from its dogmatic theology (Ladd, 1952, p. 24).

### Figure 1: The kingdom as the Church



**Adolf Von Harnack** (1851-1930) moralized the kingdom and took the subjective approach (old liberal view). He related the kingdom to the human spirit, its relationship to God, and the inner power of the soul. He used Luke 17:21 as his proof text: “behold, the kingdom of God is within<sup>27</sup> you.” The kingdom was a subjective experience. He rejected the eschatology of the gospels and considered them a product of the eschatological imagination of the NT Church. To Harnack, eschatology was the husk and not the kernel of Jesus’ teaching.

**Figure 2: The kingdom within Man**



**Albrecht Ritschl** (1822-1889) along with Adolf von Harnack believed the kingdom of God is not something to be established in the future, but that the kingdom of God “is the unity of humanity organized according to love” (Quoted by Grenz & Olson, p. 55)<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Jesus taught the kingdom of God was “among” the people by virtue of His presence among them. He was not saying the kingdom was in the hearts of men!!

Sin, therefore, is the opposite of the kingdom. Salvation is the full fruition of the kingdom of God activated on earth through love and “the association of men for reciprocal and common action from the motive of love” (quoted by Ladd, 1952,p. 25).

**Ritschl changed the kingdom from the reign of God to an ethical principle.** Ritschlian theology ignored the dynamic intervention of God into history and eschatological aspect of the kingdom in the NT. He took a non-eschatological view of the kingdom. Nevertheless, Ritschl introduced the kingdom as a principle at work in history and laid the foundation for the great social impetus of the church (Ritschl, 1982, p. 12)

**Figure 3: The kingdom as an Ethical Principle**



**Johannes Weiss** (1863-1914) in his pioneer work, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, rejected Ritschl's view and in 1892 formulated his insight as follows:

‘The kingdom of God is in Jesus’ view an absolutely supra-worldly factor which stands in exclusive contrast to this world. . . . The ethico-religious use of this concept in recent theology, which wholly strips it of its original eschatological and apocalyptic sense, is unjustified. It is only seemingly biblical, for it uses the expression in a different sense from Jesus.’<sup>29</sup>

Weiss published a little booklet called *The Preaching of Jesus About the kingdom of God* and viewed Jesus’ kingdom proclamation as something altogether future and apocalyptic, something to appear when Jesus returns. To Weiss, Jesus’ kingdom *kerygma* was purely religious, not ethical; purely a future expectation, and not present in history. To Weiss,

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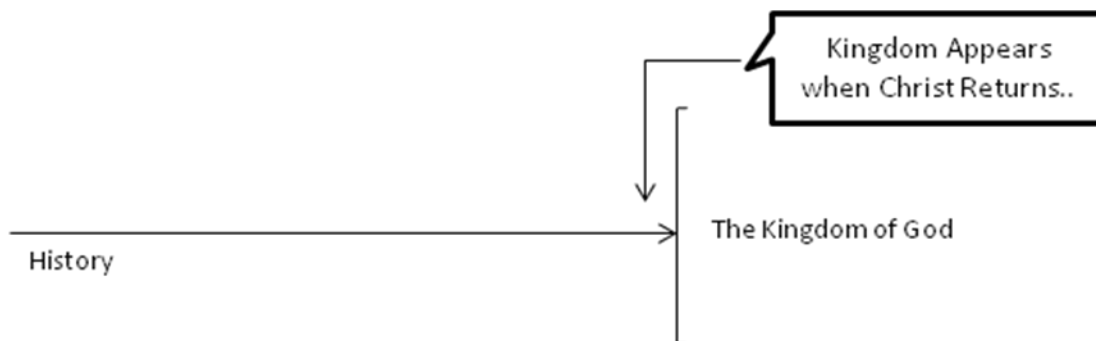
<sup>29</sup> J. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, Ruprecht, 1892, pp. 49f; zweite, Auflage, 1900.



the eschatological content of the gospels were not the husk but the kernel of Jesus' teachings.

To Weiss Jesus believed that he would become the Son of Man, if not in His life time, after his death (Johanne Weiss, 1871, Jesus' Proclamation of the kingdom of God. Trans. R. H. Hiers & D.L. Holland. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.).

**Figure 4: The kingdom as the Goal of History**



**Albert Schweitzer** (1875-1965) took an apocalyptic approach, which is called “consistent eschatology.” He recognized that the liberal view was simply a subjective bias and not the result of sound historical analysis. He agreed with Weiss that eschatological Kingdom teaching was *not the husk, but the kernel* of Jesus’ teaching.

The key verse Schweitzer struggled with was “*There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom*” (Matthew 16:28). Since the eschatological Kingdom did not appear, Schweitzer concluded that Jesus was a deluded fanatic that related the kingdom totally to an apocalyptic event at the end of history where a new heavenly order would take place. In Schweitzer’s eyes, the kingdom is in no sense operational today. To Schweitzer, Jesus was deceived about the kingdom coming in his day and died in despair and disillusionment (Schweitzer, 1954, p. 368-69).

**C. H. Dodd** (1884-1973), the Cambridge scholar, vigorously disagreed with Schweitzer and took an opposite position from him whereby he asserted a position that biblical eschatology was completely realized in Christ. To Dodd, the Christ event was “*realized eschatology*.” He saw the kingdom as “the ‘wholly other’ which entered into time and space in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.” To Dodd, *the KOG was not totally futuristic but a present reality in the ministry of Christ*. Jesus brought in the kingdom. The death,

burial, and resurrection of Christ was an eschatological event. In Jesus, the kingdom was inaugurated.

**Rudolf Bultmann** (1884-1976) took an existential approach to the kingdom and perceived the moment of decision for Christ as an eschatological experience that created authentic existence (Existential Eschatology<sup>30</sup>).

To Bultmann, realized eschatology was an issue of the heart (subjectivism), not a historical reality in the person and ministry of Christ. Bultmann stripped the kingdom of its apocalyptic mythology in favor of human decision and transformation here and now (Bultmann, 1951).

Following Bultmann, others have identified the kingdom as synonymous with heaven . . . or the realm of human heart . . . or the salvation experience . . . some power within man. . . or the pattern for an ideal society . . . or heaven.

**Oscar Cullman** (1922-1999) saw the kingdom as both present and future. Cullman penned his work, Christ and Time (1950), and advocated both elements in his thesis. To Cullman, the Eschaton arrived in the person and ministry of Christ in an already form, but it was not to be completed until the *not-yet* of the *Parousia*. *The phrase “already, not-yet” came from Cullman.* His view became the foundation for “realized eschatology.”

**Classical dispensationalists** (CDs) identify the kingdom as a form of the Davidic Kingdom. That is, John and Jesus proclaimed a geo-political Kingdom that was offered to the Jews, rejected, then postponed. Walvoord retained this view. CDs expressed the kingdom in a central dualism: the kingdom of Heaven (the Davidic, earthly rule), and the kingdom of God (Blaising & Block, 1993) – a deeply Jewish verisimilitude.

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<sup>30</sup> Existentialism was credited to Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Christian man by training and faith, and a Danish intellectual. In studying existentialism, we need to understand its two states: Early existentialism was theistic and involved the pursuit of God. It is positive and productive. Later existentialism was atheistic and involved the pursuit of radical individualism. It is negative and destructive. Because Kierkegaard was grieved by the complacency of the Danish church and the reduction of Christianity to a set of mental propositions advanced by Hegel. Kierkegaard revolted against religious systems. He wrestled with the question of epistemology and ethics. How does a man know what he knows, and why does he adopt or not adopt a certain standard of ethics during his journey on earth? He objected to Hegel’s dialectic because Hegel made truth impersonal. Truth is not attained by thinking passionately, stated Kierkegaard. Truth is subjective, not just objective. Truth must be experienced to be true.

**C. I. Scofield** (1909, 1917) saw the kingdom today as a mystery, a form of corrupted Christendom. The kingdom of Heaven was leavened; i.e., the leaven represented the infiltration of evil into the imperfect church (Scofield, 1917, p. 1015).

**John Walvoord** spoke of the kingdom today as a “mystery form” (the rule of Christ in the church today). He used Scofield’s terminology, but defined it differently. Walvoord insisted on a distinction between the millennium and the eternal state. To Walvoord, all OT promises relate to the earthly millennium. Walvoord saw different Kingdoms, while PDs see one eschatological Kingdom with different aspects. (Blaising & Block, 1993)

Theologically, **Scofield and Lewis Sperry Chafer and John Walvoord** perceived the kingdom of Heaven as a term used exclusively in Matthew by Jesus to refer to the establishment of the Davidic Kingdom on earth with a sphere of profession in it. The problem with CDs is that they multiplied Kingdoms. In these varying views, there was a Theocratic Kingdom, a Davidic Kingdom, a Mediatorial Kingdom, a Spiritual Kingdom, and a Universal Kingdom (Walvoord, 1959).

#### **Figure 5: Classical Dispensationalism**



**Revised dispensationalists** (RDs) sought a way to speak of a spiritual Kingdom in this dispensation. McClain did not believe in a Mediatorial Kingdom today. Ryrie dropped Scofield’s terminology and spoke of the Davidic Kingdom. Dwight Pentecost saw 10 successive stages of the kingdom from creation to the millennium. He understood there to be a presence of God’s Theocratic Kingdom today and that the church is an aspect of it.

Further, the RDs advanced the *postponement theory*; i.e., that Jesus offered the Jews the kingdom; that because the Jews rejected Jesus’ offer, He postponed the kingdom. The church became an intercalation, a giant parenthesis in God’s prophetic program. RDs advanced the theory that God main prophetic program involved Israel—that Israel

would be reinstated as God's people, and that their history would consummate around a global, anti-Semitic, political outrage (Ryrie, 1965; Pentecost, 1958)

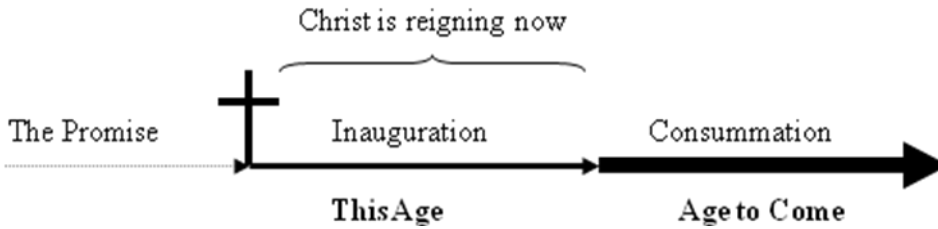
Note this is true Replacement Theology – the belief that alleged Abrahamic Jews will replace God's Church and do in seven years what the Church could not do in two-thousand years with the Spirit. To this student of Scripture, this position is sheer nonsense.

**Progressive Dispensationalists** (PDs) see one kingdom with both spiritual and political aspects in contrast to the CDs and RDs who saw multiple variations of the kingdom. PDs see the kingdom as inaugurated with Christ's ascension; that He is now reigning as Christ and Lord from His highly exalted position at the right hand of the Father. Ryrie (1995), however, chides PDs for not defining the kingdom and for blurring various Kingdoms in the Bible. CDs do not (Blaising & Block, 1993) (Ladd, 1952).

**Preterists, a segment of eschatologists that believe all prophetic portions of Parousia prediction were fulfilled in NT times**, also wrestled with the same question asked by Schweitzer and concluded that Christ was not deceived but that He did return in power as the ascended Lord to judge Israel as predicted in Matthew 24. To the preterists, Jesus acted to judge Israel and to retire the nation as God's principle agent of proclamation in 70 A.D.. There are two types of preterists: (A) consistent preterist which see all return promises in the church epistles and the Book of Revelation as having been fulfilled by 70 AD, and (B) a partial preterist which see Matthew 24 as fulfilled in 70 AD while holding to the traditional view that the church epistles hold to a future coming of Christ that will start the clock toward the consummation of history (Bray, 1996).

**Reformed Covenant Theology** contains premillennial, amillennial, and postmillennial positions. Covenant theologians agree that Christ will return as He promised and that, when He does, He will bring in the fullness of the kingdom. Nevertheless, in contrast to revised dispensationalists, that is not their emphasis. However, unlike dispensationalists, *covenant theologians proclaim the rule of Christ now!* They focus on the belief that the kingdom has already arrived. Charles Hodge is representative of this view.

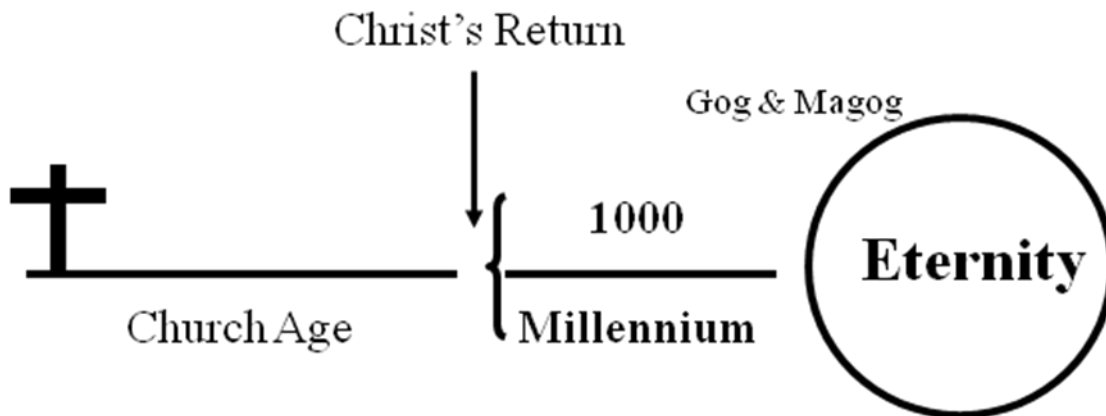
#### **Figure 6: Covenant View of the kingdom**



## Contemporary Eschatological Positions

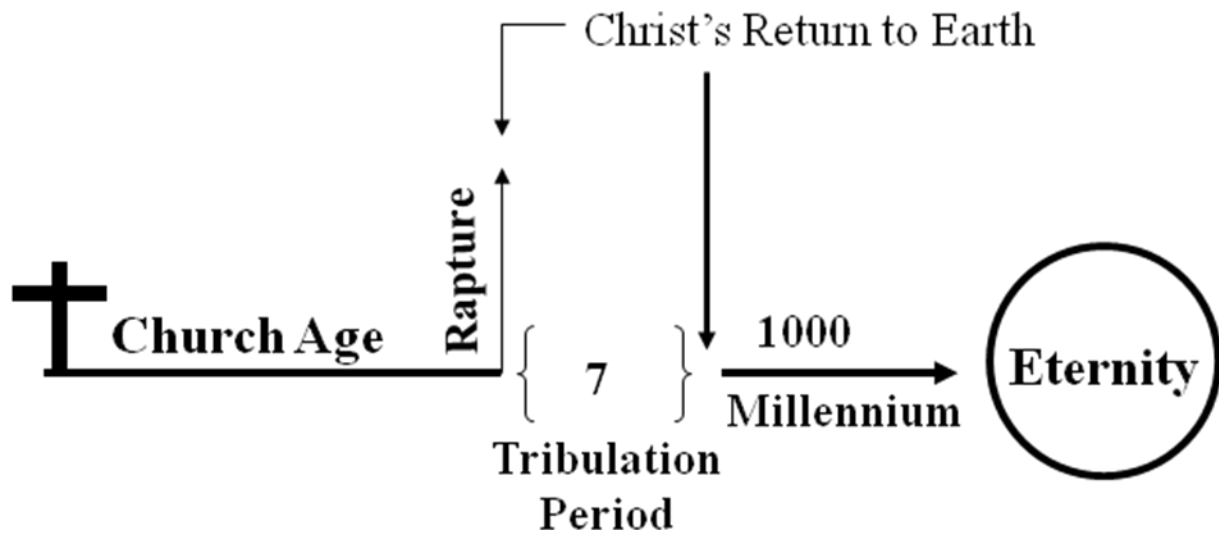
### Premillennialism

**Figure 7: Premillennial eschatology**



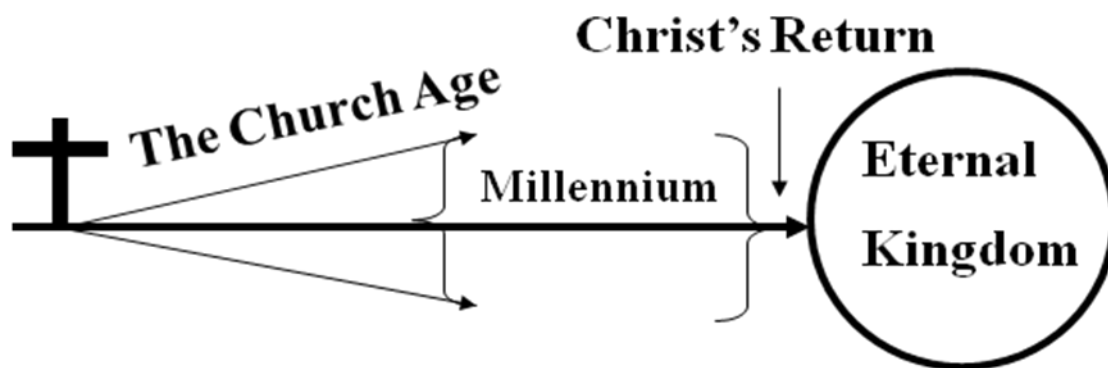
### Dispensationalism

**Figure 8: Dispensational eschatology**



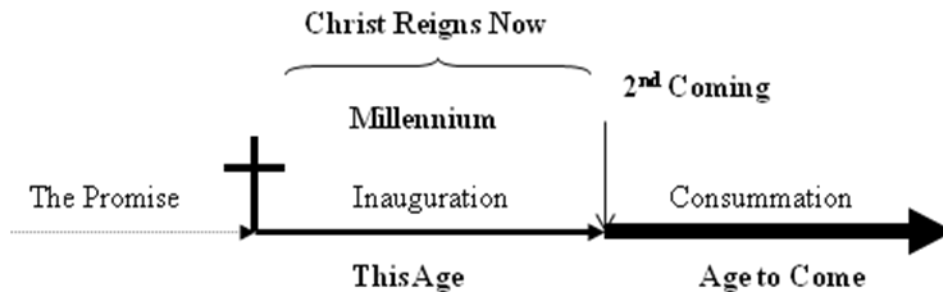
## Postmillennialism

Figure 9: Postmillennial eschatology



## Amillennialism

Figure 10: Amillennial Eschatology



Source: Stockton, B.R., unpublished seminary lecture notes (2005, 2012), The Gospel of the kingdom of God p 19-25.

### Comments on Matthew 16:27-28

**Matthew 16:27-28 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.**

The presupposition of this work is that the Bible is an accurate, inspired work of God and that Jesus was correct in all his statements of faith. If there is a conflict in our minds, then we must make more observations about the text and the context and rethink the issues. And, this is the case here.

The enigma of Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:27-28 cannot be solved exegetically. It must be resolved theologically bringing a century of kingdom studies to bear on this passage.

1. This passage has been the springboard for all discussion on the subject of the kingdom in the past one-hundred and fifty years. How one defines the expressions "Son of Man," "glory," "kingdom," and "coming" determines how one seeks to resolve the problem this text presents to Bible students.
2. This was a troubling verse to Albert Schweitzer who concluded in his own mind that Jesus preached the arrival of the full manifestation of the dynamic arrival of the disruptive, irreversible, apocalyptic kingdom of Daniel and the prophets in his life time. Because the apocalyptic kingdom did not appear in Jesus' life time, Schweitzer concluded that Jesus was a deluded fanatic because the nation-crushing, statute-smashing kingdom of Daniel did not appear in Jesus' life time.

3. To the Christian mind that believes that Jesus is the Son of God and the Truth-teller, we must conclude tongue-in-cheek, if Schweitzer's assertion is correct, *then some disciples that stood with Christ then must still be alive now . . .* because Jesus said "some standing here" shall not taste death "till they see" *the full manifestation of the dynamic arrival of the disruptive, irreversible, apocalyptic kingdom of Daniel and the prophets.*
4. To dispensationalists and others who accept Schweitzer's premise that the kingdom here is the literal, physical manifestation of the apocalyptic kingdom, the problem is resolved by the context of Jesus' transfiguration wherein He was briefly adorned with His eternal glory talking to Moses and Elijah in the presence of James, Peter, and John. Because these privileged men saw the glory of Christ, these interpreters conclude that *Jesus word about the Son of man coming in the glory of the Father was honestly fulfilled.* This is certainly a possibility and it is appealing to the conservative mind.

The problem, however, is that it seems strange and a bit dramatic for Jesus to say that some *would not taste death* before they saw Christ coming in the glory of his kingdom, as if some of his disciples would die within the six-day time frame before the display of kingdom power in the transfiguration of our Lord.

5. Others have tried to resolve the problem about Jesus' prediction by saying his prediction was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Son of Man came to destroy Jerusalem. The expression "will repay each person according to what he has done" strengthens this conclusion. Bray (page 17, 18) says the promise of seeing his "coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28, Mt. 91) refers not to the transfiguration, but to his arrival to judge Jerusalem in 70 AD. This view has some appeal since the text in Matthew 24 is about the destruction of Jerusalem and since it references "the sign of the Son of Man . . . coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

But, this view is also encumbered with difficulties. First, most of the disciples were dead except John when Jerusalem was destroyed. Second, while Jerusalem was crushed by the apocalyptic Son of Man, it is difficult to see Jerusalem's destruction as the full manifestation of the dynamic arrival of the disruptive, irreversible, apocalyptic kingdom of Daniel and the prophets.

6. The answer, however, could lie within the thinking of Dodd, Cullman, and George E. Ladd who saw a *now and not-yet* aspect of the kingdom. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote:



It is a kingdom which is to come, yes. But it is also a kingdom which has come. 'The kingdom of God is among you' and 'within you'; the kingdom of God is in every true Christian. He reigns in the Church when she acknowledges Him truly. The kingdom has come, the kingdom is coming, the kingdom is yet to come. Now we must always bear that in mind. Whenever Christ is enthroned as King, the kingdom of God is come, so that, while we cannot say that He is ruling over all in the world at the present time, He is certainly ruling in that way in the hearts and lives of all His people. ( D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959-1960, reprinted 1997), p. 16.)

7. Beginning with Herman Ridderbos and George Ladd, these theologians embrace a *now and not-yet* approach to the kingdom—proposing that the kingdom of God arrived in an inaugural form, but has *not-yet* fully been consummated, and will not be until Christ's second coming. *This already/not-yet* approach has drawn proponents from dispensational and historic premillennial reformed camps, so much so that Richard Gaffin observed that it "has now virtually reached the status of consensus."
8. This position is well represented by New Testament commentators such as D.A. Carson and progressive dispensationalists such as Craig Blaising, Darryl Bock E and Robert Saucy (Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962); George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, revised, Donald Hagner, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993, reprinted 1997; Richard Gaffin, "A Cessationist View" in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, Wayne A. Grudem, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p. 29.).
9. Still another way to view this perplexing passage is to interpret Jesus' prediction as a reference to His kingly triumph over the grave, His ascension into heaven at the right hand of the Father, and the manifestation of his power in the rapid multiplication of kingdom citizens among the Jews and especially among the Gentiles in the first century. Certainly, the statement of Stephen strengthens this view.

Acts 7:55-56 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the **glory** of God, and Jesus standing on the right

hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

10. Definitions come into play here. How one defines the "kingdom" and "coming" and "glory" is critical here. If one defines the kingdom narrowly as the full manifestation of the apocalyptic aspects of the kingdom, then one will end up with a conclusion similar to Schweitzer; but, if one interprets the kingdom more broadly as the "rule of God" in Christ, then interpretive solutions begin to emerge.

Further, it would be an error to conclude that every time the word "coming" is used in Scripture that it refers to the Parousia. But, it is difficult not to conclude this is what Jesus is talking about in verse 27. The Son of Man will come, and at his arrival, the wicked will be judged. However, our Lord's statement in verse 28 may not refer to the Parousia, but to his inaugurated kingdom and His rule now in the Christian age at the right hand of the Father (1 Corinthians 15:25).

The term "glory" could refer to the glory of his Parousia, but John is quick to capitalize on this term saying the disciples "beheld his glory" while he was still alive (John 1:14, 18). Certainly "glory" includes our Lord's presence, resurrection, ascension, and reign at the right hand of the Father though its greater reference is to the fullness of His glory at His Parousia (Luke 24:26; Ephesians 3:16; 3:21; Col 1:27; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 1:3; Jude 1:24; Revelation 21:23-24).

# Matthew 21:18-22

## *The Death of Geo-Political Israel*

Matthew 21:18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

20 And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

### Introduction

♦ This dialogue engages the question, “What is the prophetic intent of Jesus’ curse upon the fig tree?”

This passage is important in eschatology because there is a segment of American Christianity that believes that in the last days, God is going to convert 144,000 Jews and they (the Jewish nation) are going to replace the church in God eschatological program. This is a Jewish myth (Titus 1:14) that many among Evangelicals have embraced in the west.

There is no lack of opinions and interpretations of this passage especially since the establishment of the “other Israel” in 1948. Many limit the curse to apply to hypocrisy of every kind. Others see the curse as only applying to the Jews of Jesus’ generation. One article applied the curse to the “other Israel” now in existence in the Middle East. One Messianic pastor went to great lengths to prove the “fig tree” represented the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil and its fruit since the fall of man, and that the fig tree had nothing to do with Jewish Israel.

Modern Zionist Christians go to great lengths to protect their prophetic scheme of the re-establishment of Israel in the last days. Admittedly, there is much theological property at stake here, and it is difficult not to let our biases, prejudices, and preferences rule the interpretation.

The curse on the fig tree was a lesson on Jesus' curse on Jewish Israel that resulted in the death of the nation.

### **Observations from the Context**

1. The cursing of the fig tree happened on Monday the day after Palm Sunday in the final week of Christ's life and ministry on earth. This is not without significance as Christ did not have time to waste or sidetracks to explore. This account is part of the vital message Christ had for the nation of Israel in his final hour.
2. It was Passover (March / April) and fig trees had not yet blossomed. Mark noted, "He found nothing but leaves for it was not the season of figs" (11:13). Fig trees do not produce fruit until late May or June. Apparently, this tree was near a public road on the north side of the Mount of Olives. Protected from harsh weather, the tree began to sprout its leaves in advance of the normal cycle of figs.
3. This is the only account of Jesus using his power destructively. In all of Jesus' ministry, He used his power to heal. But, in this event, He used his gift to wither a natural, biological plant; that is, this story is unique and must, therefore, have an important, quintessential application.
4. The whole action by Christ is symbolic. Our Lord does not hate fig trees and the lessons here are not botanical. The treatment of this physical inanimate object (the barren fig tree) seeks to communicate a single, higher truth—the death of a nation. The real tree is not a moral agent, but it depicts the calamitous fate of the moral beings it represents.
5. The Jews would be familiar with the fact that God called their nation a fig tree in Hosea 9:10 and Micah 7:1.
6. Traditionally, the "fig tree" has been interpreted as geo-political Israel.

7. **Gill** says, "This tree was an emblem of the Jews."
8. **The Pulpit Commentary** identifies the tree as Israel: "Other nations were unproductive, for their time had not come; but for Israel the season had arrived; she ought to have been the first to accept the Messiah, to unite the new with the old fruit, to pass from the Law to the gospel, and to learn and practise the lesson of faith."
9. Further, the same source identifies the tree as the "Jewish Church." While Israel was hypocritical, there is no justification to explain the fruitless fig tree as representing a curse upon all hypocrites. Yes, hypocrites are cursed, but this is not the main lesson here. Furthermore, while the poisonous tree in the garden brought a curse upon Adam's race, there is no valid reason to inject into this account an interpretation that Jesus is cursing the curse of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The context does not merit such a manipulative annotation.
10. The context demands that Christian men interpret the curse of the fig tree as a curse upon unbelieving Israel, the Jews, and Judaism. This was Monday, the day after Jesus entered Jerusalem to cleanse the temple. The nation boasted of having a special relationship to God. It had the fig leaves of profession, but lacked the fruit of their confession.
11. The "you" in verse thirteen are those who made the temple a "robber's hideout" (21:13); that is, the "chief priests" and "scribes" who were indignant that our Lord did not rebuke the people for their *hallel* of Him as the "Son of David" (21:9,15, 16).
12. The cursing of the fig tree is in the context of judgment. Our Lord confronted the nation's leaders. In cleansing the temple, He drove the bankers out of His Father's House (21:12ff). He refused to answer the chief priests' questions about His authority (21:23-27); identified them as the disobedient sons (21:28-32); as vine growers that beat and killed God's servants, and who eventually assassinated His Son (21:33-40).
13. Our Lord called them "**wretches**" with a wretched end (21:41); "**builders**" who rejected the "**chief cornerstone**" (21:42); a people from whom the kingdom of God would be taken and given to another (not Jews) producing fruit (21:43); and persons on whom the Stone will fall and break into "dust" (21:45). Chapter 22 and 23 and 24 continue Jesus prediction of judgment coming on Jerusalem's lawyer-leaders which

would culminate in a tribulation not seen since the beginning of the world — the utter destruction of Jerusalem, Palestine, and the Jewish nation (24:21).

14. The cursing of the fig tree is an action parable designed to signify the curse that rested upon the unbelieving nation.
15. The physical, tangible curse upon the fruitless tree illustrated to the disciples one grand truth: The curse that the LORD God pronounced on disobedient Israel in Deuteronomy twenty-eight would once-for-all come upon the nation. There was no remedy. It is utter ruin. The curse was lethal, terminal, and final. Geo-political Israel as an instrument of service had come to end. Never again would the Jewish nation be the people of God or bear fruit for God. The nation was destined for destruction. Jerusalem would be sacked and burned. Even the stones in the temple would be “torn down” (24:2). Never again would God use the nation as an instrument of God . . . yes, including the modern “other” Israel (1948).
16. In 70 AD, Titus and his army invaded Palestine, surrounded Jerusalem, destroyed surrounding cities, cut down the trees, crucified thousands of Jews, destroyed the capital city, and tore down the temple. Jerusalem lay in ruins as an archaeological site.
17. The context is highly prophetic. Prophecies are either being fulfilled (Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 8:2; Psalm 118:26; Isaiah 56:7) or declared (21:19; 21:31; 21:41; 22:1-14; 24:1ff).
18. The disciples, however, were impressed with the power of Jesus and wondered how the tree withered so quickly (21:20). Jesus graced his band of followers with another, separate lesson on the power of faith (21:21-22).

### **Observations on the Text**

19. The cursing of the fig tree was a prophetic action signifying a permanent curse upon the geo-political Israel as a nation; that is, it was a prophetic affliction upon the Jewish race, their land, their language, and their Judaistic religion; that is, upon the four cultural foundations that comprise a nation.
20. The main Greek verb “genatai” is equivalent to the English word “become.” It is an aorist subjective indicating what may or may not take place. The verb behaves like an aorist subjunctive of prohibition forbidding the initiation of an action similar in purpose to an imperative. It is negated by the Greek adverb “ma-kei” (μηκέτι)

meaning “no longer” or “no more.” Thus, the translation should be read, “May it never bear fruit again.”

21. Since the tree represents unbelieving Jewish Israel, Jesus negates the possibility of Jewish Israel ever being an instrument of service to God again.
22. The Greek accusative “tov aiona” (τὸν αἰῶνα.) is correctly translated “for ever” in the KJV; that is, just as the physical fig tree dried up and died for ever, Israel as an instrument for God became a corpse in the graveyard of nations.
23. This answers the question whether the curse was temporal or permanent. The text supports the view that this curse rests permanently on geo-political Israel. Jewish Israel has no hope grounded on promise. The end of the Jewish era had arrived in history. It was the “last days” for the nation.

### **The Fulfillment**

24. On the day Jesus cursed the fig tree, the nation had one foot in the grave. The Judaizers were announced the enemies of God and his gospel (Romans 11:28), severed from Christ, fallen from grace, under a curse (Galatians 3:10; 5:1-4), noted as “contrary to all men” (1 Thessalonians 2:15), and identified as members of the Synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9, 3:9). In 70 AD, the Lord destroyed Jerusalem wherein Israel was laid in the cemetery of empires
25. Within weeks of Jesus’ curse on the fig tree, a new nation was created at the Feast of Pentecost. These “born-again” people were entrusted with the message of the kingdom of God. Gentiles soon joined the Messianic Community. The church became the trustees of revelation and the mysteries of Christ (Ephesians 3:1-12). It even inherited Israel’s sacred symbols and was called God’s “candlestick” (Revelation 1:20). The church became the People of God (1 Peter 2:9-10), a new Israel, or spiritual nation (Ephesians 2:12ff; Galatians 6:16). The church militant and church triumphant is called “Mount Zion,” the “city of the living God” and “Heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22) while unbelieving Jews are severed from Christ forever (Hebrews 12:25-29).
26. After Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., surviving Jews assimilated among the nations and lost their Hebrew identity. Today, there are no known Jews that can trace their ancestry back to Abraham. Modern day so-called “Jews” are Ashkenazim

(Genesis 10:3) germane to the Khazarian Empire (800-1000 AD) without any Semitic blood in them. Thus, the curse on the fig tree was complete.

## **Conclusion**

27. The cursing of the fig tree is a prophetic announcement that Christ was finished with the nation. His work with Israel as nation concluded. Never again would geo-political Israel be an instrument for holy service. The judgment was terminal, final, and irreversible.

28. Furthermore, Jesus prophesied that service for the kingdom of God would be taken away from the Jews and given to another people who would produce the fruits of righteousness.

Matthew 21:43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

29. However, the curse is not as bad as it sounds. The curse is not upon any one Jew in particular. Many people of Hebrew descent found their way into the kingdom of God; e.g. Paul, Timothy, Luke, and the first century Jewish believers. The death of Israel gave birth to Christ's glorious church. And, the door of salvation is still open for all men who will receive Christ for Who He claimed to be.

30. The wilting of the fig tree is a prophetic statement that any Christian man who is looking for some kind of national Jewish revival that will replace the church is a false expectation; that is, modern Christian Zionists error in teaching the Jews are the people of God and that the "other Israel" is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Nowhere in the New Testament does God offer a hope for a geo-political resurrection of national Israel. If so, where?

31. The main lesson in the cursed tree is about judgment. Sweet Jesus is also Judge Jesus. This was the day that forensic power leaked from the bench as an illustration of His judicial power. After all, God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ (Romans 2:16). And, on this day, the disciples gained sapient knowledge about God's terminal judgment on their wicked-Christ rejecting nation.

32. Any belief that the modern day "other Israel" in the Middle East is "the people of Gold" or will somehow morph into an instrument of God is an absurdity, a fantasy, a Jewish-Evangelical myth. Such expectation is prophetic gibberish, religious hooey,



and a Zionist fable (Titus 1:14). True Christians (among Jews and Gentiles) are and will remain the people of God until the rapture of the church.

1 Peter 2:9-10 But ye (Christians) are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a **people**, but **are now** **the people of God**: which had not obtained mercy, but **now** have obtained mercy.

Any prophetic scheme involving a revived Israel in the Holy Land is a delusion, a fiction, a fantasy, and an illusion in religious minds.

# Matthew 24:1-35

## The Issues

♦ Historically, Matthew twenty-four was understood to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. But, in recent times, the chapter has been used to predict the second coming of Christ to the exclusion of its historical context and direct references to the temple. A doomsday mentality fills the air waves.

Every time something awful happens in the news, futurists announce that the “birth pains” are upon us. Many Christians, believing the end is near, head for the mountains. Randy Weaver and the horrible events of Ruby Ridge (1992) comes to mind.

The doomsday prophets take the entire passage as applying to some proposed tribulation period before the second coming of Christ. They interpret the entire passage futuristically. No doubt the savage Zionist takeover of Palestine in 1948 has fueled the futurist interpretation. The student would do well to understand Zionism, the Ashkenazi origin of modern "Jews, who are not" and their political ambitions. Modern claims by Zionists in Palestine is no different than Chinese Moslems claiming they have a right to occupy Mecca.

The preterists, on the other hand, reacted to the futurists and argue the entire passage applies to the events of 70 AD. Partial preterists find a middle road and assert that it teaches both. Historists who are not committed to a particular eschatology interpret the passage in light of destruction of Jerusalem in the first century.

## Background

Daniel promised seventy weeks to complete the will of God for national Israel and to end their lawlessness and rebellion against Him. When Christ came, the Jews rejected their Messiah. Forthwith, Jesus predicted the destruction of the nation confirming God's answer to Daniel.

Matthew 24, therefore, is about the destruction of Jerusalem as predicted by Daniel and explained by Christ. However, this interpretation does not nullify other promises

regarding the return of Christ. Rather, the ruination of Jerusalem by Titus provides proof of claim that our Lord's prediction was true and correct.

Because apostate Israel rebelled against God's law-order, the LORD promised to destroy his unbelieving people in Isaiah 65: 1, 3, 12, 13, 15.

In Matthew 21:33-43, our Lord ordered, "Destroy those wicked men (husbandmen or Jews)". He stated the kingdom of God will be taken away from "you." The "you" refers to "the builders" (v. 42), "the wretches" (v. 41), and "the tenants" (v. 40).

The "ax laid a the tree" (Luke 3:9) is the destruction of Jerusalem. Our Lord said the "kingdom of God" will be taken from you (the Jews) and given to another nation (true believers) that will produce fruit (1 Peter 2:9). We know now that stewardship of the kingdom Gospel was taken away from unbelieving, Christ-rejecting Jews and given to the church, the true candlestick, composed of believers from among the nations.

In Matthew 22:7 we have an illustration of the king sending his army to **destroy those "murderers"** and **"burn their city."** We now know the king is King Jesus; the murderers were the rebel Jews during the Jewish War; and, the "city" was Jerusalem.

In Matthew 23, seven woes are pronounced against Israel's leaders. Jesus promised consummate judgment on the misdeeds of Jewish leaders from Abel to Zechariah, and that this judgment would come **upon "this generation"** (23:35), a reference to the Jews who rejected Christ circa 30-70 AD.

In Matthew 23:38, Jesus said, "Behold your house (nation) is left to you desolate." The word "desolate" is *eremos* meaning "wilderness" or "desert" or "desolation." However, it is a textual variant. Aland gives it a B rating. Copyists might have been influenced by Jeremiah 22:5 to include "desolate."

The verb, "*aphiemi*" (pres., pass., ind.) means to "forsake," "let alone," or "leave" meaning "your house is forsaken." The word "house" could either refer to the nation, Jerusalem, or the temple.

Books have been written on Matthew 24, and it is not necessary to write another one. The following commentary, however, is a brief, crisp explanation of the interpretive issues explaining why Matthew 24 should be interpreted historically rather than futuristically. The following explanation relies heavily upon John Bray's research (1996),

Matthew 24 Fulfilled and Adam Clarke's Commentary (1810-1826) having no knowledge of dispensationalism or of the modern state of "Israel."

## *Destruction of the Temple or End of the World?*

### Announcement of the Destruction of Herod's Temple

**25:1-2 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.**

**And:** The “and” (kai) connects chapter 24 to chapter 23.

**Temple:** Jesus predicts the destruction of the third temple (Herod’s temple). Origen and Eusebius said Matthew was the first of the four gospels. Possibly, John did not write about the destruction of Jerusalem because it had already occurred; or, because he saw more clearly than any other that Jesus was the true temple whom the Jews rejected.

**Not one stone:** And Jesus said unto them, “See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” **Jesus announced the destruction of Jewish temple.**

**Left:** The word “left” is the same word as “left” in 23:38.

As Jesus left the temple complex, he informed the disciples that that Herod's temple was going to be demolished. How can it be denied that Jesus was referring to anything but the Herodian temple? Christ was not talking about some presumptive temple two-thousands years removed from the time of the disciples, but the temple stones still standing at that hour. The announcement that that their beloved temple was scheduled for demolition must have sent shivers up and down the spine of the disciples that day.

Furthermore, if you believe the temple that Jesus was discussing was anything but Herod's temple, you must also believe that Jesus intentionally mislead the disciples by referring to an alleged event two-thousand years plus removed from them.

**2-3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?**

Stunned by the Lord's announcement, the disciples wanted to know the details. Some think two questions were asked, “(a) When shall the temple be destroyed, and (b) what shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age. However, only one question was on their minds: When will the temple be destroyed? Quite possibly, the disciples *wrongly connected* the destruction of the temple with the end of the world or they might have been thinking about the end of the Jewish age<sup>31</sup>.

Mark and Luke only record the question regarding the timing of the destruction of the temple. There is no reference to the sign of His coming by the other synoptic authors (cf. Mark 13:1ff; Luke 21:10ff).

**Age:** The word “**age**” (aeon) usually refers to the end of “this present evil age,” the time from Adam till the establishment of God's kingdom (13:38-40). The disciples were thinking that the destruction of the temple marked the end of the Jewish age . . . not the end of the world.

**When:** The key question is “**when**” (pote) shall (future tense) these things happen?

**Coming**<sup>32</sup>: The word “coming” could mean “presence” or “arrival” and could be unassociated with *our modern concept* of the second coming. But, the disciples knew nothing of a second coming at this time. Bray (page 17, 18) says the promise of seeing his “coming in his kingdom” (Matthew 16:28, Mt. 91) refers not to the transfiguration, but to his arrival-return to judge Jerusalem in 70 AD. Others teach his coming refers to the transfiguration. Bray denies this and says that the reference that some should not

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<sup>31</sup> Jesus taught His disciples that there were two ages: “This age” which is this evil age, and the “Age to Come” which is the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:38-40). It is not certain, however, how much of this they really grasped. It is not clear whether the disciples were connecting the destruction of the temple with the end of the world, the end of this evil age, or the end of the Jewish age. It is clear, however, that Jesus is talking about one main subject: the destruction of the temple and the nation of Israel as the disciples knew it.

<sup>32</sup> The word “coming” does not always refer to Jesus’ second advent. Scripture teaches that that Christ comes to help his people at different times and in different ways. It is possible to believe that Jesus comes to judge or to save and still hold to a distinct coming we know as the 2nd Coming.

die “within six days” as referring to the transfiguration appears not to fit. Therefore, Bray interprets 16:28 as referring to his coming in 70 AD to destroy the nation.

It is quite possible we error in crediting the disciples with having a perfected theology of a second coming of our Lord. These men were growing theologians, not masters of theology at the time of this discourse. They did not even understand that Christ was going to die, much less return a second time like modern Christians associate with the Parousia. To the disciples, the destruction of the temple would terminate the present age and inaugurate the Age to Come or the Messianic Age (Luke 20:33-36). Thus, we attribute too much knowledge to the disciples. Remember, the disciples had not yet read The Late Great Planet Earth, nor were they influenced by modern eschatological schemes.

**Josephus** (1980, Complete Works of Flavius, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI. v.1, p. 473) records Titus giving orders to dig up the temple to the foundations. Its destruction was complete. This would have fulfilled Micah 3:12, “Jerusalem shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become a heap.” Luke 19:43-44 says, “they shall not leave one stone upon another.”

**F.F. Bruce** states the Romans captured Fortress Antonio on July 24. Twelve days later the temple sacrifice ceased. On August 27 the temple gates were burned. The temple was destroyed on September 8. By September 26, the whole city was in the hands of Titus (cited by Bray, p. 15).

### **Birth Pains Preceding the Destruction of the Temple**

**4-5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.**

**Them:** This refers to Jesus’ twelve disciples, not to Christians of our day.

**Deceive you:** This does not refer to our own time. It refers to the Jewish deceivers existing prior to 70 AD.

Consider the following examples of imposters in the first century : Simon (Acts 8:9-10), Simon Magnus (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), Dositheus the Samaritan, Theudas (Josephus, Eusebius, Gamaliel — Acts 5:36), Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), the Judaizers (Galatians 5; Philippians 3:1-4) and the “antichrists” of 1 John 2:18.

**6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.**

Again, "**rumors of wars**" does not refer to political forecasts during our time. It refers to the events prior to 70 AD. Rome ruled the Mediterranean, and rumors were always grinding their way through the chatter mill about a rebellion where Rome would declare martial law to squash the revolt militarily.

Consider the following examples of wars prior to 70 AD (Josephus): In one eighteen month period, Rome had four different emperors: Nero, Galba, Otho and Vitellius. In Alexandria, 50,000 Jews were slaughtered. In Damascus, 10,000 lost their lives. Each came to a violent death. An uprising in Alexandria resulted in the slaughter of 50,000 Jews. In Damascus 10,000 Jews were reported to have been massacred. Another 50,000 were slain in Selucia. In the battle of Caesarea between the Syrians and the Jews, 20,000 Jews died and many villages were divided. Emperor Caligula ordered his statue to be erected in the Jerusalem Temple. Though the Jews did not permit it, they feared retribution from Rome if they resisted (Josephus: Bray, p. 28).

**7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.**

**Nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom** refers to political clashes, disputes, revolts, and even war.

**Famines:** The most famous famine was the famine during the life of Josephus. Eusebius mentioned the great famine in Judah which forced the Jews to buy corn from Egypt (p. 85). In the first year of Claudius, a famine broke out in Italy. Tacitus mentions the famine in the 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> year of Claudius. Renan reported a famine in Rome in 68 AD under Nero (p. 194, Bray, p. 29).

**Pestilence:** In AD 40, Jews suffered in Babylon. In AD 60, Rome experienced death from an outbreak of disease. Josephus mentioned a pestilence in Niger (Newton, p. 378; Bray p. 29).

**Earthquakes:** In the generation of the Apostles, before 70 AD, great earthquakes were recorded in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, Campania, Rome, Judea, as well as a particularly bad one in Pompeii in 63 AD. Robert Hooke in his Discourses on Earthquakes wrote that over 700 major natural catastrophes had taken place in one century alone (see Bray, p. 29).

Modern history shows us that famine is still with us today. There was the great famine of Northwest China from 1928 to 1929 where over three million died. In the USSR from 1932 to 1934 over five million died from a famine. Again China suffered a famine in 1943 which killed nearly eight million people. The great Nigerian famine which lasted from 1967 to 1974 took the lives of nearly three million. With the rise of the science of modern seismology, seismic waves are recorded on a daily basis. Earthquakes are weekly news around the globe. To say that a great famine or earthquakes are a unique sign of the end of the world is both to ignore the history of the world. Further, Jesus said these are "signs." They do not mean the end had come (Matthew 24:6-8).

### **8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.**

**The beginning of sorrows** refers to the destruction of the capital city in 70 AD, not to the troubles during own time. The Jewish sorrows began in the spring of 63 AD over taxation. Hostilities grew until Nero sanctioned a general persecution against Jews. After the Jews stopped paying taxes (65 AD), Nero declared war against Jerusalem in 67 AD.

The beginning of sorrows in 63 AD was nothing to be compared to the crushing blows on Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD. The disciples were not to think the end had come when they heard about the precursory events that plagued the nation prior to its destruction. Most disciples were alive in 63 AD, but by 70 AD all the disciples but John had died.

### **9-10 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.**

The "**you**" here refers to the apostles (Acts 4, 6, 16, 18, 24, 25). James was executed in Acts 12. Peter was arrested almost executed. Paul received five beatings of 39 stripes. Eventually, Peter and Paul were executed under Nero before the destruction of Jerusalem around 67 AD.

The death of John the Baptist was still fresh in the memory of the disciples. The book of Acts reports that persecutions continued against the early church in the time of the Apostles well after the death of our Lord. The leaders of the church were arrested, threatened, and arrested again. Stephen was stoned to death. Saul of Tarsus hunted down Christians to have them jailed and put to death. Herod had James executed by the sword. Eventually, Paul was mobbed, stoned and left for dead. He was arrested on



obviously false charges in Jerusalem, survived plots against his life, twice sent to Rome as a prisoner, and it is believed that he was executed for his faith under Nero. Paul was betrayed by Alexander and Demas (2 Timothy 4). All the Apostles along with many believers experienced tortures and violent deaths during this same time period.

**11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.**

Paul spoke of false prophets and pseudo apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13; 2 Timothy 2:17-18; Acts 13:6). Peter spoke of false teachers (2 Peter 2). Jude records the fight against false teachers and found it necessary to exhort the Christians to contend for the faith (3). But, it is also true, that the spirit of apostasy that was present in Paul's day, will be a pandemic before the return of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

Apostasy is a mark of the end times, but who is qualified to identify its *terminus a quo* in history?

**12-13 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.**

**But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.**

**Iniquity:** The word "**iniquity**" is *anomia* or lawlessness. Because men rebelled against God's law, love experienced an arctic winter. Some men deserted the faith; others corrupted it.

**Endure to the end:** The difficulties at the end would test the faith of everyone in the region. Those that endured these terrible times by obeying Christ without growing cold or apostatizing would be saved from the Roman invasion.

**Shall be saved:** This refers to being safe from execution during the Jewish War at the hands of the Romans during the destruction of Jerusalem. Not one Christian was found in Jerusalem in 70 AD reports Bray (p. 32). Further, the want of compassion by the rebels was nothing short of stunning. The rebel psychopaths killed, starved, tortured, and assassinated more of their own people than did the Romans. These Jewish madmen, even burned the temple granary.

**14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.**

**The gospel of the kingdom** is the gospel message of Messianic salvation. It is the Christian gospel initiated by Peter and expounded by Paul that God's rule has entered

history to defeat man's enemies and to bring men under the blessings of the messianic age in advance of its consummation in history.

**Preached in all the world:** This refers to the gospel proclamation by the disciples during the first century which did go into the entire Roman world during their lifetime (Romans 1:8; 10:18; 16:25-26).

**World:** The word "world" is *oikoumene* meaning *inhabited regions of Roman civilization*. To the Romans, it was the Roman Empire. To the Greeks, it meant the world of 'koine' Greek. To the Jew it meant the Holy Land. Luke 2:1, Luke refers to "all the world" and this refers to the Roman Empire.

### **The Abomination of Desolation**

**15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)**

**Ye:** The word "ye" refers to the twelve disciples.

**Abomination:** The "**abomination of desolation**" does not refer to some supposed antichrist in an alleged future war regarding modern carnal Jerusalem. Daniel 9 is called the "Swamp of Old Testament Criticism" and to insist the passage applies to a distant future generation 2600 years into the future reflects fantastic theological imagination, a reading into the text what is not there. It is an abuse of Daniel 9:24-27. In Daniel nine, the term "abomination" refers to the radical rebellion of Jews against Christ and desecration of law caused by the rebels leading to the reason for the destruction of Jerusalem.

Moreover, the term "**abomination**" must be interpreted in light of Luke 21:20 which is identified as the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem. We must allow Daniel and Luke to rule on this passage and not modern futurist speculators.

Luke 21:20 And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

Interpretive presentation of Daniel 9:27 And he (Christ) shall confirm the covenant (**make a strong, new covenant**) with many for one week and in the midst of the week (**circa 27-34 AD**): he (Christ) shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease (**By virtue of His death**), and for the overspreading (**wings or extremes**) of abominations (**the rejection of Christ and the sacrilege by**

**John, Simon, and Eleazar for control of Jerusalem in 70 AD) he (Christ) shall make it desolate (destruction of Jerusalem), even until the consummation (70 AD), and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (Jewish rebels leading the revolt in 70 AD).**

Further, there is an abomination mentioned by Daniel in chapter eleven and twelve which was fulfilled during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Maccabees 1:59) in 167 AD. This was one attempt to paganize the temple. Further, Jesus cleansed the temple of merchants who desecrated His Father's house in John 2. Many other attempts to profane the temple came through Herod and Romans before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Gessius Flores, short of money, ordered the confiscation of gold from the temple in Jerusalem. Nonplused, the Jewish jokers "passed the hat" for "that poor procurator Florus" (livius.org.). Drunken and corrupt Jews desecrated the temple according to Bray prior to the complete destruction of the temple.

### **The Great Tribulation**

**16-20 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day:**

**Them:** The word “them” refers to the residents of Jerusalem. Some disciples and their converts lived to see this destruction.

**Judaea** refers to a very specific locale—the Judaea the disciples knew and loved. This is very local language which should not be forsaken or spiritualized as a reference to some general, unknown future global tribulation two-thousand years removed from the historical crisis. The near interpretation is always preferred above a distant interpretation as long as there is merit in the context.

Josephus reports that General Cestius first came to Jerusalem with his armies and then retreated (October 15-22 in 66 AD). The destruction of Jerusalem took place during his second siege (Bray, p. 57). His first appearance was the warning for Jews to flee as spoken by Jesus. The church in Jerusalem, believing the words of Jesus, fled to Pella in Peraea in 68 AD (Bray, p. 58). There is a reason to believe not one Christian perished during the Roman siege.

**21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.**

**Great tribulation:** What is the "great tribulation?" Was it some alleged end-time seven-year global tribulation connected with dispensational eschatology or was it the tribulation caused by the Jewish Revolt and Roman vengeance circa 63-72 AD? The latter answer is preferred.

**Then:** The word "**then**" refers to the great tribulation of 70 AD—not to some future tribulation. The adverb "then" (tote') indicates a near connection to the birth pains gripping the nation, not a far, distant prediction. Jesus said this time would be "days of vengeance" (Luke 21:22-23). The tribulation is the madness of Jewish leaders and the Roman siege on Jerusalem. This tribulation is the "wrath" mentioned by Paul to the Thessalonians that would come on the Jews "to the uttermost" (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

Luke says this was the time of fulfillment (21:22); i.e., all prophecies regarding the destruction of Jerusalem in the Old Testament (OT) were fulfilled in 70 AD.

This passage does not refer to a future tribulation, but to the terrible destruction in 70 AD. Nero starting persecuting Jews in 63 AD and Christians in 64 AD. Jews stopped paying taxes and rebelled against Rome in 65 AD. The first stage of war began in October 15-22, AD 66 under Cestius Gallus. Cestius did not wage war in order to win and was forced to retreat in November of that year. The next year Nero sent Vespasian to Judaea to stop the rebellion. It took three years and six months for Jerusalem to fall (August 10, 70 AD - September 8, AD). Much of Judah was ravished before the Romans even reached Jerusalem. Could this refer to the 42 months of Revelation 11:2 where Gentiles tread the outer court? Bray thinks so (Bray, p. 69).

Reading the lengthy, detailed account of the destruction of Jerusalem by Josephus is like reading a blow-by-blow account of some deadly gladiator contest. Thousands perished by sword, famine, disease, assassination, and mercy killing during the Roman siege. Those who tried to escape over the wall were captured by the Romans, stripped naked, and crucified on crosses after taking down the body of a previous victim. Josephus records nearly three million Jews fled to Jerusalem during the Passover and were literally caged in by the Romans. Bodies were piled in the street. The stench was enough to cause asphyxia. Those teenage Jews (90,000) who survived were marched toward Rome and either crucified on the way, sacrificed to the lions, or sold into slavery in Rome. Clement of Alexandria (153 AD), Chrysostom (347 AD), St. Augustine (354 AD),

Abbot Sulpitius Severus (363 AD) all reference the “abomination” as the armies of Rome (Bray, p. 50-52).

**22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.**

**Days shortened:** Josephus said conditions inside the city were so terrible that children took food out of the mouths of fathers, mothers took food from their babies, and wicked men tortured the weak to discover where food was hidden. Torments included driving stakes up their “fundaments” in order to extract truth about provisions. Josephus said no city ever suffered such wickedness and miseries in history. Between April 14<sup>th</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup> a 115,880 corpses were taken out of the city through one gate, not including other gates, or corpses were thrown over the wall (Bray, p. 106).

**The Elect:** The “elect” refers to believers in Christ (Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4).

### **False Messiahs**

**23-26 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.**

**False Christs:** These are different than antichrists. Jesus corrects the thinking of the disciples at this point in his discourse. Some among the twelve might think the destruction of Jerusalem would herald the Messiah’s coming. This could be Jesus’ corrective according to Robert Reymond (1998, p. 1003).

Josephus reported a false prophet in Jerusalem who urged the people to get into the temple area and wait for the Messiah to appear. John (1 John 4:1) said many false Christ were in the world during his day. John Gill reported that Simon, the son of Giora, collected together many thousands in the mountains and desert parts of Judaea (Bray, p. 104).

During the siege, Jews created secret places in the temple and in and around Jerusalem to pray and consult the dead.

### **The Appearance of the Son of Man**

**27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.**

**Lightening cometh out of the east:** This is dramatic, cataclysmic language germane to the genre of apocalyptic literature. It is not literal, but it does communicate dynamic action.

**Son of Man:** The apocalyptic Son of Man takes us back to Daniel 7:13 and the judicial and executive authority given Jesus to exercise dominion and judgment.

**Coming of the Son of Man:** The word *Parousia* may refer to our Lord's presence or arrival, not necessarily His second coming (Bray). Only Matthew uses the word *Parousia* in reference to the events of 70 AD. Mark and Luke do not.

To Bray, Christ can come and not be seen. He came in 70 AD, but was unseen. God spoke of a coming down to judge the Egyptians (Exodus 3:8). Jesus "appeared" to Paul, but Paul's companions never saw the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:17). Paul heard but saw no man (Acts 9:7). Christ promised to come to the seven churches in Revelation. This was not His Parousia, but a special visitation by the risen Christ in session at the right hand of God to assist, aide, reward, or judge His church. And, we pray that our Lord will come to our aid and assistance, now in this life, but by this we are not referring to the Parousia (Revelation 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 9, 10, 11, 20)

Bray (p. 107) interprets the "lightening cometh" as Jesus universal presence versus the localized presence of false messiahs. This is Jesus coming in judgment in 70 AD. However, as lightening announces a storm, Jesus may be comparing His judgment on Jerusalem to that of lightening storm. This language is not literal, rather, it is highly apocalyptic language:

Isaiah 30:27, 30 - Apocalyptic language such as *lightening*, *flaming fire*, and *hailstones* was used by Isaiah.

Zechariah 9:14 - There is an Apocalyptic reference to *lightening*, *a trumpet*, and a *whirlwind* in this passage.

John Gill (1720-1771) says this is not the last judgment, but the Lord's coming in judgment upon the nation of Israel (Bray, p. 110).

Adam Clarke agrees saying this is a reference to the Jerusalem and the "destruction of the Jewish polity.

Lightfoot (1859) says this is Christ taking vengeance on that exceeding wicked nation and is therefore called "coming in glory" (Bray, p. 110).

Reymond has a different slant. He says Jesus now separates the events, the destruction of Jerusalem from his second coming, which the disciples had united in their minds.

**This is the corrective.** He wants the disciples to know the two are not connected.

Jerusalem's destruction will not usher in the Parousia of Christ. His second coming will be more conspicuous.

The context demands this "coming" be separated from the Second Coming where we are told the Lord shall descend from heaven in bodily form to meet the resurrected and the living saints in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

**28 For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.**

Luke puts this statement after the reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:37).

**Carcass:** The word "**carcass**" could be a reference to Jeremiah 7:33-44 signifying *people*, or, it could be a reference to Jeremiah 19:3, 7 which sees the bodies of unbelieving people as meat for the birds. Josephus says that Jerusalem was so full of corpses that soldiers stumbled over rows of corpses in their fighting. Sometimes they were stacked three to four feet high in the streets.

Adam Clarke says the carcass is "The Jewish nation, which was morally and judicially dead."

**Eagles** can be translated *vultures* or birds of prey. The Chaldeans were called "eagles" in Habakkuk 1:6, 8. Cyrus was called a bird of prey in Isaiah 46:10-11. In Hosea 8:1, God is called an eagle coming against the house of the Lord. God called Nebuchadnezzar a servant of destruction (Jeremiah 25:9). John Peter Lange says the eagles are the Roman armies. Albert Barnes Commentary sees the eagles as Roman armies (Bray, p. 115). The Roman symbol on their shields was an eagle. Adam Clarke says the eagles are a reference to the Roman ensigns on the tops of their ensign-staves.

### **The Sign of the Son of Man**

**29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:**

*This is a difficult section for the futurist or partial preterist. The futurist sees this section as referring to the Lord's second coming and the end of the world, but the futurist must deal with the word "immediately."*

If the first part of this passage refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the next part refers to the second coming, then all are disappointed because the Lord did not come after this period.

If verses 1-28 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but verses 29-31 refer to the end of the world, how does the partial preterist or futurist manage the term "immediately"? How?

He automatically inserts 2000 years plus between these two verses. To be consistent, the futurist must insist the whole or part of verses 1-28 refer to an end time tribulation. But, this doesn't fit the disciples' question or the Lord's statement about the destruction of the temple.

Furthermore, the futurists have difficulty with this passage because they interpret these words literally. The futurists contend this passage refers to the second coming of Christ and at that time the stars will collapse or cease to give their light. If they take this literally, there will be no starlight during the millennium in their theology.

The preterist, on the other hand, has no problem with the word "immediately." He believes verses 29-31 refer to our Lord coming in judgment upon the Jews in 70 AD.

*The preterist's problem, on the other hand, is the dynamic language following the word "immediately" which appears to address our Lord's Parousia at the end of history.*

How does a preterist interpret the following section?

**Immediately:** The word "immediately" demonstrates that what follows is closely associated with the previous events. To insert 2000 years between verse 28 and verse 29 is not congruent with the term "immediately." It is non sequitur. The word "immediately" is *eutheos*, a continuance participle, *meaning now, at once, or soon*. It is impossible to insert 2000 years between verse 28 and verse 29 and maintain interpretive integrity.

**Those days:** this refers to the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD by Titus. It is difficult to associate "those days" with a future time if verses 1-28 refer to the events during 70 AD.



Remember, if verses 1-28 do not refer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ but to the destruction of Jerusalem, the phrase “those days” must also refer to the demolition in 70 AD.

**The tribulation** does not refer to some future seven-year tribulation period, but to the “great affliction” during the event of 70 AD.

**Sun, moon, stars:** This is apocalyptic language. Jesus is not being literal here. The sun, moon, and stars would not literally fall out of the sky. Rather, it is hyperbole stressing the dramatic end of the Jewish hope. For the Sun not to shine, and the Moon not to give her light, and the stars to fall refer to the utter collapse of Jewish civilization, which happened in August-September of 70 AD.

**In ancient literature**, hieroglyphics, the terms “sun,” “moon,” and “stars” often represents states, kings, and queens. Jesus is dealing with a political catastrophe, **not** a natural, stellar catastrophe.

**The language of Matthew** is consistent with the language of Psalm 18. God’s deliverance to David was dynamic and cataclysmic. Note the apocalyptic language used to describe God’s work on behalf of him. The psalmist (David) uses symbolic language, not literal language to describe his deliverance by YHWH.

“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. Then **the earth shook and trembled**; the foundations also of **the hills moved** and were shaken, because he was wroth.

There went up **a smoke out of his nostrils**, and **fire out of his mouth** devoured: coals were kindled by it. He **bowed the heavens** also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.”

“He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were **dark waters and thick clouds of the skies**. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The LORD also **thundered in the heavens**, and the Highest gave his voice; **hail stones and coals of fire**. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out **lightnings**, and discomfited them. Then the **channels of waters** were seen, and the **foundations of the world** were

discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.”

The language of Matthew is consistent with Isaiah’s apocalyptic language describing the fall of Babylon (Isaiah 13:9, 10). When Babylon fell, the sun ceased to shine for that nation—not literally, but politically and emotionally.

“Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the **stars of heaven** and the **constellations** thereof shall not give their light: **the sun** shall be darkened in his going forth, and **the moon** shall not cause her light to shine.”

The language of Matthew is consistent with a judgment on Egypt (Ezekiel 32:7, 8).

“And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the **stars** thereof dark; I will cover the **sun** with a cloud, and the **moon** shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord GOD.”

The destruction of the Jews by **Antiochus Epiphanes** is described as casting down some of the host of heaven and the stars to the ground (Daniel 8:19).

**The destruction of Jerusalem** during the time of the Prophet Joel describes God’s judgment in phenomenal terms: darkening of the sun, and turning the moon to blood (Joel 2:30, 31). This is consistent with Matthew’s description of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The judgment on Idumea and Bozrah in Isaiah 34:5-6 uses symbolic language and pictures the mountains melting with their blood.

The identical language is given in Revelation 6:13-14. Revelation 6 is not the end of the world. It comes at the wrong place in the book to be the end of the world, unless one’s believes in parallelism, which futurists do not.

Adam Clarke has the right perspective:

Commentators generally understand this, and what follows, of the end of the world and Christ's coming to judgment: but the word immediately shows that our Lord is not speaking of any distant event,

but of something immediately consequent on calamities already predicted: and that must be the destruction of Jerusalem.

**30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**

**The sign of the Son of Man in heaven** is connected with the destruction of Jerusalem. This is not Jesus' Second Coming or the end of the world, but the terminal judgment on the nation at its collapse. The judgment of Jerusalem is *the sign not* of the Second Coming of Christ, but that Jesus has been glorified as Mediator and sits at the right hand of God in heaven. A literal rendering of the Greek reads, "And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven." *The sign is not Jesus appearing up in the sky, but rather the sign is the smoking ruins of Jerusalem which indicates that the Son of Man is in heaven judging the wicked tenants.* The judgment of Israel is the sign to that nation that Jesus is indeed the Lord and Christ, the ruler over the nations. As the exalted Lord at the right hand of God He is able to bring vengeance upon His enemies.

**Our Lord's allusion to Daniel 7:13** in the second half of this verse makes this interpretation unavoidable: Jesus quotes a passage very familiar to the Jews where the Son of Man is not *descending to earth*, but is, rather, *ascending to the Father to be* "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him..." (Daniel 7:14). He is the One like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days. The imagery of Daniel's vision where the Mediator comes up to God in the clouds of heaven to receive universal authority indicates that the destruction of Jerusalem was near the beginning of His reign and not at the conclusion of it. The temple's destruction in 70 AD was the time when it was clear that the Son of Man, rejected by the leaders of his people, had been vindicated and enthroned at the right hand of God. Having ascended into heaven, our Lord executed His authority to destroy the wicked nation. Jesus told the disciples on the eve of his ascension, "all authority is given unto me" (Matthew 28:18; Romans 1:4; Daniel 7:14; cf. Mark 14:62). This judicial power was demonstrated at the destruction of Jerusalem when Christ crushed apostate Israel.

Bray says the **sign** is the "proof that the Son of man is in heaven" (p. 141). His judgment upon unbelieving Israel in 70 AD is proof that he has appeared before the Ancient of Days to receive his everlasting kingdom (the right to rule). The "sign" *is the destruction*

*of Jerusalem, or to put it another way, the destruction of Jerusalem is proof of claim that the Son of Man reigns in heaven.*

**Then:** The word “**then**” references to the climatic proof that Jesus’ words are being fulfilled—the proof that He is in heaven governing the affairs of men. The word “**heaven**” defines the location of his rule. It does not say “a sign of the Son of Man” will be seen in heaven. *The destruction of Jerusalem is the sign that the Son of Man rules in heaven* (Bray, p. 142). The location is heaven, not the sky. It is not the sign which is in heaven, but the Son of Man who is working from heaven (David Chilton: Bray, p. 143).

**In summary**, the great destruction of Israel, Jerusalem, and its temple was the sign that the Son of Man was enthroned and governing the affairs of the nations from heaven. Jesus said to Caiaphas you shall see the Son of man “sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

The term “**sitting**” refers to his inauguration and session at the right hand of God (Acts 2:32-34).

The term “**coming in the clouds of heaven**” refers to the execution of His rule from heaven. He received power in heaven (Acts 2:38), and Christ exercises it from heaven towards earth. The destruction of Jerusalem is the visible proof of the presence and authority of the Son of Man. This is the end of geo-political Israel; the graveyard for the nation.

The modern Ashkenazi settlement in Palestine and formation of the modern state of "Israel" is **not** even remotely connected to Jewish ancestry of those in our Lord's day. That the modern state of "Israel" has any claim upon that land is a ruse, a lie, a deception, a hoax, a geo-political trick fostered by the Jewish media and gullible Christians.

Some refer to the existence of other signs: Farrar (p. 516: Bray, p. 128) reported from Josephus, Tacitus, and the Talmud about a sign that occurred during Passover, 65 AD:

“a mysterious light had gleamed for three hours at midnight in the Holy of Holies; how the enormous gates of brass, which it required the exertions of twenty men to move, had opened themselves, and could not be closed.” Apparently, the priests heard sounds saying, “Let us depart from here.”

Josephus, Book V tells of the **sign of the sword** that appeared in the sky over Jerusalem a whole year before her destruction:

“ . . . and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariot and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, ‘Let us remove hence.’” (Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, 1:454 (6.5.3); Quoted by Sproul, The Last Days According to Jesus, p. 124.);.

**Tribes:** The word “tribes” does not refer to the nations at some future judgment to our time, but to Israel’s **twelve scattered tribes** at the time of the destruction in 70 AD. All the people from various tribes of Israel scattered around the Mediterranean shall mourn when they hear of Jerusalem’s destruction. And, they did!

**Coming:** the word “coming” here does not refer to the Second Coming, but to his presence, his apocalyptic, in time coming, to judge. He did not have to physically manifest Himself for his presence to be known. In Exodus 19, the Lord came down upon the mountain in fire, but no one saw a bodily shape of the LORD. Jesus did come in 70 AD, but not in physical, bodily form. That awaits his Parousia at the end of the age. Craig Blomberg (Denver Seminary) says this is a **vivid metaphor** to explain earth-shaking events.

Bray says today’s student is woefully ignorant of historical interpretation on this passage, and he declared that most commentators in the 1800’s understood Matthew twenty-four in light of Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 AD (p. 147-150). He is correct! Henry Hammond (1681), Thomas Newton (1754), N. Nisbett (1802), Adam Clarke (1832), and John Gill (1809) took the view that His coming in this verse referred to the doom on Jerusalem.

Whatever this passage means, it must be interpreted in light of *terminus ad quem* of the nation in 70 AD. It had to take place in that generation. Only in recent times, times

when a plethora of dispensational apocalyptic literature hit the news racks, have expositors shifted to a futuristic interpretation of Matthew 24. Modern conflicts in the Middle East fostered by the presence of Zionist in Palestine and the godless, immoral act of driving innocent Palestinians from their roots has fueled futurism.

A preterist interpretation, however, does not invalidate a future Return of Christ!! Jesus predicted both: His coming in judgment to destroy unbelieving Jerusalem (70 AD), and His coming at the end of the age to separate the sheep from the goats.

**Clouds of heaven:** The expression "**coming in the clouds of heaven**" is apocalyptic language. The first use of celestial movements as symbolic of divine intervention into the affairs of men is in Genesis 37:5-11. The sun and moon did not literally bow to Joseph, but his brothers (signified by the stars) did literally bow to him. Likewise, coming in the clouds refers to divine intervention—his coming in wrath, vengeance upon his unbelieving people.

- The word "**coming**" (*Parousia*) means *presence* here. Note the various comings:
- Matthew 10:23 *until the Son of Man come* is a reference to his arrival at that time.
- Matthew 18:20 *There am I in the midst* refers to a spiritual presence.
- Matthew 28:20 *I am with you always* refers to his spiritual presence, not physical presence.
- John 14:18, 26 *I will come* refers to Pentecost. It was not literal presence, but spiritual.
- Acts 22:14 *See that just One* was not physical vision, but spiritual perception.
- Acts 26:16 *I have appeared unto thee* was verbal, but not visual (Acts 9:7).
- Romans 8:9, 10 *If Christ be in you* is spiritual presence, not physical.
- 1 Corinthians 9:1 *Have I not seen* refers to hearing, not seeing with the eye.
- Revelation 2:5 *I will come* refers to spiritual presence to judge, not physical.
- Revelation 3:3 *I will come* refers to a divine visitation, not a physical presence.

The word “**coming**” in Matthew 24 is also found in Matthew 21:40. In Matthew 21, the master *comes* (v. 40) and *takes away* the kingdom of God (v. 43). When did Jesus come and take away the kingdom from Israel? We know the kingdom of God was given to the church, but His coming to do so was not a literal coming, but a sovereign work from His position in heaven. Furthermore, He did come in 70 AD to take away the kingdom, the temple, the city, the nation, and the land from Israel.

The expression “**coming down**” in the OT refers to divine intervention. It is apocalyptic, symbolic imagery.

- Genesis 11:4 The Lord came down to see the city refers to intervention, not physical presence.
- Genesis 18:21 I will go down refers to divine intervention.
- Exodus 3:8 I am come down to deliver Israel is a reference to intense involvement of God.
- Deuteronomy 33:2 To come from Sinai refers to divine intervention, not presence.
- Psalm 18:9 He bowed the heavens and came down is symbolic language.
- Psalm 47:5 The hills melted at the presence of the Lord is symbolic language.
- Psalm 50:3 Our God shall come with a fire is apocalyptic language.
- Psalm 97:5 The hills melted like was at the presence of the Lord is symbolic language.
- Isaiah 31:4 to come down refers to the Lord’s intervention for Zion.
- Isaiah 64:3 to come down, the mountains fled refers to divine intervention.
- Isaiah 66:15 The Lord will come down with fire is apocalyptic language for intervention.
- Hosea 8:1 He shall come as an “eagle against” is a metaphor for judgment on Israel.
- Micah 1:3-4 *And will come down* and melt the mountains is apocalyptic language.

The expression "**in the clouds**" refers to divine intervention to redeem or judge in the affairs of men. The cloud may be real, but the essence of YHWH was hidden from the human eye.

- Exodus 16:10 The glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud
- Exodus 19:9 I come to thee in a thick cloud
- Exodus 34:5 And the Lord descended in a cloud
- Leviticus 16:2 I will appear in a cloud upon the mercy seat
- Numbers 11:25 And the Lord came down in a cloud
- Psalm 18:9-12 Around about Him were . . . thick clouds
- Psalm 97:2-5 Clouds and darkness are round about him
- Psalm 104:3 Who maketh the clouds his chariot
- Isaiah 19:1 The Lord rideth upon a swift cloud
- Daniel 7:13 One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven
- Joel 2:1, 2 the day of the Lord cometh . . . a day of clouds and thick darkness
- Nahum 1:3 The clouds are the dust of his feet
- Zephaniah 1:14-15 That day is a day of wrath . . . a day of clouds and thick darkness
- Matthew 24:30 they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven
- Matthew 26:64 You shall see the Son of man sitting . . . coming in the clouds
- Mark 13:26 They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds
- Mark 14:62 You shall see the Son of man sitting . . and coming in the clouds of heaven
- Revelation 1:7 Behold, he cometh with the clouds and every eye shall see him



- Revelation 14:14 Upon the cloud one sat like the Son of man

**See:** The term “see” is *eido* in Greek can mean to see with the eyes or it can mean “to be aware, have knowledge of.” In this passage the word “see” represents *the perception* that the Son of Man is fulfilling his word about Jerusalem. When Jerusalem fell, men could perceive His coming—his involvement in the judgment on Jerusalem. They **would not see a physical person**, they would see with the **mind’s eye his presence** on those wicked people. The destruction of Jerusalem was *proof of claim* regarding our Lord's sovereignty and session at the right hand of God.

**Tribes of the earth shall mourn:** The expression "tribes of the earth shall mourn" does not refer to the nations, but to the twelve tribes of Israel who mourned over the loss of their beloved city and esteemed temple. Further, after the destruction of Jerusalem, a general hostility and persecution broke out in every city in the Roman Empire against the Jews.

The word “**earth**” either refers to the fact the twelve tribes were scattered over the Roman Empire, or it is direct reference to the survivors of twelve tribes represented on earth, in Jerusalem, on the day of Jerusalem’s destruction.

**31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.**

**The great trumpet:** The trumpet appears to be a symbolic representation of inauguration of gospel proclamation in the first century (cf. Exodus 19:16; 20:18; Isaiah 27:12-13). If this is a literal trumpet with a literal blast, our Lord is talking about His Second Coming.

**Angels:** The “angels” (ἄγγελοι) are gospel messengers sent forth to proclaim the gospel of Christ in the four corners of the Roman Empire in order to gather his elect into his fold; that is, they are Christian evangelists (John 11:51-52; Psalm 50:3-5). (Bray quotes Roderick Campbell, Henry Hammond, Nisbett, Milton Terry, and Ezra Gould, John Ellicott, George Murray as supporters of this theory, p. 187-189). If these are literal heavenly angels, our Lord is referencing his Second Coming.

Adam Clarke agrees saying the angels are "his messengers, the apostles, and their successors in the Christian ministry."

**Gather his elect:** The "elect" refer to believers. The Lord wanted to **gather** His people as chicks under His win (Matthew 23:37), but they would not come. Now his messengers would go forth and gather his elect from the **four winds** of the Roman empire.

### **This Generation**

**32-34 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.**

**Fig tree:** Christ appeals to this agrarian society to admit a political truth that as leaves form on a fig tree indicating that summer has arrived, so the arrival of Roman armies at Jerusalem indicates the end the Jewish nation is imminent . . . even knocking at the door.

**All these things** refer to the premonitory events leading up to destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

**This generation:** The expression "this generation" does not refer to a future generation or our generation, but references the generation living at the time of Christ; i.e., to the generation of his disciples of which some would not taste of death until they saw the Son Man coming in glory in judgment upon Israel. To say these verses refer to a future generation or to the doom of the world at the end of the ages is to sever the text from its context. Hal Lindsey erred by preaching that "this generation" refers to the generation alive following the alleged establishment of Israel in 1948. According to his calculations, Christ had to return by 1988. Edgar C. Whisenant, NASA Engineer, wrote a booklet titled, "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988." Both were wrong because they were built on the errors of dispensationalism and the belief that modern Ashkenazi, Zionist Israel was a fulfillment of prophecy.

**In summary,** Matthew 24:1-34 is about the destruction of Jerusalem. It answers the disciples question about when the temple would be dismantled.

# Matthew 24:36–51

## *As the Days of Noah*

♦ As a preterist, John Bray ties this section into the destruction of Jerusalem. The partial preterist, Robert Reymond, believes this section fits the Lord's Second Coming; that is, up to verse 34-36 our Lord has been discussing the destruction of Jerusalem, but now changes the subject to the Second Coming. Reymond (1998) identified the use of the pronoun in "that day" referring to the Coming of the Son of man for his people at the end of the Christian age. Bray disagreed with this view saying that Jesus is still talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in section 36-51.

I am compelled to be consistent and not divide Matthew 24 into two themes. Because section 1-35 is the critical portion regarding an historic interpretation of Christ's discourse on the destruction of the temple, Matthew 24:36-51 are interpreted in light of the events of 70 AD with only brief remarks being offered on the following verses.

**36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.**

**That day:** The "that day" is to be understood, not as the Second Coming of Christ, the end of the world, or the last judgment, but of the coming of the Son of Man to take vengeance on the Jews for their rebellion against the Lord. Though men of that day had a general idea that judgment was looming on the horizon against the Jewish nation, no man knew the exact year, day, or hour of the nation's demise. See Hebrews 10:25. (John Gill, on Matthew 24:36, 1809 ed., Vol 2, p. 241: Quoted by Bray, p. 260-261).

**Knoweth the hour:** Regardless of how many books are published by prognosticators, no man knows the day or hour. Even angels did not know. In reference to our Lord, it may be best to say that He, as a servant, was not responsible to know about that day or to predict it with it chronological certainty.

**37-39 But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying**

and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

**Days of Noah:** The destruction of Jerusalem is compared to the sudden deluge that took place in Noah's day; that is, just as men were going about their priorities on the day the rains fell, so Jews would continue to pursue their own interests until the Son of Man issued the order to demolish the capital city and its temple. That is, the problems of Noah's day was not "wrongdoing" but worldliness. This interpretation does not rule out the possibility that the last days of this age before Christ's return will be like the days of Noah – worldliness where people focus on earthly duties to the neglect of heavenly obligations.

**40-42 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.**

**Taken and left:** We should let Luke's presentation rule here. "...For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:23-24); that is, taken away by judgment.

Further, notice that the destruction of Jerusalem is near the beginning of Christ's reign and that Jerusalem will be under the control of Gentiles until the end of Gentile dominion.

**Your Lord doth come:** The context is still the destruction of the temple. The coming is the Lord's appearing in judgment upon wicked Jerusalem. The "taking away" refers to be taken away by judgment to be destroyed. It is the unbelieving, Christ-rejecting Jew that is taken away. Josephus claimed that 1,100,000 Jews were killed in the Jewish Revolt, and that 97,000 were captured and transported to areas around the Mediterranean. Approximately 87,000 of the survivors died in Roman Gladiator games, by crucifixion, and illness. Only 9,000 reached Rome alive. Then the survivors (young teens) were sold as slaves. Paul called this "wrath to the uttermost" (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

Further, the statement that "Jerusalem would be trampled on by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" is true today in that Ashkenazi Gentiles, some of which

practice a form of Judaism while engaged in debauchery, are Gentiles controlling the modern state of Zionist Israel.

**Adam Clarke** says, "The meaning seems to be, that so general should these calamities be, that no two persons, wheresoever found, or about whatsoever employed, should be both able to effect their escape; and that captivity and the sword should have a complete triumph over this unhappy people."

**43-44 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.**

**Goodman of the house:** The "goodman" refers to the head of the home, a man and father, who is expecting a raid on his assets stays awake with club in hand ready to defend his property. The "breaking up of the house" is a reference to the Jewish house; that is, Jerusalem being broken up stone by stone by the Romans.

**Be ready:** Jesus wanted the Christians to be ready so that they could flee before the Romans came to destroy Jerusalem. The followers of Christ took that advice and fled Jerusalem before the Roman armies arrived (Clarke). They believed, endured in the faith, and were saved (24:13).

**45-51 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

**The faithful and wise servant:** These verses describe the character Jesus expects of His disciples during the troublesome times of the first century. He wanted his disciples to be faithful and not to be slothful. Likewise, there is an application for modern Christians. As servants of Christ we should do our duty in all things. We can demand no more and should expect no less. Let us remember, judgment must begin in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17). Our Master not only judges evil men, He seeks to perfect His

people in the furnace of affliction. Under trial, we are tempted to leave our post. The admonition here is not to be a doubting, slothful hypocrite, but a true Christian conscientiously performing his duties to God and man. If your duty is to chop weeds in the garden, may the Lord find you whacking away when He returns.

### **In conclusion**

The futurist sees the entire passage of Matthew 24 as applying to some unfolding destruction prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The preterist interprets Matthew twenty-four as having been completely fulfilled in the first century. It does not reference a time future to the reader. The historist understands the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming of Christ to be so mingled, one cannot separate the two. No doubt, this passage is difficult to interpret. The debate is sure to outlast our time.

### **A Warning**

Though this paper has sought to explain the preterist interpretation of this passage, it does not mean every passage referring to the Lord's coming must be interpreted preteristically. In one sense, all historical judgments are a prelude of the final destruction of heaven and earth. My disappointment with Bray was that he appears to be a consistent preterist who interprets 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5 and 2 Peter 3 to likewise apply to the first century, though he does not discount the Second Coming or a future resurrection. Christ is coming and when He comes, His deity will be unveiled and He will strike the entire earth with the rod of His wrath.

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# Matthew 25:1-13

## *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*

♦ The Lord compares the culmination of His kingdom program to ten virgins (bridesmaids) invited to participate in a wedding celebration.

The kingdom of God is the rule of God that will reach its maturity in the Eschaton at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The five wise virgins, watchful and alert, filled their lamps with oil and were ready to join the midnight celebration of the coming of the bridegroom for his bride. The unusual focus is on the groom and the bridesmaids, not the bride.

Lamps were needed to see in the dark. Lamps required oil. The wise virgins took their money, traveled to the vender, purchased the oil, took it home, and filled their lamps. Not knowing when the day or the hour the Bridegroom would come they fell asleep as nature required. When they heard the joyful sound, they jumped to their feet with excitement, trimmed the lamps, and joined the happy procession.

The five foolish virgins were not as conscientious and careful as the five wise virgins. Instead of joy, they were troubled because they had not adequately prepared for the unannounced arrival of the Bridegroom. Panic befell them. Unlike the wise bridesmaids, they did not travel to the venders, spend their money to purchase oil, and to fill their lamps. While sleeping, the Bridegroom arrived and they were unprepared to walk in the dark and to join the procession.

Their begging the five wise virgins for oil was denied. Some things cannot be shared. Thus, they were forced to do at midnight what they should have done during the day which was to purchase oil for their vessels. Detained, they appeared at the feast late. Because the door was shut, they knocked to gain entrance. But, to their shock and dismay, the Bridegroom expressed displeasure saying, "'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'



This mini-sermon was not something the disciples would have said, “Amen!” too. It is a dis-analogy and not an analogy; a contrast, not a comparison to a traditional middle-eastern wedding. The rejection of the late bridesmaids must have shocked the disciples.

The grand lesson before us is that Jesus Christ is coming back. The problem is His suspended return. We don’t know when He will come. His delay tests our faith, our patience, our diligence, our wisdom, our devotion, and our duty to always be prepared and ready to meet Him.

While we wait for Christ to return, we wait in darkness. Our times are godless, immoral, obscene, hostile to light, shameless, sinful, and ethical. Nevertheless, our Lord expects us to be ready, prepared, about our duty.

The lesson is not a rebuke for sleeping. Sleep is a necessity of all.

**The first lesson** is about the character of Christ’s disciples. They are metaphorically compared to pure and precious bridesmaids devoted to their Master. All ten virgins were invited to the **wedding, but only five were properly prepared.**

**The second lesson** connected with the foolish virgins is about avoiding a lazy, sluggardly, slothful, dreamy, distracted, doting, careless lifestyle between the two comings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The issue is not of whether they five bridesmaids were virgins, but condition of mind--a lack of wisdom, and want of true, life-giving oil in their vessels.

**The third lesson** is stated by our Lord: “Be watchful.” It is an imperative. It is about being dutiful and devoted to our Savior during the long, dark, drawn-out waiting period between His two arrivals in history. The oil and trimming of the lamps informs us that during the darkness of this age, we need light and resources outside of ourselves to be in state of readiness for His arrival. Knowing His Word, Believing His Word, renewing our minds with His Word, and obeying His Word are practical things we do to be prepared for the coming of our Lord.

Let us, therefore, be like the wise bridesmaids who should live carefully in this age of darkness fully prepared for the consummation of the kingdom; and, let us avoid the spiritual sloth and carelessness of professing Christendom.

## Part II

## **A Technical Analysis of the Parable of the Ten Virgins**

As to the interpretation and meaning of the Parable of the Ten Virgins, scholars are not agreed.

Who do the five virgins represent? Who do the five foolish virgins represent? Are they Christians or non-Christians? What does it mean when the Lord shut the door to the foolish bridesmaids saying, "I never knew you"? Will slothful Christians be shut out of God's kingdom? What is the lamp? What does the oil represent? To these questions, one will find no shortage of bold answers.

### **Background**

The background to this passage is wrapped up in the Jewish wedding tradition during the first century. Ample information is available on these traditions, so there is no need to reiterate them here. Only to say the parable is not a comparison between the Jewish wedding tradition and the coming of our Lord; rather, it is a contrast. It is an anti-analogy.

The whole idea that the late arriving five bridesmaids would have not been welcome at the feast would have shocked the disciples. Tardy wedding guest were certainly cordially permitted to enter into the festivities of all wedding celebrations. But, no so in our Lord's message to his disciples. And, it is the "shut door" and the statement, "I do not know you" that stunned the disciples and still bewilders interpreters today.

### **The Kingdom of God**

The kingdom of God is the rule of God, and to enter that kingdom, one must surrender to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God entered history in and through the ministry of Christ to defeat man's enemies: Satan, sin, and death.

Jesus often spoke of "this age" and "the age to come." "This age" over which sin has jurisdiction will conclude at the revelation of Christ, a.k.a. the Second Coming. The problem that all men face is our Lord's seeming delay. The day is past. Night is upon us. Where is the Bridegroom? True Christians remain faithful and duty-bound to the king during the darkest of the night; pseudo-Christians are slack, careless, distracted, frenzied, and unprepared.

### **The Context**

The “then” (tote) connects this parable with the Parable of the Faithful and Evil Servant in chapter 24:45-51; and, contains the same lesson.

The grand subject of the Book of Matthew is the kingdom of God and its arrival in history in and through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is the rule of God which involves the necessity of acknowledging that rule and the surrender of men to kingdom authority in order to enter into it (Matthew 11:38-39).

The context of the Parable of the Ten Virgins is the Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17); the cursing of the barren fig tree—a symbol of the destruction of Israel 21:18-22), the story of the two sons—one obedient, the other disobedient (21:28-32); the Parable of the Landowner—announcement of the disposition of Israel’s leaders over the nation (21: 33-46); the Parable of the Marriage Feast (22:1-14); the woes on the Pharisees and lawyers (23:1-39); Lord’s Olivet Discourse—the announcement of the destruction of Jerusalem and Herod’s Temple in 70 AD (Matthew 24:1-31); the Parable of the Fig Tree (24:32-41); the Parable of the thief (24:42-44); the illustration and contrast of the faithful servant with the evil servant (24:45-51); and, on the other side of the Parable of the Ten Virgins are the Parable of the Talents (25:14-30); and, the Parable of the Sheep and Goats (25:31-46).

Notice the series of contrasts taking place in these context parables:

- The cleansed temple v. the temple full of robbers and thieves
- The barren fig tree v. the cursed, dead fig tree.
- The hesitant obedient son v. the “Yes man” disobedient son
- The obedient son v. the wretched stewards of the landowner.
- The appropriately clothed wedding guests v. the inappropriately dressed guest.
- Righteous Able and Zechariah v. Israel’s Pharisees and Lawyers
- The beautiful temple v. the destroyed temple.
- Noah’s preparedness v. the shock of the flood to prediluvian generation
- One woman saved v. the other woman taken to judgment (24:41)
- The alert man v. the unaware victim of theft (24:42-45).

- The dutiful servant v. the evil harsh and brutal steward (24:45-51)
- The rewarded servant v. the hypocrites assigned to punishment (24:51)
- The five wise bridesmaids v. the five foolish bridesmaids (25:1-13)
- The industrious servants v. the fearful, slothful, neglectful servant (25:14-30)
- The sheep v. the goats (25:31-46)

In interpreting this parable, the context weighs heavily upon the meaning of this parable.

Our Lord's time on this earth was limited. These parables speak of ultimate realities. Clear and stark contrasts are presented. There is black and white but not grey. There is a separation and classification of personages indicating that you are one or the other, on one side or the other, for or against, of one character and not the other. You are either a sheep or goat; you are either an obedient servant or a slothful, evil hypocrite posing as a servant.

### **Identity of the Five Wise Virgins**

The five wise virgins are synonymous with the wise servants, the sheep, and the wheat. Thus, you are either identified with the five wise virgins who have obediently prepared themselves for the Bridegrooms return or you are identified as a foolish bridesmaid shut out of the feast that the Lord says, "I never knew you."

Note: Modern man blends and synthesizes the holy with the unholy, the spiritual with the secular, the things of God with the things of men.

Scripture separates. Modern man thinks in terms of Christian business men, Christian prostitutes, and Christian homosexuals; but, the Word of God speaks of the saved and the unsaved, wheat and tares, sheep and goats, repentant sinners and unrepentant sinners, believers and unbelievers; Christians and non-Christians.

In the mind of modern man everybody is good, but to Christ there was one good. Because our contemporaries believe all things are good, there is no such thing as evil. Such relativism makes one unprepared for judgment.

In the mind of modern man, everybody is going to heaven; but the Word of good says, 'For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few' (Matthew 7:14)

Therefore, I am inclined due to the context and the nature of the other parables, to interpret the five wise virgins as genuine and true Christians dutifully attached to Christ their Savior. Further, I would see the five foolish virgins representing the sphere of profession, hypocrisy, duplicity, deception, and fraud; that is, the five foolish virgins are in the same category as the goats, the evil servant, the faithless stewards, and the Pharisees.

The foolish virgins experience the same fate as the "evil servant" who were assigned the fate of hypocrites where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (24:51); and, the worthless servant who was cast "into outer darkness in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (25:30); and the goats who were cursed and cast "into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (25:41).

The wise virgins experience the same fate as the "wise and faithful servant" whom the Master "will set him over all his possessions" (24:47); and, the "good and faithful servant" who will "enter the joy of your master" (25:21); the "sheep that "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34).

### **More Contrasts Between the Wise and Foolish virgins**

A passage that should be considered in understanding our Lord's use of "virgins" is Revelation 14:

"These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb" (14:4).

We have here an ideal analogy of the people of God. The followers of Christ are iconized as virgins with a pure and undefiled heart that follow the Lamb where ever He goes.

Those "not defiled with women" should not be taken literally. Half of these people are women themselves. The act of defiling is a reference to the Greco-Roman practice where men and women visited pagan temples to engage in religious sexual rites. The negative

implies this class of people are virgins; i.e., they are wholly devoted to Christ and free from earthly defilements. It is God's ideal for His people and is highly symbolic of the character of the righteous.

Thus, our Lord's use of virgins or bridesmaids was used to typify the nature of Christians; that is, they have a simple, pure, wholehearted devotion to Christ. But, it is not the virgin character that is emphasized here, but the wisdom of the bridesmaids; that is, their state of mind and the oil necessary to fuel a lantern in order to see in the dark.

The five wise bridesmaids are a character type of true Christians: believing, regenerated, wise, hopeful, sensible, discerning, careful, dutiful, diligent, alert, and ready to do their master's bidding. All true Christians, even the less vigorous ones are to be identified in character with the five wise virgins.

The foolish virgins, on the other hand, are the anti-model of true Christians and the paradigm of pretenders, actors, performers, players, fakers, hypocrites, imposters, and disingenuous imitators of true religion. They are synonymous with the tares and goats. They look and act like true Israelites, but wholly devoid of the reality and substance of what makes up a genuine child of God (John 1:10-13).

### **The Lamb and the Oil**

There is no shortage of interpretations about what the lamp and oil represent.

The lamps referred to would be the clay handheld Herodian and Roman lamps that people filled with oil and a wick to illuminate an area of about four or five feet in diameter at night time.

Being there were no street lamps in those days, a handheld lamp was an essential luminary of that age in order to navigate in the dead of night. Every family had at least ½ dozen of these clay lamps in their home.

Oil was an essential commodity at the time used for medicine, comfort, beautification, and lumination. It can be a symbol of life, of joy, of the Holy Spirit.

Generally speaking, the lamps with oil address the essential character of true Israel that have the life of God burning in their soul, and the disciplines of the Christian life necessary to maneuver through the darkness of our age: devotion to Christ, Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, obedience, watchfulness and carefulness.

Specifically, the oil could refer to the character of life imparted by the Spirit of God; but, there is difficulty with this analogy in that it could be purchased; and, by the fact, once the foolish bridesmaid purchased the oil, they were still rejected at the door of the Bridegroom. So, I am inclined to reject such specificity.

Even the Charismatic interpretation that compares the virgins to Christians filled with the Spirit to those foolish virgins who are not filled with the Spirit is repugnant to the true message of this passage. The ten virgins are not Christians. While the five wise virgins represent true disciples, the five foolish virgins represent non-Christians and those people that profess faith in God without the reality of true faith in our Lord.

There is an “oil of gladness” connected with the wedding of the King in Psalm 45:7 that is consistent with the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Obviously, the five virgins were sparkling with delight, even radiantly excited about the coming of the Bridegroom and eagerly anticipated his coming. So, comparing the oil of the five virgins to the oil of gladness seems perfectly appropriate.

The emphasis in this passage is not upon “salvation by faith,” or professing Christ, but possession of oil within one’s vessel; that is, the possession of the life of the Spirit that discriminates between the living and the dead.

In contrast to the eager anticipation of the wise bridesmaids is the dismal “ho-hum” attitude of the foolish virgins. Someone has said that religion is either an acute fever or a dull habit. Genuine Christians burn with a hunger to know God; non-Christians can take it or leave it.

### **The Shut Door**

This is where “things get sticky” sort of speak; i.e., “where the rubber hits the road.” If you see the five foolish virgins as slothful Christians, the passage seems to say they will be shut out of the kingdom of God. But, if you see the five foolish virgins as pretenders and imposters, there is no theological problem with them being shut out of the kingdom.

Since our Lord is dealing with ultimate realities, and using strong contrasts in his Olivet Parables, I am inclined to view the five foolish virgins as representative of those pretenders who profess true religion but lack the regenerative-character and attributes that belong to the people of God; that is the five foolish bridesmaids profess faith in Christ, but lack the faith and devotion that mark true Christians.

Notice that the foolish virgins said, “Lord, Lord.” They knew His name and accepted his title,” but their works were inconsistent with their profession. Luke 6:46 comes to mind, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not what I say?” This confirms the interpretation that the foolish virgins represent a sphere of professing Christianity: church goers, people with God-claims, unbelievers, superficial Christians, externalism, et al.

You cannot always tell if one is a true Christian by the clothes they wear, the length of their hair, or even their God-talk. You must discern if they have a burning lamp in their soul—a knowledge of God—a true joy, and expectancy of our Lord’s return—whether they are an earthly minded or heavenly minded.

Thus, the shut door represents our Lord’s rejection of pretenders and hypocrites as He so clearly stated in the last verse of Matthew 24. Thus, the new revelation to the disciples that the door into the kingdom would be shut at his coming created a *terminus ad quem* to the gospel era. There is a day when the door will be shut; when opportunity to enter the kingdom will cease; when it is too late to be saved. “Now is the day of salvation.”

The foolish virgins represent those who “Strive to enter in at the strait gate” and the “Many” who “seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24).

### **The Major Lesson**

The grand lesson in this parable is that the true children of God are characterized by oil (eternal life), watchfulness, preparedness, obedience, eagerness, joy, and a pure devotion to Christ; but, false religion is characterized by externals, pretense, hypocrisy, show, sloth, moral carelessness, outward performance, acting, and imitation.



# Matthew 25:31-41

## *Separation of the Sheep and Goats*

♦ The futurist rightly interprets this passage as referring to the Second Coming and final judgment. It is difficult to see how a consistent preterist can declare this passage fulfilled in the first century. While our Lord seems to be quite comfortable in discussing His coming glory and uses the term "coming" interchangeably to refer to the events of 70 AD and His Second Coming, we feel compelled to distinguish the two. Clarke explains:

This must be understood of Christ's coming at the last day, to judge mankind: though all the preceding part of the chapter may be applied also to the destruction of Jerusalem (Bible Commentary).

**31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:**

The use of the title "Son of man" is a reference to the apocalyptic Son of Man in Daniel seven that received dominion and authority from the Ancient of Days. Jesus veils himself behind the mask of the Son of Man so as to arouse tensions as well as to make His message acceptable to his audience.

"**All the angels**" is a reference to the armies of heaven under command of the "Lord of Hosts."

The adjective "**holy**" is absent in the most reliable manuscripts.

The term "**glory**" is used twice in this passage to reference an unveiled Christ. The term "throne" is not the Davidic throne, but a reference to the absolute authority of Christ in his reign at the right hand of God. What is now hidden, will one day be disclosed. The verb "come" (erchomai) is an expression of the disclosure of Christ and his majestic authority at the Second Coming.

**32-32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.**

Matthew Henry says this is a description of the Last Judgment wherein our Lord gathers **the sheep and the goats** among the nations for judgment. Jesus describes the Last Judgment in terms of sheep wrangling wherein a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats<sup>33</sup>. The sheep are true Christians; the goats are pretenders. Any attempt to identify the Jews as God's people (sheep) in this passage is theology gone amuck. All true Christians are God's chosen people. On earth, we are not always able to distinguish between the false and the true, but at this judgment everything will be clarified. On earth we are deceived by the demeanor, dress, and professions of men; but, on this day the truth about men will stand out like naked on an ape.

This is not the millennium, this is the "Great White Throne" where the dead, great and small, sheep and goats, true and false, the holy and unholy stand before the Judge and the books opened (Revelation 20:11-12).

On earth sheep and goats coexist together. But, at the Last Judgment there will be a separation. Separation is absolute and final. Eternal destinies are at state. This is everlasting salvation in contrast with everlasting damnation.

**34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:**

The expression "**right hand**" is symbol of power and favor. The King of the Nations addresses his citizens (sheep). The sheep are addressed first.

Two imperatives are found in this text: "**come**" and "**inherit**." "Come," commands the Master. The sheep have heard this command before, and obeyed. In obeying, they

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<sup>33</sup> Sheep 101 has this to say, " Sheep and goats usually exhibit different behavior. Goats are naturally curious and independent, while sheep tend to be more distant and aloof. Sheep have a stronger flocking instinct and become very agitated if they are separated from the rest of the flock. It is easier to keep sheep inside a fence than goats. Goats will seek shelter more readily than sheep. Neither species likes to get its feet wet and both prefer upland grazing to lowland. In a fight, a ram will back up and charge to butt heads. A goat will rear up on his hind legs and come down forceably to butt heads. During controntation, such fighting behavior favors the ram.

became God's sheep; "My sheep hear my voice and follow me" announced the Savior (John 10:27). The sheep are blessed with the salvation of God because they have surrendered to the authority of the King. The second command is "inherit." Possibly, this command and willingness on the part of the sheep to take the inheritance is set in contrast to Israel which refused to go in and take the land (Psalms 95:7; Deuteronomy 1). Unlike the goats who wanted to return to Egypt, these sheep marched forward to enter the land. Rich or poor, male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, the sheep have laid hold of Christ and are eager to inherit the kingdom they have been patiently waiting to possess.

We learn here that the salvation of sheep was planned from the foundation of the world. This is a salvation prepared for the elect by the grace of God.

**35-36 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.**

The Lord's prayer in the garden, "I in them and you in me" (John 17:23) seems to find fruition here. Before us is the affliction of the saints: hunger, thirst, alienated, naked, sick, isolated, and imprisonment.

The pronoun "I" is used five times as if the Shepherd feels every pain, every cramp, every ache, every fever, and every misery suffered by His sheep.

"**Ye came to me**" describes lost sheep responding to the command of the Shepherd, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden" (Matthew 11:29).

What is the evidence that one is a sheep? The sheep on the right are marked by simple human courtesies that relieve suffering among men. The sheep are granted entrance into Kingdom based on righteous merits. Transgressions are not in view. Apparently, the sheep have evidence of good deeds entered into the record; that is, their altruism to the afflicted is proof of claim that they are indeed God's sheep. Regenerated souls are characterized by self-less acts of kindness.

What a contrast to much of modern Christianity! The false gospel is about health and wealth; about self-fulfillment and self-realization. But, our Lord informs us true sheep are often sick and poor, yet loving.

Modern Christians are **not** comfortable with suffering because they are settled on their lees refusing to be poured from vessel to vessel (Jeremiah 48:11). Suffering does not fit well into the modern gospel nor does suffering fit a theology that preaches obedience always yields the blessings of the covenant. When all suffering is associated with sin and disobedience, what miserable comforters we are! Because we do not appreciate the trials many good people have been forced to endure, Christians are often blind to God's sovereignty and stingy with sympathy. Fortunately, not all saints have been crippled by America's Arminian Christianity.

Sir Isaac Watts yearned for a life most Christians are trying to avoid:

Must I be carried to the skies  
On flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize,  
And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace,  
To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign;  
Increase my courage, Lord.  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
Supported by Thy Word.

Particularly egregious to modern Christianity is our Lord's reference to "prison." Docile Christianity undervalues those soldiers of the cross who pledge allegiance to Christ and refuse to bow to the tyranny of the State. Modern Christianity embraces the poor much better than it embraces those imprisoned for being politically incorrect by an overreaching government. Christians appear to be blind to human trafficking by commercial courts. We would do well to remember that the Lord's finest came face-to-face with tyrants and refused to give a pinch of incense to Caesar.

**37-39 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?**

As our Lord unravels this heavenly chronicle, the sheep appear to be shocked and surprised that their meager kindness to weak, discouraged, imprisoned Christians is a kindness to Christ. Five questions are asked. "What?" "How?" "When?" and "Where?" "Why?" bleat the sheep. Believers appear to have difficulty grasping the verity *that service to the oppressed is service to Christ*.

**40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.**

The King seems pleased to answer the *baa* and *blather* of His flock. He memorializes a lesson for the ages: Kindness to the weakest, smallest lightweight nonessential lamb is service to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

**41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.**

The King also has a message for the cursed goats. His thundering command wakes the dead: **"Depart from me . . . into everlasting fire!"**

**"prepared for the devil and his angels"** reminds us of the rebellion of Korah, goats who refused to come to the tabernacle of God (Numbers 16:24). A characteristic of this rebellion was the use of fire, both in the false worship of the rebels, and in the mode of their destruction. Furthermore, it reminds us of the Nadab and Abihu (goats) who were burned up because they offered strange fire to God; that is, these pretenders dressed up in priestly garments created their own brand of religion and approach to God (Leviticus 10:1-2).

The Lord now explains the grounds of the sentence. It proceeds on the same legal basis as the one for the sheep.

**42-46 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.**

The crimes for which these souls are punished are sins of omission; i.e., deep narcissism that has expressed itself by the neglect of God and care for souls. The Pulpit Commentary explains:

The goats failed to perform the most elementary duties of charity and brotherly love which conscience and natural religion enjoin. They had lived utterly selfish and unprofitable lives. If sins of omission are thus punished, we may infer that positive transgressions shall meet with still heavier retribution.

**"Everlasting fire"** is mentioned a second time. It is the opposite of "everlasting life." That all men go to heaven just because they haven't killed somebody is modern fiction. Goats are those who have rejected Christ as their King and refused to surrender to His authority. The writer of Hebrews asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great of salvation?" (2:1-3).

The sentence of the God-neglecting goats is to "everlasting fire." Apparently, this fire never wants for fuel to burn. There is no sense here the dead are disembodied spirits or that they exist in some unconscious comatose state devoid of sensitivity. This is conscious suffering. Who can even imagine such a fate?

Such grave and somber language ought to give every Christian pause. What kind of men are we, if we say we believe in "everlasting fire," and do not exert every effort to share the gospel with friends and neighbors?

# John 5:24-29

## *The Two Resurrections*

### An Interpretive Reading

24 Verily, verily, [a double emphasis on truth] I say unto you [by His own authority as the Son], He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life [life of the Eschaton], and shall not come into condemnation [judgment]; but is passed [a perfect active indicative-has passed] from death [spiritual death] unto life [first fruits of eternal life belonging to the Age to Come].

25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming [present indicative: because the kingdom of God entered history in and through Christ], and now is [present tense], when the dead [spiritually dead] shall hear the voice of the Son of God [the call to repent and believe in this life]: and they that hear shall live [those who respond to gospel proclamation shall have eternal life].

26 For as the Father hath life in himself [self-existing]; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself [self-existing];

27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also [position as Judge of all men], because he is the Son of man [the apocalyptic Son of Man given ministerial authority- Daniel 7:13]

28 Marvel not at this: for the hour [Parousia, the Eschaton, or Age of Resurrection] is coming, in the which all that are in the graves [the dead] shall hear his voice [at the Second Coming of Christ],

29 And shall come forth [the general future resurrection]; they that have done good [believers], unto the resurrection of life [the resurrection of the just]; and they that have done evil [Christ-rejecters], unto the resurrection of damnation [the resurrection of the unjust].

### Explanation of the Two Resurrections

**The first resurrection** is spiritual. It involves regeneration of the soul. At the moment a person is "born-again" they receive eternal life, the life of the Eschaton in a first fruits way to be enjoyed now in advance of the consummation of history.

**Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come to judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead (spiritually dead) will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live (John 5:24-25).**

The first resurrection involves raising the soul from spiritual death and reconciling man to God. Knowing God is eternal life (John 17:2).

"**And now is**" tells us this was occurring in the Savior's own day and is progressively being accomplished in the gospel age as people believe in Christ. Believers who participate in the first resurrection are not liable to the second death. Elsewhere in the New Testament the believer's fellowship with Christ is described as a resurrection that brings victory over the dominion of sin and death.

See John 11:25-26 where Christ promises those who believe in him that they will share in his resurrection power and life: "I am the resurrection and the life: he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die."

Believers, by virtue of their union with Christ (Romans 6:1-6), co-share the benefits of Christ's victorious history. The believer's resurrection in fellowship with Christ brings with it the reality of life from the dead, the assurance of never-ending life, and the blessedness of sitting and reigning with Christ in the heavenly places

**The second resurrection** is physical in character and applies to the final day of human history when the Redeemer descends bodily out of heaven to earth.

**Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29).**

This passage is very explicit: those who hear the gospel of Christ and are "born again" in this life take part in "the first resurrection." These Christian people will hear His voice again at the Parousia calling them out of their tombs to experience the full power of



bodily resurrection. This will be the consummation of history, the end of this evil age, and the inauguration of the Eschaton.

Jesus taught that He saves the whole person, both soul and body. The full preterist spiritualizing of the final resurrection is essentially gnostic and neo-platonic. The fact that verse twenty-nine speaks of the resurrection of both the just and unjust proves that a mere spiritual resurrection is not being taught. If it was only spiritual, then Jesus would be teaching that the souls of the wicked are brought out of hell to be judged and sent right back to hell.

Our Lord emphasized in another place that what makes this judgment so terrifying for the wicked is that both *body* and soul will be cast into the hell / hades. Our Lord exhorted men, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

The Apostle Paul also taught that the wicked dead would be raised and judged.

"I have hope in God which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust" (Acts. 24:15).

The teaching of Jesus and Paul regarding the universal resurrection of all men from the dead, whether saved or unsaved, explicitly opposed the dogma of the Jews [the Talmud] which taught that only the righteous would experience a bodily resurrection: "

The wicked dead will not be resurrected." (Judaism 101: Olam Ha-Ba: The Afterlife).

Furthermore, when believers die they go to be with the Lord. Unbelievers, because they have no part in the first resurrection, remain subject to the power of the second death until the Parousia where Christ will raise the unjust for judgment. Following the judgment, the unjust will receive sentence of the "second death" which is, horribly so, eternal separation from God and all hope. Such somber thought ought to give all men pause (cf. Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

Finally, notice there is no scheme or chronological blueprint here. Just pure theology.

# Romans 11:25

## *All Israel Shall Be Saved*

♦ It is important to understand the importance of this verse to a dispensationalist. The NT **never discusses a future conversion of Jews**, a return to the land, or a Jewish hope in a millennium unless it is Romans 11:25, 26. In other words, the entire dispensational scheme of a Jewish return to the land and an alleged national conversion depends on the interpretation of Romans 11:25-26.

Robert Saucy's work, The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism (1993), has an excellent section representing the unfulfilled theory position regarding Israel's alleged restoration and future conversion. Saucy argues for a non-forfeiture of the promises: "*despite a strong element of judgment upon Israel, there is no indication of a forfeiture of the promises*" (p. 246).

Saucy reasons: *if the promises to Israel have failed (Romans 9:6), then the future people of God have no basis of trust.* How can the new community trust God's Word if it failed the Jews? asks Saucy. He argues that Israel has a future based on the dispensational definitive verse, Romans 9:25: (a) The term "all Israel" refers to Jews as opposed to Gentiles; the Jews refers to the eschatological community; to Israel as a whole—a nation; (b) the time of Israel's salvation.

But, this interpretation is theological eisegesis; a reading into the text what is not there.

Bruce Waltke, a former dispensationalist and now an amillennialist, disagreed with Saucy. In his criticism of Progressive Dispensationalism in Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church, Waltke stated that if dispensationalist could show him one verse in the NT that promised a future hope to Israel that he would be a dispensationalist.

Furthermore, since modern day "Jews" are of Ashkenazi origin. How can the modern Zionist Movement be a fulfillment of any Biblical promise?

This exposition entertains the question, "What does "All Israel shall be saved" really mean? It is highly technical and should be studied accordingly.

**24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?**

*What is the olive tree?* The olive tree is not the church. It is not Israel nor is it Judaism. Since branches can be broken off and other branches grafted in, it is not identical to salvation. This is a tree of privileges, an inheritance that only true family members have a right to acquire.

The "**thou**" refers to believing Gentiles. Since only believers are part of the olive tree and unbelieving Jews are not part of the olive tree, the tree should be identified as the "commonwealth of Israel" which Paul references in Ephesians 2:11-13. This is a spiritual tree composed of true Israelites and believing peoples among the nations. It is the true Israel of God, the "tent of David," with its roots in the faith of Abraham.

By "**natural branches**," Paul is referring to Semites, to Hebrews, to the physical descendants of Abraham that formed the bulk of first century Israel. The reader must keep in mind that those who call themselves "Jews" today are not descendants of Abraham, but descendants of Ashkenaz and Japheth (Genesis10:3).

This text is the crux of Paul's argument. Since God broke off the natural branches (unbelieving Hebrews in Israel) and grafted in wild branches among the nations (believing Gentiles), God is certainly able to re-graft Israelites back into this tree when they believe in Christ their Messiah. Paul shows two examples. Ishmael and Esau were physical descendants of Abraham (9:13), but only one was a child of the promise. *God's promises only apply to spiritual Hebrews within Israel; i.e., the people with faith in Christ – the true spiritual sons of Abraham.*

**25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.**

Like a good teacher, Paul shows contempt for ignorance. There is danger of pride and arrogance when one does not understand the history and mystery of redemption.

The term "**mystery**" refers to something revealed in the New Testament Era that was not fully exposed in the Old Testament Scriptures.

That a segment of "**Israelites**" related to Abraham experience a "spiritual blindness" in order that non-Semitic people from other nations might be grafted in to Israel's commonwealth was not fully disclosed in the Old Testament. That God would visit the "Gentiles and take from them a people for his name" in order to "rebuild the tabernacle of David which is fallen down" was a brand new revelation to people of the Book (Acts 15:14-16).

**The mystery** includes (a) the partial hardening, (b) coming of the fullness of Gentiles, and (c) the salvation of Israel. What is this "hardening in part?" "In part" should not be translated "for a while." He does not mean, "all Israel is partially hardened," but, "that some are fully hardened" while the elect remnant is being saved.

"**Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in**" has been interpreted by dispensationalists as "then shall all Israel experience a national conversion and then be grafted into the olive tree." Thus, an interpretation that reads, "and then there will be a rapture, a seven-year tribulation period, another coming of Christ, and then a millennium" is eisegesis, and not exegesis. It is reading into the text what is not there. It injects a futurist's theory at the end of a sentence which cannot equitably be inserted or concluded. The whole idea of a national conversion of Jews to Christ for geo-political purposes not only runs counter to the New Testament (The NT is silent on the subject), it is contrary to the wonderful truth of Hebrew / Gentile unity in Christ as sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:28, 29), of Jewish / Greek equality in the church (Ephesians 2:12ff).

**Anthony Hoekema** is dogmatic on this point: "*The New Testament makes quite clear that God has no such separate purpose for Israel*" (1979, The Bible and the Future, p. 199).

The idea of a national conversion of the Jews into an elitist nation appears to deny the truth of one tree in Romans 11 of which Gentiles are privileged to partake.

The blessing of God's promises are **not** intended for unbelieving, ethnic Israelites. **Nor** are they exclusive for people of a certain race (9:6). True believing Israelites are children of the promise, not the unbelieving Israelites in the flesh. God never promised all Jews would be saved! Only **the elect of Israel** will be saved and this is **true Israel**.

The word “**until**” (ἄχρις οὗ, achris hou) in Romans 11:25 does not mean something is going to happen afterward. The use of “until” implies eschatological termination. The “until” has the force of a *terminus ad quem* with no indication that a prevailing circumstance will then be reversed.

The hardening will continue throughout the whole of the present church age until the return of Christ. The condition of partial blindness extends until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. He is **not** suggesting the “hardening” will be reversed at some time in the future.

**26 And so (καὶ οὕτως) all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:**

What does Paul mean, “**all Israel shall be saved?**” While the verb “**saved**” is a future tense, there is no justification for imposing a grand scale national conversion for some alleged Jewish nation at the end of the gospel age.

The conjunction “**and**” (καὶ) plus the adverb “so” (οὕτως) presents a positive outcome in lieu of the negative statement that a partial hardening has happen to natural Israel; that is, even though a hardening has happened to a portion of Israelites, there is another portion of Abraham's physical descendants that have believed and are saved.

The Greek word “kai” (and) can be translated “even” and should be translated, “Even so, all Israel shall be saved.”

The “**Israel**” here refers to *all believing Hebrews*, not the Gentile, geo-political nation, but the believing remnant. In other words, all believing Israelites through out the gospel age will be saved. This is the true Israel of God, and in this way all the promises to Israel are fulfilled.

There are three usages of the adverb “οὕτως” (“**in this way**”): (a) temporal or time related, (b) logical or locative, and (c) modal or manner.

The word “οὕτως” in verse 26 never has a “temporal” usage; i.e., it is not a “but, then, after that” all Israel will be saved. If it were logical the verse would read, “and in consequence of this process (v. 25b) all Israel will be saved.”

*The best usage is modal*; i.e., “in this manner all Israel will be saved.” It is the manner which is under consideration in Paul's argument in Romans 11:11-24 because it answers the question, “How?” and not “When?”

Further, Paul expected more Jews would repent and turn to Christ in the future. The crisis of branch breaking is not as bad as it seems. The pruning is not permanent nor is it comprehensive. All the descendants of Abraham have an opportunity to be saved and grafted into the commonwealth of Israel by placing their faith in Christ. But, they come into the kingdom the same way all Christians do, by faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 9:6 refers to an Israel composed of all the physical descendants of Abraham (Israel); and, it references a Another Israel composed of Israelites who follow the faith of Abraham (true Israel). Since there are two Israels, one natural and the other spiritual, it is reasonable to assume that the use of "Israel" in this text refers to "spiritual Israel" or the "true Israel" of God. Thus, the text should be interpreted as, "Even so, all true, believing Israelites shall be saved."

The phrase, "**There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob,**" refers to Christ's first coming, NOT HIS SECOND COMING! He took away Israel's sins at Calvary. It is the cross that turns men from ungodliness, not the Second Advent.

A theology that offers a separate future organization for Zionists is excluded here. Paul does not say Israel has experienced a hardening in part until all the Gentiles come in and *then shall all Israel be saved and form a geo-political nation*. The idea that Israel shall be saved after this period is completely absent in this section. *Jews are saved by placing their faith in Christ and His shed blood NOW in the gospel age.*

If Jews reject the sufficiency of the shed blood of Christ "**there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**" that can save the man (Hebrews 10:26). Furthermore, even if Israel as a whole turns to Christ in the future, they must do so on church ground, not on nationalistic, geo-political, Jewish grounds—that is, they must believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and accept their place as children of God alongside Gentiles!

**27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.**

This is a reference to **the New Covenant** (Jeremiah 33). Due to the death of Christ, sin was taken away at the cross. Since blood is the currency of the spirit world, Christ redeemed men by His shed blood; that is, he was the fulfillment of what the entire sacrificial system typified. Here ethnic Israel has an opportunity to become part of the true Israel of God by repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

**28-29 As concerning the gospel, *they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.***

The term "**gospel**" refers to the proclamation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and the wonderful benefits that are available to those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of Israel.

The "**touching**" of "**election**" refers to the fact that God chose Abraham and the nation of Israel as the instruments of salvation to the whole world. Election is by grace, not by merit; that is, God did **not** chose Israel because they were good. He chose Israel because He was good.

The "**they**" in this verse refers to unbelieving Jews who reject the gospel and who practice a form of Judaism. They rejected Christ as their "Messiah," "Savior," "Gate," "Door," and the "Light." Consequently, Paul labels them "enemies." John says they are members of the "synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:3; 3:3). Further, they are the Antichrists that John mentions in his epistles.

They are **not** the chosen people. Christians are God's chosen people.

They are **not** true Israelites; believers form the true Israel of God.

Likewise, today! Those who call themselves "Jews, but are not" are the enemies of Christianity. These people compose the shadow government of the United States, control Hollywood and the media, and do not disguise their hatred for the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, Paul informs us that the physical descendants of Israel are "beloved" because of the fathers; that is, Paul reminds us that everything we love and enjoy in Christianity came through Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and the prophets.

This, of course, does not apply to modern day Ashkenazi "Jews" who are Gentile imposters; that is, Gentile converts to cultic Judaism (circa 800 AD) from the tribe of Ashkenaz we call European Jews or Bolsheviks or Zionists.

By gifts here, Paul is not referring to the gifts of nature or human talents, but the gifts that accompany salvation. The gifts of salvation, once received and in effect, are immutable and irrevocable. "Once saved, always saved," is true for the elect. But, it is not true for mere professors of Christianity who are Christians in name only.

Further, Paul reminds us that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance; that is, those who come to God must embrace His work in and through the nation of Israel--a nation that brought mankind the Messianic promises, the Holy Scriptures, God's law, the prophets, the Lord Jesus Christ. "He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1).

**30-31 For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may now obtain mercy.**

There are three "**nows**" in verses 30-31. The emphasis is on the present situation, not a future conversion (vv. 1, 5, 13, 14, 30-31). Jews must believe **NOW** to be grafted back into the olive tree. Gentiles are receiving mercy "**NOW!**" Believing Hebrews are receiving mercy "**NOW!**" And, those people who believe in Christ in the future will receive a salvation that is **NOW!** The three "**nows**" indicate that Israel is **NOW** receiving mercy in this age. "**NOW**" they are bound over to disobedience, but "**NOW**" they can come into the fold by repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul said earlier, "**For I am an Israelite.**" If you doubt, look at me **NOW** (11:1). "At this present time there is a remnant of grace" (11:5). The emphasis is **NOW**; that is, grace was extended to the Jew in Paul's day. "For I speak to you . . . I am an apostle . . . I magnify my ministry" **NOW** (11:13). The means of provocation of Israel to jealousy is not a future conversion, but his own ministry of converting Gentiles to Christ **NOW** in the new age of the Spirit! The grafting is not a massive conversion of Israel as a geopolitical nation at the end of history, but a **NOW** grafting by the Spirit among those Jews who repent and place their trust in Christ during the era of gospel proclamation. **NOW** is the gospel preached. **NOW** is the time to believe. **NOW** is the day of salvation.

**32-33 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!**

The great question in 11:2 is now answered. **Paul asked, "Has God cast off his people?"** He is asking if Israel, by their failure, has completely forfeited their privilege? The question is, "No! God has not cast off ethnic Israel with respect to His salvic plan for mankind?"



The second question prejudices interpretation. The same is true of the question, “**have they stumbled that they should fall?**” He is not asking if there is going to be a mass conversion of the nation. Their stumbling is not as serious as it sounds. It is not a complete and terminal fall. The door of salvation is still open to every Jew who believes the blood of Christ is sufficient to save him from his sins. Salvation is based on mercy, not merit.

By removing ethnic privileges and assigning all to unbelief, the true door of salvation is **NOW** revealed. Grace is the ground of salvation, not race. This view strengthens the significance of the gospel for Jew as well as for Gentile. As Jews believe throughout this gospel age, they experience the “riches” of 11:12 or “life out of the dead.”

No wonder Paul burst into an accolade of praise. He is overcome by the riches and wisdom and knowledge and mystery of God's ways. The ocean of grace is deeper and wider than any man can fathom.

In summary, there are many Jewish myths that are being preached today about those who call themselves “Jews, but are not” (Revelation 3:9) and a proposed re-establishment of ancient Israel in the Holy Land.

What is important for the believer to understand is that the manifold wisdom of God is being displayed by incorporating Gentiles into the Commonwealth of Israel; that is, true Israel. Only through Christ can people be saved. He is “the way, the truth, and the life.”

When Evangelicals hold out a future hope for those who call themselves “Jews but are not”, they cling to a false hope. Jews like all other men must enter the kingdom by embracing Christ by faith. Furthermore, the amount of energy expended in proclaiming a mythological eschatological hope for Zionists not only waste valuable energy, it leads people astray from the gospel and the centrality of the cross in salvation. While we hold out a hope for those who call themselves “Jews, but are not”, we do so on gospel ground, not on the eschatological ground of a restored Israel in Palestine.

# 1 Corinthians 15:22-30

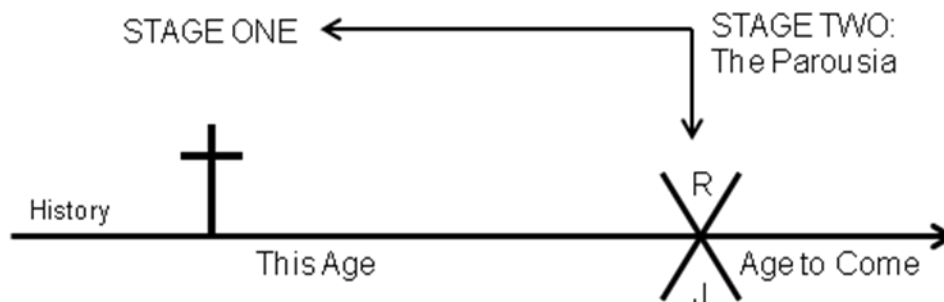
## *The Last Enemy*

♦ **Theological Issues:** The victory over death is accomplished in at least two stages, (Christ' first coming and at the Parousia of Christ).

Ladd, a strong premillennialist, saw three stages of the defeat of His enemies (Christ first coming, the *Parousia*, and the defeat of Christ's enemies after the alleged millennial reign). Ladd came to this conclusion by separating the following three phrases: (1) "Christ the first fruits"; (2) "Christ's at his *Parousia*"; and, (3) "then cometh the end." Ladd inserted a thousand years between the *Parousia* and "the end."

But, a natural reading of the text would supports the view that "the end" follows *the Parousia*. His second coming contains salvation for the righteous and final judgment of the wicked. After reading 1 Thessalonians chapter four and five one would conclude that the ominous wrath of God upon wicked men follows the rapture; that the rapture, the second coming, and the resurrection are essentially the same event—an event that cannot be exegetically supported by a thousand year separation.

**Figure 11: Two Stages of the kingdom (Stockton KOG Manual)**



**22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.**

**For:** The word "for" (gar) is conjunctive unifying Paul's discussion in the first twenty-two verses with this section.

**In Adam:** Adam is a type of humanity under the dominion of sin and death. Since all men are sons of Adam, all die; that is, we can trace our physical ancestry back to the first family. When Adam as our federal head sinned, death began its cruel work in the human race. Death is man's fundamental enemy. All get sick. All die.

Thus, religion is about man's fundamental problem—the grip of death on body and soul. Is there any tangible proof that death can be overcome? That the grave is not the end? That death is not lord of mankind? The marvelous answer is "Yes!" Christ delivered the initial blow to death in and through His death, burial, and resurrection. Since Christ defeated death, He solved man's fundamental problem (Hebrews 2:14).

**In Christ:** "In Christ" is a type of new humanity that shares the blessings of the kingdom of God. "Shall be made alive" is a future indicative which is the mood of reality. Since our Lord was raised from the dead, those who believe in Him shall experience the blessedness of resurrected life in to the Age to Come (cf. Luke 20:35).

**23 But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.**

**Order:** The word "order" (tagma) speaks of things that are arranged or placed in some kind of logical order.

**Christ the first fruits:** Christ is the head of a new humanity and those surrender to his authority destined to share in the benefits of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the rule of God and the reign of life. The resurrection of Christ was an eschatological event belonging to the Age to Come. In Christ the Eschaton arrived in history, but the consummation awaited the end of the age. He was the "first fruits" of the Eschaton, but the full harvest awaits His Parousia. The harvest is the blessed resurrection of believers at the beginning of the Eschaton. The Spirit that will create a new heaven and a new earth regenerates men as "new creation" now when they come into relationship with the Son (John 3:3, 5: 7:38; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Those who experience the eschatological powers of regeneration of the spirit now will experience the eschatological regeneration of the body when Christ returns at the end of the church era.

Two great events are in view here: The resurrection of Christ, the first fruits of the eschatological harvest; and, the Parousia, the full harvest of redeemed humanity. The Parousia marks the end of history and the beginning of the Eschaton.

**24 Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.**

**The End:** The conquest of man's enemies began with the mother promise in Genesis 3:15 which this text references. The "end" is the *terminus ad quem* of history where the enemies of God are defeated and believers are saved. The adverb "when" is a time marker indicating consummation of the conquest of Christ in His mission to defeat Satan, sin, and death.

**The kingdom of God:** The meaning of the kingdom of God is the reign of God through Christ destroying the enemies of God's reign. However, the conquest of God's enemies is not accomplished in a single act. Christ is the first fruits of the Age to Come. Two more resurrections will follow: the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust. In Christ's resurrection we see Him as the first fruits of a harvest of to come (Ladd, *The Gospel of the kingdom*, 1959; Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 1974).

**Put down:** The subjunctive aorist verb "put down" means "to nullify," and it is a reference to the future abolishment of all human rule and authority. A day is coming when the Christ will return and unveil his authority as King of the Universe. When He appears, He will squash, nullify, abolish, and demolish man's institutions along with the proud men ruling over them.

**25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.**

The kingdom of God means the defeat of the enemies of God--the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ until all His enemies are put under His feet. Since Christ has risen from the grave out of death, his triumph has begun. Sitting at the right hand of God, His reign is now . . . and not something postponed to an alleged millennium. The reign of the Lord Christ is in session by virtue of his exaltation and glorification in heaven (cf. Acts 2:32-34; 7:56; Revelation 5).

**26 The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed is death.**

**Enemy:** the kingdom of God is about the defeat of God's enemies. The OT described enemies in political terms as in Isaiah 8-9 and Zechariah 12-14, but the defeat of national adversaries was only a type of Christ's ultimate conquest over man's real enemies: Satan, sin, and death. The battlefield was the cross. There our Lord crushed these powers by virtue of his death, burial, and resurrection. The final realization of the defeat of death awaits the consummation at the end of the age.

**Death:** Man's fundamental problem is death. Can death be overcome is the great question of religion? The gospel announces our Lord's tangible, visible, physical triumph over our greatest enemy, but we await our Lord's return for our personal victory over this enemy. His historical resurrection is legal proof of claim. No other religion on earth has legal proof that its claims are true. Other religions only offer suppositions. They have no historical, legal evidence their claims are true. ONLY Christianity offers undisputable, irrefutable legal proof of claim that death is not lord.

The kingdom of God is real and true. The powers of the kingdom were being manifest in and through Jesus' ministry. The first stage of the kingdom was open for public inspection and cross examination. Men could enter the kingdom and experience its powers, but the full, dynamic, irresistible, universal manifestation of the kingdom awaits the end of the age. The kingdom was present in and through Christ in advance of its climatic conclusion in judgment.

**27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.**

**Under his feet:** This is an idiom for victory. The image is that of a champion putting his heel on the head of a vanquished enemy. The image reminds us of the serpent under His heel.

**All things under him:** This is reference to Psalm 8:6 and Psalm 110:1 wherein God put all things under the foot of the Son of Man. Historically this promise was not realized until the historical triumph of Christ at the cross. The verb "put under" is a perfect, passive indicative indicating this is an accomplished fact. The fact that He rose from the dead and was received at the right hand of God is evidence that His work for man's redemption was accepted by the Father and that He is now the King with all things in subjection to Him.

**Excepted:** This phrase should be translated, "Except the one (God) Who did subject the 'all things' to Him (Christ)." We have here a rendition of Christian theology at its best.

Christianity clearly teaches there is one God in three persons without mixing or confusing the personalities. God placed all things, even His enemies under the feet of Christ. Christ is the supreme authority in the universe. However, the apostle is careful to note that the "all things" under His feet does not include the Father Himself.

**28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.**

Scripture anticipates a day where Paradise will be restored, and the original creative order reinstated: That order is stated perfectly in 1 Corinthians 11 wherein the practice of head covering memorializes the truth of God's order: the Father, Christ, man, woman, all of creation. On the day of consummation, all will see God as the supreme Being, and His Son, the Head of redeemed humanity, in subjection to the Father. The supreme desire of Son, the God / man, is that His Father may be "all in all;" i.e., on that day when Paradise is restored the wonder and greatness of God and His amazing work of redemption will capture the wonder and devotion of every creature.

**29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? 30 And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?**

**Else:** "Whence" or "Since" builds upon the preceding deliberation. The apostle just codified the greatest historical event in history and explained its ramification from the garden to Paradise and now takes a deep breath before proceeding.

**Baptized for the dead:** There are no less than thirty interpretations on this verse. As a Christian apologist, the apostle engages a *reductio ad absurdum argument* wherein a proposition is disproven by following its implications logically to an absurd conclusion.

The reasoning is as follows: If Christ is dead and not risen from the dead, then it is ridiculous to be baptized for a dead Christ. Why would any sane man place his ultimate hope in a dead man who promised victory over death but who could not provide proof of claim; i.e., victory over death by a physical resurrection. How could a reasonable man worship a dead corpse believing the dead person could save him from death? To say, "I believe in So-in-So who is dead is a reasonable proposition. But, to conclude this So-in-So, a corpse, can save a man from death is ridiculous. Why would any man endanger his life ("jeopardy") for such an argument?

The good news, however, is that Christ did die, but unlike all the false religious leaders in history, Christ provided proof of claim that He could save men from death by personally, physically, tangibly, evidentially rising from the dead. The fact that normal living men and woman saw, heard, and touched the risen Christ, is proof that death was defeated. To trust that this Christ as the Savior Who can save them from death is **not** a *reductio ad absurdum argument*, but a reasonable, rational, logical conclusion by sane people; i.e., trust in Christ is the result of inductive reasoning. Therefore, Christians profess their trust by obeying the Risen Lord in water baptism. In so doing, they announce that they are co-participants in the benefits of His triumphant history -- a history to be consummated at the last trump.

Thomas was such a man. When his fellow disciples declared they had seen the risen Christ, Thomas did what any empiricist ought to do: to question the claim.

John 20:25 We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

To label Thomas as a "**doubter**" is a grievous misnomer. Thomas was **not** a skeptic. He was a reasonable man, an empiricist that believed that knowledge comes only from sensory experiences. He had just heard an eyewitness testimony of the impossible: Jesus, who was crucified and buried, was now alive. He demanded to go into the court room and have the proponents of the claim provide proof of claim. Further, he wanted a chance to cross examine the eye-witness testimony. He wanted legal, tangible proof; direct evidence; material evidence. He wanted to see, feel, touch, and hear this so-called "risen Christ." And, he got it!! After examining the evidence by seeing, hearing, and touching Him, Thomas turned to Christ and said, "My Lord, and my God!"

**Jeopardy every hour:** ~ a reference to the suffering of the apostles in the Mediterranean world due to their proclamation of the gospel of the risen Christ.

### **Jesus Rose to life**

If Jesus be dead, in the grip of a tomb,  
There'd be nothing for us but fear and doom.  
Life would be sad, with no way to cope.  
Death would reign all, without any hope.

If Jesus be dead, in the grip of a tomb,  
We'd have no future, only dark and gloom.  
No life after death, no eternity in sight,  
No hope, no joy, no Savior, no light.

But.... (And aren't we thankful there is a "but")

But thanks be to God, Jesus rose to life.  
The debt all paid, though sin was rife.  
His body lay in the tomb three days,  
Then up from the grave his life was raised.

Yes, thanks be to God, Jesus rose to life.  
He conquered death, all sin and strife.  
To those who believe, from death set free.  
With hope, with joy, their Savior to see.

A poem by John R. Cross  
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# 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

## *The Last Trump*

♦ Jesus spoke of two resurrections: the resurrection of the soul wherein the believer is transformed in the inner man by the powers of the Eschatological Spirit due to his faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This is the first resurrection mentioned by John. It is also called "the new birth" or "the new creation."

The second resurrection is the redemption and transformation of the body associated with the Parousia of Christ and the arrival of the Age of Regeneration. Before us is the final victory of redemption (cf. John 5:24-29; 2 Corinthians 5:17 ).

**50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.**

**Now this I say, brethren:** This is Paul's summation of his argument regarding the significance of Christ's resurrection in history and its future implications for believers.

**"Brethren"** is an affection reference to Christians who believe Christ.

**Flesh and blood:** This expression refers to our mortal body which is subject to corruption and death.

**The kingdom of God:** The kingdom of God belongs to the Age to Come (the Eschaton) and is contrasted with this age (an age of corruption). In this age, death reigns; in the Age to Come, life reigns.

While Christians do taste the first fruits of Eschaton when they believe (Ephesians 1:13-14), they will never experience the full blessings of God's kingdom in this life until the *Parousia* (coming glory of Christ). The fullness of the kingdom belongs to an age beyond history. The kingdom will never be fully realized apart from the personal, glorious, triumphant return of Christ in the clouds to meet His saints.

**Corruption v. Incorruption:** These mortal bodies poisoned by sin and subject to death cannot inherit the glories of the Eschaton. To enter the Age of Regeneration, one must have a regenerated soul and possess a regenerated body. Salvation is an eschatological gift wherein believers experience the first fruits of the Eschaton (justification, regeneration, reconciliation, and eternal life) by faith. Though believers are saved and born again, their bodies are not born again. The salvation and regeneration of the body awaits the arrival of the Eschaton at the Parousia of Christ.

**51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,**

**Mystery:** A mystery is a truth not fully developed in the OT, but which has been made known in the NT era by revelation.

**Sleep and changed:** Sleep is a metonym for death because a dead person looks like they are sleeping. When Paul said "not all sleep," he is referring to the fact that while all believers die in history, a generation of believers will be alive when He returns; that is, the living saints will experience the redemption and transformation of the body at His Parousia. Not all believers will die a natural death, but all will be changed (*allasso*).

**52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.**

What will happen at the Parousia?

At the Parousia, the dead will rise and the living will be raptured into His presence. His Parousia announces the arrival of the Eschaton and the consummation of salvation promises. At this marvelous moment mortal bodies will be wonderfully regenerated and transformed by His resurrection powers.

The Spirit condescends to explain the wonders of the resurrection in terms our humanity can understand. We are told that at the Parousia there will be a piercing sound, a trumpet blast that will wake the dead. In a split second, in the blink of an eye, masses of believing humanity will glowingly escape the chains of death, the dark caverns of the cemetery, and the horrors of the tomb. Bodies and ashes with bones, arms, and feet shall be summoned from the four corners of the earth to meet their Champion.

**53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.**

**Must put on incorruption:** The term "**must**" states an absolute, irrefutable, undeniable truth. The "corruptible" is this precious but flawed body. Though the body is weak and affected by sin, it is not trash. God's plan of redemption not only includes the salvation of the soul, but the salvation of the body. "Incorruption" is a reference to the quality and character of the glorious, powerful, regenerated, imperishable, spiritual, immortal body promised by our Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42-49).

**54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'**

The victory of victories is announced! When these corruptible tents will be transformed into incorruptible mansions; and, these bodies clothed in rags mortality will one day be dressed in glorious robes of immortality, then from home on earth to home in heaven released prisoners cheer, "Death is swallowed up in victory."

Death has proved to be man's most fierce, invincible foe. With all our diets, technology, and pharmaceuticals, death remains the victor still. But, death is not lord. We have a Champion that entered the brutal arena on our behalf to contest death's terrifying, cold grip on our humanity. Wounded but triumphant, Calvary's darkness gave way to Sunday's light. From heaven's walls, he will descend in the clouds to call our name. Into His presence we shall ever be, and there we will shout, "Death is swallowed up in victory."

**55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**

Death is compared to the poison injected by the serpent near the Poisonous Tree. The grave is personified as a thief that's been caught and forced to return stolen goods. The query is taken from Hosea 13:14 in reference to the Messianic Age. It's as if the saints, who were captured by the enemy, have been rescued from an Auschwitz-like death camp by the mighty army of their Commander. With their heels on the necks of their enemies, they taunt the conquered foes: "Now, death, where is your power? Now, grave, where is your boasting? (cf. Hosea 13:14).

**56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.**

With amazing brevity and simplicity, Paul summarizes the entire subject of hamartiology, Biblical jurisprudence, and soteriology. Sin is portrayed as a venomous serpent having fangs of death. Here the bitten sinner in his delirium is depicted as a

Saturday-night thief with stolen fruit from the Poisonous Tree standing in court confronted by witnesses of his crime. One by one the witness testify of the horrors of broken law. Violation after violation is stated enabling the court to pronounce the sinner guilty as charged.

But, God provided a remedy.

**57 But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

How can a guilty sinner escape the terrors of death and eternal punishment? Into the courtroom walks a Friend of the Court with wounds in hand and feet: "I've already paid for this sinner's crime with my own blood. Set him free!" Lifting his chin off his chest, the tearful sinner suddenly realizing that he has been vindicated by the victory of Another. Jumping up, he shouts, "Thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

**58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.**

**Beloved Brethren:** Paul affectionately refers to the Corinthians as "beloved brethren:" i.e., he reminds them that they are objects of God's love in Christ. Set free from condemnation and destined to share in the ultimate liberation at the Eschaton, Paul lays on the redeemed a duty:

**Be steadfast:** "Be" is an imperative ordering the believers, in light of their eschatological hope, to take responsibility for their own growth in the faith. He wants them to be strong and muscular, firm and steady in the faith; i.e., not to give into doubt or a personal weakness that might make them vulnerable to the blows of the enemy. For doubt is the mother of all sins!

**Unmovable:** Paul does not want the Corinthians to be shaken or flustered in the faith by the peevish doubts of others. "Life is argument; and, argument is the art of living" (Gerry Spence). When a person does not believe in Christ, they itch to rattle and shake the faith of Christians. Paul does not give the believers permission to be a victim of the skepticism and unbelief of opponents of Christianity; that is, Paul does not want the Corinthians to give adversaries power over their minds.

**Always abounding in the work of the Lord:** A cure for anxiety and doubt is gospel work. "Always" means *continuously*; and, "abounding" means "to overflow and cause to increase." Paul is saying, "Don't stop serving Christ! Don't quit! Don't take a vacation! Don't retire! Keep on serving, loving, and sharing the faith."

**Not in vain:** The reason the apostle exhorted believers to be steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding and expanding their ministry is because God is careful to remember every effort to please Him and to reward them for it; that is, one day their work will be their crown and their joy. Not all work will be rewarded. But, that service "in the Lord" (to Christ) will not be forgotten by Him (cf. Hebrews 6:10).

## 2 Corinthians 5:1-9

### *A Christian Theology of Death*

♦ Without a doubt, the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has challenged every presumption of man about what happens at the time of death. His victory over the grave softens the blow and infuses hope into every heart still living when a loved one passes from this life. But, to even the best of saints, what happens at death is not clear. At Trinity Seminary in Albuquerque, Dr. Steven Collins offered the following perspective.

In John 11:26, Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me shall never die."

The author of Hebrews announced, "It is appointed unto man once to die" (Hebrews 9:27)

What is meant by these amazing statements? Is there a contradiction between them? From a medical standpoint, Lazareth was dead. No one doubted the grip death had on his body. But, we must ask from a divine standpoint if Lazareth really died; i.e., crossed the veil between earth and heaven to enter Paradise? When Christ arrived at the tomb and called out to Lazareth, was the brother of Martha and Mary summoned from Paradise and made to re-cross the veil between heaven and earth and to enter his mummified corpse? It appears that this was not the case as Jesus referred to his condition as "sleep" (11:11).

From Jesus' standpoint Lazarus never died. We have here a radical healing, a dynamic resuscitation if you will from the dead, a powerful illustration that Christ is Lord of the grave. But, we must ask, do all believers sleep until the Lord returns? That is, upon death do believers enter a non-conscious state waiting the appearance of Christ to appear at some future time in history? Or, are believers in some kind of state as a disembodied spirit?

These questions are answered in our text. Upon death, believers are not "asleep" until the Lord returns, nor do they become disembodied spirits floating in heaven waiting for

the return of Christ. The Apostle Paul under inspiration of the Holy Spirit enlightens the Corinthians as to what really happens at the moment of death for believers. **We have in this text, a theology of death for believers.**

In eternity, there is no time. In fact, eternity is not a long time anymore than infinity is a large number. When a believer dies, he is transported out of the dimension of time into the omni-dimensional world of eternity where in that realm of unseen reality, he/she immediately receives his/her resurrected body; that is, one's next conscious thought after death is the rapture of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17ff. When Enoch prophesied, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints" (Jude 14), he apparently saw people in resurrected bodies and not thousands of disembodied spirits.

Let's read the following text carefully:

### **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

**16 For which cause we faint not [do not give up]; but though our outward man perish [the body], yet the inward man [the regenerated soul] is renewed day by day.**

**17 For our light affliction [physical suffering], which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;**

**18 While we look not at the things which are seen [earthly, physical dimension], but at the things which are not seen [eternal, heavenly, spiritual dimension]: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

### **2 Corinthians 5:1-9**

**2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if our *earthly house* [mortal body] of this *tabernacle* [the body as a temporary temple] were dissolved [physical death], we have [present tense] *a building of God* [a resurrected body] *an house* not made with hands [an immortal, incorruptible, spiritual body], eternal in the heavens.**

**2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring *to be clothed* [with a resurrected body] upon with our house which is from heaven [the resurrected body].:**

**3 If so be that being clothed [bodily transformed], we shall not be found *naked* [as a disembodied spirit].**

**4 For we that are in *this tabernacle* [this earthly body] do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed [separated from our body by death], but clothed**

upon [transformed by resurrection in a new body], that mortality [subject to death] might be swallowed up of life [the power of eternal life].

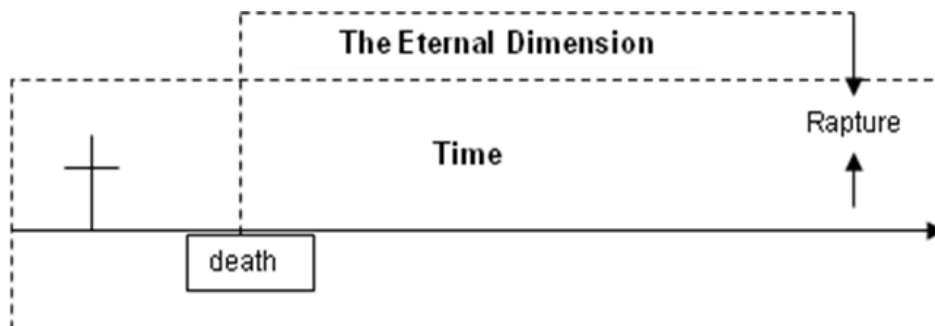
5 Now he that hath prepared us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest [down payment] of the Spirit.

6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body [here on earth], we are absent from the Lord [who is in heaven in his resurrected body]:

7 (For we walk by faith [seeing the real eternal world], not by sight [the physical world]:)

8 We are confident [courageous], I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body [mortal body and out of this three dimensional world], and to be present with the Lord [in our resurrected body in His one-dimensional world].

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.



**In summary**, death is an enemy of man. From this side of the veil there is so much uncertainty about what happens when a Christian man or woman dies. Not everyone goes to heaven. Not everyone will enter Paradise.

But, Christians are assured in this text that when a believer's body dies, *that he immediately crosses Jordan's River into Paradise, and that he has a house waiting for him*. The believer **neither** sleeps or wanders around as a disembodied spirit in another dimension. At death, the Christian enters his new body, a building from God, which he will have for all eternity--a body won by the wonderful accomplishments of Christ on his behalf at Calvary.



# 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

## *The Parousia of Christ*

### The Reality of the Resurrected Christ

**1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.**

♦ Since some Thessalonian believers had died since Paul's first visit to the city, many in the church were distressed over the death of family members and friends. Apparently, some of the Thessalonians had adopted the idea that believers who die before the Second Coming would have a serious handicap over those who survive and are still living. Perhaps they were thinking that the dead would not participate in the benefits of the Parousia.

Paul begins by saying **"I do not want you to be ignorant"** (v. 18). Such introductory prefaces are common in the epistles (cf. Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:8). Ignorance about what happens when a believing family member dies can be quite distressing. It can have serious negative emotional and spiritual ramifications. Despair and hopelessness is not a condition germane to the faith. Christians are permitted to grieve over dead Christian family members and close friends. Even Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus His friend (John 11:35.)

But, grief, however, must always be tempered by hope and joy. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Notice the present tense "to be present." Consequently, believers have an entirely different perspective about death than pagans and the religious cults.

**14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.**

Into this cave of despair, Paul lit a candle of hope. This hope was not based on human philosophy, or human opinions, or human propositions. This hope was based on an

essential fact—THE HISTORICAL RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. Since Christ defeated death by virtue of his resurrection, He is the Lord. If Christ defeated death, then He solved man's fundamental problem. If He solved man's fundamental problem, then there is forensic proof He can solve "our" fundamental problem—death of the body.

The use of the term "**sleep**" to describe physical death is common in Scripture (e.g., Genesis 2:30; 2 Samuel 7:12; 1 Kings 2:10; Matthew 27:52; John 11:11-13; Acts 7:60; 1 Corinthians 2:39; 15:6, 18).

Dead people often look like they are sleeping. The English word "cemetery" comes from this same Greek word (*koimaomai*) and means "a sleeping place." This is not to be confused with "soul sleep." When a believer dies, he goes to be with the Lord immediately!

Thus, in using the term "**sleep**," Jesus distinguishes between the wicked dead, and believers who "sleep in Jesus" (4:14). The soul of believers is not asleep. Only their decaying bodies. God's salvation includes the redemption of the body which is here explained in resurrection terms. These mortal bodies will one day receive immortality.

Romans 8:11: "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

The Christ who died and rose again will come again, and when He comes again, He will come with all those who died in the faith. In other words, the holy dead are safe and secure in the arms of Jesus.

[Note: This passage does not augur well for radical preterism that teaches "sleeping" refers to some type of spiritual sloth -- a lethargic state that will dissipate at the Lord's judgment on Jerusalem in 70 AD wherein sleepy Christians will be invigorated by His invisible coming in 70 AD. "He brings with him" is not the same as "raise them up." The radical preterist view that turns the "second resurrection" into a spiritual event falls into the error of the Gnostics; i.e., it is essential neo-platonic. For a full refutation on "full Preterism", see Brian Schwerley's excellent work on the Rapture of the Saints, an Exposition of 1 Thessalonians 4:12-18, on which many of my comments are based.]

### **The Revelation of the Parousia**

**15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.**

The Greeks speculated about life after death. Philosophers reason about the inexplicable mystery of death. But, Paul does not contemplate or speculate. He does not try to comfort these bereaving saints with imaginative theories. His belief system is based on revelation, and he anchors hope to the sure Word of God. The expression “by the word of the Lord” assuredly refers to the receiving of direct revelation from Christ to one of the apostles or even to Paul himself.

The pronoun “**we**” includes all Christians who are alive at His Parousia. To narrow this to a slice of Christians living at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem is the same interpretive error the Pharisees made when they narrowed violations of the law to only the acts of violence saying, e.g., “thou shall not murder” refers only to a homicidal act (cf. Matthew 5:20ff). Remember, Jesus expanded the command to its original application which included the prohibition of “anger” leading up to malicious act of passion.

Likewise, the “**we**” here is generic and not specific. One must be very careful at coming to dogmatic theological conclusions on the basis of the words, “we,” “our,” “us,” or “you” (plural).

The word “**coming**” is the Greek word *Parousia*. For this reason, scholars refer to the second coming as the “Parousia of Christ.” The word means “coming” or “arrival” or “presence” and is used in 2:19 and 3:19. The word is used in many different ways in the NT and does not always refer to the Second Advent of our Lord. Here it does! Christ is coming again in history!

When He comes, there will be Christians on the earth, “**we which are alive.**” The use of the pronoun “we” indicates that Paul had this hope burning in his heart at the time of writing his epistle. The phrase “shall not prevent” means “to precede.” In the Greek, the word “prevent” is announced with a double negative (no, not<sup>34</sup>). Paul assures us the living shall not rise until the Christian dead have risen.

[It is extremely difficult to see how consistent preterists can contend that this passage refers to the events of 70 AD. Terms like “sleep,” “bring with him,” “dead in Christ will rise first,” “so we shall always be with the Lord” are expressions related to the Parousia

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<sup>34</sup> ουv mh. fqa,swmen tou.j koimhqe,ntaj\

at the end of the Christian age and not some spiritual escalation due to the Roman assault on Jews and Christians during the reign of Nero and Titus. The error of radical preterism is that it redefines the Savior's victory in terms of a secret, undetectable, spiritual conquest (a second and final coming in 70 AD) that even the church of Christ was unaware of until the nineteenth century.]

### **The Return of Christ**

**16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God . . .**

### **What Will We See?**

We will **not** see an angel. The Lord will **not** send a messenger or emissary or special agent. This event is so important in the heart of God, the great Administrator of the Universe will step out of His palace of praise to meet His bride personally. We will see Christ Himself.

The verb "**descend**" (katabaino) literally means "to go down." The descent is from heaven to earth. He will be arrayed in all his glory and majesty to welcome his people into their eternal home. His return is bodily and physical, not spiritual and symbolic. As he ascended into heaven bodily, he will return physically, materially, and tangibly (Acts 1:11; 5:31-23). His return will be visible to the naked eye.

Note the three coterminous acts associated with His physical, bodily descent out of heaven. This is not a private, invisible, secret coming, but a public appearance. This is something that appeals to human senses; that is, this is a material, physical experience of which facts in a court of law are made up of: What did you hear? What did you feel? What did you see?

### **What Will We Hear?**

We will hear three distinct audible sounds.

**First**, we will hear **A THUNDERING SHOUT** (*keleusma*<sup>35</sup>)! So piercing will be his whoop and howler, it will awake the dead. Every grave on the earth and in the sea will hear the Captain's command, "COME!" Whether believers are buried in shallow graves or under tons of geologic rock, the Christian dead will rise and come forth leaping like calves released from the stall to meet the Savior (Malachi 4:1-4). Our Lord spoke of this when He said, "all who are in the graves will hear His voice" (John 5:28). This is *his own* command proceeding from *his* lips to *his* own sheep. It is not an order given to him, but a command issued *by* our Captain.

**Second**, there will be the beautiful voice of the archangel. The only archangel mentioned by name in Scripture is Michael (see Jude 9; Revelation 12:7; Daniel 10:13). In Daniel 10:13 he is called one of "the chief princes." Scripture indicates that there are different ranks of angels and archangels are probably the cardinal authorities of the angelic armies. The Bible tells us that our Savior will come with all the holy angels (Matthew 25:31). Possibly, this archangel summons the mighty hosts of heaven to descend with our Lord. Angels ministered to Jesus during His time of humiliation (Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:13) and have always shown empathy regarding the salvation of sinners (Matthew 18:10). Subsequently, it is fitting that they are present at the Parousia and destruction of the wicked. So glorious is this event, the conductor of the heavenly choir will take leave of his duties to lead this procession with a song of triumphant praise.

**Third**, we will hear the distinct, clear blast of heaven's trumpet. It will announce the command to assemble. From above the earth and from below the earth, the saints will fall in rank to welcome Him as King of kings, and Lord of lords. The blast of the trumpet in Scripture calls to mind a number of uses. The two silver trumpets blown by the priests were used to call the people of God together for worship (Numbers 10:3), to sound the call for the Israelites to begin their journeys in the wilderness (Numbers 10:5-6), to sound the alarm to go to prepare for war (Numbers 10:9), and they were blown over the sacrifices (Numbers 10:10; 2 Chr. 29:28). Trumpets were blown to announce the year of Jubilee when land was released to the original owners and slaves were set free (Leviticus 25:8-17). All of this symbolized the redemption and freedom wrought by

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<sup>35</sup> The word "shout" (*keleusma*) occurs only here in the New Testament. It is used to issue orders such as a military command, the shout of a chariot driver to his horses, the command of a huntsman to his dogs, or the cry of a Roman captain to his rowers to row.

Jesus Christ. Our Lord even spoke of “the favorable year of the LORD” was fulfilled in His ministry (Luke 4:16-21; cf. Isaiah 61:1-3).

Further, the sound of a “**great trumpet**” announced the launching of the gospel to the world (Matthew 24:31). But, this may be symbolic. With the trumpet blast a great work commenced where God’s gospel servants went forth as an army to conquer souls with the sword of the Spirit. The apostles and evangelists went forth gathering together God’s elect into a new nation, the true Israel of God, His church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

Further, trumpet blasts announce the judgment of God (Isaiah 27:13; Zech. 9:12; Revelation 8:2-11:15). The use of the trumpet is also conjoined with Old Testament theophanies. In Psalm 47:5, God ascends to the temple mount accompanied by the Ark of the Covenant with a shout and the sound of a trumpet. Jehovah’s descent to Mount Sinai to speak to His people was accompanied with “*the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled*” (Exodus 19:16, 19; cf. Hebrews 12:19).

After looking at the use of the trumpet in Scripture, we see why the trumpet is such an appropriate icon at the Parousia of Christ. In fact, the second coming, more than any other event, calls to mind all the usages of the trumpet in Scripture which involves: judgment of the wicked, the resurrection of the righteous, the assembling together of the saints of God, their association together in the accomplishments of redemption. At the Parousia our bodies are glorified and set free decay and the earth itself finds its liberation from the bondage of sin. This is the eternal Sabbath rest and eternal Jubilee. The trumpet calls all of God’s people to worship. What a blessed trumpet blast this will be!

### **What Will We Feel?**

I am not sure what we will feel. Perhaps, we will feel the sensation and thrill of a space shuttle lift as we are released from gravitational forces of earth. Paul refers to “a moment of the twinkling of an eye” where we will feel a mighty surge of power transform our mortal bodies into immortality (1 Corinthians 15:52). Interestingly, the word “moment” is the Greek word *atomos* (ἐν ᾧτόμῳ), the smallest unit in Greek thought, from which we get the English Word “atom.”

### **What Will We Say?**

I am not sure, but the first words in Revelation five are “Worthy is the Lamb” (5:12). Or, maybe we will be like Zechariah who was so overwhelmed with the presence of God in the temple, he was not able to speak a word. I know this, that when the wonderment of our eternal state settles in, we will be in awe of the glory and splendor of the Lamb. Our thoughts will begin to understand the name of the Champion mentioned by Isaiah (Isaiah 9:6-7).

The details in this passage seem to refute dispensationalism's secret rapture theory and the radical preterist doctrine of a clandestine, inaudible, indiscernible Second Coming of Christ?

### The Resurrection of the Christian Dead

#### **16 and the dead in Christ shall rise first:**

Following the wondrous sounds, we have the resurrection of the dead.

The word “**rise**” is a term of resurrection. This is not resuscitation, nor reconstruction, nor revival of a faith statement. It is a statement of fact. The Christian dead who will rise first will receive **a resurrected body**. It will be a real, physical, spiritually-generated resurrected body like the Lord had after he left the tomb. It will be **a glorified body**—an object of beauty and health and ability. It will be **a spiritual body**—that is, it will be adapted through God’s metamorphic power to serve and submit to the regenerated, human spirit. It will be **an incorruptible body**; i.e., it will no longer be mortal or subject to humiliation, disease, decay, and death. The sag, droop, and wrinkle will no longer plague this new creation. Throughout the ages believers have suffered terribly from disease and fire and cruel wars. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the battlefield graves will yield their prisoners. The deserts that have bleached the sun-baked bones of martyrs will release their grip, and they will rise. In Scripture, this is called the first resurrection and if any want to be a part of it, they must trust Christ now (John 5:24ff).

[Note: This could not possibly refer to 70 AD as no one rose from the dead during the Jewish War. In Matthew 24, the Lord said nothing about a resurrection from the dead. Instead, our Lord urged believers to flee Jerusalem and to go into hiding. The fact that Paul is expounding the resurrection of “the dead who are in Christ” (*oi nekroi en Kristo*) rules out the radical preterist view that this account describes only a spiritual event.

Further, this cannot refer to regeneration of *Christian* souls, for these dead souls are already saved and in heaven. It cannot refer to a revival of *Christian* souls, for such a

thing is impossible and unnecessary. Finally, this is not a partial resurrection of privileged saints as the Scripture warrants no such concoction.]

### The Resurrection / Rapture of the Saints

**17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds,**

Having announced the glorious destiny of the Christian dead, the apostle now addresses the destiny of living saints on earth when Christ returns.

The adverb “**then**” (*epeita*) simply means “then after” and is used to introduce the second result of the Redeemer’s descent from heaven.

By using the pronoun “**we**,” the expositor can correctly conclude that Paul was expecting the coming of Christ in his day. The phrase “alive and remain” anticipates some part of the Church being alive on earth when Christ returns. Every generation has the hope that Christ will return in their life time. And, after two millennia of Christian history, that hope burns brighter each and every day.

The word “**caught up**” is the Greek word *harpzo* (ἁρπαγισμέθα), a future indicative, which means “to snatch away.” It is translated “to catch away” (Acts 8:39), “to seize by force” (John 6:15), “to claim for one’s self” (Matthew 25:6), “to move to a new place” (John 14:1-6; Philippians 3:20-21) and “to rescue from danger” (Acts 23:10).

In Matthew 13:19 the word is used to describe the wicked one who “snatches away” the word sown in the hearer’s heart. In Acts 8:39 the word is used to describe Philip being caught away suddenly by the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 12:5 the Christ Child is “caught up” to God to protect Him from the power of the dragon. In Jude 23 the word is used of “seizing” someone *out* of the fire. The idea of complete removal is implied by the context.

The translators during the growth of the church used the Latin word “*rapto*” as a translation of the Greek word *harpzo*. Hence, we get the word “**rapture**” from the Latin. The terms “rise,” “caught up,” “rapto,” and “rapture” are terms of resurrection. When Christ returns, the Christian dead will rise first, and those believers who are alive on earth at the Parousia will be suddenly snatched from the earth to meet the Lord in the clouds.



[Radical preterist make too much of the word "then" by errantly inserting several millennia between verse sixteen and verse seventeen. The forcing of this text by radical preterist to propose a secret, physical resurrection during the events of 70 AD or a non-physical spiritual resurrection crosses the line into absurdity. If the rapture in this text is merely a spiritual event that takes place inside man, then why is it necessary for Jesus to descend bodily from heaven to meet them? For this reason, the radical preterist denies the physical resurrection and correlates it to a descending of the Spirit similar to the events of Pentecost wherein the Spirit filled the early disciples. A spiritual, subjective resurrection makes no sense exegetically, theologically, or historically!]

### The Reunion of Loved Ones

**shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.**

The phrase "**caught up together with them**" implies the living will be reunited with their loved ones. The place of this meeting is in the "air" or "sky" or "atmosphere." Jesus is not coming to meet with His people "in the spirit" to revive their souls. This is a visible, physical, public "open air" meeting.

The expression "**to meet**" (*eis apantesin*) "was a technical expression in Hellenistic Greek for the departure from a city of a delegation of citizens to meet an arriving dignitary in order to accord the person proper respect and honor by escorting the dignitary back to the city" (Wanamaker, p. 175).

This will be a glorious reunion because all will have tangible, glorified bodies. It will be an **everlasting reunion** because we shall "ever be with the Lord." It will be a **triumphant reunion** because we will be gathered around our victorious Savior. It will be a **happy reunion** because we will be with our Christian family in Christ.

[Again, the radical preterist spiritualizes the word "**air**" by interpreting it as "man's spirit."<sup>36</sup> Since the whole context of this section is about a bodily gathering with audible

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<sup>36</sup> Preterist use 1 Peter 3:19 as a proof text to show that people are sometimes called "spirits." The passage 1 Peter 3:19, "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison," cannot be a proof text for such a view because: a) The context makes it clear (v. 20) that Christ preached through Noah to Noah's generation which is now in prison. b) This passage says nothing about dead saints waiting to be released from Hades to go to heaven. c) Even if there was such a release, it would have occurred immediately upon the death or resurrection of Christ and not 40 years later at the coming in judgment upon Jerusalem.

sounds and sights and the physical, corporal resurrection of saints, spiritualizing the word "air" is simply a manipulation of definitions to force a preterist interpretation on this passage.]

### **The Reassurance of Triumph**

#### **18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.**

Death separates loved ones and grief rushes in to fill the vacuum. Death seems so final, so absolute. What can possibly comfort broken hearts? Only the sure word of Christ.

Paul exhorts the believers to take his revelation about the Parousia of Christ and to find in them comfort for the heart. The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is not a fantasy, or myth, or speculation. It is a sure hope. Death is not the end. Death is not lord. Death is not the victor. Christ is Lord and He has defeated death by virtue of his resurrection in history. One day he will return and consummate that victory with his glorious presence. This is our hope. This is our comfort.

Unfortunately, instead of comforting one another with these words, these words have been used to divide and multiply pain and anguish in the Christian community. The source of grief is over the timing of the rapture and the meaning of this event.

In the past few decades, "rapture theology" has grown in popularity to include pretribulation views, mid tribulation views, pre-wrath raptures views, post tribulation views, and radical preterist views. There are even polls on the internet where a person can register their opinion about when the rapture will occur. Will a majority vote effect the timing of the rapture?

Several facts need to be pointed out. **First**, this passage does not tell us when Christ will return. But, we know the Second Coming is a bodily return and not some kind of spiritual renewal akin to a revival. **Secondly**, one cannot exegetically separate the rapture from the second coming. They are one in the same event in this text. Third, since 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians four and Christ's comings precedes 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians five and Paul's description of the day of the Lord and the sudden destruction that will come

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d) The people described in this passage are unbelievers who rejected the gospel in the days of Noah (v. 20). Dead saints are not addressed in this passage. (Brian Schwertley)

upon “them” (sons of darkness), it is exegetically sound to say that believers will be raptured before the destruction of chapter five engulfs the unbelieving world.

Furthermore, Paul assures the believers that they are **not** “appointed to wrath” in 5:9. This statement gives assurance that when God judges the world, not one drop of wrath will fall on his church. It appears from this context that whatever wrath and destruction God has for the future, believers will not experience any of it.

Finally, the consistent preterist view that this text applies to the events of 70 AD and the Lord's judgment of the Jewish nation boggles the mind. Such a conclusion is an abuse of language and must be discarded on the trash heap of failed theories. While the Lord comes many times in history to judge and assist His people, there is a Parousia at the end of the Christian Age that will bring all Christian men bodily into the presence of the Lord Christ.

**Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.**

# 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

## *The Day of the Lord Like a Thief in the Night*

♦ This is another passage that has multiple interpretations. The hyper-preterist sees this "wrath" as connected with the events of Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD. The futurist connect this passage to either the end of the Christian Age or the end of the world.

Because chapter four so clearly and indisputably refers to the events of the Second Coming and because Paul's discussion on the "day of the Lord" immediately follows the resurrection of the dead in chapter four, this section is unquestionably associated with the Parousia.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.**

Paul is writing to the Thessalonian church and he affectionately calls them "brethren" because they, like Paul, had experience the saving power of Christ. In this passage, the Christians are contrasted with the unbelievers. After all, there are only two types of men, the saved and the unsaved; believers and unbelievers. The Christians are called "brethren," "you," "sons of light," "sons of day," "not of the night," "us," "one another," and are associated "light" and "salvation" and living "together with Him." Unbelievers are called "they," and are associated with "darkness," "night," "destruction" and "wrath."

The subject of this section is the "**day of the Lord**." Paul develops his theme, however, to encourage the Christians to live as "sons of light" even though they will not experience one drop of God's wrath (5:9).

The "**Day of the Lord**" follows the coming of Christ for believers in chapter four which also commences the judgment of unbelievers in chapter five. The expression is a designation of a season in history, not just a 24 hour period. The "day of the Lord" is compared to the unwanted intrusion of a thief at night, "destruction," "labor pains," and "wrath."

The expression "**thief in the night**" is an idiom for a sudden, unexpected, and unwanted event. Thieves can leave a man beggin' for bread and suckin' on lemons; that is, thieves are destructive taking a man's precious all. When the day of the Lord comes, no man will die laughing.

**The kingdom of God** is about two great events: the salvation of the righteous, and the judgment of the wicked. John the Baptist preached about the baptism of the Holy Spirit (age of regeneration) and the baptism of wrath (destruction of the wicked) (Matthew 3:7).

Malachi compared the salvation of the righteous as resurrection from the dead wherein believers would come out of graves like "calves from the stall," and the wicked would be burned up like chaff in a furnace and tread down like ashes (4:1-5). Jesus spoke of a harvest at the end of the age where the reapers (angels) would separate the chaff from the wheat to burn with fire. He identified the chaff as "law-breakers" or those "who do iniquity" (Matthew 12:39-41).

Likewise, Paul references these two great events to the Thessalonians using the terms "**salvation**" and "**destruction**."

**The Day of the Lord**, however, is somberly associated with the terrors of judgment upon the wicked: Isaiah calls the day of the Lord a day to humble the proud (2:12) wherein hands will tremble and hearts melt (13:9). Joel refers to the "destruction from the Almighty," "food cut off," "seeds shriveling," "storehouses desolate," "barns torn down," "grain dried up," "beasts groan," "sheep suffer," "fire has devoured the pastures," "flame has burned up all the trees," "beasts of the field pant," "water brooks dried up" and devoured pastures (1:15-20). Amos says it is a day of darkness and not light. He compared it to being chased by a lion and met by a bear (5:18-19, 20). Obadiah spoke of a day of calamity, disaster, and looting which he called "the day of the LORD" (1:15). Zephaniah says the "day of the LORD" is a sacrifice that punishes kings and rulers, swindlers and murderers; a day which called for wailing and mourning; a day of plundering and failed harvests and bitterness (1:7-13).

Concerning "**the times and seasons**" of the Lord's return to save his people and to judge the wicked is of paramount importance to modern eschatology teachers, but the Thessalonians were well taught and seemed to be at peace with God's end-time program. While they understood the great events regarding the Day of the Lord, they

did not know when that day would arrive in history. Those who watch do not need to be told *when* the hour will come, for they are always ready (Bengel).

Use of the expression “**thief in the night**” declares how the Parousia will be a surprise to Christians and a stunning shock to the wicked.

**3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.**

“**They**” refers to unregenerate men.

Apparently, Christ will return during a period when the power-players in the non-Christian world are celebrating a time of peace and prosperity.

The adverb “**then**” and the adjective “**sudden**” informs us of an abrupt, cataclysmic shift wherein ripples of thundering death and judgment crash on man’s parade of peace. The Day of the Lord is compared to labor pains that grip a woman ready to give birth. But, unlike child birth that grants relief to a mother, none shall escape the intense, seizing twists and cramps of God’s strangulation upon proud, Christ-rejecting men.

“They shall not escape!”

**4-5 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.**

**When the Day of the Lord comes** the Sun will not shine, the moon will collapse, and the stars will implode. Like a freak October storm that hits the northeast and drops three feet of snow on power lines causing them to collapse and the whole region to lose power, the Day of the Lord will smother all hopes of men.

The “**but**” in verse four informs us that believers are not on the grid where judgment will fall. Christians are exempt. The use of “light” and “darkness” are metaphors for “righteous” and “unrighteous,” “good” and “evil.” “Day” and “night” are idioms depicting heaven and hell, salvation and condemnation.

To be a “**son**” of light means to take on its character. All believers are children of light, even the weak and struggling. All are cleansed by the blood. All are justified, though not all are sanctified.

**6-7 Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.**

Since the Day of the Lord is coming, how shall we then live?

The expression “**sleep**” refers to a state of spiritual lethargy and moral sluggishness that characterizes the unbelieving world. To be asleep means that one is oblivious and indifferent to the moral decay around them. This spiritual state can be compared to guards at the gate of city that are asleep while an enemy force is coming over the walls to pillage the town. To sleep means the believer has made peace with evil and has given up the fight.

The word “**but**” is a strong adversative calling for Christians to be alert and attentive during their watch on church walls; that is, take your duty seriously and don’t fall into the errors of the age. Paul reminds the believers that the night is characterized by sleeping and drunkenness. If you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause. Christians are called to pull in the opposite direction of the world. This is Paul's way of saying, stop being dead-dog tired! Pull your socks up and run the race. Don't give in to evil! Don't make peace with sin! Show some teeth! Fight! Resist! Growl!

**8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.**

Paul uses the illustration of a soldier to illustrate duty. Like a disciplined soldier ready to kill, Christians are to stand erect, shoulders high, alert and watchful during the night watches.

In war, the enemy goes for the vitals. He is like a snake slithering behind a bush ready to sink in his fangs and to poison the mind. The enemy is like a cosmopolitan seductress with raven-black hair and ruby-red lips that goes for the heart.

Consequently, the combatant is called to put on the breastplate of faith and love to protect himself from the arrows of doubt and disobedience hurled at him by the enemy. Faith slays duplicity, and love motivates a person to obey God’s law during periods of moral laxity. Paul told the Romans that love is a fulfilling of law (Romans 13:8). Further, the believer is called to put on a helmet, the hope of salvation. This is not wishful thinking or confidence in fiction, but true men who like an eagle sink its talons into the truth of the gospel -- a gospel with its roots in the historical events of crucifixion and resurrection.

**9-11 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort (encourage) yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.**

Paul ends his instruction with a vital truth and with two imperatives: to encourage one another in the faith, and to edify one another.

The one comforting truth that is to guide the Christian regarding the terrifying Day of the Lord is that God has not appointed believers to wrath, but to salvation. Wrath is a reference to the fiery judgment on the wicked. Since Christ paid for his sins at Calvary, there is not one drop of wrath left to fall on the believer. Christ discharged the believer's debt. Hence, there is no further claim made upon him by Heaven's Court. Wrath is reserved for tares and goats; that is, those who reject God's remedy for sin through Christ (Matthew 35:31-41).

Unlike chapter four written to comfort believers (4:18), this section in chapter five was given to provoke believers to love and good works.

The word "**encourage**" (parakaleo) means "to cajole, urge, beg, request and summon." Because Christians tend to fall asleep during night watches, Paul grants permission to Christian marines to poke their fellow soldiers and to charge them with duty.

Secondly, the term "**build up**" (oikodomeo) reminds zealous Christians that they must not beat the sheep, but to employ words that build up the flock. Christianity does not need more judges with sticks in one hand and a beam in their own eye to pound Christians into submission. Rather, the church needs true men like the "children of Issachar, that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chronicles 12:32).

[Note: Radical Preterists say this passage describes the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The "Day of the Lord" is a reference to people crying peace, and with some type of destruction involved? The phrases crying "peace" were used in reference to Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 6-11, 6:13-14, 8:10-11, Ezekiel 13:10). Since the Day of the Lord in the OT referred to the first destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, then it is possible the Day of the Lord in the NT is referring the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome. Maybe this explains why the center of government for the church was transferred to the New Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 12:22-23, and Revelation 21:1-10). However, the Day of the Lord in this section is addressed to the



Thessalonians and their concerns, not those in Jerusalem. This dark day appears to be final, absolute, universal, and terminal. The use of terms like "light" and "dark" are general classification that best fit the events associate the Second Coming of Christ rather than the narrow, defined, restricted judgment in 70 AD.]

# 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

## *The Unveiling of Christ*

**2 Thessalonians 1:1-2 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

♦ The authorship of this epistle is attributed to Paul, Silas, and Timothy, the traveling missionary team in Greece. The destination of the letter was to the assembly of saints in Thessalonica—a church created by the work of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The official titles of God and Christ reinforce the authority of the letter, as well as its honor and its majesty.

The attention to grace exposes the church's reliance on God for its survival and its success. A church established by grace must be sustained by grace. Grace is the strength of the church. For by it, God reaps the glory, not man. Further, grace comes before peace, and peace is the happy result of grace received. The source of grace was not in the apostles, but in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**3-4 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:**

As the apostles reflected on this church, they were compelled to give thanks because they saw the fruits of faith and love growing in this assembly of saints. A church cultivating faith creates an environment where love can best flourish. Furthermore, **patience** (ὕπομονής) was also in their garden of virtues. *Patience is the ability to produce godliness under severe trials.* Another said that patience is the ability to count down before blasting off. This church was able to keep on loving each other even though the church traveled a rocky road.

The expression “**growth exceedingly**” (ὑπεραυξάνει) informs us that this church had a bumper crop of love flourishing within its borders; that is, the reality of these graces sweetened the church during the bitterness of trials that had come upon these dear Christians. These believers did not sit on cushions of strawberries and drink Italian tea. They were being persecuted for their faith and pressed down by the weight of their afflictions.

### **5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:**

The term “**manifest token**” (ἐνδειγμα) is a legal expression for “evidence” or proof of claim. The contrast between the sweet Thessalonians and the bitter abuses of their persecutors vindicated the “righteous judgment of God.” Wheat and tares grew in Thessalonica. The persecutions exposed the true character of the tares providing cognitive evidence they merited prosecution in the superior court of Almighty God. These persecutions were not benign disagreements by opponents of the faith. Rather, the character of their actions were *mala in se*. The intent to do harm created a *prima facie* case against the violators of God’s law-order that they deserved a guilty verdict in God’s court.

The term “**kingdom**” refers here to the consummation of the manifestation of reign of God over all of the earth that will take place when Christ returns.

Further, “**to count worthy**” does not mean that the Christians at Thessalonica had stacked up enough works to enter the kingdom. Rather, it means that they were true men; that exemplified godly character consistent with kingdom law. They provided evidence by their acts that they followed God’s law-order. When the Lord’s white sheep become dirty gray, the black sheep feel more comfortable. Because they bore the family image, God’s enemies became their enemies. The dignity in which the Thessalonians endured their afflictions was evidence they were members of God’s household; that they were sheep and not goats. In Paul’s first letter he called these believers a model (tupos) to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1:7).

### **6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;**

God’s judgment is always fair and just. But, it is not always immediate. The development of faith, love, and patience provided proof of claim the Thessalonians were God’s children. The persecutions and pain afflicted on them by adversaries

justified God's judgment on His enemies who now experience their gruesome fate in eternity.

**7-8 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:**

Some believers felt the direct blows of their persecutors and were troubled by the dogged hostilities of their adversaries.

The remedy or "**relief**" (rest) Paul offered was the *apocalupsis* (*revelation*) of Christ bound up in the mind of God. Because God does not always bring men to judgment immediately in this life, Paul exhorted the afflicted at Thessalonica to join him in waiting for God's righteous judgment to be revealed from heaven at a future time.

**Vengeance:** is a present active participle which means "to give" or "to render."

There are judgments that happen in our life time: "when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it" (Psalm 37:34).

The unveiling of Christ is not a matter of "if" but "when." At his first coming, the humanity of Christ was unveiled and his deity hidden; at His second coming His deity will be unveiled and His humanity hidden. On that day, He will come with the armies of heaven ("mighty angels") to arrest and punish those that "know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

[Note: Because 1 Thessalonians four undoubtedly refers to the Second Coming of Christ and not his coming to judge the wicked Jews in 70 AD, we must insist this passage is about the Parousia and not the destruction of Jerusalem. Language like "kingdom of God," "flaming fire," "punished with everlasting destruction" "from the presence of the Lord," "come to be glorified in his saints" are evidence this passage shines light on His Parousia and does not refer to His judgment on the wicked Jews in 70 AD. ]

**9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;**

To clarify what the unveiling is all about, Paul adds a somber thought.

"**punished**" (dike) means "to pay the penalty." While His coming means salvation and rest for the believer, it means punishment and bone-crushing death for the unbeliever.

The verb “**suffer**” is a future indicative, the mood of reality. Two accusatives are used: “punishment” (a judicial action) and “destruction” which refer to “utter ruin.”

“**Everlasting**” (aionios) means “eternal,” “unending,” or “forever.” It is an adjective describing the duration of punishment.

The instrument of ruin is the “**flaming fire**” in verse eight. Most grievous is the statement “**from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.**”

**Is the fire literal?** No one knows, but suffering associated with fire is real.

“**from**” the presence of the Lord means “from the face of the Lord” and his “power” to give life, to heal, and to make whole.

This is the horrible second death, eternal separation from God.” (cf. Revelation 20:14). Men who live without God now will experience the mammoth weight of that choice at the Judgment.

There is one question in the Bible no man can answer: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great of salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3)

The righteous character of God, the seriousness of sin, and the neglect of the golden gift of God’s Son and His work on the cross, and the neglect of His love sharpens the nature of the question above.

Further, it is difficult to conclude that this “everlasting destruction” refers to “annihilation” in this section. But, then again, who can live with the certainty of an everlasting torment in hell composed of conscious souls?

If one believes in eternal damnation what kind of fool would neglect his own soul and the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Further, what kind of Christians are we if we do not do everything in our power to warn our friends and neighbors about the just judgment of Almighty God?

**10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.**

The unveiling of Christ is not only a revelation about his wrath and judgment, but an unveiling of the Christian hope. His coming will not only recompense the wicked with damnation, but reward the righteous with salvation. That day will distress sinners, but

it will delight the souls of the saints. Faith placed in the invisible Christ will become a tangible reality.

Today Christians see the coming of Christ with eyes of faith, but on that day, the senses will explode with kinesthetic wonder. Paul is quick to remind the Thessalonians that this glorious salvation is reserved for believers. That “all men go to heaven when they die” is the fruit of liberal idealism and human conjecture, not Biblical scholarship.

The literal, visible, bodily nature of the second coming is clearly taught in the epistles. Paul refers to the Parousia of Jesus at a time when He is revealed. Christ will be “revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Thessalonians 1:7). Believers are to eagerly wait for the *revelation* of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7).

Our Lord visibly ascended into heaven, but there is a day when He will descend out of heaven to meet His saints. His glory that is veiled now will be unveiled at His Return when the saints will admire and glorify Him (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

The term “**admire**” (thaumazo) is sometimes translated “marvel” or “wonder,” and it clearly contains the idea of astonishment and amazement here. Daniel's presentation of the Stone coming out of the mountain to disrupt society and to squash the kingdoms of men finds its catastrophic fulfillment in the absolute sense at the Second Coming of our Lord.

[Note: this text drives a knife into radical preterism as all the saints never marveled at the presence of Jesus in 70 AD. People marveled at the destruction of Jerusalem, but not at His bodily presence (cf. 1 John 2:28-3:2): The word translated “appears” in v. 28 (NKJV, NASB) or “shall appear” (KJV) is *phanerothe* which literally means “he shall be manifested.” The word “manifest” means “to make visible.” This is a reference to the Second Coming, not a secret undisclosed coming in 70 AD.]

**11-12 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

In light of the revelation of Christ and the ruin of their adversaries, Paul shares his prayer for this flock.

The Thessalonians were called of God to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, but he is concerned that external pressures on this congregation might cause some to back off their vigorous commitment to their faith. He prays that God may count them worthy of their calling; that is, that they may continue to prove that they are great investments for the kingdom of God. Paul wants his flock to be a valuable asset to the Lord Jesus Christ and a tool in His hand for dominion.

Further, he prays that God will supply every power necessary to fulfill the good energized by the faith of the saints; that is, Paul wishes that God would water this garden in Thessalonica so that it becomes a model orchard for other churches.

Moreover, he wants these believers to glorify the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is, after all, “the sweetest name I know.” He is not the “man upstairs,” but Master and Commander of God’s Royal Fleet on the seas of this life.

How is this to be done? By grace! Christians begin with grace, continue with grace, and finish with grace. Grace can undo the effects of sin, heal the wounded, encourage the fainthearted, and strengthen the weary.

## 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

### *The Apostasy and the Man of Sin*

♦ In his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul addressed the Return of Christ and the wonders associated with his Parousia.

Because some of these saints misunderstood the instruction of Paul's initial epistle, or had been influenced by false teachers, the apostle was constrained to write a second letter to correct the erroneous views entertained by the Thessalonians.

Apparently, there were some powerful personalities in the region of Thessalonica who advocated an alien dogma that the Lord had already returned.

Here is how Paul managed that error--the same error, by the way, offered by radical preterist that 70 AD was the Second Coming of Christ.

#### **Response to a False Report**

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-2** Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

**The Coming of our Lord:** The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and "our gathering together unto him" are **not** two different occurrences but two different aspects of the same event. *The Granville Sharp Rule* for Greek grammar states that when the definite article precedes two nouns of the same case which are connected by the conjunction "and," *the two nouns are virtually identical.*

In our text, "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him," refer to the grand event we call the "Second Coming of Christ;" i.e., *the Parousia* and *the Rapture* are one phenomenon.



**We beseech:** Paul admonished the Thessalonians to reject alien reports that the great and terrible "Day of Christ" had passed or was even eminent.

The infinitive "shaken" (saleuo) describes motion produced by winds, storms, and waves. Here the theological winds produced an unsettled mind crashing on the shores of doubt.

The infinitive "**troubled**" (throeo) means "to cry aloud, moan, and make a noise." The stinging of the serpent has a way of poisoning the mind. Concerned that these Christians soldiers might retreat or even abandon the faith, the apostle urged them to stand their ground. Christ is coming, but **not** before the great apostasy occurs.

**By spirit or letter:** "Either by spirit or by letter" is a reference to the troubling message of misguided prophecy allegedly spoken or written by Paul or Timothy.

**At hand:** The final clause, "the day of the Lord is at hand," should be translated "the day of Christ." The verb "at hand" (enistemi) is a perfect tense form in the original language which means "to be present." The term suggests that false teachers of that day were alleging that the Parousia had come and gone.

### The Apostasy

**3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Let no man deceive:**

The subjunctive aorist verb "**deceive**" is negated by two negatives.

The subjunctive expresses the possibility of being led astray. It is a strong, powerful subjunctive of prohibition forbidding the initiation of an action. The wretchedness of deception is that the deceived does **not** know he is being led into a trap.

**That day:** this is a reference to the Second Coming in verse one.

**Apostasy:** The expression "falling away" is translated from the Greek term *apostasia*. Our English word "apostasy" is an Anglicized form of this original term.

In the Bible, the word *apostasy* is used of a defection from the Christian faith. As a noun, it is employed of a departure from the Mosaic system (Acts 21:21). In Joshua 22:22, the term refers to a rebellion against the Lord. Plutarch uses it of political revolt and it occurs in 1 Macc. 2:15 about Antiochus Epiphanes who was leading the apostasy from

Judaism to Hellenism. In 1 Timothy 4:1, the verbal form refers to some who will "depart from the faith" (cf. Hebrews 3:12).

The noun is qualified by a definite article (*the apostasia*). The definite article points to a *particular movement* in the apostle's prophetic vision — not merely a "principle" of defection! In this present passage it speaks of a grave, radical movement of defection from Christianity -- THE Rebellion against God's gospel and law-order.

Robertson says the reference to *the apostasy* infers the coming of Christ is not imminent because it must be preceded by a specific period of apostasy. This menacing movement, from a first-century vantage point, had yet to be revealed (v. 3). This suggests that the migration from Biblical truth to the lies of man had not yet progressed to the point where it could be identified as a definite, acceptable mainstream movement by the first century saints. It awaited future development toward the end of the Christian age.

The challenge, however, is identifying a *terminus a quo* for the period of apostasy. Who is qualified to say when that age of apostasy has arrived in history? The righteous in every era of Christian history have been grieved over departures from the faith.

**Look at the context:** We have this prayer in 2 Thessalonians 1:12 -

"That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

**The title** "Lord Jesus Christ" is mentioned two times in this verse, two times in verse one and five times in chapter one. The Title "Lord Jesus Christ" is referred to 11 times in 2 Thessalonians and 9 times in 1 Thessalonians for a total of 20 times in Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians.

When is the last time you heard the name "The Lord Jesus Christ" in the media? In church? From a Christian?

His name is **not** "the man upstairs" or the "big guy in the sky" or a "prophet" or "the spirit-brother of Lucifer" (Mormons) or "a god" (JW's) or "My Friend" (casual evangelicalism), but the Lord Jesus Christ. He is **not** a way to God, but The Way to the Father. He is **not** a savior, but the only Savior. He is **not** a "good example." He is Lord, Master, Commander, and King!

Likewise, apostasy appears to be connected with a skewed view of the Word of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

In like manner, the word "**gospel**" is mentioned 8 times in these epistles. Therefore, we conclude the apostasy mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is a departure from the Word of God, the glory of His name, and His glorious gospel.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

[Note: In our time we are seeing the religion of omnism swamp Britain -- the belief that all truth is God's truth; that every religion has truth; and, that every religion is a path to God. King Charles would not take the oath of the Kings of England. He changed the oath from a "protector of the faith" to "protector of faith." Even tPope Francis stated: "All religions are paths to God. They are like different languages that express the divine" (Google- 2024). Certainly the lies of main stream media, LGBTQ marriage, gender-bender beliefs, the apotheosis of psychology in the church, Charismatic Confusion, female preachers, unconditional support of genocidal Israel, and abortion et al. qualifies as apostasy. It is so bad you would be hard pressed to find a Christian that refers to the Savior as "the Lord Jesus Christ."]

**The Man of Sin:** The Man of Sin is the sinister-figure behind "**the falling away**" from the faith a.k.a. the gospel (v. 3). He is called a "**son of perdition**," or *child of the devil*. Moffatt says the phrase "son of perdition" essentially means *the doomed one*. But, who is this person? How will we recognize him when he appears?

### Interpretive Possibilities

Clarke and others understand the Man of Sin to be the alleged super-Antichrist of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13. There is much support for this view!

Robertson says the use of the subjunctive aorist *apohaluphtheia* reveals the supernatural character of the Man of Sin who will suddenly appear in history. One cannot but be reminded of that infamous "little horn" in Daniel's vision who "shall think to change the times and the law ..." (7:25) or of antichrists in the book of John or the beast in Revelation

**But, is this figure what Paul had in mind?**

The title "**The Antichrist**" is never used in the NT, but the rise of *a class of antichrists* (plural in 1 John 2:18) is developed by the Apostle John. Identifying the Man of Sin as "The Antichrist" may be too narrow and too specific. The most traditional way of understanding this Man of Sin is to say that he is not an individual, but *a system* or *an office* or *a class of mankind*.

Historically, Protestant interpreters have identified *the Man of Sin* to be the succession of popes.

John Calvin proposed the following: "Paul, however, is not speaking of one individual, but of a kingdom that was to be seized by Satan for the purpose of setting up a seat of abomination in the midst of God's temple. This we see accomplished in popery." Calvin is justified in calling the pope antichrist.

Limiting the Man of Sin to the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church applies, but again may be too narrow an application because it leaves out apostates who lead liberal, apostate Protestant churches.

**Thus, a third proposal is offered.** The Man of Sin may have a broader application that includes *a class of rebels* that seem to crop up in Christian societies in increasing numbers.

### Exegetical Considerations

**The man:** The term "**man**" (*anthropos*) is singular, not plural (*anthropoi*). It is preceded by the definite article. Wuest is careful to tell us that the expression *anthropos* can refer to a single man or mankind as a whole. The view that this is **a class of humanity** known as lawless mankind makes sense here. The noun "anthropos" includes males and females. This is the autonomous, antinomian man / woman, a prominent opponent of God's law-order.

The opposite of a lawless man is a Christian man or lawful man—a man that believes the gospel and obeys the law of the LORD God.

Further, this strange figure is called "**the son of destruction**" --a possible reference to his/ her / their destination which is hell (2 Thessalonians 1:8-12).

**Of sin:** The word “sin” (*anomia*) means “lawless” or “lawlessness.” The expression *anomia* is translated *iniquity*, *wickedness*, or *lawless* in the NT. Jesus addressed those producing iniquity (“lawlessness” - Matthew 7:23), and it is used in conjunction with a plural participle. In Matthew 13:41, Jesus spoke of a time when the workers of iniquity (plural participle) would be expelled from His kingdom. John labeled the *sinning ones* as *lawless men* doing lawlessness (*anomia*) (1 John 3:4).

**Lawlessness:** *Anomia* is **not** a reference to doctrinal differences or variations of doctrinal positions within the Christian ministry of the church. Further, lawlessness is **not** defined by a single act of sin or transgression of law. Rather, *anomia* involves *malicious, reckless abandonment of God’s law-order to plunge into debauchery and dissipation*. *Anomia* involves a serious breach of the Ten Commandments or common law wherein innocent people are injured and property damaged. Thus, the spirit of antinomianism and permissiveness in the Evangelical church ought to raise eyebrows here.

[Note America's statutory legal system that creates crimes out of code violations and decriminalizes immorality is a departure (apostate) from God's law -- a commercial scheme that damages the family and enriches the state.]

Lawlessness involves all forms of idolatry, oath-breaking, Sabbath desecration, dishonor to parents, murder, adultery, womanizing, fornication, perjury, homosexuality, theft and fraud. Several lists of lawlessness are mentioned in Scripture: Romans 1:24-31; 3:10-18; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 2 Timothy 3:1-6; Jude; 2 Peter 2:1ff).

**Revealed:** The verb “**revealed**” indicates the antinomian man was hidden in Paul’s day and that the antinomian man had not yet been unveiled. Thus, the *Man of Sin* is surrounded with mystery.

Possibly, Paul is **not** narrowly referring to an individual Super Cleric or class of apostate popes, but simply a day when *lawless clerics* will seize power in numerous denominations. This is the position offered here. There are only two types of men in the Bible: sheep and goats, wheat and tares, law-abiding saints and lawbreaking sinners.

The opposite of law is **not** grace, but lawlessness. The essence of sin is rebellion against God's law-order.

When men forsake God, they forsake His law and replace it with their own law-order. Certainly religious movements in our day to ordain female bishops and homosexual

priests fits the category of a *lawless, unbiblical movement in Christendom*. Wild charismatic preachers laughing on stage and passing around prayer handkerchiefs; and, Hebraist wearing tallits and quoting the Talmud fits the meaning of apostasy.

See [Apostate Bishop Buddy](https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2025/01/woke-liberal-bishop-mariann-budde-doubles-down-anti/), false pastoreess promoting DEI to President Trump (2025):

<https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2025/01/woke-liberal-bishop-mariann-budde-doubles-down-anti/>

The merchandizing of the church must also be considered. Certainly, the modern denial of the headship of Christ and petitions by the church to be under the authority of the IRS as a 501 c 3 religious organizations alongside Mormons and the cults "fits the bill."

Thus, **the Man of Sin**, appears *to be a class of men, lawless mankind hostile to God's law-order*. The Christian man is the lawful man--the one in-lawed to Christ. The *lawless man* rejects God's law-order replacing it with his own religious legal preferences. The man of lawlessness is a churchman or churchwoman who is deceived by Satan, forsakes God's laws, and emerges in a church organization to rule God's Temple as if his / her ideas are the canon of truth. Lawless popes, Jesuits, lusty televangelists, female pastoreesses, and religious con-artists would fit this category of mankind.

**4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.**

**Opposeth and exalteth himself:** These two participles are in the middle voice indicating the personal autonomy and self-aggrandizing traits of this sinister figure -- a contrast to the lawful man or Bible-based Christian.

The participle "**opposeth**" (*anti-kemenos*) tells us this "class of mankind" is an enemy of Christ and Biblical Christianity. It can be translated as "the one opposing" or "the opposer."

The participle "**exalteth himself**" (*huperairo*) literally means "to lift oneself above others." He exalts himself not only above all false pagan gods and objects of worship, but also against the true God (cf. Acts 17:3). Those advancing their careers through perversions of the Word of God come to mind.

**As God:** This expression is not in the original text and should be omitted; that is, the emphasis here is on the audacity and pomposity of the lawless one -- **not** a claim to deity.

**Sitteth in the temple of God:** The lawless man will “sit in the temple of God” (v. 4). This is **not** a reference to the “temple” in Jerusalem or to a 4th temple to be allegedly constructed by Zionist Israel on the temple mount in modern-day Jerusalem. That structure had lost its significance to the mature apostle Paul. The temple here is a reference to the church (1 Corinthians 6:19; 3:16, 17; Ephesians 2:21) -- the newly-established institution, “living-stones”, or “new nation” of Paul’s time (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

The Greek word for **temple** is *naos*. It is used eleven times by Paul (Romans thru Philemon); not once does he employ the term for a Jewish temple. He is burdened for the church of Jesus Christ -- the true temple of God and **not** a carnal Jewish temple. In fact, after the death of Christ, the Jewish temple is never again called the temple of God (Newton, Thomas. 1831. *Dissertations on the Prophecies*. London: Blake).

There is **no** indication here that the Man of Sin is an international, political-leader of a ten nation confederation.

Rather, **the Man of Sin** is an *ecclesiastical figure* occupying the highest rank in the church (a) making claims and rulings that belong only to deity; (b) receiving adoration reserved exclusively for God; and, (c) usurping prerogatives which only God has a right to claim. Clearly, *the Man of Sin* is a churchman and **not** a civil ruler, politician, or monarch. At the time of the Reformation, the Reformers saw this figure as a pope: “The pope doeth whatsoever he listeth [wills], even things unlawful, and is more than God” (quoted by Newton, p. 456).

The Roman Catholic Church, however, saw Martin Luther, the “wild bore” of Germany, as the lawless man.

In this analysis, the Man of Sin is **not** some future supernatural Antichrist or Satan’s incarnate figure. The “man of sin” is **a class of unregenerate men** emerging within a church organization to rule the congregation. We can call him a goat, or tare, or rebel. **He represents a class people** and **not** a super Antichrist; i.e., lawless mankind rising to power within the institutional church (Catholic, Protestant, or Eastern Orthodox).

Before us are self-centered, egotistic, narcissistic clerics rising to power in the institution of the church. MacKnight labeled them the “corrupt clergy . . . exalting themselves

above all that is called God, or an object of worship civil and religious" (Quoted by Benson).

Multiply these clerics by a thousand and you have a mass movement called *the Apostasy*. The popes, homosexual priests, Jesuit assassins, female pastors and prophets, Bible critics, Charismatic miracle workers, Zionists, and teachers of psychology are classes of lawless mankind that have emerged in church systems that fit the description of the antinomian man.

This, however, does not include Christian leaders with differing doctrinal positions. Such differences do not rise the level of apostasy, or because of lawlessness, but because of differences in hermeneutics and skills attached thereto.

**5-6 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.**

**That he might be revealed:** The Man of Sin as a class of apostate men had roots in the world of ancient Christianity (v. 6), would nevertheless endure, in some form or another, until the end of the age before the Second Coming of Christ. In view of this, the *anomial* man cannot be an individual Antichrist or some persecuting enemy that faded into oblivion centuries ago. *This class of mankind was being restrained at the time of Paul, but appears to be unshackled toward the end of the Christian age.*

**Now ye know what withholdeth:** This expression (to katecho) is an articular, present, active, neuter accusative participle that should be translated, "the One restraining." It is the neuter gender that challenges the interpreter. Who or what is the Restrainer? A reasonable assumption is that this is a reference to the Spirit of God and his power at work preventing the early church from being dominated by antinomian men<sup>[1]</sup>. But, there are other noteworthy considerations.

**7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth (katecho; ptc.) will let, until he be taken out of the way.**

**The mystery of iniquity:** The Greek word "iniquity" is our word *anomia* which means "without law" or "lawlessness."

The "**mystery of lawlessness**" appears to be a rebellion against law and righteousness which was already at work in Paul's time. Paul announces that the *anomia* will one day



gather steam to become a major movement of rebellion against the gospel and Christ's law-order.

The present pressure on churchmen to modernize the faith in order to conform to humanistic, woke values fits "the work of lawlessness" mention in this verse.

As an example, "Christian" Psychologist Karl Menninger noted a transition in the sixties in his own book entitled, *"Whatever Became of Sin?"* (1973). Culturally, ugly old sins got a face lift, put on new clothes and proudly came to church. Fornication and adultery are sins that would have gotten a person stoned to death in ancient Israel, appears in the modern church as "meaningful relationships " Only a small minority of churches today excommunicate outlaws from their fellowship (1 Corinthians 5).

The term "**work**" (*energeita*) is a present tense, middle voice form suggesting that the forces of this lawless movement were currently working itself towards a greater goal. Again, lawlessness involves a serious breach of the Ten Commandments. Lawlessness includes transgressions of the law, tolerance of evil, immorality, amorality, permissiveness, and sensual indulgence. The mystery is that evil is often disguised. Tares look like wheat; goats look like sheep; Gnostics look spiritual; Christian psychologists sound priestly. The epigram, "You're O.K.; I'm O.K." comes to mind.

Three problems are addressed in this letter attach themselves to the mystery of iniquity:

- lawlessness (*anomos*: 2:3),
- unrighteousness (*adikia*: 2:12); and
- unruliness (*ataktos*: 3:6).

The early stages of this ecclesiastical apostasy were "already at work" in the early church (v. 7).

The child of antinomianism, later to become a Man, was growing in Paul's day. The error was "already operative" (R.C. H. Lenski, p. 417), but not yet "revealed" (v. 6). This is a crucial point. One cannot help but think of the apostate popes with all their pomp and the Jesuits with all their poisonous cups that appeared in history. Pope Francis said,

"All religions are paths to God. They are like different languages that express the divine" (Google- 2024).

"Jesus was a beast and a dangerous liar" - Pope Francis  
(<https://rumble.com/v5ii7lp-pope-francis-declares-jesus-is-a-liar-and-lucifer-is-son-of-god.html>)

Anyone whom Satan uses to attack the Church's foundation of law from within Christianity fits the description of the Man of Lawlessness. In Paul's day, the Judaizers who Paul called "enemies of the cross"<sup>[2]</sup> slipped into individual churches seeking to turn Jewish Christians back to Judaism. But, it could refer to any man that abandons God's law seeking to replace it with man-made rules and precepts. Modern Zionism fits this description.

"**only he who now letteth will letteth**" (to katecho / katechon) is the same word for "**withholdeth**" (to katecho) - a participle, singular construction means "the one restraining."

"**until he be taken out of the way**" raises the question, "Who is the he, and what does it mean to be taken out of the way?" Again, there are no shortage of answers.

The great question is who is the one that "**letteth**" and "**withholdeth**"? MacKnight advanced the theory that the "restrainer" was Emperors and magistrates in the Roman Empire.

Another possibility is that the one restraining is the Holy Spirit which departs from corrupt clerics.

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, influenced by the Russian Orthodox church, claimed the Russian Orthodox Empire (Putin) was the one restraining the antinomian, antichrist West (01-12-2023).

Russian philosopher Alexandr Dugin sees Russian President Valdimir Putin (Russia) as an Eastern Orthodox Czar as the one remaining civil power in the world warring against the forces of the antichrist in the West (Ukraine, NATO, Britain, France, Germany, and the U.S.). To many Russians, the United States is the antichrist!

In Dugin's world view the "mystery of iniquity" is a secularizing world force (an antinomian system) at work in Western countries, and Putin is the *katechon* leader (force) preventing the coming of the antichrist. American presidents like Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden are not restrainers of evil but promoters of lawlessness.

The words "**mystery**" and "**iniquity**" both have the article indicating the Thessalonians were already familiar with this knowledge. The word "mystery" does **not** refer to something confusing but a to a matter known only to those being instructed; that is, the Thessalonians already knew about a time when the lawlessness would arise to pollute society in general and the church specifically.

The verb "**be taken**" is an aorist, middle, subjunctive -- a common construction for a future action.

[Note: the Christian should consider how the mystery of lawlessness is at work in modern times: Papism, Jesuits and Loyola Spirituality and the Counter-Reformation Movement, the Black Pope, League of Spiritual Discovery (LSD), Thomas Harris, "I'm OK-You're OK, Pop Psychology, Pentecostalism, Charismatic Movement, Antinomian Theology, Zionism and the Palestinian Holocaust, the shift from local churches to Government approved 501-c-3 Organizations, Installation of the IRS as the Legal Head of the Organized Church, Tongues, Holy Laughter, Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Same-sex Marriage, Ordination of Sodomites, Ordination of Women as Bishops, Child Trafficking among Bishops in the Roman Catholic Church, the Ninth Circle Satanic Child Sacrifice Rituals of the Catholic Church, Easy Divorce Proponents, "Christian" Pornography, Rise of Statutory Law and Rule by Mala Prohibita, Miracle-working Charlatans, Statism, the Queen of England as Head of the Anglican Church, Rise of Talmudic-Judaism in the Church, the Neo-Nazi Movement, Neo-Gnosticism, Choose Your Own Values Movement, Black Liberation Movement, Political Liberalism and Situation Ethics.]

**8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:**

**Wicked:** The translation "wicked one" (o anomos) is a singular, articular noun denoting the "Lawless One." This could be one individual many identify as the antichrist, or it could be **the rise of a class of lawless clerics appearing in the apparatus of church structures** -- the position taken here.

**Be revealed:** The Greek word *apocalupto* means "to uncover or to unveil or to disclose." It is a future tense implying that there will be an unveiling of lawless men and their character (or, a single antichrist). The Man of Sin (Lawless Mankind), though having roots in the world of ancient Christianity (v. 6), would nevertheless endure, in some form or another, until the end of time; i.e., until the Second Coming of Christ.

In view of this, the Man of Sin cannot be some persecuting enemy that faded into oblivion centuries ago, nor can it be a single political leader appearing at the end of history. This provides us with a clue. The Man of Sin is not an eschatological figure **but a class of mankind** that rules churches—lawless men using the church as a tool to accomplish their own ambitions. When the Lord comes, lawless men (incl. females) will be perched in many pews. At that time, the antinomian man will be divested of power by the Lord’s appearance at the end of the Christian age (v. 8; cf. Revelation 19:15).

**9-10 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.**

**After the working of Satan:** The Man of Sin opposes God and exalts himself against all that is genuinely sacred (v. 4). He feigns religiosity, but his true character reveals that he is diabolic. His activity actually is “according to the working of Satan.” Whether, this is a single individual or a class of men is the question raised in this commentary. That charlatans abound augurs well for the position that the antinomian man is a class of charlatans parasitizing themselves to the church.

**Signs, wonders, and deception:** He (or this class of men) deceives those who do not love the truth by character of the “lying wonders” he effects (vv. 9-10). Bloomfield calls these “pretended miracles” (p. 345).

These “**wonders**” are not in the category of Christ’s miracles. R. C. H. Lenski has well commented: “So many are ready to attribute real miracles to Satan and to his agents; the Scriptures never do” (p. 1961, 426).

In identifying the Lawless Man, one must thus look for a post-apostolic movement that claims to prove its authenticity by miracles . . . by predictions allegedly coming true. The Roman Catholic Church with its miracle of the Sun in Portugal (1917), the Man of Lenciano (700 AD), Padre Pio (St Pio of Pietrelcina) (1887-1867), and the stigmata of various nuns and friars come to mind. Consider the following from this Catholic Website:

This website is devoted to the many Miracles of the Church that have occurred throughout the ages including the incorruptible bodies of the Saints, extraordinary miracles of the Eucharist, the miraculous blood of St Januarius, the Miraculous Medal- The Virgin Mary's appearances to St Catherine Labouré, and also Jesus comes alive -the miraculous

crucifix of Limpais, and also marvels surrounding the relics of the Saints, the Miraculous Mystical Voice from the next world and many others. - See more at:

<http://www.miraclesofthechurch.com/#sthash.QZf8D5LQ.dpuf>

But, the Catholic Church does not have an exclusive claim on miracles. Consider all the Pentecostal, Charismatic faith-healers that preach a miracle-a-day.

**Perish:** The followers of the lawless man perish because they do not accept the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, their faith is in their experiences rather than in the experience of Christ at Calvary.

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) and his pursuit of self-authenticating experiences fits well here. Loyola created the Jesuit order, a society of radical religious zealots that has been called the assassination squad of the Roman Catholic Church. This lair of roaring lions committed to "the poisonous cup," led by the Black Pope, have murdered thousand of Protestants, world leaders, and even white popes. These secret, sinister figures certainly fit the classification of "the lawless man" that will perish.

**11-12 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**

**Strong delusion:** The God who sends a strong delusion is also the One Who restrains in verse six and seven. A delusion is a fiction. Men are in love with fiction from political promises to Hollywood movies -- fictions of evolution, the Big Bang, a round earth, alien invasions, going to the Moon, bi-sexual identity, global warming, the AI bionic man, and the like.

The whole legal profession serves dead fictional corporations that exist only on paper.

Likewise, history is a study of what winners want you to think about victories and defeats. Wheat is surrounded by husks. The delusion comes on those "who love not the truth" in verse ten. The problem with those who follow the Lawless Man is that they are not in search of truth. Rather, they are in search of a religion that licenses their iniquity. And, the lawless churchman offers it to them.

The LGBTQ+ community that barter for the legality of same-sex "marriages" and for ordination of Sodomites to the Christian ministry belong to this class. The followers of

Ignatius Loyola and false spirituality are of this class and will be damned. Why? Because they love fiction rather than truth, they are eternally condemned. The emphasis here is upon unbelief, their pleasure in law-breaking, and damnation.

**13-14 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

In contrast to the lawless man is the Christian man who has heard the truth through gospel proclamation and believed it. In juxtaposition to those who love fiction and are condemned is the Christian man who loves truth, and who is destined to share in the glories offered in the gospel by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite the apostasy, the gospel was and is gloriously advancing around the globe. In contrast to lawless men that are doomed to hell are the elect of God destined to experience the fullness of Christ's salvic powers.

**15-17 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.**

**Stand fast:** The verb "stand" (steko) is a present imperative. This is Paul's practical application. Because of the rumors circulating that the Day of Christ had passed, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to continuously and vigorously stand in the truth they received from him. His concern that the gullible might drift away from the gospel and into the error of the apostates has now been addressed. Consequently, he holds out a hope that the Thessalonians will experience relief from their stress and strength to continue doing good from his exhortation.

**Comfort and Establish:** This is the same exhortation Paul gave the Thessalonians in his first letter in chapter 5:9-11.

The word "**encourage**" (parakaleo) means "to cajole, urge, beg, request and summon." Because Christians tend to become discouraged by the avalanche of apostasy crumbling on them, Paul calls this assembly of Christians to employ the gifts of exhortation.

Secondly, the term "**build up**" (oikodomeo) reminds us of the need to build up the body of Christ so that it is strong enough to resist apostates.

**In conclusion**, the Man of Sin is the antinomian man, an opponent of God's law-order. This could be a super Antichrist or even apostate popes, but it is more likely *referring to a class of lawless men leading individual congregations*. Before the Second Coming there will be "the Apostasy" spawned by a class of clerics that individually fit the description of *anthropos tas anomias*.

Liberal pastors, female pastoressees, and Charismatic fraudsters fit this category of men.

[1] The Restrainer: In modern times the restrainer has been identified as God, Christ, the Spirit, even Satan and the alleged Antichrist.

[2] Philippians 4:18

Source: adapted from Stockton, "Towards Exegetical Eschatology"  
(<https://sedm.org/Forms/17-Theology/TowardsExegeticalEschatology.pdf>)

Additional Note: the term "**anomian man**" is used in the singular and not the plural. The use of the singular does not support the idea of one, super-antichrist at the end of history.

Rather, the use of the singular is a literary device used to clarify the subject presented. Discussing a subject in the plural (mass nouns) such as "lawless men" could be confusing even though there is more than one lawless man operating at the end of the church age. Each denomination must identify the lawless man rising to power within the system and have "them" / he / she removed from power.

For example:

A: Using the pronoun "I" believe, can be very personal and offensive. For this reason, authors will use the terms "We" to express an opinion.

B. A football coach might say, "I need some water" when he really means "My team needs some water."

C. A soccer coach might say in an interview, "my players" were confused when he was really thinking of a singular player that was confused. Coaches do this all the time in order to remove the pressure from a single player.

D. The psalmist will use the term "wicked" to refer to a class of men when in fact the cause of the psalmist's troubles is caused by a single man or a class of men in society. See Psalm 58 and notice how the psalmist switches from addressing a class of evil men in the nation to addressing the presence of wicked men.

That is, there may be a good reason to use the term "I" or "we," or to substitute a singular noun for a plural noun for easy or clarity.



## 2 Peter 3:1-18

### *The Day of the Lord*

♦ The purpose of this chapter is to quash the objections of the mockers, to reassert the truth that the Lord Jesus will return again to this world to destroy it by fire, to assure the believers that they have an inheritance in a new heavens and a new Earth, and to shed light on the affect this should have upon the heart and minds of Christians.

**2 Peter 3:1-2 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be *mindful* of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior:**

Peter is concerned that people of God might be led away from the faith by sophisticated arguments of skeptics and fall back into a life of dissipation. His letter is an antidote for the poison people were drinking offered to them by the maestros of Peter's day.

The word "**stir up**" (*dingier*) reveals the purpose of Peter's letter. The Greek word *dingier* means "to agitate or to awaken." It is used of our Lord awakening out of his sleep on the storm tossed sea of Galilee (Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24), and of surf and foam of white-capped waves on the sea (John 6:18); that is, he wants these sleepy Christians who were hypnotized by the bickering of the skeptics to wake up! These believers needed to remember the prophetic word of the prophets and of the Lord Jesus Christ regarding the breakdown of civilization, the return of Christ, and the destruction of the world. He does **not** encourage them to consult the prognosticators or shyster female prophetesses, but to reflect on the words or prophetic portions of Scripture.

**3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,**

The verb "**knowing**" us the first century Christians were not ignorant about the scoffers of their time. Likewise, we should be able to identify the enemies of Christ during our day.

The adjective "**first**" is in the emphatic position. The word "knowing" is a present active participle; that is, while stirring up their minds, Peter sounds the alarm about the end times.

Two words take our thoughts into the future. The word "**shall come**," a future tense, and the noun "**last days**."

*The rise of mockers and their pronouncements is a sign of the end times.* The word "first" (proton) indicates that in the end times, scoffers will appear walking after their own passions; that is, they are autonomous men hostile to God's law order and amorously in love with the things of this age. But, who among us have the competence to know when that time has arrived in history?

The noun "**scoffers**" (empaktai) is plural and refers to a class of men who heckle, jeer, and "trash-talk" the Parousia of Christ. Mockers are not always unlikeable, nor are they unintelligent. They are not idiots wearing a red suit with a tail hanging out the hinder part. More than likely, they are pseudo-intellectuals with graduation gowns. Possibly, mocking will be institutionalized; i.e., entire institutions will incorporate constructive ridicule as a pre-requisite for employment as is the case in the sciences and the media. Men with a PhDs in Moonbat lead colleges that persecute Christians who deny evolution and believe in "intelligent design."

**4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.**

The word "coming" refers to the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ. The persons doubting the Parousia were charismatic skeptics; Christians made up the gullible audience.

Peter slices through the dialectic and quotes the mockers who committed the logical fallacy of *argumentum ad antiquitatem* (it's always been this way). To quote a stock broker, "Past performance is no guarantee of future results;" in this case present cosmological conditions were a guarantee of past performance.

"**That all things continue as they were**" is as good of definition as any for the dogma of *uniformitarianism*. This is the guiding principle of origins among evolutionists which assert that the same processes that operate the universe today have operated on the in the past, at the same rates, under the same laws. Obviously, if "all things continue as they were" then the world will never end.

However, the Bible points to at least two cataclysmic destructions in the prediluvian cosmos that interrupted and altered the course of history: The fall of man, and the great flood. The fall of man caused the "whole creation" to groan and travail "in pain together until now;" and, the global flood impacted erosion and deposition to such an affect that scientists cannot legitimately extrapolate present processes beyond that period in history (Romans 8:22; Genesis 6-8).

Thus, Scientists cannot accurately conclude the age of the Earth or predict with certainty the future of the cosmos based on any premise of uniformitarianism.

**5-6 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the Earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:**

The text says the world was created by the Word of God – **not** by a "big bang" or some slow evolutionary process. Time plus chance is **not** the cause of this cosmos or life on Earth. That the earth is billions of years old or that man has been on earth evolving for millions of years is sheer nonsense.

The principle of **irreducible complexity** destroys any concept of a slow, progressive development of life on earth over millions of years.

The phrase "willingly are ignorant of" is translated in Acts 26:26 as, "I am persuaded that none of these things *escape his notice*; for this has not been done in a corner."

Peter argues that these mockers willingly ignored the fact that the heavens and Earth was created by the Word of God.

By using "**willingly**" and "**ignorance**," Peter charges the mockers with revisionism and malice aforethought. We are all ignorant of many things. For example, most of us are ignorant of things like astrophysics and calculus and the animal species unique to Venezuela. But, this is not a moral fault. Ignorance is not wrong **until** the will resists knowledge--especially common knowledge . . .universal knowledge . . . things "not done in a corner."

The fact that water covered the Earth during the creation, and that water destroyed the surface of the Earth during the deluge was universally accepted at the time of Peter. In the prediluvian world, there was no rainfall. A canopy enveloped the Earth wherein the Earth was a giant terrarium creating an efficient ecosystem for man and plants. The

Earth's canopy held in the moisture preventing cycles of evaporation and condensation. Likewise, proof of claim for the flood is under man's feet: the fossil record and the rapid burial of plants and animals, sediment layer deposits, sediment transportation over long distances, sea-shell fossils on top of mountains, carbon oil deposits below the Earth's surface, and the fact the Earth surface is two-thirds water provides ample evidence of a global flood.

Peter's argument is that the mockers are culpable in that they exercise selective knowledge regarding geology; that they have suspended knowledge for a political agenda.

**7 But *the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.***

**"Kept in store":** The expression "kept in store" means "to accumulate." The passive perfect infers that God's power is at work preventing the collapse of the cosmos now; that He is not only the Great Creator but the Great Preserver.

**"Reserved for fire":** This expression informs us of the means of the terminal destruction of the heavens and the earth (cf. 1 Peter 3:12).

**Perdition:** The term "perdition" (*apoleia*) is a synonym for "destruction or ruin." The future is not only unpredictable but the universe is unstable; that just as the prediluvian world was destroyed by water by an order from heaven, this present world is going to be destroyed by fire by an order from God. There is a day when time will end; a day when the universe and the ungodly will be destroyed by fire; a day when God will withdraw his support and the creative order will collapse . . . and burn.

**8 But, *beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.***

The affectionate title "**beloved**" refers to Christians who have received the faith of the apostles. Peter instructs the faithful. On this side of heaven, the saints long for the swift hand of justice to take out its sword and to slay the wicked. Judgment seems to move at a snail's pace. But, in eternity there is no time. A day? A millennium? There is no difference to God. Nothing is long; nothing is short to the Lord. There is no clock in heaven. He is not limited by time. Thus, the wicked should not suppose that a delay in judgment infers they are safe; and, the godly should not suppose that a delay means failed justice.

**9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**

The term "**slack**" means "negligent;" and, the particle "**not**" negates the charge that God is dilatory regarding His promises.

The word "**long suffering**" means "long in spirit." It refers to God's amazing endurance and patience with sinners and corruption on Earth. Peter reminds Christians that they should **not** misinterpret God's patience as a permanent moratorium on justice. Rather, Christians should see delay as an opportunity to win souls to Christ. He is not only a God of justice, but a God of mercy and grace. His delay means that his mercy is at work leading men to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance is in regards to sin; faith regards the history of Christ; i.e., his death, burial, and resurrection in time.

**10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the Earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.**

Peter continues his war against ignorance. "**The day of the Lord**" and "the day of judgment" and the "day of God" refer to the same end-time event. This is the "day of the Lord" mentioned in Acts 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 1 Corinthians 5:5; and Philippians 2:16.

There is a promise here: The Day of the Lord will come (future indicative) . . . in God's timing. No one knows the day nor are any responsible to know.

Peter employs cataclysmic language to describe Judgment Day: "**heavens pass away,**" "**great noise,**" **elements shall melt . . .**" and "**the Earth and the works . . . burned up.**" The Day of the Lord will be sudden, dynamic, calamitous, irreversible, and terminal. There are no bulletins or public announcements. There is no second chance or exit ramp. The Day of Judgment will come at an unexpected time like a thief in the night. It is the end of civilization.

It would be inappropriate to read into the text (eisegesis) some eschatological scheme here. There is no mention of a seven year tribulation period, or rapture, or millennium. Judgment Day is the *terminus ad quem* of history.

11-12 *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*

The participle "**dissolved**" (luo) means "to loose, break, pull down, break up, or destroy."

The things that shall be broken up are "**the elements**" of "**the heavens**" and "**the Earth**" in verse ten.

The word "**conversation**" refers to one's manner of life – his ambitions, habits, and character.

Since the material things we hold so dear are so temporal, Peter urges men of faith to follow holiness and godliness. These two adjectives describe the kind of behavior men are to pursue in light of the collapse of civilization.

**Holiness** refers to a separated life that is devoted to God; that is, allowing the cross and it benefits to have its intended effect in our mind, habits, ambitions, and values. It does not mean "be religious;" rather, it means "to be consecrated" to His purposes. The opposite of holiness is ordinary; waking up everyday thinking one has a choice about good and evil.

**Godliness** refers to the kind of character a reconciled man possesses. It is God-like. Holiness refers to following the law of God; Godliness refers to imitating the God of law. Both call for *coram deo*, "to live one's whole life in *the presence of God*, under God, and to the glory of God."

Judgment Day is called "**The day of God**." God created the heaven and Earth, and God will destroy them both. The instrument of destruction is fire--the exothermic chemical process of combustion which could be a simple reference to a rapid release of energy from a high-speed nuclear reaction. In God's first judgment, he used water to asphyxiate life on Earth; in God's second judgment he will use heat to destroy the heavens and the Earth.

The two passive accusative participles "**looking**" and "**hasting**" measure the verb "ought" in verse eleven.

The participle "**looking**" does not refer to a function of the human eye, but to the focus of a soul. The man of faith regards the Day of Judgment; i.e., he lives responsibly knowing the Day of God is coming and that his behavior makes a difference to the Lord even speeding up the time of judgment.

"**Hasting**" (hurry or speed) places a duty on Christians. This verse links human responsibility with divine sovereignty; that is, the Day of God moves closer to reality by other causes such as the sanctification of His people. Judgment must begin at the house of God. The more the church judges its slackness and the more holy it becomes, the sooner the Day of God will come.

**13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.**

Peter's hope is not heaven, but in a "new heavens and a new Earth" characterized by righteousness. The meek shall inherit the earth, not heaven.

The Bible begins with the announcement that God created the cosmos. The Bible ends with the appearance of a "new heavens and a new Earth." The Christian hope is not the millennium or a narrow piece of real estate called "the Holy land", but a new cosmos created by God (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1).

One of the great questions that face Bible students is whether this Earth will be annihilated or renewed and refashioned.

Annihilation infers total discontinuity between this Earth and the promised new Earth. Renewal, however, expresses some kind of continuity between this cosmos and the one to come.

One key is the word "**new**" (*kainos*). The Greek word *kainos* (καινος) refers to something with a *new quality* rather than something new in time; that is, there is holistic continuity between this Earth and the "new Earth" (Romans 8:20-21).

Both Peter and Paul inform us that this cosmos is not going to be annihilated, but reformed and reshaped much like a potter will scrap his work and begin again with the same lump of clay. Satan will not have the final word.

It seems reasonable to assume resurrected saints will inherit a regenerated Earth rather than one created ex nihilo. That is, just as there is continuity between this Earthly body



and the resurrected body, there will be continuity between this Earth and the new Earth.

**14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.**

Peter's point is that because this world will be melted down and remolded into a new one where righteousness dwells, believers ought to live consistent with the new reality and practice holiness now. Peter is interested in the moral dynamic at work in the new heavens and the new Earth. It is possible to have a prophetic interest in end times without moral consideration, and it is certainly true that one who gives up hope in the Second Advent gives in to ethical deterioration and the triumph of evil over good.

Since the kingdom of God is characterized by peace, we ought to be at peace with God now; that is, to lay down our weapons and surrender to the accomplishments of redemption wherein Christ made it possible to have "peace with God" through the cross.

Since the kingdom is about redemption, and the new heavens and new earth is under the rule of righteousness, Christians should be earnest about having the last stain of sin removed from souls--"**without spot.**"

"**Blameless**" refers to living so consistent with God's law that no judicial charge can be brought against them; that is, be faithful to God and don't harm your neighbor. In so doing the saint prepares the way of the Lord to judge the wicked.

**15-18 And account *that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.***

Again, Peter reminds his readers that what appears to be a delay in the execution of justice is in reality and opportunity for salvation. Peter reminds his readers that his



message on the Judgment Day and the new cosmos is consistent with the gospel of Paul. His letters, like Romans, were treatises inspired by God as the other Scriptures.

Peter returns to his main concern that believers might actually take the mockers seriously and be led away from the faith into dissipation. Here the mockers are called "the wicked." The error perpetuated by the scoffers is that the coming of Christ is a hoax; that matter is eternal and that the processes governing the substratum of the universe is stable and final. The reader is confronted with a choice: to believe the skeptics, or to go deeper into Christ. Peter urges the believers to grow in the gospel of grace and to increase their knowledge about Christ and His glorious history--a history to be culminated at the Parousia.

Jude

## *Fate of the Apostates*

♦ A key verse in the Book of Jude is found in verse five which addresses the purpose of the book: "to put in remembrance" what happens to those who apostatized from the faith. Though Jude does not quote the Old Testament, he refers to characters and events in the Tanach at least nine times. He wants his readers to recognize apostates, and to go to war against the naysayers.

The doctrinal and moral apostasy exposed by Jude (vv. 4–18) closely parallels that of 2 Peter 2:1–3:4 -- the difference being that Peter predicted the coming of apostates, while Jude identifies their arrival in the first century.

We don't know the date that Jude wrote his book but we presume it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem (63-69 A.D.).

### **Remember the Faithful**

**Jude 1:1 Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:**

**Jude** or Judas (Greek) was one of the four half-brothers of Christ. Chosen by Jesus to be His servant, Jude writes his letter to the saints, those selected to be saved, sanctified, and "kept" (tereo) for eternal salvation by Jesus Christ. The exact recipients of Jude's letter is unknown, but we know it was a community of Christians plagued by dissenters.

Jude does not claim to be an "apostle:" rather, he identifies himself as a "doulos" of the Lord, a slave to His will.

**2 Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.**

The verb "**multiplied**" is an aorist optative -- a wish by Jude. Mercy, peace, and love are the three choice blessings in all of Scripture. Mercy is the grounds of peace; and love is the fruit of one having peace with God and possessing the peace of God.

### **Remember to Fight for the Faith**

**3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.**

"**Beloved**" (agapetos) is a strong term of endearment -- an assurance that though this community was infested with false teachers and needed "to go to work to clean out the rat's nest," they were very much the object of the Father's love.

"**all diligence**" (spoude) means "haste." It refers to the intense, urgent, heart-felt desire of Jude to communicate with his readers.

"**needful**" (anagke) refers to a necessity. Very few things are necessary, but going to war against the apostates took priority over the daily routines of life . . . over all other desires . . . over all other occupations. Jude moved war to the top of the priority list.

"**to write unto you of the common salvation**" appears to be the theme that Jude wanted to address in his epistle, but because this community was infiltrated by apostates, Jude had to adjust his theme to warn them about the dangers of these false teachers and to urge this community to put on their combat gear and go to war against these enemies of the gospel.

"**to earnestly contend**" (epagonizomai) is a translation of the Greek word "to agonize" which means "to strain every muscle," to "put every effort" into fighting for the faith. "earnestly contend" is opposed to the fat, over-weight, casual, complacent, apathetic, nonchalant, lukewarm, lackadaisical attitude so common among "pew sitters" and "TV watchers." Sharpen your swords. Read and study the Scriptures. Arm yourself to fight these aggressive, proud, sensual, self-confident apostates.

War is the will of God for the church (Judges 3:1-3; Ephesians 6:10ff; 2 Corinthians 10:4).

"**the faith:**" At stake was the truth and foundation of the faith . . . of the gospel . . . and morals of the gospel.

"**The faith**—i.e., that which is believed by Christians: not the expression of the doctrine, nor the holding of it, **but the substance of it.**" - Ellicott.

"**Once for all delivered to the saints**" - refers to the perfect, complete revelation of God about the gospel. No change, No addition, No amendment, and No prophecy need be added to it!! -- A contrast to the false prophets with all their creative additions, fanciful

insights, and permissive moral practices. The canon is complete. Those claiming to have dreams and visions from God are heretics. Rebuke them. Avoid them. Shun them.

**4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.**

"**certain men**" refers to the apostates called "ungodly" men. Jude is not addressing a backsliding church. He addresses a church plagued with apostate teachers -- a minority of attendees that sought to disfigure the gospel of Christ.

"**crept in**" (paraeisduno) refers to "something secret;" "to deceptive hidden motives." And, it is this stealthy, insidious invasion of these heretics which constituted the necessity underlying Jude's motivation to write his epistolary. The misinformation, disinformation leavening covertly pushed on the Christians needed to be confronted, exposed, and expunged by ambassadors for Christ.

The word "**ordained**" (prographo) refers to something "written down," "written aforetime" predicting their condemnation; that is, a forecast of what the penalty for this unlawful conduct would be. Literally "written down" or in modern vernacular "written up" like a summons -- a demand for a court appearance containing a sworn indictment, lawful charges, accusations, allegations containing a verifiable claim deserving strong condemnation.

"**of old**" refers to facts in history -- not to divine purposes. Best not to use this text to support strong Calvinistic leanings.

"**condemnation**" (krima) refers to a divine decree . . . some act proscribed in law . . . to a judicial decision whereby the judge repudiates a certain type of unlawful behavior.

"**this condemnation**" refers to a particular degree -- to a category of unlawful acts.

"**turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness:**" "turning" (metatithemi) is a present active participle meaning "to change," "to transpose," "to transfer," or "to fall away from." The charge is turning away from the grace of God and using it to promote lasciviousness; that is, modifying it; altering it; amending it; editing it; and, revising it to incorporate "lasciviousness" or "permissiveness."

This "turning" or "bending the grace of God" involves two deviations: one moral, the other doctrinal.

**(1) The moral deviation:** "lasciviousness" (aselgeia) refers "to unbridled lusts," "excess," "licentiousness," "outrageousness," "wantonness," "reckless freedom," and "shamelessness" that are orbits outside normal, decent behavior. "a" negates; "elgeia" means continence; that is, aelgeia refers to "incontinence" or "unbridled lusts" "uncontrolled urges," or to one who is unable to control his passions. [shock videos by Hollywood performers comes to mind,]

**(2) The doctrinal deviation:** The KJV translation "denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" is confusing.

There is a textual variance in this passage. The issue is whether or not the accusative noun "God" (theon) should appear in the final phrase of the text of v. 4. The modern critical text: kai ton monon depoten kai kurion hemon Iesoun Christon arnoumenoi: "and denying the only Sovereign, and our Lord Jesus Christ." This reading is supported by p72 and the leading manuscripts like Sinaiticus and B.

Metzger (Textual Commentary, 2nd Edition, p. 656) suggests that theon was added by the orthodox for Christological reasons "to avoid the ambiguity" as to whether despoten refers to Christ or God. Was it intentionally omitted for Christological reasons to avoid a direct affirmation of Jesus as God?

NIV: "and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

NASB: "and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

RSV/NRSV/ESV: "and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

The title "God" is not in the text and should be omitted and replaced with the term "Lord" or "Master." The proper translation seems to be, "while denying the only Master and Lord of us, Jesus Christ." The idea here is that the apostates will not have Jesus Christ as their Lord. The heretics seem to be advocating some type of omnism -- that there are many gods and lords while insisting on a belief that there are no absolutes.

Denying the humanity (Gnosticism) or deity of Christ (Arianism) or even his visitation to earth would be included in this heresy.

### **Remember the Fate of Apostates**

**5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.**

The conjunction "**but**" (de) shows Jude taking a stand against the apostates. There is no doubt where he stands -- he stands opposed to these false teachers and their false doctrines.

"**Remembrance**" (hupomimnesko) means "to review and call to mind." Jude calls his readers to reflect on three examples of apostates in the Old Testament:

The apostate Hebrews that came out of Egypt;

The apostate angels;

The apostate cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt" -- a reference to the Passover and deliverance at the Red Sea (Exodus 10-14).

There is a textual variance here. Some translation use the term "Lord" or "kurios", while others use the name "Jesus" as the one delivering and judging.

If the proper translation is "Lord" (kurios), Jude implies that it was "Jesus" was the One who led Israel out of Egypt (v. 4).

But, there is textual uncertainty about the original text.

The best Manuscripts A, B, 33, 81, 322 and others require the insertion of "Jesus" indicating that it was the Lord Jesus Christ that delivered the people out of Egypt. (See Bruce Metzger, "Textual Commentary", p. 657).

The context in Jude favors the ESV and Berean translations:

**Jude 5 ESV "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe."**

"**having saved the people**" refers to Israel being saved from the wrath of Pharaoh, slavery in Egypt, and drowning at the Red Sea by the "LORD" (YHWH) Who is identified as "Jesus" in Jude.

**"afterward destroyed them that believed not"** refers to the many death sentences upon that unbelieving generation involving a myriad of apostate acts -- reference to those who died because of the golden calf and those Hebrews that rebelled and died in the wilderness (Exodus 32; Number 14, Numbers 16). The three main sins of the unbelieving Hebrews were idolatry, complaining, and immorality (1 Corinthians 10).

### **Remember the Fate of Angels**

**6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.**

**"And the angels which"** (plural) refers to all the fallen angels and not merely to a class within these celestial beings.

**"which kept not their first estate"** (arche) refers to their "first dignity," "created purpose," and standing as created beings. In English the word "estate" refers to "everything of value a person owns."

**"but left their own habitation"** (oiketerion): "habitation" refers to one's dwelling or place in life.

**"Kept not"** (tereo): "Kept" is the verb. "not" is the adverb - a reference to the sin of ambition, pride, and rebellion.

[A legal analogy: In law a man is born free with unalienable rights from God. But, as he matures, he is offered privileges from the government changing his status from a free man to a "U.S. citizen," or "officer," or "U.S. person," If accepted, he unwittingly becomes a citizen subject to Congress; that is, a slave under the jurisdiction of the United States (14th Amendment) -- a lure which is a step down from one's original estate.]

These **"angels"** have desires and a will. Apparently, they lusted for a higher status . . . or station . . . or rank . . . or role . . . or stature than originally assigned to them by the Lord (their first estate). "they attempted to raise themselves to a higher station than that which God had allotted to them" (Benson).

**"hath reserved"** (tereo) means "to keep" in a legal sense. [This text has nothing to do with pre-flood immorality.]

**"in everlasting chains under darkness"**: What kind of a "chain" can bind a spirit-being like an angel? This is a metaphor for "custody," "detention," "imprisonment," "internment," "destiny" and "fate."

**"under darkness"**: "under" (hupo) refers to authority; that is, these beings are under the jurisdiction of darkness. It doesn't mean they can't move or act. Theirs is a legal, judicial status that is sealed without hope of appeal - a dark, irreversible fate. The Court sentenced has passed; the execution is still pending. They are like inmates on "death row in solitary confinement" waiting "their execution."

**"unto the judgment of the great day"** refers elsewhere to the day of the Lord . . . a day where the wicked are force marched into everlasting fire -- a fire prepared for the devil and his angels. This is a day of execution -- a day known to fallen angels of which they are terrified.

### **Remember the Fate of Sodom and Gomorrha**

**7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.**

**Sodom and Gomorrah** were two ancient, libertine cities on the east side of the Jordan River north of the Dead Sea that represent the debauchery and depravity of the ancient Canaanite Civilization during the days of Abraham (Genesis 18-19).

**"in like manner"** means "likewise:" that is, these city-states rebelled against God's authority just as the unbelieving Hebrews and the angels revolted against God's law-order;" i.e. as there was a judgment of fire determined for the angels -- a judgment of fire executed on the twin cities.

**"in like manner"** does **not** refer to the same sin. Jude is **not** suggesting that angels committed fornication with "the daughters of men" before the flood like the queer cities did after the flood. Jude is not interpreting preflood chaos. Such strange speculation is not based on sensible hermeneutic principles.

[Genesis 6 explains why God destroyed all of humanity by a flood. He did not destroy angels, he destroyed all mankind including those "sons of God" (Seth's descendants) who compromised holiness by marrying the godless daughters of Cain. The great sin of that age was worldliness and a neglect of the things of God.]



**"giving themselves over to fornication"**: The word "fornication" (ek'porneuo) refers to people giving themselves over to unnatural sexual acts -- homosexual acts clearly prohibited under God's law-order (Leviticus 18-20); a serious deviation from natural law.

**"going after strange flesh"**; the word "strange" (*heteros*) refers to "other flesh" as in homosexual lust opposed to the man-woman, husband-wife paradigm in Genesis 1:26-28.

**"are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire"** -- The incinerated cities are an example . . . a type . . . a powerful illustration of the fires of hell that await the disobedient.

### **Remember the Features of Apostates**

**8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.**

**"Likewise"** means "in like manner" despite the above judgments to the twin cities.

**"filthy"** is not in the original text.

**"dreamers"** (enupniazomai) - a present middle participle refers to sleeping apostates who dream of eating yum yum drops from the Poisonous Tree.

These dreamers pick three fruits off the Poisonous Tree: defiling the flesh, despise dominions, and speaking evil of dignities

**"defile the flesh"** -- "defile" means "to dye with another color" or to stain a perfectly good garment -- like raspberry jam on a white dress; that is, they misuse the body by unnatural employments.

**"despise dominion"** refers to rejecting authority; that is, they loathe, hate, and scorn authority by disparaging God's law-order. Devoid of moral principles, these people are identified by their lawless, careless, and reckless behavior.

**"speak evil of dignities"** (glories) -- "speak evil" refers to blasphemy and the depravation and profanation of God-ordained authorities.

Ellicott believes Jude is addressing angelic authorities. Barnes believes "glories" speak of men of high rank or superiors in earthly authority. Poole believes Jude is speaking of

earthly magistrates and governors. Gill believes Jude is addressing men who despise the authority of parents and government officials. The Cambridge Bible agrees with Ellicott. It is not generally known who and what angelic authorities Jude could be referring to.

**9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.**

This may be the most difficult verse in Jude for scholars to explain. Some have disputed the inspiration of Jude and wanted it removed from the Canon based on what appears to be a spurious record regarding the disputation about Moses' body.

Where did Jude obtain his information about this dispute between Michael and Satan? The story is not in Scripture. Did he obtain it by special revelation or from an unknown Jewish apocryphal source?

"Jude, in this account, either adopts it from the apocryphal "assumption of Moses" (as Origen [Concerning Principalities, 3.2] or else from the ancient tradition on which that work was founded. Jude, as inspired, could distinguish how much of the tradition was true, how much false. We have no such means of distinguishing, and therefore can be sure of no tradition, save that which is in the written word" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary).

"**Archangel**" is singular and not plural. Daniel introduces Michael as one the "chief princes" (Daniel 10:13). "Michael" means "Who is like God?" Paul introduces the role of the archangel in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 where he is distinguished from Christ. Jude calls him by name. According to Revelation 12:7, he is the champion angel leading heaven's war against Satan's attack on Christ. Zechariah (3) introduces us to a similar dispute between the Angel of the Lord and Satan involving the impurity of the post exile priesthood represented by Joshua the High Priest.

The message that death can be defeated and the hope of resurrection had its proof in the pre-diluvian world with Enoch, the 7th from Adam, and the post-diluvian world in the resurrection of Moses (the great lawgiver) where he appeared with Elijah (the first of the prophets) and with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Apparently, the dispute between Michael and Satan involved the burial place of Moses' body alleging that Satan wanted his body buried in a prominent place so Jews would

end up venerating Moses; and, Michael wanted his body buried in a common place, out of sight and out of mind.

Jude utilizes this conflict between Michael and Satan to illustrate that even the highest ranking angel, in a judicial contest, out of reverence to God, did not rail against the spiritual authority of darkness. If angels are careful not to blaspheme spiritual powers, how much more should men refrain from proudly fulminating against legitimate authorities with whom they disagree.

[In American law, no man has a duty to venerate illegitimate regimes and regiments. But, even here men must speak carefully and responsibly.]

**10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.**

"**But these**" (houstos) is used six times in Jude, and each occurrence refers to the apostates.

"**speak evil**" means to blaspheme, criticize, and proudly denounce.

"**those things which they know not**" refer to God's law-order and the excellencies of the gospel of which they are willingly ignorant.

"**as brute beasts**" refers to the nature of the apostates - void of reason, animalistic, and vicious.

"**in those things they corrupt themselves**" implies going deeper into sin by blaspheming Scripture and therefore sinning against the Lord, even abusing their bodies. Totally without principles, the people behaved like animals devoid of understanding on how to properly employ their own bodies to the glory of God.

**11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.**

"**Woe to them**" -- Jude grieves over the fate of these apostates and refers to three examples of wickedness: Cain, Balaam, and Korah.

"**for they have gone in the way of Cain**" -- Cain was a murderer and these apostates murdered the souls of men with lies and slander by picking fruits from the Poisonous Tree. Cain was not guilty of worshiping a false God, but for the false worship of the true God. Cain offered beans, beets, and broccoli to the Lord instead of a blood sacrifice.

Blood is the currency of the Spirit world and Cain discounted the importance of a blood offering; and, therefore, the Lord discounted the life of Cain.

**"ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward"** -- running and hurriedness is the way of fools. "greedily" means "to pour out in streams" -- an analogy to wholehearted devotion to "wages;" that is, Balaam used religion as a means of wealth creation. Further, Balaam persuaded the Moabites to seduce the Israelites by inviting them to a religious festival which involved fornication.

**"and perished in the gainsaying of Core"** -- Korah was a revolutionary seeking political power by blaspheming Moses, by promoting himself, and challenging Moses's authority.

**12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;**

**"these"** refers to the infiltrators.

**"These are spots"** -- "spots" means "rocks." It refers to shoreline rocks that are a hazard to ships -- a metaphor for apostates that damage "fellow-ships."

**"rocks"** are set in contrast to the "feasts of charity."

**"in your feasts of charity"** - refers to sacred meals and gatherings of early Christians. Believers build up the church; apostates demolish churches.

**"feeding themselves"** -- refers to inordinate self-interest, even selfishness; that is, instead of caring for the poorer members of the flock, these parasites ate the substance of the poor.

**"clouds they are without water"** refers to disappointment -- an agricultural analogy referring to hope of rain that clouds represent -- a hope that dries up like clouds without water.

**"carried about of winds"** - These rock-headed apostates are not only hopeless; they have no anchor, no grounding, no stability. They change their positions based on the intellectual movements of the time.

"**trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit**," refers to autumn trees (dendra akarpos) like fall apple trees that ought to be filled with fruit but are in reality barren -- another visual metaphor for disappointment.

"**twice dead**" refers to these apostates being spiritually dead (the first death) and appointed to the Lake of Fire and eternal separation from God (the second death).

"**plucked up by the roots**" is another vivid metaphor expressing the utter ruin and devastation of these apostates.

**13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.**

"**Raging waves of the sea**," refers to strife, turbulence, agitations, instability, unsteadiness, and weakness of the apostates.

"**foaming out their own shame**": -- In Jude's mind these heretics are like the tossing turbulent waves of the sea that vomit out mire, dirt, shells, carcasses, and the remains of sea life on the shore.

"**wandering stars**" -- The image in Jude's mind is of "shooting stars" and "comets" that leave their place in the heavens, catching the attention of the viewer for a few seconds, and then disappear into the darkness.

The word "**kept**" or "reserved" (tereo) is used four times in Jude.

"**to whom is reserved (tereo = kept) the blackness of darkness for ever.**" -- Few words depict more horror than these. "Blackness" -- nothing to see, no colors, no place to go, no light, no hope, no one to speak to . . . utter despair "forever."

**14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,**

"**Enoch also, the seventh from Adam**" is meant to distinguish this Godly man from "Enoch" the son of Cain (Genesis 4:17). The first coming of Christ was revealed to Adam, but the second coming of Christ and the grand conclusion of the Christian age was revealed to Enoch. The early disciples saw Christ in His humble humanity; the last generation will see Him in all His glory with thousands of angels and glorified saints.

Thus, Jude teaches the believers to discern truth. In this case, Jude shows us two witnesses testifying to the coming of Christ: Adam and Enoch.

**15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.**

The genitive "**ungodly**" is used four times. It refers to those who build their house on the sand of false hope and immorality. The apostates are ungodly in nature. Therefore, they do godless things and speak blasphemy against Christ, morality, and law.

In our Lord's first coming, He brought the marvelous first fruits of the kingdom blessings to believers; at His second coming the saints will participate in the full harvest of salvation blessings; and, the wicked will suffer the full fury of His terrible wrath and judgment.

**16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.**

"**These are murmurers**" (guggustes) -- referring to the muttering of doves (murmur); that is, all their undertones complain against Providence and the station assigned to them by the Lord.

"**complainers**" (mempsimoiros) -- refers to the heat and intensity of their muttering against Providence -- a sin similar to the complaining uttered by unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness.

"**walking after their own lusts**" -- The source of all this murmuring is germane to the lusts and ambitions of the ungodly.

"**and their mouth speaketh great swelling words**" -- Possibly, Jude refers to the type of speech whereby the apostates "toot their own horn;" or, Jude refers to their blasphemous speech wherein the apostates railed against Roman-Greek authorities that prohibited the vices that enchanted the these apostates.

"**having men's persons in admiration because of advantage**" -- The idea here seems to be the apostates only complimented Roman authorities in order to gain favors and obtain benefits from them.

**Remember the Forecasts of Christ**

**17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;**

In contrast to the luring, bewitching speeches of the apostates, Jude commands his readers to remember the healthy words of the apostles and our Lord Jesus Christ.

**18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.**

"**there should be mockers in the last time**" -- by using coarse jesting and sarcasm, these "mockers" showed contempt for Christ, the cross, and sacred doctrines contained in the Holy Scriptures .

"**who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.**" -- While these scoffers mocked and shamed holy habits, they venerated their own lusts without restraint.

**19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.**

"**who separate themselves**" -- These apostates live apart from the holy traditions of the church and separate themselves from believers under the pretense of seeking greater enlightenment (Benson).

"**sensual**" refers to the principles of animal life dominated by concerns for comestibles, copulation, and comfort.

"**having not the Spirit**" -- none of the desires are heavenly because all their desires, interests, and priorities are attached to matters on earth.

**Remember to be Faithful**

**20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,**

"**But**" is in contrast to Jude's denunciation of the apostates' hated by God; that is, the following instruction is for the "beloved" -- those loved by the Lord.

Unlike the apostates who only fed themselves, Jude called the beloved to build themselves up in the most holy faith; that is, to be involved in constructing, repairing, and perfecting a godly life in conformity to the holy faith -- to the substance and crux of the revelation of God which involves correct doctrine and holy practices.

This is the only place in the Bible where it instructs Christians to "pray in the Holy Ghost" -- praying in conformity to instructions in Scripture by the energy of the Spirit.

## **21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.**

**"Keep yourselves in the love of God"** -- that is, holding tightly to the love of God revealed through Christ at Calvary. This involves our attention to His love and our love for Him.

**"looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"** -- every generation has the hope that the Lord will return in mercy so they can fully experience the full harvest of eternal life -- the main characteristic of the kingdom of God.

**"looking for mercy"** contains the idea of accepting the Lord's offer of mercy so one can experience life in the kingdom; that is, the "and" (de) plus the imperative in verse 22 gives the participle "looking" an imperative sense.

## **22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:**

**"some have compassion"** is a present, active imperative meaning to keep on showing mercy to men with the hope this will draw them to the gospel; that is, speak with conviction, kindness, and confidence that some people influenced by the apostates may repent and believe the gospel.

Ellicott understands "making a difference" refers to doubters who have withdrawn from Christian fellowship; that is, Jude expresses hope that those snagged by the apostates may be reclaimed.

## **23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.**

**"And others save with fear"** -- "with fear" is in the wrong place and needs to be removed. Jude's instruction means "try to save" the wobblers and doubters. Some men are in need of profound pity and patience by physicians of the soul.

**"pulling them out of the fire (in fear)"** -- the idea here is try to save these disputants from the present danger of leaving the faith to the endangerment of their soul. Do it with fear knowing that matters are serious and the stakes are high.



**"hating even the garment spotted by the flesh"** means these wobblers and doubters are sin-stained creating a danger by infecting them with their doubts and duplicity. Soul-winners must avoid the sins and attitudes of sick souls. No physician is immune to the spiritual diseases at work in rebels and skeptics.

Believers must learn to hate sin. People sin because they don't fear sin enough.

### **Remember the Faithfulness of God**

**24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,**

Notice the use of the 3rd person. Jude now announces what God is able to do for his readers.

**"Keep yourselves . . ."** in verse 21 is now balanced with the Source of that power,

**"Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling . . ."** What the Spirit commands, He also provides; What the Summoner orders, He also empowers.

Having seriously denounced the somber fate of the apostates in the drumming sounds of a death march, Jude transitions to a breakbeat calypso challenging believers to seize divine powers available to them.

**"Now unto him that is able"** - Can you feel the power, potential, and proficiency of of the Lord God who is able "to keep you from falling"?

**"to keep"** (tereo) involves thundering canons blasting promises of protection and preservation.

**"to keep you from falling"** would better be translated "to keep you unfallen" (Ellicott) -- "unfallen" morally and doctrinally.

**"and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory"** -- God is able to provide protection and power so one can stand blameless before the judgment-seat of Christ.

**"faultless"** (amomos) means "blameless" or without moral weakness. It is possible to stand in front of pure holiness without fear and trembling.

**"with exceeding joy"** -- arriving in His presence with extreme joy as opposed to stumbling across the finish line; that is, there is power available not only to enter

heaven's gates, but to finish the course with extreme joy bubbling with confidence --  
"O, taste and see that the Lord is good."

**25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power,  
both now and ever. Amen.**

Though the word "Savior" is used of Christ most of the time, it can properly be applied to God since He is the author of salvation.

"be glory and majesty" -- all that is good, excellent, and noble belong to God. To speak of goodness is to speak about God, and to speak about God is to entertain what is good in life.

"dominion and power, both now and ever" -- Because God is good and righteous, glorious and majestic, sacrificial and giving, He has a right to have dominion over all things.

Oh, that all men might personally confess His Lordship and surrender to His authority now in this life.

# Revelation 6:1-10

## *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*

### Introduction to the Seals

♦ The issue involved with the interpretation of the vision of the seven seals is the "When and the What?" Does this vision involve the early part of church history (preterism), all of church history (historical view and symbolic view), or the final acts of the tribulation period which are yet to come (futurism)?

Caird says the first century saints lived through a series of grim events which challenged the belief that our Lord is really the Ruler of earthly kings: Earthquakes (60 AD), defeat of the Roman armies by the Parthian Vologeses in 62 AD, the Neronian persecution and the death of most of the apostles around 67 AD, the suicide of Nero in 68 AD, the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD) the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, and the grain famine of 92 AD.

My understanding of the seals is that this is a complete vision representing the forces present in the first century, but active in history until the end of this age. It was the common belief of the early church that Christ ascended into Heaven's Courtroom and took His seat at the right hand of the Father where He reigns as Christ and Lord; from there He reigns until "all enemies are under his feet."

The early Christians preached another king, King Jesus—a king reigning now over the hard facts of history. To relegate the forthcoming vision to a future age two-thousand years removed from the original readers skews interpretation and destroys the relevance of the book to the original readers.

The bulk of the Book of Revelation is about the present reign of the Lord Christ, not about His Parousia. The seals are preparatory remarks about the grand subject of the scroll: conquest, war, stress, death, martyrdom, and judgment on political powers. The seals teach one major lesson. *Christ is in control of all the forces of history, good and bad, and that history is marching toward the final judgment and the revelation of the kingdom of God.*

The opening of the seals is not something future to us, but the present activity of God existing from the time of Christ's ascension until the consummation of history at the end of this age. While the end may indeed be characterized by human tragedies depicted in this chapter, these consummate forces have, are, and will be with us until the Parousia.

The seven seals do not retain their character as the seventh breaks into the vision of the trumpets. John is not a Greek rhetorician giving a lecture. **He performs like an artist painting a picture!** He is not telling us. He shows us God's rule in action. With great artistic skill, John brushes the present reign of Christ on the canvas of Holy Writ to stir our imaginations.

### **The First Seal**

**Revelation 6:1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.**

The term "**thunder**" announces a storm brewing in the Holy of Holies. The thunder occurred when the "**faithful Witness**" (1:5) picked up the stone of condemnation and cast it to earth (Deuteronomy 17:5-7). The noise was like thunder probably because of the hoof beats.

Kirban, Ironside, and Walvoord say this is the beginning of the tribulation period which is still future to us. Ladd and Rosenthal would see this as preparatory to the tribulation which is still future to us. Pieters, Caird, and Summers see this as current events controlled by Christ throughout the ages. I agree with the latter.

The seals show us that this period of history has opened up by His authority. A seal is a sign of ownership. Only one with proper authority has the right to open the document and execute the will of God.

The command to "**come**" is addressed to the four horsemen, not to John. The Codex Sinaiticus has the double imperative "come and see" but the better translation is "Come."

"**Come**" is an invitation to the horsemen to ride across the field of activity into the theater of this drama. A pantomime, there are no lines and no action. One of the four living beasts from the center of the throne gives the order. The book is in the hand of Christ. Christ is in charge of the evils inflicted on society. *Their purpose is to bring men*

*to repentance and faith in Christ. The great calamity is not the catastrophes on earth, but the lack of repentance within men.*

To the original readers, horses were a king's most powerful military asset. Horses are swift and powerful, capable of covering territory very quickly. Rapidity is in view here. Like the pony express, the horsemen travel with an urgent message. Like Ezekiel's vision, there are four horsemen. All of these horsemen represent evils that come upon men to trigger the judgmental conditions mentioned in this chapter.

**Revelation 6:2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.**

### **The White Horse**

The interpretation of this figure is greatly disputed and biblical scholars are not in agreement as to its identity. It is the color "white" that gives us trouble. White is usually a symbol of purity and righteousness (19:8). A crown is a symbol of authority.

**Could this be Christ?** Our Lord is depicted as riding a white horse in Revelation 19. The problem, however, with the white horse representing Christ is the context. Christ has already come in history and is seen as sitting on the throne as the Lion-lamb. He opened the scroll on the throne, not on the back of a horse. Second, Christ in chapter 19 is armed with one weapon, the sword of his mouth and not a bow. Furthermore, since the other three horsemen represent an evil upon men, **the context favors an interpretation that the first horseman as an agent of evil.** War, famine, and death are not the result of Christ coming into the world, but the result of evil at work in the hearts of tyrants.

**Could this be the Antichrist or false religion?** Paralleling this verse with the Olivet Discourse, futurists take the color white and apply it to false messiahs, even an end-time super Antichrist. History has its share of false prophets and false religions. Think of how Islam captured the minds of so many in the Middle East. Indeed, antichrists do come and conquer people.

To say this is "the Antichrist" may be forcing a theological position on the passage not intended by John. Though this text parallels the troubles mentioned in the Olivet Discourse, they do not appear to represent the same period of history because the vision in chapter six ends with the terminal judgment of God on all mankind. The bulk of

Matthew 24 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, not the end of the cosmos. Further, the engineering of the Antichrist is a product of the modern mind. Yes, there are antichrists in history (plural), but the concept of a single Antichrist flows out of Baconian compilation of verses rather than an exegesis of a single passage of Scripture.

**Could this be the gospel?** Jesus said in Matthew 24 the gospel must go forth into the entire world (24:14). The spread of the gospel is a subject Jesus associated with the traumas in Matthew 24. White is the color of Christ's horse (19:11). His hair is white (1:14). The stone given to believers is white (2:17). White garments are given to saints (3:4, 5, 18). White is the color of the garments of the elders (4:4). The cloud of Christ is white (14:14). The robes of martyrs are white (6:11). God's throne is white (20:11). It is, therefore, consistent to see white as something good, not evil. Ladd adopted this view but also recognized the problem with this interpretation saying this horse is dissimilar in kind with the other three horses that represent evil (p. 96).

**Could this be a reference to Parthians?**<sup>37</sup> Holding to a form of preterism, Summers and Caird identified the first horsemen as Parthian horsemen who wore crown-like helmets. White could refer to white horses on which generals paraded through streets after a military victory. It is easy to visualize this army. However, if this vision spans the ages, interpreting the first horsemen as Parthians seems too specific.

*Taking a broader perspective, this horse could represent military imperialism.* This certainly fits the character of this age and would fit nicely into the first century events.

I am compelled to be consistent and believe all the horsemen represent negative forces in history; i.e., *political and military imperialism*. The idea the first horseman represents military forces and political propagandists at work to conquer men under a cloak of honorable causes in this present evil age makes sense. Powerful dictators, tyrants, and ambitious politicians do rise to power . . . and they all promote themselves as righteous ones. Even the Pharisees "feigned themselves just men" (Luke 20:20). Henry the Eighth, Queen Mary, Napoleon, Mussolini, Stalin, Winston Churchill, Mao Tse Tung, and Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, and Kim Jong Il of North Korea, and Barak Obama are of this ilk.

Whether we are talking about Vikings that raided and pillage the North Sea or Moslems that used the sword to conquer the Middle East, history is characterized by aggressors

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<sup>37</sup> Parthians refer to people occupying what we know as ancient Babylon or modern Iraq and Iran.

on a mission of conquest while holding out a righteous objective. Furthermore, entire societies are captured by religious ideologies.

Paul warned the Colossians of being taken captive by philosophy; i.e., intellectual movements within history (Colossians 2:8). The first century had its “isms” vying for supremacy: Gnosticism, Stoicism, Judaism, Asceticism, Epicureanism, Merkabah mysticism and the like. Reflect on the “isms” in modern times that have conquered so many minds: atheism, humanism, liberalism, feminism, socialism, Marxism, Communism, Bolshevism, multiculturalism, statism, legalism, naturalism, pragmatism, transvestitism, antinomianism, Zionism, psychotheism, existentialism, hedonism, and many others. Heads of State, heads of religious orders, and business marketers are all trying to capture the devotion of people.

*Consequently, the color “white” represents the pretense of righteousness. White, therefore, appears to personify the appearance of righteousness under the color of law; i.e., propaganda and indoctrination.*

Governments conquer whole civilizations while men are asleep. Through the enactments of legislation, men are deprived of civil liberties; that is, the power brokers do “mischief through law” (Psalm 94:20). We, must, therefore, question every man-made law and ask if it passes Biblical standards. Dr. Eduardo Rivera, retired attorney, stated, “The first duty of man is not to obey, but to question all authority!”

The way a society is enslaved is by the principle: ***Crisis-Reaction-Solution***. Whenever there is natural or political crisis, the people react and cry out for protection. The government then steps in with a solution. “Give up more of your rights, and we will protect you.” Rulers have used this principle for centuries. For this very reason the Lord ordered the church of Sardis to wake up! The thief was coming to capture the people and to take them captive.

In summary, there will be no peace as long as men reject the Prince of Peace. Because men reject Christ as King of the Nations, they will be subjected to frauds and impostors. Powerful politicians, philosophers, and cultic teachers will arise at various times in history to conquer people. **The first horseman represents political conquest**, howbeit through *subterfuge or sophistry or color of law or through military might*. The spirit of Nimrod is at work capturing minds and hearts. Until the end of the age, Satan continues to show ambitious men “the kingdoms of this world” and gives it to them (Matthew 4:8, 9). Whole populations will be subjugated by tyrants that rob men of their

rights, property, and freedom. War will crash on the shores of all nations. Famine will grind civilizations where death stalks every man. In the end, God's wrath and God's salvation will come.

The good news is that the scroll and its seals are in the hands of the Lion-lamb. He controls history. War and evil are restrained by His hand. All things are working together for good to those who love God. The gospel will prevail. History is marching toward the kingdom of Christ. He must rule until all enemies are under his feet. Court is in session. Warrants are delivered. Men are summoned to give account. Judgments are being issued from the throne. Men will die, but many will come to know Christ and enter His kingdom (Isaiah 56:7; Romans 8:28ff).

### **The Second Seal**

**Revelation 6:3-4 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.**

Again, the command is "**come.**" It is addressed to the four horsemen, not John.

### **The Red Horse**

**Red** is the color of blood. The imagery here is one of war and bloodshed, of revolution and slaughter.

**Military imperialism** dressed in white results in war and bloodshed. Peasants will revolt against tyrants. *Shalom* is taken from the earth. With the major exception of Jerusalem's destruction, the first century was not characterized by great wars. The *Pax Romana* presided over the Mediterranean. Resistance was crushed by the Legions of Rome. But, as great as Rome was through the centuries, she could not keep peace on the earth. John assures his readers that conflict, bloodshed, and conquest are forces under the control of Christ that are at work during the Christian era. War and the rumors of war will continue during the Christian age. Christ uses these political forces to cause men to question the meaning of life and to search for truth.

### **The Third Seal**

**Revelation 6:5-6 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair**



of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

### **The Black Horse**

**Black** is a symbol of famine and pestilence. Balances represent scarcity, trade inflation, and commercial bartering. War tears up the infra-structure of a country and the result is scarcity and famine. War creates debt and debt is paid by inflating the currency. During periods of inflation, men must scramble for survival and to earn a living. Consider how so many people died of starvation, malnutrition, and disease as the allies viciously bombed Germany in WWII.

A **penny** here is a denarius. It was a silver coin equal to a day's wage for the common man. Grain was the main food of the Eastern world. Barley was the poor man's grain, and wheat was the wealthy man's choice. Wine and oil were also necessities of life. Possibly, this refers to an abundance of luxury goods during this period, or it could refer to the fact that this period of famine is not characterized by total devastation but shortages caused by political policies. Complete devastation is reserved for the final act of history.

### **The Fourth Seal**

**Revelation 6:7-8 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.**

### **The Pale Horse**

The pale horse (pale green) represents death from famine, from war, from starvation, and from disease. The sword is a broad barbaric Thracian sword.

*One fourth part of the earth* is not a literal figure. It represents substantial but limited suffering. Disease and death always follow war. John wants the reader to understand that the forces of imperialism, war, famine, and death will continue throughout the Christian age. As awful as these forces are, they are under the control of Christ. God uses these forces to cause men to question the reason for their existence, to bring men to

a saving knowledge of Christ, and to exhibit the faith of the saints. His restraint enables our survival.

### **The Fifth Seal**

**Revelation 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:**

### **The Souls Under the Altar**

Suddenly, the scene switches from earth to heaven. Summers says *this seal introduces us to the reason of judgment*. The four horsemen represent actual judgments on the earth. Now we understand why this judgment was released. The chief reason for Rome's judgment was its persecution of God's people.

**The altar:** Is this the Brazen altar or the altar of incense? Some authors think it was the brazen altar, others say it is the golden altar. The brazen altar was a place where blood was poured for libations (Leviticus 4:7). The imagery portrays saints martyred in the name of their God whose souls were spilt like blood on the altar of service (Philippians 4:7). The saints pray and therefore, the altar could be the golden altar. The problem, however, is easily resolved when we realize there is only one altar in heaven. The two altars in the earthly tabernacle symbolize two aspects of one reality in the heavenly temple. The brass altar typifies the work of Christ on earth for sinners, and the golden altar typifies the work of Christ in heaven for saints.

The souls mentioned are actual martyrs, the apostles, and other disciples who confronted the evils of the State with a penetrating message offensive to political leaders. These souls were killed because of the word of God. "Witness" is an accusative noun, not a verb. They held "the witness" (testimony), that is, they venerated the gospel of Christ. It is likely they accepted the gospel and were put to death because of their devotion to Christ and their unwillingness to conform to totalitarian demands of Caesar's officials. No man can serve two masters: God and Government; King Jesus and Caesar; The Ten Commandments of God and the civil statutes of man.

Who are these souls? Ironside said they were Jewish brethren. Summers saw them as the martyrs of the Domitian persecution because Antipas is mentioned as a martyr in this book (2:13). But, again, this may be too specific. I am compelled to think that in the mind of the original readers these are the martyrs of the first century who were accused of crimes against the State; i.e., the apostles. This would be a comfort to the first century

Christians and it would answer their questions about the status of martyred churchmen. But, in one sense they represent all believers who have suffered at the whims of authoritarian regimes. Consider how Christians have been beheaded in Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. Ladd agreed saying these souls represent the entire church. The warning of an impending danger to the seven churches is now understood: *Persecution of Christians will continue throughout the age until Christ returns*. Sheep are easy targets for powerful tyrants: Lenin, Stalin, Churchill, and the like.

**Revelation 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?**

The word “**dwell**” is qualitative, not quantitative.

Behind this prayer is our Lord’s question, “Will not God avenge His elect who cry out day and night . . . ? ” (Luke 18:7). God’s throne is a throne of holiness as well as mercy. While Christians as a group have been called to express love, it does not mean they cannot cry out for adjudication from the One who has the duty to judge the acts of men. The issue among Christians is never, “Should justice prevail?” but, “Why does God take so long to dispense justice?” In Psalm 37, we have this promise: “When the wicked are cut off, ye shall see it.”

Like Abel’s blood that screamed for retribution, these souls cry out for vengeance. Cain’s hatred of righteous Abel has expanded to incite governments to slaughter Christians who proclaim Christ as King and resist the cruel, cultic powers of the State. The martyrs are baffled by God’s moratorium on judgment. God’s delays have their own trial in the hearts of truth seekers (Psalm 13:1ff).

**In conclusion**, there is more to this vision, but our purpose is not to exegete the whole passage. John is informing the Christians in Asia Minor that the Christian era will be plagued by wars and its terrifying consequences. These catastrophes are judgments of Almighty God upon mankind. But, even these negative forces are controlled by the Lamb upon the throne. These forces are used to bring men to repentance and a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

(Source: Stockton, B. (2005) A Commentary on Revelation, *Standing Firm in our Time*.1.4.2, Unpublished Manuscript, ABQ, NM)

# Revelation 7:1-8

## *The Sealing of the 144,000*

**Revelation 7:1** And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

♦ Four angels have the power to release destructive forces. The four winds are not literal, but symbolic of the forces of evil that fall upon the inhabitants of the earth.

The earth does not have four corners. It appears to be a semi-round flat disk. The term “four corners” is symbolic. The earth is pictured as a great square and the four corners represent the four directions (N. S. E. W.).

**Revelation 7:2-3** And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

**The east:** The east is the place of the rising Sun, but it is also the origin of truth. All that we hold precious about the revelation of God comes from the east through the nation of Israel and its inspired-prophets. The angel from the east delays the four angels and their destructive forces until the servants of God are identified.

**Hurt not:** Revelation 1-3 warned the seven Churches of an imminent crisis coming on the churches. In Revelation six we understand the destructive forces that will plague mankind and the leakage of eschatological wrath upon the anti-God forces within history. The question remains, “What will happen to God’s people during these periods of divine judgment?” Do they escape or will the floods of destruction engulf them? For this reason, this interlude is introduced to inform the readers that God has provided for the protection of His elect.

**The seal:** A seal is a tool for engraving or stamping. It represents ownership. When an observer sees a mark on an object, he knows immediately that it belongs to the one owning the seal. Those with the seal are spared from the coming judgments. Believers will suffer tribulation, but they will never experience the wrath of God!

The purpose of the seal is for identification so that the sealed may be preserved during the destruction (Revelation 9:4) – a similitude to the mark (tav) place on the forehead of the righteous to protect them from destruction in Ezekiel 9:4.

Wrath is reserved for the Christ-rejecter. The sealed are delivered from this grief. God's judgment has always been selective: Israel was delivered from the plagues planned for Pharaoh (Exodus 5-10). Israel was delivered from the hail storm in the time of Joshua (Joshua 10:11). The believing remnant was marked and preserved from the slaughter of idolaters during the days of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 9:4). Here, the servants of God are marked and protected. The sealing is an assurance of preservation based on divine ownership.

This sealing is God's way of informing us of the Pauline truth that all believers are known by God (Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:13). John is seeking to insure his original readers that regardless of the trials they may face, God knows His own! The seal is God's assurance the elect are preserved from the wrath and judgment of God; it is not, however, a promise to be delivered from suffering of life or persecution by man.

**Revelation 7:4-8 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.**

Who are the “**servants of God**” that are now sealed? John hears the tally and he reports the calculation (144,000); that is, twelve thousand from each of the tribes of Israel.

**Who are the 144,000 servants that are sealed?** There is no lack of interpretations on this subject. The dispensational view holds that these are strictly Jewish believers and the

great host represents Gentile Christians — that the 144,000 represent saved Jewish evangelists that will market the gospel during the alleged tribulation period.

The symbolic, apocalyptic approach says that the 144,000 represent all Christians, Jew and Gentiles, who are sealed for protection. This is the view I hold, and I hold it for the following **reasons**:

Revelation is a book of symbols and must be interpreted symbolically. A literal hermeneutic in a book full of symbols is a flawed hermeneutic. It is not surprising that God would use Israel as a symbol of all of God's people since the church is the true messianic community composed of the spiritually responsive from Israel and the spiritually responsive among the Gentiles.

McDowell (1951) says, "It is difficult to see how the symbolism here can refer to Jews only."

Ladd agrees calling this "apocalyptic language" (1972, p. 111).

Summers concurs, "Revelation is written in symbolical language" (1951, p. 146).

Kistemaker (2001) quotes William Milligan, "It is the custom of the Seer to heighten and spiritualize all Jewish names. The Temple, the Tabernacle, and the Altar, Mount Zion, and Jerusalem are to him the embodiments of ideas deeper than those literally conveyed by them" (p. 245).

All the way through Revelation, John uses Hebrew symbols to convey spiritual truth. Gross literalism violates the literary tool used by John to reveal as well as conceal spiritual truth. Furthermore, in chapter fourteen, the 144,000 are identified as "those redeemed among men," "first fruits to God," which is the Church, "the first fruits among His creatures" (James 1:18). Thus, the 144,000 are an *ideal depiction* of God's people during this present age. They are "undefiled," "pure," "blameless," and "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (14:4-5).

The numbers 144,000 and 12,000 are not to be viewed as literal calculations. Why not write down 11,495 from the tribe of Judah, or 12,241 from the tribe of Asher? If God were seeking to tally the literal sum of those being numbered, He would not round them off to 144,000 or to 12,000. He would use exact calculation as Moses did when tallying the twelve tribes in the Book of Numbers (chapters 1-3). The reason God does not use precise numbers is because the numbers are symbolic and not literal,

mathematical, engineering calculations. Beware of the engineering mind at work in interpreting the Book of Revelation.

The numbers 12,000 from each tribe and the total of 144,000 are ideal numbers. Twelve times 12,000 equals 144,000 which expresses *fullness* and *completeness*. That is, God's harvest of souls on the earth will be full and complete. They are sealed "to protect them" while upon earth until their work is done and given an "assurance of spiritual safety" says Ladd (1972, p. 112).

The literal view says that John is following Ezekiel's list of the 12 tribes and the hope of Israel's conversion and return to the land (Ezekiel 48). However, John does not follow Ezekiel's eschatological list (Ezekiel 48). John has an irregular list with Dan and Ephraim omitted<sup>38</sup>. The tribe of Joseph may refer to Ephraim, but it is different from Ezekiel's list in that it mentions Manasseh and Ephraim.

Those marked are called "servants of God." Early Christian leaders accepted the title, "servants of God" (Romans 1:1; James 1:1). When we understand the Jewish nature of the early church, it was perfectly appropriate to use Hebrew symbols to symbolize the body of Christ. In John's mind, there is **no** distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Revelation. "To the eyes of John, the church is one," says Summers (1951, p. 148).

McDowell states, "The one hundred and forty-four thousand represent, it is most reasonable to conclude, God's elect *upon the earth*" (1951, p. 97).

Quoting Charles, Summers says, "It is not believers descended from the literal Israel . . . but from the spiritual Israel that are here referred to . . ." (1951, p. 148).

Since all Christians are sealed (Ephesians 1:13), the 144,00 symbolize all Christians who have trusted Christ during this age and are alive today; that is, **the church militant**.

In Chapter 14, the 144,000 are said to have "his name" written on their foreheads. Surely, this is not a literal mark. The angel did not leave a physical tattoo on the forehead of his servants anymore than the "beast" places a literal mark on his followers.

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<sup>38</sup> Why is the tribe of Dan missing? One view is that the AntiChrist will come from this tribe. But, this is speculative. Another view is that Dan was the first tribe to admit idolatry to be practiced in Israel. Since one of John's messages in the Book of Revelation is that believers should be faithful to Christ even unto death, omitting Dan may be John's way of reinforcing the imperative that Christians must not make an idol out of life, but be willing to lay down their lives for the gospel if called upon to do so.

The “mark” is a spiritual fact. It cannot be observed with the human eye nor can it be discerned by human observation. The marking of these servants is symbolic and was designed to encourage living believers that though they go through trials and tribulations, they are protected by the Lord; that is, they won’t be touched by the wrath of God nor will they experience the second death.

Before the first destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the faithful remnant was sealed with a mark known to God (Ezekiel 9:4). This sealing assured the faithful that God knows His own and preserves them. Likewise, the sealing of John’s 144,000 assures the reader that God’s people are known and protected during troublesome times.

This list, therefore, **must refer to all believers, the true Israel; that is, spiritual Israel** (See Romans 2:28ff; Galatians 3:29; 6:16; and Philippians 3:3). Gentiles are grafted into Israel’s olive tree (Romans 11) to share in Messianic salvation. There is only one tree, true Israel, made up of believing Jews and believing Gentiles to form the complete family of God, the new reconstituted Israel. This is the remnant that formed the foundation of the Church, the true Israel of God (Ephesians 2:14ff; James 1:1) as opposed to false Jews who are of the “synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9) and those who are “not all Israel (physical Israel), which are of Israel (spiritual Israel)” (Romans 9:6).

“The 144,000 of the first consolatory vision represent not Jewish Christians only **but the whole body of believers**” (Summers, 1951, p. 150).

Using the twelve tribes to represent the Jewish/Gentile Church is perfectly appropriate since it is the Gentiles who have drawn near to Israel’s promises through faith; and, it is Gentiles who are used during the Christian era to “build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down” (Ephesians 2:12-13; Acts 15:16).

**The conclusion**, therefore, is that John’s list of 144,000 is a symbolic representation of true Israel, the complete family of God, the Church, who is known and marked by God for special preservation while on earth. These people are on earth where hurricanes of judgment thrash the nations. This would encourage the first century Christians that their cause was victorious and that no matter what kind of trial they face, they would be untouched by judgment raining on Christ-rejecters. Rather, God’s people are protected from the destruction that spies out the wicked.

Pieters: “The first group (144,000) represents the true believers on earth while they are still subject to the storms of divine judgment that break



over the world; while the second group (the great throng) symbolize believers who are already in heaven . . . the two groups, then, are respectively, The Church Militant and The Church Triumphant” (Quoted by Summers, 1951, p. 147).

(Source: Stockton, B. (2005) A Commentary on Revelation, *Standing Firm in our Time.1.4.2*, Unpublished Manuscript, ABQ, NM)

# Revelation 13

## *The Beast and His Followers*

♦ Two cows were talking. One said to the other, “Do you know what they are going to do with us? They are going to load us in trucks, take us to a killing pen, shoot us in the head, cut us up, and eat us!” Stunned, the other cow said, “They wouldn’t do that!”

Sometimes we are stunned by the world’s animosity towards Christians. When our message is opposed, we are shocked and chagrined--but never more so when that opposition comes from a government or from people in positions of authority. We are tempted to sheepishly capitulate to political policies. This was true of the Christians in the first century and in our time. Many of the people in Asia Minor heard the gospel message and experienced the blessings of salvation. But, they were traumatized by the reports of Peter’s crucifixion, of Paul’s execution, and the cruel death of leading apostles. But, when politicians in Asia Minor sought to gain the favor of Caesar by demanding political conformity of their citizens to the emperor cult, Christian devotion was tested beyond measure. They faced tough choices: worship Kurios Caesar and live, or confess Kurios Christ and die. Would they be a people who “loved not their lives unto the death?”

See the story of Saint Andrews, his martyrdom, and the basis of the Confederate Flag.

One of the central themes of the Book of Revelation is the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. John writes to let his readers know that Satan has rallied his forces and is now at work through the Roman government. He does not want his readers to be shocked by the coming persecution, but to be ready to declare loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. St. John wants his readers to love Christ more than their own life, for he knew some would be asked to make the ultimate sacrifice.

Likewise, modern day Christians need to understand that governments often take on the characteristics of the Beast. Satan uses government agencies, government policies, and government power to crush devotion to King Jesus. In the minds of social engineers

the “Pledge of Allegiance” must replace the “Lord’s Prayer;” devotion to the State must replace love for Christ; statutory law must take precedence over the Ten Commandments; the “good news that you can be all you can be,” must replace the Gospel message that “you are a sinner in need of a Savior;” public education must replace Christian home schooling. And, when this happens, Christians will face opposition to their message and values. But, Christians can be a powerful witness for Christ if they are prepared for the conflict.

Some expositors see this vision as something that is futuristic. Ladd (1972), for example, saw this vision as representing the struggle between the end-time saints and the Antichrist. This may be true, but one has to ask “What possible meaning could a futuristic interpretation have upon the struggling saints in Asia Minor?” The problem with this view is that it indicates the Beast controlled by Satan is always in the future and never a present reality to be reckoned with today. Thus, Christians have failed to resist anti-God forces working through their own government in contemporary time.

Some expositors see this vision as typifying only the conditions existing in the first century. Any proper interpretation must include an application to the first century saints. A difficulty with this view is that it could bury the meaning in past history and rob present day saints of needed application to the fascists states in modern times. Consequently, this perspective has produced mealy-mouse Christians that aren’t discerning the evil, unbiblical character of their modern government.

I take a symbolic view of the passage and view the Beast as evolving civil political structures who are controlled by ungodly men that have and will confront Christians until Christ returns. No doubt, John’s readers understood the Beast as present day Rome. Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of the first century. But, the spirit of Rome lives on and will continue to persecute the rest of the woman’s offspring in the unfolding events of history. Christians in various parts of the world are battling evil concentrated in government citadels and will continue to battle the Beast of godless governments until Christ returns in glory. *Thus, this chapter must be interpreted in light of the original readers, but its lessons must be applied to our time.* When cities like Rome or Washington D.C. take on the characteristics of the Beast, Christians must resist and prepare for conflict.

In John’s first vision (12), he saw a dragon pursuing a woman and her offspring. The dragon is a mythological figure that is a symbol of Satan. He has, is, and always will be the great enemy of God’s people. John has prepared his people to expect persecution.

*But, up to now in the book, they have not understood the means of that persecution.* Persecution will come from the Roman State! This is what John wants his people to understand. In the vision of the two Beasts, he informs his readers that the Roman government is an enemy of Christianity. St. John informs the seven churches to not be surprised by this opposition, but prepare to face resistance to their faith! And, to develop an armadillo-faith that resist tyranny.

John wants Christians in every generation to recognize when governments take on the characteristics of the Beast and prepare for conflict. *To relegate this passage to some distant, future eschatological end-time scheme robs modern Christians of needed application to present tyrannical States (and schemes) today!*

Has not the United States, Inc. become increasing more predatory and controlling? Has not D.C. banned the Lord's Prayer and Bible reading and the Ten Commandments from the classroom? Do not State officials execute punitive statutes against those who speak against abortion, or Sodomy, or unconstitutional taxation?

Interpreting this passage is a challenge. The fundamental rule of interpretation is to interpret every passage of Scripture literally, but in a symbolic vision the presumption is always towards the figurative. Our job, then, is to interpret the symbols correctly to the best of our knowledge according to first century sensitivities. And, then to apply it to our times.

### **The First Beast**

**Revelation 13:1 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a Beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.**

John was in heaven. Now, John is on the earth and stands by the sea. Like a dream, his location suddenly shifts. The cosmic battle between the red dragon and the seed of the woman (chapter 12) has moved from heaven to earth (13:1). The dragon summons the Beast to come up out of the sea.

**He saw (aorist) a Beast coming out of the sea:** The ocean is a symbol of the restless, agitated sea of politics. Out of this turbulence arises a grotesque monster. This political entity is presented in mythological imagery. He has seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns. Daniel seven comes to mind. On his heads are blasphemous names. His

association with the hideous dragon in chapter twelve is obvious. The gigantic Beast is Satan's instrument to enslave men and crush the gospel message.

Satan, who took the form of a cute, little serpent to tempt the first man and woman, has now become a huge, hideous red dragon who takes the form of a colossal monster to control the rest of humanity. The difference between the dragon and the Beast is the difference between spirit and form. The dragon is Christ's archenemy, Satan. The Beast is the body or tool of Satan; i.e., human institutions, particularly human government that is controlled by madmen.

John interprets the symbols for us. **The seven heads** are seven kingdoms.

**The ten horns** are 10 kings (Chapter 17). Possibly, John's creature is related to the great kingdoms that dominated God's people in ancient Israel. Some see the seven heads as the adversarial kingdoms of Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Caird (1966) understands the seven heads as seven Caesars. Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian, and Titus were officially declared divine. Futurists see this creature as the future super Antichrist. Certainly the Caesars took on blasphemous names such as *augustus*, *theo* (god), *kyrious* (Lord), and *soter* (Savior). There is no doubt, however, that the manifestation of the Beast in John's day referred to Rome and its militaristic State.

My understanding is that the **seven heads** represent multiple manifestations of political opposition. The Beast was before John's time, was present in John's time, and will be present until the end of this age (17:8). This monster represents the political institutions that harness their energies to squash the gospel. In Hezekiah's day, the Beast was Assyria. In John's day, it was Rome and the present form of political power that opposed the Christians in Asia Minor. In our day, the Beast may represent those governments and institutions that oppose Christianity. Bolsheviks, Zionists, Communist China, and Islamic governments in the Middle East are obvious instruments of the Devil which could be easily labeled as "the Beast." Russian Christians see the United States as the Antichrist.

Even today, lusty kleptocrats sit in positions of power in Congress, in the courts, and on the boards of education. When an entire nation culls Scripture reading in the class room, and replaces it with humanism and evolution, is not Satan working through the system? Why are Christians so cooperative with godless humanistic regimes in America, England, and Germany?

**Revelation 13:2 And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.**

The imagery is similar to that of Daniel's vision (Daniel 7) where he saw four beasts representing the political powers of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. As Daniel's friends experienced persecution from the Babylonian State, the Christians in Asia Minor would face persecution from the Roman State.

Daniel's big message was that God's people will be subjected to the godless acts of the anti-God forces until the kingdom of God arrives in history.

John wants his readers to know that the difficulties they were experiencing from human authorities in the Roman Empire were due to Satan's influence over human institutions. Behind the punishing political policies of Rome was a demonic spirit, the red dragon, Satan himself.

**The monster** John describes is empowered by Satan (the dragon). He appears to have absolute authority on earth. The Beast is an entity or an institution, not a living soul—a political system with tyrannical powers. Government corporations come to mind.

To John there were many antichrists. **Rome was just another form of the Beast.** Whatever or whoever the Beast is, the imagery is set in direct contrast to the Holy Trinity. The inhabitants of heaven worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The inhabitants of Earth worship the unholy trinity: Satan, the first Beast, and the second Beast. The spirit is Satan; the form is human exploitive institutions.

Because this image expresses a general principle of satanic opposition, we may expect throughout history multiple manifestations of satanically inspired political regimes. The Beast, therefore, represents despot rulers that demand absolute allegiance by its citizenry. Before us is a State that seeks total subjugation of the total man to total government. A military police state comes to mind.

**Revelation 13:3-4 And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?**

One of the strange aspects about this monster is **the wound in his head** that was healed. Is the death representative of physical death or political death?

Interpreters disagree on what John means by this wound. Preterists understand this phenomenon to be a reference to the **Nero-revivus myth**. Nero committed suicide in 68 A.D. A rumor arose that this infamous emperor survived, was alive, and hiding in the empire seeking the time and place to take revenge on Rome. Rome seemed to survive all threats. It was amazingly resilient.

Futurists take this wound literally and see a future Antichrist who will appear to rise from the dead. When President John Kennedy was assassinated, many futurists thought Kennedy was the Antichrist and that he was the one who was going to recover from a literal head wound. One of the problems with the futuristic view is that it would have no application and would provide no comfort to John's audience.

Another view is that "**one of the heads**" experienced political death . . . and then recovered. Beastly nations seem to live and die, then reappear in history. John may have a particular nation or Caesar in mind. Possibly, we do not have enough information to be dogmatic. Whatever is meant by the wound that was healed (ἐθεραπεύθη), this healing appears to be in juxtaposition to the resurrection of our Lord.

The response of the world was **wonderment** (ἐθαυμάσθη). How could anyone worship such a hideous monster? He not only terrorizes people into submission, his counterfeit healing attracts worshippers—possibly a political miracle or civil come back.

By **worship** (προσεκύνησαν), John means allegiance, loyalty, and servitude. Every municipality wanted to contract with Rome. The political monster exercises political power and captures the loyalty of men and diverts them from devotion to Christ to devotion to the State. His power is convincing. Few feel they can successfully resist his tri-lateral powers.

Possibly, John is referring to **emperor worship**. Rome always struggled with factions. The emperor cult united the provinces. Early gladiators would say, "Hail Caesar, we who are about to die for thee . . ." But, to the early Christians, this was a subtle warning: to worship the emperor was to worship the dragon. Likewise, those who put their trust in government will be crushed under an elephant of disappointment.

Have you noticed what a big part government plays in American life? It's as if the American media has made a god out of the State? Politicians and media personalities

view the State as the solution for ALL man's problems. Many have an idolatrous view of government talking about it day and night. When all hope is in Washington D.C., idolatry reigns. Statism reigns. Satan reigns.

"In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem" (Ronald Reagan, 1981)

**Revelation 13:5 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.**

**"mouth"**: One of the unique features of this Beast is his oratory skills and his ability to attract a following. Before us is rhetorical bayonet charge from a logo-crat. His policies are not anti-religious, but they are anti-gospel.

**"blasphemes"** refer to his hostility against the truth. Possibly, the apostle wants his readers to wake up and recognize State propaganda and the State's ability to alter public perception by its propaganda. John wanted his audience to know that Satan was now empowering his progeny—the Roman Empire. The masses in the empire appear to offer blind allegiance to the Beast much like Americans do to their own secular, godless government.

**Forty-two months** equals 1260 days. Futurists see this as the 3 1/2 year reign of a future super Antichrist. William Hendriksen sees this as the gospel age (p. 147). Another view understands the 42 months as representing a limited time. Every evil political system has an end. It is not the will of God that humanistic governments succeed. The State's authority is limited. Satan's ability to persecute the church is limited.

Historically, Rome's persecution of Christians was not universal. During Domitian reign (81-96), his persecutions were limited in scope. There can be no doubt that the Beast is Rome! But, the Beast morphs and governments of every age take on certain characteristics of Rome; that is, when Christians find themselves under secular, humanistic regimes which oppress and silence the gospel through Roman civil law, the lessons of this chapter must be applied.

**Revelation 13:6-7 And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.**



The word “**blaspheme**” (βλασφημία) refers to insulting speech—lies, disputation, and slander. St. John wanted his readers to know that Rome opposed God’s law-order. The object of this hostility is God’s true dwelling and God’s true people (Christians).

Government has to compete for the affections of the people, and religion is often viewed as a fierce competitor of the State. Slander is an effective tool—a covert operation to destroy the people’s trust in Deity. Slander Christ, His gospel, and Christians . . . and the simple gobble up the lies like a dog on puke.

In reference to the early Christians, Francis Schaffer said they were not put to death because they were Christians, but because they were deemed *atheists*. Because they would not worship Caesar, Christians were labeled “non-believers.”

Furthermore, because Christian churches would not incorporate and surrender to the jurisdiction of Caesar, Christians were suspect and even persecuted. The Beast compelled absolute allegiance and when the saints confessed another king, King Jesus, they were labeled as traitors and a threat to the empire (Acts 17:6, 7).

**The charge of treason** strikes fear into all. The Beast is imperialistic and covets universal dominion. It demands undivided loyalty by all kindreds, tongues, and nations. Treason to God and a violation of the First Commandment was not a crime; but, treason to a Caesar was punished by death.

This hostility can be seen in our day in countries where Moslems demand a pure Islamic State and the application of Sharia law. Governments are run by clerics and mosques are funded by the State. Dissension is not allowed. Conformity is required. Preaching of the gospel is forbidden. Conversion is a crime. Churches are burned. Christians are beheaded. Saudi Arabia is as hostile to Christians as Rome ever was.

Even in America, there are humanistic, Zionistic elements in our society attempting to eradicate every reference to God in public life. Under the guise of anti-Semitism, Christian opposition to political tyranny is brutally punished. All the government has to do is announce to the media that they are investigating “radical, right wing, Christian anti-government” church, and every household immediately sympathizes with the State.

One pastor was ordered to take cultural sensitivity classes after he visited a nursing home and asked an atheist woman if she would mind if he prayed for her. In March 2009, the Missouri Independent Analysis Center labeled Christians, homeschoolers,

constitutionalists, and people who flew the American flag as “domestic terrorists.” The State will not attack Christianity directly. When the State wants to silence politically active pastors, slander is the government’s weapon of choice. And, it works! Accuse a pastor of not paying his fair share of taxes, and the whole nation will believe the pastor is evil and the government is good.

In March 2025 this headline appeared on the Gateway Pundit as evidence of government tyranny:

‘Motivated by a Desire to Punish,’ Active-Duty Air Force Major is Being Forced to Go Without Pay ‘Indefinitely’ for Taking a Religious and Medical Objection to the Flu Vaccine

To the early Christians, Rome’s war against “the atheists” meant that Christians had to choose between allegiance to Rome or allegiance to Christ. They could not be neutral. To submit to the State was to treason to Christ. The choice was between loyalty to Jesus and risk offending the State, or pledging allegiance to the State and risk offending their Lord.

Even today, believers have to make this same choice as Beastly governments wage war against kingdom proclamation in all kinds of forms.

**Revelation 13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.**

To “**dwell upon the earth**” refers to worldly men who are at home on the Earth.

“**worship**” means to pledge allegiance to the State. The Beast is popular. He has a following. He has the majority vote. Rome's democracy conquered all. The inhabitants of the earth, those who do not know God, pledge absolute allegiance to this system. They vote in every election.

Worship here probably refers to contracts with Rome wherein municipalities exchanged rights for benefits. Their total focus is with the affairs of the State. If people do not know God, their only hope resides in kings and princes of this world. To many, a “better” government is the hope of mankind. We would do well to remember that the majority of men saw nothing wrong with the Beast. He had the popular support of the people.

But, the majority is seldom correct. Beware of majority rule.

<sup>NAS</sup>Exodus 23:2 "You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice;

There are two trees, the poisonous tree and the tree of life. Likewise, there are only two cities, the city man and the City of God. One cannot be a member of both. There are only two kingdoms, the kingdom of Light and the kingdom of darkness. One cannot be a member of both. There are only two kings, Kurios Jesus or Kurious Caesar. One cannot worship both. No man can serve two masters.

The phrase "from the foundation of the world" could modify either "written" or "slain." Both are true. The names of God's people are penned in God's book from the foundation of the world. Christ was destined to suffer for our sins at the cross before time began. Here, John draws his first application. When one knows that his name is written in heaven, he can endure opposition on earth. True Christians are loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. They do not fear the beast more than God. Do we know for sure our name is written in heaven? If not, how can we ever risk offending authorities? And, if our name is not on some government hate list, our Christian life is not sprinkled with salt.

**Revelation 13:9-10 If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.**

The phrase, "**If any man have an ear**" is John's way of saying, "Beloved, I want you to stand up and make an application to your life."

This is John's way of informing us many Christians will be harassed. Some will suffer banishment. Others will be martyred. John himself was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. This was a time for Christians to take a stand; to dig in their heels and to be faithful. To resist the State can be suicide. One Christian with a sword is no match for a Roman legion. Randy Weaver at Ruby Ridge and the survivors of the Branch Dividians in Waco, Texas can testify to man's vulnerability against the thundering power of the State's military forces. If there is any encouragement here, it is in the phrase, "must be killed." Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.

The word "**patient**" (ἡ ὑπομονή) means to "to remain under." When we go through difficult trials, we look for a quick exit. But, there is no exit from the cruel mercies of

tyrants. John is telling his people they must remain under the pressures from the State as they follow Christ.

The word “**faith**” (ἡ πίστις) could mean one’s personal faith or the need to be faithful. I understand this to refer to the need for each saint to fortify his personal beliefs. Severe persecution tests one’s fundamental convictions. There is very little one can do to stop an elephant stampede. Likewise, there is very little one Christian can do to halt the progress of evil in a political system. To openly resist is a death warrant. If government is God in the minds of people, you can expect to be treated like Typhoid Mary if you embrace Theocracy instead of the gospel of democracy. Nevertheless, we are called to stand our ground. If enough snowflakes stick together, they can stop traffic. This is the patience of the saints. Believe! Be faithful! Stand!

### **The Second Beast**

**Revelation 13:11 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.**

**A second Beast** appears from the earth – not the sea. He is sometimes referred to as “**the prophet**.” This monster is camouflaged in wool. He has horns like a lamb and looks harmless, but the fact he speaks like a dragon exposes his true character. He is an agent of Satan.

Futurists see this as a future prophet who will attract followers to the alleged Antichrist. Preterists see this Beast as the smaller confederate powers within Rome that sought to pledge allegiance to the Empire for political favors.

Possibly, **the second Beast** refers to the government’s propaganda machine which appears to be harmless but is joined at the hip with the first Beast. States have a huge interest in controlling the media and spinning the news. No doubt Rome had its promoters that discharged information, disinformation, and misinformation through its reporters. Governments have their ways of controlling “free speech” and “the press” whether it be rewarding the loyal or punishing the disloyal.

**Revelation 13:12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed**

**The second Beast** acts like a false prophet directing humanity to follow the first Beast. He is a propagandist skilled in the art of social conditioning. We might call this “brainwashing” or “ballyhoo.” In one sense, he is a false Holy Spirit, a representative of the government that gives political speeches to expand the party base and promote public policy. Every state is in some sense a logocracy, a government of words. Courts issue “gag orders.” Public policy promotes censorship by enacting legislation against “hate speech” and “anti-Semitism” or promoting “allowable speech” to prevent any criticism of the ruling elite.

In the first century, the propagandists were priests for the imperial cult, a council of distinguished city representatives who promoted loyalty to Rome in exchange for political favors. In Asia Minor, citizens were required to place a pinch of incense on an altar before they entered the market place to do business. Refusing to honor Caesar in this manner could result in something as simple as rejection from the market place or something as serious as capital punishment.

Circa 30 A.D. promoters of Rome circulated this publication: “Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved.”<sup>39</sup> When Peter preached that Jesus is Lord, he declared war on Rome (Acts 4:12). Rome executed all the apostles who taught there was “another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7).

And, modern States have no tolerance for Christians who do not pledge allegiance to the regime. Shortly after Vicky Weaver addressed the U.S. Attorney General for Idaho as “Servant of the Queen of Babylon,” she was summarily executed by a government assassin along with her son and her dog (Ruby Ridge, August 1992).

**Revelation 13:13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,**

The word “**wonders**” (σημεῖα) means “signs” or “miracles.” Making fire come down from heaven reminds us of Elijah the prophet. Whether this is literal or figurative has

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<sup>39</sup> CA Farmer 241:5 (Oct. 5, 1974), p. 28.

been a matter of dispute. Since this section of literature is a mythological allegory, the presumption should be toward the figurative.

Apparently, this propagandist was a powerful political agent who wielded thumaturgical power to produce solidarity in the empire. It is not clear whether John is referring to counterfeit miracles that he regarded as fraudulent, or that he is referring to the tricks of a magicians and sorcerers in the service of a false religion, or clever tricks in commerce, or that he is referring to a genuine manifestation of demonic power, or that he is referring to boasts of government about their accomplishments.

Like our politicians, the Caesars took credit for all the good and accepted zero responsibility for the blunders in their administration. Victors are famous for whitewashing their crimes and demonizing their adversaries as monsters.

One must ask, “What is the attraction of false systems like Mormonism or Islam or secularism or communism?” All have powerful leaders with a grand propaganda machine that rewards solidarity and punishes dissent. Modern Iran is an illustration where civil/religious leaders may execute anyone who does not adhere to Islamic Fundamentalism. Zionists are famous for their solidarity and cruel punishment against dissenters. Indoctrination and mind control are functions of the State. Every monarch employs the art of deceit to win adherents and defeat enemies.

**Revelation 13:14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.**

The word “**deceiveth**” (πλανῶ) is a present active indicative verb which means “to lead astray” by the practice of deception. The wretchedness of deceit, of course, is the deceived does not know that he is deceived.

“**miracles**” refers to extraordinary powers – not miracles like our Lord performed.

The phrase “**them that dwell on the earth**” are the objects of dupery. They are set in direct contrast to God’s heavenly people who are not deceived. The propagandist is effective. His pragmatic methods work. Possibly, John is referring to such methods used by the imperial cult to trick and deceive superstitious people. Sorcery and ventriloquism is attested in Acts 13:6; 16:16; 19:13. Perhaps, this applies to the

propaganda machines that are associated with all governmental powers; that is, sophistry<sup>40</sup> used in the media outlets of a nation.

Futurists, however, foresee an apocalyptic ambassador who will be empowered by Satan to counterfeit the miracles of Christ. Historists see this as the papacy. But, this would be of little interest to the original readers. They were facing Roman propaganda, imprisonment, and execution, not a distant end-time deceiver.

We learn that the Beast was **wounded by a sword**. Possibly, this refers to some type of military defeat . . . or assassination (Goths, Huns). Julius Caesar was the first to gather all power unto himself. Though assassinated, the Caesars following him continued his imperialistic ambitions. Recovery from the wound speaks of resilience of this political machine.

**Revelation 13:15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.**

This is a difficult passage. Some apocalyptic dispensationalists understand this to be a prophetic statute of a future Antichrist that will be placed into a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

The historical background to the fact that he had “**power to give life unto the image**” is a Roman statue via deception by a ventriloquist. In Asia Minor, citizens were required to wear amulets and jewelry that signified loyalty to Rome or be subject to the accusation of “treason.” In Asia Minor, failure to give a pinch of incense to Caesar was a capital offence. Remember, saint Andrew. Regardless of the details here, John paints a picture of a system that is resolute in demanding total devotion of the total man to the total State. Failure to comply meant prosecution and persecution, even death.

### **The Mark of the Beast**

**Revelation 13:16-17 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number**

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<sup>40</sup> Sophisticated: In relation to public officials: unduly refined, deprived of simplicity and honesty, pretentious or superficially wise, able to employ word magic in order to alter the mind of the innocent, deceive, or to plant fictions in the mind; mind controllers employing propaganda through word art.

of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count<sup>41</sup> the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

What is this **mark** (ἀράγμα)? Dozens of interpretations abound.

**The mark** (ἀράγμα) has been identified as anything from a social security number to a computer chip. Many prophecy teachers have advanced all kinds of interesting theories. The practice of assigning numerical values to letters is called Gematria. By assigning Hebrew, Greek, and English letters a number, various calculations have been submitted to identify the Antichrist. From Nero to Henry Kissinger, endless possibilities abound.

In the Roman world, a **mark** or “**charagma**” was a technical term for the imperial stamp used on commercial documents and coins--something like the American dollar with all its symbols. Either of these usages would explain the mark on the hand or forehead.

This mark may or may not be literal. God has marked his saints, but not with a literal physical symbol. Without a visible pledge of allegiance to Rome, Christians living in Asia Minor could not do business in Caesar’s market place.

I understand that there are at least sixty interpretations to the number **666**. Many have tried to identify this with a particular person in modern times. But, in a highly symbolic passage, such consideration is speculative. But, there is an exception. In Hebrew<sup>42</sup>, the name/number for **Nero Caesar tallies to 666**. In some manuscripts the number reads 616, the Latin equivalent to Nero Caesar<sup>43</sup>. Nero Caesar (54-68 A.D.) is the strongest candidate for the symbol 666.

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<sup>41</sup> The imperative “count” (ψηφισάτω) is an aorist active imperative. If the original readers were to obey this instruction, the name Nero Caesar would be 666. What relevance would calculating this number have if it applied to someone 2000 years into the original reader’s history? This is powerful evidence the book was written before 70 AD and that it had immediate relevance. The fact that the Syrian version reads, “John the Evangelist in the Isle of Patmos, where he was thrown by Nero Caesar” must be considered when interpreting this passage.

<sup>42</sup> Each letter has a numerical value: Aleph is 1, Beth is 2, and so on until 10, then count by tens till 100, then by hundreds till we run out of letters. Nero Caesar in Hebrew is NeRON QeiSaR; adding up the letters we get “the number of the man”, 666.

<sup>43</sup> Some MSS known to Tischendorf read the number of the beast as 616 (Latin number for Nero Caesar: נרין קסר) instead of the Hebrew 666 (Nero Caesar in Hebrew characters: נרין קסר).



The number 666 is symbolic like all the other numbers in Revelation are symbolic. The number seven is the number of perfection and often symbolizes God's perfection. The number 666 is the number of man that symbolizes man's imperfection.

**The point of the passage** is that this economic system is controlled by autocrats in a pagan institution that demand absolute allegiance. It punishes non-conformists.

For example, consider how President Roosevelt introduced FRNs, unbacked securities, and banned the use of silver and gold, Executive Order 6102, 1933. All systems fail to achieve perfection (777). The Roman Empire, Romanism, Communism, Islam, and Democracy has failed to produce a just political / economic system. For this reason, Christians pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done;" i.e., that men may recognize God's rule now and surrender to it now.

Why the **hand**? Why the **forehead**? Again, there are over 60 interpretations to the question. My opinion is that the number signifies the dehumanization of man. The forehead is chosen because that is the origin of man's thought life. This system seeks to control the thinking of mankind through deception and coercion. The hand is chosen because the hand represents human labor. This system seeks to control labor and to extract wealth in the form of taxation from the common citizen to fund the system.

This passage has an application for our time! An interpretation that consigns this passage to a future government hinders Christians from discerning how their own government behaves like the Beast of Rome. The Beast morphs its way through history. At various times, governments take on the characteristics of Rome by demanding absolute allegiance and by controlling commerce. When this happens, Christians are called to resist. "Resistance to tyranny is service to God" - Thomas Jefferson.

Capitalism and its wealth creation from "excess value of labor" comes to mind. Usury and the errant belief that money propagates money is another fruit of the Poisonous Tree. Every modern government contaminated by the IMF has a system in place to control the mind through legalize and propaganda as well as an unconstitutional graduated system of taxation to fleece the sheeple. Does mentally imbalanced political machines that produce passive, unquestioning, obedient, ignorant, compliant dumb-downed, 1040 Revenue producing slave units ring a bell?

As we consider our own technological age with social security numbers, credit cards, computer chips and AI, it is very possible to imagine a legislative ID system that assigns a number for the purpose of tracking people and controlling the economy. Since the fall

of the World Trade Center in (September 11, 2001), Americans have demanded greater security. All kinds of governmental tracking systems have been embraced. RFIDs (Radio Frequency Identification Devices) can read driver's licenses, credit cards, and passports. Telephone calls are recorded. Emails are collected in some NSA government cyber data base. Privacy is a right of the past. And, considering our own economy, how can anyone doubt that the Federal Reserve with its toxic currency owns everything and everyone? Since, the gold confiscation of April 5, 1933 we have been forced by color of law to use Federal Reserve Notes (FRNs). The Social Security Number already acts like the Mark of the Beast. Ever try getting a job or bank account without one? The Beast of Babylon reigns unchallenged. In the midst of things we cannot control, God still calls us to be loyal to Christ during all seasons of life.

# Revelation 16:15-17

## *Armageddon*

### Pastoral Warning

**Revelation 16:15** Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

♦ **The Lord speaks.** He announces a coming. **This coming** is not the Parousia of our Lord but a coming in history to wage war against the antichrist forces.

Imagery of a **thief** highlights the unexpectedness of this judgment. It is a pastoral warning against laxity and indolence in the time of spiritual warfare. Christians are present during this period. Believers are called to be alert, awake, and ready to wage war against sin and compromise at all times.

"I believe there are more instances of abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations..." James Madison.

**Nakedness** is a symbol of spiritual poverty (3:17ff) and of unexpected exposure.

**Shame** is the result of ungodly conduct. Both are to be avoided. "Wake up and be clean," commands the Lord. This is God's way of saying, "Don't be caught with your pants down!"

At this point in the book, in view of a futurist's interpretation, this phrase seems almost superfluous. The Lord could come at any time: before, during, or after the display of divine wrath. If this is the end of the world and Christians have been raptured, why is there the exhortation to watch and keep one's garments clean?

**Revelation 16:16** And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

**Armageddon** ("har megiddon") refers to the mountains of Megiddo south of Nazareth and east of modern day Haifa. Barak, Saul, and Josiah fought battles in this famous valley. It has been considered by some a perfect battlefield for a war.

*This battle, however, is not spatial or geographical.* It is spiritual and logical. It does not occur on earth's landscape, but in the realm of the Spirit.

This is John's way of telling us that there is a day of reckoning. This war is organized by the incarnate Logos. It is a battle between the forces of evil and forces of good, between truth and lies. Satan will rally the nations to resist the gospel at various times in history. But, evil will be defeated. Satan will use the powers of the State to crush truth, but Christians armed with the Word of God will ultimately prevail. Satan can use it and abuse it; bend it and twist it, but he cannot destroy and demolish it.

*The gospel will be victorious in this age.* In fact, the gospel seems to prosper in times of persecution. Hardened men who seem impossible to reach will be won to Christ. Wickedness will experience defeats through the Christian message. Proud politicians have an Armageddon. They will fall and collapse in God's time.

### **Seventh Bowl**

**Revelation 16:17-21 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunder, and lightning; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.**

This is the climax of the revelation. We have here a drama designed to impress us with an absolute truth that the Babylonian system will give way to the kingdom of God.

**Voices, thunders, lightening, cities falling, cup of wine, sinking islands, and giant hailstones** is phenomenal language adding to the drama of this scene. John is not a reporter describing a natural catastrophe. He is an artist painting truth on the canvas of our minds. The truth illustrated is the dark, horrible reality of God's judgment on

rebellious man. The punishment is fierce, Herculean, and inescapable. When men are judged, their world will collapse.

**Babylon** represents the worldly political systems, the anti-God forces united against God. To John, Babylon would be Rome. To us, Babylon represents the systems of evil that works through political regimes to silence gospel proclamation. Closer to home, Babylon is the United States Government and the Zionist New World Order with all its tainted commerce and godless corruption.

God's people are often bewildered by the might and power of the anti-God powers in ministerial systems. Who hasn't felt helpless against political monopolies? John wants his audience to know that though these forces may be inspired by the trinity of evil and united to resist Christ, they will be demolished when God orders their destruction. They will not prevail! They will be beaten, scattered, and pulverized by the wrath of Almighty God.

"In the continuing conflict between good and evil, truth is the weapon that wins the war." George Washington

"The more a Truth is told, the more it is believed."

What an encouragement to John's readers. The gospel will prevail! Rome will lose. Believers will be safe and secure in the presence of God. God's wrath will not sleep forever. Evil men will be punished. The enemies of the gospel and their institutions have a destiny with vengeance. Liberals will be stripped of their pride and arrogance. Rebels will be crushed under the wheels of justice. The righteousness will be rewarded. Stand for Christ and fight the good fight for you are on the winning side. This is John's message.

**Interpretive note:** In apocalyptic literature, God uses symbols as a vehicle of truth. The symbolic imagery is not to be taken literally, but **the symbols do convey a literal truth!**

These physical, earthly, climatic images represent the reality of God's judgment upon Christ-rejecters, but "waters turning to blood" and "collapsing cities" are not necessarily literal events in the Biblical drama. However, they teach that God literally judges what man esteems; that the hopes of the unbelieving will crash when God pulls the switch of judgment and discharges wrath upon the unbelieving. He has many instruments of judgment in his arsenal including but not limited to environmental catastrophes, earthquakes, natural disasters, and political reversals.

There is a difference between the end of a political system and the catastrophic destruction of the universe. In view of Peter's words, "*Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*" (2 Peter 3:12).

The Lord will come and the world as we know it will have its end. After all, we look for a new heaven and new earth renewed by the creative powers of our Lord and Savior.

But, this does not mean that this chapter is describing the end of the world. Rather, the Lord comes many times in history to act and bring political systems to an end. These "ends" are often described in apocalyptic imagery and "end of the world" terminology which is what we have in this chapter.

While we look for our Savior to come in time to end history, we also look to the Lord to come in our time and to judge the anti-god forces that resist truth and freedom: "When the wicked are cut off, ye shall see it."

Such political falls are often inexplicable and must be the result of the prayers of the saints.

For example, Nazi Germany had its Armageddon in 1944. It's "spiritual" Euphrates, that is its borders maintained by its military defenses, was crossed by the Allied Forces. The nation was pulverized and the Nazi culture met a horrific end. Is there any doubt the wrath of God was poured out on this recalcitrant regime?

Likewise, the British Empire crumbled under Churchill, the English warmonger. London was demolished. England was left in ruins. This passage in Holy Scripture should be a warning to every political leader that has imperialistic ambitions that sets his mind to build an empire built on greed and lust. In his time, God will crush these societies — regimes that build their society on the whims and wishes of madmen instead of God's law-order.

(Source: Stockton, B. (2005) A Commentary on Revelation, *Standing Firm in our Time*.1.4.2, Unpublished Manuscript, ABQ, NM)

# Revelation 19:11-21

## *The Rider on the White Horse*

♦ Futurists understand this section to refer to the second coming of Christ, the Parousia mentioned in 1 Thessalonians four, and the consummation of history.

**The symbolic-apocalyptic view** understands this as imagery pertaining to the present risen life of Christ warring on behalf of His people against the anti-God forces. I hold to the symbolic approach for following reasons: (a) the scene is a heavenly vision; (b) the white horse, blazing eyes, robe dipped in blood, and sword out of the mouth are not a literal description of Christ but an illustrative presentation of our Lord's command from heaven; (c) the warrior is symbolic and not a physical person; (d) the war is spiritual and not physical; present, not future; synthetic, not analytical; (e) the context of this section is surrounded by iconic imagery, and (f) John's presentation is written in apocalyptic style, a dramatic literary form suitable for his purpose of revealing the work of Christ in history. This image functions like a political cartoon we see in newspapers—a caricature of actual political events.

The vision before us is personified by **the Rider on a white horse** showing us how Christ wages war from His position in heaven. The vision shows us that it is through the gospel and the proclamation of the Word of God that He penetrates society to win souls and to root out evil. Christ will indeed come again, but this is not a picture of the Second Advent. It is an image of Christ coming in history to defeat adversaries through the sword of the gospel. We have seen in previous chapters the defeat of the beast and the destruction of the great harlot. Now we see the means of that defeat and the sure and ultimate destiny of the unholy trio of evil.

**Revelation 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.**

The periscope of prophecy has just announced the marriage supper of the Lamb, but what we see are a captain warrior and His mighty army arriving at a battlefield. The warrior can be interpreted in no other way than Christ. He is the One Who intercedes at the right hand God "above" us (Romans 8:34) and sends his Holy Spirit to help with our infirmities "in us" (Romans 8:26-27).

**The white horse** is not literal. Christ does not come to fight the anti-God forces via the medium of a horse. The white horse is a symbol of conquest, of royalty, of military leadership, of a righteous cause, and of pure virtue.

John identifies the Rider as **"Faithful and True"** as opposed to fraud and deception which characterized the beast, whore, and the devil.

By **"faithful"** John means that Jesus is dependable.

By **"true"** John means that Jesus is reliability. The idea is that in Christ's person and work, God is keeping His covenant with men. Ascended to the right hand of God, He acts in history to save his people and to defeat evil.

The word **"judge"** means "to sever" or "to cut through." Christ is the Warrior Judge.

**"He doth judge and make war"** informs us that our sweet Jesus is more than a gentle, loving shepherd Savior, but a fierce, military general waging war against the anti-God forces on earth. Jesus is not some ooey gooey butter cake that tolerates the sugar-coated political correctness going on in this age. After Israel was delivered from Egypt, Miriam wrote a song announcing her new insight into the God that delivered Israel from Pharaoh's army: "The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name" (Exodus 15:3).

We tend to think of Jesus as "sugar and spice and everything nice," but our Bible informs He is tougher than marines. Ready to flex his military muscle, Jesus crushes hostiles to the law of God. He commands all men to repent including statesmen, legislators, judges, and presidents. He is at war against deceivers, thieves, abortionists, Sodomites, fraudulent bankers, trickster lawyers, and humanistic social engineers. And, if we are going to follow him, we'd better be ready for mortal conflict and hand-to-hand combat against the anti-God forces of our age.

**Revelation 19:12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.**

This is how we need to see Jesus.



The Savior is portrayed as having **eyes as a flame of fire**. This signifies his piercing knowledge and His intense focus on the mission. Our Warrior King is not some sugar-coated politician sitting on a cushion of strawberries in an air-conditioned office. He is a seasoned battle commander with dust on his face and grit on his teeth fiercely engaged in the heated battle for hearts and minds.

The **crowns on his head** are not literal figurines worn on the head. These are symbolic images representing the fact that He has a victor's authority to wage war against evil by virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection. He has achieved nothing but victories against the anti-God forces in history. He is the Victor over Satan, sin, and death. He is the King of creation and King of the new creation (Colossians 1:15-18). He, not Satan, rules the universe. He, not Caesar, must be obeyed. His law, not man's law will prevail. He is on the throne now and Head over all "all rule and authority" (Colossians 2:10).

The fact that He **has a name** that no man knows indicates his personal depth of character. The riches of Christ are unsearchable. There is much about Christ that is incomprehensible to the mind of man. There are unexplored galaxies yet to be discovered in the universe of Christ. His ministry in heaven, his work of saving souls, and his conquest over evil in history is often invisible. It remains a mystery.

**Revelation 19:13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.**

Having a **cloak dipped in blood** is not literal of course, but representative of experience in war. Our Lord knows what it is like to have face-to-face, hand-to-hand, nose-to-nose combat with the evil men. Our Savior King is a battle-scarred Veteran of holy conflict. The blood here is not his own, but that of rebels splattered in a hack-and-cut brawl of a battle to the death. His garment is stained with blood before the battle begins demonstrates that this is apocalyptic imagery, not prose. Reality, not sequence is the issue here. We are dealing with facts, not fiction. Our Lord is the Scorpion Warrior King, and those who serve Him will find themselves engaged in a stinging, bloody combat for the truth of the gospel.

John now erases any ambiguity about the identity of this general. He is none other than the **Word of God**, the eternal *Logos* made flesh, the Hebrew-Greek answer to all man's questions. Christ is the exact representation of the invisible God, the complete revelation of the will of God, and the supreme reflection of deity in bodily form. To see

Him is to see the Father, and to obey Him is to obey the Living Torah (John 1:1, 14; 14:6-10; Colossians 1:15-18; 2:9).

**Revelation 19:14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.**

Christ leads the charge. His army is **dressed in white** riding upon **white horses**.

**The armies of heaven** could be angels (Zechariah 14:5; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:7), but more than likely the army represents the sum total of Christians who trust Christ and follow him in this life. The strength of the saints is their holiness and devotion to the Savior. His army is not perfect, but they are pure. We are not told what they do or even that they participate in battle—only that they are Holy Ones.

Before us is a huge army, a symbol of hope and power and deliverance. We are on the winning side. The saints are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Not because Christians fight the war, but because they rely upon the victories and accomplishments of Another. These are captives who share in the conquest of our Lord and Savior. Believers are **not** defeated foes, but beneficiaries of His royal accomplishments at the cross (Romans 8:37; Ephesians 4:6ff; Colossians 1:9-14). *His gospel will prevail.*

The “**fine linen, white and clean**” represents imputed righteousness, the forensic justification of the saints. Because of their faith in the faithfulness of Christ, the people of God are viewed as holy and righteous in his eyes. This is positional truth. It is idealistic.

In reality, we are more like Joshua clothed “in filthy garments” (Zechariah 3:30). Nevertheless, we claim our glorious position in the Beloved by faith. We aspire to be holy and virtuous in our Christian walk. In heaven, we are righteous men; on earth, we are flawed and defiled soldiers learning to be righteous in all that we do.

**Revelation 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.**

The only weapon in this conflict of the ages is not in his hand, but in his **mouth-- the Word of God**. He does not use the clanking, thundering, banging metal rods of

bayonets and muskets to force the retreat of His enemies. He uses persuasive arguments consistent with the Word of God on the bloody battlefield of public debate.

Political adversaries lay like corpses before His gospel offensive. The imagery looks back to Isaiah 11:4 where He shall smite His enemies with the rod of His mouth. It is the power of the gospel rather than the exercise of brute force that achieves victory. Jesus wins souls, not by compulsion, but by persuasion; not by force, but by the faithfulness of his followers; not by grim coercion, but by the attractive character of His people.

By using the terms “**iron scepter**” and “**winepress of the wrath of God**,” John informs Jewish readers that Jesus is New Israel’s true messiah, and that He is the One through whom YHWH advances the kingdom of God within the human race. The King wages war and eschatological judgment smites the nation in advance of the dynamic consummation at the end of history.

Enough of man! We pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy rule be done.” This is a rebel’s prayer. By this, we are not praying for some millennial kingdom but that God’s will be done now, in our time, in our nation, today!! And, the rule of God is extended when hearts surrender to the authority of the King of the nations as their Ruler and Lawgiver. All that is wrong with our age is because global leaders have rejected God’s law and are hell bent on creating their own utopia through man-made legislation—legislation opposed to God’s Law-word. The problem is not “the economy, stupid” but the lack of theonomy in the hearts of men (Jeremiah 10:7; 32:22; James 4:12).

Here we understand the nature of this battle. This is a spiritual warfare. Christ does not wage war against the forces of evil with guns and tanks, *but by proclamation of the gospel!*

It is through the Word of God that this King defeats the antichrist powers, wins hearts, and judges men (Hebrews 4:12). He is seen here in the fierce capacity of treading the winepress of the wrath of God squashing the wicked and rooting out evil among men.

As a way of application, the early Christians would have taken courage from this vision to proclaim the gospel to neighbors and friends. This is why Christians involved in political struggles and cultural wars of our age must never stop quoting the Word of God. There is a tendency, in order to be politically correct and not to appear religious, to fail to quote the Bible in the arena of ideas because it irritates humanists. When Christians stop quoting God’s Word, they lay down their swords and experience a loss of power and effectiveness. This does not mean Christian politicians must hammer people with Scripture, but it would be refreshing to hear Christians quote an

appropriate verse in critical debates from time-to-time. It is their honor to acknowledge the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father. It is this truth that will defeat the decrepit ideas coming from tenets of atheistic humanism. Christ reigns; not Caesar; Christ rules the affairs of men; not liberal leaders of this world.

**Revelation 19:16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.**

Christ has a secret name that only He knows. The Church knows Him as “faithful and true.” The world knows Him as “**King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.**”

Since he rose from the dead, he conquered the greatest enemy of all and merits the title “**Lord.**” By virtue of His exalted position to the right hand of God, He is our representative, King of kings. There is no potentate whose power exceeds that of Christ. All are responsible to Him and will one day stand before Him in their individual capacities to give account of their stewardship. Take off your crowns! Bow your heads, O kings. Jesus reigns!

According to the German historian, Ethelbert Stauffer, the religious principle of the Roman Empire, from the days of Augustus on, was salvation by Caesar: “Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved.” When Peter preached Christ and said about Him, “Neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,” Peter declared war on Rome. The gospel that “turned the world upside down” in the first century preached another king—King Jesus (Acts 17:6-7).

### **The Great Supper**

**Revelation 19:17-18 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.**

To see an angel standing in the **Sun** was blinding. He calls to the **birds of the air** to come to a great supper. Beckoning to the call, John sees turkey vultures circling in the

sky. Men are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. What we see in this vision is continuity with the proceeding visions announcing the defeat of the anti-God forces.

The background of this scene is found in Ezekiel 39:17-20. Foreseen is a **feast** in contrast to the Marriage Supper of the lamb. This binge is for the carrion. Vultures and eagles and crows are invited to attend this battle because of the tremendous slaughter that will take place in the land. But, this is not a literal slaughter with literal birds on a literal landscape. John's vision is logical and spiritual, not literal and geographical.

The main course at the banquet will be human flesh. *This imagery is not letter for letter but symbolic of utter defeat -- a grotesque, mythological painting to impress the mind.* Destroyed in this battle will be the great and the small, generals and privates, mercenaries and soldiers and any who accepted the mark of the beast. Regardless of wealth, or status, or sex, or achievement, all will bow the knee to Christ; that is, men can bow the knee now voluntarily, or bow the knee later by force.

**Revelation 19:19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.**

The center figure in this campaign is **the beast** and his forces; that is, the armies of this age. This war is presented as the battle of the ages, the final mythical showdown. John wants his readers to understand that Rome was not fighting Christians, but the King of kings. *Godless, imperial States arise because they hate the Christ; His Word; and His rule.* The icy chill in the wrinkles on their brow are rows of murmurs against God's law order. Rulers are like angry roosters crowing with purple faces in protest against the authority of the highly exalted Christ.

There is **no description of the battle**. John described the defeat of the beast and the great whore in early chapters. John wants his readers to understand that Christ knows their trials, that in the mind of God, He has already defeated the ugly monster. The Leviathan's demise is certain.

God wants us to understand the continuous process of history. The Lord Jesus is the central fact of history. His death, burial, and resurrection is the triumph of history; and, His ascension to the right hand of God must be embraced and acknowledge for the ongoing progress of civilization.

### **Destruction of the Anti-God Forces**

**Revelation 19:20-21 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.**

Missing is the description of the battle. In its place is the final reality -- **a captured beast**, a false prophet, their followers, and their execution. This is the period at the end of the sentence; the last rail on the track; the final fact in the judge's verdict.

As the original readers listened to the Book of Revelation being read, John wanted his audience to understand that in the mind of God Rome was already defeated. Likewise, we must understand that every evil that arises against Christians in the flow of life will experience the defeat of Gog and Magog. Christian adversaries, though they appear invincible now, will one day be nothing but a carcass on which the feathered carrions behind the veil feed eternally.

Many treat Revelation as a literal, precise, scientific, chronological, detailed map toward end time events. In my opinion, this approach is unwise because it leads to false expectations about the future and an unhealthy preoccupation with speculation. John writes in apocalyptic style using imagery to expand the imagination and to impress the senses. Through these visions, *John wants his readers to understand and be deeply motivated by three fundamental facts:*

- (a) The gospel is the most wonderful, powerful, fundamental fact of history. The ascended Savior died, rose from the dead, and rules over the affairs of nations to win souls and to defeat evil;
- (b) the wicked in society and the institutions through which they rule will be trounced and will not prevail. Their destiny is Armageddon, the defeat of Gog of Magog, destruction and hell. Like birds feed on corpses and pluck out eyes after an intense battle, the scavengers of God's judgment will feed on these foes for eternity. They will be thrown "alive" and "conscious" into the lake of fire; and
- (c) the righteous will be feasting and celebrating the joy of redemption forever and ever in the blessed company of Christ. Earthly Jerusalem finds its fulfillment in the new Jerusalem. Therefore, believers should embrace the gospel and live boldly in this present evil age for the cause of Christ even though evil appears to prevail.

(Source: Stockton, B. (2005) A Commentary on Revelation, *Standing Firm in our Time*.1.4.2, Unpublished Manuscript, ABQ, NM)

# Revelation 20:1-6

## *The Thousand Year Reign of Christ*

### The Binding of Satan

**Revelation 20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.**

Having described the Battle of Armageddon and the defeat of the beast, John now describes the defeat of the one behind the Beast, the old Serpent which is Satan himself.

Revelation 20:1 takes us back to the beginning of the NT era. It is only proper that John takes us back to the beginning of Satan's defeat so he can show us Satan's final ruin at the end of the age (20:7ff). It is obvious the thousand-year reign of Christ is symbolic of His present reign from the right hand of God and that it occurs before, **not** after the Second Coming of Christ.

The key to this passage is to understand the nature of apocalyptic literature. The apocalyptic is **not** concerned about time, chronology, and sequence as much as it is concerned about impressing the mind with ultimate realities. Again, this is **not** literal language: the key, the pit, the chain, the serpent, the dragon, and the thousand years are merely symbols that convey a literal truth.

The "**abyss**" is mentioned in chapter 9:1-6 and it is the place from which the demonic locusts swarm. It is the home of the beast (11:7).

**Revelation 20:2-3 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.**

Note the complex of names for man's archenemy. He is the dragon, the aged serpent, the Devil, and **Satan**.



**The number thousand** is also symbolic. It is not literal. It is difficult to hold to a strict literal view in light of the symbolic use of numbers in this book. A thousand is ten to the third power and it represents an ideal period or a long, long time. We are now living under the reign of Christ and believers look forward to its consummation in the future<sup>44</sup>.

Linguistically, the word “**bind**” means “to bind, to tie, or to wind.” Jesus rode a bound colt (Matthew 21:2). Jesus was bound before Pilate (Matthew 27:2). Paul intended to bind Christians and bring them to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). Paul was bound in spirit (Acts 21:11). Satan’s defeat began during Jesus’ reign: Jesus’ temptation in Matthew 4, His exorcisms (Luke 10:17), and at the cross (John 12:2-32). Finally, Satan’s defeat will be complete when Christ returns (Revelation 20:7ff).

The word “**bound**” is not literal language. What kind of chain can bind a spiritual being? This is apocalyptic imagery designed to communicate the control and restriction of Satan during the age of gospel proclamation.

The term “**bound**” is the same word as found in Matthew 12:29, “bind the strong man.” In Matthew, the entrance of Jesus into history is interpreted as the thief invading the household of Satan. The thief ties up the “strong man” in order to steal his treasures, that is, rescue men out from underneath his power. The “treasures” represent souls. The “binding” represents control. How could Jesus rescue men out of the kingdom of darkness unless he had control over Satan? In this passage, binding the serpent describes limitation and control, not total restriction and helplessness. John wants believers to know that Jesus is now in authority and the power of Satan is restrained (Hebrews 2:14; Luke 10:17; 10:19; Matthew 12:22-29; Colossians 2:15; Matthew 29:19, 20; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9).

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Kroll, Worldwide Church of God comments: Considering those limitations, some commentators nevertheless believe the figure given in Revelation 20 represents a literal 1,000 years. Other biblical commentators feel that while the “millennium” is a real period of substantial length, its actual time is undetermined. In the same way that “one hour” means a very short time (Revelation 17:12), 1,000 years would mean a very long time. Those who feel the number “thousand” refers to an indefinite though long time cite examples of similar usage from the Old Testament. In Psalm 50:10 God speaks of himself as owner of all that exists. He says, “Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.” Obviously, the expression is not to be taken literally, as though God owned cattle only on 1,000 specific hills. (<http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/Rev/millenn.htm>; Retrieved April 2004).

The reason for the incarceration is that the nations should be deceived no more. We have here the curtailing of Satan's power during the gospel age. What an encouragement this must have been for the original readers. They were given the assurance that gospel proclamation to which they were dedicated would **not** be defeated, and that their efforts to make Christ known was **not** in vain. Likewise, we have the assurance that during this present evil age, Satan does **not** have absolute power to squash missionary efforts to reach the lost for Christ.

Furthermore, history proves this is true. Before the cross, the knowledge of YHWH did not reach beyond the borders of Israel. After the death and resurrection of Christ, the gospel traveled into Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. Why did the gospel have such power in the first century and why does the gospel continue to expand into every nation and tribe? The answer lies in the power of the gospel, the ascension of Christ, and the binding of Satan<sup>45</sup>.

We must remember that it is **not** at Jesus' Parousia that Satan is defeated. It is through Jesus' death and resurrection that Satan received his fatal wound: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out<sup>46</sup>" (John 12:31).

### **The First Resurrection**

**Revelation 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.**

John sees **thrones** and people sitting on them. Thrones are a symbol of authority.

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<sup>45</sup> Dispensationalist Carl Hoch (Grand Rapids: PNT) in his essay (Blaising and Bock, 1992) argues for an historical approach to Ephesians in contrast to a personal salvic interpretation; that is, there has been a change in Gentile status before God due to virtue of the cross. If this is the case, then Revelation 20:1-3 would be a by-product of the cross and explain the massive success of the gospel during this era.

<sup>46</sup> The word "cast out" (ἐκβλήθησεται, ekballo) means that Satan was cast out of power by virtue of Jesus' death and resurrection. Satan was defeated at Christ first coming. This does not mean that Satan does not exist or have power in this world. He is still the "god of this age." However, it does mean that our Savior snatched away Satan's legal right for unrestricted control over men. He does not and cannot exercise unlimited authority to deceive entire nations about the truth as iterated in the gospel.

The word “**throne**” is used forty-seven times in Revelation. All but three appear in heaven, not earth. The use of the word “souls” indicates that the locale of John’s vision has moved to heaven. Jesus promised through John that those who overcome will sit with Christ and rule with Him (2:26; 3:21; 5:9-10). Now John sees the fulfillment of this promise. The saints are not ruled over, but share in the reign of Christ; i.e., they enjoy the benefits of his rule. Daniel saw thrones and dominion was given to the saints (Daniel 7:27). Jesus promised his disciples that they would rule with Christ over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Paul said the saints would “judge” (*krino*) the world (1 Corinthians 6:2).

Who is sitting on the thrones? The people sitting on the throne are those who “had been beheaded” for Christ and those who refused the mark of the beast; that is, these people represent Christians--those that lived and died for Christ while on earth. The first century Christians had many questions about the fate of the apostles and those that had been martyred by the Caesars. John answers these questions in his work. He introduced the martyrs to us in chapter six where we see them safe under the altar. Being under the altar is a symbol that the martyrs were secure and enjoying the benefits of the work of Christ at the cross. Now, John shows us another fact about the presence of the martyrs: they sit on thrones, that is, they are victors who share in the blessing of Christ’s accomplishments. Reigning is another way of describing the fact that life triumphs over death<sup>47</sup>.

“**They lived**” is possibly the most important phrase in this section. The pronoun “they” refers to “those who had been given authority to judge” and to the “souls of those who had been beheaded.” All saints are included in these two descriptions. Believers either have the privilege of living for the Lord or dying for their Lord. Both living and dying involve personal sacrifice.

“**Lived**” is the Greek word *ezesan* (ἐζήσαν).<sup>48</sup> John wants us to know that the departed saints are safe, secure, alive, and enjoying the wonders of Christ’s accomplishments.

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<sup>47</sup> Revelation 20:4 “the souls of those who had been beheaded” and 6:9-11 “the souls of those who had been slain” are parallel texts. Note “the souls” (6:9) are conscious, alive, and with Christ. They are told to wait a little longer for the resurrection of the body. The only difference is that the saints in Revelation 6 are told to “be at rest” and the saints in Revelation 20 are said to be living and reigning with Christ.

<sup>48</sup> ἐζήσαν is a aorist, active, indicative, third person plural verb. It means, “they lived.” Ladd objects to “they lived” (ἐζήσαν) as having any NT authority to describe living souls. However, Luke 20:37 describes

**“They lived”** is simply another way of saying that death did **not** end the existence of departed saints. John saw Peter, James, Paul, and all the disciples alive enjoying the Savior. They lived!! What a revelation!! Martyrdom at the hands of Roman officials in time did not impact their eternal status.

This is called the **“first resurrection.”** The idea of a spiritual resurrection has its roots in Jesus’ message in John five. Here Jesus made a distinction between the first resurrection, being spiritually regenerated (John 5:25), and the second resurrection, being physically regenerated (John 5:28, 29). The first resurrection is either (A) being made alive through the new birth so that a believer is said to sit with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:1-7) or it is (B) the transmigration of the soul into the presence of the Lord at death. Both are true.

**Revelation 20:5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.**

This verse is parenthetical. The word **“lived”** means the same thing here as it does in verse four. Neither refers to a physical resurrection. “The rest of the dead” corresponds to unbelievers. In contrast to the departed saints who **are alive** and enjoying the reign of Christ. Unbelievers are viewed **as dead!**

The rest of the dead (unbelievers) do not appear until the end of history. At the end of history, there will be a physical resurrection of the just and the unjust (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:25).

The **“first resurrection”** is **not** a bodily resurrection<sup>49</sup>, but a spiritual resurrection<sup>50</sup>. It either refers to (a) the coming to life of a man by virtue of the regenerating work of the

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the state of the dead, “I am the God of Abraham of Isaac, and of Jacob . . . He is not the God of the dead, but of the living (zwntwn), for to him all are alive (ζώντων)” (NIV . ζώντων is a present, active participle—a present tense, not future. The Sadducees denied not only the physical resurrection of the saints, but continued existence after death. Souls died with the body. Jesus corrected both errors of the Sadducees. Admittedly, no other uses of *zao* with this meaning can be found in Revelation.

<sup>49</sup> According to Jesus (John 5:25-29), there are two kinds of resurrections. The first is a spiritual resurrection that we identify as regeneration. When a person hears the gospel and believes in Christ, he comes to life, that is, he is born again and united with the Savior (Romans 5:3-5; 6:2-6; Ephesians 2:4-5). The second resurrection is a bodily resurrection and it refers to the physical transformation that will take place at the Parousia of Christ when the believer’s body will be raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 5:17ff; 1 Corinthians 15:35-58). The “first resurrection” is not physical, but the “transition from physical

Spirit of God as Jesus iterated in John 5:25, “a time is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live,” or it refers to the transmigration of the soul to God following physical death as iterated in 1 Corinthians 5:6 “to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” The phrase “they came to life” is **not** referring to a physical resurrection at the end of the age. It is a simple reference letting the original readers know what happened to the martyred apostles and the first generation of Christians who had passed from the scene of history. The departed saints are alive! John sees the church triumphant. Glory! Victory! Hallelujah!

**Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.**

The first resurrection is a *spiritual resurrection* that unites souls with Christ. Those resurrected are called “**blessed**” and “**holy**” because the second death hath no power over them.

The “**second death**” refers to the final judgment of unbelievers where they will be sentenced to depart from the presence of Christ forever and ever—a terrifying thought. Remember, physical resurrection is no guarantee that one will escape the fate of the second death. To be united with Christ in eternity, one must be united to Christ now. If one is first saved from sins, he will be saved from the second death.

Another fact supporting the interpretation that the first resurrection is spiritual in nature is the fact that those participating in the first resurrection are called “priests to God.” Being a priest to God is not a status connected with the second coming of Christ but a status connected his first coming or with faith in this lifetime. According to Peter,

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death to life in heaven with Christ” (Hoekema, p. 237). It is an unusual term, but understandable against the background of the text.

<sup>50</sup> Much is at stake theologically on the doctrine of resurrection and much theological capital is spent seeking to justify doctrinal positions. Dispensationalists advance three or four resurrections in history (the rapture before the tribulation, a rapture after the tribulation, the resurrection of believers that die during the supposed millennium, and the resurrection of the wicked dead after the supposed millennium). I fear that my dispensational brethren are guilty of multiplying distinctions. My understanding of Scripture is that there are only two resurrections mentioned in Scripture, spiritual and physical. The spiritual resurrection that happens when one believes or when one dies and his spirit is taken into the presence of Christ and the physical resurrection that happens at Christ’s second advent.

Christians join the priestly caste when they believe in Christ (1 Peter 2:5-9). Reigning with him has the idea of kingship, of sovereignty, of authority.

(Source: Stockton, B. (2005) A Commentary on Revelation, *Standing Firm in our Time*.1.4.2, Unpublished Manuscript, ABQ, NM)

# Revelation 20:7-10

## *Gog and Magog*

**Revelation 20:7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.**

♦ The conclusion of history is shrouded in mystery.

Any interpretation of Gog and Magog other than a apocalyptic mythological approach must conclude that this war is postmillennial. It happens after the millennium mentioned in this chapter. The only way the battle of Gog and Magog could be the next great event in history is in light of an amillennial or postmillennial interpretation of this passage. In the premillennial scheme of things, the battle can only come after the supposed earthly millennial reign. To say that the Battle of Gog and Magog will happen before and after the millennium in the dispensational presumption is to multiply events that are not supported in Scripture. Consequently, the criticism that dispensationalists suffer from "double vision" and "double fulfillment" ideologies appears true in this passage.

The evidence causes us to take an amillennial approach. The thousand years does **not** refer to a supposed 1000 year millennial reign of Christ on earth future to our time (the millennium). The thousand years refers to the Messianic Age, the Gospel Age that is taking place now, but that was totally future to the original readers. At the end of the Gospel era, Satan will be released to deceive the nations once more.

The "*four quarters of the earth*" refers to the global nature of Satan's recruitment. He will have no difficulty finding subjects willing to menace God's people. The battle between God and Satan, good and evil, and the sons of light and the sons of darkness will

continue until the end. However, toward the end of history, Satan will emerge with unprecedented power to deceive souls and to squash Christian proclamation<sup>51</sup>. At this time, Christ will act and bring the prophecy of Gog and Magog to its prophetic fulfillment; that is, toward the end of this age Satan will have unprecedented power to deceive--sweeping powers not known in the first two thousand years of Christian history. The rise of liberalism, humanism, evolution, abortion, and homosexuality may be preliminary tremors that indicate a volcano of horror to come.

The battle of God and Magog is a symbolic, mythological battle presented in Ezekiel 38-39 and Genesis 10:2. This account unites historical detail with apocalyptic imagery to show the ultimate fate of the wicked and the ultimate victory of God's people. Death and destruction will feed on the enemies of God, and God's people envisioned as Israel in the setting of Jerusalem will be safe and secure. Augustine, in his work *The City of God*, taught these nations shall rise up against the Church in a final confrontation.

Apparently, John is informing us that the gospel will triumph in the Church age, not completely but substantially. Toward the end of the age, there will be an apostasy from the faith due to Satanic deception. The age will end with a climatic display of God's power resulting in the dramatic defeat of God's enemies and the salvation of God's people.

**Revelation 20:9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.**

The reference here is **not** to geographical Jerusalem or to some alleged battle in the Valley of Jezreel, but to **"the breadth of the earth"** indicating global resistance.

The terms **"camp"** and **"city"** are a dual symbol of the true church, the people of God.

The term **"camp"** refers to the pilgrim nature of the church or the church militant, and the **"beloved city"** refers to her permanent status of the church and its organization centered around God in heaven. There are only two cities in Revelation: the city of

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<sup>51</sup> The neutering of Christianity in Europe and Great Britain, and the cultural decay in America like the propaganda of abortion, homosexuality, the assault on the phrase, "In God We Trust," the removal of the Ten Commandments from public buildings, and the secularization of Christmas appear to be consistent with the apostasy toward the end of the age mentioned in this chapter.



Satan where the beast and the harlot reign, and the city of God that honors and exalts Christ.

These two worlds collide. No literal battle actually occurs, but the armies are destroyed. Possibly, the battle is logical rather than geographical. God's people are destined to enjoy His protection while God's enemies are subject to the terror of his wrath. This is the message John wants the readers to grasp.

**Revelation 20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.**

The emphasis is again upon the spirit behind the rebellion.

First, the armies are destroyed, then the power behind the army is confronted.

In Revelation the Devil is mentioned first, then the beast, then the false prophet. They are ruined, however, in reverse order. Babylon is demolished first (17 & 18), the beast & false prophet second, and finally Satan himself. The destruction may be logical rather than referring to literal event in linear time.

The lake of fire, which was planned for Satan, now fulfills its purpose. The language here is difficult. Satan is a spirit; fire is an earthly phenomenon. How can a non-physical being be touched by fire? The imagery, however, is that of judgment and painful suffering.

John is showing us ultimate spiritual realities in physical, material terms. Satan will be utterly defeated and he will experience the same fate as the beast and false prophet.

The term **"torment"** (βασιλίσθησονται) is translated "tossed" or "toiling in the winds" in Mark 6:48.

The term **"day and night"** is used in 4:8 to describe the eternal nature of praise. It is used here to describe the terrible, round-the-clock punishment of the anti-God forces.

The phrase **"forever and ever"** comes from the Greek words "ages of ages" and properly conjures up images of an endless nightmare so terrifying our finite souls cannot grasp it. There is no sense of annihilation here. This is eternal suffering—endless, desperate rowing in the fires of eternal affliction on the seas of hell towards shores that

do not exist. Before us are images of final comic destruction and the conclusion of history as we know it.

(Source: Stockton, B. (2005) A Commentary on Revelation, *Standing Firm in our Time*.1.4.2, Unpublished Manuscript, ABQ, NM)

# Revelation 20:11-15

## *The Great White Throne Judgment*

**Revelation 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.**

♦ The great white throne is the same throne that John saw in chapter five. This is a vision of the heavenly courtroom.

The first adjective describing this throne is the word “**great**” (mega). How can one describe the regal, imposing, grandiose authority and power and finality of the throne of God? This is the supreme court and the Grand Jury from which there is no further appeal. John simply says “great.” It is used 80 times in Revelation.

The fact that it is a **white throne** shows us that this court is holy, pure, and true. White represents the glory and majesty of God.

“Him that sat on it” is not identified, but we assume it is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:22) -- a reference to the “Ancient of Days” working through the Son to render true judgment.

The dramatic poetic language, “**from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away,**” represents a theological truth that the holy judgment of God is a terrifying encounter for sinful men. In Revelation one, “His face” is described as having eyes of fire — a symbol of intense, incredible perception. Stripped and exposed before the piercing knowledge of pure righteousness, there is no place to hide, no clothes to cover one’s nakedness, no cave to crawl into, no forest to camouflage one’s presence, no fig leaves to conceal one’s most private matters. The earth and the heaven which appear so fixed and permanent will flee in a panic like streakers on the day when God’s penetrating holiness cast its glowing light.

This imagery is seen in the sixth seal. The old order must pass away that God might establish a new order. This is not the dissolution of the universe, but the emergence of a new cosmic cast.

**Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.**

This verse assumes the resurrection of all the dead.

The **small and the great** will be examined in this Court. The maid, janitor, and bricklayer will stand before God as well as lawyers, doctors, politicians, senators, and presidents. The antediluvian giants, Nimrod, the Pharaohs, the Caesars, Napoleon, Freud, Huxley, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Russian Czars, Zulu princes, and American presidents, senators, and congressmen will all be there. Evil stepmothers, wicked witches, Medusa, Baba Yaga, hags and harpies will shutter in terror. Movie stars, actors, bankers, and millionaires will shake with disbelief as the sentence of their fate is announced.

Daniel 7:10 mentions books. By “**books**” John wants his readers to know that God keeps records on everyone’s life with German accountant-like accuracy. The One in heaven sees and knows all that we do and say (Psalm 139; Proverbs 15:3).

What a terrifying thought! I am so thankful that I have body to hide in where people cannot see my thoughts or feelings. But, on that day the efforts to hide the real me will meet with naked shame.

When a missionary asked an African was asked why he made his idol with his eyes shut and no holes in his ears, he replied, “I did not want my god to see what I did or to hear what I said.”

In burlesque, nudes dance behind seven veils, but on this day the all-seeing, all-hearing one will be present—and, there will be no veil to cover shame. All the hocus pocus of a Reno magician will not enable one to escape the terrifying judgment of Almighty God.

**The Book of Life** (zoas) is also opened and it includes the names of all who have believed in Christ (Exodus 32:32; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 21:27). What a wonderful thought! God’s judgment will not be arbitrary or

capricious, but will be based on the deeds of men (Romans 2:6). No one appears to be saved from judgment as a result of having his record examine. It is scenes like this that cause Christians to cling to the promise, "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17).

**Revelation 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.**

The term "**gave up the dead**" is a term of resurrection. Death is a state. Hell is a place. The sea--the awesome, turbulent, uncontrollable sea—the place of wonder and mystery will yield to the arm lock of Almighty God. All the sailors on all the ships, including the victims on the Titanic, that have perished at sea will rise from their watery grave and appear before Him who commands the spirits. All regions of earth will surrender their dead and men will snap to attention when the bailiff in this courtroom says, "All rise!"

"... **and they were judged**" are sobering words. "Judged!" When the truth-telling God points his finger and announces his accusations, what will men say? What Philadelphia lawyer can defend the sinner against heavenly accusations? Smith & Wesson are barred from the pleading. Hal & Horton are not licensed to practice law in this courtroom. There is only one Counselor and Advocate and one would do well to meet him now (Isaiah 9:6; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1).

**Revelation 20:14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.**

John sees the final destruction of **death**, the grave, and the place of the dead. Death and hell are here personified.

**Fire** cannot necessarily be taken literally. This is figurative language designed to stir the imagination of what eternal penalties are like. Fire appears to be condescending language to describe the final punishment of the wicked. A shocking, ghastly, piercing, sizzling fate awaits the Christ-rejecter.

**The first death** is the soul's separation from the body. **The second death** is the soul's eternal separation from God. All must face the first death, but none who trust in Christ will see the second death. This is the Christian hope.

**Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.**

The book of life refers to the registration log of those who believe in Christ – a catalogue listing of the elect.

Life is a gift of God given to those who confess their shame and flee to Calvary to be washed in the blood of the Lamb and to receive eternal life (Romans 5:6-8; 6:23). A man's name is written in the Book of Life the minute he trusts Christ as his Savior and Lord (Romans 10:9,10). Hallelujah!!

If a man does not believe in time, there is no hope for him in eternity. He will be cast alive into the lake of fire like the beast and false prophet toiling and rowing to escape towards a non-existent shore.

(Source: Stockton, B. (2005) A Commentary on Revelation, *Standing Firm in our Time.1.4.2*, Unpublished Manuscript, ABQ, NM)

# Revelation 21:1-8

## *The New Heavens and the New Earth*

♦ New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to the new earth represents the culmination of eschatological hope for the people of God from ages past to present times. The meek shall inherit the earth.

Revelation twenty portrays the ultimate destiny of the present universe when it is renovated by the redemptive powers of the Lord Jesus Christ. This renovation involves continuity between the old Adamic order and the order of the New Adam.

**Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new<sup>52</sup> earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.**

“**And**” (kai) connects chapter twenty-one with chapter twenty. The following events follow the events of the great judgment.

Does the word “**new**” represent a renovation of a thing or a creation of a new thing out of nothing (*ex nihilo*)? My understanding is that God renovates the present heavens and earth. He does not obliterate it.

The “**making new**” is equivalent to the “regeneration” (παλιγγενεσία) of Matthew 19:28 or the restoration (αποκαταστασις) of Acts 3:21. The cosmos is **not** the source of sin. Rather than total annihilation and a creation *ex nihilo*, it appears that God will radically renew the present world. The new heaven and new earth is not ontological, but ethical and spiritual.

The term “no more sea” indicates a totally different environment. This is not renewal of the old order, but replacement by a new order. The sea with all its terrors and mysteries, with its unpredictability and hindrances will vanish like a vapor in the wind.

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<sup>52</sup> The Greek word “neos” means *new in time or origin*, while *kainos* means new in nature or quality.

In Greek thought, the philosophers conceived reality in terms of the physical world and the spiritual world. This kind of dualism is contradicted by this section of Scripture. Heaven and earth are merged into a new world order. Spirit and body exist in harmony. Land and sea have a message of shalom to all men.

**Revelation 21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**

Old Testament (OT) saints, because of Israel's temple and God's presence in that structure, saw OT Jerusalem as the hope of all mankind. But, in the New Testament, Heavenly Jerusalem is conceived of as the homeland of the saints — the antitype of OT Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22; Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20). The Biblical hope, even though expressed in very earthly terms, is not the renewed land of carnal Jerusalem but the reality to which it pointed. OT Jerusalem is really a shadow or type of true Jerusalem, the residence of God's people. The detail of the city is described later on in the chapter.

Jerusalem, the home of the redeemed, is portrayed as a beautiful bride with braided hair, ornamented with jewelry, decked out in a white wedding gown. This image captures our attention and our imagination. Just as there is nothing more beautiful or curious than a young bride with glowing skin and a lovely smile, there is nothing more attractive to the believer than the purity and hope of the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Strangely, however, we are not allowed to see the bride till later.

**Revelation 21:3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.**

Booming from heaven was **a piercing voice** with a marvelous announcement.

The glory of Israel was God **tabernacling** among them. Though short lived in history, God dwelling with Israel was the pride and joy of God's ancient people. What was shadowed in the OT during the Period of the Judges and Kings, and what was lost during the captivity, and what was proclaimed as a hope by the exilic prophets, is now announced as a reality by a thundering voice.



What a thought: **God among men!** What expectation: the unseen, holy and loving Creator walking in the midst of a cleansed and holy people!

**The tabernacle**, the temporary dwelling of God, made after the heavenly pattern, is now brought to fruition in this vision: God dwelled in the tabernacle, then in the temple of Christ, God dwelled among men (John 1:14). In the church age, Theos indwells the church in a spiritual sense (Ephesians 2:22). On the new earth, faith will be turned into sight; hope into reality; expectation into fulfillment. The Holy Trinity dwells among His people, and His people taste the ripe fruits of fellowship with Him.

The phrase, “**they shall be His people,**” introduces the hope of the Torah, the goal of the prophecy, the results of Christ’s redemption, and the purpose of our Heavenly Father coming to fruition (1 John 3:1).

**Revelation 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.**

**No tears:** Tears are the physical manifestation of overwhelming emotion. They are the result of frustration -- the inability to articulate joy and grief. In this new order, emotions will be able to be totally expressed without tears.

**No death:** The king of the ages will not enter here. Destruction of death is not an end in itself. It is the result of fellowship with God. Death was defeated at Calvary by the Savior (Hebrews 2:12ff), but its realization happens at this point in time.

**No sorrow or crying:** When the New Jerusalem intersects time and history, there will be no more sorrow over losses, setbacks, failures, or sins. There will be no crying for joy or for sorrow. There will be no more pain, no disease, no fractures, not heart attacks, no terrorism, no war, and no cancers. What a glorious day that will be! Even so come, Lord Jesus.

**Revelation 21:5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.**

Back of this new creation is the One that sits on "the throne" and who makes all things new. It represents sovereignty and absolute power. The new order is the creation of Christ. The old order will disappear and the new order will saturate existence.

This may seem like a mere dream. It is . . . but it will turn into reality. But, John reminds us that all things are possible with God and that his vision is true and that it will come to pass. God is faithful! Not one of His good promises will fail.

The Eschaton began with the coming of Christ. The blessings of the Eschaton like justification and regeneration are thrust into the believer's experience in advance of the consummation of history in a first fruits way. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The life of the Eschaton that indwells the regenerated soul will one day blossom into total fulfillment in a new environment in the kingdom of God.

**Revelation 21:6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.**

"**It is done**" is God's way of telling us that the future is secure, that it is "as good as done!"

The "**Alpha and Omega**" encompasses all reality and virtue and capacity of the living God. He is the A to Z, the Aleph and the Tav, the Alpha and Omega of history.

The **figure of thirst** represents man's deep sense of need. Not all thirst for forgiveness and a relationship with the living God, but those who do can drink from the wells of eternal life by believing in Christ. This is John's way of telling the reader that the door of salvation is still open for those that hunger to be right with God.

A man will become the sum total of his desires. Having a thirst for God is a blessed spiritual state. And, if a hunger for God is the expression of spiritual health, then complacency must be the fruit of spiritual depravity.

"Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee?" (St. Augustine).

**Revelation 21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.**

The metaphor switches from "thirst" to "**overcoming**." We get the term "**nike**" or "nikon" from this word. It means "victor" and takes us back to the promises of chapters

two and three. "This is the victory (nike) that overcomes the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Having faith is the victory.

The term "**overcoming**" implies that there is tremendous resistance to becoming a true Christian. "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:14). There is a difference between believing something about Christ and truly trusting in Him.

In modern Christianity, it is posh to act like a Christian on a stage of fools. Like a shallow puddle on a sidewalk, few truly absorb the gospel into the soil of their hearts and nurture its intended effects. Many prefer sleeping on comfortable beds of dogma surrounded by pillows of pleasures rather than taking up the cross with all its splinters and shivers. The gospel of wealth and success appears to have more followers than the gospel of "forsaking all" to follow Christ (Luke 14:33). To the one who turns his back on the world's attractions and confesses Christ, he will find a homecoming. It takes no faith to turn down the worst the world has to offer, but it takes real faith to turn down the best the world has to offer.

The one prerequisite to being an overcomer is abiding devotion to our Lord in the face of all opposition. In juxtaposition to allegiance to Christ is the attachment to family, friends, and the State.

**Revelation 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.**

Listed are those God is unwilling to call His sons.

**The fearful:** The first in the infamous list is the cowardly -- those timid souls that would not commit to Christ out of fear of being ridiculed for His name's sake. Some people have no molars to chew the elephant hide of criticism for Christ.

Fear not, for I have given you authority. – Matthew 28:19, 20

Never be afraid to try something new. Remember, amateurs built the ark, professionals built the Titanic. -- Unknown.

If a man harbors any sort of fear, it percolates through all his thinking, damages his personality, makes him landlord to a ghost. -- Lloyd Cassel Douglas.

Never fear shadows... they simply mean there's a light shining somewhere nearby.-- Unknown.

The coward believes he will live forever.

If he holds back in the battle,  
But in old age he shall have no peace  
Though spears have spared his limbs  
The words of Har

**Unbelieving:** The unbelieving are those who do not seriously examine the evidence for the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and believe. These are the people who prefer to live like a dumb goose in a courtroom of facts. They can believe in Santa Clause and the Easter bunny, but they can't sink their teeth into the forensic evidence of a risen Christ.

**Abominable:** The "abominable" appears to represent those who pollute morals through obscene idolatrous acts. These are the people who court the Sultans of perversion with demonic madness. These are the carrion that feed off the maggots of society. They litter civilization with Jezebels, pimps, and whores.

**Murderers:** This class would include criminals, crime figures, and abortionists—those immoral butchers who have the conscience of an amoeba. It would also include the irascible, the violent, the incorrigible, rapists, those who use coercion and intimidation to get their way. Murder includes not only premeditated murder, but war crimes, suicide, DWI, drug addicts, gluttons, abusers of their body, and those who promote a culture of death. Slander kills the soul and murders men's reputation. Taxation under color of law is a death sentence to the working man. Thugs and thieves would be included in this list.

**Whoremongers:** This is a term for the sexually immoral. From the word "whoremongers" we get the word "pornography." It refers to the sexually promiscuous, fornicators, prostitutes, rapists, homosexuals, transvestites, and adulterers. These are the bedroom bimbos that drink deeply from the well of sensuality and who eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of "consensual" sex. Like parasites, they suck innocence out of children. Those who board this ship of obscenity will drown in the fiery foaming sea of God's judgment.

**Sorcerers:** These are deceivers, cult worshippers, primitive witches, and modern day commercial charlatans. These are the tricksters who consult the dead and allege the ability to read palms; those who practice the black arts and white magic; those who have more frog legs and shed more chicken blood than the Cajun queen of voodoo, Marie Laveau. Politicians and lawyers and bankers engaged in brewing “words of art” to trap the unsuspecting in adhesion contracts and predatory lending practices would also be of this class.

**Idolaters:** These would include ancient idol worshipers as well as those who presently love money and pleasure above God. Lust is a form of idolatry (Ephesians 5:3ff). Sporting tattoos is a subclass of Idolatry.

Idol worship would include those who reject God’s law-order and who advance man’s legislation in society. Let us not forget the modern State pursues power and arrogates to itself the prerogatives of deity. When the State sees itself as the ultimate source of law instead of seeing God’s Word as the source of all law, then the State claims total jurisdiction over man. To claim total jurisdiction over man, from the womb to the tomb, is to claim to be as god. When a regime requires allegiance to itself above the Lord and demands a thirty percent tithe or more of all its worshippers, it sets itself up above Christ.

The First Commandment is a proscription against statism, tyranny, and totalitarianism. To demand children routinely pledge allegiance to the State while proscribing prayer in the classroom is nothing more State worship—the crowning achievement of the totalitarian, new world order. To surrender to the State and obey its law-order is idolatry—a form of treason-- a defiance of the rule of God. The Spirit calls us to acknowledge His rule and to surrender to His law-order. To reject His rule and to possess a fanatical allegiance to the State is idolatry.

**Liars:** These include perjurers, defrauders, extortionists, and slanders. Propagandists, gossips, and media bias are accommodated on God’s black list. False advertizing, commercial schemes, and fraud are a product of lying. The term “caveat emptor,” *let the buyer beware*, is a product of humanism not Biblical thinking. The Word of God places the onus of truth telling upon the seller, not the consumer. Valid contracts demand full disclosure.

A liar’s tale is as deadly as a bite from a black mamba. The trouble with a liar is that he is believed even when he speaks the truth. The trust of the innocent is the liar’s Trojan

horse that captures his soul and plunders his wealth. The most expensive purchase most men will ever make is their own government. And, when the government lies, you know that it has declared war on its people. And, all war is the art of deception said Sun Tzu.

Americans are required to sign all kinds of government documents under “penalties of perjury” while at the same time you can’t get a government agent to certify anything under oath. I wonder why?

One asked, “When can you tell if a politician is lying?” “When he has his mouth open,” responded the other. Thus, misrepresentations, half-truths, and deception by terms of art are the tools of the modern totalitarian and its corporations who engage in ultra vires acts. So damaging are lies that hell eagerly awaits to devour the souls of liars. But, this is not a condemnation of all lying. Abraham, the Egyptian midwives, and Rahab lied. Nowhere does Scripture condemn them for doing so. In some instances, we do not owe the truth to those who would abuse the truth.

The second death is defined as the assignment of the wicked to the lake of fire is documented as a fact.

(Source: Stockton, B. (2005) A Commentary on Revelation, *Standing Firm in our Time*.1.4.2, Unpublished Manuscript, ABQ, NM)

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