

# Post-Apocalyptic Christianity

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# Chapter One

*"What is proof?" asked Ellery. "It's merely the clothing of what we already believe to be true. Anybody can prove anything, given sufficient will to believe."*

*The Door Between, Ellery Queen (1936)*

## A PRIMER ON BIBLE STUDY

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There is a simple, logical conundrum that has driven this question for over one thousand years. This quandary both identifies disagreements among Christians and supplies solutions for addressing those disagreements.

**Tradition** is the transmission of inferences, assumptions, conclusions, and viewpoints from one generation to the next.

A **paradigm** is a collection of assumptions forming a way of thinking, a theory, a model, or a philosophy.

The acceptance of a tradition leads to the development of a dominant paradigm: the world view of the majority. When a tradition develops to the point where its supporters wish for it to be widely accepted, Christians often write their understanding of the Bible into statements that express the collective opinion of the group. These become **creeds**.

A creed may become a standard of acceptable belief. Some Christian expositors would agree with Barton W. Stone and his compatriots about creeds.

"It is an established maxim, that when any law, or rule of conduct is *authoritatively* explained, the explanation is the law; and we are necessarily bound to understand the original according to the explanation. **A creed, or confession of faith, is considered both as a summary of the doctrines taught in the Bible, and an explanation of them.** If it were left it its own place, to occupy the low ground of human opinion, it might do some good. But the moment it is received and adopted as a *standard*, it assumes the place of the Bible; it is the explanation, according to which we must understand the original law, the *word* of the living God. If such a church is founded on the Scriptures, it is not immediately; but by means of this *standard*, or pillar. But if there is a mistake in the business, and any part of the pretended *standard*, or pillar should not be founded on the rock, will not the whole church tumble to the ground? Is it not better to

clear away all the rubbish, of human opinions, and build the church immediately on the rock of ages, the sure foundation which God has laid in Zion?"<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added)

Others hold to a middle ground, believing that creedal professions of faith mark out necessary boundaries for interpretation:

"...a dynamic exists between creeds resting on the authority and interpretation of the Scripture, and creeds functioning as a kind of hermeneutic grid for future interpretations. Thus the second principle for the use of creeds in theology is that they provide protective boundaries. Creeds serve as a kind of pre-existing grid for approaching the study of the Bible. They necessarily and inevitably provide a lens through which one interprets the Scriptures, as they are embraced prior to the study. Creeds assist one in seeing clearly what the settled doctrine is for the church to which the theologian is ministering, and provides a kind of boundary over which **he may not pass** and justifiably consider himself to be joined to that community of saints.

"Therefore creeds serve as **a fence to protect** the larger body of believers. Creeds serve to inform the theologian that he **must remain loyal** to certain doctrines for him to remain at one theologically with his current fellowship of believers. Should he be convinced from Scripture of the necessity of such action, he is free to pass outside the scope of the creed, but "at his own risk." If he is convinced of the necessity of taking this step "outside the boundary" of the present creed, he must either convince the fellowship of believers to change their creed to articulate the more Biblically accurate doctrine, or go unite himself to a different body whose creed already embraces his conclusion. These are the ethical demands creeds place on the theologian. In this way, creeds protect and stabilize the doctrine of the church of God."<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added)

The strongest statements about the role of tradition are made by leaders of Christian groups that existed prior to the Protestant Reformation. For example, we read:

"...since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The **living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account** along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Abstract of an Apology for Renouncing the Jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky," (1804) from *The Biography of Barton W. Stone*, Barton W. Stone, p. 232 (1847).

<sup>2</sup> "The Role of Creeds in Theology," Ryan Martin (2006).

Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is **subject finally to the judgment of the Church**, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.”<sup>3</sup> (emphasis added)

When scholars express their viewpoints about the role of tradition and creeds, those opinions tend toward either the view expressed by Paul VI – that tradition regulates later interpretation – or that related by Stone, namely, that tradition is mere human opinion that cannot be accepted as a standard. The question that lurks behind many of the divisions that have separated Christian groups from one another throughout the years has been something like this:

***When we learn that the Bible disagrees with tradition, what action do we take?***

Logically, we have several cases to examine, and we will see that the actions taken depend frequently on one’s opinion about the role of tradition – exactly as we have read in the quotes above.

Assume for the sake of discussion: ***We have discovered that a statement in an ancient creed or tradition disagrees with our understanding of the Bible.***

A prime example for the purpose of this book would be the following wording from the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, which said about Jesus that he was **“again coming with glory to judge living and dead.”** While this example suits the focus of this book, for the purpose of this exploration the disagreement could be with any tradition at all.

Either the disagreement represents a genuine conflict, or it is merely a perceived one. We might agree in principle with any one of the following paradigms of resolving such conflicts:

- When an ancient tradition (such as a creed) disagrees with our understanding of the Biblical teachings, it is likely to be ourselves that have gone wrong. We do not understand the Bible as well as those who have passed along the tradition to us. We should retain the tradition.
- When an ancient tradition (such as a creed) disagrees with our understanding of the Biblical teachings, we must remember that the creed only indicates the fallible opinions of the people of another time. We should reject the tradition.

In the end, we wind up siding with our own understanding of what the Bible teaches, or we side with the interpretations of others. Perhaps those others were in a better position to understand the Bible than we are, but it is also possible that modern

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<sup>3</sup> “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Inspiration,” Chapter III, Pope Paul VI (1965).

scholarship and research tools provide foundations that are better grounded than, for example, the notions of Eusebius.

Outside of Christianity, the struggle between tradition and Bible was visited by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism. Reform Judaism was introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Jewish people who accepted the inclusion of ideas from other cultures – including the use of languages other than Hebrew in worship. Other Jewish leaders, most notably Zechariah Frankel, wanted balance “change for the sake of change” with the ancient traditions. They founded Conservative Judaism. For a while there was no distinct division between the two schools, but after only a few years, there was a graduation celebration for Reform rabbinical students at which non-Kosher foods were served. This became known as the “shrimp incident,” which divided the two schools of thought. It was after this, in 1918, that Rabbi Kaplan left the conservative movement to found another school of thought. Again the matter was the role played by tradition. Kaplan did not view the traditions of the Mishna and Talmud as binding creeds. Instead, they represented the observations of the great rabbis. However, he did not want to step away from tradition entirely. In this spirit, Kaplan famously said that tradition “has a vote but not a veto.” Questions that the schools have thought to answer often relate to modern issues, such as abortion, birth control, and homosexuality. Some rabbis will recognize a traditional interpretation and oppose it; while others cling to that tradition.

An article beginning with the sentence, “The sources of Judaism's traditional position on homosexuality and gay issues are well known,” continues by noting the unequivocal nature of that interpretation. However, all but the Orthodox school have endorsed *civil* equality for gays and lesbians. Regarding homosexuality as involuntary, the Reform school has gone further. “...the Reform movement does not condemn homosexual sex, and openly gay people are eligible for admittance into Reform rabbinical schools. In addition, the Reform movement approves of rabbinic officiation at same-sex marriages and commitment ceremonies. However, they do not consider same-sex marriage as tantamount to heterosexual marriage. Whereas heterosexual marriage is referred to as *kiddushin* (from the Hebrew word for holy), many Reform rabbis object to applying this term to homosexual relationships.”<sup>4</sup>

Islam is also facing issues of interpretation. The major schools of thought within the religion are highly traditional in nature, and an *imam* must generally conform to the interpretations of the Qur'an that have been passed down to him. However, there is a growing call for Islamic Protestantism, in which tradition would be rejected if it has been found to disagree with the modern group's understanding of the Qur'an. Observe the opposition to the restrictions of tradition in this speech from Hashem Aghajari in June, 2002:

“The Protestant movement wanted to rescue Christianity from the clergy and the Church hierarchy - [Christians] must save religion from the pope. We [Muslims] do not need mediators between us and God. We do not

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<sup>4</sup>from MyJewishLearning.com



need mediators to understand God's holy books. The Prophet [Jesus] spoke to the people directly? We don't need to go to the clergy; each person is his own clergy.”<sup>5</sup>

The same tradition that some view as a fence for protection is regarded by others as a prison. Ultimately, when we make the choice to accept or reject a tradition, that choice stems from our own paradigm about its role and importance.

## **Arius and Opinion**

The discussions about the nature of Jesus' relationship to his Father did not begin with Arius, the fourth-century church leader who became the poster child for heresy. Marcion of Sinope, most notable around 140 AD, was a third-generation church leader. For Marcion there arose questions that the leadership were unable to answer. To him there were two gods: the vengeful deity of the Jews and the loving and good God heralded by Jesus. For him, Jesus was the son of the good God, but he was not the human Jewish Messiah. Marcion's Jesus was divine but not human.

Some Docetists and later Classical Gnostics modified and expanded Marcion's ideas. The Docetic view was that Jesus only *seemed* to suffer and die (from δοκεω, seem). The Gnostics claimed that the spirit of Christos left Jesus. According to Irenaeus, Basilides the Gnostic was reported to have said, "He appeared, then, on earth as a man, to the nations of these powers, and wrought miracles. Wherefore he did not himself suffer death, but Simon, a certain man of Cyrene, being compelled, bore the cross in his stead; so that this latter being transfigured by him, that he might be thought to be Jesus, was crucified, through ignorance and error, while Jesus himself received the form of Simon, and, standing by, laughed at them.”<sup>6</sup>

The dichotomous saying that expresses the problem at hand is, "If Christ suffered, he was not divine; if he was divine, he could not suffer." Valentinus, another contemporary of Marcion, separated three entities: Father, Son, and Spirit. He too believed that the true Jesus did not suffer or die.

Irenaeus (c. 180) considered those ideas to be absurd. He was convinced that all three entities comprised a single deity, and that divine Wisdom was the same as the Holy Spirit, "I have also largely demonstrated, that the Word, namely the Son, was always with the Father; and that Wisdom also, which is the Spirit, was present with him, prior to all creation ....”<sup>7</sup> But Irenaeus was convinced that God became human in order to enable humans to become gods. He urged people to follow "the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, so that he would bring us to be what he is himself.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "From Monkey to Man," *The Iranian*, December 4, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> *Against Heresies*, I:24:4.

<sup>7</sup> *Against Heresies*, IV:20:3.

<sup>8</sup> *Against Heresies*, V:Preface

By the middle of the Third Century, the classical formulation of the Trinity was circulating. By that time, Sabellius had come up with another explanation. In about 215 AD, he became convinced that Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit were all God. However, there was no distinction between the three – no different "personalities". Instead, there was one God who took on different roles at different times, much like a human being might be a father, and a brother, and a carpenter. Under this belief, then, God the Father actually suffered on the cross and experienced a physical death. Sabellius' theory was embraced by Christians in several cities but eventually fell out of favor.

The Adoptionists had a slightly different idea. Theodotus of Byzantium developed the notion (c. 190) – taught by Paul of Samosata in the middle of the Third Century – that Jesus was fully human until his baptism. At that point, he was made the adopted Son of God. Unlike the Trinitarians, Sabellians, and Gnostics, Paul believed that Jesus did not exist prior to his birth; the others believed that Jesus was some form of divine being prior to taking on a body. As for the Holy Spirit, this was merely a manifestation of God.

By the time Arius came along, there were already so many explanations of God's relationship to Jesus: all of the above, in addition to the Jewish Christian assertion that Jesus had been fully human. He rejected all of them, and unlike the other ideas – most of which had local appeal – the beliefs of Arius might possibly spread broadly. There are two (longer) descriptions of Arius' beliefs – sometimes called manuscript "A" and manuscript "S". Manuscript "A" was actually a list of charges against Arius made by his Trinitarian opponent, Athanasius of Alexandria. Manuscript "S" comes from a Synod (meeting) in 359 AD, at which Arius' beliefs were again discussed. At that meeting, actual writings of Arius were supposed to have been used. According to manuscript S,

*"Arius and those with him thought and professed this: 'God made the Son out of nothing, and called him his Son;' 'Word of God is one of the creatures;' and 'Once he was not;' and 'He is alterable; capable, when it is his Will, of altering.'"*<sup>9</sup>

To Arius and his followers, God was alone prior to the creation of his son. Jesus, then, was a created being – not God the Father but a lesser deity. Arius claimed that Jesus was neither equal to God nor of the same substance as God.

All of the above ideas were based on the interpretation of the Bible, and all of them differed from one another considerably. These were all mere human opinions, but members of the Trinitarian school of thought were displeased by the very existence of the other points of view. While outsiders had been condemning the Gnostics for more than a century, the Trinitarians regarded the viewpoint of the Arians to be particularly onerous. In February of 325, some Christians met locally at Antioch (in Syria). A man named Hosius (also Bishop of Cordova, Spain) served as Emperor Constantine's representative at that meeting, during which Arius and his beliefs were condemned. Their results were compiled into a statement of belief. At that council, the bishops

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<sup>9</sup>Charges Against Arius, Manuscript "S"

proposed a "great and holy synod" of even more bishops that would meet at Arcyra (Ankara, Turkey). At the request of Emperor Constantine, who wished to preside over the meeting, that synod was moved to Nicaea.

About 250 church leaders were present, although estimates vary. Most of those present, had no theological commitment to either the Trinity or to Arius' beliefs. Ancient sources record that Arius had at least 17 adamant supporters at Nicaea. Emperor Constantine himself (assisted by Bishop Hosius) presided over the Council, and it is said that his goal there was to establish peace.

Various attempts at peace between the two factions had been made, with Arius attempting at times to explain his beliefs in a manner that might be acceptable to the Trinitarians. Similarly, there were some Trinitarians who wished to include Arius. Eusebius made one attempt at reconciliation, but Athanasius and his supporters prompted the council to release a stronger statement excluding Arius.

"We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of all things (both visible and invisible);

And in one Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, God's son,

born of the Father, unique,

that is, from the Father's substance;

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,

born not made, of one being with the Father,

through whom all things were done,

the things both in heaven and things on the land;

who on account of us human beings and on account of our salvation came down

and was made flesh, and put on a human nature,

suffered, and rose during the third day,

went up into the heavens,

coming to judge living and dead;

And in the holy Spirit.

But those who say, 'There was *a time* when he was not,'

and, 'Before he was born he was not,'

and that, 'He happened out of what is not,'

or those who assert that he is 'of a different foundation or being'

or 'created,'

or 'turning,'

or 'changing,'

these people the universal and apostolic assembly curses."

Regarding the creed, the Catholic Church acknowledges the popularity of Arianism at the time. "The decisions of Nicaea were really the work of a minority, and they were misunderstood and disliked by many who were not adherents of Arius. In particular the terms *ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας* and *ὁμοουσιος*<sup>10</sup> aroused opposition, on the grounds that they

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<sup>10</sup> meaning "from the substance" and "same substance"

were unscriptural, novel, tending to Sabellianism (taking □□□□□ in the sense of particular reality) and erroneous metaphysically. Athanasius was twice exiled, and when ninety bishops assembled at Antioch for the dedication of Constantine's 'Golden Church' a council was held and a 'Creed of the Dedication' put forward as a substitute for that of Nicaea, in spite of, or perhaps because of, a letter from Pope Julius urging Athanasius' restoration."<sup>11</sup>

There was an issue that had been a matter of speculation for many years. A minority group issued a written statement condemning a more popular opinion, and that profession of faith became part of "the living tradition of the whole church." It was a difficult issue that was resolved not by discussion and agreement but by the condemnation of those who did not agree with the people making the statement. To this day, nearly every Christian group acknowledges the doctrine of the trinity without question. To them the Creed of Nicaea settled the matter.

### ***Sola Scriptura* and Tradition**

In opposition to using tradition to resolve disputes, the Protestant reformers considered all tradition to be "interpretation." Although they described themselves as returning to the Bible alone, that expression was not entirely accurate. Robert Richardson, the restorationist of the Nineteenth Century, expressed the concept this way:

"For my part, I shall ever claim the right of thinking and judging for myself, and of fully and freely expressing my views, whether these correspond with those of others or differ from them. This I conceive to be a high and holy privilege, and its exercise a sacred duty."<sup>12</sup>

Martin Luther considered even the selection of the text to be a matter of judgment. With his translation of the New Testament into German, he wrote,

"From all of this, you can now judge all of the books, and decide among them which are the best. John's Gospel and St. Paul's epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter's first epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought properly to be the foremost books. ...St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to the others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it."<sup>13</sup>

Luther considered James, Hebrews, Jude, and Revelation to possess a lesser quality than he found in the other New Testament writings. It was Martin Luther who separated the deuterocanonical literature from the rest of the Old Testament – making it forever "intertestamental" to protestants. Luther labeled these, "Apocrypha: These Books Are Not Held Equal to the Scriptures, but Are Useful and Good to Read" – expressing his

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<sup>11</sup> *Documents of the Christian Church*, Second Edition, p. 41

<sup>12</sup> *Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. IV, No. 6, p. 350 (June, 1847).

<sup>13</sup> "Preface to the New Testament," Martin Luther, translated by Charles M. Jacobs and revised by E. Theodore Bachmann.

own opinion that the books lacked the quality of the protocanonical literature. Yet he recognized his opinions not as facts but as interpretations.

Luther's own guidance in understanding the Bible was at worst equal to the opinions of those who preceded him. He considered it important for him to seek God's guidance in establishing the text itself. After this, he recognized that all opinion is still opinion; none of it is fact. Therefore, all of Martin Luther's predecessors, all of his contemporaries, and those who follow him are included as providers of "interpretation" in this quote from him:

"O that God should desire that my interpretation and that of **all teachers** should disappear, and each Christian should come straight to the **scripture alone** and to the pure word of God!

"You see from this babbling of mine the immeasurable difference between the word of God and all human words, and how no man can adequately reach and explain a single word of God with all his words. It is an eternal word and must be understood and contemplated with a quiet mind. No one else can understand except a mind that contemplates in silence.

"For anyone who could achieve this without commentary or interpretation, my commentaries and those of everyone else could not only be of no use, but merely a hindrance. Go to the **Bible itself**, dear Christians, and let my expositions and those of **all scholars** be no more than a tool with which to build aright, so that we can understand, taste, and abide in the simple and pure word of God; for God dwells alone in Zion."<sup>14</sup> (emphasis added)

Did Luther really intend to say that all tradition was to be discarded if it disagreed with the Bible – even something like a centuries-old creed? Yes.

The church of Christ makes no laws or commandments without God's Word. Hence **all human traditions, which are called ecclesiastical commandments**, are binding upon us only in so far as they are based and commanded by God's Word.<sup>15</sup> (emphasis added)

Luther's associates and successors understood clearly what he meant by *sola scriptura*.

First we affirm that we desire to follow **scripture alone** as a rule of faith and religion, without mixing it with any other things which might be devised by the **opinion of men** apart from the Word of God, and without wishing to accept for our spiritual government any other doctrine than what is **conveyed to us by the same Word of God**, and without addition or diminution, according to the command of our Lord.<sup>16</sup> (emphasis added)

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<sup>14</sup> Christmas address, Martin Luther (1522).

<sup>15</sup> "The Theses of Berne," Martin Luther (1528).

<sup>16</sup> "The Geneva Confession," Article I, John Calvin (1536).

Calvin there acknowledges that everything he writes after that point is his own opinion, including his opinion that some traditions (those that “are necessary for the internal discipline of the church”) come directly from Paul. He refers there to 1C 14. However, every tradition that he finds to be in conflict with the Bible itself, Calvin condemns as “*perverses doctrines de Sathan*” – perverse doctrines of Satan. In that same paragraph (Article XVII), he expressly condemns certain teachings that came to him through tradition.

By way of example, the Catholic Church affirmed its teachings about **penance** and **confession to priests** as far back as the fourth century – believing that they were in agreement with the Bible. The teaching dates as far back as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

"Moreover, how much are they both greater in faith and better in their fear, who, although bound by no crime of sacrifice to idols or of certificate, yet, since they have even thought of such things, with grief and simplicity **confess this very thing to God's priests**, and make the conscientious avowal, put off from them the load of their minds, and seek out the salutary medicine even for slight and moderate wounds, knowing that it is written, 'God is not mocked.' God cannot be mocked, nor deceived, nor deluded by any deceptive cunning. Yea, he sins the more, who, thinking that God is like man, believes that he evades the penalty of his crime if he **has not openly admitted his crime**. Christ says in his precepts, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, of him shall the son of man be ashamed." And **does he think that he is a Christian**, who is either ashamed or afraid to be a Christian? How can he be one with Christ, who either blushes or fears to belong to Christ? He will certainly have sinned less, by not seeing the idols, and not profaning the sanctity of the faith under the eyes of a people standing round and insulting, and not polluting his hands by the deadly sacrifices, nor defiling his lips with the wicked food. This is advantageous to this extent, that the fault is less, not that the conscience is guiltless. He can more easily attain to pardon of his crime, yet he is not free from crime; and let him not cease to carry out his repentance, and to entreat the Lord's mercy, lest what seems to be less in the quality of his fault, should be increased by his neglect of atonement. I beg you, beloved brothers, that each one should **confess his own sin**, while the one who has sinned is still in this world, while his confession may be received, while the satisfaction and **remission made by the priests** are pleasing to the Lord."<sup>17</sup> (emphasis added)

"As the one whom the priest baptizes is enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, so also the one who confesses his sins in penance receives through the priest forgiveness in virtue of the grace of Christ."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *On the Lapsed*, 28-29, Cyprian (251).

<sup>18</sup> *Against Novatus*, Athanasius (IV century).

John Chrysostom (387) also applied the “**authority of binding and loosing**” to the priests, specifically saying that priests could forgive sins. Ambrose of Milan (388) said about the forgiveness of sins that, “this power has been granted to priests only.” Augustine (397) wrote, “Open your lips, then, and confess your sins to the priest. Confession alone is the true gate to Heaven.” Indeed, as early as Hippolytus (215) we read about the overseer (bishop) “**by the spirit of the high priesthood hav[ing] the authority to forgive sins.**”<sup>19</sup>

Yet Calvin directly condemned “pilgrimages, monasteries, distinctions of foods, prohibition of marriages, **confessions** and other similar things” as being human traditions that are contrary to the Bible. The traditions of monasteries (c. 320), the celibate priesthood (c. 314), and confession to priests (c. 215) all predate the Nicene Council and were affirmed by the Church, and still Calvin condemned them because he regarded them as anti-Biblical teachings. It is clear then that the protestant reformers intended to question all tradition, that is, every interpretation of the Bible.

Calvin wrote that “the certainty of binding and loosing is not subject to the decision of an earthly judge.”<sup>20</sup> He believed in confessing to one another, but he rejected the role of the priest in confession – despite tradition. He and his compatriots wrote:

“...**no authority** whether of **antiquity**, or custom or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or **councils** or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these holy Scriptures, but on the contrary, **all things should be examined**, regulated and reformed according to them.”<sup>21</sup>

Everything that follows in the French Confession is preceded by language indicating that it is mere opinion. When they wrote, “*Nous croyons*” (“we believe”), they meant to convey that as far as they were concerned such things were consistent with the Bible. However, everything must be subject to the Bible itself and not to tradition – no matter how extensive. Calvin was able to write the opinion that, “[Jesus] is in heaven until he come to judge everyone,” and still realize that it was just his opinion. The partial preterists exist among the protestant groups, and yet they ignore the very standard by which the protestant movement was founded: the rejection of all tradition that is found to conflict with the Bible itself.

Perhaps Calvin considered the matter to be unsettled by the Church at large? He did not. The Fourth Lateran Council clarified the existing tradition in words that were certain, “**All the faithful** of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion faithfully **confess all their sins** at least once a year to their own priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist, unless perchance at the advice of their own priest they may for a good reason abstain for a time from its reception; **otherwise they**

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<sup>19</sup> “Apostolic Tradition”

<sup>20</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin, trans. John Allen, p. 579 (1921). Published in Latin in 1536.

<sup>21</sup> “The French Confession of Faith,” Article V, John Calvin, et. al. (1559)

**shall be cut off from the Church** during life and **deprived of Christian burial** in death.”<sup>22</sup> If an ecumenical council (from Nicaea onward) ever settled any issue, Calvin should not have opposed the authority of the council. It is clear that his wording (above) denies any authority to such forms of tradition.

There are some protestant groups now which claim to question only *certain* traditions, while they likewise claim to follow the early creeds. Rather like our citation earlier, they say that “creeds serve as a fence to protect the larger body of believers.”

One protestant minister wrote to me, expressing his denomination’s view of the creeds very well. “We make a distinction between what the early church may have said and done and that which was **decided in formal ecumenical councils**. For example, the early church may have used various extrabiblical books not in our canon. But when they met to agree on which books were inspired, their consensus in the ecumenical councils should settle the matter for us.”

For example, Baptists will not question the doctrine of the Trinity, which was settled at Council Nicaea. A statement of faith for a Baptist congregation might include items like this one, which closely resembles lines from the Creed of Nicaea, “We believe in the deity and virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, coexistent with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He came to the world, born of a virgin, suffered, died, was buried and rose again bodily and ascended to the right hand of the Father.”<sup>23</sup>

For reference, Ryan Martin, who used the fence analogy, is a Baptist. Like Calvin, the Baptists have called other elements of ancient creeds into question at times – not content to rely on tradition as a “fence.” Consider the defining issue of infant baptism – an issue separating Baptists from other groups.

Dealing with the issue known as Pelagianism, a council was convened at Carthage on May 1, 418. The council decided in part that:

*“If anyone says that newborn children need not be baptized, or that indeed they should be baptized for the remission of sins, but that they have in them no original sin inherited from Adam which must be washed away in the bath of regeneration, so that in their case the formula of baptism ‘for the remission of sins’ must not be taken literally, but figuratively, let him be anathema; because, according to Romans 5:12, the sin of Adam (in quo omnes peccaverunt) has passed upon all.”*<sup>24</sup>

The acts of the Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 record that the council expressly agreed to the elements of the Council of Carthage. “The only point which is material to the main object of this volume is that Pelagius and his fellow heretic Celestius were condemned by the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus for their heresy. On this point there can be no possible doubt. And further than this the Seventh Council by ratifying the

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<sup>22</sup> Canon 21, Twelfth Ecumenical Council (1215).

<sup>23</sup> *The Case for Independent Baptist Churches*, chapter 3, M. L. Moser, Jr. (2010)

<sup>24</sup> Council of Carthage, Canon II (418).



Canons of Trullo received the Canons of the African Code which **include those of the Carthaginian conciliar condemnations of the Pelagian heresy** to which the attention of the reader is particularly drawn.”<sup>25</sup>

That settles it, yes? The fence has been drawn, right? An early ecumenical council – well before the East/West split – confirmed that the church as a whole agrees with the statements at Carthage. In particular, it affirmed the baptism of children and condemned those who opposed it. That condemnation would include everyone who properly belongs to the Baptist movement. The list also affirms the doctrine of original sin, which is opposed by many “free will” protestant groups. Therefore, we see that protestants are not unwilling to challenge early decisions of the historical church when called upon to do so. However, the fact is that they often do not question early creeds.

Our central question is still unanswered. We have presumed that

***We have discovered that a statement in an ancient creed or tradition disagrees with our understanding of the Bible.***

In this book, we will adopt the restorationist ideal of *sola scriptura*, whether or not we are able to practice that ideal perfectly.

**When an ancient tradition (such as a creed) disagrees with our understanding of the Biblical teachings, we must remember that the creed only indicates the fallible opinions of the people of another time. We should reject the tradition.**

We acknowledge that groups that claim to practice *sola scriptura* have split from one another based on their opinions about Biblical teachings. Likewise, we acknowledge that groups that accept a greater role for tradition in the church have also split from one another based on points of disagreement. The traditionalist philosophy is no more likely to come into a knowledge of Truth on any given issue than is the restorationist, but the restorationist looks back to the First Century for guidance rather than depending on the later opinions of other Christians *about* what may have been believed during the First Century.

## **The Twenty-Cent Problem**

*Now he also told this analogy to them: "No one puts a patch from a new cloak onto an old cloak. But if they do, it rips the new one, and that patch from the new one does not agree with the old one. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. But if they do, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the wineskins will be destroyed. On the contrary, one must put new wine into new wineskins. And no one who has drunk the old wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'" (Lk 5:36-39)*

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<sup>25</sup> First Council of Ephesus, Excursus on Canon IV (431).

“In science, as in the playing card experiment, novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation. Initially, only the anticipated and usual are experienced even under circumstances where anomaly is later to be observed. Further acquaintance, however, does result in awareness of something wrong or does relate the effect to something that has gone wrong before. That awareness of anomaly opens a period in which conceptual categories are adjusted until the initially anomalous has become the anticipated. At this point the discovery has been completed.”<sup>26</sup>

A dominant world view is a set of opinions: lenses through which the average person in a particular culture sees the universe around him. This is the old wine about which Jesus was speaking. One cannot put the new paradigm together with the old, for the two are incompatible, and the problem is that those who have been part of an existing paradigm will resist any change to a new way of thinking. “The old is better.” It is because existing ideas may be incompatible with newly-discovered ones that Max Planck was prompted to say that, “A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”<sup>27</sup>

Kuhn described the pervasiveness of existing paradigms as though they provide a filter, a selective blindness to ideas that are deemed to be novel. Whether the newer idea better explains reality or Truth is irrelevant; the paradigm is conservative, resisting change for the sake of doing so. George Wald once described a strange occurrence in the development *away from* the theory of Spontaneous Generation. He wrote,

*“Throughout our history we have entertained two kinds of views of the origin of life: one that life was created supernaturally, the other that it arose “spontaneously” from nonliving material. ... This great controversy ended in the mid-19th century with the experiments of Louis Pasteur, which seemed to dispose finally of the possibility of spontaneous generation. For almost a century afterward biologists proudly taught their students this history and the firm conclusion that spontaneous generation had been scientifically refuted and could not possibly occur. Does this mean that they accepted the alternative view, a supernatural creation of life? Not at all. They had no theory of the origin of life, and if pressed were likely to explain that questions involving such unique events as origins and endings have no place in science.”*<sup>28</sup>

Their paradigm shift made the issue impossible to discuss. Being compelled to reject their earlier theory and unable to accept the known alternative, they could go nowhere

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<sup>26</sup> *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn, p. 63 (1962).

<sup>27</sup> *Scientific Autobiography*, Max Planck, pp. 33-34 (1949). Although Planck did not say it as follows, his quip is often summarized as, “Science advances one funeral at a time.”

<sup>28</sup> “Innovation and Biology,” George Wald, *Scientific American*, September, p. 100 (1958).

with it – blinded by their own paradigm. Religious philosophers have at times observed the same problem with respect to their own traditions.

"A sectary, who looks at the scriptures through a restrictive system of doctrines and opinions, called a creed, is like one who is incarcerated and fettered, and permitted to gaze upon one particular landscape only, from the single window of his gloomy and unwholesome prison."<sup>29</sup>

This means that there is often little connection between the ideas that are passed on to us and what might possibly be the truth. A tradition is useful in that it represents what people believed about something at a given time. But we may take that no further. We may not say that we do not need to examine what we mean by "canon," since Luther or the Council of Trent decided the matter for us. On the contrary, we must each examine every issue carefully – being aware that those holding a more popular opinion may criticize us just as similar people criticized Jesus.

*"Well knows he who used to consider, that our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion. Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. **A man may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believe things only because his pastor says so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing any other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy.**"<sup>30</sup> (emphasis added)*

Milton's statement is apropos here, given the opposition that the post-apocalyptic view of the "end times" has faced in recent decades from so-called partial preterists. Paradigms get in the way of properly understanding and interpreting new information. Therefore, several viewpoints of issues (such as eschatology) exist. These viewpoints themselves are human opinions. We will find out more about these viewpoints in Chapter Two, as this chapter concludes with a quote from Charles Beecher.

**"What were the Romish arguments from the days of the Nicene debate down to the pontifical anathema?**

**They were, Truth is one – therefore, true believers cannot differ.**

**But they *do* differ – therefore, there is heresy.**

**Heresy must be kept out. Make a creed to keep it out;**

**and as to which side *is* heresy, "Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus" – that is, heresy is the opinion which is in the *minority*."**<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Article by Robert Richardson, *Millennial Harbinger*, p. 1 (July, 1847).

<sup>30</sup> *Areopagitica*, John Milton, 1644.

<sup>31</sup> "The Bible a Sufficient Creed," Charles Beecher, *Millennial Harbinger*, p. 572 (October, 1846).

# Chapter Two

*"There is no present or future - only the past happening over and over again - now."*

*A Moon for the Misbegotten, Eugene O'Neill (1947)*

## INTRODUCTION TO SEVERAL ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEWPOINTS

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When Richard Francis Weymouth published his translation of Revelation in 1903, he described briefly four approaches to viewing the "end times" mentioned in the Bible, and the book of Revelation in particular. His order of the four opinions will be used here in presenting them, although I add one more. These viewpoints have developed alongside one another throughout history. Each of them is distinct from the others, having characteristics that make it unique. While three of the views, (Futurist, Historicist, and Preterist) differ chiefly as to what portion of the Revelation prophecy has been fulfilled, the remaining one (Idealist) shies away from literal interpretation entirely. I might mention here, too, that the Historicist view has its points of distinction that separate it cleanly from either the Futurist or Preterist opinions.

### FUTURIST

Futurists hold that the major portion of the events detailed in Revelation have yet to occur. In particular, the "rapture" and "millennium" (or thousand year reign) have not yet happened. Many futurists take these events quite literally; e.g., the millennium is a literal thousand years. Even so, futurists find themselves grouped into sub-categories, divided over the details. All of them believe that a seven year "great tribulation" is coming.

#### AMILLENIALIST

Futurist amillennialists believe that the coming millennium is not a specific period of time. Rather, it is a spiritual description of the current state of affairs. The events of Revelation 4-19 are future events, but the millennium is not to be understood literally.

#### POSTMILLENIALIST

Futurist postmillennialists believe that a literal thousand year reign is coming in the future, and that the "second coming" of Jesus will occur AFTER that thousand years. This second coming is often referred to as the "rapture".

#### PREMILLENIALIST

Futurist premillennialists believe that the literal thousand year reign of Jesus will follow the rapture. That is, the second coming of Jesus will occur BEFORE the 1000 years. This viewpoint is also divided into three sub-categories, depending upon whether a person believes that the rapture will happen before, during, or after the "great tribulation" (seven-year war, Armageddon). These views are usually called pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation. Thus, the

question "Will Christians have to endure the tribulation?" is discussed among premillennialists.

In concluding our discussion of the Futurist opinions, there are also schools of thought as to whether the letters to the seven churches were intended only in their historical context or whether they were written for the church at large for the times of the events in chapters 4 and following.

### **HISTORICIST**

Weymouth refers to this viewpoint as "Continuous Historical." Historicists hold that God has been fulfilling the events described in Revelation (and the related prophecies) as time passed. They relate various events throughout history, then, to the images mentioned in the book. Chiefly, this is limited to chapters four through nineteen, but some historicists understand the seven letters to be referring to eras in church history. This view is particularly strong among Protestants, many of whom (Protestant Historicists) identify the wild animal (or "beast") of Revelation with the Papacy. The Greek word "λατεινος" (describing the Roman race and language) does add up to the required 666. Although there are many disagreements as to which historical events are to be identified with the images in Revelation, the historical viewpoint was shared by many Reformation leaders. Often, for example, the "42 months" mentioned in the book are taken to mean 1260 years, since a day, here, is equated with a year. Sometimes, the statement that with God "a day is like a thousand years" is used to create a picture of history as it developed from the time of Adam to the present.

Historicists in general believe that a "millennium" is still coming and that the final events of Revelation are imminent.

### **SYMBOLIC (or IDEALIST)**

Weymouth refers to this viewpoint as "Poetic," although most do not employ that term today. The Idealist sees the prophecies about the "end times" to refer only to the timeless struggle between Good and Evil. God always triumphs over evil in the long run, and the church should benefit by reading the prophecies and understanding their true significance. This opinion is an old one, going back at least to the third century. By comparison with the two views already mentioned, and even the Preterist view, this is a minority opinion. That statement should not be construed as ruling it out, however. The seers may have been looking toward the future struggles of the church allegorically.

### **PRETERIST**

Weymouth summarizes this viewpoint by saying that "the writer had in view only the needs and circumstances of his own time. The drama belongs to the first century." Preterists hold that the events of Revelation 4-19 occurred in the first century. "Praeter" means "past" in Latin, and thus the description "Preterist" to describe this view. The Preterist identifies the war described in Revelation and in Matthew 24 (and parallels) as the First Jewish Revolt (66-73). Usually, the "beast" is identified with Nero Caesar, whose name in Hebrew adds to 666. The persecutions mentioned as coming from the Caesars may be those of Vespasian or Domitian, although some extend these into the second century as well, depending upon when they believe the book was written.

(Partial) preterists still look forward to the second coming of Jesus and to the events described in Revelation 20-22. To them, these things have not yet happened. In that, all four of the viewpoints converge. All of the most popular opinions about the "end times" look forward to the glorious second coming of Jesus. [Kenneth Gentry, Jr.](#), is a modern advocate of the (partial) Preterist viewpoint.

## POST-APOCALYPTIC

Now Weymouth did not create a distinction between a viewpoint that regards all of the prophecies in the New Testament as having been fulfilled and one that regards only most of them to have been fulfilled. The Post-Apocalyptic viewpoint, most frequently called "full" preterism, expresses Weymouth's contention completely. "Full" preterists differ from partial preterists in one respect: they believe that ALL of Revelation occurred during the First Century. The whole book, they say, deals with a judgment on Israel that resulted in the destruction of the temple; the "end of time" is not mentioned. [Don Preston](#), [John Noe](#), Ed Stevens, and [Frank Speer](#) are modern advocates of the Post-Apocalyptic viewpoint.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIEWPOINTS

The earliest references to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem come from extrabiblical sources. None of them say "Jesus came back," and none of them say "Jesus did not come back." Josephus and Tacitus provide the earliest accounts of what happened at Jerusalem.

According to Josephus, the direct impetus for the First Revolt concerned the action of Florus, who was the last governor (procurator) of Judea. Upset that the people did not obey his directive to hand over to him anyone who might have reproached him, he plundered and looted the temple.

"Florus was more provoked by these things and called out loudly to the soldiers to plunder what was called the Upper Marketplace, and to kill those whom they met. Now the soldiers, taking their leader's call with their strong desire for financial profit, not only plundered the place to which they were sent, but, forcing themselves into every house, they slaughtered its household. But the citizens fled along the narrow roads, and *the soldiers* murdered the ones that they caught, and no method of plunder was left out. And they took together many of the moderate people, and let them up to Florus. These he mistreated ahead of time (to be whipped) and had them crucified. Now the number of those that were destroyed at once that day, with women and children (for they did not spare babies), was about six hundred thirty altogether. And what made this heavier was this new attitude of Roman crudeness, for Florus dared what no one had done before: to have men of the order of the cavalry whipped before his tribunal and nailed to crosses. These people were Jews by birth, however, they were they of Roman dignity."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Wars of the Jews*, Flavius Josephus, II:14:9 (c. 75).

This sparked a revolution that resulted in the deaths of the members of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. Cestus Gallus sent in reinforcement on Rome's behalf, but the Jewish rebels were victorious over them. When Nero Caesar learned of this humiliation, he sent general Vespasian to deal with the Judean situation.<sup>33</sup>

Vespasian's armies began their slaughter in the north and swept southward – killing perhaps as many as 100,000 rebels and causing some to flee into Jerusalem. Civil unrest erupted, and many moderate Jewish leaders were killed by their fellow citizens. City after city fell to Vespasian's army. Vespasian's armies surrounded Jerusalem in 68 and prepared for a final invasion, but news intervened. Emperor Nero was dead. Josephus does not record the circumstances surrounding the emperor's death, but according to Suetonius he died while fleeing his would-be assassins during a tax revolt in Rome. Rather than be slain, it is recorded that he committed suicide. His last words, according to Suetonius, were "*Qualis artifex pereo*," which mean "What an artist; I am lost" – usually interpreted to say, "What an artist the world loses in me."

The struggle for power in Rome kept the conflict in Judea from coming to an end. After Nero followed Galba, Otho, and Vitellius as Caesar. Galba's concerns were financial – as he levied severe taxes, and Vespasian was more popular than Galba among the soldiers. He was assassinated. Otho was immediately confronted by Vitellius, and he encountered war on every front. It is said that he killed himself after only three months in office – hoping that his death would avert a Roman civil war. Vespasian rivaled Vitellius within months of the latter's taking the throne. Many of his own supporters deserted him, so Vitellius decided to resign. As soon as Vespasian's soldiers entered Rome, they executed Vitellius.

Vespasian sent his son, Titus, to Jerusalem to finish the siege. This brings us to April of the year 70 AD. After several phases of battle, Titus took the temple. Josephus reports, "*And now, after the flight of the rebels into the city, and after the burning of the holy house itself – and all the buildings around it, the Romans brought their ensigns to the temple and set them opposite its eastern gate. There they offered sacrifices to them and there did make Titus emperor with the greatest shouts of joy.*"<sup>34</sup>

According to Josephus, the destruction of the temple was preceded by prophecies predicting its fall.<sup>35</sup> Tacitus gives this report: "Prodigies had occurred, but their atonement through the offering of victims or vows is held to be unlawful by a nation that is the slave to superstition and the enemy to true beliefs. A vision of armies, with glittering armor, in battle appeared in the sky. A sudden lightning flash from the clouds lit up the temple. The doors of the holy place suddenly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure. Few people placed an evil interpretation on this. The majority were convinced that the ancient writings of their priests alluded to the present as the time when the east would triumph and from Judaea would go forth men destined

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., III:1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., VI:6:1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., VI:5:3.

to rule the world. This mysterious prophecy **really referred to Vespasian and Titus**, but the common people, true to the selfish desires of humanity, thought that this powerful destiny was reserved for them, and not even their calamities opened their eyes to the truth.”<sup>36</sup>

The Talmud records this strange omen regarding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

“Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white; nor did the westernmost light shine; and the doors of the Hekal would open by themselves, until R. Johanan b. Zakkai rebuked them, saying: Hekal, Hekal, why will you be the alarmer yourself? I know about you that you will be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Ido has already prophesied about you: Open your doors, oh Lebanon, so that the fire would devour your cedars.”<sup>37</sup>

The same tractate earlier records (39a) that during the time of Simon the Just, c. 280 – 260 BCE, the opposite was true, and that during the intervening years the random events indeed occurred at random. Every year on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), two goats would be selected, according to the requirement in the Torah. One goat would be “for the Lord,” and the other would be the so-called “scapegoat.”

*Aaron will cast lots for the two goats, one lot for Yahweh and the other lot for the scapegoat. Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for Yahweh fell, and make it a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell will be presented alive before Yahweh, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat. (Lev 16:8-10)*

According to the Talmud, every year between 30 CE and 70 CE, the high priest always selected a black stone rather than a white stone – indicating the scapegoat. The crimson strap was tied between the bullock’s horns. By tradition, if the strap became white, God had forgiven the people; if it remained crimson, he had not forgiven Israel’s sins. For forty years it remained crimson.

The lamps of the Menorah in the Temple were lit in the evening and allowed to burn until morning. The “westernmost light” refers to one of the candlesticks – the one that was lit first. It alone was allowed to burn all day long, and when it did so, that was considered a sign that the Shechinah (the divine presence) rested over Israel. For forty years between 30 and 70, the lamp burned out. The opening of the doors was a particularly bad sign, because it was a clear sign of doom. These omens prompted the rabbi to ask why it was predicting its own destruction, and they came to understand Zech 11:1 as pertaining to the destruction of the temple.

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<sup>36</sup> *Histories*, Tacitus, V:13 (c. 109).

<sup>37</sup> *Talmud*, Yoma 39b ().



Some second-century Christians wrote about the destruction of the temple. In the Letter of Bar-Nabas, we read,

“Now I still *must tell* you about the temple, how these wanderers who had been deceived hoped in the building, as though it were God's house, and not in God who made them. ... Afterward he says again, "Look, those who destroyed this temple will rebuild it themselves." It happened, for on account of their war it was destroyed by their enemies. Now also the officers of their enemies build it up.”<sup>38</sup>

In the early third century, Clement of Alexandria expressed his opinion that the destruction of the temple was a fulfillment of the “seventy weeks” of Daniel:

“That the temple accordingly was I built in seven weeks, is evident; for it is written in Esdras. And thus the Anointed One became King of the Jews, reigning in Jerusalem in the fulfillment of the seven weeks. And in the sixty-two weeks the whole of Judea was quiet and without wars. And the Anointed One, our Lord, "the Most Holy," having come and fulfilled the vision and the prophecy, was anointed in his flesh by the holy Spirit of his Father. In those "sixty-two weeks," as the prophet said, and "in the one week," he was Lord. The half of the week Nero held sway, and in the holy city Jerusalem placed the detestable thing; and in the half of the week he was taken away, as were Otho, and Galba, and Vitellius. And Vespasian rose to the supreme power, and destroyed Jerusalem, and desolated the holy place. And that such are the facts of the case is clear to the one who is able to understand, as the prophet said.”<sup>39</sup>

Both Tertullian (c. 203) and Origen (c. 215) agree with Clement; however, none of them understand to relate Daniel to Revelation or to the discourse in Matthew 24-25.

Early testimony exists to indicate that the Christians withdrew from the Jerusalem area, exactly as Jesus had instructed. For example, Eusebius writes,

“But the people of the assembly in Jerusalem, according to a certain vision of seemingly people were directed before the war to leave the city and to go and live in a certain city of Peraea named Pella. And when those who trusted in the Anointed One had migrated from Jerusalem, then – as though both the royal city of the Jews and all of Judea together were emptied of holy men, God's justice overtook those who had done such bad things against the Anointed One, and his envoys, and he wiped out that generation of impious men.”<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, Epiphanius says this, “Now the school of thought of the Nazareans is in Berea, around Koele-Syria, and in the Dekapolis around the region of Pella, and in that place in Basinitis that is called Kokabe. (Now it is said Khorabe in Hebrew.) For its beginning was there, after the departure from Jerusalem of all the students who had gone to Pella. The Anointed One had instructed them to leave Jerusalem and stay

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<sup>38</sup> Letter of Bar-Nabas, 16 (c. 130).

<sup>39</sup> *Miscellanies* (Stromata), Clement of Alexandria, I:21 (c. 203).

<sup>40</sup> *History of the Church*, Eusebius, III:5:3 (c. 325).

away from it since it was to suffer the coming siege. It was because of this reason that they lived in Peraea for a while.”<sup>41</sup>

This tradition of the migration to Pella is late enough that it may represent only conjecture; however, it is probably likely that both Christians and (other) Jews left the area when the war heated up. Still, the presence of more pressing issues in the second and third centuries kept any Christian commentator from putting forth a clear exegetical commentary on the end times.

None of the viewpoints was an obsession before the Catholic/Orthodox church split the way that they are today. The budding Catholic Church at Nicaea (325) expressed their belief that Jesus “is coming to judge the living and dead,” and the exact wording may have left the question open. On this they expanded slightly at Constantinople in 381 by adding the word “again.” What little they dwelt on Revelation was generally spent making short statements; apart from the work of Victorinus shortly before Council Nicaea (c. 260-300), no attempts were made to explain the prophetic figures. No great discussions were held on the matter, and no efforts were made to determine a consensus. Neither the individual churches, nor any local councils, nor any ecumenical councils condemned anyone for holding contrary viewpoints. Instead, scholars were far more concerned with determining the precise nature of Jesus’ relationship to his Father.

By the sixth century, there were those who tended to regard many of the prophecies about the “later days” as referring both to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE and to an unspecified time in the future. Then as time passed, some commentators tended to view the events in Revelation as having been developing through history but as not yet complete. Victorinus regarded some of Revelation as complete, but when he arrives at the chapters dealing with the great war, Victorinus sets some things in the near future. We might call this the beginnings of the historicist viewpoint, but historicism as we know it today seems to have begun slowly in the Tenth Century, with various people (beginning with Arnulf of Rheims) accusing their popes of being antichrists. The first true “historicist commentary” on Revelation was probably that of Joachim of Fiore in 1190. The historicist viewpoint took hold with the Lollards and then seriously took off during the protestant Reformation, when several protestant leaders expressed their opinions that the papacy was the beast of Revelation.

Francisco Ribera, a Jesuit priest, responded by proposing the Futurist viewpoint. His work, *In Sacrum Beati Ioannis Apostoli, & Euangelistiae Apocalypsin Commentarij*, was published c. 1590. As an example of Ribera’s work, we read, “Hic cernetur sapientia Christianorum, sapientes enim ex iis, quae dictum sunt de caractere, et ex iis, quae nunc dicuntur de numero nominis, poterunt intelligere an sit ille Antichristus.”<sup>42</sup> With this he indicates that wise Christians would be able to understand the number of the Antichrist, which Ribera identifies with the wild animal “beast” in Revelation 13. He understood the Antichrist to be a single person, yet to come, who would abolish

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<sup>41</sup> *Panarion*, Ephiphanius, 29:7 (c. 375).

<sup>42</sup> *In Sacrum Beati Ioannis Apostoli, & Euangelistiae Apocalypsin Commentarij*, Francisco Ribera, p. 419 (1602 edition).

Christianity as a religion and identify instead with Judaism. It was his opinion that the numerical value, 666, would not be understood until the time of fulfillment. Futurism expanded from there, eventually becoming the dominant modern view among both Catholics and protestants alike.

In modern times, both the Post-Apocalyptic and Partial Preterist viewpoints trace back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, at which point it is basically impossible to distinguish them. If Luis Alcasar's *Investigation of the Hidden Meaning in Revelation*<sup>43</sup> (1614) is indeed the first preterist book, then recent preterism likely emerged in response to the Historicist point of view. In Alcasar's interpretation of Revelation, First-Century Christianity triumphs over Priestly Judaism and then over Roman idolatry. He seems to conclude with the conversion of pagan Rome to Christianity in the fourth century. Alcasar, then, responds to Historicism with a viewpoint placing all of Revelation in the past. In this sense, then, he was a post-apocalyptic. However, his view did not limit the events in the book to the First Century; instead, he allows for some historical development.

Still reacting to Historicism, preterist authors began to comment on the "beast" of Revelation and on the "antichrist" of 1 John – claiming that these were figures from the first century. Thomas Hayne (1645) was convinced that all of Daniel had been fulfilled in the First Century; Joseph Hall repeated the idea (1650) but was unconvinced that the paradigm should be expanded to include Revelation. Hayne explained that the Millennium in Revelation was also over:

"The famous kingdom of Christ and Christians, and this notable binding up of Satan for a thousand years begin both together. Dr. J. Alstede, Mr. J. Mede, Mr. Archer, The Glimpse joyntly hold this undeniable.

But the famous Kingdome of Christ and Christians began moe years then one thousand five hundred ago, as I have above proved.

Therefore the notable binding up of Satan began one thousand five hundred years ago, and therefore is past long before our time."<sup>44</sup>

Three years later, Henry Hammond wrote about the Millennium, "Constantine's receiving the faith, and concluding of the persecutions, and by decree proclaiming liberty of Christianity, may most properly be styled *the binding of Satan, the dragon*, that sought to *devour the child as soon as it was born*; and then the beginning of *the thousand years* will fall about A.D. 311, at which time the conversion of heathen Rome to Christianity is set down...."<sup>45</sup>

Hammond allowed for a "double" start to the thousand years of Revelation 20, and therefore he accepted a "double end." Taking the thousand-year period to be somewhat literal, his interpretation is somewhat historicist at this point – rather like that of Alcasar before him. In this respect, neither Alcasar nor Hammond were true "preterists" in the modern sense, but their viewpoints were closer to preterism than to historicism. Of a similar mind was Fermin Abauzit, whose *Essai sur L'Apocalypse*

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<sup>43</sup> In Latin, *Vestigatio Arcani Sensus in Apocalypsi*.

<sup>44</sup> *Christs kingdome on earth, opened according to the scriptures*, Thomas Payne (1645), p. 72.

<sup>45</sup> *Paraphrase and Annotations upon the New Testament*, Vol. IV, Henry Hammond (1653).

(1730, 1770) contended that the final three chapters concerned the spread of the church after the fall of Jerusalem.

As a response to the Adventist movement started by William Miller (c. 1822), the number of alternative explanations grew. By 1840, the preterist movement was developing several schools of thought. Four German papers had been written identifying Nero Caesar with the number of the second wild animal in Revelation: 666. Ephraim Currier's studies led him to believe that a "rapture" of sorts had occurred in the First Century. He used a *sola-scriptura* restorationist ethic in arriving to his conclusions. In his words, *"In the following pages, the writer has consulted the Bible itself for his guide, and this must be his apology for departing from all other religious systems now in existence of which he has any knowledge."*<sup>46</sup> In pointing to the role of the destruction of the temple, Currier was "post-apocalyptic" (or full preterist) in the sense that he would likely have been accepted by modern full preterists as one of their own.

He writes, for example, "...at the end of the world, or Jewish dispensation, when the unbelieving Jews were punished according to their sins, those who had not perished by the sword or famine, were driven from their country, and were no longer to be God's servants, or holy people; then according to the scriptures, was the whole house of Israel brought up out of their graves, brought into the land of Israel, death, the last enemy, destroyed, and the reign of Christ, as king of the Jews ended."<sup>47</sup>

Currier had once been associated with the Universalists. Although separated from them by 1841, he learned that some of their ideas were correct, and he extended beyond what they taught – to something about the second coming of Jesus and about hell.

"...the limitarians of every sect, have always held that the coming of Christ to raise the dead, and to reward every man according to his works, as taught in the gospels, and in the epistles, is yet future. It is well known, also, that, connected with this event, is the sentiment that there will be a final separation of the righteous and wicked, that all who have not been born of the spirit, shall be banished from every hope of happiness, and doomed to suffer eternal pains. Until within about sixty years, very few have been bold enough to dissent from this awful doctrine."<sup>48</sup>

"There is much said and written in these days, about the coming of Christ; or as it is called, his second coming. With the Bible for my only guide, I have come to a different conclusion, perhaps, from any other person on earth, whether learned or unlearned...That time **I understand to be at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, or soon after.**"<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *The Second Coming of Christ*, and the Resurrection, Ephraim Currier, p. 3 (1841).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24 – citing a letter that Currier had published on April 4, 1840.

Facing disputes over his preterism, Currier later wrote, “And I believed, and I still believe that if any person will read all the passages in the Bible, from the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis to the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Revelation, with no other view than to understand its true meaning, he will find that in every single passage where the second coming of Christ is spoken of, it refers to his coming in the clouds of heaven immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem.”<sup>50</sup>

Currier’s ideas regarding Matthew 24 are similarly focused on the past: “Some have attempted to evade the force of this by saying that by ‘*generation*’ in this passage is not meant that these things should take place while that generation should remain on earth...But all these things are mere shifts, in order to make the word of God bend to human notions.”<sup>51</sup>

Even though Currier considered there to be but one “second coming,” and that Revelation 20 and 21 were fulfilled in 70 CE, his beliefs differed from those of *modern* full preterists in one respect. Currier was convinced that the events of Revelation were not to be fulfilled in order, so that some parts of Revelation were still in the future. Therefore, for Currier, not every prophecy was fulfilled in the First Century. Still, the post-apocalyptic viewpoint owes a great debt to Ephraim Currier.

Following Currier by a few years was Dr. Samuel Lee. Lee was opposed to “the papal antichrist theory” of the Historicists. With his preterist account of Daniel, Lee “solved the great and apparently insoluble problem.” However, Lee was as concerned with Catholicism as the Historicists were, and although for him all prophecy has been fulfilled, he was determined that the final chapters of Revelation were concerned not with 70 CE but with the fall of pagan Rome and the rise of Christianity under Constantine. Aside from his notion of a delay in the final fulfillment, Lee was in every other respect a full preterist (post-apocalyptic).

Robert Townley left the Church of England because of his growing conviction that the post-apocalyptic view of the end times was correct. Refuting an Historicist construct, he writes, “We confine [the millennium] within the period of Jerusalem’s desolation....” He was convinced that Rev 20:4 “militates against the doctrine of a future Millennium.”<sup>52</sup> Townley was familiar with Lee’s work and agreed with portions thereof, but he became convinced that the whole of the prophecy of Revelation was fulfilled within the First Century.

John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the Oneida Community, concluded during this same period that the “second coming” of Jesus occurred in 70 CE. However, he posited an additional arrival – for lack of a better term, a “third coming” – that was still in the future.

By 1847 Erasmus Manford, a Universalist, had entered the discussion. A prominent debater, Mr. Manford was convinced that the second coming of Jesus occurred in 70

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>52</sup> *The Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ: a Past Event*, Robert Townley, p. 96 (1845).

CE. However, he too looked forward to a future coming “to raise the dead” that was not connected with judgment. In his mind, Revelation 20 “preceded the gospel dispensation.” Viewing no other “coming” in judgment, Manford was convinced of universal salvation.

The appearance of what was then called the Praeterist Scheme attracted the attention of other commentators. Edward Bishop Elliott’s commentary defends Historicism against both Futurism and Praeterism. Believing both viewpoints to be products of Catholicism designed to oppose the Historicist scheme, he describes the Praeterist viewpoints as having “the prophecy stop altogether short of the Popedom.” The central views with this label either explain revelation with respect to the “catastrophe” of the Jewish Nation or of “Pagan Rome.” That is, some Praeterists confined the whole prophecy to the First Century (Vespasian or Domitian), and some extended into the subsequent centuries but stopped short of the Fourth Century. He was equally annoyed with Futurists who “shoot over the head of the Popedom into times yet future.”<sup>53</sup> He was familiar with and mentions Dr. Lee.

The discussions of such detail in the nineteenth century undoubtedly contributed to the distinctions between partial preterists and full preterists. James Stuart Russell, who likely knew Lee and was familiar with his work, disagreed with Lee’s placement of some chapters of Revelation after the year 70. His 1878 book, *The Parousia*, establishes that all of the first nineteen chapters of Revelation were in the past; however, he struggles with the “thousand years” of chapter 20. He recognizes the existence of a full-preterist view that would “bring the whole within the prescribed apocalyptic limits,”<sup>54</sup> but he chooses not to accept it. His book forms the basis for the “temporal gap” viewpoint held by many modern partial preterists.

## **PARTIAL-PRETERISTS VS. POST-APOCALYPTICS**

Over the past thirty or so years, partial preterists have distanced themselves from post-apocalyptic – arguing that the post-apocalyptic view is a “grave error” and labeling their supporters “heretics.” For this reason, they have made up the label “Hyper-Preterist” to refer to Post-Apocalyptic. Although the two viewpoints agree to a great extent, (partial) preterists find it abhorrent to believe that the Second Coming of the Messiah (SC) has already occurred. Post-Apocalyptic advocates, on the other hand, are bothered by the “dual fulfillment” and “temporal gap” theories required by partial preterism. These distinctions have separated them into camps, with many of the restorationist mindset approving of the post-apocalyptic viewpoint, even as most commentators who adhere more to tradition accept partial but not full preterism.

### **The Players Mentioned Here**

Don Preston is a covenant eschatologist (full preterist). He is the author of *Who is this Babylon: a Study of Revelation* and of *We Shall Meet Him in the Air*, each of which

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<sup>53</sup> *Horae Apocalypticæ, or A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, E. B. Elliott, p. 488 (1847 edition).

<sup>54</sup> *The Parousia*, James Stuart Russell, p. 514 (1878).

advocates full preterism. He refers to Isa 51:14 as evidence that the Hebrew Bible uses “heaven and earth” to signify God’s relationship with his people – just as we read about a “new” heaven and earth in Isa 66 and in Revelation.

John Noe is a post-apocalyptic who refers to his view simply as Preterist, without the qualification of “full”. He has authored several books on the subject, including *Beyond the End Times*. He writes, “Preterists additionally buttress their view by literally honoring the time statements in Revelation’s first and last chapter.”

Ken Gentry is a (partial) preterist. That is, he believes that some elements of the biblical book of Revelation have already come to pass, while others have not yet happened. He is the author of *Before Jerusalem Fell*, which dates the book of Revelation to the time of Nero. Gentry also wrote *The Beast of Revelation: Identified*, which equates that apocalyptic figure with Nero Caesar. He claims that, “Every evangelical Christian is, to some extent, a preterist.” He mischaracterizes the Post-Apocalyptic view as a “new movement.” “Hyperpreterism, in fact, covers a multitude of sins.”

Steve Atkerson is a (partial) preterist. Several years ago, Mr. Atkerson posted what he put forth as a ten-point condemnation of “full preterism.”

I refer here to **five** major viewpoints concerning the Christian “end times.” While external scholars would consider the Post-Apocalyptic and Preterist viewpoints to be shades of the same school of thought, in the same way that there are distinctions among Futurists and Historicists, the (partial) preterist camp has distanced themselves so much from the Post-Apocalyptic that I believe it is more proper to label them separately. Even so, before continuing it is necessary to say this. All of these viewpoints are opinions based on the inferences that their advocates have drawn from reading the Bible. As such, every one of them is an opinion about what the Bible teaches. I believe that the people who promote these viewpoints are honest truth-seekers. None of them have hidden agendas. They are not trying to “indoctrinate” people with “lies.” Each of these viewpoints explains what its advocates honestly believe to agree best with the Biblical teachings. In this, I respect their scholarship. I merely disagree with certain of their conclusions. It would be improper to confuse opinions with facts, and it would be wrong to condemn those who disagree with me.

## Chapter Three

*“Count the numerical values of the letters in Nero’s name  
and in ‘murdered his own mother,’  
and you will find their sum is the same.”*  
*Lives of the Twelve Caesars, Suetonius (121)*

### THE DATE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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There have been several theories regarding the date of composition of the book of Revelation. This date bears on the discussion because if Revelation were written very late (after the First Revolt), that late date rules out both the Preterist and Post-Apocalyptic points of view.

The “late date” theories generally place Revelation to the mid 90’s, under the reign of Emperor Domitian (who died in 96). The argument in favor of the late date rests on the speculation of Irenaeus, who wrote c. 180 CE. Irenaeus made several speculations about Revelation, including one about the date of composition.

It is therefore more certain, and risk-free, to wait for the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to assume and propose names. Now it is possible to find many names with the number; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved. For if there are many names found to have this number, it will be asked which among them will the person to come bear. It is not through a lack of names containing the number of that name that I say this, but on account of the fear of God, and jealousy for the truth: for the name Euanthas (ΕΥΑΝΘΑΣ) contains the required number, but I make no allegation regarding it. Then also Lateinos (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable one, this being the name of the last kingdom. For the Romans are the ones who now rule; however, I will not make any boast about this. Teitan, too, (ΤΕΙΤΑΝ), among all the names which are found among us, is rather worthy of credit. ...Therefore, we do not risk stating certainly the name of the Antichrist; for if it were a necessity that this name be revealed in this season now, it would have been declared by the one who saw the revelation. For neither was it seen a great time earlier, but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian’s rule. (*Against Heresies*, V:30:3)

Irenaeus cites no source for his one-line statement. Now, there is no “antichrist” mentioned in Revelation. Already, we see that Irenaeus is stating opinions. His references to possible identities for the “second wild animal” (“beast”) are clearly



speculative. In the narrative, he appears to be referring to whatever opinions he has heard. By no means was he attempting to place a date on the prophecy that had been written 100 years prior to his treatise. His only points were to opine that no one knew what the “beast” figure meant, and to express lack of certainty regarding the prophecy.

All of the “late date” tradition that follows Irenaeus seems to stem from his statement. The Muratorian Canon, a list of books in use in about 180 – contemporary to Irenaeus – tends to support an “early date” during the reign of Nero. There, we read: “It is necessary to discuss [Paul’s letters] separately, since the blessed envoy himself followed the example of Johannes who preceded him....” So, if the author of the Muratorian fragment thought that John’s letters to the groups in Revelation preceded even some of Paul’s genuine letters, then John must have written Revelation during the time of Nero, and not during the time of Domitian.

By the fifth century, it was clear that there was an “early-date” tradition that was independent of the Muratorian Canon. A superscription (heading) appears before the first verse of at least one Syriac manuscript from this period, reading, “The Revelation, which was made by God to John the Evangelist, in the island of Patmos, to which he was banished by **Nero the Emperor**.” (Murdock’s translation)

Clement of Alexandria (c. 190-200) wrote not about Revelation in particular but about the apostolic mission: “For indeed, the teaching of our Lord according to his appearing, begins with Augustus [Caesar] and was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius. Now that of his envoys, embracing the work of Paul, **ends with Nero**.” (*Miscellanies*, VII:17:106)

Epiphanius of Salamis, writing c. 377, identified the date of Revelation as during the reign of Claudius Caesar: “when John, before falling asleep, prophesied in the days of the Claudius Caesar [and earlier], while he was in the island of Patmos” (*The Medicine Chest*, aka *Heresies* 51:12). Since Nero Claudius was the last of the Claudian line, this entry from Epiphanius also supports the early date. His identification is certainly independent of the Muratorian Canon and is likely independent of both the Syriac tradition and of Clement.

Arethas of Caesarea wrote a commentary of Revelation in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. His predecessor, Andreas, had written (c. 500) about two schools of interpretation. In Andreas’ day, some people believed that Revelation was about the First Revolt, while others interpreted it as being about the future. Arethas appears to have taken both views, seeing in Revelation a dual fulfillment. As to the date of composition, he wrote about Rev 7:4 that, “When the evangelist received these oracles, the destruction in which the Jews were involved **had not yet been inflicted** by the Romans.”

The dominant book among modern scholars placing an earlier date on Revelation is *Redating the New Testament*, by John A. T. Robinson – published in 1976. Robinson examines all of the above evidence and the opinions of several scholars. After indicating that the traditions regarding the book are divided, he examines the date

through internal evidence. He finds, for example, several connections between 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation – particularly between the readers’ opponents in all three books. He contrasts the supportive language about the Jews in Revelation with the condemnation and complete separation found in the letter of Barnabas, which mentions the destruction of the temple as having taken place.

When Robinson walked through the letters to the seven assemblies in the early chapters of Revelation, he found that the reference to Laodikea’s affluence connects to the city’s pride of having reconstructed itself so rapidly after the earthquake of 60-61 CE. Tacitus writes, “One of the famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was that same year overthrown by an earthquake, and, without any relief from us, recovered itself by its own resources. In Italy meanwhile the old town of Puteoli obtained from Nero the privileges of a colony with an additional name.”<sup>55</sup> This event is certainly mentioned as though in the Sibylline Oracles as though it had been prophesied, where we also read,

“Wretched Laodicea, you sometime  
Will an earthquake lay low, casting headlong down,  
But you, a city firmly set, again  
will stand.”<sup>56</sup>

One observes that the restoration of Laodikea is mentioned as a matter of pride in Rev 3:17. This would have made sense five to eight years after the quake – when the city was newly restored, but to mention the restoration thirty years after the fact would not have had the same impact.

After indicating that Eusebius’ account of the Roman persecutions of Christians do not mention any executions, he quotes the Christian historian as supporting the view that Domitian did not persecute the Christian faith – he being more concerned with Roman dominance. Robinson agreed with other authors, who indicated before him that the persecution under Domitian has been exaggerated, and that references to it are late – not at all until the Fifth Century. According to Tertullian, though, Domitian’s practice was rather to exile (banish) Christian offenders rather than torturing or executing them. Tertullian had been quite clear in stating that Domitian was far less cruel than Nero:

“Domitian, too, a man of Nero’s type in cruelty, tried his hand at persecution; but as he had something of the human in him, he soon put an end to what he had begun, even restoring again those whom he had banished.”<sup>57</sup>

Robinson later makes observations about the numbering of the Caesars, which he was certain “may be settled quite quickly.”<sup>58</sup> Suetonius’ account of imperial Rome began with Julius, who was the first to claim the title of Imperator. Robinson also draws attention to the “comparable lists of kings” in other writings. What he references we will cite explicitly. The Fifth *Sibylline Oracle* reads:

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<sup>55</sup> *Annals of Imperial Rome*, Tacitus, XIV:27 (c. 115).

<sup>56</sup> *Sibylline Oracles*, IV:107-108 (c. 76-80)

<sup>57</sup> *Apology for the Christians Against the Nations*, Tertullian, chapter 5 (c. 197).

<sup>58</sup> *Redating the New Testament*, John A. T. Robinson, p. 243 (1976).



“The very first lord shall be, who shall sum  
Twice ten with the first letter of his name;  
In wars exceedingly powerful shall he be;  
And he shall have the initial sign of ten;  
And in like manner after him to reign  
Is one who has the alphabet’s first letter;”<sup>59</sup>

The surname of the first Emperor was *Καίσαρ*, which begins with kappa (κ) in Greek. The numerical value of kappa is 20. The “initial sign of ten” refers to his first name, Julius. In Greek, Julius begins with an iota (ι), whose value is 10. The second ruler’s name, Augustus, begins with alpha (α) – the first letter of the alphabet. The list of emperors clearly begins here with Julius.

A similar reckoning is given in 2 Esdras, where we read:

“The days are coming when a kingdom shall rise on earth, and it shall be more terrifying than all the kingdoms that have been before it. And twelve kings shall reign in it, one after another. But the second that is to reign shall hold sway for a longer time than any other one of the twelve. This is the interpretation of the twelve wings that you saw.”<sup>60</sup>

The Caesar who reigned for the longest period of time was Augustus – the second of the twelve. Cassius Dio’s *Roman History* (written c. 211-233) also begins the Empire with Julius, making Augustus the second. Like 2 Esdras, Josephus, refers to Augustus as the second of the Roman emperors.

“After him came Annius Rufus, under whom died [Augustus] Caesar, the second emperor of the Romans, the duration of whose reign was fifty-seven years, besides six months and two days (of which time Antonius ruled together with him fourteen years; but the duration of his life was seventy-seven years); upon whose death Tiberius Nero, his wife Julia’s son, succeeded.”<sup>61</sup>

Robinson leaves the matter somewhat unsettled. He fixes the time frame between 68 and 70, believing that “the precise dating (late 68 or early 70) is of secondary significance.”<sup>62</sup> Gentry goes further, building on Robinson’s evidence for an early date. The seven heads mentioned in Revelation 17 represent the first seven Caesars ... through Galba. Galba’s reign tips the reader off, because unlike his predecessor he remained for a short time. This numbering provides a direct clue to the time of composition: “Five have fallen.” These were: Julius; Augustus; Tiberius; Gaius; and Claudius. “One is.” Nero was still reigning when the book was written.

Gentry cites Josephus also: “In his *Antiquities* he calls Augustus the ‘second’ and

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<sup>59</sup> Op. Cit., *Sibylline Oracles*, V:17-21.

<sup>60</sup> 2 Esd. 12:13-16 (NRSV)

<sup>61</sup> Op. Cit., *Antiquities*, XVIII:2:2.

<sup>62</sup> Op. Cit., Robinson, p. 252.

Tiberius the ‘third’ emperor.”<sup>63</sup> We will see later that Gentry’s analysis of Nero as the “wild animal” (beast) in Revelation is incorrect, but it makes sense. He was right in observing that we can find a way to associate Nero with the number 666, but there is more at play here. For more information, read Robinson’s book<sup>64</sup> and Gentry’s work.<sup>65</sup> Suffice it to say that scholars have certainly demonstrated the viability of the Neronian date, and therefore of the Post-Apocalyptic and Preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation.

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<sup>63</sup> *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Kenneth Gentry, p. 155 (1989).

<sup>64</sup> <http://richardwaynegarganta.com/redating-testament.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> [http://www.entrewave.com/freebooks/docs/a\\_pdfs/kgbj.pdf](http://www.entrewave.com/freebooks/docs/a_pdfs/kgbj.pdf)

## Chapter Four

*"In the year 7510,  
if God's a' coming, he oughta make it by then."*

"In the Year 2525," Zager and Evans (1968)

### A SOCIETAL OBSESSION WITH DOOM

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The Greek word ἀποκαλυψις (apokalupsis) comes from καλυπτω (kaluptw), meaning "cover." An "apocalypse" in Greek is literally an uncovering. It is a revelation. The word appears naturally as a title for the last book of the Bible, which begins with "A revelation of Anointed Jesus." Most dictionaries give an alternate definition of the word "apocalypse" in English – a definition that is used today more frequently than to indicate the book of Revelation. That definition runs this way:

"great or total devastation; doom" (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

"a great disaster" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)

"any universal or widespread destruction or disaster" (*Dictionary.com*)

The book of Revelation also describes a conflict taking place at Megiddo. The word Har-Megiddo was loaned into Greek as the word "Armageddon." In the Bible, Armageddon is a place; the word appears in the New Testament only one time – at Revelation 16:16. Historically, the mound at Megiddo was the location of several battles, and traditionally, it is the location of a battle in Revelation.

All the author of Revelation wrote about Armageddon is this: "And he gathered them into the place called in Hebrew Har-Magedon." The passage does not actually predict a world war, or nuclear war, or species-destroying event at Megiddo. After Josiah was defeated at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29ff.), Megiddo came to be used symbolically of a place of disastrous defeat. This usage is found in Zech 12:11, *"When that day comes [the day of the destruction of nations], there will be a great mourning in Judah, like the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo."* The New Testament predicts only a sort of disaster, like that at Megiddo, for God's enemies.

The words "Apocalypse" and "Armageddon" have taken on a significance in English that they never had in Greek. That significance – indicating a tremendous, world-wide disaster that would destroy nearly everyone – has been the source of a great deal of literature, film, and speculation. I do not believe that this is a direct result of the Futurist viewpoint; that is, it is certainly possible to believe that Jesus has not yet returned and yet to not focus on potential disasters. However, American society in particular does look for disasters. Indeed, it fixates on them, fueling the fires of obsession to suit its own purposes.

Those viewers of the movie, *Apocalypse Now*, in 1979 who were familiar with the Book

of Revelation were probably quite surprised to discover that the Brando film was not about Revelation but about the conflict in Vietnam. There was no Second Coming of the Messiah, and relatively speaking very few people died. Nevertheless, the title was a deliberate reference to an earth-shattering consequence – it being the opposite of the “Nirvana Now” pinback button that collegiate hippies wore during the late 1960’s.<sup>66</sup> What could be more opposite to nirvana than all-out war?

“Post-apocalyptic” movies are everywhere, however, and serve as quite a fascination for people all around the world – and particularly for Americans. Consider the following:

Mel Gibson’s **Mad Max** series – consisting of *Mad Max*, *the Road Warrior*, and *Beyond Thunderdome* – is set in a post-disaster world in which law and order have broken down to the point where gangs run the show. The first film in the series is, to date, the highest-grossing film of all time in Australia (where it was shot). Together, the three films took in more than \$160,000,000 – a figure that has not been adjusted for inflation.

Years before Max began bringing his own kind of justice to Australia, there was the **Planet of the Apes** series (partially starring Charlton Heston and Roddy McDowall. To date there have now been seven films in the series. Together they have made over \$400,000,000. The premise behind the first film is that humanity has destroyed their societies, with all its great cities now a wasteland. Famously, that movie ends with images of the destroyed Statue of Liberty and Charlton Heston’s character proclaiming, “We blew it all up!”

In both **Escape from New York** and its sequel, *Escape from LA*, Kurt Russell plays “Snake” Plissken: a criminal turned reluctant hero. In this post-apocalyptic world, criminal chaos is the dominant force. Manhattan Island is a prison, and parts of California have been rendered an island by a massive earthquake. Together the movies have made approximately \$100,000,000.

Arnold Schwarzenegger’s series of **Terminator** films deal with an impending and inescapable “Judgment Day,” after which time the human race will be forced into a conflict with androids. Human society is destroyed, and the androids seek to exterminate all humanity. To-date, the series of four films and a television program have made well over \$500,000,000.

Other post-apocalyptic movies include **12 Monkeys** (Bruce Willis), in which the world is rendered uninhabitable by a fast-spreading virus; **Waterworld** (Kevin Costner), in which oil users are the enemy who wind up causing the polar ice caps to melt; and the **Matrix** series (Keanu Reeves), in which humans are in perpetual conflict against artificial intelligence. The Matrix series alone has made over \$1,000,000,000 worldwide.

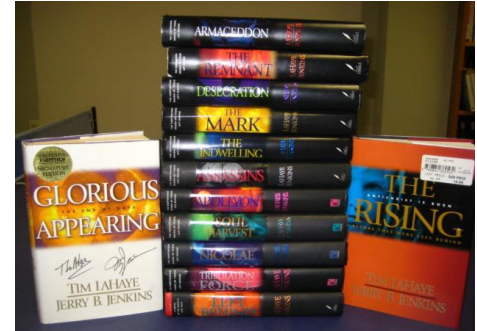
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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, the 2/24/67 issue of *The CUNY Campus* (p. 3), and *The Apocalypse Now Book*, Peter Cowie, p. 3 (2001).

The common societal fear that makes every one of the above movies both credible and popular is the notion that an unknown, usually unforeseen disaster is imminent. Human beings may cause their own destruction – through our sins, and technology in particular frequently receives partial blame.

Christian groups have performed quite a few songs that focus on eschatology. A prime example is “Jesus is Coming Soon.” Written by Robert E. Winsett during World War 2 in 1942, the song paints an audio picture of the present day in terms of impending devastation:

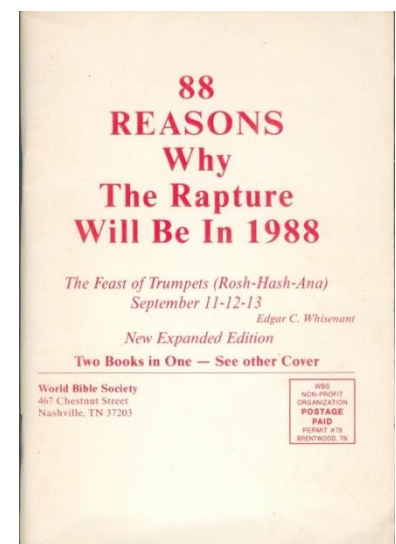
“Troublesome times are here,  
Filling men’s hearts with fear.  
Freedom we all hold dear now is at stake....  
Jesus is coming soon –  
Morning or night or noon.  
Many will meet their doom.  
Trumpets will (surely) sound.”



Johnny Cash’s “The Man Comes Around” provides another example of the same phenomenon. Strongly evocative of Revelation, its first true stanza begins with, “There’s a man goin’ ‘round takin’ names.” Judgment is coming. Zager and Evans described a sci-fi dystopia when they wrote about the same subject in “In the Year 2525”: “In the year 7510, if God’s a’ coming, he oughta make it by then. Maybe he’ll look around himself and say, ‘Guess it’s time for the Judgment Day.’...Now it’s been ten thousand years. Man has cried a billion tears for what he never knew. Now man’s reign is through.”

All of these examples from popular (Christian) culture demonstrate the public obsession with “the apocalypse,” which they equate to a future doom in the book of Revelation. In the world of literature, there have now been sixteen novels in Tim LaHaye’s and Jerry Jenkins’ “*Left Behind*” series. That series is based on a Futurist interpretation of Revelation. In it, the “rapture” has occurred, and the world is in chaos. The set of books was so fascinating, so popular, that briefly in 1998 the first four books in the series were the top four best-selling books in the United States – according to the New York Times. The books have prompted the creation of a set of movies and video games. While detractors call the books “awkwardly plotted” and “packed with insulting stereotypes” (Gordon Haber, *The New York Sun*, August 23, 2004), the popularity of the series is undeniable. How has this obsession impacted the Christian world?

In 2011, Harold Camping’s Project Caravan traveled around predicting that the “Day of Judgment” would be May 21, 2011. A few years earlier, Irvin Baxter’s Endtime Ministries claimed that the “Great Tribulation” – the war in Revelation – would begin in 2008. Before that, the Y2K scare in the late 1990’s was a signal that the end was near. In 1997, Marshall Applewhite’s Heaven’s Gate group explained that the earth was going to be wiped clean;





they killed themselves in order to meet up with the aliens on the spaceship that was allegedly following the Hale-Bopp comet. Before we were worried about computers or Hale-Bopp, Camping predicted that the End would come in 1994. Prior to that, Rollen Stuart circulated the date of the Rapture as September 28, 1992; Stuart was most famous for being the “John 3:16 man” at sporting events. Elizabeth Clare Prophet, of the Church Universal and Triumphant, had predicted earlier that a global, thermonuclear war would begin on March 15, 1990. This prediction reportedly came through her daughter, Erin.<sup>67</sup>

Reasoning, among other things, that “The 40 years end for the Church age on Rosh-Hash-Ana 1988,” Edgar C. Whisenant gave *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will be in 1988* – specifically at some time between September 11<sup>th</sup> and September 13<sup>th</sup>. Before that, there was a “planetary alignment” in 1982 that was going to destroy everything. In the first edition of *The 1980’s: Countdown to Armageddon*, Hal Lindsey predicted that the Rapture would happen in 1981 – because the End had to come seven years later (in 1988, forty years after the modern nation of Israel was founded). Lindsey predicted that the Soviet Union would complete their conquest of Afghanistan and invade Iran, pushing conflict closer to Israel. Even earlier, preachers were predicting the End in 1914, or 1844, or.... Alright, you get the idea. None of these predictions came true, but the supporters of those predictions truly believed that the end was coming. Simply, the society in which they lived, and their religious circles, primed them to focus on an upcoming destruction. Strangely, none of these groups ever claims that the end will be in, say, the year 50,214.

Over the past 30+ years, Americans have connected their obsession about doom with various conspiracy theories. Here is an example. On the back of the Great Seal of the United States, and on the back of the current American one-dollar bill, is the Latin inscription “**Novus Ordo Seclorum**,” which means (roughly) “New Order of the Ages.” The apocalyptic crowd usually translates it as “New World Order.” When the expression was written on the seal in 1782, designer Charles Thomson intended for it to connect with the date, 1776, as follows: “The date underneath is the date of the Declaration of Independence, and the words under it signify the beginning of the new American Aera, which commences from that date.”<sup>68</sup>



End-Times conspirators claim that “New World Order” actually indicates the coming of a confederation that will result in a “one-world government.” This “one-world government” is usually taken to be a projection of socialism on a worldwide scale. Whenever nations cooperate, it is taken as a sign that the New World Order is coming. The League of Nations formed in 1920. The United Nations succeeded it in 1946. The European Economic Community was designed in 1957, with the Merger Treaty combining several operations in 1967. This, in turn, was a precursor to the European Union that formed in 1993. Countries

<sup>67</sup> *Prophet’s Daughter*, Erin Prophet, p. 176 (2009).

<sup>68</sup> “Remarks and Explanation,” Charles Thompson, June 20, 1782. As adopted by Congress.



participating in the EU created a common monetary unit (the Euro) in 1999. Current theories about the EU are connected to post World War 2 theories about the United Nations, which similarly insisted that the goal of the union was a “one-world government” that would bring about the end of the world. To the conspiracy theorist, all of these unions are signs that Doom is here. Not only countries but also the wealthy – and particularly bankers – are seen as being behind the conspiracy that will create the one-world government and bring about the End. As End Times Ministries puts it on their website, “The prophesied one-world government is being formed on earth at this very time.” This sentence expresses the concept well: “The New World Order theory holds that, one day, the United Nations will lead a military coup against the nations of the world to form a one-world government.”<sup>69</sup>

Connected with this fear of secret conspiracies is a general fear of technology. Since the introduction of the Universal Product Code (commonly called the “bar code”) in 1974, preachers have been concerned that it is the “mark of the beast” mentioned in Revelation. In Revelation, no one can buy or sell goods without the “mark of the beast.” As early as 1981, false documents were circulating that stated that people would not be able to receive government paychecks after a certain date without the UPC code imprinted on their hands or foreheads.<sup>70</sup>

In *The Last Days of America* (written in 1984), Bob Fraley wrote, “Every Universal Product Code has three unidentified marks whose number equivalent ‘6’ encoding it with the code number ‘666’.” That fated number, 666, is the “number of the beast” in Revelation. Terry Cook’s book, *The Mark of the New World Order*, explains in more detail about how the computer scanning protocol is designed “deceptively” to lead to “Global Economic Enslavement” and the End. Other scientific advancements, such as genetic manipulation, cloning, and the Internet are also to be feared as developments connected with the End of the World.

Rumors always surface that are unverifiable and which seem to support the forecast of doom. In 1984, one author wrote, “As I stood in Jerusalem I saw buses, taxicabs, and other public vehicles displaying a triple-digit prefix on their license plates, ‘666.’ This identifies them as being Arab-owned. The requirement has been in effect since 1973, but no one seems to know the reason for using that particular number, just as no one has been able to explain the use of 666 in more than 50 prominent ways internationally at the present time.”<sup>71</sup> That author has predicted the rapture several times.

The people who are worried about Armageddon and who believe these conspiracy theories view everything that happens on the global scale as a portent of doom – particularly if the modern nation of Israel is involved. Many live in a dual state of fear and relief, begging to God beyond hope that the Rapture will take them away before all the horrors occur. In the following chapters, we will examine the prophecies in the Bible

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<sup>69</sup> *Terrorism: Documents of International and Local Control, US Perspectives*, Robert Friedlander, et. al., p. 480 (1979).

<sup>70</sup> *When Your Money Fails...*, Mary Stewart Relfe (1981).

<sup>71</sup> *America Israel Russia and World War III*, Jack van Impe, p. 33 (1984).

that religious people often take to be about future events. We will see that every one of them has passed, and that the language of heavenly portents and massive destruction never indicates a global disaster.



Many Americans now believe this to be the fated “mark of the beast” from the book of Revelation. The red bars allegedly represent the number 666.

# Chapter Five

*"It's very clear that the people alive right then  
were the ones that were going to witness this thing."*

Russell Glasser, atheist advocate<sup>72</sup> (2012)

## DEFINING THE POST-APOCALYPTIC VIEW

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If the post-apocalyptic, full-preterist view of the End Times is summarized in a statement that all prophecy has been fulfilled, how might we flesh out an accurate description – a definition of what it means to be a full preterist?

Don Preston writes, "Preterism upholds the authority and integrity of the word of God against theories of purported postponement and double fulfillment. Preterism is the affirmation that prophecy culminated and came to an end in Christ, and that Christ's prophetic utterances were fulfilled when and as he said they would."<sup>73</sup> But this is less of a definition and more of a mission statement. Preston describes in part what it is and in part what it does.

Although the post-apocalyptic view predates the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, the early authors were content to simply delineate Daniel and/or Revelation – rather than attempting to define their viewpoint. To date, the clearest definition of the post-apocalyptic view has come from Ed Stevens. We will begin there.

## THE STEVENS THESES

In his introductory article to the series called "Doctrinal Implications of Preterist Eschatology," Ed Stevens summarizes the implications of the post-apocalyptic viewpoint with seventeen points. Briefly, these are:

### 1. The kingdom has arrived.

This means that when John the Baptizer and Jesus said things like *"Change your minds, for the kingdom of the heavens is near,"* they were referring to an "arrival" that happened in the first century. Stevens says, "We can live optimistically and victoriously in [the kingdom] right now and indefinitely into the future."

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<sup>72</sup> The Atheist Experience #748, February 12, 2012.

<sup>73</sup> "What is Preterism," Don Preston, [eschatology.org](http://eschatology.org)

**2. The kingdom is spiritual.**

The kingdom is not something physical, such as an earthly government. It is *“not of this world.”*

**3. The kingdom must be entered and dwelt in through spiritual means.**

One may not enter God’s kingdom through “physical rituals, agreement to complex systems of man-made theology or only after the approval of powerful ecclesiastical institutions.” Stevens rejects a focus on “sacraments.”

**4. All things written about Christ in the OT have been fulfilled (Lk. 21:22).**

**5. The great commission has been fulfilled (Matt. 28:18-20).**

Most post-apocalyptic point to language such as we find in Col 1:23 to indicate that the message had indeed gone out everywhere.

**6. All things have been made new (Rev. 21:5).**

**7. The scheme of redemption has been consummated.**

**8. The old heavens and earth have passed away, and the new heavens and earth are here (Mt. 5:17-20).**

**9. The time of reformation has occurred (Heb. 9:10).**

Referring to the religious system, *“It was only laid down until a season of correction, being physical right deeds regarding foods and drinks and different ritual cleansings.”*

**10. Christ has returned.**

**11. The “perfect” has come (1 Cor. 13:10; Eph. 4:13).**

Stevens believes that “the perfect thing” of 1C 13 was “a state of maturity and completeness” that “arrived by the time Jerusalem fell.”

**12. The Bridegroom has returned.**

**13. The first covenant grew obsolete and disappeared (Heb. 8:13).**

**14. The mystery is finished (Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 3:4-10; Rev. 10:7).**

This refers to the announcement in Revelation 10 that, *“The time still will not be. But during the days of the sound of the seventh messenger, when he is about to blow, God’s secret will also be completed, as he announced the good message to his slaves, the prophets.”* Stevens connects this secret with the spread of the Christian message to gentiles.

**15. Death and Hades have been thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:13-14).**

**16. All things have been “restored” (Acts 3:21).**

*“Anointed Jesus, whom indeed it is necessary for heaven to embrace until times of restoration of all things, which he spoke about from the age through the mouth of his holy prophets.”*

### **17. Armageddon is past.**

By this, Stevens means that the war in the Book of Revelation has already happened.

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE PARADIGM**

Among these theses, some are probably unnecessary to the post-apocalyptic viewpoint, while others ought to properly be combined into single points. John Noe also has a list of theses, but most of his own theses deal with ramifications of the viewpoint and are not a description of preterism itself.

The Great Commission, for example, may very well have been a role of the Twelve themselves and was thus limited to their lifetime; I will address the matter later in this book. Suffice it to say that it need not be connected directly to the “Second Coming” or to the destruction of the temple.

As to “the scheme of redemption,” this is an ecclesiastical paradigm that does not need to be connected to any particular event in time.

The “complete thing” of 1C 13 refers to Love, as compared to the “partial” glimpses of God’s nature provided by the miraculous gifts. The passage does not refer to a specific event in time.

In the New Testament, “God’s secret” typically refers to the fact that the Anointed One was supposed to suffer and die – rather than rule an earthly kingdom. The destruction of the earthly kingdom, and the earthly temple, was the ultimate revelation of God’s secret. This is connected with the fulfillment of all prophecy. The restoration of the kingdom to Israel, referenced in Acts 1:6f. and by Peter’s application of the prophecy of Joel to his own time, demonstrate that this restoration was already occurring during the lifetime of the envoys.

We might now distill Stevens’ theses down to five essential conclusions that arise from recognizing that the events of the book of Revelation have occurred.

If we acknowledge that **the events of Matthew 24-5 and Revelation have happened, including that: the Great War is over; that Death and Hades have been thrown into the Lake of Fire; and that we are living in a “new Heavens and Earth,”** then we draw also the following conclusions:

**1. Every Biblical prophecy has been fulfilled.<sup>74</sup>**

**2. The return of Jesus (Mt 24) was the judgment on Priestly Judaism in 70 CE.**

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<sup>74</sup> For John Noe, these are his theses 1, 2, and 7.

**3. The kingdom of the heavens (mentioned by John and Jesus) is the rule of God. Its citizens are those who turn themselves over to God. It has arrived and is not of this world.<sup>75</sup>**

**4. The time of reformation (in Hebrews) has occurred because Priestly Judaism was removed. This means also that the first covenant grew obsolete and disappeared.**

**5. The kingdom was restored to Israel, and the “great and majestic day of Yahweh” (in Acts 2) has passed.**

If we are to accept that all Biblical prophecies have been fulfilled, then it is necessary to examine certain passages that are commonly associated with the future. We will do this in the next three chapters.

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<sup>75</sup> For John Noe, the presence of the kingdom needs to be a focus of modern Christianity.

## Chapter Six

*"The conquering Assyrian army, parading under the symbols of the Assyrian pantheon, would use the precious metals of gold and silver that formerly overlaid Samaria's rich idols to pay the Assyrian cult prostitutes. . . ."*

*A Commentary on Micah, Bruce K. Waltke, p. 55 (2007)*

### FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECIES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

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It is not necessary to examine those prophecies that clearly are not points of contention among the various groups; that is, prophecies that do not have any bearing on the discussion of eschatology. However, we must examine certain passages over which there is disagreement as to their application. Are they to be fulfilled at some far off point in the distant future, or has God already fulfilled them?

#### Psalm 8:3-6

*When I look at your skies – the work of your fingers: the moon and the stars that you have fixed – what is humanity that you are mindful of him, and the mortal [son of man], that you visit him? For you have made him slightly less than messengers; and have crowned him with glory and honor. You made him rule over the deeds of your hands; you have arranged all things under his feet....*

This passage refers to the station of humanity, compared with that of the rest of God's creation. It is not a prophetic work, but since the Messiah was human it is applied to Jesus in the New Testament. It is Paul (in Eph 1) that applies the passage most specifically to Jesus. There, he puts nothing in the future but merely states that God made the Messiah our superior: above and the source of "every ruler and authority." Therefore, he epitomizes what was written in the psalm.

#### Amos 8:7-10

*Yahweh has sworn by Jacob's pride, "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. Won't the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? Yes, all of it shall overflow like the river, and it will sink like the river of Egypt. And it will be in that day, says the Lord Yahweh, that I will make the sun set at noon, and I will darken the land in the light of the day. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into howls. And I will bring up sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head. And I will make it*

*like the mourning for a loved one; and the end of it will be like a day of sorrow."*

Writing in about 750 BCE, Amos announces a day of judgment for the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. He refers to that judgment as "the day of Yahweh" (5:20) and predicts heavenly portents. None of these things literally happened, but what Amos predicted did come true. In 722 BCE, the Assyrians brought judgment on behalf of God, and the kingdom of Israel was wiped out. The kingdom certainly had the opportunity to return to God. According to Amos, his forecast of doom was given first to King Jehoachim II. Several kings reigned after Jehoachim, but the account in 2 Kings records that they did what was evil in Yahweh's sight. As a result, Israel was destroyed permanently.

### **Isaiah 2-5**

*"This is the message that happened [through Yahweh] to Isaiah the son of Amoz about Judah and Jerusalem.*

*"It will be in later days that Yahweh's mountain and Yahweh's house will appear as the high point of the mountains, and will be lifted above the hills; and all nations will flow into it. And many nations will go and say: 'Come and let us ascend to Yahweh's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will announce his way to us, and we will walk in it.' For out of Zion will go out the Torah, and Yahweh's message from Jerusalem. And he will judge in the midst of the nations, and will reprove many people. And they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation; neither will they learn war anymore." (2:1-4)*

Now this is a part of "first" Isaiah, written about Judah at the end of the VIII<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The oracle (chs. 2-5) is undated, but given the national struggles in ch. 3, we observe that the prophet was looking toward the deposing of King Ahaz. Ahaz was certainly known as an idolater. Isa 2 - 5 are clearly not a prediction of a far-off time in the future, but rather, they serve as a response to whatever was going on in Israel during the VIII century BCE. This is confirmed by the language used by the Chronicler: "For that reason Yahweh's anger was on Judah and Jerusalem, and he handed them over to be a horror, an astonishment, and a hissing, as you see with your eyes." (2 Chr 29:8) This language parallels the anger and idolatry about which we read in Isa 3 – 5. The restoration in ch. 2 is fulfilled by the coming of Hezekiah, who "did what was right in Yahweh's eyes" and "opened the doors of Yahweh's house and repaired them." The Chronicler goes on to state that Hezekiah, "brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the broad place on the east and told them: 'Listen to me, you Levites: purify yourselves now, and purify the house of Yahweh, the god of your fathers, and cast away the unclean things out of the holy places.'" (29:5)

Looking deeper into Isaiah 2-5, we recognize that Isaiah was writing about an invasion from the forces of the king called Sarganu (Sargon, c. 711 BCE = Sin-ahhi-eriba). The



coming judgment was referred to as Yahweh's day (2:12). This is the same language that we see regarding judgment elsewhere, and it is the same language that the NT uses. The language of ending the necessity to fight – beating swords into plowshares – is reversed later on by Joel (ch. 3). In Isaiah's time God was about to judge his people, and to end the conflict with Assyria.

### Isaiah 13-14

*"The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw....*

*"Howl, for the day of Yahweh is near; it is coming like destruction from the Almighty. (v. 6)*

*"For look, Yahweh's day is coming – cruel both with emotion and rage – to **make the whole habitation a desolate place**, and to destroy the sinners from it. **For the stars of the sky and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be darkened in his going forth, and the moon will not give its light.** And I will visit the badness of the whole habitation, and the sin of the impious, and I will stop the arrogance of the proud, and will humble the high-minded.*

*"The remnant will be more rare than refined gold, and the human being will be more valuable than the ore of Ofir.*

*"For I will **make the sky shake**, and the land will quake from its place, on account of the anger of Yahweh of the hosts, and the day of his fierce anger. (vv. 9-13)*

*"And Babylon, which is called glorious among kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be like when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will not be inhabited for the time of the age, nor will it be lived in for many generations.... (v. 20)*

This passage was written during the Exile, well before the time of Cyrus. After the death of Nabu-kudurri-usur II (Nebuchadnezzar) in about 562 BCE, the kingdom of Babylonia went into turmoil. Between 562 and 556, the much weakened Babylon was ruled by Amel-Marduk (562-559), then Nergal Sharra-usur (559-556) and Labashi-Marduk (556). The Medes (v. 17) were God's agent of destruction here. The city was not literally destroyed, nor did the stars and moon stop shining, but Babylon's power was devastated forever. After this, the last Babylonian kings, Nabu-na'id and Bel-sarra-usur, were actually Assyrians. This was followed by the empire's final conquering by Koorush (Cyrus); during this time and afterward, Babylon spent many years with but a shadow of its former glory.

### Isaiah 24-27

*"Look, Yahweh is depopulating the habitation, laying waste to it, ripping its surface and scattering its inhabitants. ... The land will be completely depopulated and completely plunder, for Yahweh's mouth has said these things.... Now the land is being polluted by its inhabitants, since they have violated the Torah, altered the statutes, and broke the everlasting covenant....*

*"The broken city is wasted. Each house is shut so that none may enter.... Desolation is left in the city, and the gate [or houses] are forsaken to ruin.*

*"All of these things will be in the land in the midst of the nations, shaken like the shaking of an olive tree – like the gleanings when the grape harvest is over. [Those who remain on the land] raise their voices, they call out for joy; they call out from the sea about Yahweh's glory....*

*"For the high windows have been opened, and the foundations of the land are shaking. The land is broken with trouble; the land is divided; the land is confused ... For its lawlessness has overpowered it. It will fall, never to rise again.*

*"It will happen that day that Yahweh will punish the creation in heaven and the kings of the land on earth. They will be gathered like prisoners in a pit and will be shut up in the prison, and they will be visited after many days.*

*LXX: "Then the bricks will be baked, and the wall will fall down,"*

*MT: "Then the moon will be ashamed, and the sun will pale,*

*"because Yahweh will rule in Zion and in Jerusalem, and he will be glorified in the presence of the old people."...*

*"Because Yahweh's hand will [give] rest on this mountain, and Moab will be trampled in its place, like straw is trampled in the urine of a manure pile." ...*

*"For he has humbled those who live in the high places: the secure city. He has laid it low; he casts it to the ground; he beats it down to dust."...*

*"Yahweh our God, others have ruled over us besides you, but we will name only your name. The dead do not live, nor do their ghosts rise. You have punished them; their memories are destroyed."...*

*v. 19 MT: "Your dead will live; my corpses will rise. You who lie in the dirt, wake up and shout for joy.*

*v. 19 LXX: "Your dead will live; those who lie in the grave, wake up and shout for joy." ...*

*"My people, proceed. Enter your rooms, and close your doors behind you. Hide for a short time until [Yahweh's] rage has passed. For, look, Yahweh is about to come out from his [holy] place to visit the sin of those who live on the land. And the land will reveal its blood and will not hide its murdered.*

*"In that day, with his holy and great sword Yahweh will punish Leviathan the fleeing snake: the perverted dragon. And he will execute the dragon that is by the sea."*

*"And it will be in that day that Yahweh start threshing, from the flowing river to the brook of Egypt, but you will be gathered up one by one, sons of Israel. And it will be in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and*

*those who were being destroyed in the country of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and bow down to Yahweh on the holy mountain at Jerusalem."*

This section was likely written just around the time when the Assyrians overran the northern kingdom of Israel (722 BCE), during the Assyrian siege of Tyre (724 – 720 BCE). Assyria had conquered Moab at around 735 BCE, so the two forces were united at the time.

In chapter 10 of his own book, Hosea records that a (Moabite) king named Shalman (=Salmanu) sacked and destroyed a place called Beth-Arbel ("House of God's Court"). In 2 Kings 13, we read about roving bands of Moabites that began to enter the land of Israel, beginning with the death of Elisha, one hundred or so years before this oracle. The mythical beast, Leviathan the dragon, is to be identified here with Nineveh, the great city of Assyria. Nineveh is also the "great fortified city" of 25:2.

At 26:14, the dead who will no longer live is a reference to the Assyrians along with their gods, which do not really exist and will be forgotten. At 26:19, the author makes a deliberate contrast with what he said earlier in vv. 13-14:

*"Yahweh our God, others have ruled over us besides you, but we will name only your name. The dead do not live, nor do their ghosts rise. You have punished them; their memories are destroyed."* Clearly, the author is not writing about a future bodily resurrection for everyone. In fact, the dead "not living" is equated with the oppressors being forgotten by history. However, God was going to restore the Israelites to their country. In verse 19, "your people will rise to life" was intended in that same context. When the author writes, "leave your graves and shout for joy," he calls upon the oppressed readers themselves – the "dead" – to praise God for what he was about to do for Israel. The oppressors will be forgotten, but God has remembered his people. There is nothing here about the afterlife, and there is nothing here about a bodily resurrection for everyone.

## **Isaiah 65-66**

*"For, look, I am creating a new sky and a new land, and the earlier things are not remembered – nor do they ascend into the heart.*

*"But rejoice and be glad forever that I am the creator, for, look, I am creating rejoicing in Jerusalem, and gladness in her people. And I have rejoiced in Jerusalem, and have been joyful in my people. Not heard in her anymore is the sound of weeping, or the sound of crying.*

*"In it, there is no more a newborn baby or an elderly man who does not complete his days, for the young man will die one hundred years old, and the hundred-year-old sinner is cursed. And they have built houses and lived in them – and planted vineyards, and eaten their fruit. They do not build, and have another live. They do not plant, and have another eat. For*

*as the days of a tree are the days of my people, so also my chosen people will consume the work of their hands. They do not work for emptiness, nor do they produce for trouble, for they and their offspring are the seed of the blessed Yahweh.*

*And it has happened. They do not still call, and I answer. They are still speaking, and I am listening. Wolf and lamb feed as one, and a lion eats straw like an ox. As for the serpent, dust is its food. They do no injustice, nor do they ruin, at all on my holy mountain,' said Yahweh!*

*Yahweh said this: 'The sky is my throne, and the land is my footstool. What is this house that you are building for me? And where is this, my place of rest? Hasn't my hand made all of these things? And all these things mine,' says Yahweh. 'And to this one I look attentively: to the humble and quiet in spirit, and who trembles at my message.'"*

These chapters likely were written just after the exile, c. 539 BCE. Upon returning to the land, the Israelites discovered people living in the land. Some seemed to lack a concern about a return to temple life. At the beginning of chapter 65, we read about that state of affairs. When Israel returned to the land they were strangers. He let himself be found by those who were not searching for him. He opened his arms to an estranged people (65:2), who ignored his teachings (65:4). Some people among them, however, were devout. Applying a saying about wine to himself (v.8), God insisted on sparing Israel on account of the good people who were there.

The bad people would receive their own punishment (vv. 11-16), while the good would be blessed (65:17ff.). In the new state of affairs (v. 17), the sins of the past would be forgotten. Relatively speaking, there would be peace and prosperity (vv. 18-21). Unlike the time before the Exile, during which people constructed homes that wound up being seized and lived-in by others, people would have enough security after the Exile to build homes that they themselves would live in (vv. 22-23). In this, then, evil has been defeated, and there is peace (vv. 24-25).

As for Solomon's temple, it was not fully reconstructed and rededicated until 516 BCE, but God points out that it was never necessary to begin with (66:1-2); his people may serve him without it. The book concludes with the God affirming through the prophet that Yahweh's enemies would be destroyed and that the new state of affairs would include Israelites returning from all over the region (66:18-19). This is indeed what happened.

## **Ezekiel 38-39**

*And it happened that Yahweh's message came to me, saying, "Mortal, turn your face toward Gog, that is, the land of Migog, the ruler of Rosh Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy about him.*

*And tell him this, 'Yahweh the Lord says this: Look, I am on top of you, Gog, the ruler of Rosh Meshech and Tubal. And I will lead you together – you and all your power and horses, and cavalry (with their chests clothed), all the large gathering, with shield and helmet and sword: Persia, and Ethiopia, and Libya – all with helmets and shields; Gomer and all those around him; the house of Thorgama, from the far north, and all those around him; and many nations around you.*

*“Be prepared, and prepare yourself – you and all your gathering (those who are gathered with you) – and you will be a guardian for me. You will prepare for many days, and at the last year you will go and exit into the land that is returning from the sword – gathering many nations into the land of Israel, which happened to have been made wholly desolate, and which left the nations, and they all lived in peace.*

*“And you will rise up like the rain, and you will go out like a cloud to fully cover the land, and you will be there, and all those who are around you, and many nations with you.*

*“Yahweh the Lord says this: And in that day it will be that a declaration will arise in your heart, and you will consider an evil consideration. And you will say, <<I will rise up on a land of rejection. I will go out to the quiet people in their quietness, that is, to those who live in peace: all of them living on the land without being walled, or barred, and without there being doors. I will take loot, and I will take their spoils – to turn back your hand to the desolate place that was lived in, and to a nation that was gathered from many nations to make a possession – to live at the navel of the land.>>*

*“Sheba, and Daidan, and merchants of Karthage, and all those with hair will say to you, <<Are you coming to take loot, and to take spoils? Have you gathered your gathering to take silver and gold, to carry away the possession, to take spoils?>>’*

*“On account of this, prophesy, mortal, and say to Gog, ‘Yahweh says this: <<During that day when my people, Israel, live in peace, won't you awaken? And you – and many nations with you – will leave your place in the remote north, all to ride horses: a great gathering, that is, a large power. And it will be in later days that you will rise up as a cloud over my people, Israel, to cover the land. And I will lead you up to my land so that will know me when I am made holy in you in their presence.>>’*

*“The Lord Yahweh says this to Gog: ‘You are the one about whom I spoke before, in the earlier days, through the hand of my slaves, Israel's prophets, in those days and year: to lead you to them. And in that day, in the day when Gog comes to the land of Israel, it will be – the Lord Yahweh*

says – that my emotion and my jealousy will arise in the fire of my rage. I have spoken, that indeed in that day there will be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. And at the presence of Yahweh, the fish of the sea, and the birds of the sky, and the animals of the field, and all the reptiles that crawl on the land, and all the human beings on the face of the land will quake. And the mountains are to shatter, and the valleys are to fall, and every wall on the land is to fall.

“And I will call him to all fear,’ says Yahweh, ‘A person is to war with his brother. And I will judge him: I will rain down death, and blood, and overwhelming rain, and hailstones, and fire, and the divine – on him and on all those who are around him, that is, on the many nations that are with him. And I will be magnified, and made holy, and glorified, and in the presence of many nations they themselves will know that I am Yahweh.’

“And you, mortal, prophesy to Gog, and say, ‘Yahweh says this: <<Look, I am on you, Gog – ruler of Rosh Meshech and Tubal. And I will gather you, and I will guide you, and I will make you rise out of the remote north, and I will lead you up to the mountains of Israel. And I will knock the bow from your left hand, and I will make your arrows fall from your right hand, and I will cast you down onto the mountains of Israel, and you will fall – you, and all those who are around you; that is, the nations that are with you: for you to be given to the fullness of all the flying birds. I will give you to all the wild animals to be devoured. You will fall on the surface of the field, because I said so,>> says Yahweh.

“And I will sent out fire to Gog, and to those who are living in the islands in peace, and they will know that I am Yahweh. And my holy name I will make known in the midst of my people, Israel, and they will not profane my holy name any longer, and I will make known to the nations that I, Yahweh, am holy in Israel.

“Look, and know that it is coming and will be,’ says the Lord Yahweh, that is, ‘the day about which I am speaking. And those who are living in the cities of Israel will go out, and set fires, and heat tools: shields; and poles; and bows; and arrows; and hand-staves; and spears. And they will burn them in fire for seven years, and by no means will they take wood out of the fields, or cut any from the forests; on the contrary, the tools will burn the fire, and they will loot those who loot them, and take spoils from those who take spoils from them,’ says Yahweh.

“And in that day, it will be that I will give Gog a place (to be named) of remembrance in Israel: the mass grave of those who travel along to the sea, and they will build around the mouth of the chasm, and there they will bury deeply Gog and all of his crowd, and they will call the land the mass grave of Gog.

*“And for seven months the house of Israel will bury them deeply in order to cleanse the land. And all the people of the land will bury them deeply to the point of renown. It is a day when I will be glorified, says Yahweh. And through everything, men who journey on the land will separate, to bury those who are left behind on the face of the land, to cleanse it after the seven months, and they will chase.*

*“And all those who go through the land and notice a human bone will construct a sign next to it, until the buriers bury it in the land of the mass grave of Gog. For also, the name of the city is Mass Grave, and they will cleanse the land.*

*“And you, mortal, say this: ‘Yahweh says, Say to every winged bird, and to all the wild animals of the field, <<Gather and come. Gather from all the places around my sacrifice – which great sacrifice I am burning for you on the mountains of Israel. And you will eat meat and drink blood. You will eat the meat of giants, and you will drink the blood of the rulers of the land – rams, and bulls, and goats. And the bulls will all be fat ones. And you will eat suet until you are full, and you will drink blood until you are drunk from my sacrifice which I have burnt for you. And at my table you will be filled with horse, and giant cavalry, and all male warriors,>> says Yahweh.’*

*“And I will give out my glory among you, and it will be apparent to all the nations: my judgment that I made, and my hand that they were led to. And from that day on, the house of Israel will know that I am Yahweh their God. And all the nations will know that the house of Israel was exiled on account of their sins, as a result of their ignoring me. And I turned my face away from them, and I handed them over into the hands of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword.*

*“According to their uncleanness, and according to their lawless deeds, I did to them, and I turned my face away from them. On account of this, the Lord Yahweh says this, ‘Now I will return to Jacob’s captivity, and I will be merciful to the house of Israel, and I will be jealous on account of my holy name. And they will take their dishonor, and the injustice that they committed against me, while they live on their land in peace, and the frightening things will not be. As I return them from the nations and gather them to me out of the hands of the nations, I will be made holy in the presence of the nations. And they will know that I am Yahweh their God, during my exiling them to the nations. And I will no longer turn my face away from them, as a result of having poured out my anger on the house of Israel,’ says the Lord Yahweh.”*

This passage was written about the return from the Exile. It is parallel to and expands upon the prophecy of Jeremiah about the return, found in chapter 25 of his own book.

The prophet here uses names of nations taken in part from Genesis 10, but the identification is the same here, including the reference to the north (25:9).

In both accounts, the oracles begin with an introduction of Babylon as an agent of God, sending many Israelites into exile. In Jeremiah, the author begins his description of the nations surrounding Israel – which would be overwhelmed by Babylon – with the south, then moves to the southeast, the southwest, then the east, the west, and finally winds up in the north (25:19ff.). Both accounts shift focus toward a judgment of all nearby nations (Jer 25:30), which Ezekiel dwells on inasmuch as it relates to the end of the Exile.

Ezekiel personifies the land of Migog (or Magog) as a person, Gog – one of the names borrowed from Genesis. Gog represents the leaders of the Neo-Babylonian empire, from Nabu-Kudurri-Usur II through Nabu-na'id, being also an embodiment of the Babylonian Empire: to which God speaks directly in the oracle. *“You are the one about whom I spoke before, in the earlier days, through the hand of my slaves, Israel's prophets, in those days and year: to lead you to them.”* This is a deliberate reference to Babylon. The readers are expected to know from earlier prophecies that God was talking to Ezekiel about the Babylonian Empire.

The role that Babylon played in judging God's people, so prominent in those earlier prophecies, is mentioned again in the summary portion of this one:

*“And all the nations will know that the house of Israel was exiled on account of their sins, as a result of their ignoring me. And I turned my face away from them, and I handed them over into the hands of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword.”*

However, this oracle extends as far as the coming of Cyrus the Great. Cyrus began a rebellion against his grandfather, who ruled the Medes. After three years of uprisings, he took over the Median Empire in 550/549 BCE. This subjected the Medes to the Persians, and in 546 BCE Cyrus assumed the title “King of Persia,” after having taken over the Lydians in 547 BCE. Cilicia turned against Babylon and began supporting Cyrus and the Persians. After that, Cyrus turned his attentions to Babylon and Egypt.

The Persians' advances took control of more territories to the east, and then turned to the west – toward Babylon itself. The Elamites of Susiana accepted Cyrus without conflict. According to the Chronicle of Nabu-na'id, when the Persian forces moved toward Susa, the capital of Susiana, the Babylonians withdrew – knowing that Cyrus was going to take the capital without much conflict. After that, on the way to Babylon, Cyrus' forces encountered resistance at Opis – a strategic river city north of Babylon itself. Nabu-na'id's son and co-regent, Bel-sarra-usur (Belshazzar), may have been killed in the battle of Opis. The battle was hard-won and resulted in many casualties. With the battle won, in early October (539 BCE), Persian forces moved to Sippar, on the banks of the Euphrates. The city surrendered without conflict, and Nabu-na'id's forces – including the ruler himself – fled. According to Herodotus, the Persians diverted the Euphrates river, lowering it enough that they were able to storm Babylon by following the river's path underneath the city walls. Nabu-na'id surrendered and fled, as Cyrus



conquered Babylon on October 7 or 12, 539 BCE. Cyrus himself entered Babylon later that month, assuming the titles once possessed by Nabu-na'id. The Neo-Babylonian empire ceased to exist at this point in time – never to return.

The prophecy in Ezekiel refers to the end of that empire as the creation of a mass grave. It was the empire itself that suffered utter defeat and slaughter, with many of its own people accepting Persian domination. The prophecy forecasts Cyrus' conquering and ultimate destruction of the Babylonian Empire, leading toward the conclusion of the Exile. *"As I return them from the nations and gather them to me out of the hands of the nations, I will be made holy in the presence of the nations."*

The Israelites viewed Cyrus not as a conqueror but as a liberator: a role that he fancied. In contrast to Nabu-na'id's perceived tyranny, Cyrus immediately issued a decree of cultural, linguistic, and religious freedom – perhaps the first of its kind in the world. The Cyrus Cylinder, which the Persian ruler ordered placed under a Babylonian temple, states in part, "All the people of Babylon, Sumer, and Akkad, princes and governors, fell down before him and kissed his feet. They rejoiced in his sovereignty; their faces shone." This is not far from the truth. The cylinder tells how he restored the city and its people, and how he respected the local cultures. It is the coming of Cyrus that is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Ezekiel 38-39.

### **Micah 1:1-5**

*"And it happened that Yahweh's message came to Micah the Morashtite in the days of Yotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw about Samaria and about Jerusalem.*

*"Peoples, hear the message. Pay attention, land and all that is in it; and Yahweh will be a witness against you – Yahweh, from his holy house. Because, look, Yahweh will leave his place, and will descend, and will trample the high places of the land. And the mountains will be melted underneath him, and the valleys shall be ripped apart – like wax in the presence of fire; like water flowing down a cliff.*

*"Because the impiety of Jacob are all these things, and for the sin of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's impiety? Isn't it Samaria? And what is Judah's sin? Isn't it Jerusalem?*

*"And I will place Samaria as a heap in the field, and as a place for the planting of vineyards; and I will pull down its stones into chaos, and I will reveal its foundations.*

*"And all of its carvings will be cut to pieces, and all of its rented buildings will be burned with fire, and all of its idols will I make disappear; since she has gathered them from the rented buildings of a prostitute, and they will return to the rented buildings of a prostitute."*

A contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, Micah lived during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He wrote the early chapters to explain what was going on in the land of Israel. The oracle predicts the desolation of Samaria and a later invasion of Jerusalem. This prophecy

came true when Assyria overran Samaria in 722 BCE. However, the mountains did not melt. The valleys were not torn apart. God did not literally trample the land. These things were metaphors.

After referring to the seizure of the kingdom of Israel, Micah describes the destruction of the cities in Judah during the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE. This passage is interesting because the cities' fates are not literal but are plays on words, based on the names of those cities in Hebrew. Micah forecast judgment on Israel because of its idolatry, and God's agents were going to melt those idols. I recommend Bruce K. Waltke's commentary on Micah for more detail.

#### **Micah 4**

*And it will be in later days that Yahweh's mountain will be apparent, made ready on the mountain peaks, and it will be raised above the hills; and the people will hurry to it.*

*And many nations will go and say, 'Come, let's go up to Yahweh's mountain, and into the house of Jacob's god. And they will show us his path, and we will walk in his tracks.' Because the Torah will go out from Zion, and Yahweh's message from Jerusalem.*

*And he will judge in the midst of many peoples, and will convict strong nations far away. And they will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. And nation will not lift up a sword against nation; neither will they learn war anymore. And everyone will rest under his vine, and every one under his fig-tree; and there will be no one to frighten them: for the mouth of almighty Yahweh has said these things.*

*Because each of the nations will walk in its own way, but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God for the age and beyond.*

*Yahweh says, 'In that day I will gather the bruised and will receive the one who was cast out, and those whom I rejected. And I will place the bruised one to be a remnant, and the one who was rejected to be a mighty nation: and Yahweh will be king over the ones in mount Zion from now on, and for the age. And you, tower of the flock, daughter of Zion, the rule will come and enter you'; that is, the first kingdom from Babylon: that of Jerusalem's daughter.*

*And now, why do you call out? Isn't there a king for you? Or has your plan perished, because pangs like those of a woman in labor have come to you? Be in labor and give birth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor: for now you will leave the city, and will stay in the field, and will reach as far as Babylon. From there Yahweh your God will rescue you, and from there he will redeem you out of your enemies' hands.*

*And now many nations have gathered against you, saying, 'We will rejoice, and our eyes shall look upon Zion.' But they don't know Yahweh's thoughts and have not understood his plan, because he has gathered them like sheaves of the threshing floor. Get up, and thresh them, daughter of Zion, because I will place your horns to be iron, and I will place your hooves to brass. You will crush many nations, and will devote their fullness to Yahweh, and their strength to the lord of all the land.*

This oracle was probably looking toward the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE, using the language of Isaiah 2, which concerned King Ahaz. The details illustrate for us a response to the things that were going on there in the late VIII century, BCE. Jerusalem was under siege (ch. 3), but eventually Yahweh would rescue it. The author predicts a scattering of the people, but there is hope here for peace and restoration. The reference to Babylon has caused many commentators to place this oracle during the Exile, and this indeed is a possibility. If that is the case, the author is predicting the reconstruction and rededication of the temple in 516 BCE. However, there is no doubt that the prophecy was fulfilled several centuries before Jesus.

### **Haggai 2:1-9**

*On the twenty-first of the seventh month, Yahweh's message came to Haggai the prophet saying, "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Yehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying, 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? And don't you see it now like nothing in your presence? And now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says Yahweh. 'And be strong, Joshua son of Yehozadak, the high priest. And be strong all you people of the land,' says Yahweh. 'And work; for I am with you,' says Yahweh almighty. '[I have established what I covenanted with you when you left Egypt.] My spirit continues in your midst; you will not fear,' since Yahweh almighty says this:*

*"Yet once and for all, I will shake the sky, and the land, and the sea, and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and they will come – the chosen of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says Yahweh almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' says Yahweh almighty. 'The glory of this later house will be greater than the first one,' says Yahweh almighty, 'and in this place I will give peace,' says Yahweh almighty."*

This passage was a prophecy given by God in the year 520 BCE, to which the author of Hebrews refers in chapter 12. In Hebrews, the writer indicates that something similar was about to happen (in 70 CE, a few years after the treatise was authored) to what had happened years ago – as Haggai had predicted. Hebrews cites Hag 2:6 as "Still once and for all I am shaking not only the earth but also heaven." Similar language (to Hag 2:6, 2:21) occurs in Luke's version of Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple. This was not what Haggai was originally predicting. Once again, the newer authors

were borrowing language from an earlier prophecy as a means of indicating that something similar was about to occur. People who were familiar with what had happened before would know exactly what Jesus and the author of Hebrews meant to convey.

We read this in Haggai 2:6, *“For Yahweh almighty says this: Yet once and for all, I will shake the sky, and the land, and the sea, and the dry land.”* The Septuagint and the NT citations of the passage contain no reference to time here. The Masoretic text adds a word that may mean “soon” or may mean “a small thing,” or even that the oracle consists of “a few words.” This oracle (and the one found at the end of the chapter) predicts a change in the state of affairs. It further predicts that the temple that was being rebuilt by Zerubbabel (2:2) would be occupied (vv. 3, 9), and that it would be better than Solomon’s original temple. This second temple was completed less than three years after Haggai’s prophecy and was dedicated for use in 516 BCE.

What about the changes regarding the nations? Cyrus had sacked Babylon in 539 BCE, during the Battle of Opis. In the years surrounding Haggai’s oracle, Babylon rebelled more than once – achieving independence briefly in 521-520 and again in 514 BCE. The rebelling king, Arakha the Armenian, called himself “Nebuchadnezzar IV” in order to give credence to his claim of rightful authority, but his efforts were thwarted. This time, the city was re-captured by the Persians, who destroyed parts of the city’s defensive walls. Babylon was never independent again, and Arakha wound up being the last “King of Babylon.” So, Haggai did indeed intend to convey that the destruction of Israel’s enemies would happen soon.

## **Zechariah 12 – 14**

*The commission of Yahweh’s message about Israel. Yahweh, the one who stretched out the sky and established the land and molded the human spirit within him, says, “Look, I am placing Jerusalem as a threshold of shaking for all the surrounding peoples. The surrounding of Jerusalem will also be in Judah.*

*“And on that day I will place Jerusalem as a rock of treading for all the nations. All who tread on it will mock themselves. And on it will gather together all the nations of the land.*

The authors of the section, Zech. 9 - 14, “Second Zechariah,” probably wrote during the late Fourth Century (9-11) and Third Century BCE (12-14). Unlike the previous eight chapters, the author does not mention Zechariah. Zech 9:13 mentions the “children of the Greeks” (τα τέκνα των ἑλλήνων), who did not enter the equation in Palestine until the advent of Alexander. The focus of these chapters is not on the restoration of the temple but on an impending conflict between the people of Judah and the surrounding nations. Egypt in particular is singled out, which is an important fact. After the demise of Alexander, his kingdom was divided into four basic pieces. At that time, the

Ptolemies who ruled Egypt also controlled the Holy Land. However, by the final quarter of the Third Century BCE, the Jewish people were looking for a change.

Chapters 12 and 14 are parallel to one another, showing different aspects of the same events. In this chapter, Jerusalem's strength is emphasized, but in chapter 14 we will see that the conflict in the surrounding area was not an easy one.

Jerusalem a “rock of treading” in the Septuagint, but it is a stone of lifting in the Masoretic Text. If the MT is correct, stones of lifting were used in ancient Greece for physical therapy and in weightlifting contests. Smaller stones would be lifted above the head, and the competitors would also try to lift large boulders off the ground. One inscription, on an ancient lifting stone weighing over 1000 pounds, explains that a certain Eumastas, the son of Kritovoulos, lifted the stone from the ground.<sup>76</sup> A cup (shown right) housed in the Wurzburg Museum displays a young competitor lifting two large rocks (c. 500 – 450 BCE). During the Hellenistic period, knowledge of this sport made its way to Palestine.



If the LXX reading is correct, Jerusalem would be a stepping stone over which the nations would trip and fall. Either way, when there was an attempt to take Jerusalem, it would result in mockery for the countries involved, for although there were changes in rulership coming, Jerusalem would be protected.

*“On that day,” says Almighty Yahweh, “I will strike every horse with amazement, and its rider with insanity. But for the sake of the house of Judah I will open wide my eyes, and I will strike all the horses of the peoples with blindness. And the commanders of Judah will say in their hearts, ‘We will find for ourselves those who live in Jerusalem in Almighty Yahweh, their god.’”*

The wording here appears to be an extension of the curse in Deuteronomy for violating the Torah. There we read, “Yahweh will strike you with insanity, and blindness, and mental amazement.” (Dt. 28:28) Here we find amazement, insanity, and blindness all together. Immediately before mentioning the curse of blindness, God provides a dichotomy. God will open his eyes wide; the horses will be made blind. The horses likely refer to the Jewish people who resist the change toward freedom. They would be resisting the Torah, and hence the curse is directed toward them.

The Septuagint has “we will find for ourselves,” emphasizing that the military leaders will look toward Jerusalem. The Masoretic Text calls Jerusalem's residents “the strength” of Judah, for they would defend their way of life fiercely if they had to do so.

*“On that day I will place the commanders of Judah as a flaming pot in a wood, as a flaming lamp among grain. And they will devour all the*

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<sup>76</sup> *Cyprus 2010*, Junior and Under 23 weightlifting competition program, p. 16 (2010).

*surrounding peoples at the right and left, while Jerusalem will still be inhabited in its place.*

A fire placed as described here will ignite and spread rapidly. God tells Zechariah that the defenders of Judah would easily defeat the occupying force. “Jerusalem will be inhabited” uses language of the return from the Exile to express the return of Jewish customs and security to the region.

This may refer to the coming of Antiochus III (the Great) into the region. By the time of the writing, the Jewish people were growing annoyed with the rule of the Ptolemies. They welcomed the advances of Antiochus III, who initiated campaigns expanding his own kingdom.

*“And Yahweh will save the tents of Judah, just as at the beginning, that my boasting of the house of David and the pride of those living in Jerusalem would not be greater than that of Judah. And on that day, it will be that Yahweh will protect those who live in Jerusalem, and on that day the weak among them will be like the house of David, but the house of David will be like God – like Yahweh’s messenger – in their presence. And on that day, I will seek to remove all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And onto the house of David and those who live in Jerusalem I will pour a spirit of generosity and mercy.*

In the early history of the region, both Bethlehem and Hebron had been as important as Jerusalem. Here, God would spare cities throughout the region – not just the city itself. At that time, David was a mighty warrior. Here, the purpose is so that the Jerusalemites would be equal to the other residents of Judah. The promise here is that everyone from the strongest to the weakest would be protected by Yahweh. The weak would be like David’s army – strong warriors. And the strongest warriors would be like the messenger of God that led the Israelites out of Egypt – out of captivity and into the promised land. In that day, says God, he would remove the occupying forces (the Egyptians) from the area of Jerusalem. In this act, God would be merciful to Jerusalem.

*“And when they gaze at the one whom they pierced, they will mourn for him, as though mourning for a beloved one, and they will grieve as over a firstborn.*

The verses that follow this one provide a reminder of the death of King Josiah. In 2 Chr 35:20ff., we read that Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt expressed that he did not want to fight Josiah’s people, the kingdom of Judah. Instead, his conflict was with the Babylonians, who were about to attack the Assyrian capital (Karkemish) in northern Syria or southern Turkey. Josiah wanted a fight, and Necho’s archers wounded him fatally. He retreated to Jerusalem, where he died and was laid to rest. The account says that “And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women spoke of Josiah in their lamentations.”

As a result of the combat, Judah fell under the influence of Egypt. Necho returned from his combat in Assyria and captured Josiah's son, who died in exile. He also imposed a tribute on the people of Judah.

The application here may be to the death of Ptolemy IV (Philopator), who is described in the intertestamental book known as 3 Maccabees. The Septuagint reading of this section uses the verb *κατορχεομαι*, which would literally indicate dancing in triumph over someone. It deals with treating someone badly rather than physically wounding them. Both this reading and the reading in the Masoretic Text may harmonize if applied to Ptolemy IV.

Ptolemy's rule in Egypt was a weak one; however, in 217 BCE, Ptolemy personally oversaw the defeat of Antiochus III in an important battle at Raphia. This temporarily kept Antiochus from advancing further into the territory controlled by Ptolemy. According to the "Maccabean" account, Ptolemy was supported by the Jewish people at the time, but on his way back to Egypt from Syria, he stopped in Jerusalem. There, he reportedly insisted on visiting the Most Holy Place in the temple. The high priest, Simon II, prayed in opposition to this action, and God took action. "He shook him on this side and that as a reed is shaken by the wind, so that he lay helpless on the ground and, besides being paralyzed in his limbs, was unable to call out, since he was entwined by a just judgment."<sup>77</sup> In place of "entwined" or "smitten" (RSV, NRSV), the NRSV notes in the margin that "other ancient authorities read *pierced*." The historicity of the miracle is in doubt among scholars, but his humiliation may have been historical.

Here, Ptolemy was humbled and sent home. The action taken against him in Jerusalem was described in some versions of 3 Maccabees as being "pierced." Thus, he was both pierced (MT of Zech 12) and humiliated (LXX of Zech 12). Despite the fact that Ptolemy's response was to oppress the Jewish people living in Egypt, Ptolemy was not entirely despised. According to Maccabees, he tried to salvage himself by ultimately issuing a statement in support of the Jewish people (ch. 7). By and large, the rule of the Ptolemies had been good for Judea.

Ptolemy IV died in approximately the summer of 204 BCE. Because the death was not recorded by historians, it is widely believed that his close associates kept his death a secret until some of his affairs could be put into order.

Simon II, the high priest who reportedly confronted Ptolemy, died at about this time – although the date and circumstances are uncertain (due to a lack of records) – might alternatively have been the pierced one. Some place his death as early as approximately 200 BCE, while others believe he may have survived until c. 185 BCE. Although this fits better with the analogy to Josiah, the obstacle to this view is that there is no record of his death – and there would be no reason for the Jewish people to have celebrated his defeat (making the LXX simply wrong).

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<sup>77</sup> 3 Macc 2:22

*“On that day of the mourning in Jerusalem they will [mourn] as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmone in the valley of Megiddo. And the land will mourn, each tribe by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their women by themselves; the tribe of the house of Nathan by itself, and their women by themselves; the tribe of the house of Levi by itself, and their women by themselves; the tribe of Shimi by itself, and their women by themselves; and each of the remaining tribes by itself, and their women by themselves.*

We have seen that the author was referring to the death of Josiah, which took place during a war between Egypt and a northern foe. Here, around 200 BCE, the Jewish people mourned the death of the pierced (or disgraced) one. It was at this time that the advancing armies of the Seleucid kingdom took advantage of Egypt's weakened state. After victories back and forth across the region (recorded by Josephus in *Antiquities* XII), Antiochus III finally took control of the holy land. With that success, Palestine was wrested permanently from the Ptolemies of Egypt.

*“On that day a fountain will be opened up for the house of David and those who live in Jerusalem, [for a removal of offences.]*

*“And on that day,” says Yahweh, “I will cut out the names of the idols from the land, and there will be memory of them no long. And I will remove from the land the false prophets and the spirit of uncleanness. And if a person still prophesies, it will be that his father and mother who gave birth to him will tell him, ‘You will not live, because you are speaking lies at Yahweh’s name.’ And his father and mother who bore him will pierce him while he prophesies.*

Josephus reports that the Jewish people “suffered greatly” on account of the conflict between Ptolemy and Antiochus. Near the end of the conflict, the Judeans supported Antiochus. Josephus indicates that Antiochus rewarded this support:

"Since the Judeans, upon our first entrance on their country, demonstrated their friendship towards us, and when we came to their city [Jerusalem], received us in a splendid manner ... and joined with us in ejecting the garrison of the Egyptians that were in the citadel, we have thought fit to reward them, and to revive the condition of their city, which has been greatly depopulated by such accidents as have befallen its inhabitants, and to bring those that have been scattered abroad back to the city. ... I would also have the work about the temple finished, and the cloisters, and if there is anything else that ought to be rebuilt...and let all of that nation live according to the laws of their own country; and let the senate, and the priests, and the scribes of the temple, and the sacred singers, be discharged from poll-money and the crown tax and other taxes also. And that the city may the sooner recover its inhabitants, I grant a discharge from taxes for three years to its present inhabitants, and to such as shall come to it, until the month Hyperheretus. We also discharge them for the



future from a third part of their taxes, that the losses they have sustained may be repaired. And all those citizens that have been carried away, and are become slaves, we grant them and their children their freedom, and give order that their substance be restored to them."<sup>78</sup>

Contrary to the reported actions of Ptolemy, Antiochus also ordered that "It will be legal for no foreigner to come within the limits of the temple round about; which is forbidden also to the Jews, unless to those who, according to their own custom, have purified themselves."<sup>79</sup>

This permission of the people to purge the land of idols and to live by their own customs was a blessing to the Jewish people. As in Ezekiel 36:16-28, the language indicates a protection against "unclean" associations with gentile nations. Just as Antiochus allowed exiles to return to their homeland, Ezekiel had indicated, *"I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God."* (Ezek 36:24-28)

Here we read of the banishing of the false prophets from the area, due to the restoration of Jerusalem. Numerous false prophets had surrounded the first temple and had been the source of consternation for God's people. Josiah's reforms (2 Kgs 22-23) called for the execution of false prophets. Now with the second temple standing, God calls for a stronger purge of false prophets from the land.

*"And it will be that on that day that prophet will be ashamed at his seeing visions and at his prophesying. And he will not put on a hairy coat so as to deceive, and he will say, 'I am not a prophet, since I am a worker of the land, because a man brought me up this way from my youth.' And if someone asks him, 'What are these wounds in the middle of your hands?' he will say, 'The ones with which I was wounded in the house of my beloved ones.'*

The oracle depicts the false prophets as being so disgraced that their prophecies do not come true that they will abandon the practice entirely. Stereotypically, prophets wore furry garments or sackcloth (to separate themselves from the rest of society), and in this scenario the false prophet will avoid being deceptive – he will not dress like a prophet. Their shame would be so great that they would return to whatever vocation in which their families had instructed them. The wounds mentioned here are the ones referenced earlier – given by his family when they ordered him not to prophesy, but he will say instead that his friends wounded him. The false reason may be that he did a poor job (in the example, as a tiller of the soil) and so was chastised. This would be preferable to facing the disgrace of a false prophet. The divine statement intends to

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<sup>78</sup> *Antiquities*, Josephus, XII:3:3-4

<sup>79</sup> *Antiquities*, Josephus, XII:3:4

express how much the people will hate false prophecy in Jerusalem around the second temple, compared to the generally lax attitude toward them while the first temple was standing.

*“Wake up, oh sword, against my shepherd,  
and against the man who is my citizen,” says Almighty Yahweh.  
“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; and I will turn my  
hand against the little ones. In the whole land,” says Yahweh, “two parts  
will be cut off and be destroyed, and the third part will remain in it. And I  
will put this third through the fire, and refine them as one refines silver,  
and I will test them as gold is tested.”*

*“They will call out my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are  
my people’; and they will say, ‘Yahweh is my god.’”*

Because of the connection that 13:7-9 have with chapter 11, some commentators place these verses together with that chapter. Others infer from the content that the passage likely belongs here in chapter 13. I will address both possibilities.

In 11:6, we observe that the shepherds represent the gentile kings that rule over Judea in the authors’ times. In that narrative, several shepherds appear. The first, represented by the prophet, is Ptolemy III, the Egyptian king who reigned from 247 to 222 BCE. Ptolemy III greatly increased the taxes levied against the Jewish people. Furthermore, Josephus indicates that he installed an unscrupulous tax collector who maximized his own profit. During the rule of Ptolemy III, three Seleucid kings died – although Ptolemy was not actually responsible. These were Antiochus II (who died right after Ptolemy ascended to the throne), Seleucus II, and Seleucus III. The foolish shepherd of 11:15f. is his successor, Ptolemy IV. These verses do follow well after 11:17, but since we see that chapter 12 also correlates to the death of Ptolemy IV and his removal from power over Judea, it is not necessary to remove these verses to chapter 11.

Yahweh summons the sword with which he threatened Ptolemy IV in 11:17. The sheep are all of Ptolemy’s subjects, including especially those in Judea. As the forces of Antiochus III battled with Egypt, many people died in the struggle between these two gentile nations that would have control over Palestine. Those who survived indeed expressed a greater devotion to God. In the end they supported Antiochus, who emerged as the victor, and they celebrated their newfound freedoms as also they rebuilt.

*Look, a day is coming for the Lord, when the spoils taken from you will be  
divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to  
battle, and the city will be taken, and the houses will be plundered, and the  
women will be defiled. Half of the city will go out into captivity, but the rest  
of my people will not be cut off from the city. And Yahweh will go out and  
fight against those nations just as he fights on a day of battle.*

This chapter retells the events of chapter 12 from a different perspective. The surrounding nations – Syria; Egypt; and their allies – gathered in Judea around Jerusalem to do battle. This is the prediction of the prophet about the same event about which Yahweh has just spoken. He portrays the battle for the control of Judea as a war against the people of Jerusalem. The city would be taken. It would be plundered. Although chapter 12 foresees a positive conclusion, the battles ahead were going to be brutal. Still, God himself would defend Jerusalem from both Egypt and Antiochus, so that it would not be destroyed.

*On that day his feet will stand on the Mountain of Olive Trees that is opposite Jerusalem on the east, and the Mountain of Olive Trees will be split in two – toward the east and toward the sea – by a very wide valley, so that one half of the mountain will slope to the north, and the other half to the south. And the chasm of my mountains will vanish, for the valley of the mountains will be joined to its flank. And it will be blocked as it was blocked during the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. Then Yahweh my god will come, along with all the holy ones with him.*

The Mountain of Olive Trees is important in this apocalyptic vision for two reasons. First, its location permits the description of cutting across it from east to west. This separates the north from the south. That is, the author predicts (for the time being) an end to the conflict between the Ptolemies in the south and the Seleucids in the north. God will separate them from one another – via the Mountain of Olive Trees. The other importance attached to the mountain is given in Ezek 11:23. As the first temple was destroyed, God's divine presence left its place and paused over the Mountain of Olive Trees before leaving the area during the Exile. This provides the mountain with an important significance, as it indicates the presence of God.

The “earthquake in the days of Uzziah” occurred when the king sought to enter the temple and burn incense there. He was opposed by the priests (2 Chr 26:16f.) and contracted leprosy. At this time, the earthquake (mentioned in Amos 1:1) occurred. The author may be paralleling Uzziah's having wanted to enter the temple with the oral tradition of Ptolemy IV attempting to do the same thing.

The valley that is joined to its flank is where the Gihon spring comes down. The Gihon spring was the source of natural spring water for Jerusalem. The temple, however, was supplied with water by Solomon's aqueduct, which ran from Hebron. It was indeed blocked after the earthquake.

*On that day there will be no light, or cold, or frost. And there shall be one day, and that day will be known to Yahweh, and there will be neither day nor night, but at the evening there will be light.*

*On that day living waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the former sea and half of them to the latter sea. It will be in summer and in winter.*

Here, weather extremes appear to symbolize the battles back and forth between the gentile forces that were running over the land. Instead of constant battle, one force would be allowed to rule the area for the foreseeable time. In place of the requirement of a spring, Jerusalem itself would be the source of running water for all of Judea. This is similar to the description of Eden from which rivers went out to water the land nearby.

The reference to having light in the evening seems to indicate that when it looks like darkness will overwhelm Jerusalem – that is, when it appears that the land may be destroyed in battle – God would come to protect his people, turning the land into a garden.

This paradise is an adaptation of Ezekiel 47. Ezekiel was describing the return from the Exile, beginning with the temple. The last two chapters of that book describe the effects of the restored temple on the nation of Israel, including the nation's boundaries. From God's throne in the temple would flow water: "issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar." (Ezek 47:1)

Ezekiel's vision continues in detail, explaining how this river from the temple would water the region, "And wherever the river goes every living creature which swarms will live...everything will live where the river goes." (Ezek 47:9) The vision of Zechariah depicts the flowing waters going from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean. This represents God's teachings filling Judea, and so we read:

*And Yahweh will be one king over all the land. On that day both Yahweh and his name will be one – in all the surrounding land from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem will remain in its high place from the Gate of Ben-Yamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hanan-El to the king's winepresses. And it will be lived in, for there will never again be a curse, and Jerusalem will live in security.*

Immediately after Ezekiel's vision of the river, he describes the borders of Israel. Paralleling that description, this account does the same. Rimmon refers to Umm er-Rammamin, ten miles northeast of the more famous marker, Beersheba, which had in earlier days marked the southern point of the land. Beersheba was abandoned some time before the Exile and remained as such through the date of Zechariah 14. Geba was the north-easternmost fort in the kingdom of Judah, and the expression "from Geba to Beersheba" appears in 2 Kings 23:8.

In the description, Jerusalem would be elevated over all of Judea; that is, God and his Torah were going to be supreme throughout the land, as the Jewish people were once again allowed to practice their customs.

*And this will be the plague with which Yahweh will strike all the people who wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will melt while they are still standing on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will melt in their mouths.*

The prophet promises a great plague on all those who try to make war with the people of the city of Jerusalem. That is to say that the city is under God's protection, and no one will be able to destroy it.

*And on that day a great astonishment from Yahweh will happen to them, so that each one will grasp his neighbor's hand, and his hand will be grasped in his neighbor's hand. And Judah will fight in Jerusalem. And the strength of all the surrounding nations will be collected: gold, silver, and clothing in great abundance. And a plague like this one will happen to the horses, the mules, the camels, the donkeys, and whatever animals are in those camps.*

Some commentators interpret this as saying that if an army tries to fight in Jerusalem, God would cause them to fight one another instead. Others say that it extends the flesh-melting to whoever would enter the region and harm Jerusalem. If any nations try to destroy the city, its citizens will win, as indicated in the vision by their taking tribute from the invaders.

*Then whoever remains of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the king, Yahweh almighty, and to keep the Feast of Booths. And if any of the tribes of the land do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the king, Yahweh almighty, these things will rain on them. And if the tribe of Egypt does not go up or come, then on them will be the rain of the plague with which Yahweh will smite the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. This will be the sin of Egypt and of all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths.*

The permanent celebration of the Feast of Booths is an indicator that Jerusalem will not be destroyed, for the feast commemorates the wandering that the Jewish people suffered for forty years as they made their pilgrimage from Egypt into Palestine. In this vision, whatever people remain of the armies that try to destroy Jerusalem will convert to Yahweh and will celebrate Jerusalem's permanence as a symbol of God's power.

Since the forces of Ptolemy IV are the focus of the oracle as a whole, the author explicitly mentions Egypt, just as it was from Egypt that the Israelites had fled many

years earlier. The penalty for not recognizing God's sovereignty in the region was to smite the land with a plague of drought.

*And on that day there will be inscribed on the horses' bridles, "Holy to the Lord." And the pots in Yahweh's house will be like the bowls in front of the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to almighty Yahweh, so that everyone who sacrifices would come and take from them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there will no longer be a trader in the house of almighty Yahweh on that day.*

In conclusion, the people will be so happy that God has prevented Jerusalem's destruction that they will dedicate every item they own to God. Thus, every citizen would serve God. Some say that the closing reference to a trader (or "Canaanite") means that no one will need to sell holy bowls and pots because everyone will already possess them. Others connect this with the false prophets.

### **Reapplications of Zechariah 11-14 to Jesus in the New Testament**

Matthew 19:37 uses the reference to the "pierced one" from Zechariah 12. In Zechariah, the piercing may not have been literal, but with respect to Jesus it certainly was. In the original context, the people would mourn the one who was pierced, and this is what happened in Jesus' case.

Mt 26:31 references striking the shepherd. In Zechariah, the shepherds represent kings, and Jesus is the Messianic king. Striking the shepherd refers to killing him, which is exactly what Jesus alluded to, and his own students probably experienced the same state of disarray that was present in the Ptolemaic empire after the king's death.

In Zechariah 11, playing the role of the king, the author took his wages (30 silver pieces) and cast them into the temple treasury. Matthew 27 depicts Judah Iscariot as similarly refusing to keep his wages; he tosses them into the temple.

John applies the imagery of both Ezekiel 47 and Zechariah 14:8 to the people who accept his message (Jn 7:37f.). This extends the metaphor of a river flowing out of Jerusalem to each person who embraces the Messiah and his explanation of the Torah. The extension is not far out of context. The running water has the same significance, so that Jesus merely points to the individual instead of the city as the source of that water.

A brief summary of that portion of Zechariah 12 concerning the lament of the people over the "pierced one" is mentioned in Rev 1:7. Nothing there is outside the scope of the synoptic reference.

# Chapter Seven

*"On December 6, 167 BC, Antiochus polluted the sanctuary's altar, by sacrificing unclean animals such as a pig and by placing in the temple an idolatrous statue of the Greek god Zeus Olympias that bore an image of Antiochus' own face."*

*Rose Guide to the Temple, Randall Price, p. 71 (2011)*

## COMMENTARY ON DANI-EL

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These notes on the book of Daniel (Dani-El) are an abridgement and partial expansion of this author's commentary on Dani-El found at this location: <http://www.friktech.com/rel/dacom.htm>

### Authorship and Date:

Since the text of Dani-El is in a conflated state -- as though it has been developed over the years -- there are several theories of its composition. Some generally conservative scholars regard the entire book as having been written during the VI century BCE, dismissing the problems associated with such an early date: that portions are in Aramaic; that the later sections are not chronological; that certain Greek words appear in the book; that the book was still being added to when the Septuagint was translated.

On the other hand, most liberal scholars regard the entire book as being the product of the II century BCE. Since much of the content appears to address second century concerns, this identification makes sense, but it too does not explain the compound state of the work.

I propose the following theory, which unfortunately is as complicated as the textual state of Dani-El:

1. During the period shortly after Cyrus (Koorush) the Great's death (in 529 BCE), and probably c. 525 BCE, the original section of the book was written down in Aramaic. This section now comprises a segment from 2:4 through the end of chapter six.
2. Chapter seven was composed sometime during the Hellenistic period (after 332 BCE) and possibly was fleshed out after the advent of Antiochus IV (c. 171 BCE) but before the end of the Maccabean Revolt (c. 165-4 BCE). The new section largely borrows from the ideas in chapter two, applying them to the Maccabean Revolt. With the addition of chapter seven, the Aramaic portion appears to have a structure wherein chapters 4 and 5 are somewhat parallel, chapters 3 and 6 are somewhat parallel, and chapters 2 and 7 are somewhat parallel.

3. Sometime beginning in the III century BCE, translations into Greek were made and three sections of Dani-El were written down in Greek: "Susanna"; "Azariah's Song and the Prayer of the Three Young Men"; and "Bel and the Serpent". Adjustments were also made to the existing Greek text, resulting in textual differences. These differences, due to the fact that the text was still developing, were cleared up by Theodotian (II CE), who standardized the Greek text by comparing it to the then-existing Hebrew text.
4. Immediately prior to the Maccabean Revolt, the book received an editing in Hebrew. A new introduction was created, replacing a similar (but likely insufficient) one in Aramaic. The Greek sections were eliminated, and several oracles in Hebrew were added, including those that served to interpret the Aramaic oracle in chapter seven. These Hebrew sections were translated into Greek, and (due to their content) fragments are found at Qumran (1Q71-2; 6Q7; a citation in 11Q13 from the I century BCE).

## Chapter 7 – The Four Wild Animals

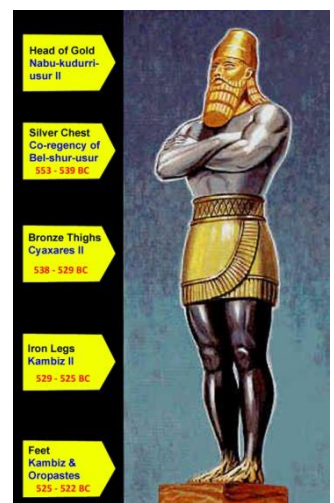
*In the first year of Bel-shur-usur king of Babylon, Dani-El had a dream and visions in his head as he was lying on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and explained its content.*

Thus begins a vision which does not fall into line chronologically with the original section of Dani-El. The timing of the vision itself is unimportant. It is possible that the visions recorded in chapters seven through twelve were obtained by Dani-El and retained as oral tradition until near the time of their fulfillment. More likely, the visions were received by later prophets and collected in Dani-El's name because of the similarity of the events foretold in them and the events in Dani-El chapter two.

*Dani-El said: "I saw in my vision at night, and look, the four winds of the sky were stirring up the great sea. Four large wild animals, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.*

This section distinguishes itself from what was written earlier because the author writes in the first person. The author sees a vision not of four parts of the same idol (as in chapter two) but of four different animals. The images in chapter two represent rulers over Babylon: Nabu-kudurri-usur II, Bel-shur-usur, Cyaxerxes II, Kambiz II, and the rulership of Kambiz with Oropastes. The separate creatures in chapter seven also represent kings. The imagery is of the primordial ocean, from which various monsters were supposed to arise. Some authors suppose that the sea represents chaos, but the Mediterranean Sea may be intended. The four winds coming together on the sea indicate a storm.

*The first one was like a lion, but it had the wings of an eagle. As I watched, its wings were torn off and it was lifted off of the ground*





*and made to stand on two feet like a human being. And a human mind was given to it.*



Of the four animals, the lion is the one recognized as the most noble. The eagle was considered the noblest of birds, and so this creature was the noblest of the four. But its wings were removed, and it became human. The representation of the first king as a lion with eagles' wings is not uncommon, since Babylonians used such an animal from time to time as a symbol signifying themselves. Nabu-kudurri-usur II (Nebuchadnezzar) is intended here. He is represented as a mythical creature that was placed on earth in human form. This is how highly Nabu-kudurri-usur II was revered in the neo-Babylonian empire.

*And in my presence there was a second animal that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three tusks in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, "Get up and eat much flesh!"*

The bloodthirsty bear was the second animal. The author does not say who authorized it to eat flesh, but he presumes that the reader will realize that the authority to grant such a prerogative comes from God. This animal represents Bel-shur-usur, as a reference from Amos indicates. "It will be darkness and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him" (5:18-9) refers to the departure of a good king (Nabu-kudurri-usur) and the arrival of an inferior one (Bel-shur-usur). Bel-shur-usur himself is mentioned by name in the following chapter of Amos, and the Talmud refers to him as a tyrant.

*I watched after that, and look, there was another one that looked like a leopard. And it had four wings like a bird's on its back. This animal had four heads, and it was given rulership.*

The third animal was given still more authority – not only to kill but also to rule. The leopard was swift, and the bird's wings made it still faster. This was Cyrus the Great. The leopard is native to Persia and few other countries. Cyrus conquered rapidly and deposed the others. Cyrus conquered the kingdoms around him, eventually wearing the crowns of Media, Persia, Lydia, and Babylonia. The famous cuneiform "Cyrus cylinder" declares him to be "king of the four corners (of the land)" and proclaims him to be more pleasing to the gods than his predecessor in Babylon.



*After that, I watched in my night vision, and look, there was a fourth animal - terrifying and frightening and very strong. It had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed its victims and trampled whatever was left with its feet.*

The fourth and final animal is described as the most terrifying of all. Interestingly, it was not "given" authority, but the author appears to insinuate that it imposed its rule on

others. It is not described as being "like" any earthly animal; instead, this man is a monster. This was Alexander the Great, who – being from Makedon, did not inherit rulership in Persia, or in Egypt, or in Asia, or in Palestine. Instead, he conquered all of them.



*[It was different from all the previous animals, and it had ten horns. I was thinking about the horns, and look, there was another horn, a little one, sprouted among them. Three of the former horns were uprooted by it. And look, this horn had eyes like a human being's eyes and a mouth that spoke great things.]*

Without the mention of the horns, the vision appears to belong to an earlier period, c. 325 BCE. A later author/prophet seems to have added the reference to the horns so that they refer to events that occurred in the II century BCE. Since Dani-El was still being added to in the IV century BCE, and since its translations into Greek in the III century contained differences, these indicators of an unfinished book were likely what caused Dani-El not to be placed by the early sages among the Prophets; the book is found in the Writings, the third section of the Hebrew Bible.

The author of this section draws attention to the horns because they are important to his interpretation. As he wonders what the horns mean, he notices that the horn represents a boastful person.

*As I looked, thrones were set into place, and an Old One took his seat. His clothing was white like snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool. His throne was flaming fire, and its wheels were burning with fire. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from his presence. Thousands of thousands served him; ten thousands of ten thousands stood before him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*

The Old One is reminiscent of certain non-Jewish tales. For example, Charon, the boatman who has power over the transition from death, appears as an old man in *The Frogs* by Aristophanes (c. 405 BCE). Nereus appeared as a wise old man in the *Iliad* (c. 800 BCE). Nanna, the Lord of Wisdom in Sumerian mythology, is also an old man. The metaphor of fire represents judgment, and indeed all of the imagery depicts imminent judgment. The fact that the figure is an old man conveys the wisdom of the coming judgment.

*[Then I watched because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking.] As I looked, the wild animal was slaughtered, and its body was destroyed and handed over to the burning fire. The other animals had their rule taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.*

The fourth animal, described only in terms of a monster, is put to death because of its unnatural monstrosity. The other animals were not executed in the judgment. The fire

here is the fire of destruction, which often accompanies judgment. The extension of the lives does not represent the persons themselves. Neither does it represent their kingdoms, most of which ended with the death of the ruler. This refers to their memory, their legacy. The others would be remembered somewhat fondly, but when Alexander died the Judean people would try to put him out of their minds as though he had never existed.

*I watched in my vision at night, and look, there was someone who seemed mortal, coming with the clouds of the sky. He approached the Old One and was led into his presence. He was given rule, and glory, and the kingdom. All peoples, nations and races of every language would bow to him. His rule is an everlasting rule that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.*

Coming with the judgment ("with the clouds of the sky") was a human being -- someone who seemed mortal rather than divine. The "mortal" is a representation of the Jewish people. Each of the rulers in succession had reigned over Palestine, but after the Old One stripped the fourth animal of its power, he gave that power to the mortal, because the mortal was found worthy in judgment.

*I, Dani-El, worried spiritually, and the visions in my head bothered me. I approached one of those who was standing there and asked him for the truth about all of this. So he told me and made the meaning of these things known to me.*

The author asked someone in his vision to explain the four animals, and he received an explanation (which follows). He did not ask the Old One for the interpretation but merely someone who was standing there -- an onlooker in the judgment proceedings. This represents the prophet himself providing the definitive interpretation of the symbols.

After Alexander's downfall, the Jewish people were promised that some time later would come a period of regional self-rule. The second state of Daniel 7 agrees with chapter 8 in extending the judgment on Alexander to certain members of the less noble Seleucids who ruled Palestine after Alexander's death.

*"The four great animals are four kings who will rise from the land. But the Highest One's holy ones will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever - yes forever and ever."*

The animals represent four kings: Nabu-kudurri-usur; Bel-shur-usur; Cyrus; and Alexander the Great. A later interpretation follows in chapter eight. The "mortal" is a representation of the Jewish people. After Alexander's downfall, the Jewish people are promised that some time later will come a period of Jewish rule. The representation of the first king as a lion with eagles' wings is not uncommon, since Babylonians used such an animal from time to time as a symbol signifying themselves.

*[Then I wanted to know the truth about the fourth animal, which was different from all the others and was very terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws -- the animal that devoured and crushed its victims and trampled whatever was left under its feet.*

The first three animals, and even their identity, are unimportant. The judgment comes upon the fourth animal -- the fourth king. The description of the animal is repeated for emphasis; it is in this manner that the fourth animal is different from the earlier three. This probably belongs in the later section.

*...and about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that sprouted, before which three of them fell -- the horn that had eyes and eyes and a mouth that spoke great things and which seemed greater than the others. As I watched, this horn warred against the holy ones and was victorious over them, until the Old One came and judgment was given for the Highest One's holy ones, and the time came when they received the kingdom.*

The later addition mixes the metaphor with the reality of the identification (of the "mortal" and Israel). In the vision, there had been no war between the mortal and the fourth monster, just as Alexander was not at war with the people of Israel. But this human horn is described as dominating Israel at the time of the judgment.

*He said this: "As for the fourth animal, there will be a fourth kingdom on the land that will be different from all the kingdoms and will devour the whole land, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones. He will put down three kings. He will speak against the Highest One and will oppress the Highest One's holy ones and will think to change the times and the law. The holy ones will be handed over to him for a year, two years, and a half a year.]*

In the earlier section of chapter seven, the animals were kings, not kingdoms. Instead of judging Alexander, God (the Old One) will now judge the remains of his kingdom in the II century BCE. The earlier kingdoms now represent those of Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Makedonia/Greece – in relation to Israel. This identification is made on the basis of the author's understanding of chapter two and the earlier section of chapter seven.<sup>80</sup>

Alexander's empire was European in origin, and Alexander had imposed Hellenization on the people of his empire, establishing Greek as the official language and imposing certain customs on his areas of conquest. Alexander had often represented himself as Herakles, and after his death he was deified.

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80 A similar listing of Neo-Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Makedonia appears in the Sibylline Oracles (IV: 49-101).

But the later author is not as concerned with Alexander, who had died in 323 BCE, as he is concerned with the Seleucid kings, who emerged after Alexander eventually to govern the region which contained Judah, just as the Ptolemies ruled Egypt. These consisted of: Seleucus I (312-280 BCE); Antiochus I (280-261), called "Savior"; Antiochus II (261-246 BCE), called "God"; Seleucus II (246-226 BCE); Seleucus III (226-223 BCE); Antiochus III (223-187), called "the Great"; Seleucus IV (187-175 BCE), called Philopator; Antiochus IV (175-164 BCE), called Epiphanes; Antiochus V (164-162 BCE), called Eupator; Demetrius I (162-150 BCE), called "Savior". The Jewish people achieved some level of freedom under Demetrius, making peace with Syria in 158 BCE. They allied with his successor, Alexander Balas (the usurper), and with Demetrius I and Demetrius II after Balas was defeated. In 141 BCE, the Jews obtained some self-rule, but with strife. After the death of Antiochus VII in 128 BCE, Judea became a more or less independent state under priest/ruler John Hyrcanus by 115 BCE. He expanded Judean influence in 113 BCE and again in 110 BCE with successful campaigns against Samaria and the people living in the Transjordan region. That strength remained until 63 BCE when the Roman Period began.

As they will in chapter eight, the ten horns represent the Seleucids and Ptolemies who reigned in Judea after Alexander. The "little horn" that rose from among the others represents Antiochus IV, who called himself "the Illustrious One" (Epiphanes). Antiochus bribed and murdered his way to the reins of rulership, plundered and desecrated the temple, and sold the high priesthood. The time of three-and-one-half years represents half of the Jewish number of perfection. That number also corresponds to the period of persecution under Antiochus. 1 Macc 1:41-43 report that he ordered the Jewish people to give up their customs, something that many of them did.

*"But the court will sit, and his rule will be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. Then the kingdom, rule, and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the holy ones, the Highest One's people. Their kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will bow down and listen to them."*

The author predicts that after the downfall of Antiochus IV, the Jewish people will increase their self-rule until the other nations recognize it and listen to them.

*This is the end of the matter. I, Dani-El, was very worried by my thoughts, and my color became pale, but I kept the matter in my mind."*

The presumed author, Dani-El "kept the matter in his mind." This is the author's device for revealing that the oracle had been written down several centuries after the life of the historic Dani-El. Dani-El himself had not revealed these things, but they had been given to a later prophet who wrote in the style of Dani-El.

This ends the Aramaic portion of Dani-El. The oracles that follow are intended to be read in the order in which they are included, with each one explaining the previous ones

in more detail. These later oracles were compiled shortly after the inclusion of chapter seven in its final form. Because they are based in part on chapter seven, chapters 7-12 are normally considered as a unit.

## **Chapter 8 – Vision of the Ram and the Goat**

*In the third year of the reign of king Bel-shur-usur a vision appeared to me, even to me, Dani-El, after the one that had appeared to me earlier.*

The author of this section relates the current vision to the vision in chapter seven, for certain of the imagery is the same.

*And I saw things in the vision. When I saw, I was in the fortress of Susa, which is in the province of Elam. And when I saw in the vision, I was by the river Ulai. Then I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and, look, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last.*

Susa was the winter capital of the kings of Persia, located east of Babylonia. Daryashah I and Ardeshia Deraz Dast (Artaxerxes) I built palaces there. Susa was the location of Alexander's victory celebration and wedding in 324 BCE. The Ulai River borders the northern side of Susa. By the time of writing, the area had been fully Hellenized. The ram is a noble two-horned animal, and here it is represented fully naturally.

*I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; and no animals could stand before him, nor was there anyone that could rescue people from his hand. Instead, he did whatever he wanted, and he made himself great.*

The empire represented by the ram spread out in all directions, overcoming the other nations that had existed previously. The identity of the two horns will be spelled out shortly.

*And as I was thinking, look, a male goat came from the west over the face of the whole land, and it was not touching the ground. Now the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. And he approached the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing by the river, and he trampled him in a powerful rage.*

Even as the former empire (the ram) was spreading, along came a more powerful expanding empire (the goat). The goat is an animal that was largely undesirable and not as noble as the ram. It came from the west, Makedonia, and overwhelmed the previous empire. The spread of this new empire is described as rage.

*And I saw him approach the ram, and he was aggravated against him. He struck the ram and broke his two horns, and the ram was powerless to stand in his presence. Now he tossed him down to the ground and trampled over him. And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his hand.*

The empire represented by the ram was utterly destroyed by the onslaught of the newer empire. Such destruction indicates that the new empire imposed its own culture on the peoples and nations that it conquered.

*And the male goat greatly strengthened. And when he was strong enough, the great horn was broken. Instead of it four conspicuous ones sprouted, pointing toward the four winds of the sky. And out of one of them came out a little horn which grew toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the place of glory -- it became very great.*

The new empire, represented by the goat, had originally been unified under one horn. That great horn broke, and now four others appeared in its place. From one of these horns came a smaller horn, representing a portion of the goat's empire. This smaller empire occupied the southeastern portion of the goat's empire, including the "place of glory" -- the land of Judea.

*And it grew great, even to heaven's host, so that it cast down some of the host of the stars, and it trampled over them. Yes, it continued to make itself great, even to the prince of the host. And it took away from him the continual burnt-offering, and the location of his holy place was overthrown. And the host was handed over to it, together with the continual burnt-offering on account of the detestable thing. And it cast truth down to the ground, and it acted and prospered.*

Even against "the stars," also called "heaven's host," the new empire proved itself unstoppable. It "trampled" God's people, the Jewish people. It imposed its culture on them, too, to the point of angering God (the "prince") by profaning the temple, so that the offerings could no longer be made there on behalf of the people. Something detestable would cause the temple's defilement.

*Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to whatever one was speaking, "How long will the vision of the continual burnt-offering, and the desolating detestable thing last, causing both the holy place and the host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "After two thousand and three hundred evening and morning times, then the holy place will be cleansed."*

From the execution of Oniah III – the cessation of the legitimate priesthood – until the rededication of the temple would be 2300 days, or about seven years, including a time

of about 3 ½ years while the temple was out of use – the same time frame as described in chapter seven.

*And after I, even I Dani-El, saw the vision, it happened that I tried to understand it. And look, someone stood before me who appeared like a human being. And I heard someone's voice between the banks of the Ulai that called out, saying, "Gabri-El, make this man understand the vision."*

God himself directs his messenger, Gabri-El, to explain the vision. A "human-like" figure is a "geber," and so there is a play on words in the name, Gabri-El, which means (roughly) "God's man." This is the first occurrence of Gabri-El in the Bible. Gabri-El is also mentioned in conjunction with the sending of the Anointed One (Luke 1); based on the surrounding context this is almost certainly an indicator that the Messiah was to be connected with the destruction of the temple.

*So he neared where I stood, and when he approached, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he told me, "Understand, mortal, that the vision belongs to the time of completion."*

The messenger explained that the events that he saw would not begin to take place during the life of Dani-El but would happen later on, at the appropriate time of completion (or "time of the end"). The expression "end time" has caused great confusion, but it was only intended to signify a later time when the events would unfold.

*Now as he was speaking with me, I fell into a deep sleep face down on the ground. But he touched me and set me on my feet. And he said, "Look, I will make known to you what will be in the later time of rage. For it belongs to the appointed time of completion."*

Again the messenger stresses to the prophet that the conflict of empires and the involvement of the people of Israel are not for the time of Dani-El but for some later period. This literary device points the period of the time of writing in the II century BCE.

*"The ram that you saw, that had the two horns -- the horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the shaggy male goat is the king of Greece: and the large horn between his eyes is the first king."*

The Medo-Persian empire is the empire represented by the ram. Even as the empire was spreading, it was weakening. For approximately one hundred years, the empire had been seized by rebellions and ruled poorly. After two men in line for the throne were poisoned, Codomannus (or Darya-Shah III) ascended to power in 336 BCE. Codomannus had planned to retake Egypt, but all of his achievements were to amount to nothing, for Alexander defeated him for the first time in 333 BCE. Within three years, Alexander had taken the empire. It is Greece that is represented by the goat, with Alexander himself being the "first king" of the great empire.



*"And as for the horn that was broken, in the place of which four stood up, four kingdoms will rise from his nation, but not with his power.*

After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, his kingdom was divided among his successors ("diadochi"), who fought for control. The power was ultimately split into four segments: Greece/Makedonia (ruled by Kassander); Asia Minor (ruled by Antigonos); Egypt (ruled by Ptolemy); and the northern Middle East (ruled by Seleucus). As the account indicates, none of their kingdoms ever rose to the stature of Alexander's.

*And in the later time of their kingdom, when the wanderers have fully come, a king with a bold attitude who understands dark sayings will arise. And his power will be mighty, and he will cause frightening destruction and will act in prosperity. And he will destroy mighty ones and the holy people.*

The author's concern is not the dissolution of the Greek Empire but the second century BCE Seleucid kingdom. Here as in chapter seven, the "little horn" represents Antiochus IV, a bold king who was skilled in intrigue. Instead of "frightening," perhaps "confusing" is closer to the word: the destruction caused by Antiochus created great wonderment. He was known to be both ruthless and political. Antiochus' destruction of "mighty ones" is not surprising, but together with that he destroyed pious Jews living in Israel -- the "holy people." Antiochus rose to prominence in 175 BCE.

*"Through his cunning he will make deceit prosper under his hand, and he will make himself great in his own mind. Now while they think they are secure, he will destroy many, even also standing up against the prince of princes. But he will be broken by no human hand.*

Although the kingdom of Antiochus was not the empire of Alexander, Antiochus is recorded as having bragged of his own greatness. In Judea, innocents were slaughtered -- even those who thought they were safe. In desecrating the temple -- slaughtering pigs there and erecting a statue of Zeus -- Antiochus is portrayed as rivaling God. The expression, "detestable desolating thing" is a word play, for the word sounds like the word "Shamem," and "Ba'al Shamem" -- Lord of the Heavens -- was a title of Zeus Olympias. 2 Macc 6 mentions this explicitly, also indicating that Antiochus demanded that the Jewish people stop making sacrifices, stop adhering to the Torah, and leave behind the ways of their ancestors.

Not long after this the king [Antiochus IV] sent an Athenian senator to force the Jews to abandon the laws of their ancestors and live no longer by the laws of God, also to profane the temple in Jerusalem and dedicate it to Olympian Zeus, and the one on Mount Gerizim to Zeus the Host to Strangers, as the local inhabitants were wont to be. This was a harsh and utterly intolerable evil. The Gentiles filled the temple with debauchery and revelry; they amused themselves with prostitutes and had intercourse with women even in the sacred courts. They also brought forbidden things into the temple, so that the altar was covered with abominable offerings prohibited by the laws.

No one could keep the sabbath or celebrate the traditional feasts, nor even admit to being a Jew. Moreover, at the monthly celebration of the king's birthday the Jews, from bitter necessity, had to partake of the sacrifices, and when the festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were compelled to march in his procession, wearing wreaths of ivy.

Following upon a vote of the citizens of Ptolemais, a decree was issued ordering the neighboring Greek cities to adopt the same measures, obliging the Jews to partake of the sacrifices and putting to death those who would not consent to adopt the customs of the Greeks. It was obvious, therefore, that disaster had come upon them. Thus, two women who were arrested for having circumcised their children were publicly paraded about the city with their babies hanging at their breasts and then thrown down from the top of the city wall. Others, who had assembled in nearby caves to observe the seventh day in secret, were betrayed to Philip and all burned to death. In their respect for the holiness of that day, they refrained from defending themselves. (2 Macc 6:1-11, UCCCB)

*"And the vision of the evenings and mornings that was told is true. Now you seal up the vision, for it belongs to many days later."*

In completing the explanation, Gabri-El explains again that the vision pertains to the time of Antiochus IV and not the time of Dani-El. Therefore, the vision was "sealed up" until the II century BCE. (Contrast this with the language in Revelation, where the vision was NOT to be sealed up because it DID relate to John's own generation.)

*And I, Dani-El, passed out, and was sick for some days. Then I got up and took care of the king's affairs, but I was appalled at the vision, which I did not understand.*

In the narrative, Dani-El "did not understand" the vision because it was not for his own people but for the people of the II century BCE.

## **Chapter 9 – The 490 Years**

Daniel 9 begins with another – newer vision. This chapter was written after the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes and prior to its restoration.

*In the first year of Darya-shah the son of Achash-verosh, of the stock of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign I, Dani-El, understood from the scrolls the number of the years about which the declaration of Yahweh (for the accomplishing of the desolations of Jerusalem) had come to Jeremiah the prophet; that is, seventy years.*

The title, Achash-verosh ("Ahashuerus") indicates a ruler with the personality of a lion, a "lion king." In this case, this refers to Astyages, the Median. His two children were Cyaxares (Darya-shah) and Mandane. Mandane married Kambiz I and became the mother of Cyrus the Great. Thus, this is the same Darya-shah the Mede who was mentioned in the Aramaic section of Dani-El. The oracle is set during 539/8 BCE, after Babylonia fell to the Medes and Persians.

Jer 25:1 places the time of Jeremiah's oracle about the seventy years in 605 BCE. The number 70 is a round number representing the length of the Babylonian Exile (which took place from 587 BCE until c. 536 BCE, although the temple was not rededicated until 515 BCE). The number itself probably indicates the death of the complete generation of the people who had gone into the Exile. The author of Dani-El chapter nine sees an extended period. Writing as though the Exile were about to end (538, remember?), the author received a prophetic interpretation that views the current state of affairs as about to end.

*And I turned toward the Lord God, to seek the answer through prayer and questions, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed to Yahweh my God and made an acknowledgement, saying, "Oh, Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy with those who love him and keep his precepts, we have sinned, and have twisted the Torah, and have done evil, and have rebelled, turning aside from your precepts and tenets. Nor did we listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.*

Just as Jeremiah had recognized that the sins of the people of Israel had caused God to judge the nation and to send them into exile, the author of this chapter sees the nation's sins as being responsible for the current state of affairs (under Antiochus IV). He begs forgiveness both for his own sins and for the sins of the people.

*"O Lord, justification is yours, but ours is shame of face even to this day. To the men of Judah, and to the residents of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, through all the countries where you have driven them, because of the wandering that they have wandered away from you.*

*"O Lord, ours is shame of face -- to our kings, to our princes, and to our ancestors -- because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness. For we have rebelled against him; we haven't listened to the voice of Yahweh our God, who said to walk in his instructions that he placed in our presence through his servants the prophets.*

*"Yes, all Israel has wandered from your instruction, turning aside, so as not to listen to your voice. Therefore the curse and the oath that is written in the Torah of God's servant Moses have been poured out on us. For we have sinned against him, and he has established those words of his that*

*he spoke (against us and against our judges who judged us) by bringing on us a great bad thing. For under the whole heaven nothing has been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.*

The author looks at himself and on his people with disgrace, because the people themselves are to blame for what Antiochus has done. He reads the Torah (Dt 28:15ff.) and sees the penalties for not "listening to Yahweh's voice" and not "keeping his precepts," and he applies the passage to the Jewish people of second century BCE Israel. Judgment has come to them, just as judgment was promised by God through Moses. Those people who gave themselves over to the idols worshipped by Antiochus brought on themselves the curse mentioned by Moses (Dt 27:15) and affirmed by all the people. And so, it should not surprise the reader that the promise of Dt 28:36 (to be dominated by nations with other gods) would happen. It may be that the author of chapter nine views the people as having been idolatrous even prior to the coming of Antiochus.

*"As it was written in Moses' Torah, all this badness has happened to us: yet have we not begged for the favor of Yahweh our God, so that we should turn from our iniquities, and have discernment in your truth. Therefore Yahweh has watched over the bad thing, and has brought it to us; for Yahweh our God is just in all those deeds that he does, but we have not listened to his voice.*

The passage brings to mind the typical prayers for forgiveness, for the people of Israel were often promised that if they changed their minds and returned to God, then he would show favor to them. The author states bluntly that since the people have not asked forgiveness, God has allowed the desecration of the temple to happen. In his eyes the people are without excuse. The use of the term "watched" is probably present to remind the reader of Jeremiah, where the almond tree (Jer 1:11) is used as a symbol for God's watchfulness. The prophecies of Jeremiah portray God as watching for the proper time to carry out his judgments and redemption. This was a play on words in Hebrew, since watching (**shaqad**) and almond (**shaged**) are similar-sounding.

*"And now, oh Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and who made yourself famous, even to this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly.*

With one final acknowledgement of the sins of the people, the author points out that he remembers the mighty deeds of God. Often the people are faulted for not remembering, but the author has returned to remember, and to listen to God. Having acknowledged his own faults and those of Israel, the author then begs for forgiveness and recognizes that everyone who sees Jerusalem and the state of Israel realizes that God chastens his people when they desert him.

*"O Lord, according to all your ethics, I pray, let your anger and your rage be turned away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain, because for*

*our sins and for the lawless deeds of our ancestors, Jerusalem and your people have become a reproach to everyone around us.*

Having acknowledged his own faults and those of Israel, the author begs for forgiveness and recognizes that everyone who sees Jerusalem and the state of Israel realizes that God chastens his people when they desert him.

*"Now therefore, our God, listen to the prayer of your servant, and to what he asks, and make your face shine upon your desolated holy place, for the Lord's sake. Oh my God, give your ear and hear. Open your eyes, and look at our desolations and at the city that is called by your name. For we aren't presenting what we ask in your presence for our own justification, but for your great mercies' sake.*

*"Oh Lord, hear; oh Lord, forgive; oh Lord, listen and do; do not delay, for your own sake, oh my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."*

The temple has been "desolated" by Antiochus, and the author begs that God reverse the temple's fortunes, allowing it to be restored. This chapter was written after the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes and prior to its restoration. The author asks for its restoration not so he or the people would feel forgiven but because he realizes that they deserve what they have received by God through Antiochus and because he knows how merciful God is. Therefore, he asks not for justice but mercy.

*And while I was speaking, and praying, and acknowledging my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting what I asked in the presence of Yahweh my God for the holy mountain of my God, yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabri-El, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, and who was flying swiftly, touched me at about the time of the evening offering.*

If the oracle had stopped there, it would have remained very typical of the prayers of the prophets on behalf of the people of Israel, but as the account continues, Gabri-El the messenger appears to him.

Since he finds himself in the situation described earlier (in which Gabri-El appeared), the author of chapter nine presents his plight as a natural extension of what had been written previously. Gabri-El appears to him as he prays for Jerusalem and wonders about the seventy weeks that Jeremiah had written about. The timing of the intervention (at the time of offering) indicates that God had accepted the author's plea. Gabri-El flies "swiftly," indicating the speed at which God answered his prayer.

*And he instructed me and talked with me, saying, "Oh Dani-El, I have come out now to give you wisdom and understanding. As you began to ask, the statement went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are*

*greatly loved. Therefore, consider the statement and understand the vision.*

The author's favor with God was so great, that God issued the answer to Dani-El's question as soon as he began to ask it. With his repeated reflections on Jeremiah, the author returns to Jeremiah's vision, coupling it with his own.

*"Seventy groups of seven are decreed for your people and for your holy city, to finish the wandering, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting justification, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place.*

*Therefore, know and discern that from the departure in the precept there will be seven sevens to restore and to construct Jerusalem until the anointed one, the leader.*

*For sixty-two sevens it will be restored and built up, with squares and a wall, but in troubled seasons."*

The sealing of the vision and prophecy does not mean an end to all prophetic utterance. Instead, it signifies the fulfillment of the prophecies about this particular event.

Other than creating a parallel between two consecutive destructions of the temple by gentiles, the seven sevens have no bearing on what follows. The author sees his own people as being ultimately responsible not only for the Babylonian Exile but also for the conditions in his time – the II century BCE. At a chosen time, the Judeans will stop wandering and will return to God. At the end of the fulfillment, God would finally consider Israel's wanderings properly atoned-for; he was planning to forgive them.

Jeremiah had been told to look for an approximate time period of seventy years. After that time, the temple was rebuilt. The departure (the scattering into exile) of Jeremiah's prophecy was in 587 BCE. That is when the seven sevens begin. The author sees his own people as being ultimately responsible not only for the Babylonian Exile but also for the current conditions. At the chosen time, God's people will stop wandering and will return to him. At the end of the period, Israel's wanderings from God would be considered properly atoned-for. God was planning to forgive them. The "seven sevens" (forty-nine years) represents the term of the Exile, from approximately 587/6 BCE to 538 BCE. At the end of that period, an anointed one was to appear out of the Exile.

The term "anointed one" here refers to a priest, and the High Priest coming out of the exile was Yeshua (Hag 2:2). Although some prefer Zerubbabel as the anointed one, the usage later refers to the high priest, and so Yeshua is likely intended here, even though Haggai does refer to Zerubbabel as a chosen servant (Hag 2:23). This was the operative part of the seventy years mentioned by Jeremiah in his original oracle.

“Look, I will send out and will take from the families of the north, [and I will send my servant to Nabu-kudurri-usur the king of Babylon,] and I will lead them to this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations nearby; and I will wipe them out, and will make them a desolation, and for a hissing, and for an eternal reproach. And I will stop from them the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride, the smell of balsam, and the light of the lamp.  
“And all the land will be a desolate place, and these nations will be enslaved [to the king of Babylon] for seventy years. And when seventy years are completed, I will bring justice on that nation,” says Yahweh, “and I will make them an eternal desolation.” (Jer 25:9-12)

The current author sees a parallel between Jeremiah's vision and his own time. The “sixty-two weeks” run concurrently with the “seven weeks” above, but the importance of Jeremiah is in no way reduced, since his words are the starting point of the sixty-two weeks. From the oracle of Jeremiah (**605 BCE**) until the period during which the author lives, there would be “62 weeks” of years – that is, a comparatively longer period.

*“Then after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one will be cut off and will have nothing. Then the people of the ruler who comes will destroy the city and the sanctuary; its end will be with a flood, and there will be war to the end; desolations are decreed.*

This anointed one was **Oniah III**, whose tenure as high priest lasted from 198 BCE to 175 BCE – during the “sixty-second week” after Jeremiah's oracle. He is mentioned in 2 Macc 3:1ff., where he is called by the Greek form of his name (Onias). When Antiochus IV took over, he sold the priesthood to Onias' brother, Yeshua (whose Greek name was Jason). An account of Onias' removal is given in 2 Macc 4:7f. and again in 4 Macc 4:15f..

*When Seleucus died and Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes, succeeded to the kingdom, Jason the brother of Onias obtained the high priesthood by corruption, promising the king at an interview three hundred sixty talents of silver, and from another source of revenue eighty talents. In addition to this he promised to pay one hundred fifty more if permission were given to establish by his authority a gymnasium and a body of youth for it, and to enroll the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch. When the king assented and Jason came to office, he at once shifted his compatriots over to the Greek way of life. (2 Macc 4:7-10, NRSV)*

The Maccabean literature also indicates Antiochus' successful removal (via Jason) of certain Jewish customs and of the agreements between earlier Seleucids and the Jewish people. 2 Macc 4:10 indicates that Jason immediately “shifted his countrymen over to the Greek way of life.”



The Hellenization of the Palestinian Jews is referred to in the verse that follows as a "firm covenant with many." Antiochus so opposed the Jewish way that he sacrificed pigs -- an unclean animal -- in the temple, an act which defiled it. He also plundered its holy vessels, an act similar to what Nabu-kudurri-usur had done in Dani-El's day (2 Macc 5:15-16). Antiochus reportedly ordered a death decree on any Jewish person who practiced Judaism (4 Macc 4:24-6), and the conflict that engulfed the region may have begun as early as 169 BCE (2 Macc 5:1, 5, 11f.). And so the region was left desolate.

*"And he will make a firm covenant with many for one week: and in the middle of the week he will cause the sacrifices and the offerings to cease; and at the temple he will set up a detestable thing that causes desolation, until the determined end, when it will be poured out upon the desolator."*

The Hellenization of Israel was to last throughout the "week" (a period of approximately seven years). We have already seen that he ordered the end of the sacrifices. In Jewish literature, Antiochus is regarded as a brutally disgusting man. In 172 BCE, Jason was removed from the priesthood as a certain member of the tribe of Ben-Yamin named Menelaus outbid Jason for the honor of being high priest. It was under Menelaus that the temple was looted and desecrated. Since Menelaus was not from the tribe of Levi (as specified in the Torah), for the first time since Aaron the priestly lineage had been broken. Menelaus promised money to Antiochus IV and never paid it (2 Macc 4:27), increasing existing tensions. He too robbed the temple (2 Macc 4:32), an act which resulted in the murder of Oniah III (2 Macc 4:34). According to Josephus, Oniah was also Menelaus' original name.



Coin of Antiochus IV, declaring himself a god.

The desecration of the temple happened during the middle of the "last week." The placement of an idol in the temple and the pillaging of the temple served to signal the final desolation of Jerusalem, but in the end Antiochus himself would be judged; he caught a disease and died.

## Chapters 10 - 12 – Vision of the Kings

*In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed about a great conflict to Dani-El, whose name was called Bel-te-shatzar. And the thing was true, and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision.*

At the beginning of this vision, the author states that Daniel understood the vision and its significance. At this point, the author places the beginning of its unfolding during the time of Daniel rather than during his own time. The message concerned "a great conflict," which the author was about to reveal.



*In those days I, Dani-El, was mourning for three whole weeks. I ate no rich food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth. Nor did I anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks had been completed.*

The vision is presented as direct testimony, and so, like the earlier portions of Part Two, it is in the first person. The vision reportedly came during a time of particularly strong devotion toward God, including prayer and fasting. The reader is to glean from this that the contents of the vision are to be taken even more seriously than what was written earlier. The interpretation of the vision will result in the essential details of the relationship between Israel and other nations during the Hellenistic Period, and up through the time of the present author. Indeed, the second century BCE author may have been praying and fasting at the time when he received his visions. The author did not even bathe.

*And during the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Chiddekel, I lifted up my eyes and saw. And look, there was a man clothed in linen, whose waist was wrapped with pure gold of Uphaz. His body too was like the chrysoberyl, and his face was like the brilliance of lightning, and his eyes were like flaming torches, and his arms and his feet were similar to burnished bronze, and the sound of his words were like the voice of a crowd.*

The author sat by the banks of the river called "chiddekel," which means "rapid." Most people identify the "rapid" river with the Tigris, although the term occurs only here and at Gen 2:14. The timing was immediately after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and so the author may have been mourning the fact that his people were oppressed and had been compelled to become like the Greeks -- much in the same way that the Israelites in Egypt had been oppressed and had chosen to become Egyptian in some of their ways.

The figure is probably to be identified with Gabri-El, who had visited one of the authors of Dani-El previously. Gabri-El was depicted revealer of secrets, and a mystery was about to unfold. Every part of the figure is portrayed as shining or glowing in some way, including his clothing, for the message to be revealed to the author came from the presence of God and his messengers. His words were difficult to understand, like the many voices that one hears in a crowd, but the author would be made to understand them.

*And I, Dani-El, saw the vision by myself, for the men who were with me did not see the vision. Instead, a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves.*

There were other people with the author at the time of the vision, but the appearance was so brilliant and so frightening that they became incapable of understanding what was going on. A similar thing happened to Saul on the road to Damascus.

*So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me. My facial appearance turned into decay, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the sound of his words, and when I heard the sound of his words, then I fell on my face into a deep sleep, with my face toward the ground.*

After the others fled, the author was still barely capable of comprehending what was going on. His face paled, he became weak, and he fell to the ground in a trance. The great effect of Gabri-El's appearance illustrates the importance of the vision's content.

*And look, a hand touched me, lifting me to my knees and to the palms of my hands. And someone said to me, "Dani-El, you greatly loved person, listen to the words that I am speaking, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this statement to me, I stood trembling.*

Gabri-El lifts the author, raising him to the role of an equal (for it would have been appropriate for him to have remained on his face or knees in the presence of a superior). The messenger touches the author, and so this was a real appearance and not merely a dream. The author stands.

*Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Dani-El, for from the first day that you set your mind to understanding, and humbled yourself in the presence of your god, your words have been heard: and I have come on account of your words.*

The author had spent three weeks praying and fasting, but God had dispatched Gabri-El immediately, just as he had previously done. Whatever the author feared, God had sent his messenger to show what was going to happen.

*"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me for twenty-one days. But look, Micha-El, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him there with the kings of Persia.*

The term "prince" here indicates a divine messenger. Here, each nation is portrayed as having a divine representative who stands up for that nation. The author intends to convey the gravity of the situation: if the nations are at stake, then their messengers are at war. And so the present conflict is deeper than the things that the Jewish people observe around them.

Micha-El is the patron messenger of the Jewish people, and so he is depicted as fighting for Israel so that Gabri-El might deliver his message of comfort.

*"Now I have come to let you know what will happen to your people in later days, for the vision is for many days from now."*

While the vision will commence with the kings of Persia, its focus will be on the time of writing -- near the time of the Maccabean Revolt.

*Now when he said these statements to me, I set my face toward the ground and became mute. And look, the one in the likeness of the mortals touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to the one who stood before me, "My lord, my sorrows have turned on me because of the vision, and I retain no strength. How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For immediately no strength remained in me, nor was there breath left in me."*

The importance of the vision immediately struck the author, and again he was unable to speak. He recognized Gabri-El as his superior ("lord") and disputed that he should even talk with someone who was engaged in the conflict of nations. Gabri-El's might in contending for all Israel has caused the author to shift his wording. Instead of calling him "a man," the author now says only that he looks or seems mortal. In the narrative, he has now fully realized that Gabri-El is more than human. "Seeming mortal" alone does not indicate this, but the shift in wording does show the author's perception of the messengers.

*Then the one who looked mortal touched me again, and he strengthened me. And he said, "Greatly loved person, do not be afraid. Peace to you. Be strong, yes, be strong." And while he was speaking to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak; for you have strengthened me."*

Just as Gabri-El's touch had brought the author back to his senses before, so also it provides comfort a second time. Although the message that he brings is ominous, Gabri-El foresees a future that is not to be feared. At this point, the author is prepared to hear the message.

*Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I will return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I go back, look, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is written in the scroll of truth, and there is no one who stands with me against these, except for Micha-El your prince."*

Gabri-El again describes the struggle between Israel and the other nations. In Dani-El's day, the struggle was with Persia, but Persia would someday be conquered by Greece, and so Israel would have Greece to contend with. The things in the scroll of truth are things that would surely happen. Some of these things had already happened at the time of writing, but the important predictions were soon to come. Gabri-El is portrayed as having an air of urgency about him -- only he and Micha-El represent Israel in influencing the other nations. That is, mere human beings (such as the readers) could not direct the fate of the Jewish people in this instance, because the things that were going to happen were in the hands of God and his messengers.

*"Now as for me, in the first year of Darya-shah the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him, and now will I show you the truth. Look, three kings will arise in Persia, and a fourth will be far richer than all of them. Now when he has become strong through his riches, he will stir everyone up against the realm of Greece.*

Darya-shah had been part of the rule of Cyrus the Great, who had supported a degree of freedom for the Jewish people and who was highly regarded. Since Persia would not always be that way, the author paints a picture of coming conflict.

More than "three kings" followed Cyrus, but the author is only concerned with marking important ones. These are Kambiz, Darya-shah I ("the Great"), and Xerxes I, who went to war with the Greeks. The fourth king is possibly Ardesia Deraz Dast (Artaxerxes I) or Darya-shah III, who was the last independent ruler of Persia.

*And a mighty king will arise who will rule with great sovereignty and do whatever he wants. And after he rises, his kingdom will be broken, and will be divided toward the four winds of the sky, but not to his descendants, nor according to the sovereignty with which he ruled. For his kingdom will be snatched up for people other than these.*

The "mighty king" is Alexandros (Alexander) the Great. Even though he had conquered nearly all of the known world, he was unable to dictate who his successor would be. Therefore, since he had no obvious heir, Greece was not divided among his descendants or others of his choosing but among four would-be successors.

*Then the king of the south will be strong, but one of his princes will be stronger. And he will be strong enough to be over him and will be sovereign. His sovereignty will be a great one.*

Ptolemy I, one of the "kings of the south" (Ptolemies), was strong, but Seleucus I resisted him and carved out a place of his own (described below as being in "the north") after the defeat of Antigonus. He expanded the "Seleucid Empire" to include the northern region of the area once controlled by Alexander.

*And at the end of years they will join together, and the daughter of the king of the south will come to the king of the north to make an agreement. But she will not retain the strength of her arm, nor will he stand, nor his arm. Instead, she will be given up, and those who brought her, and the one who fathered her, and the one who strengthened her in those times.*

In later years, c. 250 BCE, Ptolemy II had been fighting a costly and lengthy war against the Seleucids. Ptolemy sent his daughter Bernike to Antiochus II in order to cement an agreement. However, his wife (and the mother of Seleucus II), whose name was Laodike, successfully plotted against the alliance, which would have meant that Laodike and her sons would have been disinherited. After Ptolemy's death, Antiochus II

accepted Laodike and her sons back, but she had him assassinated, along with Bernike and her attendants. Therefore, Seleucus II took over his throne.

*But out of one branch from her roots someone will arise in his place. He will come out against the army and will enter the fortress of the king of the north, and he will deal with them and will be victorious.*

Bernike's brother, Ptolemy III (Euergetes), succeeded Ptolemy II in Egypt. After his sister was murdered, he ordered an attack on Syria (where the Seleucids were headquartered). The city of Seleucia was captured, and soon Syria retreated under his power.

*And he will carry captive into Egypt even their gods, with their molten images, and their choice vessels of silver and of gold. And he will stay away from the king of the north for several years.*

Trouble in Egypt prevented Ptolemy from keeping his armies in Syria, and so he withdrew, taking the spoils of war with him. Prior to the capture of Syria by Seleucus, Egypt had stored various riches in the province; when he returned to Egypt, Ptolemy III took those items with him.

*And he will enter the realm of the king of the south, but he will return to his own land.*

In 242 BCE, Seleucus II invaded Egypt, but his forces were rebuffed.

*And his sons will war, and will gather a crowd of great forces. They will come on, and overflow, and pass through. And they will return and war as far as his fortress.*

Seleucus II was succeeded by Seleucus III (Ceraunus). He conducted a war with Egypt, but he was assassinated in 223 BCE. His brother, Seleucus II's other son, was Antiochus III, nicknamed "Antiochus the Great." Antiochus continued the war, and by 218 BCE he had amassed a great army. His forces swept through Palestine into Gaza.

*Then the king of the south will be moved with anger, and will come out to fight with him (with the king of the north). And he will raise a great crowd, but the crowd will be given into his hand. And the crowd will be lifted up, and his heart will be lifted. And he will cast down tens of thousands, but he will not be victorious. For the king of the north will return, and will bring on a crowd greater than the earlier one. And after some years, he will return with a great army having abundant supplies.*

Ptolemy IV (Philopator) was now king in Egypt. He sent armies into Palestine and defeated Antiochus III at Raphia. However, Antiochus was able to counter by defeating Ptolemy at Banias. This appears to have been due to a serious military blunder on

Ptolemy's part, for after his victory, he returned to Egypt rather than demolishing his foe. Antiochus III had the time to rebuild his forces and claim the eventual victory.

*And in those times many will oppose the king of the south. Even the children of violence among your people will lift themselves up to establish the vision. But they will fall.*

Ptolemy V (Epiphanes) was only five years old when his predecessor died (203 BCE). Antiochus III took advantage of this and pressed the attack. Furthermore, a general sense of unrest and a perceived alliance between Antiochus and Philip V of Makedonia caused the Ptolemaic Empire to suffer temporarily. Some Jewish people allied themselves with Antiochus, hoping to rid themselves of Ptolemaic rule. However, Egypt retained control of both their empire and of Palestine, and so "the vision" of Israel's independence did not come true.

*So the king of the north will come and set up siege engines, and he will take a well-fortified city. And the forces of the south will not stand, nor will his chosen troops. Nor will there be any strength to resist.*

Later, the Ptolemaic general Skopas stood against the forces of Antiochus, but Antiochus pursued him to Sidon. Laying siege to the city, he was able to take it in 198 BCE. Some of Ptolemy's generals tried to support and rescue Skopas, but even their hand-picked troops could not overcome Antiochus' army, and so Sidon fell to Antiochus.

*But the one who comes against him will do whatever he wants, and no one will resist him. And he will stand in the Land of Glory, and destruction will be in his hand. And he will fix his mind to come with the strength of his whole kingdom. He will bring terms of peace, and he will carry them out. So he will give him the daughter of women to destroy the kingdom, but it will not stand or be his.*

After his victory at Sidon, Antiochus took Palestine (the "Land of Glory"). Antiochus campaigned to take over Egypt, but the rising Roman Republic vowed to help Ptolemy if he continued. Antiochus changed his strategy, offering his daughter Kleopatra to Ptolemy V, who was now 14 years of age. This would seem to bring peace, but Antiochus planned to use the marriage in order to take over Egypt through the influence of the alliance. But Kleopatra became loyal to her husband and opposed her father's wishes, and so the kingdom was not his.

*After this will he set his mind on the coastlands, and he will take many, but a commander will cause the insolence offered by him to cease. Yes indeed, he will turn his insolence back on him.*

Antiochus returned from Egypt, deciding to invade the coastal areas of Asia Minor. This campaign was successful until he met up with the Roman commander, Lucius Scipio,

who prevented Antiochus from entering Greece (190 BCE). Thus, Antiochus' daring presumption (to take Greece) was turned back on him.

*Then he will turn himself to the fortresses of his own land, but he will stumble and fall, and he will not be found.*

After suffering defeat, Antiochus had to pay a large tribute. He chose to plunder a temple (187 BC) in Elumais, and so Antiochus retreated to his own fortresses and looted a temple in Elumais, where an angry mob ran him down and murdered him.

*Then someone will stand up in his place who will cause an exactor of tribute to pass through the glorious kingdom. But within few days he will be broken, neither in anger nor in battle.*

Antiochus III was succeeded by Seleucus IV (Philopator), who was determined to regain financial stability, since his father had spent so much on the war effort. He sent out tribute takers, one of whom (Heliodorus) went to Palestine to take money from the temple treasury. When Heliodorus returned to Seleucus, he reportedly poisoned him (at least that is the rumor). Therefore, Seleucus died, but not in anger or in battle. His son, Demetrius, was heir to the throne, but Heliodorus and others sought to seize command of the Seleucid Kingdom.

*And in his place a contemptible person will arise, to whom they had not given the honor of the kingdom. Still, he will come in a time of security and will obtain the kingdom by treachery.*

"Coming in a time of security" signifies "coming without warning," and that is what Seleucus' eventual successor did. Antiochus IV was not the rightful heir to the kingdom, but Antiochus was able to have him sent to Rome, so that he could not take over. After murdering Heliodorus and Seleucus' infant son, Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" was able to take control of the empire, even though the royal majesty ("honor of the kingdom") had not been conferred on him.

*And the armies will be swept away from his presence and broken. Yes, and so will the prince of the covenant. And after an alliance is made with him he will work deceitfully. For he will come up, and will become strong with a small people.*

Antiochus' southern campaign ran through Palestine, where Oniah III was removed from the office of high priest. He established an alliance whereby Jason was set up as high priest, and his troops were permitted to plunder Palestine without taking it by force.

*In a time of security he will come even upon the richest parts of the province, and he will do what his predecessors, and their predecessors, did not do, scattering plunder, and spoils, and goods among them. Indeed, he will devise plots against the strongholds, but only for a time.*

The plunder of Palestine was sudden, and none of Antiochus' predecessors or earlier nations had taken spoils from the whole land of Palestine.

*And he will stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army. And the king of the south will wage war with a vast and mighty army. But he will not stand, for they will devise plots against him. Indeed, those who eat his rich food will destroy him, and his army will overflow, and many will fall down slaughtered.*

Antiochus invaded Egypt, which was now under the control of Ptolemy VI (Philometor), who was captured by treachery in 169 BCE. The throne was given to his brother, Ptolemy VIII ("the Pot Bellied").

*And as for both these kings, their minds will incline to do mischief, and they will speak lies at the same table. But it will not prosper, for the end will still happen at the chosen time.*

At Memphis, Antiochus and Ptolemy VI frequently held conferences, even pretending to befriend one another. Ptolemy and his brother were conspiring to overthrow Antiochus, though. However, their plans did not succeed, and the author's reason is was that it was not time for Antiochus' reign to end.

*Then will he return into his land with great substance; and his mind will be set against the holy covenant. And he will do what he pleases and will return to his own land.*

It was on his way home from Egypt that Antiochus Epiphanes sacked and looted the temple treasury (and Jerusalem).

*At the chosen time he will return and enter the south, but it will not be in the later time as it had been in the earlier time, for ships from Kittim will come against him. Therefore he will be disappointed, and will return, and will be indignant with the holy covenant. And he will take action, and he will return, and pay respect to those who forsake the holy covenant.*

During his second campaign against Egypt, Antiochus was forced to withdraw because Roman ships from Kupros (Kittim) intervened, stopping him just seven miles from Alexandria. Antiochus was forced to yield to the Roman Senate and return to Syria. Angry that his plans failed, Antiochus turned his anger on Palestine. In 167 BCE he again attacked Jerusalem.

*And forces of his will profane the temple and the fortress, and they will remove the continual burnt offering, and they will set up the detestable thing that causes desolation. And those who violate the covenant he will seduce with flattery, but the people who know their God will withstand and take action. And those who are wise among the people will instruct many,*



*yet they will stumble by sword and by flame, by capture and by plunder, for some days. Now when they fall, they will be helped with some small assistance, but many will join themselves to them through flatteries. And some of those who are wise will fall, to refine and cleanse them, and to make them white, until the time of the end. Because it is still not the chosen time.*

As he defiled the temple by slaughtering pigs in it, Antiochus IV set up a statue of Zeus Olympias in the temple – the detestable thing that caused desolation – for the temple was dedicated to a foreign idol. God's true people, says the author, refused to allow their faith to be taken away even though its chief symbols were removed. But still some time would have to pass before Antiochus met his end -- the book of Dani-El reports that this desecration took place in the middle of the last "week of years." The "help" is the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt.

There is a play on words in the Hebrew text here, with the line, *And those who are wise among the people will **instruct** (sâkal) many, yet they will **stumble** (kâshal) by sword and by flame.*

*And the king will do what he wants, and he will elevate himself, and make himself great above every god, and will speak astonishing things against the most divine God. And he will prosper until the anger has been accomplished, for that which was decided will happen.*

Antiochus is portrayed, here as in secular history, as being a self-serving man who had no true allegiance.

*He will not even show respect to the gods of his ancestors, nor the desire of women, nor will he respect any god; for he will magnify himself above all. But in his place he will honor the god of fortresses and he will honor with gold, and silver, and precious stones, and pleasant things, a god whom his ancestors did not know. And he will deal with the strongest fortresses with the aid of a foreign god. He will promote with glory whoever acknowledges him. And he will cause them to rule over many, and will divide the land for a price.*

In setting up shrines to Zeus, Antiochus even rejected the deities of his ancestors. Adonis, "the desire of women," was a favorite of the Seleucids, but Antiochus preferred Zeus Olympias, a "god whom his ancestors did not know." In the name of this foreign god, Antiochus conquered, claiming divine honors for himself. Anyone who acknowledged him was granted favors, and even the priesthood was sold to the highest bidder.

*And at the time of the end, the king of the south will thrust at him, and the king of the north will rush at him like a whirlwind: with chariots, with cavalry, and with many ships. And he will enter countries, and will overflow*

*and pass through. He will also enter the Land of Glory, and many will be overthrown, but these nations will be delivered from his hand: Edom, and Moab, and the majority of Ammon's descendants. He will stretch out his hand also over the countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape. But he will have authority over the treasures of gold and of silver, and over all of Egypt's precious things. And the Libyans and the Ethiopians will follow in his steps.*

At this point, the author's commentary on past history ends and his prediction of the future end of Antiochus begins. No historical records exist of a final Egyptian campaign, but the Maccabean books clearly elevate the role of the Revolt in Palestine. We do know that Ptolemy VIII took control of Egypt in 164 BCE, since Ptolemy VI had escaped to Rome. However, there were pleas for Ptolemy VI to return, and eventually he came back and split up the empire with his brother -- ruling Egypt while Ptolemy VIII held the western regions.

The death of Antiochus IV came a few months before the return of Ptolemy VI, during a time when Egypt was somewhat weakened. Ptolemy VI had been forced to flee to Rome, where for several months he pretended to be a common citizen. Although Antiochus never took control of the treasury, viewed more generally this was the event that the author was predicting.

*But news from the east and from the north will trouble him, and he will go out with great fury to destroy and utterly to sweep away many. And he will plant the tents of his headquarters between the sea and the glorious holy mountain. Yet he will meet his end, and no one will assist him.*

Antiochus did hear bad news from all fronts. The Maccabean Revolt was distressing (1 Macc 6:8), and before that, he had realized a need to strengthen his political position by imposing his armies on the northern areas of Persia. In the north, he raided temples in order to gain enough funds to support his efforts.

"The sea" does not refer to the Mediterranean but what we call the Persian Gulf. The Maccabees were in the process of restoring the temple, and -- encamped somewhere in Persia -- Antiochus became violently ill, an illness that 1 Maccabees attributes to the news of Jewish successes. 2 Maccabees places his location as Ecbatana, on his way to Babylon. 2 Maccabees also portrays him as vowing to avenge the Jewish victories, whereas 1 Maccabees only goes so far as to say that he realized that his illness was because of what he had done in Jerusalem. As Antiochus fled from his defeated attempts at plundering Persia, he reportedly decided to advance on Jerusalem once more. However, his intestinal illness was so strong that he was unable to maintain control of his chariot (2 Macc 9:7), and he was thrown. True to the words of the author, no one was able to assist him, and the dying Antiochus IV turned over control of the Seleucid Kingdom to his son, Antiochus V.

*And at that time Micha-El will stand up -- the great prince who stands for the children of your people, and there will be a time of affliction, like which there never has been since the nation existed, even to that very time. And at that time your people will be saved -- everyone who is found written in the scroll.*

The author predicts the restoration of the temple and attributes the judgment of Antiochus Epiphanes to Micha-El, God's messenger-warrior who fights on behalf of Israel. The time of affliction on Israel will be the worst in its history, but those who did not forsake the covenant (as Antiochus had directed) would be spared.

*And many of those who are asleep in the dirt of the ground will wake up: some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

The Jewish people who died in the Maccabean Revolt would be symbolically judged collectively. In actuality, each person's judgment was at the time of his death, but here they are portrayed as happening at the same time. Everyone who left the covenant would be disgraced, but those who kept God's principles would have eternal life.

*And those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to what is right will shine like the stars to the most remote age.*

This is a promise for the faithful Jews of the Maccabean period. The wise ones are the ones who keep the covenant, and after Antiochus' death, everyone will realize their wisdom. And those pious Jews who were able to persuade Hellenized Jews to return to what they knew to be right would also be regarded as having been wise.

*But Dani-El, you seal up the sayings, and seal the scroll, until the time of completion. Many will wander about, and knowledge will increase."*

This is a tip from the author that he is writing in the guise of Dani-El. The written message has little to do with the time of Dani-El but is intended for the time of Antiochus IV -- the author's lifetime. From Dani-El's perspective, the prophecies are for a much later time, and so the sayings are "sealed up." This can be contrasted with the sayings in Revelation, which were **not** to be sealed up because the portrayed time of writing and the time of fulfillment were the same.

*Then I, Dani-El, saw, and look, two others were standing there: one on this bank of the river, and the other on the opposite riverbank. And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be to the end of these wonders?"*

Two "others" (messengers) ask on the author's behalf -- how long until these things are completed?

*And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he raised his right and left hands to the sky and swore by the one who lives forever that it will last a year, two years, and half a year. And when they have finished breaking the power of the holy people into pieces, all these things will be finished.*

The author gives the same time frame as the previous prediction: it would be roughly three and one half years from the desecration of the temple until its rededication and end of the revolt.

*And I heard but did not understand. So I said, "My lord, what will be the result of these things?" And he said, "Go your way, Dani-El, for the sayings have been shut up and sealed until their time of completion. Many will cleanse themselves and make themselves white, and they will be refined. But the lawless will behave lawlessly, and none of the lawless will understand. Only those who are wise will understand.*

In the narrative, the original Dani-El was not meant to understand what was said because those things were for the people of the second century BCE. However, the author recognizes around him both wise and lawless people -- those who still keep the faith and those who allow themselves to be Hellenized. Without a temple, there is no formal cleansing, but the "wise" are cleansed anyway -- their trust in God cleanses them.

*And from the time that the continual burnt-offering is removed and the detestable thing that causes desolation is set up, there will be one thousand, two hundred, ninety days.*

This author regards the time between the abolition of offerings to the setting up of the statue of Zeus as being about one month and the time from Zeus until the end of the revolt as being three and one half years. The rededication of the temple occurred prior to the end of the revolt, accounting for the additional time here.

As Moses Stuart explains, the time of 3.5 years was expressed approximately (time, times, and half), while the days are here quite precise. Antiochus removed the daily sacrifices in the second half of May, 168 BCE. "As we have already seen, about 3 ½ years elapsed, after the temple worship was entirely broken up, before Judas Maccabaeus expurgated the temple and restored its rites."<sup>81</sup> The suppression of temple rites constitutes the beginning of the 1,290 days, and the rededication of the temple marks the end.

*Blessed is the one who waits, and who completes the one thousand, three hundred, and thirty-five days. But, you go your way till the completion*

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<sup>81</sup> *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy*, Moses Stuart, p. 94 (1842).

*happens. For you will rest and will stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.*

The exact reason for the additional 45 days here is not known and probably relates to something that the author was personally aware of but which is now lost. He allows for one month between the two events caused by Antiochus, then allows for the (approximately) 3.5 years for the temple to be rededicated. But the author further appears to fill up the rest of the 3.5 years with the end of the revolt and establishment of some degree of stability. Historically, this took longer than "3.5 years," but of course the times are representative and not precise estimates. Battle continued in the Jerusalem area after the restoration of the temple rites; therefore, the 45 day difference between this verse and the previous appears to signify Judah's suppression of the gentile rebellion in the area of Jerusalem that is mentioned in 1 Macc 5:13. After this somewhat brief time, Judah and Simon crossed the Jordan River and took the conflict outside of the immediate region.

The second century BCE author also portrays Dani-El as receiving a reward when the prophecy comes true – an affirmation on his own part that Antiochus would soon be deposed.

### **The Nature of Prophecy**

Writing in someone else's name was not a forbidden practice in early times. The "Enoch books" were written alleging to be from Henoch, "the seventh from Adam," but the readers were expected to know that the author was using Henoch as a representative symbol. Similarly, the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" are written as though they relate to the Jewish tribal leaders, but they were actually intended to convey a message to the people of, roughly, the I or II century BCE. It is further known that the additions to Dani-El in Greek were not original to the document. Again, the authors of those three sections were not intending to defraud or trick anyone, but in each case the readers were aware that the authors were presenting information to their own people in the style of someone else. The later prophets, predicting the end of Antiochus' reign, recognized the similarity between their situation and the earlier exile, and so they wrote as Dani-El. In no way does this affect the fact that Antiochus was indeed defeated and that the Jewish people did gain a degree of freedom that the authors had promised them. These later writers were as much "interpreters of visions" as the original Dani-El had been, but they wrote during a later period of similar distress.

Seleucus I (312-280 BCE)

Antiochus I (280-261), called "Savior"

Antiochus II (261-246 BCE), called "God"

Seleucus II (246-226 BCE)

Seleucus III (226-223 BCE)

Antiochus III (223-187), called "the Great"

Seleucus IV (187-175 BCE), called Philopator

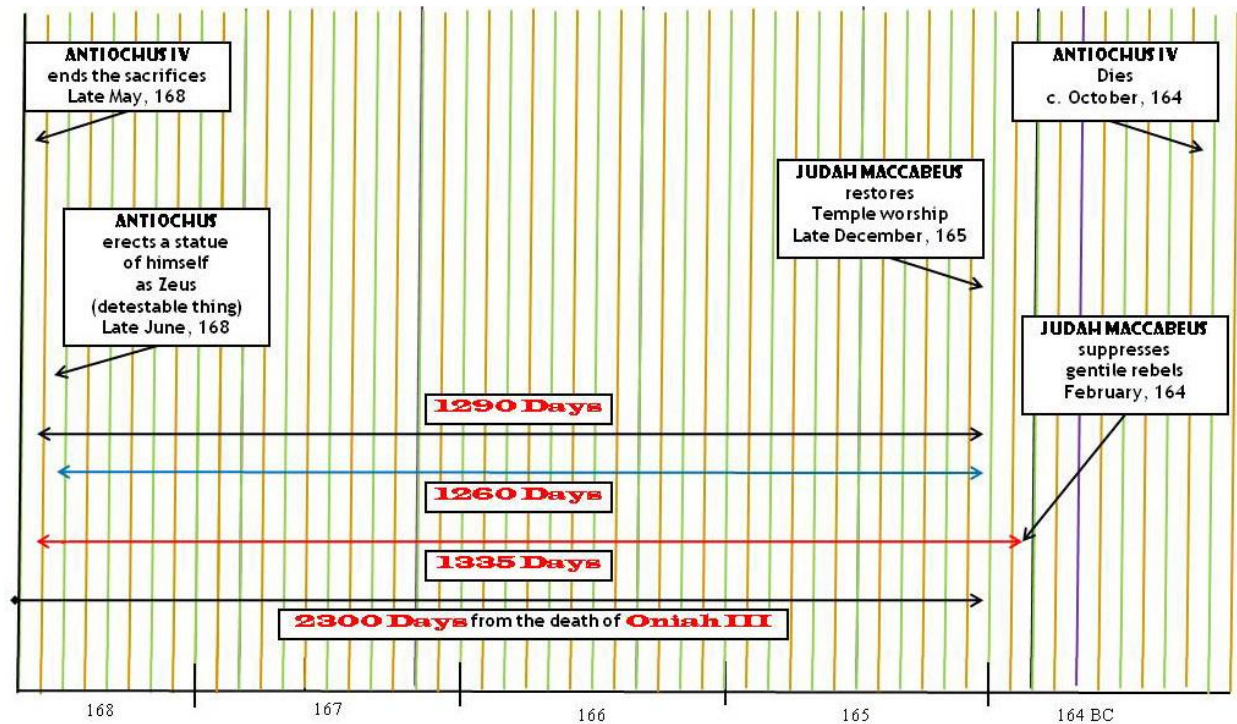
Antiochus IV (175-164 BCE), called Epiphanes

Antiochus V (164-162 BCE), called Eupator

Demetrius I (162-150 BCE), called "Savior"

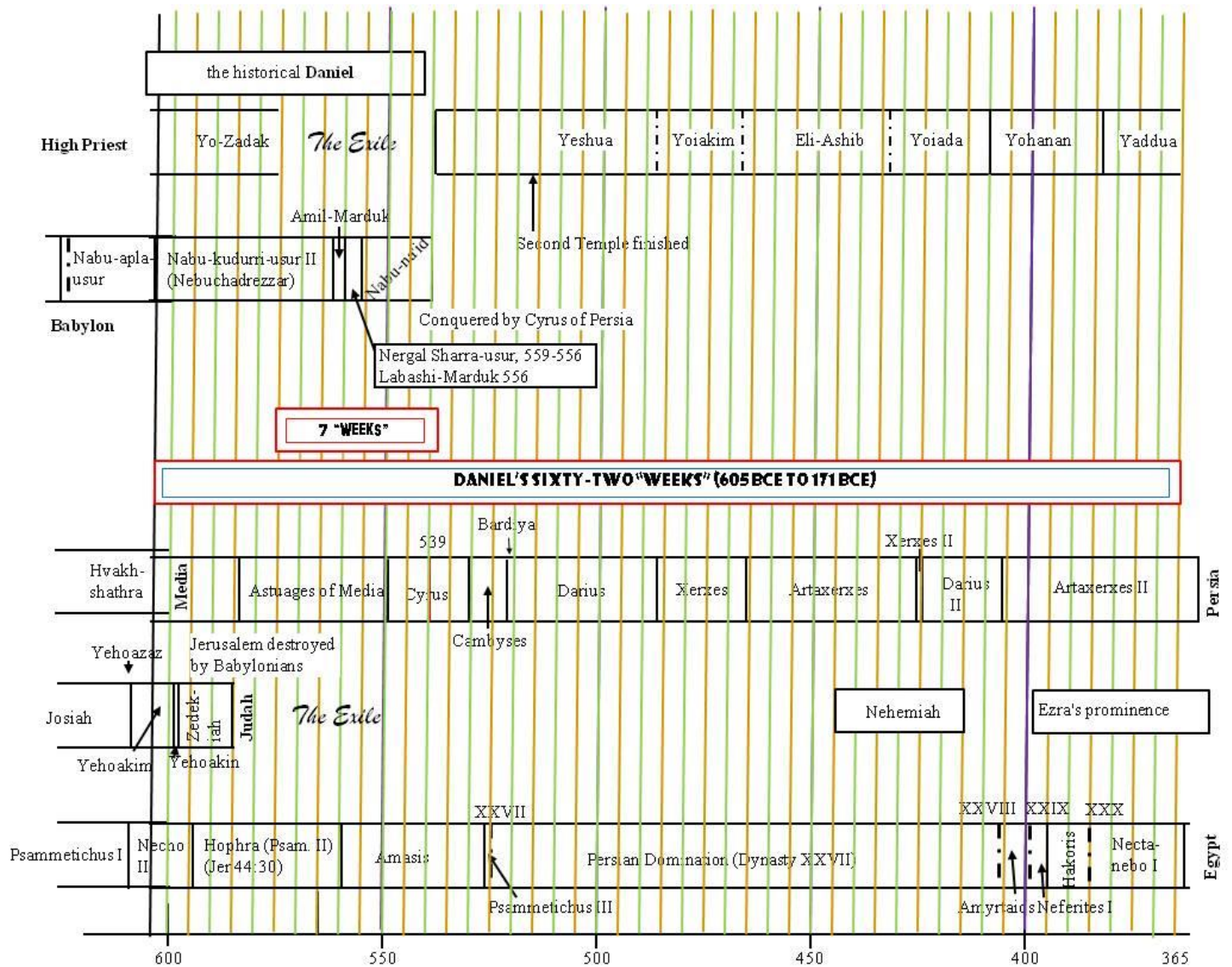


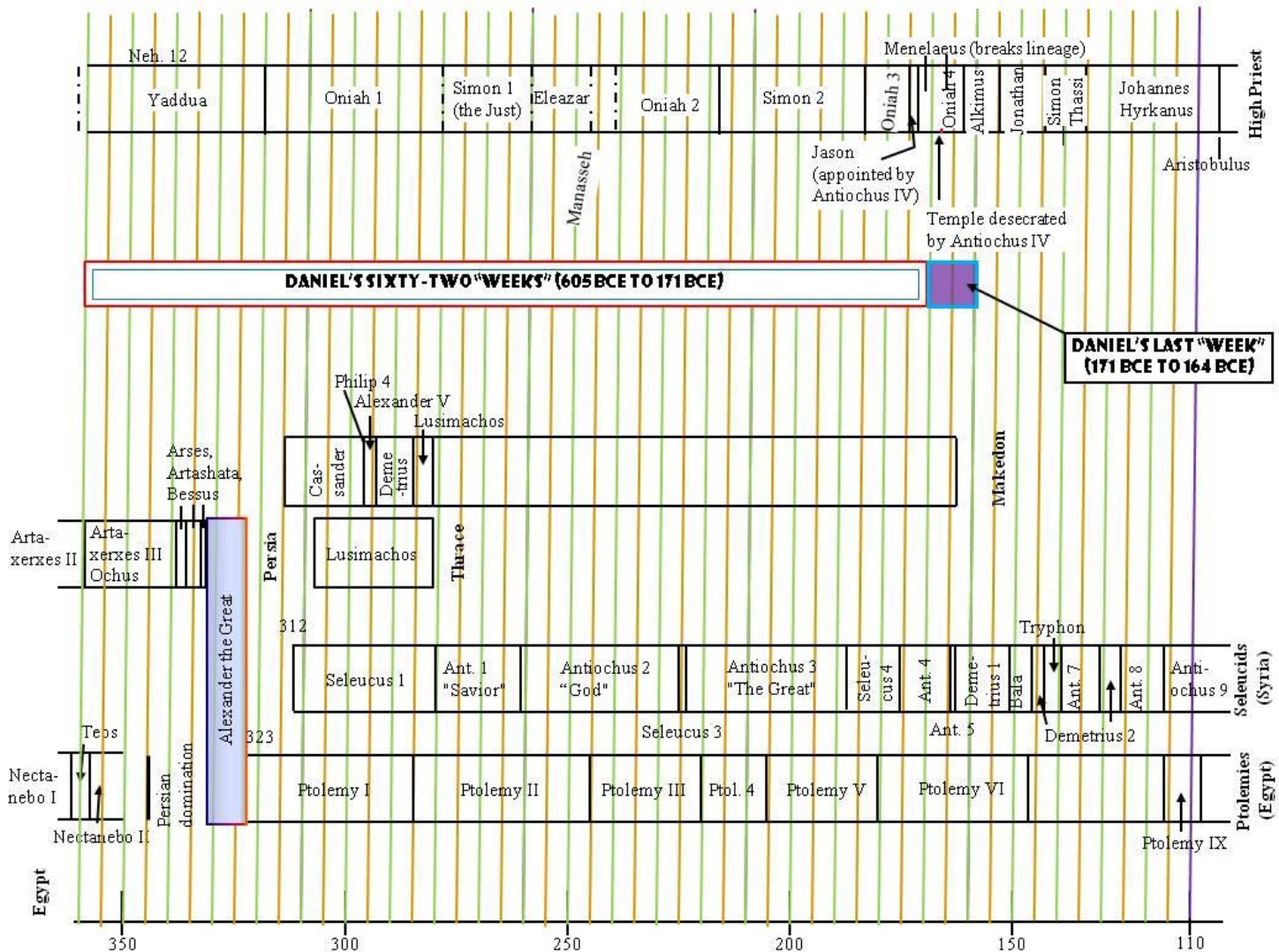
Although Jesus applies portions of Dani-El to his own time, he was not claiming that Dani-El had not been fulfilled. Nor was he claiming dual fulfillment of Dani-El. Instead, Jesus pointed backward to the Second Century BCE in order to teach something about what was going to happen during the First Revolt. Since they understood that gentiles had come to desecrate the temple and ravage the city under Antiochus, his followers knew that he was saying that the Romans were about to do something similar.





# TIMELINE OF DANIEL'S SEVENTY WEEKS







## Chapter Eight

*"The eastern world, it is explodin',  
Violence flarin', bullets loadin'.  
You're old enough to kill, but not for votin'.  
You don't believe in war, but what's that gun you're totin'?  
And even the Jordan River has bodies floatin',  
But you tell me  
Over and over and over again, my friend,  
No, you don't believe  
We're on the eve of destruction."*  
"Eve of Destruction," Barry McGuire (1965)

### NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECIES ABOUT THE END OF THE AGE

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**IT'S ALL OVER!**

He sees it vividly, as though it were tomorrow:  
Bullets, stinging like scorpions, come from every tree,  
Cast by the unseen VC.  
Burning napalm rains from the open skies--  
Aflame with lies.  
Tomorrow, or maybe never, he reaches Saigon.  
How much of it is post-traumatic stress,  
And how much is yearning for the closure--  
The resolution that never came?  
What therapy will it take  
For him to finally accept  
That the war is over?  
The war is over.  
("Can't Leave Vietnam," from Temple's Book of Poems)

***"It was the last of times. It was the first of times."***

Members of the Jewish "Zealot" faction were on the move. Fed up with being dominated by the Romans and appalled at the treatment they were receiving from Procurator Florus, they were ready to strike. Popular support for the group was growing by leaps and bounds as Florus continued to extort money from the people and even from the temple. At one point, Josephus records, Florus's men simply took money from the temple to which he felt entitled. Under the direction of Eleazar, the priests ceased their practice of offering a sacrifice for the well-being of the Emperor. This sparked an ever-increasing spirit of rebellion among the general public. Agrippa tried to prevent war, attempting to persuade the Jews that rebellion was futile, but his efforts were in vain. By September of 66, the Roman garrison at Antonia had been taken by the rebels, with its guard slain.

The Zealots saw this as an opportunity to move against the Empire. Mustering forces, they laid siege on the fortress at Masada. With weapons acquired at the Masada arsenal, they marched on Jerusalem. Upon reaching Jerusalem, conflict ensued between the Zealot forces and Eleazar's men, a battle which resulted in the slaying of one of the Zealot leaders and the Zealot faction's retreat to Masada. Suddenly, rebellion broke out all over Palestine. By November, the Roman government saw this as a situation out of control, and they sent in the armies.

The force commanded by Cestius Gallius was turned away from the capital, however, spelling a temporary victory for the Jewish rebels. In Spring of 67, Vespasian assumed control of the Roman forces and made a steady advance from the north toward Jerusalem. As his armies moved, they left bloody slaughter in their wake. During this time, citizens of the cities of Palestine took sides against one another, elevating the atmosphere of chaos to the level of fever.

When Vespasian neared Jerusalem, however, the Jews were temporarily spared. Emperor Nero committed suicide in early June of 68, leaving the Empire in turmoil. He was the last of the Julian emperors, and a civil war broke out to determine who would be the next Emperor.

Jerusalem saw a reprieve from desolation, albeit a temporary one. The Jews developed a stronger command and control structure as the Romans sorted out their troubles. Three rival leaders emerged, as in Rome first Galba, then Otho, and finally Vitellius took the mantle of Emperor. By June of 69, however, the Roman affairs of state had been settled, with Vespasian himself (a popular military leader) taking over as Emperor and establishing his family as the Imperial line.

Moving quickly, the Romans asserted their command over the situation in Palestine. A few strongholds, plus Jerusalem itself, were all that remained under Jewish control. The siege of Jerusalem began in April of 70, led by Vespasian's own son, Titus. For five brutal months of brutal war, the Jews held their capital, but despite their fervor they continued to lose ground. People were dying everywhere. As Summer passed, the

temple itself was occupied by Titus' forces--something Titus himself would later regret--and the entire structure was razed by fire. With the holy building destroyed, the resistance would last only a month longer--until September. By that time, the Romans had desolated the entire city, leaving it virtually in ruin.

Christian Jews had been called upon to help defend Jerusalem and the Jewish state, but they refused, taking the advice of Jesus to flee to the mountains. This symbolic rejection of their heritage created a permanent rift between Jews and Christians. By 120, they would have nothing to do with one another.

Still, resistance at the three Jewish strongholds continued for another three years. Yet these too fell, one by one, leaving innumerable dead to be buried. The last to fall was Masada, which managed to hold out until Spring of 73 (or 74). Many people fled to the south to avoid being butchered. As the battle for Masada went on, it became obvious to the Jews involved that their defense was hopeless. Rather than suffer the indignity of being captured or killed by the Romans, the last garrison committed mass suicide under the direction of Eleazar ben Yair himself, who reasoned that if God was their sole authority, then they could not submit to Roman power.

The war, the First Jewish Revolt, was over. So great a victory was this for the Romans that Vespasian ordered coins minted to commemorate their win, coins that would be imitated by Vespasian's sons when they eventually became Caesar, even though by that time, a number of years had passed. Yet Vespasian's victory was not a victory for his family, all of whom died in unusual ways, putting an end to the Flavian lineage before the end of the century. To this day, of course, modern Jews have yet to hold the ground on which their temple once stood.



IUDAEA CAPTA coinage of Vespasian

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

### THE GREEK TEXT OF REVELATION

Revelation holds a unique position textually among the writings of the New Testament, for several reasons. The prophecy often circulated alone. It was not universally accepted by the church in ancient times. These factors combine to yield a comparatively sparse set of manuscripts for the book. Kurt and Barbara Aland (*Text of the New Testament*, 2nd Edition) list a grand total of 287 Greek manuscripts containing Revelation or a portion thereof. Of these, only 2 manuscripts predate the development of text types (c.325 CE), these being p<sup>18</sup>, containing only 1:4-7, and p<sup>47</sup>, which contains most of chapters 9-17. A heavy weight must therefore be placed on p<sup>47</sup> when determining the text of Revelation.

We also give consideration to the following uncial manuscripts: Sinaiticus (although its character is lesser in Revelation); A (whose character is superior here); and C (whose character is also superior). This is the consideration generally given by the Nestle-Aland text, and so it has been generally adopted as the basis for the translation. Any point at which the Greek text deviates from the Nestle-Aland text, it follows p<sup>47</sup>, A, and/or C.

### STRUCTURE and STYLE

Revelation borrows heavily from the former Jewish writings. Isaiah, Zechariah, Daniel, and Amos are cited, to name just a few. The visions seen by the author are not equated with those of the former prophets; that is, they are not referring necessarily to the same events. However, in each case, the use of images from the former prophets indicates that the subject matter is similar in nature.

The structure of the writing appears somewhat complex to the person not accustomed to apocalyptic style. It is complicated by the introductory letters, which normally did not accompany a prophetic work.

Nevertheless, we can perceive a structure as follows:

- INTRODUCTION 1:1-1:3
- LETTERS 1:4-3:22
- SYMBOLS OF JUDGMENT 4:1-11:18
- EXPLANATION 11:19-22:5
- CONCLUDING REMARKS 22:6-22:21

These major sections are divided into smaller parts throughout the book.

The **introduction** and **conclusion** are both important in the sense that they set the stage for the rest of the work. What is coming is to take place soon ("in a short time," 1:1, 22:6, 7). The "time is near" (1:4). Because the events are to take place so soon, Johannes is not to "seal up the words of the prophecy" (22:10). This is to be contrasted

with the conclusion to Daniel, where Daniel was told, “seal up the words, and seal the scroll, until the time of the completion” (12:4). The content of Daniel’s own interpretation of the vision (11:1-12:4) shows that the conclusion of the matter was circa 164 BCE, at the end of the reign of Antiochus IV, less than 400 years from when Daniel received his vision. By contrast, the events of Revelation would happen soon. The urgency of Revelation is continued to the end, where we are again told that the matters in the prophecy would happen soon (22:20).

The letters to the assemblies continue to convey this temporal urgency. He addresses seven very real and specific groups of Christians, making warnings where appropriate. He refers to local matters for which the communities were known and formulates guidance based on these things.

The symbolic judgment sections are meant to add to this sensation that a swift and powerful judgment is on the horizon for the readers. Some will be spared from this judgment against Israel, but the sense conveyed in the sections is that nothing will be the same for Israel after the judgment takes place. While some of the specific symbols are meaningful, they have little to no bearing on the overall meaning of the book.

Now we will examine the book in closer detail.

## THE INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION

*1:1 A revelation of Anointed Jesus that God gave to him, to point out to his slaves the things that will necessarily happen in a short time, and which he sent out afterward through his messenger to Johannes his slave, who testified to God's message and the testimony of Anointed Jesus (as many things as he saw).*

*Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear, the sayings of the prophecy and who keep the things that are written in it. For the season is near.*

The work begins without any mention of the author. Instead, the author takes a back seat to the vision itself and gives credit to the ones who orchestrated the vision that is to be written down. Johannes immediately mentions the reason why he was given the vision (and therefore the reason for the book): to show God's faithful people what was about to happen. In contrast to the warnings of certain prophets (e.g., Jonah) – which give the readers the opportunity to change what is about to happen, these things must happen, and they will happen soon. Once he has written this important distinction, the author considers it suitable to introduce himself and bear testimony to the vision he is writing down. He indicates that he was the Johannes who testified to God's message. That is, he is the envoy.

The writing was meant to be read out loud in gatherings of Jewish Christians. "Blessed is the one who reads" is referring to public reading; therefore, it is followed by "and those who hear." Then for the second time the author impresses the urgency of the events that are contained in the vision: "the season is near."

## THE SEVEN LETTERS

### COMMON LETTER TO ALL SEVEN

**4** *Johannes,*

*To those seven assemblies that are in Asia.*

*Hello to you, and peace from the one who is, and who was, and who is coming, and from the seven spirits that are in the presence of his throne, and from Anointed Jesus: the witness; the trustworthy one; the firstborn of the dead; and the one who rules the kings of the land.*

*To the one who loves us and releases us from our sins with the blood of his own, and who made a kingdom for us – we are priests to God; that is, his Father – to God be the glory and the might forever and ever. A-men.*

**7** *"Look! He is coming with the clouds," and every eye will see him, even the ones who pierced him, "and all the tribes of the land will lament over him."*

*"Yes indeed.*

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says Yahweh God: the one who is, and who was, and who is coming; the Almighty."*

**9** *I, Johannes, your brother and co-partner in the affliction and the endurance in Jesus happened to be on that island that is called Patmos on account of God's message and the testimony of Jesus. It happened that I was with the breath during the Lord's day, and behind me I heard a loud voice, like a war-trumpet, saying, "Write on a scroll what you see, and send it to the seven assemblies: to Ephesus; and to Smurna; and to Pergamum; and to Thuateira; and to Sardis; and to Philadelphia; and to Laodikeia."*

*And I turned around to look at the voice that was speaking with me. And after turning around, I noticed seven gold lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands was someone similar to a mortal, clothed in a foot-length garment and having a golden belt wrapped around his breasts. Now his head and hairs were white like white wool, like snow, and his eyes were like a flame of fire, and his feet were similar to fine brass (fiery like a furnace), and his voice was like a sound of many waters. And in his right hand he had seven stars, and from his mouth came out a sharp, two-edged, broad sword, and his appearance was like the sun appears in its power.*

*And when I saw him, I fell to his feet like a dead man, and he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. I am the First and the Last and the one who is alive. And I became dead, and look, I am alive forever and ever! And I have the keys of death and Hades. Therefore, write what you saw, even what is and what is about to happen after these things.*

**20** *"This is the secret of the seven stars that you saw at my right side and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are messengers of the seven assemblies, and the seven lampstands are the seven assemblies."*

Although the introductory common letter is a single literary unit, it will be constructive to analyze it in sections. The first of these sections is 1:4-1:6, in which the author politely and graciously greets the seven assemblies. For the first time, God is mentioned by title as "the one who is, and who was, and who is coming." He will refer to God in similar (not always identical) ways later throughout the book. God is: he exists. This is perhaps the single statement basic to all Jews: *"Hear O Israel, Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is one"* (Dt 6:4). This statement affirms both the existence of God and the personal nature of his relationship with Israel. God was. This takes us back to the beginning, at which time *"God created the heavens and the earth"* (Gen 1:1). God has always existed. The final phrase, God is coming, takes us forward not only throughout eternity but also to the events that will happen "in a short time." God is coming. When reading the writings of the prophets who warned Israel to repent from their sins, the coming of God is seen as a fearful thing. But for God's faithful, it is also a joy, as we will see. The author defines the "seven spirits" (later "seven stars") as seven divine messengers. They will be mentioned further later on, in conjunction with seven lampstands.

Next in line, Johannes provides Jesus with several descriptive titles, each of which represents a different role. First of all, he is God's Anointed One: the one whom God

chose to fully explain the Torah to humanity. As “the witness,” Jesus testified about what God had taught him, and to his own actions while he was on earth. In conjunction with that testimony, the Messiah is “the trustworthy one,” just as the same author wrote in his account of Jesus’ life: *“What he has seen and heard, this he testifies about, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony has set his seal that God is true. For the one that God has sent speaks the declarations of God; for he doesn’t give the breath by measure.”* (Jn 3:32f.)

The Anointed One is also “firstborn of the dead” – the leader of all of the people who have ever died and who are now in the afterlife. All are children of God, but the Messiah is the firstborn son. Connected with that, it is the Messiah who truly rules the land of the living, through God’s principles – those principles that he explained while he was on earth. After mentioning the messengers, then the Messiah, Johannes concludes the salutation with a blessing to God, who is Jesus’ father.

Then the author continues on to the matter at hand. Vv. 7-8 contain a brief statement embodying what is about to happen, borrowed from Dan 7:13 and harkening back also to Zech 12. The author identifies the so-called “second coming” with the events in Revelation. The lamenting of the tribes refers explicitly to the tribes of Israel, so that the context of “every eye” is intended to indicate that every Jewish person would know about the judgment – the coming with the clouds. In all of this, we have God’s own affirmation, for the words come from God himself. Here, he not only affirms himself as the one who is, was, and is coming, but also calls himself the Almighty, a term usually equated with the Hebrew expression “Yahweh of (the) Hosts”. God’s own power will accomplish the things in the book. Once again, God is the self-existent one.

Verses 9-19 tell how the vision came to Johannes, and the images here also set the stage for what Jesus is to tell each of the assemblies (through the seven messengers). Johannes is enduring persecution (from Jews and Romans) just as the hearers of the letters are suffering. Therefore, he indicates his partnership with them.

Tradition tells us that Johannes was exiled to the Isle of Patmos because he was teaching about Jesus. While the author does not mention exile, he does say that he was there at Patmos because of “God’s message.” John had been heralding Jesus by announcing that Jesus was the Anointed One, and that the Torah was to be understood as a set of internal principles rather than external regulations. For saying these things he may very well have been exiled. Johannes does not say here that he wrote down the revelation while still in exile; however, since the revelation is both a warning and a prediction, he wrote the material before the events described here took place.

He continues to indicate that he was “with the breath” on one occasion. In the language of the first century writers, then, he was inspired. This is an assurance by the author that God and Jesus were actually speaking to him when he received the vision. This happened during “the Lord’s day,” an expression used in the Old Testament for a day when God did something particularly noteworthy. On the day of the Lord, something



illustrious would happen, and in Johannes' case, a vision came to him of the "last times."

The voice of Jesus sounded to Johannes like a war trumpet, indicating to him that he should write everything down and send it to the seven assemblies. The vision that he received of Jesus would tie in to the problems faced by those seven groups of Christians. When the author turned around, he noticed someone "similar to a mortal." This is the same expression used in Daniel 7 and means that the being that he saw (representing Israel) **seemed** human, an indication that the being appeared somewhat more than human as well. Normally, the use of "mortal" would merely mean that he **was** a human being, but the addition of "similar to" indicates that the author felt that he **looked** human. From the description, we can see why he would describe Jesus this way.

First, Johannes noticed the seven lampstands. In verse 20, he indicates the meaning of the seven lampstands: they are the seven assemblies. Jesus is standing in their midst and has the power to remove the lampstands should he so desire (2:5). He is the authority of the church, holding the seven stars (messengers) in his hand. It is he who sends out the messengers, and their message is his message. In his treatise about Jesus, the author has described the Messiah as the Light of humanity. In this vision the Messiah shines the Light directly from God, bringing true enlightenment and wisdom into the dark ignorance of creation. He sends divine messengers who are stars – sources of light, but they are not the Light. By contrast, the assemblies are merely lampstands, holding small quantities of light.

In the image, Jesus sports a full-body garment, representing his priesthood (see Ex 28:4; 29:5). The fact that he appears as high priest is notable, since those events that are about to happen will greatly affect the status of the Jewish priesthood. Wearing a golden belt (or girdle), he is royalty, the high priest over the "royal priesthood" of believers (Is 61:6; Ex 19:5). The whiteness of his hair indicates that he has come from being in the presence of God, an image borrowed from Dan 7:9. Like Moses, whose skin glowed after having glimpsed God's glory (Ex 34), Jesus' hair has been purified, white, from the presence of God. But Jesus has seen God's full glory, and so his face glows with the full brightness of the sun "in its power" (v.16).

The burning eyes search the "kidneys and hearts" (2:23; see 2:18), burning past the appearance to the reality of people's intentions. The feet of brass (borrowed again from Daniel, this time from chapter 2) indicate permanence or steadfastness and are also connected with the message to Thuateira. His feet, his support, have been refined in fire. They are pure, polished, and strong.

The sound of many waters is like the sound that accompanies God's glory in Ezek 43:1-2. There, the rushing water represents an unstoppable force; it is no difference here. Jesus' voice – the words of the prophecy – are unstoppable. His words are like a sharp sword, an image used to indicate that they clearly divide one thing from another (see

also Heb 4:12). In this case (2:12f.), they prohibit the mingling of Yahweh worship with anything else.

The image of Jesus is both awe-inspiring and frightening, causing Johannes to faint (v.17), or at least to be paralyzed with fear. This is not a surprising response. With comfort in mind, though, the ominous Jesus touches Johannes and urges him not to be afraid. Perhaps he said this with the same voice he used when crossing the waters of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:20). He assures Johannes that he is "the First and the Last". In contrast to the "Alpha and Omega" used to refer to God as eternal, the phrase "the First and the Last" indicates Jesus' place within God's plan. Jesus encompasses all of what God has done and all of what God is about to do. Knowing this, Johannes should not be afraid. Jesus also reminds the author that he is "the one who is alive." As if to underscore the impact of his own resurrection, Jesus adds that he was dead and will now live forever. Even death did not destroy Jesus, because it could not. And as if this comfort were not enough, Jesus indicates that he holds the "keys of Death and Hades." That is: no one will die or go to the grave (She'ol, Hades) during the coming events unless Jesus allows it. He possesses such authority. These things ought to assure the author, and they do.

Now that the author is once again competent to write down what he hears, Jesus urges him to do so and explains the symbolism of the lampstands and stars. The other symbols of his appearance to Johannes would become more apparent as Jesus continued to speak.

## THE FIRST LETTER: EPHESUS

**2:1** *"To the messenger of the assembly in Ephesus, write:*

*"Now the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks in the midst of the seven gold lampstands says these things:*

*"I know your deeds and labor, and your endurance, and that you are unable to bear bad people, and that you have tested those who say themselves to be envoys and are not, and you have found them to be liars. And you have endurance and have borne on account of my name, and you have not been made weary.*

*"But I have it against you that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember where you fell from, and change your minds, and do the first deeds. But if you don't, I am coming to you, and I will remove your lampstand from its place, if you do not change your minds.*

*"But you have this: that you hate the deeds of the Nikolaitans, which I too hate."*

*The one who has an ear should hear what the spirit says to the assemblies.*

*"To the victor I will give him to eat from the forest of life, which is in God's Paradise."*

Jesus reminds the Ephesian messenger that he is the one who controls the seven stars and stands among the lampstands. That is, he has power over both the messengers of the assemblies and the assemblies themselves. This reminder is necessary because the people at Ephesus have begun to wander; they have left their first love. From the description given, apparently they were sound as far as knowledge was concerned but had been neglecting of late to put what they know into practice. Therefore, the one who holds their lampstand may take it away; i.e., the people collectively are in danger of leaving God.

We know little to nothing about the "Nikolaitans." From the letter to Pergamum, we can fathom that they advocated merging idol-worship (or some forms of it) with Judaism/Christianity. From their name (from the word for "victory" or "overcomer"), they might have advocated a system of positional authority, and the idol-worship depicted here is an analogy connecting gentile religions metaphorically with an element of modern Judaism that was rejected by Jesus (Mt 23:1-12). It is possible that they had been claiming to be genuine envoys, but that the Ephesians had rejected them.

Jesus urged the people at Ephesus in a fashion similar to how he would express himself to the other assemblies: if they endured through to the victory, they would be saved.

## THE SECOND LETTER: SMURNA (SMYRNA)

**8** *"And to the messenger of the assembly in Smurna, write:*

*"Now the First and the Last, who became dead and is alive, says these things:*

*"I know your affliction and poverty (but you are wealthy), and the evil speaking from those who say themselves to be Jews and are not (but they are the enemy's gathering). Don't fear the things that you are about to suffer. Look, the accuser is about to throw some of you into jail, so that you might be tested, and you will have affliction for ten days. Become trustworthy until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

*The one who has ears should hear what the spirit says to the assemblies.*

*"The victor will by no means suffer injustice from the second death."*

According to the letter, the Christians at Smurna were suffering and are afraid. Jesus wants to reassure them so that they will endure what is to come. He reminds them with the same calming statements as he said to Johannes that everything – even death – is under his control. He indicates his sympathy by expressing an understanding of their situation ("I know..."). The non-Christian Jews have been persecuting them; these people are the enemy's gathering (synagogue). Those people will shortly be dealt with. As for the Christians, there will be persecution and testing for "ten days" (a short time), but if they endure, they will receive their reward. The final statement assures them of a place in the afterlife and mentions "the second death" for the first time. More will be revealed about this second (spiritual) death as the vision nears its close.

The abject poverty of the Christians in Smurna appears to have been due to the non-Messianic Jews -- the same people whom Johannes nicknames "the enemy's gathering" -- where "gathering" (synagogue) is the ordinary word for any group of Jews.

### THE THIRD LETTER: PERGAMUM

**12** *"And to the messenger of the assembly in Pergamum, write:*

*"Now the one who has the two-edged broad sword says these things:*

*"I know where you live--where the enemy's throne is -- and you hold fast to my name and did not deny my trust, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed near you, where the enemy lives.*

*"But I have a few things against you: that you have there people who hold fast to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block in front of the sons of Israel, to eat idol-sacrifices and to sin sexually. Just as you also have and similarly hold fast to the teaching of the Nikolaitans.*

*"Therefore, change your minds. But if you don't, I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war with them with my mouth's broad sword."*

*The one who has an ear should hear what the spirit says to the assemblies.*

*"To the victor I will give him the manna that was hidden, and I will give him a white pebble, and on the pebble a new name will have been written, which no one knows except the one who receives it."*

The Pergamites were the ones who were beginning to mingle the true religion with "idolatry". Some of them had begun to adhere to the teachings of the Nikolaitans. Whether this was actual Gentile idolatry that the Pergamites were practicing or a teaching of the Jews like that mentioned above, we cannot say. However, Jesus appears to them with his broadsword to cleanly divide the truth from lies. The truth of what Jesus taught is about to be borne out in the events that will soon unfold, and if the Christians at Pergamum do not get their act together, they will wind up on the wrong side of the conflict when it happens.

The mention of Balaam (Num 31:16) is part of an accusation of idolatry, for Balaam had advised Balak to lure the Israelites away from God's protection by seducing them to worship idols. Eating idol-sacrifices and cultic prostitution were regarded as being part of the idolatry scene. If Balaam here represents the non-Christian Jews turning people away from God's instruction, then the author is advising that if his readers decide to return to traditional Judaism to follow those who know Jesus was the Messiah but who are lying, then their faith would not survive the coming war.

The "white pebble" that the victors will receive is symbolic of their entry into the afterlife; they will receive passage, to receive the true manna – spiritual food from God, just as Jesus insisted (John 6) that Moses never gave them the true bread from heaven, but that he (Jesus) would do so. In addition, the victor will obtain a "new name." This is not a real name; instead, it represents their new life with God as part of his family.

## THE FOURTH LETTER: THUATEIRA

**18** *"And to the messenger of the assembly in Thuateira, write:*

*"Now God's son, the one who has his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet similar to fine brass, says these things:*

*"I know your deeds, and love, and trust, and service, and your endurance. And your last deeds are more than the first ones.*

*"But I have it against you that you have accepted the woman Jezabel, the one who says herself to be a prophet and who teaches and leads astray my slaves, to sin sexually and to eat idol-sacrifices. And I gave her time, so that she might change her mind, and she did not want to change her mind from her prostitution. Look, I am casting her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am casting into great affliction, if they do not change their minds from her deeds. And I will kill her children with death, and all the assemblies will know that I am the one who searches kidneys and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your deeds.*

*"But I am telling you – the rest of those who are in Thuateira – as many as do not have this teaching, who don't know the depths of the enemy (as they say), I am not throwing another burden on you. However, hold fast to what you have until I come.'*

*"And the victor, that is, the one who keeps my deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations, and "He will feed them with an iron rod, like those earthen vessels that it breaks together," as I also obtained from my Father. And I will give him the morning star."*

*The one who has an ear should hear what the spirit says to the assemblies."*

The problem at Thuateira was merely a need to endure, and for them, their endurance would produce refinement; it would make them better. So for them, Jesus has the penetrating eyes of flame and feet of brass. He can see their deeds, and his penetrating eyes can search them out.

The people have been working hard, but they are now following "Jezabel". The original Jezabel, King Ahab's wife, is being used here as a symbol of treachery. Here, she "teaches and leads away my slaves." In the metaphor, she was leading them to "sin sexually and eat idol-sacrifices" – the two things that are used symbolically of mingling God's truth with other things. These people were likely former Christians who were enticing people to return to Priestly Judaism. This Jezabel, whatever group she may represent, was about to be judged, having been given enough time to leave "her" harmful beliefs. Since we will see that the broader judgment was to fall on Priestly Judaism, we understand the "enemy" in the passage to be its supporters. Even those Thuateirans who claim to be well-meaning and yet who led people away from Jesus' teachings would suffer and die in the affliction that was coming soon.

As for the rest, the people need to endure. While the penetrating eyes are directed at the ones who follow the mingled teachings, the feet of brass offer security to the others.

If they endure – if they keep doing as Jesus taught – they will be given authority. If our analysis of the Nikolaitans as position-seekers is accurate and if they were at work here, then this promise essentially assures the faithful Thuateirans that real power cannot be had on earth. In citing Psalm 2:8-9, he reminds them that all the nations' power is his, for Psalm 2:7 is the messianic statement, *"You are my son; today I have fathered you."* Finally, the faithful will receive the "morning star", symbolic of glory and power.

## THE FIFTH LETTER: SARDIS

**3:1** *"And to the messenger of the assembly in Sardis, write:*

*"Now the one who has the seven spirits of God; that is, the seven stars, says these things:*

*"I know your deeds, that you have a name, that you are alive and are dead. Become watchful, and strengthen the remaining things that were about to die. For I have not found your deeds to be full in the presence of my God.*

*"Therefore, remember how you received and heard, and keep and change your minds. Therefore, if you are not watchful, I will come like a thief, and by no means will you have known at what hour I will come upon you. But you have a few names in Sardis that have not soiled their clothes, and they will walk with me in white ones, because they are worthy.'*

*"The victor will have white clothes cast around him, and by no means will I blot out his name from the scroll of life, and I will acknowledge his name in my Father's presence and in the presence of his messengers."*

*The one who has an ear should hear what the spirit says to the assemblies."*

Like the Ephesians, the Sardisians were not growing spiritually. In this case, though, no mention is made of their knowledge being sound, so the situation in Sardis appears to have been more dire. It is possible that many of them were returning to their ritual religion. Jesus appears to them as the one who has the power over the assemblies. If these Christians do not watch out, they will be overwhelmed when the action starts and will fall away from God. But there were at least a few people there in Sardis who were worth emulating. Although it is not expressly stated, the implication is that the rest should follow the good example of the ones who had not "soiled their robes." Those people's robes are still white – pure.

Here, God will esteem the victor as pure (represented by the white clothes). As in all the letters, the one who overcomes his city's troubles will pass on to the afterlife. In this case, we hear that the victor's name will be written on "the scroll of life" and that Jesus will personally acknowledge him to God, just as Jesus indicated while on earth (Lk 12:8-9). The allusion to this statement of Jesus may be an indication that many of the Sardisians were failing to stand up for Jesus or be called by his name.



## THE SIXTH LETTER: PHILADELPHIA

**7** *"And to the messenger of the assembly in Philadelphia, write:*

*"Now the holy one, the true one, the one who has David's key, the one who opens (and no one will shut) and who shuts (and no one opens), says these things:*

*"I know your deeds. Look, I have given an open door in your presence, which no one is able to shut, because you have a little power, and have kept my message, and did not deny my name. Look, I am giving from those of the enemy's gathering who say themselves to be Jews and are not. (On the contrary, they are lying). Look, I will make them so that they come and bow down in the presence of your feet, and they will know that I loved you. Because you have kept the message of my endurance, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole Empire, to test those who dwell on the land. I am coming quickly. Hold firmly to what you have, so that no one may take your crown.'*

*"The victor, I will make him a pillar in my God's temple, and by no means will he go outside. Yet I will also write my God's name on him, and the name of my God's city, the new Jerusalem which is descending from the sky from my God, and my new name."*

*The one who has an ear should hear what the spirit says to the assemblies."*

To Philadelphia, Jesus appears with a key to open doors, an image borrowed from Isa 22:22, although there it referred to Eliakim. Eliakim is used as a type for the Anointed One, with the imagery indicating that Jesus stands firmly, with the ability to "open and close doors." The citizens of Philadelphia need to hear this because they have been suffering and not surrendering. So Jesus has opened a door for them to something that cannot be taken away. Eternal life is theirs, which no one can wrest from them. Their opposition, called the enemy's gathering (synagogue), these are the ones who are following the false Jewish teachings – perhaps again the Nikolaitans. After the war, these "false Jews" will have to acknowledge that the good Philadelphians were the ones who truly followed God. Jesus has nothing but good things to say to the Christian assembly in Philadelphia, urging them only to continue to hold on throughout the coming affliction.

The victor will become a pillar, constructing the new temple of the new Jerusalem. This new "city" will be foretold more near the end of the book. To have God's name (and Jesus') name written on them symbolizes that they are a *"people for God's own possession."* They belong to God. We will hear more about this new state of affairs later on in the book.

## THE SEVENTH LETTER: LAODIKEIA

**14** *"And to the messenger of the assembly in Laodikeia, write:*

*"Now the A-mein, the trustworthy and true witness, the beginning of God's creation, says these things:*

*"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. Since it was bound for you to be cold or hot, just as you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you from my mouth, because you say that, 'I am wealthy and full, and I have need of nothing. And you don't know that you are the lamentable one, and the pitied one, and the poor one, and the blind one, and the naked one. I counsel you to buy from me*

*gold that has been refined by fire,*

*so that you would be wealthy,*

*and white clothes,*

*so that you would be wrapped*

*and so that the shame of your nakedness would not become*

*apparent,*

*and salve to rub your eyes with,*

*so that you may see.*

*"As many as I may be affectionate toward, I reprove and train. Therefore, be jealous and change your minds. Look, I am standing at the door, and I am knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter to him and I will dine with him, and he with me.'*

*"The victor, I will give him to sit with me on my throne, as also I conquered and have sat with my Father on his throne."*

*The one who has an ear should hear what the spirit says to the assemblies."*

The importance of a-mein in Hebrew is often overlooked. The word first appears in the Torah in Num 5:22, where it indicates the strong affirmation that a curse will be placed on someone. "Let it be," as some say. The word appears in that sense many times (e.g., twelve times in Dt 27 alone). Otherwise it is an oath of agreement, as in 1 Kgs 1:36. The title of "the A-mein" indicates that the Messiah is a positive and solemn affirmation of whatever God is about to do. As the trustworthy and true witness, the Messiah doubly affirms with solemn testimony everything that he has seen and heard – which is from God. The "beginning of God's creation" is the first part of God's plan. Everything that God intended to accomplish – and particularly his instruction of humanity – was done looking ahead to the completion of that teaching and plan. That completion was the Messiah.

Laodikeia was a city whose inhabitants were generally wealthy. They had been so rich, monetarily, that they had rapidly rebuilt their city after the devastating earthquake of 60-61 CE, without Roman assistance. In their wealth, the people tended to forget God, feeling that he was no longer "necessary". They had failed to look forward to the eventual outcome of life and were only regarding their pleasant (physical) state at the time. Jesus gives them a rude awakening! To them, he appears as the trustworthy and true witness; the A-mein. What he will say to them is absolute truth, truth that they cannot avoid. As the "beginning of creation," he asserts that he is the purpose behind everything God has done and will do. The Laodikeians MUST turn to Jesus.



The expressions "neither cold nor hot" and "lukewarm" are not referring to any lack of commitment one way or another, but they should be taken to mean, simply, unpalatable to God. What makes them "lukewarm" is explained readily: because they think they have everything and don't need God. When the wakeup call comes, they need to realize that they need him. Unlike the Smyrnans, who have spiritual wealth, the Laodikeians are dirt poor, spiritually.

Laodikeia was known for its clothing dealers and its oils and ointments. So when Jesus calls them naked and blind, he then tells them they need to buy (clean) clothing and salve, for spiritually, these are the things they lack. They also need true spiritual wealth—gold refined by fire; at the time of the vision, the poor Laodikeians have these things only physically. Such a stern slap in the face is followed by the reminder that Jesus would not chasten them if he didn't care so much about them. "Let me in, and I will let you in," he says. As another symbol of abundant wealth, he offers the victor a throne to sit on, with Jesus himself. Of course, this is intended to be taken spiritually like the items he has mentioned.

## BOOK ONE

The author has completed his letters of warning. His visions of what is to happen "in a short time" are about to unfold. This unfolding takes place in two main parts, called here Book One and Book Two. Book One comprises essentially the things that are to happen to Israel. For the most part, these are told in heaven. Book Two, commencing at 11:19, will display the struggle on earth between the faithful Jews (Christians, represented by pure Jerusalem) and the unfaithful Jews (represented by Babylon); the second section takes place largely on earth.

### PART ONE

*4:1 After these things, I saw. And look, a door opened in the sky, and the first sound that I heard was like a war-trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you what things are necessary to happen after these things."*

*Immediately, I became spiritual, and look, a throne was placed in heaven, and someone was sitting on the throne. The one who was seated was similar visually to a stone of diamond and a ruby. And a rainbow, similar visually to an emerald, was encircling the throne.*

*Also encircling the throne were twenty four thrones, and on the twenty four thrones were seated old people who were wrapped in white clothes, and on their heads were gold crowns. And lightning bolts, and sounds, and thunders went out from the throne. And seven lamps of fire were aflame in the presence of the throne. They are the seven spirits of God. And in front of the throne was something like a sea of glass, similar to crystal.*

*And in the middle of the throne, and around the throne, were four animals that were full of eyes in front and in the back. And the first animal was like a lion, and the second animal was like a young bull, and the third animal had a face like a person, and the fourth animal was like a flying eagle.*

*And the four animals, one by one, had six wings each. Encircling and within them, they are full of eyes. And they have no rest, day and night, saying, ""**Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh, the Almighty God:**" the one who was, and who is, and who is coming."*

*9 And when the animals give glory, and honor, and thanks to the one who is sitting on the throne -- to the one who lives forever and ever--the twenty four old people fall down in the presence of the one who is sitting on the throne, and they bow down to the one who lives forever and ever, and they throw down their crowns in the presence of the throne, saying, "You are worthy, Lord and our God, to receive the glory, and the honor, and the power, because you created all things, and they were and were created through your wishes."*

This is quite obviously a scene of worship, setting us up for the events that are to be foretold. Johannes is swept away spiritually up into the sky, into the "third heaven," that

place outside the universe which was regarded as God's abode. There, he sees God's throne and God upon it. Jews were always careful about describing God in human terms, even on their coinage they did not depict him, and here the author describes God as radiant and gemlike--surrounded by a rainbow.

Around the throne of God were 24 other thrones. 1 Chr 24:1-9 details the twenty-four classes of priests, and since these old people have priestly functions (see 4:10; 5:9; 11:16-7; 19:4) in worshipping God, it is reasonable to expect that the entire priesthood is being symbolized by the twenty-four people whom Johannes envisions. They wear crowns because they have been enthroned and empowered by God.

The number twenty-four is significant, it being two times twelve. Later on, we will be told about the new Jerusalem, with its twelve foundation stones and twelve gates. The twenty-four elders may then doubly represent the twelve envoys and the twelve patriarchs (tribes).

God's voice is like thunder and lightning. God's messengers, or spirits, make another appearance in this vision. Here, they appear as the fire in seven lamps and may therefore be representative of the seven assemblies of Asia. Symbolically, this is the throne room in God's palace. The sea of what appeared to be crystal is reminiscent of the "sea of bronze" in Solomon's palace (1 Kgs 7:23-26) that had been built by Hiram of Tyre. The Solomonic "sea" held a large supply of water that was to be used for holy purposes (such as in the ritual of spring water, Num 19). Here, the glass or crystal indicates a higher level of purity, not humanly possible, for Hiram never could have constructed a huge water basin out of crystal!

Closer to the throne, Johannes saw four animals. This symbolic image appears much like the imagery at the beginning of Ezekiel (1:5-28). The descriptions of Ezekiel's animals make them symbolic of the combined abilities of wisdom, nobility, strength, and swiftness. In Revelation, the four animals have different faces; in Ezekiel, they each have four faces. But the faces are essentially the same, and therefore the symbolism is the same. In total, they represent the positive attributes of human beings and of all the animals. Thus, all creation never stops praising God. Their many eyes symbolize God's omniscience.

The passage says that every time the universe calls out in praise to God (which repeats continually), the priestly figures worship God in humility, tossing down their crowns and declaring Yahweh God as the worthy one, as the one with full and final authority.

## **PART TWO**

**5:1** *And at the right side of the one who was sitting on the throne I saw a scroll that was written inside and on the back, fully sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong messenger heralding with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And no one in heaven, nor on earth, nor underground, was able to open the scroll or to look at it. And I cried a lot, because no one was found worthy to open the*

scroll or to look at it. And one of the old people said to me, "Don't cry. Look, that lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has been victorious. He is opening the scroll and its seven seals."

**6** And I saw in the midst of the throne and the four animals, and in the midst of the old people, that a lamb was standing, like it had been slaughtered. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that were sent out into all the land. And he came and took it from the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. And when he took the scroll, the four animals and the twenty four old people fell down in front of the lamb, each one having a harp and a golden bowl that was full of incense (which is the prayers of the holy ones). And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you redeemed for God with your blood, people from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And you made them royalty and a priesthood for our God, and they will reign on the land."

And I saw, and I heard many messengers' voices encircling the throne, and the animals, and the old people. And their number was tens of thousands upon tens of thousands, and thousands upon thousands. With a loud voice, they were saying, "The lamb that was slaughtered is worthy to receive the power, and wealth, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and praise!"

And every creature that is in the sky, and on the land, and underground, and on the sea, and the things that are in them -- I heard all things saying, "To the one who is sitting on the throne and to the lamb be praise, and honor, and glory, and might, forever and ever. And the four animals said, "A-mein." And the old people fell and bowed down.

Now Johannes' attention – and the reader's – is brought to a scroll that lies next to God's throne (probably on a stand). The scroll is filled with writings and is sealed with seven seals. What's in this scroll? We are supposed to wonder, just as the author himself wondered. We want it opened, just as everyone in the vision wanted to see the scroll opened. But who should be the one to open it? Who is fit to read it and to declare the future? A "strong" messenger announces that question boldly, and for a pregnant moment, there is no answer. No one **anywhere** is even fit to look at it! Now what is coming will never be known!

As Johannes cries about this, one of the priests comforts him. This makes sense, for it is the great high priest who is about to open the scroll. He declares that the Anointed One – the Lion, the Root, is about to open the seals and unroll the scroll. The images the old person conjures up, in describing the Messiah, are images of power. The Lion has been victorious; he has overcome!

And who does Johannes see? A slaughtered lamb: the Passover lamb. The sacrificial lamb and the lion who conquers even death are the same person! Naturally, the Anointed One here is Jesus. The lamb is a strange one, with seven horns – symbolizing universal power, and seven eyes – symbolizing universal knowledge.

As all creation prays (and the priests, properly, offer up the prayers as incense), and as they worship God, they praise the Messiah, for by his redemptive death, he alone is

worthy to open the scroll. Jesus founded his community, which he redeemed, and he alone is fit to announce what God has planned for them – these things that would happen soon. The spiritual nature of the Messianic Kingdom is in focus here. Jesus redeemed Israel and restored the Kingdom, but not as the Jews were expecting it. He made God's children royalty, adopting them as brothers. He made them a priesthood, as God had always planned. Their "reign on the land" should be interpreted symbolically and not literally. Jesus has overcome (death and sin), and his people are victorious. It is over these things that they will reign. As we will later find out, death and the grave have no power over God's children. At last, here, Jesus gets his due. Everyone and everything acknowledges what he has done: the one who came here to teach...and to die. Wow! How prominent! How magnificent! And when the praise was duly given, Jesus prepares to open the scroll, allowing the events foretold in them to unfold.

## **PART THREE**

### ***THE FIRST SEAL***

*6:1 And I saw when the lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four animals saying (as with the sound of thunder), "Come." And I saw, and look, there was a white horse, and the one who was sitting on it had a bow. And a crown was given to him, and he went out victoriously and so that he might be victorious.*

Keep the time frame in mind. Johannes received his vision during Nero's reign. Nero's forces had been responsible for negotiating a settlement between the Roman Empire and the Parthians. King Vologeses I of Parthia so respected Nero that after Nero's death, according to Suetonius, Vologeses specifically requested the Roman Senate to honor Nero's memory (*The Twelve Caesars*, ch. 6, sect. 57). The Parthian warriors were known for their skill with the bow, and it is the Parthians who ride on the white horse of victory in Johannes' vision. In the second volume of *Wars of the Jews*, Josephus reports about the impossibility of defeating the Romans, since the Parthians would not be likely to break their alliance with Nero.

“And why is it necessary to say much more, while the Parthians, that warlike tribe, rulers of so many nations, and surrounded with such powerful forces, send hostages to the Romans? And it will shine for you to see that this is in Italy, the noblest nation of the East, submitting in peacetime to be slaves. Now when almost all people under the sun bow down to the arms of the Romans, will you alone make war against them?

“...but certainly these will not implicate themselves with a wordless cause of prolonged war, nor, with such bad planning, will the Parthians enable it; for it is their foresight to maintain the truce with the Romans, and they will

slip out of the drink-offerings<sup>82</sup> between them, if anyone under them is against the Romans.”<sup>83</sup>

## THE SECOND SEAL

*3 And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second animal saying, "Come." And another horse, a red one, came out, and to the one who was sitting on it, it was given to take peace from the land, and so that they would slaughter one another. And a great sword was given to him.*

Just as the noble lion-like animal announced the vision of the Parthian invasion, the unstoppable bull-like animal announces the opening of the second seal. This time, the horse is red; it and its rider are symbolic of war, and all of the description indicates this.

## THE THIRD SEAL

*5 And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third animal saying, "Come." And I saw, and look, there was a black horse, and the one who was sitting on it held a scale in his hand. And I heard something like a voice in the midst of the four animals, saying, "A choenix of wheat for a denarius, and three choenices<sup>84</sup> of barley for a denarius. And you may not do harm to the oil and the wine."*

The human-like animal announces the third calamity. This time, it is a grain famine being forecast. Food was to be rationed and sold at high prices. This situation is exactly what Josephus reported taking place during the First Revolt:

“Indeed, there were many who sold what they had for one measure; it was of wheat, if they were of the wealthier sort; but of barley, if they were poorer. When they had done this, they shut themselves up in the innermost rooms of their houses, and ate the corn they had gotten; some did it without grinding it, on account of the extreme nature of their need, and others baked bread of it, just as necessity and fear dictated to them: a table was nowhere laid for a distinct meal, but they snatched the bread out of the fire, half-baked, and ate it very hastily.”<sup>85</sup>

## THE FOURTH SEAL

*7 And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth animal, saying, "Come." And I saw, and look, there was a pale horse, and the one who was sitting on*

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<sup>82</sup> Covenants, agreements

<sup>83</sup> Op. Cit., *Wars of the Jews*, II:16:4.

<sup>84</sup> One choenix held the capacity of two Roman sextarii, or just over one liter.

<sup>85</sup> Op. Cit., *Wars of the Jews*, V:10:2.

*top of it was named Death, and Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over one fourth of the land to kill with a broad sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild animals of the land.*

Finally, the swift animal announces the black death: Plague. The four together symbolize the usual terrors with which the unfaithful Israelites were threatened: wild animals (here, the Parthians, but see Lv 26:22); war (see Lv 26:25); famine (see Lv 26:25); and plague (see Lv 26:25). These were among the penalties for not listening to God's instruction. [Ezek 6:11 and 7:14f. also promise the triple threat of war, famine, and plague; Ezek 33:27 gives the threat of war, wild animals, and plague.]

Just as these things did not literally happen to the people who wandered from the Torah, this passage should not be interpreted as indicating that these things would all literally happen. Here it is the seriousness of the threat that is the important thing to gather – and its relationship to the Jewish people having rejected God's instruction. Hades (She'ol) is the grave. It comes with Plague because people will be slaughtered in the revolt. Those deaths would be like a plague from God. People will die and die soon. Unlike many earlier prophecies, there is no "escape clause" here. These things WILL happen. The first four seals are intended to be taken together, and indeed they are summarized together; they are not four things but one.

## **THE FIFTH SEAL**

*9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered on account of God's message and on account of the testimony that they held. And they called out with a loud voice, saying, "Holy and True Sovereign, until when are you not judging and vindicating our blood from those who dwell on the land?" And white robes were given to them, and it was declared to them that they would rest for still a time, until both their fellow slaves and their brothers were completed -- those who were about to be killed, as they had been also.*

When the Romans began to retaliate against the (First) Jewish Revolt, many innocents were slain. Here, those innocents are portrayed as waiting impatiently and calling out for justice. The language is unusual in English, but the question being asked of God is "When will you stop doing what you're doing – allowing the innocent to die?" God told them in the vision that there would be an end to the bloodshed soon. Until that time, their fellow slaves (Christians) and brothers (Jews) would be dying. Thus, the first four seals represent the war for Israel from 66-73, and the fifth seal indicates that good people would die in the conflict also, even if they are not fighting against Rome. Jesus himself spoke about this (see, for example, Mt 24-5) and gave advice as to what to do and expect.



The imagery calls for God to hasten the conflict so that there would not be a long period prior to the final judgment. The ones who are already dying were going to wait patiently for the war to end – when all of the dead would be together.

## **THE SIXTH SEAL**

*12 And I saw when he opened the sixth seal. And a great earthquake happened, and the sun became black like sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the ground like a fig tree casts its unseasonal figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was separated, like when a scroll is rolled up, and every mountain and every island was moved from its place.*

*And the kings of the land, and the magistrates, and the commanders, and the wealthy, and the strong, and every slave and free person hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. **"And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us,"" and "Hide us"** from the presence of the one who is sitting on the throne, and from the lamb's anger! Because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

In the prophetic writings (see, e.g., Joel 2-3, reapplied in Acts 2), descriptions of natural disasters indicate that God is doing something illustrious and powerful. Often but not always, this indicates God's anger about something. This is certainly the case here. The Jews who rejected their Messiah are being judged. As the world would soon find out, the nation of Israel, the temple that represented their religion, and the city of Jerusalem itself were about to be ravaged. This was foretold as early as the days of John the Baptizer:

*But when he noticed many of the Perushim and Zadokites coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who pointed out to you to flee from **the coming anger**? Therefore, make fruit worthy of the mental change, and do not think to say among yourselves, 'We have Abraham as a father.' For I am telling you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones! But **the axe is already lying toward the roots of the trees**. Therefore, each tree that does not make nice fruit will be chopped down and cast into fire.*

*"I indeed am baptizing in water into mental change. But the one who is coming after me is stronger than me, whose sandals I am not strong enough to carry. He will baptize you with holy breath and fire. **His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor**. And he will gather the wheat into the storehouse, but **he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**." (Mt 3)*

Our passage in Revelation borrows from Hosea 10. A more complete citation reads, "Samaria's king will perish like a straw on the surface of the ocean. The idolatrous high places – the sin of Israel – will be destroyed. Thorn and thistle will grow on their altars.



*Then they will say to the mountains, 'Cover us!' and to the hills, 'Fall on us!'" We can see that God is promising retribution for the sins of the nation.*

Taking the first six seals together, we see that God threatened Israel with the usual terrifying plagues. Furthermore, the innocent are seen as crying out for vindication. In all of this, God is pouring out his anger on those Jews who rejected Anointed Jesus. A logical question might be, "Would anyone be safe?"

*7:1 After this, I saw four messengers standing on the four corners of the land, holding fast the four winds of the land, so that the wind would not blow on the land, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another messenger, ascending from the sunrise, who had a seal of the living God. And with a loud voice he called out to the four messengers to whom it had been given to do injustice to the land and the sea, saying, "Do not do harm to the land, or to the sea, or to the trees, until we seal our God's slaves on their foreheads."*

*And I heard the number of those who were sealed: one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:*

*From the tribe of Judah, there twelve thousand who were sealed.*

*From the tribe of Reuben there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Gad there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Asher there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Naftali there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Manasseh there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Simeon there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Levi there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Issachar there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Zebulun there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Yosef there were twelve thousand.*

*From the tribe of Ben-Yamin, there were twelve thousand who were sealed.*

After asking "Who is able to stand," the author immediately gives his readers a comforting answer. Four messengers come into view, with control over the wind (or breath, or spirit). This prepares the way for the fifth messenger to enter. Symbolically, the messenger with God's seal represents the fact that God would save certain people from the war. Nothing can be done to the land until the position of God's people is secured. The number 144,000 is special. It is 12 x 12 x 1000, indicating not a specific number but the full number of living faithful Jews, i.e., Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Anointed One and who were following his teachings. Thus, all Jewish Christians were going to be saved from the judgment. Gentile Christians are not mentioned here because the prophecy generally concerns the fate of the Jewish nation; the gentiles are not in focus.

*9 After these things, I saw. And look, there was a great crowd, which no one is able to number, from all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and*

*tongues, standing in the presence of the throne and in the presence of the lamb. They were wrapped in white robes, and there were palm branches in their hands. And they called out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation is our God's, who is sitting on the throne, and our lamb's!" And all the messengers stood encircling the throne, and the old people, and the four animals, and they fell on their faces in the presence of the throne, and they worshiped God, saying, "A-mein. The blessing, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanks, and the honor, and the power, and the strength be to God forever and ever. A-mein." And one of the old people answered, saying to me, "These who have been wrapped in the white robes, who are they? And where did they come from?" And I answered him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are coming out of the great affliction, and they have washed their robes and have whitened them with the lamb's blood. On account of this, they are in the presence of God's throne and do religious service to him day and night in his temple. And the one who is sitting on the throne will pitch his tent over them. **"They will not still hunger, nor will they still thirst, nor will the sun fall on them, nor any heat."** Because the lamb that is in the middle of the throne will feed them and will lead them to fountains of waters of life. **"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."***

First, the author portrayed a scene of all faithful Jewish Christians being sealed (i.e., saved). Now, we (along with Johannes) see the dead – the martyrs – those who died during the Revolt in service to Jesus. This massive crowd has already received their palm branches: symbols of victory. They stand in God's presence, wearing their white robes (since they have been spiritually purified). Even Johannes himself knew who these people represented, although he prompted Jesus for the answer. These represent the people who died in "the great affliction" – i.e., the First Revolt (66-73). They worship God day and night. For the first time, we read of people having "every tear" wiped away. Here, the passage speaks of the dead; later on, a similar statement will be made for living people.

In this section, we also find the second interesting irony revolving around the lamb. Earlier, as the sixth seal was undone, Johannes revealed a vision of people wishing to escape "the lamb's anger." The Lamb is not a powerless lamb but a mighty one, even though he was slaughtered on an altar. Now we read about clothes being "whitened...with the lamb's blood." This imagery appears elsewhere in the NT and again forms a deliberate picture of irony: the robes of the dead have been made white by the crimson blood of the lamb. Naturally, this signifies the fact that these people are Christians.

## **THE SEVENTH SEAL**

**8:1** *And when he opened the seventh seal, silence happened in heaven for about one half hour. And I saw the seven messengers who stood in*

*God's presence, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another messenger came and stood at the altar. He had a golden brazier, and a lot of incense was given to him, so that he would give it for the prayers of all the holy ones on that golden altar that is in front of the throne. And the smoke of the incense sticks went up for the prayers of the holy ones, out of the hand of the messenger, in God's presence. And the messenger took the brazier, and he filled it from the fire of the altar, and he threw it to the ground. And thunderings, and sounds, and lightnings, and earthquakes happened.*

One might group this section with Part Four, since the opening of the seventh seal represents (by itself) further revelation of the things uncovered by the opening of the first six seals. The seals appear in groups of 4 and 3, with the latter three seals being broken down as 2 + 1. Whether Johannes intended to break 7 down into powers of 2, 4 + 2 + 1, cannot be determined, but the division is a fine one. The repetition to come indicates that the time is growing nearer. The images to follow, representing essentially the same series of events, will be more vivid and must have seemed to Johannes to be more urgent.

When Yahweh comes, there is often silence, as there is here. After a short but appropriate pause, the author sees seven messengers in the process of taking up seven trumpets. An eighth messenger makes an appearance in the vision. He serves in the priestly function of carrying coals to the altar of incense (which is mentioned in Ex 30:1-10 and also here in Rv 8:3): the "golden altar" in front of God's throne. The earthly altars were wooden and were set up in front of the Ark of the Covenant, opposite the throne of mercy.

*"And Aaron will burn on it incense of sweet spices. In the morning when he trims the lamps he will burn it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at dusk, he will burn it: a perpetual incense in Yahweh's presence throughout your generations." (Ex 30:8-9)*

On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the high priest used the altar and censer in a way that is directly related to what is depicted here in Revelation:

*"Aaron must offer the bull which is to be a sacrifice for his own sin, then he must perform the rite of atonement for himself and for his family, and immolate the bull. Then he is to **fill a censer with live coals** from **the altar that stands before Yahweh**; and to take two handfuls of finely ground aromatic incense. He is to take these through the veil and then to put the incense on the fire before Yahweh, and with a cloud of incense he must cover the throne of mercy that is on the Testimony; if he does this, he shall not die. Then he must take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the eastern side of the throne of mercy; in front of the throne of mercy he must sprinkle this blood seven times with his finger." (Lev 16:11-14, JB)*

What Johannes witnesses is quite similar to the punishment in Ezek 9-10. There we read of punishment on Israel, one which spares the innocent and is ushered in by the scattering of incense. In that case incense is scattered on the city of Jerusalem, and in this case on all the land of Israel. The symbol that Johannes saw, then, represents an interrupted offering. Yahweh has rejected the deeds of those Jews who in turn rejected Jesus. Thus, symbolically, the incense is cast down on the whole land. The various sounds and lightning signify, as usual, a majestic act of God.

## **PART FOUR**

### **THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS**

*6 And those seven messengers who had the seven trumpets prepared them, so that they would blow them.*

*7 And the first one blew, and hail and fire happened, mixed with blood, and they were cast into the land. And one third of the land was burnt up, and one third of the trees were burnt up, and every green grass was burnt up.*

*8 And the second messenger blew, and something like a great fiery burning mountain was cast into the sea. And one third of the sea became blood, and one third of the creatures of the sea (those which have lives) died, and one third of the ships decayed.*

*10 And the third messenger blew, and a great star fell from the sky, burning like a lamp, and it fell on one third of the rivers and on the fountains of the waters. And the star's name was called Wormwood. And one third of the waters became wormwood, and many of the people died from the waters, because they were bitter.*

*12 And the fourth messenger blew, and one third of the sun, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were plagued, so that one third of them would be darkened and day would not appear (one third of it), and night likewise. And I saw, and I heard one eagle flying in the middle of the sky, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the land, from the remaining soundings of the trumpets of the three messengers who are about to blow!"*

Once again, this series of four happenings illustrates God's anger. The details of the trumpet-blowing do not signify any actual events on earth but are rather the usual apocalyptic language associated with the coming of an angry Yahweh. The image of hail and fire may originate in Exodus, "So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation." (Ex 9:24, NASB) This was one of the plagues on Egypt, but here the hail and fire are "mixed with blood." Blood was another of the Egyptian plagues (Ex 7:14ff.), but here they are combined. This may indicate that God is angrier with Priestly Judaism than he was with Egypt. Fire (symbolic of destruction in Jewish literature) and plague appear here as they did earlier. The plague of blood also affects the sea, just as in Exodus the blood had impacted all of the water in Egypt. The land, the sea, and the

air are affected, indicating the universal nature of God's punishment for Israel. This time, however, the punishments seem more violent, indicating that they are nearer. "Wormwood" is a drug used in Jeremiah (9:15; 23:15) as a symbol of divine chastisement:

*"For this reason Yahweh of hosts, Israel's God, says this: Behold, I will feed them – that is, this people – with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink."* (Jer 9:15)

Jeremiah's oracle allows the people the opportunity to change their minds and return to God (Jer 7:1ff.); no such exit is found here. Part of the punishment in Jeremiah resulted in Hinnom (Gehenna) being renamed the valley of slaughter (Jer 7:32). In this instance, the wormwood is more potent, coming as a result of heavenly judgment and causing a great deal of death. The great star that falls from the sky and becomes wormwood is earthly Israel. From an elevated position of glory Israel falls, and its people suffer.

This image reminds us also of Isaiah. "Oh, how you have fallen from the sky, dawn star, son of the morning! How you have been crushed down to the ground, you who were set apart from all the nations!" (Isa 14:12) Isaiah was talking about the fall of Babylon to the Medes. In Revelation, Babylon will signify Priestly Judaism, which had rejected its Messiah. In doing so, then, it falls from glory, and its fall is greater than that of the original Babylonia.

The image of stars being darkened is probably borrowed from Daniel 8. We have seen there that the stars represent the people of Israel, and that what happens to them in the vision indicates the unstoppable nature of the approaching nation. The same thing happens here.

The announcement of the eagle (a symbol of swiftness, urgency) indicates that we are to pay special attention to the symbolism of the final three trumpets; the use of the term "woes" to describe them indicates their particularly harsh nature. Watch out!

### ***THE FIFTH TRUMPET***

**9:1** *And the fifth messenger blew. And I saw a star falling from the sky to the land. And to him was given the key to the pit of the deep waters. And he opened the pit of the deep waters, and smoke went up from the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened by the pit's smoke. And locusts came out of the smoke into the land. And authority was given to them, like the scorpions of the land have authority. And it was declared to them that they might not do harm to the land's grass, nor to any green thing, nor to any tree, to nothing except the people who did not have God's seal on their foreheads. And it was given to them that they not kill them, but that the people would be tormented for five months. And their torment was like the torment of when a scorpion stings a person. And during those days, the people will seek death and will not find it, and they will strongly desire death, and death will flee from them.*

*And the likenesses of the locusts were like horses prepared for war, and on their heads was something like crowns, similar to gold. And their faces were like human beings' faces. And they had hair like women's hair. And their teeth were like a lion's. And they had breastplates like iron breastplates, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of many chariots of horses rushing into a war. And they have tails similar to scorpions' tails, and stingers, and in their tails was the authority to do harm to people for five months. They have a king over them, the messenger of the deep, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek his name is Destroyer.*

**12** *One woe has gone away. Look, two woes are still coming after these things!*

Some reckon the "messenger of the deep," the one who opens up the pit, to be the Enemy, but it is more likely, given his name, that the image is supposed to remind the hearer of the Passover (Ex 12). We have already seen that some of the plagues in the revelation parallel those that happened to Egypt. There, various plagues go forth from God, with the final plague being the "plague of the firstborn". The Passover plague was headed up by "the Destroyer" (Ex 12:23, e.g.), the agent of God himself. The fact that he is referred to as a star falling from the sky likely indicates his origin: that he was sent by God.

The "deep waters" (aka the Deep, aka the Abyss) are the place where the unknown, often terrible, creatures lurk. Something coming up out of the "deep waters" indicates that a hitherto unknown terror is arising.

The plague of locusts (see Ex 10:12-15) is suggestive of armies, just as the image is used in the first two chapters of Joel. There too, the locust-armies "look like horses" (Joel 2:4). The teeth are also described in Joel. Here as there (Joel 2:2), the coming of the locusts is preceded by their ominous cloud – a cloud of anticipation; in this case, it is described as "the smoke of a great furnace." Historically, the retribution by the Roman Empire against the Jews did hang over them like a cloud. According to Josephus, Nero sent Vespasian into Palestine in early 67 to stop the revolt. But trouble at Rome and the suicide of Nero (June 9, 68) brought a temporary respite to the attack against the Jewish people. After three short-lived Caesars, Vespasian found himself as Emperor (summer of 69) and resumed the ruthless attack. The Palestinian Jews had a long time to wait, knowing that the Romans would soon continue the war.

As on the day of Passover, the plague of the Destroyer was only sent to harm those who were not following God. We read in the "little apocalypse" (Mt 24:15-23) that Jesus had given his followers signs, so that they would know when the foretold events were going to happen. He advised them to flee Jerusalem, not taking the time even to gather their belongings. The only innocents who would die, then, would be those who had not listened to Jesus, just as the only innocents who died at the first Passover were those Jews who had not followed God's instructions and those Jews who realized during the war that Jesus was the Anointed One.

Here, the locusts symbolize the Parthian hordes. The Euphrates River (v.14) was at the eastern border of the Roman Empire, from where the Parthians were likely to invade. The coming of foreign invaders into the holy land is the first of woes. Their "sting" will last a relatively long period of time, here symbolized by "five months."

### **THE SIXTH TRUMPET**

**13** *And the sixth messenger blew, and I heard a voice, one of the four horns of that golden altar which is in God's presence, saying to the sixth messenger who had the trumpet, "Let loose those four messengers who have been bound at the great river Euphrates". And those four messengers, the ones who had been prepared for the hour, and day, and month, and year, were loosed, so that they would kill one third of the people. And the number of the armies of the cavalry was twenty thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number.*

*And I saw the horses in the vision that way, and those who were sitting on them. They had breastplates of fire and hyacinth and sulfur, and the horses' heads were like the heads of lions; and fire, and smoke, and sulfur went out from their mouths. One third of the people were killed by these three plagues: from the fire, and the smoke, and the sulfur that went out from their mouths. For the authority of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are similar to serpents: they have heads and do harm with them.*

*And the rest of the people, those who were not killed in these plagues, did not even change their minds away from the deeds of their hands, so that they would not worship the spirit beings, [and the idols], and the golden things, and the silver things, and the bronze things, and the wooden things which are able neither to see, nor to hear, nor to walk. And they did not change their minds away from their murders, nor from their alchemies, nor from their prostitutions, nor from their thefts.*

The cavalry is coming! But as was the case with the "locusts" (the army), the descriptions of the cavalry are meant to conjure up certain feelings. This will be an overwhelming force, but the number 200,000,000 is a symbolic one. Ten thousand normally indicates a very large "whole amount." Twenty thousand times ten thousand, then, indicates a double-strength overwhelming force. Just as the coming of the army was told to readers in language reminiscent of the plagues on Egypt (see Ex 10:12f., the plague of locusts), so is the coming of the cavalry. The plagues mentioned here are fire (destruction), smoke (darkness, see Ex 10:21f.), and sulfur. If the army is signified by a more intense version of the eighth plague on Egypt, then this is a more hazardous version of the ninth plague, that of darkness). This darkness kills and causes suffering. The symbolism of the four messengers indicates that the attack would seem to come from everywhere (the four directions).

After the ninth plague on the Egyptians, the Pharaoh's hard was hardened even more,



and he refused to hear Moses' words (Ex 10:27-9). Similarly, when the attacking hordes come, the earthly nation of Israel will refuse to repent of their wickedness, which as usual is portrayed as forms of idolatry. In reality, the people's sin was in rejecting Jesus in favor of their religious system. The final plague against the Egyptian nation was the removal of Egypt's first born children. The whole state of Israel would be removed by the stronger plague on Israel, which was about to be foretold.

## **PART FIVE**

### ***THE THUNDERS***

**10:1** *And I saw another strong messenger descending from the sky, wrapped in a cloud, and the rainbow was on his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire. And he had in his hand a small scroll, opened. And he placed his right foot on the sea and the left on the land, and he called out with a loud voice, just like a lion roars. And when he called out, the seven thunders spoke their sounds.*

*And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Seal up the things that the seven thunders spoke, and don't write them."*

*And the messenger, the one I had seen standing on the sea and on the land, lifted up his right hand into the sky. And he took an oath by the one who lives forever and ever, the one who created the sky (and the things that are in it), and the land (and the things that are in it), and the sea (and the things that are in it), that "The time still will not be. But during the days of the sound of the seventh messenger, when he is about to blow, God's secret will also be completed, as he announced the good message to his slaves, the prophets."*

Before the final trumpet sounds and the last woe is announced, there is an interlude filled with consolation and comfort for the faithful. The first portion of this consolation concerns the utterances of God in theophany. The theophany is described as mysterious (cloud), wearing a royal crown (rainbow), being glorious (sun), and having the power to destroy (fire). The cloud and the pillars of fire are probably supposed to remind the faithful ones of the manners in which God led his people through the desert after the Passover (Ex 13:21-2). Thus, all four symbols are signs of safety for the people: the sun to light their days and the fire their nights; the rainbow was the sign of safety that God sent to Noah (Gen 9:12-17). Thus, the Jewish Christians are being reminded of God's guidance out of Egypt and of God's sign of protection to Noah – that not everyone is going to be destroyed.

When God speaks, it is as the voice of thunder (see, e.g., Jer 25:30-32). But Johannes cannot write them down, for this would reveal the exact nature of the things that are about to happen, and the time for that has not yet come. God, who has nothing greater to swear by, takes an oath by himself (see Heb 7:20f., for example, about the high priest, Jesus) that just as the message about Jesus (the good message) was



announced to the prophets, so also this message that was being announced would be revealed and completed.

Note that when the theophany takes the oath, he stands so as to touch land, sea, and air: the three states of matter and the three regions of the earth. God is master of all three.

### **THE LITTLE SCROLL**

*8 And the voice from heaven that I heard was again speaking with me, and it was saying, "Go. Take the scroll that is opened in the hand of that messenger who is standing on the sea and on the land." And I went away to the messenger, saying to him, "Give me the small scroll." And he said to me, "Take and devour it, and it will make your belly bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey."*

*And I took the small scroll from the messenger's hand, and I devoured it, and in my mouth it was like honey, sweet, and when I ate it, my belly was made bitter.*

The news of the impending destruction of the physical city of Jerusalem and of Priestly Judaism with it is bittersweet. The enemies of God's message were about to be destroyed, and so the news is sweet. But God's faithful were going to suffer, and so the news is bitter.

### **THE TWO WITNESSES**

*11 And they said to me, "It is necessary for you to prophesy again to the peoples, and nations, and tongues, and many kings." And a reed (similar to a rod) was given to me, as he said, "Get up and measure God's temple, and the altar, and those who are worshiping in it. And cast out that court which is outside the temple, and don't measure it, because was given to the gentiles, and they will set foot in the holy city for forty-two months."*

*11:3 "And I will give my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days, wrapped in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees – those two lampstands that are standing in the presence of the Lord of the Land. And if anyone wants to do them harm, fire will go out from their mouths and devour their enemies. And if anyone wants to do them harm, it is necessary that they be killed this way."*

*"These people have the authority to shut the sky, so that it would not bring forth rain during the days of their prophesying, and they have authority over the waters, to turn them into blood and to strike the land with every plague, as often as they want."*

*"And when they have completed their testimony, the wild animal that ascends from the deep waters will make war with them, and will be victorious over them, and will kill them. And their corpses will be on the street of the great city (which is called, spiritually,*

*'Sodom' and 'Egypt'), where also the Lord was crucified. And those from the peoples, and tribes, and languages, and nations will see their corpses for three and a half days, and they will not allow their corpses to be placed into a tomb. And those who dwell on the land will rejoice over them and will be glad, and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the land."*

*And after the three and one-half days, **"the breath of life"** from God **"entered into them, and they stood up on their feet,"** and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. And I heard a loud voice from the sky telling them, "Come up here." And they ascended into the sky in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. And during that hour, a great earthquake happened, and one tenth of the city fell, and the names of seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest became afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

**14** *The second woe has gone away. Look, the third woe is coming quickly!*

Johannes was told to "prophesy again" – to tell the story yet another time. This time, the content will be even more clear. It is not just about Jerusalem but about Jewish people throughout the whole Empire – nations, and languages, and many kings.

The "temple and the altar" – representing God's faithful – are measured. Given this special attention, they will be preserved. Priestly Judaism, which remains remote from God, is represented as the outer court of the true temple. The people who knew that Jesus was the Messiah and who followed his teachings were inside, but the outer court would be destroyed as gentiles overrun Jerusalem. Forty-two months, or three and one-half years, was indeed the approximate time it took for the Romans to ravage the Jewish nation. But here, the time is probably symbolic, having been borrowed from Daniel (ch. 7) to represent any period of persecution – in this case the persecution initiated by Nero.

Two witnesses will be testifying during this period. This image is borrowed from Zechariah. The olive trees in Zechariah are standing next to a lampstand, apparently providing oil for it. Here, the olive trees ARE the lampstands, too – the life of the assembly.

*"And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." And I said to the messenger who was speaking with me, "What are these, sir?" Then the messenger who was speaking with me answered, saying to me, "Don't you know what these are?" I said, "No, sir." And he said to me, "This is Yahweh's message to Zerubbabel: Not by great power, nor by strength, but by my spirit, says Yahweh almighty. Who are you, great mountain? In Zerubbabel's presence you will become a plain. And he will bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'A most generous gift to it!'"*

*And Yahweh's message happened to me, saying, "Zerubbabel's hands have founded this house; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that almighty Yahweh has sent me to you. For whoever has*

*despised the day of small things will rejoice, and will see the metal in Zerubbabel's hand.*

*"These seven are Yahweh's eyes, which gaze on all the land." And I answered him, "What are these two olive trees at the right and the left sides of the lampstand?" And I answered a second time, saying to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden nostrils from which the golden oil is poured out?" He said to me, "Don't you know what these are?" I said, "No, sir." Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of all the land." (Zech 4:3-14)*

The images in Zechariah represent Joshua (who was important in the development of the early Jewish community) and Zerubbabel (who was important in the days of the prophecy). The author uses this connection, and the images of Elijah (whose prayers held back and restored rain) and Moses (who called the plagues upon Egypt), to represent Peter and Paul. If Revelation was written before their deaths, then here it is predicting them. Peter probably indicates the mission to the Jewish people, while Paul points to the gentile mission. This indicates a distinction between religious Israel, physical Israel, and spiritual Israel.

For the first time, the author refers to a "wild animal" that is said to have come up from the deep waters. We will eventually see that this is the Roman Empire – its first appearance in any of the visions. Although both Peter and Paul were both put to death in Rome (it is said that Paul was beheaded and that Peter was crucified upside down), the image indicates that indirectly the Jewish leaders are to blame. Their bodies are said to lie in the streets of Jerusalem (where Jesus was crucified). This is the apostate Jerusalem, nicknamed Sodom and Egypt.

Sodom as a nickname indicates that the Jews who rejected their Messiah did so out of a desire to keep the system that the leaders had put into place. In doing so, they rejected God. Whenever this sort of thing happened in the Old Testament, or whenever the people were unfaithful to God in general, he often referred to them as prostitutes. The use of "Sodom," here is a more extreme version of the familiar label. The use of Egypt is supposed to signify a land of slavery, and the Jews' maintenance of a legalistic system is often referred to this way by NT writers (particularly Paulus). Both the Jewish leaders and the Romans were glad when Paul and Peter were killed, just as the passage reports (or predicts).

However, the passage predicts that they would rise again and continue proclaiming Jesus. Like the "dry bones" of Ezekiel 37 (from where the image is borrowed), the breath of life will enter them, and they will ascend into heaven. Both Peter and Paul rose from the grave, symbolically, because their assassination did not stop the spread of the good message to people of all nations. People who had heard Peter and/or Paul continued to proclaim the message all the more boldly. This is recorded in the secular writings as a curious thing, almost as if the people were considered insane. The description of their ascent to heaven parallels that of Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11).

The first two "woes" have passed. The third woe, soon to come, involves the fall of Priestly Judaism and the rebellion against God that it now represents.

### **THE SEVENTH TRUMPET**

**15** *And the seventh messenger blew, and a loud voice happened in the sky. It said, "The kingdom of our Lord's universe has also become the kingdom of his Anointed One, and he will reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four old people who were sitting on their thrones in God's presence fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We thank you, Yahweh God, the Almighty One, who is and who was--because you have taken your great power and have reigned. And the nations became angry, and your anger came. And the season came for the dead to be judged and to give the reward to your slaves, the prophets, and to the holy ones, and to those who fear your name – to the little ones and the great ones – and to make those people decay who are making the land decay."*

The aftermath of the destruction of the temple and the system that ran the temple is the rise of God's people – the assembly. Thus, God's kingdom has become Jesus' kingdom, and this way of understanding God's instruction will exist forever.

The twenty-four old people are the same ones as in the earlier vision. Now, though, when they praise God, he is no longer "the one who is coming," because in the historical development of the narrative, he has already come. Here, the old people foretell what is to be told in Book Two. This narrative is placed, chronologically, after the judgment in chapter 20. The loud voice is announcing the state of affairs in chapters 21 and 22.

## BOOK TWO

Book Two is distinct from Book One in that its historical narrative begins and ends in a different place. However, it belongs with the first book because it fleshes out in more detail certain of the developments mentioned in Book One, clarifies them, and adds an epilogue to them. As Johannes saw these things, they were perceived together as the aftermath of the blowing of the seventh trumpet. Yet the images that follow will be more concrete. In fact, explanation occurs in Book Two that is much more detailed and precise than any of the descriptive work in the earlier chapters.

## PART SIX

*19 And God's temple, the one in heaven, was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple, and lightnings, and sounds, and thunderings, and earthquakes, and great hail happened. And a great sign was seen in the sky: a woman wrapped in the sun. And the moon was under her feet, and on her head was a crown of twelve stars. And since she had a baby in her belly, she also called out, laboring and being tormented to bear a child.*

*12:3 And another sign was seen in the sky: and look, a great red dragon who had seven heads and ten horns. And on his head were seven diadems. And his tail was dragging one third of the stars of the sky, and he cast them into the land. And the dragon stood in the presence of the woman who was about to bear a child, so that when she gave birth, he would devour her child. And she gave birth to a male son, who is about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod, and her child was snatched away to God and to his throne. And the woman fled into the desert, where she has a place there prepared by God, so that they would nourish her there for one thousand two hundred sixty days.*

God's true temple is opened, making the mysteries of the previous visions (and those still to come) known. This is where the most careful discussion must begin. The author contrasts permanent, figurative temple "in heaven" with the physical temple that was about to be destroyed.

At the start of the vision, we have no immediate clue as to the time frame, but one such clue emerges shortly. A woman appears "in the sky." This woman, like the other who will appear later, is a city. This first woman is Jerusalem in her most pure form, and by extension, the true Israel. These are the spiritual Jews, those who have been following God through the spiritual principles that Jesus completely explained. This is God's system as he intended it. The author might have borrowed the image from Joseph's dream in Gen 37:9. There, the dream foretold the fact that Joseph would someday have a position over the whole civilized land (Gen 42:6). Here, the image represents Israel as God's chosen people. She is crowned with twelve stars, representing the twelve tribes

of Israel. At the start of the explanation, she is about to give birth to a child, the Anointed One (see also Isa 66:7), who came from the pure followers of God.

A dragon also appears in the sky. This dragon represents the leaders of the religion of Priestly Judaism, which is also identified as the Enemy; we are told as much in 12:9. Here, he is portrayed as enormously powerful, with the head and horns indicating that he is the one who empowers the Roman Empire (more later). As Johannes tells it, the religious leaders try to destroy Jerusalem and her child Jesus the Anointed One, but they are kept safe. The "1260 days" are symbolic of Jesus' work on earth, which did last roughly three and one-half years. Escape into the desert was traditional for Jews undergoing persecution in the Old Testament. The true children of God could not be destroyed during that time, since they were being nourished – secretly – in the "desert." They were being nourished by the teachings of the Messiah.

*7 And a war in the sky happened. Micha-El and his messengers made war with the dragon. And the dragon and his messengers made war, and they were not strong enough, neither was their place still found in the sky. And the great dragon was cast down; the serpent, the ancient one, the one called Accuser and Enemy, the one who deceives the whole empire was cast into the land, and his messengers were cast down with him. And I heard a loud voice in the sky saying, "Salvation has now happened, and the power, and our God's kingdom, and the authority of his Anointed One, because the accuser of our brothers has been cast down – the one who accuses them in our God's presence day and night!"*

*"And they were victorious over him through the lamb's blood and through the message of their testimony. And they did not love their lives, until death. On account of this, be glad: the heavens and the things that make their tents in them!"*

*"Woe to the land and the sea, because the Accuser has been cast down to you. He has great rage, knowing that he has a short season."*

*And when the dragon saw that he had been cast into the land, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she might fly into the desert, into her place, where she would be nourished there away from the serpent's presence for a year, and two years, and half a year.*

*And the serpent cast water like a river from his mouth after the woman, so that he might make her be carried away in the river. And the land helped the woman, and it opened its mouth and drank up the water that the dragon had cast from its mouth. And the dragon was angered at the woman, and he went away to make war with the remainder of her seed who keep God's precepts and who have the testimony of Jesus.*

This passage describes the conflict between good and evil, occurring during the lifetime of Jesus. Since the Anointed One was brought forth (v. 5) and kept safe (for the symbolic three and one half years), the crucifixion was a triumph. The religious leaders (the Enemy) were metaphorically cast down (v.9) by the teachings and crucifixion of

Jesus (v.11, "the lamb's blood") and the message of those who adhered to Jesus' teachings. This was the cause of great rejoicing, but even after the crucifixion the religious leaders believed themselves capable of thwarting God's plan. In the vision, the dragon then pursues the woman and makes war with her offspring, the faithful Jews who have accepted Jesus as Anointed One (v.17).

*"And Yahweh spoke to me yet again, saying: 'Forasmuch as this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice with Rezin and Remaliah's son. On account of this, look, Yahweh is bringing upon them the waters of the river, strong and many; that is, the king of Assyria and all his glory; and he will come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks; And he will sweep through Judah overflowing as he passes through he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, Imma-nu-el.'" (Isa 8:5-8)*

Just as the flood in Isaiah represented a nation of gentiles, the image of the flood in Revelation represents the Roman Empire, unleashed by the Enemy – by the Jewish opposition leaders – to destroy the faithful. Nero's persecutions did not begin until around the time of the burning of Rome (64 CE), which most ancient sources blame Nero himself for having started. Nero blamed the fire on Christians (see, e.g., Suetonius) and began his persecutions. The difference between the images is that the Enemy brings the "river" here in Revelation.

### ***THE FIRST WILD ANIMAL: THE EMPIRE***

**13:1** *And I was placed on the sand of the sea, and I saw a wild animal ascending from the sea, which had ten horns and seven heads. And on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were names that were evil speakings. And the wild animal that I saw was similar to a leopard, and its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it its power and its throne and great authority. And one of its heads was slaughtered to the point of death, and the plague of its death was cured.*

*And the whole land wondered after the wild animal, and they worshiped the dragon because he had given the authority to the wild animal. And they worshiped the wild animal, saying, "Who is like the wild animal? And who is able to make war with it?" And a mouth was given to it that spoke great things and evil speech, and authority was given to it to do this for forty-two months. And it opened its mouth in evil speech toward God to speak evil of his name, and of his tent, and of those who make their tents in heaven. [And it was given to it to make war with the holy ones and to be victorious over them.] And authority was given to it over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation. And all those who dwell on the land will worship it--those whose names have not been written in the scroll of life of the lamb that was slaughtered from the laying down of creation.*

*If anyone has an ear, he should hear.*

*If anyone is for captivity, he will be led to it. If anyone kills with a sword, he will be killed with a sword. Here is the endurance and the trust of the holy ones.*

The next figure to emerge is the first wild animal, or “beast,” which makes its first appearance here after some foreshadowing in chapter 11. In this writing, the term “monster” is an acceptable rendering of the term. This wild animal is the Roman Empire.

The dragon, the religious system, was to blame for the situation in which they found themselves, because the religious system was corrupt and consented to those things that Rome wanted. In keeping a grip on the people, they calmed any fears of revolution. In so doing, the Roman government allowed them to remain in office and to continue to hold onto their political standing in Judea. The author describes the lay people as having worshiped the religious system instead of God. Had they not supported the religious system, the Romans could have punished or executed them.

The author indicates that this first wild animal has seven heads. Later we are told are the emperors, the Caesars (17:10). The ten crowned heads are the rulers of the subsidiary kingdoms who have no authority of their own. A secondary interpretation will be provided there as well: the heads also represent the seven hills of Rome (17:9), in case there is any doubt as to the animal's identity. The leopard, the bear, and the lion are borrowed from Dan 7:4-6. This means that the Roman Empire is as powerful as all of the kingdoms mentioned in Daniel (Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Macedonians).

The animal is fierce and all-conquering, as the Roman Empire was, and in the vision it was empowered in Judea by the religious leaders. One of its heads (emperors) was wounded to death. This is Nero, who was alleged to be resuscitated as Vespasian. The Empire was briefly in turmoil after Nero's death, until a new line of emperors arose. The historian Tacitus wrote:

*"The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors failed by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars and often both at the same time...Moreover, Italy was distressed by disasters unknown before or returning after the lapse of ages.... In Rome there was more awful cruelty...."*<sup>86</sup>

The Empire first spoke against God and his people and then made full scale war against the Jews (v.7). The speaking of "evil speech" may extend to the fact that emperor-worship was encouraged, then required, throughout the Empire.

The ignorant people of Judea gave in to the lifestyle of Rome. In that sense, they worshiped the Empire and the religion, for they were content to follow the customs of the Perushim and the other leaders without standing up for the truth. The author equates them with idolaters. An interesting play on words occurs here. Michael, in Hebrew, means, "Who is like God?" The Empire's worshipers are said to ask, "Who is like the wild animal?" I.e., in their question, they make the Empire their god, and Michael has just been mentioned (ch. 12) as defending God's people.

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<sup>86</sup> Op. cit., *Histories*, I: 1: 2.



It is important to notice that the language involved when mentioning the persecution indicates that God did not lose control. God allowed these things to happen for a season, and by his will they would also be put to an end. Even the Empire's sovereignty is spoken of passively, for God is the true Sovereign. At this point in the narrative Johannes and his listeners are comforted: God's true worshipers will not worship the wild animal (they are urged to endure); everyone else in general, though, falls under the Empire's self-centered spell. The statement about captivity and the sword comes from Jer 15:2, which was talking about the first destruction of Jerusalem. Jer 15:6 bears quoting: *"You have rejected me, says Yahweh. You keep going backward; so I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you."*

## **PART SEVEN**

### ***THE SECOND WILD ANIMAL: THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT OF JUDEA***

*11 And I saw another wild animal ascending from the land. And he had two horns that were similar to a lamb's, and he spoke like a dragon. And he does all of the authority of the first wild animal in its presence. And he makes the land and those who dwell in it worship the first wild animal, whose plague of death was cured. And he does great signs, so that he would even make fire descend from the sky to the earth in the presence of people. And he deceives those who dwell on the land on account of the signs that it was given to him to do in the presence of the wild animal, as he tells those who dwell on the land to make an image for the wild animal (who had the plague of the sword and lived).*

*15 And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the wild animal, so that the image of the wild animal might also speak and act, so that as many people as would not worship the image of the wild animal would be killed. And he makes all people--the little ones and the great ones, and the wealthy and the poor, and the free and the slaves--that they would give themselves a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and that no one would be able to buy or sell except for the one who has the mark, the name of the wild animal, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. The one who has a mind should calculate the number of the wild animal, for it is the number of a person, and his number is six hundred sixty-six.*

The second wild animal to emerge appears first to be like a sheep (lamb) but speaks like a dragon. We might call him a "wolf in sheep's clothing". The civil ruler of the Roman province of Judea wields the authority of the Empire itself and uses it for evil purposes. He speaks like the dragon (the ritual religion) although appearing harmless. This wild animal comes from the land – i.e., he is a natural human being who lives in the Holy Land (v.18). He is described in terms of the false prophets, who claimed to be leading the people to truth but instead brought them destruction. The political ruler, having the power of the Empire, could seemingly do anything. He was deceiving the people by being politically joined to the Empire – in effect having them worship the Empire. Those who did not embrace the state and its ways were persecuted or put to

death. In this, the continued adherence to the ritual religion of Priestly Judaism was equal to rejecting God and pursuing idolatry – just as the people had done in ancient times. The expression comes from Exodus 13, where the ritual practice of Pesach (Passover) was labeled as “a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of Yahweh may be on your lips.” Now the opposite is true. The practice of the rituals is a direct rejection of God’s teachings. The Judean people would not trade equally with anyone whom they regarded as an apostate. Here, this is portrayed as not being able to act without taking the “mark.”

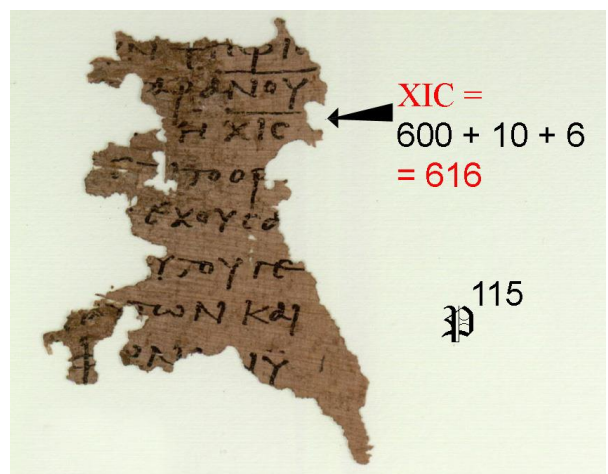
Gessius Florus was the procurator immediately prior to the breakout of the First Revolt. According to Josephus, it was Florus’ brutal, violent rule that led to the revolt.

“Now Gessius Florus, who was sent by Nero as Albinus’ successor, filled Judea with many bad things. Now he was born in the city of Clazomene, and brought along with him his wife, Kleopatra, who was no less evil as he was. (Through her friendship with Nero’s wife, Poppea, he obtained this rule.) Florus was so bad and so violent regarding his authority – so excessive were the bad things that he brought to them – that the Judeans praised Albinus as though he had been their benefactor. For indeed he [Albanus] had hidden his evil and was careful that it might not be discovered by everyone.” (*Antiquities* XX:11:1)

When the anti-Roman Sicarii faction robbed people, he protected them in return for a cut of their plunder – so that the surrounding towns were being looted. He favored the Greeks over the Judean nationals. His corruption stirred up the people to rebel against the Empire. Eventually he stole from the treasury, claiming the money was owed in tribute. The man was a ... beast.

Many full preterists believe that Caesar is the second wild animal. There is reasonable support for this viewpoint, although I no longer believe it to be true.

When "Nero Caesar" is added up in its traditional Hebrew form (*nrn qsr*), 666 is the result. 13:18 indicates that the wild animal is “a man” whose number adds to 666. In transliteration from Latin, Nero’s name added to 616. There are variant manuscripts here which use 616 in place of 666, indicating that the identity of the wild animal was known to early readers, as it was supposed to be. Nero's brutal nature was known to Tacitus, who said that he "put to death so many innocent men." Pliny the Elder (d.79 CE) called him "the destroyer of the human race".



P<sup>115</sup>, from the III/IV century, showing the variant reading of 616 in Rv 13:18.

Certainly, there were people who later believed that Nero had been the wild animal. However, the use of the number 666 is more likely connected with the weight of the annual tribute to the last king of united Israel – **Solomon**. When he ruled the whole land, Solomon received an annual tribute of 666 gold talents. This figure is recorded in both 1 Kings 10:14 and in 2 Chronicles 9:13. Such an exact value, excluding plenty of other income, should not expect to be fixed from year to year. The number represents not only the wealth of the political ruler but also his pride. Solomon had spent the money (1 Kgs 10:15ff.) not to help the people in some way but to secure his own political place. He had a great throne constructed, decorated his palace with gold, and sent out a fleet of ships to accumulate more wealth.

The author intended to point to Solomon, who was best known for his wisdom, and therefore introduced the number 666 with the prefacing sentence, “*Here is wisdom.*” When Solomon built the Temple, God promised him that his lineage would never end **if** he followed God’s teachings.

“As for you, if you walk in my presence as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and honesty, acting in agreements with every precept that I gave you – if you keep my arrangements and my precepts, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, ‘You will never lack a man on Israel’s throne.’” (1K 9:4-5)

Solomon wound up rejecting God, and so the united kingdom would come to an end. As Solomon’s wealth increased, he married many foreign women, and he abandoned Yahweh and turned away to idols (1K 11:1-9). God tried to correct Solomon, but he refused correction. Solomon had been known for his great wisdom, but his wisdom left him.

Furthermore, the first wild animal in Revelation comes from the sea; that is, the Roman Empire came from across the Mediterranean. The second wild animal comes from the land; that is, he comes from Palestine. Just as the author reached into Exodus 13 to describe the mark on one’s hand or forehead, so also the number of a person is from the Hebrew Bible – and does not come from compiling the numerical equivalent of someone’s name from the alphabet. Since the people had demanded a political ruler when God wanted them to be ruled by him directly through the judges, the political ruler represented everything that was bad about the relationship between Israel and the other nations. We certainly see this in 1 Samuel 8.

“Then all of Israel’s older people gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘Look: you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Make for us a king to judge us like all the nations....’” Samuel took this personally, believing that the people did not accept him as their judge. That wasn’t the case. “And Yahweh said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.’” The political rulers were from the very start a symbol of the people’s rejection of God’s rule. Since the number associated with Solomon’s opulence was 666, that number represented the civil (political) ruler in Judea during the First Century.

## PART EIGHT: *THE LAMB WILL DESTROY BABYLON*

**14:1** *And I saw, and look: the lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from the sky, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. And the sound that I was hearing was like harpers playing their harps. And they were singing something like a new song in the presence of the throne and in the presence of the four animals and the old people. And no one was able to learn the song except for the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been bought from the land.*

*These are those who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are those who follow the lamb wherever he goes. These were bought from the people as a first-fruit to God and to the lamb. And falsehood "was not found in their name;" they are blameless.*

**6** *And I saw another messenger flying in the middle of the sky, who had an eternal good message to announce to those who were sitting on the land and to every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and people. In a loud voice, he was saying, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. And worship the one who made the sky, and the land, and the sea and fountains of the waters."*

**8** *And another messenger, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is the great Babylon! She gave all the nations to drink of the wine of the rage, of her prostitution."*

**9** *And another messenger, a third, followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the wild animal and his image and takes a mark on his forehead or on his right hand, he too will drink from the wine of God's rage, which was mixed without control in the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented in fire and sulfur in the presence of holy messengers and in the presence of the lamb. And the smoke of their torment will ascend forever and ever. And those who worship the wild animal and his image (and if anyone takes the mark of his name) will have no rest day and night." Here is the endurance of the holy ones, the ones who keep God's precepts and the trust of Jesus.*

Finally the lamb, Jesus the Anointed One, emerges to lead those Jews who have accepted his teachings. These followers have not defiled themselves. When "women" are indicated here, one specific woman, the prostitute of later chapters, is meant. These are the people who have not prostituted themselves. Thus, "they are blameless." They will be part of a new, spiritual, Jerusalem, to be constructed (on earth) on the ruins of the old, physical one. The living faithful are portrayed as being in communion with God and with the prophets. They sing a "new song," because after the war, the state of affairs for God's people would be different (more about this later).

With the temple destroyed (70 CE) and Jerusalem and the nation in ruins (by 73), God's judgment is about to turn against Priestly Judaism itself, personified by the city of and Babylon – a symbol of rebellion against God's instruction, and of idolatry. A different messenger brings this message; this is not the one who announced that the destruction of the Temple was at hand. In particular, in the vision, the judgment falls on the religion

(identified with Jerusalem) (14:8), and Johannes gives his readers a preparatory vision, the explanation of which begins at 17:1.

The third messenger indicates judgment against all those who follow the government and all those who turn to the civil government which was allied with the religion of Priestly Judaism. This signifies the Jewish people who act like gentiles by following ritual religion. God will pursue such people vigorously, but those who stay faithful will be safe if they endure. As it is in Ezekiel 9, the “mark” indicates ownership.

“And Yahweh told him, 'Go through the midst of the city, Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who mourn and wail for all the lawless things that are done in her midst.'

And to the others he said in my hearing, 'Go through the city after him, and chop down. Don't let your eye spare, nor have mercy. Slaughter the old man and the young man, the virgin and little children and women. But do not go near anyone upon whom is the mark; and begin at my holy place.' And they began with the old men who were in the house.” (Ezek 9:4-6)

In Ezekiel, we see that the “marked ones” are spared from the judgment on Jerusalem. The vision to Johannes flips that around. Through their rejection of the Messiah, the “marked ones” have allied themselves with the beasts. The marked ones now (AD 70) are those who support lawlessness by rejecting the Torah to follow Priestly Judaism; all of them will be judged. However, in order to avoid this judgment, God's people must endure. They must continue to follow the teachings of Jesus until the Temple is finally destroyed.

*13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write. From now on, blessed are the dead who have died in the Lord – 'Yes,' says the spirit – that they might rest from their labors. For their deeds follow with them."*

*14 And I saw, and look: a white cloud. And on the cloud was seated someone similar to a mortal, who had a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another messenger went out from the temple, calling out with a loud voice to the one who was sitting on the cloud: "Send your sickle, and harvest, because the hour to harvest has come. Because the harvest of the land is dry."*

*And the one who was sitting on the cloud cast his sickle at the land, and the land was harvested.*

*17 And another messenger, who also had a sharp sickle, went out of that temple that is in heaven. And another messenger went out from the altar, having authority over the fire. And he sounded with a loud voice to the one who had the large sickle, saying, "Send your sharp sickle, and cut off the clusters of the vine of the land, because its grapes are ripe."*

*And the messenger cast his sickle into the land, and the vine of the land was cut, and he cast it into the great winepress of God's rage. And the winepress was stepped on outside of the city, and blood went out from the*

*winepress, up to the bridles of the horses one thousand six hundred stadia away.*

With the war over, a blessing upon those who were faithful is spoken by Jesus, who has been telling Johannes to write. Then the author sees him on a cloud (representing judgment). He **seems** human (as he did in chapter 1), meaning that the author perceives that he is greater than an ordinary person. Jesus wears a crown, for he is the crowned Prince, the son of God. In this part of the vision, Jesus symbolically gathers the dead who have died both faithfully (vv.14-6) and unfaithfully (v.17f.). In the images received by Johannes, the dead are "harvested" at the end of the war. Jesus sends out two messengers to reap the harvest, one to reap the faithful, and one to reap the wicked. The judgment of the wicked will appear in chapter 20. Their end result is not pleasant: they are "cast...into the great winepress of God's rage." And the winepress (the seeds of unfaithfulness in general, Jew and gentile) is "stepped on", and there is blood for miles! In fact, the size of the patch of blood is the approximate span, north to south, of the region of Judea. The image is such a strong one because the wine of God's anger (back in v.10) is undiluted.

## **PART NINE**

**15:1** *And I saw another great and wonderful sign in the sky: seven messengers who had the last seven plagues, because God's rage was being finished in them.*

*And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire. And the ones who were victorious over the wild animal, and over his image, and over the number of his name, were standing on the glassy sea, holding God's harps. And they were singing the song of Moses, God's slave, and the song of the lamb, saying, ""Great and wonderful are your deeds, Yahweh God, the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the Nations. Who will fear not at all, Yahweh, and glorify your name?" Because you alone are godly, because "all the nations will come and worship in your presence." Because your right deeds were made apparent."*

*And after these things, I saw. And the temple of the tent of the testimony in heaven was opened. And those seven messengers who had the seven plagues went out from the temple, clothed in clean bright linen and wrapped with golden belts around their chests. And one of the four animals gave the seven messengers seven golden bowls filled with the rage of that God who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from God's glory and from his power, and no one was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven messengers were completed.*

This next scene prepares us for the "pouring of the bowls of rage" on Priestly Judaism in the aftermath of the physical war. The plagues, once again, are given as seven in number.



This time, the sea of glass contains not water but fire, indicative of God's destroying anger. The song sung by the attending faithful (who died in the war) is called the song of Moses because of its origin: Exodus 15:1-18. The Israelites sang the song of Moses after escaping the land of Egypt; here, the faithful will sing the same song when they are delivered from the Jewish leaders and from their war with the Romans. It is also the song of the lamb, because the words equally apply to those things that have been accomplished since the advent of Jesus (Part Two of Revelation). God's punishment would be severe, but it is certainly justified, and the justification is presented in advance, here as in 8:3-5.

The tent of the testimony contained the ark of the testimony (covenant) and is also referred to symbolically as God's dwelling (Ex 40). Thus, the wrath comes from God himself, through the seven messengers. There may be an allusion to 2 Macc 2:4-8 here. In symbol, God removed the tent and the ark until the time would come for him to vindicate his people during the Messianic Age.

Just as no one was able to stop the earlier destruction of Jerusalem from happening, no one would be able to stop the elimination of the lineage associated with Priestly Judaism. God fulfilled his promise in this respect, for after the temple was destroyed it gradually became impossible to trace one's lineage back to Abraham through Jacob and Aaron. The priesthood was cut off permanently.

## **PART TEN**

### ***THE FIRST FOUR BOWLS OF ANGER***

**16:1** *And I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven messengers, "Go on and pour out into the land the seven bowls of God's anger."*

*And the first one went out and poured out his bowl into the land. And a bad and evil boil happened to those people who had the wild animal's mark and those who worshiped his image.*

*And the second one poured out his bowl into the sea, and blood like a dead person's happened. And every living soul – the things that were in the sea – died.*

*And the third one poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters, and blood happened.*

**5** *And I heard the messenger of the waters saying, "You are just: the one who is and who was, the Pious One, you have judged these people. Because they poured out the blood of holy people and prophets, you also gave them blood to drink. They are worthy of it."*

*And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Yahweh God, the Almighty: your judgments are true and just."*

**8** *And the fourth one poured out his bowl onto the sun, and it was given to him to scorch the people with fire. And the people were scorched with a*

*great scorching, and they spoke evil of the name of that God who has the authority over these plagues, and they did not change their minds to give him glory.*

The golden bowls resemble the bronze basins that the priests used in the ritual of sacrifice (Ex 27:3). We should compare their pourings to the plagues on Egypt, just as the blowing of the trumpets was compared. The first four bowls are poured out on the land, the sea, the rivers (inland waters), and the sun (sky) – symbolizing the fact that the judgment applied universally to Jewish people everywhere. The descriptive details are provided to give the listener/reader a sense of terror. The judgment comes against those Jewish people who had been unfaithful (v.2). The boils (or ulcers) come from the plagues on Egypt: *“And Yahweh said to Moses to Aaron, ‘Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from the furnace, and let Moses throw it into the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. And it will become small dust over all the land of Egypt, and will be a blistering boil on people and on quadrupeds, throughout all the land of Egypt.’”* (Ex 9:8-9)

Just as the plague on Egypt had been on the land, so also this plague was to cover the land of Judea. Everyone who accepted the idolatrous ways of the religious leaders was subject to this plague. That is to say, they suffered.

The second and third bowls correspond to the plague of blood upon the Nile River (Ex 7:17-21), when the fish died and the river turned to blood. In this case, the image is more calamitous. The necrotic blood naturally signifies death. The messenger interjects with a statement vindicating God for his actions; the people deserve their fate. The evil ones who died during the revolt deserved it, and the religious leaders who would be cut off were worthy of it as well. During God's retribution, the people are hard-hearted and refuse to "change their minds to give God glory." That is, even after all they have seen, they still refuse to embrace Jesus' teachings.

The pouring of the bowl onto the sun parallels the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars in 8:12-13. Here this is the source of light, the temple. As the temple is destroyed, the people who required it for their ritual religion are scorched with fire. Yet instead of turning to Jesus' teachings, they cursed God and refused to change their minds. According to Josephus, the brilliance of the temple reflected the rays of the sun.

*“Now the outward face of the temple in its front lacked nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes; for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays.”*<sup>87</sup>

The author depicts the temple's destruction as a blinding light from God that burnt up those who rejected the Messiah. Without his teachings, indeed, they would be destroyed.

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<sup>87</sup> Op. Cit., *Wars of the Jews*, V:5:6.



## THE FIFTH BOWL

*And the fifth one poured out his bowl onto the wild animal's throne, and it happened that his kingdom was darkened. And they chewed their tongues from the pain, and from their pain and from their boils they spoke evil of the God of heaven, and they did not change their minds from their deeds.*

The wild animal's throne is “evil Jerusalem” or “Babylon.” This is identified with the source of his power and, symbolically, with Egypt. Without the temple to enlighten it, God plunges the people into the plague of darkness (Ex 10:21ff.) – which might be understood as a lasting ignorance. This darkness causes sharp pain, indicating that it is more powerful than the one against Egypt.

## THE SIXTH BOWL

*And the sixth one poured out his bowl onto the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of those kings who are from the East would be prepared.*

*And I saw: from the mouth of the dragon, and from the mouth of the wild animal, and from the mouth of the false prophet came three unclean spirits, like frogs. For they are the spirits of spirit beings which go out, making signs, to the kings of the whole empire, to gather them into the war of the great day of God the Almighty.*

*"Look, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who is watchful and keeps his clothes, so that he would not walk around naked, and they would see his shame."*

*And he gathered them into the place called in Hebrew Har-Magedon.*

In the days of historical Babylon, the country had been overthrown by Cyrus the Great, who diverted the river in order to take the capital city. That event was viewed as divine intervention on Cyrus' behalf. Jerusalem had a large store of grain, which would have allowed them to continue to withstand the Romans. But Josephus reports (*Wars*, V:1:4) that the destruction of the grain store led to starvation, which allowed the Romans to perceive more swiftly. Thus, this image, like the others, was intended to cause fear and create a sense of defenselessness. As we saw in chapter 9, Titus and the cavalry were going to advance on Jerusalem.

The images of the frog-like spirits stems from the plague of frogs on Egypt (Ex 7:25ff.). The frog was regarded by the Egyptians as disgusting. The Jewish leaders (dragon), the civil rulers (wild animal), and the false prophet (apostate Christian Jews) call disgusting (unclean) spirits to assist them. These are the spirits of war. Essentially, this image represents the universal resistance to Christianity, coming from reverted Jewish Christians and from the religious leaders (through laws and rabbinical proclamations) – who are equated with idolaters serving the Roman gods. This is not just any war. “The

war” here is the same war that Johannes mentioned in chapter 6 and will mention again in chapter 19. This is the First Revolt.

Jesus pauses to interject his reminder that these things are going to happen soon! Coming “like a thief” is an expression that Jesus and the NT authors used to describe the second coming – the coming in judgment. Everything would be a surprise to the person who wasn’t paying attention. “Keeping one’s clothes” is equivalent to “keeping the faith.” The one who loses his faith is metaphorically not only naked, but his genitals are visible to others, who are disgusted (and would look away).

Har-Megedon is the mound of Megiddo. After Josiah was defeated at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29ff.), Megiddo came to be used symbolically of a place of disastrous defeat (see Zech 12:11). Therefore, disaster is being forecast for reverted Christians, for all of Priestly Judaism, and for the leaders in particular.

### **THE SEVENTH BOWL**

*17 And the seventh one poured out his bowl on the Air, and a loud voice went out from the temple, from the throne, saying, "It has happened."*

*18 And lightnings, and sounds, and thunderings happened, and great earthquakes happened. Such a thing has not happened since humanity happened on the earth, such an earthquake, so great. And the great city became in three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And the great Babylon was remembered in God's presence: to give it the cup of the wine of the rage of his anger. And every island fled, and not a mountain was found. And a great hail happened, as if weighing a talent, descended from the sky on the people, and the people spoke evil of God from the plague of the hail, because its plague was exceedingly great.*

Why pour out judgment onto the air? In a literal sense, the Jewish people viewed the **air** (αἴρ) as the atmosphere, which the Greeks thought to stretch up to the moon, but in metaphor it meant more. The air was a place that was symbolically the abode of many evil spirits. Examples illustrating this way of thinking are somewhat abundant. In the New Testament, most of the time αἴρ simply means “air.” However, in Paul’s open letter (Ephesians), he mentions “the ruler of the authority of the air.” In the context he is referring to evil spirits, such as “the spirit which is now working in the sons of unpersuasion.” As in the Thessalonican correspondence, John is using the Air as representative of a source of evil.

The pouring of the last bowl of anger onto the air signified the cessation of all of the evils in the land. As soon as this occurs, the judgment is complete. Shortly, a messenger is about to explain to Johannes (ch. 17) that this is the judgment on the false or apostate Israel. Chapter eighteen begins with a messenger announcing that Babylon (Priestly Judaism, represented by Jerusalem-Babylon) has fallen.

Let us also look at a few references to the Air outside the New Testament:

"For the one who fears God and loves his neighbor cannot be smitten by Beliar's spirit of the **Air**." (*Testament of Benjamin*, 3) The Testament of Solomon, which may have been written as early as the time of Paul, but was edited by Christians in the centuries that followed, also refers to the air this way.

"But since Ba'al Zebul, ruler of the spirits of **Air**, and of those underground, and lord of earthly ones, has a kingship together with us ...." (*Testament of Solomon*, 67)

"For there are rulers, authorities, and powers, and we spirit beings fly about in **the Air**...." (*Testament of Solomon*, 114)

"It has happened." The statement is reminiscent of Jesus' own "It has been completed" (Jn 19:30). The same sort of omens happened following Jesus' death (Mt 27:51f.). Instead of the veil of the temple being torn, the city (Evil Jerusalem = Babylon = Rome) is torn not in two parts but in three parts. The powers of Rome cannot withstand an angry god. The hail is borrowed from Ex 9:13ff.; once again, this plague is more intense. Even though their greatness is destroyed, the people's hearts remain hard.

Regarding the catapults used in the siege of Jerusalem, Josephus records:

"Indeed, the engines that all the legions had equipped for them were well arranged, but more functional ones were of the tenth legion: those that threw darts and large stones were more forcible and larger than the rest, with which they not only repelled charges, but also upset those who were upon the walls. For the stones that were thrown weighed one talent, and were carried more than two stadia. The wound they gave was irresistible, not only to those who stood first, but also to those who were beyond them far away. Now indeed the Jews, at first they watched the stone, for it was white, and therefore it could not only be indicated by the whistling it made, but also it could be seen ahead of time by its brightness. Therefore, the watchmen who sat on the towers warned them when the engine was let go and the stone was carried, and they called out in the language of their country, 'The stone is coming!'"<sup>88</sup>

## PART ELEVEN

### EXPLANATION OF CERTAIN IMAGES

**17:1** *And one of those seven messengers who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come. I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the land prostituted themselves, and those who dwell in the land became drunk with the wine of her prostitution."*

*And he led me out, spiritually, into a desert. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet wild animal that was full of the names of evil speakings and that had seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was wrapped in purple and scarlet (plated with gold, and valuable stones, and pearls). She had in*

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<sup>88</sup> Op. Cit., *Wars of the Jews*, V:6:3.

*her hand a golden cup full of detestable things and the unclean things of her prostitution. And a name was written on her forehead, saying the secret, "Great Babylon, the mother of the land's prostitution and detestable things." And I saw that the woman was drunk from the blood of the holy ones and from the blood of Jesus' witnesses. And I wondered, having seen her with great wonder.*

Johannes is taken out to see the prostitute (v.1), seated on a scarlet animal (v.3) which has seven heads and ten horns (as above). As this happens in the vision, the author prepares to explain the image to us, both of the prostitute and of the animal(s). This first wild animal is the Empire, the original beast. Thus, wicked Jerusalem, equated with the idolatrous gentiles, is depicted as now riding the Empire. She is called, metaphorically, Babylon (v.5). Babylon represented a city of prosperity, and for the Jewish people, Babylon was a symbol of idolatry and was representative of the destruction of the Temple under Nabu-kudurri-usur. The "great city" was also called "Sodom" and "Egypt" for similar reasons.

The Mishna (Tamid 29-30) reports that for the daily sacrifice, they gave the sacrificial animal water to drink from a golden cup. In the view of most later rabbis, this was an exaggeration. Here in Revelation, the religion (prostitute) does not have nourishing water in the golden cup but detestable and unclean things that were part of her idolatry against God. She holds a cup of uncleanness – choosing to reject God's chosen one. She is responsible for "the land's prostitution and detestable things" (their wanderings away from God and everything detestable).

Jesus had said (Mt 23), "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you!" He referred earlier in the passage to the religious leaders filling that role. John uses the same accusation here — the leaders of Priestly Judaism were responsible for murdering the prophets. To them, he adds the people who had died recently as they testified about Jesus.

The author's wonder is a literary device, calling attention to the image on his reader's behalf. He is about to share the secret with the readers.

*7 And the messenger said to me, "Why are you wondering? I will tell you the woman's secret, and that of the wild animal which is bearing her, the one that has the seven heads and the ten horns.*

*"The wild animal that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the deep waters, and it is going on into destruction. And those who dwell on the land (whose names have not been written on the scroll of life from the laying down of creation) will wonder as they see the wild animal, because it was, and is not, and will be along.*

*"Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits. And they are seven kings: five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come. And when he comes, it is necessary for him to remain for a short time. And the wild animal that was*

*and is not, it is both an eighth and is one of the seven, and it is going on into destruction.*

*"And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom. But they receive authority like kings for one hour with the wild animal. These have one opinion, and they give their power and authority to the wild animal. These people will make war with the lamb, and the lamb will be victorious over them, because he is the most noble lord and the most royal king. And the ones who are with him are called, and chosen, and trusting."*

*And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is sitting, they are the peoples, and crowds, and nations, and languages."*

*"And the ten horns that you saw, and the wild animal, these will hate the prostitute and will make her desolate and naked, and they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God gave it into their hearts to do his opinion, even to do one opinion--and to give their kingdom to the wild animal until God's statements have been completed."*

*"And the woman that you saw is the great city that has kingship over the kings of the land."*

Physical Rome sits on the seven hills of Rome (v.9). If there is any doubt that the author is setting up the Priestly system that rejected the Messiah as the moral equivalent of idolatrous Babylon and Rome, he clarifies here multiple times. The woman also rides the Empire on top of "many waters" (v.1). These are the other nations and peoples of the world which Rome has conquered (v.14). The political rulers hate unclean Jerusalem, which is the moral equivalent of idolatrous, gentile Rome. We are told this bluntly. The great city is apostate Jerusalem, the most illustrious in the land, but Rome "hates" the Israelite people. When the conflict is over, the Romans leave the Jewish people "naked" – both empty and disgraced.

The seven heads also represent the first seven Caesars, through Galba. Galba reigns for just a short time. Otho and Vitellius, who only reigned during the year of chaos, are ignored, and the count will jump ahead to Vespasian, an "eighth." This numbering provides an additional clue to the time of Revelation's composition:

"Five have fallen." These were: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius.

"One is." Nero, still reigning when the book was written.

"The other has not yet come." Galba was not yet in power, but he would only reign for a short time. As for the ruler about which the author is concerned, Vespasian hadn't been crowned yet. Since Vespasian embodies the Empire and comes later, he is "an eighth." But he is "one of the seven." Embodying Nero returned from the dead, Vespasian is one of the seven as well as an eighth. In the form of Nero, the wild animal is about to proceed toward destruction.

The image of the ten horns is clearly borrowed from Daniel, where they represent the Seleucid kings. Here they also represent kings. The ten horns/kings are the rulers of

the kingdoms that were subject to Rome, or, perhaps the prefects and procurators who operated under the Empire's authority. Having no independent status, they "have not been crowned." But along with the Emperor, they have the power of the Empire.

With that said, another picture of the struggle between God's forces and his opposition is painted, again with the assurance that God will triumph.

## **PART TWELVE**

*18:1 After these things, I saw another messenger descending from the sky who had great authority. And the land was illuminated with his glory. And he called out with a strong voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is the great Babylon! And it has become an empire of spirit beings and a jail for every unclean spirit, and a jail for every unclean bird, and a jail for every unclean and hated wild animal! Because from the wine of the rage of her prostituted, all the nations have fallen, and the kings of the land have prostituted themselves with her, and the merchants of the land have been made wealthy out of the power of her luxuries."*

Now begins a set of pronouncements forecasting the fall of the religious system that we know today as Priestly Judaism. To the author, Priestly Judaism is not the system that God established. Instead, it represents an obstinate refusal to follow God, who had sent the Anointed One to explain all things. A messenger (who has the authority to say such things) indicates the reasons for the judgment against Priestly Judaism. These religious leaders caused people to fall away from God, not only among Judeans but among the people of other nations also.

Instead of being a bastion of hope for God's people, every bad thing in the Hebrew Bible is now part of Jerusalem. Spirit beings, "demons," perpetuate the religion in the sense that Jesus described during his life:

*"Now when the unclean spirit has come out from a person, it goes through waterless places, seeking and not finding a resting place. Then it says, "I will turn back to my house from which I came out." And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept clean, and adorned. Then it got and takes along with itself seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person has become worse than the first. It will be that way with this evil generation." (Mt 12:43-45)*

The original spirit being represents the idolatry with which the Jewish people had struggled for so many years. Finally they had reached the point where the temple was not surrounded by false prophets, prophets of Ba'al, and the like. However, they had their religion, and it was seven (or eight) times as idolatrous as the state that they had left behind.

The messenger also announces that Jerusalem is filled with every species of unclean bird and animal. These are “detestable things,” as we might have ascertained from chapter seventeen, but the metaphor means more than that. Being infested with unclean things signifies being unsuitable for inhabitation, and if a person is in contact with unclean things constantly, and if that person tries to partake of the sacrifices, then that person is to be removed from the people. In this case, the people who follow Priestly Judaism have been cut off, in accordance with the Torah:

*“And if a living being touches an unclean thing, whether human uncleanness or an unclean quadruped or any unclean detestable thing, and eats from the meat of the sacrifice of salvation that is Yahweh’s, that being will be destroyed from his people.”* (Lev 7:21)

The “merchants of the land” became wealthy because of the religion through the merchandising that took place around the temple. Johannes cites Jesus’ distaste with the temple being a “house of merchandise,” while Matthaiah’s account of the second cleansing is more upsetting – referring to the temple as a “den of robbers.”

The juxtaposition of the unclean animals with the merchants may be intended to remind the reader of the sacrificing of unclean animals in the temple by Antiochus IV over a century earlier. We certainly must bring the oracle of Malachi to mind:

*“ ‘... if I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a lord, where is my fear?’ says Yahweh almighty to you, the priests who hate my name. But you say, ‘How have we hated your name?’ By presenting defiled food on my altar. ... But when you present the blind for sacrifice, isn’t it a bad thing? And when you present the lame and sick, isn’t it bad? Offer it to your governor; would he be pleased with you, or would he receive you personally?” says Yahweh almighty. ... “I am not pleased with you,” says Yahweh almighty, “ nor will I accept an offering from your hands... But cursed is the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but kills a blemished one for the Lord, since I am a great king....”* (Mal 1:6-14)

The rulers of the land treated the temple and the city like a cult prostitute, rather than like a city separated apart for service to God. This is what filled the city with uncleanness; the religion made it unpalatable to God and caused its judgment.

*4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "My people, come out from her, so that you would not be partners together with her sins. And come out from her plagues, so that you would not receive them. Because her sins were built up to the sky, and God remembered her deeds of wrong. Give out to her as also she gave out, and give double according to her deeds: mix her double in the cup in which she mixed. As much as she glorified herself and was luxurious, give her that much torment and mourning. Because in her heart she says that, 'I am sitting as a queen, and by no means will I see mourning.'*

These things are being said at the "present time," i.e., c. 64 - 66 CE. Johannes provides a warning to God's faithful people to avoid prostituting one's self with the paradigm of the religious system. God has remembered "her deeds of wrong" and will soon begin inflicting punishment. He urges the people, morally, to fight back.

The exhortation to leave the city is similar to what Jesus told his followers in the Olivet discourse. Leave the area so as not to be judged along with Priestly Judaism and the temple. Until the revolt began, the Judeans were convinced that the temple would stand.

*"On account of this, her plagues will come on one day: death, and mourning, and famine, and she will be burnt up in fire. Because Yahweh God, the one who has judged her, is strong.*

*"And the kings of the land who sinned sexually with her and were in luxury will cry and lament when they see the smoke of her fire. From a large distance they will stand, on account of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe! The great city, Babylon, the strong city! Because your judgment came in one hour!'*

*"And the merchants of the land will cry and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargo any longer: cargo of gold, and silver, and valuable stone, and pearls, and cotton, and purple cloth, and silk, and scarlet cloth, and every kind of fragrant wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel of valuable wood, and copper, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and amomum, and incense, and balsam, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and people's bodies and souls.*

*"And your fruit season of the soul's strong desire has gone away from you, and all the fine things and splendid things have gone away from you. And by no means will they find these things any longer.*

*"The merchants of these things that have become wealthy from her will stand at a large distance on account of fear of her torment, crying and mourning, saying, 'Woe, Woe! The great city that was wrapped in cotton and purple cloth and scarlet cloth, and was plated with gold, and valuable stones, and pearl. Because such wealth was desolated in one hour!'*

*"And every sea captain, and everyone who is sailing to a place, and sailors, and as many as are working on the sea, they stood at a large distance, and they called out as they saw the smoke of her fire, saying, 'What is similar to the great city?' And they threw dust onto their heads and called out, crying and mourning, saying, 'Woe, Woe! The great city, in which all those who have ships in the sea were made wealthy from her value! Because she was desolated in one hour!'*

*"Have a good attitude about her, oh heaven, and the holy ones, and the envoys, and the prophets. Because God has judged your judgment on her."*

This is a lament over the vindication of God's people. The images indicate that Priestly Judaism was once spiritually wealthy, but her wealth will be worthless and is now useless to prevent God from exacting vengeance on behalf of his people.

A couple of ironies bear noting. First, the merchants are mourning not over the loss of



the city but over the loss of their great wealth. We read about such wealth several times in the Hebrew Bible. For example, we see, *"Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous"* (Gn 47:27). We read also that Balaam was attracted to the physical people of Israel because, *"it pleased Yahweh to bless Israel"* (Num 24:1). Statements of prosperity and wealth appear frequently enough that Johannes is able to describe their great fortune as blessing all the nations – a statement reminiscent of what God told Abraham. But Gen 22:18 indicates that the true blessings came *"because you have listened to my voice."* Such was no longer the case. The religious leaders certainly would mourn – but what they mourn is their own loss of power, the removal of their "place and nation." Second, the sea captains ask "What is like the great city," reminiscent of "Who is like the wild animal" and the name Michael (as previously mentioned). The image concludes with another statement of comfort for the faithful.

In this vision also, we see the decorations of the temple, and in particular the author reminds his readers of the splendid attire of the high priest:

*"You will make a breastplate of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of **gold**, of blue and **purple** and scarlet material and fine twisted linen you shall make it. It will be square and folded double, a span in length and a span in width. You will [\[o\]](#)mount on it four rows of stones; the first row shall be a row of **ruby**, **topaz** and **emerald**; and the second row a **turquoise**, a **sapphire** and a **diamond**; and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; and the fourth row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; they will be set in gold filigree. The stones will be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they will be like the engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes."* (Ex 28:15ff.)

Many of the other items mentioned here were typically used in the sacrifices, although some appeared as decorations on the temple itself. The two shocking items at the end of the list are intended to indicate that the religious system made people into slaves – human beings that were treated as merchandise. The wealthy sea merchants of Israel – who brought the materials into the temple to be bought and sold, and who traded in other items as well – these also mourn the loss of the great economic power. Jerusalem was a wealthy city, and a lot of that wealth was connected with the city's place as a cultural center. The temple was the centerpiece of that culture. In the vision, the city was desolated so rapidly because God was ultimately responsible for the judgment.

## PART THIRTEEN

**19:1** *After these things, I heard something like a loud voice of a large crowd in heaven, saying, "Hallelu-Yah! The salvation, and the glory, and the power is our God's, because he is true and his judgments are just! Because he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the land with*

*her prostitution, and he has vindicated the blood of his slaves from her hands." And a second time they said, "Hallelu-Yah!" And her smoke ascends forever and ever. And the twenty-four old people and the four animals fell down and worshiped that God who was sitting on the throne, saying, "A-mein. Hallelu-Yah."*

*And a voice came out from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all of his slaves, and those who fear him--the little ones and the great ones."*

The images of praise here are deliberately focused on Jerusalem. God has detailed his judgments for the ungodly people, and now is the time to praise. This proclamation and the coming expressions of praise show that the images of the destruction of (physical and ungodly) Jerusalem and the vindication against Priestly Judaism have been completed.

## **PART FOURTEEN**

*6 And I heard something like the sound of a large crowd, and like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of strong thunderings, saying, "Hallelu-Yah! Because Yahweh our God, the Almighty, has reigned! Let's rejoice and exult and give glory to him! Because the marriage feast of the lamb has come, and his wife has prepared herself." And it was given to her that she would be wrapped in cotton, splendid, pure. For the cotton is the right deeds of the holy ones.*

*9 And he said to me, "Write. Blessed are those who have been called into the supper of the lamb's wedding feast." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."*

*And I fell in front of his feet to worship him, and he said to me, "Look, no! I am your fellow slave and the fellow slave of those brothers who hold to Jesus' testimony. Worship God." For Jesus' testimony is the spirit of prophecy.*

All of the faithful in heaven praised God and announced a "marriage feast" at the end of the great war. This time, Johannes was told to write something precise, indicating again its importance. God himself affirms that the wedding feast (of the Messiah and the faithful dead) is something blessed. Johannes falls down to worship the messenger who said these things, but the messenger urged him properly to worship God instead.

## **THE PROCESSION OF TRIUMPH**

*11 And I saw the sky opened, and look: a white horse. And the one who was sitting on it was called Trustworthy and True. And he judges justly and makes war. Now his eyes were like a flame of fire, and on his head were many diadems which had a name written on them that no one knows*

*except himself. And he was wrapped in a cloak that had been dipped in blood. And his name was called God's message.*

*And those armies that are in heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in clean white cotton. And a sharp broad sword comes out of his mouth, so that he would strike the nations with it. And "he will shepherd them with an iron rod," and he steps on the winepress of the wine of the rage of the anger of God the Almighty. And he has a name written on his cloak and on his thigh, "Most Royal King and Most Noble Lord."*

*And I saw one messenger standing in the sun, and he called out with a loud voice, saying to all those birds that fly in the middle of the sky, "Come gather at God's great supper, so that you might eat kings' flesh, and commanders' flesh, and the flesh of strong people, and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people – both free and slave, both little and great."*

The image is that of a victory procession. Jesus, the embodiment of God's message (the spiritual Torah) arrives on the white horse of victory, accompanied by his attendants. The cloak dipped in blood represents the crucifixion. He is called trustworthy, true, just, powerful, penetrating (eyes like fire), royal, and the shepherd (of Ezekiel). The sword that cuts the nations is God's message itself. Eating the flesh of people is symbolic of victory over them – over everyone who has opposed the faithful in their service to God. The people and the birds of prey are sharing in God's victory.

## **PART FIFTEEN: *THE JUDGMENT FROM ANOTHER ANGLE***

**19** *And I saw the wild animal, and the kings of the land, and their armies gathered to make the war with the one who was sitting on the horse and with his armies. And the wild animal was caught, and so was the false prophet who was making the signs in his presence, with which he deceived the ones who took the mark of the wild animal and those who worshiped his image. The two were cast, living, into the lake of that fire which burns with sulfur. And the rest were killed with the broad sword of the one who was sitting on the horse, the one that went out from his mouth. And all the birds were gorged on their flesh.*

**20:1** *And I saw a messenger descending from the sky, which had the key to the deep and a great chain on his hand. And he took hold of the dragon, the serpent, the ancient one, who is an accuser and the enemy, and he bound him for one thousand years. And he cast him into the deep, and shut him up, and sealed something over him, so that he would not still deceive the nations – until the completion of the one thousand years. After these things, it is necessary to let him loose for a short time.*

*And I saw thrones, and the souls of those who had been chopped up on account of Jesus' testimony and on account of God's message, and who did not worship the wild animal nor his image, and who did not receive the*

*mark on their foreheads and on their hands – and they sat on the thrones. And they lived and reigned with the Anointed One for the one thousand years.*

*This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no authority over these people. On the contrary, they will be God's and the Anointed One's priests and will reign with him for the one thousand years.*

The author backs up again to the beginning of the conflict. Both the Empire (here a symbol of wicked people opposed to God) and the false prophet (symbolic of Jewish people who claimed that God favored their religion over the teachings of Jesus) were cast into the Lake of Fire. In other words, they were destroyed: not literally, but figuratively. What does this mean? These forces are rendered powerless, as far as the true believer was concerned. All their armies are symbolically defeated by God's message (the message of salvation and freedom – the gospel). They too are powerless and, metaphorically, have their flesh eaten. As we read in 19:19ff., all of this took place during the Revolt.

The religious leadership – called the serpent because of their treachery, and the Accuser (the usual Hebrew name for the Enemy) – is first shut up in the deep then later freed. Some full preterists prefer to identify this “shutting up” with the period between the crucifixion and the Revolt, but if something closer to 1000 years is desired, then Priestly Judaism may be seen to begin with the construction of the temple many years earlier. Once this time began, the sequence of events was fixed; there was nothing that the Jewish leadership could do to prevent the ultimate destruction of the temple and their religion. The good people are vindicated (“reign with Jesus”) during this period, as ordinary people start to realize that the path that the leaders led them down was only going to bring them destruction. During the conflict, the ones who die faithfully go to be with God. Johannes calls this the “first resurrection.”

*7 And when the thousand years are completed, the Enemy will be loosed from his jail. And he will go out to deceive the nations that are in the four corners of the land – Gog and Magog – to gather them into war. Their number is like the sands of the sea.*

*And they went up to the plain of the land and encircled the encampment of the holy ones and the beloved city. And “fire descended from the sky and devoured them.” And the accuser that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the wild animal and the false prophet also are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

When the Revolt began, the religious leaders tried to stir up discontent and to save their religion. Gog, king of Magog, is found in Ezek 38-9, where they both are a symbol of the Babylonian Empire. Here the two are used symbolically of all of the evil forces that have been mentioned thus far – and in particular the religious leaders. They tried to wipe out the Messiah's people and his way of thinking, but their religion was destroyed.

The evil forces were metaphorically destroyed by fire from the sky, an image plucked out of that passage in Ezekiel. Thus, the Enemy and all his forces are destroyed, symbolically. That is to say, not all wicked people are killed physically, but to the faithful one, they were rendered utterly powerless. The temple was gone, the sacrificial system was gone, and the priests were powerless – leaving only ordinary teachers with their human philosophy.

*11 And I saw a great white throne and the one who was sitting on it, from whose face the land and the sky fled, and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, the great ones and the little ones, standing in the presence of the throne. And scrolls were opened, and another scroll was opened, which is the scroll of life. And the dead were judged out of what was written in those scrolls, according to their deeds. And the sea gave the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave the dead that were in them. And each was judged according to his deeds. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if someone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.*

An earlier vision has already displayed some of the celebration of the righteous. Now it continues to the condemnation of the wicked. This condemnation **ONLY** extends to the evil people who died during the war (v.12). It is the **dead**, not all humanity, who are being judged here. All the bad guys are destroyed (cast into the lake of fire). This is called by the author "the second death" – permanent destruction.

Now comes the marvelous metamorphosis. Death is destroyed (rendered powerless), and Sheol, Hades, the abode of the dead, along with it (v.14). This marks the conclusion of the age and the beginning of the post-Messianic period. The power of death is stripped away – death is **metaphorically destroyed** for the Christian. None of the forces of evil, not even death itself, has any power over God's holy ones. The forces of evil (the religious leaders, et. al.) have been described earlier as being in torment, because they are powerless.

## **PART SIXTEEN**

*21:1 And I saw a new sky and a new land, for the first sky and the first land went away, and the sea is no longer. And I saw that holy city, a new Jerusalem, descending from the sky from God, prepared like a bride that is adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Look: God's tent is with people, and he will pitch his tent with them. And they will be his people, and God himself with them will be their god. And **"he will wipe away every tear from their eyes,"** and death will be no longer, nor mourning, nor crying. Neither will pain be any longer, because the first things have gone away."*

*And the one who was sitting on the throne said, "Look: I am making all*

*things new," and he said, "Write, because these sayings are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "They have happened. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the one who is thirsty I will give as a gift from the fountain of the water of life. The one who is victorious will inherit these things and **"I will be his god, and he will be my son."***

*"But to those who are cowards, and distrustful, and detestable things, and murderers, and prostitutes, and alchemists, and idolaters, and all the liars – their part is in that lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."*

"The sea is no longer" refers to the Bronze Sea from the temple of Solomon, in which the priests washed their hands and feet. Ritual cleanliness is unimportant in the new order, because the kingdom consists entirely of priests, all of whom are holy.

This new state of affairs (21:1) is borrowed from Isaiah (65:17; 66:22). Isaiah 65 and 66 likely were written just after the exile, c. 539 BCE. When they returned to the land, the Israelites discovered people living there, and they themselves were like strangers. Some seemed to lack a concern about a return to temple life. At the beginning of chapter 65, we read about that state of affairs. God opened his arms to an estranged people (65:2), who ignored his teachings (65:4). Some people among them, however, were devout. Continuing the situation in Isaiah, the bad people would receive their own punishment (65:11-16, see below), while the good would be blessed (65:17ff.). In the new state of affairs (v. 17), the sins of the past were to be forgotten.

Isaiah also refers to Solomon's temple in language similar to what we find in Revelation. Solomon's temple was not fully reconstructed and rededicated until 516 BCE, but it was never necessary to begin with (66:1-2); his people may serve him without it. Here in Revelation, the New Jerusalem, the people governed by the Messiah's spiritual Torah, is here in all her glory, prepared as the bride of the lamb (21:9). The quote, partly a citation from Isaiah 25, contains parallel language to those sayings about the new covenant (see Jer 31:31-4, quoted in Heb 8:8-12), if we wish to call it that. Jesus pointed out that God's promise would come true for those who followed his teachings.

Death is now powerless for every believer. This was not true under the former covenant, because a practitioner of the sacrifices might still be overwhelmed with guilt – instead of feeling forgiven. With a consciousness of forgiveness (instead of legalism), the pain of this self-condemnation exists no longer. Whoever wants spiritual truth need not need approach mediators (the clergy); under the new system they approach God directly. Whoever overcomes the old system to have a relationship with God, that person is the "one who overcomes."

In the narrative, Jesus urges Johannes to write down this important statement. Since the readers have Jesus' and God's assurance, these things are spoken of as though they had already happened. The faithful should persevere; the wicked will be destroyed.

The pronouncement on the wicked is taken from the prophecy of Isaiah about the end of the Exile:

*"But you who abandon me, who forget my holy mountain, and who prepare a table for a spirit being, and fill up a mixed drink for Fate: I will give you over to the sword, and all of you will fall in the slaughter. Because I called you, and you did not listen; I spoke, and you did not hear; and you did evil in my presence, and you chose what I did not want." (Isa 65:11-12)*

The ones who are left because of their bad choices are those who chose the religion of Priestly Judaism over the Messiah. Johannes' vision equates their choice of ritual religion to idolatry, prostitution, and witchcraft – all of the things that the Jewish leaders stereotypically applied to godless gentiles. The "cowards" are the ones who knew who Jesus was but who refused to stand up for his teachings because of the social persecution that they faced. The liars were those who knew that Jesus was the Messiah but who deliberately denied him. As many of these who died during the war were lost forever. About these liars, the author previously wrote in his first letter:

*"Who is the liar, if not the one who denies, 'The Anointed One is not Jesus?' This person is the one who opposes the Anointed One, the one who denies the Father and the son. No one who denies the son has the Father either; the one who acknowledges the son has the Father also." (1J 2:22-23)*

## **THE CITY: FAITHFUL STUDENTS**

**9** *And one of the seven messengers that had the seven bowls (which were full of those seven last plagues) came and spoke with me, saying, "Come. I will show you the bride, the lamb's wife." And he led me away spiritually to a great and high mountain, and he showed me that holy city, Jerusalem, descending from the sky from God and having God's glory. Its luminary was similar to a most valuable stone, like a glassy diamond stone. It had a great and high wall; it had twelve gates, and at the gates were twelve messengers. And names were written on the gates, which are the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel – from the east, three gates; and from the north, three gates; and from the south, three gates; and from the west, three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were twelve names, of the lamb's twelve envoys.*

*And the one who was speaking with me had a measure, a golden reed, so that he might measure the city, and its gates, and its walls. And the city lies four sided, and its length is as much as its width. And he measured the city with the reed to be twelve thousand stadia. Its length, and width, and height are equal. And he measured its wall: one hundred forty-four pecus, a person's measure, which is a messenger's.*

*And the structure of its walls was of jasper, and the city was clean gold, similar to clean glass. The foundation of the wall of the city was adorned with every valuable stone: the*



*first foundation was jasper; the second was sapphire; the third was lapis lazuli; the fourth was emerald; the fifth was sardonyx; the sixth was ruby; the seventh was chrysoberyl; the eighth was beryl; the ninth was topaz; the tenth was green agate; the eleventh was hyacinth; the twelfth was amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls. Each one of the gates was of one pearl. And the street of the city was clean gold, like transparent glass.*

*And I saw no temple in it, for Yahweh God, the Almighty, is its temple, along with the lamb. And the city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, so that they would enlighten it. For God's glory enlightened it, and its lamp is the lamb. And the nations will walk through its light, and the kings of the land will carry their glory into it. And its gates will by no means be shut by day, for there will be no night there. And they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. And by no means will anything common enter into it, or the one who does detestable things and falsehood, no one except the ones who are written in the lamb's scroll of life.*

The bride, now the Messiah's wife, consists of all of Yahweh's children – those who recognize that Jesus was the Anointed One and who follow the spiritual Torah. Much of this description comes from Ezekiel 40, where we read:

*In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was struck, on that same day the hand of Yahweh was on me, and he brought me there. In God's visions, he brought me into the land of Israel and set me on top of a very high mountain; and on it was something like the construction of a city, to the south. (Ezek 40:1-2)*

In Ezekiel's vision, he was taken up to a mountain to see the reconstruction of the temple after the end of the Exile. Johannes does not see the construction of a third temple after the desolation of the second. Instead, he sees with a new paradigm that the new Jerusalem consists of all of the people who truly follow God – through the teachings of his Anointed One. Instead of sitting on the land, the new city appears to be coming directly from heaven. In the vision, the new city is built not only on the twelve tribes of Israel but also on the teachings of Jesus' envoys. The imagery continues to parallel Ezekiel:

*And look, there was a wall outside of the house, surrounding it, and in the man's hand there was a measuring-reed six long pecus in length: (each long pecus was one pecus and a palm-width in length). (Ezek 40:5)*

As in the vision in Ezekiel, the man holding the reed was there to measure. However, the focus of the measurement in Ezekiel is the second temple, which appears with dimension similar to those of Solomon's Temple. In Revelation, there is no temple, for the people itself comprise the temple. Therefore, measurements are taken of the city. A single stadion was approximately 606.6 feet in length. Therefore, the measurement of 12,000 stadia would measure 7,279,513 feet (or over 1375 miles) across. This gives



the city an area of over 1,900,000 square miles. That's over 223 times the size of the physical nation of Israel, and about 5,430,862 times the size of historical Jerusalem. This would be over 100,000,000 times the size of the Second Temple. The expression of the vastness in size is intended to convey the fact that it includes all of God's followers everywhere. The number 12,000 is the product of the "large, complete number" of 1000 and the number of Jesus' envoys to the Jewish people. The thickness of the wall to the new city is given as 144 paces. In the vision, that would be thick enough to repel any army – signifying that the new city cannot be destroyed. The number, 144, is twelve times twelve: the product either of the number of tribes with itself or the number of tribes with the number of envoys.

There are still nasty people, but they are outside of the city and apart from God (22:15). The city, God's people who follow his teachings through the Anointed One, was founded on the twelve tribes of Israel (v.12), for they follow the pure Torah. It was also founded on the Twelve envoys to the Jews (v.14). The valuable stones seem to correspond to those found on the breastplate of the high priest, indicating that the people in the city are a kingdom of priests.

*And you will interweave with it a texture of four rows of stone;  
there will be a row of stones: a **ruby**, a **topaz**, and **emerald**, the first row.  
And the second row, a **hyacinth**, a **sapphire**, and a **jasper**.  
And the third row, a **lapis lazuli**, an **agate**, an **amethyst**.  
and the fourth row, a **chrysoberyl**, and a **beryl**, and an **onyx** stone,  
encircled with gold, bound together with gold: let each be according to its  
row. (Ex 28:17-20)*

According to the account in Exodus, the stones were engraved with the names of Jacob's sons. Here the stones appear in a different order, and are probably engraved with the names of the envoys (since they correspond to the walls). Although there have been mathematical and zodiacal suggestions as to the reason for the reordering, none is satisfactory, so that it may simply be the case that Johannes was told to list all twelve stones.

The city is a perfect cube: the shape of the Most Holy Place inside the temple. Pure Christianity is a wonderful, precious, and yet fathomable thing (vv.15-21). There is no temple in the new city, which hearkens back to John 4:21-4, Acts 7:48-50, and Acts 17:24-5. Yet these too remind us of Isaiah's words (66:1-2), quoted by Stefanos in Acts, which mention that true worship is apart from any physical structure; it comes instead from the heart (see also Jn 4, "spiritual worship"). This is a pure Judaism – as the author has contrasted with the corrupted forms of religion practiced beforehand.

**22:1** *And he showed me a river of water of life, splendid like crystal, going out from God's and the lamb's throne. In the midst of its plain, and on this and that side of the river, was a forest of life which produced twelve fruits, giving out its fruit according to each month. And the leaves of the forest were for the curing of the nations.*

*And every curse will no longer be. And God's and the lamb's throne will be in it, and God's slaves will give religious service to him. And they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no longer, and they will not have a need of the light of a lamp and the light of the sun, because Yahweh God will shine on them, and they will reign forever and ever.*

The life-giving water is the spirit of God (Jn 4, Jn 7), as we have also read in passages in the Hebrew Bible. God's life-giving message flows out from God by way of Jesus. The forest of life (perhaps taken from the tree of life, Genesis 1-3) is symbolic of spiritual food, spiritual growth, which can heal spiritual wounds. This time, the forest represents Jesus' teachings, of course. The twelve fruits signify the Twelve envoys to the Jewish people. Since the city is comprised only of the faithful, the curses that were to result from abandoning God's teachings no longer apply; instead, they live entirely in the light. Because they live the spiritual Torah, every true Christian worships God through Jesus. The people will "see God's face" – that is, they will know him like a friend. Several passages in the Hebrew Bible use this expression, and see also 1 Cor 13:12. The faithful people, living lives of love in service to God always have God as a light.

## **PART SEVENTEEN**

*6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true," and, "Yahweh, the God of the spirits of the prophets sent out his messengers to show his slaves what things are necessary to happen in a short time." And, "Look, I am coming quickly."*

*Blessed is the one who keeps the sayings of this scroll's prophecy. And I, Johannes, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell to worship in front of the feet of the messenger who showed me these things. And he said to me, "Look, no! I am your fellow slave and the fellow slave of your brothers, the prophets, and of those who keep the sayings of this scroll. Worship God."*

*And he said to me, "Don't seal the sayings of this scroll's prophecy, for the season is near. Let the one who is unjust be unjust still, and let the one who is dirty be dirty still, and let the one who is just still do what is right, and let the one who is holy be holy still. Look, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to each one, as his work is."*

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that their authority will be over the forest of life, and they will enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, and the alchemists, and the prostitutes, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who is affectionate to and who does falsehood."*

At last the prophecy and its explanations have concluded. The time of completion was so near to the time of writing that it did not allow for change (22:10-12). As Jesus himself said, some of those who were alive in his day were alive when all of these things happened (Mk 9:1). The oracle describes Yahweh God as being consistent. The same deity who sent the prophets also inspired “his slaves” – the modern envoys, and gave them the message that all of the things described in this scroll were going to happen very soon.

Johannes was overcome by the majesty of God’s messenger, but any messenger of God (even Jesus, in this case) is only that: a “fellow slave.” God is the only one deserving of worship. Johannes could not seal the prophecy, for the time of its fulfillment was so near! This is an intentional contrast to Daniel 12, in which the time between the historical Daniel and the fulfillment of the prophecy was several hundred years. Here, the season of fulfillment was almost immediate: within the span of a few years. In the oracle, there was not even enough time to make serious changes in one’s life; all of it was about to happen. For us today, the Enemy ought to be powerless. Death ought to be powerless. The grave ought to be powerless. For we can do all things with God, and our own deaths are but the beginning of a spiritual eternal life with God. Indeed, our everlasting life has already begun. Let us praise God, for he has kept his word and fulfilled his promises to us.

After the destruction of the temple, the people who are outside are the ones who had their ritual religion taken away. These people are now the moral equivalent of the gentiles – described here in some of the worst terms. Last on the list are “idolaters.” These people wanted to keep their religion rather than acknowledge their Anointed One. The worship of religion rather than God is idolatry. This list is parallel to the list found at 21:8. In that instance, the people who had died in the war and who were advocates of ritual religion were snuffed out in the Lake of Fire. Now that the war is over, there are still people who want to practice ritual religion, including those who practice falsehood – liars who knew from personal experience that Jesus was the Anointed One but who deny it.

## APPENDIX

**16** *"I, Jesus, sent my messenger to testify these things to you at the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And the one who hears should say, 'Come.' And the one who is thirsty should come: the one who wants to may take water of life as a gift.*

*"I am testifying all things to the one who hears the sayings of this scroll's prophecy. If anyone should place something onto them, God will place on him the plagues that are written in this scroll. And if anyone should take away from the sayings of the scroll of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the forest of life, and from the holy city, that are written about in this scroll. The one who testifies these things says, 'Yes.'"*

*"I am coming quickly." A-mein, Lord Jesus, come! The generosity of Lord Jesus be with all people.*

This concluding affirmation contains further testimony, by Jesus himself, that the things contained in the prophecy would definitely happen and happen soon. Indeed, they all came to pass within a few years of the time of writing. The hearer of the prophecy is cautioned against adding to it or taking away from it: to do either is an indicator that you are not a follower of Jesus the Anointed One. With that, the author affirms everything that Jesus told him and blesses his faithful readers.

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## THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE or OLIVET DISCOURSE

Matthew 24 and 25 contain Jesus' own predictions about the "end times". These end times or "last days" are often thought to be referring to some distant future date when the earth will be destroyed. Contextually, though, the full description relates to those same events that are described in Revelation: the First Revolt of 66-73 CE. We will see this as the situation unfolds.

**24:1** *And after Jesus was exiting, when he was going away from the temple, his students came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered, saying to them, "Don't look at all these things. Indeed I am telling you, by no means will there be a stone left here on top of another stone that will not be thrown down." Now as he was sitting on the Mountain of Olive Trees, the students came to him by themselves, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the age?"*

*And Jesus answered, saying to them, "Watch out, so that no one deceives you. For many will come with my name, saying, 'I am the Anointed One,' and they will deceive many people. But you are about to hear about wars and reports of wars. See to it that you are not alarmed, for it is necessary to happen. But the end is not yet.*

As the conversation begins, it is plain to see what is the topic of discussion. Looking at the temple, Jesus indicates its certain destruction. They ask Jesus, "When will these things be?" That is, when will the temple be thrown down? The confusion over the meaning arises because of the second question: "And what will be the sign of the presence and of the conclusion of the age?" The "presence" or παρουσία, usually translated "coming," is the so-called second coming. And on account of this, many people identify the conclusion of the age with the end of the *world*. However, this is not what they are asking about.

Let's look to Markus's and Lukas's parallels for help. Markus has: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be concluded?" It is clear, then, from the wording in Markus that Matthew's "completion of the age" is when "all these things are about to be concluded." Furthermore, Lukas's account of the question reads: "Teacher, how then will **these things** be, and what will be the sign when **these things** are about to happen?" The end of the world is not the subject for discussion, or at least it has not been mentioned in the students' questions. The end of the pre-Messianic age was seen as coinciding with the destruction of the temple. Thus, asking about its desolation was the same as asking about the end of the pre-Messianic age.

Jesus indicated that many human beings would come along claiming to be the Anointed One. But Jesus' students knew that he was the genuine article: the son of God.

## THE WAR: THE FIRST REVOLT

*"For nation will rise up upon nation, and kingdom upon kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes at places. But all these things are the beginning of painful things.*

*"Then they will deliver you over for affliction, and they will kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations on account of my name. And then many will stumble, and will deliver one another over, and will hate one another. And many false prophets will rise up, and they will deceive many people. And on account of the fullness of lawlessness, the love of the majority will be cooled, but the one who endures to the end, this one will be saved. And this good message of the kingdom will be heralded in the whole empire, for a witness to all the nations. And then the end will come.*

This is Jesus' explanation as to what must happen before the temple would be destroyed -- just before the conclusion of the age. The famines and earthquakes are the same kind of apocalyptic talk as found in Revelation. The image of the war, however, is vivid. "They" will hand Jesus' students over to be persecuted. They, who? So far, Jesus has not said, but in the context of Jesus' work on earth, he means the Jewish leaders. In all of this horrid war, "the one who endures to the end...will be saved." This is essentially the same message of endurance as found in Revelation.

Jesus ends his description on a positive note: "This good message of the kingdom will be heralded in the whole Empire, for a witness to all the nations. And then the end will come." By the time of Paul's letter to the Kolossaeans, he was already capable of saying that the good message had been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (1:23); the message was everywhere. What Jesus had in mind would start in Acts 2, when Peter announced the message to Jews from "every nation under heaven" (Ac 2:5) and would continue throughout the years between his resurrection and the fall of the temple.

Markus's account adds the description: "They will deliver you over to councils and to gatherings. You will be beaten, and you will stand before governors and kings on my account for a testimony to them." The words used here, councils and gatherings, indicate that until the time of the war, the Jewish leaders would form the largest resistance to the Christian message. "Councils" indicates the Sanhedrin, and "gatherings" is the English translation of the word usually transliterated as "synagogues." Because of these people, the students would "stand before governors and kings," merely because they were testifying about Jesus. In the case of Peter and Paul, this was definitely the case. Tradition holds, too, that almost every one of the ones who heard Jesus say this wound up being martyred--killed for Jesus' sake. Markus's account also mentions the betrayal as being "brother against brother," an indication that few would stand up for the envoys during the affliction. All of this proved to be true.

## **DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE; the FALL OF ISRAEL**

*"Therefore, when you see "the desolating detestable thing," that was declared through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place--the one who reads, let him think--then those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains, the one on the roof should not descend to take the things from his house, and the one who is in the field should not turn back to take his cloak. Woe to the ones who have babies in their bellies and those who are nursing in those days!*

*"But pray, so that your flight would not happen in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great affliction, the likes of which has not happened from the beginning of creation until the present, neither should it by any means happen. And if those days were not cut short, no flesh would be saved. But on account of the chosen ones, those days will be cut short.*

The original "abomination of desolation" is found in Daniel 11:31 and in chapter 12. There, the expression indicates the presence of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the temple, where he sacrificed swine and set up a statue of Zeus -- thus profaning the temple. Here, Jesus cleverly reminds his listeners to look back to what Antiochus had done, for something similar was going to occur. In Matthew, the expression indicates the presence of the Romans in the temple, led by Titus (son of Emperor Vespasian, who would later become Emperor himself).

We read in Encyclopedia.com about the Cult of Battle Standards:

*The early Roman army had a standard called the signum for each manipule, carried by the centurion who commanded the unit. When Marius established a professional army in Rome (about 100 BC), he reorganized the legion, making the cohorts the major tactical units, and giving it a standard, the eagle or aquila. This standard was regarded as the sacred emblem that personified the legion's existence. A chapel was built for it, and it was honored with a religious cult. The standard was made first of silver, later of gold. It was placed at the top of a long pole and variously ornamented. Its loss brought disgrace on the members of the legion and frequently led to the disbanding of the legion in question. In the period of the Roman Empire before Constantine, the image of the reigning emperor was carried also as a standard by various military units, and was likewise an object of worship. The cult of these standards created a formidable problem for Christian soldiers, and particularly for Christian officers.*

It is well-known that, "The eagle standard accompanied Titus during his siege of Jerusalem. This led to the demolition of the Second Temple."<sup>89</sup> This placement of the eagle standard in the Temple defiled it with a gentile object of idol-worship – exactly as Antiochus IV had done with the statue of himself dressed as Zeus Olympias. Like that

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<sup>89</sup> Lisa M. Haasbroek, "The Golden Eagle in Jerusalem: History Repeats Itself," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 23, 2020.

statue, the battle standard was a “desolating, detestable thing.” The placement of this standard was the event predicted by Jesus. Suetonius' ancient account may allude to the possibility that Titus died regretting having invaded the temple.

Jesus told his students that when the Romans entered the temple, the desolation of the city was coming soon. Therefore, Jesus' followers should “flee to the mountains.” Fortunately, the siege of the city would be relatively short. In total, the attack on Jerusalem lasted from April of 70 CE until September – only five months. By late Spring of 73, the fortress at Masada had been taken and the war was over.

Lukas has Jesus wording it as follows:

*“Now when you notice **Jerusalem** surrounded by encampments, then you should know that **its desolation** has come near. Then those who are in Judea should flee....”* There, Jesus urges his followers not to go back into Jerusalem. And so, it is clear that he was still talking about the destruction of the temple and desolation of Jerusalem – not about a later, different event.

## **FALSE PROPHETS**

*“Then if someone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Anointed One,’ or, ‘He is here,’ do not believe. For false Anointed Ones and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, and so they will deceive, if possible, even the chosen ones. Look, I have told you in advance. Therefore, if they should say to you, ‘Look, he is in the desert,’ don’t go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the private places,’ do not believe. For just as the lightning comes out from the east and is apparent as far as the west, the presence of the Son of Man will be this way. Wherever a corpse may be, the vultures will be gathered there.*

Jesus again indicated that people would show up on the scene before and during the war claiming to be prophets and the Anointed One. Indeed, the coming of the false prophets began immediately after Jesus died. Some are recorded in the New Testament. Some of the Jewish Christians began claiming that Jesus was not really the Anointed One; these are the one whom Johannes calls “the ones who oppose the Anointed One,” throughout his first letter. Because of the transliteration “anticristos,” many people believe that this is referring to a person to be called the Antichrist. Although Revelation never uses the term, people identify that figure with the wild animal (Beast) of Revelation. While Nero (the wild animal) was certainly opposed to God's people, Johannes makes clear the identity of the “antichrists”:

*Beloved, do not trust every breathing, but examine the breathings to see if they are from God. Because many false prophets have gone out into creation. In this way we know God's breath: every breathing that acknowledges Anointed Jesus to have come in the flesh is from God, and no breathing that does not acknowledge Jesus is from God. And this is the one who opposes the Anointed One whom you have heard is coming. And now he is already in creation. (1J 4:1ff.)*



There, Johannes urges his readers not to believe people who claimed to be prophets. One way to tell is simple: if someone claims that Jesus was not the Anointed One, he is a false prophet. "And this is the one who opposes the Anointed One (antichrist) whom you have heard is coming." Johannes refers back to the sayings of Jesus (such as this one in Mt 24) that predicted the coming of false prophets and false Messiahs. Who is the so-called antichrist? Anyone who claims that Jesus is not the Anointed One. Want to see it again?

*Young children, it is the last hour. And just as you heard that one who opposes the Anointed One is coming, even now many who oppose the Anointed One have arisen. By this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from among us, but they did not belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But they left so that it would become apparent that not all of them belong to us. (1J 2:18ff.)*

Johannes says that MANY who oppose the Anointed One are already there! MANY "antichrists." He then goes on to remind the readers that they have an "anointing" (deliberate play on words) that tells them the truth about such things. Then he adds, "Who is the liar, if not the one who denies, **'The Anointed One is not Jesus?'** **This person is the one who opposes the Anointed One**, the one who denies the Father and the son. No one who denies the son has the Father either; the one who acknowledges the son has the Father also." Anyone who denies that Jesus was the Messiah is an "antichrist." So when Jesus predicted that such persons would come, many such people did come--before the fall of the temple.

Returning to Matthaiah's account, Jesus adds to his mention of false prophets that the true presence (or second coming) would be obvious. He also describes the religious system as being nearly dead. It is in Jerusalem at the temple where the vultures are going to gather. Hmm.... Let's keep reading.

### **THE COMING IN JUDGMENT (first account)**

*"Now immediately after the affliction of those days, **"The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens"** will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will be in the sky, and then all the tribes of the land will lament, and they will see the Son of Man **"coming on the clouds of the sky"** with power and much glory. And he will send his messengers with great trumpets, and they will gather his chosen ones from the four winds – from the extreme points of the heavens to their other extremes.*

This is a description of the Second Coming. The second coming is the coming in judgment, already mentioned in our discussion of Rev 19-20. The description of the heavenly portents, taken from Isaiah 13 (or Ezekiel 32, Amos 8), is the usual indication that God is coming in judgment. As we have read earlier, none of these were intended as literal signs – just as they never happened literally when they were fulfilled in the Hebrew Bible. Then "all the tribes of the land will lament" – they lament over the

judgment. The people will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky"--borrowed from Daniel, the 'coming on the clouds' also indicates judgment. The "gathering of the chosen ones" is a call to war, which (in metaphor) every good person – living and dead – would fight.

This statement of Jesus' is directed at the faithful, and so it focuses on the outcome of the war for those who remain loyal to God and Jesus.

Lukas's account words it this way:

*"And there will be signs with sun and moon and stars, and on the land anguish of nations in confusion; of the sea, a roar and tossing. There will be a fainting away of people from fear and an expectation of the things that are coming to the Empire. For "the powers of the heavens" will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much brilliance. But when these things are beginning to happen, straighten yourselves up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is nearing!" (Lk 21:25-8)*

Once again, Jesus stays within the context of the First Revolt (66-73 CE). These things are coming to "the Empire." When Jesus comes, the redemption of the faithful is nearing. This redemption will become the state of affairs during the Messianic Age – the age that begins as the temple is destroyed in 70 CE.

### **ANALOGY OF THE FIG TREE**

**32** *"Now learn from the analogy of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and it puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near. In the same way also, when you notice all these things, know that he is near, at the doors. Indeed I am telling you that by no means will this generation pass away until all these things happen. The sky and the land will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away."*

Jesus gives an analogy (or parable) to indicate that his listeners should watch carefully for these things. What things? They need to watch for the things that he just described: the advent of false prophets and the surrounding of Jerusalem by Roman armies. So, "when you notice all these things, know that (Jesus) is near, at the doors." In case there is doubt as to how soon the temple would be destroyed and the age would end, he adds, "by no means will this generation pass away until all these things happen."

Markus's account has essentially the same thing, and Lukas's has: *"In the same way also, when you notice these things happening, know that God's kingdom is near. Indeed I am telling you that this generation will by no means pass away until even all things have happened."* This occurrence is also called the coming of God's kingdom. Markus's record has already foretold this: *"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my sayings among **this** adulterous and sinful **generation**, the Son of Man will also be*

ashamed of him **when he comes** in his Father's glory with the holy messengers." And he said to them, "Indeed I am telling you that there are **some of those who are standing here** who will by no means taste death until they see God's kingdom when it has come with power." (Mk 8:38-9:1)

Matthaiah's account often speaks of "this generation":

*"Now to what will I liken this generation?" (11:16)*

*"Ninevite men will stand up during the judgment with this generation, and they will condemn it." (12:41)* There, Jesus also indicates that the Southern Queen would condemn them.

*"Indeed I am telling you, all these things will come upon this generation." (23:36)*

In every case, Jesus is talking about the people who were alive in his day. There is no exception to that pattern here; everything happened during the First Century. Jesus' final phrase, "my words will by no means pass away," is talking about his prophetic statements about the destruction of Jerusalem. He assured his listeners of the veracity of the prophecy; it would certainly be fulfilled soon. The assurance should not be extended further than that.

### **ANALOGY OF THE DAYS OF NOAH**

**36** *"But about that day and hour no one knows: neither the messengers of the heavens nor the son, no one except the Father alone. For just as in the days of Noah, the presence of the Son of Man will be that way. For as in those days before the flood, they were dining and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the chest -- and they did not know it until the flood came and took everything away -- the presence of the Son of Man will also be this way. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken along, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding in the mill; one will be taken along, and one will be left."*

Jesus will not fix a date for them. His students would have to be watchful and look for the signs that he has mentioned. Only God knows the exact timing anyway! In saying this, Jesus prepares to give several analogies.

Immediately prior to the flood, there were many people (he says) who weren't watching for a flood. They didn't know the flood was coming and were slain. That's how it would be when the war and the end of the age came.

The parallel (male/female) analogies about "one being taken" and "one being left" are only meant to indicate the seeming suddenness of the events as they unfold. The conflict would be like you were walking along with your friend, and all of a sudden he disappeared – slain in the war!

Lukas's account adds this advice to the faithful:

*"But pay attention to yourselves; otherwise your hearts will be burdened with gluttony, and drunkenness, and life's anxieties, and that day will come upon you suddenly. For it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the land like a snare. But keep watch in every season, begging so that you might prevail to flee out of these things that are about to happen and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man."*

This was all going to happen so soon that he urged his followers not to get wrapped up in the ordinary affairs of life. Notice that Jesus did not say that the faithful would be caught unawares. He has only said, thus far, that those who are *not* looking for the war to happen will be blindsided when it comes. When the Zealots seized Masada and Jerusalem in 66 CE, this was not predictable except to those who followed the political situation involving the Zealot faction. To the people who knew what was going on, it was clear that this was going to happen. Jesus' listeners needed to be alert.

### ***THE THIEF and THE TRUSTWORTHY SLAVE***

*"Therefore, watch out, because you don't know on what day your Lord is coming. But you know this: that if the ruler of the house knew on what guard the thief were coming, he would watch out and would not allow him to dig into his house. On account of this, you too should become prepared, because you don't know at what hour the Son of Man is coming."*

*"Consequently, who is the trustworthy and mindful slave, whom the lord has set over his household, to give them food in season? Blessed is that slave whom his lord finds doing this when he comes. Indeed I am telling you that he will set him over all his possessions. But if that bad slave should say in his heart, 'My lord is taking his time,' and if he should begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with those who get drunk, that slave's lord will come in during a day when he is not expecting and at an hour that he doesn't know, and he will cut him in half and will place his portion with the hypocrites. There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth."*

Jesus again warns that the events could happen at any time! Therefore, it was necessary to be watchful. He provides another analogy: just as if you know a "thief" is coming, but you don't know precisely when, so you must watch out, rather than being caught unprepared.

The trustworthy slave analogy shows his listeners the attitude that would be necessary to have when God brings down the judgments on Israel. Each person should be doing what God wants him to do. Otherwise, God will cut the unfaithful one in half -- he will destroy him. Ouch! For the first time, Jesus predicted anguish the Jewish people who strove to rely on their religion. When their access to God was cut off, they would have only destruction and anguish.

## **ANALOGY OF THE TEN VIRGINS**

**25:1** *"Then, the kingdom of the heavens will be like ten virgins, who, after taking lamps, went out to a meeting with the bridegroom. Now five of them were foolish, and five were mindful. For the foolish ones took their lamps but did not take oil with them. Now the mindful ones took oil in the vessels with their lamps.*

*"Now while the bridegroom was taking longer time, they all nodded off and fell asleep. But in the middle of the night, a cry happened: 'Look, the bridegroom! Go out to his meeting.' Then all those virgins got up and adorned their lamps. But the foolish ones said to the mindful ones, 'Give us of your oil, because our lamps are being extinguished.' But the mindful ones answered, saying, 'Lest there by no means should be enough for us and you, go to those who sell, rather, and buy from them.'*

*"Now while they were going away to buy, the bridegroom came, and the prepared ones came with him for the wedding festivities, and the door was shut. But afterward, the rest of the virgins came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open for us!' But he answered, saying, 'Indeed I am telling you, I don't know you.' Therefore, watch out, because you know neither the day nor the hour."*

This longer analogy again shows that vigilance and diligence (in doing God's will) would be rewarded. He remarks that the people who continue to do God's will (from the time this oracle until the siege) will be rewarded. The people who stop doing God's will (and therefore cease to be prepared) will be turned away by God. Once again, the reason why those people would be unprepared is because they were clinging to their religion rather than Jesus. If something happens, they reason (in the analogy) that they could prepare themselves then. However, by the time they truly realize what's going on, the temple will be gone.

## **ANALOGY OF THE TALENTS**

**14** *"For it will be just like a person traveling abroad, who called his own slaves and delivered over his possessions to them. And to one indeed he gave five talents, but to one he gave two, and to one he gave one, to each according to his own power. And he traveled abroad. The one who had received the five talents went immediately, traded with them, and gained another five. Similarly, the one with the two gains another two. But the one who had received one, retired and carved out ground, and he hid his lord's silver.*

*"Now after a long time, the lord of those slaves came and settled the account with them. And the one who had received five talents went to him and brought the five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you gave five talents over to me. Look, I have gained five other talents.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave. You were trustworthy with a few things; I will place you over many. Enter into your lord's joy.' "Now also, the one who had the two talents went to him, saying, 'Lord, you gave two talents over to me. Look, I have gained two other talents.' His lord said to him, 'Well*



*done, good and trustworthy slave. You were trustworthy with a few things; I will place you over many. Enter into your lord's joy.'*

*"Now also, the one who had the one talent went to him, saying, 'Lord, knowing that you are a violent person, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you did not scatter, and being afraid, I went out and hid your talent in the ground. Look, you have what is yours.' But his lord answered, saying to him, 'You evil and slow slave! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered. Therefore, it was necessary for you to cast my silver to the bankers, and when I came I would have been paid what was mine with interest. Therefore, take the talent away from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For all will be given to and will be abundant for the one who has, but for the one who does not have even what he has will be taken away from him. And cast the useless slave into the outer darkness. There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth.'"*

We may say many things about the parable of the talents, for the details can be understood several different ways. For our purpose, this analogy fleshes out the details of the earlier analogies. God did not expect every Jew to do the same things or to do them in the same way. But he did want each person to work for God according to his/her abilities. The person who did nothing good with his skills, the "evil and slow slave" who remained with Priestly Judaism out of tradition's sake, was going to have everything taken away. He would be destroyed, cast into the "outer darkness" away from God's presence! This piecemeal expansion on the fate of the wicked almost comes across as though Jesus is cautioning them gently. His assumption for the faithful is that they will remain faithful. But there is an alternative, if they cease to live for God.

### **THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS**

**31** *"Now when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the messengers with him, then he will sit on his throne of glory, and all the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them out from one another, just as the shepherd separates out the sheep from the goats. And he will indeed station the sheep at his right side and the goats at the left.*

*"Then the king will say to those at his right side, 'Come, you who are praised by my Father: inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the laying down of creation. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink. I was a stranger, and you gathered me in; naked, and you wrapped something around me; weak, and you visited me. I was in jail, and you came to me.' "Then the just ones will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and gather you in? Or naked and wrap something around you? When did we see you weak or in jail and come to you?' And the king will answer, saying to them, 'Indeed I assure you, as often as you did them for one of these of the least of my brothers, you did them for me.'*

**41** *"Then also he will say to the ones at the left side, 'Cursed ones! Go from me into the eternal fire that was prepared for the accuser and his messengers. For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat. I was thirsty, and you did not give me to drink. I was a stranger, and you did not gather me in; naked, and you did not wrap anything around me; weak and in jail, and you did not visit me.'*

*"Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or weak, or in jail, and did not serve you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Indeed I am telling you, as often as you did not do these things for one of these of the least, neither did you do them for me.' And these will be released into eternal severance, but the just ones will be released into eternal life."*

Finally, Jesus gives a fully detailed description of the judgment of the dead (as Johannes also explains in Revelation 19 and 20). Each person who died in the war was judged by his deeds – whether they supported the Messiah or not. The ones who did good things on earth would "be released into eternal life." This is God's gift (Rm 6:23), a reward for having lived for God. The ones who resisted God would be "released into eternal severance": their souls wound up being destroyed. The analogy is plain. He told them that whatever they would do for him, in his presence, they should do for others as well. For it was just the same as if they were doing those things for Jesus.

As the reader should be able to discern, none of the things mentioned thus far were forecast to take place after the First Revolt. The following section will examine other passages that have been construed as referring to the "end of the world."

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## OTHER NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES

### 2 PETER 3:1ff.

**3:1** *Beloved: I am already writing this second letter to you, in both of which I have been stirring up your sincerely judging minds in reminding you to recall the declarations that were spoken previously by the holy prophets and of the precept of our Lord and savior spoken by your envoys. Know this first: that in the last days mockers will come in, mocking, walking according to their own strong desires and saying, "Where is the promise of his presence? For from the time when the ancestors went to sleep, all things have continued this way from the beginning of creation."*

**5** *For it willingly escapes them that the heavens were of old, and the land was put together out of water and through water by God's statement. Through a statement, the creation that existed then was drenched in water and was destroyed. But the present-day heavens and land have been treasured up by the same statement and are being kept until a day of judgment and of destruction of the impious people.*

**8** *Now don't let this one thing escape you, beloved, that one day with Yahweh is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day. Yahweh of the promise is not slow, as some consider slowness. On the contrary, he is being longsuffering toward us, not wishing for anyone to be destroyed, but for all to hold to a change of mind. Now Yahweh's day will arrive like a thief. In it, the heavens will be released with a roar. Now the elements will be released and burnt up, and will the land and all the deeds in it be found?*

*Since these things will all be released in this way, what sort of people is it necessary for you to exist as, in holy conduct and piety? We are expecting and hastening the day of God's presence, through which the heavens will be on fire and will be released, and through which the elements will be burnt up and melted. But, according to his promise, we are expecting "a new heaven and a new earth" in which right dwells.*

*So, beloved, since you expect these things, try hard to be found by him in peace, without spots and without stains, and regard the longsuffering of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paulus also wrote to you, according to the wisdom that was given to him (just as he speaks in all of his letters about these things). Some things are difficult to understand in them, and the unlearned and unstable people distort them to their own destruction, as they do the remaining writings.*

**17** *Therefore, beloved, since you know beforehand, guard yourselves, so that you will not be carried away by the deceit of unprincipled people and will not fall from your place of stability. Now grow in generosity and knowledge of our Lord and savior, Anointed Jesus. To him be the glory, even now and into the day of the age. [A-mein.]*

In this passage, Peter discussed an issue that had arisen among faithful Jewish Christians: why hadn't the events foretold by Jesus happened yet? Since Jesus died c. 33 CE and at the time of writing, it was most likely c. 61-62 CE, almost thirty years had passed, and the people were becoming anxious. Non-Christian Jews had already begun mocking Jesus, saying that his prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem was not going to



happen.

Peter reminds the readers (v.5f.) that God both created and destroyed the evil society in Noah's day with a statement. Why? To remind them of who's in control. Right now (61), he says that by God's statement the land is being preserved until the right time (70 CE, although Peter did not know the date).

If God seems slow, the author adds (v.8f.), we who live on earth must remember that God is eternal. To him, the thirty years that have passed are but a moment. Some people take this to mean that Peter is spelling out an equation for examining prophecy: one of God's days = 1000 earthly years. Contextually, however, all he is saying is that God is taking his time. The people need to be patient and wait for God. Peter's rationale for God's apparent delay is that the readers should regard this as God allowing more time for people to repent. I.e., this is a positive thing.

Peter's apocalyptic vision of the elements being burnt up as the heavens are set on fire indicate that a vast judgment is coming. And since judgment is coming, you (the reader) ought to behave appropriately: to be a holy and pious Christian. This is exactly the kind of warning that Jesus told Johannes to give to the seven Asian assemblies, and Peter even recalls the day "coming like a thief" for those who are not vigilant.

Peter and his readers are looking ahead to the Messianic Age, the "new heavens and the new earth" foretold by Isaiah (and soon to be foretold through Johannes also). Therefore, the people ought to seek to be found spotless by God when he executes judgment. The "without spots and without stains" is a reference to the people of chapter two: *"They are spots and stains who revel in their self-deception while feasting together with you."* Thus, here and at the end of the letter, the author brings together the themes of the letter: that the people should not be led astray by the foolish and unprincipled ones. Apparently, these people had a copy of one of Paulus' letters (the first letter to the Corinthians is usually speculated, although it may have been a non-extant letter) that addressed the subject and were deliberately misinterpreting it.

The author of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter was looking ahead to the events that would soon happen, when the assembly would shine as the new Jerusalem, as prophesied by both Jesus and Johannes.

## **2 THESS 2:1ff.**

**2:1** *But we beg you, brothers, about the presence of our Lord, Anointed Jesus, and of our being gathered together to him:  
that you not be quickly shaken from your mind nor be alarmed – neither through a spirit,  
nor through a message, nor through a letter (as through us) – as though the Lord's day  
were present.*

**3** *No one should trick you by any means, because unless the Revolt should come first  
and the person of lawlessness be revealed – the son of destruction, the one who*

*opposes and who lifts himself up above all things that are called a god or august, so as to seat himself in God's temple, displaying himself (that he is a god).*

**5** *Don't you remember that I told you these things when I was being directed toward you? And now you know what is holding back: for his revelation in his season. For the secret of lawlessness is already working (until only the one who is holding back in the present should happen out of our midst). And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the breath of his mouth and deactivate with the appearance of his presence. The lawless one's presence is according to the working of the enemy: with all kinds of false power and signs and wonders and with all kinds of wrong deception for those who are being destroyed. Against this, they did not receive the love of the truth for their salvation. And on account of this, God will send them a working of deceit, to the point of their trusting the lie, so that all those who do not trust the truth but who delighted in wrong would be judged.*

Here, just the opposite problem was occurring. The people were concerned that the events foretold by Jesus were already happening. Now this letter was written c. 51-52 CE by best estimates, and the people apparently were viewing their own affliction as the start of the war. There was a famine in Judea at around that time, which may have contributed to the rumors that the end of the age was nearing.

But Paul assures them that certain things have yet to happen. The "person of lawlessness" has not yet been revealed. Here, it is interesting that Paul employs the word "august," because the "August One" was a term commonly used to describe Caesar. Since Octavian first called himself Augustus, every Caesar had referred to himself officially as Augustus. The "person of lawlessness," a personification of Priestly Judaism, would stand up to oppose even Caesar.

He directly refers to the First Revolt (or revolution), and so he is certainly aware that the events foretold by Jesus will take place during a revolt of some kind. The secret of lawlessness already in operation is priestly Judaism, of which opposition the Thessalonikan readers were already aware.

Ah, but when Nero is Emperor, then the war would begin. Then God would allow the Jewish people who oppose Christianity and stand up for a physical Jewish state to have their hearts hardened (as in Revelation), or as Paul put it, to "trust the lie." With the destruction of the temple they would have their judgment.

### **1 THESS 4:13ff.**

**13** *But brothers, we don't want you to be ignorant about those who have gone to sleep, so that you would not be sorrowful, like those remaining people who have no hope. For if we trust that Jesus died and rose, then we trust also that God will lead out with him those who fell asleep on account of Jesus. For we are telling you, in a statement of the Lord, that we who are living and who are left over until the Lord's presence will not reach more than those who have fallen asleep.*

*Because with a directive and with the voice of a chief messenger and with God's war-trumpet, the Lord himself will descend from heaven, and those dead people who are in the Anointed One will be resurrected first. Afterwards, we who are living and who are left over will be snatched with them at the same time in clouds, into the air, to meet the Lord. And we will always be with the Lord in this way. And so, advise one another with these words.*

**5:1** *But concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to be written to. For you know yourselves accurately yourselves that as a thief comes in the night, so Yahweh's day is coming. When they say, "Here are peace and safety," then their sudden destruction will be standing, as labor pains come to the one who has a baby in her womb. And they will not escape.*

*But you, brothers, are not in darkness that the day should come upon you like a thief. So then, we should not sleep like those who remain. On the contrary, we should be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But we who belong to the day should be sober, armoring ourselves with the breastplate of trust and love and with our helmet being the hope of salvation. Because God did not set us here for anger but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus, the one who died on our behalf, so that whether we are awake or sleeping, we would live together with him. So, advise one another and each one should build the other up, just as also you are doing.*

The Thessalonians' earlier concern was about the people who died before or during the First Revolt. What would happen to them? Paul's explanation is entirely allegorical. "Those who are left over...will not reach more than those who have fallen asleep." Simply put, it won't be any better or worse to survive the war or to die in or before it. The symbolic explanation for this is that whether dead or alive, we will be with Jesus. Being "snatched...into the air" indicates being summoned to combat against the forces of evil. Having just indicated that the dead were joining the battle, Paul could not then say that the living remain apart from it. In their own way, the living would be fighting on God's side, too. We will go into more detail about this section in chapter nine of this book.

When was this going to happen (5:1)? Paul did not know. But he knew the saying of Jesus: that the day would come suddenly. As Jesus earlier indicated, the faithful will not be caught unawares. When it happened, they would know it. Therefore, "we should be awake and sober." Just as Johannes, Jesus, and Peter urged people to be diligent, Paul did also. Thus, there are two options: "anger" (the end of their religion) and "salvation" (eternal life and continued access to God). Given those two choices, Paul urges that the Thessalonians take the obvious path: "awake or sleeping [alive or dead], we would live together with him." Therefore, since the Thessalonians are doing so well spiritually (the preceding narrative), they should keep on doing what they have been doing: live for God.

## 1 KORINTHIANS 15:51f.

**51** *Look, I am telling you a secret: indeed, not all will go to sleep, but we will all be changed in the smallest amount of time, in the blinking of an eye, during the last war-trumpet. For it will blast, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For it is necessary for this corruptible thing to be clothed with incorruptibility, and for this mortal thing to be clothed with immortality. Now when this mortal thing is clothed with immortality, then the message that was written will occur:*

*"Death was swallowed in victory. Where, death, is your victory; where, death, is your sting?" Death's sting is sin, but the power of sin is the Torah. But thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord, Anointed Jesus. And so, my beloved brothers, become steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, knowing that your toil in the Lord is not worthless.*

We do not have the Korinthians' letter to Paul, and therefore like so many things in his (first) reply to them, we have to piece together what it was that they were inquiring about. Here, they were clearly looking forward to the "second coming". During all that was predicted to happen (during the years 66-73 CE), people would die. "What happens when people die? Some people say there is eternal life, and others say there isn't. What is the case Paul? And give us some details." Some of the things they asked were specifically directed toward the war and "second coming," and some of their questions were more general than that. The portion previous to this in Paulus' reply deals with the question of what might the afterlife be like. This portion (vv.51f.) concerns the timing of the end of the age.

Paul wrote in metaphor in order best to explain. He says that not everyone will die in the First Revolt, but everything would be different for those who remain alive: "we will all be changed." When the dead are "raised incorruptible" and are given their "spiritual bodies" (earlier in the chapter), "we will be changed." He doesn't say, "We'll die, too," or "we'll get our spiritual bodies, too," but "we will be changed" when the war is over, when the last war trumpet sounds.

At that time, death was swallowed up in victory, with the saying quoted loosely from Hosea 13:14. Therefore, we must understand the context of Hos 13:14 in order to see why Paul used it. Hosea 6:4 and Hosea 13:3 compare and contrast with one another. Hos 6:4 -- "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears." (NIV)

Hos 13:3 -- "Therefore they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window." (NIV)

These connect the oracles of the book; it is not possible to explain chapter 13 without explaining the book's context.

The Israelites committed two chief offenses and angered God. These were:

- a. They established kings.
- b. They were idolaters.

We see these listed in Hos 8:4, where we read:

*“They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction.”* (NIV)

These are the same problems about which we read in chapter 13.

In urging Israel to throw out their idols, the author writes,

“a craftsman has made it; it is not God.” (8:6)

“they make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen.” (13:2)

So we see that the book of Hosea does not “break.” It does not suddenly begin to talk about other things.

Based on this, in chapter 13 the author forecasts the end of Israel (Ephraim) because of their idolatry. The chapter begins with a discussion of their idolatry; verses 10-11 focus on their reliance on human leaders. Verse 12 begins their judgment.

V. 12 – Israel’s sins have been accumulating.

V. 13 – Israel’s judgment in metaphor is like giving birth.

V. 14 is cited by Paul.

Vv. 15-6 – Yahweh will dry up Israel’s spring, causing its destruction. Israel hunted the wind (12:2) finding a wind/spirit of prostitution (4:12); now it will be destroyed by a “wind” from God. She “bears her guilt” on account of her rebellion against God.

This context sets up Paul’s citation. In his time, Israel was about to be judged because of its ritual religion, which was a rebellion against God.

*“Will I rescue them out of the hand of Hades and redeem them from death? Death, where is your victory? Hades, where is your sting? Regret is hidden from my eyes.”*

The NET Bible is probably correct in rendering the beginning of the verse as rhetorical questions, “Will I deliver them from the power of Sheol? No, I will not!” God hides his eyes from Israel’s regret and allows Death and Hades to bring on their effects. Paul quotes this passage in context. At this point we are ready to return to Paul.

In response to their questions, Paul wants to explain to his readers a few things about what’s going to happen when the judgment against the evil religion comes. I envision their question being something like this: “If we’re all supposed to participate in this judgment, what happens if some of us die before it happens?”

However, some of his readers are not convinced that there is an afterlife. He proves that first.

1. Jesus died and came back from the dead. There were many witnesses of this (including Paul), and the readers themselves believe it. He uses absurdities to make the readers realize that they do know this is true themselves. Therefore, there is life after death.
2. The readers knew personally that Israel was going to be judged, and that their access to God through the temple would be taken away. Why would they undergo such a struggle if they were going to be destroyed along with the rest? Therefore, there is an afterlife.

3. Since there is an afterlife, Jesus (who died and yet is not dead) was the first "Messianic" person to go there. The next point is that he wasn't the only one in the afterlife.
  - a. Everyone can choose like Adam chose: to reject God's teachings and die, or to accept God's teachings and live. Here, the ritual religion is part of rejecting God's teachings, so...
  - b. "Then the end will come" when the sacrificial system will be gone for good. Death itself is powerless for the person who lives by the spiritual Torah. The end of the war would prove conclusively that God is over everything: the ultimate authority.
  - c. There is no access to God among the idolatrous religionists.
4. Were they still unconvinced? People were suffering for the dead. Why do that if there was no afterlife? Truly they knew that the dead were still alive.
5. There is a quote from Isa 22:13. There, judgment on Jerusalem was coming (just as in the First Century), and there was no hope. If/when the Assyrian armies came, the end could not be stopped, and so, you might as well be happy. Death is certain, and there would be no point in trying to avoid it. That quote continues with, "Surely this wrong will not be forgiven of you until you die." With God coming in judgment again, if there were no afterlife, there would be no point in doing anything. Just accept God's judgment on Israel and die with many of the others. But Paul's point was that life was not that hopeless.
6. "Bad relationships corrupt beneficial ethics." The quote comes from Menander's "Thais". Menander was a Greek dramatist who lived from 342 BCE to 291 BCE. Menander's works were peppered with easy to remember sayings like the one that Paulus quoted. Paul affirms Menander's saying, implying that the readers should not listen to the foolish people who were denying that there was an afterlife. They should watch such matters carefully, realizing that those people were just ignorant.
7. Paul doesn't want his readers to get distracted wondering all kinds of trivial things about the afterlife. He wants to return to his main point. The questions here probably represent what the non-afterlife people were asking the others. Paul compared the physical body to a seed, which ceases to exist when the mature plant grows from it. The body planted in the soil is sown like a seed, and the mature spiritual self rises from it. We should not expect something that is not physical to be the same as something physical, and we should expect to leave our physical bodies behind when we die.
8. When someone dies, the wasted shell of a physical body -- this "seed" -- is replaced with a glorious and powerful spiritual self. Paul uses the term "body" by analogy (since his Corinthian opponents had used it), but he made it clear that he was referring to something that was not physical. This body is physical; that "body" will be spiritual. He related this again to the relationship between Adam and Jesus. Adam had been made a living being (literally, "a living being/soul," Gen 2:7). By contrast, Jesus' resurrection made him into "a life-giving spirit." Even so, those good people who die are spiritual beings, just as they had been physical beings. Even Jesus traded his physical body in for a spiritual self. The spiritual one came afterwards, just as Jesus had come after Adam. In life, we

bear the physical image of Adam, who was "dusty"; in the afterlife, good people live on to resemble "the heavenly one," Jesus, who is now no longer physical. What summarizes this is one of Paulus' beautiful sayings, "Flesh and blood are not able to inherit God's kingdom." The body must be left behind because the afterlife is not physical.

9. Now he returns to his main thesis: They were expecting to die in the First Revolt. Some of them may have been expecting the end of all things, when what was coming was merely the end of Jewish life as they knew it. So Paul told them that they would not all die, but everything would be different after the judgment on Israel. In his allegorical description, as soon as the judgment began, everything they knew would change. Those Christians who died innocently during the conflict would be part of the afterlife right away. While in their bodies, they were mortal, but they would be (metaphorically) "clothed with immortality" in order to be with God."
10. Here he quotes Hosea. God brings on Death and Hades (the grave) for the idolaters. Here, those are the people following ritual religion and rejecting their Messiah's teachings. His application to their legalism is summed up in the next statement: "Death's sting (or poison) is sin, but the power of sin is the Torah." The victory over death comes through Jesus' spiritual teachings. But in Paul's reading the saying is fully realized when someone actually dies. Death is not the end. What is it here that makes people fear death? Sin. The unfaithful fear death because of its finality, but for the Christian it is not final. "The power of sin is the Torah" because the religion used the Torah to bind people to the rituals as a means of reminding them of death in the hope that they might escape it. Jesus' teachings aren't just hope; they're victory.

Death was rendered powerless; it has no victory. It NO LONGER has a sting. This is the situation of the freed church, the new Jerusalem of Rev 21. Death's sting is sin, he says. The "power of sin is the Torah." Where did that come from? The legalism that accompanied the ritual religion was a perpetual reminder of sin and sinfulness, but the freed person would have a consciousness of forgiveness rather than guilt – once the temple was out of the theological picture. After the destruction of the temple (and, symbolically, the Jewish system), sin was made powerless (without anyone to impose a code on others), and therefore death should have no sting. Paul was describing victorious Christian living in the Messianic Age. Therefore, he thanks God for giving the victory, through JESUS, i.e., through his death and resurrection. His closing admonition to remain faithful exactly fits the usual context of these kind of discussions.

#### **HEB 12:27f.**

*His voice shook the earth then, but now it has been announced, saying, "Still once and for all I am shaking not only the earth but also heaven." Now this: "still once and for all" points out removal of the things that are shaken, as of the things that were made, so that the things that are not shaken would remain.*

There are some people who interpret this to signify the end of the world. However, in the context of the book of Hebrews, the author is referring to the system of rituals in Judaism as being "shaken." The author compares this ritualistic system to the completed message through Jesus, which is not shaken. God was in the process of removing the former covenant, leaving the new one.

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Throughout this chapter, I have tried to mention the other views very little. The purpose for this book is not to attack the other opinions, for every one of them makes sense within its own paradigm. The purpose has been to explain in detail a fifth viewpoint for consideration: the Post-Apocalyptic view. Simply stated:

***"God has kept all of his promises to humanity. The events foretold by Jesus and his followers were all fulfilled in the first century."***

I believe that the desire for a glorious second coming is something that many people hold dear. Wouldn't it be nice to be plucked away from this life, which can be painful, into a wonderful life with Jesus? But in so believing, they overlook the possibility that THIS is the wonderful life, if only we will make something of it.

*"And, in the end, the love you take*

*Is equal to the love you make."*

"The End," John Lennon-Paul McCartney



# Chapter Nine

*"Everybody disappears one by one,  
And no one hears a thing."*

"The Poison Arrow," The Hot Lies (2007)

## THE GREAT 'ΑΡΠΑΖΩ

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The meaning of 'αρπαζω in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4 has bothered people ever since Latin overtook Greek as the dominant language of the Roman world. The word is negative...seriously negative, yet Paul seems to employ it positively. When the word was translated into Latin (raptō), we wound up with the famous "rapture" of futurist fame. To see what is going on, let's look at uses of 'αρπαζω in the LXX and beyond.

### 'αρπαζω

Usual meanings: seize; plunder; rob; take away rapidly, snatch; take forcefully or ravenously; swindle

from 'αιρεομαι = choose or take for one's self

from 'αιρεω = choose, take

There are several meanings for the word. The Liddell-Scott-Jones Lexicon provides these: carry off (steal, rob); seize hastily, snatch up; overpower, overmaster; adopt an idea (legend); grasp with the senses; captivate, ravish (capture); plunder.

Related words in the group include: 'αρπαγη = robbery (the result of 'αρπαζω); 'αρπαγμος = 'αρπαγμα = an act of plunder or rape; 'αρπαξ = ravenous, forceful; διαρπαζω = plunder fully, tear in pieces; διαρπαγη = plunder; αφαρπαζω = tear off; αναρπαζω = snatch up; εξαναρπαζω = snatch away; καθαρπαζω = seize. The other cognates all include a similar idea of plundering, stealing, raping, etc..

In the Septuagint, 'αρπαζω is used to translate several Hebrew words.

It translates **tāraf** fourteen times – most of which are connected with the actions of a ravenous animal. These occurrences are:

**Ge 37:33:** And he recognized it and said: "It is my son's tunic. An evil wild animal has devoured him; a wild animal has forcefully attacked (ἤρπασεν) Joseph."

**Psa. 7:2:** Otherwise he will tear ('αρπαση) my life like a lion, there being neither redemption nor salvation.

**Psa. 22: 13:** They open their mouths at me like a lion who snatches ('αρπαζων) and roars.

**Psa. 50: 22:** You who forget God, understand these things. Otherwise, I will take you away (‘αρπαση), and there will no rescuer.

**Psa. 104:21:** The young lions roar to take away (‘αρπασαι) and to seek their food from God.

**Ezek. 19:3, 6:** And it brought up one of its cubs. It became a lion, and he learned to catch (‘αρπαζειν) prey (‘αρπαγματα); it ate people.

‘αρπαζω translates *tāraf*, the noun translates a related word. V. 6 is similar.

**Ezek. 22:25, 27:** There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst, like a roaring lion catching (‘αρπαζοντες) prey (‘αρπαγματα); they have devoured lives in taking treasure and valuables with injustice.... Her princes in the here midst are like wolves catching (‘αρπαζοντες) prey (‘αρπαγματα)....

**Hos. 5:14; 6:1:** So I am like a panther for Ephraim, and like a lion to the house of Judah. And I will plunder for myself (‘αρμωμαι), and go and take, and there will be no release.

V. 6:1 is similar and in the past.

**Amos 1:11:** Yahweh says this: “For the three impieties of Edom (that is, for the four), I will not turn away from him, since he chased his brother with a sword, and did cast off the mother on the land, he plundered (‘ηρπασεν) his rage for a testimony, and he guarded his rage for a feud.”

**Mic. 5:8:** And what remains of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among domestic animals in the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep. Whenever he goes through, he walks down and plunders (‘αρπαση), and no one takes it out.

**Nah. 2:12:** The lion caught (‘ηρπασεν) enough for its cubs and choked for its lionesses, and filled its brood with wild animals, and its dwelling-place with plunder (‘αρπαγης).

It translates *gāzal* fifteen times. Most of these appear to be connected with swindling or robbing – the word meaning strip off, take by force, tear away.

**Lev. 6:4:** if he has sinned and is guilty, then it will be that he will give back the robbed thing (‘αρπαγμα) that he robbed (‘ηρπασεν), or the wrong thing that he obtained wrongly, or the deposit that was deposited with him, or the lost thing that he found.

**Lev. 19:13:** You will not wrong your neighbor, and you will not rob (‘αρπασεις) him. By no means will the wage of a worker sleep with you until morning.

**Deut. 28:31:** Your ox will be butchered in your presence, and you will not eat from it. Your donkey will be violently taken (ηρπασμενος) from you and will not be given back to you. Your sheep will be given to your enemies; and there will be no one to help you.

**2 Sam. 23:21;** and he struck an Egyptian man, a notable man. Now the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but he went down with a staff, and he took (‘ηρπασεν) the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear.

**Job 20:19:** For he has rendered many powerless and forsaken the poor; he has taken away (‘ηρπασεν) a house and he will not restore it.

**Job 24: 2, 9, 19:** Now the impious cross boundaries, taking away (‘αρπασαντες) the flocks and shepherd.... They take away (‘ηρπασαν) the orphans from the breast, and destroy the humble....Let the natural things reveal the dry land [for them], for they take away (‘ηρπασαν) orphans.

ἄρπαζω translates the Hebrew word **gâzal** in all three places, but the LXX differs considerably from the MT in verse 19.

**Psa. 69: 4:** Those who were controlled to hate me freely have multiplied to be more than the hairs of my head; those who would cut me off. My enemies who pursue me unjustly are many; should I give back what I did not take away (ἡρπασα)?

**Isa. 10:2:** To deviate the needy from justice, taking away (ἄρπαζοντες) the judgment of the poor of my people, so that widows may be their plunder (ἄρπαγην), and that they may make orphans their prey!

The use of the noun translates **shâlâl**.

**Ezek. 18:7, 12, 16, 18;** ...and has by no means oppressed any person, but has repaid his debt, has not plundered (ἄρπαται) any plunder (ἄρπαγμα), has given his bread to the hungry, and has wrapped the naked; ... has oppressed the beggars and starving, and has taken (ἡρπασεν) plunder (ἄρπαγμα)...and has not plundered (ἡρπασεν) any plunder (ἄρπαγμα)... But his father, if he caused trouble, and took (ἄρπαση) plunder (ἄρπαγμα), and did contrary in the midst of his people, he will also die in his injustice.

In the LXX, v. 7 is in the future tense.

**Mic. 3:2:** Those who hate the nice things and seek the evil things, who are taking (ἄρπαζοντες) their skin from them and their flesh from their bones,

It translates **châtaf** three times, in the sense of capture, or grab.

**Jdg. 21: 21, 23;** and gaze and look, as the daughters of Shiloh went out to dance in the dances, all of you, every man, go out of the vineyards and capture (ἄρπασετε) a wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go away to the land of Benjamin.

Verse 23 indicates that the men did just that: they took wives.

**Psa. 10: 9:** He waits secretly like a lion in its lair, he waits to capture (ἄρπασαι) the beggar – to capture (ἄρπασαι) the beggar in his net.

It translates **lâkad** once, where it means catch, snare, or capture.

**Amos 3:4:** Does a wild lion roar in its forest without having? Does it give its voice out of its den at all, unless it has caught (ἄρπαση) something?

ἄρπαζω translates the Hebrew word **lâkad**.

Uses are similar in the deuterocanonical books.

**1 Maccabees 13:34:** Simon also chose emissaries and sent them to King Demetrius with a request to grant relief to the country, for all that Trypho did was to plunder (ἄρπαγαι).

**4 Maccabees 4:10:** and while Apollonius was going up with his armed forces to plunder (ἄρπαγην) the money, messengers on horseback with lightning flashing from their weapons appeared from the sky, instilling in them great fear and trembling.

**Judith 2:11:** But to those who resist show no mercy, but hand them over to slaughter and plunder (ἄρπαγην) throughout your whole region.

**Judith 16: 9:** Her sandals captured (ἡρπασεν) his eyes, her beauty took his mind prisoner, and the falchion passed through his neck.

**Tobit 3:4 (Sinaiticus):** They sinned against you, and disobeyed your precepts. So you handed us over to plunder (‘αρπαγην), slavery, and death,

**Baruch 4:26:** My pampered children have traveled rough roads; they were being captured (‘αρπασμενον) like a flock carried off by the enemy.

**Outside of the Septuagint,** the word group has meanings similar to those in the LXX, but we do find a few additional senses of the word.

**Josephus** usually uses ‘αρπαζω in the context of war. Along with βιαζω (invade), ‘αρπαζω indicates for Josephus the use of force to take something. This echoes Matthew’s use of the two terms together (11:12).

"How long, oh Lord, will you overlook our nation, while it suffers such great misfortunes, and while we are made the plunder (‘ηαρπαγμα) and spoil of all people?" (*Antiquities* XI:5:6)

**Herodotus** uses the word in its usual senses of “carry off” (*Histories* II: 66, 113, etc.) and (*Histories* II: 156) to indicate the adoption or acceptance of an idea: “Now out of this saying and no other Æschylus the son of Euphorion took (‘ηρπασε) this which I will say....”

**Plutarch** has: “Therefore, through this she so captured (‘ηρπασεν) Antony that indeed, while his wife Fulvia was at war in Rome with Caesar, over her husband’s practices...he allowed her to carry him off to Alexandria.” (*Life of Antony* 28:1)

“By means of the heat, the odors shoot up into the brain as they are caught away (‘αρπαζομεναι) by the nostrils.” (*Morals* 2:647)

**Xenophon** reads, “a robber approaches; as soon as the sower sees him coming, he grabs (‘αρπασας) his weapons, goes to meet him, and fights with him to save his oxen.” (*Anabasis* 6:1:8)

**Aeschylus** has, “In my lack of spirit, fear grabs (‘αρπαζει) the tongue.” (*Seven Against Thebes* 259)

**Aristophanes** has, “I will stand near the door. [And then?] And grab (‘αρπασομαι) the dishes as they pass by.” (*Ecclesiazusae*, 866)

That ‘αρπαγμος and ‘αρπαγμα are horribly negative words is easily seen from examples outside the New Testament. ‘Αρπαγμος is an act of plunder, but it also has a primary meaning of “rape.” For example, **Plutarch’s** *The Education of Children* reads, “And while the sort of love prevailing at Thebes and in Elis is to be avoided, as well as the one called rape (‘αρπαγμος) in Crete, that which is found at Athens and in Lacedaemon is to be emulated.” (*Education of Children*, 15)

**Pausanias** writes, “Dionusos arriving from the rape (‘αρπαγμος) of Ariadne” (*History of Greece*, I:20:3)

Vettius Valens has, "If Mars holds Daimon and the moon holds the Marriage-bringer, the marriage will be by rape (ἄρπαγμος)." (*Anthologies*, II:38)

Coming into the time of the **New Testament**, we see then that ἄρπαζω typically was used to signify the **use of force** to take something, or the act of an animal that is tearing at something ravenously. The nouns, ἄρπαγμος and ἄρπαγμα, indicate acts of **plunder**. Outside of the context of force, the word group indicates catching or being caught – physically, through the senses, or in any sense. The sense of being taken through an act of ἄρπαγμα is **never** something gentle, and no one in the LXX who is the object of ἄρπαζω has that act labeled positively. People are torn at, captured, plundered, robbed, or taken away violently. The Hebrew words are likewise not positive, and the use of the word in Greek up until the first century still has to do with being plundered or captured. However, one might be "caught away" by one's senses, which is a new distinction. This is probably the same distinction that is used to describe the so-called "ecstasy" of prophets and appears to indicate a broader sense of the word, meaning **"take (someone) randomly, against their will, or without their knowledge."**

The verb appears 13 times in the New Testament, and ἄρπαγμος appears once.

**Mt. 11:12:** From the days of John the Baptizer until the present the kingdom of the heavens has been invaded, and invaders have been **plundering** it.

**Mt. 13:19:** Each one who hears the message of the kingdom and who does not understand, the evil one comes and **takes away** what was sown in his heart. This is what was sown by the road.

**Jn. 6:15:** Then, knowing that they were about to come and **take hold** of him to make him a king, Jesus retreated again into the mountain alone by himself.

**Jn. 10:12:** Then the wolf **snatches** and scatters them, because a hireling is only a hireling. He doesn't care about the sheep.

**Jn. 10:28-9:** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I have them eternal life. And they will by no means ever be lost, even into the next age. And no one will **snatch** them out of my hand.

"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than everyone: no one can **snatch** them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

**Ac 8:39:** Now when they came up out of the spring, the Lord's Spirit **snatched** Filippus, and the eunuch did not notice him any longer, for he was going on his way rejoicing.

**Ac 23:10:** Now when the dispute became a great one, the commander, fearing that Paulus would be rent by them, gave word that the troops should go down and **snatch** him out of their midst and lead him into the fortress.

**2C 12:2-4:** I know a person, in the Anointed One, who was **snatched** fourteen years ago up to the third heaven – whether he was in a body I don't know; or if without the body, I don't know...God knows. And I know that this person was **snatched** into Paradise – whether in a body or if without the body, I don't know...God knows. And he heard indescribable declarations, which it is impossible for a human being to speak.

**1Th 4:17:** Afterwards, we who are living and who are left over will be **snatched** with them at the same time in clouds, into the Air, to meet the Lord.

**Phil 2:5-6:** For you should have this attitude in you that was also in Anointed Jesus: who existed in God's form, but did not consider an **act of plunder** to be like God.

**Jude 23:** But beloved, construct yourselves on your holiest trust, pray with holy breath, and keep yourselves in God's love, expecting the mercy of our Lord, Anointed Jesus, to the point of eternal life. Indeed, **snatch** them out of fire.

**Rev 12:5:** And she gave birth to a male son, who is about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod, and her child was **snatched away** to God and to his throne.

The adjective (ἄρπαξ) appears 5 times in the NT, in Mt 7:15; Lk 18:11; 1C 5:10-11; and 1C 6:10. In all of the uses outside of Matthew, the adjective appears in a context similar to that of a swindler, but Matthew uses it of animals.

The noun (ἄρπαγη) appears in just three locations: Mt 23:25; Lk 11:39; and Heb 10:34. The broad term “plunder” seems to apply in all three verses.

The uses of ἄρπαγη in the NT relating to animals no doubt correspond to the use of the Hebrew word **tāraf**. The uses of ἄρπαγη in the NT relating to swindling likely correspond to the use of the Hebrew word **gāzal**. While these are the most common uses in the Septuagint, and while they were common in Greek outside of the LXX, the majority of uses of ἄρπαζω in the New Testament correspond either to *minority* uses in the Hebrew Bible, or to uses that others would label as *previously unattested*; that is, definitions that developed during the years after the LXX was created.

In one case in the NT, Jn 10:12, the Greek verb appears in connection with a hungry **animal**.

In six instances, the verb appears in the sense of using **force** to take something (Mt 11:12; 13:19; Jn 6:15; 10:28, 9; Phil 2:6), although the sense in Philippians may be one of **swindle**. In Jn 6:15, a use of **suddenness** but not violence may be implied, and the idea of taking someone *involuntarily* is clearly present.

In these other cases, ἄρπαζω is used to indicate the taking of something suddenly, but not necessarily with violence (Jn 6:15?; Acts 8:39; 23:10; 2C 12:2, 4; 1Thess 4:17; Jude 23; and Rev 12:5). These cases are of major interest, since they do not so easily match the general sense of plunder found in the LXX and general Greek usage.

One of the *previously unattested* senses is that of the influence of God (or the gods) on prophets. In Acts 8:39, for example, Filippus was clearly in control of his faculties as he “went on his way rejoicing,” however, it seems that he was carried off in his emotions. Filippus was not kidnapped by God, but in a sense he went away without making the decision. The impression that we get is one of someone caught up in “**prophetic ecstasy**.” In the Hebrew Bible this was most often associated with dreams or a dreamlike state, such as when God spoke to Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5, 9:2) and Nabu-kudurri-usur (Daniel 2, 4). Dreams are most common in Genesis as a means of revelation – six people receive divine dreams – but the prophetic ecstasy mentioned in later literature is more similar to the dreams in **Daniel**. This is a sense of prophecy that



comes later in history. Philo refers to Moses as having been “possessed by God’s spirit” (*Life of Moses* 2:258).

Philo described what happened to Balaam (Numbers 22-24) this way, “I will prompt the necessary sayings, without any thoughts of your mind, as I will guide the organs of speech in the way that shall be just and convenient. ***I will direct your words***, using your tongue for each prophecy, though you yourself understand nothing of it” (*Life of Moses* 1:274). Josephus agreed with the assessment, indicating, “And indeed he invokes these things not from himself but from God’s spirit, which is victorious over him.” (*Antiquities* IV:118) Josephus’ record of the divine spirit was somewhat fixated on the account of Balaam and Balak; three out of the eight references to God’s spirit in Josephus are connected with Numbers 22-24. Elsewhere in Josephus, it is not necessarily the case that God’s spirit (or “the divine spirit”) overwhelms someone, although it is *with* prophets like Daniel (*Antiquities* X:239). *Antiquities* VI:166 suggests that prophets are led along.

This idea coincides not only with the use of ἄρπάζω in Acts 8:39 but also of Paul’s somewhat mysterious use in 2C 12. In examining the uncommon uses in the NT, we now have only four unexplained uses to consider: three instances of pulling someone away suddenly (Acts 23:10, Jude 23, and Rev 12:5) and the singular use in 1 Thess 4:17. These do not appear to correspond to any of the Hebrew words in the LXX that are translated by ἄρπάζω, but they do seem to match up with the perceived meaning of ***“take (someone) randomly, against their will, or without their knowledge.”***

Do the uses in Acts, Jude, and Revelation correspond to an underlying sense of the Hebrew word ***châtaf***? In the Masoretic Text, the Hebrew word only appears in the three locations where it is translated by ἄρπάζω in the LXX. It means “capture” every time and is not used positively. No, ἄρπάζω in these verses is not the equivalent of ***châtaf***.

What then of the Hebrew word ***lâkad***? The word appears more frequently in the NT than ***châtaf*** but is only translated by ἄρπάζω one time. Usually, ***lâkad*** means “catch” or “trap” – in a negative way. It appears in a less negative sense in Josh 7:14, where God is taking people away, but the overall context is clearly negative – the people who are taken are *executed*. In 1 Sam 14, the word occurs for being chosen by lot; however, the consequence of being chosen was again to be a negative one. Only in 1 Sam 10:20-1 does the act of being chosen by lot (***lâkad***) seem to be non-negative, as it was by this process that Saul was “taken” by Yahweh to be king of Israel. This use of ἄρπάζω would coincide with the usage we perceive of taking someone involuntarily.

It could be, then, that there is a sense of ***lâkad*** – being chosen *randomly, against one’s will, or without one’s knowledge* – that we might apply here to the uses in Jn 6; Acts 23, Jude, Thessalonians, and Revelation.

In Acts 23, the Roman commander was aware that a Roman citizen (Paul) had to be afforded certain rights. In order for Paul to be punished, he would have to be sent to the governor, Felix, and properly sentenced; otherwise, the commander would be liable for

any punishment against the citizen. In this case, that same commander realized (ch. 22) that it was improper for him to allow Paul to be beaten without a sentence. When he thought that the crowd was going to tear Paul to pieces without a trial, his intent was to grab Paul away without his consent – to ensure that he could be sent to trial through proper channels.

Judah hoped that his readers would be able to snatch the “mockers” out of the fire – to get them out of Priestly Judaism and make them part of the Christian group. Since we observe throughout the letter that the mockers do not currently **want** to be “snatched,” the usage makes sense here as well.

In Revelation, a baby is being snatched (kidnapped, if you will). Babies have no choice in the matter, so this use of ἀρπαζω clearly fits with our understanding.

I claim now that the purpose in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians is somewhat negative: conscription to participate in a **war**.

1Th 4:17: Afterwards, we who are living and who are left over will be **snatched** with them at the same time in clouds, into the air, to meet the Lord.

The Greek text of 1Th 4:17 follows:

ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς  
ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄέρα·  
καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα.

### ***Literally...***

“Afterwards, we the living – those who are left over – at the same time will be snatched (ἀρπαγησόμεθα) in clouds for a meeting of the Lord into (the) air; and this way always with (the) Lord we will be.”

Let’s look at the immediate and general context of the Thessalonican passage:

In the traditional disclosure format of a Greek letter, early on Paul has established that the upcoming revolt was in view.

*For, regarding us, they are declaring ... how you turned toward God from the idols, to be slaves to the living and true God and to endure for his son from the heavens, whom he raised from among the dead: Jesus, the one who is rescuing us from the coming anger.*

This established for the readers early in the letter that leaving Jesus to go to the synagogues was not a viable option, for Paul himself (rescuing “us”) or for the readers.

Chapter Four begins Paul’s advice to the readers. First, Paul addressed the problem that some of them might give up serving Yahweh. Reminding them that “Yahweh is an avenger,” he notes that only people who “do not know God” live according to their own physical desires. Urging them not to return to such unclean practices, he reminded them



that God, who had performed miracles through them, had called them to be holy – devoted fully to him. They must trust God.

Rather than chastise them about abandoning the principle of Love (since the readers had shown themselves to be very loving), Paul and his companions urge the readers to continue even more in it, becoming outstanding examples for others to follow...even amidst persecution. "Be quiet," and "practice your own matters," and "work with your hands" are typical admonitions for this purpose. The readers need to simply go about their lives, knowing that judgment on their opponents would be coming soon. After this, we read of the next problem:

*But brothers, we don't want you to be ignorant about those who have gone to sleep, so that you would not be sorrowful, like those remaining people who have no hope. For if we trust that Jesus died and rose, then we trust also that God will lead out with him those who fell asleep on account of Jesus. For we are telling you, in a statement of the Lord, that we who are living and who are left over until the Lord's presence will not reach more than those who have fallen asleep.*

*Because with a directive (κελευσμα) and with the voice of a chief messenger and with God's war-trumpet (σαλπιγξ), the Lord himself will descend from heaven, and those dead people who are in the Anointed One will be resurrected first. Afterwards, we who are living and who are left over will be caught with them at the same time in clouds, into the air, to meet the Lord. And we will always be with the Lord in this way. And so, advise one another with these words.*

The readers were not concerned with whether or not there was an afterlife. Paul does not use the word "life" in the letter at all, and while he does mention raising, he does not refer to "the resurrection" anywhere in the letter. They were not concerned at all about what would happen to them when *they* themselves died. However, the Thessalonikans had expressed concern about the vindication of those who died prior to or during the First Revolt. The readers were looking forward to the triumph of Good over Evil as the temple was destroyed, but the fact that good people were dying caused them to wonder whether the dead would miss out. Would they be able to fight (in some sense) in the climactic battle between God's forces and the forces of evil? Paul's explanation is entirely symbolic, taking place in the heavenly realm.

v. 13 – "Those who have gone to sleep" refers to the members of the Christian group who died prior to the destruction of the temple. Contextually, it appears that some of them were concerned that if someone did not live all the way to the destruction of the temple, he would somehow receive a lesser reward from God – or none at all.

"We who are living...will not reach more than those who have fallen asleep." Simply put, it would not be more or less advantageous to survive the war or to die during or before it. The symbolic explanation for this is that whether dead or alive, they would fight at Jesus' side. Let's check out the elements of war in vv. 16-17:

v. 16 – A **κελευσμα** indicates a shout, a “stimulating” battle cry or directive. At sea, it is the **κελευστης** who calls out to set the rhythm for the rowers with his calls. Here, this shout is the call to arms of a military commander, here called the chief messenger. The war context is clear in Prov 30:27, where we read, “The locust is kingless, but it marches out with a well-arranged battle cry (**κελευσμα**).”<sup>90</sup> A **σαλπιγξ** is a war trumpet, not a trumpet of celebration. The trumpet prepares people for war (see, for example, 1C 14:8). Thus, when the reader encountered the words, “*with a directive* (**κελευσμα**) *and with the voice of a chief messenger and with God’s war-trumpet* (**σαλπιγξ**), *the Lord himself will descend from heaven,*” the first thought that came to mind was a summons to battle. A military commander gives the call, and the war trumpet sounds. The judgment on our enemies is about to begin, and we are all fighting in it.

v. 17 – The Jewish people viewed the **air** (**αηρ**) as the atmosphere, extending to the moon. However, the air was regarded as the abode of evil spirits. Examples illustrating this way of thinking are somewhat abundant. In the New Testament, most of the time **αηρ** simply means “air.” However, in Paul’s open letter (Ephesians), he mentions “the ruler of the authority of the air.” In the context he is referring to evil spirits, such as “the spirit which is now working in the sons of unpersuasion.” As in the Thessalonican correspondence, Paul may mean here that there were literally spirit beings from the air possessing people, but more likely he is using the Air as representative of a source of evil.

This use of the Air to represent the abode of evil beings is also present in Revelation. “*And the seventh one poured out his bowl on the air, and a loud voice went out from the temple, from the throne, saying, ‘It has happened.’*” (Rev 16:17) Notice in Revelation that it is the last bowl (of seven) that is poured out on the air. When this occurs, the judgment is complete. Afterward, a messenger explains to Johannes (ch. 17) that this is the judgment on the false or apostate Israel. Chapter eighteen begins with a messenger announcing that Babylon (Priestly Judaism, represented by Jerusalem-Babylon) has fallen. The pouring of the last bowl of anger onto the air signified the cessation of all of the evils in the land.

We have already read about these external references to the Air from the *Testament of Benjamin* and the *Testament of Solomon*.

“For the one who fears God and loves his neighbor cannot be smitten by Beliar’s spirit of the air.” (*Testament of Benjamin*, 3) That Paul had the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs in mind when he wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians is evidenced by the fact that at 2:16 he quotes the *Testament of Levi* (6:10).

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<sup>90</sup> See also Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War, “When the Athenians noticed these things that were happening, they took courage. With one **battle cry**, they sounded a cheer, and took the lead. The enemy, embarrassed by their errors and the disorder in which they found themselves, only withstood for short time, and then fled out to Panormos, for which they had set out.” (II, 92)

Similarly, we read in Aeschylus’ account of the Persians, “The trumpet with its blast set all their side afire, and immediately at the **battle cry**, with the even stroke of foaming oars they struck the briny deep.” (I. 397)

“But since Ba'al Zebul, ruler of the spirits of **Air**, and of those underground, and lord of earthly ones, has a kingship together with us ....” (*Testament of Solomon*, 67)

“For there are rulers, authorities, and powers, and we spirit beings fly about in **the Air....**” (*Testament of Solomon*, 114)

Returning to the Thessalonian passage, we read about Jesus' followers being summoned to the clouds. Being “in clouds” means being part of the judgment process. The “gathering of the chosen ones” is a summons to battle. The use of ἀρπαζω here is like being conscripted or drafted into combat. The readers would not fight literally, but their goodness would defeat the idolatry of ritual religion. In the analogy, all good people – dead and living – would meet the Lord together in the air. They would all be part of the great judgment and would be united thereafter. Having indicated that the dead continue living spiritually with God, Paul could not then say that the living were separated from him. In their own way, the living would be with God, too – fighting the same battle against evil. This interpretation is an expansion of and is consistent with Jesus' language in Matthew 24:

“And he will send his messengers with great war-trumpets (σαλπιγγος), and they will gather his chosen ones from the four winds – from the extreme points of the heavens to their other extremes.” (Mt 24:31)

Paul's explanation continues.

*But concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to be written to. For you know yourselves accurately yourselves that as a thief comes in the night, so Yahweh's day is coming. When they say, "Here are peace and safety," then their sudden destruction will be standing, as labor pains come to the one who has a baby in her womb. And they will not escape.*

*But you, brothers, are not in darkness that the day should come upon you like a thief. So then, we should not sleep like those who remain. On the contrary, we should be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But we who belong to the day should be sober, armoring ourselves with the breastplate of trust and love and with our helmet being the hope of salvation. Because God did not set us here for wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus, the one who died on our behalf, so that whether we are awake or sleeping, we would live together with him. So, advise one another and each one should build the other up, just as also you are doing.*

When would all of this happen (5:1)? Paul did not know, but again he relates this to Jesus' explanation (Matthew 25) of the timing of the events. Since Paul understood what Jesus had said, he likewise indicated that the day of judgment was going to come **suddenly**. As Jesus had noted, the faithful would not be caught unawares. When it happened, they would know it. Therefore, Paul advised his readers that "we should be

awake and sober." Just as John, Jesus, and Peter urged people to be diligent, Paul did also. The advocates of ritual religion belonged to the night – the darkness. They were going to begin a revolution without realizing that it was going to result in their own judgment. The followers of Jesus lived in the daytime – the light; they knew better. Thus, there were two options. There was "anger" – the destruction of Priestly Judaism (and loss of access to God), which the readers' opponents were going to experience, and there was "salvation" – continued access to God after the conclusion of the Revolt.

At the end of this segment of the letter, Paul parallels his earlier statement: "whether we are awake or sleeping, we would live together with him." Ultimately, those who survive the First Revolt would continue to fight evil along with those who had died prior to it. They would always be together, and when each living person died naturally, they would join their loved ones and God. Again in this passage, Paul's reminder urges the living to **prepare for war**. In the location of the parallel that mirrors the Great Harpadzo in chapter four, Paul instructs his readers to put on armor, in the form of a breastplate and helmet. They needed to prepare, because they were going to be called to war. Remember, though, that his readers were not going to fight physically against the supporters of Priestly Judaism. Their "breastplate" was to be Trust and Love – Jesus' summary of the central teachings of the Torah. The helmets protecting their brains would be their certain knowledge that the judgment was not against them but against the supporters of ritual religion. By practicing Jesus' spiritual Torah, they would fight the war and be part of the judgment "in clouds."

In Paul's second letter to the same group, we find further proof that he had not intended to tell them that the Great Harpadzo would be a physical event. By that time – not long later – some of his readers were convinced that the "presence" had already happened. Paul went on to explain some of the things that he knew were about to happen prior to the judgment on Priestly Judaism. Not once did he say, "How could it have happened already? You're still here. I'm still here. We haven't been 'snatched up.'" That would have been the obvious answer if the Great Harpadzo were a literal, physical event. Come to think of it, when did Christians begin writing about the Harpadzo as a literal event, and how did they understand it? How did this contribute to modern church history?

### **It's a Rupture!**

The earliest reference to an occurrence that *may* be an interpretation of ἁρπαζω to mean a meeting of Jesus and his students in the literal air, flying, comes from the dubious document now known as "On the End of the World," attributed to pseudo-Ephraem. The document exists in two very different forms: one in Syriac and the other in Latin. The Syriac recension mentions the Islamic invasion of the VII century, whereas the Latin version borrows from another document (pseudo-Methodius, late VII century) that itself refers to the Islamic invasion. The text of pseudo-Ephraem was clearly in a state of flux until after this time, and so the existing manuscripts do not reflect a tradition older than about 700 AD.

The Syriac text describes the end as a battle with Islam. After this comes judgment, and the “man of sin” from Paul’s Thessalonian correspondence appears, proclaiming himself to be a god. After this, the author quotes Jesus saying, “Those days will be shortened for the sake of the chosen and the holy ones.” There is no “rapture” here, for the saints remain until the end, when “He will dissolve the heavens and the earth, and there will be (only) darkness and gloom.” Everybody dies, and the good people go to be with God.

The Latin text appears to describe the fall of the Byzantine Empire. In the book of Revelation, the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are replaced on the list of “sealed” tribes. In their place appear Manasseh and Joseph. This is likely because of Judges 17-18, in which the tribes of Ephraim and Dan leave God for idolatry. The Latin text of pseudo-Ephraem reports that the “murderous one is born from the tribe of Dan.” This is the legendary Antichrist. After three and one-half years – a brutal period during which there is “no rain upon the earth” and the rivers have dried up, “Then, when this inevitability has overwhelmed all people, just and unjust, the just, so that they may be found good by their Lord....” After that, there is a great judgment, during which the dead are raised.

Although the Latin text has references to good people remaining on the earth, with bad things happening to everyone, there is one line that has been used to support the rapture: *“For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.”* (from section II)

While the two recensions are difficult to compare, these two passages – one from Syriac and one from Latin – appear to be parallel to one another:

"Pronouncing the good fortune of the deceased who had avoided the calamity: 'Blessed are you for you were borne away (to the grave) and hence you escaped from the afflictions! (Syriac)

“For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.” (Latin)

That is, the Christians who avoid the calamity are the ones who die prior to it.

The first clear reference to a “rapture” concept is found in the 1726 publication, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (of Italian Writers), in which is contained *Historia Fratris Dulcini Heresiarche* (History of Arch-Heretic Brother Dulcino). The section dealing with Dulcino appears as a summary of the actions and beliefs of a 14<sup>th</sup> century monk.

Dulcino was one of the leaders of the Apostolic Brethren, a sect that taught a number of things which the Catholic Church opposed. Dulcino believed that “The Popedom was the Great Harlot of the Revelations.”<sup>91</sup> He and his followers were historicists in their view of Revelation, but they were convinced that the end was very near. According to Milman, Frederick of Aragon was going to become emperor in 1335, after which he would execute the pope. “Dolcino was to be Pope, if then alive, for three years; and

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<sup>91</sup> *History of Latin Christianity*, Henry Hart Milman, Vol. VII, chapter 6, (1896 edition).

then came the Perfect Pope, by special outpouring of the Holy Ghost. It might be Dolcino himself holy as St. Peter, or Gerard of Parma, restored to life. Then Antichrist was to come; the Perfect Pope was to be wrapt for a time to Paradise with Enoch and Elias; after the fall of Antichrist he was to return and convert the world to the faith of Christ."<sup>92</sup> Milman reports that Dolcino was torn limb from limb: executed.

The Latin text of that section of the *History of Arch-Heretic Brother Dulcino* regarding the rapture-like occurrence reads:

Quantam receperunt Apostoli Iesu Christi post ascensionem eius in die Pentecostes; et quod ipse Papa sanctus, quem eum esse dicebat, erit ita sanctus et tantae perfectionis, sicuti et quantae fuit sanctus Petrus Apostolus. Item, quod intra dictos illos tres annos ipse Dulcinus et sequaces sui predicabunt adventum Antichristi; et quod ipse Antichristus veniret in hunc Mundum finitis dictis annis tribus cum dimidio; et postquam venisset, ipse Dulcinus, et sui sequaces transferrentur in Paradisum, in quo sunt Enoc et Elias et sic conservarentur illesi a persecutione Antichristi, et quod tunc ipsi Enoc, et Elias descenderent in terram ad predicandum Antichristum, deinde interficerentur ab eo, vel eius ministris et sic regnaret idem Antichristus per plura tempora. Eo vero Antichristo mortuo, ipse Dulcinus, qui tunc esset Papa sanctus, et sui sequaces reservati descendent in terram, et predicabunt Fidem Christi rectam omnibus, et convertent eos, qui tunc erunt vivi, ad veram Fidem Iesu Christi.<sup>93</sup>

This is rendered into English as:

Likewise, he said that within those three years, Dulcino himself and his followers proclaimed the coming of the Antichrist, and that the Antichrist will come into this world at the end of said three and a half years, and after he was come, Dulcino himself and his own followers would be translated into Paradise, in which are Enoch, and also Elijah, and so they would be preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist, and that Enoch and also Elijah themselves would descend to the earth to proclaim the Antichrist, and then they would be put to death by him, or by his servants, and so that reign of the Antichrist would be very long. But then, after the death of Antichrist, Dulcino himself, who then would be the holy pope, and his followers would come down to the ground, preserved, and would proclaim what is right to all the Faith of Christ, and would turn them, those who will then be living, to the true faith of Jesus Christ.

The tradition does not reveal whether Dulcino believed that his occultation from the earth would be the fulfillment of any passage in the New Testament. Indeed, it reads that only he and his followers would be removed – not every professing Christian. The writings about him make it unclear as to whether he believed that the professed removal of his followers – or any of his other beliefs – were connected to the Bible in any way.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> *Historia Fratris Dulcini Heresiarche*, Tomus Nonus (Volume 9), p. 436.

In 1788, we arrive at the earliest exposition of the Biblical writings that mention a “rapture.” In his book *Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the Following Titles: Millennium; Last-Novelties*, Morgan Edwards expresses a clear viewpoint about the Great Harpazo. There is no mistaking his identification of 1 Thess 4:17 with a future, literal event.

“Another event previous to the Millennium will be the appearing of the son of man in the clouds, coming to raise the dead saints and change the living, and to catch them up to himself, and then withdrawing with them, and observed before, This event will come to pass when Antichrist be arrived at Jerusalem in his conquest of the world; and about three years and a half before his killing the witnesses, and assumption of godhead.”<sup>94</sup>

“As for the descent of Christ and his saints in the New Jerusalem it ought not to be deemed incredible, since events of the kind have been very sequent. Did not Moses and Elias descend to mount Tabor, in clouds, and thence ascend? Did not Jehovah come down to Sinai in a chariot of angels and returned in the same animated vehicle? Will not Christ descend in clouds to raise the dead and change the Living about three years and a half before the Millennium? Will not they spring up to meet him in the air? And when he has gathered all to him. Will not the whole assemblage ascend to heaven?”<sup>95</sup>

In both places, it appears to be the case that the expected “rapture” would take place three and one half years before the “thousand-year reign.” We may understand this in modern terms to be a “mid-tribulation” expectation.

In 1830, Scottish spiritualist Margaret MacDonald had begun advancing a “partial rapture” theory. By this time, mid-tribulation and post-tribulation rapture theories were current, but her notion was new. MacDonald foresaw some Christians avoiding the great war entirely, while others suffered through all of it. She appears to have predicted that the spirit-filled Christians would be raptured away, while everyone else would endure the great seven-year distress.

Edward Irving’s publication, *The Morning Watch*, explained the growing distinction between the premillennial and postmillennial views in the first issue of his magazine in 1830 (p. 35). In September of that year, an historical review of John’s letters to the seven churches (Revelation 1-3) appeared in *The Morning Watch*. There, we read that, “The Laodicean church (the only one yet entirely future) is our sad monitor concerning the history of the church on earth during that period of great tribulation which shall intervene **between the coming of the Lord to the air and the establishment of his throne and rest in Zion.**”<sup>96</sup>

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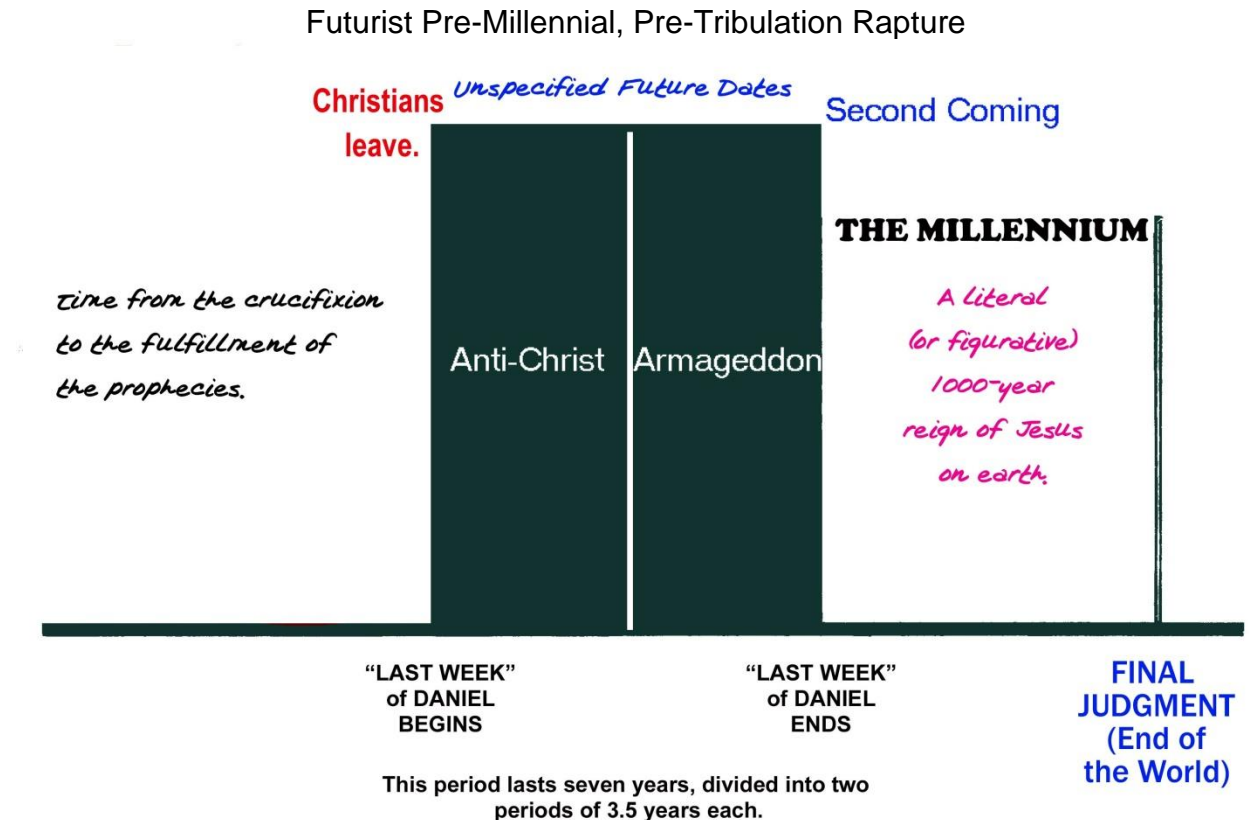
<sup>94</sup> *Two Academical Exercises...*, Morgan Edwards, p. 21 (1788).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>96</sup> *The Morning Watch*, Volume II, p. 510 (1831).

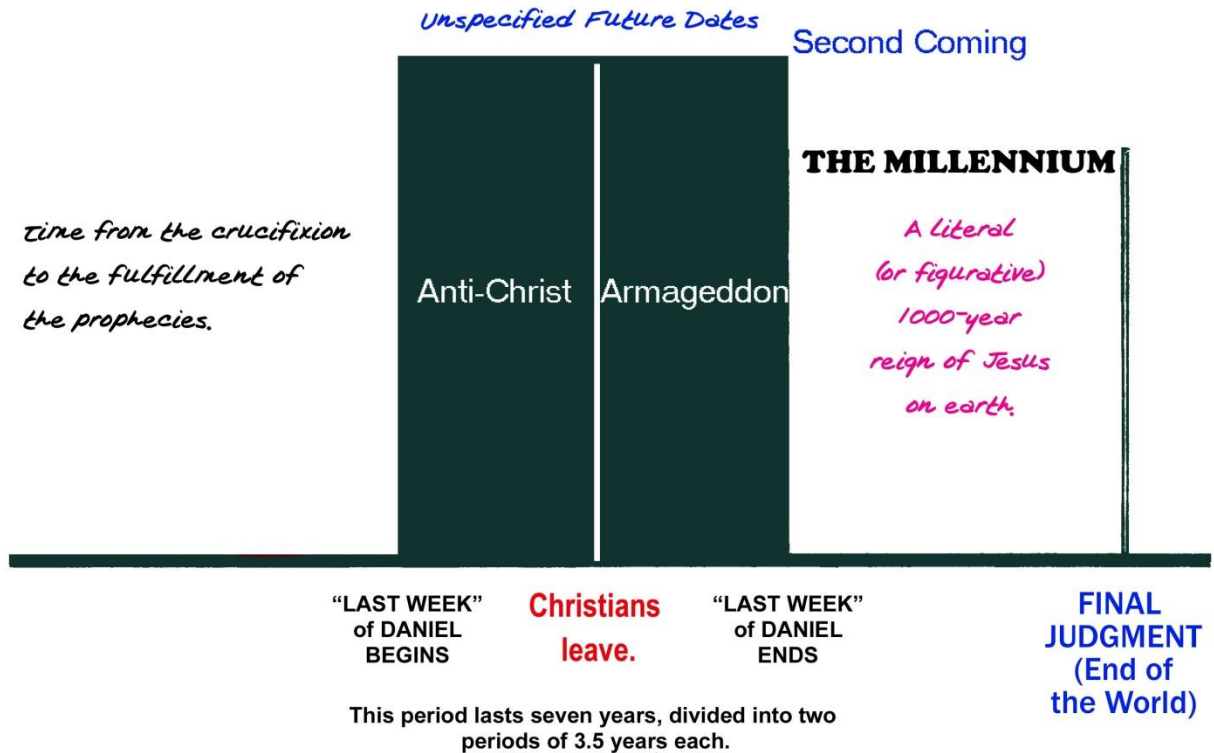
The article is attributed to “Fidus” – perhaps a pseudonym for the editor; it is still unknown why the author was anonymous. This marks the first exposition of the viewpoint of a rapture seven years before the Second Coming. The author also viewed the first three chapters as mainly complete, while the rest remained in the future; he was a futurist.

There are several viewpoints of when the Great Harpadzo is supposed to happen. If this book is right, then it has already occurred. Various schematics for the time frame might look like this in diagram form:

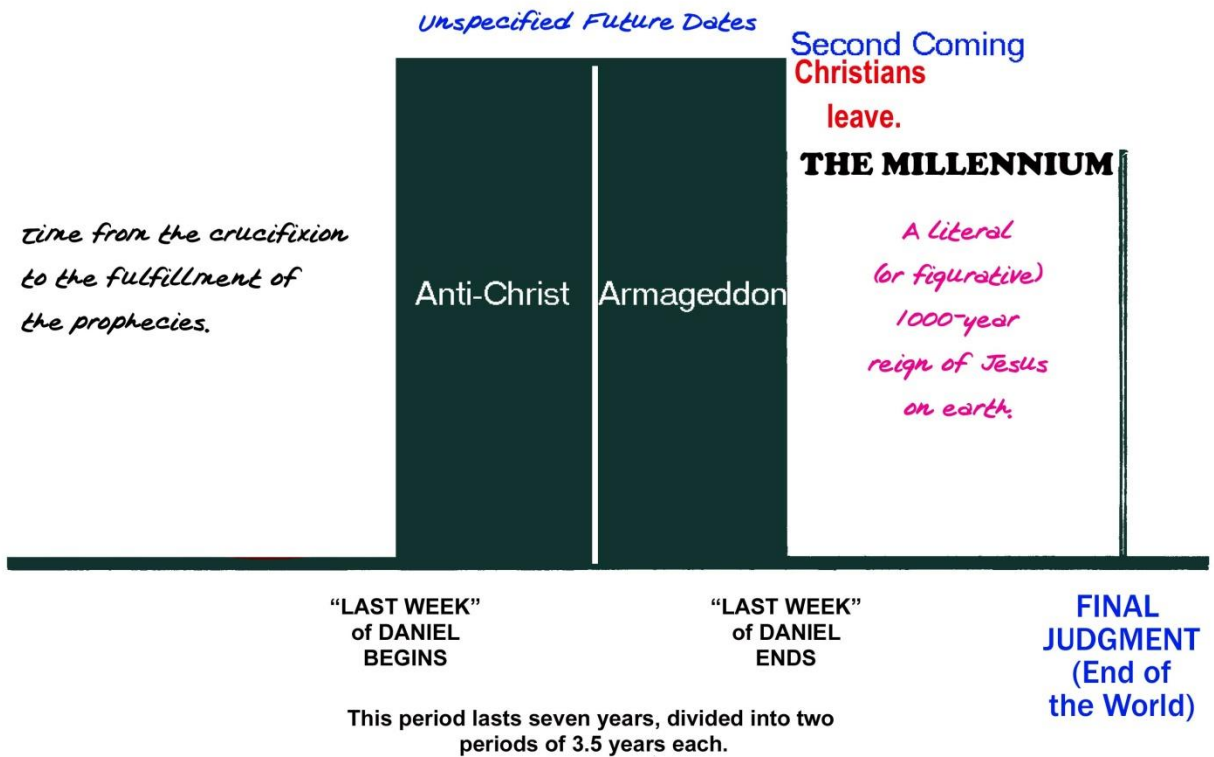


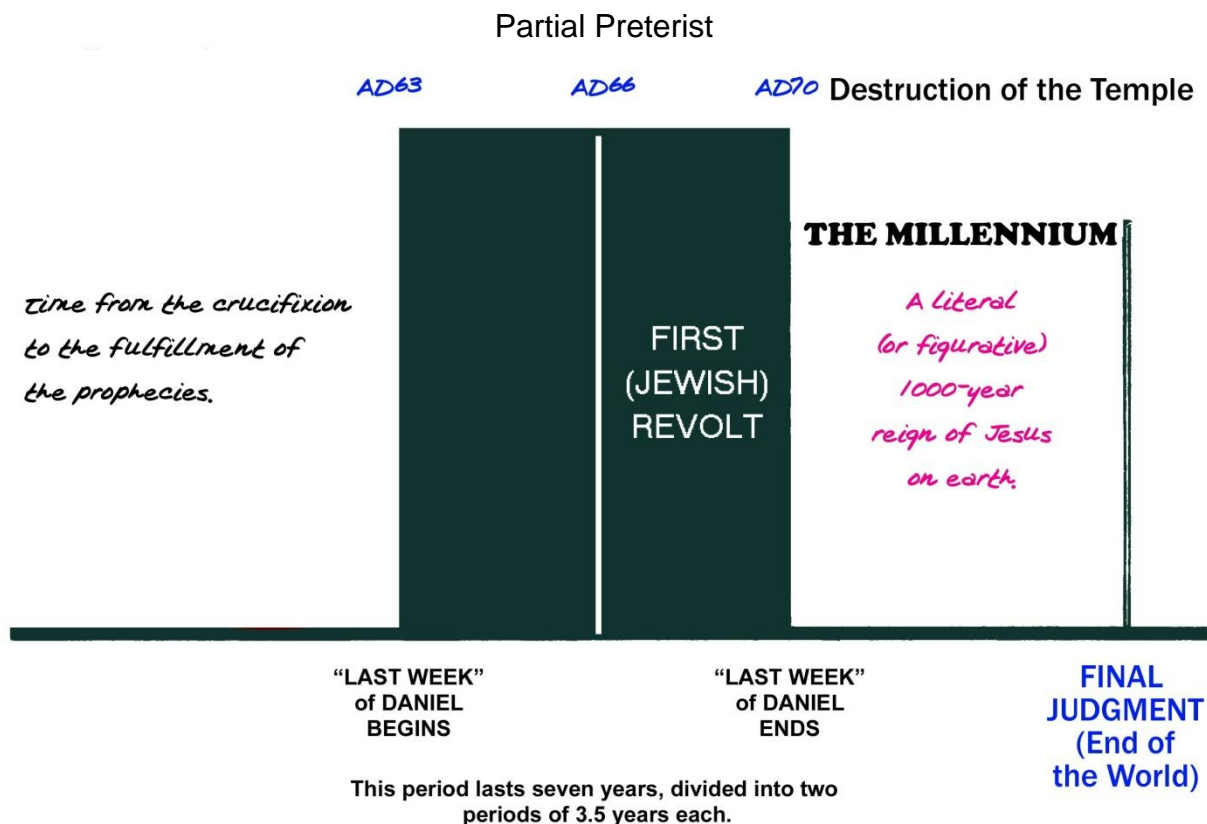
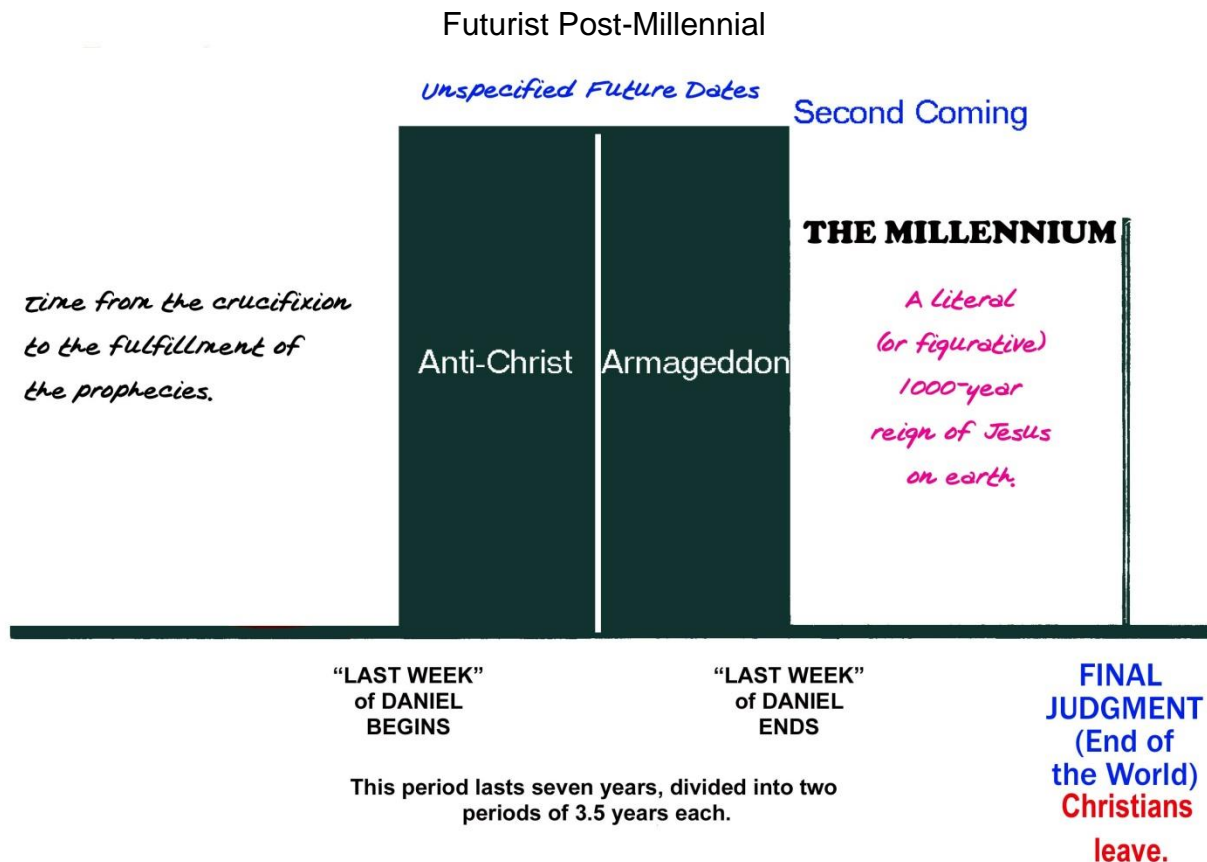


## Futurist Pre-Millennial, Mid-Tribulation Rapture



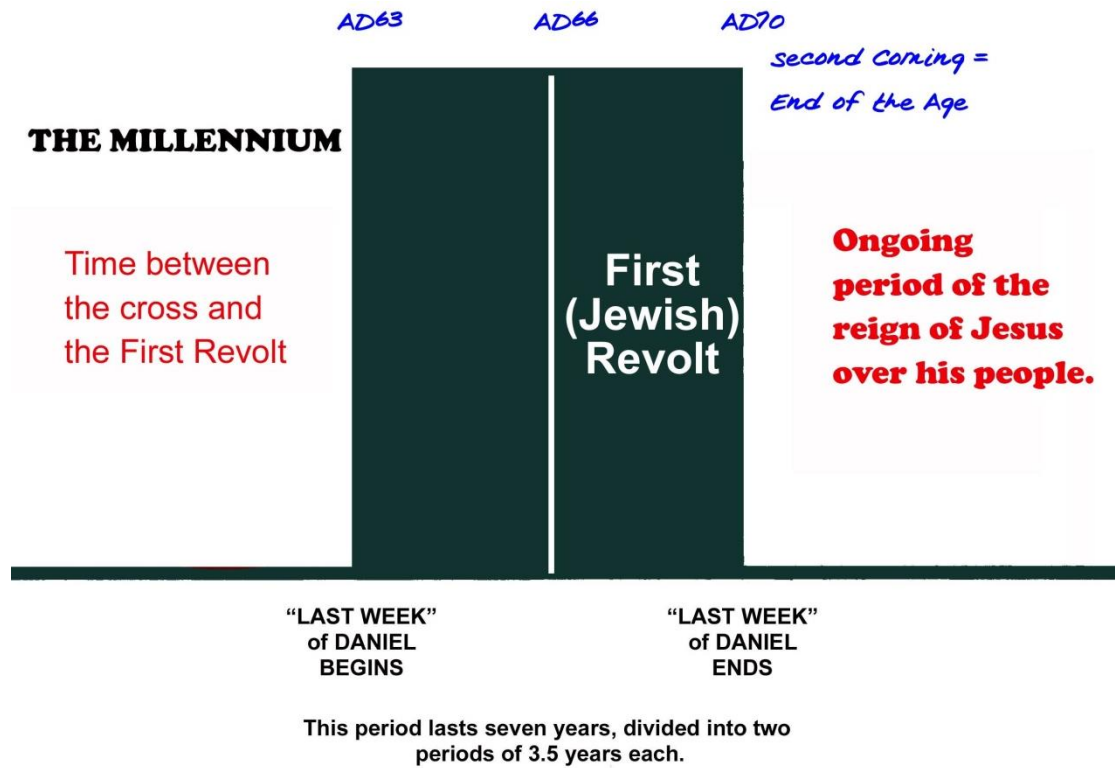
## Futurist Pre-Millennial, Post-Tribulation Rapture



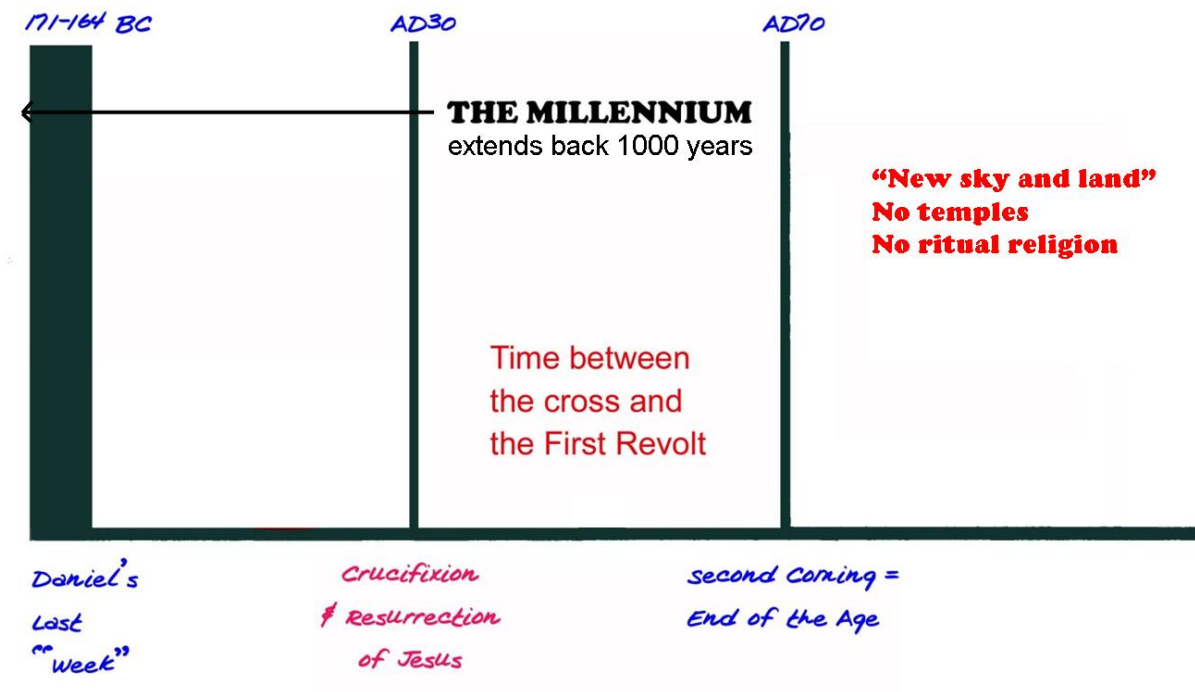


Partial preterists are usually post-millennial; that is, they believe in a general resurrection of the dead along with the final judgment.

For futurists and historicists, the introduction of the "rapture" concept brought in several new ideas as to how the world might end. As you have read in this book, full preterists allow for several possible explanations, all of which equate the "final" judgment with the judgment on Israel. A typical timeline expressing a full-preterist view might look like this:



The Timeline Proposed by the Author of this Book



As these pictures demonstrate, the partial-preterist opinion has key elements in common with the full-preterist viewpoint. It also shares a final judgment with the futurists. Since the partial-preterist view is somewhat in “between” the futurist and post-apocalyptic viewpoints, its proponents are opposed to each of the others.

With all of this discussion about the Great Harpado, and about the different viewpoints that have developed throughout the past two hundred years, before defending the post-apocalyptic view against its chief critics, let’s look at how some of the theorists view one another.

“Why is this system of interpretation scripturally blasphemous? Whenever someone or some system takes credit for what God does he usurps the glory that belongs to God. That is blasphemy. Mankind, Christian or otherwise, will never bring the world into subjection to Christ. Christ will do it himself! There were even some who held to some of the tenants of postmillennialism, and its sister teaching A-millennialism around during the time of the apostle Paul.”<sup>97</sup> (a mid-tribulation premillennial view of postmillennialism)

“Why can’t the rapture happen mid or post trib? Because this violates the doctrine of imminency the bible teaches over and over. If the rapture were to happen in the middle do you not think we would know when it is coming? That is to say that the first half of the trib will precede the rapture, therefore we must look out for the seals and the antichrist. Where is the element of surprise? The parable of the 10 virgins? There will be no surprise when Christians see the antichrist make a covenant with Israel, worldwide food shortage, 25% of the population (4th seal) will be killed by sword, famine, and plague to name a few, and the 3rd temple being rebuilt, 2 OT witnesses (we know one of them is Elijah) and chaos!”<sup>98</sup> (a pre-tribulation view of mid-trib and post-trib rapture)

**“Premillennialism weakens one’s commitment to orthodox Christianity as a religion based on the objective written Word of God.** The exegetical foundation for premillennialism is very tenuous, to say the least. The defense of it drives the rational mind in the wrong direction, toward subjectivism, rather than toward objectivity in the formation of religious understanding. This opens the can of worms now called neo-orthodoxy and situation ethics.”<sup>99</sup> (historicist view of premillennialism)

“The Whore of Babylon is a Biblical figure that no Christian can deny, but it’s the alleged manifestation of this figure in the person of the Roman Catholic Church and Pontiff that clearly puts Protestants and Catholics at opposite ends of the scale of toleration.”<sup>100</sup> (Catholic response to historicism)

“It is the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture that proves conclusively that Dispensationalism is not, as dispensationalists claim, a return to Biblical theology – but a pseudo Christian cult. Most arguments against pretribulationism have focused upon

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<sup>97</sup> “Post Millennialism,” David Rowley, from SoundDoctrine.com

<sup>98</sup> “Rapture and Apocalypse TRUTH...Heresies Debunked!” Laire Lightner, from lightnercrew.com (2010).

<sup>99</sup> “Why Premillennialism is Heresy,” Gary Cutler, from rapturerevival.org (2008).

<sup>100</sup> The Origin, Proliferation, and Institutionalization of Anti-Catholicism in America, and its Impact on Modern Christian Apologetics, Robert Fazio, p. 65 (2011)

showing that the doctrine is a new development in theology and can not be found in the scriptures. ... We will therefore take a different tack, and show that the doctrine is in direct opposition to the everlasting Gospel of Christ Jesus. ...

“Alexander Reese, a classic premillennialist, utterly destroyed this position with convincing scriptural arguments locating the resurrection of the Old Testament saints at the Day of the Lord at the end of the Tribulation.”<sup>101</sup> (a post-trib premillennial view of pre-trib rapture)

“Why are Protestants now preaching a FUTURE ANTICHRIST when Luther preached a Pope antichrist unless it was to leave Rome free to pursue her destructive business under the leadership of the Jesuits? ... trace the FUTURE ANTICHRIST FABLE back to the Jesuit RIBERA where it was born, in 1585 A.D. AND THEN WE SHALL SEE THE LIGHT.”<sup>102</sup> (an historicist connects Futurism to Catholicism)

At this point, you are probably convinced that the whole issue should be ducked, or that those who call themselves Christians will hate one another for any reason. Many of the groups which uphold one of the viewpoints over another label at least one of the others as heretics. They exclude and ostracize one another over eschatology. This is no good thing. We ought to defend our convictions against attacks, but there is no need for us to disfellowship (excommunicate) one another on the basis of opinion. With that said, I will proceed now to defend the post-apocalyptic viewpoint against attacks. I do not believe that futurists and partial preterists are idiots. I do not believe that they are heretics, or dishonest scholars, or false teachers. They merely disagree with the ideas that I am convinced are more accurate. Let us try to approach the disagreement as scholars.

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<sup>101</sup> “How the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Denies the Gospel,” from [testallthings.com](http://testallthings.com) (2007).

<sup>102</sup> Antichrist: Futurist and Historicist Views Compared, Ralph Woodrow and E.L. Saunders, p. 19 (1981).

# Chapter Ten

*“...the advantage of the new movement is that we do not want to anticipate the world dogmatically, but only to discover the new by way of the criticism of the old world. Until now, philosophers kept the solution of all mysteries inside their desks, and the stupid uneducated world merely had to open its mouth and the fried dove of absolute knowledge would fly in.”*

Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge (1843)

## ANSWERING OBJECTIONS MADE BY FUTURISTS AND PARTIAL PRETERISTS

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With these things now written, I will proceed to elucidate on several points of dispute that futurists and partial preterists have with the post-apocalyptic view, and will explain how it is that they are mistaken. Mr. Atkerson’s set of objections<sup>103</sup> captures most of these. In his list he makes ten points. I will cite both the numbering of these points and his statement of those points exactly as he stated them.

### ➤ ON THE NATURE OF THE AFTERLIFE

Part of the futurist’s and partial preterist’s insistence that the second coming must be in the future stems from their interpretation that the afterlife is physical, and that dead people do not reach their final destinations until after a singular event: THE resurrection. Logically, if there were such an event, it would have to occur at the **End of Time**. We cannot have a singular resurrection event for all people unless everyone who ever lived is dead. If there is such a “general event,” then it has not yet happened. The dispute in this instance is over whether there is a general event for all human beings. Atkerson writes:

#### 1. BIBLICAL STATEMENTS ON THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD Should Lead To A Rejection of Full Preterism.

He opens his attack on post-apocalypticism as with the assumption that the Bible as a whole portrays “the resurrection of the dead” as a singular historical event. He claims that, “full preterism teaches that the general resurrection of the dead has already happened.” On this point already I perceive him to be mistaken about the full-preterist position. I do not claim to speak for *all* post-apocalypticists; however, I would simply say that there is no such thing as a “**general** resurrection of the dead.”

Atkerson rightly describes my belief that when a person dies, his body “will never come up out of the grave...will never be reanimated.” At least it is right to say that the Bible does not say that every dead body will be “reanimated” at some point in time. The

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<sup>103</sup> “Back to the Future,” Steve Atkerson (2005).

futurist claims as support several distinct passages in which a specific dead person's physical body is restored to earthly life. These events, including the physical resurrection of Jesus and Lazarus, are presented as anomalies. In each case, they were unusual occurrences – not what everyone should look toward. Let us see.

A typical first example is 2 Kgs 19:20-1, where we read:

*And Elisha died, and they buried him. Now armed bands of Moabites would enter the land at the beginning of the year. And as they were burying a man it happened that, look, they noticed an armed band, and they cast the man into Elisha's tomb. And when he touched Elisha's bones, he came to life and stood up on his feet.*

The passage ends there, with the next verse talking about the king of Aram's oppression of Israel. From the context we see that this is not about a future bodily resurrection for all people. Instead, the passage concerns respect for the dead – in particular, God's prophet. This certainly should not be construed to imply that everyone will be resurrected physically – even if their corpses touch Elisha's bones!

Other physical resurrections did occur, but each of them – including the one above – was a sign pointing to something particular that is mentioned in the context.

Next, Mr. Atkerson cites passages such as Isa 26:19, which again he extracts from its context. His commentary on that passage indicates only, "This Old Testament passage clearly promotes the idea of corpses coming out of the grave." For everyone? A reading of the whole chapter reveals that again he is mistaken. My earlier comments on Isaiah indicate the context quite clearly.

What about Job 19:25-6? First of all, the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint disagree slightly on the wording. The Septuagint reads:

*For I know that he is eternal, the one who is about to free me -- to raise up on the land my skin that is enduring these things: for these things have been fully accomplished for me by Yahweh.*

The Masoretic text of the passage reads:

*For I know that he is alive, the one who is going to redeem me – afterward to raise up on the land my skin that has been afflicted with this: [without] flesh I will contemplate God.*

The Hebrew text was normally interpreted by the rabbis to mean one of two things: that either Job poetically promises to keep praising God even after his skin disease causes his flesh to fall off, or that Job's hope is that God will restore his skin and in that he will see God. The Septuagint favors the latter interpretation, with the wording there indicating Job's belief that God was already planning to restore Job's skin. Even at its most pessimistic – that Job thought he was going to die from the disease, the passage promises no physical resurrection and certainly does not support the notion of a far-off future event.

Neither does the apocalyptic passage in Daniel 12 support his case.

*And many of those who are asleep in the dirt of the ground will wake up: some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

In this passage, the Jewish people who died in the Maccabean Revolt are being symbolically judged, collectively as a people. In the passage, the judgment takes place at the time (12:1) of the restoration of the temple in 164 BCE. In actuality, each person's judgment was at the time of his death, but here for dramatic effect the judgments are portrayed as happening simultaneously. The passage only says that everyone who left the covenant would be disgraced, but those who kept God's principles would have eternal life.

Futurists refer to John 11:23, in which Martha responded to Jesus' having stated that her brother, Lazarus, would rise again. *"Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection, in the last day.'"* Particularly in John, "the resurrection" is used to indicate what we refer to in English as "the afterlife." "The last day" doesn't refer to a mythical final day of the universe billions of years from now. Neither does it refer to the conclusion of the book of Revelation. Here (as in every case in John), the expression "in the last day" means **"finally."** Not at the end of the universe but *ultimately*. Martha was aware that her brother was going to wind up in the afterlife but she wanted him back.

Jesus' reply indicates that he is both the afterlife and the life: his teachings are everything important to spiritual existence. On the other hand, he is "the resurrection" -- the act of making alive the (spiritually) dead, as he has already told his followers. That resurrection in John was not a singular event. It was already taking place for believers:

*Indeed I assure you that whoever hears my message and trusts the one who sent me **has** eternal life and is not coming into judgment but **has passed** out of death into life. Indeed I assure you that an hour is coming, and **now is here**, when the dead will hear the voice of God's son, and those who have heard will live. (Jn 5:24-5)*

These "dead" are not dead physically, nor is the resurrection a physical one. Although Martha was expecting to see Lazarus in the afterlife, she was about to see him again in the flesh. Is the afterlife a physical one? **No.** Paul explicitly says otherwise in 1C 15:42ff.:

*"It is also the same way with the resurrection of the dead.... It is sown as a **physical** body; it is raised up as a **spiritual** body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual one, just as it was also written, 'The' first 'person,' Adam, 'was made into a living soul.' The last Adam was made into a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual one was not the first one; that was the physical one. The spiritual one came afterwards. ... And just as we carried the image of the dusty one, we should also carry the image of the heavenly one. Now I sound like this, brothers, because **flesh and blood are not able to inherit God's kingdom**, nor will the corrupt thing inherit incorruptibility."*



Paul does not explain what the so-called spiritual body is, but he does tell us what it is NOT. The afterlife is not physical. Some of the Corinthians were concerned that there might not be an afterlife at all. Many people believed then, as many do now, that death is simply the end.

Paul related this to something they could not deny. They knew that Jesus had come back from the dead. Therefore, it was impossible for them to argue that “dead is dead.” Logically, if there is no afterlife, then Jesus could not have been raised from the dead. The contrapositive to this statement, then, must be true along with it: that if Jesus had been raised, then there must be an afterlife. Having already demonstrated the condition that Jesus was risen, Paul has proven his point. Yet he continued.

Taking this logical absurdity to the greatest extreme possible, Paul follows the line of reasoning to its conclusion. If Jesus could not have been raised from the dead, then Paul himself and those hundreds of others had all been lying. Everything they had done was meaningless. Not only were they have been false witnesses – which God condemns – but also the Corinthians themselves were without hope. They knew personally of the coming judgment on Israel – knowledge that they had probably received through the holy breath. If Jesus were not the Messiah, then they were all doomed, and everyone who had ever died had simply ceased to exist.

The argument against the existence of an afterlife was something that Jesus resolved by citing the famous self-introduction, “*I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.*” Paul did not need to support himself with this point. Instead, he concluded by noting that if this life were all there was, what a worthless existence it would be! And who would have been the most pitiful of people? The ones who had become so deluded that they believed God would somehow rescue them for following the Messianic teachings throughout the Revolt. In other words, Paul and the Corinthians themselves were to be pitied.

We can see that Paul intended to indicate that people go to the afterlife at their *own* end of days, and not at some fictitious point in the future. For he wrote, “*Death, the last enemy, has been stripped of power, for "he has arranged all things under his feet."* Death **had already been** rendered powerless. How? Because the one who lives by God’s teachings **has** eternal life. That life begins immediately and continues without end. Death is just a transition from physical life into spiritual life.

Now, Paul *did* refer to the First Revolt in 1C 15, but the Corinthians’ question was broader than just that. “*Then the end will come*” is a reference to the end of Priestly Judaism. At that time, the temple was destroyed, and Priestly Judaism ceased to exist. For the believer, no sacrificial system would ever again be required. No reminder of death would ever remain, and people could live their lives knowing in full confidence that they belonged to God. For such a believer, then, death is rendered powerless. It is powerless **now** (in advance of the end). Corinthians were dying. Some would probably die in the war, but death was powerless.

Paul backed up his case (that death would be powerless) by citing a Messianic prophecy -- a saying that again the Corinthians knew applied to Jesus. The Messiah had been crowned with glory, and everything was to be placed under his feet (Psa 8:5-6). The Corinthians understood that this was not to be taken to signify physical kingdoms, that this was a metaphysical metaphor. All of the Messiah's enemies, physical and spiritual, were subjected to him. Death was that last enemy that Jesus conquered, which he did while he was on earth. Only God remained in authority, and in the framework Jesus would subject everything to himself and himself to God, meaning that (of course) everything was subject to God.

The events of the First Revolt demonstrated God's ultimate authority. In getting rid of Priestly Judaism and a notion of religion that Yahweh had set up as a teaching tool, God left only Jesus' teachings as a means of access to him and to the afterlife. There is no access to God among the idolaters, and since that time no sacrificial system remains. The Messiah's interpretation of the Torah, a spiritual one, is dominant, just as Paul and the psalmist had predicted.

Mr. Atkerson believes that Acts 24 supports the notion of a bodily resurrection. He writes about that passage, "Here again, Paul, who was himself a Pharisee, clearly identified himself with their belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead." Again the issue in question actually concerns the **existence** of life after death -- not whether that afterlife was a **physical** one. If Jesus came back from the dead, then there is an afterlife; for believing this the Zadokites (Sadducees) condemned Paul. The Perushim (Pharisees) were able to accept the possibility of someone coming back from the dead, and they were likewise willing to accept the idea that a spirit being (i.e., a being without a body) had spoken to Paul, so they said, "*We find nothing bad in this person. Now what if a **spirit** or a messenger spoke to him?*"

The Zadokites took issue with this assumption and argued with the Perushim about it. The "future resurrection" means the personal judgment that each person faces when (s)he dies -- not a single, collective event. For this reason, the Biblical authors create a distinction between what happens to the just and to the unjust. The unjust do not have life after death. They face what is called, metaphorically, a resurrection of judgment.

Paul's contrast words it this way: *Now the end of this is eternal life. For the wages of sin is **death**, but God's free gift is **eternal life** in Anointed Jesus our Lord.* Bad people do not spend "eternal life being tortured." They earn the natural result of life here: they cease to exist when they die. This is the judgment that they face.

Humanity does not possess immortality by nature. By nature, death is the end. We require a **gift** in order to continue living after death. That gift from God is granted only to the faithful. Bad people go into the fire, which is symbolic of destruction, and God's enemies are always **destroyed**.

*You nations, approach to hear, and you people pay attention: let the land and what fills it hear: the world and everything that comes from it. For Yahweh is angry with all the nations, and is outraged at all their host. He has utterly destroyed them. He has handed them over to slaughter. Even their dead will be cast out, and the stench of their corpses will rise, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. (Isa 34:1f.)*

Scholars disagree as to the date of composition for chapters 34-35, but a probable time is sometime around 700 BCE. The language in the oracle is starting to look like what's in Revelation, and yet it was about a judgment on the people of Edom. That judgment happened during the fifth century BCE: hundreds of years before Jesus. Even though the author wrote, "Now all the host [i.e., the stars] of the skies will be dissolved, and the skies will be rolled up like a scroll" (v. 4), we are still here. The universe was not destroyed. Instead, the oracle ends with a prediction that the Israelites would be allowed to return to Jerusalem – something that happened in the sixth century BCE:

*"And Yahweh's ransomed will return and enter Zion, with singing and everlasting joy on their heads. Gladness and joy will reach them; sorrow and sighing will flee." (35:10)*

During the fifth century BCE, various Arab tribes assimilated the Edomites into their cultures; the Edomites ceased to exist. Eventually, the Nabataeans (ancient Jordanians) took control of the region. Near the end of the second century BCE, the Roman Republic expanded into the area, and anything that remained of ancient Edom vanished. Meanwhile, the Israelites returned to the area beginning with the decree of King Cyrus in 539 BCE. All of this happened just as Isaiah predicted, and the world did not end. God's enemies, however, were destroyed.

What about fire? Where's the fire? Later in (second) Isaiah, we read about Babylon, "Look, they (Babylon) will be stubble, the fire shall burn them; they will not save their lives from the power of the flame." (47:14) The fire would utterly destroy God's enemies.

This is exactly the kind of language that was used about Priestly Judaism and its adherents.

*"You brood of vipers! Who pointed out to you to flee from **the coming anger**? Therefore, make fruit worthy of the mental change, and do not think to say among yourselves, 'We have Abraham as a father.' For I am telling you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones! But the axe is already lying toward the roots of the trees. Therefore, each tree that does not make nice fruit will be **chopped down and cast into fire**.*

*"I indeed am baptizing in water into mental change. But the one who is coming after me is stronger than me, whose sandals I am not strong enough to carry. He will baptize you with holy breath and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor. And*

*he will gather the wheat into the storehouse, but he will **burn up** the chaff with **unquenchable fire**." (Mt 3)*

The old system wasn't going to continue. It was going to be burnt up in fire. It was going to cease to exist. Where else do we read about fire destroying people? The psalms and prophets in particular are loaded with such language. Whether the people who opposed God were Israelites (Deut 32; Isa 29; Isa 33:13f.; Isa 64; Isa 66:15f.; Jer 4; Jer 15; Jer 17; Lam 2:3-4; Ezek 5:4; Ezek 15; Ezek 24; Hos 8) or someone else (Psa 79; Psa 83; Psa 97; Isa 30; Isa 33:11-2; Nah 1:5-6), a punishment of fire always indicated destruction for the enemies.

There are other passages that appear to be individualized rather than nationalized. For example, Psa 11:5: "*Yahweh tests the just; but his soul hates the impious person and the one who loves injustice. Upon the sinner he will rain coals: fire, and sulfur, and burning wind shall be their part of their cup.*" Psalm 21:9, talking about the author's enemies, says, "*In your time of anger, you will make them like a fiery furnace. Yahweh will swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire will consume them.*" Psa 68:2 reads, "*As smoke is driven away, you drive them away. As wax melts before the fire, the wicked are destroyed in God's presence.*"

Consistently throughout the Bible, evil people cease to exist when they die. Except in a parable, no evil person is ever resurrected bodily in the Bible or mentioned as being part of the afterlife. Also consistently, good people are given eternal life. That life begins immediately and continues in a spiritual way, without a physical body, after death. It is also significant that no one in the Bible who had been dead a significant time – longer than a few days – was ever raised from the dead in their physical bodies. These are the only cases wherein we know when the person died relative to the time when they were raised:

1 Kings 17:17f. – The widow's son had died while Elijah was there. He remained dead for less than one day.

2 Kings 4:30 – The Shunammite's son died while Elisha was nearby. He remained dead for less than one day.

2 Kings 13:20-1 – As I indicated before, this was a fresh corpse that was being buried.

Mk 5:38f. – Jesus raised a girl who had just died.

Lk 7:12f. – A man who had just died was being carried in a procession, and Jesus raised him.

John 11 – Lazarus was raised during the fourth day after his death. According to their custom, the body had begun to decay on that day.

Ac 9:36f. – Peter raised Tabitha (Gazelle) shortly after her death.

Ac 20:9f. – Paul raised Eutychus immediately after the plunge to death.

We see, then, that the Bible never describes the bodily animation of a corpse that had been dead longer than four days and never predicts this for people in general.

Mr. Atkerson continues by citing Romans 8. What was Paul actually intending there?

*But you are not fleshly but spiritual, because God's spirit is dwelling in you. But if someone doesn't have the Anointed One's spirit, that person is not his. Now if the Anointed One is in you, the body is indeed dead on account of sin, but the spirit is life on account of justification. Now if the spirit of the one who raised up Jesus from among the dead is dwelling in you, the one who raised the Anointed One from among the dead will also make alive those mortal bodies of yours, through his spirit that is dwelling in you.*

"You are not fleshly but spiritual" – that is, the envoys have taught the Roman Christians the full explanation given by Jesus. They know the true nature of the Torah and should be completely free of the legalistic notions of the Judaizers. Why? Because God's spirit – here, his attitude or way of thinking – is with them.

Anyone who doesn't "have the Anointed One's spirit" – that is, anyone who doesn't have the same attitude that he had toward the Torah – that person "is not his." The only real followers of the Messiah are those who follow his core teachings. If the Judaizers presume to be Christians and legalists, then they are one but not the other.

Being a follower of Jesus does not mean that one becomes sinless, incapable of wrongdoing. By no means. But while the body is still "dead on account of sin," the attitude of forgiveness and loyalty toward God (in trust and love) brings life (inner peace). Why? "On account of justification" – because it focuses on justification rather than guiltiness. Anyone who has this attitude is "alive" spiritually because of that attitude – the same positive attitude that Paul recognizes in the Romans.

Ah, but what about Phil 3:20-1, from which Mr. Atkerson also claims support? Once again Paul trades in something physical for something that is NOT physical:

*For our citizenship exists in the heavens, from which we are also expecting a savior, Lord Anointed Jesus, who will change the scheme of our bodies of humiliation into a form like his body of glory, according to the working of his power to also arrange all things under himself.*

Paul and the Philippians do not depend on physical things. Nor do they brag about physical things. Rather than being citizens of earthly Israel – which would soon cease to exist – God's followers are citizens of a spiritual kingdom. Thus, their physical bodies (those "of humiliation") were unimportant. The dependence on physical things was gone; the physical death was irrelevant. In this way they would be transformed. Instead of seeing themselves as physical beings (like they once did regard themselves), the teachings of Jesus transform their believers into something spiritual. The "arranging of all things" refers to his lordship over the assembly from his time on earth, onward into the Messianic era; the era began in 70 CE.

## ➤ THE FLYING JESUS

Partial preterists and futurists object to the post-apocalyptic view because of their assumptions about Jesus returning “in the same manner” that he left. For example, “This means that today Jesus continues to have a resurrected and glorified body that is the pattern for ours. When he returns he will come in his glorified human body.”<sup>104</sup> We all recognize that there are but three alternatives:

Jesus said that he would return “with the clouds of the sky.” Either...

- Jesus did return as he predicted, but that return was not literal; or
- Jesus did not return, but his prediction was for some future time; or
- Jesus did not return because he was lying.

Atheists assume that the first possibility is untrue and consider the second to be ridiculous; therefore, they happily conclude the third. A typical atheist comment on Jesus reads as follows, “*There are multiple New Testament verses that clearly indicate that the second coming was supposed to occur within the lifetimes of Jesus’ contemporaries, almost two thousand years ago.* If there was such a person as Jesus Christ who promised to return to Earth, he is now close to two thousand years late.”<sup>105</sup>

On the other hand, Futurists assume that the first possibility is untrue and do not wish to contemplate the third; therefore, they conclude the second option. It is necessary to examine what Jesus and his students said about the “second coming.” In Acts 1, Luke records that Jesus rose up slightly and then simply disappeared, being obscured by a cloud. Two divine messengers appeared, indicating that Jesus would reappear “in the same manner” as his departure. Futurists and partial preterists interpret this to mean that Jesus would come back **flying**. For example, “Clearly, Scripture tells us that we meet Jesus in the air when God snatches us up. He is in the clouds, waiting to receive us.”<sup>106</sup> Even those who do not believe in a “rapture” like that one believe that Jesus will return by floating down from the sky. Here is Mr. Atkerson’s second objection.

## 2. BIBLICAL STATEMENTS ON THE NATURE OF THE SECOND COMING REQUIRE A REJECTION OF FULL PRETERISM

Atkerson is convinced that the so-called Final Coming is something different than what happened at any point in history. Therefore, rather than conclude that he doesn’t understand what did happen, he concludes that the Final Coming (FC) hasn’t happened yet. The real issue is simpler than that. Having misinterpreted the passages about the FC, futurists and partial preterists have no choice but to either postpone the FC or to follow the atheists in declaring Jesus to have been a false prophet.

John Noe put it this way, “The only solution to this dilemma of non-occurrence is occurrence! It is the only biblically consistent solution that can stop the liberal attack

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<sup>104</sup> *Vintage Jesus*, Mark Driscoll and Jerry Breshears, p. 151 (2007).

<sup>105</sup> “2000 Years Late, The Second Coming of Jesus,” Ebon Musings (2001).

<sup>106</sup> *Rapture Redux: Living With Hope and Purpose in the Last Days*, Daniel J. Gansle, p. 42 (2007).

dead in its tracks. Jenkins and LaHaye only add to the dilemma by pushing Christ's return and their rapture idea into the future."<sup>107</sup>

Jesus' departure in Acts 1 (cloud and all) was visible to the Eleven, and they were able to briefly look into heaven – this is paralleled and confirmed by Stephen's later vision (in Acts 7) of Jesus in heaven with God. The two messengers redirect their focus on the things to come. Jesus would return "in the same manner" in which he left. In agreement with other passages that describe the surprise associated with the SC, I interpret this to mean, that he would return **suddenly** – just as he left suddenly. Jesus indicated several times that his return would be sudden and unexpected, and all of the authors who wrote of Jesus' impending and imminent return indicated that it would seem sudden, just as his departure into heaven was surprising and sudden.

Although Luke does not sketch out a deliberate parallel between the disappearance of Jesus and the fates of Enoch and Elijah, these certainly come to mind. While Elijah's disappearance was spectacular, Enoch simply "was not found" (Gen 5:24), "for God took him." At any rate, Luke was explaining why Jesus' body was never discovered by anyone after his departure.

The controversy arises over the perceived ambiguity of "in the same manner" and the fact that the word translated "heaven" can mean the atmosphere, space, or the place where God is. If we reinterpret "heaven" here to be the sky and "in the same manner" to be something physical, then would Jesus return flying? Or covered in a mist?

Eager to support the Flying Jesus theory, Mr. Atkerson cites Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. In that letter – as we have already seen in chapter nine of this book, Paul was addressing a concern from his readers, who were worried about the vindication of those who died prior to or during the First Revolt. We already noted that nowhere in Greek literature (i.e., prior to or during the time of Paul) does any author – Jew or gentile – use the word ἄρπαζω in a manner such as would support the "flying" theory.

Futurists and preterists posit that not only will Jesus be flying but also hundreds of thousands of Christians and the corpses of dead Christians will also fly up into the sky. As we observed, Paul's answer was a symbolic call to war, and not a prediction that Jesus would literally fly. Paul does mention two different ways that the Great Harpadzo would be sudden:

*For you know yourselves accurately yourselves that as a **thief** comes in the night, so Yahweh's day is coming. When they say, "Here are peace and safety," then their **sudden** destruction will be standing, as labor pains come to the one who has a baby in her womb. And they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness that the day should come upon you like a **thief**. So then, we should not sleep like those who remain. On the contrary, we should be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at*

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<sup>107</sup> New Book Shatters Left Behind Delusion, John Noe (2000).

*night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But we who belong to the day should be sober, armoring ourselves with the breastplate of trust and love and with our helmet being the hope of salvation. Because God did not set us here for wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus, the one who died on our behalf, so that whether we are awake or sleeping, we would live together with him. So, advise one another and each one should build the other up, just as also you are doing.*

Paul knew that the day was going to come **suddenly**. This is what everyone meant when they described the manner in which Jesus would return. Since the terminology in the ἁρπαζω passage is all connected to battle, we recognize that Jesus and all of the New Testament authors who address the subject were talking about a single event – not two “comings of Christ.”

The Jewish leadership in Thessalonike had been telling them that no such devastation (of the temple in Jerusalem) was going to happen. Therefore, Paul urged his readers to realize that the louder people insisted that such things were not going to happen, the closer the time was to their happening. The situation is likened to a pregnant woman complaining of her labor; as labor increases, the baby is closer to birth. The partial preterist, represented here by Mr. Atkerson, would like for you to believe that the “labor” has been going on for thousands of years. Paul didn’t need to warn the Thessalonians, then, because there was certainly no need for his readers to be diligent. Some futurists reason that he wasn’t really writing to **the Thessalonians** at all, but to people in the far-off future; yet the letter certainly addresses real issues that the Thessalonians were having. To put this into temporal perspective, the time between Jesus’ death and today is about the same as the time between Isaac’s promised birth and Jesus’ death. During each of these tremendous time spans, the entire world has changed many times over. All of the Hebrew prophets, including Moses, came and went, and none of them told their listeners to be vigilant and wait for 2000 years; neither did Paul.

So, when Paul told Timotheos (Timothy) in about 55 CE, *“I charge **you** [Tim] before God who makes alive all things and Anointed Jesus who testified the good acknowledgement in front of Pontius Pilatus, to keep the precept unspotted and without reproach **until the appearing** of our lord Anointed Jesus, which will be shown **to us** in his own time by the blessed and holy power...,”* he meant literally that Timotheos would live to see it. If Tim were going to die thousands of years before the appearing, there was no point in mentioning the coming judgment (“appearing”); Timothy just needed to keep the precepts. Secondly, if Tim were going to be snatched away prior to the appearing, Paul should not have told him that both of them would see it.

The treatise to the **Hebrews** is actually clear about the SC, for the whole letter is about the coming judgment on Israel. The date of authorship was in the late 50’s or early 60’s. The setting of the work is closely tied to its purpose. Certain Jewish followers of Jesus were experiencing pressure from their fellow Jews. The exact nature of this pressure is alluded to in the book – most likely involving social shunning, the severing of friendships and relationships, and banning from the Jewish gatherings (synagogues).



This pressure had one purpose in mind: to get the recipients of the treatise to denounce Jesus as Anointed One and return to the Judaism of the priests and rabbis. The author, wishing to prevent this from happening, wrote the work to serve as a reminder of the place of Jesus the Anointed One in Judaism. Looking ahead to the coming destruction of the temple, the author urged the readers to band together and listen to those inspired individuals who had taught them about Jesus. That there was a judgment on Israel that was coming during the readers' lifetime is evident in chapter ten:

*Therefore, brothers, since **we** have freedom of speech by the blood of Jesus to the point of entering the holy places (by this blood he made new for us a recent and living way through the veil, that is, his flesh), and since we have a great priest over God's house, we should come near with a true heart, wearing our trust fully, having our hearts sprinkled from a consciousness of evil, and having our bodies washed in clean water, we should hold fast to the acknowledgment of hope without nodding our heads. For the one who promised is reliable. **We should also bear one another in mind** out of a stimulation of love and nice deeds and not abandon gathering together (as it is the custom of some people). On the contrary, **we should comfort** one another, and rather a lot, **as you see the day drawing near.** (Heb 10)*

The author uses "we" to refer to the readers and to himself (or herself, if the author was a woman). Instead of going back to Priestly Judaism – instead of dumping Jesus, "we should come near." We should comfort one another, as you – the readers – see the day drawing near. What day? Not the end of time thousands of years away, but the end of the temple and Priestly Judaism.

Since the metaphorical barrier between the non-priest and God is now broken, since Jesus (the "great high priest" came), we should approach God "with a true heart." We should trust God fully. The reference to the sprinkling of hearts hearkens back to the Jewish rituals of purification. Here, our hearts have been sprinkled -- cleansed. From what? From a consciousness of evil -- i.e., from the guilt accompanying our sins. The washing of bodies is a reference to the OT cleansings and probably also to Christian baptism, which separate the Jews who had accepted Jesus as God's Anointed from those who did not. The author reminds the readers of the dependability of God: "God is reliable." Why? Because the promises belong to the reader who will accept them. More will follow later on this topic. What should the readers do, then? "We should draw near" was the first thing. "We should hold fast" is the second. Hold fast to what? To "the acknowledgement of hope"; that is, to the fact that Jesus is who he is and that he brought an end to the former system. Do this "without nodding our heads" -- without any wavering of any kind. Third, "We should bear one another in mind." In other words, times are rough. Others around you may be stumbling. They too may be prepared to give up what they know to be true in order to avoid persecution. Help them, so that they will not fall away. Get together with people. Don't abandon them, because we Christian Jews all need one another now--for strength. "Comfort one another." Why? Because there is persecution from your own (Jewish) people, maybe even from your own

relatives. And you will need comfort, especially "as you see the day drawing near" -- the closer we get to the time of the destruction of the Temple and siege on Jerusalem and Masada. Next, the author sketches out the unpleasant alternative.

*If by choice we sin after taking recognition of the truth, no sacrifice on behalf of sin is left any longer. But there is some fearful expectation of judgment and fiery jealousy which is about to consume the ones who are against him. Anyone who set aside Moses' Torah "dies" without compassion "at the testimony of two or three witnesses." How much worse a punishment do you think he will be worthy of: the one who has trampled on God's son and who has regarded the blood of the covenant in which he was made holy to be a common thing, and who as insulted the spirit of generosity? For we know the one who says: "Vindication is mine. I will repay." And again, "Yahweh will judge his people." It is a fright to fall into the hands of a living God! (Heb 10:26f.)*

If "we" – and the author is pointing at the readers – reject Jesus as Messiah although we know he really is, then what can we do? We are rejecting God's covenant knowingly. Without any sacrificial system, all that will remain for us is to be judged and destroyed by God. The writer likens this to "dying under the testimony of two or three witnesses." It's worse, (s)he reckons, to knowingly reject God's son (i.e., the Messiah). This is "trampling" on him. It is "regarding the blood of the covenant [as] a common thing."

There were generally three classifications into which an item could fall. A holy item was consecrated for sacred use--dedicated to God. The blood of the covenant was therefore a holy thing. An unholy thing was something used for defilement or for an evil purpose. (No such things are mentioned here.) Everything else was "common." Anyone could touch, handle, or use it, because it had no special purpose. Here, the author equates knowingly rejecting Jesus (to gain social favor) as treating the blood of the covenant as a common thing. It is an insult to God, to the spirit of generosity. God will exact vengeance on such a person. And so (s)he quotes from Deuteronomy. These words come from the Song of Moses (32:35-6), sung as Moses was preparing to die --after the whole Torah had been given. Here, the author likens the Jews who reject their Messiah to the gentiles who opposed the Torah. God will protect his people from these individuals. In Isaiah, between the quoted portions lies the words, **"the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom is coming swiftly."** The author likens the swift destruction of Jerusalem (and those Jewish people who rejected him) to the corrupt nations that were about to be overthrown under Joshua.

### ➤ THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF LITERALIZING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

In our examination of passages from the Hebrew Bible, we have seen that the authors of the prophetic writings frequently employed language of doom and devastation. When God was going to wipe out Israel's greatest enemy at the time, he would use broad and descriptive language, like this language that we observed multiple times earlier: *"For look, Yahweh's day is coming – cruel both with emotion and rage – to **make the whole***

***habitation a desolate place, and to destroy the sinners from it. For the stars of the sky and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be darkened in his going forth, and the moon will not give its light.***

Although the prophecies were fulfilled by various events in the centuries prior to Jesus – the conquering of Israel by Assyria; the punishment of the Assyrians; the destruction of the temple and conquering of Judah by Babylon; the punishment of Babylon; the desecration of the temple by Antiochus – at no time did the language come true literally. Neither God nor the authors ever intended for that to happen. The world did not literally end on any of those occasions, but futurists and partial preterists expect similar prophecies to point to the End of the World.

### 3. EARTH-SHATTERING EFFECTS OF THE SECOND COMING & THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT FORCE A REJECTION OF FULL PRETERISM

Mr. Atkerson's third objection takes the figurative language of apocalyptic literature and literalizes it. He asks things like, "The world was destroyed once by literal, real, wet water. The world will be destroyed again by real, hot fire. Has this happened yet?"

As early as Joshua chapter 5, we read that, "*For the children of Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness, until all of the people who were men of war, who had left came Egypt, were destroyed, because they did not listen to Yahweh's voice: to whom the Yahweh swore that he would not reveal the land to them....*"

This was a fulfillment of punishment prescribed by God. The exact language about listening to God – which concerns following his teachings – is found earlier in Deut 28:

*"But if you do not listen to Yahweh your God, to keep all his precepts and his statutes with which I charge you today, then it will happen that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you..."*

*"Yahweh will strike you with **consumption** and with **fever** and with inflammation and with fiery heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you are destroyed. The sky over your head will be **bronze**, and the ground under you will be **iron**. Yahweh will **make the rain of your land powder and dust**; it will come down from the sky onto you until you are destroyed....*

*"Yahweh will strike you with the **boils of Egypt** and with tumors and with the scabs and itching, from which you cannot be healed. Yahweh will strike you with **insanity** and with **blindness** and with bewilderment of heart; and you will grope at noon like the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you. You will be engaged to a woman, but another man will **rape** her; you will build a house, but you will not live in it; you will plant a vineyard, but you will not use its fruit. Your ox will be **slaughtered before your eyes**, but you will not eat of it; your donkey will be torn away from you, and will not be restored to you; your*

*sheep will be given to your enemies, and you will have no one to save you....”*

These were just some of the curses for not following the Torah – God’s instruction. Ancient Israel rejected God’s instruction time and time again. Consider this stronger wording about violating the covenant:

*“...the children of Israel had sinned against Yahweh their God (who brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of the pharaoh, Egypt’s king), and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the nations, whom Yahweh cast out from the presence of the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they practiced; and the children of Israel secretly did things that were not right by Yahweh their God, and they constructed high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city; and they set up pillars and Asherim on every high hill, and under every leafy tree; and there they offered in all the high places, as did the nations whom Yahweh carried away before them; and worked evil things to provoke Yahweh; and they served idols, about which Yahweh had told them: 'You will not do this thing';*

*“Yet Yahweh previously warned Israel and Judah, by the hand of every prophet and every seer, saying: 'Turn away from your evil ways, and keep my precepts and my statutes,' according to all the instruction which I gave to your ancestors, and which I sent to you by the hands of my servants the prophets'; still they would not listen, but they hardened their necks, like the necks of their ancestors, who did not trust in Yahweh their God; and they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their ancestors, and his testimonies which he had testified against them; and they pursued worthless things, and became worthless, and like the nations that surrounded them, about whom Yahweh had charged them that they should not do like them; and they forsook all the precepts of Yahweh their God, and made molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Ba'al....” (2 Kgs 17:7ff.)*

The account continues by saying that God caused the northern nation of Israel to cease to exist on account of their idolatry. Later, something similar would happen to the southern kingdom of Judah. However, what did not happen – literally – were all of the curses found in Deuteronomy. **Not** everyone who got engaged had his fiancée raped. They were **not** all afflicted with boils and scabs like Job. The sky did **not** become bronze; the rain did **not** become powder. The things that were mentioned in Deuteronomy did not happen literally. Those were metaphors.

Even more descriptive language of devastation appears in Micah 1, which I mentioned in more detail earlier. *“And the **mountains will be melted** underneath him, and the **valleys shall be ripped** apart – **like wax in the presence of fire**; like water flowing*

*down a cliff.*” Now these things were written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and they came true when Assyria overran Samaria in 722 BCE. However, the mountains did not melt. The valleys were not torn apart. God did not literally trample the land. These things were metaphors. Similar language was used to describe the destruction of the temple and fall of Judah in 587 BCE. Similar language was used to describe the desecration of the temple by Antiochus IV in the second century BCE. Even more so the language of apocalyptic used to describe the fate of the temple and Priestly Judaism in 70 CE is to be understood metaphorically. Yet in order to deny that it already happened, Atkerson must interpret it literally.

Yet no futurist or partial preterist takes everything literally in an apocalyptic prediction. For example, in Revelation 5 we read, *“And I saw in the midst of the throne and the four animals, and in the midst of the old people, that a lamb was standing, like it had been slaughtered. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that were sent out into all the land.”* Instead of interpreting this literally, futurists will say, “That’s not an actual **lamb** with seven eyes and seven horns. The lamb represents Jesus.”

Bring up Revelation 12, *“And another sign was seen in the sky: and look, a great red dragon who had seven heads and ten horns. And on his head were seven diadems. And his tail was dragging one third of the stars of the sky, and he cast them into the land.”* Since the stars are each many times larger than the earth, and a dragon that size flying through space would literally collapse the galaxy, futurists will say, “The dragon represents Satan, and the description means that he is fierce. The stars mean that he took one-third of the angels with him when he left God.” So this part isn’t literal either! They take the “destruction of the universe” literally – despite it being figurative in the Hebrew Bible – but not this part. After all, they believe that to do so would be ridiculous.

Making his next point, Atkerson examines several other times when God judged the people of Israel, saying that:

#### 4. THE VARIOUS COMINGS OF THE LORD THAT ARE DISTINCT FROM THE SECOND COMING SHOULD LEAD TO A REJECTION OF FULL PRETERISM

It is clear from what I have already written that I agree that God judged both his people and other nations repeatedly, and that prophets accurately predicted that he would do so. Where we disagree is that Atkerson and some other (partial) preterists claim that Jesus spoke of the SC separately from the judgment on Israel in 70 CE.

Atkerson directly claims that Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in Matthew 24. Gentry agrees with him. I agree with Atkerson when he says, “In Matthew 24:1-2, Jesus predicted that Herod’s temple in Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed.” However, Atkerson and the partial preterists shift gears at this point. As Atkerson puts it, “the disciple’s question about Jesus ‘coming’ to destroy Jerusalem may not have been a question about the second coming as we commonly think of it. Rather, it could have been about another type of coming, a judgment coming.” Here is where we

disagree. Whereas he posits a third “coming,” I claim that the only additional “coming” that Jesus predicted was the SC – the coming in judgment.

Let’s look at the language used in Matthew 24-5 and its parallels.

*And after Jesus was exiting, when he was going away from the temple, his students came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered, saying to them, "Don't look at all these things. Indeed I am telling you, by no means will there be a stone left here on top of another stone that will not be thrown down." Now as he was sitting on the Mountain of Olive Trees, the students came to him by themselves, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of the **presence** and of the **conclusion of the age**?"*

Now, the partial preterists agree that this must be talking about the destruction of the temple because the parallels in Mark and Luke makes that much clear. Mark records their question as, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all **these things** are about to be concluded?" It is clear, then, from the wording here that Matthew's "**conclusion of the age**" is when "all **these things** are about to be concluded." Furthermore, Luke's account of the question reads: "Teacher, how then will **these things** be, and what will be the sign when **these things** are about to happen?" They never asked about the mythical End of Time. The end of the world is not the subject for discussion. The end of the pre-Messianic age was seen as coinciding with the destruction of the temple. Thus, asking about its desolation was the same as asking about the end of the pre-Messianic age.

In Matthew, the expression **conclusion of the age** occurs several times – always talking about the same event. In explaining the parable of the darnel plants, Jesus said, "*The one who sows the nice seed is the Son of Man. Now the field is creation. Now the nice seed, these are the sons of the kingdom, but the darnel plants are the sons of the evil one. Now that enemy who sowed them is the Accuser. Now the harvest is the **conclusion of the age**, but the harvesters are messengers. Therefore, as the darnel plants are collected and burnt up with fire, in the same way it will be during the **conclusion of the age**.*" (Mt 13) Jesus reiterated immediately with an analogy about a dragnet, again referring to the conclusion of the age. At the very end of the gospel, Jesus finishes by reminding the Eleven that he would be with them until the **conclusion of the age** (28:20).

Now, let’s run quickly through the rest of Matthew 24-25 a second time. What did Jesus predict there in connection with the destruction of the temple?

*"For nation will rise up upon nation,..."* This was the war that we call the First Revolt. It began as a rebellion against Roman rule and ended with the battle for Masada. This prediction of the war ends with the words, "And then the end will come." This is not the end of time but the end of the old system. The next passage starts with a reminder of Daniel.

*"Therefore, when you see "the desolating detestable thing," that was declared through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place--the one who reads, let him think--then those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains....*

This reminder of Daniel was designed to make anyone who knew Daniel remember what he had predicted. As we observed earlier, the original "abomination of desolation" from Daniel 11:31 and chapter 12 indicates the statue of Antiochus/Zeus in the temple. For Matthew, the expression indicates the presence of gentiles (Romans) in the temple, led by Titus – an action that he may have regretted.

Jesus told his students that when the Romans entered the temple, the desolation of the city was coming soon. Therefore, Jesus' followers should "flee to the mountains." Fortunately, the siege of the city would be relatively short. In total, the attack on Jerusalem lasted from April of 70 CE until September -- only five months. By late spring of 73, the fortress at Masada had been taken and the war was over.

Luke's wording makes it clear that Jesus is still talking about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and not about the end of the world:

*"Now when you notice **Jerusalem** surrounded by encampments, then you should know that **its desolation** has come near. Then those who are in Judea should flee...."* There, Jesus urges his followers not to go back into Jerusalem. And so, we see that he is still talking about the destruction of the temple and desolation of Jerusalem – which was about to happen.

After predicting the arrival of false Messiahs before and during the war, Jesus continues.

*"Now **immediately after** the affliction of those days, **"The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens"** will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will be in the sky, and then all the tribes of the land will lament, and they will see the Son of Man **"coming on the clouds of the sky"** with power and much glory. And he will send his messengers with great trumpets, and they will **gather his chosen ones** from the four winds--from the extreme points of the heavens to their other extremes. "Now learn from the analogy of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and it puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near. In the same way also, when you notice all these things, know that he is near, at the doors. Indeed I am telling you that by no means will this generation pass away until all these things happen. The sky and the land will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.*

The verses that follow were going to happen immediately after something. After what? Immediately after Jerusalem was surrounded by armies in the year 70. What does Jesus predict would happen? This is his description of the Second Coming. Here again we see that the second coming **is** the coming in judgment. The description of the

heavenly portents, taken from Isaiah 13 (see also Ezekiel 32, Amos 8), is the usual indication that God is coming in judgment. We have already observed that **these portents never mean** that the world is coming to an end. The people will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky." The expression 'coming in the clouds,' borrowed from Daniel, also indicates judgment. The "gathering of the chosen ones" is what John terms the "first resurrection" in Revelation. This statement of Jesus' is directed at the faithful, and so it focuses on the outcome of the war for those who remain loyal to God and Jesus. Luke's account words it this way:

*"And there will be signs with sun and moon and stars, and on the land anguish of nations in confusion; of the sea, a roar and tossing. There will be a fainting away of people from fear and an expectation of the things that are coming to the Empire. For 'the powers of the heavens' will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much brilliance. But when these things are beginning to happen, straighten yourselves up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is nearing!" (Lk 21:25-8)*

Once again, Jesus stays within the context of the First Revolt (66-73 CE). These things were all coming to the Empire. When Jesus comes, the redemption of the faithful is nearing. This redemption will become the state of affairs during the Messianic Age – the age that begins as the war ends in 73 CE. Matthew's conclusion of the age happens in 70 CE, then the war ends, then we're in the new period. There is no room here for thousands of years to pass.

Since it is clear that any natural reading of the prophecy here must give rise to the view that it was supposed to happen in the First Century, and since partial preterists and futurists reject the idea that the apocalyptic language of the heavenly portents was supposed to be a metaphor, they are required to look ahead either at a "double fulfillment" of some prophecies or at a "gap" between the beginning and the end of the prophecy. There's no gap in the narrative of Matthew 24-25, but partial preterists require one. This leads us to...

### ➤ THE MYTHS OF TELESCOPING PROPHECY AND DUAL FULFILLMENT

In light of the context which clearly demonstrates that Jesus was predicting the destruction of the temple in 70 CE along with his "second coming" – or "presence," one either must acknowledge that the second coming was connected with the destruction of the temple or must concoct theories about "temporal gaps" in the prophecies and the "dual fulfillment" of prophecy.

In other words, they say, "Sure that's about AD 70, but the whole thing will repeat over again," and "That's about AD 70, but between these two verses there's a gap of thousands of years. This one is AD 70, but the *next* verse won't take place until some far off time in the future." What? Do they really say that?



Ken Gentry writes, "We must recognize that a simple reading of Matthew 24:34 provides an unambiguous assertion that all of the things Christ the Great Prophet mentioned up to this point — i.e., in verses 4 through 34 — were to occur in the very generation of the original disciples...."<sup>108</sup> Gentry also says, "The following events (Matt. 24:36-51) relate to some other event that was not to occur in 'this generation.' Thus, all events **before verse 34** are to occur to 'this generation.'"<sup>109</sup> Between one segment of Matthew 24 and the next, Gentry sees a vast difference "between the war-torn Great Tribulation and the unexpected appearance of Christ to end history."<sup>110</sup>

Yes, they require a "gap" — both in Matthew and in Revelation. Since partial preterists regard most of these discourses to belong to the first century, they require a means of getting from there to the far future. This is the "gap": the "telescoping prophecy." Other partial preterists, like Atkerson, see the same "gap" both in Matthew and in Revelation.

## 5. THE PHENOMENON OF TELESCOPING PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT Would Argue For A Rejection of Full Preterism

I agree with one thing that partial preterists say when they introduce the fulfillment of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible do the prophets predict the Messiah's return (in judgment). Although Joel references the day itself ("the great and majestic day of Yahweh"), he does not refer directly to a messianic second coming. This was a prophecy made by first John the Baptizer and then by Jesus. Yet that is where we diverge. Despite the protests of partial preterists, the contexts do not allow for such temporal gaps.

Atkerson cites Luke 4:17-21, where we read:

*And he came into Nazareth, where he had been raised, and according to his custom he entered into the gathering on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And a scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him, and after unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written, "Yahweh's breath is upon me. On account of this he has anointed me to announce a good message to the poor. He has sent me forth to herald a release to captives and a restoration of sight to blind people, to send forth in freedom those who had been crushed, to herald Yahweh's acceptable year."*

In this section, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61. That section of Isaiah is reminiscent of the servant songs, and the author writes in the first person. The chapter was commonly seen as a prediction by the author of the Anointed One, and what God would say through him. The chapter speaks of an everlasting covenant (v. 8) and of superiority over outsiders (vv. 5-6). The Anointed One describes himself as a bridegroom (v. 10), an image used by John the Baptizer in John's account to describe Jesus.

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<sup>108</sup> "Dispensationalism As a Non-Prophet Movement," Ken Gentry, *Dispensationalism in Transition*, Vol. V, No. 5, p. 1 (May, 1992)

<sup>109</sup> "On the 'transitional verses' in Matthew 24," Ken Gentry, *The Forerunner*, (September, 2008)

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

"The poor" here may signify anyone who has been suffering spiritually; the reading in Isaiah allows for it, and Luke appears to use "the poor" in place of Matthew's "poor in spirit". The heralding of the acceptable year is an announcement of God's favor for those who accept their Messiah. In stating that the writing was being fulfilled, Jesus was essentially telling them that he was the Anointed One. Although he did not bluntly state it so, anyone who understood the passage realized that if Jesus was applying it to the current time, then he was applying it to himself.

Now, Isaiah predicted "the day of repayment" in that passage (61:2). While this word is often translated "vengeance," and while Atkerson takes it to mean the judgment on Israel in 70 CE, the Septuagint translates the underlying Hebrew word with the more neutral ἀνταποδοσεως, a word simply meaning "repayment." This word can be positive or negative, depending on the context. In the context here, as in Psa 103:2, the word should be interpreted favorably. The sending of the Anointed One was indeed a day of restoration, and all of the verses in Isa 61 describe something **positive**.

However, partial preterists require the idea of a single prediction meaning two disconnected things so that they can interpret the end of Matthew 16:

*"For the Son of Man **is about to come** in his Father's glory with his messengers, and then "he will give out to each one according to his practice." Indeed I am telling you that there **some of those who are standing here** who will by no means taste death until they should notice the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

In Mark, we read this as:

*"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my sayings among **this** adulterous and sinful **generation**, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him **when he comes** in his Father's glory with the holy messengers." And he said to them, "Indeed I am telling you that there are **some of those who are standing here** who will by no means taste death until they see God's kingdom when it has come with power." (8:38-9:1)*

Atkerson opines, "Matthew 16:27 could refer to the second coming and 16:28 could refer to the transfiguration," but it is again clear from Mark that he is talking about the people who were living at the time – throughout the whole oracle. Does he mean "this" generation – the people living in his day, or "that" generation – some far off time in the future? As we observed earlier, Jesus used the expression consistently.

Mt 11:16 – *"Now to what will I liken this generation?"*

Mt 12:41 – *"Ninevite men will stand up during the judgment with this generation, and they will condemn it."*

Mt 23:36 – *"Indeed I am telling you, all these things will come upon this generation."*

Every single time, when Jesus says "this generation" he means the people who were living at the time. Even later in Acts, when Peter tells people to save themselves from "this generation," he means those people living then. When Jesus predicted the SC, he

predicted it for the people who were living at the time. This is why, as we have seen, the authors of the New Testament letters tell their readers to watch out for it.

Atkerson also claims that “the two events” – the SC and the judgment on Israel – are separate in Luke’s account. Yet Luke 21, which clearly predicts the destruction of the temple (as we have already seen), refers to heavenly portents that Atkerson himself claims have not happened:

*"And there will be signs with sun and moon and stars, and on the land anguish of nations in confusion; of the sea, a roar and tossing. There will be a fainting away of people from fear and an expectation of the things that are coming to the Empire. For “the powers of the heavens” will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much brilliance. But when these things are beginning to happen, straighten yourselves up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is nearing!"*

So, has the destruction of the temple not happened? No. We know that the temple was destroyed, as it is still desolate to this day. Then these signs happened, too – including the Son of Man coming suddenly “in a cloud” (as Jesus predicted in Acts 1). Far more likely there was only one Second Coming – the one that happened in the First Century.

The partial-preterist argument continues with the “dual” fulfillment assertion. What does this mean? Maybe some prophecies were meant to be fulfilled not once but twice. That would allow for something to happen in the First Century, and it would happen again thousands of years later. This is a fine speculation, but the Bible does not advance it.

## 6. THE DOUBLE FULFILLMENT OF SOME OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES ALLOWS FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF THE SAME IN NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECIES AND SHOULD MAKE ONE WARY OF FULL PRETERIST CLAIMS

Why is there confusion? The contexts of the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible generally make it clear that both God and the prophet were addressing a specific issue at a certain time in history. It should be clear, then, that every prophecy in the Hebrew Bible was fulfilled exactly once. However, on more than one occasion a more modern commentator sees that something is happening in his time that is very much like something that happened earlier. The prophecy is not coming true again, but the new situation is quite similar to the earlier one. For this same reason, the partial preterists and futurists stumble over the book of Daniel – since Jesus mentions Daniel. In brief, every section of prophecy in Daniel was fulfilled prior to or during the second century BCE. In particular, let’s reexamine the Vision of the Kings in chapters 10-12.

*"Now I have come to let you know what will happen to your people in later days, for the vision is for many days from now."*

While the vision will commence with the kings of Persia, its focus will be on the time of writing – near the time of the Maccabean Revolt. As my notes reveal, the account records, in chronological order, events during the reigns of Ardeschia Deraz Dast (Artaxerxes I); Alexandros the Great; Ptolemy I; Seleucus I; Ptolemy II and his daughter,

Bernike; Antiochus II; Seleucus II; Ptolemy III (Euergetes); Seleucus III (Ceraunus); Antiochus II; Ptolemy IV (Philopator); Ptolemy V (Epiphanes); Antiochus III; and Seleucus IV. After their days, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) – a “contemptible person” – came into power. The central part of the prophecy concerns Antiochus’ treatment of the priesthood and defilement of the temple.

*And the armies will be swept away from his presence and broken. Yes, and so will the prince of the covenant. ...*

Everything here describes in detail things that actually happened in the Second Century BCE. So, when the later reader hears about a “detestable thing that causes desolation,” he remembers that Antiochus IV defiled the temple, set up a statue of himself as Zeus in the temple and dedicated the temple to a foreign god. God's true people, says the author, refused to allow their faith to be taken away even though its chief symbols were removed.

A historian who examines the context of the passage in detail will see that the historical context only allows for something that has already taken place. Some Full Preterists think that all of this happened around 70 CE rather than in the Second Century BC; one way or the other, the context clearly points to events that have taken place, and I am convinced that it happened over a century before Jesus was born. When Jesus told people to remember Daniel’s statement about the **detestable thing that causes desolation**, he meant that what was about to happen – the defilement of the temple – was similar to what his listeners knew had happened before.

Instead of looking for a “double” fulfillment, the Biblical authors always meant that their readers should learn from the past. Something like that was happening again. “As it was in the days of Noah...” Learn from the past about the suddenness of the coming conflict. “The detestable thing that causes desolation...” Learn from the past about the defilement of the temple by outsiders. “The only sign will be the sign of Jonah....” Learn from the past that Jesus would return from the dead. The Hebrew Bible contained prophecies that were fulfilled once and which were used to teach about later times as well.

## 7. "ALL" IN THE BIBLE DOES NOT ALWAYS MEAN "ALL", MAKING FULL PRETERISM NOT SO FULL

With this point, in my opinion Mr. Atkerson grasps at straws. While it is true that expressions like “all,” “everybody,” and “forever” are sometimes generalizations, the wording “all of these things will be fulfilled” is more precise. Not “everything” but “**these** things.” Those specific things that Jesus was talking about were about to happen. The temple was about to be destroyed, and the age was about to end. Atkerson intends for us to believe that when Jesus said “all these things” would come true, he only meant that **some** of those things would happen; for the rest to come true we would have to wait thousands of years.

Not every partial preterist would have made Atkerson's statement. For example, Ken Gentry disagrees. He has gone on record as saying, "When Jesus says, 'All these things must take place in this generation,' that is a preterist statement." Referring to the time statements in Revelation, he said that the time statements there indicate "to some extent" a limitation to the first century.<sup>111</sup>

#### 8. OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETICAL USE OF IMMINENT TIME STATEMENTS: IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO! THIS ALLOWS FOR A SIMILAR POSSIBILITY IN NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECY AND UNDERMINES FULL PRETERISM

Mr. Atkerson refers to Haggai 2, which we have already observed referred to the construction of the second temple, which was completed less than three years after Haggai's prophecy. All of the "imminent" fulfillments in the Hebrew Bible did indeed come true soon after God gave the oracles. Each one of these has been examined above. Whenever a prophecy concerned something in the indistinct future – typically, this meant the coming of the Messiah – there was no language of imminence.

#### 9. STATEMENTS ABOUT THE TRANSFORMATION AND RAPTURE OF LIVING CHURCH AT SECOND COMING MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE AD 70 JUDGMENT TO HAVE BEEN THE SECOND COMING

Once again, it is necessary for the partial preterists and futurists to take a figurative passage literally. The so-called "rapture" is taken to predict God's people flying through the air. Obviously this hasn't literally happened, but they *want* for it to happen literally. Therefore, it must be something that will happen at some far off point in the future. Atkerson asks, "Were all Christians living in AD 70 changed from mortal to immortal?" Yes. All those who follow God are immortal – not by nature, but through a gift of God.

#### ➤ THE ASSAULT ON SOLA SCRIPTURA

#### 10. CONFIDENCE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ABILITY TO GUIDE THE CHURCH MUST LEAD TO A REJECTION OF FULL PRETERISM

This is the appeal to human opinion, labeled as tradition: "Everywhere in the world today, the church is in agreement that the second coming of Jesus is a future, bodily event," says Atkerson. Gentry asks, rhetorically, "How could the church be wrong for 2,000 years?"<sup>112</sup> Yet everywhere around the world, denominations separate from one another by believing something different than whatever was taught "everywhere" before. I ask the protestant groups, was Martin Luther wrong because he was different? He was surely wrong about some things – he was human. However, his holding a minority opinion about something – or even a unique one – did not mean that he was wrong. Gentry is a minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly, a group that was founded in 1991. It branched off of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (USA), a group that emerged from the protestant reformation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and which

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<sup>111</sup> Ken Gentry, interview on nicenecouncil.com (March 31, 2009)

<sup>112</sup> Ken Gentry, interview, Covenant Radio (September 16, 2009)

suffered church splits in the intervening years. Would Gentry ask them if their predecessors had been wrong for so many years? No. It seems odd for Protestants to argue on behalf of ***sola scriptura*** on one hand and in favor of tradition on the other. Yet he writes:

“The ‘consistent preterist’ believes that all prophecy is fulfilled in the A. D. 70 destruction of the Temple, including the Second Advent, the resurrection of the dead, the great Judgment, and so forth.... [The post-apocalyptic viewpoint] is outside the creedal orthodoxy of Christianity. No creed allows any second Advent in A. D. 70. No creed allows any other type of resurrection than a bodily one. Historic creeds speak of the universal, personal judgment of all men, not of a representative judgment in A. D. 70.”<sup>113</sup> As he and other protestant preterists and futurists express it here, then, the problem that they have at this point is not so much with the possibility that Jesus’ return was something different than they understand it to be; their problem is with the protestant philosophy of ***sola scriptura***, which they appear to understand differently than either Luther or Calvin did. Certainly they would oppose a restorationist paradigm.

The partial preterist’s appeal to tradition is somewhat fascinating, for many futurists and historicists claim that both (partial) preterism and the post-apocalyptic “full” preterism developed in the seventeenth century. In *The New Testament for English Readers*, Vol. II Part II, Henry Alford described three of the viewpoints of Revelation – omitting the Idealist view entirely. There he wrote, “The Praeterist view found no favour, and was hardly so much as thought of, in the times of primitive Christianity.”<sup>114</sup> Alford’s opinion was that the whole preterist movement began in modern times with the publication of Luis Alcasar’s *Vestigatio Arcani Sensus in Apocalypsi (Investigation of the Hidden Meaning in Revelation)* in 1614. Alford refers to several other publications in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and of its perceived revival in Germany. Alford sympathized with what we now call partial preterism, for he expressed a belief that some (but not all) of Revelation had come to pass.

Gentry and others appear to be confused on this issue, for Gentry stated somewhat rhetorically, “the hyper-preterist position cannot be theonomic in that in its view the Law came to fulfillment in the passing away of the Jewish order.”<sup>115</sup> Theonomy is the belief that God is the sole source of human ethics. When the Torah was fulfilled, as Jesus himself said, this does not mean that its principles were abolished. On the contrary, Jesus merely replaced a set of external regulations with certain fundamental, internal principles. These principles both summarize and supersede the regulations, and it is precisely this comparison of external regulation and internal principle that is the central topic of what we call the Sermon on the Mount.

Immediately after his proclamation, “*Do not think that I came to let the Torah or the Prophets go. I have not come to let them go, but to fulfill them,*” Jesus provided explicit examples of what he meant by that. His first example concerned murder:

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<sup>113</sup> “A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism,” Ken Gentry (1997)

<sup>114</sup> *The New Testament for English Readers*, Vol. II Part II, Henry Alford, pp. 348-9.

<sup>115</sup> “A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism”

*"You have heard that it was said to the ancients, "Do not murder," and that whoever murders will be liable to the judges.*

*"But I am telling you that each one who is angry with his brother will be liable to the tribunal." (Mt 5:21f.)*

As in the examples that follow in Matthew, Jesus explains the internal principle behind the external regulation found in the Torah. Murder is an act. The custom said that the murderer would go before the judges and afterwards be put to death. Therefore, murder was harshly punished under their legal code. But what is the real problem behind murder? Anger is an internal source that results occasionally in murder. Does Jesus say that anger is as bad as murder? Yes. To drive his point home, he continues with two more examples, in each of them providing a harsher penalty for a seemingly lesser offense.

The same angry emotions are at play regarding insults and murder. If you feed that negative emotion one way (to insult or slander) but not another way (to murder), the internal problem is still the same. You cannot deal with the ill-feeling toward someone if you address only the outer manifestation. Walking around hating someone is NOT what the Torah intended. Jesus provides the "cure": *"If you are bringing your gift to the altar..."* Simply, don't let anger exist between you and your fellow Jew/Christian. If you're the one who's angry, or if the other person is, the problem still requires a peaceful solution. God's priority is not for religious "duty" but for the relationship you have with that person.

Whether Jesus was talking about murder (5:21ff.), or adultery (5:27ff.), or divorce (5:31f.), or swearing oaths (5:33ff.), his application is the same. The Torah is not supposed to be understood as a set of externals but as a collective instruction that points us toward the internal principles. Therefore, when Jesus summarized the whole duty of humanity in the principle of Love (Mt 22:34f.), he meant to indicate that the Torah was never meant to be applied as a code of laws but rather as a way to become a better person. Knowing this, we cannot be complete without it. Theonomy requires that ethics come directly from God – not from human tradition. Only by replacing an external system with a spiritual one could a theonomic principle be revealed.

These principles were what God was trying to communicate to humanity since the beginning (John 1:1ff. and Heb 1:1f.). They are timeless. So Gentry writes – again confusedly – that post-apocalyptics must believe that, "if the entire New Testament spoke to issues in the pre-A. D. 70 time frame, we do not have any directly relevant passages for us."<sup>116</sup> I perceive him to misunderstand entirely, for God's principles – centrally of Love and Trust – are the most relevant matters that God has ever given us. These things he teaches us largely through the examples of others around us, but also through the Bible.

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<sup>116</sup> "A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism," Kenneth Gentry.

In a rebuttal to Ken Gentry, Ed Stevens wrote, "If anything, we in the post-70 period have a more relevant and applicable revelation. We are now in the kingdom. The full inheritance is here. All the things Jesus, Paul and the other apostles taught about the kingdom now apply fully to us."<sup>117</sup>

At this time it is appropriate to ask the question, "***In order to accept the post-apocalyptic viewpoint, must one first become a Protestant?***" This is a question without an obvious answer. While it is clear that the opposition on this point has come from those who are also opposed to Protestantism, generally, is it necessarily the case that one must be a Protestant in order to acknowledge that Revelation has been fulfilled? As we prepare to answer that question, let us first examine the nature of Biblical authority.

Biblical authority exists in at least three forms. The most frequent discussion regarding Biblical authority comes from people who call themselves "conservatives." The term itself is an interesting label, but throughout the years, what is meant by "the authority of the Scriptures" has diversified and grown in meaning, so that the conservative movements do not have a monopoly on the term or on its use.

## **Biblical Authority**

Many people ask, "Do you believe that the Bible has authority?" Accompanying this question is another one: "Do you believe it was inspired?" The purpose of our query today is to ask in return not *whether* the Bible has authority but *what kinds* of authority it has. If I were to ask an atheist, "Does the Bible have authority" – using just those words, he might very well say "no." But suppose I asked instead whether he could observe the Bible changing the lives of other people. He might indeed say "yes" instead of giving a negative answer. Now if this book changes people's lives, we must admit that it has authority, even if that authority is not understood in the traditional conservative sense.

William Placher (professor at Wabash College) participated in the religious discussion that took place in 1989 at Christian Theological Seminary.<sup>118</sup> In fact, it was he who gave the opening and defining talk. Placher defines not one but **three kinds** of Biblical authority – and there might be more. His definitions include:

1. The Bible contains true things.
2. The Bible changes people's lives.
3. The Bible "narrates God's identity."<sup>119</sup>

Now, what does Placher mean by each of these things? Generally speaking, these things are easy to see, and most people will not dispute them entirely. For example, the Bible does teach truths. Whether or not the history contained therein is factual, the most liberal of liberals will acknowledge that the Bible teaches spiritual truths. You will have to

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<sup>117</sup> From preterist.org

<sup>118</sup> This discussion of Biblical authority produced the book, *Conservative Moderate Liberal*.

<sup>119</sup> *Conservative Moderate Liberal*, edited by Charles Blaisdell, pp. 6, 7, 11 (1990).



search long and hard to find people who honestly believe that there is nothing wrong with murder, rape, theft, and other violations of the Torah. People might not say, "That truth comes from God," but it is clear that the Bible teaches those true things. Certain things in the Bible are virtually undeniable *because they are universally recognized as true*.

That the Bible changes lives can be proven beyond a doubt by examining the lives of people today and throughout history who have had their lives changed. Consider Martin Luther, who was a happy monk until he began reading the Bible differently from the Catholic Church. He came to the conviction that the Bible taught contrary to the practice of the Church and set out to reform it. Eventually, this resulted in a group pulling away from the Church in protest and for Luther to stand up for his convictions so that his life was in danger. Here we have a man whose life was changed simply by reading the Bible, and there are many stories like Luther's in and out of every group in Christendom.

Most anyone, too, will acknowledge that the Bible tells about God. It is not merely the story of the Jewish people; it is the narrative of their relationship with Yahweh God. Anyone who reads the Bible will see that God is central to it. Further, the Bible describes what God is like. Even if none of the stories about God's involvement with his people are historically accurate, the stories themselves provide glances into God's personality. Even if God never smote the Egyptians and led his people out of slavery into the Promised Land, the story of the exodus speaks volumes about how God is to be understood. Words like love, compassion, and justice come out of any discussion of the exodus, whether or not there was a "Moses" on Mount Sinai.

People who call themselves "conservatives" generally adhere to the first definition, almost to the exclusion of the others. Even more specifically, the Bible **IS** the truth. Some have gone so far as to say that the precise wording, and even translation, of the Bible is no less than exactly what God has to say to every person in every time. This is a very strong attachment between the Bible and "truth." Yet there are others, call them "liberal" for the purpose of discussion, who might not assign historical or factual meaning to most or any of the stories contained therein. But they will say that the Bible changes lives, or that it narrates God's identity. To them, the incidental information in a story is not as important as the themes and principles that the story is attempting to convey. Whether or not Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman at a well, we know what the story shows us about Jesus and about God--we know what it means. There are the Mother Teresas of the world: there was a woman who devoted forty years of her life to helping the poor in Calcutta without ever examining whether Mark 16:9-20 really belongs in the Bible. The moderate view is somewhat in between, attaching to each of the three propositions nearly equally.

Is one view more correct than the others? It is clear to me that each of the propositions is true at least to an extent. The Bible is both a beacon of truth, and a transforming power, and a source for information about God. How these may balance one another is not the concern of this examination. We recognize that the Bible has authority.

In addition to the authority issue, there are also several models of "*inspiration*". How is inspiration defined? In a most general way, **inspiration is the process that brought the Bible from God to human beings**. By this definition, it would be hard to say that the Bible is uninspired without denying God. Therefore, this definition should provide a basis for a Christian discussion of inspiration. We need not ask *whether* the Bible was inspired, but *how*. In this examination, too, there are several existing models:

- God spoke the Bible to prophets, who wrote exactly what he said. This has been transmitted to us precisely today. This view is called **Inerrancy**.
- God spoke the Bible to prophets, who wrote exactly what he said. Then the Bible was copied by ordinary human beings. This view may be called **Infallibility**.
- God spoke portions to prophets, and the rest consists of ordinary histories and sayings, written with God's principles in mind.
- The Bible consists of narratives, letters, and sayings written by ordinary people who did not speak to God. Rather, their understanding of God lies in what they wrote. Much of the Bible has relevance culturally, and not for all time.
- The Bible consists of made up tales; God was seldom if ever involved, and the tales have relevance only culturally, although there may be themes that are true for us today.

Most people will consider this to be the same scale as "Biblical authority," with the most conservative views near the top and the most liberal opinions near the bottom of the list. To a great extent, then, one's view of inspiration stems from one's view of authority--or perhaps vice-versa. The person who was taught that the Bible is the Word of God in every sense adheres to the view of inerrancy or infallibility. The one whose spiritual journey teaches her that the Biblical narratives have transforming power but may or may not express absolute truth may find her view of inspiration elsewhere on the list. The "liberal" most likely holds one of the views nearer the bottom, but this is not because the Bible is any "**less inspired**". On the contrary: the Bible IS inspired, but the inspiration is of a different sort than the inspiration required by conservatives.

The nature of Biblical authority and inspiration are issues because they appear occasionally in comments about preterism. Douglas Wilson is a Calvinist (Reformed) minister whose congregation belongs to the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. The Communion generally opposes the "liberal" way of looking at Biblical authority and supports the "conservative" paradigm. Although he, like Gentry, comes from a tradition of Protestantism, Wilson writes, "If the hyper-preterists are right about the nature of Scripture, many more things flow from their position than simply eschatological detail. The consequences are far-reaching; they would amount to nothing less than the establishment of what we might call an arch-restorationism."<sup>120</sup>

Wilson distinguishes between Reformation and Restoration, and he rejects the spirit of Restoration. In this context, Reformation means **keeping every part of the tradition associated with one's religious heritage except for those portions that have been**

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<sup>120</sup> "Sola Scriptura, Creeds, and Ecclesiastical Authority, by Douglas Wilson, from *When Shall These Things Be?*, edited by Mathison, p. 257 (2004).

**found to be anti-Biblical.** By contrast, a Restoration attempts to regard the traditions of the centuries as representing only what individuals thought in their times. For the Restorationist, **every tradition must be examined to see whether it conforms with the Bible, and those that are opposed by the Bible must be discarded.** Wilson accepts the principle of reformation, as follows, "...we conservative American Christians think we have come to all these 'self-evident' truths through simple, straightforward Bible study, with no dependence on the collective wisdom of the church at all."<sup>121</sup> As he explains his own view, protestants often disregard the authority of creeds and councils while at the same time affirming what those creeds say. On the other hand, the "arch-restorationist" – his term for a restorationist – rejects what is in those creeds. Groups that claim to have some tradition of restoration, such as the churches of Christ, Wilson labels as "inconsistent restorationists." This is rather like the distinction between "full" and "partial" preterism themselves. A consistent restorationist may have discovered that some element of an ancient creed is anti-Biblical; if so, he rejects the creed or portion thereof, in favor of what the Bible says. The central example here is the Creed of Nicaea, adopted by the anti-Arian faction in 325 AD.

The creed does not say that they expected God's son to return in the future to judge. In fact, in the original creed, "coming to judge living and dead," may have been set in the past – since "coming" (ερχομενον) is a participle and not a verb in the future tense. By the time of the council of Constantinople in 381, it is clear that the revisers of the creed intended for the wording to be taken as a reference to a second coming – whether that second coming lay in the past or future. The operative portion of the creed was changed to read, "and again coming with glory to judge living and dead." This could still mean that he came again in 70, but the opinions of the Church's leaders are clear from their own writings. The theologians of the late fourth century certainly looked forward to a future coming.

Therefore, it would be difficult to retain the original wording of the creed while rejecting the interpretation that it was intended to refer to an event that they believed had not yet occurred. Wilson is concerned about the rejection of the contents of a fourth-century profession of faith. He writes, "The only eschatological position that the universal church has been able to agree to thus far is that hyper-preterism is wrong." It disturbs him that Ed Stevens should write,

"There is nothing wrong with having creeds unless we set them up as an authoritative standard equal with Scripture and require adherence to them. So, even if the creeds were to clearly and definitively stand against the preterist view (which they don't), it would not be an overwhelming problem since they have no real authority anyway. They are no more *authoritative* than our best opinions today, but they are *valuable* because of their antiquity."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> "Creeds and Preterist Orthodoxy," Ed Stevens, [www.preterist.org](http://www.preterist.org)

Stevens is in agreement with the restorationist, Barton W. Stone, and his allies, who wrote many years earlier about the necessity for not adopting a creed as a standard; yet Wilson disagrees.

Wilson is so opposed to this concept that he goes on to claim that *sola scriptura* is itself a creed. He expresses his conviction that tradition is not to be disregarded entirely but made subordinate to the Bible. He concludes, "It is not possible to have a *Scriptura* that we can appeal to...without having a coherent doctrine of the teaching authority of the historic Christian church."<sup>123</sup> Wilson wants to be able to trust tradition when it comes to issues like determining the Biblical canon; this leads him to reject the restorationist principle altogether. When he says that tradition has settled "the fundamentals," he does not want to revisit them. He believes in such a thing as a "true" historical church. On the other side of the argument is the notion that ***no amount of opinion establishes a fact***. Even if everyone from the second century onward believed it to be true, that belief may be wrong. Is there One True Church?

Referring to an earlier book by Stanley Grenz, Gentry writes, "We reflect upon the creedal question because of our desire to promote the 'universal doctrine' of the church, the 'heritage of the church,' the 'second pillar' of evangelical theology, 'the historical tradition of the one true church.'"<sup>124</sup> Some protestants and all traditionalist groups share a belief in the tradition of the One True Church. Perhaps best expressing the connection between tradition and the One True Church was Paul VI, who said,

"First, your Church must be first of all Catholic. That is, it must be entirely founded upon the identical, essential, constitutional patrimony of the self-same teaching of Christ, as professed by the authentic and authoritative tradition of the one true Church. This condition is fundamental and indisputable."<sup>125</sup>

So, Catholics exist in this "tradition of the One True Church," while anyone calling himself a Christian and living outside of Catholic tradition is clearly not part of that one true Church. However, OrthodoxChristianity.net disagrees with that assessment. While they embrace the notion of an historically correct Church, they are certain that it is not the Catholic Church. "We, as Orthodox, believe that we live in the Tradition of the One True Church founded by Jesus Christ and His Apostles."<sup>126</sup> This is spelled out in more detail by the Orthodox Christian Information Center: "Any honest and sane judgment, any act of good conscience, anyone familiar with the history of the Christian Church, the pure and unaltered moral and theological teachings of the Christian religion, must confess that there was but one true Church founded by our Lord, Jesus Christ, and that She has preserved His Truth holy and unchanged."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Op. cit., Wilson, p. 263.

<sup>124</sup> "The Historical Problem with Hyper-Preterism," by Kenneth A. Gentry, from *When Will these Things Be?*, edited by Keith A. Mathison, p. 2 (2004).

<sup>125</sup> Speech in Kampala, Uganda, on July 31, 1969.

<sup>126</sup> Comment on the forum, orthodoxchristianity.net

<sup>127</sup> "True Orthodoxy," Archbishop Averky of Blessed Memory, *Orthodox Christian Witness*, p. 20 (1968).

Protestants who accept this concept of “one true church” preserved by history profess that there were elements of error that crept into the historical record, but that these have been ferreted out and eliminated – leaving the One True Church doctrinally “pure.” For example, we read, “Foreseeing the coming troubles of the Church, both Paul and the Lord emphasized the real danger of heeding human traditions as though they came from God. They called these misguided religious exercises *“commandments of men”*. Both knew that the vital organization of the Church would soon be abused and used as a platform for propelling a perverted form of religion.

“... In 120 AD the doctrine of Holy Water was introduced. In 140 AD Lent and the rituals related to it were implemented. By 150 AD many people forsook biblical teachings on baptism and practiced infant baptism. And around 200 AD elders were replaced by priests. *None* of these doctrines can be supported by the Bible, but *all* have been encouraged as a part of a religious system that God never endorsed....It wasn't long before most churches weren't *the Church* at all.”<sup>128</sup> To a protestant, tradition has not preserved all of the correct teachings. Instead, tradition has preserved some of the correct teachings, while Protestantism itself has corrected the deviations.

Therefore, it is certainly possible for protestants to either accept or reject the One True Church concept. The official creed of the Orthodox Church states, “Apostolic succession is an indispensable factor in preserving Church unity. Those in the succession are accountable to it, and are responsible to ensure all teaching and practice in the Church is in keeping with Her apostolic foundations. Mere personal conviction that one's teaching is correct can never be considered adequate proof of accuracy. Today, critics of apostolic succession are those who stand outside that historic succession and seek a self-identity with the early Church only. The burgeoning number of denominations in the world can be accounted for in large measure by a rejection of apostolic succession.”

One might ask how it is possible that the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church differ, when each believes in apostolic succession. Simply put, each believes their own tradition to be correct while the other group's tradition is wrong. They are bound to the doctrine of the One True Church. The issue of their division was more complex than disagreement over interpretations, and it took so long to finalize and confirm that indeed it could be possible for an “ancient” issue of agreement to now be regarded as a doctrinal error.

For example, while the earliest Christian authors do not mention the issue, Tertullian (c. 165), Clement of Alexandria (c. 185), Sextus Julius Africanus (c. 220), Origen (c. 225), and other early Christians state their common opinion that the whole of Daniel 9 was fulfilled. If a modern Orthodox commentator allows for all of Daniel to have been fulfilled by the First Century, then the error is simply in not recognizing that Matthew 24 (which applies Daniel) has been fulfilled as well. If a modern commentator were to criticize the use of a “time gap” in Daniel 9, then that same commentator could eliminate the time

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<sup>128</sup> “Bad Religion,” Wade Stanley, from [onetruechurch.net](http://onetruechurch.net).

gap in Matthew 24 that (partial) preterists require – and therefore eliminate it in Revelation as well.

Ken Gentry strongly supports the identification of the “second beast” in Revelation with Nero and has written books advocating (and virtually proving) this viewpoint. Yet he writes, “It would seem most reasonable to expect that since Irenaeus wrote within about one hundred years of Revelation, he likely would have heard of the proper view. At the very least, we would think, Irenaeus would recognize the true view.... Furthermore, *no* early church father suggests Nero’s name as the proper designation of 666....” In fact, according to Kitsemaker’s research, “When did the writers begin to identify Nero with the number in this particular passage? There is no reference anywhere in history until the 1830s when four German scholars proposed his name.”<sup>129</sup> Yet Gentry’s own argument continues with, “there is the possibility that Irenaeus did not record the Nero theory because of his predisposition to a futuristic interpretation of Revelation generated by his premillennialism.”<sup>130</sup>

Here we have a case in which a specific viewpoint does not appear in any of the church tradition prior to at least 1830, and yet Gentry embraces it – rejecting every viewpoint held by anyone who expressed a known opinion from 180 to 1830 AD. It is certainly possible that someone from an Orthodox (or Calvinist) point of view might decide that the “predisposition to a futuristic interpretation of Revelation” might have clouded the viewpoints of commentators who wrote prior to the discovery of the post-apocalyptic viewpoint. Then, they might retain the rest of their tradition while accepting full preterism as a viable opinion. However, this has not happened widely, and it remains the case that most post-apocalyptic are from a Protestant background that accepts the restoration paradigm to at least some degree, while much of the opposition about tradition to full preterism from (partial) preterists actually concerns the Protestant ethic with respect to the use or rejection of tradition. What happens when a modern understanding of the Bible disagrees with an early tradition? Most of the people who have been led to the post-apocalyptic view side with the rejection of any opinion that is perceived as contrary to the Bible.

### ➤ WHAT ABOUT THE GREAT COMMISSION AND THE SACRAMENTS?

Still appalled by the direct application of the Bible and clinging to his traditions, Gentry asks, “Is the Great Commission delimited to the pre-A. D. 70 era, due to the interpretation of “the end” by hyper-preterists (*Mt. 28:20*)? Is the Lord’s Supper superfluous today, having been fulfilled in Christ’s (alleged) Second Advent in A. D. 70 (*1 Cor. 11:26*)?” (“A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism”)

This is something about which individual adherents of the post-apocalyptic viewpoint hold different opinions. It is a matter indeed that is not central to the acceptance of the “full” preterist view. I will answer only for myself. To answer these things, we must look first and foremost to the Bible itself.

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<sup>129</sup> *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Simon J. Kitsemaker, pp. 394-5 (2001).

<sup>130</sup> *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Kenneth Gentry, pp. 205, 207 (1989).

## The Great Commission

*Now he said to them, "These are my sayings that I spoke to you while I was still with you: that it is necessary for all the things that are written in Moses' Torah and in the Prophets and in the Psalms about me to be fulfilled."*

*Then he opened their minds to understand the writings, and he said to them, "Thus it was written for the Anointed One to suffer and to be resurrected from among the dead during the third day, and for mental change to the point of forgiveness of sins to be heralded in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And look, I am sending my Father's promise upon you, but you are to remain connected with the city until you are empowered with power from on high." (Lk 24:44-49)*

First, Jesus cited the Hebrew Bible. As he did so, he opened their minds to understand the writings about the Messiah. Then he sent the Twelve out as witnesses of the things that they had personally observed about Jesus. He sent them out in the name of the Anointed One – the Messiah. They were sent to the people who had been waiting for a Messiah: to the Jews.

This is the parallel discussion to the one found in Matthew.

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make students of all the nations, baptizing them into [my] name, teaching them to keep all of whatever precepts I gave you. And look, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age." (Mt 28:18-20)*

The book of Acts continues the narrative at the same point.

*And he gathered them together and charged them "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise, which you heard from me, that 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized in holy breath' after not many of these days."*

*So, after they came together, they indeed asked him, saying, "Lord, will you restore the kingdom to Israel at that time?"*

*Now, he said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own authority. However, you will receive power when the holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the farthest part of the land." (Acts 1:4-8)*

Jesus replied in the affirmative when asked about the restoration of the kingdom. Wasn't the Messiah supposed to restore the kingdom to Israel? Yes. This would happen, Jesus said, when the holy Spirit gave them power. The Twelve were "not to depart from Jerusalem" until that time.

Jesus was asked about restoring the kingdom to Israel.

Jesus' response was for the Twelve (Eleven), as indicated by his use of "you" throughout verse 8.

The locations named represent the center of mainstream Judaism and centers of Hellenistic Judaism. No primarily Gentile centers are named.

The expression "to the farthest point of the land" need not mean "the ends of the earth", but was used to express any remote place. It need not refer to any place outside Palestine.

When did the restoration of the kingdom happen? When was the Great Commission fulfilled? A few days later...just like Jesus said. During the days that followed the ascension, the Eleven found it necessary to replace Judah, restoring their number to twelve: representative of the number of Israel's tribes. No sooner had this been done then Luke reports of the fulfillment.

*And on the full day of Pentecost, they were all one at the same place. And suddenly a sound from the sky happened, like that of a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And they observed with them forked tongues, like fire, that sat on each one of them. And they were all filled with holy breath, and they began to speak in other tongues, saying what the Spirit gave them to say. (Acts 2:1f.)*

This was the sign that Jesus told the Twelve to expect. This was the "power from on high" that they would receive when the kingdom was to be restored. Luke continues with an interesting note.

*Now, there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, pious men from **every nation under heaven**. Now when this sound happened, the crowd came together and were confused because each one heard their speech in his own language. Now they were astonished, and they wondered, saying, "Look, aren't all of these ones who are speaking Galilaeans? And how is each one of us hearing in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes, and Elamites, and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Judea, and also Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Frugia and also Pamphulia, Egypt, and the parts of Lybia near Kurene, and the Roman strangers – Jews and also proselytes, Cretans and Arabians. We hear them speaking in our own languages the great things of God."*

The author reports that Jews of all nations were present. Jesus had earlier told the Twelve to wait in Jerusalem until empowered and to speak in the name of the Messiah to all nations. Now the author sets up the reader so that he realizes that this event fulfills the renewed commission (Lk 24:45-7; Mt 28:19; Mt 10:1f.) to the Twelve. If Josephus'



estimates for the year 65 are even close to the numbers for this year, there might have been as many as one million people gathered for the feast!

Luke points out that these were **pious** men. These were not the unfaithful. These were the Jews who had been honestly seeking God, to the point at least where they made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on foot (and possibly by boat) to participate in the feasts. These men had devoted their lives to God. Since this event fulfills the commission to the Twelve, Luke is also careful enough to point out where the men are from, naming various nations – which comprise the Palestine area plus all areas of the zodiac (i.e., people from all directions). He specifically writes that these men were "from every nation under heaven." The Twelve were supposed to take the message to Jews of all nations, then their number was restored, then the sign happened that they had been awaiting, and now they fulfilled that commission.

Next, the author indicated one of the miracles – a miracle of hearing. Whatever the Twelve were saying and however they were saying it, these devout men **heard** those things as though the men were speaking in their native languages! One first century Jewish source wrote about the "prophetic utterances." Such a miracle would not have been out of their understanding. Normally, the prophet would be carried away "in ecstasy," speaking praises to God -- but the faithful could understand. Here, the faithful Jews of all nations DO hear, and they DO understand. But they don't know what it means. The author was pointing out in detail that the message in its original form was being carried to Jews everywhere.

When the crowd wondered what was going on, Peter stepped up with an explanation.

*Now Peter, standing up with the Eleven, raised his voice and spoke clearly to them:*

*"Men, Judeans and all those who are staying in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and heed my declarations.*

*"For these are not drunk as you are assuming, for it is the third hour of the day! On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel,  
""And it will be in the last days," says God, "I will pour out from my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young will see visions, and your elderly will dream dreams.*

*""And indeed on my male slaves and on my female slaves I will pour out from my spirit in those days," and they will prophesy.*

*""And I will give wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and majestic day of Yahweh comes. And it shall be that each one who may call on the name of Yahweh will be saved." (Acts 2:14ff.)*

The passage (lasting the rest of the book) is long. It is a prophecy about the "restoration of the kingdom" that was to be accomplished by the Messiah. That same passage continues by promising a period of Jewish dominance.

*"For look, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered among the nations, and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it....Proclaim this among the nations: prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears." (Joel 3:1-3; 9-10)*

Peter said in Acts 2, "THIS IS HAPPENING NOW." The signs they were seeing showed that the kingdom was restored. There was now be a new, free, covenant, but only Jews could enter...until Acts 10. Both Peter and Joel indicate that the signs would be present **"until the great and majestic day of Yahweh."** The destruction of Jerusalem and end of Priestly Judaism was coming, and the period mentioned in the prophecy would soon pass, but the signs were here for the time being.

Peter's explanation continued with an exposition proving that Jesus indeed had been the Messiah: the same Jesus who had been crucified just over seven weeks earlier. People from all nations had flocked to Jerusalem. They heard and understood the message. Peter demonstrated that Jesus was the Anointed One. They responded to the message and became Christians. These travelers would go back to their countries with the message, and so the representative Twelve had spread the message of the Messiah's advent to "all nations" of devout Jews.

How can we be sure that the Great Commission was intended to apply to Jews? The Twelve as a unit, so important in the commission are never mentioned as "the Twelve" in present narrative tense after Paul, and only in Acts 6 after Pentecost. This is because Gentiles were allowed to become Christians from the time of Acts 9-11 on and because the mission of the Twelve had been fulfilled.

In Acts 3 – 7, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. They did not **go out** into "all nations" but stayed put. The message had already gone out. Even when persecution arose (Ac 8:1) and people fled the city, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. They did not interpret the message at Mt 28:19 as applying to gentiles, only taking the message to Jewish people until the advent of Paul. They still attended the synagogues and worshiped in the temple.

Later (Acts 10), Jesus was explicitly told in a three-fold mission to speak to gentiles and was directed to go to Cornelius (10:19-20). Peter was so inclined not to speak with gentiles that he took some Jews with him as witnesses (10:23; 10:45). The account states that he only went since he was told to go (10:28).

In Peter's message, he indicates that it was through that revelation that he had just received from God that he realized that gentiles were now acceptable (10:34-5). He further stated that Jesus had sent them only to Jews:

*"The message that he sent to the sons of Israel announced the good message of peace through Anointed Jesus." (10:36)*

With this statement, Peter clearly interpreted Mt 28:19 as applying to Jews of all nations, and not everyone. However, in Acts 10 he had been told to speak to gentiles, and so he told them about Jesus (10:37-43). Even so, he did not accept them into the covenant, but then God intervened with miraculous signs (10:44-6). Peter's witnesses were amazed, and he pleaded with them to allow him to baptize them (10:47).

After this important event, Peter was called on the carpet by his fellow Christians – all of whom were Jewish. He was compelled to retell the story (11:1-16), adding, "now who was I to be able to restrain God?" (11:17). The Jews then admitted that gentiles could be saved. Neither Peter nor any of the others ever knew this until that point, because the Great Commission in Mt 28:19 had applied only to Jews – it being a renewal of the commission in Mt 10, which explicitly informed them not to teach to gentiles.

When God wanted Peter to know that he was to herald to Gentiles, he made sure that Peter understood. The overall tone of the history as presented by Luke is revelatory of the fact that it was not known that gentiles could become Christians.

In referring back to the so-called gentile dispensation, no one in the NT ever refers to Mt 28:19 as including gentiles. In Acts 15, both Peter (vv. 7-11) and James (vv. 13ff.) mention Acts 10 as the time when God allowed gentiles into the new covenant. When the other apostles and Paul met, they all agreed that Paul ***"was entrusted with the good message to the foreskinned, just as Peter to the circumcised...."*** (Gal 2:7) The earlier apostles and Paul all agreed unanimously that the Twelve had been sent only to Jews.

Had Mt 28:19 been for everyone, then the Eleven (who could understand all the writings about Jesus) ***never*** realized it...even though he had expressly opened their minds to understand those writings so that they could carry out that commission. On the contrary, the Great Commission was carried out in the first century, and the message went not only to gentiles but to Jews of all nations.

It is not necessary, though, to point to Pentecost as the fulfillment of the commission in order to see that the commission was fulfilled. Paul wrote to the Colossaeans that the message had been heralded "in every created place under heaven" or "to every creature." (Col 1:23) Did Paul really mean that the message was everywhere? Actually, he had already written it once before ... in the same letter. "The good message is present among you, just as also it is in all the creation." (Col 1:6) In his letter to the Romans, he mentions that the message was a secret that "has been made known for a listening of trust for all the gentiles." (Rm 16:25) Citing the ninth psalm in

the same letter, Paul says, "After all, trust is from hearing, but hearing is through the declaration of the Anointed One. But I say, didn't they hear? Indeed, "their musical sound went into all the land, and their declaration went into the farthest points of the habitation." (Rm 10:17-18)

Whether you believe that the commission was fulfilled specifically by going to Jews of all nations at Pentecost, surely we see in the other NT writings that the message had gone out everywhere it was sent – everywhere it was intended to go.

A skeptic may now ask, "So, we shouldn't tell people about Jesus?" I have only said that the Great Commission does not direct any Christian today to do so. We are free to share the good message with others, and we should all do so through the examples that we set.

## ➤ THE SACRAMENTS

### **The Lord's Supper**

"Is the Lord's Supper superfluous today," Ken Gentry asks. A more appropriate question would be, "Was there ever a Lord's Supper in the sense that we have celebrated it since the second century?" The answer to Gentry's question is "yes," for the answer to my own question is "no."

Let me first point out here that it is no requirement of the post-apocalyptic viewpoint to consider as unnecessary the Lord's Supper (or communion or Eucharist, if you prefer). Ed Stevens certainly approves of the practice, for he wrote, "And we no longer observe the Lord's supper as just a memorial of Him until He returns, but rather as a victory feast with Him at His table in His presence in His Kingdom now and forevermore."<sup>131</sup> We see that those (full) preterists who embrace the practice consider its purpose to have been changed by the events of 70 CE, but they continue to observe it nevertheless. Stevens relates the changed purpose of the Lord's Supper to the changed purpose of the Passover celebration in the Hebrew Bible.

I would say, however, that the phrase used by some to create a ritualistic observance, "Do this for my remembrance," simply meant "eat together lovingly." There was to be no ritual observance, but friends eating together. Whenever Christians enjoy a meal together, they should remember Jesus' advice as indicating to them, "When you eat together, show love to one another." Throughout his last meal, Jesus talked about the love and friendship he shared with everyone else. And that is precisely what Paul wanted the Corinthians to share together: love. Love is the center point of the teachings of Jesus, and eating together lovingly is a demonstration and practice of Jesus' teachings.

Therefore, in bringing up the expression, Paul did so in a context in which people were not treating one another well at their common meal. He concluded that whenever they

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<sup>131</sup> "Doctrinal Implications of Preterist Eschatology," Ed Stevens, section 10

ate and drank together, their meal ought to truly be dedicated to God. Simply, they needed to practice love toward one another. Anyone who was getting drunk or being gluttonous instead of loving was behaving in a manner that was unworthy of the meal itself. If they rejected love, they'd have been (in metaphor) as guilty of killing Jesus as those who had actually crucified him. But when people are loving, then what they drink together is a cup of praise, and what they eat together represents the own unity of the Christian body.

The expression “break bread” normally meant the same as “eat food.” This is the case throughout the book of Acts – in which we observe Christians enjoying a common meal along with their shared lifestyle. Free of all ritual observances, the Christian lives by God’s spiritual principles.

## **Baptism**

Christian baptism was ritual washing that served as a rite of separation from Priestly Judaism. While there were many ritual cleansings in the Hebrew Bible, some of which employed the term βαπτισμος, the only direct antecedent of Christian baptism was the ritual washing of John the Baptizer.

There were stated purposes to this baptism. In John’s account of Jesus’ life, we read, *“I have come baptizing in water for this reason: that [the Anointed One] might be shown to Israel.”* (Jn 1:29f.)

This baptism was an initiation into a Jewish reformation – a reformation that heralded the impending arrival of the Anointed One. It must be remembered, though, that the whole scope of this reformation concerned the removal of Priestly Judaism. In Matthew’s account, we read that some of the religious leaders approached John for baptism – people who had no intention of leaving their religion behind. John responded by referring directly to the destruction of the temple that was coming about 40 years from then:

*But when he noticed many of the Perushim and Zadokites coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who pointed out to you to flee from the coming anger? Therefore, make fruit worthy of the mental change, and do not think to say among yourselves, 'We have Abraham as a father.' For I am telling you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones! But the axe is already lying toward the roots of the trees. Therefore, each tree that does not make nice fruit will be chopped down and cast into fire.*

*"I indeed am baptizing in water into mental change. But the one who is coming after me is stronger than me, whose sandals I am not strong enough to carry. He will baptize you with holy breath and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor. And*

*he will gather the wheat into the storehouse, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3)*

An important part of the Messianic mission, as John viewed it, was to complete the work of "cleaning the threshing floor." During the First Revolt, the "coming anger," everything that was central to those religious leaders would be removed. John would not baptize them unless they changed their minds and accepted the new paradigm that would be brought by the Anointed One. Luke's account that indicates certain elements of the reformation involved thinking highly of other people.

Luke's account records more about John's societal role, and about his baptism. After Jesus explained that John had been the Elijah figure – the messenger whom God would send in advance of the Messiah, we read:

*And when all the people heard, even the tribute takers declared God just, having been baptized with John's baptism. But the Perushim and the lawyers set aside God's plan for them, not having been baptized by him. "Therefore, to what will I liken the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like those servant boys who sit in the marketplace and who sound off to one another and say, 'We played the pipes for you, and you did not dance. We lamented, and you did not cry.' "For John the Baptizer came without eating bread and without drinking wine, and you say he has a spirit being. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at the gluttonous person and the drunk, a friend to tribute takers and sinners,' and 'wisdom is justified by all her children.'" (Luke 7)*

John's baptism separated those Jews who were willing to accept Jesus' identity as Messiah from those who did not. It was a sign of public identification with the Messianic movement.

"This generation" refers – as usual – to the people of his time, including especially the majority of Jewish leaders who rejected their Messiah. His generation was going to be judged. Why? Because they were like "boys who sit in the marketplace."

Rather than portraying them as great leaders of their people, expounding the Torah and performing God's will, Jesus identifies his generation as little servant boys who play for the crowds. That is, they were not performing a sacred duty; instead, they were trying to win the people's favor. In the name of popularity (among other things), they sacrificed any honor or esteem that they might have gained.

Instead of happily inviting the Anointed One in, the religious leaders rejected him. They were so concerned with the fact that the people were turning away from **them** that they failed to consider that the reason for people leaving them was that they had been wrong. They had played to the crowds and were now whining because the crowds had

found someone else to follow around. They didn't throng around the leaders, yet the common people were hanging on the words of John and Jesus.

Since they had only been concerned with themselves – with the idea of occupying positions over their fellow Jews – they had criticized both John and Jesus. They criticized John because he lived like a Nazirite (and not like everyone else). But when the Messiah came, who lived among them like everyone else – eating meat and drinking wine, they accused him of doing those things to excess. Simply put, they were going to find fault with the two prophets no matter what they did, because the leaders' intent was to continue to establish themselves as positional leaders and their way of thinking as supreme. They were not interested in the truth, but "wisdom is justified by all her children." That is, the "children of wisdom" (the people who dumped the Perushim and ritual religion for Jesus' spiritual way) prove themselves in their deeds to have chosen the wise way. [This saying also comes down to us as "wisdom is justified by her deeds," which means the same thing.] The lifestyles of the people who follow Jesus' teachings are much better than they had been when those people followed ritual religion.

The baptism associated with Jesus appears to have been concocted by the former followers of John the Baptizer (such as the apostles Peter and John). It was not enough for someone to simply be a "follower of John." Since a focal point of John's work was to show the Jewish people who was the Messiah, in order to truly participate in the reformation one had to embrace Jesus as the Messiah.

We have already seen that the baptism of John was connected with the "coming anger" of the First Revolt. Jesus' baptism was associated with the granting of the spiritual gifts in Acts 2, which in turn was limited in scope to the time in the Joel prophecy: prior to the "great and majestic day of Yahweh" in 70 CE. In Acts 19:1f., we read:

*Now it happened while Apollos was in Korinth that Paulus was passing through the upper parts and came into Ephesus. And when he found some students, he said to them, "Did you receive holy breath after trusting?"*

*Now they said to him, "We haven't heard if there is holy breath." And he said, "Into what were you baptized?" Now they said, "Into John's baptism." Now Paulus said, "John baptized with a baptism of mental change, telling the people that they should trust in the one who was coming after him...that is, in Jesus." Now after hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paulus placed his hands on them, the holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Now the entire number of the men was about twelve.*

Whenever Luke employs the word "students" without a modifier, he always means the same thing as "Christians" (Ac 6:1,7; 9:1,19, 26; 11:1, 26; 14:21-22). Paul encountered some Christian converts who had been seeking the holy breath – that which was promised in the Joel prophecy that Peter quoted in Acts 2. These miracles were a sign

of God's approval (see 1 Jn 5, for example). They needed to acknowledge that indeed Jesus had been the very person about whom John had spoken. Since they had accepted John's baptism, they needed the Christian one, allying themselves with the Messianic movement and not merely the reformation associated with the Baptizer's followers. In the traditional show of public acceptance, Paul placed his hands on them. Once they publicly identified themselves with the Jesus movement through baptism, they received the holy breath – just as the Joel prophecy indicated they would. Knowing that they had accepted their Messiah, baptism gave the baptized person an assurance of faith. As John points out, it was a witness to the one being baptized that he was following the right path (1 Jn 5:13).

This separation from Priestly Judaism was important in the First Century. The sacrificial system was something that God had personally authorized. Since the Messiah was going to bring a change, as long as Priestly Judaism still existed God allowed for signs to show which school of thought – PJ or Jesus' own – had his approval. During the first century, baptism was as serious as circumcision – which indicated the separation between the Jewish people and the gentiles around them. In covenantal language, baptism separated them from the Mosaic covenant and identified them with the Messianic one.

However, just as the true circumcision was always figurative and takes place in the heart, so also baptism was a sign of one's separation from Priestly Judaism – with the true dedication taking place in the heart. The cleansing comes in the heart by following God's spiritual principles. Once Priestly Judaism was removed, baptism became obsolete. After the separation that took place between Jews and Christians – which at the time centered around the Christians' rejection of the temple and the religion of Priestly Judaism, gentile Christians kept baptism around.

Is it a "requirement" of the post-apocalyptic view not to baptize. Of course not. For example, Don Preston writes, "There is one direct contrast between Old Covenant circumcision and the New Circumcision. Under the Old System a child was born into covenant relationship, circumcised, then taught the meaning of his circumcision and standing before God. Under the New Covenant system a person is taught, then born into Covenant relationship through **baptism** where the circumcision of the heart takes place."<sup>132</sup>

The post-apocalyptic, "fulfilled" viewpoint of eschatology certainly allows for the practice of baptism after the year 70 but does not require it. For many full preterists, baptism is a side matter, while to others it is important.

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<sup>132</sup> "Baptism: a New Appreciation," by Don Preston, from [eschatology.org](http://eschatology.org) (2008).



# Chapter Eleven

*"That's a team, gentlemen, and either we heal as a team, or we will die as individuals. That's football, guys; that's all it is. Now what are you gonna do?"*

"Tony d'Amato," Any Given Sunday (1999)

## THE SECOND COMING HAPPENED. NOW WHAT?

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Now that full preterism has burst the bubble of fear, Christians might be wondering what is left on which to fixate. Indeed, human beings enjoy fixation, don't we? Christianity has not been immune from trends, fads, and shared obsessions. Some Christians define their ministries around certain issues – which they believe hold paramount importance. These issues include referring to one or two percent of the American population as a "powerful lobby" and making a concerted effort to reduce their influence. Others bemoan the deaths of fetuses worldwide. Some are focused on ending world hunger. Still other Christians focus their efforts on trying to compel various levels of government to teach their form of Christianity; they are particularly concerned about how science is taught in school. There are others who make a great deal about the influence of "paganism" or "secularism." A few decades ago, it was the worldwide spread of Communism that caused so many books to be written. Fringe movements include those Christians who are convinced that a conspiracy kept certain books out of the Bible, and that perhaps there are secret codes concealed within its pages.

If we are not going to obsess over doom, what will we replace that obsession with? Concern about space aliens or blind watchmakers, perhaps? No. Should we speculate about what the afterlife might be like? No. The Biblical focus of the teachings of Jesus was always more practical than that. Rather than create fad obsessions for his followers, our Lord taught them how to live their lives.

*"Therefore, don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we be dressed in?'. These are all things that the gentile is hunting. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all of these things. But you seek first his kingdom and what is right, and all of these things will be added to you. So do not be anxious about the next day, for the next day will be anxious about itself. One day's trouble is enough."*

Rather than worry about even those things that were considered to be "life's essentials," Jesus quietly noted that his followers should trust God. Then they would live without anxiety, worry, or stress. Having stress-free lives – now that's something for Christians to seek! But how do we get there? If it's not about spreading the message of impending doom, what is life all about?

*Now when the Perushim heard that he had muzzled the Zadokites, they gathered at the same place. And one of them, a lawyer, asked, testing him, "Teacher, what precept in the Torah is greatest?" Now he said to them, ""You will love Yahweh your God with the whole of your heart, and with the whole of your soul, and with the whole of your mind." This is the greatest and foremost precept. Now the second is similar: "You will love your neighbor as yourself." The whole Torah and the Prophets are hung by these two precepts."*

That last sentence is both powerful and difficult to grasp. Many modern Jewish people believe that there are over six hundred precepts ("commandments") in the Torah – a number that was and is the subject of historical debates. Yet Jesus boiled the whole Torah down to just two of them. The principle of love for God (Dt 6:5) is part of the "Shema Yisrael," the passage that begins with "Hear, oh Israel, Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one." This is a statement of great importance in Judaism, and it is that great pronouncement that Jesus cited as one of the greatest points made in the Torah.

The other one indeed is similar, for Lv 19:18 focuses on love for others. People are tempted to put themselves first, or their families first. God had had Moses tell the Israelites that they were not to treat one another unjustly, nor were they to hate one another or carry grudges; instead, it was necessary for all of God's people to love one another. To many Jews and Christians these are familiar words.

If you love someone else, you won't steal from them, rape them, murder them, or commit another offense against them. Thus, the central teachings of the Torah flow out of the principle of Love. If someone focuses on living a life of love, then they'll keep the guiding principle that directed God to give the Torah to his people. "Get that sin out of your life!" Jesus' followers applied this teaching in several ways.

*And yet I am showing you a way according to excellence: If I speak with the tongues of people and of messengers but do not have love, I have become a clanging gong or crashing cymbal. And if I have prophecy and know all secrets and all knowledge, and even if I have all trust (so as to remove mountains), but if I don't have love, I am nothing. And if I hand out all that is mine, and even if I offer up my body so that I may boast, but if I don't have love, it profits me nothing.*

This segment begins one of the most famous and powerful statements about love in history: the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Christians at Corinth. The Corinthians were pursuing all sorts of things – things that they believed to be godly and spiritual. Paul spent the time re-focusing them on what was really important, for even if someone had everything that they were seeking, she would have nothing without love. In this life, he writes later in the chapter, there are many things that point to God. Most of these are just partial glimpses into God's nature, but love is complete. As John elsewhere writes, "God is love." So, of the things that remain – trust, hope, and love –

the greatest among them is love. Therefore, it is most important to live a loving life. But how?

*If anything I say has deep feelings and compassions, then make my joy complete, so that you would have the same attitude, having the same love, having united souls, having this one thing in mind: to do nothing out of bigotry or worthless conceit. On the contrary, with a humble attitude regard one another as being superior to yourselves. Each person should not look after his own interests, but also the interests of others. For you should have this attitude in you that was also in Anointed Jesus....*

In this letter to the Christians at Philippi, Paul explains how to be loving. Loving another person involves making him or her a **priority** in your life. It does not mean giving them whatever they desire, but it does mean looking out for their needs – even ahead of your own! “Worthless conceit” is the “me-first” attitude, and bigotry is an “us-first” attitude. Paul tells his readers to adopt a “you-first” attitude toward their Christians friends, and the attitude of Jesus that he goes on to describe is the attitude of caring for one another to the point of dying for them. Strengthening the teachings of Epicurus, Jesus himself had said, *“No one has greater love than this: that one should lay down his life on behalf of his friends.”* John, describing that love, writes, *“In this way, we have known love: because he laid down his life on our behalf. And we are bound to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers. But whoever has the material things of creation, and who observes his brother having a need, and who shuts up his compassions from him, how can God's love remain in him? Children, let us not love in word or with the tongue but in deed and truth.”*

Loving others includes caring for their needs while we are here on earth, even dying for them if that is necessary. More importantly, the duty and purpose of every follower of Jesus is focused not on the afterlife, nor on politics, nor on secret codes, but on his fellow Christians. Christianity is about being friends with one another. The author of Hebrews focused that letter on the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem. What should Jesus' followers do about the social persecution they were facing? They should wait patiently for God to judge their opponents. Immediately after reminding them that the Mosaic covenant was about to be removed in the upcoming judgment, the author admonishes every reader about what they should do: *“Let brotherly affection continue. Do not neglect the affection toward strangers, for through this some have escaped, having entertained messengers....”* Instead of worrying about the future, Christians should love. The First Revolt and destruction of the temple are behind us today, but love still remains.

Likewise, immediately after taking note of reasons for the judgment during the First Revolt, Paul informs the Christians at Colossae to focus on love most of all: *“Therefore, beloved holy ones, be clothed as God's chosen people, with deep feelings of compassion, gentleness, a humble attitude, meekness, longsuffering. Bear with one another, and forgive one another if someone has something to complain about. Just as also the Lord forgave you, you also do likewise. Now on top of all of these things is*

*love, which is a bond of completeness. And let the peace of the Anointed One arbitrate in your hearts. You were also called for this in the body. Also become thankful.”*

During the middle of the First Century, the followers of Jesus looked ahead to “the great and majestic day of Yahweh,” when God would destroy ritual religion. Isaiah had described the new state of affairs as a “new heaven and new earth.” Joel referred to it as a time of peace. This was not a time when all the governments on earth would stop having wars, nor were they referring to a time when no one would commit any crimes. Even after the “new Jerusalem” (i.e., the Messianic following) was planted in place of the old one, there are still evil people on earth – but they are outside of the city: *“Outside are the dogs, and the alchemists, and the prostitutes, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who is affectionate to and who does falsehood”* (Rv 22:15). Evil still exists in the world – even after the Messiah’s return in judgment. However, the followers of Jesus are those who practice the principles of Love and Trust; among them there are peace, and thankfulness, and kindness, and the fruit of the spirit.

Therefore, if we must obsess about anything at all, let us be fixated on those things. Let’s practice trust and love toward God and one another, so that others will recognize the godly examples that we set. The students of Jesus are not the people who label themselves as “Christian” but are the ones who practice his teachings. Therefore, let’s take the knowledge that the judgment in Revelation has come, and let’s use it wisely – applying the practical teachings about friendship and stress to our lives, and helping others around us to do the same. The life after Armageddon is not a war with futurists, or idealists, or historicists, or partial preterists; the life we share is the free and beautiful way that Jesus promised...if we keep his principles. Love one another.

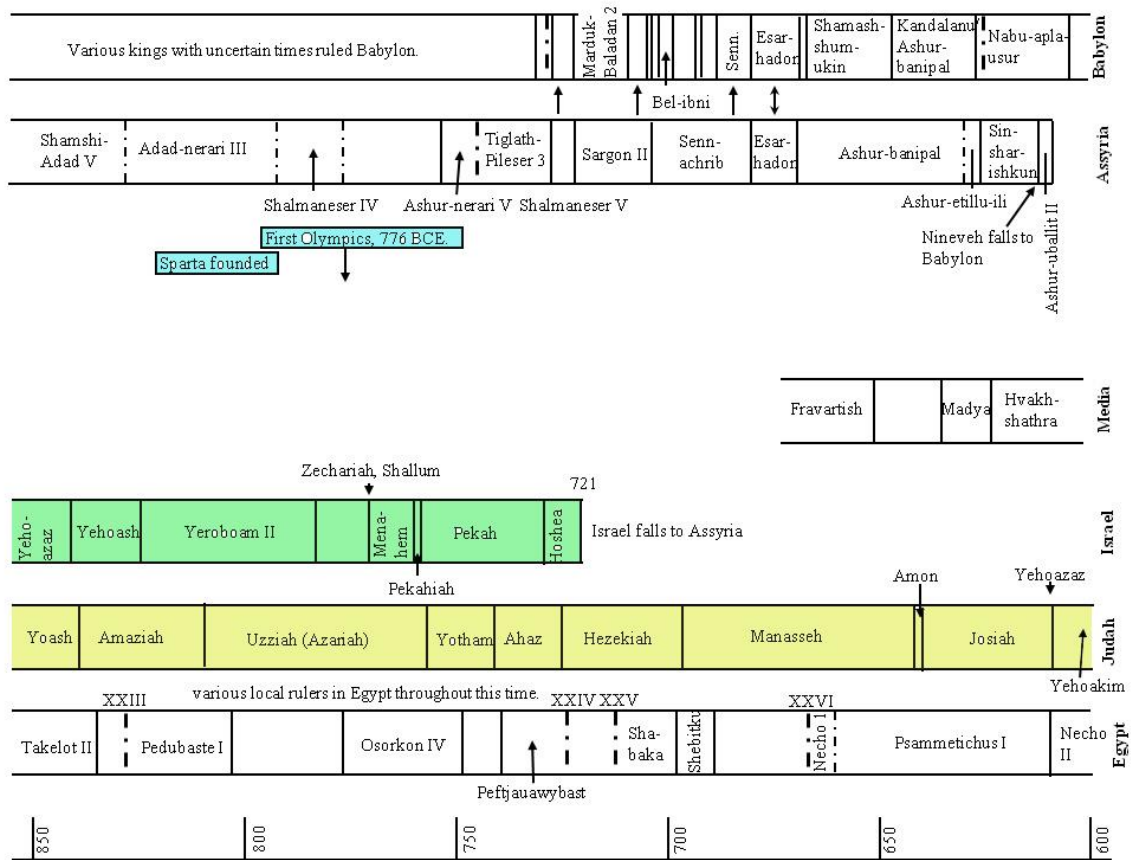
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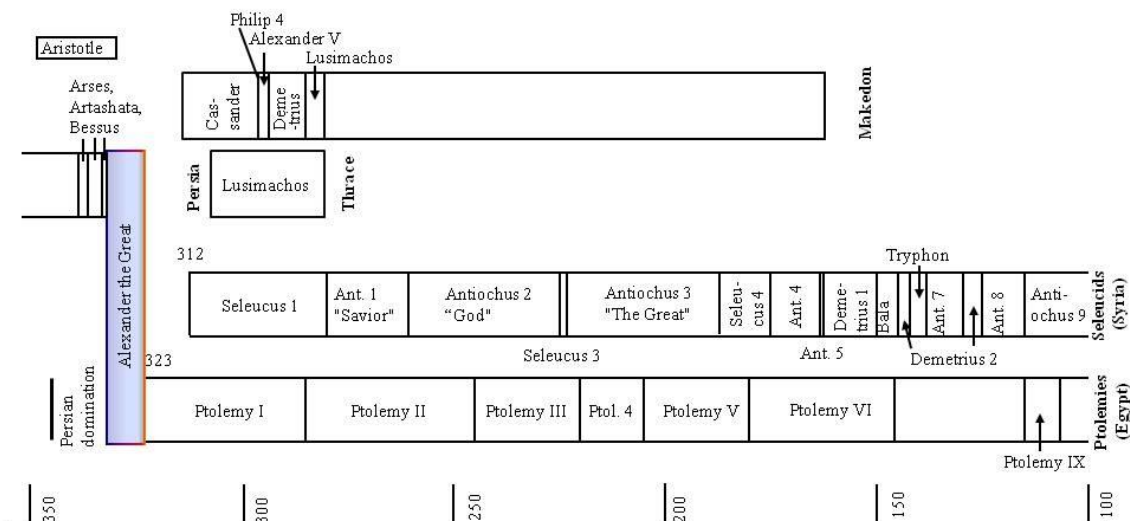
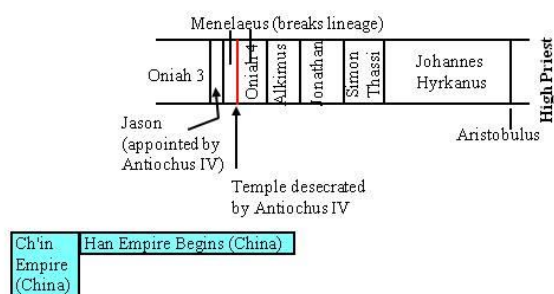
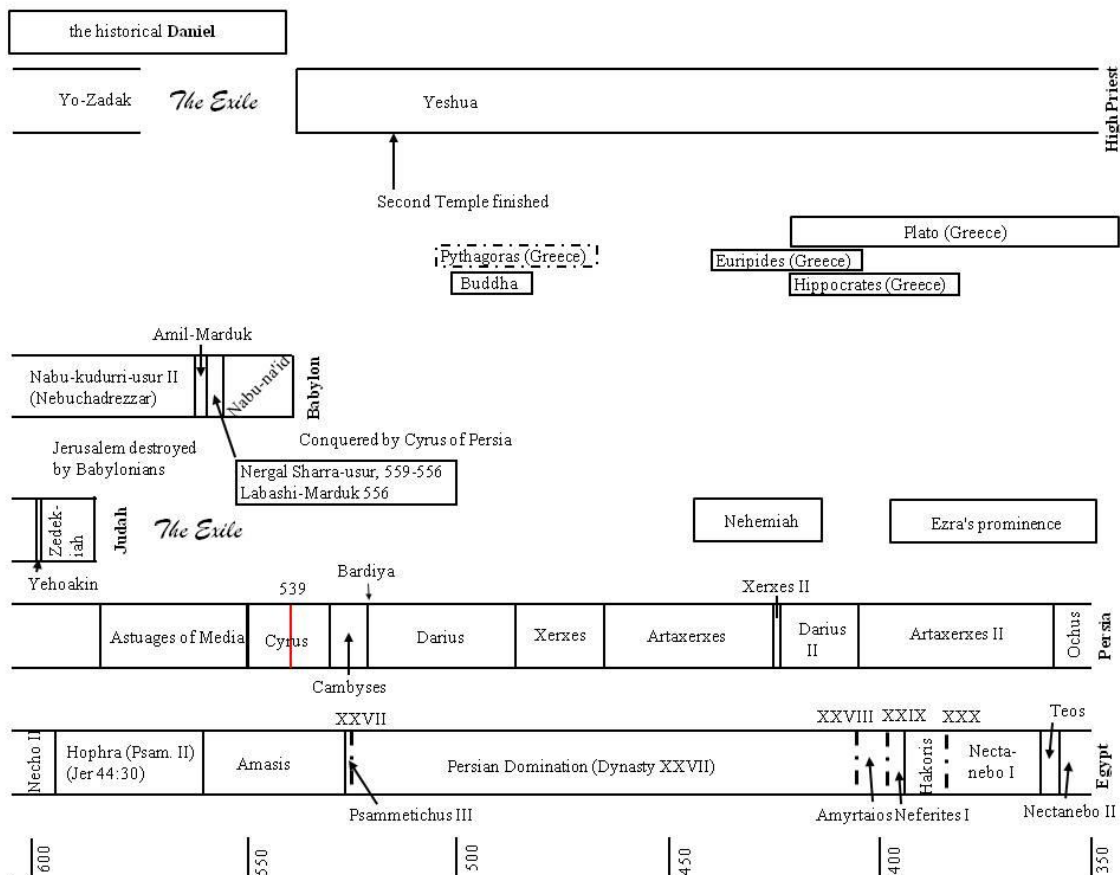
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## A Timeline of the Period Covered by the Book of Daniel





# Reign of Antiochus IV and the succeeding years

