

ABSTRACT

The New Testament and the Future of the Cosmos

This study is an exploration into the cosmic eschatology of the NT. When the writers of the NT speak about the eschatological fate of the cosmos, they use the divergent images of cosmic renewal and cosmic catastrophe, which at face value appear to contradict one another and make it impossible to speak of a unified and consistent NT theology pertaining to the future of the cosmos. As a result, this study will seek to address two interrelated questions: (1) What did the writers of the NT teach about the eschatological fate of the cosmos, and (2) can we synthesize their teachings into a coherent NT theology pertaining to the future of the cosmos? The methodology employed to answer these questions involves a close grammatical-historical reading of the NT texts which address the eschatological fate of the cosmos (most notably Matt 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28; Rom 8:19-22; Heb 12:25-29; 2 Pet 3:7-13; and Rev 21:1-5). Furthermore, each NT writer will be asked a series of correlative questions, which will provide a basis for comparing and contrasting their various teachings. In conversation with other scholars who have written on this topic (e.g. Anton Vögtle, David M. Russell, N. T. Wright, Edward Adams, J. Richard Middleton, and others), this study will argue that one can ascertain a clear and coherent message (i.e. a NT theology) pertaining to the future of the cosmos that relates to the larger unity and diversity of the NT witnesses.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. David R. Bauer, Mentor
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ACNT	Augsburg Commentaries on the New Testament
<i>AcTSup</i>	<i>Acta Theologica Supplementum</i>
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Edited by Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Edited by Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibLeb</i>	<i>Bibel und Leben</i>
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BRS	Biblical Resources Series
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTCP	Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology
CBNT	Commentaire Biblique: Nouveau Testament
CBOT	The Clarendon Bible: Old Testament
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
<i>CJT</i>	<i>Canadian Journal of Theology</i>
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
CS	<i>Chicago Studies</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>

DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
<i>DJG</i>	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992.
<i>DLNT</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development</i> . Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997.
<i>DNTB</i>	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> . Edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000.
<i>DOTP</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets</i> . Edited by Mark J. Boda and Gordon McConville. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012.
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993.
EBib	Études Bibliques
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>EBC</i>	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
EC	Epworth Commentaries
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-1993.
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
ENT	Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios Bíblicos</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
EUSST	European University Studies Series: Theology
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExAud</i>	<i>Ex Auditu</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>FFF</i>	<i>Foundations & Facets Forum</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GNS	Good New Studies
GP	Gospel Perspectives
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentary
HThANT	Historisch Theologische Auslegung Neues Testament
HThKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDS</i>	<i>In die Skriflig</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITSCBS	International Theological Studies: Contributions of Baptist Scholars
ITSRS	Italian Texts & Studies on Religion & Society
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JIBS</i>	<i>Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>

JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KBANT	Kommentar und Beiträge zum Alten und Neuen Testament
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
L&N	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> . Edited by Johannes P. Louw and Eugene. A. Nida. 2nd ed. 2 vols. New York: UBS, 1989.
<i>LASBF</i>	<i>Liber Annuus Studii Biblici Franciscani</i>
LBS	Linguistic Biblical Studies
LD	Lectio Divina
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
<i>LumVit</i>	<i>Lumen Vitae</i>
<i>MidJT</i>	<i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>
<i>MSJ</i>	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> . Edited by Colin Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-1978.
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary
NkS	Neukirchener Studienbücher
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTC	The New Testament Commentary
NTCon	The New Testament in Context
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTL	New Testament Library
NTM	New Testament Message
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTT	New Testament Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
PC	Proclamation Commentaries
PCNT	<i>Paideia</i> Commentaries on the New Testament
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary

<i>QJS</i>	<i>Quarterly Journal of Speech</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
<i>RelStTh</i>	<i>Religious Studies and Theology</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
<i>RTP</i>	<i>Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SA	Sciences in Antiquity
SB	Sources Bibliques
SBAL	Studies in Biblical Apocalyptic Literature
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
ScrHer	Scripture and Hermeneutics Series
<i>SE</i>	<i>Studia Evangelica</i> (= TU)
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SJTOP	Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SNTSU</i>	<i>Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt</i>
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World
SP	Sacra Pagina
SSEJC	Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity
<i>SwJT</i>	<i>Southwestern Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>Theology Digest</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976.
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-2006.
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
THNTC	Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TPINTC	TPI New Testament Commentaries
<i>TQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>TR</i>	<i>Theological Review</i>
TTCS	Teach the Text Commentary Series
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

WBComp	Westminster Bible Companion
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WPC	Westminster Pelican Commentaries
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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1 Introduction

1.1 Two Strands of New Testament Thought

This study is an investigation into the cosmic eschatology of the NT. More specifically, it explores what the various writers of the NT have to say about the fate of the created universe (i.e. the non-human world) at the consummation of the age. The writers of the NT offer a stunning array of images to describe this event. For example:

- the renewal of all things (Matt 19:28)
- the stars falling from the sky (Mark 13:25 and parr.)
- universal restoration (Acts 3:21)
- creation being set free from its bondage to decay (Rom 8:21)
- the world passing away (1 Cor 7:31; 1 John 2:17)
- heaven and earth being shaken and removed (Heb 12:26-27)
- the elements being dissolved with fire (2 Pet 3:10)
- earth and heaven fleeing from God (Rev 20:11)
- a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1)

These diverse images suggest that there are at least two strands of thought in the NT concerning the eschatological fate of the cosmos. Several texts appear to envision the transformation of the universe (i.e. *cosmic renewal*), while others appear to envision its destruction (i.e. *cosmic catastrophe*).

It is important to pause here and define these concepts. A text which envisions cosmic renewal emphasizes *continuity* between the present world and the world to come.¹ Romans 8:19-22 is a classic example of a text that is normally interpreted in this direction. Paul writes about “creation being set free from bondage,” which seems to imply some sort of non-destructive

¹ When I use the word “cosmic,” I take it to mean the “physical/material world” as opposed to the spiritual world of angels, demons, and the like. I will use phrases like “heavenly” or “celestial realm” to refer to the latter.

transformation of this world in the age to come.² On the other hand, a text which envisions cosmic catastrophe emphasizes *discontinuity* between the present world and the world to come. Second Peter 3:5-13 is a classic example of a text that is normally interpreted in this direction. Peter says “the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works in it will not be found.” This seems to imply the destruction of this world, which is then followed by the creation of “a new heavens and a new earth.”

The apparent tension between these strands of thought raises two issues. First, there is the issue of *interpretation*. What do the writers of the NT teach about the eschatological destiny of the cosmos? Does a given text lean toward cosmic renewal or cosmic catastrophe? There is often considerable disagreement among scholars concerning how to best interpret the passages listed above. For example, some scholars interpret Rev 21:1 as conveying the idea of cosmic renewal, while others emphasize cosmic catastrophe. Thus, these two strands of thought give rise to the need for a close reading of each NT passage within its literary and historical context. Second, there is the issue of *correlation*. How do these texts fit together, if at all, within the broader scope of the NT canon? Does the NT present a coherent message concerning the fate of the cosmos, or is it filled with multiple messages (i.e. cosmic eschatologies)? Thus, these two strands of thought give rise to the need for exploring the potential unity and diversity of the NT.

² To be clear, stressing continuity between the present and future worlds does not preclude all discontinuity. Otherwise, the future world would not qualify as something which is “new.” We must allow for flexibility along the lines of a spectrum, with complete continuity and discontinuity standing at opposite ends (see below).

1.2 Previous Study on the Future of the Cosmos

1.2.1 Anton Vögtle

The most comprehensive study to date, despite being published in 1970, is Anton Vögtle's monograph, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*.³ Vögtle is the only author who has put forth a detailed examination of both texts that emphasize cosmic renewal and texts that emphasize cosmic catastrophe. He gives attention to: Matt 5:18 (and parr.); 19:28; Mark 13:24-25 (and parr.); 13:31 (and parr.); Rom 8:19-22; 1 Cor 7:31; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:10-12; 12:26-27; 2 Pet 3:1-13; 1 John 2:17; Rev 6:12-17; 20:11-15; and 21:1-8.

Concerning methodology, Vögtle attempted to find a hermeneutical middle ground between what he perceived to be the two extreme interpretive positions of his day (Oscar Cullmann's salvation-historical model and Rudolf Bultmann's existential-personal model).⁴ As a result, he concludes that the writers of the NT were not attempting to produce doctrinal statements concerning the future of the cosmos. Rather, they were concerned primarily with the salvation of the human community in Christ, that is, the Church.⁵ In other words, Vögtle interprets the cosmological language of the NT strictly within the category of God's judgment of humanity for purposes of condemnation and salvation. Because of this focus on theology in relation to anthropology, Vögtle ultimately finds that the NT says nothing of substance concerning cosmic eschatology. He writes, "The exegete can leave with good conscience the question concerning the relative and absolute future of the cosmos to the natural scientist. At the center of the New Testament

³ Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970). Certain chapters from this book also appear in essay form with minor variations. See idem, "Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos: Hebr. 12,26f. und das Endschicksal des Kosmos," *BibLeb* 10 (1969): 239-53; idem, "Röm 8,19-22: Eine Schöpfungstheologische oder Anthropologisch-soteriologische Aussage?" in *Mélanges Bibliques: en hommage au R. P. Bédard Rigaux*, ed. Albert Descamps and André de Halleux (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 351-66.

⁴ Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 13-16.

⁵ Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 232-33.

message of salvation stands God's future-oriented saving action in humanity, and thus the eschatological community of salvation" (my translation).⁶ Vögtle reiterates the basic points of this conclusion in two subsequent works on Rev 21:1 and 2 Pet 3:1-13.⁷

In assessing Vögtle's work, I affirm his contention that the cosmological language of the NT cannot be categorized as dealing exclusively with cosmological matters. Such a categorization would ignore the complexity of each NT writing and the situationally bound purposes for which they were written. Thus, I agree with Vögtle that the writers of the NT did not use cosmological language for the sake of writing a doctrine of cosmology. Their purpose in writing was to communicate and persuade their readers/listeners of a worldview that was theologically informed and ethically expressed. As a result, the cosmological language and concepts of the NT serve a larger purpose for its writers. As Sean McDonough and Jonathan Pennington point out, when the writers of the NT employ cosmological language, they do so for the purpose of making "theological, polemical, and exhortational points."⁸ For example, the writer of Second Peter employs the language of cosmic catastrophe (3:5-10) in order to contradict the argument of his opponents (3:4), and to serve as a basis for his call to ethical living (3:11-15). So, Vögtle is right to emphasize that the eschatological saving action of God for the benefit of humanity is in view.

However, Vögtle is too restrictive when he suggests that an interpreter cannot gain exegetical insight into the future of the cosmos from the NT. His anthropocentric hermeneutic

⁶ In German, "Die Frage nach der relative und absoluten Zukunft des Kosmos kann der Exeget mit gutem Gewissen dem Naturwissenschaftler überlassen. Im Zentrum der neutestamentlichen Heilsbotschaft steht das auf die Zukunft ausgerichtete Heilshandeln Gottes am Menschen und damit die endzeitliche Heilsgemeinde." Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 233.

⁷ Anton Vögtle, "'Dann sah ich einen neuen Himmel und eine neue Erde...'" (Apk 21,1): Zur kosmischen Dimension neutestamentlicher Eschatologie," in *Glaube und Eschatologie: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Erich Grässer et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 303-333; idem, *Der Judasbrief, Der 2. Petrusbrief*, EKKNT 22 (Solothurn; Düsseldorf: Benziger; Neukirchener, 1994), 209-61.

⁸ Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, eds., *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, LNTS 355 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008), 4.

confines his interpretative conclusions to what can be said about the relationship between God and humanity. Thus, Vögtle fails to appreciate the cosmological teaching that can be attained through a close reading of the text, even if it is not always the primary focus of the writer. The writers of the NT certainly had beliefs about the fate of the cosmos and taught some of those beliefs in their writings. As a result, this study will attempt to elucidate those teachings in order to see what can be said about the future of the cosmos in the NT.

1.2.2 David M. Russell

Reacting to what he perceived to be an overemphasis in scholarship concerning the negative attitude of apocalyptic writers toward the created world, David M. Russell wrote, *The “New Heavens and New Earth”*: *Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament*.⁹ Published in 1996, Russell sets out to reassess the role of the created world and its redemption in apocalyptic literature and the NT. His goal is “to demonstrate that the apocalyptic motif of ‘the new heavens and a new earth’ preserves an important and positive role for the *present* creation.”¹⁰ At odds with anthropocentric interpretations that only highlight aspects of personal salvation, Russell explores the complementary themes of creation and redemption throughout apocalyptic literature and the NT with an eye toward “clarifying the NT understanding of the natural world and its ultimate redemption.”¹¹ After surveying the themes of creation and redemption in relevant passages from the OT and comparative apocalyptic literature, Russell turns his attention to the NT. Here he discusses Jesus and the kingdom of God, Jesus’ inauguration of a new creation, and an assortment of texts (Matt 5:5; 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom

⁹ David M. Russell, *The “New Heavens and New Earth”*: *Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, SBAL 1 (Philadelphia: Visionary, 1996).

¹⁰ Russell, *New Heavens*, 6 (italics original).

¹¹ Russell, *New Heavens*, 7.

8:19-22; Col 1:15-20; 2 Pet 3:3-13; Rev 4:1-5:13; 21:1-5). Focusing on the idea of cosmic renewal, Russell advocates that God is both the Creator and Redeemer, and his plan of redemption encompasses the entire creation. He concludes: “The discussion in the previous chapters has demonstrated that an overwhelming positive perspective toward the present creation prevails in apocalyptic and biblical writings.”¹²

Russell’s study is a strong contribution to understanding the relationship between creation and redemption in the NT. He admirably traces the idea of God as Creator and Redeemer throughout his work. However, because he chooses to focus exclusively on the theme of redemption as it relates to the created order, his study is limited in scope. He does not incorporate all of the texts that deal with the future of the cosmos in the NT, specifically those that appear to emphasize a cosmic catastrophe. For example, he does not treat Mark 13:24-25 (and parr.); Heb 12:25-29; or Rev 6:12-17 (although he does discuss 2 Pet 3:3-13 at length). Thus, Russell does not present the whole picture concerning the future of the cosmos in the NT.

1.2.3 Edward M. Adams

In response to what he believed was a trend in biblical studies that favored texts of cosmic renewal, Edward Adams focuses on NT texts that underscore cosmic catastrophe with his monograph, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*.¹³ Adams’ study, published in 2007, is primarily framed as a response to the influential work of N. T. Wright, who has argued that Jesus and his first followers were not expecting the

¹² Russell, *New Heavens*, 210.

¹³ Edward M. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

“end of the space-time universe” when they evoked the imagery of cosmic catastrophe.¹⁴

Wright’s stance is that the writers of the NT “knew a good metaphor when they saw one, and used cosmic imagery to bring out the full theological significance of cataclysmic socio-political events.”¹⁵ In other words, he claims that first-century Jews employed such language expecting the end of the present world order, not the end of the world. Adams challenges Wright’s proposal concerning metaphorical language and argues that first-century Jews really did expect the end of the world in such texts. Thus, Adams’ aim is “to establish whether the ‘cosmic catastrophe’ texts have in view an actual catastrophe and, if so, whether that catastrophe results in the total destruction of the created cosmos.”¹⁶ After surveying a comparative pool of Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, Adams turns his attention to the NT, specifically Mark 13:24-27 (and parr.); Heb 12:25-29; 2 Pet 3:4-13; and Rev 6:12-17. To a lesser extent, he also treats Mark 13:31 (and parr.); Heb 1:10-12; and Rev 20:11; 21:1. After a thorough examination of these texts, Adams concludes,

In light of the comparative evidence, language of cosmic catastrophe such as we find in the New Testament simply cannot be regarded as conventional, first-century language for referring symbolically to socio-political change. In the key New Testament passages employing this language, a catastrophe of cosmic dimensions (within an ancient cosmological framework) is genuinely in view.¹⁷

Adams’ work is another strong study contributing to the cosmic eschatology of the NT.

He surveys a wide range of relevant comparative literature and discusses each NT text within its

¹⁴ Adams, *Stars*, 1. It is important to add that I will interact with Wright at several points throughout this study. He is not included in this section because he has not offered detailed exegesis on a number of the texts in question. His most extensive work to date has been on Mark 13:24-27 (and parr.) and Rom 8:19-22, although he also offers brief commentaries on every book in the NT in his “*For Everyone*” series. See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 280-338; idem, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 94-8, 198-226, 320-68; idem, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); idem, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 2:1091-92; idem, “The Letter to the Romans,” *NIB* 10:594-97.

¹⁵ Wright, *New Testament*, 333 (cf. 280-86).

¹⁶ Adams, *Stars*, 17.

¹⁷ Adams, *Stars*, 253.

literary and historical context. He also raises the issue of how apocalyptic language should be interpreted in conversation with Wright. However, it is precisely on this issue that Adams should be questioned. He repeatedly claims to interpret the language of cosmic catastrophe metaphorically, but in essence he reads it literally based on a similar method of interpreting the OT and comparative apocalyptic literature. As a result, he tends to interpret the language of cosmic catastrophe as straightforward cosmological language without appropriate attention to its theological use by the writers of the NT.¹⁸ I will discuss this issue more in the chapters that follow. Furthermore, much like Russell's work, Adams' study is limited in scope. He deals only with texts that are normally taken to communicate cosmic catastrophe, bypassing those that appear to advocate for cosmic renewal (e.g. Matt 19:28; Rom 8:19-22; Col 1:15-20).¹⁹ Thus, while counter-balancing the data, so-to-speak, against Russell's emphasis on cosmic renewal, Adams does not explore the possibility of a synthesis between the two strands of eschatological thought.²⁰

1.2.4 J. Richard Middleton

The final study under consideration here attempts to offer an accessible and clear statement of holistic eschatology, J. Richard Middleton's, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*.²¹ Published in 2014, Middleton's primary purpose is "to sketch the coherent biblical theology (beginning in the Old Testament) that culminates in the New

¹⁸ In a sense, Adams does not heed the warning of Vögtle that the cosmological language and concepts of the NT serve a larger purpose for its writers.

¹⁹ Although he does treat texts such as Rom 8:19-22 in a previous work, see Edward Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul's Cosmological Language*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

²⁰ Although see Adams, *Stars*, 256-57.

²¹ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014).

Testament's explicit eschatological vision of the redemption of creation."²² To achieve his goal, Middleton traces the story of redemption as it runs throughout the entire Bible, attempting to demonstrate how the OT sets the stage for the NT vision of *cosmic renewal*. Particularly relevant for this study is his discussion of the language of cosmic catastrophe in the OT and how it relates to the NT.²³ Concerning the NT, Middleton elaborates on the significance of the resurrection and the kingdom of God for understanding the fate of the cosmos, and treats a wide array of texts that involve both the language of cosmic renewal (Act 3:19-21; Rom 8:19-23; Col 1:19-20; Eph 1:9-10) and cosmic catastrophe (Mark 13:24-27 [and parr.]; Heb 1:10-12; 12:26-29; 2 Pet 3:3-13; Rev 6:12-17; Rev 20:11; 21:1). In conclusion, Middleton argues that even those texts which appear to depict the destruction of the world ultimately contribute to a holistic view of redemption.²⁴

Middleton's work is an admirable study in biblical theology. It takes a vast amount of research and contemplation to speak clearly about a canonical theme with as many twists and turns as cosmic eschatology. Furthermore, Middleton does not shy away from texts that appear to challenge his claim. However, given the broad scope of a work on biblical theology, Middleton is not always able to enter into a detailed analysis of each text. As a result, there are several exegetical questions (at least in the mind of this writer) that are left unanswered.

1.3 The Purpose of This Study

The previous overview of literature attempts to demonstrate that there remains a gap in scholarly research pertaining to the NT and the future of the cosmos. First, while Vögtle's study sheds

²² Middleton, *New Heaven*, 15.

²³ Middleton, *New Heaven*, 109-28, 179-210. Significantly, Middleton lays out an understanding of the language that stands in contrast to Edward Adams and is consistent with N. T. Wright.

²⁴ Middleton, *New Heaven*, 179-237.

light on God's judgment and salvation of humanity, he finds no definitive cosmological teaching in the NT. Second, both Russell and Adams have put forth strong comparative studies that address the future of the cosmos, but each study is limited in scope.²⁵ Finally, Middleton wrestles with how the Bible as a whole speaks to the issue of the fate of the cosmos, but his sweeping study precludes a detailed discussion of all the NT texts that speak to this issue.²⁶ Thus, more research needs to be done in this area.

My research problem, then, is that *there are divergent images that the writers of the NT use to talk about the eschatological fate of the cosmos (cosmic renewal and cosmic catastrophe), which at face value appear to contradict one another and make it impossible to speak of a unified and consistent NT theology pertaining to the eschatological future of the cosmos.*²⁷ This is a problem that I think arises naturally from the text of the NT itself when one attempts to read it canonically.

The primary research question that flows from this problem is: *What did the writers of the NT teach about the eschatological future of the cosmos, and can we synthesize their teachings into a coherent NT theology pertaining to the eschatological future of the cosmos?* Addressing this research question will make contributions to the fields of NT cosmology, NT eschatology, and NT theology.

The purpose of this study is to argue that *through a close grammatical-historical reading of the NT texts which address the eschatological fate of the cosmos, one can ascertain a clear and coherent message (i.e. a NT theology) pertaining to the future of the cosmos that relates to*

²⁵ I do not want to fault them for this, since it was not their aim.

²⁶ As with Russell and Adams, I do not fault Middleton for this.

²⁷ I understand "NT theology" to be a historical description of the theological teachings of the writers of the NT and their interrelationships. See G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, compl. and ed. L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 1-4; I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 17-47; Peter Balla, *Challenges to New Testament Theology: An Attempt to Justify the Enterprise*, WUNT 2/95 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

the larger unity and diversity of the NT witnesses. Contra Vögtle, I will assert that one can speak meaningfully about the eschatological future of the cosmos from the NT. Beyond Russell and Adams, I will argue that one can speak meaningfully about a NT theology that encompasses both the texts of cosmic renewal and the texts of cosmic catastrophe. And as a complement to Middleton, I will wrestle with exegetical details that he was unable to address within the scope of a project on biblical theology. This study will result in a NT theology of the future of the cosmos.

1.4 The Methodology, Scope, and Structure of This Study

1.4.1 Methodology

This study will be conducted according to grammatical-historical-critical standards (i.e. an inductive approach which engages in a comprehensive study of the texts in question). David Bauer and Robert Traina describe this method of study as “*a comprehensive, holistic study of the Bible that takes into account every aspect of the existence of the biblical text and that is intentional in allowing the Bible in its final canonical shape to speak to us on its own terms, thus leading to accurate, original, compelling, and profound interpretation and contemporary appropriation.*”²⁸

Some of the key features of this methodology include the following.²⁹ (1) It focuses on the final form of the text as the starting point for interpretation. (2) It is evidential. Thus it is committed to letting the text speak, and following the evidence wherever it may lead. It also takes into account that evidence is sometimes unclear or even contradictory, thus there is always

²⁸ David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 6 (italics original). “Contemporary appropriation” will not be a feature of this study.

²⁹ See Bauer and Traina, *Inductive*, 1-74.

a degree of probability involved. (3) It realizes that the interpretive process is neither wholly objective nor subjective. As a result, it embraces a “critical-realist” hermeneutic.³⁰ (4) It focuses primarily on an implied author and recipients.³¹ (5) It is integrative and holistic. Thus, it is committed to a comprehensive study of the text which incorporates evidence from all critical approaches. And finally, (6) it is compositional and canonical. Thus, it is committed to interpreting a particular text within both its literary context (the book-as-a-whole) and its canonical context (in this case the NT).

This study will focus primarily on two aspects of the hermeneutical process: *interpretation* and *correlation*.³² The interpretive portion of the study will attempt to provide answers to the first part of our research question (What did the individual writers of each NT passage teach about the eschatological future of the cosmos?), while the correlative portion of this study will attempt to answer the second part of our research question (Can we synthesize the teachings of the NT writers pertaining to the eschatological future of the cosmos into a coherent NT theology?).

1.4.2 Scope

Given that this study is an exploration into the cosmic eschatology of the NT, all of the texts under consideration will speak to the issue of the future of the cosmos in some way. In other words, each text will employ cosmological language (e.g. the sun, moon, stars, heaven, earth,

³⁰ As applied to the study of biblical texts, critical realism is a theory of knowledge which rejects the antitheses that knowledge is purely “objective” on one hand, or purely “subjective” on the other. It seeks a synthesis through the recognition that a text is “other” from the reader, while at the same time recognizing that the reader’s only way into the text is through their own subjective lens. Knowledge of the “other” is attained through a careful, thoughtful, responsible, and reasonable reading of a text.

³¹ The “implied author” as described by Bauer and Traina is a term used to identify the “author who is inferred from the text” (*Inductive*, 43). Thus, the “implied author” is reconstructed by the interpreter from the text and is not to be confused with the real flesh-and-blood author. The “implied recipients,” then, are also inferred from the text.

³² See Bauer and Traina, *Inductive*, 177-277, 337-60.

world, all things, creation, etc.) within an eschatological context (usually in reference to the parousia and/or the Day of the Lord) concerning the fate of the cosmos. The combination of these components is important for limiting the scope of this study.³³ The NT texts which fall within these parameters are: Matt 5:5, 18; 19:28; 24:29-31, 35; Mark 13:24-27, 31; Luke 16:17; 21:25-27, 33; Acts 2:19-20; 3:19-21; Rom 8:19-22; 1 Cor 7:31; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 1:20; Heb 1:10-12; 12:25-29; 2 Pet 3:7-13; 1 John 2:17; Rev 6:12-17; 11:15-19; 16:17-21; 20:11; and 21:1-5.

This list of texts can be divided into two categories, primary texts and secondary texts, based on the amount of information they provide concerning the future of the cosmos. The NT texts which I consider to be *primary*, and thus deserving of greatest attention and exegetical focus, are: Matt 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-27; Rom 8:19-22; Heb 12:25-29; 2 Pet 3:7-13; and Rev 21:1-5. These texts are recognized by other scholars as the core texts which inform the topic.³⁴ As a result, they will be foundational to the study since they provide the most essential research data.

In addition to these primary texts, I will also treat a *secondary* group of texts: Matt 5:5, 18; 19:28; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33; Acts 2:19-20; 3:19-21; 1 Cor 7:31; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 1:20; Heb 1:10-12; 1 John 2:17; Rev 6:12-17; 11:15-19; 16:17-21; and 20:11. These texts are considered to be secondary because they do not offer as much exegetical information concerning the future of the cosmos. Many of them are only one verse in length, or make a passing reference to the future of the cosmos while addressing some other matter. As a result, they will not be treated in as great of detail as the primary texts listed above.

³³ For example, although a text like 1 Thess 4:13-5:11 contains some cosmological terminology and addresses the parousia of Jesus Christ, it does not address the fate of the cosmos itself. Thus, it and others like it fall outside of the scope of this study.

³⁴ See Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 28-31; Russell, *New Heavens*, 134-37; Adams, *Stars*, 16; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 131-210.

1.4.3 Structure

Overall, this study will be organized similar to a project on NT theology following G. B. Caird's model of a "conference table" approach, whereby the researcher facilitates a conversation between the writers of the NT concerning a specific topic (in this case the cosmic eschatology of the NT).³⁵ My primary goal, then, will be to listen to each NT writer who addresses the topic at hand (chaps. 2-9), and then compare and contrast their various teachings (chap. 10). By taking this approach, I will be focusing on the final form of the text as we have it; I will not attempt to trace any historical development within the theme itself.³⁶ As a result, the study will proceed author by author through the canonical order of the NT. The NT writers who address the future of the cosmos are: Matthew (chap. 2), Mark (chap. 3), Luke (chap. 4), Paul (chap. 5), Hebrews (chap. 6), Peter (chap. 7), John (chap. 8), and John the Seer (chap. 9).³⁷

Within each of these chapters, individual texts will be treated separately in context.

When multiple texts are written by the same author (e.g. Matt 5:5, 18; 19:28; 24:29-31, 35), the findings will be synthesized in order to gain a clearer picture of the writer's theology. For each primary text under consideration I will offer a brief overview of the segment within which it occurs (i.e. the immediate context). For example, before interpreting Matt 24:29-31, I will attempt to situate it within the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:1-25:46). Only after I have completed this step will I move into an interpretation of the passage at hand. Sometimes it also will be

³⁵ Caird, *New Testament Theology*, 18-26.

³⁶ On the difficulties associated with a chronological approach see Caird, *New Testament Theology*, 8-15.

³⁷ Given the methodology being employed in this study, it is important to allow each Synoptic Gospel writer (i.e. Matthew, Mark, and Luke) to speak on his own terms while at the same time acknowledging a clear relationship between their works. Thus, I will not adopt a strict version of literary criticism where each Synoptic text is interpreted in isolation from the others, but neither will I advocate for an uncritical harmonization of the texts. Furthermore, I intend to push beyond the classic model of redaction criticism where a specific source hypothesis is employed. When I encounter parallel texts, then, I will not attempt to identify source material or how a particular parallel may have been redacted (I will leave these questions open). Nevertheless, I will compare parallel Synoptic texts in order to identify similarities and differences that need to be explored.

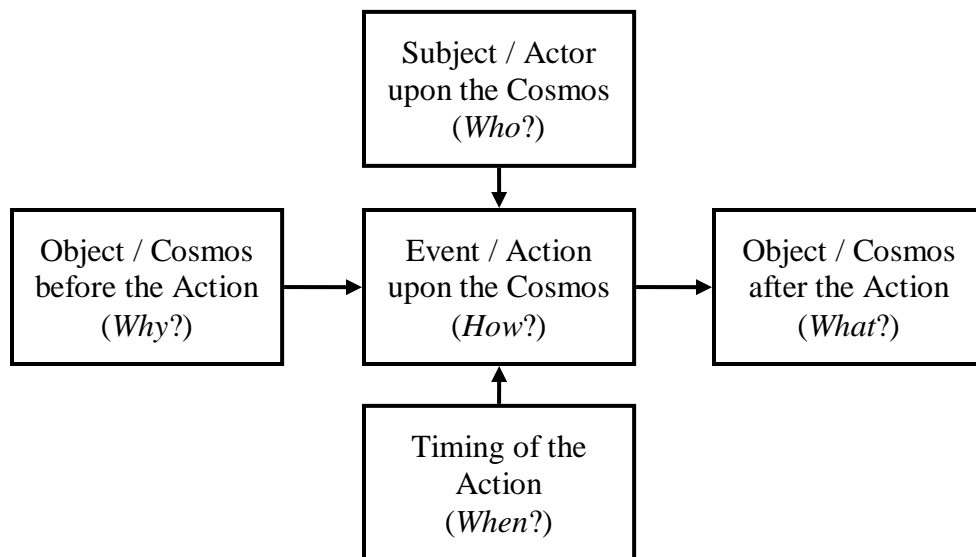
necessary to treat other preliminary matters, such as a specific issue related to the history of interpretation, or the cosmology of a book as a whole.

In order to provide some sense of consistency during the process of correlation, I will attempt to describe the theology of each NT writer by having him answer five basic questions about the cosmic event that determines the eschatological future of the cosmos.

- (1) Who is the actor (i.e. the one who takes action) in the cosmic event?
- (2) When will the cosmic event happen?
- (3) Why will the cosmic event take place?³⁸
- (4) How will the cosmic event unfold?
- (5) What will be the result of the cosmic event?³⁹

While answering question four will be the key focus of this study, the other questions will serve to probe the cosmic event from different vantage points, thereby filling out the thoughts of the writer concerning the fate of the cosmos. These five questions can be illustrated as follows (see fig. 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1: THE FIVE CORRELATIVE QUESTIONS



³⁸ In other words, what do the writers tell us about the problems associated with this age/world?

³⁹ In other words, how do the writers describe the age/world to come?

These correlative questions will help to establish similarities and differences among the writers of the NT as well as offer different vantage points from which to analyze the event itself. It must be acknowledged that not every question will be answered completely or uniformly by every writer. Some writers will focus on some questions but neglect others. Nevertheless, after all of the available data is collected and analyzed, I will explore the possibility of speaking of a NT theology pertaining to the future of the cosmos (chap. 10).

1.5 Further Clarifications

1.5.1 Ancient and Contemporary Cosmology

Living in an age when space exploration is nothing new, most of us have a firm grasp of the basic order and function of the universe. The moon circles the earth, the earth circles the sun, the sun is a star in our galaxy, and so on. However, ancient people had a different conception of the universe, especially in terms of its scale. Generally speaking, the writers of the NT most likely assumed a view of the universe similar to what is presented in the OT (see fig. 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2: THE ANCIENT HEBREW CONCEPTION OF THE UNIVERSE

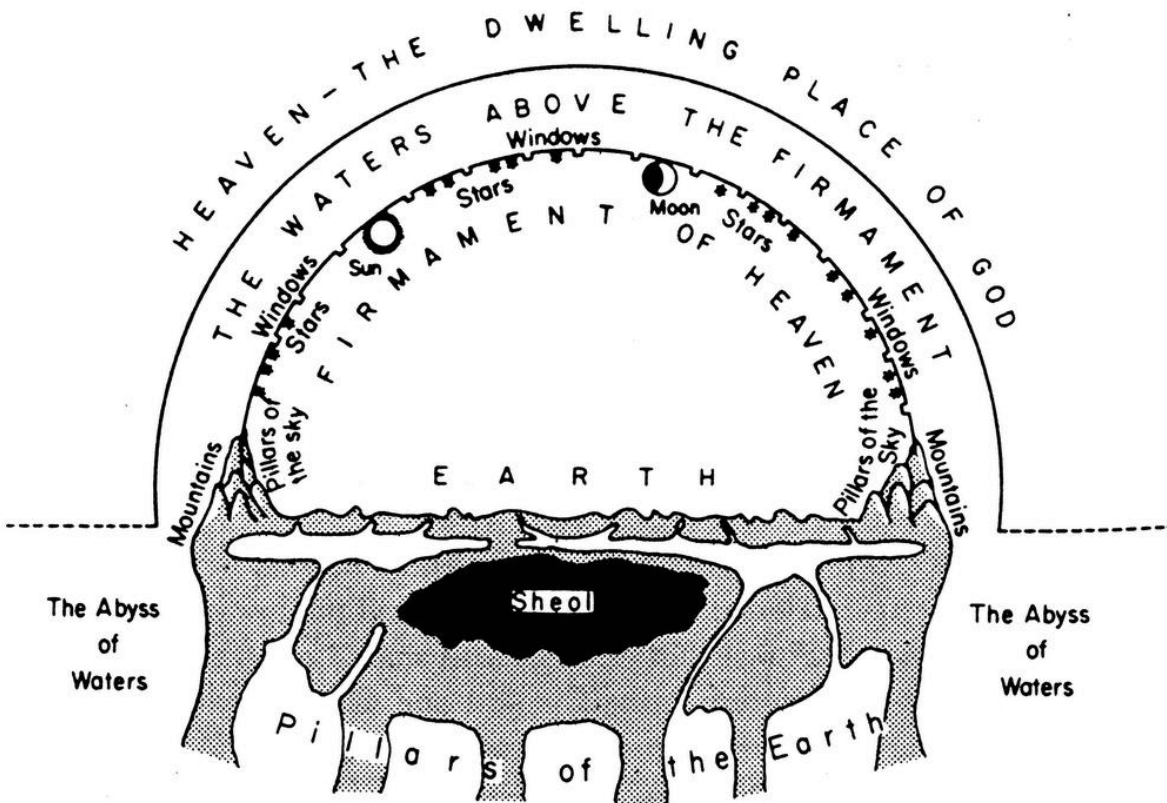


Illustration from S. H. Hooke, *In The Beginning*, CBOT 6 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947), 20. Used by permission.

Therefore, this basic cosmological model must be kept in mind during our study, while at the same time allowing for other ancient cosmological viewpoints (e.g. Stoicism, Platonism, etc.).⁴⁰

1.5.2 Continuity and Discontinuity

At the heart of this study is an attempt to determine the level of continuity and discontinuity between this world and the world to come. Most discussions on the future of the cosmos offer two basic positions related to continuity and discontinuity, either *renewal* or *destruction*.

However, there is a great deal of imprecision within these two categories. Does “destruction”

⁴⁰ For more on ancient cosmology see Pennington and McDonough, *Cosmology*; M. R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity*, SA (New York: Routledge, 1995); Luis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World: A Philological and Literary Study*, AnBib 39 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970).

imply the mere breakdown of physical matter, or its total annihilation? Does “renewal” imply the mere rehabilitation of physical matter, or its utter transformation into something identifiably new? This lack of precision demonstrates the need for clearer distinctions between the interpretive options of continuity and discontinuity.

In what follows, I have listed six possible options pertaining to the future of the cosmos, all of which have been espoused by various interpreters in relation to the texts included in this study. The first three options (1-3) emphasize varying degrees of continuity between the present and future realms, whereas the final three options (4-6) emphasize varying degrees of discontinuity between the present and future realms.

(1) *Permanence*: the shift between the ages results in no change. Thus, there is complete continuity between this world and the next. The physical matter of the present universe is unaltered. The world to come is equivalent to the present cosmos.

(2) *Restoration*: the shift between the ages results in a return to conditions similar to the Garden of Eden. Thus, there is a major emphasis on continuity between this world and the world to come. The physical matter of the present universe remains unaltered as the change between the ages is more like a reset to original conditions. In other words, eschatology and protology are collapsed together as the “last things” are a return to the “first things.” The world to come is a regenerated universe.

(3) *Renovation*: the shift between the ages results in a total transformation of the cosmos into a renewed order. Thus, there is a minor emphasis on the continuity between this world and the world to come. The physical matter of the present universe does not stay the same, but is altered into a renewed state. The world to come is a transformed universe.

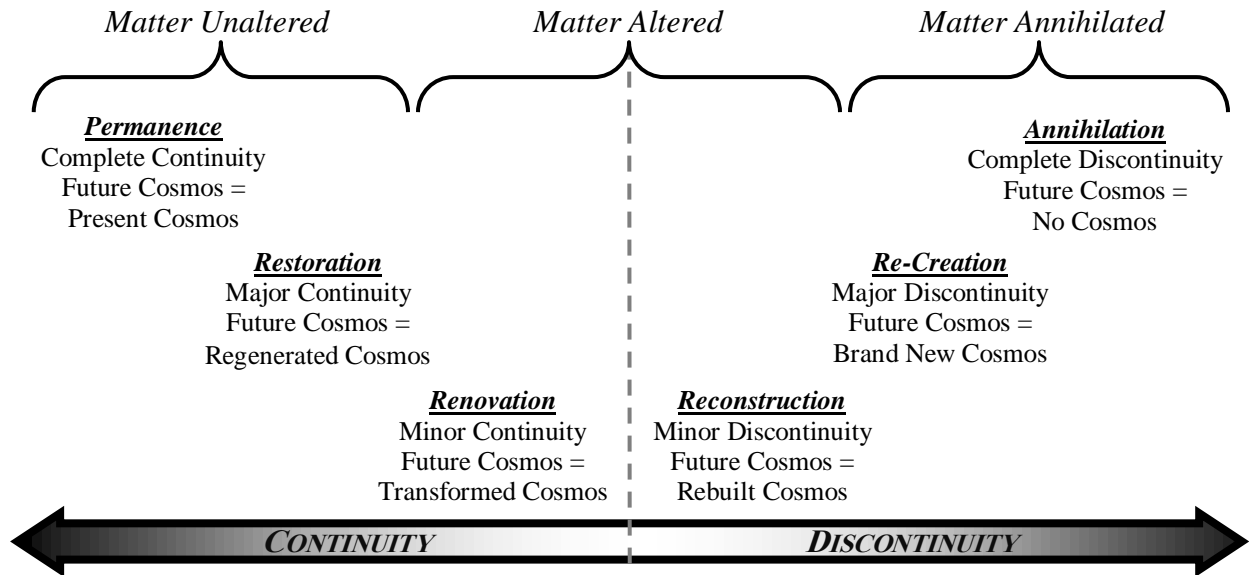
(4) *Reconstruction*: the shift between the ages results in the destruction of the universe followed by its reconstruction. Thus, there is a minor emphasis on discontinuity between this world and the world to come. The physical matter of the present universe is not obliterated, but altered in the process of its dissolution and re-formation into a renewed state. The world to come is a rebuilt universe.

(5) *Re-Creation*: the shift between the ages results in the total destruction of the universe followed by its re-creation. Thus, there is a major emphasis on discontinuity between this world and the world to come. The physical matter of the present universe is annihilated so that God can establish a new creation (*ex nihilo*). The world to come is a brand new universe.

(6) *Annihilation*: the shift between the ages results in the total destruction of the physical universe. Thus, there is complete discontinuity between this world and the world to come. The physical matter of the present universe is eradicated, never to be created again. As a result, there is no cosmos in the world to come. All that remains is an immaterial heavenly realm.

These six interpretive options can be placed along a continuum of continuity and discontinuity, with (1) permanence, and (6) annihilation, being at opposite ends of the spectrum representing complete continuity and discontinuity (see fig. 1.3).

FIGURE 1.3: A CONTINUUM OF CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY



According to Figure 1.3, we can also chart what happens to the physical matter of the present cosmos at the shift between the ages. In the first two options (1 & 2), the physical matter of the present cosmos remains *unaltered*. In the second two options (3 & 4), the physical matter of the present cosmos is *altered* during the cosmic transition. And in the final two options (5 & 6), the physical matter of the present cosmos is *annihilated* during the cosmic transition.⁴¹

Obviously, interpretation is not always this tidy. Some texts will resist fitting neatly into any one option. However, this spectrum of possibilities will at least serve as starting point for investigation and offer us some needed precision on the issue. Part of my aim at the conclusion of this study will be to place the various writers of the NT somewhere along this continuum according to their emphases.

⁴¹ Adams argues that annihilation was not a conceptual option for ancient people (*Stars*, 21-22).

1.5.3 Eschatology and Apocalyptic

Given that this study deals with the future of the cosmos, I must comment on two important words: “eschatology” and “apocalyptic.” While space limits a full discussion of these important words, here I will offer my understanding of these concepts.

Eschatology: Many choose to use the gloss definition of “last things” to talk about eschatology, while others employ the term to describe issues such as the fate of the individual (death, heaven and hell, and resurrection), the end of history, or the imminent expectation of the end.⁴² I intend to define and use the word broadly. Eschatology is the study of the destiny of humanity and the world. This definition is intended to be both individual and cosmic in scope, and encompasses past, present, and future realities. To describe something as “eschatological,” then, is to say that it is integral to or associated with the destiny of humanity and the world according to the divine plan of God. In other words, “eschatological” events (such as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) are used by God to bring his entire creation to its intended goal.

Apocalyptic (apocalypse, apocalypticism): There is no clear consensus definition for “apocalyptic” within scholarship, often resulting in a nebulous concept that lacks precision.⁴³ It is normally recognized that an “apocalypse” is a type of literary genre that discloses/reveals a heavenly perspective.⁴⁴ Related-but-distinct is “apocalypticism,” which is an apocalyptic social

⁴² See the discussion of the different senses of “eschatology” offered by G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 243-56; Dale C. Allison, Jr., “Apocalyptic,” *DJG* 17-20.

⁴³ However, see the important works of John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed., BRS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Christopher C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982); David S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC-AD 100*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, SBT 2/22 (Naperville: Allenson, 1972).

⁴⁴ John J. Collins provides the standard definition, “‘Apocalypse’ is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (“Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 [1979]: 9).

ideology or worldview embedded within a historical movement.⁴⁵ “Apocalyptic,” then, is an adjective used to describe something that has affinity with the common characteristics of apocalypses (genre) and/or apocalypticism (worldview). For example, we might describe a writer’s use of symbolism and OT imagery for the purpose of revealing heavenly mysteries as “apocalyptic” language since it shares a common characteristic of an apocalypse.

Another related issue is the overlap between “apocalyptic” and “eschatology.” As I have defined “eschatology” above, it is a larger theological category and the terms should not be collapsed together. As a result, I will treat “apocalyptic” as an adjective which describes a specific form of language or worldview, which may or may not be eschatological in nature. Thus, a writer’s use of “apocalyptic” language or worldview does not necessarily mean that the text is also “eschatological.” Although, the “apocalyptic” language and worldview espoused in the texts of this study will express an “eschatological” outlook. Some have found the term “apocalyptic eschatology” useful for describing this phenomenon. However, as John Collins has warned, “apocalyptic eschatology” is most helpful for describing the type of eschatology found in an apocalypse proper. Using the phrase outside of an apocalypse should be done with the recognition that the adjective “apocalyptic” is being used in an “extended sense.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 12-14; Koch, *Rediscovery*, 28-33.

⁴⁶ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 11-12.

1.5.4 Metaphorical Language

Finally, given the large number of texts employing metaphorical/figurative language in this study, a few words are in order concerning metaphorical language in an apocalyptic context.⁴⁷ I can organize my thoughts under five points.

(1) Janet Martin Soskice defines metaphorical language as “a figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.”⁴⁸ In other words, metaphorical language involves the interaction of two linguistic entities, a *tenor* (the subject of the metaphor, which is sometimes unstated) and a *vehicle* (the unit which describes the tenor in a new way).⁴⁹ Vehicles are generated from a *model*, which is the conceptual framework that stands behind the vehicle. For example, in Rev 5:6 John the Seer calls Jesus (the *tenor*, who is unnamed in this verse) a “Lamb” (the *vehicle*, which metaphorically describes Jesus). In looking at this use of metaphor, it is important to realize that there are not two subjects (Jesus and a Lamb), but one (Jesus). The “Lamb” is a metaphorical term that John draws from Israel’s cultic past (the *model*).

(2) Interpretation of a metaphor, then, involves analyzing the *interaction* between the tenor and vehicle, with the key question being: *What do the tenor and vehicle say together which could not be said by the tenor or vehicle alone?*⁵⁰ Thus, metaphorical language is cognitively and evocatively creative in that it communicates something new, something which could not be

⁴⁷ See John J. Collins, “Apocalyptic Literature,” *DNTB* 40-45; idem, *Apocalyptic Imagination*; D. E. Aune, T. J. Geddert, and C. A. Evans, “Apocalypticism,” *DNTB* 45-58; Rowland, *Open Heaven*. Also helpful is Caird, *Language*, 243-71.

⁴⁸ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 15.

⁴⁹ This is known as the “incremental” theory of metaphor. It rejects both the “substitution” and “emotive” theories of metaphor because they do not allow for new cognitive material to be developed. See Soskice, *Metaphor*, 24-53; Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 46-53; Caird, *Language*, 152-59.

⁵⁰ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 47-48.

said otherwise.⁵¹ To continue my example from above, we would ask the question: What do the *tenor* (Jesus) and *vehicle* (Lamb) say together which could not be said by the *tenor* or *vehicle* alone? Interpretation, then, must go beyond the simple identification of Jesus as the subject of the metaphor. Exploring the interaction of the *tenor* (Jesus) and *vehicle* (Lamb, which was generated by the *model* of cultic worship) tells us that John probably wanted to recall and associate Jesus with Israel's cultic worship practices (in particular the slaughter of a lamb on the Day of Atonement). To call Jesus a "Lamb," then, communicates that Jesus is to be understood in relation to Israel's cultic system and that this additional meaning is intended by John the Seer. As a result, Jesus being called a "Lamb" says something that could not be said otherwise. Obviously, this metaphor would have to be explored in more detail to flesh out its intricacies and full intended meaning, but this is how I propose to go about it when appropriate in this study.

(3) To call language *literal* or *metaphorical*, then, is to refer to the way the language is being employed by the writer. Thus, these terms describe the function of the language and not the reality being described by the language. Literal and metaphorical should not be confused with *concrete* and *abstract*, which are more appropriate terms to describe the physical reality of what is being addressed.⁵² It is necessary to keep these distinctions in mind given that the majority of the passages under consideration employ metaphorical language to describe concrete events.

(4) A related issue is whether metaphorical language depicts reality. A common (and incorrect) assumption is that metaphorical language is strictly "fictitious," having no basis in reality. However, Soskice notes that metaphorical language can be "reality depicting without

⁵¹ Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 52-53.

⁵² See N. T. Wright, "In Grateful Dialogue: A Response," in *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. Carey C. Newman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 261-62.

claiming to be directly descriptive.”⁵³ In other words, while metaphorical language in our study will not provide us with an exact literal description of future cosmic events, it can offer us a truthful description of the eschatological events nonetheless. This leads to a final question.

(5) What, then, can we actually discover about the eschatological future of the cosmos? Given the nature of metaphorical language, it would be unwise to mine the language for concrete “factual” data about the future of the cosmos. This would force the language to do something that it was not intended to do. As several scholars have cautioned, metaphorical language should not be pressed for its literal cash value.⁵⁴ What we can gain from a close reading of metaphorical language is the writer’s intended description of the event through the interplay of the tenor and vehicle. Thus, the language will not yield an exact blueprint of the cosmic future, but will give us the writer’s theology of the cosmic future.

⁵³ Soskice, *Metaphor*, 148.

⁵⁴ So Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 282; Wright, *New Testament*, 280-86.

2 Matthew and the Future of the Cosmos

This chapter is an exploration of the cosmic eschatology of Matthew's Gospel. The primary text under consideration will be Matt 24:29-31, one of the most debated passages in the NT along with its parallels in Mark and Luke (which will be the subjects of the next two chapters). First, I will survey the various ways that 24:29 has been interpreted. Second, I will discuss the Olivet Discourse as a whole. Third, I will offer an interpretation of 24:29-31, concluding that Matthew utilizes the language of cosmic catastrophe to underscore the coming of the Son of Man "with power and great glory." Fourth, I will examine Matt 5:5, 19:28, and 24:35 (cf. 5:18) in order to fill out Matthew's understanding of the future of the cosmos. Finally, I will discuss how Matthew answers the five correlative questions posed in the previous chapter.

2.1 Interpretations of Matthew 24:29

Matthew 24:29 has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Sorting through the various scholarly positions is no easy task, especially given the amount of attention the Olivet Discourse has received. At the risk of oversimplification, we can categorize five views.¹

(1) Matthew 24:29 is a literal description of the concrete collapse of the universe at the end of the age.² For example, Floyd Filson comments, "the breakup of the previously orderly

¹ There is of course overlap between some of the following categories and not all scholarly positions fit so neatly into this scheme.

² D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *EBC* 8:505; Robert H. Smith, *Matthew*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 288; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 846-47.

starry system will herald the imminent end.”³ Thus, Matt 24:29 is more-or-less a straightforward description of future events.

(2) Matthew 24:29 metaphorically describes the collapse of the universe at the revelation of the Son of Man.⁴ This is the contention of Edward Adams, who argues that Matthew expected the cosmic images of 24:29 “to cash out into real cosmic disasters.”⁵ Thus, Matt 24:29 provides an example of cosmic dissolution.

(3) Matthew 24:29 metaphorically describes “signs” that herald Jesus’ coming and the end of the age.⁶ Representative of this view is David Turner, who says that 24:29 “describes the climactic signs in heaven that immediately precede Jesus’ future coming.”⁷ Thus, the primary function of the language is to point to a theophany of Jesus. The signs are likely concrete phenomena in the sky, and may or may not indicate the collapse of the universe.

(4) Matthew 24:29 metaphorically describes the coming of the Son of Man to save and to judge at the end of the age. In other words, the language does not portray what happens to the cosmos, but describes the parousia. Within this approach some prefer to emphasize a connection between 24:29 and the language found in OT descriptions of theophany.⁸ For example, W. D.

³ Floyd V. Filson, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, HNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1960), 256.

⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 362; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss and James E. Crouch, 3 vols., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1989-2005), 3:200-201, 205-206; David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, SNTSMS 88 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 168-69.

⁵ Edward M. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 169-70. I will discuss Adams’ work more thoroughly in the next chapter since his primary concern is Mark 13:24-25.

⁶ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2 vols., WBC 33A-B (Dallas: Word, 1993-1995), 2:713; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 982-83; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 891, 893; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 487; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 584-85; M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *NIB* 8:443-44; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 338.

⁷ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 581-82.

⁸ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 181-87; Joachim Gnllka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 2 vols., HThKNT 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988),

Davies and Dale Allison, Jr. write that Matthew uses “the language of cosmic destruction in a symbolic manner, and our text seems to employ the symbolism of the OT theophany.”⁹ Others, like Anton Vögtle, prefer to emphasize a connection to the OT tradition of the Day of Yahweh.¹⁰ For example, Rudolf Schnackenburg writes that the phenomenon of 24:29 “are part of the scenery of the eschatological drama and must not be taken to mean the catastrophic destruction of the world.... On the whole, this portrayal is an indication of the judgment of God over the whole earth.”¹¹ Whether one emphasizes a theophany of God or the Day of Yahweh, the point is that the imagery of 24:29 does not constitute the concrete collapse of the cosmos. Rather, it highlights the powerful and glorious coming of the Son of Man.

(5) Matthew 24:29 metaphorically describes the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE.¹² For R. T. France, the “language about cosmic collapse, then, is used by the OT prophets to symbolize God’s acts of judgment within history, with the emphasis on catastrophic political reversals,” thus 24:29 depicts “God’s judgment on Jerusalem’s temple and the power structure which it symbolized.”¹³ Quiet obviously, this view also denies that the imagery of 24:29 portrays the catastrophic end of the cosmos.

2:328-29; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 609-610; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, THKNT 1 (Berlin: Evangelische, 1968), 418.

⁹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988-1997) 3:358.

¹⁰ Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970), 69-71; Victor K. Agbanou, *Le Discours Eschatologique de Matthieu 24-25: Tradition et Rédaction*, EBib 2 (Paris: Lecoffre, 1983), 114-15.

¹¹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 243-44.

¹² N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 361-62; Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 189-97; Alistair I. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25*, PBM (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 154-56; David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 238; R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, TNTC 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 225-26; J. M. Kik, *The Eschatology of Victory* (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 127-29; repr. of *Matthew Twenty-Four: An Exposition* (Swengel: Bible Truth Depot, 1948).

¹³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 922.

2.2 Matthew's Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:1-25:46)

Any interpretation of Matt 24:29-31 is bound up with one's interpretation of the discourse as a whole. The goal of this section is not to settle every possible issue within the discourse, but to lay out in organized fashion the view which I have come to over a period of time.

The discourse has gone by several titles (Olivet, Eschatological, Temple, etc.), and has been categorized under multiple genre.¹⁴ Most famously, Timothy Colani argued that the discourse was a "little apocalypse."¹⁵ However, Matt 24-25 and its parallels do not qualify under what is commonly accepted today as an "apocalypse." Yet, it would be a mistake to claim that Matthew lacks an apocalyptic perspective.¹⁶ Others have compared the discourse to a "farewell" speech, but again the text lacks many of the expected features of such a genre.¹⁷ As a result, it seems best to identify Matt 24-25 as a discourse in general, with the recognition that other literary genres influence certain sections.

One of the most difficult issues facing any interpreter is the subject matter and structure of the discourse. Three routes are generally taken. (1) Some interpreters think the discourse refers strictly to past events surrounding the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE.¹⁸ (2) Others think the discourse refers strictly to future events surrounding the second coming of

¹⁴ On the lengthy history of interpretation see George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993).

¹⁵ Timothy Colani, *Jèsus Christ et les croyances messianiques de son temps*, 2nd ed. (Strasbourg: Treuttel & Wurtz, 1864).

¹⁶ Cf. Donald A. Hagner, "Apocalyptic Motifs in the Gospel of Matthew: Continuity and Discontinuity," *HBT* 7 (1985): 53-82; Léopold Sabourin, "Apocalyptic Traits in Matthew's Gospel," *RelStTh* 3 (1983): 19-36.

¹⁷ E.g. Fred W. Burnett, *The Testament of Jesus-Sophia: A Redaction-Critical Study of the Eschatological Discourse in Matthew* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), 183-93.

¹⁸ E.g. Wright, *Jesus*, 182-86, 339-68. Also see idem, *Matthew for Everyone*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 2:111-44. It appears that Wright is the only recent scholar (to my knowledge) to advocate this position regarding Matthew's entire discourse (including 24:36-25:46). It is common to include the following works within this general "preterist" position: France, *Matthew*, 885-967; Tasker, *Matthew*, 223-40; Kik, *Eschatology*, 67. However, this is a bit misleading. These scholars argue that 24:4-35 refers to the destruction of the temple, and 24:36-25:46 refers to the parousia.

Jesus.¹⁹ (3) The majority of interpreters think the discourse refers to both the destruction of the temple and the second coming of Jesus.²⁰ In anticipation of what I will argue below, I think Matthew's discourse refers to both the destruction of Jerusalem's temple and to the second coming of Jesus, and can be divided into four main sections: 24:1-3, 24:4-14, 24:15-31, and 24:32-25:46.

2.2.1 The Setting of the Discourse (Matt 24:1-3)

When Jesus' disciples point out the buildings of the temple, Jesus responds with a prophecy concerning its destruction. "All these things" (ταῦτα πάντα) will be completely dismantled (24:1-2).²¹ As a result, the disciples approach Jesus privately on the Mount of Olives for an explanation (24:3).²² They ask him two separate-but-related questions: (1) "When will these things be" (πότε ταῦτα ἔσται)? (2) "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age" (τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)?²³

¹⁹ E.g. Burnett, *Testament*, 183, 208; Agbanou, *Discours*, 39; Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:309-13; Harrington, *Matthew*, 331-60; Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 402-23. Sim argues that the entire discourse refers to the future, except for 24:6-7a, which refers to the temple's destruction (*Apocalyptic*, 159-60).

²⁰ E.g. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:326-31; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:683-85; Nolland, *Matthew*, 59-60; Turner, *Matthew*, 565-67; Carson, "Matthew," 8:491; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 351-52; Morris, *Matthew*, 593-94.

²¹ Matthew uses "all these things" in the rest of the discourse to refer to the temple's destruction (24:2, 8, 33, 34).

²² Burnett claims that the disciples' questions are not related to Jesus' prediction (*Testament*, 23, 163-65). Sim also leans in this direction (*Apocalyptic*, 158-59). But this position cannot stand. See Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 169-70.

²³ First, the two interrogatives indicate two questions, not one. Contra Burnett, who argues that the *καὶ* between two questions is exegetical to mean "that is" (*Testament*, 207-208). Second, in the second question the use of one article (τῆς) with two nouns in the same case joined by *καὶ* (*παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας*) indicates the presence of one question pertaining to two closely associated concepts, the "parousia" and the "end of the age." Thus, the disciples do not ask three questions, contra André Knockaert, "A Fresh Look at the Eschatological Discourse (Mt 24-25)," *LumVit* 40 (1985): 170-71. Third, I take the term "coming" (*παρουσίας*) to mean the second coming, especially since it is used in relation to the "end of the age" (cf. 13:39, 40, 49; 28:20). Contra Wright, who prefers the meaning "presence." He rejects that the word was used by the disciples (and Matthew) in any fixed sense for the second coming (*Jesus*, 341, 345-46).

Most scholars agree that the twofold question is significant for determining the overall structure of the discourse.²⁴ However, there is little agreement on how Jesus answers these questions, or to what extent he answers them, if at all. The main point of contention centers on which portions of the discourse refer to the temple's destruction and which refer to the parousia/end. For example, Craig Blomberg sees a change of subject at 24:21, with the preceding referring to the destruction of the temple and the following referring to the period after the destruction of the temple leading up to the parousia.²⁵ Schuyler Brown proposes a shift of subject at 24:32.²⁶ For R. T. France, the transition between subjects occurs at 24:36.²⁷ Others, while still dividing the discourse at 24:36, prefer to see an intermingling of subjects within 24:4-35 (some utilizing what is often called a "prophetic perspective").²⁸

The underlying problem with many of these proposals is that they divide the discourse according to the *subject matter* found in the questions and not according to the actual *form of the questions* themselves. For example, France argues for a bipartite structure based on the twofold question of the disciples.²⁹ He contends that the first question (When?) is answered in 24:4-35 because the question refers to the subject of the temple's destruction. The second question (What?), then, is answered in 24:36-25:46 because the question refers to the subject of the parousia and the end of the age. The problem, however, is the supposition that the first question

²⁴ It cannot be dismissed that Matthew frames the discourse as an answer to the questions posed by the disciples (24:4). And given that Matthew's Jesus regularly answers the questions posed by his disciples, and that his answers squarely fit with the initial questions, we can expect that Jesus' discourse will pertain to the questions (cf. 13:10-23; 15:32-34; 17:10-13, 19-21; 18:1-5; 19:23-26, 27-30; 20:20-28; 21:20-22; 26:8-13). As a result, it is unlikely that Jesus uses the questions as a "springboard" to talk about something else.

²⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 351, 359.

²⁶ Schuyler Brown, "The Matthean Apocalypse," *JSNT* 4 (1979): 2-27; so also Boring, "Matthew," 8:444.

²⁷ France, *Matthew*, 333-36. He is joined by Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 170-74; Kik, *Eschatology*, 67; Wilson, *When*, 133-35; Garland, *Matthew*, 234-36; Timothy J. Christian, "A Questionable Inversion: Jesus' Corrective Answer to the Disciples' Questions in Matthew 24:3-25:46," *JIBS* 3 (2016): 49-52.

²⁸ Carson, "Matthew," 8:495; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:330-31; Nolland, *Matthew*, 956; Turner, *Matthew*, 565; Jan Lambrecht, "The Line of Thought in Matthew 24,1-35: A Discussion of Vicky Balabanski's Reading," *ETL* 84 (2008): 519-28.

²⁹ France, *Matthew*, 893-94, 936.

is strictly about the subject of the temple, and the second question is strictly about the subject of the parousia/end. But a close reading of the questions suggests otherwise. For example, the subject of the second question is not the parousia/end, but *the sign* of the parousia and the end of the age. Thus, any proposal must go beyond dividing the discourse according to subject alone. One must be able to explain *how* Jesus' response answers the specific questions that have been asked.

Based on Jesus' clear prediction of the temple's demise, one would expect the disciples to inquire about "when" it would happen and what would be "the sign" of its nearness (as in Luke 21:7). But instead of asking for the sign of the temple's destruction, the disciples ask for "the sign of your parousia and of the end of the age."³⁰ The unexpected change in subject probably indicates that the disciples (as portrayed by Matthew) presumed a close connection between the destruction of the temple and the eschatological consummation. In other words, they were not asking Jesus about a single isolated event, but about a cluster of eschatological events which they believed were linked. Therefore, by juxtaposing multiple subjects (temple and parousia), *Matthew demonstrates that the disciples believed the destruction of the temple would accompany the parousia and the end of the age.*³¹ In this respect, the disciples were probably

³⁰ If we aim to let Matthew, Mark, and Luke speak on their own terms, it is crucial to not harmonize the opening questions. Matthew has introduced the parousia into his second question. Mark also seems to allude to the consummation (13:4). Luke, on the other hand, restricts his version of the questions to the temple's destruction (21:7). These differences highlight the difficulty of historical reconstruction. For example, in attempting to reconstruct the historical situation, Wright apparently considers Luke the most historically accurate, choosing to harmonize Matthew with Luke at this point (*Jesus*, 345-46). In addition, Wright cites Luke on several occasions as providing the clearest sense of a particular verse (e.g. *Jesus*, 345, 359, 364). But this flattens out clear differences between the writers that need to be examined. I happen to agree with Wright that Luke addresses (exclusively) the destruction of the temple in his version of the discourse. However, I disagree with Wright concerning Matthew and Mark because they frame the discourse with different opening questions.

³¹ Most interpreters accept this conclusion, e.g. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:337; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:688; Carson, "Matthew," 8:495; Nolland, *Matthew*, 960; Turner, *Matthew*, 569; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 353; France, *Matthew*, 895; Osborne, *Matthew*, 869. Contra Christian, who states that the disciples accurately distinguished between the temple's destruction and the eschatological consummation ("Questionable Inversion," 61-62).

thinking just like many other first-century Jews.³² Whether the disciples were correct in doing so has been debated, but it appears as though they were mistaken according to Matthew.³³ If this is the case, we should expect Jesus to correct their misunderstanding in his response by separating what they had mistakenly joined together.

In light of the considerations above, the first question cannot be restricted simply to “when” the temple will be destroyed. Even though “these things” (ταῦτα) most naturally refer to the events surrounding the temple’s destruction, the plural appears to carry the disciples’ misunderstanding which joined the temple’s demise with the eschatological consummation. Thus, in the first question the disciples probably were asking “when” the destruction of the temple would occur *and* “when” the parousia and the end of the age would occur. For the disciples to ask about one was also to ask about the other. In the same way, the second question cannot be restricted to “what will be the sign” of Jesus’ parousia and the end of the age. For the disciples to ask about the sign of the parousia/end was *also* to ask about the sign of the temple’s destruction. Therefore, those who divide the discourse according to subject matter alone do not take into consideration that the disciples merged the temple’s demise with the parousia in their thinking and their questions.

As I will contend below, in order to correct the disciples’ mistaken assumption, *Jesus chronologically separates the temple’s destruction from the parousia/end and then addresses both subjects individually while answering each question.* In other words, after making it clear

³² Wright stresses that the disciples were not asking about the “parousia” in a technical sense for the second coming. He says that they were “very interested in a story which ended with Jesus’ coming to Jerusalem to reign as king. They *were* looking for the fulfillment of Israel’s hopes, for the story told so often in Israel’s scriptures to reach its appointed climax. And the ‘close of the age’ for which they longed was not the end of the space-time order, but the end of the present evil age (*ha’olam hazeh*), and the introduction of the (still very much this-worldly) age to come (*ha’olam haba’*)” (*Jesus*, 345-46). I would agree. Wright is probably correct in his historical assessment of what the disciples were asking in 24:3, especially in light of how often the disciples seem to misunderstand Jesus (*Jesus*, 345-46). However, what Wright seems to overlook is that Matthew’s Jesus might not agree with the disciples’ assumption that the temple’s destruction and the consummation would occur together.

³³ See Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 178-81.

that these events will not happen concurrently, Jesus provides answers to “when” the temple’s destruction will occur *as well as* “when” the parousia and the end of the age will occur. He also articulates “the sign” of temple’s destruction *and* “the sign” of the parousia and the end of the age. Thus, in essence, Jesus answers four questions:³⁴

- (1) When will the destruction of the temple happen?
- (2) When will the parousia and the end of the age happen?
- (3) What will be the sign of the destruction of the temple?
- (4) What will be the sign of your parousia and the end of the age?

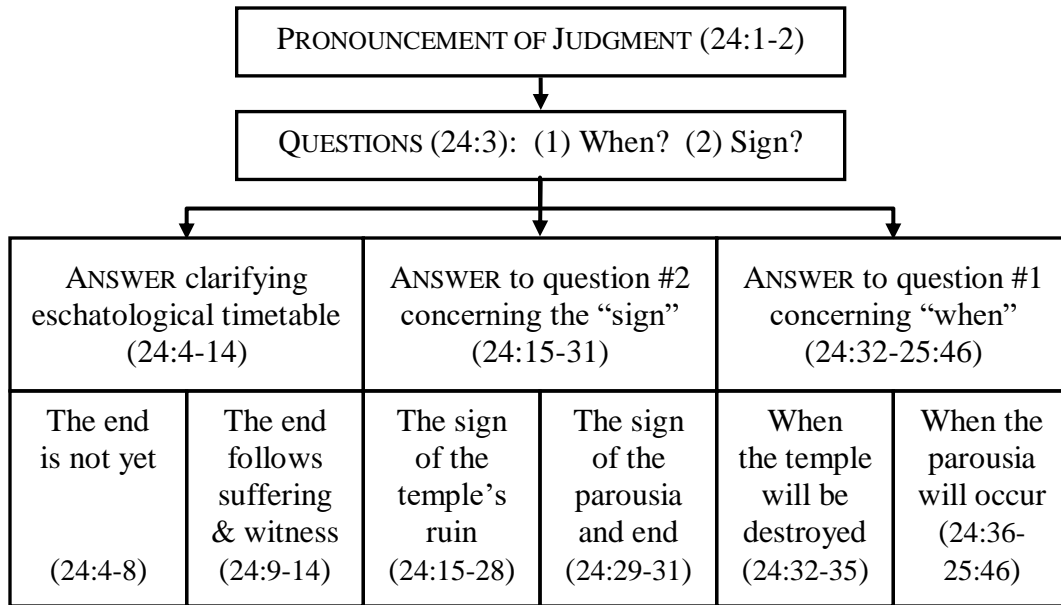
A final observation about the disciples’ questions is that they expect certain types of answers. The second question about “the sign” expects a response which addresses things that can be *seen*. It is most probable, then, that Jesus’ answer should refer to concrete “signaling” events like those found in 24:4-31 as opposed to the abstract stories and parables found in 24:32-25:46. The first question about “when” expects a response which makes specific reference to *time*. These chronological references are found most prominently in 24:32-25:46.³⁵

So how does Jesus answer the twofold (or better yet fourfold) question? My contention is that he corrects the misguided assumption of the disciples by chronologically separating the events surrounding the temple’s destruction from the eschatological consummation in 24:4-14. Following this clarification, he responds to the disciples’ specific questions. In 24:15-31, he answers “what will be the sign” by addressing both the temple’s destruction and the parousia. In 24:32-25:46, he answers “when these things will happen” by addressing both the temple’s demise and the parousia (see fig. 2.1).

³⁴ A four question approach is also suggested by A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament*, NovTSup 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 134. However, his four questions differ from mine: (1) What are the signs? (2) What is the end? (3) When are the signs? (4) When is the end?

³⁵ This is not to deny that the question about the “sign” involves time. A “sign” is an indicator or mark whereby something is known (cf. BDAG, 920-21). In Matthew, understanding the “sign” contributes to answering the “when” question.

FIGURE 2.1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE IN MATTHEW 24-25



According to this interpretation of the discourse, Matthew answers the questions in reverse order according to the natural progression of speaking first about a “signaling” event, which would then provide knowledge as to “when” the second (main) event would happen. This division of material also is supported by the shift in Jesus’ mode of speech at 24:32. In 24:4-31 Jesus speaks prophetically by predicting future events and warning the disciples to pay attention (clarifying the chronological order of events leading to the “end” in 24:4-14, and communicating the signs in 24:15-31). In 24:32-25:46, Jesus shifts to telling parables and stories with a focus on exhorting the disciples to be prepared.³⁶ Furthermore, this division of material is supported by paying attention to various recurring elements within the discourse.³⁷ Matthew 24:4-31 repeatedly makes reference to observable signs, sights, and sounds that are coupled with

³⁶ Also suggesting a major break at 24:32 based on the parenetic character of 24:32-25:30 is Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:309; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:207; Burnett, *Testament*, 184.

³⁷ Others who observe some of the same recurring elements below are Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 171-72; Brown, “Matthean,” 4; Kik, *Eschatology*, 162-65; Christian, “Questionable Inversion,” 55-56.

warnings to avoid deception. These recurring elements, along with a few others, can be pinpointed as follows:

- Language of signs, sights, and sounds (24:5, 6, 14, 15, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30)
- Warnings to remain alert in order to avoid deception (24:4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 23, 24)
- Language of turmoil and suffering (24:6, 7, 9, 10, 19, 21, 22, 28, 29, 30)
- End (24:4, 6, 14)
- Those days (24:19, 22 [2x], 29)³⁸
- Elect (24:22, 24, 31)

All of these themes and vocabulary help to unite 24:4-31 as Jesus' answer to a proper understanding of chronology (24:4-14) and the question concerning "the sign" (24:15-31).³⁹

Furthermore, these themes and vocabulary are not emphasized in 24:32-25:46.⁴⁰ In Matt 24:32-25:46, Jesus emphasizes "knowledge" of when an event is going to happen. In doing so, he increases his use of temporal language involving specific periods of time in this section. These recurring elements, along with a few others, can be pinpointed as follows:

- Knowledge (24:32, 33, 36, 39, 42, 43, 50; 25:12, 13, 24, 26)
- Periods of various time (24:32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 42, 44, 48, 50; 25:5, 13, 19)⁴¹
- Separation of people into two groups (24:37-25:46)
- Preparation for the return of Jesus (24:42, 43, 44; 46, 25:10, 13, 24-27)
- Lord/Master (24:42, 45, 46, 48, 50; 25:11 [2x], 18, 19, 20, 21 [2x], 22, 23 [2x], 24)
- Servant/Slave (24:45, 46, 48, 50; 25:14, 19, 21, 23, 26, 30)

All of these themes and vocabulary help to unite 24:31-25:46 as Jesus' answer to the question concerning "when." Furthermore, these themes and vocabulary are not emphasized in 24:4-31.

³⁸ "Those days" will be distinguished from "day," which is emphasized in 24:32-25:46.

³⁹ The final three recurrences in the list above help to distinguish Matt 24:4-14 from 24:15-31.

⁴⁰ While the parable of the fig tree (24:32-33) clearly involves a "sign," the parable addresses how to use the sign to determine "when" the main event will happen. Thus, the parable should be included as part of the answer to the "when" question.

⁴¹ The specific words involved in this theme are: near, generation, day, hour, delay, and after a long time. Again, a period of time marked by Matthew in 24:4-31 was "those days," which does not occur in 24:32-25:46. Also cf. the less precise temporal terms that occur throughout the entire discourse: when (πότε), whenever (ὅταν), and then/at that time (τότε).

2.2.2 Correcting a Misguided Eschatological Timetable (Matt 24:4-14)

As I move into a discussion of the discourse proper, the primary question before us will be: How does Jesus' response answer the specific questions posed by the disciples? The initial section addresses what Matthew's Jesus perceives to be a wrongheaded assumption (evident within the disciples' questions) about the chronological proximity of temple's destruction to the parousia/end. This critical issue of perspective must be addressed before any direct answer can be given to the questions. The key word in this section is the "end" (τέλος), which refers to the eschatological consummation (24:6, 13, 14).⁴² For discussion purposes, we can divide 24:4-14 into two sections:

- The end will not follow the events surrounding the temple's destruction (24:4-8)
- The end will follow a period of suffering and witness (24:9-14)

In 24:4-8, Matthew chronologically separates the events surrounding the temple's destruction from the end. In 24:4-5, Jesus warns the disciples to "beware" of false messiahs, who will come claiming the messianic role for themselves.⁴³ These messianic figures will rise up and contribute to the "wars and rumors of wars" which will ultimately lead to the temple's ruin (24:6). But the disciples are to remain calm since all these things must happen according to God's plan. However, "the end is not yet." So, even though events like military conflicts, famines, and earthquakes (stereotypical messianic woes) appear to herald an imminent end, Jesus indicates that they are only preliminary in nature (24:7-8).⁴⁴ In other words, "all these things"

⁴² I understand the "end" as roughly synonymous with the "end/completion of the age" in 24:3. The suggestion that the term refers to the "end" of the temple is improbable, contra France, *Matthew*, 903; Wright, *Jesus*, 346-48. Matthew has not framed the destruction of the temple as its "end," but as its dismantling (24:2).

⁴³ See Josephus, *J.W.* 2.258-76, 433-56; 4.503-510; 6.285-88; *Ant.* 17.271-85; 18.85-87; 20.97-99, 160-72, 188; Acts 5:36-37; 21:38; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:338-39; France, *Matthew*, 902-903; W. J. Heard and C. A. Evans, "Revolutionary Movements, Jewish," *DNTB* 936-47.

⁴⁴ On the messianic woes see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 277-78. There were reports of wars and civil wars (e.g. the Parthian war and the so-called "year of the four emperors"), famines (Acts 11:28; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.320; 14.471;

(i.e. the events surrounding the destruction of the temple) are only the “beginning,” not the end, “of birthpangs.” Thus, Matthew drives a temporal wedge between the temple’s destruction and the eschatological consummation.

In 24:9-14, Matthew address a period of suffering and witness among the nations that (in contrast to 24:4-8) will extend to the eschatological consummation.⁴⁵ Jesus’ disciples will suffer, be killed, and be hated by all nations on account of his name. Matthew’s emphasis on “suffering” appears to connect this period to “those days,” which also is defined by the suffering of believers (cf. 24:9, 21, 29). Such persecution will cause significant disruptions among the community of believers, as will false prophets and the “increase of lawlessness” (24:10-12). Given these threatening conditions, sustained endurance will be key all the way to the “end” (24:13; cf. 10:22). Ironically, believers must proclaim the gospel to the very ones who persecute them (24:14; cf. 28:18-20). In contrast to the events surrounding the destruction of the temple, the worldwide proclamation of the gospel is what will ultimately lead to the eschatological consummation; for once it is complete, “then the end will come.”⁴⁶

To sum up, Matt 24:4-14 corrects a confused chronology which equates the temple’s destruction with the onset of the eschatological consummation. These events must be considered separate. The temple’s destruction will not lead to the end. The end will only arrive after a period of suffering and witness.

15.7; 20.51-53, 101), and earthquakes (Acts 16:26; Josephus, *J.W.* 4.286-87; 1.370; Pliny, *Nat.* 2.84) in the period between Jesus’ prediction and the Jewish war which led to the temple’s destruction.

⁴⁵ This section of material is for the most part unique to Matthew and appears to be written as a complement to 10:16-23. In 10:16-23, Jesus addresses a period of suffering and witness among the “towns of Israel,” which will continue until the “Son of Man comes” (i.e. the temple is destroyed). In 24:9-14, Jesus appears to address a different period of suffering and witness among the “nations,” which will continue until the parousia.

⁴⁶ Some note that Paul could already speak of the gospel being taken to the “ends of the world” in Rom 10:18, e.g. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:696; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 356. However, given Matthew’s emphasis on the “great commission” (28:18-20), he evidently did not think this mission was complete.

2.2.3 Jesus' Answer to Question #2: What will be the sign? (Matt 24:15-31)

Having established a new chronological perspective, “therefore” (οὖν) Matthew’s Jesus turns to answer the second question of the disciples directly.⁴⁷ Jesus will speak of two signs in 24:15-31, both of which will be “seen” (ὁράω, 24:15, 30). For discussion purposes, we can divide Jesus’ answer into two sections:

- The sign of the temple’s destruction and the period of “those day” (24:15-28)
- The sign of Jesus’ parousia and the end of the age (24:29-31)

In Matt 24:15-28, Jesus addresses the sign that the temple will be destroyed and the period of “those days.” Before jumping into specifics, it is important to observe that while the circumstances surrounding the temple’s destruction form the general background at the beginning of this section, Matthew’s focus is on how these events impact the disciples. In other words, he does not address the plight of Jerusalem in these verses, but the dilemma of the disciples. Matthew begins by referring to an ominous event which the disciples will “see” (ἰδῆτε) in the temple, the “desolating sacrilege” (24:15). While it is difficult to identify this event, Matthew evidently understood it in relation to the words of the prophet Daniel (cf. Dan 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).⁴⁸ Furthermore, he considered it *the sign of the temple’s impending doom*, although he does not state this here (contrast Luke 21:20).⁴⁹ In what follows, Matthew focuses on how believers should respond. So, when they “see” the desolating sacrilege, they are

⁴⁷ Several interpreters struggle with identifying the movement signaled by “therefore.” See e.g. Nolland, *Matthew*, 968-69; Carson, “Matthew,” 8:500. France argues that Matthew transitions from things that do not signal the temple’s destruction (24:4-14) to things that do in 24:15 (*Matthew*, 910). But this does not fit with “therefore.”

⁴⁸ In Daniel the “desolating sacrilege” likely refers to the pagan altar and sacrifices established by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the Jerusalem temple, which contributed to the Maccabean revolt (cf. 1 Macc 1:54-59; 6:7; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.253, 320). For discussion see Nolland, *Matthew*, 696-72; France, *Matthew*, 911-13; Carson, “Matthew,” 8:500-501; Agbanou, *Discours*, 83.

⁴⁹ Matthew indicates that the “desolating sacrilege” is the sign of the temple’s demise when he repeats the phrase “when you see...” in the parable of the fig tree (see below on 24:32-35).

to “flee” from Jerusalem and Judea (24:16). They needed to be ready to leave at a moment’s notice, whether from home or the field (24:17-18).⁵⁰

In 24:19-22, Matthew discusses a period of suffering which he calls “those days” (24:19, 22, 29, 38). This is a crucial phrase for interpreting the discourse. Significantly, Matthew *does not* define this period by describing the suffering of Jews (or any remaining believers) in the midst of Jerusalem’s siege by the Romans (contrast Luke 21:22-24). Instead, he defines “those days” in reference to *the suffering of believers*, which includes their flight from Jerusalem (24:19) and extends to the eschatological consummation (24:22, 29, 38).⁵¹ Therefore, while “those days” certainly includes the events surrounding Jerusalem’s impending calamity, it cannot be limited in scope to these events. With this said, the period of “those days” appears to encompass all of the events described in 24:4-28. It is likely another way of referring to the entire period of “birthpangs” (i.e. the days of the messianic woes) which have *begun* in the events surrounding the temple’s ruin, but are not finished and must run their course until the end.⁵² “Those days” will continue until the arrival of “that day” (24:36-39).

In 24:19, Matthew underscores the dire circumstances of “those days” with a “woe” upon pregnant and nursing mothers trying to escape Jerusalem’s destruction (24:19). Such a hurried departure would be taxing upon these individuals and their infants. It is important to recognize

⁵⁰ Such a clear focus on Judea and the practical matters of escape would seem to disallow a “double reference” (or “prophetic perspective”) in 24:15-20 to the temple’s destruction and an eschatological tribulation which will precede the parousia. Most who argue for this see all of 24:15-28 this way, e.g. Turner, *Matthew*, 576-80; Gundry, *Matthew*, 474-75; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 846-47. However, as noted by Hagner, if we restrict ourselves to investigating Matthew’s intended meaning in 24:15-28, it is unlikely that he intends a double reference (*Matthew*, 2:699).

⁵¹ The suggestion by Carson that the “those days” of 24:15-21 (focusing on Jerusalem’s destruction) is only a part of the more comprehensive “those days” of 24:22 is unconvincing (“Matthew,” 8:502-503). I agree with him in principle, but not in the details of exegesis. There does not seem to be enough evidence to justify changing the referent of “those days” between 24:19 and 24:22. It is much simpler to take every instance of “those days” in reference to the same period of suffering which is not limited to the circumstances surrounding the temple’s destruction.

⁵² As a result, “those days” is also the proper setting for the stories and parables about the approach of the parousia in 24:36-25:46.

that, for Matthew and Mark, these women are *believers* participating in the flight from Judea, not Jewish women who are trapped in the siege of Jerusalem (as in Luke 21:23). One could only pray that their time to flee would not come during the winter or on a Sabbath (24:20). In 24:21, Matthew's "for" (γάρ) does not provide the reason for the "flight" of 24:19-20, but functions to explain the nature of "those days."⁵³ It will be a period of "great suffering" which can be characterized as the worst in all of history (24:21; cf. Dan 12:1).⁵⁴ On account of its severity, not a single living being would be saved if God had not already decided to intervene (24:22). But for the sake of believers (i.e. the elect), he will shorten the period.

It is also during those days that a second wave of deceptive figures will arise and lead people astray (24:23-28; cf. 24:11).⁵⁵ The disciples will hear reports that the Messiah is at this or that location, but they should not believe these reports or go out to see him (24:23, 26).⁵⁶ These deceivers will pose a threat to the disciples and will use "great signs and wonders" to lure people into following them (24:24). But the signs they produce are not signs of the parousia, because the actual parousia will be like "lightning" flashing across the sky; it will be universal and public for all to see (24:27). Jesus' prediction of these events "beforehand" should make it obvious to

⁵³ Contra most commentators, e.g. Carson, "Matthew," 8:501; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:702; Turner, *Matthew*, 578; Nolland, *Matthew*, 975; France, *Matthew*, 915. The reason for flight is already known, Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed. Furthermore, the reasons for the woe and prayer are implicit in 24:19-20. What needs further explanation is the nature of the ambiguous "those days" in 24:19. See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 359; Keener, *Matthew*, 577-78.

⁵⁴ Several argue that 24:21 refers to the suffering of Jerusalem in hyperbolic terms, e.g. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:702; Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 183-84. Others contend that the description is fitting of Jerusalem's demise, e.g. Carson, "Matthew," 8:501; Kik, *Eschatology*, 112-20. However, the phrase must be understood as designating a wider perspective of suffering consistent with the scope of "those days." Some argue that this period of "great suffering" must refer to Jerusalem's suffering because the phrase "and will certainly never happen [again]" indicates that other less severe periods of suffering must follow this period, e.g. Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 185; France, *Matthew*, 915; Carson, "Matthew," 8:501. However, the scope and severity of the suffering seems to suggest that nothing could follow it but the "end." Furthermore, Matthew's emphatic negation here may actually function like something of a promise that suffering will cease after this period. God's intervention will end it for good (cf. 24:30-31).

⁵⁵ Matthew appears to distinguish between two sets of deceivers, one prior to the destruction of the temple (24:4-5) and a second prior to the parousia (24:11, 23-26). Mark appears to make the same move, but Luke does not.

⁵⁶ Matthew appears to parallel 24:23-25 with 24:26-28. This material is mostly unique to Matthew, although Luke has parallels in 17:23-24, 37.

the disciples that the false messiahs and prophets are deceivers (24:25). The final proverbial statement appears to reinforce the idea that the Jesus' parousia will be an obvious event (24:28).⁵⁷

Here I will briefly summarize my interpretation of Matt 24:29-31. Jesus addresses "the sign" of his parousia and the end of the age in this section. Directly after "those days," there will be a glorious and sovereign coming of the Son of Man into the historical sphere for judgment and salvation. Matthew uses the language of cosmic catastrophe to depict a *theophany* which he applies to the *parousia*. With the darkening of the heavens, the Son of Man himself gloriously appears as the "sign" of the parousia/end (24:29-30a). As a result, four things will occur on earth. First, the tribes of the earth will mourn the sight of the Son of Man in heaven because it means their judgment is at hand (24:30b). Second, the tribes will "see" (ὄψονται) the Son of Man as he comes in power and great glory for judgment (24:30c). Third, the Son of Man will send out his angels for purposes of salvation (24:31a). And fourth, the Son of Man's angels will gather believers from the entire earth (24:31b).

In summary, Jesus provides a two part answer in 24:15-31 to the disciples' question about "what will be the sign." Matthew 24:15-28 names the "desolating sacrilege" as the sign of the temple's destruction, and addresses the period of "those days," which spans the time between the temple's demise and the parousia. In Matt 24:29-31, the Son of Man himself is "the sign" of the parousia and the end of the age. Having answered the disciples' request concerning "the sign" Jesus turns to address "when" these things will occur.

⁵⁷ See the multiple interpretive options in France, *Matthew*, 918-19; Carson, "Matthew," 8:503-504.

2.2.4 Jesus' Answer to Question #1: When will these things happen? (Matt 24:32-25:46)

As previously noted, we have a shift in the discourse at 24:32. Jesus ends his answer to the question about “the sign” in 24:31 and changes his mode of speech to begin his answer to the question about “when.” The key word in this section is “know” (γινώσκω and οἶδα). For discussion purposes, we can divide Jesus' answer into two main sections:

- What can be known: When the destruction of the temple will occur (24:32-35)
- What cannot be known: When the parousia and the end of the age will occur (24:36-25:46)

In Matt 24:32-35, Jesus addresses “when” the temple will be destroyed. Some interpreters choose to include this paragraph with 24:29-31 because 24:32-35 refers to something from the previous narrative.⁵⁸ But doing so overlooks a significant shift in focus at 24:32. While Jesus is still talking about a sign in the parable of the fig tree, the sign itself is not the main point of emphasis. In 24:32, Jesus turns to explain *how to interpret* a sign that he has already told the disciples about so that they can “know” (γινώσκετε) the answer to their primary question, “when these things will happen.”⁵⁹ In other words, just as the appearance of fig leaves provides knowledge to the observer that summer is near, the sign Jesus has given points beyond itself by providing *knowledge* as to “when” the main event is about to occur. Therefore, 24:32-35 does not provide an answer to the “sign” question, but an answer to the “when” question.

The key is to decipher how Matthew has applied the parable by determining the referent of “all these things” (πάντα ταῦτα) in 24:33. Most scholars identify “all these things” with 24:4-28, which then heralds the parousia in 24:29-31.⁶⁰ But this cannot be correct because Matthew

⁵⁸ E.g. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:708; Morris, *Matthew*, 608; Evans, *Matthew*, 409; Wright, *Jesus*, 360-61.

⁵⁹ Matthew and Mark do not interpret the meaning of the “desolating sacrilege” until the parable of the fig tree. Luke interprets his sign of the temple’s destruction immediately in the same verse (cf. Luke 21:20). This should caution us against using Luke’s version of the parable to interpret Matthew and Mark (contra Wright, *Jesus*, 364). Luke uses the parable for a different purpose.

⁶⁰ E.g. Turner, *Matthew*, 585-86; Carson, “Matthew,” 8:506-507; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:366.

does not offer a “sign” of the parousia in 24:4-28, nor does the sum of 24:4-28 constitute a sign. For Matthew, the sign of the parousia is certainly “the *sign* of the Son of Man” (24:30). But identifying “the sign of the Son of Man” as the referent of “all these things” is also unacceptable because it creates a tautology according to the logic of the parable. In other words, the “sign of the Son of Man” is part of the parousia event itself and so cannot be considered the kind of sign required by the parable to foretell its approach. What we find upon closer inspection is that Matthew is not talking about the parousia at all in 24:32-35. Instead, the parable of the fig tree addresses “*when the temple will be destroyed*.” First, when Matthew writes “all these things” in the rest of the discourse, he always refers to the temple and the events surrounding its destruction (24:2, 8).⁶¹ Thus, “all these things” likely refer to the same thing in 24:33. More decisively, when Matthew writes “when you see” (ὅταν ἴδητε) in 24:33, he deliberately looks back to “therefore when you see” (ὅταν οὖν ἴδητε) the “desolating sacrilege” (24:15).⁶² Matthew 24:15 is the only other place in the discourse where the disciples are specifically said to “see” something. Therefore, when they “see” the desolating sacrilege (24:15), they will know that “it” (i.e. the temple’s destruction) is near, at (metaphorically speaking) the temple’s very gates.

In Matt 24:34, Jesus indicates through the use of a solemn declaration, that “all these things” will happen within a “generation.” Again, “all these things” refer to the events preceding the temple’s destruction (24:4-8, 15), but here it also probably includes the temple’s destruction itself.⁶³ Matthew normally uses “this generation” temporally and qualitatively to designate Jesus’ wicked and unperceptive Jewish contemporaries.⁶⁴ Some interpreters try to avoid the temporal sense of the word by assigning “generation” a highly improbable meaning like the

⁶¹ So Keener, *Matthew*, 589.

⁶² So France, *Matthew*, 929.

⁶³ “All” in 24:34 most likely includes the event to which the sign pointed in 24:33. See Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 204-207; Agbanou, *Discours*, 107.

⁶⁴ Cf. Matt 1:17; 11:16; 12:39, 41, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; Friedrich Büchsel, “γενεά,” *TDNT* 1:662-63.

“human race,” the “Jewish race,” or “wicked people in general.”⁶⁵ But the temporal aspect of the word cannot be avoided, especially when it is used to answer a *temporal* question about “when” the temple will be destroyed.⁶⁶ “This generation” specifies the time frame within which the disciples will “see” the desolating sacrilege and what it heralds, the destruction of the temple. Therefore, Jesus answers the first half of the “when” question by saying that *the temple will be destroyed within roughly 30-40 years*. It will be a judgment against Jesus’ wicked and unperceptive Jewish contemporaries who continually reject him and his kingdom message. As a way of conveying the certainty of his prediction, Jesus guarantees the validity of his words (24:35).

In summary of Matt 24:32-35, Jesus speaks about what the disciples can “know,” which is “when” the temple’s destruction will occur by paying attention to the sign. And they can count on it happening within a generation.

In Matt 24:36-25:46, Jesus addresses “when” the parousia and the end of the age will occur. Most commentators are correct to see some kind of transition in the discourse at 24:36. Matthew’s use of “but concerning” indicates both a switch in subject (from temple to parousia) and a contrast with the preceding material in terms of *knowledge*. In 24:32-35, the disciples could “know” when the temple was about to be destroyed by looking for the sign. However, in 24:36-25:46 the disciples *cannot* “know” when the parousia and end of the age will occur.⁶⁷ As a result the disciples must remain vigilant and prepared. Matthew 24:36-25:46 can be divided into five smaller sections: 24:36-44, 24:45-51, 25:1-13, 25:14-30, and 25:31-46.

⁶⁵ E.g. Neil D. Nelson, Jr., “‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective,” *JETS* 38 (1996): 369-85.

⁶⁶ See Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 205; France, *Matthew*, 930; Nolland, *Matthew*, 988-89; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:367-68.

⁶⁷ See Matt 24:36, 39, 42, 43, 50; 25:13. This same contrast concerning knowledge is in Mark 13:28-37, but not in Luke.

In 24:36-44, Jesus offers his most explicit answer to the question of “when” the parousia will occur: “But about that day and hour no one knows [οἶδεν].”⁶⁸ No one has this knowledge except for the Father himself. The day upon which the Son of Man comes will be like the days of Noah. The people “knew nothing” until it was too late (24:37-39). The main point of this section can be summed up with the following exhortation: Because you do not know when the Son of Man is coming, therefore you must be ready at all times (cf. 24:42, 44).⁶⁹ In other words, knowledge of when the parousia will occur is not of primary importance. What is more important is being prepared.

The next three sections (24:45-51, 25:1-13, and 25:14-30) expand upon the significance of being prepared for the parousia.⁷⁰ In each section, Jesus contrasts those who are prepared for his return (which may even be delayed) with those who are not. The consistent answer to the disciples’ question about “when” the parousia will occur remains the same. No one knows when it will happen, so the disciples must remain ready. The parables describe what faithful endurance looks like to the “end” (cf. 24:13).

The final section of the Olivet discourse (25:31-46) functions as the climactic *realization* of what will happen *when* the parousia of the Son of Man does occur (cf. 24:30-31).⁷¹ The unknown nature of the parousia is marked by Matthew’s use of the indefinite “whenever” in 25:31, and is further highlighted as people fail to grasp “when” they served, or did not serve, the king (25:37-39, 44). However, it must be acknowledged that 25:31-46 is different in nature from the preceding material because it focuses on the judgment surrounding the parousia itself. When the Son of Man comes and sits on his throne, he will separate from among all the nations the

⁶⁸ Several others note that 24:36 provides the primary theme of 24:36-25:46. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:374; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 364; Turner, *Matthew*, 587; Wilson, *When*, 224; Osborne, *Matthew*, 902.

⁶⁹ Wilson, *When*, 229; Kik, *Eschatology*, 163.

⁷⁰ Nolland, *Matthew*, 996-97.

⁷¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:416; France, *Matthew*, 957; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1023.

sheep and the goats (25:31-33). Both the sheep (25:34-40) and the goats (25:41-45) will be judged according to their conduct and rewarded accordingly (25:46).

To sum up, Jesus provides a two part answer in Matt 24:32-25:46 to the disciples' question about "when these things will happen." In 24:32-35, the disciples can know "when" the destruction of the temple will occur by remaining alert for the desolating sacrilege. In 24:36-25:46, the disciples will not be able to know "when" the parousia and the end of the age will occur. As a result, they must remain ready.

2.3 Matthew 24:29-31

Matthew 24:29-31 depicts a sequence of events that begin in the heavens (24:29-30a) and then transitions to earth (24:30b-31). Matthew divides the sequence into three sections with "and then" (*καὶ τότε*). First we have the language of cosmic catastrophe in the heavens (24:29). Second, comes the sign of the Son of Man (24:30a). Finally, there are the earthly events involving the judgment of the tribes of the earth and the sending of the angels for the elect (24:30b-31).

2.3.1 But Immediately After the Suffering of Those Days (Matt 24:29a)

Matthew writes that the events of 24:29-31 will follow "immediately after the suffering of those days" (*εὐθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων*).⁷² Attempts to suggest that "immediately"

⁷² Matthew's use of "but" (*δέ*), if it should be translated at all, seems to indicate a temporal contrast which sets apart the period of "those days" (24:21-28) from the period "immediately after those days" (24:29-31).

means something other than its normal lexical sense are unconvincing.⁷³ Matthew regularly uses the term temporally to denote one thing following another without interval or delay.⁷⁴

The more difficult issue is identifying the period referred to by “those days” (cf. 24:9, 19, 21, 22, 29). The main problem is that most interpreters limit the phrase to the suffering associated with the siege of Jerusalem.⁷⁵ If this is accepted, then the clear implication for 24:29-31 is: (1) Jesus and/or Matthew believed the parousia would immediately follow the temple’s demise and thus were utterly wrong, or (2) Matt 24:29-31 is actually a metaphorical description of Jerusalem’s destruction. In order to avoid one of these conclusions, some argue that Matthew employs a “prophetic perspective” which sees a double referent to the words of 24:15-28, thus allowing for a reference to the parousia following it.⁷⁶ But this raises other problems. How does one know for sure that Matthew is addressing the parousia in 24:29-31 and not the destruction of the temple? Why is the double reference only applied to 24:15-28 and not 24:29-31? Others solve the problem by arguing that Matthew changes the referent of “those days” somewhere between 24:19 and 24:29 from Jerusalem’s suffering to the so-called “great tribulation” (the entire interadvent period) or the “final tribulation” (still to come).⁷⁷ But I see little justification

⁷³ See BDAG, 405.

⁷⁴ Cf. Matt 4:20, 22; 8:3; 13:5; 14:22, 31; 20:34; 21:2; 24:29; 25:15; 26:49, 74; 27:48.

⁷⁵ E.g. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:710-13; Tasker, *Matthew*, 225; France, *Matthew*, 919-21; Kik, *Eschatology*, 128. Some avoid the issue of “those days” all together by arguing that all of 24:15-28 refers to a future tribulation. As a result, there is no conflict for the parousia to follow it, e.g. Boring, “Matthew,” 8:442-43; Schnackenburg, *Matthew*, 239-42. But the specific historical language which refers to Jesus’ disciples (not future believers) seeing the “desolating sacrilege” set up in the temple, which is a sign for them to run from Judea, cannot easily be made to refer to a distant future crisis.

⁷⁶ E.g. Turner, *Matthew*, 576-80.

⁷⁷ E.g. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 359; Nolland, *Matthew*, 975-76; Osborne, *Matthew*, 892-93; Morris, *Matthew*, 605; Adams, *Stars*, 168. Carson’s argument that “those days” refers to “the entire interadvent period” of suffering (described in 24:4-14 and 22-28, but not 24:15-21, which has in view “great suffering”) forces him to change the subject of “those days” between 24:19 and 24:22, 29 (“Matthew,” 8:502-503, 504-505). Matthew calling the suffering of 24:21 “great” does not warrant such a change. Going against Carson’s theory is that Matthew also adds “great” to the signs produced by false messiahs and prophets in 24:24. The use of “great” appears to be a unifying feature of 24:21-28. Also unconvinced by Carson is Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:357.

for changing the referent of “those days” between 24:19 and 24:29. In my opinion, all of the above options are improbable.

The best solution, as I argued earlier, is that “those days” do not refer to the plight of unbelieving Jews suffering in the midst of Jerusalem’s siege.⁷⁸ Instead, it refers to a period of undetermined length characterized by the suffering and witness of believers, which (at the very least) began with the flight from Jerusalem and extends all the way to the eschatological consummation. Therefore, it is consistent for Matthew to say that the parousia follows *directly after* the “suffering of those days.”

2.3.2 The Day of the Son of Man (Matt 24:29b-e)

We now arrive at the central text under consideration in Matthew. Matthew appears to have structured the verse poetically using parallelism between the first two clauses and the final two clauses. The first two clauses, which allude primarily to Isa 13:10, have singular subjects (sun and moon) and both refer to darkening. The final two clauses, which allude primarily to Isa 34:4, have plural subjects (stars and powers) which are located in the “heaven(s).” Matthew 24:29b-e reads as follows:

²⁹ ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται,
καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς,
καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες πεσοῦνται ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ,
καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν σαλευθήσονται.

²⁹ the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will fall from heaven,
and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

⁷⁸ Contra France, *Matthew*, 919-21; Tasker, *Matthew*, 225; Kik, *Eschatology*, 128.

2.3.2.1 Allusions to the Old Testament in Matthew 24:29b-e

Matthew 24:29 is primarily an allusion to two prophetic texts from the OT: Isa 13:10 and 34:4.

In addition, Joel 2:10 and 3:15 [4:15 LXX] appear to have influenced Matthew's formulation of the verse.⁷⁹ It is difficult at times to determine whether Matthew is drawing his language from the LXX or the MT of Isaiah, although the LXX is probably to be preferred.⁸⁰

Matthew 24:29b, “the sun will be darkened,” seems to be a rendering of Isa 13:10c from the MT, “the sun will be dark in its coming forth” (יָהָאֲרָבָהּ וְהָיָה טָשֶׁת), but there are also similarities with the LXX, “and it will be dark when the sun rises” (καὶ σκοτισθήσεται τοῦ ἡλίου ἀνατέλλοντος).⁸¹

Matthew 24:29c, “and the moon will not give its light,” is nearly a replica of the LXX of Isa 13:10d, “and the moon will not give its light” (καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φῶς αὐτῆς). The only difference is the word used for “light.” Whereas Isaiah used φῶς, Matthew uses the synonym φέγγος.⁸²

Matthew 24:29d, “and the stars will fall from heaven,” is closest in language to the LXX of Isa 34:4c, “and all the stars will fall as leaves from a vine and as leaves fall from a fig tree” (καὶ πάντα τὰ ἄστρα πεσεῖται ὡς φύλλα ἐξ ἀμπέλου καὶ ὡς πίπτει φύλλα ἀπὸ συκῆς). Matthew drops the analogy to the vine and fig tree, but appears to retain the idea that the leaves fall

⁷⁹ So Adams, *Stars*, 154-55. Also cf. Joel 2:31 [3:4 LXX]; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Hag 2:6; Ezek 32:7; G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 86-87.

⁸⁰ Matthew seems to maintain the ability to render his own translation. See Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel: With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 51-52. While Matthew may have used Mark, I make no assumptions concerning Markan priority.

⁸¹ Matthew's choice to begin with the “sun” as opposed to the “stars” (which begins Isa 13:10) may reflect Joel 2:10, as suggested by Adams, *Stars*, 154. However, the order of the sun, moon, and stars is the common way of referring to these three entities in the rest of the OT. See Nolland, *Matthew*, 982.

⁸² Matthew may derive φέγγος from Joel 2:10; 3:15 [4:15 LXX]; Amos 5:20.

“from” (ἀπὸ) somewhere. Thus, Matthew supplies what is assumed in Isaiah, that the stars fall “from heaven.”

Finally, Matt 24:29e, “and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,” most closely resembles an LXX variant reading of Isa 34:4a, “and all the powers of the heavens will melt” (καὶ τακήσονται πᾶσαι αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν).⁸³ The variant renders the first clause of Isa 34:4 in the MT, “and all the host of heaven will rot away” (וְהַיְהוֹדוּתֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם יִרְבְּזוּ). Matthew’s use of “will be shaken” (σαλευθήσονται) may allude to Joel 2:10, “and heaven will be shaken [σεισθήσεται],” or to Hag 2:6-7, “I will shake [σείσω] the heaven and the earth and the sea and the dry land, and I will shake [συσσεισω] all the nations and the elect of all the nations will come.” However, each of these texts use σείω as opposed to σαλεύω.⁸⁴

What is the significance of Matthew’s OT allusions? Based on his choice of Isa 13:10 and 34:4 in comparison with what he writes in Matt 24:29, we can draw three inferences.

(1) The common denominator among Matthew’s allusions is their relation to the Day of Yahweh. Isaiah 13:1-14:32 is an oracle of judgment against Babylon, Isa 34:1-17 targets Edom, and Joel 2:1-17 focuses judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. While the origins of the Day of Yahweh are difficult to trace, it is generally agreed that it arose in the context of Israel’s holy wars.⁸⁵ George Beasley-Murray defines the concept in the OT:

It denotes a day on which the Lord *acts*, bringing disaster on the subjects of his wrath. This is an important datum, for it indicates that the Day of the Lord is an occasion (1) that involves God acting in the historical sphere, (2) that entails

⁸³ See Vaticanus (B) and Lucian (L).

⁸⁴ Also cf. Isa 13:13.

⁸⁵ See Gerhard von Rad, “The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh,” *JSS* 4 [1959]: 97-108; J. D. Barker, “Day of the Lord,” *DOTP* 133-36; K. J. Cathcart, “Day of Yahweh,” *ABD* 2:84-85; Richard H. Hiers, “The Day of the Lord,” *ABD* 2:82-83.

judgment for those for whom the day comes, and (3) that occurs at such time as is determined by the Lord (not necessarily at the end of history).⁸⁶

Thus, by alluding to these particular texts, Matthew likely intends an association with the *Day of Yahweh*.

(2) While the minor variations of word order and terminology suggest the influence of Joel 2:10 (or other texts) on Matthew's rendering of Isa 13:10 and 34:4, the verb "will be shaken" (*σαλευθήσονται*) appears unaccounted for. Matthew's insertion of *σαλεύω* was probably intended to enhance the idea of a "coming" of the Lord in connection with the Day of Yahweh. Not only was the word a "standard term in OT descriptions of theophany" (cf. Judg 5:5; Pss 18:7 [17:8 LXX]; 97:4 [96:4 LXX]; Amos 9:5; Mic 1:4; Nah 1:5; Hab 3:6), we have a "coming" that is "seen" in the immediate context (Matt 24:30c).⁸⁷ A theophany reference would fit well in conjunction with a reference to the Day of Yahweh because the concepts were frequently joined together by the OT prophets.⁸⁸ Both concepts influenced one another's development, and shared common language depicting the coming forth of the Lord and the subsequent reactions of nature.⁸⁹ Both concepts also are grounded in historical events. Theophany accounts tend to reflect upon past events when God acted for salvation, such as in the Exodus, or at Mt. Sinai (e.g. Judg 5:4-5; Ps 68:7-8; Hab 3:3-15), while references to the Day of Yahweh normally see a present, imminent, or future event when God will act, often in judgment (e.g. Isa 13:6; Joel 2:1; Amos 5:18-20). Beasley-Murray is probably correct to suggest that the concept of the Day of

⁸⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 11 (italics original). Also see Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 2:119-25.

⁸⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*, 424. Also see G. Bertram, "σαλεύω," *TDNT* 7:65-67. For a detailed account of the concept of theophany see Jörg Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer Alttestamentlichen Gattung*, WMANT 10 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1965).

⁸⁸ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:119, 124. Beasley-Murray, *Kingdom*, 15.

⁸⁹ See Jeremias, *Theophanie*, 97-100; Beasley-Murray, *Kingdom*, 15-16.

Yahweh is a subset, or “specialized application” of theophany language.⁹⁰ Thus, by inserting the word *σαλεύω*, Matthew likely intends to draw attention to a *theophany*.

(3) In their OT context, Isa 13:10 and 34:4 are associated with God coming to act.

However, Matthew has made a christological alteration by placing his allusions in the context of the Son of Man coming to act. Thus, Matthew likely intends to the language of 24:29 to emphasize *Jesus*’ coming to act in the place of Yahweh himself.⁹¹

2.3.2.2 Interpreting the Language of Cosmic Catastrophe in the Old Testament

Since Matthew appears to highlight the language of theophany and the Day of Yahweh, what is the best way to interpret this sort of language? We can begin by looking at Isa 13 and 34. In each of these Day of Yahweh accounts, particular language of local judgment (i.e. against a specific nation) is set alongside generalized language of universal judgment (i.e. against all nations).⁹² At first glance it would appear as though Isaiah were speaking about two different subjects side-by-side. However, G. B. Caird has suggested that the prophets looked into the future with “bifocal vision.”⁹³ He writes,

With their near sight they foresaw imminent historical events which would be brought about by familiar human causes; for example, disaster was near for Babylon because Yahweh was stirring up the Medes against them (Isa. 13:17). With their long sight they saw the day of the Lord; and it was in the nature of the prophetic experience that they were able to adjust their focus so as to impose the one image on the other and produce a synthetic picture.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Kingdom*, 16.

⁹¹ On the NT’s use and alteration of the Day of Yahweh into the Day of the Son of Man see T. F. Glasson, “Theophany and Parousia,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 259-70; Mark D. Vander Hart, “The Transition of the Old Testament Day of the LORD into the New Testament Day of the Lord Jesus Christ,” *MidJT* 9 (1993): 3-25; Bernard De Souza, “The Coming of the Lord,” *LASBF* 20 (1970): 166-208.

⁹² Cf. Paul R. Raabe, “The Particularizing of Universal Judgment in Prophetic Discourse,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 652-74.

⁹³ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 258 (see 199-271). He is followed by Wright, *New Testament*, 280-99.

⁹⁴ Caird, *Language*, 258. It is important to note that Caird is not arguing for a “prophetic perspective” which sees a double reference in the words. For a description of the “prophetic perspective” view see George E.

As a result, texts such as Isa 13 and 34 do not speak about two separate subjects/events. Instead, Isaiah speaks about one event in the near historical future, and describes it in part with metaphorical language derived from his conception of the eschatological consummation.⁹⁵ John Collins agrees, commenting on Isa 13:10-13, “Despite the cosmic imagery, it is clear that the prophet is speaking about the destruction of Babylon, not of the whole world. The cosmic imagery provides hyperbolic language to underline the significance of a specific historical and geographical situation.”⁹⁶

The prophets were able to take this “bifocal” view because of their commitment to God’s sovereignty over all of history. Beasley-Murray writes:

If it is the case, as is increasingly recognized, that the unique element in Israel’s eschatology is its relation to history—the history that is under the sovereignty of God at all times and that is heading for a goal of his determination—then one can understand that the prophets saw *all* the future as subject to the Lord, and so could speak of impending judgments on contemporary nations in terms of the Day of the Lord in the same way they would speak of the event that will bring history to its climax. This is particularly applicable to Isaiah and Jeremiah in their prophecies, but not alone to them.... Accordingly, Von Rad laid down the following principle: *whenever and wherever great political complications were to be seen on the horizon, especially when hostile armies approached, a prophet could speak of the coming Day of Yahweh.*⁹⁷

Consequently, while the language was applied to particular instances of Yahweh’s judgment (e.g. against Babylon and Edom), there remained an intrinsic eschatological component to the language. Local manifestations of Yahweh’s judgment *embody and anticipate* the universal judgment of the future through the comparative aspects of the metaphorical language being

Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 64-70.

⁹⁵ To quote Caird, the prophets used “end-of-the-world language metaphorically to refer to that which they well knew was not the end of the world” (*Language*, 256).

⁹⁶ John J. Collins, “The Beginning of the End of the World in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*, ed. John J. Ahn and Stephen L. Cook, LHBOTS 502 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 140.

⁹⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Kingdom*, 13 (italics original).

employed.⁹⁸ In other words, the local historical manifestations of the “day” of Yahweh prefigure the great “Day.”⁹⁹

In light of the above discussion, the language of cosmic catastrophe in texts like Isa 13 and 34 is primarily *theological* in orientation, yet retains a *historical application*. Therefore, it refers to the glorious and powerful coming of God into the historical sphere for purposes of judgment and salvation. While the historical instances of judgment and salvation vary depending on the context of the language (e.g. Babylon, Edom, etc.), the basic point of the language remains the same: God comes forth to act.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the OT language of cosmic catastrophe denotes a *theophany*. The historical situation into which God intervenes is determined by examining the broader context within which the language appears. Understood in this manner, the language of cosmic catastrophe in the OT prophets should not be pressed too hard for cosmological information. Its goal is not to indicate the dissolution of the cosmos, but the coming of God and the end of the object of his judgment.¹⁰¹

This, of course, does not mean that Matthew necessarily followed Isaiah’s use of the language. If we look at the comparative Jewish literature of Matthew’s era, while some

⁹⁸ Caird, *Language*, 260.

⁹⁹ Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*, 248.

¹⁰⁰ This position is more-or-less in agreement with Caird and Wright (if I have understood their positions correctly), who take the language to refer to socio-political events, which are invested with their full theological significance. However, I would prefer to reverse the emphases so that the language refers to Yahweh’s coming forth to act, which is then manifested in socio-political events. In this way the language of cosmic catastrophe says more about Yahweh as the Creator of the universe and Lord of history than it does about the specific historical events. He comes to judge and to save. This slight distinction may be splitting hairs. What I find essential about Caird and Wright’s handling of the language is that it refers to *both* historical events and God’s activity within them. The shift in emphasis which I am proposing attempts to focus more clearly on the theophanic aspects of the language without rejecting its historical application. Also see Middleton, *New Heaven*, 109-28; Beasley-Murray, *Kingdom*, 11-16; idem, *Last Days*, 424-26; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 70-71.

¹⁰¹ As Collins contends, “When we find speculation about the end of the world in the biblical tradition, it is seldom a matter of cosmological necessity, or of the world growing old, although that motif does occur. Rather, it is a matter of divine judgment, and the idiom is mythological” (“Beginning,” 137). Some of the OT texts that I think may be interpreted similarly are: Judg 5:4-5; Job 9:5-11; Pss 18:6-19; 68:7-10; 77:16-20; 96:10-13; 97:1-5; 98:7-9; 99:1; 104:31-35; 114:1-8; Isa 13:6-13; 34:1-5; Jer 4:23-28; 51:24-26; Ezek 32:7-8; 34:12; Joel 2:1-10; 3:14-16 [4:14-16 LXX]; Amos 1:2; 5:18-20; 8:9; Mic 1:1-5; Nah 1:1-6; Hab 3:1-19; Zeph 1:1-18; Hag 2:6-7, 21-23. A notable exception appears to be Isa 24:1-23, which shows no sign of a historical situation, although Collins has suggested that it was originally written with the downfall of Babylon in mind (“Beginning,” 142-55).

apocalyptic texts seem to maintain a prophetic use of the language, others show more interest in depicting a concrete cosmic catastrophe by using the language literally.¹⁰² The point is: there does not appear to have been a “standardized” use of cosmic catastrophe language in Matthew’s day.¹⁰³ It could be employed in a variety of different ways depending on the worldview and purposes of the author. Therefore, we must attempt to discern how Matthew has employed the language.¹⁰⁴

2.3.2.3 Matthew’s Application of the Language

So, how does Matthew use the language of cosmic catastrophe within the context of 24:29? In anticipation of what follows, I think Matthew uses the language of 24:29 similar to an OT prophet in order to communicate theological content concerning a historical event.¹⁰⁵ However, instead of describing a “day” which embodies and anticipates the Day of Yahweh, Matthew has

¹⁰² Texts that appear to follow Isaiah’s use of the language include: Sir 16:18-19; 4 Ezra 3.18; 2 Bar. 59:3; 1 En. 1:3-9; 102:1-3; T. Mos. 10:3-7; T. Levi 3:9-10; Sib. Or. 3.675-681. Some of these texts lack an obvious local historical referent, but the language still seems to focus on emphasizing the sovereign and powerful coming of God. Creation reacts to the presence of its mighty Creator. Texts that appear to envision a “real” cosmic catastrophe include: 4 Ezra 7:30; 2 Bar. 31:5-32:1; 1 En. 83:2-6; Ps.-Soph. fr. 2; Apoc. Zeph. 12:5-8; 1 QH 11.19-36 (formerly 1QH 3.19-36); Sib. Or. 3:80-92; 4:175-192; 5:155-161; 5:211-213; 5:477-478; 5:512-531.

¹⁰³ See the surveys of comparable Jewish literature in Adams, *Stars*, 52-100; David M. Russell, *The “New Heavens and New Earth”: Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, SBAL 1 (Philadelphia: Visionary, 1996), 80-133; Mark B. Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal? The Meaning and Function of New Creation in the Book of Revelation*, WUNT 2/307 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 46-116; Harry A. Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8.19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, LNTS 336 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 35-168. On the difficulty of gauging the significance of Jewish apocalyptic literature for NT study, see Richard Bauckham, “The Relevance of Extracanonical Jewish Texts to New Testament Study,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 90-108.

¹⁰⁴ See Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 51-55; Daniel M. Gurtner, “Interpreting Apocalyptic Symbolism in the Gospel of Matthew,” *BBR* 22 (2012): 525-45; Richard Beaton, “Isaiah in Matthew’s Gospel,” in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J.J. Menken (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 63-78.

¹⁰⁵ This is not to deny that Matthew is uninfluenced by apocalyptic thought. Matthew’s prophetic-like usage of the language is based on the following observations. First, Matthew has Jesus speaking and acting like a prophet of judgment in Matt 21-25 (esp. 24:2). Second, when Matthew has Jesus either quoting or clearly alluding to the OT, he uses scripture like a prophet to deliver an authoritative word of the Lord rather than, for example, an apocalypticist to disclose heavenly secrets (cf. Matt 4:4, 7, 10; 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43; 10:35-36; 11:10; 13:13-15; 15:8-9; 21:13, 16, 42; 22:44; 26:31; 26:64). Finally, the language of Matthew’s allusion is much closer to Isaiah than one would expect if he was borrowing the imagery in order to depict a concrete destruction of the cosmos. Also see Beaton, who argues that Matthew does not simply proof-text, but shows a sophisticated use of Isaiah that supplements his depiction of Jesus (“Isaiah,” 63-78).

shifted the historical application of the language to the great “Day” itself, the parousia. In other words, Matthew employs the language to depict a theophany of the Son of Man at the end of the age for purposes of judgment and salvation.

As suggested in the previous section, the historical situation to which Matthew applies the language can only be determined by examining the broader context of the discourse.¹⁰⁶ A growing number of interpreters, following scholars such as R. T. France and N. T. Wright, argue that Matt 24:29-31 should be applied to the destruction of the temple.¹⁰⁷ And for what it’s worth, I think Luke’s version of the discourse favors this conclusion (see chap. 4). However, I think Matthew’s context favors the parousia for the following reasons.

- (1) When observing the differences between the synoptic versions of the discourse, Matthew stands out as stressing the parousia in comparison to Mark, and even more so in comparison to Luke. Not only does he explicitly use the word *παρουσία* (24:3, 27, 37, 39), he adds unique sections that highlight the coming of the Son of Man and the need to be prepared (24:26-28; 24:37-25:46).
- (2) I have argued that the structure of the discourse contains four main units (24:1-3, 4-14, 15-31, and 24:32-25:46). If this is accurate, every unit ends with a reference to the parousia and/or the end of the age (24:3, 13-14, 29-31; 25:31-46).
- (3) The questions posed by the disciples suggest that both the destruction of Jerusalem and the parousia should be addressed (24:3). If “the sign of the Son of Man” (24:30a) is a part of Matthew’s explicit answer to the question about “the sign” of Jesus’ parousia and the end of the age, then it makes sense that 24:29-31 refers to the

¹⁰⁶ In other words, the language of cosmic catastrophe alone cannot be considered determinative for interpretation since it can be rendered in different ways.

¹⁰⁷ E.g. France, *Matthew*, 919-28; Wright, *Jesus*, 360-63; Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 187-204; Tasker, *Matthew*, 225-27; Kik, *Eschatology*, 127-35; Garland, *Matthew*, 238-39.

- parousia. Some may object that the “sign” does not provide actual forewarning (which is true), but this is consistent with Matthew’s contention that no one knows the timing of the parousia (24:36-25:46).
- (4) The main thrust of 24:4-14 is to correct a mistaken assumption on the part of the disciples that the eschatological consummation would accompany the destruction of the temple. Thus, Jesus chronologically separates the two events with an undefined period of length. “Those days” (24:19, 22, 29, 38) most likely refer to a period of suffering and witness which is broader in scope than the period surrounding Jerusalem’s destruction. This implies that the event which follows “immediately after the suffering of those days” is the parousia.
- (5) The language of 24:29-31 has many similarities to 25:31-46 (esp. v.31), which is a description of the final judgment.
- (6) While some texts in Matthew do refer to a “coming” of the Son of Man other than the parousia (cf. 10:23; 16:28; 26:64), other texts more than likely describe the parousia (cf. 16:27; 19:28; 25:31).¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the majority of occurrences of “come” (ἔρχομαι) in the discourse refer to the parousia (24:5, 30, 39, 42, 43, 44, 46; 25:10, 11, 19, 27, 31, 36, 39).
- (7) The language of 24:30-31 is interpreted with more exegetical ease as a description of the parousia than as a description of the temple’s destruction (see below).
- (8) In the rest of the NT, this sort of language is normally applied to the parousia (e.g. 1 Thess 4:13-18).

¹⁰⁸ In my opinion, Matt 10:23 and 16:28 probably refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. See Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:278-80; 2:485-87. Matthew 26:64 appears to be a statement by Jesus that he will be enthroned and vindicated by God over-and-against his adversaries.

In my opinion, all of these points, taken together, suggest that Matthew focuses on the parousia in 24:29-31. Therefore, Matt 24:29 depicts *a theophany of the Son of Man at the end of the age (i.e. the parousia) for the purpose of judging the world and saving his elect, something we might call a “Day of the Son of Man.”*

2.3.2.4 The Meaning of Matthew 24:29b-e

What, then, does the language of cosmic catastrophe mean? To interpret the metaphorical language of 24:29, we must answer: What do the tenor (i.e. the parousia of the Son of Man) and vehicle (i.e. the language of cosmic catastrophe) say together which could not be said by the tenor or vehicle alone?¹⁰⁹ We can divide Matt 24:29b-e into two parts according to the parallelism within the first two clauses (24:29b-c) and the final two clauses (24:29d-e). The entire verse centers upon events in the heavens.

In 24:29b-c, Matthew draws primarily from Isa 13:10 and focuses on the sun and moon. These are the “two great lights” created by God to “rule” the day and night and “to shine upon the earth” (Gen 1:16-18). But as Matthew reports, these sources of light will cease to shine. He does not state how the sun and moon are darkened (whether they are covered, extinguished, destroyed, etc.).¹¹⁰ Neither does he indicate why they are darkened, although it is certainly because of the coming of the Son of Man (again, the reaction of nature is a standard feature of theophany scenes). If we look at the picture being presented, the sum effect of the imagery is *darkness*.¹¹¹ Matthew employs this imagery to contrast, and therefore highlight, the parousia of

¹⁰⁹ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 47-48. See the section on “metaphorical language” in chapter 1.

¹¹⁰ Ezekiel 32:7 may suggest that the sun is “covered” with a “cloud.” More likely, Isa 24:23 may suggest that the sun and moon are outshone, or “put to shame” by the overwhelming glory of God.

¹¹¹ This is a traditional aspect of the Day of Yahweh (cf. Amos 5:18-20, Joel 2:1-2, 31 [3:4 LXX]; Zeph 1:15).

the Son of Man as a *glorious* (i.e. divinely radiant) event.¹¹² Matthew has already said that the coming of the Son of Man will be like “lightning” flashing across the (presumably) dark night sky (24:27). Thus, the darkening of the two great sources of light sets the stage for the brilliant lightning-like coming of the Son of Man by plunging the entire earth into darkness.¹¹³ In this setting (also including the loss of the stars), the people of the earth cannot see a thing. What follows, then, is the sign of the Son of Man “appearing” (i.e. becoming visible) in the darkened sky and the tribes of the earth mourning as they “see” the coming of the Son of Man in “great glory” (24:30). Thus, the darkening of the sun and the moon in 24:29b-c are crucial elements in Matthew’s emphasis on the *visual* nature of the parousia.¹¹⁴ It serves to accentuate the divine glory of the Son of Man. Nothing will overshadow his glorious arrival as Lord of all creation.

In Matt 24:29d-e, the focus turns to the “stars” and the “powers.” The parallelism between 24:29d and 24:29e, as well as their shared allusion to Isa 34:4, suggest that Matthew closely associates the “stars” with the “powers.”¹¹⁵ This link also probably implies that, for Matthew, the “stars” are more than simple cosmological entities.¹¹⁶ The people of the ancient world routinely associated the heavenly bodies with heavenly powers, the angelic beings who governed the nations and exerted authority over earthly matters.¹¹⁷ For example, in Isa 34:4 LXX, “the powers of the heavens” are not merely heavenly bodies, but also represent angelic rulers whom God conquers as he descends on the Day of Yahweh to judge the people of Edom

¹¹² So Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:358. On the luminous nature of “glory” see BDAG, 257.

¹¹³ Morris, *Matthew*, 609; Gundry, *Matthew*, 488.

¹¹⁴ Most of Matthew’s unique material in 24:29-31 highlights this emphasis.

¹¹⁵ The “powers” may also summarize all of the heavenly bodies in 24:29 (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars). Also note the difference between the singular and plural uses of “heaven” in 24:29d-e. While the difference can be attributed to the probable sources of Matthew’s allusions, see the theory that the singular may refer to the “sky” while the plural may refer to the “transcendent realm” in Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup 126 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 156-60.

¹¹⁶ See Walter Grundmann, “δύναμις,” *TDNT* 2:307-308; W. Foerster, “ἀστήρ, ἄστρον,” *TDNT* 1:503-505; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:358; Nolland, *Matthew*, 982-83; Morris, *Matthew*, 609-10.

¹¹⁷ The idea in second temple Judaism that angelic powers ruled the world was based on Deut 32:8 LXX, “When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God” (cf. Ps 82:1-8).

(cf. 34:5).¹¹⁸ This blended referent of heavenly bodies/powers can be observed in subsequent allusions to Isa 34:4 LXX, where “the powers of the heavens” are interpreted by some writers as the “sun, moon, and stars” (Rev 6:12b-13; Apoc. Pet. 5:4 Eth.) and by others as “invisible spirits” (T. Levi 4:1). Matthew appears to hold this common belief when he talks about the magi being led by the Messiah’s “star,” which probably refers to an angel (2:2, 7, 9, 10).¹¹⁹ Thus, we likely have a form of metonymy in Matt 24:29, where the heavenly bodies refer to the angelic powers.¹²⁰

Matthew indicates that these powers will be “shaken.” The shaking of the heavens, another common theme of theophany accounts, seems to explain the reason why the stars “fall.” They are dislodged from their arrangement in the sky when the Son of Man comes. Thus, Matthew presents an image of these angelic powers being jolted out of their *positions of authority* over the earth. In other words, the “powers” of the heavens are overthrown and supplanted by the Son of Man who comes “with power” to *reign* over all things (24:30c). Thus, for Matthew, the shaking of the heavenly powers serves to bolster his emphasis on the Son of Man coming “with power.” Every power and authority will become subject to his rule at the parousia (cf. 1 Cor 15:24-25).

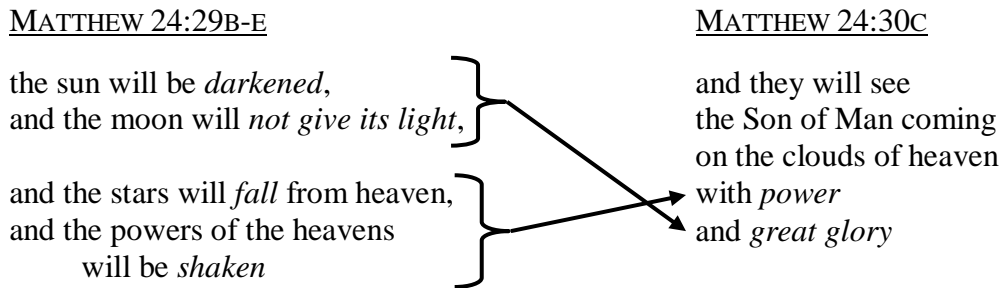
¹¹⁸ So Middleton, *New Heaven*, 117-18, 184-87; John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1-39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 611.

¹¹⁹ See Dale C. Allison, Jr., “The Magi’s Angel (Matt. 2:2, 9-10),” in *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 17-41. Furthermore, Matthew has already suggested in his narrative that Jesus will deal decisively with the hostile powers at the parousia. For example, in making a point about how the Messiah is not merely the Son of David, but an even greater figure (i.e. the Son of God), Jesus claims that his “enemies,” who are identified in the previous narrative as the Devil and those who follow him (cf. 13:24-30, 36-43), will be put in subjection to him by quoting Ps 110:1 [109:1 LXX] in Matt 22:44. The writers of the NT routinely use Ps 110:1 to speak of the subjection of heavenly powers to the resurrected and exalted Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Heb 1:13; 10:12-13; 1 Pet 3:22). In addition, in the story of the Gadarene demoniac the demons ask Jesus, “Have you come here to torment us before the time” (8:29)? “The time,” of course, refers to the parousia (cf. 13:30; 21:41). So Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:227; Evans, *Matthew*, 198.

¹²⁰ Caird defines metonymy as “calling a thing by the name of something typically associated with it” (*Language*, 136). Also see Jeannette Littlemore, *Metonymy: Hidden Shortcuts in Language, Thought and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4-13.

In conclusion, Matthew appears to have specifically chosen his allusions to Isaiah in order to enhance his description of a theophany of the Son of Man. The darkening of the sun and the moon accentuates the divine radiance of the Son of Man. The judgment of the stars/powers accentuates the divine power of the Son of Man (see fig. 2.2).

FIGURE 2.2: THE RELATION BETWEEN MATTHEW 24:29B-E AND 24:30C



Therefore, it appears that the primary meaning of Matt 24:29b-e is *christological* in nature. The imagery functions to convey the parousia of the Son of Man as *a stepping forth of the exalted and glorious Lord of the universe over-and-against all other heavenly glories/rulers*. In other words, on the Day of the Son of Man there will be a change in dominion. He will come in judgment against the rulers of “this age,” bringing to completion the victory of his death and resurrection over the powers of evil.¹²¹ As a result the Devil and his angels will be overthrown and put in subjection to him (22:44; 25:41). Their world will come crashing to an end as the Son of Man comes to sit on his “glorious throne” as King (cf. 19:28; 25:31).

So what does this picture tell us about the future of the cosmos? Given the combination of Matthew’s emphasis on the visual nature of the parousia, and the close association in ancient thought between the heavenly bodies/powers, the coming of the Son of Man over-and-against the

¹²¹ Note that Matthew connects the death and resurrection of Jesus to his parousia through the imagery of darkness and shaking (cf. 27:45, 51; 28:2).

hostile powers of the universe probably suggests the destruction of the sun, moon, and stars.¹²² But this should not be taken to imply the dissolution of the cosmos, its return to primeval chaos, or the onset of such events.¹²³ For Matthew, the language of cosmic catastrophe portrays the judgment of the powers of the heavens via a powerful and glorious theophany of the Son of Man. It simply cannot be dismissed that the imagery of 24:29 fits precisely with the manner in which the Son of Man comes. Furthermore, Matt 24:30-31 attests that the earth remains intact. Thus, while Matt 24:29 may anticipate the destruction of the heavenly bodies (specifically because they are hostile powers), Matthew's purpose is to convey a christological message. The hostile rulers of this age will be overthrown by the Son of Man and this world as a place of evil and rebellion will come to an end. As a result, the kingdom of God will become fully manifest throughout the entire cosmos at the parousia.

Having offered my interpretation of Matt 24:29, we can now turn to the rest of Matt 24:30-31. In 24:30a, Matthew continues his description of events which take place in the heavens by addressing “the sign of the Son of Man.” He then shifts his focus to the events on earth which bring judgment (24:30b-c) and salvation (24:31).

2.3.3 The Sign of the Son of Man (Matt 24:30a)

Unique to Matthew's version of the discourse is the content of 24:30a, “and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven” (καὶ τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ). Interpretation has generally centered on identifying the content of “the sign.” But first

¹²² Cf. 2 Pet 3:10c; Rev 21:23; 22:5.

¹²³ We also must remember at this point the difference between ancient and modern cosmology. In the ancient world, the “darkening” of the sun or moon and the “falling” of the stars were grounded in phenomena that we would call “eclipses” and “shooting stars.” See Nolland, *Matthew*, 982-83; Gundry, *Matthew*, 487. This is not to diminish catastrophic nature of such an event in the minds of ancient people, but attempts to place the language in its proper historical context.

it is important to recognize that 24:30a is Matthew's most definitive answer to the disciples' request for a sign (24:3).¹²⁴ If this is correct, then a fuller reading of 24:30a would be, "and then the sign of the parousia of the Son of Man and the end of the age will appear in heaven."¹²⁵

Some may object to identifying a sign here because it does not provide forewarning of the parousia.¹²⁶ It is true that this sign is part of the overall parousia event, and thus does not provide knowledge as to when the parousia will occur. However, this remains consistent with Matthew's claim that the timing of the parousia is unknown (24:36-25:46).

In terms of identifying "the sign," three positions are normally advanced. (1) The sign is some unique manifestation in the sky, possibly the cross.¹²⁷ (2) Relying on the LXX, the sign is an "ensign" or "standard" used in military battle (cf. Isa 11:10-14).¹²⁸ (3) Treating the genitive as appositional (or epexegetical), the sign is the Son of Man himself.¹²⁹

Given the elusive nature of "the sign," each view is possible. However, I favor the third option for the following reasons. First, if Matthew uses the language of cosmic catastrophe to indicate a theophany, then the most probable event to follow is the appearance of the Son of Man. Second, with the heavens darkened, the sign "will appear [φανήσεται] in heaven." This scene suggests that the sign must be luminous in nature. The one thing described as luminous in

¹²⁴ So most interpreters, e.g. Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 155; Nolland, *Matthew*, 983; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:713; Turner, *Matthew*, 583; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 362; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:202; Gundry, *Matthew*, 488.

¹²⁵ Some interpreters suggest that "the sign" is not connected to the question of 24:3 (e.g. France, *Matthew*, 925-26; Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 198-99). They argue that the phrase should be read "the sign of the Son-of-Man-in-heaven" (i.e. the temple's destruction is a sign of Jesus' enthronement). However, taking "in heaven" as adjectival instead of adverbial is grammatically improbable.

¹²⁶ E.g. R. H. Charles argues that no sign will be given for the parousia, but he does not allow Matt 24:30a to be counted as evidence on the grounds that it is part of a "Jewish-Christian apocalypse" (*A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*, 2nd ed. [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913], 385-86).

¹²⁷ A. J. B. Higgins, "The Sign of the Son of Man (Matt. XXIV. 30)," *NTS* 9 (1963): 380-82; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:713-14; Grundmann, *Matthäus*, 418; Agbanou, *Discours*, 115.

¹²⁸ T. F. Glasson, "The Ensign of the Son of Man (Matt. XXIV. 30)," *JTS* 15 (1964): 299-300; Jonathan A. Draper, "The Development of 'the Sign of the Son of Man' in the Jesus Tradition," *NTS* 39 (1993): 1-21; Osborne, *Matthew*, 893-94; Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:329-30. Davies and Allison combine the idea of the cross with Glasson's argument for an "ensign" (*Matthew*, 3:359-60).

¹²⁹ Gundry, *Matthew*, 488; Schnackenburg, *Matthew*, 244; Boring, "Matthew," 8:444; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:201-202.

the immediate context is the Son of Man, who comes in “great glory” (24:30c). Third, in 24:30b Matthew says that “all the tribes of the earth will mourn.” This text alludes to Zech 12:10, which gives the reason why the people mourn, “they will look upon me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for him.” Matthew’s allusion suggests that the mourning of the tribes is induced by the seeing the Son of Man, presumably when he appears in the sky. This coheres with a final point: what “will appear in heaven” (causing the tribes to mourn) is likely the same thing which the tribes “will see,” the Son of Man (24:30c). Therefore, “the sign” is probably *the Son of Man himself*. Matthew may have in mind texts like Isa 60:2 and 60:19-20.¹³⁰

² Behold, darkness will cover the earth, and thick darkness over the nations; but the Lord will appear [φανήσεται] over you, and his glory [δόξα] will be seen [ὀφθήσεται] over you.

¹⁹ And the sun [ὁ ἥλιος] will no longer be a light [φῶς] by day for you, nor will the rising of the moon [σελήνης] enlighten [φωτιεῖ] the night for you; but the Lord will be an everlasting light [φῶς αἰώνιον] for you, and God will be your glory [δόξα]. ²⁰ For the sun [ὁ ἥλιός] will no longer set for you, and the moon [ἡ σελήνη] will no longer wane for you, for the Lord will be for you an everlasting light [φῶς αἰώνιον] for you, and the days of your mourning will be completed.

We seem to have a highly visual movement from *darkness* (24:29), to the Son of Man *appearing* in heaven as the sign (24:30a), to the tribes mourning the Son of Man’s *appearance* (24:30b), to the tribes *seeing* the Son of Man coming with power and *great glory* (24:30c).

2.3.4 The Results of the Son of Man’s Visitation (Matt 24:30b-31)

I have argued that Matt 24:29b-30a depicts a theophany of the Son of Man reminiscent of a Day of Yahweh, whereby the powers of the heavens will be overthrown. In Matt 24:30b-31, the linking words “and then” (καὶ τότε) mark another movement in the visual sequence of events,

¹³⁰ Also cf. Isa 24:21-23; Rev 21:23; 22:5.

shifting the focus from heaven to earth.¹³¹ Thus, the theophany of the Son of Man in the heavens leads to four things on earth: the tribes mourning (24:30b); the tribes seeing the Son of Man's coming (24:30c); the Son of Man sending out his angels (24:31a); and the angels gathering the elect (24:31b). The first two phrases appear to emphasize *judgment*, whereas the final two phrases appear to emphasize *salvation*. I will deal with each phrase separately.

Matthew 24:30b reads, “and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn” (καὶ τότε κόψονται πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς).¹³² This text alludes to Zech 12:10-14 (LXX).¹³³

¹⁰ And I will pour out on the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a spirit of grace and compassion. And they will look upon me because they mocked [me], and they will mourn [κόψονται] for him, mourn [κοπετόν] as for a beloved one [ἀγαπητόν]; and they will grieve [ὀδυνηθήσονται] [for him], grieve [ὀδύνην] as for a firstborn.... ¹² And the land will mourn according to tribes [κόψεται ἡ γῆ κατὰ φυλάς], each tribe by itself..., ¹⁴ all the tribes [πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ] who are remaining, each tribe by itself.

As noted by Carson and others, Matthew introduces two changes to Zechariah's text.¹³⁴ First, he broadens the scope of “land” (γῆ) to mean “earth.” Those arguing for a destruction of the temple interpretation of 24:29-31 suggest that Matthew retains the sense of “land” (of Israel).¹³⁵ But this is unlikely given Rev 1:7, which also alludes to Zech 12:10-14 in combination with Dan 7:13-14 (cf. Matt 24:30c) and applies the allusions to the parousia, “Look! He is coming with the clouds; and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn on account of him.” The second change introduced by Matthew concerns the nature of “mourning.” In Zechariah, the mourning of the tribes is characterized by sorrow and repentance.

¹³¹ Καὶ τότε likely has an implicational function here in the sense of “and as a result.” So Nolland, *Matthew*, 965.

¹³² Like 24:30a, this is also content unique to Matthew.

¹³³ Note there are a few differences in the LXX compared to the MT, see Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 52-53; Clay A. Ham, “Reading Zechariah and Matthew's Olivet Discourse,” in *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels: Volume 2: The Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Thomas R. Hatina, LNTS 310 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 85-97.

¹³⁴ Carson, “Matthew,” 8:505; Turner, *Matthew* 583; Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 199-200.

¹³⁵ E.g. France, *Matthew*, 924-25; Wilson, *When*, 157-58; Garland, *Matthew*, 238.

But in Matthew, the context suggests that mourning involves distress or despair in the face of judgment.¹³⁶ Matthew seems to have interpreted Zechariah's "mourning" through the lens of Amos 8:9-10 (LXX), which also addresses mourning on account of a "beloved one" (or "only son" in the MT).

⁹ And it will come about in that day, says the Lord God, the sun will go down at noon, and the light will be darkened on the earth during the day; ¹⁰ and I will turn your feasts into mourning [πένθος], and all your songs into lamentation [θρήνον]; and I will bring up sackcloth on every loin, and baldness on every head; and I will make it like [a time of] mourning [πένθος] of a beloved one [ἀγαπητοῦ], and those with it as a day of grief [ὀδύνης].

Amos 8:9-10 seems to be the link between Zechariah's picture of the tribes mourning the sight of the "beloved one," and Matthew's imagery of darkness on the Day of Yahweh which leads to the tribes mourning the sight of the Son of Man (24:29-30a). The tribes of the earth mourn the appearance of the Son of Man in heaven because they realize that the time of their judgment has come.

The following clause (24:30c) provides further basis for why the tribes of the earth mourn. It describes the theophany of the Son of Man *from their perspective*, "and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (καὶ ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς). The initial verb "they will see" may allude to Dan 7:13 ("I beheld"), or Zech 12:10 ("they will look upon").¹³⁷ But the majority of the clause alludes to Dan 7:13 (cf. Jer 4:13), "and behold, one was

¹³⁶ Some dispute the notion of judgment here, but the strong allusions to the Day of Yahweh in 24:29 make it probable.

¹³⁷ Those who argue for a destruction of the temple reading suggest that the subjects of "will see" are the Jews of Jerusalem. This is based on limiting the scope of "earth" to "land" in the previous clause (which is problematic), as well as the parallel nature of Matt 26:64, "from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Jesus states that the religious leaders will somehow "see" him sitting and coming, and that they will do so within the near ongoing future. "From now on" appears to communicate an imminent and inaugurated sense, cf. Osborne, *Matthew*, 997; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:800; Gundry, *Matthew*, 545. Thus, Matthew is probably referring to Jesus' impending death and resurrection (cf. 27:51-54; 28:11-15), when thereafter Jesus is able to say "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18; cf.

coming on the clouds of heaven as a Son of Man” (καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο).¹³⁸ It should also be mentioned that the phrase “the clouds of heaven” draws upon a long tradition of OT theophany texts where God manifests himself to lead and defend Israel (Exod 13:21-22; 14:24), to reveal his glory over the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-38), and even to ride on the clouds or make them his chariot (Pss 68:4, 33; 104:3; Isa 19:1; Jer 4:13).¹³⁹ Daniel 7:13 (and probably Matt 24:30c as well) is most closely aligned with this final group of texts, where Yahweh the “Cloud-Rider” comes as a warrior in judgment upon his enemies. Thus, the Son of Man most likely comes from heaven to earth.¹⁴⁰ Matthew’s reference to the coming of the Son of Man “with power and great glory” emphasizes the manner in which he comes and probably alludes to Dan 7:14, which speaks of the Son of Man receiving authority over the nations of the earth. Matthew emphasizes the “glory” of the Son of Man by adding the adjective “great,” which coheres with his consistent emphasis on the *visual* nature of the parousia.¹⁴¹

What does all of this mean for Matt 24:30c? By describing a theophany of the Son of Man from

Dan 7:13-14), so Nolland, *Matthew*, 1132; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:800. Gibbs also includes the destruction of the temple here (*Jerusalem*, 201). But this seems unlikely. Jesus’ statement has more to do with his vindication and enthronement at the resurrection than it does the destruction of the temple.

¹³⁸ There is considerable debate about whether Matthew alludes to the LXX or MT. See Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 52-54.

¹³⁹ Jeremias, *Theophanie*, 70-71; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:362; Osborne, *Matthew*, 894. Matthew also uses “cloud” imagery for a theophany of God in the transfiguration account (17:5). For more on the function of clouds see Léopold Sabourin, “The Biblical Cloud: Terminology and Traditions,” *BTB* 4 (1974): 290-311; Richard D. Patterson, “The Imagery of Clouds in the Scriptures,” *BSac* 165 (2008): 13-27.

¹⁴⁰ Much is made of the direction Jesus travels in 24:30c. Those arguing for a destruction of the temple reading argue that Jesus ascends into the presence of the Ancient of Days (in heaven) as an indication of his vindication and enthronement (Wright, *Jesus*, 361-63; France, *Matthew*, 923-24; Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 200-201). While an upward ascent into heaven is probable in Dan 7:13, Matthew appears to reverse the direction of movement for the following reasons. First, in 24:29 we have allusions to the Day of Yahweh, which is normally understood as a day when Yahweh comes from his place of dwelling in heaven to earth for the purpose of judgment and salvation. Second, this downward movement is made all the more apparent by Matthew’s use of the verb “shake,” which highlights the concept of a theophany. Third, those who “see” the Son of Man coming (the “tribes of the earth”) view the coming from an earthly perspective. Finally, when the Son of Man “comes” in Matthew, he normally “comes” for judgment, not for vindication (cf. 16:27; 24:37, 39, 44; 25:31). Therefore, the most probable view is that the Son of Man comes from heaven to earth (so Carson, “Matthew,” 8:505-506; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:714; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 363).

¹⁴¹ Luke also emphasizes the “great glory” of the Son of Man (21:27), while Mark emphasizes his “great power” (13:26).

the perspective of the tribes, Matthew appears to emphasize the purpose of Jesus' coming in relation to those who see him. He comes on the clouds with the glorious status of Yahweh himself, prepared to exercise his power and authority as the Ruler and Judge of the earth. The tribes of the earth will experience *judgment* on the "Day of the Son of Man."

In Matt 24:31a, Matthew changes subjects from those who witness the coming of the Son of Man to the Son of Man himself, "and he will send out his angels with a great trumpet-blast" (καὶ ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ μετὰ σάλπιγγος μεγάλης). The great trumpet-blast probably alludes to a similar phrase in Isa 27:13, a verse which refers to the positive outcome of the Day of Yahweh, the gathering of dispersed Israel (also cf. Zech 9:14).¹⁴² On his day, the Son of Man "will send out his angels" to gather his people for salvation. Some suggest that ἀγγέλους means "messengers" (i.e. the disciples) instead of "angels," but this is improbable.¹⁴³ Matthew overwhelmingly uses ἄγγελος for "angel" (cf. 16:27; 25:31).¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the near-identical wording of Matt 13:41 suggests the same, "the Son of Man will send his angels" (ἀποστελεῖ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ), who are charged to "collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers." Thus, Matt 24:31a emphasizes the Son of Man acting on behalf of his people in order to bring about their *salvation*.

Continuing the action of the previous clause, Matt 24:31b says, "and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (καὶ ἐπισυνάξουσιν τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων ἀπ' ἄκρων οὐρανῶν ἕως [τῶν] ἄκρων

¹⁴² See Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 54-55. The function of a trumpet was varied and could signal a variety of events, cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:363; Gerhard Friedrich, "σάλπιγξ," *TDNT* 7:78-81, 85-88. In the NT, the trumpet is used to refer to the Sinai theophany (Heb 12:19; cf. Exod 19:16-19) as well as the parousia (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16).

¹⁴³ Contra Gibbs, *Jerusalem*, 202; Tasker, *Matthew*, 227; Garland, *Matthew*, 239.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; 4:6, 11; 13:39, 41, 49; 16:27; 18:10; 22:30; 24:36; 25:31, 41; 26:53. It is translated "messenger" once in reference to John the Baptist (11:10).

αὐτῶν).¹⁴⁵ This probably alludes to Zech 2:6 (2:10 LXX), “I will gather you from the four winds of heaven,” and Deut 30:4, “From the end of heaven to the end of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you.” These allusions emphasize the worldwide scope of the gathering. Those gathered by the angels, the “elect,” are the faithful followers of Jesus (cf. 22:14; 24:22, 24).¹⁴⁶

2.3.5 Initial Conclusions

If the interpretation above has merit, Matthew may anticipate the destruction of the heavenly bodies as an expression of judgment against “the powers of the heavens.” But even if this is the case, it only affects the heavens, not the earth. Thus, 24:29 does not seem to indicate the dissolution of the cosmos (either literally or metaphorically). What we appear to have is the language of cosmic catastrophe in order to communicate a theophany of the Son of Man, emphasizing his “power and great glory” over-and-against the hostile powers of this age.

2.4 Other Notable Matthean Texts

2.4.1 Matthew 24:35 and 5:18

Given that Matt 24:35 is only six verses removed from the language of cosmic catastrophe in 24:29, we must consider its relationship and significance. Matthew writes, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away” (ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσεται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρέλθωσιν). As often noted, the format of the verse is similar to Isa 40:8,

¹⁴⁵ See Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 54-55.

¹⁴⁶ Gibbs argues that the worldwide gathering is performed by the disciples during their mission to the Gentiles (*Jerusalem*, 201-204). In order to establish this argument he makes a sharp division between Matthew’s conception of “gathering” and “separating” for judgment. However, Matthew probably views “gathering” and “separating” as corresponding actions which cannot be separated.

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.” There also may be echoes of OT passages that refer to the impermanence of the cosmos in relation to God and his word (cf. Pss 102:25-27; 119:89-90; Isa 51:6).

If my understanding discourse’s structure is correct, Matt 24:35 falls within Jesus’ answer to the question of “when” the temple will be destroyed (24:32-25). This should caution us against drawing too close of a connection between this verse and 24:29, which answers a different question (what is the sign?) concerning a different subject (the parousia/end). Matthew 24:35 seems to function as a solemn pledge by Jesus that his answer to the question of “when” the temple will be destroyed is completely reliable. The pledge also probably extends to Jesus’ other answers within the discourse (24:4-25:46).

At the heart of Matt 24:35 is a contrast between the fleeting nature of the cosmos and the enduring nature of Jesus’ words.¹⁴⁷ Whereas “heaven and earth” (understood here as one entity) is transitory, Jesus’ words will endure beyond the present cosmos. Thus, Matthew uses the durability of “heaven and earth” as the yardstick for measuring the durability of Jesus’ words. Matthew uses the durability of “heaven and earth” in a similar fashion in Matt 5:18 to talk about the longevity of the Mosaic Law.¹⁴⁸ While the primary purpose of the contrast in 24:35 is to highlight the ongoing validity of Jesus’ words, the contrast would cease to function properly if “heaven and earth” did not have some kind of expected “ending.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, it is reasonable to

¹⁴⁷ Also cf. Matt 7:24-27.

¹⁴⁸ Matthew 5:18 reads, “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, certainly not one letter or stroke will pass away from the law, until all things happen.” Matthew 24:34-35 shares many similarities with 5:18. Both include: (1) a formulaic phrase “truly I say to you,” which indicates the gravity of the following words, (2) a reference to “heaven and earth passing away,” (3) a reference to things that “will certainly not pass away” (“this generation,” “my words,” and “one letter or stroke”), and (4) a conditional phrase referring to “until all things happen.” Overall, 5:18 is more difficult to interpret because of the two “until” clauses, which could possibly be a way of saying “never.” See the discussion in Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:106-108.

¹⁴⁹ Some have argued that Jesus’ words about the passing away of heaven and earth is nothing more than a rhetorical saying that highlights the validity of Jesus’ words, e.g. Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 104-107; France, *Matthew*, 930-

infer that Matthew does not envision the cosmos lasting forever. Temporally speaking, it will “pass away” (παρέρχομαι).¹⁵⁰ However, Matthew says nothing about *how* heaven and earth will pass away or what it means to pass away. Matthew 24:35 (and 5:18) could imply that the cosmos will cease to exist (i.e. pass into nothing, be destroyed) or that it will cease to exist as it is (i.e. pass into another state, be transformed). Either is a legitimate possibility. Thus, the most we can say confidently at this point is that Matthew affirms an *ending* of some kind to the present cosmos.¹⁵¹ How the ending occurs remains uncertain.

2.4.2 Matthew 19:28

At the conclusion of an encounter between Jesus and a rich young man over entering the kingdom of God (19:16-22), Jesus continues the discussion with his disciples (19:23-30). Within this context Matthew writes in 19:28,

²⁸ ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὑμεῖς οἱ ἀκολουθήσαντές μοι ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ, ὅταν καθίσῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ, καθήσεσθε καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐπὶ δώδεκα θρόνους κρίνοντες τὰς δώδεκα φυλὰς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ.

²⁸ And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, you who have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you also will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

While there are many interesting aspects to this verse, my focus will be on Matthew’s understanding of the phrase ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ, which has been translated a variety of ways: “in the regeneration” (NASB, NKJV), “at the renewal of all things” (NRSV, NIV), and “in the new age” (NAB).

31; Wright, *Jesus*, 364-65. As a result, 24:35 does not say anything about the durability of the cosmos. These interpreters are correct to point out the primary function of the saying. However, the contrast cannot be ignored.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Matt 5:18; 8:28; 14:15; 24:34, 35; 26:39, 42; and BDAG, 775-76; J. Schneider, “παρέρχομαι,” *TDNT* 2:681-82; A. Sand, “παρέρχομαι,” *EDNT* 3:38-39.

¹⁵¹ Cf. “the end of the age” in 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20.

The term *παλιγγενεσία* is rare in the Bible. It does not appear in the LXX, and only occurs twice in the NT.¹⁵² In Titus 3:5 it refers to the “regeneration” of an individual person after baptism.¹⁵³ Outside of the Bible the term has a more substantial history.¹⁵⁴ In Stoic thought *παλιγγενεσία* was used to describe the “regeneration” of the cosmos after its conflagration (*ἐκπύρωσις*), a process which occurred cyclically (Marcus Aurelius 11.1.3).¹⁵⁵ In Philo the term refers to the rebirth of an individual’s soul (*Cher.* 114), as well as to the regeneration of the world after the Genesis Flood (*Mos.* 2.65).¹⁵⁶ For Josephus, the term could be applied with a national sense to the rebuilding and restoration of Israel’s land after the exile (*Ant.* 11.66).

So, what is the meaning of *παλιγγενεσία* in Matt 19:28? Scholars have proposed four different senses. It refers to:

- (1) The eschatological restoration of Israel¹⁵⁷
- (2) The resurrection¹⁵⁸
- (3) The age to come¹⁵⁹
- (4) A renewed or re-created cosmos¹⁶⁰

In Matt 19:28, Jesus answers a question posed by Peter. Given that Peter and the other disciples have left everything to “follow” Jesus, Peter asks what they will gain (19:27). Jesus

¹⁵² Although cf. *πάλιν γένωμαι* in Job 14:14.

¹⁵³ Titus 3:5 reads, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration [*παλιγγενεσίας*] and renewing [*ἀνακαινώσεως*] by the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁵⁴ See F. Büchsel, “*παλιγγενεσία*,” *TDNT* 1:686-89; J. Guhrt, “*παλιγγενεσία*,” *NIDNTT* 1:184-86.

¹⁵⁵ Describing the Stoic view, Philo uses the term in conjunction with *ἐκπύρωσις* (*Aet.*, 47.1; 76.5).

¹⁵⁶ See Fred W. Burnett, “Philo on Immortality: A Thematic Study of Philo’s Concept of *παλιγγενεσία*,” *CBQ* 46 (1984): 447-80.

¹⁵⁷ Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 165-66; Gundry, *Matthew*, 392-93.

¹⁵⁸ J. Duncan M. Derrett, “PALINGENESIA (Matthew 19:28),” *JSNT* 20 (1984): 51-58; Luz, *Matthew*, 2:517.

¹⁵⁹ Fred W. Burnett, “*Παλιγγενεσία* in Matt. 19:28: A Window on the Matthean Community?” *JSNT* 17 (1983): 60-72. Davies and Allison combine this position with view (1) (*Matthew*, 3:57-58).

¹⁶⁰ The majority of interpreters, e.g. David C. Sim, “The Meaning of *παλιγγενεσία* in Matthew 19.28,” *JSNT* 50 (1993): 3-12; Jonathan T. Pennington, “Heaven, Earth, and a New Genesis: Theological Cosmology in Matthew,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. J. T. Pennington and S. M. McDonough, LNTS 355 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008), 40-43; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 430-31; Russell, *New Heavens*, 156-59.

replies that when he sits on his glorious throne, the disciples will also sit on twelve thrones, “judging” the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁶¹ The scene described by Jesus resembles Matt 25:31, which describes the final judgment of humanity. Thus, we can at least infer that *παλιγγενεσία* refers to the eschatological future, an inference that is also supported by the parallels in Mark 10:30 (“in the age to come”) and Luke 22:30 (“in my kingdom”).¹⁶² But it also seems probable that Matthew intended *παλιγγενεσία* to imply the renewal or re-creation of the cosmos.¹⁶³ The new creation would then be the domain where Jesus’ followers would reside after inheriting “eternal life” (Matt 19:29). This also may help to explain Matthew’s use of the phrase “in the resurrection” (*ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει*; cf. 22:28, 30), which is identical in construction.

Ultimately, Matthew seems to use *παλιγγενεσία* to combine several eschatological concepts. God will establish a new creation in the age to come that will be ruled by Jesus and will serve as the suitable domain for resurrected/eternal life.¹⁶⁴ *Παλιγγενεσία*, then, seems to imply a regeneration of the cosmos that results in a materially transformed world, but it does not inherently imply how the new world will emerge. Thus, it appears that the most we can say confidently at this point is that Matthew affirms a *new beginning* of some kind for the cosmos. How the transition will come about remains uncertain.

¹⁶¹ “Judging” can be understood as the act of judgment or the act of ruling. It appears that Jesus intends both nuances when he shares his judgment and rule with the disciples in the age to come. As a result, the disciples receive a unique role over “Israel.” It appears that Matthew intends the “twelve tribes of Israel” to be understood as the redeemed people of God in the age to come, not ethnic Israel. For more discussion see Hanna Roose, “Sharing in Christ’s Rule: Tracing a Debate in Earliest Christianity,” *JSNT* 27 (2004): 123-48; Yongbom Lee, “Judging or Ruling the Twelve Tribes of Israel? The Sense of Κρίνω in Matthew 19.28,” *BT* 66 (2015): 138-50.

¹⁶² The phrase *ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ* probably should be read with “when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne” as opposed to “you who have followed me.” The latter would seem to break the contrast between the disciples and the rich young man “following” Jesus.

¹⁶³ The idea was a common among Matthew’s contemporaries. See Sim, “Meaning,” 5-7.

¹⁶⁴ Similar is Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:172.

2.4.3 Matthew 5:5

The final text that we will consider is the third Matthean beatitude, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν). Here Matthew alludes to Ps 37:11 (36:11 LXX), “The meek will inherit the earth” (οἱ δὲ πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν).¹⁶⁵ There has been a significant amount of discussion about the meaning and nature of those who are “meek.” Most commentators suggest that the term should be understood in light of those who are “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3; cf. Isa 61:1-2), and as a result take the term to mean something like “humble” (cf. 11:29; 21:5).

It is important to note that γῆ clearly refers to the promised “land” of Palestine in Ps 37:11. But Matthew’s Jesus interprets this verse as an eschatological promise of blessing and abundance in the age to come.¹⁶⁶ This transformation of the promise explains why Matthew likely intends γῆ to be understood as the “earth.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, the hope of “inheriting” (κληρονομέω) the earth was bound up with the hope of God’s restoration, when Jesus’ followers would inherit “eternal life” (19:29) and the “kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world” (25:34).¹⁶⁸ Matthew also seems to refer to the promise of inheriting the earth when Jesus speaks of a “regenerated cosmos” (παλιγγενεσία) in 19:28.¹⁶⁹ Thus, it appears that Matthew envisioned

¹⁶⁵ Also cf. Isa 61:7.

¹⁶⁶ Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:123. This will presumably involve the idea of an eschatological reversal of fortunes, as is common to many of the beatitudes. See Russell, *New Heavens*, 149-51; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:450.

¹⁶⁷ Robert L. Brawley, “Evocative allusions in Matthew: Matthew 5:5 as a test case,” *HvTSt* 59 (2003): 597-619. Paul makes a similar move in Rom 4:13, where the promised “land” is expanded to become the “world.” Also cf. Jub. 17:3; 22:14-15; 32:19; 2 Bar. 51:3; 1 En. 5:7; 4 Ezra 6:59; LAB 32:3; Sir 44:21; Philo, *Somn.* 1.175; *Mos.* 1.155.

¹⁶⁸ Wright, *Jesus*, 428-30.

¹⁶⁹ Some interpreters prefer to “spiritualize” the promise of land so that the “earth” is essentially equated with “kingdom.” Cf. Frédéric Manns, “Blessed are the Meek for They Shall Inherit the Earth,” *LASBF* 50 (2000): 37-51; W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine*, BibSem 25 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 362. However, Matthew seems to expand the scope of the land to include the entire earth. See Russell, *New Heavens*, 149-52; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:92-93; Osborne, *Matthew*, 167; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 99; Boring, “Matthew,” 8:179; Luz, *Matthew*, 1:236.

the “earth” as the proper domain of eschatological life in the kingdom, which would be the inheritance of God’s people in the age to come.

All in all, the promise that the meek “will inherit the earth” lends further weight to the idea that Matthew expected a new world to dawn in the age to come, and that it would be suitable for eschatological life in the kingdom. However, it still does not provide precise information as to how Matthew expected the future cosmos to arrive.

2.5 Matthew’s Theology of the Future of the Cosmos

In this section I will draw some conclusions about Matthew’s theology of the future of the cosmos by answering the series of questions posed in the introduction.

2.5.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

Matthew identifies the exalted Jesus as the primary actor in the transition between the present and the future world (24:29-31). However, given that Matthew inserts Jesus in the place of God the Father on a day similar to the Day of the Lord (24:29-31), and that Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the Son of God who exercises all the authority and power of his Father, Matthew likely saw the exalted Son as carrying out the will of his Father.

2.5.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

Matthew articulates that the cosmic transition will occur at the “end of the age” in conjunction with the parousia (19:28; 24:29-31; 25:31). But this is of minimal help given that the timing of the parousia remains unknown (24:36), a point which Matthew repeatedly emphasizes in Jesus’ answers to the question of “when” it will occur (24:36-25:46). Matthew does indicate that

several eschatological events will precede the parousia, such as the destruction of the temple and the messianic “birthpangs” (24:4-8). But these are only the beginning of a longer process which will involve continued suffering and the worldwide proclamation of the gospel (24:9-14). Only after this period (i.e. “those days”) will the end come. Thus, when the cosmic transition will occur is unknown.

2.5.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

Matthew frames the main problems affecting the cosmos during “this age” in terms of sin, death, and dominion.¹⁷⁰ For Matthew, humans have rebelled against God and are in need of teaching, forgiveness, healing, and exorcism (e.g. 1:21; 4:16, 23-25; 19:16-17; 26:28). Furthermore, the Devil is the ruler of this age.¹⁷¹ As the primary opponent of Jesus, he is the one who exercises control over “the kingdoms of the world” (4:8-9) and hampers the spread of the kingdom of God (13:1-9, 18-23, 24-30, 36-43). However, the Devil’s kingdom is destined to be overthrown and replaced by the “kingdom of heaven” (6:10).¹⁷² The decisive defeat of sin, death, and the Devil has already occurred according to Matthew in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who tells his disciples at his ascension, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18). Yet Jesus’ victory will not be fully implemented until the parousia, when he comes with power and great glory to judge the world and rule over all things (13:41; 19:28; 24:29-31; 25:31). All of this suggests that the cosmic transition will occur in order to bring to completion the victory of Christ’s death and resurrection over *sin*, *death*, and the *Devil*.

¹⁷⁰ On “this age” see Matt 12:32; 13:22, 39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20.

¹⁷¹ Matthew uses several names to describe the “Devil” (4:1, 5, 8, 11; 13:39; 25:41) and his activity. He is “the tempter” (4:3), “Satan” (4:10; 12:26; 16:23), “the evil one” (5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38), “the enemy” (13:25, 28, 39), Beelzebul (10:25; 12:24, 27), and the “ruler of demons” (9:34; 12:24).

¹⁷² Most interpreters traditionally understand Matthew’s use of “heaven” as a way of maintaining reverence for the divine name (seeing it as a subjective genitive to “kingdom”). However, Matthew appears to use “kingdom of heaven” (taken as a source or attributive genitive) in order to contrast the kingdoms of the earth. See Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 279-330.

2.5.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

Matthew does not offer many specifics about how the cosmic transition will occur. He affirms that the present cosmos will “pass away” (24:35; 5:18), and that it will experience a “regeneration” (19:28). Thus, the present world will come to an end and the future world will have some kind of new existence. But these descriptions do not necessarily tell us how the cosmic transition will occur. Matthew’s primary image for depicting the cosmic transition is *the darkening and shaking of the heavenly bodies/powers* (24:29). At the parousia, the Son of Man will come in order to judge and rule over all things (24:29-31; cf. 16:27; 19:28; 25:31). The darkening of the heavenly lights and the downfall of the heavenly powers vividly portray the coming of the Son of Man “with power and great glory” over-and-against the angelic powers of this age. This implies that, for Matthew, the transition between this world and the next is deeply rooted in a *transfer of dominion*. In other words, the parousia will put into full effect the victory of the death and resurrection of Jesus, whereby he will exert his authority over all things (28:18). As a result, the hostile powers, chief among them being the Devil, will be deposed and banished (25:41), and the kingdom of heaven will appear on earth in all its glory (19:28). The judgment of the Son of Man against the hostile powers of the universe also may entail the destruction of the heavenly bodies (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars), but this is difficult to determine based on the nature of the language. Whatever the case may be, the language of cosmic catastrophe in 24:29 does not appear to signal the destruction of the cosmos, its return to primeval chaos, or the onset of a universal calamity. At most it only seems to affect the heavenly bodies. The cosmos remains intact in 24:30-31 and Matthew writes that Jesus’ followers will “inherit the earth” (5:5).

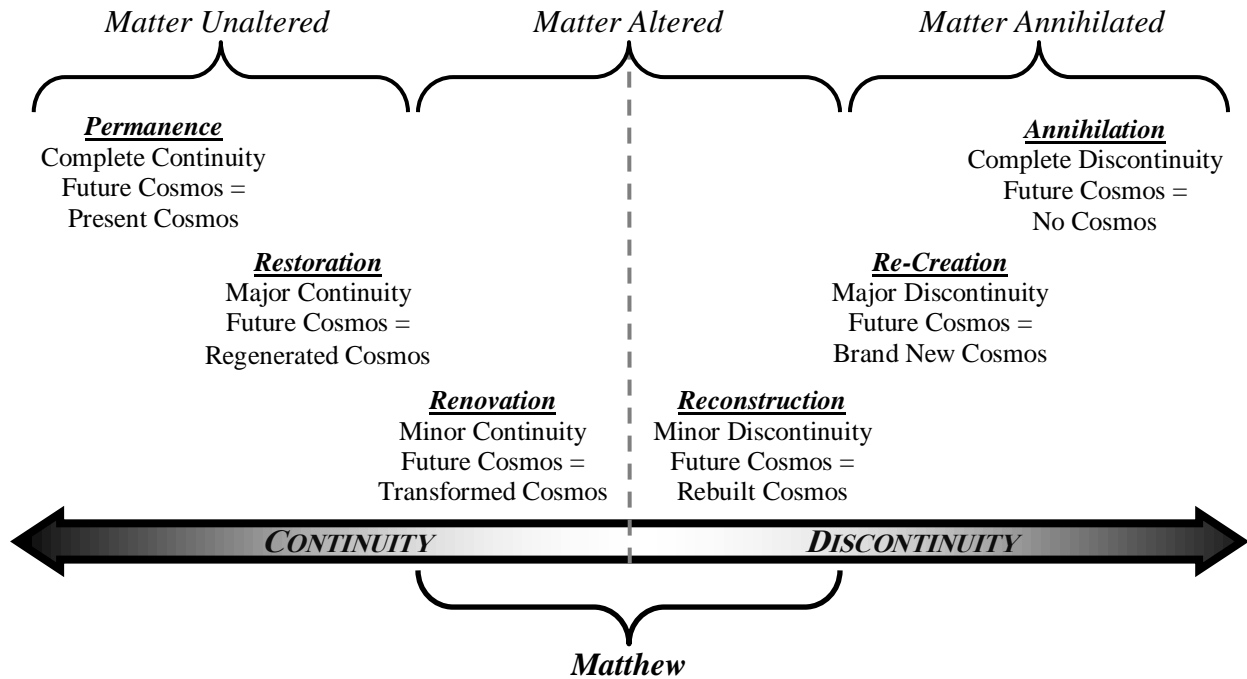
Ultimately, Matthew does not provide us with enough information to make a firm judgment about his views concerning the cosmic transition. We can, however, narrow down some of the possibilities. Because Matthew affirms some level of continuity and discontinuity between this world and the world to come, we can eliminate the possibilities of *permanence* and *annihilation*.¹⁷³ Furthermore, because Matthew believed in the resurrection of humanity (22:29-32) and characterized the new world as a “regeneration” of the old (19:28), he probably conceived of new world as an altered form of existence. This implies that he did not expect a *restoration* of the world to its original condition.¹⁷⁴ Finally, the beatitude “the meek will inherit the earth” (5:5) seems to indicate that the present “earth” is the object of inheritance. Thus, Matthew probably did not think of the cosmic transition in terms *re-creation* (i.e. annihilation followed by *creatio ex nihilo*).¹⁷⁵ This leaves us with two possibilities for Matthew, with the first being slightly more probable. He may have believed that the present cosmos would be thoroughly transformed (*renovation*), or that it would be destroyed and rebuilt (*reconstruction*). Either possibility would result in a materially transformed world. We can chart the possibilities below in Figure 2.3.

¹⁷³ In other words he does not affirm an unchanged cosmos (i.e. complete continuity) or an eradicated cosmos (i.e. complete discontinuity). For more on these terms see the introduction.

¹⁷⁴ One could argue on the basis of *παλιγγενεσία* (19:28) that this is the case, but Matthew does not seem to follow the Stoic notion of the same world being “re-birthed.”

¹⁷⁵ It may also rule out the idea that the cosmos will be destroyed and rebuilt (*reconstruction*), although this is less certain.

FIGURE 2.3: MATTHEW AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



2.5.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

Matthew does not describe “the age to come” in great detail (12:32), but he does offer a few brief insights. He describes the future world as a “regeneration” (19:28) as well as a “kingdom” that the righteous will “inherit” (5:5; 25:34). These descriptions appear to imply four things. First, the age to come will be without sin since the final judgment will remove “all causes of sin and all evildoers” (13:41). Second, it will be a world without death since believers will be glorified and resurrected to eternal life (13:43; 19:29; 25:46). Third, the future cosmos will be ruled by the exalted Jesus, a reign that he will share with his disciples (19:28; 24:30; 25:21, 23). Finally, the absence of sin and death, coupled with a belief in resurrection, appear to suggest that Matthew looked forward to a materially transformed world, a “regeneration” that will reflect some of the blessedness, joy, and reward of life with God (5:5; 25:10, 21, 23, 34).

3 Mark and the Future of the Cosmos

Since I am investigating the view of each NT writer concerning the future of the cosmos, it is important to treat each synoptic version of the Olivet Discourse separately. Thus, the focus of this chapter will be Mark 13:24-27 and 13:31. However, given that I have already laid out my understanding of Matthew's version of the discourse, and that I think Mark expresses the same basic structure and overall message, this chapter will be shorter in length. Please consult the previous chapter for comment on several issues that will be omitted here.

As with the previous chapter, I will begin with a survey of interpreters of Mark 13:24-25. Second, I will briefly discuss Mark's version of the Olivet Discourse. Third, I will offer an interpretation of Mark 13:24-27, concluding that Mark, like Matthew, utilizes the language of cosmic catastrophe to underscore the coming of the Son of Man "with great power and glory." Fourth, I will make a few comments on Mark 13:31. Finally, I will discuss Mark's view of the future of the cosmos via the five correlative questions.

3.1 Interpretations of Mark 13:24-25

Having sorted through the various interpretations of Matt 24:29 in the previous chapter, we can adopt a similar scheme here. There are five main ways that the language and meaning of Mark 13:24-25 has been interpreted.¹ (1) Mark 13:24-25 is a literal description of the concrete collapse of the universe at the end of the age.² (2) Mark 13:24-25 metaphorically describes the

¹ For a similar presentation see Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 137-39.

² C. S. Rodd, *The Gospel of Mark*, EC (London: Epworth, 2005), 156; Alfred F. Loisy, *L'Évangile selon Marc* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1912), 380-81. Robert H. Gundry argues for a literal reading, but thinks the language refers

collapse of the universe at the revelation of the Son of Man.³ This interpretation, which is taken by Adams, tends to identify the heavenly phenomena as “signs” of the end that indicate the concrete dissolution of the cosmos.⁴ (3) Mark 13:24-25 metaphorically describes signs or portents that herald the coming of the Son of Man.⁵ This interpretation identifies the “signs” primarily as precursors to the parousia and may or may not indicate the dissolution of the cosmos. (4) Mark 13:24-25 metaphorically describes the coming of the Son of Man to save and to judge at the end of the age.⁶ In this interpretation, which is endorsed by Vögtle, Russell, and Middleton, the heavenly phenomena portray the power and glory of the parousia and not a

to “celestial disasters,” thus restricting the destruction to the heavens (*Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 783).

³ Joel Marcus, *Mark* (2 vols.; AB 27-27A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000-2009), 2:906; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 402-403; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 5th ed., 2 vols., EKKNT 2 (Zürich: Benziger, 1999), 2:200; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 266; Dieter Lührmann, *Das Markusevangelium*, HNT 3 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 224; Dom Benoît Standaert, *Évangile selon Marc Commentaire*, 3 vols., EBib 61 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 2010), 3:938-39. Rudolf Pesch held position (4) in an earlier work, but later changed his mind (*Das Markusevangelium*, 2 vols., HThKNT 2 [Freiburg: Herder, 1977], 2:303).

⁴ Technically, Adams contends that Mark 13:24b-25 refers to “the cosmos in process of collapse” (*Stars*, 160). He ultimately argues that Mark 13:31 confirms that heaven and earth will be destroyed (cf. *Stars*, 153-64).

⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, 2nd ed., CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 405-406; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 327-29; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark*, BNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 318-19; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 614; Egon Brandenburger, *Markus 13 und die Apokalyphtik*, FRLANT 134 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 100-102; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, SP 2 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2002), 374.

⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 425; Lars Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted: The Formation of Some Jewish Apocalyptic Texts and of the Eschatological Discourse Mark 13 Par.*, ConBNT 1 (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1966), 157; Jan Lambrecht, *Die Redaktion der Markus-Apokalypse: Literarische Analyse und Strukturuntersuchung*, AnBib 28 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), 176; William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 474-75; Rudolf Pesch, *Naherwartungen: Tradition und Redaktion in Mk 13*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1968), 158-66; Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 612-13; Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 347-48; Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 590-91; Camille Focant, *L'évangile selon Marc*, CBNT 2 (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 498-99; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 9th ed., THKNT 2 (Berlin: Evangelische, 1984), 362; Paul Lamarche, *Évangile de Marc*, EBib 33 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1996), 302. M. Eugene Boring calls the phenomena “signs,” but they occur in response to the advent of the Creator, not as precursors (*Mark: A Commentary*, NTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 372-73). So too Darrell Bock, *Mark*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 328. PHEME Perkins emphasizes that the phenomena point to a theophany, but also that the astronomical bodies will cease to function (“The Gospel of Mark,” *NIB* 8:691-92).

concrete act of destruction.⁷ (5) Mark 13:24-25 metaphorically describes great socio-political or socio-religious events within the course of history.⁸ Within this view the majority of proponents, such as Wright, argue that the language refers to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.⁹

3.2 Mark's Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:1-37)

Given that Mark appears to adopt the same structural scheme as Matthew, I will argue that Mark's discourse refers to both the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and to the second coming of Jesus, and that it can be divided into four main sections (13:1-4, 13:5-13, 13:14-27, and 13:28-37) based on the two questions posed by the disciples (13:4).¹⁰

3.2.1 The Setting of the Discourse (Mark 13:1-4)

After Jesus pronounces judgment upon the temple in Mark, four disciples approach him privately to ask two separate-but-related questions: (1) "When will these things be" (πότε ταῦτα ἔσται)?

⁷ Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970), 69-71; David M. Russell, *The "New Heavens and New Earth": Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, SBAL 1 (Philadelphia: Visionary, 1996), 206; J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 181-87. Middleton is also open to the possibility of a double reference where Mark also refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

⁸ Understanding the language to refer to socio-political upheaval is R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., TNTC 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 280; Keith D. Dyer, *The Prophecy on the Mount: Mark 13 and the Gathering of the New Community*, ITSCBS 2 (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 230. Bas van Iersel takes the language to imply the overthrow of Greco-Roman deities ("The Sun, Moon, and Stars of Mark 13,24-25 in a Greco-Roman Reading," *Bib* 77 [1996]: 84-92).

⁹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 362; idem, *Mark for Everyone*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 176-88; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 531-34; Ezra P. Gould, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 249-50; Timothy C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in Its Narrative Role* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 94-155; Thomas R. Hatina, *In Search of a Context: The Function of Scripture in Mark's Narrative*, JSNTSup 232, SSEJC 8 (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 325-73; idem, "The Focus of Mark 13:24-27: The Parousia, or the Destruction of the Temple?" *BBR* 6 (1996): 43-66; Andrew R. Angel, *Chaos and the Son of Man: The Hebrew Chaoskampf Tradition in the Period 515 BCE to 200 CE*, LSTS 60 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 132-33; Michael F. Bird, "Tearing the Heavens and Shaking the Heavens: Mark's Cosmology in its Apocalyptic Context," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, LNTS 355 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 55-58.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the structure of Mark's discourse see Stein, *Mark*, 584-85; Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 10-12, 261-94.

(2) “What will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished” (τί τὸ σημεῖον ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα συντελεῖσθαι πάντα)? As in Matthew, these two questions are structurally significant and set the agenda for the entire discourse.¹¹

The first question asks about timing (“when”). As dictated by the immediate context, the primary referent of “these things” (ταῦτα) is clearly the temple’s destruction.¹² But Mark’s use of the plural leaves open the possibility of a wider referent. The second question (“what”) focuses on “the sign.”¹³ The most natural referent of “all these things” (ταῦτα ... πάντα) is again the temple’s destruction. However, Mark’s inclusion of “all” probably indicates that the disciples were thinking of a larger eschatological scenario where the temple’s destruction would coincide with the eschatological turn of the ages. This is further supported by Mark’s allusion to Dan 12:7, which looks forward to the decisive moment when Israel’s suffering at the hands of an evil king would end and they would be delivered from exile.¹⁴ Daniel writes, “when the dispersion of the holy people comes to an end, all these things will be accomplished [συντελεσθήσεται πάντα ταῦτα].”¹⁵ *Therefore, similar to Matthew, Mark suggests that the disciples believed the destruction of the temple would accompany the eschatological*

¹¹ Contra Gundry, *Mark*, 738; Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology*, JSNTSup 26 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 203-206; Elizabeth E. Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3:22-30*, BZNTW 189 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 199. Jesus regularly answers the questions posed by his disciples in Mark (cf. 4:10-34; 7:17-23; 9:11-13, 28-29; 10:10-12; 14:12-16).

¹² As in Matthew, “these things” is an important phrase in Mark’s discourse for referring to the temple’s destruction (cf. 13:2, 4, 8, 29, 30).

¹³ Geddert (*Watchwords*, 29-58) and Edwards (*Mark*, 390) conclude that Mark has a negative view of “signs” based on his broader use of the term (cf. 8:11-12; 13:22), and thus argue that Jesus will not provide a sign in the discourse. However, they fail to recognize that Mark uses “sign” in 13:4 to mean something like “indication,” and not “proof” as in the other usages. See Evans, *Mark*, 304-305; France, *Mark*, 506; Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 295; Stein, *Mark*, 590-91.

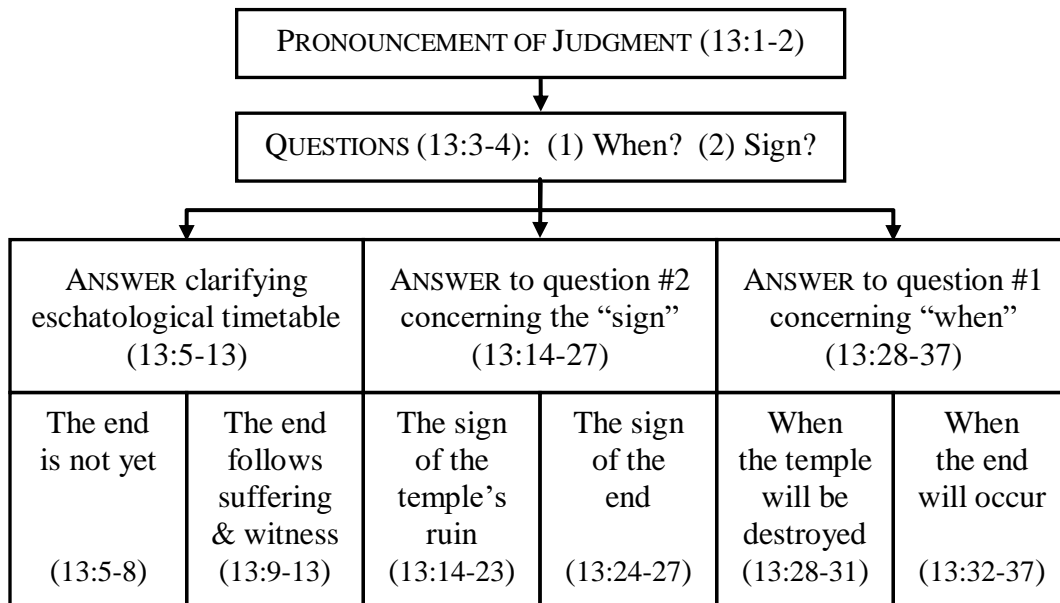
¹⁴ The oppressor of God’s people in Mark’s narrative is not an earthly king as in Daniel, but “the strong one” (i.e. Satan), who holds people captive and cannot be subdued (cf. 3:22-27; 5:2-4; 9:22-23).

¹⁵ Also noting this allusion are: Adams, *Stars*, 140-41; Edwards, *Mark*, 390; Gundry, *Mark*, 736; Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 87; Lane, *Mark*, 454; Marcus, *Mark*, 2:870; Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*, 387; Boring, *Mark*, 355; Hartman, *Prophecy*, 145.

consummation.¹⁶ Thus, when the disciples asked “when” the temple would be destroyed they *also* were asking “when” the eschatological consummation would occur. In the same way, when they asked for “the sign” of the temple’s destruction they *also* were asking for “the sign” of the eschatological consummation.

In order to correct the disciples’ mistaken assumption, Jesus chronologically separates the temple’s destruction from the parousia (13:5-13), and then addresses both subjects individually while answering each question. In 13:14-27 he answers “what will be the sign” of the temple’s demise and the parousia, and in 13:28-37 he answers “when” the temple’s destruction and the parousia will occur (see fig. 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE IN MARK 13



¹⁶ So the majority of interpreters, e.g. Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*, 372, 386-87; Boring, *Mark*, 355; Cranfield, *Mark*, 393-94; Marcus, *Mark*, 2:874; Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 104; Witherington, *Mark*, 343; Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, 602; Hooker, *Mark*, 305-306; Jacques Dupont, “La Ruine du Temple et la Fin des Temps dans le Discours de Marc 13,” in *Apocalypses et théologie de l’espérance: Congrès de Toulouse 1975*, ed. Louis Monloubou, LD 95 (Paris: Cerf, 1977), 211-13.

This division of material is supported by Jesus' shift from prophetic speech in 13:5-27 to parabolic speech in 13:28-37 as well as by various recurring elements within the discourse.

Recurring elements in Mark 13:5-27 include:

- Language of signs, sights, and sounds (13:6, 7, 14, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26)
- Language of turmoil and suffering (13:7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 19, 24, 25)
- Warnings to beware in order to avoid deception (13:5, 6, 7, 9, 21, 22)
- End (13:7, 13)
- Those days (13:17, 19, 20 [2x "days"], 24)¹⁷
- Elect (13:20, 22, 27)

Recurring elements in Mark 13:28-37 include:

- Knowledge (13:28, 29, 32, 33, 35)
- Periods of various time (13:28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35)¹⁸
- Warnings to remain alert in order to be prepared (13:33, 35, 37)

All of these themes and vocabulary help to divide the discourse between 13:5-27 and 13:28-37.

The division between 13:5-13 and 13:14-27 can be observed in final three elements of the first list (end, those days, elect). We now turn to Jesus' response.

3.2.2 Correcting a Misguided Eschatological Timetable (Mark 13:5-13)

Similar to Matthew, Mark's Jesus begins by correcting the mistaken assumption of the disciples that the temple's destruction would coincide with the eschatological consummation. The focus of 13:5-13 is on what does and does not lead to the "end" (τέλος) (13:7, 13).¹⁹ For discussion purposes, we can divide 13:5-13 into two sections:

- The end will not follow the events surrounding the temple's destruction (13:5-8)

¹⁷ "Those days" will be distinguished from "day" in 13:32.

¹⁸ The specific words involved in this theme are: near, generation, day, hour, time, evening, midnight, cockcrow, and dawn. Again, a period of time marked in 13:14-27 was "those days," which does not occur in 13:28-37. Also cf. the less precise temporal terms that occur throughout the entire discourse: when (πότε), whenever (ὅταν), and then/at that time (τότε).

¹⁹ The "end" does not refer to the "end of the temple" as suggested by Stein, *Mark*, 598; France, *Mark*, 508-509; Hatina, *In Search of a Context*, 349. The most likely reference to the "end" comes in relation to "when all these things are about to be accomplished [συντελεῖσθαι]?" See Evans, *Mark*, 307; Lane, *Mark*, 459.

- The end will follow a period of suffering and witness (13:9-13)

In 13:5-8, Mark chronologically separates the events surrounding the temple's destruction from the "end." He begins with a command to "beware" of messianic claimants, who will lead many astray and instigate war.²⁰ The disciples should not "be alarmed" when they hear of such events, for God's plan is being worked out through them. But at the same time, they must realize that "the end is not yet." The military conflicts, famines, and earthquakes surrounding the temple's demise are eschatological events (consistent with the messianic woes), but are not events which herald an imminent end. In other words, these events are only the "beginning of birthpangs." Thus, similar to Matthew, Mark indicates a temporal gap between the events surrounding the temple's destruction and the eschatological consummation.

In 13:9-13, Mark addresses a period of suffering and witness that (in contrast to 13:5-8) will extend to the eschatological consummation. Once again the disciples are cautioned to "beware," this time for their own wellbeing on account of their witness for Jesus. In carrying out this task they will experience bodily harm, yet it will not be in vain because it will aid the proclamation of the good news to all the nations, which must happen "first" before the end.²¹ They must endure.

3.2.3 Jesus' Answer to Question #2: What will be the sign? (Mark 13:14-27)

With a new chronological perspective in place, Mark's Jesus turns to explicitly answer the questions of the disciples. He begins with the second question concerning the "sign." The focus

²⁰ "Beware" is a call to be cautious and attentive (cf. 13:5, 9, 23, 33). See Geddert, *Watchwords*, 59-60, 86-87; Lane, *Mark*, 456-57.

²¹ Mark leaves what is to follow the worldwide proclamation of the gospel unstated. Some suggest that the temple's destruction follows, e.g. Stein, *Mark*, 600; France, *Mark*, 516-17. However, Mark (like Matthew) is most likely referring to the eschatological consummation (cf. 13:7). See Hooker, *Mark*, 311; Lane, *Mark*, 461-63; Evans, *Mark*, 310.

of 13:14-27 is on two signs that both will be “seen” (ὄραω, 13:14, 26). For discussion purposes, we can divide Jesus’ answer into two sections:

- The sign of the temple’s destruction and the period of “those days” (13:14-23)
- The sign of the eschatological consummation (13:24-27)

In 13:14-23, Jesus addresses “the sign” that the temple will be destroyed as well as the period of “those days.” Similar to Matthew’s version of the discourse, Mark does not focus exclusively on Jerusalem’s impending doom in these verses. His emphasis is on how these events impact his disciples. He begins with an event that the disciples will “see” (ἴδητε), the “desolating sacrilege” (13:14). This is the sign that the temple will be destroyed, but Mark does not make this explicit until 13:28-31.²² Identifying the nature of the desolating sacrilege has proven elusive, although Mark hints that it involves a man “standing” somewhere where he shouldn’t (probably as Matthew suggests, in the temple).²³ Mark’s primary concern is how the disciples respond to the event. They need to flee when it occurs.

In 13:17-20, Mark describes “those days,” a phrase which needs explanation (13:17, 19, 20, 24).²⁴ Mark uses the phrase in the same manner as Matthew to denote *an undefined period of suffering for believers*, not the period of Jerusalem’s siege (as in Luke 21:22-24).²⁵ This period includes the flight of believers from Jerusalem (13:17) and extends to the eschatological consummation (13:19, 20, 24). Therefore, while the period of “those days” certainly includes the events surrounding Jerusalem’s impending calamity, it cannot be limited in scope to these events. It embraces the whole of what is being described in 13:5-23 and is probably another way

²² So the majority of interpreters, e.g. France, *Mark*, 519; Hooker, *Mark*, 313-14; Stein, *Mark*, 602; Wright, *Mark*, 182; Bock, *Mark*, 325. Adams suggests that the desolating sacrilege is Jesus’ answer to the disciples question about “when” the temple will be destroyed, but this seems to blur the distinction between the two questions. He then goes on to say that the desolating sacrilege is “the signal” that destruction is near (*Stars*, 144).

²³ The participle “standing” (ἑστηκότα) is masculine singular. Cf. Dan 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11. For a discussion of various theories see Stein, *Mark*, 602-604; Evans, *Mark*, 317-20; France, *Mark*, 519-26.

²⁴ Mark 13:20 simply has “the days,” (2x) without the demonstrative pronoun.

²⁵ Contra Stein, *Mark*, 605; Strauss, *Mark*, 581-83, 589-90. France recognizes that “those days” is defined by the suffering of believers, yet resists the implication that it is a larger period of time (*Mark*, 526-27).

of expressing the period of the messianic woes or eschatological “birthpangs.” It is the period which leads to “that day” (13:32).

Mark begins his description of “those days” in 13:17 with a “woe” showing compassion for pregnant and nursing mothers trying to escape Jerusalem’s doom (13:17). As in Matthew, this “woe” is for believers trying to escape, not those left in Jerusalem’s siege (as in Luke). Further elaborating on the nature of “those days,” Mark says that it will involve unrivaled suffering for the disciples (13:19; cf. Dan 12:1). But the Lord will act on behalf of his elect, shortening the days so that all life is not extinguished (13:20).²⁶

It is also during “those days” that believers will be confronted with the dangers of a second round of deceivers who will rise to lead people astray (13:21-23).²⁷ There will be those who are touted as the Messiah, but the disciples must not believe these reports (13:21). Nor should they put any stock in the “signs and wonders” they produce (13:22). These “signs” would naturally perk the interest of the disciples, so Jesus gives a final emphatic warning to “beware” (13:23). The disciples do not need to listen to these deceptive figures since they will not provide a new revelation from God. On the contrary, Jesus has informed the disciples of “all things” ahead of time.²⁸

Here I will briefly summarize my interpretation of Mark 13:24-27, which follows the same basic argument I advanced in the last chapter. In Mark 13:24-27, Jesus addresses the sign of the eschatological consummation (cf. 13:4). After the suffering associated with the messianic

²⁶ Adams (*Stars*, 145-46), following Evans (*Mark*, 322), contends that Mark shifts from the Judean tribulation in 13:14-18 to an “end-time tribulation in general” in 13:19-20 (also cf. Hooker, *Mark*, 315-17). I agree with this interpretive move in principle. However (and Adams notes this objection), the repetition of “those days” connects 13:19-20 to the preceding. It is much simpler to see every occurrence of “those days” as referring to a larger period of suffering like the messianic woes.

²⁷ Similar to Matthew, Mark seems to distinguish between two sets of deceivers, one prior to the destruction of the temple (13:5-6) and a second prior to the parousia (13:21-22).

²⁸ Mark 13:23 does not assert that everything the disciples needed to know has now been spoken (as if their questions have been completely answered). Jesus is affirming the completeness of what he is telling the disciples in light of the threat posed by false messiahs and prophets (13:21-22). See Boring, *Mark*, 371.

woes, there will be a powerful and glorious coming of the Son of Man into the historical sphere for judgment and salvation. Mark uses the language of cosmic catastrophe to depict a *theophany* which he applies to the *parousia* (13:24-25). After the heavens are darkened and the hostile powers are overthrown, the Son of Man, who is the “sign” that the end has come (as in Matthew), will be “seen” (ὄψονται) coming for purposes of judgment and salvation on earth (13:26-27).

3.2.4 Jesus’ Answer to Question #1: When will these things happen? (Mark 13:28-37)

In Mark 13:28-37 Jesus addresses the “when” question in two parts. This portion of the discourse centers on the concept of “knowledge” (γινώσκω in 13:28, 29; and οἶδα in 13:32, 33, 35).²⁹ Jesus will address what *can* and *cannot* be known. For discussion purposes, we can divide 13:28-37 into two main sections:

- What can be known: When the destruction of the temple will occur (13:28-31)
- What cannot be known: When the end will occur (13:32-37)

In 13:28-31, Jesus addresses “when” the temple will be destroyed.³⁰ Using the parable of the fig tree, Jesus explains *how to interpret* a sign which he has already given in the discourse so that the disciples can “know” (γινώσκετε) the answer to their primary question, “when” the main event will happen. Central to interpreting the parable is identifying the referent of “these things” (ταῦτα) in 13:29. It must be recalled that “these things” is an important phrase used by Mark to refer to the temple itself or the events surrounding its destruction (13:2, 4, 8). More importantly, when Mark writes “when you see” (ὅταν ἴδητε) in 13:29, he deliberately repeats the beginning of 13:14, “but when you see” (ὅταν δὲ ἴδητε). This implies that the “desolating sacrilege” is the sign

²⁹ So Dupont, “Ruine,” 216; Gray, *Temple*, 104.

³⁰ So Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 227; Stein, *Mark*, 618-20; France, *Mark*, 537-40.

which heralds the temple's destruction. Therefore, "these things" probably refers to the general events surrounding the temple's ruin (13:5-8) and most specifically the desolating sacrilege (13:14). So, just as the appearance of fig leaves indicates that summer is near, when the disciples see the desolating sacrilege, they know that "it" (i.e. the temple's destruction) is near, at the very gates (13:29).

Jesus then indicates, through the use of a solemn declaration, that "all these things" will happen before "this generation" ends (13:30). "All these things" encompasses the "these things" of the previous verse (13:5-8, 14), but also probably includes the temple's destruction itself (an event which is not described in the narrative).³¹ "This generation" should be taken to refer to Jesus' wicked and unrepentant Jewish contemporaries (cf. 8:12, 38; 9:19; 13:30).³² As in Matthew's Gospel, Mark uses "this generation" to specify the time frame within which the disciples will "see" the desolating sacrilege and what it heralds, the destruction of the temple. Therefore, Jesus partially answers the "when" question by saying that *the temple will be destroyed within roughly 30-40 years*.

In 13:32-37, Jesus addresses "when" the eschatological consummation will occur. Mark's use of "but concerning" indicates both a switch in subject (from temple to end) and a contrast of *knowledge*.³³ In 13:28-31, the disciples could "know" when the temple would be destroyed because of the sign. However, in 13:32-37, the disciples *cannot* "know" (οἶδεν) when

³¹ "All these things" (13:30) should have a larger scope than "these things" (13:29) as noted by Dupont, "Ruine," 217-18; France, *Mark*, 538-40. Contra Adams, *Stars*, 165; Stein, *Mark*, 618-19; Strauss, *Mark*, 594; who treat the referents as synonymous.

³² So Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*, 444. Contra Evald Lövestam, "The ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ Eschatology in Mk 13, 30 parr.," in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. Jan Lambrecht, BETL 53 (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1980), 403-13.

³³ On "but concerning" and this contrast see Dupont, "Ruine," 214-16; Boring, *Mark*, 373-74; Jan Lambrecht, "Literary Craftsmanship in Mark 13:32-37," *SNTSU* 32 (2007): 22.

all things are about to be accomplished (13:32).³⁴ As a result the disciples must remain vigilant (13:33). The brief parable of the departed-but-returning master underlines the need for the disciples to “keep awake” because the master’s return will be sudden (13:34-37).

3.3 Mark 13:24-27

3.3.1 But in Those Days After That Suffering (Mark 13:24a)

Mark connects 13:24-27 to the preceding with the phrase “but in those days after that suffering” (ἀλλ’ ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν ἐκείνην). The contrasting conjunction “but” signals two things: (1) a temporal change, and (2) a subject change. First, the temporal change involves a slight contrast in time between the events of 13:14-23 and 13:24-27. The phrases “in those days” and “after that suffering” must be understood in light of one another. “In those days” refers to the days of the messianic woes, an undefined period of length which extends beyond the temple’s ruin all the way to the consummation (13:17, 19, 20, 24).³⁵ “That suffering” is one of the defining characteristics of “those days” (13:19). So, while the events of 13:24-27 occur in the *same time period* as the events of 13:14-23, they are distinguished from the events of 13:14-23 since they happen “*after that suffering.*” Given the tension within Mark’s wording, which both joins and separates 13:14-23 and 13:24-27, he appears to be saying that the events of 13:24-27 follow *directly after* the suffering of the elect described in 13:14-23.³⁶ This suggests that 13:24-27 envisions the end of the messianic woes, the time when the Creator of the world will intervene on behalf of his elect (13:19-20). Second, Mark introduces a change in subject

³⁴ Since the “sign” of the consummation is the appearance of the Son of Man himself, it will not provide foreknowledge of when the “day” will occur.

³⁵ Several commentators point out that “in those days” is a common OT expression for the last days, e.g. Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*, 422; Focant, *Marc*, 498; Marcus, *Mark*, 2:906.

³⁶ Adams, *Stars*, 146; Stein, *Mark*, 612; also cf. Gray, *Temple*, 138-39. Noting the tension between the two phrases is Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 174; Gnllka, *Markus*, 2:199-200; Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 157-58.

between 13:14-23 and 13:24-27. While he addressed the sign of the temple’s ruin and the ensuing period of suffering in 13:14-23, he now begins to address the sign of the end in 13:24-27. Thus, he moves from describing events surrounding and following the temple’s destruction to the eschatological consummation itself. As part of this contrast, Mark sets the misleading “signs and wonders” produced by the false messiahs and prophets (13:22) against the genuine sign of the consummation, the arrival of the Son of Man for judgment and salvation.

3.3.2 The Day of the Son of Man (Mark 13:24b-25)

Like Matthew, Mark structures his language of cosmic catastrophe poetically using parallelism within the first two clauses and the final two clauses.³⁷ Mark 13:24b-25 reads as follows:

²⁴ ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται,
καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς,
²⁵ καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες ἔσονται ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πίπτοντες,
καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις αἱ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς σαλευθήσονται.

²⁴ the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers [who/which are] in the heavens will be shaken.

There are only minor differences between the text of Matthew and Mark, both of which seem to rely most heavily on the LXX of Isa 13:10 and 34:4 (with influence from Joel 2:10).³⁸ Whereas Matthew uses a future verb to state that the stars “will fall” (πεσοῦνται) “from” (ἀπὸ) heaven, Mark uses the periphrastic construction “will be falling” (ἔσονται ... πίπτοντες) “from” (ἐκ) heaven. The only other difference is how they choose to modify “the powers” in the final clause.

³⁷ Standaert, *Marc*, 3:936-37. Although see Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 176.

³⁸ For a more in-depth discussion of the OT allusions present in 13:24-25, see the last chapter. Also cf. Joseph Verheyden, “Describing the Parousia: The Cosmic Phenomena in Mk 13,24-25,” in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett, BETL 131 (Leuven: University Press, 1997), 534; T. F. Glasson, “Mark xiii. and the Greek Old Testament,” *ExpTim* 69 (1958): 213-15; Hatina, *In Search of a Context*, 326-31; Adams, *Stars*, 154-55; Hartman, *Prophecy*, 156-59; Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 176-78.

While Matthew writes that the powers “of the heavens” (τῶν οὐρανῶν) will be shaken, Mark says that the powers “[who/which are] in the heavens” (αἱ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς) will be shaken.³⁹ These minor variations of language are probably due to personal style and make little difference in the overall meaning of the allusions.

As a result, there appears to be no reason why we should not understand Mark 13:24-25 as having the same basic function and meaning as Matt 24:29, especially since Mark adopts the same structural scheme for the discourse as a whole. The basic points of my argument from the previous chapter can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The allusions to Isa 13:10 and 34:4 are significant in three ways. First, each allusion calls to mind the Day of Yahweh. Second, both Matthew and Mark introduce the word “shake” (σαλεύω) in order to enhance the idea of a theophany of God.⁴⁰ Third, both Matthew and Mark have reinterpreted these concepts christologically by inserting Jesus in the place of Yahweh.
- (2) The best way to interpret the OT language of theophany and the Day of Yahweh in texts like Isa 13 and 34 is to recognize that the prophets operated with what G. B. Caird has called a “bifocal vision,” which imposes metaphorical images of universal judgment upon local manifestations of God’s judgment so as to produce a “synthetic picture.”⁴¹ As a result, the prophets did not speak about two separate judgments (one local and one universal), but about one historical event which was described in part

³⁹ Mark’s use of the article αἱ can be omitted in translation or treated like a relative pronoun (cf. Mark 11:25), which may underscore the personification of “the powers” as in Isa 34:4-5.

⁴⁰ It has been common for interpreters to choose between an emphasis on the Day of Yahweh (judgment) or a theophany (salvation) in 13:24-27. Hartman favors a theophany (*Prophecy*, 157, 165), while Pesch favors the Day of Yahweh (*Naherwartungen*, 158-66; *Markusevangelium*, 2:303). Verheyden argues that because the “Day of Yahweh” is not specifically mentioned the judgmental aspects of this concept are not brought forward, thus a theophany for the purpose of salvation is being emphasized (“Describing,” 525-50). However, this is somewhat of a false dichotomy. The traditions appear blended together. So Adams, *Stars*, 159.

⁴¹ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 258.

with universal language.⁴² Consequently, local instances of judgment were then seen to typologically embody and anticipate the universal judgment of the future.⁴³ When understood in this way, the OT language of cosmic catastrophe is primarily *theological* in nature, yet retains a *historical application*. Therefore, *it refers to the sovereign and powerful coming of God into the historical realm for judgment and salvation*.⁴⁴ This does not, of course, mean that Mark followed the prophetic usage of the language, but it does provide us with a beginning point of reference.

- (3) In assessing how Mark applies the language of cosmic catastrophe in 13:24-25, he appears to use it like an OT prophet to communicate theological content concerning a historical event.⁴⁵ But instead of applying the language to a “day” which embodies and anticipates the Day of Yahweh, he applies it to the great “Day” itself, the parousia.⁴⁶ Therefore, Mark 13:24-25 depicts *a theophany of the Son of Man at the end of the age (i.e. the parousia) for the purpose of judging the world and saving his elect, something we might call a “Day of the Son of Man.”*

⁴² Caird, *Language*, 114, 256.

⁴³ Caird, *Language*, 260; Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*, 248.

⁴⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*, 424-26; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 70-71; Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 158-66; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 181-87; Hatina, “Focus,” 53-59.

⁴⁵ Mark appears to lean toward the prophetic usage of the language for the following reasons. First, Mark’s Jesus speaks and acts like a prophet of judgment in Mark 11-13. Second, when Jesus quotes or clearly alludes to the OT in Mark, he usually makes a claim about himself or rebukes others. He does not use the OT like an apocalypticist (cf. Mark 4:12; 7:6-7; 10:7, 19; 11:17; 12:10, 29-31, 36; 14:27, 62). Third, while there is considerable speculation about whether an apocalyptic document lies behind the Olivet discourse, Mark’s work is not an apocalypse per se. Noting how the language is much closer to Isaiah than Jewish apocalyptic literature is Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 162-64. Andrew Angel, who after a study of how this sort of language was being used during the period, finds that it was still being used metaphorically in a way similar to its use in the OT (*Chaos*, 130). Morna Hooker also argues that Mark’s allusion “would clearly evoke memories of the prophetic threat of judgment” (“Isaiah in Mark’s Gospel,” in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J.J. Menken [New York: T&T Clark, 2005], 44). Also arguing for a prophetic tone is Keith D. Dyer, “‘But concerning that day...’ (Mark 13:32): ‘Prophetic’ and ‘apocalyptic’ eschatology in Mark 13,” in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1999*, SBLSP 38 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 104-22.

⁴⁶ Contra Wright, *Jesus*, 360-63; France, *Mark*, 530-37; Hatina, “Focus,” 43-66; Gould, *Mark*, 249-52; Gray, *Temple*, 137-45. The determination that 13:24-25 refers to the parousia can only be made by observing the context into which the language is placed. Similar to Matthew (and in contrast to Luke), I think the context of Mark favors the parousia over the destruction of the temple. See the relevant contextual points made in the previous chapter.

(4) In terms of the meaning of 13:24-25, Mark depicts a scene in the heavens which enhances his portrayal of a theophany of the Son of Man. In 13:24b-c, Mark alludes primarily to Isa 13:10 to address the darkening of the sun and moon. The clear picture presented is one of *darkness*, which serves as a backdrop to emphasize the *glorious* nature of the Son of Man coming “with glory.” In 13:25, Mark alludes primarily to Isa 34:4 to speak of the stars and the powers. Paralleling the “stars” with the “powers” most likely introduces the idea that the stars are spiritual beings that exercise control over earthly matters.⁴⁷ Thus we appear to have a form of metonymy. These heavenly powers will be “shaken,” causing them to “fall.”⁴⁸ As a result, the powers will be removed from their *positions of authority* over the earth.⁴⁹ They are overthrown and supplanted by the Son of Man, who comes like Yahweh with “great power” to *reign* over all things.⁵⁰ Therefore, Mark uses the language of cosmic catastrophe to enhance his picture of the Son of Man coming “with great power and glory” (13:26).⁵¹

As in the previous chapter on Matthew, we can depict Mark’s emphasis with the following diagram (fig. 3.2).

⁴⁷ The people of the ancient world regularly made this association, so Middleton, *New Heaven*, 117-18, 184-87; Marcus, *Mark*, 2:908; Edwards, *Mark*, 403. Furthermore, Mark puts on the lips of an unclean spirit speaking to Jesus, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us” (1:24)? This question appears to express the expectation that Jesus will come to judge evil spirits at the parousia.

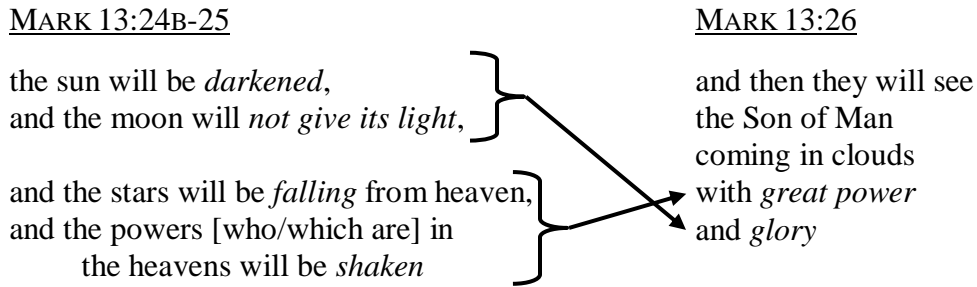
⁴⁸ It does not seem inconsequential that when evil spirits are confronted by Jesus in Mark’s narrative, they often *shake* and *fall*. For example, in an encounter between Jesus and a boy with an unclean spirit, Mark writes, “Seeing him, the spirit immediately convulsed [συνεσπάραξεν] the boy, and he fell [πεσών] on the ground [ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς]” (9:20). Also cf. Mark 1:26; 3:11; 5:6. The scene depicted in 13:24-25 appears to emphasize Jesus’ ultimate victory over Satan and the hostile powers as Jesus comes with “great power.”

⁴⁹ Boring, *Mark*, 372.

⁵⁰ Marcus, *Mark*, 908.

⁵¹ See Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 183-84.

FIGURE 3.2: THE RELATION BETWEEN MARK 13:24B-25 AND 13:26



In conclusion, it appears that the primary meaning of Mark 13:24b-25 is *christological* in nature. It helps to convey the parousia of the Son of Man as *a stepping forth of the exalted and glorious Lord of the universe over-and-against all other heavenly glories/rulers*. And whereas Matthew went on to draw attention to the *visual* nature of the parousia by stressing “the sign of the Son of Man” and the Son of Man coming with “great glory,” Mark goes on to draw attention to the *powerful* nature of the parousia by stressing that he comes with “great power” (13:26). The Day of the Son of Man will witness the coming of the King who will bring about the ultimate victory of God over the rulers of this age. Satan and his angels will be defeated and the reign of God will be extended to every corner of the cosmos.

What, then, does Mark 13:24-25 tell us about the future of the cosmos? Similar to Matthew, given the close association in ancient thought between the heavenly bodies and heavenly powers, Mark may anticipate the destruction of the heavenly bodies as a consequence of the judgment of the Son of Man against “the powers who are in the heavens.” However, even if the sun, moon, and stars are caught up in this judgment, their destruction should not be taken to imply the dissolution of the cosmos or its return to primeval chaos. For Mark, the language of cosmic catastrophe implies the judgment of the hostile powers of the universe, which ultimately accentuates a theophany of the Son of Man. Furthermore, Mark 13:26-27 shows that the cosmos

is still intact when the Son of Man comes. Thus, while Mark 13:24-25 may anticipate the destruction of the heavenly bodies, the purpose of this judgment is to convey a christological message. The Son of Man will come on the Day of the Lord in glory and might to overthrow all rival rulers. As a result, the kingdom of God will become fully manifest throughout the entire cosmos.

This interpretation of Mark 13:24-25 differs from those proposed by N. T. Wright on the one hand (who interprets the language as metaphorically referring to the destruction of Jerusalem's temple), and Edward Adams on the other (who interprets the language as metaphorically referring to the dissolution of the cosmos at the parousia). Adams frames his work on Mark 13:24-25 as a deliberate critique of Wright.⁵² And given that I have tried to demonstrate where I agree and disagree with Wright in the previous chapter (primarily in the footnotes), I will focus the majority of my attention below on Adams.⁵³ I will begin with a summary of his position on 13:24-25, followed by a few critiques.

Adams sees Mark 13:24-25 as a “creative reworking” of Isa 13:10 and 34:4 which contributes to Mark's description of the parousia of the Son of Man in 13:26-27.⁵⁴ Thus, the celestial upheavals are signs which “both *announce* and *accompany* the eschatological coming.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, when Mark 13:24-25 is read in light of Jewish comparative literature, it has remarkable similarities with texts that “exhibit a ‘catastrophic intervention’ pattern.”⁵⁶ These

⁵² For a brief, yet incisive, response to Adams see N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1:167-75.

⁵³ My primary disagreement with Wright is not that the language cannot be applied to socio-political events, such as the destruction of Jerusalem, but that the contexts of Matthew and Mark do not favor interpreting the language in this manner. These writers appear to structure their discourses in a way that leads up to the parousia. However, Wright's contention that the language refers to the socio-political events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem appear to make the best sense of Luke's discourse (see chap. 4).

⁵⁴ Adams, *Stars*, 154-55.

⁵⁵ Adams, *Stars*, 158-59 (italics original).

⁵⁶ Adams, *Stars*, 159. Comparative texts that are of particular importance to Adams are: 1 En. 1:3b-9; 102:1-3; 1 QH 11.19-36; T. Mos. 10:3-6; 2 Bar. 32:1; Apoc. Zeph. 12:5-8; Sib. Or. 3:675-81.

texts, Adams claims, describe actual catastrophic events which will occur in conjunction with the end-time theophany of God. And since Mark seems to follow this pattern, he also probably intends the phenomena of 13:24-25 to translate into actual cosmic upheavals. Adams recognizes that it is difficult to sustain this conclusion from 13:24-25 alone, but when 13:24-25 is read in light of 13:31 (which Adams takes as an unambiguous statement about the dissolution of the cosmos), then 13:24-25 depicts “the catastrophic beginning of the end of the present cosmic order.”⁵⁷ While Adams’ argument is possible, I do not find it convincing for a number of reasons. I will address three.

(1) I find Adams’ treatment of Isa 13 and 34 (as well as several other OT and apocalyptic texts) open to debate, particularly his understanding of the language of cosmic catastrophe.⁵⁸ At the heart of the problem is how to treat instances where both language of local judgment and universal judgment appear together. Do these texts address one sustained subject (e.g. the judgment of Babylon in Isa 13:1-22), or two (e.g. the judgment of Babylon in Isa 13:1-5, 14-22, and universal judgment in Isa 13:6-13)? Adams chooses the latter on the basis of a “strategy of particularization,” which he argues “grounds the announcement of impending local judgment in the genuine expectation of universal judgment by global or cosmic catastrophe.”⁵⁹ Adams utilizes this strategy to *divide* the content of Isa 13 and 34 into portions that refer to local historical judgment and portions that refer to universal judgment, and then notes that both Isa 13:10 and 34:4 appear in sections related to universal judgment. Thus, he concludes that Mark 13:24-25 must refer to an end-time universal cosmic catastrophe.⁶⁰ However, as I argued in the last chapter, I think a more sensitive treatment of OT prophetic language is offered by Caird (and

⁵⁷ Adams, *Stars*, 181.

⁵⁸ To be fair, Adams acknowledges the possibility of other positions (*Stars*, 156).

⁵⁹ Adams, *Stars*, 156 (cf. 36-38, 43-44). Adams derives his position from Paul R. Raabe, “The Particularizing of Universal Judgment in Prophetic Discourse,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 652-74.

⁶⁰ Adams, *Stars*, 156-57.

followed by Wright and Middleton).⁶¹ He argues that the prophets looked into the future with “bifocal vision,” and so were able to produce a “synthetic picture” of divine judgment.⁶² As a result, texts such as Isa 13 and 34 do not speak of two separate subjects, but one (a local historical judgment by Yahweh). Adams’ “strategy” unnecessarily divides the subject of the text and appears to miss the transcendent perspective of judgment upon cities or nations offered by the metaphorical language.

(2) While Adams’ analysis of Jewish comparative texts is helpful and to be commended, it does not illumine Mark 13:24-25 as much as he contends.⁶³ He repeatedly claims that the comparative material undermines Wright’s view of the language (which is somewhat questionable in light of the point above). But what Adams does not say is that the material he surveys *does not firmly support his view either*. Adams begins by comparing Mark 13:24-25 with texts that envision “‘preliminary’ celestial abnormalities.”⁶⁴ However, after weighing the evidence, and discussing the merits of calling the phenomena of Mark 13:24-25 “signs,” Adams concludes that 13:24-25 is much closer to a second category of comparative material, which he labels as texts that “envisage a global/cosmic catastrophe,” particularly those that “exhibit a ‘catastrophic intervention’ pattern.”⁶⁵ Adams finds it intriguing that these texts combine the language of theophany with language of cosmic catastrophe, something which he sees associated in Mark 13:24-27. In his analysis of the texts, Adams states that while several texts “anticipate

⁶¹ Caird, *Language*, 256-60; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 280-86; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 109-28.

⁶² Adams seems to misread Caird at this point, suggesting that he argues for a “double reference” (*Stars*, 9, 11-12). However, Caird’s “synthetic picture” does not have a double reference. Caird’s point was that end-of-the-world language was used metaphorically *to describe one referent*, the local historical instance of God’s judgment (see *Language*, 256-60). Caird writes concerning Isa 13:9-11, “On a superficial reading the referent of these verses might appear to be the end of the world.... Yet when we read on it becomes apparent that what the prophet intended to describe, under the symbols of world judgment, was the end of Babylon’s world, the coming destruction of the Babylonian empire by the invading armies of Cyrus the Mede” (*Language*, 114).

⁶³ For his full analysis see Adams, *Stars*, 52-100.

⁶⁴ Adams, *Stars*, 158. He cites: 1 En. 80:4-8; LAB 19:13; 4 Ezra 5:4b-5; Sib. Or. 3:796-804; 5:346-49.

⁶⁵ Adams, *Stars*, 159. He cites: 1 En. 1:3b-9; 102:1-3; 1 QH 11.19-36; T. Mos. 10:3-6; 2 Bar. 32:1; Apoc. Zeph. 12:5-8; Sib. Or. 3:675-81.

actual catastrophic happenings,” the nature of these catastrophes is not world-ending.⁶⁶ As a result, he is forced to admit, “In Jewish apocalyptic and related writings, God’s catastrophic intervention *does not usually result in the destruction of the cosmos*, at least not explicitly.”⁶⁷ This would seem to weigh heavily against his argument for cosmic dissolution. Adams continues, “One might argue that since the earth still seems to be in existence in v. 27, the upheavals of vv. 24-25 cannot be world-ending.”⁶⁸ This would be a natural conclusion based on the comparative evidence he has presented. But then Adams presses the issue by claiming, “But the scene being evoked could be that of the cosmos in *process* of collapse.”⁶⁹ I would contend that this final inference is forced, going beyond what the evidence will allow. There is nothing in the immediate context of 13:24-27 that suggests such a nuanced cosmological statement about a *progressive* breakdown of the cosmic order. Realizing the tenuous nature of his argument, Adams concludes, “From Mk 13.24-27 alone, it is not possible to determine whether the convulsions occasion dissolution. However, an ‘end of the cosmos’ reading is suggested when these verses are read alongside v. 31” (I will discuss this verse below).⁷⁰ In conclusion, with as much weight as Adams assigns to Jewish comparative literature, it does not seem to bolster his position as much as he contends.

(3) Adams argues that Mark 13:24-25 should be read metaphorically as *imagery* for the dissolution of the cosmos since the end of the world is outside of human experience and therefore cannot be described with precision.⁷¹ Thus, Mark 13:24-25 is not a literal description of events but nonetheless describes the concrete breakdown of the universe. In practical terms,

⁶⁶ Adams’ statement that these texts “anticipate actual catastrophic happenings” is debatable. For example, T. Mos. 10:1-10 could easily be understood as depicting a theophany but not the destruction of the cosmos. The language highlights the glory and might of the Creator when he steps forth to act.

⁶⁷ Adams, *Stars*, 160 (italics added). Also cf. his full treatment of the above passages (ibid., 64-66, 70-74).

⁶⁸ Adams, *Stars*, 160.

⁶⁹ Adams, *Stars*, 160 (italics original).

⁷⁰ Adams, *Stars*, 160.

⁷¹ Adams, *Stars*, 17.

the stars might not fall from heaven exactly the way Mark describes, but something equally catastrophic is in view. Now, I do not object to the possibility of arguing this position. The difficulty I have with Adams' interpretation is that, at certain points, he seems to blur the distinction between literal and metaphorical language by collapsing them together as if we can read non-literal language literally.⁷² For example, while attempting to substantiate his interpretation of 13:24-25 he writes,

The prediction of 'earthquakes' (σεισμοί) in Mk 13.8 very plainly looks for real earthquakes (few would dispute this). From this, the inference may be drawn that objective cosmic 'shaking' and other upheavals are expected in vv. 24-25. This is not, of course, to say that the language of vv. 24-25 is meant 'literally'. My claim is that like the writers of *I Enoch* 1, etc., the evangelist very probably expects the stereotypical images of catastrophe to translate into actual cosmological events of a calamitous nature.⁷³

What I do not see is how his inference follows from the evidence he provides. Adams' reasoning seems to be: If (a) Mark 13:8 and 13:24-25 both contain the language of "shaking," and if (b) Mark 13:8 expects a concrete earthquake, then (c) Mark 13:24-25 also probably expects a concrete destructive event. But this line of thinking ignores the difference between literal and metaphorical language.⁷⁴ Adams states that he is not interpreting 13:24-25 literally, but his logic suggests otherwise. If 13:24-25 is not a literal statement that the powers will be "shaken" (as Adams contends), then how can he be so confident that some form of concrete "shaking" or destruction is forecasted? Attempting to relate the literal language of Mark 13:8, which certainly forecasts a "real" earthquake, with the metaphorical language of 13:24-25 based solely on an association of similar "shaking" language is unacceptable. We cannot assume that "shaking"

⁷² It is certainly a possibility here that Adams and I define terms differently. See chapter 1 for how I define terms such as: literal, metaphorical, concrete, abstract, etc.

⁷³ Adams, *Stars*, 160.

⁷⁴ As Wright points out in a response to Adams, it also seems to misunderstand the nature of "signs" (as in Mark 13:5-8), which do not forecast "a larger version of the same thing," but herald "concrete events... of a different sort" (*Paul*, 1:174).

denotes the same type of verbal action in each instance (that is, unless both are read literally).⁷⁵ Furthermore, if “shaking” in 13:24-25 has close associations with theophany language, a point which Adams recognizes, then why are we to assign the word “shaken” a cosmological meaning (like “earthquake” in 13:8) when the immediate context of 13:26-27 suggests a theological meaning (as in a metaphorical expression connoting the Son of Man coming “with great power” over-and-against hostile angelic powers of this age)? By its very nature metaphorical language suggests a definition *other* than its normal lexical sense. By focusing so intently on cosmology, Adams appears to miss, or at least underemphasizes, the christological point that Mark is trying to make.

As a result of these deficiencies in Adams’ argument, I question his claim that Mark 13:24-25 portrays the dissolution of the cosmos. What we seem to have is the language of cosmic catastrophe in order to illustrate the coming of the Son of Man with “great power and glory.” Mark 13:24-25 contributes more to christology than cosmology.

3.3.3 The Results of the Son of Man’s Visitation (Mark 13:26-27)

The scene shifts in Mark 13:26 from events depicted in the heavens to events on earth. Mark uses two “and then” (*καὶ τότε*) clauses to describe the results of the parousia: the judgment of those in opposition to God (13:26), and the salvation of the elect (13:27).⁷⁶

As mentioned above, Matthew adds material at this point in the discourse to emphasize the visual nature of the parousia. Mark, however, opts for a different emphasis. He chooses to draw attention to the *powerful* nature of coming of the Son of Man. He writes in 13:26, “and

⁷⁵ For other critiques of this line of reasoning see Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 179; Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 158-62.

⁷⁶ So Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 166-74; idem, *Markusevangelium*, 2:302-304; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 69-71. Accepting the notion of a theophany, but seeing it only in terms of the salvation of the elect is Dupont, “Ruine,” 243-54; Hartman, *Prophecy*, 165; Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 191.

then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (καὶ τότε ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλαις μετὰ δυνάμεως πολλῆς καὶ δόξης).

One of the main interpretive issues in 13:26 is identifying the subject of who “will see” (ὄψονται) the Son of Man. There are three primary interpretive options.⁷⁷ (1) Those who interpret 13:24-27 as referring to the destruction of the temple argue that the religious authorities will “see” the Son of Man coming as a vindicated Messiah in the destruction of Jerusalem.⁷⁸ This interpretation is based on similarities between the language of 13:26 and 14:62 (also cf. 8:38-9:1). These other texts may refer to the destruction of Jerusalem (although this conclusion is heavily debated).⁷⁹ However, even if this is true, 13:24-27 most likely refers to the parousia.

(2) Another possibility is that “the powers who are in the heavens” will see the Son of Man coming.⁸⁰ This is the most natural grammatical subject of the verb, which is carried over from the previous clause (13:25b). Given Mark’s emphasis on the coming of the Son of Man with “great power” over-and-against the “powers,” this option is possible. However, the “and then” at the beginning of 13:26 appears to signal a shift from events in the heavens (13:24-25) to events on earth (13:26-27). Thus, the Son of Man comes from heaven to earth in order to execute judgment.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Mark probably did not consider the disciples the subject; otherwise he would have written “you will see.” So Focant, *Marc*, 499; Luhrmann, *Markusevangelium*, 224.

⁷⁸ E.g. Wright, *Jesus*, 361-63; France, *Mark*, 534-35. For an argument against this interpretive option see Adams, *Stars*, 147-53. Also cf. his fuller treatment in idem, “The Coming of the Son of Man in Mark’s Gospel,” *TynBul* 56 (2005): 39-61.

⁷⁹ Mark 14:62 may refer to the temple’s ruin as a vindication and/or theophany of the Son of Man that will be witnessed by the Jewish authorities. Although see 15:32 where the religious authorities “see” Jesus dying on the cross and do not recognize that the kingdom is coming with power (cf. 10:42-45). Mark 8:38-9:1 also is notoriously difficult to interpret. I find that 8:38 probably refers to the parousia and that 9:1 probably refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

⁸⁰ Marcus, *Mark*, 2:903-904, 908; Van Iersel, “Sun,” 90; Angel, *Chaos*, 128; O. J. F. Seitz, “The Future Coming of the Son of Man: Three Midrashic Formulations in the Gospel of Mark,” in *SE* 6 (= TU 112), 490.

⁸¹ Contra Wright, *Jesus*, 361-63; France, *Mark*, 534-35. On Jesus’ direction of travel see the comments on Matt 24:30 in the previous chapter.

(3) The most likely position, which is also the majority position, is that ὄψονται is an impersonal plural where “they” = “people.” In other words, people in general will see Jesus’ parousia.⁸² Yet, “they” most likely refer to those who are in opposition to Jesus. This view is based on a recurring contrast in Mark’s discourse between those who embrace Jesus (“you,” i.e. the disciples) and those who reject him (“they,” i.e. various Jews and Gentiles). “They” in the discourse include: false messiahs and prophets (13:6, 22), betrayers (13:9, 11), and those who entice others to follow the false messiahs and prophets (13:21). Of particular interest is Mark’s other use of an impersonal plural in 13:9, “they will hand you over to councils.”⁸³ Thus, “they” most likely refer to those whom Jesus will condemn as his coming. This appears to cohere with Mark’s allusion to Dan 7:13-14, which most likely suggests the Son of Man coming as a divine warrior.⁸⁴ Thus, “they will see” the Son of Man coming in judgment.⁸⁵

Mark’s use of “see” (ὄψονται) in 13:26 also raises another issue which is infrequently discussed, namely that the Son of Man is “the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished” (13:4). We have already observed that the disciples would “see” the sign of the temple’s ruin in the “desolating sacrilege.” Here, when the people “see” the Son of Man coming, he will be the sign that the end is upon them. Thus, similar to Matthew, Mark probably understands the Son of Man himself as the sign of the consummation. Again, this does not provide warning as to when the end will occur, but it remains consistent with Mark’s contention that the timing of the parousia is unknown (cf. 13:32-37). When they “see” the Son of Man, he will indicate that the consummation is at hand.

⁸² Bock, *Mark*, 329; Cranfield, *Mark*, 406; Gundry, *Mark*, 745, 783; Lambrecht, *Redaktion*, 179-80; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 2:303; Stein, *Mark*, 613-15. Some restrict “they” to all of the “elect” (13:22, 27).

⁸³ “Councils” refers to local Jewish city councils (cf. Matt 10:17). Also see Mark 10:33.

⁸⁴ On the “divine warrior” background see Angel, *Choas*, 125-34.

⁸⁵ Also taking “see” to imply judgment is Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 167-69; idem, *Markusevangelium*, 2:303-304; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 69-71; Gnllka, *Markus*, 2:200; Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 209.

Finally, when the Son of Man comes it will be with “great power and glory.” As discussed above, this phrase relates to the language of cosmic catastrophe in 13:24-25. Mark highlights that Jesus will come “with great power.”⁸⁶ This emphasis underscores the ultimate victory of the Son of Man over the hostile “powers” of the universe. They will be vanquished.⁸⁷ This would be a fitting climax to Mark’s recurring emphasis on the battle between Jesus and Satan. Recalling the beginning of Mark’s narrative, Jesus is endowed with the power of God through the Holy Spirit (1:9-11) and sets out to proclaim the kingdom of God (1:14-15). Satan, on the other hand, is Jesus’ adversary (1:12-13), and consistently holds the people of the narrative physically and spiritually captive through various means.⁸⁸ He is “the strong one” who must be tied up so that people may be released from bondage (3:22-30).⁸⁹ Jesus’ ministry of healing, teaching, and exorcism draws attention to the fact that Satan’s kingdom is alive and active, yet at the same time is beginning to crumble. We will see later in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus will decisively defeat Satan through his death and resurrection, yet the battle is not over. Even after Jesus’ death and resurrection Satan will continue to exert influence through false messiahs, false prophets, and those who persecute believers all the way until the end (13:5, 9-13, 17-22). But after the suffering of those days, Jesus will finally overthrow of Satan and his kingdom. “The strong one” and his underlings will “shake” and “fall” in the face of the one who comes “with great power and glory.” Mark ensures their ultimate defeat.

Mark indicates a second outcome of the theophany of the Son of Man in 13:27 (καὶ τότε).

The subject shifts to the Son of Man and his salvific activities: “And then he will send out the

⁸⁶ Both Matthew and Luke add “great” to “glory” instead of “power.” In the LXX, “with great power” always refers to a large army (cf. Isa 36:2; 1 Macc 7:10, 11; 9:60; 11:63; 12:24, 42; 13:12). This may imply that the Son of Man will come with a large angelic host to do battle, and then gather the elect. See Angel, *Chaos*, 127.

⁸⁷ So Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 203-11.

⁸⁸ Cf. 1:12-13, 23-28, 32-34, 39; 2:1-12; 3:10-11, 14-15, 22-30; 4:15; 5:1-20, 25-34; 6:2-5, 7, 13, 53-56; 7:24-30; 8:17-18, 31-33; 9:14-29, 38-39; 10:27, 42-45; 11:27-33; 12:24; 12:35-37.

⁸⁹ See Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 71-76.

angels and will gather [his] elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end heaven” (καὶ τότε ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἐπισυνάξει τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς [αὐτοῦ] ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων ἀπ’ ἄκρου γῆς ἕως ἄκρου οὐρανοῦ).⁹⁰ As I argued in the previous chapter, Mark is describing the gathering of the elect by Jesus’ “angels” at the eschatological consummation.⁹¹ The gathering is a global event.

3.3.4 Initial Conclusions

Mark 13:24-25 may anticipate the destruction of the heavenly bodies as a consequence of the judgment of the Son of Man against the hostile powers of this age. But even if this is the case, these verses do not appear to portray the dissolution of the cosmos (either literally or metaphorically). What we seem to have is the language of cosmic catastrophe in order to communicate a powerful and glorious theophany of the Son of Man. We can now turn to Mark 13:31.

3.4 Mark 13:31

Mark writes in 13:31, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away” (ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρελεύσονται).⁹² As noted in

⁹⁰ See the allusions to Zech 2:6 (2:10 LXX) and Deut 30:4.

⁹¹ The normal sense of ἀγγελος in Mark is “angel” (1:13; 8:38; 12:25; 13:32), although “messenger” is a possibility (1:2).

⁹² The only differences from Matthew’s version are the two forms of “pass away” (παρέρχομαι). In the first instance, Matthew uses a third person singular as opposed to Mark’s third person plural. In the second instance Matthew uses an aorist, active, subjunctive compared to Mark’s future, middle/deponent, indicative. These differences are minor.

the last chapter, this verse seems to be patterned after Isa 40:8, which highlights the permanence of God's word as opposed to the impermanence of the cosmos.⁹³

Adams hangs his case for the dissolution of the cosmos in Mark 13:24-25 on his interpretation of Mark 13:31. He makes several valuable points worth repeating. First, he acknowledges that the overall emphasis of 13:31 stresses "the permanence of Jesus' words."⁹⁴ Jesus' purpose in 13:31 is to communicate that his words can be trusted, particularly his affirmation in 13:30 that "this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." Second, I think Adams is correct to critique both Wright and France, who suggest that Jesus' declaration about the passing away of heaven and earth does not communicate anything about the future of the cosmos. Jesus' declaration cannot be reduced to a rhetorical statement (even though that's the primary goal of the verse as a whole).⁹⁵ To do so loses sight of a third important point: Mark 13:31 is structured according to a contrast which compares the durability of the cosmos with the durability of Jesus' words.⁹⁶ The contrast would cease to function properly if "heaven and earth" did not have some kind of expected "ending." Thus, Mark probably expected the present cosmos to end at some point.

Now we can turn to where I think Adams' case is lacking. First, if Adams is to base his interpretation of Mark 13:24-25 on Mark 13:31, then he must demonstrate how 13:31 relates to 13:24-25. Three different times he claims that it "seems natural" or is "reasonable" to associate the texts, but ultimately he writes:

⁹³ A few interpreters argue the unlikely possibility that "heaven and earth" is metaphorical language referring to the temple in 13:31, e.g. Gray, *Temple*, 148-49; Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, "Jesus, the Temple and the Dissolution of Heaven and Earth," in *Apocalyptic in History and Tradition*, ed. Christopher Rowland and John Barton, JSPSup 43 (London: Sheffield, 2002), 117-41; idem., "The Destruction of the Temple & the Relativization of the Old Covenant: Mark 13:31 & Matthew 5:18," in *Eschatology in Bible & Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of a New Millennium*, ed. Kent E. Brower and Mark W. Elliott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 145-69.

⁹⁴ Adams, *Stars*, 161. Also see Boring, *Mark*, 376; Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 376; Witherington, *Mark*, 349.

⁹⁵ Adams, *Stars*, 161-62. Contra Wright, *Jesus*, 364-65; France, *Mark*, 540; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 104.

⁹⁶ Adams, *Stars*, 162. Also see Cranfield, *Mark*, 409; Evans, *Mark*, 335; Lane, *Mark*, 480.

The saying on the passing away of heaven and earth in v. 31 is not a direct comment on vv. 24-27, so we cannot be certain that Mark intended his readers to view the latter in the light of the former. But given the shared language of ‘cosmic fragility’, it is not unreasonable to take the announcement that ‘heaven and earth will pass away’ as expressing the outcome of the catastrophe envisioned in vv. 24-25.⁹⁷

On the surface, it may seem reasonable to relate 13:24-27 and 13:31. However, if my analysis of the discourse is correct, even though 13:24-25 and 13:31 are close in proximity and share language of “cosmic fragility,” they are written as answers to different questions. Mark 13:24-25 answers the question about “the sign” of the end (13:24-27), whereas 13:31 answers the question about “when” the temple will be destroyed (13:28-31). *This should caution us against drawing a close connection between 13:24-25 and 13:31.*⁹⁸ Therefore, Mark 13:31 is probably not a statement, as Adams contends, which expresses “the outcome of the catastrophe envisaged in vv. 24-25.”⁹⁹ Its function is primarily rhetorical in order to bolster the trustworthiness of Jesus’ prophecy concerning “when” the temple will be destroyed (13:28-30).

The second weakness of Adams’ argument is that he appears to assume *how* the cosmos will come to an end. He writes that 13:31a “is an unequivocal statement that heaven and earth *will be dissolved.*”¹⁰⁰ While I am in agreement with Adams that the present cosmos will end at some point, I am puzzled by his choice of the word “dissolved” (which I take to mean something like “split apart” or “disintegrate”). Adams seems to take for granted that “passing away” (παρέρχομαι) must involve catastrophic destruction, a conclusion that I think is unwarranted. Παρέρχομαι is best taken temporally in 13:31 because the contrast between the cosmos and

⁹⁷ Adams, *Stars*, 161-64.

⁹⁸ Also skeptical about a connection between 13:24-25 and 13:31 is Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 189.

⁹⁹ Adams, *Stars*, 164. Essentially, Adams argues the strange position that 13:28-30 is *not* a comment on 13:24-27, but that 13:31 is (*Stars*, 164-65).

¹⁰⁰ Adams, *Stars*, 162 (italics added).

Jesus' words is one of *time*.¹⁰¹ The contrast does not imply how the cosmos will end any more than it implies how Jesus' words will endure. Furthermore, the temporal uses of *παρέρχομαι* in 13:31 are employed by Mark to reinforce the temporal use of *παρέρχομαι* in 13:30, "this generation will certainly not pass away."¹⁰² Therefore, *παρέρχομαι* communicates that the cosmos will end, but not *how* it will end. It leaves open the possibility that the cosmos will cease to exist (i.e. pass into nothing, be destroyed) or that it will cease to exist as it is (i.e. pass into another state, be transformed). Thus, the most we can infer is that Mark affirms an *ending* of some kind to the present cosmos. How the ending occurs remains uncertain.

3.5 Mark's Theology of the Future of the Cosmos

3.5.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

Similar to Matthew, Mark identifies the exalted Jesus as the primary actor in the transition between this world and the world to come (13:24-27). However, given that Mark inserts Jesus in the place of God the Father on a day similar to the Day of the Lord (13:24-27), he likely saw the exalted Son as carrying out the will of his Father.

3.5.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

Mark connects the cosmic transition to the parousia (13:24-27; cf. 10:30). But as with Matthew, this information is not all that helpful because the timing of the parousia remains unknown (13:32). Mark also indicates that several eschatological events will precede the end, such as the destruction of the temple and the messianic "birthpangs" (13:5-8). But these are only the beginning of a longer period which will involve suffering and the worldwide proclamation of the

¹⁰¹ Cf. Mark 6:48; 13:30; 14:35; and BDAG, 775-76.

¹⁰² We should also not forget that 13:28-31 is an answer to a question about *timing* (when?).

gospel (13:9-13). Only after the suffering of “those days” will the end come. Thus, when the cosmic transition will occur is unknown.

3.5.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

Like Matthew, Mark frames the main problems affecting the cosmos during “this age” in terms of sin, death, and dominion.¹⁰³ Mark demonstrates in his narrative that humanity has sinned and is in need of forgiveness, healing, and exorcism (e.g. 1:32-34; 2:17; 10:45). Yet, there is another dimension to the problem. Mark does not explicitly say it, but he implies that Satan is the ruler of this age. He is the primary opponent of Jesus (1:12-13) and the one who reigns over a kingdom that stands in opposition to the kingdom of God (3:20-27; 4:3-9, 13-20; 8:33). In his death and resurrection, Jesus provided a remedy to sin, death, and the reign of Satan. Yet Jesus’ victory will not be fully implemented until the parousia, when he comes with great power and glory to judge the world and rule over all things (13:24-27). All of this suggests that the cosmic transition will occur in order to bring to completion the victory of Christ’s death and resurrection over *sin*, *death*, and *Satan*.

3.5.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

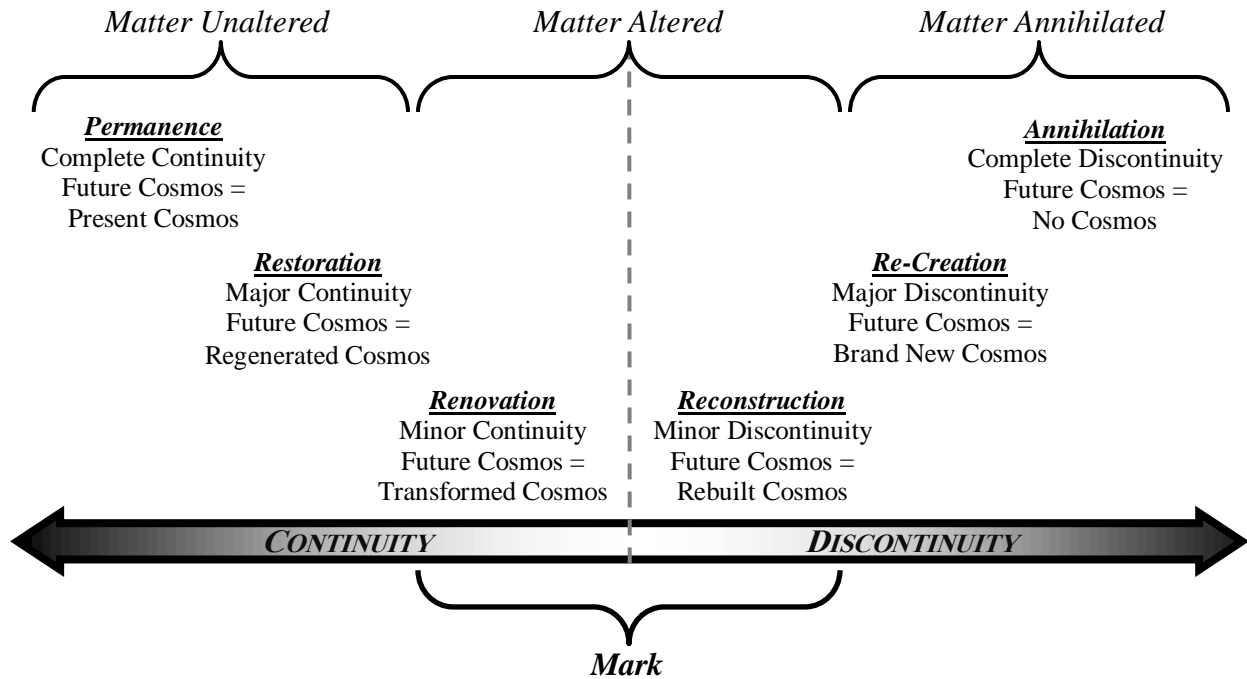
Mark offers even less than Matthew concerning the nature of the cosmic transition. He writes that “heaven and earth will pass away” (13:31), but this does not tell us how the cosmos will end. It only states that the cosmos will not last forever as it currently stands. Similar to Matthew, Mark’s primary image for depicting the cosmic transition is *the shaking of the heavenly bodies/powers* (13:24-25). The darkening of the heavenly lights and the downfall of the heavenly powers underscore the “great power and glory” with which the Son of Man comes

¹⁰³ On Mark’s distinction between “this age” and “the age to come” see 10:30.

over-and-against the angelic powers of this age. This implies that, for Mark, the transition between this world and the next is deeply rooted in a *transfer of dominion*. In other words, the parousia will put into full effect the victory of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Satan and his angels will be dethroned. The judgment of the Son of Man against the hostile powers of the universe also may entail the destruction of the heavenly bodies (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars), but again, this is difficult to determine based on the nature of the language. Whatever the case may be, the language of cosmic catastrophe in 13:24-25 does not appear to signal the destruction of the cosmos, its return to primeval chaos, or the onset of a universal calamity. At most it only seems to affect the heavenly bodies. The cosmos remains intact in 13:26-27.

Mark appears to affirm some level of continuity and discontinuity between this age and the age to come in his discussions of concepts like resurrection and eternal life (cf. 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:17-31, 34; 12:18-27; 14:28; 16:6). As a result, he probably did not embrace the ideas of *permanence* and *annihilation*. Furthermore, based on his belief in resurrection, Mark suggests that life in the age to come will be an altered form of existence (cf. 12:25). This implies that the new world will not be a *restoration* to original conditions. This leaves us with three possibilities for Mark. He may have believed that the present cosmos would be thoroughly transformed (*renovation*), destroyed and rebuilt (*reconstruction*), or annihilated and re-created (*re-creation*). But given his close similarities with Matthew, the first two are more probable (see Figure 3.3).

FIGURE 3.3: MARK AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



3.5.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

Mark only offers a few brief comments about “the age to come” (10:30). First, it will be without sin since the final judgment will remove all forms of sin from God’s kingdom (9:43-48). Second, it will be without death since believers will be resurrected to eternal life (10:30; 12:23-27). Finally, Jesus will reign over all things in the age to come, having overthrown the hostile powers of this age (13:24-27).¹⁰⁴ Taken together, these characteristics seem to imply some kind of materially transformed world in the age to come, but Mark never explicitly states such an idea.

¹⁰⁴ The judgment of the powers may imply that the world to come will lack the sun, moon, and the stars; but this is uncertain.

4 Luke and the Future of the Cosmos

We now turn to Luke's writings.¹ The primary text under consideration in this chapter will be Luke 21:25-28. As with the previous chapters, I will begin with a survey of the various ways 21:25-26 has been interpreted. Second, I will discuss Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse, which I will call the Temple Discourse because of its different setting and focus. Third, I will offer an interpretation of Luke 21:25-28, concluding that Luke uses muted language of cosmic catastrophe to describe worldwide events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. If this is the case, it is a significant departure from how Matthew and Mark employ the language. Fourth, I will examine Luke 21:33, Acts 2:19-20, and Acts 3:19-21. Finally, I will discuss how Luke answers the five correlative questions posed in the introduction.

4.1 Interpretations of Luke 21:25-26

It is important give attention to the various ways Luke 21:25-26 has been interpreted, especially in light of Lukan differences in comparison to Matthew and Mark. We can categorize four different ways of understanding the language and meaning of Luke 21:25-26.² (1) Luke 21:25-26 metaphorically describes the collapse of the universe at the parousia of the Son of Man.³ The

¹ I accept the basic unity of Luke-Acts as one story written in two volumes.

² As always, not all interpreters fit neatly into this scheme.

³ Edward M. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 175-78; John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 420; Christopher F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, 2nd. ed. (London: SCM, 2008), 753-54; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2 vols., AB 28-28A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981-1985), 2:1349-50; Vittorio Fusco, "Problems of Structure in Luke's Eschatological Discourse (Luke 21:7-36)," in *Luke and Acts*, ed. Gerald O'Collins and Gilberto Marconi, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist, 1993), 83, 85; François Bovon, *Luke*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Christine M. Thomas, Donald S. Deer, and James Crouch, 3 vols., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002-2013), 3:117; Hans Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, KEK 1/3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 650-51; Wolfgang Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, THKNT 3 (Berlin: Evangelische, 1987), 353-54.

heavenly phenomena are “signs” of the end that indicate the concrete dissolution of the cosmos.

(2) Luke 21:25-26 metaphorically describes natural phenomena that herald the coming of the Son of Man.⁴ These “signs” are concrete events in the natural world that point first and foremost to the parousia. Left unclear is whether or not these phenomena are severe enough to also lead to the dissolution of the cosmos. (3) Luke 21:25-26 metaphorically describes the coming of the Son of Man as a theophany.⁵ The “signs” are understood as language pointing to the glory of the parousia. (4) Luke 21:25-26 metaphorically describes great socio-political or socio-religious events within the course of history.⁶ Most identify these events with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE.

4.2 Luke’s Temple Discourse (Luke 21:5-36)

The vast majority of interpreters argue that Luke’s Temple Discourse refers to both the destruction of the temple (21:8-24) and the second coming of Jesus (21:25-36).⁷ A different approach will be taken in this chapter. I will argue that Luke focuses solely on the events

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, 2 vols., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994-1996), 2:1682-83; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 774-75; John Nolland, *Luke*, 3 vols., WBC 35A-C (Dallas: Word, 1989-1993), 3:1005-1007; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, SP 3 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 327-30; E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 245; M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Luc*, EBib (Paris: Lecoffre, 1927), 530-31; Léopold Sabourin, *L’Évangile de Luc: Introduction et Commentaire* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1985), 333; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 607; David E. Garland, *Luke*, ZECNT 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 834-35.

⁵ Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970), 69-71; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 739-40; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 524; Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 679-80; Bernard De Souza, “The Coming of the Lord,” *LASBF* 20 (1970): 198-200.

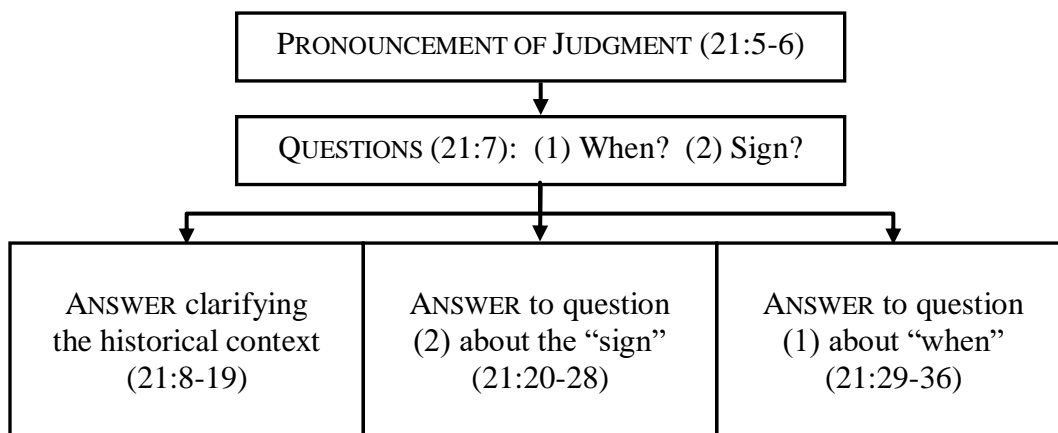
⁶ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 362; idem, *Luke for Everyone*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 249-60; G. B. Caird, *Saint Luke*, WPC (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 231-32; A. R. C. Leaney, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, HNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988), 262; R. T. France, *Luke*, TTCS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 334; Andrew R. Angel, *Chaos and the Son of Man: The Hebrew Chaoskampf Tradition in the Period 515 BCE to 200 CE*, LSTS 60 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 137-39. Also see André Feuillet, “Le Discours de Jésus sur la Ruine du Temple d’après Marc XIII et Luc XXI, 5-36,” *RB* 55 (1948): 481-502; 56 (1949): 61-92.

⁷ E.g. Bock, *Luke*, 2:1650; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1334; Marshall, *Luke*, 753; Stein, *Luke*, 512; Nolland, *Luke*, 3:986-87; Johnson, *Luke*, 324; Garland, *Luke*, 826; Edwards, *Luke*, 591-612.

surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 21:5-36. In comparison to Matthew and Mark, not only does Luke appear to deliberately exclude parousia-oriented material from his version of the discourse, he also seems to make a concerted effort to portray the downfall of Jerusalem as a divine judgment reminiscent of a world-altering Day of Yahweh.⁸ Furthermore, Luke has already prepared his readers/listeners in 17:22-37 to interpret the “day of the Son of Man” in reference to Jerusalem’s destruction (I have argued this point elsewhere).⁹

We can divide Luke’s Temple Discourse into four main sections: 21:5-7, 21:8-19, 21:20-28, and 21:29-36.¹⁰ Luke 21:5-7 is the setting of the discourse. In 21:8-19, Luke sets the context for understanding the temple’s destruction within history. In 21:20-28, he answers the question about the “sign” of the temple’s destruction. In 21:29-36, he answers the question about “when” the temple will be destroyed, also adding a few concluding exhortations (see fig. 4.1).

FIGURE 4.1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEMPLE DISCOURSE IN LUKE 21



⁸ For a discussion of Luke’s redactive work and emphases see: Bovon, *Luke*, 3:105-109; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1656-57; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1326-29; Vittorio Fusco, “Le Discours Eschatologique Lucanien »Rédaction« et »Composition« (Lc 21,5-36 et Mc 13,1-37),” in *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism*, ed. Camille Focant, BETL 110 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 311-55.

⁹ See Ryan P. Juza, “One of the Days of the Son of Man: A Reconsideration of Luke 17:22,” *JBL* 135 (2016): 575-95.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the structure of Luke’s version of the discourse see Fusco, “Problems,” 72-92, 225-32; Carroll, *Luke*, 412; Charles Homer Giblin, *The Destruction of Jerusalem According to Luke’s Gospel*, AnBib 107 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1985), 78-86.

4.2.1 The Setting of the Discourse (Luke 21:5-7)

In response to Jesus' prediction of the temple's demise, some who are present (not specifically the disciples) ask Jesus two interconnected questions: (1) When, therefore, will these things happen (πότε οὖν ταῦτα ἔσται)? (2) What will be the sign when these things are about to happen (τί τὸ σημεῖον ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα γίνεσθαι)?

The first question concerns timing. The primary referents of "these things" (ταῦτα) are the events surrounding the temple's destruction (cf. 21:6).¹¹ This is a departure from Matthew and Mark, who expand the referent to include the eschatological consummation on account of the disciples' mistaken assumption that the temple's destruction and the eschatological consummation would occur together (cf. Matt 24:3; Mark 13:4). But Luke does not do this. Thus, the first question does not look beyond the events surrounding the temple's demise.

The second question focuses on identifying "the sign," which will provide an indication of the temple's impending destruction. Given Luke's repetition of ταῦτα from the first question, the most natural referents of "these things" are again the events surrounding the temple's destruction. And unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke gives no indication that the general group of people who asked the question were inquiring about the eschatological consummation.¹² Thus, *the two questions posed to Jesus in Luke's version of the discourse focus exclusively on the temple's ruin.*¹³ Therefore, we should begin with the assumption that Luke's version of the discourse does not address the eschatological consummation.

¹¹ "These things" is an important phrase in the discourse. Luke routinely uses it to refer back to the destruction of the temple (cf. 21:6, 7, 9, 12, 28, 31, 36).

¹² Contra Bock, *Luke*, 2:1663-64; Green, *Luke*, 734; Marshall, *Luke*, 760-62; Fusco, "Problems," 73-74.

¹³ So the majority of interpreters, e.g. Adams, *Stars*, 173; Wright, *Jesus*, 345-46; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1331; Johnson, *Luke*, 320; Nolland, *Luke*, 3:990; Stein, *Luke*, 512-13; Ellis, *Luke*, 243; Carroll, *Luke*, 415; idem, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 92 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 109; Josef

4.2.2 Situating the Temple's Ruin within Its Historical Context (Luke 21:8-19)

In this section, Luke's Jesus situates the destruction of the temple within the course of world history. For discussion purposes, we can divide this part of the discourse into three sections:

- The temple's destruction will not be followed immediately by the end (21:8-9)
- The temple's destruction will occur amid other worldwide events (21:10-11)
- The temple's destruction will follow a period of suffering (21:12-19)

In 21:8-9, Luke separates the temple's destruction from the eschatological consummation (i.e. the "end"), which *will not immediately follow* it. Jesus begins with explicit commands to his followers concerning local events which they will experience for themselves.¹⁴ First, they must "beware" not to be "led astray" or "follow" the enticing claims of false messianic figures (21:8; cf. 17:23). These deceivers will attempt to usurp Jesus' title as Israel's Messiah. Luke recounts three such figures in the book of Acts (cf. 5:36, 37; 21:38). One of their deceptive claims will be, "the time has drawn near." In other words, they will claim that the "end" is near, Israel's decisive moment of redemption which they will bring about as the messiah through wars and insurrection (cf. Luke 1:68-73; 2:25, 29-32, 38; Acts 1:6).¹⁵ But their violence will not lead to redemption, only to Jerusalem's destruction. The disciples should not "be terrified" when "these things" happen, for God has planned them.¹⁶ In other words, the temple will be destroyed "first,"

Zmijewski, *Die Eschatologiereden des Lukas-Evangeliums: Eine traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Lk 21,5-36 und Lk 17,20-37*, BBB 40 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1972), 78-79; Steven L. Bridge, *'Where the Eagles are Gathered': The Deliverance of the Elect in Lukan Eschatology*, JSNTSup 240 (New York: Sheffield, 2003), 118; Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 118.

¹⁴ Note the recurrence of second person plurals ("you") in 21:8-9.

¹⁵ See Evans, *Luke*, 738. Jesus will tell his disciples later in the discourse that they *themselves* will be able to "see" and "know" when the time "has drawn near" (21:20, 31). Thus, they do not need to rely on others to indicate it for them.

¹⁶ "These things" refer to the events surrounding the temple's demise, so Stein, *Luke* 514; Green, *Luke*, 735.

but the eschatological consummation “will not follow immediately.”¹⁷ Thus, Luke designates the temple’s destruction as an eschatological event, but one that remains chronologically separate from the consummation. There will be an intervening period.

In 21:10-11, Luke sets the context for understanding the temple’s destruction in relation to other *contemporary world events*. Luke’s unique phrase “then he said to them” (τότε ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς) appears to indicate a shift from the *local* perspective of the disciples (21:8-9) to a *global* perspective of the nations (21:10-11).¹⁸ If this is accurate, the mention of conflict between nations and kingdoms (21:10) is a global perspective of international and intranational conflicts which parallels the local perspective of “wars and insurrections” (21:9). The events in the natural world (21:11) also highlight the global perspective of the nations. Luke writes in Acts that these events happen at various locations around the Roman world: a great earthquake (16:26), a great famine (11:28), and great signs from heaven (2:2, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 9:3; 14:3; 15:12; 22:6). The “dreadful portents” appear to be picked up again in 21:25-26 where the “signs” among the sun, moon, and stars cause great fear and dismay among the “nations.” It is also worth noting that the “great signs” (plural) in 21:11 do not answer the question asking for a

¹⁷ So Bock, *Luke*, 2:1666; Green, *Luke*, 734-35; Marshall, *Luke*, 764; Evans, *Luke*, 739. Some argue that the “end” refers to the end of the temple, e.g. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1336-37; France, *Luke*, 333; Garland, *Luke*, 829; Johnson, *Luke*, 321; Stein, *Luke*, 514.

¹⁸ In contrast to 21:8-9, note the absence of “you” in 21:10-11. Observing a similar change in perspective is Carroll, *Luke*, 416; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1667. Many scholars rush over this editorial comment or move into a discussion of sources. Few attempt to explain its function. Arguing that 21:10-11 as a chronological step forward from the temple’s destruction to the parousia is Evans, *Luke*, 740; Edwards, *Luke*, 598. Hans Conzelmann suggests a long period of missionary activity between 21:9 and 21:10 (*The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 127). But Luke gives no indication of a temporal shift forward between 21:9 and 21:10. Leaney suggests Luke particularizes the general details of 21:8-9 in 21:10-11 (*Luke*, 260). Similar is John Nolland, who sees 21:10-12 as expanding on the wars of 21:9 also using a scheme of “escalation” (“‘The Times of the Nations’ and a Prophetic Pattern in Luke 21,” in *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels: Volume 3: The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Thomas R. Hatina, LNTS 376 [New York: T&T Clark, 2010], 143). But the language of 21:10-11 does not seem to particularize or expand upon 21:8-9, and an escalating movement is questionable. What is different is the perspective. If Fusco is correct, it may also suggest a shift of address from the historical disciples to Luke’s recipients (“Problems,” 75-77).

“sign” (singular) of the temple’s destruction.¹⁹ It will be the nations (and probably Luke’s readers who live abroad) who will witness the events of 21:10-11, not Jesus’ disciples living in Jerusalem.²⁰ In conclusion, Luke appears to situate the temple’s destruction alongside other contemporary events that will happen throughout the Roman world.

In 21:12-19, Luke sets the context for understanding the temple’s destruction in relation to a period of suffering which must *precede* it. This is different from Matthew and Mark, who situate their periods of suffering and witness *after* the temple’s destruction and before the consummation (cf. Matt 24:9-14; Mark 13:9-13). As most scholars recognize, 21:12-19 describes the situation which will be expounded upon in the book of Acts, detailing the suffering and witness of the early church on account of Jesus’ “name,” beginning locally in Jerusalem and spreading abroad among the nations.²¹ Thus, 21:12-19 envisions a period of suffering and witness in the name of Jesus which occurs “before” the destruction of the temple (see 17:25).²²

In summary, Jesus’ initial answer sets the context for a proper understanding of the temple’s destruction in relation to the end (21:8-9), other contemporary world events (21:10-11), and a period of suffering and witness (21:12-19). This places the temple’s ruin firmly within its historical context, describing what comes before, alongside, and after. Thus, 21:8-19 creates a timeline of events where there will be four periods: (1) a period of suffering, (2) a period of worldwide upheaval within which the temple will fall, (3) a period of unknown length, and (4) the eschatological consummation.

¹⁹ So Maddox, *Purpose*, 118.

²⁰ The implied reader, “Theophilus,” appears to be a person (or represent persons) in the Roman world (cf. 1:3).

²¹ See Carroll, *Response*, 117-19; Nolland, *Luke*, 3:998; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1668-74; Edwards, *Luke*, 598-603. Jesus’ “name” is referred to 34 times in Acts.

²² Luke 21:12-19 is likely another description of “the days of the Son of Man” (17:25-26). See Juza, “One of the Days,” 584-89.

4.2.3 Jesus' Answer to Question #2: What will be the sign? (Luke 21:20-28)

In 21:20-28, Jesus specifies “the sign” that Jerusalem (and therefore the temple) will be destroyed.²³ This unit as a whole is bound together by two interrelated sayings, one negative (21:20) and one positive (21:28), concerning what “draws near” (ἐγγίζω) when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies, thus forming an inclusio.²⁴ Furthermore, this unit returns to the local and global events surrounding Jerusalem’s downfall (21:8-11). However, rather than simply repeating the events of 21:8-11, Luke *interprets them theologically* in terms of a Day of the Lord so as to bring out their significance within God’s divine plan. It is during “those days” that Jerusalem and the nations will experience the judgment of the Son of Man. Yet, those days will also bring liberation for the disciples (21:28). For discussion purposes, we can divide this part of the discourse into three sections:

- The sign of the temple’s destruction (21:20-22)
- “Those days” and the coming of the Son of Man (21:23-27)
- The sign of the disciples’ liberation (21:28)

In 21:20-22, Luke conveys the sign heralding Jerusalem’s demise, the local event which those listening will “see” (ἰδῆτε). Thus, Luke 21:20 is Jesus’ definitive answer to the second question concerning the “sign” (21:7).²⁵ It is also important to recognize that Luke interprets the significance of the sign in 21:20 by explicitly stating what “draws near” (ἤγγικεν), whereas Matthew and Mark wait until the parable of the fig tree to do this. Jesus then urges that when the sign is recognized, his disciples must “flee” (21:21; cf. 17:31-32). The reason is clear:

²³ Luke 21:20-28 differs considerably in vocabulary and meaning from the parallels in Matt 24:15-31 and Mark 13:14-27. See Carroll, *Response*, 104-114; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1342-44, 1348-49; Marshall, *Luke*, 770-71, 774; C. H. Dodd, “The Fall of Jerusalem and the ‘Abomination of Desolation,’” *JRS* 37 (1947): 47-54; Joseph Verheyden, “The Source(s) of Luke 21,” in *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. F. Neirynck, rev. and enl. ed., BETL 32 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 491-516.

²⁴ A similar observation is made by Carroll, *Luke*, 418.

²⁵ So Maddox, *Purpose*, 118; Green, *Luke*, 738-39; Carroll, *Luke*, 418; De Souza, “Coming,” 196-97; Nolland, “Times,” 143-44. Stein suggests that 21:20 answers the question about “when,” but this blurs the distinction between the two questions (*Luke*, 520).

theologically speaking, Jerusalem (and as I will argue, the whole world) will experience something reminiscent of a Day of Yahweh (21:22).²⁶ God will execute his wrath during the “days of vengeance” (ἡμέραι ἐκδικήσεως).

Here I will provide a brief summary of my understanding of 21:23-27, to which I will return later in this chapter. In 21:23-27, Luke shifts the focus from Jesus’ disciples to those under punishment (i.e. the Jews of Jerusalem and the nations abroad) in order to elaborate upon the nature of “those days” (i.e. the “days of vengeance”). Jesus begins with a “woe” upon unbelieving pregnant women and mothers of infants (21:23a). Luke provides a basis for the woe in 21:23b by suggesting that the nature of “those days” is comparable to a Day of Yahweh, “for there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people” (cf. Zeph 1:15).²⁷ Luke 21:23b is probably a general statement which conveys both *global* and *local* perspectives concerning the judgment of “those days.” The local perspective of judgment (i.e. “wrath against this people”) is experienced by the Jews of Jerusalem. Luke particularizes this phrase in 21:24. The global perspective of judgment (i.e. “great distress on the earth”) is experienced by the nations. Luke particularizes this phrase in 21:25-26. Thus, Luke does not interpret the destruction of Jerusalem as an isolated event, but as the centerpiece of a worldwide “day” which will “come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth” (21:35). As a result, “they” (i.e. the Jews of Jerusalem and the nations abroad) will “see” a revelatory theophany of the Son of Man (21:27; cf. 17:24, 30), actualized in the destruction of Jerusalem and great socio-political upheaval throughout the Roman world.

In 21:28, Luke shifts the focus back to Jesus’ disciples. Here Jesus elaborates on the implication of the “days of vengeance” (ἡμέραι ἐκδικήσεως) for his followers. “Those days” will

²⁶ Cf. Deut 32:35; Isa 34:8; 61:2; Jer 46:10 [26:10 LXX]; Hos 9:7; Evans, *Luke*, 750.

²⁷ Also cf. Jer 4:4; 9:15-16 [9:14-15 LXX]; Ezek 5:13; Deut 28:58-68.

do more than simply punish those who have rejected Jesus and caused the suffering of his disciples. Every time Luke uses the word ἐκδίκησις (or the verb ἐκδικέω), it conveys a sense of *granting justice* for an oppressed group over-and-against their oppressors (cf. Luke 18:3, 5, 7, 8; Acts 7:24). Thus, Luke implies that the coming of the Son of Man to judge is not just to punish Jerusalem and the nations; it is also to vindicate his suffering disciples. So, when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies (21:20), the point at which “these things *begin*” (21:28), the disciples are to “raise up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near [ἐγγίζει].” The “days of vengeance,” then, will also be days of justice and vindication, liberating the disciples from their oppressors.

4.2.4 Jesus’ Answer to Question #1: When will these things happen? (Luke 21:29-36)

For discussion purposes, we can divide this part of the discourse into two sections:

- When the temple will be destroyed (21:29-33)
- Remaining ready for when the Day draws near (21:34-36)

In Luke 21:29-33 Jesus answers the question about “when” the temple will be destroyed. The majority of scholars interpret the parable of the fig tree and all the trees (as well as its application) in reference to the parousia, making 21:31 roughly parallel to 21:28.²⁸ Thus, it is argued that “these things” (in both verses) refer to the “signs” in 21:25-26 which herald the parousia (21:27).²⁹ Understood in this manner, 21:31 would read something like, “So also, when you see these things (i.e. the “signs” in the sun, moon, and stars) taking place, you know that the (future consummate) kingdom of God is near.” While this interpretation is reasonable at a surface level, I think it encounters three problems that make it improbable. (1) Luke is not

²⁸ E.g. Marshall, *Luke*, 778-79; Stein, *Luke*, 526-29; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1687-88.

²⁹ Some interpreters think “these things” refer to 21:20-24, making Jerusalem’s destruction a sign of the parousia, cf. Fusco, “Problems,” 87-89; Maddox, *Purpose*, 121.

referring to a distant future event (i.e. the parousia) in 21:29-33, but to something that would occur (or did occur) within the lifetime of Jesus' disciples and Luke's readers. (2) The referent of "these things" in 21:31 cannot be restricted to 21:25-26. Luke 21:31 is parallel to both 21:20 and 21:28. (3) A parousia reading of 21:31 forces an abnormal interpretation of either "all things" or "this generation" in 21:32. We will look all three of these issues.

(1) Those who witness "these things" (21:31 and 21:28) should not be conceived of as a group of believers in the distant future living at the time of the parousia. Instead, Luke states strongly that Jesus' historical disciples and (potentially) his readers will witness "these things."³⁰ Luke accomplishes this by stressing the second person plural in 21:30 ("seeing for yourselves") and 21:31-32 ("you"). The same is true of 21:28, where "these things" will indicate "your" redemption. Furthermore, Luke adds the word "already" (twice in 21:30) to emphasize that the events in question *have already been set in motion*, thus suggesting that the "summer" event, the "kingdom of God" (21:31), is about to arrive (or already has arrived). As a result, the "kingdom of God" should not be interpreted as a consummated kingdom in the distant future, but as a kingdom which Luke viewed as impinging upon the present (cf. 9:27, "But truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God"). One could argue, as some have, that Luke was wrong about the date of the parousia, but I do not think that is the case. He is not referring to the parousia, but to a coming of the Son of Man (21:27; cf. 17:24, 30) made manifest in God's judgment of Jerusalem and the nations (21:20-26).

(2) A parousia reading of 21:29-33 is also improbable because "these things" (21:31) do not refer only to the events of 21:25-26. Luke demonstrates this in two ways: (a) by the way he frames the parable of the fig tree, and (b) by the way he parallels 21:31 with both 21:20 and 21:28.

³⁰ So Fusco, "Problems," 89; Edwards, *Luke*, 608-609.

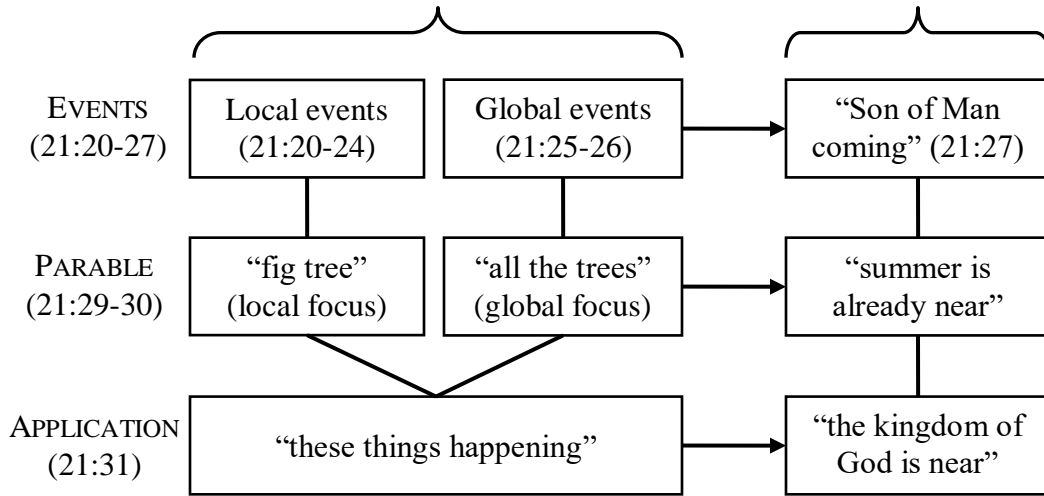
(a) Matthew and Mark use the parable of the fig tree to illustrate how to interpret the sign of the temple's destruction. But Luke already has interpreted the sign of Jerusalem's destruction by indicating what "draws near" when the sign is "seen" (21:20). Thus, we should expect Luke's parable to have a different focus. Furthermore, Luke adds, "and all the trees," with the result that the parable now refers to multiple leaf-bearing events which will herald "summer." It is probable that the phrase "the fig tree and all the trees" parallels the shift in perspective from particular/local to general/global in 21:20-26.³¹ The "fig tree" likely corresponds to the local events surrounding Jerusalem's destruction (21:20-24). "All the trees" probably corresponds to the global upheavals among the nations (21:25-26). Thus, "things things" (21:31), which according to the parable is parallel to "the fig tree and all the trees," probably refers to all of 21:20-26. These events indicate that the "kingdom of God is near." We can illustrate the flow of thought with Figure 4.2.³²

³¹ Nolland suggests the "fig tree and all the trees" may refer to the fates of the Jews and Gentiles (*Luke*, 3:1008-1009). This is similar to what I think is happening here, except I see the local and global perspectives as occurring during the same time period.

³² For further analysis on the logic of the parable see L. Gregory Bloomquist, "Rhetorical Argumentation and the Culture of Apocalyptic: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Luke 21," in *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture: Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps, JSNTSup 180 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1999), 194.

FIGURE 4.2: THE FLOW OF THOUGHT IN LUKE 21:20-31

When you see these [SIGNALING EVENTS], then know that the [MAIN EVENT] is near.



(b) Identifying “these things” in 21:31 with the events of 21:20-26 is also supported by Luke’s paralleling of 21:20, 21:28, and 21:31. The parable of the fig tree and all the trees (21:29-30) and its application (21:31) are parallel in terminology, structure, and logic to Jesus’ assertion that Jerusalem’s encirclement will signal its destruction (21:20) and the disciples’ redemption (21:28). Looking at these verses side-by-side, we can observe the similarities (see Table 4.1).

TABLE 4.1: A COMPARISON OF LUKE 21:20, 21:28, AND 21:31

21:20	21:28	21:31
<p>Ὅταν δὲ ἴδητε κυκλουμένην ὑπὸ στρατοπέδων Ἱερουσαλήμ, τότε γινώτε ὅτι ἤγγικεν ἡ ἐρήμωσις αὐτῆς.</p>	<p>ἀρχομένων δὲ τούτων γίνεσθαι, ἀνακύψατε καὶ ἐπάρατε τὰς κεφαλὰς ὑμῶν, διότι ἐγγίξει ἡ ἀπολύτρωσις ὑμῶν.</p>	<p>οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ἴδητε ταῦτα γινόμενα, γινώσχετε ὅτι ἐγγύς ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.</p>

<p>But when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies.</p> <p>then you know that has come near its desolation.</p>	<p>But beginning these things to happen, straighten up and lift up your heads, because is coming near your redemption.</p>	<p>So also, when you see these things happening,</p> <p>you know that near is the kingdom of God.</p>
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The high frequency of recurring words in same sequence make it improbable that 21:31 is parallel to 21:28, but not to 21:20 (as in a parousia reading). Instead, the parallelism above suggests that *all three* of these verses refer to the same underlying events and should be interpreted in light of one another. If this is the case, “Jerusalem being surrounded by armies” (21:20) is related to “these things” (21:28, 31). In other words, the encirclement of Jerusalem is “when these things *begin* to happen” (21:28). Thus, “these things” (21:28, 31) likely refer to all of the events in 21:20-26, which began with Jerusalem being surrounded. Furthermore, Luke parallels what is “near” in each verse: “its desolation” (21:20), “your redemption” (21:28), and “the kingdom of God” (21:31). When the Son of Man comes in power and great glory, “the kingdom of God” will become manifest in the condemnatory judgment of Jerusalem (“its desolation”) and in the redemptive liberation of the disciples from their oppressors (“your redemption”). In other words, Luke indicates that the kingdom of God will become manifest through expressions of judgment and salvation (cf. 10:8-12). In this way, 21:20, 21:28, and 21:31 are all different ways of describing the implications of the coming of the Son of Man (21:27).

Overall, the terminology, structure, and logic of 21:20, 28, and 31 suggest they should be read together as referring to interlocking realities manifested by the coming of the Son of Man

(21:27). Therefore, the most likely referent of “these things” in 21:31 (and 21:28) is all of 21:20-26.

(3) The final problem associated with a parousia reading of 21:29-33 is its abnormal interpretation of either “all things” or “this generation” in 21:32.³³ Most scholars shy away from interpreting “all things” (πάντα) as anything other than an all inclusive term.³⁴ “All things” most likely refers to 21:8-28. As a result, the majority of scholars assign “this generation” an unusual (and improbable) sense.³⁵ The various proposals are:³⁶

- (a) The Jewish race³⁷
- (b) The human race³⁸
- (c) Unbelievers (a subset of the “human race,” i.e. wicked people)³⁹
- (d) Believers (a subset of the “human race,” i.e. disciples)⁴⁰
- (e) This age (i.e. the final generation/period in God’s plan)⁴¹
- (f) Luke’s contemporary generation⁴²
- (g) Jesus’ contemporary generation⁴³

³³ That is, unless one adopts the position that Jesus and/or Luke were mistaken about the date of the parousia (e.g. Nolland, *Luke*, 3:1009-1011; Carroll, *Luke*, 421). But this position ultimately fails because of the previous point that “these things” in 21:28, 31 refers to 21:20-26.

³⁴ Although see Marshall, *Luke*, 780; Caird, *Luke*, 233-34; Lagrange, *Luc*, 533. These commentators suggest “all things” refer only to the events preceding 21:24, and thus interpret “generation” as a normal temporal designation. But Luke has not set up a pattern which switches back and forth between the temple’s destruction and the parousia as in Matthew and Mark. Furthermore, Luke does not write “all these things” like Matthew (24:34) and Mark (13:30) do to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem as differentiated from the parousia. Because Luke does not address the parousia, he does not have to specify whether he is referring to the temple’s demise or the parousia. So, he uses “all things” because everything in 21:8-28 is related to the temple’s destruction. Bock essentially argues that “all things” refer only to 21:25-31, thus the end will occur within a generation of the cosmic signs in 21:25-26 (*Luke*, 2:1691-92). But this cannot be sustained.

³⁵ See BDAG, 191-92; Friedrich Büchsel, “γενεά,” *TDNT* 1:662-63. Also see the occurrences of “this generation” in Luke 7:31; 11:29, 30, 31, 32, 50, 51; 17:25; 21:32; Acts 2:40.

³⁶ See the surveys in Maddox, *Purpose*, 111-15; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1688-92.

³⁷ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 8th ed., NTD 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 230.

³⁸ Conzelmann, *Theology*, 131; Leaney, *Luke*, 263; Zmijewski, *Eschatologiereden*, 281-82; Sabourin, *Luc*, 335. Opting for this view or option (d) is Wiefel, *Lukas*, 355.

³⁹ Green, *Luke*, 742; Johnson, *Luke*, 328; Giblin, *Destruction*, 84. Stein initially argued for this position in his commentary (*Luke*, 526-28), but later opted for proposal (g) in an article on Luke 21:5-38.

⁴⁰ Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 681-82.

⁴¹ Ellis, *Luke*, 246-47; Bovon, *Luke*, 3:121; Evans, *Luke*, 758-59; Garland, *Luke*, 836; Stein, *Luke*, 528.

⁴² Erich Klostermann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1929), 204; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 204.

⁴³ Maddox, *Purpose*, 111-15; Carroll, *Luke*, 421; Nolland, *Luke*, 3:1009-1010; Wright, *Jesus*, 364-65; Edwards, *Luke*, 609; Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 652; France, *Luke*, 335; A. J. Mattill, Jr., *Luke and the Last Things: a perspective for the understanding of Lukan thought* (Dillsboro: Western North Carolina, 1979), 96-103; Jan

Proposals (a-d) attempt to evade the temporal aspect of the phrase, which Luke has certainly retained (especially in the context of answering a *temporal* question about “when” the temple will be destroyed). While Luke regularly uses “this generation” to speak of a specific class of Jewish people who are wicked and unperceptive of God’s plans (option c), the fact that he does this does not nullify the temporal aspect of the term. Furthermore, options (a-e) render Jesus’ emphatic negation that this generation “will certainly not pass away” superfluous. Why would Jesus need to guarantee with certainty that the “the human race,” or the like, would not die before the parousia, or that “this age” would not cease? These are self evident, making an emphatic declaration unnecessary. Option (f) is insufficient because Luke uses the phrase to address Jesus’ contemporaries in the narrative, although there is probably overlap between Jesus’ contemporaries and Luke’s.

Therefore, the most probable option is (g), with the understanding that Jesus qualifies “this generation” as his Jewish contemporaries, the ones whom he finds to be wicked and unperceptive of God’s plans. In the rest of Luke-Acts, Luke uses “this generation” both *temporally* (to designate a period of time contemporary to Jesus) and *qualitatively* (to describe the nature of a general group wicked and unperceptive Jews) at the same time. The temporal aspect of “this generation” explains the meaning of “near” in 21:31. The kingdom of God will be made manifest within approximately 30-40 years in the destruction of Jerusalem. The qualitative aspect of “this generation” has in mind “this people” (21:23), the wicked and unperceptive Jewish contemporaries of Jesus, who will be condemned in the destruction of

Lambrecht, “Naherwartung in Luke? A Note on M. Wolter’s Explanation of Luke 21,” *ETL* 87 (2011): 429. Robert H. Stein, “Jesus, the Destruction of Jerusalem, and the Coming of the Son of Man in Luke 21:5-38,” *SBJT* 16 (2012): 25.

Jerusalem. These people “will certainly not pass away” until they “see” divine judgment (cf. 9:27).

In conclusion, a parousia reading of 21:29-33 is improbable in light of the above evidence. Jesus is not addressing “when” the parousia will occur, but “when” the temple will be destroyed (cf. 21:7). He explains that just as a fig tree and all the trees sprout leaves and signal summer, the local (21:20-24) and global (21:25-26) events surrounding Jerusalem’s ruin will signal the coming of the kingdom of God made manifest in divine judgment and the liberation of the disciples from their oppressors. In other words, the coming of the Son of Man will alter the course of local and global history. And it will happen within a generation. Jesus ends his answer to the question of “when” with a declaration that his words are certain (21:33).

In 21:34-36, Jesus shifts toward exhorting his followers to “be on guard” (21:34-35) and “be alert” (21:36). If the disciples failed to remain vigilant, they would begin to return to a pattern of daily living consumed with the excesses and worries of this life (cf. 12:17-20; 17:27-29, 33). As a result, the “day” could catch them like a “trap” (cf. Isa 24:17). In other words, Jesus warns the disciples that they are not exempt from the dangers associated with the day, for it “will come upon all who sit on the face of the earth.” If they were not prepared to flee, they could get caught up in Jerusalem’s demise. In 21:36, Jesus calls for his followers to “be alert” at all times through the practice of prayer (cf. 18:1-8). They were to ask for the strength to successfully “flee from all these things which are about to happen.” This clause deliberately looks back to the question concerning the sign of the temple’s destruction (“when these things are about to happen” in 21:7), and what the disciples are to do when they see the sign (“flee” in

21:20-21).⁴⁴ Thus, the disciples were to pray for the strength to escape Jerusalem’s impending destruction so as not to be trapped (cf. 17:31-32). Then, they would be able to “stand before the Son of Man,” liberated from their persecutors (cf. 21:28).

4.3 Luke 21:25-28

We can now focus more intently on Luke 21:25-28. First I will address how this passage is related to the preceding (21:20-24). Then I will offer an interpretation of 21:25-28.

4.3.1 The Relationship Between Luke 21:20-24 and 21:25-28

The vast majority of interpreters assert that Luke 21:20-24 describes Jerusalem’s destruction, and 21:25-28 describes the parousia.⁴⁵ However, I contend that 21:25-26 *continues* a description of a “day” of the Son of Man already begun in 21:20-24. At issue is the nature of the transition between 21:24 and 21:25, which I will discuss under the following points: (1) Luke’s unique use of material in 21:20-28, (2) the meaning of “the times of the nations” in 21:24, (3) the conjunction “and” in 21:25, and (4) the shift in perspective from local events in 21:24 to global events in 21:25.

(1) One issue often left un-discussed in relation to the transition between 21:24 and 21:25 is Luke’s choice of material in 21:20-28 in comparison to Matthew and Mark.⁴⁶ While there is not space to engage every detail, it is important to observe where Luke has significant divergences. While Luke 21:20-21 is, for the most part, similar to Matthew and Mark, Luke

⁴⁴ It is important again to note that 21:36 does not refer to a distant parousia. Just as Luke stated that “all things” will happen within “this generation” (21:32), he reiterates that the situation at hand involves “all these things which are *about* to happen” (cf. 21:7).

⁴⁵ E.g. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1348; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1658; Stein, *Luke*, 523; Johnson, *Luke*, 329-30.

⁴⁶ As with previous chapters, I make no assumptions concerning Markan priority or other source material. This work is based on a comparison of the Synoptic Gospels in their final forms.

21:22-24 continues a sustained emphasis on Jerusalem's demise that is lacking in Matthew (24:19-22) and Mark (13:17-20). This sustained emphasis results in *a change in the meaning of "those days."* Matthew and Mark describe "those days" as a period of undefined length (i.e. extending from the flight from Jerusalem to the parousia) characterized by the suffering of believers at the hands of unbelievers. But in Luke, "those days" refer to a period of defined length (i.e. contemporary with the Roman siege of Jerusalem) characterized by the suffering of unbelieving Jews and the nations via the hand of God. Luke accomplishes this redefinition by his inclusion of the "days of vengeance" (21:22), which governs the meaning of "those days" (21:23a). As a result, while the woe of Luke 21:23a parallels Matt 24:19 and Mark 13:17 verbatim, it must be interpreted differently. Matthew and Mark understand the pregnant and nursing mothers as believers attempting to escape Jerusalem, while Luke understands them to be inhabitants of Jerusalem experiencing the siege (cf. Luke 19:44; 23:28-29). This is made all the more apparent by Luke's omission of a prayer for those fleeing Jerusalem (cf. Matt 24:20; Mark 13:18). The implication is, whereas Matthew and Mark use "those days" to begin a transition to the parousia, Luke does not. He maintains his focus on Jerusalem's demise. Luke does, of course, introduce "the times of the nations" in 21:24, but its primary function is to qualify Jerusalem's "trampling." It does not necessarily begin a temporal shift to the parousia in 21:25. Thus, in 21:20-24, Luke appears to suppress or reinterpret material which Matthew and Mark use to transition to the parousia.

Luke's suppression of parousia-oriented material is also evident in his omission of a second reference to false messiahs and prophets, which according to Matthew 24:23-28 and Mark 13:21-23 should appear between Luke 21:24 and 21:25.⁴⁷ Matthew and Mark distinguish

⁴⁷ Luke has partial parallels in 17:23-24, 37, which he has used in reference to the temple's destruction, see Juza, "One of the Days," 575-95.

two sets of deceivers of whom the disciples must beware. One group will rise during the period prior to the destruction of the temple (Matt 24:4-5; Mark 13:5-6), and a second group will rise during the period of world mission prior to the parousia (Matt 24:11, 23-26; Mark 13:21-22). Luke, however, only discusses the first set of deceivers associated with the temple's ruin (21:8). His omission of a second group prior to the parousia coheres with his decision to place his period of world mission *before* Jerusalem's destruction (21:12-19) instead of after it (as in Matt 24:9-14 and Mark 13:9-13). The implication is: Luke omits a second appearance of deceivers between 21:24 and 21:25 because he is not transitioning to the parousia in 21:25-28.⁴⁸

Luke also suppresses or reinterprets traditional parousia-oriented material in 21:25-28. Rather than decisively alluding to OT texts that describe the Day of the Lord like Matthew and Mark, Luke weakens the allusions and strips away much of the language of cosmic catastrophe (21:25-26). Furthermore, despite retaining the coming of the Son of Man (21:27), Luke has already connected this event to the destruction of Jerusalem, not the parousia (cf. 9:27; 17:24, 30; 18:8).⁴⁹ Finally, Luke eliminates a reference to the gathering of the elect (21:28), choosing instead to include a comment about the redemption of Jesus' historical disciples (not future believers). Therefore, when compared to Matthew and Mark, there is strong evidence that Luke specifically avoids writing about the parousia in 21:20-28.

(2) Luke's expression "the times of the nations" is ambiguous and difficult to assess.⁵⁰

Most scholars interpret the phrase as a limited period of Gentile domination over Jerusalem,

⁴⁸ Luke does not omit this second reference simply because it is repetitive, contra Bovon, *Luke*, 3:107; Nolland, *Luke*, 1005; Stein, *Luke*, 523-24. Bock observes the omission, but seems to miss the implication for Luke's version of the discourse (*Luke*, 2:1683).

⁴⁹ See Juza, "One of the Days," 575-95.

⁵⁰ This fact alone should dictate that the phrase should not be used as the deciding factor for determining whether Luke transitions to the parousia in 21:25. On the phrase cf. Zech 12:3; Dan 8:13-14; 12:5-13; Tob 14:5.

while others emphasize a period of Gentile mission.⁵¹ Luke uses the plural “times” (καιροί) in four other locations (Acts 1:7; 3:20; 14:17; 17:26). The most relevant verse, which also refers to the “nations” is Acts 17:26, “And he made from one [human] every nation [ἔθνος] of humanity to live upon all the face of the earth, having determined [their] appointed times [καιροὺς] and the boundaries of their dwelling places.” It would appear that Luke considers the “times of the nations” to be either a group of fixed periods concerning multiple nations, or one fixed period for all the nations.⁵² In Luke 21:24, Luke uses the period(s) to qualify the duration of Gentile “trampling” over Jerusalem (cf. 19:43-44). “Trampling” appears to have a connotation of divine judgment (cf. Lam 1:15; Zech 10:5; 12:3), especially as an expression of the “days of vengeance” (21:22). This seems to suggest that when God’s judgment against “this people” is finished, so then will be “the times of the Gentiles.” Thus, the phrase appears to indicate that God’s divine judgment of Jerusalem will be carried out by “the nations” for a set time until God’s wrath is complete. Understood in this way, the phrase does not begin a transition to the subject of the parousia in 21:25. Rather, it begins a transition from a discussion of the Jews (21:24) to a discussion of the Gentiles/nations (21:25-26).

(3) Too much has often been made of Luke’s “and” (καί) at the beginning of 21:25. Luke lacks the transitional phrases seen in Matt 24:29 and Mark 13:24. Several interpreters, especially those who think Luke’s agenda is to emphasize the so-called “delay of the parousia,” suggest that Luke’s omission is evidence of a large gap of time between 21:24 and 21:25.⁵³ But this is speculative at best. If anything, Luke’s omission should be interpreted in the opposite direction. As several interpreters observe, therefore, *a definite break does not exist between 21:24 and*

⁵¹ For discussion see Giblin, *Destruction*, 89-92; Nolland, “Times,” 133-47, Bock, *Luke*, 2:1680-82; Green, *Luke*, 739; Zmijewski, *Eschatologiereden*, 216-20.

⁵² See Nolland, *Luke*, 3:1002-1003.

⁵³ E.g. Conzelmann, *Theology*, 130; Evans, *Luke*, 753; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1348; Stein, *Luke*, 524.

21:25.⁵⁴ This is bolstered by the fact that Luke regularly combines *καί* with other features to indicate a shift in the discourse, like “and then” (*καί τότε*) in 21:29.⁵⁵ As a result, Luke’s simple use of *καί* is probably connective in nature, joining 21:25-26 to 21:20-24 without a temporal gap. This is confirmed when we recognize that 21:23b is particularized in 21:24-26.

(4) Most interpreters assume the shift between 21:24 and 21:25 is temporal in nature.⁵⁶ However, I think it is better understood as a change in *perspective*, not time.⁵⁷ In 21:23b, Luke offers a dual description of the global and local impact of “those days” (21:23a). He writes, “for there will be great distress on the earth [*ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*] and wrath against this people [*λαῶ τούτῳ*].” The majority of interpreters translate *γῆς* as “land.”⁵⁸ However, “earth” appears to be the better translation for the following reasons. First, Luke normally uses *ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* to mean “on the earth.”⁵⁹ Second, the same prepositional phrase clearly means “on the earth” in 21:25.⁶⁰ Third, Luke specifies “this people” in order to distinguish the Jews from the general population of the “earth” as a whole. Finally, Luke’s emphasis on “great distress” (*ἀνάγκη μεγάλη*) recalls the “great” earthquakes and “great” signs which were viewed from the perspective of the nations abroad during the time of Jerusalem’s fall (cf. 21:10-11). Therefore, 21:23b is probably a general statement which conveys the global and local significance of “those days,” the period within which Jerusalem will fall. Luke particularizes these two perspectives in 21:24-26. In 21:24, he details the specifics of God’s “wrath against this people.” “This generation” will be

⁵⁴ Maddox, *Purpose*, 120-21; Carroll, *Response*, 111-12; Fusco, “Problems,” 86; Angel, *Chaos*, 137-38; De Souza, “Coming,” 198-99; David Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse*, GP 4 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 307. Furthermore, 21:24 and 21:25 are connected through Luke’s continued use of the predictive future tense and his continued reference to the “nations,” so Feuillet, “Discours,” 62.

⁵⁵ Also cf. 21:5, 27. See Nolland, “Times,” 145.

⁵⁶ E.g. Bock, *Luke*, 2:1682-83; Marshall, *Luke*, 775; Nolland, *Luke*, 3:1005.

⁵⁷ Suggesting a change in perspective (local to global) and time (past to future) is Carroll, *Luke*, 420.

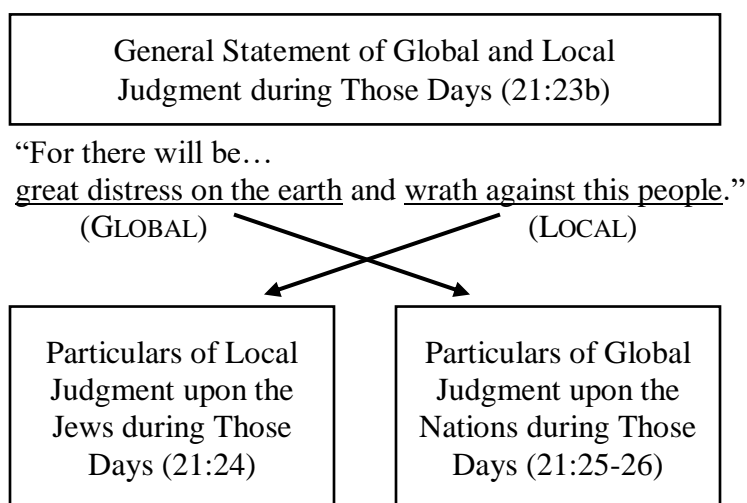
⁵⁸ E.g. Nolland, *Luke*, 3:1002; Bock, *Luke*, 2:179; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1346.

⁵⁹ The translation “earth” fits more naturally with *ἐπὶ* + a genitive (cf. Luke 2:14; 5:24; 18:8; 21:25, 35; Acts 2:19). A more natural fit for “land” would have been *ἐπὶ* + an accusative (cf. Luke 4:25; 23:44).

⁶⁰ So Feuillet, “Discours,” 62; Evans, *Luke*, 751.

killed and carted away as Jerusalem is walked upon by the nations until God’s plan dictates that their appointed time is up. In 21:25-26, Luke details the specifics of the “great distress on the earth.” In “those days” when Jerusalem experiences divine judgment, the nations will also experience great upheaval. They will witness ominous signs and other chaotic events which will cause great confusion, anxiety, and dread. Luke 21:25-26, then, does not describe worldwide events that will happen *after* Jerusalem’s destruction, but worldwide event that will happen *concurrently* with it. This appears to be how Luke interpreted the OT prophetic tendency to place language of local judgment alongside language of universal judgment (cf. Isa 13 and 34).⁶¹ This interpretation of 21:23b-26 can be illustrated as follows (fig. 4.3).

FIGURE 4.3: THE PARTICULARIZATION OF LUKE 21:23B IN 21:24-26



As I have discussed, Luke has already used this same multi-perspective view of events in 21:8-11, a passage which shares many similarities with 21:20-26.⁶² What we seem to have in 21:8-11,

⁶¹ See e.g. Paul R. Raabe, “The Particularizing of Universal Judgment in Prophetic Discourse,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 652-74.

⁶² Most scholars note an apparent relationship between 21:10-11 and 21:25-26 but struggle to define the connection. Green labels 21:8-11 as a “prospective summary” of the entire discourse with 21:11 relating to 21:25-26 (*Luke*, 734-35, 739-40). Luke 21:8-11 may be something of a summary of 21:20-26, but it does not account for

then, is a preparatory discussion about various events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem from the local perspective of the disciples (21:8-9) and from the global perspective of the nations (21:10-11). Luke follows this with a theological interpretation of these events as an expression of a “day of the Son of Man” in 21:20-26 (see Table 4.2).

TABLE 4.2: A COMPARISON OF LUKE 21:8-11 AND 21:20-26

	<u>LUKE 21:8-11</u>	<u>LUKE 21:20-26</u>
LOCAL PERSPECTIVE:	Jewish war (21:8-9)	Jewish war (21:20-24)
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:	Upheaval on earth and in the heavens (21:10-11)	Upheaval on earth and in the heavens (21:25-26)

On the basis of the evidence above, it appears unlikely that Luke makes a temporal shift between 21:24 and 21:25 in order to transition to the parousia. Rather, 21:25-26 shifts the focus from Judea (i.e. local) to the nations (i.e. global) in order to continue a discussion concerning the devastating effects of “those days.” Not only will God’s vengeance fall upon Jerusalem, it will rock the nations as well.

4.3.2 The Reaction of the Nations (Luke 21:25-26)

Luke uses a chiasmic arrangement (A, B, B’, A’) in 21:25-26 with extra content (compared to Matthew and Mark) at the center of the chiasm.⁶³ The first (21:25a) and fourth (21:26b) clauses speak of occurrences in the heavens, while the second (21:25b) and third (21:26a) clauses speak

21:12-19, 27-36. Nolland proposes an “escalation” of events (i.e. a worsening pattern of disasters) between 21:9 and 21:10-11, and also between 21:9-11 and 21:25-26 (*Luke*, 3:990-93, 1005-1007; “Times,” 143-44). But his scheme forces an intensifying pattern upon the text under an assumption that it leads to the parousia. It is unclear how “nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom” (21:10) is an escalation of “wars and insurrections” (21:9). These are the same type of events described from different perspectives. Furthermore, it seems improbable that the “signs” (21:25) are an intensification of “great signs” (21:11). If anything, the omission of “great” suggests de-escalation. Also, the distinction between signs “from” heaven (21:11) and signs “in” the heavenly bodies (21:25) does not reveal an intensification. The different prepositions describe the same events. The location “from” where the signs will be received by the nations is “in” the heavenly bodies.

⁶³ It should be noted that the chiasmic pattern is more conceptual than based on the repetition of specific vocabulary. See Nolland, *Luke*, 3:1006; Evans, *Luke*, 753; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 679; Adams, *Stars*, 176.

of occurrences on earth. What we seem to have is a report of events in the heavens which result in corresponding events on earth. The text reads as follows:

²⁵ Καὶ ἔσονται σημεῖα ἐν ἡλίῳ καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ ἄστροις,
καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς συνοχὴ ἔθνῶν ἐν ἀπορίᾳ ἤχους θαλάσσης καὶ σάλου,
²⁶ ἀποψυχόντων ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ φόβου καὶ προσδοκίας τῶν ἐπερχομένων τῇ οἰκουμένῃ,
αἱ γὰρ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν σαλευθήσονται.

²⁵ and there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars,
and on the earth dismay among nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and waves,
²⁶ people fainting from fear and the expectation of what is coming upon the world,
for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Put alongside the other versions of the discourse, Luke's first clause (21:25a) is a concise statement compared to Matt 24:29b-d and Mark 13:24b-25a. Luke still refers to the "sun," "moon," and "stars," but does not retain the language of cosmic catastrophe. Instead Luke writes, "and there will be signs in" (καὶ ἔσονται σημεῖα ἐν) the sun, moon, and stars. As a result, Luke blurs the clear OT allusion to Isa 13:10 found in Matthew and Mark. The second and third clauses (21:25b-26a) are unique to Luke, focusing on fear and confusion in the earthly domain as a result of what occurs in the heavens. Concerning Luke's fourth clause (21:26b), it begins with the conjunction "for" (γάρ) as opposed to Matthew and Mark's "and" (καί). Otherwise, Luke agrees with Matthew by writing "the powers of the heavens will be shaken."⁶⁴ The cumulative weight of these differences suggests that Luke 21:25-26 has a different focus than Matt 24:29 and Mark 13:24-25. As a result, we should be careful not to uncritically harmonize 21:25-26 with its parallels.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Mark reads "the powers [who/which are] in the heavens."

⁶⁵ It is frequently stated by interpreters that Mark 13:24-25 brings out the meaning of Luke 21:25-26 (e.g. Nolland, *Luke*, 1005, Marshall, *Luke*, 775). But this conclusion must be questioned based on Luke's unique selection and arrangement of material.

4.3.2.1 Allusions to the Old Testament in Luke 21:25-26

Luke alludes to or echoes several OT texts in 21:25-26.⁶⁶ As noted above, Luke has weakened the case for any one specific OT allusion behind 21:25a. The same group of OT texts behind Matthew and Mark may remain behind 21:25a, but it is far from certain on account of Luke's wording.⁶⁷ His use of "signs" may recall a different text, Joel 2:30-31 [3:3-4 LXX], which describes the Day of Yahweh.⁶⁸

³ καὶ δώσω τέρατα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς αἷμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ
⁴ ὁ ἥλιος μεταστραφήσεται εἰς σκότος καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἰς αἷμα πρὶν ἔλθειν ἡμέραν
κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ

³⁰ And I will show portents in heaven, and upon the earth, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. ³¹ The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes.

Luke clearly alludes to this passage in Acts 2:19-20 to describe events preceding the parousia. But this raises the question: If Luke is alluding to Joel in 21:25a, then why is his allusion so vague, especially in relation to the language of cosmic catastrophe? It would make much more sense for him to allude clearly to Joel here if he were speaking about the parousia than in Acts 2:19-20 when Peter is addressing the coming of the Spirit.⁶⁹ Luke may also draw the idea of "signs" from Ps 65:8 (see below).

Luke 21:25b-26a appears to allude to several texts revolving around the idea of the reaction of the nations to a theophany or Day of Yahweh.⁷⁰ The idea of the nations being "perplexed" (ἀπορία) may allude to Isa 24:19, "The earth will be utterly troubled, and the earth

⁶⁶ For discussion see: Charles A. Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel*, JSNTSup 94 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 191-92; G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 378.

⁶⁷ Cf. Isa 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10; 3:15 [4:15 LXX]; Ezek 32:7-9; etc.

⁶⁸ So Adams, *Stars*, 176; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1349; Green, *Luke*, 740; Nolland, *Luke*, 3:1005.

⁶⁹ Luke does not equate Luke 21:25-26 with Acts 2:19-20 as Adams contends (*Stars*, 177). The language is different, and the "signs" in Acts 2:19 do not refer to events in the heavens, but to events on earth.

⁷⁰ Besides the texts highlighted below for Luke 21:25b-26a, also see: Pss 46:2-3 [45:3-4 LXX]; 89:6-9 [88:7-10 LXX]; 96:11-13 [95:11-13 LXX]; 98:7-9 [97:7-9 LXX]; Isa 5:30; 8:22; 13:5, 9, 11; 17:12; 34:1; Jer 4:23-31; 10:2; 4 Macc 15:18; T. Mos. 10:4-6; 1 Cor 2:4.

will be utterly perplexed” (ταραχῆ ταραχθήσεται ἡ γῆ καὶ ἀπορία ἀπορηθήσεται ἡ γῆ). Psalm 65:5-8 [64:6-9 LXX] also appears to play a role in Luke’s thought as it provides an image of Yahweh delivering his people from the nations (Luke may be thinking of his readers here).⁷¹

⁶ ἐπάκουσον ἡμῶν ὁ θεὸς ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν ἡ ἐλπίς πάντων τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς... ⁷
περιζωσμένος ἐν δυναστείᾳ ⁸ ὁ συνταράσσων τὸ κύτος τῆς θαλάσσης ἤχους
κυμάτων αὐτῆς ταραχθήσονται τὰ ἔθνη ⁹ καὶ φοβηθήσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὰ
πέρατα ἀπὸ τῶν σημείων σου

⁵ Hear us, God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth... ⁶ having been girded with power; ⁷ the one who disturbs the depth of the sea, the roar of its waves. The nations ⁸ also will be troubled, the ones who dwell at the ends [of the earth] will be afraid of your signs.

Luke may also draw upon Isa 13:6-8 when he writes about the earth being in dismay and the fearful reaction of people to what is to coming upon the world. Isaiah says: “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near, and devastation will come from God. On account of this every hand will become faint and every soul of humanity will be dismayed, and the elders will be troubled, and pangs will seize them.”

Finally, Luke 21:26b is a clear allusion (like in Matthew and Mark) to a variant reading of Isa 34:4a from the LXX, “and all the powers of the heavens will melt” (καὶ τακῆσονται πᾶσαι αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν).⁷² It is difficult to know if there is a specific text behind “will be shaken” (σαλευθήσονται). While the following texts use different words for “shake,” Luke may be alluding to Joel 2:10, “and heaven will be shaken” (καὶ σεισθήσεται ὁ οὐρανός), or to Hag 2:6-7, “I will shake the heaven [ἐγὼ σείσω τὸν οὐρανὸν] and the earth and the sea and the dry [land], and I will shake all the nations and the elect of all the nations will come.”⁷³

⁷¹ Note that the LXX has a few differences from the MT in this passage.

⁷² The variant reading is contained in Vaticanus (B) and Lucian (L).

⁷³ Also cf. Isa 13:13.

What is the significance of Luke's OT allusions in 21:25-26? Similar to Matthew and Mark, Luke's imagery comes from theophany or Day of Yahweh accounts. Thus, these concepts seem to be the overall frame of reference, which becomes more probable given Luke's depiction of the "coming" of the Son of Man in 21:27. Also similar to Matthew and Mark, Luke has christologically altered the OT context by placing Jesus in the position of Yahweh. It is the Son of Man's "day." However, dissimilar to Matthew and Mark, Luke seems to harness these images for a different purpose. He does not draw primarily upon the language of cosmic catastrophe from these passages.⁷⁴ The sun, moon, and stars do not fail nor fall from the heavens. Instead, there are "signs" and other forms of chaos in the "roaring of the sea and waves," but nothing that would suggest the dissolution of the universe (not even the "shaking" of the powers).⁷⁵ These images still portray a "coming" of God to act, but serve as a basis for what appears to be Luke's primary interest: *the fearful and dismayed reaction of the nations*. Thus, these allusions appear to portray a judgment of the day of the Son of Man coming upon the nations, to which they react in fear, confusion, anxiety, and anguish.

4.3.2.2 Luke and the Language of Cosmic Catastrophe

I have already stated how I think we should interpret OT language of cosmic catastrophe (see chap. 2). Briefly stated, I think the most profitable way to interpret this sort of language is to recognize that the prophets operated with what G. B. Caird has called a "bifocal vision," which imposes metaphorical images of universal judgment upon local manifestations of Yahweh's

⁷⁴ So Wiefel, *Lukas*, 353-54; Klostermann, *Lukasevangelium*, 203.

⁷⁵ Lagrange, *Luc*, 530-31.

judgment so as to produce a “synthetic picture.”⁷⁶ In this way, local instances of Yahweh’s judgment were seen to embody and anticipate the universal judgment of the future. Thus, the OT language of cosmic catastrophe is metaphorical language that is primarily *theological* in orientation, yet retains a *historical application*. It refers to the sovereign and powerful coming of Yahweh into the historical realm for judgment and salvation.⁷⁷ However, having said this, we must be cautious given that Luke has removed much of the catastrophic language from his account in 21:25-26. What might this mean?

The challenge for the interpreter is to make sense of how Luke has adapted and employed the language.⁷⁸ As we have seen, Matthew and Mark seem to employ the language with a predominantly theological emphasis to depict a glorious and powerful theophany of the Son of Man at the parousia. However, Luke is different. He does not appear as determined to highlight the glorious nature of the coming of the Son of Man through direct allusions to the Day of Yahweh. Instead, 21:25-26 is more like prose narrative than prophetic poetry.⁷⁹ Furthermore, he has done away with the majority of the language of cosmic catastrophe in favor of focusing more attention on the reaction of the nations. Thus, Luke does not seem to use the language like that employed by a prophet, or an apocalypticist, but like a *historian* whose intent is to ground historical events in God’s overarching plan for the world. In other words, he seems to reverse

⁷⁶ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 258. Please see the relevant portions of chapter two on Matt 24:29 for a more detailed argument of how to interpret this metaphorical language.

⁷⁷ Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 70-71.

⁷⁸ See I. Howard Marshall, “Political and Eschatological Language in Luke,” in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony C. Thiselton, *ScrHer* 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 157-77. Marshall offers a few valid critiques of Caird and Wright’s position on the interpretation of “apocalyptic” language, but then goes too far in stressing a literal reading. For example, Marshall suggests (correctly in my opinion) that Luke does not see the “signs in the sun, moon, and stars” (21:25a) as political events. Luke probably is actually speaking about phenomena in the sky. These phenomena would have been interpreted as pointing to other events. But on the other hand, for Marshall to suggest the “roaring of the sea and the waves” (21:25b) is a statement about water seems insensitive to the way this imagery evokes pictures of chaos. I think an appropriate methodology for interpreting this sort of language must have a certain amount of flexibility which allows different writers the ability to employ the same style of language differently.

⁷⁹ So Evans, *Luke*, 755.

the emphases of the OT prophets, focusing primarily on *historical events* and applying to them *theological meaning* within the scope of God's plan.⁸⁰ This, of course, is a well documented strategy of Luke in the way he offers a theological interpretation of history surrounding Jesus and the early church. He seems to interpret the language of the OT in a similar manner.

So, then, what are the historical events to which Luke applies theological meaning? *In 21:25-26, Luke expounds upon upheavals in the Roman world (in the heavens, on earth, and in the socio-political realm) that occur at the time of Jerusalem's destruction (21:10-11). He invests these events with theological significance by describing them in language reminiscent of a Day of Yahweh to communicate a judgment upon the nations for their role in the persecution of Jesus and his witnesses and to enhance his overall depiction of the day of the Son of Man as a worldwide event which foreshadows the parousia.* In other words, just as 21:20-24 was a theological interpretation of the local events that were introduced in 21:8-9, Luke 21:25-26 is a theological interpretation of the global events that were introduced in 21:10-11. Luke 21:20-26, then, depicts the day of the Son of Man as a worldwide judgment that will come upon Jerusalem (21:20-24) and the nations (21:25-26). Thus, not only is the "coming" of the Son of Man portrayed as a *local* event which liberates some (Jesus' disciples) and condemns others (this generation), it is also portrayed as a *global* event which liberates some (probably Luke's readers) and condemns others (the nations). Luke 21:25-26, then, depicts the judgment of the Roman world as a day reminiscent of the Day of Yahweh. It interprets the chaotic events listed in 21:10-11 theologically, revealing the "great distress on the earth" (21:23b) which comes with the day of the Son of Man.

⁸⁰ This, of course, is very close to N. T. Wright's basic theory of the language, which invests socio-political events with their full theological meaning (*The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 1 [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 280-86). I will, however, suggest differences with Wright below.

4.3.2.3 The Meaning of Luke 21:25-26

The “signs in the sun, moon, and stars” (21:25a) seem to pick up the “dreadful portents” viewed by the nations (21:11), describing them in language suggestive of a Day of Yahweh. Thus, Luke reports that the people of the nations will probably see unusual phenomena in the sky (possibly shooting stars, eclipses, etc.).⁸¹ Regardless of the exact identification of these “signs,” these phenomena are to be understood as ominous disturbances related to the coming of the Son of Man for judgment. They contribute to the “dismay” (συννοχῆ) experienced in the Roman world (21:25b). As noted by Marshall, this term was “used in Greek astrological texts to signify the dismay caused by unfavorable omens.”⁸² The anxiety of the Roman world is further compounded by the “perplexity” (ἀπορία) they experience in reaction to the “roaring of the sea and waves.” The churning of the sea is an image of chaos which probably refers to the various natural and socio-political upheavals in the earthly realm (21:10-11). As noted before, Luke reports a “great earthquake” (Acts 16:26) as well as a “great famine” (Acts 11:28) occurring in the Roman world during the days prior to Jerusalem’s ruin. Furthermore, it is commonly recognized that the time surrounding Jerusalem’s fall was a period of significant socio-political upheaval in the Roman Empire. The relative stability of the Empire was shattered when Nero committed suicide in 68 CE. The ensuing struggle for power was comparable to a civil war with various military commanders vying for control. Four different emperors ascended to the throne in one year (69 CE) but were either assassinated or committed suicide themselves.⁸³ In the face of such overwhelming events like wars, civil wars, earthquakes, famines, and plagues (21:10-

⁸¹ Luke may have in mind something similar to the ominous signs reported by Josephus and others. Some of the following appeared in the sky, others were terrestrial signs. Cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 6.288-315, 312-15; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13; Dio Cassius, *R.H.* 48.43.4-6; 54.19.7; Appian, *C.W.* 1.9.83; Livy, *Hist.* 26.23.4; 27.11.2.

⁸² Marshall, *Luke*, 775. See Helmut Köster, “συννοχῆ,” *TDNT* 7:886-87.

⁸³ See T. S. Johnson, “Roman Emperors,” *DNTB* 970.

11), the people of the Roman world certainly had reason to be at their wits end.⁸⁴ But again, these are no ordinary upheavals; Luke portrays them as evidence of a divine judgment upon the Roman world similar to a Day of Yahweh in which the Son of Man will deliver his witnesses from their oppressors (cf. Isa 24:19; Ps 65:5-8 [64:6-9 LXX]). Luke writes that people, overcome by the mental anguish and weight of these circumstances, will “faint” (or even possibly “die”) from “fear and the expectation of what is coming upon the inhabited world” (21:26a).⁸⁵ These crises will strike fear and panic so taxing that some will be unable to stand in the face of such chaos and uncertainty (contrast Luke’s readers, cf. 21:9, 28).

In 21:26b we have Luke’s most direct allusion to the OT (cf. Isa 34:4a). His linking word “for” (*γάρ*) implies that this allusion is the underlying reason for the upheavals in the Roman world and the distress of its citizens (21:25-26a). Thus, 21:26b seems to be Luke’s most blatant theological interpretation of the events which transpire throughout the Empire, “for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” The “powers of the heavens” certainly refer to the heavenly bodies (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars) listed in 21:25a; however “powers” cannot be restricted to cosmological entities. Like Matthew and Mark, Luke probably conceives of the heavenly bodies as living being, the angelic powers that governed the nations.⁸⁶ These gods ruled the Roman world. Luke mentions several of these “gods” in Acts, such as Zeus, Hermes, and Artemis (14:11-14; 17:16, 22-23; 19:21-41), as well as the emperor’s claim as the only “king” (17:7). Thus, if there were ominous signs in the heavens and major upheavals on earth, then the “powers” were experiencing their own upheaval. They were being overtaken, “shaken”

⁸⁴ Evans, *Luke*, 755; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1683.

⁸⁵ “Faint” (*ἀποψύχω*) may even refer to death, since it means to “stop breathing” (cf. BDAG, 125). Also, Luke’s routinely uses “inhabited world” (*οἰκουμένη*) to refer to the Roman Empire (cf. Luke 2:1; 4:5; Acts 11:28; 17:6, 31; 19:27; 24:5).

⁸⁶ Isaiah 34:4 uses “powers” to refer to the gods of other nations whom Yahweh conquers and destroys. Also see Walter Grundmann, “*δύναμις*,” *TDNT* 2:307-308; Bovon, *Luke*, 3:117.

(σαλεύω) by the coming of the true King of the world, the Son of Man. Luke does not seem to use this verb to imply cosmological destruction, but a divine “coming” into history to act (cf. Acts 4:24-31). Thus, by evoking Isa 34:4, Luke appears to stress that the events of 21:25-26a are a divine judgment of the Son of Man against the Roman world, enacted by the true King of the universe who comes in “power and great glory” over and against the nations and their so-called gods (21:27).⁸⁷

To sum up my interpretation of Luke 21:25-26, Luke continues his discussion of the day of the Son of Man by shifting the focus from Jerusalem to the nations. Picking up on the events listed in 21:10-11, Luke interprets them theologically as a day of the Son of Man coming upon the Roman world. The upheavals in the heavens and on the earth are judgments upon the nations and their deities. Therefore, Luke offers a theological interpretation of world history at the time of Jerusalem’s downfall. In doing so, Luke endows the day of the Son of Man with worldwide significance, making it a forerunner which both embodies and anticipates the parousia.

4.3.3 The Day of the Son of Man (Luke 21:27)

Luke 21:27 is the climactic scene of the discourse, the culmination of the “days of vengeance.” The unfolding of God’s wrath against “this generation” of Jews (21:24) and the Roman Empire (21:25-26) will reveal Israel’s Messiah and the true King of the world (21:27). Luke writes, “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (καὶ τότε ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλῃ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς). This verse, of course, alludes to Dan 7:13, “and behold, one was coming on the clouds of heaven as a Son of Man.” As in Matthew and Mark, the coming of the Son of Man on a cloud suggests a theophany

⁸⁷ See a similar argument in Bas van Iersel, “The Sun, Moon, and Stars of Mark 13,24-25 in a Greco-Roman Reading,” *Bib 77* (1996): 84-92.

(Pss 68:4, 33; 104:3; Isa 19:1; Jer 4:13).⁸⁸ Luke's use of the singular "cloud" identifies the Son of Man with the presence of God himself (cf. Luke 9:34-35; Acts 1:9).⁸⁹ The cloud imagery is also similar to the thunderstorm imagery of 17:24 when the Son of Man was revealed in judgment against Jerusalem. Furthermore, Luke emphasizes the manner in which the Son of Man will come, "with power and great glory" (cf. Dan 7:14). This most likely communicates a royal coming with the authority of God. Jesus comes as the suffering-yet-vindicated Messiah, enacted in the destruction of Jerusalem and worldwide chaos (cf. 9:26-27; 13:35; 17:24, 30; 18:8; 20:16).⁹⁰

Others who argue this position normally contend that Luke 21:27 depicts an upward movement of the Son of Man from earth to heaven.⁹¹ However, Luke appears to reverse the upward ascent of the Son of Man in Dan 7:13 for the following reasons. First, in 21:20-26 Luke's primary frame of reference for describing the day of the Son of Man has been the Day of Yahweh, the day in when God comes from his place of dwelling in heaven to earth for the purpose of judgment and salvation. Second, this downward movement is made all the more apparent by Luke's use of the verb "shake," which highlights the concept of a theophany. Third (as I will argue below), those who "see" the Son of Man coming in 21:27 are those on earth who will experience his judgment. Finally, other Lukan texts which speak of a "coming" of the Son of Man in reference to the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem suggest a movement from heaven to earth (cf. 9:26-27; 17:24, 30; 18:8; 20:16). Thus, while I agree that Jesus'

⁸⁸ So Green, *Luke*, 739-40; De Souza, "Coming," 198-200; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 69-71.

⁸⁹ Luke's reference to Jesus "coming in the same way you saw him go" (Acts 1:9-11) does not confirm that 21:27 is ultimately about the parousia. Luke could just have easily been referring to the return of the Son of Man to vindicate the disciples after they had suffered (21:12-19, 28, 36). In fact, Luke appears to contrast the disciples "standing and looking up" (Acts 1:11) with the commands to "straighten up and raise your heads" (Luke 21:28). At that point in Acts, the disciples had not gone through the suffering required to raise their heads and "stand before the Son of Man" (21:28, 36). It was not yet time for them to raise their heads (21:28) because Jesus had not yet come to vindicate them from their oppressors (21:27).

⁹⁰ See Juza, "One of the Days," 575-95.

⁹¹ Wright, *Jesus*, 361-63; France, *Luke*, 334.

“coming” in 21:27 is enacted in the fall of Jerusalem and upheavals throughout the Roman Empire, I disagree that Jesus is being received in heaven.⁹²

Another critical aspect of Luke 21:27 is identifying who “will see” (ὄψονται) the Son of Man. In the Matthean and Markan parallels, those who “see” witness Jesus’ parousia. Most interpreters conclude the same here for Luke, suggesting that “they” refer to the people of the nations. However, the most probable designation of this unidentified group is “this people” (21:24) and the people of the nations (21:25-26). “This people” or “this generation” is the wicked and unperceptive Jewish contemporaries of Jesus who cause the suffering and rejection of Jesus and his witnesses in Luke-Acts (21:23-24; cf. 17:25).⁹³ The people of the nations (21:25-26) are also unbelievers who reject Jesus and inflict suffering upon his witnesses in Luke-Acts.⁹⁴ Luke has already referred to these two groups earlier in the discourse with impersonal plurals, “*they* will arrest you and persecute you; *they* will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name” (21:12). Thus, Jesus the King will be vindicated before those who have rejected him. He comes on a cloud with the status of Yahweh himself, prepared to exercise his messianic power and authority as their Ruler by making war against them. They will see and experience a “day of the Son of Man” that will play out in the destruction of Jerusalem’s temple and other upheavals throughout the Empire.⁹⁵ The kingdom of God will be made manifest in their judgment.

⁹² This position is not prohibited by Acts 3:21, which states that Jesus “must remain in heaven until the time of the universal restoration.” In 21:27, Luke is not referring to a literal “coming” in the sense that Jesus leaves heaven. The “coming” is manifested in the accomplishment of earthly events.

⁹³ Juza, “One of the Days,” 584-91.

⁹⁴ See e.g. Acts 14:5; 16:19-24; 17:6-8; 22:22-29.

⁹⁵ See De Souza, “Coming,” 203.

4.3.4 The Sign of Your Redemption (Luke 21:28)

In Luke 21:28, Luke's Jesus addresses what God's judgment of the Jews and the nations means for his disciples (and likely Luke's readers/listeners as well). He writes, "Now when you see these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (*ἀρχομένων δὲ τούτων γίνεσθαι ἀνακύψατε καὶ ἐπάρατε τὰς κεφαλὰς ὑμῶν, διότι ἐγγίξει ἡ ἀπολύτρωσις ὑμῶν*). The initial clause "now when you see these things begin to take place" looks back to "when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies (21:20), the point at which "these things" *began*. Thus, Jerusalem's encirclement did not just signal the imminent demise of the temple, it also signaled the liberation of Jesus' followers from their oppressors near and abroad (cf. 21:12-19). In other words, during the "days of vengeance" God's anointed King would grant "justice/vindication" for his disciples against their oppressors (cf. Luke 18:1-8; 21:22; Acts 7:24). As a result, Jesus commands his disciples to "stand up and lift up your heads." This command implies that their posture before the "day" was bent over with heads bowed, under oppression. They were experiencing suffering and persecution on account of the "name" of Jesus (21:12-19).⁹⁶ However, their "liberation" (*ἀπολύτρωσις*) was coming.⁹⁷ Therefore, just as the kingdom of God would become manifest in the condemnatory judgment of "this people" and "the nations" (21:23-27), the kingdom would also become manifest in the liberation of Jesus' followers from their persecutors (21:28).

4.3.5 Initial Conclusions

If I am correct in my interpretation of Luke 21:25-26, these verses do not portray the parousia, let alone the catastrophic end of the world. Rather, this language focuses on the reaction of the

⁹⁶ De Souza, "Coming," 196-206; Fusco, "Problems," 89.

⁹⁷ See F. Büshsel, "ἀπολύτρωσις," *TDNT* 4:352.

nations to the coming of the Son of Man amid the “days of vengeance.” The nations and their so-called gods will be judged for their part in the persecution of Jesus and his witnesses. Luke uses this picture to emphasize the worldwide effects of the theophany of the Son of Man, which extends beyond Jerusalem to the nations. We will have to examine other Lukan texts to assess his views about the future of the cosmos.

4.4 Other Notable Lukan Texts

4.4.1 Luke 21:33 and 16:17

Both Luke 16:17 and 21:33 speak of heaven and earth passing away. Given that I have treated the parallels of these passages in previous chapters (cf. Matt 5:18; Matt 24:35; Mark 13:31), and that I do not think Luke significantly alters the meaning of the sayings, my comments here will be brief.

In 21:33, Luke is answering the question about “when” the temple will be destroyed (cf. 21:7, 29-33). After declaring that “this generation will certainly not pass away,” Jesus makes a solemn pledge that his answer is reliable, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away.” Thus, 21:33 is not a direct comment on the fate of the cosmos.

However, at the heart of the verse is an assumed contrast between the fleeting nature of the cosmos and the enduring nature of Jesus’ words. The contrast would fail to function properly if the cosmos did not have some kind of expected ending. Thus, the cosmos will come to an *end*. But this does not imply what kind of an ending, for it may cease to exist, or cease to exist as it is.

In 16:17, Luke compares the durability of the cosmos with the law, “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke [of a letter] of the law to fail.” Here Luke uses the apparent permanence of the cosmos (i.e. the difficulty for it to pass away) to stress the

ongoing validity of the law despite the arrival of the kingdom of God. This saying could be taken either as saying the cosmos will not pass away, or that it would take a major act of God for it to pass away. The sayings rhetorical function in relation to the law precludes us from making a firm assessment.

4.4.2 Acts 2:19-20

In Acts 2:17-21, Luke quotes Joel 2:28-32a [3:1-5a LXX] in order to explain the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Peter declared that the “last days” have arrived because the promises of God have begun to be fulfilled. Peter recites two promises from Joel: God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh (2:17-18), and God will show portents and signs before the day of the Lord (2:19-20). Because these promises are being fulfilled, these last days are the time of salvation (2:21). I am concerned here primarily with the second promise (2:19-20).

- ¹⁹ καὶ δώσω τέρατα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἄνω
καὶ σημεῖα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κάτω,
αἷμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ.
²⁰ ὁ ἥλιος μεταστραφήσεται εἰς σκότος
καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἰς αἷμα,
πρὶν ἐλθεῖν ἡμέραν κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ.

- ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and a cloud of smoke.
²⁰ The sun will be turned into darkness,
and the moon into blood,
before the great and manifest day of the Lord comes.

Luke has altered Joel by adding three things: (1) the portents will occur in heaven “above,” (2) the blood, fire, and smoke are labeled as “signs,” and (3) the signs will occur “below” on earth. These changes establish symmetry between the portents in the sky and the signs on earth, which Luke then particularizes in chiasmic fashion. The signs on earth are the “blood, and fire, and a

column of smoke,” while the portents in heaven are the “sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood.” All of 2:17-20b will occur before the parousia (2:20c).

Similar to his emphasis on the fulfillment of God’s promise of the Spirit, Luke also emphasizes that the promise of portents and signs has already begun to be fulfilled. Luke repeatedly refers to “signs and wonders” being performed by Jesus and his disciples (Acts 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12). Thus, Luke may see these events as the fulfillment of the portents and signs. However, these other signs and wonders are restricted to the earth below, and none of them seem to fit Luke’s particular language related to blood, fire, smoke, the sun, and moon. Yet, Luke’s emphasis on realized eschatology moving toward fulfillment suggests that he may have certain events in mind when he speaks of these portents and signs. As a result, some have argued that Luke is thinking of eclipses of the sun, or other cosmic phenomena. Others have argued that Luke’s reference to blood or the sun being darkened refers to Jesus’ crucifixion (cf. Luke 23:45), or that the fire refers to the coming of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:2-3). However, the texts which most resemble this language are Luke 21:10-11 and 21:25-26, which refer to the heavenly and terrestrial phenomena that terrified and disturbed the nations in relation to the “day” of the Son of Man. Thus, Luke may be referring to the circumstances surrounding Jerusalem’s ruin as portents and signs of the parousia. The blood, fire, and smoke could relate to the ravages of war leveled against Jerusalem, while the portents in the sun and moon could relate to the signs which were witnessed by the nations. If this is the case, Luke views the local and global events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. However, Luke may just as well have in mind future portents and signs that will herald the parousia.⁹⁸ These portents and signs would probably resemble those witnessed by the nations

⁹⁸ C. K. Barrett, *Acts*, 2 vols., ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 1:137-38; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 143-44.

(21:10-11, 25-26) and point to a theophany for the purpose of judgment and salvation. Either way, the language does not appear to address the catastrophic end of the cosmos.⁹⁹

4.4.3 Acts 3:19-21

In a sermon following the healing of a crippled man, the apostle Peter urges his fellow Jews to “turn and repent” so that: (1) “times of refreshing [καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως] may come from the presence of the Lord,” and (2) the Lord might send the “Messiah appointed for you, Jesus” (3:20). Elaborating upon Jesus, Peter says that it is necessary for him to remain in heaven until the “time of the restoration of all things [χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων], of which [ὧν] God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from long ago” (3:21). The two results of repentance appear to involve both present and future “blessings” (3:26), the sending of the Spirit in the present and the sending of the Messiah in the future.¹⁰⁰

First, the “times of refreshing” probably refer to the blessings associated with the forgiveness of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰¹ “Refreshing” (ἀνάψυξις) has the sense of recovering one’s breath or regaining strength.¹⁰² The imagery of breath/wind has already been used to describe the Spirit, who also comes from the Lord (2:2, 33). Furthermore, the “times of refreshing” appear to parallel “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” a line from Peter’s first sermon where the same sequence is used, “Repent and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah, so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38). We possibly have the same movement in 3:19-20 from repentance, to the

⁹⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012-2015), 1:917-19; Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 115-17.

¹⁰⁰ The issues surrounding 3:19-21 are many, see Carroll, *Response*, 137-54; William L. Lane, “Times of Refreshing: A Study of Eschatological Periodization in Judaism and Christianity” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1962).

¹⁰¹ Barrett, *Acts*, 1:205.

¹⁰² BDAG, 75; Albert Dihle and Eduard Schweizer, “ἀναψύχω, ἀνάψυξις,” *TDNT* 9:663-64.

forgiveness of sins, to the reception of the Spirit. The healing of the crippled man, the context of Peter's sermon, also seems to support this conclusion (3:1-10). When the crippled man saw Peter and John, he "expected to receive something from them" and in the process of being healed his legs were "made strong" (3:5-7). His expectation to "receive" seems to recall Luke's emphasis on receiving the promise of the Spirit (1:8; 2:33, 38; 8:15, 17, 19; 10:47; 19:2), and the healing of his legs appear to be the divine strengthening or "refreshing" given by the Spirit.¹⁰³ In this understanding, the "times of refreshing" are the continued blessings of the ministry of Jesus received through the Spirit (cf. Luke 4:18-19), which are a foretaste of the "times of the restoration of all things."

The second blessing is the Messiah being sent "for you" (i.e. for your benefit) at the parousia, when the "time of the restoration of all things" will take place. The period in view (i.e. the "times") is spoken of in connection with the parousia and is probably intended to occur at the same time, although it is not clear.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, "all things" (πάντων), which is the most probable antecedent of "of which" (ὧν), can be interpreted in two ways.¹⁰⁵ If read in light of the relative clause which follows (i.e. "the times of the establishment of all things that God spoke about through the prophets"), "all things" likely refer to *prophecy*. However, given that this forces an improbable sense of ἀποκατάστασις (i.e. "establishment/fulfillment"), the majority of interpreters opt to read "all things" in light of the preceding (i.e. "the times of the restoration of all things"), so that it refers to the *created world* as the object of restoration.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Luke appears to highlight the content of the promise: the restoration of the cosmos. He likely has in

¹⁰³ Although the "strengthening" might be the "restoration" of the man's legs if ἀποκατάστασις is taken as referring to the period before the parousia.

¹⁰⁴ See Carroll, who proposes a period which coincides with the proclamation of the gospel to the nations before the parousia (*Response*, 146-48). He attempts to assign a meaning which captures both prophecy fulfilled and the restoration of all things.

¹⁰⁵ See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 69.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Albrecht Oepke, "ἀποκατάστασις," *TDNT* 1:389-93; Bock, *Acts*, 177; Barrett, *Acts*, 1:206.

mind several OT promises connected with the idea of a new heaven and a new earth or the restoration of Israel to the land (cf. 1:6-8).¹⁰⁷

If the “time of the restoration of all things” refers to the eschatological consummation, then Luke’s use of ἀποκατάστασις seems to imply the restoration of the cosmos to something like its original state.¹⁰⁸ But this should not be construed simply as a return to the Garden of Eden. Luke certainly anticipates heightened aspects of eschatological newness such as resurrection from the dead. There may be similarities here to Matthew’s idea of universal “regeneration” (Matt 19:28). However, while ἀποκατάστασις seems to imply a cosmic restoration, it does not inherently imply how the new creation will emerge, other than connecting it to the parousia of Jesus. Thus, Luke appears to affirm a *new beginning* that seems to involve some kind of material transformation of the cosmos in the age to come, but how it will come about remains uncertain.

4.5 Luke’s Theology of the Future of the Cosmos

4.5.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

Luke does not identify the actor in the cosmic event. However, it is worth noting Luke’s emphasis on God as the one who directs history according to his plan. Furthermore, Luke closely identifies the exalted Jesus with the Father (especially using the title “Lord”), often casting Jesus in the role of God’s chosen agent. This implies that, for Luke, Jesus is God’s appointed Messiah/Son, the one who accomplishes God’s divine plan. Thus, even though Luke

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Isa 65:17-25; 66:22; Jer 16:15; 24:6; 27:19; Ezek 16:55; 17:23; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Zech 8:1-17; 14:6-11; Keener, *Acts*, 2:1109-1112. Luke does not have in mind the idea of universalism, which was famously suggested by Origin in his doctrine of ἀποκατάστασις (*Princ.* 1.6.1-4; 2.3.1-5; 3.5-6; *Cels.* 8:72). The context of Peter’s sermon certainly implies that “repentance” is a required response, and the sending of Jesus appointed “for you” is conditional (3:20-21).

¹⁰⁸ Barrett, *Acts*, 1:206; Joseph A Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB 31 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 288-89.

does not identify the actor in the cosmic event, he most likely would answer God the Father by means of his exalted Son (Acts 17:30-31).

4.5.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

Luke appears to draw a link between the cosmic transition and the parousia (Acts 3:20-21).

However, when the parousia will occur is known only to God. He is the one who determines the timing of events according to his divine plan (Acts 1:7; 17:31). According to Luke, the key event that will occur before (but not immediately before) the parousia is the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:9). It also appears that various portents will herald the parousia (Acts 2:19-20). But ultimately, when the cosmic transition will occur is unknown.

4.5.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

As with Matthew and Mark, Luke frames the main problems affecting the cosmos during “this age” in terms of sin, death, and dominion.¹⁰⁹ Humanity has rebelled against its Creator and is in need of salvation (e.g. Luke 4:18-19, 40-41; 5:31-32; Acts 3:19). Furthermore, Luke indicates that the Devil is the ruler of this age.¹¹⁰ He is the primary opponent of Jesus, the one who exercises control over “all the kingdoms of the world” (Luke 4:5-6) and hampers the growth of the kingdom of God (Luke 8:12; Act 10:38; 26:17-18). However, the Devil and his kingdom are already being overthrow by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:18; 13:16). The decisive defeat of Satan, sin, and death occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:26; Acts 2:22-36). Yet Jesus’ victory will not be fully implemented until the parousia, when he

¹⁰⁹ On “this age” see Luke 16:8; 18:30; 20:34-35.

¹¹⁰ Luke uses several names to describe the “Devil” (Luke 4:2, 3, 6, 13; 8:12; Acts 10:38; 13:10), “Satan” (Luke 10:18; 11:18; 13:16; 22:3, 31; Acts 5:3; 26:18), “the enemy” (Luke 10:19), “Beelzebul” (Luke 11:15, 18, 19), and the “ruler of demons” (Luke 11:15).

comes to judge the world and rule over all things (Act 2:20-21; 3:20-21; 17:31). All of this suggests that the cosmic transition will occur in order to bring to completion the victory of Christ's death and resurrection over *sin*, *death*, and the *Devil*.

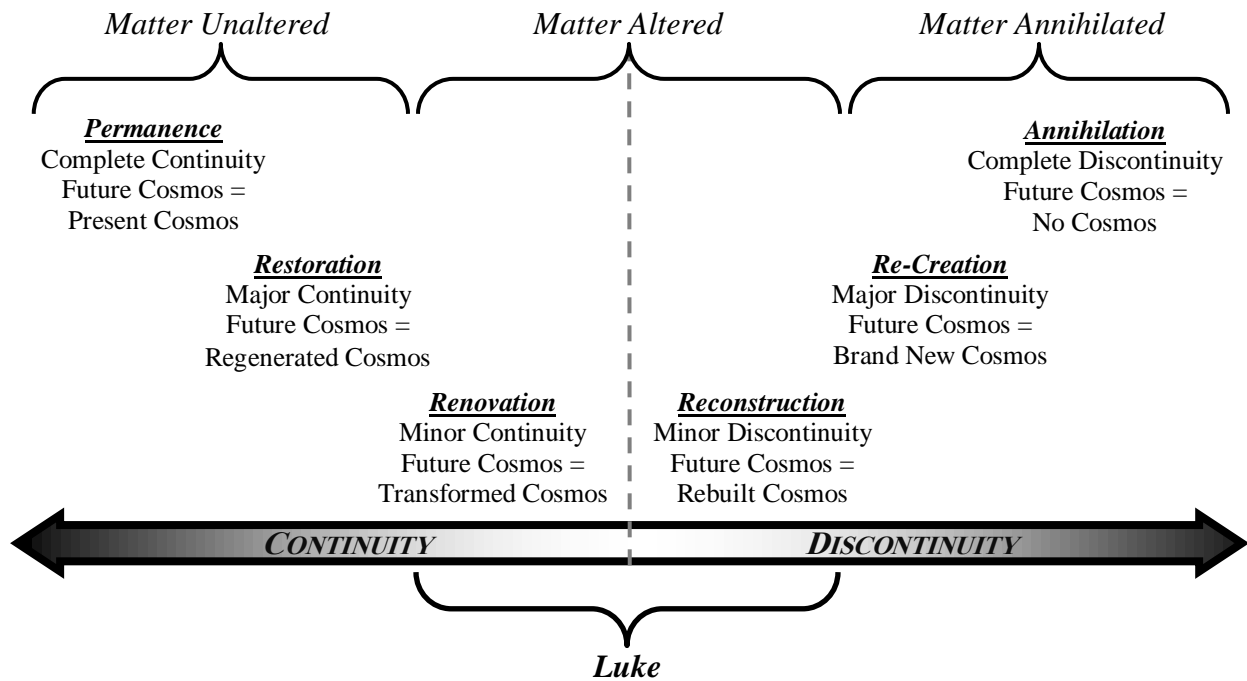
4.5.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

Luke affirms the ongoing durability of the cosmos (Luke 16:17), but also that it will come to an end by "passing away" (Luke 21:33). In addition, he indicates that God will act at the end of the age to bring about a new beginning of some kind, a "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). While these descriptions point to some type of a cosmic transition, precisely how the transition will unfold is left unstated. Luke also appears to suggest that various portents or signs in the natural world will herald the parousia (Acts 2:19-20). But, for Luke, these signs do not appear to anticipate the dissolution of the cosmos. He seems to have intentionally downplayed the language of cosmic catastrophe in his works, using the images to refer to historical events (cf. Luke 21:25-26; Acts 2:17-21).¹¹¹

As with Matthew and Mark, Luke does not provide us with enough data to make a firm decision about his beliefs concerning the future of the cosmos. However, because he speaks of all things "passing away" and being "restored," he does not appear to envision the ideas of *permanence* or *annihilation*. Furthermore, his belief in resurrection suggests more than a *restoration* to original conditions. And finally, Luke's lack of emphasis on the language of cosmic catastrophe makes the notion of *re-creation* unlikely. Thus, the most likely options for Luke are *renovation* and *reconstruction*. We can chart the possibilities below on Figure 4.4.

¹¹¹ Even if one disagrees with my conclusions concerning 21:25-26 (in preference of a parousia interpretation), the muted language of cosmic catastrophe still does not seem to suggest the destruction of the cosmos.

FIGURE 4.4: LUKE AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



4.5.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

Luke does not provide many details about “the age to come” (Luke 18:30; 20:35). His primary description is that it will be the “time of the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). This idea seems to imply some kind of materially transformed world in which there will be no more sin and death, and believers will be resurrected to eternal life (Luke 14:14; 20:33-38; Acts 4:2; 17:31; 24:15). Luke also notes that Jesus will reign as the exalted Messiah over the future world (Luke 1:33; 22:28-30; Acts 3:20-21). Finally, Luke also appears to suggest that humanity will share in governing over the future world (Luke 12:44; 22:28-30).

5 Paul and the Future of the Cosmos

Having examined the writings of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we now turn to Paul. The primary text under consideration in this chapter will be Rom 8:19-22. I will also touch upon several other texts that indirectly address the future of the cosmos (1 Cor 7:31; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; and Col 1:19-20). Given that the vast majority of interpreters agree upon the cosmic implications of Rom 8:19-22 (i.e. Paul anticipates the renewal of cosmos at the end of the age), I will not offer a survey of interpretive views. We can begin with a brief overview of Rom 8.

5.1 Life in the Spirit (Rom 8:1-39)

Often extolled as one of the greatest chapters in the NT, Rom 8 is beloved for its focus on the certainty of hope found in Christ and the Spirit. For discussion purposes, we can divide the chapter into three sections: 8:1-17, 8:18-30, and 8:31-39.

5.1.1 The Spirit of Life (Rom 8:1-17)

In Rom 8:1-17, Paul elaborates on the role of the “Spirit” in God’s plan of redemption, contrasting it with the “flesh.” As Paul sees it, the Spirit and the flesh stand in opposition to one another and lead to different ends. Whereas the one who lives according to the flesh remains hostile to God, the one who lives according to the Spirit is aligned with Christ. As a result, the followers of the flesh remain condemned under the law, a path that ultimately leads to death; but the followers of the Spirit experience the freedom secured by Christ, a path that ultimately leads to life.

One of the major privileges associated with the Spirit is adoption (8:14-17). Paul uses this powerful concept to remind his readers that they are God's children who will receive an *inheritance* along with Christ (8:17).¹ He writes, "And if children, then also heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we might also be glorified with him." Given that an understanding of 8:17 is important for grasping what follows in 8:18-22, we must pause to ask a few questions.

First, who are the heirs? Paul states that they are *believers* who are: (1) heirs of God, and (2) joint-heirs with Christ. By calling believers "heirs of God," Paul identifies God the Father as the benefactor who bestows an inheritance upon his children (cf. 8:32). By identifying believers as "joint-heirs with Christ," Paul qualifies what it means to be an heir.

Second, what is the content of the inheritance? Paul probably has in mind three interrelated gifts: glory, adoption, and the cosmos. (1) Paul views the inheritance of believers primarily as the reception of "glory" (8:17-18, 21), which is something that innately belongs to God. It is not so much a static quality of his nature as it is the dynamic weight of his magnificent presence and life-giving power.² Thus, glorification is the final outcome of God's righteousness as it pertains to humanity (8:30; cf. 1:17). (2) Part of receiving glory appears to be "adoption," which Paul qualifies as the resurrection of the body (8:23-25). Even though the "Spirit of life" has already brought believers into the family of God, the process of adoption is not brought to completion until the age to come. (3) A final aspect of receiving glory is that believers will inherit the "world" along with Christ (4:13; 8:19-22, 32).³ In the OT, the language of

¹ On "inheritance" in Paul see James D. Hester, *Paul's Concept of Inheritance: A Contribution to Understanding Heilsgeschichte*, SJTOP 14 (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1968); Mark Forman, *The Politics of Inheritance in Romans*, SNTSMS 148 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

² See Harald Hegermann, "δόξα," *EDNT* 1:344-48.

³ See Hester, *Paul's*, 69-89.

“inheritance” is often tied to the Abrahamic promise of land.⁴ Paul refers to this promise earlier in Romans, “For the promise to Abraham or to his seed that he would inherit [κληρονόμου] the world [κόσμου] did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (4:13). Here Paul universalizes the scope of the promise to include the entire “world.”⁵ This shift in thought occurred as the Abrahamic promise of land began to be understood as a future hope.⁶ Paul returns to the thought of 4:13 when he reintroduces the language of adoption and inheritance in 8:14-17.⁷ Then in 8:19-22, Paul goes on to address the condition of the inheritance itself (i.e. the κτίσις). Taken together, these three interconnected gifts appear to communicate that *inheritance involves glorified and resurrected humanity sharing in Christ’s reign over a renewed world* (cf. Rom 8:32; 1 Cor 6:2-3, 9-11; 15:20-28).⁸

Third and finally, when will the inheritance be received? The movement from present suffering to future glory in 8:17-18 suggests that believers will inherit glory, resurrection, and the world as part of the eschatological consummation.

⁴ See e.g. Gen 15:7; 28:4; Exod 23:30; Lev 20:24; Deut 1:8, 21; 4:1; 8:1; 30:5; Josh 1:15.

⁵ Cf. Jub. 17:3; 22:14-15; 32:19; 2 Bar. 51:3; 1 En. 5:7; 4 Ezra 6:59; LAB 32:3; Sir 44:21; Philo, *Somn.* 1.175; *Mos.* 1.155; Hester, *Paul’s*, 32; Kenneth E. Bailey, “Paul’s Understanding of the Territorial Promise of God to Abraham: Romans 4:13 in its Historical and Theological Context,” *TR* 15 (1994): 59-69. The promise of land should not be restricted to an “a-territorial” promise as suggested by W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine*, BibSem 25 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 178-79.

⁶ Cf. Isa 57:13; 60:21; Ezek 36:8-12; Sir 36:10. Also see Hester, *Paul’s*, 29-44; Douglas J. Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 462-63. Thus, the promise became associated with eschatological life in general (particularly as a component of the kingdom of God).

⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield objects to correlating 8:17 and 4:13 on the grounds that 4:13 addresses the “heirs of Abraham,” while 8:17 addresses the “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975-1979], 1:405-407). However, the apparent differences between Rom 4 and 8 are resolved by Gal 3-4, where Paul clarifies the connection between being “children of God” and the “seed of Abraham.” Christ is Abraham’s “seed,” and those who believe in him (i.e. “the children of God”) also belong to him. See Forman, *Politics*, 102-135.

⁸ See N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 2:1091-92.

5.1.2 Future Glory Outweighs Present Suffering (Rom 8:18-30)

In 8:18-30, Paul elaborates on the tension between “suffering” and “glory” introduced in 8:17. His main premise appears in 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy compared to the glory that is about to be revealed to us.” In other words, Paul proposes that believers embrace a perspective that considers the present in light of the future (cf. 2 Cor 4:16-18). What we see in 8:18-30, then, is a contrast between what is (i.e. suffering) and what will be (i.e. glory). While the righteousness of God has been set in motion by the work of Christ and the Spirit, it is not yet complete. Therefore, the present is a period which requires hopeful endurance while God’s plans are being worked out.

In 8:19-30, Paul substantiates 8:18. He offers four reasons why believers ought to adopt the perspective that future glory outweighs present suffering.

- (1) Evidence from the natural realm (8:19-22): The non-human creation, which currently suffers in corrupting bondage, eagerly waits to be set free when its heirs are glorified.
- (2) Evidence from the human realm (8:23-25): Believers, despite suffering in the present, have the Holy Spirit who is the first installment of their eventual adoption.
- (3) Evidence from the spiritual realm (8:26-27): The Holy Spirit, who comes alongside believers in the midst of present suffering, offers intercession according to God’s will.
- (4) Evidence from the will of God himself (8:28-30): God, whose purposes ultimately lead to the glorification of believers, allows suffering as part of the process by which believers are conformed to the image of Christ.

Also noteworthy is the deliberate chain in 8:19-30 which connects the four subjects of each section (non-human creation, believers, the Holy Spirit, and God). In each instance, one subject hears the plea of the previous subject, identifies with its suffering, and comes to its aid. In reverse order, God hears the intercessory prayer of the Spirit and acts accordingly to bring about the Spirit’s prayers for his will to be done (8:28-30). The Spirit hears the groans and feeble prayers of believers, joins with them in groaning, and acts accordingly to intercede on their

behalf (8:26-27). Believers know about the groaning of the non-human creation, and thus act accordingly by enduring suffering in order to participate in its liberation (8:23-25), which will come about when righteous humanity is glorified (8:19, 21). In this movement, every being has a role that contributes to the actualization of God's will.

5.1.3 The Victory of God's Love in Jesus Christ (Rom 8:31-39)

In 8:31-39, Paul reflects upon his arguments from the previous chapters.⁹ If all that Paul has said about the outworking of the righteousness of God is true, then a “celebration of the cosmic triumph of God's love” is in order.¹⁰ The numerous rhetorical questions in 8:31-39 drive home this point.¹¹ While the answers to these rhetorical questions are certainly all inclusive, it would be a mistake to think that Paul does not have certain enemies of God in mind when he speaks of those: who are “against” believers (8:31), to whom God “handed over” his Son (8:32), who “bring charges against” believers (8:33), who attempt to “condemn” believers (8:34), and who attempt to “separate” believers from the love of Christ and God (8:35).¹² These enemies of God appear to be both human agents (8:35-36) and hostile spiritual “powers” (8:38-39). However, all enemies of God are ultimately unsuccessful because of Jesus Christ, who stands over all creation. He is the one “who is at the right hand of God” interceding on our behalf (Rom 8:34; cf. Ps 110:1). And for those who are in Christ, they share in his reign as conquerors in the present

⁹ Commentators disagree about how 8:31-39 relates to the preceding. The issue has to do with the scope of “these things” in 8:31a. At a minimum it refers to 8:28-30, but could encompass much more given the breadth of what is being addressed in 8:28-30. It is most likely a conclusion to 5:1-8:30 as a whole given Paul's return to the language of “love” (cf. 5:5, 8, 35, 39). See Moo, *Romans*, 537-39; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 538-47.

¹⁰ J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 365.

¹¹ On the scriptural allusions in 8:31-39 see Wright, *Paul*, 2:902-908.

¹² Arguing that God “hands over” Jesus to “anti-god powers” in 8:32 is Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Interpreting the Death of Jesus Apocalyptically: Reconsidering Romans 8:32,” in *Jesus and Paul Reconnected: Fresh Pathways into an Old Debate*, ed. Todd D. Still (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 125-45. Also see idem, “Neither height nor depth: discerning the cosmology of Romans,” *SJT* 64 (2011): 265-78.

(8:37), and will also participate with him in his reign over “all things” in the future (8:32; cf. 8:17).¹³ This reality is a cause of celebration for Paul. The hope of a glorious future is assured.

5.2 Interpretive Issues Pertaining to Romans 8:19-22

Before launching into an interpretation of 8:19-22, we must pause to explore two issues that have played a significant role in the history of interpretation of this passage. (1) What is the meaning of the word *κτίσις*? (2) What is the narrative substructure of Rom 8:19-22?

5.2.1 The Meaning of *Κτίσις*

When Rom 8:19-22 is interpreted as addressing the non-human creation (sometimes referred to as the “subhuman creation,” or simply “creation”), the vast majority of interpreters think that Paul’s topic is the renewal of the cosmos at the end of the age. As a result, there is minimal debate about the cosmic implications of 8:19-22. However, not all interpreters think that the subject of 8:19-22 is the non-human creation.

At the center of this debate is the meaning of the word *κτίσις* (8:19, 20, 21, 22).¹⁴ While the current scholarly consensus understands *κτίσις* in reference to *the non-human creation* (i.e. the natural world, including animate and inanimate life), several alternative meanings are possible. We can list them here:¹⁵

¹³ “All things” may be a shorthand allusion to Ps 8:6 [8:7 LXX], referring to the reign of Christ.

¹⁴ Paul also uses the term in Rom 1:20, 25; 8:39; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 1:15, 23. For additional background and usage see Werner Foerster, “*κτίζω, κτίσις, κτίσμα, κτίστης*,” *TDNT* 3:1000-1035; Hans-Helmut Esser, “*κτίσις*,” *NIDNTT* 1:378-87; Gregory P. Fewster, *Creation Language in Romans 8: A Study in Monosemy*, LBS 8 (Boston: Brill, 2013), 94-122.

¹⁵ For similar surveys see Fewster, *Creation*, 1-12; Longenecker, *Romans*, 719-22; Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970), 184-87; Harry A. Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8:19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, LNTS 336 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 176-81; Olle Christoffersson, *The Earnest Expectation of the Creature: The Flood-Tradition as Matrix of Romans 8:18-27*, ConBNT 23 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 33-36.

- (1) The non-human creation¹⁶
- (2) The entire creation (i.e. the non-human creation and all of humanity)¹⁷
- (3) The non-human creation and unbelievers¹⁸
- (4) Unbelievers¹⁹
- (5) Believers²⁰

While it is unnecessary to rehearse all of the arguments in favor of interpreting *κτίσις* as “the non-human creation,” we can highlight a few important points.²¹

¹⁶ Hahne, *Corruption*, 180; Moo, *Romans*, 513-14; Longenecker, *Romans*, 719-22; David M. Russell, *The “News Heavens and New Earth:” Hope for Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, SBAL 1 (Philadelphia: Visionary, 1996), 161; J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 160; Edward Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul’s Cosmological Language*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 175-78; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed., BNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 155-56; Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, SP 6 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 255-56; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:410-12; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, 2 vols., WBC 38A-B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 1:469; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 506; Klaus Haacker, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, THKNT 6 (Leipzig: Evangelische, 1999), 163; Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 511; Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 347; Hans Lietzmann, *An die Römer*, 3rd ed., HNT 8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1928), 84; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 435; Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 222-23; N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” *NIB* 10:596; John Ziesler, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, TPINTC (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1989), 219. Vögtle opts for this view in 8:19-21, but broadens the scope to all creation in 8:22 (*Zukunft*, 184-87).

¹⁷ Foerster, “*κτίζω*,” 3:1031; Horst R. Balz, *Heilsvertrauen und Welterfahrung: Strukturen der paulinischen Eschatologie nach Römer 8,18-39*, BEvT 59 (München: Kaiser, 1971), 47-48; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 53-54; John G. Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Theology*, NovTSup 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 39-40; Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 321; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer*, KEK 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 266; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 134.

¹⁸ Susan Eastman, “Whose Apocalypse? The Identity of the Sons of God in Romans 8:19,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 273-76; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 232-33; Franz J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. H. Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1961), 219. Also adding the “powers” here is Heinrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief*, 2nd ed., HThKNT 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1928), 259.

¹⁹ John G. Gager Jr., “Functional Diversity in Paul’s Use of End-Time Language,” *JBL* 89 (1970): 328-29; Nikolaus Walter, “Gottes Zorn und das ‘Harren der Kreatur’: zur Korrespondenz zwischen Römer 1,18-32 und 8,19-22,” in *Christus bezeugen: für Wolfgang Trilling*, ed. K. Kertelge et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 220-23.

²⁰ John Reumann acknowledges the use of creation language, but says it is only present to talk about believers (*Creation & New Creation* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973], 98-99). Arguing that *κτίσις* functions as a metaphor for the human “body” are Fewster, *Creation*, 123-66; J. Ramsey Michaels, “The Redemption of Our Body: The Riddle of Romans 8:19-22,” in *Romans & the People of God*, ed. S. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 92-114. Fewster’s work is a bold attempt to rethink lexical analysis, arguing for a monosemic approach. While I do not have a strong enough grasp on the field of modern linguistic theory to critically assess his overall proposal, his literary analysis of 8:19-23 is unconvincing. Especially problematic is his contention that the “body” in 8:23 continues a chain of “creation” language that ultimately identifies the true meaning of *κτίσις* in the previous verses.

²¹ See the additional arguments in Hahne, *Corruption*, 176-81; Adams, *Constructing*, 174-84; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:411-12.

In the book of Romans, *κτίσις* occurs seven times. The first instance has a distinct verbal quality, referring to God's act of creating the world (1:20). The remaining six occurrences (1:25; 8:19, 20, 21, 22, 39) all denote the result of a creative act, implying that *κτίσις* most naturally means *that which is created*.²² However, the imprecise nature of the word poses a problem for interpreters: What is the underlying referent which Paul describes as a "created thing?" Given that *κτίσις* can have a general or specific referent, the immediate context becomes very important for determining its meaning.

In 1:25 Paul discusses idolatry, which he defines as worshiping and serving the "creature" (*κτίσις*) rather than the Creator himself. It is unlikely that Paul refers here generally to the entire creation because the context indicates a number of possible specific referents underlying *κτίσις* such as a human, bird, animal, or reptile (cf. 1:23). Thus, *κτίσις* refers *indefinitely* to any "created thing" that is revered in the place of God. In 8:39, Paul uses *κτίσις* in a similar manner. After listing several entities which are unable to divide the believer from God's love, Paul ends the list with an all-inclusive statement, "nor any other created thing." In other words, he states that no "created thing" (i.e. whatever we choose to fill-in-the-blank with from the entire creation) can ever divide the believer from God's love. Again Paul uses *κτίσις* *indefinitely* to refer to one of several possible created things from within the created world.

When we turn to Rom 8:19-22, the immediate context seems to suggest a different meaning involving a group designation: *the non-human creation*. First, Paul's language of inheritance in 8:17 recalls his earlier discussion in 4:13 concerning Abraham inheriting the "world" (*κόσμος*). Coupled with the fact that Paul has already used *κτίσις* in association with the creation of the *κόσμος* (1:20), and to refer to various created things within the *κόσμος* (1:25), a

²² BDAG, 572-73.

cosmological meaning is probably in view.²³ Second, Paul distinguishes the *κτίσις* from believers, since it expectantly waits for “the revelation of the sons [and daughters] of God” (8:19). He also distinguishes the *κτίσις* from believers in 8:22-23 (cf. “but also we ourselves”).²⁴ Thus, we can eliminate options (2) and (5) above. Third, by indicating that the *κτίσις* was “subjected to futility, not of its own will” (8:20), Paul seems to exclude “unbelievers.” Romans 8:20 implies that the *κτίσις* did not have a choice its subjection, which would appear to contradict Paul’s repeated claims that every human being is responsible for their own condition (cf. 1:19-21; 2:1-5; 3:9-18, 23; 5:12). In addition, it would seem out of character for unbelievers to be waiting with “eager expectation” for the revelation of God’s heirs (8:19). This evidence, then, eliminates options (3) and (4). Thus, contextually speaking it would seem that humanity, both believers and unbelievers, cannot be included within the meaning of *κτίσις* in 8:19-22. This leaves us with the most probable meaning, that *κτίσις* refers to option (1), the non-human creation.

The main objection to this view is that Paul uses verbs which seem to require human subjects, such as “waiting eagerly” and “groaning.” However, Paul likely personifies the non-human creation in 8:19-22, a move which is not out of keeping with the OT (cf. Pss 65:12-13;

²³ Fewster observes that when *κτίσις* is used in close conjunction with “world” (*κόσμος*), it “seems to indicate that the natural order is in view” (*Creation*, 103-105). I would completely agree. But he goes on to reason, however, that because the term *κόσμος* is not present in 8:19-23, *κτίσις* probably does not have a cosmological meaning. But he fails to observe that Paul introduces the *κόσμος* into the immediate context (despite not using the actual word) by alluding to the promise that Abraham would “inherit the *κόσμος*” in Rom 8:17 (cf. 4:13).

²⁴ Fewster contends that Paul does not contrast the non-human creation with believers in 8:22-23 (*Creation*, 135-42). Instead he argues that Paul contrasts two propositions about what is known (an assertion about “every created thing” in 8:22 and an assertion about “us” in 8:23). While his argument is plausible, it hardly makes the case that Paul does not differentiate between *κτίσις* and believers. Furthermore, it obscures the parallelism between the two different subjects (*κτίσις* and believers) that both “groan” and “wait” for God to bring about redemption.

77:16; 98:7-9; Isa 24:4; Jer 4:28; 12:4).²⁵ Furthermore, *κτίσις* is personified in Wisdom of Solomon, a book which has obvious ties to Romans (cf. Wis 5:17-23; 16:15-29). Therefore on the basis of the brief analysis above, it appears that Paul uses *κτίσις* to refer to the non-human creation.

5.2.2 The Narrative Substructure of Romans 8:19-22

Another issue influencing the history of interpretation is the narrative substructure of Rom 8:19-22, that is, the assumed story (or stories) underpinning Paul's argument. However, determining the underlying story with great precision has proven difficult. As a result, several possibilities have been proposed. I will briefly highlight four.

(1) The consensus view is that Paul utilizes the story of God "cursing the ground" on account of Adam's sin in Rom 8:20 (cf. Gen 3:17-19).²⁶ Paul appears to develop this tradition by reflecting on the significance of the "fall" in terms of how it negatively affected the created world (cf. 4 Ezra 7:9-18; 2 Bar. 56:6-10).²⁷ Some also suggest that the "travailing" of Rom 8:22 draws upon the punishment directed toward Eve in Gen 3:16.²⁸ Now, while Paul certainly seems to echo Gen 3 in Rom 8:20, in my opinion many interpreters overstate its clarity. In other words, while a general echo of the Gen 3 "fall" seems probable (cf. Rom 3:23; 5:12), a particular

²⁵ For more on the personification of creation in Romans see Hahne, *Corruption*, 180-81; Joseph R. Dodson, *The 'Powers' of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans*, BZNW 161 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 69-81, 162-77.

²⁶ E.g. Adams, *Constructing*, 178; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:413; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:470; Hahne, *Corruption*, 189-90; Longenecker, *Romans*, 722-23; Moo, *Romans*, 515; Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 132; Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, SP 6 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996), 257; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 3 vols., EKKNT 6 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener; Zürich: Benziger, 1978-81), 2:246-47.

²⁷ For examinations of Jewish apocalyptic thought related to the corruption and redemption of nature see Hahne, *Corruption*, 33-168; Russell, *New Heavens*, 80-133. Claiming, correctly in my opinion, that Paul's dependence on any one apocalyptic text cannot be proven is Walther Bindemann, *Die Hoffnung der Schöpfung: Römer 8,18-27 und die Frage einer Theologie der Befreiung von Mensch und Natur*, NKS 14 (Düsseldorf: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), 24-29.

²⁸ E.g. David T. Tsumura, "An OT Background to Rom 8.22," *NTS* 40 (1994): 620-21.

allusion to God's "curse" on the ground in Gen 3:17-19 is far from obvious. For one, none of the key terms from Gen 3:17-19 (LXX) appear in Rom 8:20. Furthermore, the subjection of creation to futility appears to be a broader concept than God's curse upon the ground. In Gen 3:17-19 God only curses the "ground" to punish Adam's labor, but Rom 8:20 seems to envision an event striking the heavens and the earth, as well as its animate and inanimate life. Therefore, while Adam's "fall" in Gen 3 is likely part of the guiding narrative behind Rom 8:19-22, we should be cautious about how Paul has employed Adam's story. At the very least we ought to remain open to the possibility that Paul has adapted Adam's story or has combined it with other storylines.

(2) Olle Christoffersson has argued that Paul draws upon the rich history of the flood tradition and its apocalyptic developments (cf. Gen 6-9 and 1 En. 6-11).²⁹ He finds the story of the Watchers as an influential lens for interpreting Rom 8:19-22. This tradition does have some parallel terminology with Rom 8:19-22, the most significant being the "sons of God" (Gen 6:2, 4) and the earth being "corrupt" in God's sight (Gen 6:11-13). However, Christoffersson's conclusions are consistently rejected by scholars, particularly his claim that the "sons of God" refer to the "angels of the Last Judgment."³⁰ Beyond this, several of Christoffersson's allusions to the flood tradition are vague and do not appear to illumine Paul's thought.³¹

(3) Sylvia Keesmaat and N. T. Wright have argued that, in addition to Gen 3, Paul may be working with the exodus tradition in Rom 8.³² They emphasize that the created world experiences its own groaning under the weight of slavery, but eventually will be liberated when the redeemed people of God emerge from slavery to receive their inheritance, the promised land

²⁹ Christoffersson, *Earnest*, 47-93.

³⁰ Christoffersson, *Earnest*, 120-24.

³¹ See Christoffersson, *Earnest*, 120-27, 129-34.

³² Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Paul and his Story: (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Tradition*, JSNTSup 181 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1999), 97-135; N. T. Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3-8," in *Romans & the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 26-35.

(i.e. the renewed world). The strength of this proposal is that it explains some of the general underlying themes in Rom 8, specifically 8:12-17. However, it may be too general to illumine some of the specific exegetical issues in 8:19-22.

(4) More recently, a few scholars have argued that Paul is drawing from the prophetic tradition of the OT to describe the “groaning” and “travailing” of creation in Rom 8:22 (cf. Joel 1-2; Isa 24; Zeph 1).³³ While undermining the common view that Gen 3 is the only tradition which underlies Rom 8:19-22, these interpreters emphasize the consequences of human sin and God’s subsequent judgment upon the created order. The strength of this proposal is that it emphasizes the ongoing nature of human sin which accounts for creation’s continued suffering, but like the previous proposal it might be too general to illumine some of the specific exegetical issues in 8:19-22.

Perhaps a better starting point for identifying the narrative substructure of Rom 8:19-22 would be a storyline that Paul has already provided for us earlier in his letter. It has been generally recognized that Paul looks forward in 8:18-30 to the climactic salvation of humanity, God’s final resolution to the problem of sin first introduced in 1:18-32.³⁴ In other words, the plight of unrighteous humanity under the wrath of God is finally resolved in the eventual outworking of the righteousness of God (8:18, 19, 30). For example, in Rom 1:23 humanity turns away from the “glory” of God and embraces an idolatrous “image,” whereas in Rom 8 humanity is conformed to the “image” of God’s Son and receives “glory” (8:18, 19, 29, 30). Furthermore, in contrast to the dishonoring of human “bodies” under the wrath of God (1:24),

³³ Laurie J. Braaten, “All Creation Groans: Romans 8:22 in Light of the Biblical Sources,” *HBT* 28 (2006): 131-59; Cheryl Hunt, David G. Horrell, and Christopher Southgate, “An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8:19-23 and a Modest Proposal for its Narrative Interpretation,” *JTS* 59 (2008): 546-79; Jonathan Moo, “Romans 8:19-22 and Isaiah’s Cosmic Covenant,” *NTS* 54 (2008): 74-89.

³⁴ See Dunn, *Romans*, 1:467; Jewett, *Romans*, 512; Gaventa, *Mother*, 59-60; Walter, “Gottes Zorn,” 218-26; Steven J. Kraftchick, “Paul’s Use of Creation Themes: A Test of Romans 1-8,” *ExAud* 3 (1987): 82-85.

the unfolding of the righteousness of God will lead to the redemption of the “body” (8:23).

Thus, it appears that in 8:18-30 Paul returns to build upon a storyline involving God, humanity, and the created world, a storyline which he has already introduced in 1:18-32.³⁵

Additional evidence that Paul picks up the storyline of 1:18-32 in 8:18-30 can be observed in the numerous terminological and thematic connections between the two passages (see Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1: A COMPARISON OF ROMANS 1:18-32 AND 8:18-30

1:18-32	8:18-30
Reveal (ἀποκαλύπτω) (1:18; cf. 1:17)	Reveal (ἀποκαλύπτω) (8:18) Revelation (ἀποκάλυψις) (8:19)
Glory (δόξα) (1:23) Glorify (δοξάζω) (1:21)	Glory (δόξα) (8:18, 21) Glorify (δοξάζω) (8:30)
Creation (κτίσις) (1:20, 25) Creator (κτίζω) (1:25)	Creation (κτίσις) (8:19, 20, 21, 22)
Become futile (ματαιόμοι) (1:21)	Futility (ματαιότης) (8:20)
Hand over (παραδίδωμι) (1:24, 26, 28)	Subject (ὑποτάσσω) (8:20) ³⁶
Cause of “handing over:” Because of the lusts of their hearts ³⁷ (ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν) (1:24; cf. 1:18-21, 23, 25)	Cause of “subjection:” Not because of its own will (οὐχ ἐκούσα) [implies inculpability] (8:20)
Mortal (φθαρτός) (1:23; cf. 1:32)	Corruption (φθορά) (8:21) ³⁸
Bodies (σῶμα) (1:24)	Body (σῶμα) (8:23)
Hearts (καρδία) (1:21, 24)	Heart (καρδία) (8:27)
Image (εἰκόν) (1:23)	Image (εἰκόν) (8:29)

³⁵ Suggesting that “the story of God and creation” can be viewed as the “substructure of Paul’s whole argument of Romans 1-8” is Edward Adams, “Paul’s Story of God and Creation: The Story of How God Fulfills His Purposes in Creation,” in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 37.

³⁶ These verbs share semantic overlap, both referring to the act of delivering objects into the control or rule of someone/something. See L&N 1:472-88 (Domain 37: Control, Rule).

³⁷ Paul uses “heart” to designate the inner being, the center of one’s will (cf. 2:5; 6:17; 10:1). Thus, Paul appears to contrast the “willful” choice of humanity with the “unwilling” subjection of creation (8:20).

³⁸ Not only are φθαρτός and φθορά closely related terms, Paul appears to use them interchangeably to mean something like “perishable” in 1 Cor 15:42, 50, 53-54.

Largely overlooked is that the majority of these recurring features (7 out of 10) occur between the more narrow passages of 8:19-22 and 1:18-25. While not every parallel is exact, the large number of recurring features hardly seems coincidental. Furthermore, several of the terms are only (or predominantly) found in these two passages of Romans.

Now, one could argue that 8:19-22 and 1:18-25 cannot be associated based on the fact that idolatrous humanity is the primary subject of 1:18-25, whereas the non-human creation is the primary subject of 8:19-22. But I would argue that we have a dynamic interplay between Creator, humanity, and the non-human creation in each text.³⁹ Furthermore, if it is accepted that the condition of the non-human creation follows from (or is dependent upon) the condition of humanity, a premise which Paul appears to assume in 8:19-22 and is acknowledged by the majority of interpreters, then it would seem reasonable to infer that Paul's discussion in 8:19-22 expands upon his previous discussion in 1:18-25, especially in light of the numerous verbal and thematic parallels charted above.⁴⁰

So, if 8:19-22 develops a story already present in 1:18-32, then what is the storyline of 1:18-32? In simplified terms, it is a story about the unveiling of God's wrath against human sin. It is generally agreed that Paul offers a critique of Gentile idolatry and immorality in 1:18-32 as part of his overall discussion of human sinfulness in 1:18-3:20. Yet in doing so he also draws upon the stories of Adam and Israel.⁴¹ The primary theme of 1:18-3:20 is stated in Rom 1:18,

³⁹ So Richard Bauckham, "The Story of Earth according to Paul: Romans 8:18-23," *RevExp* 108 (2011): 91-97.

⁴⁰ Contra Fewster, who rejects the premise that creation's condition follows from humanity's (*Creation*, 130).

⁴¹ There is some debate whether 1:18-32 is focused exclusively on the Gentiles, or includes all of humanity (i.e. including the Jews). But this debate seems to confuse categories. It is helpful to delineate between the narrative substructure and the overall rhetorical argument of 1:18-32. First, the underlying story of 1:19-32 draws together the stories of Adam (Gen 1-3), Israel (Exod 32; Ps 106), and the Gentiles (Wis 12-14) with the result that Paul seems to imply that *all humanity* has a "heart" problem that manifests in idolatry (cf. 1:21, 24; 2:5, 15, 29). As a result, all are sinful and subject to wrath (3:23). Second, the rhetorical argument advanced in 1:19-32 clearly intends to characterize the Gentiles as sinners, thus they are the intended subject of the argument (not all of

“For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of humanity who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness.” Paul indicates that the target of God’s wrath is unrighteous humanity (which turns out to include both Jews and Gentiles), who suppress the truth of God by means of their unrighteous behavior. Turning his attention primarily to Gentiles in 1:19-32, Paul rehearses a common Jewish polemic against pagan idolatry and immorality (cf. Wis 12-14), which lays the foundation for his eventual charge against the moralists and/or Jews in 2:1-3:20.⁴² Paul contends that the Gentiles have deliberately disregarded the knowledge of God which was made manifest to them through the created order (1:19-20). The appropriate response would have been to honor God and give him thanks, but instead they embraced folly and became futile, disconnecting themselves from the true reality of their Creator (1:21-22). Turning their hearts away from God coincided with their egregious lapse into idolatry (a behavior in which the Jews have also participated), choosing to worship the created things of the world instead of the Creator himself (1:23, 25).⁴³ In response, God reveals his wrath against humanity by “handing them over” (*παραδίδωμι*) to the powers of Sin and Death, whereby they receive the dehumanizing consequences of their actions (1:24-32).⁴⁴ Thus, God’s wrath becomes manifest in ways that pronounce judgment upon the sins of humanity by reciprocating their error. If idolatrous humanity chooses to go after other so-called gods, then God will hand humanity over to the reign of these powers, and immorality and death will be the

humanity) in 1:19-32. Note how Paul frames the argument with “they/them” in 1:19-32 versus “you/us” in 2:1-3:20 in order to entrap his moralist and/or Jewish readers. On the scope of 1:18-32 see Moo, *Romans*, 96-97; Jonathan A. Linebaugh, “Announcing the Human: Rethinking the Relationship Between Wisdom of Solomon 13-15 and Romans 1.18-2.11,” *NTS* 57 (2011): 214-37.

⁴² For parallels between Rom 1:18-32 and Wis 12-14 see Linebaugh, “Announcing,” 217-20; Byrne, *Romans*, 64-65; Witherington, *Romans*, 63; Wilckens, *Römer*, 1:96-97. Other examples of Jewish critiques against idolatry include: T. Naph. 3:3-5; Let. Aris. 132-38; Sib. Or. 3:8-45; Philo, *Spec.* 1.13-31; Josephus. *Ag. Ap.* 2.236-54.

⁴³ Cf. Paul’s allusions to historical instances of Israel’s idolatry (Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11).

⁴⁴ Gaventa has argued convincingly that the verb “hand over,” consistent with its usage in the LXX, involves the surrendering of an entity to another agent (*Mother*, 113-23). Thus, God hands humans over to “anti-god powers” which are in conflict with God.

outcome.⁴⁵ This present manifestation of God’s wrath anticipates the future Day of wrath (cf. 2:5, 8, 16), but at the same time functions as a prelude to potential mercy (cf. 11:30-32).

For our purposes, it is important to recognize that Paul probably weaves the story of Adam (Gen 1-3) into Rom 1:18-32, especially in 1:18-25.⁴⁶ The strongest allusions are to Gen 1-2, but Gen 3 is also likely in view, especially in light of Paul’s summarization of 1:18-3:20 in 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” which probably alludes to the forfeiture of Adam and Eve’s “glory” after the “fall” (cf. Apoc. Mos. 20:1-3; 21:6; 3 Bar. 4:16).⁴⁷ Thus, Paul emphasizes that all humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike, bear the Adamic legacy of sin (cf. Rom 5:12-21). So, if Paul echoes Adam’s “fall” in Rom 1:18-25, then it is also important to recognize that he characterizes it as *idolatry*. If this is correct, it bears weight for how we should understand Paul’s echo of Adam’s “fall” in 8:20.

We have in Rom 1:18-32, then, *a story about God’s wrath being revealed against Adamic humanity because they have perverted the original design of God’s created order through idolatry, worshiping created things instead of the Creator*. This storyline appears to be the strongest starting point for interpreting Rom 8:19-22, which presents the climactic resolution of this story by means of the outworking of the righteousness of God.

⁴⁵ Just as Paul sees both divine and human elements involved in humanity’s righteousness, he also appears to see both human and transcendent elements (i.e. the powers of Sin and Death) involved in human sin. As Gaventa writes, “Paul understands that human beings always live in the grasp of some power, whether that of God or that of an anti-god power” (*Mother*, 119).

⁴⁶ See Morna D. Hooker, “Adam in Romans 1,” *NTS* 6 (1960): 297-306; idem, “A Further Note on Romans 1,” *NTS* 13 (1967): 181-83; Niels Hyldahl, “A Reminiscence of the Old Testament at Romans i. 23,” *NTS* 2 (1956): 285-88; A. J. M. Wedderburn, “Adam in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” *Studia Biblica 1978: III. Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors*, ed. E. A. Livingstone, JSNTSup 3 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980): 413-30; Douglas J. W. Milne, “Genesis 3 in the Letter to the Romans,” *RTR* 39 (1980): 10-12; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:53; idem, “Adam and Christ,” in *Reading Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, ed. Jerry L. Sumney, RBS 73 (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 127-29; Adams, “Paul’s Story,” 34-35; Wright, *Paul*, 2:769. Those rejecting an allusion to Adam include: Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 274; Moo, *Romans*, 109-110; Witherington, *Romans*, 68.

⁴⁷ So Byrne, *Romans*, 130-31; Dunn, “Adam,” 129-30; Wright, *Paul*, 1:439-40.

5.3 Romans 8:19-22

In Rom 8:18 Paul writes, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is about to be revealed to us.” Paul signals his intention to substantiate this claim with the conjunction “for” (γάρ). His first piece of supporting evidence comes from the non-human creation in 8:19-22,

¹⁹ ἡ γὰρ ἀποκαραδοκία τῆς κτίσεως τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται. ²⁰ τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἑκοῦσα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι ²¹ ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ. ²² οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν.

¹⁹ For the creation waits with the eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of the one who subjected it on the basis of hope, ²¹ because the creation itself also will be set free from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains together until now.

Once again, Paul appears to recall Rom 1:18-32 in this text through his use of specific terms and themes.

5.3.1 Creation Eagerly Waits (Rom 8:19)

While the semantic subject of the verb in 8:19 is “the non-human creation” (τῆς κτίσεως), the syntactic subject is “the eager expectation” (ἡ ἀποκαραδοκία).⁴⁸ By placing ἀποκαραδοκία in a forward position of prominence, Paul underscores creation’s anticipatory desire. The term paints a picture of a person craning his/her neck forward to see something coming in the distance. Some interpreters see a negative connotation in the word, suggesting that it portrays a sense of

⁴⁸ I take τῆς κτίσεως to be a subjective genitive.

anxiety, uncertainty, or nervous expectation.⁴⁹ However, this is improbable in light of Phil 1:20 where Paul aligns ἀποκαραδοκία with his confident hope of things to come.⁵⁰ Furthermore, a positive sense of the word is supported by Paul's use of the verb "wait eagerly" (ἀπεκδέχεται), which he regularly employs to describe the assured expectation of Christ's parousia or other events closely associated with it (cf. Rom 8:23, 25; 1 Cor 1:7; Gal 5:5; Phil 3:20). Thus, Paul uses two similar terms which communicate a confident sense of waiting in order to emphasize creation's hope-filled desire to witness a future event: "the revelation of the sons of God."

Who are these sons (and daughters) of God? In Rom 8:14 Paul identifies them as believers: "all who are being led by the Spirit of God" (cf. Rom 9:26; Gal 3:26; 4:6). They are the benefactors of adoption, having become heirs along with Christ (Rom 8:14-17). But these are not believers in their present condition. Paul envisions them as coming with Christ in eschatological glory.⁵¹ By closely associating these believers with the outworking of God's righteousness, Paul likely intends a contrast with those who will find themselves under the wrath of God, the "sons of disobedience" (Col 3:6; Eph 2:2; 5:6). This "family" (so to speak) follows the cravings of the "flesh" and are enslaved to "beings that by nature are not gods," such as the "weak and inferior elemental spirits" (Gal 4:4-9; Col 2:8-20; Eph 2:2-3). In doing so, they were under the "wrath" of God, disbarred from an "inheritance" in the kingdom of Christ and God (Col 3:6; Eph 2:3; 5:5-6). Paul appears to describe these disobedient ones as Adamic humanity in Rom 1:18-3:20 and in 11:30-32 when he writes, "For God has imprisoned all [i.e. Gentiles and Jews] in disobedience, so that he may be merciful to all" (11:32). Thus, the sons and daughters

⁴⁹ E.g. Georg Bertram, "ἀποκαραδοκία," *ZNW* 49 (1958): 264-70.

⁵⁰ So Gerhard Delling, "ἀποκαραδοκία," *TDNT* 1:393; D. R. Denton, "ἀποκαραδοκία," *ZNW* 73 (1982): 138-40; Ernst Hoffman, "ἀποκαραδοκία," *NIDNTT* 2:244-46.

⁵¹ Contra Jewett, who takes the "sons of God" in a fully realized sense (*Romans*, 512). Arguing that the "sons of God" includes not only redeemed Gentiles, but also "all of Israel" is Eastman, "Whose," 263-77.

of God are those whom God has liberated from the powers of Sin and Death, redeeming them through the work of Christ and the Spirit (cf. 5:1-5).

What is their “revelation?” Given that the NT regularly talks about humanity looking forward to the revelation of Christ at his parousia (e.g. 1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7), some interpreters have suggested the revelation of God’s children is rather striking.⁵² However, the statement is not all that unusual when it is recognized that the revelation of God’s children elaborates on what it means for believers to be “joint-heirs” with Christ (Rom 8:17). In other words, the revelation of believers will be the culminating moment in their participation with Christ, when they join him in a glorified state at the parousia to come as rulers of the world (1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Cor 15:23; cf. 1 John 3:2).⁵³ At that time the true status of God’s adopted children will be made manifest. Just as Christ (who is currently hidden in heaven) will be unveiled as the glorious and resurrected Lord of the world, in the same way believers (who are hidden with Christ) will be unveiled as the glorious and resurrected heirs of the world (cf. Col 3:3-4). Therefore, the non-human creation waits for the day when God’s righteous heirs, the ones who will inherit the “world” (Rom 4:13) will become manifest. On that day they “will reign in life” through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17).

5.3.2 Creation was Subjected (Rom 8:20)

Why is the non-human creation waiting for the revelation of the sons and daughters of God?

Paul turns to answer this implicit question in 8:20-21. He writes in 8:20, “for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of the one who subjected it on the basis of

⁵² E.g. Käsemann, *Romans*, 234; Balz, *Heilsvertrauen*, 37.

⁵³ Jewett conceives of this “revelation” as a fully realized phenomenon with believers restoring the “ecological system that has been thrown out of balance by wrongdoing” (*Romans*, 512). However, while there certainly are realized aspects of God’s work in humanity, Paul clearly is referring to the consummation. So Dunn, *Romans*, 1:487; Hahne, *Corruption*, 183; Michel, *Römer*, 266-67; Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 134.

hope” (τῆ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἢ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἐκοῦσα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι).⁵⁴

As discussed above in the section on narrative substructure, this verse is commonly interpreted in light of Gen 3:17-19. However, Paul’s use of κτίσις, ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἐκοῦσα, and ματαιότητι all suggest that we shift our focus to the story of God’s wrath against Adamic humanity in Rom 1:18-25, a narrative which recasts Adam’s “fall” in terms of idolatry.

We can begin by asking: Who subjected the non-human creation to futility? Interpreters regularly choose between Adam and God.⁵⁵ The argument for Adam is based on the idea that since Adam was given dominion over creation (cf. Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8:5-8), he subjected creation to sin and death when he “fell” (cf. 4 Ezra 7:11-12). Interpreters who take this position appeal to the phrase διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα because a διά + accusative construction normally indicates the *cause* of an action (i.e. Adam) as opposed to the *agent* behind the action (i.e. God).⁵⁶ However, as the majority of interpreters conclude, it is more probable that *God is the Subjector*.⁵⁷ First, in Ps 8:6 [8:7 LXX] it is God who “subjected all things” to Adam, suggesting that the act of subjecting is a function reserved for God. Second, it is difficult to imagine how anyone other than God could have subjected the creation “on the basis of hope.” Third, it appears that the verb ὑπετάγη is a divine passive, which has a counterpart in 8:21 (ἐλευθερωθήσεται). Finally, God is

⁵⁴ The NA²⁸ opts to place a comma between τὸν ὑποτάξαντα and ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι to suggest that ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι modifies the main verb ὑπετάγη instead of the participle τὸν ὑποτάξαντα. While the decision is a difficult one, I think ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι modifies the participle, making a comma unnecessary (see below).

⁵⁵ See the discussion in Hahne, *Corruption*, 186-89. Ziesler sees Satan as the “immediate obvious answer” before deciding upon God (*Romans*, 219-20).

⁵⁶ E.g. Balz, *Heilsvertrauen*, 41; Bryne, *Romans*, 258; Gerhard Delling, “ὑποτάσσω,” *TDNT* 8:41; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 160; G. W. H. Lampe, “The New Testament Doctrine of *KTISIS*,” *SJT* 17 (1964): 458; Jacques Schlosser, “L’espérance de la création (Rm 8, 18-22),” in *Ce Dieu qui vient: Études sur l’Ancien et le Nouveau Testament offertes au Professeur Bernard Renaud à l’occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire*, ed. Raymond Kuntzmann, LD 159 (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 333-37.

⁵⁷ So e.g. Adams, *Constructing*, 178; Russell, *New Heavens*, 169; Hahne, *Corruption*, 187-89; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:414; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:470-71; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 508; Hultgren, *Romans*, 323; Jewett, *Romans*, 513; Käsemann, *Romans*, 235; Leenhardt, *Romans*, 220; Longenecker, *Romans*, 722-23; Michel, *Römer*, 267; Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 260; Schreiner, *Romans*, 436; Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 134; Wilckens, *Römer*, 2:247; Wright, “Romans,” 10:596.

supported by the association between 8:20 and 1:24 (see below), where God is the actor, “handing over” Adamic humanity on the basis of wrath instead of hope.⁵⁸

Why did God subject creation to futility? As most interpreters recognize, here is where the stories of Adamic humanity and creation intersect. Thus, it is helpful to recall how Paul described humanity’s “subjection” (so to speak). Following a description of humanity’s idolatrous behavior, Paul writes, “God handed them [humanity] over because of the lusts of their hearts into impurity” (1:24). While Paul does not use the same terminology in 8:20 and 1:24, the verses appear to illumine one another. The similarities and differences can be observed in Table 5.2.

TABLE 5.2: A COMPARISON OF ROMANS 1:24 AND 8:20

	1:24	8:20
Subject	God (ὁ θεός)	the one who subjected it (τὸν ὑποτάξαντα)
Object	them (αὐτούς) [humanity]	the creation (ἡ κτίσις)
Verbal action	handed over (παρέδωκεν)	was subjected (ὑπετάγη)
Basis for action related to the subject	on the basis of wrath [implied from 1:18]	on the basis of hope (ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι)
Basis for action related to the object	because of the lusts of their hearts (ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν)	not [because] of its own will (οὐχ ἑκοῦσα)
Result of action	into impurity (εἰς ἀκαθαρσίαν)	to futility (τῇ ματαιότητι)

Here we can make a few observations about the relation of these verses. First, both of the main verbs in each verse (παρέδωκεν and ὑπετάγη) are performed by God and involve the act of delivering an object into the control of someone/something. Second, the objects which are acted upon are Adamic humanity (αὐτούς) and the non-human creation (ἡ κτίσις). Third, Paul expresses a combination of reasons why each entity was delivered into the control of another, all

⁵⁸ Rightly seeing a connection to 1:24 here is Käsemann, *Romans*, 235.

involving the *will* (i.e. volition). There are (1) circumstantial reasons related to the objects (i.e. Adamic humanity and creation), and (2) divine reasons relating to the subject (i.e. God).

(1) Paul contrasts the *circumstantial reasons* why Adamic humanity and the non-human creation were delivered into the control of another. These reasons involve the *willful behavior* of each. While humanity was handed over because of its sinful will, creation was not subjected because of its will. This contrast emphasizes humanity's guilt as opposed to creation's innocence from the perspective of the will, and probably implies that creation's subjection occurred as a consequence of *Adam's "fall," understood as an act of idolatry* (cf. 1:18-25). Furthermore, this contrast likely implies that God's subjection of creation was not a manifestation of his wrath against creation, but *a manifestation of his wrath against Adamic humanity*.⁵⁹ In other words, God subjected creation in order to demonstrate that created things are not gods, thereby exposing the sinful behavior of Adamic humanity. Consequently, instead of being an instrument of God to make known "his eternal power and divine nature" (1:19-20), creation was forced to become an instrument of God to reveal his wrath against idolatrous humanity (cf. 1:18).

(2) Paul also contrasts the *divine reasons* why Adamic humanity and the non-human creation were delivered into the control of another. These reasons involve God's *willful responses* to the behaviors of Adamic humanity and the non-human creation. While God responded to the guilt of humanity by handing them over on the basis of "wrath" (which is clearly implied in 1:24; cf. 1:18, 26, 28), he responded to the innocence of creation by subjecting it "on the basis of hope" (διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα ἐφ' ἐλπίδι). The *διά* + accusative construction, then, should probably be taken naturally as indicating the *cause* of subjection, which is

⁵⁹ Vögtle is correct to stress that God's act was intended to punish humanity (*Zukunft*, 194). However, this does not imply (as he concludes) that Rom 8:19-22 is primarily anthropological in nature.

ultimately indicated by the addition of ἐφ' ἐλπίδι to the participle, thus communicating the underlying motivation of “the one who subjected” creation.⁶⁰ The contrast between God’s wrath and hope thus implies that *hope is the main principle underlying God’s subjection of creation.*⁶¹ To be clear, it is not so much that God is the one who “hopes” creation will be liberated (as if it might not come to pass); instead, God is the one who provides the “hope” that creation will be liberated (i.e. God’s will emanates hope).⁶² Furthermore, this contrast likely implies that *creation is not an object of God’s wrath, but an object of hope.* So, even though it suffers under the weight of subjection, which manifests God’s wrath against Adamic humanity, it does not have to worry or be anxious about its fate. This enables creation to wait with “eager expectation” for the revelation of God’s children (8:19). It can endure its present circumstances because its subjection to futility is not a permanent state.⁶³

Finally, the difference between God’s “wrath” and “hope” appears to explain the difference between the verbs “hand over” (1:24) and “subject” (8:20). Adamic humanity was “handed over” in wrath because it already wanted to be controlled by another (i.e. the so-called gods it venerated from the created world). Creation, however, was “subjected” (a more forceful term) in hope because it did not willfully chose the same sinful route as humanity (i.e. it did not want to be venerated as a god). Nonetheless, God subjected it in order to execute his wrath upon

⁶⁰ “On the basis of hope” could modify ὑπετάγη or τὸν ὑποτάξαντα. The majority of scholars favor the former, but because ἐφ' ἐλπίδι appears to be the *cause* sought by the διά + accusative construction, the latter is to be preferred. See the comparable usage of a substantival participle + ἐφ' ἐλπίδι in 1 Cor 9:10 to communicate the underlying motivation for action. Also see BDAG, 364 (6.a); Dunn, *Romans*, 1:470-71; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 508. The proposal of John Duncan, that ἐφ' ἐλπίδι modifies “waits eagerly” (ἀπεκδέχεται) in 8:19, is unconvincing (“The Hope of Creation: The Significance of ἐφ' ἐλπίδι (Rom 8.20c) in Context,” *NTS* 61 [2015]: 411-27). The phrase is simply too far removed from the verb in 8:19 and Duncan does not provide convincing examples of parenthetical clauses inserted by Paul between a verb and a modifier.

⁶¹ Gibbs, *Creation*, 37.

⁶² So Hultgren, *Romans*, 323. Some suggest that Paul’s reference to “hope” refers to the *protoevangelium* of Gen 3:15, which Paul explicitly references in 16:20. However, there appears to be a better explanation for 16:20 (see below).

⁶³ So Adams, *Constructing*, 180.

idolatrous humanity. Thus, the two verbs seem to refer to the same underlying reality of being given over into the control of malignant powers.

What does it mean, then, for creation to be “subjected to futility” by God? In line with the interpretation advanced above, creation’s subjection to futility can be understood against the backdrop of idolatry in Rom 1:18-25 and its echoes of Gen 1-3. Adam (i.e. humanity) was created in the image of God and commissioned to have dominion over the earth and its creatures (Gen 1:26-28). In the words of the Psalmist, God “subjected all things under his feet” (Ps 8:6 [8:7 LXX]). The non-human creation, then, was designed to reach its purpose and potential under the authority of humanity. But in turning to idolatry, humanity overturned the authority structure of Gen 1-2 (cf. Rom 1:21-23; Wis 13:1-2). Not only did Adamic humanity reject its position *under* the authority of God, it also rejected its position of authority *over* the non-human creation by placing itself under that which it was supposed to rule. This lapse into idolatry had significant consequences for humanity, provoking the wrath of God whereby he “handed them over” to the hostile powers of Sin and Death (cf. Rom 1:24-32). But Adam’s idolatry also had consequences for the non-human creation (which Paul did not address in Rom 1, but likely picks up here in Rom 8). When Adam chose to worship created things instead of ruling over them, he left the non-human creation with no means to achieve its purpose and potential according to God’s design. This alone would have been enough to cause creation’s “futility” in the sense of purposelessness and ineffectiveness.⁶⁴ But even more so, Paul seems to imply that when Adam chose to vacate his position of authority over creation, God responded in wrath against Adamic humanity by “subjecting” its so-called gods (i.e. the non-human creation) to other “rulers,” the same malevolent powers to whom God “handed over” Adamic humanity (cf. 1:24, 26, 28).

⁶⁴ A conclusion suggested by most interpreters, e.g. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:413; Leenhardt, *Romans*, 220.

Simply put, God subjected creation to *the futile reign of hostile powers*.⁶⁵ This inference is supported by the following observations.

(1) As a general observation concerning secondary literature, the vast majority of interpreters are so focused on defining “futility” that they fail to appreciate the significance of the verb “subject” (ὕποτάσσω) in Pauline thought, especially as it relates to his understanding of Ps 8:6 [8:7 LXX], to which Paul clearly alludes in Rom 8:20.⁶⁶ Most interpreters fail to even comment on ὕποτάσσω outside of discussing “who” subjected creation to futility.⁶⁷ Most simply assume (without warrant in my opinion) that God’s subjection of creation is equivalent to his “pronouncement of a curse” upon the ground in Gen 3:17-19. However, Paul appears to be presenting a bigger problem than “thorns and thistles.” He seems to be interpreting Adam’s “fall” as a cosmic event, the point at which the powers of Sin and Death gained control over the cosmos (cf. Rom 5:12-21).

When Paul speaks of someone or something becoming “subject,” it is never to an abstract state; it is always to another *being* (either stated or implied).⁶⁸ Furthermore, in every other instance where Paul alludes to Ps 8:6 [8:7 LXX], he evokes a cosmic narrative about the reign of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:27; Phil 3:21; Eph 1:22; Col 1:15-20). In these passages, Paul puts Christ in the place of Adam and talks about “all things” becoming “subject” to the rule of Christ over-and-

⁶⁵ So Barrett, *Romans*, 155; Gibbs, *Creation*, 43; Hester, *Paul’s*, 81; Lietzmann, *Römer*, 85; F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 163; G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 68-69; Joel White, “Paul’s Cosmology: The Witness of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians,” *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, LNTS 355 (New York: T.&T. Clark, 2008), 100-101. Wright seems to push in this direction, but does not argue for this claim (*Paul*, 2:1092; also cf. 2:771). On the apocalyptic nature of Pauline theology see Beker, *Paul*, 135-81; M. C. de Boer, “Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology,” *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* 1:345-83.

⁶⁶ A notable exception to this trend is Wright, *Paul*, 2:1092. Also cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 1:470-71.

⁶⁷ This is especially true of those who explicitly reject the position I am advocating, e.g. Hahne, *Corruption*, 187-91; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 507; Schreiner, *Romans*, 436; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:413; André Viard, *Saint Paul: Épître aux Romains*, SB (Paris: Gabalda, 1975), 183.

⁶⁸ Cf. Rom 8:7; 10:3; 13:1, 5; 1 Cor 14:32, 34; 15:27, 28; 16:16; Eph 1:22; 5:21, 24; Phil 3:21; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5, 9; 3:1. This is also true in the rest of the NT (Luke 2:51; 10:17, 20; Heb 2:5, 8; 12:9; James 4:7; 1 Pet 2:13, 18; 3:1, 5, 22; 5:5).

against *hostile powers*. Other Pauline passages inform us that these hostile powers held the created world captive until Christ triumphed over them on the cross and was exalted above them at his resurrection (cf. Col 2:15; Eph 1:20-22).⁶⁹ Furthermore, Paul says that Christ will ultimately “subject” these powers “under his feet” at the parousia (cf. 1 Cor 15:24-28; Phil 3:21). Thus, when it comes to Rom 8:20, Paul seems to be describing *the past event which necessitated Christ coming in the place of Adam to reclaim the cosmos from these hostile powers*. This, of course, naturally refers to the “fall” of Adam, depicted as the idolatrous worship of other so-called gods, the point at which the hostile powers were allowed to take control of the created world by God. Thus, to “be subjected” implies that creation was delivered by God into *the reign of “futile” powers as an expression of wrath against Adamic humanity*.

(2) *Ματαιότης* has a general meaning of emptiness, futility, purposelessness, or transitoriness.⁷⁰ In the LXX the word group has negative connotations and is used to describe the vanity of existence, the deceptive speech of false prophets, and the unreal/worthless gods (and idols) of the nations.⁷¹ Paul picks up on this final usage in Rom 1:21 when he says that Adamic humanity “became futile” (*ἐματαιώθησαν*) in their thinking by worshiping the futile gods of the nations (cf. Eph 4:17-19; Jer 2:5; 2 Kings 17:15).⁷² In other words, they became like what they worshiped, disconnecting themselves from true reality by worshiping unreal gods.⁷³ Returning to a similar concept in Rom 8:20, Paul writes that creation experiences “futility”

⁶⁹ See Wright, *Paul*, 2:1066-69.

⁷⁰ BDAG, 621.

⁷¹ See Otto Bauernfeind, “μάταιος,” *TDNT* 4:519-24; Erich Tiedtke, “μάταιος,” *NIDNTT* 1:549-52.

⁷² Byrne, *Romans*, 68, 258; Moo, “Isaiah’s,” 80-81; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:470; Gager, “Functional,” 328; Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 260.

⁷³ Vögtle is right to stress that *ματαιότης* is used to describe a spiritual condition (*Zukunft*, 194). On the essential “unreality” of *ματαιότης* see Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 260; Schlosser, “L’espérance,” 333-34; Käsemann, *Romans*, 235.

because it was subjected to the reign of futile gods.⁷⁴ Thus, *ματαιότης* implies that creation has been forced into *an unreal or illusory existence under hostile powers*.

(3) Paul lists several of these futile powers in the immediate context as ones whose rule has been overcome by God's love in Christ (Rom 8:38-39).⁷⁵ While Paul never provides a detailed discussion of the hostile powers, they are most likely the same rulers whom Paul describes in other locations as the powers of Sin and Death (Rom 5:14; 6:6, 12; 1 Cor 15:26), the "rulers of this age" (1 Cor 2:6-8), the "many gods and many lords" (1 Cor 8:4-6), the "elemental spirits of the world" (Gal 4:3, 8-9; Col 2:8, 20), and the "cosmic powers of this present darkness" (Eph 6:12).⁷⁶ They are undoubtedly in league with Satan (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; cf. Luke 4:5-6), and are the ones who govern the "sons of disobedience" (see on 8:19 above).

Therefore, when Paul writes that the non-human creation was "subjected to futility," he seems to indicate that the non-human creation was subjected to *an unreal existence under the reign of hostile powers*. These futile rulers could never direct creation toward its intended goal according to God's original design. Instead, as Paul will describe in 8:21, their reign results in "corrupting slavery."

⁷⁴ Some interpreters draw a link to the idea of "vanity" in Ecclesiastes, e.g. Otto Bauernfeind, "*ματαιότης*," *TDNT* 4:523; Jewett, *Romans*, 513; Viard, *Romains*, 183-84. However, the connection to idolatry as well as the "hope" Paul ascribes to creation seem to make an allusion to Ecclesiastes unlikely.

⁷⁵ See Gaventa, "Neither," 265-78.

⁷⁶ On Paul's theology of the powers see Caird, *Principalities*; Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992); Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*, The Powers 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); G. H. C. MacGregor, "Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of Paul's Thought," *NTS* 1 (1954): 17-28.

5.3.3 Creation will be Liberated (Rom 8:21)

There is some question here as to whether the initial conjunction of 8:21 should read ὅτι or διότι.⁷⁷ But regardless of the choice, both terms can function to substantiate the “hope” spoken of at the end of 8:20. Thus, 8:21 indicates the reason why creation was subjected on the basis of hope, *because* he intends to liberate it in the future.⁷⁸ Paul writes, “because the creation itself also will be set free from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ).

Paul begins by distinguishing between righteous humanity (i.e. the children of God) and the non-human creation in God’s plan of redemption. Not only will God’s children experience liberation, Paul writes “the creation itself also” will be set free. Thus, Paul emphasizes that the present created order will have its own moment of liberation.⁷⁹ There will be continuity between this age and the age to come.

Paul describes creation’s redemption as a future event when it “will be set free” (ἐλευθερωθήσεται). The verb is probably another divine passive whereby God ultimately liberates creation. Paul has already used ἐλευθερώω in Romans (6:18, 22; 8:2) to express God’s transfer of believers from the enslaving powers of Sin into the power of God (cf. 6:15-23). Thus, Paul seems to describe a similar action, albeit in the future, when creation will be transferred from its enslavement to hostile powers into the power of God (cf. 1 Cor 15:24-28). Paul elaborates on the nature of this movement by contrasting two prepositional phrases. Creation

⁷⁷ The evidence between the two is divided with ὅτι having slightly better manuscript support, and διότι being the more difficult reading. Both can be explained by the δι ending of ἐλπιδι. Those favoring ὅτι include Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 508-509; Moo, *Romans*, 516; Schreiner, *Romans*, 440. Favoring διότι is Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:415; Barrett, *Romans*, 156; Witherington, *Romans*, 223.

⁷⁸ Hultgren, *Romans*, 323; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:471; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 509; Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 134.

⁷⁹ So Adams, *Constructing*, 181-82.

will be freed “from the slavery of corruption,” and set “into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

The first prepositional phrase, “from the slavery of corruption” (*ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς*) can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Many scholars interpret it as (1) roughly synonymous with “subjected to futility,” and (2) contrasted with “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”⁸⁰ However, “subjected to futility” and “slavery of corruption” communicate two different ideas. If God “subjected” creation to futile powers, then creation’s “slavery of corruption” is *the product of their futile reign*. In other words, God subjected creation, but the hostile powers enslave it.⁸¹ Thus, the genitive phrase “slavery of corruption” should probably be taken as an attributive genitive (“corrupting slavery”) or as a genitive of product (“slavery which produces corruption”).⁸²

While Paul can also use slavery language in reference to serving God (1:1; 6:16, 18, 19, 22), the negative connotation here suggests that “slavery” (*δουλεία*) is the bondage produced by the hostile powers of Sin and Death (6:6, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20). Furthermore, Paul uses the same word in the immediate context to describe a “spirit” who stands in contrast with the Holy Spirit, “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery [*πνεῦμα δουλείας*] to fall back into fear, but you have received a Spirit of adoption by which we cry out ‘Abba! Father!’” (8:15). Most scholars interpret “spirit of slavery” as a rhetorical foil, designating what the Holy Spirit does not do

⁸⁰ E.g. Wright, “Romans,” 10:596; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:470.

⁸¹ Ziesler recognizes this tension, but does not consider the possibility that the one who “subjects” might not be the one who “enslaves” (*Romans*, 219-20).

⁸² So Barrett, *Romans*, 156. For a discussion of these categories see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 86-88, 106-107. Others render the genitive as objective, “slavery to corruption” (Byrne, *Romans*, 261; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 509; Moo, *Romans*, 517; Jewett, *Romans*, 515); appositional, “slavery which is corruption,” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 436); and subjective, “corruption that enslaves” (Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:415-16).

when a person becomes a believer.⁸³ However, Paul seems to be thinking of hostile powers. This conclusion is supported by reading Rom 8:15 in light of Paul’s parallel discussion in Gal 4:1-11 (note esp. 4:6), where the “spirits” who enslaved people before they became believers were the “beings that by nature are not gods” (4:8), the “weak and inferior elemental spirits” (4:9; cf. 4:3). The “spirit of slavery” (Rom 8:15), then, is most likely a general reference to the hostile powers who used to enslave Paul’s readers before they became believers. Paul does not want them to submit themselves “again” (πάλιν) to their reign (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:9). A final supporting piece of evidence comes from a near identical phrase in 2 Pet 2:19, which labels false prophets as “slaves of corruption” (δοῦλοι ... τῆς φθορᾶς). The writer of 2 Peter describes this state as slavery to hostile powers (2:18-21; cf. Matt 12:43-45). Therefore, creation’s “slavery” refers to *its bondage under the reign of hostile powers*.

What, then, is the meaning of “corruption” (φθορά)? The term has a general meaning of dissolution, deterioration, corruption, depravity, or destruction.⁸⁴ Thus, it can mean moral corruption, physical corruption, or a combination of both. Paul uses the term with both senses (cf. 1 Cor 15:42, 50; Gal 6:8; Col 2:22). His use in 8:21 is most similar to 1 Cor 15:42 and 50 where he contrasts the “corruptible” (φθορά) human body with the “incorruptible” (ἀφθαρσία) glorified body. A few verses later, he seems to use φθορά synonymously with the term “perishable” (φθαρτός), which he also sets in antithesis to ἀφθαρσία (cf. 1 Cor 15:53-54). If φθορά takes on a similar meaning in Rom 8:21, then it probably refers to physical corruption or decay which naturally leads to death. This seems to be the natural consequence of Adamic

⁸³ E.g. Keesmaat, *Paul*, 67; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:396; Moo, *Romans*, 500. Those taking this position often cite 1 Cor 2:12, but this passage also points to hostile powers. In 1 Cor 2:12, Paul says that believers have not received “the spirit of the world,” which in the context of 2:1-16 most likely refers to the “the rulers of this age” (2:6, 8).

⁸⁴ BDAG, 1054-55.

humanity's choice to worship that which is "mortal" (φθαρτός) as opposed to the "immortal" (ἄφθαρτος) God (Rom 1:23). The powers which enslave creation perpetuate mortality instead of life, captivating it to ruin (cf. Wis 14:12). Therefore, φθορά most likely refers to *physical corruption which ultimately results in death*.⁸⁵

The second prepositional phrase states that creation will be set free "into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ). Paul's repetition of "set free ... into the freedom" stresses the result for which creation longs. The string of genitives could be understood in multiple ways, but is probably best taken as saying something like "the freedom produced by (or that comes about in association with) the glory belonging to God's children."⁸⁶ In other words, when God glorifies humanity, the non-human creation will experience the liberating effects of being inhabited and ruled by righteous humanity. This appears to involve two interrelated concepts which resolve creation's "subjection to futility" and "corrupting slavery."

First, God will liberate the non-human creation through a transfer of *reign*. Creation finally will be unshackled from the enslaving reign of hostile powers so that it might experience "freedom" under the dominion of God's glorified heirs. Thus, creation's subjection to futility will fully come to an end when God reestablishes humanity (on account of their participation with Christ) as the ones to whom the non-human creation is subjected (cf. Gen 1:26-28).⁸⁷ This transfer of rule began with Christ's death and resurrection, when he triumphed over the powers

⁸⁵ So Dunn, *Romans*, 1:472-73; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:415; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 509.

⁸⁶ This reading takes the first genitive (τῆς δόξης) as a genitive of production in the sense that humanity's glorification will enable creation to be free from the corrupting effects of Sin and Death (although God remains the ultimate agent). The second genitive (τῶν τέκνων) is most likely possessive for it is God's children who receive glorification from God. The final genitive (τοῦ θεοῦ) is a genitive of relationship indicating to whom the children belong.

⁸⁷ Contra Käsemann, *Romans*, 233. Speaking of glorified humanity reigning over the world as in Gen 1:26-28, Wright states, "the hope of creation is for these humans to take up their ancient charge once more" (*Paul*, 2:1092). So also Leenhardt, *Romans*, 221-22.

and God “subjected all things under his feet” (1 Cor 15:27; Col 2:15; Eph 1:20-22; Gal 4:9).⁸⁸ Yet, the hostile powers still hold sway until Christ (functioning in the role of a new Adam) puts them “under his feet,” doing away with “every ruler and authority and power,” reclaiming the entire cosmos for himself and his fellow joint-heirs at the parousia so that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:24-28).⁸⁹ This reestablishment of humanity-in-Christ as God’s chosen rulers over the created order is probably what Paul alludes to in Rom 16:20 when he uses the subjection language of Ps 8:7 [LXX] to claim that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” When the sons and daughters of God are revealed with Christ at his parousia (Rom 8:19), they will come with him to reclaim the world over-and-against Satan and his cohorts (cf. Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 6:2-3).⁹⁰ As a result, the proper relationships between God, humanity, and the non-human creation will finally be restored, ultimately providing the remedy to the disastrous story of idolatry in Rom 1.

Second, as a result of receiving a new reign, the non-human creation will experience a new *condition*. Under the rule of the exalted Christ and glorified humanity, creation’s “corrupting slavery” will come to an end. It will no longer be imprisoned to physical corruption and death, but will flourish and abound with life on account of the “glory” belonging to God’s heirs. Thus, creation will once again be able to achieve its purpose and potential according to God’s design. Paul does not elaborate on what this might look like, but it seems to imply some type of transformed materiality compatible with the resurrected state of humanity (cf. Rom 8:23-25).

⁸⁸ Cf. Pss 8:6 [8:7 LXX]; 110:1 [109:1 LXX]. So Gibbs, *Creation*, 45; MacGregor, “Principalities,” 28.

⁸⁹ On the important connection between Rom 8 and 1 Cor 15 see Wright, *Paul*, 2:1062-66, 1092-94; Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 134.

⁹⁰ See Wright, *Paul*, 2:1090; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 160.

Creation's hope for freedom brings us back full circle to why it longs for the children of God to be revealed (8:19). The revelation of God's heirs will mean: (1) creation will be released from its subjection to futility under hostile powers and placed into the authority of the glorified children of God, and (2) creation will be set free from its corrupting slavery so that it might teem with life instead of death. This is why creation eagerly anticipates the arrival of its heirs.

5.3.4 Creation Groans in Labor Pains (Rom 8:22)

Paul has already addressed the present state of the non-human creation (8:19), its past (8:20), and its future (8:21). In 8:22 he returns to describe its present condition, using the conjunction “for” (γάρ) to provide further support for his assertions in 8:20-21.⁹¹ He writes, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains together until now” (οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν).

Paul often uses the phrase “we know that” to introduce a well-known fact (cf. Rom 2:2; 3:19; 7:14; 8:28). The content of 8:22 is probably well-known because it is drawn from the OT or Christian teaching which his readers had already received.⁹² Given that Paul seeks to substantiate 8:19-21, he may be referring to the familiar idea that the hostile powers of this age hold sway over the cosmos and are the real enemies of God and believers.

By referring to “the whole creation” in conjunction with two συν-prefixed verbs, Paul highlights that every member of the non-human creation groans in labor pains collectively, “with one accord.”⁹³ The expression “groaning in labor pains” is comprised of two verbs (συστενάζω

⁹¹ Cf. the similar use of “for” in 7:14, 18. Romans 8:22 also begins a transition from the experience of the non-human creation (8:19-21) to the experience of believers (8:23-25).

⁹² So Hahne, *Corruption*, 199-200; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:416; Leenhardt, *Romans*, 222.

⁹³ So Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:416-17.

and *συνωδίνω*) which do not appear in the rest of the of NT or the LXX.⁹⁴ Scholarly discussion has generally centered on the cognate terms “groaning” (*στενάζω*) and “suffering labor pains” (*ώδίνω*) in an attempt to locate the background of Paul’s thought.⁹⁵ Many scholars see a connection here to the tradition of the birthpangs of the Messiah (cf. Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8; 1QH 3.7-18).⁹⁶

Because Paul uses Rom 8:22 to substantiate 8:20-21, the expression “groaning in labor pains together” should bolster the tension between creation’s present suffering and its hope for future liberation. This tension also appears in Paul’s other use of “groaning” language in 8:18-30. In 8:23, believers “groan” (*στενάζω*) because of their present physical bodies while they patiently wait for the arrival of the future redeemed body (cf. 2 Cor 5:2-4). Likewise in 8:26, the Spirit bears the burden of humanity’s weakness in prayer and thus intercedes with “groans” (*στεναγμός*) which help to facilitate the accomplishment of the will of God. In each case, groaning occurs: (1) in response to an undesirable circumstance, and (2) in the confident hope that God will bring about a remedy to the undesirable circumstance (cf. Gal 4:19). Thus, “groaning in labor pains” is probably a metaphor which simultaneously acknowledges the suffering of the present while holding onto the hope of a glorious future (cf. Rom 8:18).

⁹⁴ Most recent translations (e.g. ESV, NRSV, TNIV) render *συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει* as a hendiadys, which communicates a singular idea (i.e. “groaning in labor pains together”) as opposed to two separate ideas. This is probably the best way to interpret the relationship between the two verbs for the following reasons. (1) “To suffer labor pains together” appears to qualify the nature of creation’s “groaning,” so Michel, *Römer*, 269. This is similar to how the “groaning” of believers is qualified as “in ourselves” (8:23), and the “intercession” of the Spirit is qualified as “groaning” (8:26). In each instance there is a qualification of the main verb. (2) It is difficult to observe a notable difference between the two verbs if they are interpreted separately. Both seem to communicate a tension between present suffering and future hope. (3) Cognates of the two verbs are used in conjunction with one another in other literature (cf. Isa 21:2-3; Jer 4:31). However, see Braaten, who challenges the idea of a hendiadys (“Creation,” 131-59).

⁹⁵ See Conrad Gempf, “The Imagery of Birth Pangs in the New Testament,” *TynBul* 45 (1994): 119-35.

⁹⁶ E.g. Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 192-93; Russell, *New Heavens*, 171-72; Michel, *Römer*, 269; Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 132.

What, then, does the metaphor of creation “groaning in labor pains until now” refer to? First, creation “groans” under the oppression and slavery of hostile powers (8:20-21). But at the same time, Paul probably qualifies creation’s groaning as being “in labor” because its liberation is assured; it was subjected “on the basis of hope.” Furthermore, the labor pains could be heightened by the fact that Christ has already inaugurated the age to come. Therefore, *creation has been simultaneously groaning under oppression and laboring in hope ever since the beginning of its subjection up to the present time* (i.e. “until now”).⁹⁷

5.3.5 Initial Conclusions

Paul narrates the story of God, humanity, and the non-human creation in 8:19-22. He has framed it as a story about human idolatry and its devastating consequences upon the natural world. God began by subjecting creation to Adam. But on account of Adam’s idolatry, God subjected the creation to hostile powers who enslaved it to corruption. Through the process of redeeming humanity in Christ, God will ultimately set creation free so that it can experience the liberating reign of its heirs. In the meantime, creation groans in labor pains under oppression while it waits in hope for the revelation of the sons and daughters of God. This brief summary shows that Rom 8:19-22 is more than a story focused on anthropology.⁹⁸ Not only does Paul address the ramifications of human sin for the cosmos, he also speaks of the cosmic scope of God’s deliverance in Christ.⁹⁹ He looks forward, along with creation itself, to the material transformation of the cosmos.

⁹⁷ Some interpreters suggest eschatological force behind “until now,” e.g. Dunn, *Romans*, 1:473; Barrett, *Romans*, 156; Jewett, *Romans*, 517-18. Dunn cites Rom 3:26 as an example, but this seems to say more about *καίρος* than *νόον*.

⁹⁸ Contra Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 183-207; Lampe, “Doctrine,” 455-56; Reumann, *Creation*, 99.

⁹⁹ Adams is incorrect to suggest there is no hint of a “cosmic battle” in Rom 8:19-22 (*Constructing*, 183). So Gaventa, *Our Mother*, 61-62. On Paul’s cosmic christology related to Romans 8 see Gibbs, *Creation*, 139-60;

5.4 Other Notable Pauline Texts

5.4.1 1 Corinthians 7:31

In 1 Cor 7:31 Paul writes, “For the form of this world is passing away.” At first glance, this verse would seem to imply, in disagreement with Rom 8:19-22, that the cosmos will be destroyed. Some interpreters have taken it as such, including Adams who states that Paul “does not take a consistent position on the fate of the created order.”¹⁰⁰ However, the evidence seems to point to a different conclusion.

In 1 Cor 7:29-31 Paul offers an explanation for his preference why the Corinthians should “remain,” if possible, as they are (cf. 7:8, 11, 20, 24, 26, 40). First, Paul asserts that “the time has been shortened/compressed” (ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν).¹⁰¹ In other words, the future has been brought forward into the present by means of the death and resurrection of Christ so that the present is now eschatological time (cf. 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Cor 6:2).¹⁰² As a result, Paul calls believers to relate differently to the world, offering five examples of what this might look like (1 Cor 7:29b-31a).¹⁰³ Paul substantiates his five examples by saying “For the form of this world is

idem, “The Cosmic Scope of Redemption According to Paul,” *Bib* 56 (1985): 13-29; John Bolt, “The Relation Between Creation and Redemption in Romans 8:18-27,” *CTJ* 30 (1995): 34-51.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 256 (n.4). His argument for this position is in idem, *Constructing*, 130-36.

¹⁰¹ For the translation “compressed” see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 373-74; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 328.

¹⁰² The phrase need not express an imminent expectation of the parousia, so Fee, *First Corinthians*, 374; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 328-29; Darrell J. Doughty, “The Presence and Future of Salvation in Corinth,” *ZNW* 66 (1975): 69.

¹⁰³ These contrasts appear to express the idea that since the externals of life associated with “this world” are passing away, one should approach the things of “this world” with the perspective that they will not last. This is not an argument to detach from the world, but a plea to see the world differently, thereby living according to the values of the age to come. See the discussions in Doughty, “Presence,” 66-74; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 327-31; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 375-77; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 317-18.

passing away” (παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου). We can look at each part of this statement.

When Paul uses the phrase “this world,” it would be a mistake to assume that he simply means “earth” or “the inhabited world” as if it were a neutral cosmological statement. Instead, the expression immediately evokes connections with Paul’s apocalyptic thought concerning “this age.”¹⁰⁴ Paul does not use the phrase “this world” often (1 Cor 3:18-19; 5:10-11; Eph 2:2), but when he does he means something comparable to “this age.” For example, in 1 Cor 3:18-19 Paul parallels the two expressions in a chiasmic pattern:

- (a) If anyone thinks that they are wise in this age [τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ],
- (b) let them become foolish,
- (b’) so that they may become wise,
- (a’) for the wisdom of this world [τοῦ κόσμου τούτου] is foolishness with God.”

In Pauline thought “this age” is synonymous with “the present evil age” (Gal 1:4) and is governed by hostile powers like “the rulers of this age” (1 Cor 2:6-8) and “the elemental spirits of the world” (Gal 4:3, 8-9; Col 2:8, 20). However, because of the death and resurrection of Christ, the age to come has dawned in the midst of this age. Paul refers to this phenomenon when he speaks of the presence of the “kingdom of God” (Rom 14:17; Col 1:13) and a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). As a result, this age is under siege by God and will eventually give way to the age to come at the parousia. But until this happens, believers have a foot in *both* ages/worlds. In other words, they live in this world, but are to reject conformity to it (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 5:9-11). Salvation in the interim period, then, involves *internal* renewal but not *external* renewal (2 Cor 4:16). Therefore, when Paul speaks of “this world,” he is referring to *the world*

¹⁰⁴ Adams, *Constructing*, 133. Contra David W. Kuck, “The Freedom of Being in the World ‘As If Not’ (1 Cor 7:29-31),” *CurTM* 28 (2001): 590. For a brief overview of Paul’s apocalyptic thought here see J. Louis Martyn, “World without End or Twice-Invaded World?” in *Shaking Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Walter Brueggemann and Charles B. Cousar*, ed. Christine Roy Yoder et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 117-32; David E. Aune, “Apocalypticism,” *DPL* 25-34.

as it currently exists in contrast to what we might call “the world to come.”¹⁰⁵ So, “this world” is the present created world, including both redeemed and unredeemed humanity, which suffers under the reign of hostile powers in a futile state. God has begun the process of reclaiming the world through the death and resurrection of Christ, but external renewal must wait until the parousia (Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:20-28).

If “this world” refers to the present world order, then what is its “form?” The word *σχῆμα* has a basic meaning of outward appearance, form, shape, or way of life.¹⁰⁶ Paul only uses the term one other time to describe Jesus Christ “being found in appearance [*σχῆματι*] as a man” (Phil 2:7), which seems to imply that *σχῆμα* is something perceivable to humanity. The five examples of 7:29b-31a also suggest a similar inference. Marriage, weeping, rejoicing, buying possessions, and using the world (which appears to have a summarizing function) all are things which are observed or experienced by humanity within the confines of this present age. Another text which seems to help illumine the meaning of *σχῆμα* is 2 Cor 4:16-18, where Paul elaborates on his life in this world,

¹⁶ Therefore, we do not lose heart, even though our outer humanity [*ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος*] is wasting away [*διαφθείρεται*], yet our inner humanity [*ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν*] is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our slight momentary distress [*θλίψεως*] is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ because we do not look at the things which are seen [*τὰ βλεπόμενα*], but at the things which are not seen [*τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα*]; for the things which are seen are temporary [*πρόσκαιρα*], but the things which are not seen are eternal [*αἰώνια*].”

While not using the same terminology, this passage has all of the same themes as 1 Cor 7:29-31. Paul refers to: (1) a believer’s relationship to the world, (2) suffering, (3) the contrast between this age and the age to come (i.e. temporary vs. eternal), (4) the contrast between the external and

¹⁰⁵ Paul never actually uses the phrase “the world to come,” but it is clearly implied in the texts such as Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:20-28; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15.

¹⁰⁶ BDAG, 981.

internal (i.e. outer vs. inner humanity and the seen vs. the unseen), and (5) a present tense verb communicating a destructive process (i.e. is wasting away).¹⁰⁷ By comparing 2 Cor 4:16 with 1 Cor 7:31, we can observe that “outer” (ἔξω) and “the things which are seen” (τὰ βλεπόμενα) both seem to parallel “form” (σχῆμα) and offer the most probable explanation of its meaning.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, the “form” of this world probably refers to *that which is seen or can be observed/experienced by humanity*.¹⁰⁹ The “form of this world,” then, most likely refers to *the current manifestation of the world*. For clarification purposes, Paul does not view the observable things of this world as inherently evil. This is why, for example, he does not denounce marriage, because it is still a good creation of God. Yet, as long as “this world” remains, things like marriage are prey to the corrupting powers of this world.

Finally, Paul asserts that the world’s present mode of existence “is passing away.” This is Paul’s only use of the term *παράγω* (cf. 1 John 2:17).¹¹⁰ It is significant that Paul utilizes the present tense of the verb, implying that the action was already occurring in Paul’s day. The present tense most likely reflects Paul’s conviction that the death and resurrection of Christ were the determinative events of history.¹¹¹ As a result, “this world” has been decisively judged and

¹⁰⁷ Also note the connections here to Rom 8:18-25 involving suffering, hope, glory, a contrast between the ages, and the creation experiencing corrupting slavery.

¹⁰⁸ One could object that 2 Cor 4:16-18 is talking about humanity while 1 Cor 7:31 is talking about the world, but Paul views the individual in some sense as a microcosm of the cosmos. See Aune, “Apocalypticism,” 32-33.

¹⁰⁹ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 377; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 318; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 331-32; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, HThANT (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2006), 441; Vincent L. Wimbush, *Paul The Worldly Ascetic: Response to the World and Self-Understanding according to 1 Corinthians 7* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 34. Adams objects that an “external” interpretation of *σχῆμα* leaves the evil essence of “this world” unaffected (*Constructing*, 134-35). But this seems to underestimate Paul’s driving conviction in this passage that Sin and Death have *already* been defeated by Christ’s death and resurrection. Furthermore, Adams essentially collapses “form” and “this world” together with the result Paul could have just written “this world is passing away.”

¹¹⁰ Also cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Matt 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33.

¹¹¹ So Fee, *First Corinthians*, 377; Schnabel, *erste Korinther*, 441.

its fate is sealed. It will come to an end.¹¹² At the same time, the form of this world also “is passing away” because it has been relativized by the inauguration of the age to come. For example, Paul notes several features in 1 Cor 7 which were considered important according to “this world,” but have lost their significance in light of “the age to come,” such as: ethnic boundaries (7:18), social position (7:21), and marriage (7:8, 28).

In conclusion, Paul elaborates on the significance of the death and resurrection of Christ by stating that “this world” is already coming to an end, even though it has not yet been completely overthrown. So Paul affirms that the cosmos will not exist forever in its current state. It will have an *ending*. However, he makes no comment on *how* it will end in this passage. To claim that Paul has in view here the future destruction of the cosmos or “the process that will lead to final cosmic destruction” reads too much into the verb *παράγω*.¹¹³ The most *παράγω* can reasonably communicate here is that the present world order will not continue to exist as it currently is forever. Therefore, when Paul claims that the “form of this world is passing away,” he is not describing *how* the cosmos will end (i.e. be destroyed). Instead, he is describing *what* will not remain after the cosmic transition occurs. In other words, Paul highlights the *discontinuity* between the present expression of “this world” and the future expression of “the world to come.” There is no conflict here with Rom 8:19-22.

¹¹² Adams is right to insist that 1 Cor 7:31 does not “de-eschatologize the apocalyptic belief in a coming cosmic change” (*Constructing*, 134). However, his suggestion that “suffering” is somehow the realized aspect of an eschatological process which eventually leads to the *future* passing away of this world is unconvincing. Paul says it is a *present* occurrence.

¹¹³ Adams, *Constructing*, 135. Adams seems to work with the assumption that if Paul is speaking at all about the cosmos in 1 Cor 7:31, then he must be referring to its eventual destruction (*Constructing*, 132-33, 35).

5.4.2 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15

Both 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15 contain a short Pauline expression which has generated a great amount of interest and debate: “new creation” (καινή κτίσις). In general, there have been four approaches to interpreting the phrase.¹¹⁴ It refers to:

- (1) Individual believers (i.e. new creature)¹¹⁵
- (2) The community of believers in Christ (i.e. new people/church)¹¹⁶
- (3) The new cosmic order (i.e. new creation)¹¹⁷
- (4) A combination of the three options above¹¹⁸

In oversimplified terms, the issue boils down to the scope of κτίσις, which as we’ve already observed in relation to Rom 8:19-22 describes an underlying referent that is often difficult to identify with precision.

In 2 Cor 5:14-17, Paul highlights the reality that controls his life and ministry, namely the “love of Christ.” It was Christ who “died for all.” Thus, not only did all die with him, his death opened up a new way of living. The result for those who respond is that they no longer live “for themselves,” but “for him who died and was raised for them.” Having received this new life, Paul says that he “perceives” people differently (5:16). He no longer looks at them from a human point of view (lit. “according to the flesh”). Instead, he sees with a new perspective, “So, if anyone is in Christ, [there is a] new creation: the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινή κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά).¹¹⁹ The

¹¹⁴ For a brief overview of the history of interpretation see John R. Levison, “Creation and New Creation,” *DPL* 189-90.

¹¹⁵ Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought*, SNTSMS 119 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹¹⁶ Wolfgang Kraus, *Das Volk Gottes: Zur Grundlegung der Ekklesiologie bei Paulus*, WUNT 85 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996).

¹¹⁷ Ulrich Mell, *Neue Schöpfung: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Studie zu einem soteriologischen Grundsatz paulinischer Theologie*, BZNW 56 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989).

¹¹⁸ T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept*, WUNT 2/272 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

¹¹⁹ On the many issues surrounding the translation of this verse see the discussions in Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 430-34; Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical*

immediate context of this statement suggests that Paul is describing the effects of Christ's death and resurrection on the individual (cf. 4:6). Yet, this individual change cannot be separated out as if it stands apart from the new community formed in Christ (cf. 3:18), and from the new world order inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection (cf. 6:2). Paul probably saw these realities as a unified whole.

In Gal 6:11-18 Paul brings his letter to a close, summarizing its main themes. In 6:12-13 he assesses the motives of the rival missionaries who were "compelling" the Galatians to be circumcised. He says they: (1) want to make a good showing, (2) want to avoid persecution, and (3) want to boast.¹²⁰ But Paul will have none of it. His one and only boast is in the "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14). This eschatological event not only reoriented Paul's life, it also altered the course of the world. Through the cross of Christ, not only was this age dealt a decisive blow, a new age was inaugurated. Paul substantiates this by saying, "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but new creation [is all that matters]" (οὔτε γὰρ περιτομή τί ἐστίν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ καινή κτίσις).¹²¹ For Paul, the reality of a new creation in Christ trumps all other claims and has relativized the old order (cf. 3:28). Again, Paul's use of "new creation" appears to encompass not only the individual, but also the believing community, and a new world order.

In conclusion, regardless of how one interprets καινή κτίσις, Paul appears to ground it in the death and resurrection of Christ, which has opened up a "new state of affairs."¹²² When it

and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994-2000), 1:420-28.

¹²⁰ Richard J. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 290-93.

¹²¹ This translation is similar to the one suggested by Longenecker, *Galatians*, 295. Also see the instructive comments on "new creation" and "apocalyptic antinomies" by J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 565, 570-74; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC 9 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 342-43.

¹²² Douglas J. Moo, "Creation and New Creation," *BBR* 20 (2010): 39-60.

comes to assessing the cosmological implications, Paul again implies a decisive *end* to the existing world order and a definite *beginning* to the new world order. To speculate whether 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15 imply the future destruction or transformation of the cosmos is to ask too much of these specific texts.¹²³ Suffice it to say, the ultimate transition between this world and the world to come is assured because it has already begun through the work of Christ.

5.4.3 Colossians 1:19-20

The final text of this chapter comes from what is normally referred to as an early christological hymn (Col 1:15-20).¹²⁴ I take the hymn to be divided into two halves which highlight Christ's status and role concerning creation (1:15-17) and new creation (1:18-20).¹²⁵ The hymn begins by talking about Christ's position of status over all creation and his role as God's agent in the creation of all things (1:15-16). "All things" (τὰ πάντα) is understood here as all-inclusive, everything in heaven and earth, even such things as spiritual powers. Not only were all things created "through him" and "for him," they also are sustained by him (1:17). Christ is also the primary figure of a new creation, the head of the church, and the first to be resurrected from the dead (1:18). The purpose behind God exalting Christ was to confer upon him the status he had from the beginning (cf. Col 1:15; Phil 2:5-11). Colossians 1:19-20 explains the reason why God exalted Christ in resurrection, because of his reconciling death on the cross, "For in him all the Fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things [τὰ πάντα] to himself,

¹²³ E.g. Adams assumes once again that destruction is in view (*Constructing*, 227, 235).

¹²⁴ There is no possible way to enter into (or even summarize) the various debates surrounding this text. See Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC 44 (Waco: Word, 1982), 31-63.

¹²⁵ See N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 99-119.

having made peace through the blood of his cross, through him whether the things on earth or the things in the heavens.”¹²⁶

The first thing to observe here is that Christ’s death on the cross resulted in the reconciliation of the *entire cosmos*, or as the hymn puts it, “all things.”¹²⁷ Some have argued that “all things” ultimately must be limited to humanity on account of 1:21-23.¹²⁸ However, Paul consistently uses “all things” here to refer to the entire created world (cf. 1:16, 17, 18), which encompasses everything “in heaven and on earth” as well as “visible and invisible.” Thus, humanity’s reconciliation in 1:21-23 should be understood as a particularization of Christ reconciliation of “all things.”¹²⁹

Second, the fact that God needed to “reconcile” the universe suggests that a *rupture* occurred between God and the created order.¹³⁰ In other words, the hymn presumes that something happened which alienated the cosmos from God. Paul describes humanity’s alienation in terms of being under the “power of darkness” (1:13), being “estranged and hostile in mind” (1:21), and following “the elemental spirits of the world” (2:20). This likely implies that the very “rulers and authorities” who were created through Christ (1:16) somehow gained control over the created world. Paul probably explains how the cosmos became “subject” to the reign of these hostile powers in Rom 8:20 (see above). But God’s solution to the hostile reign of these powers was the cross of Christ, “When he disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in him” (Col 2:15).

¹²⁶ On this translation cf. 2 Cor 5:19; Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon*, EGGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 50-51.

¹²⁷ Middleton, *New Heaven*, 158-59.

¹²⁸ E.g. Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 229-32.

¹²⁹ So F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 74.

¹³⁰ See Bruce, *Colossians*, 74; O’Brien, *Colossians*, 53; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 102-103.

Third, God's reconciliation was achieved by "making peace through the blood of the cross." With the created order in a state of rebellion, Christ's death on the cross should probably be considered the *pacification* of all things.¹³¹ In other words, through the cross Christ imposed his reign over all creation, forcing it to submit to his lordship whether it was welcome or not (cf. Col 2:15; Phil 2:9-11). So, just as all things were created through him and for him, the reconciliation of the cosmos on the cross returned "all things" to Christ's dominion. While it does not appear as though all things are submitted to him at present, it will eventually be worked out at the parousia (cf. 1 Cor 15:24-28).

In conclusion, God's reconciliation of "all things" through the cross of Christ implies that he intends to reclaim all that he created.¹³² While this passage does not get at the specifics of how the cosmic transition will occur, it does imply a strong sense of *continuity* between the present and the future cosmos. The idea of reconciliation implies that "all things" will not be destroyed, but brought under the harmonious reign of Christ. The difference between the present and future cosmos, then, is that all that remains rebellious will be removed. Thus, what we have here is a picture of cosmic restoration founded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

5.5 Paul's Theology of the Future of the Cosmos

Having examined the Pauline texts above, we can now turn to reflect on their significance by answering the following questions.

¹³¹ So O'Brien, *Colossians*, 56; Bruce, *Colossians*, 76; Harris, *Colossians*, 51.

¹³² This is not to suggest that Paul envisioned what has been called "universal salvation." He clearly thinks that a faithful response to God's reconciliation in Christ is required (cf. Rom 2:6-8; 5:1; 2 Cor 5:10).

5.5.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

Paul indicates that God, his Son Jesus Christ, and glorified believers all have a part to play in the cosmic transition. First, Christ appears to be God's agent to bring about the transition between this world and the world to come. Not only was Christ crucified and raised in order to enact God's plan of redemption (2 Cor 5:14-17; Gal 6:14-15; Col 1:18), he will ultimately "subject all things under his feet" by defeating the hostile powers which hold the created world captive (Col 1:20; 2:15; 1 Cor 15:24-27). At that time he will hand all things over to his Father (1 Cor 15:28). Thus, Paul seems to suggest that Christ carries out the will of his Father. To a lesser extent, Paul also indicates that glorified believers will have a role. The created world awaits their revelation with Christ as joint-heirs of the world, so that it can share in the freedom of God's reign (Rom 8:19; cf. 1 Thess 4:14-17).

5.5.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

Paul writes that the cosmic transition will happen in association with the parousia of Christ. Creation will be set free when "the sons [and daughters] of God" are revealed along with Christ (Rom 8:19; cf. 1 Cor 15:23; Col 3:4; 1 Thess 4:16-17). However, Paul does not give any indication as to when he thinks the parousia will occur. Some have taken the language of 1 Cor 7:29 to suggest that Paul thought the parousia was imminent. But it is best to see this language as stressing the certainty of the parousia (because of the death and resurrection of Christ) while at the same time maintaining the possibility that it could happen at any moment.¹³³ Thus, when the cosmic transition will occur remains unknown.

¹³³ See Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World: A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 23-35.

5.5.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

According to Paul, the main problems affecting the cosmos during “this present evil age” (Gal 1:4) are sin, death, and the dominion of futile powers.¹³⁴ Humanity was created to rule over the cosmos, but became idolatrous by worshiping created things instead of the Creator himself (Rom 1:18-32). In response, God handed Adamic humanity over to the powers of Sin and Death, and subjected the created world to the “corrupting slavery” of futile powers (Rom 8:20). In other words, these hostile powers, who are undoubtedly in league with Satan, have enslaved the created world to decay and death. As a result, creation “groans in labor pains” under the weight of oppression (Rom 8:22), yet stands assured in “hope” that liberation is coming (Rom 8:21). This hope is grounded in that fact that Christ has already broken the grip of the powers of evil through his death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:21-22; Gal 4:2-5, 8-9; Col 1:18-20; 2:15). Christ will bring this transition to its conclusion when he returns at the parousia to judge the world and destroy every ruler and authority and power (1 Cor 15:24-27). Thus, the cosmic transition will occur in order to bring to completion the victory of Christ’s death and resurrection, thereby liberating the created world from its subjection to *futile powers* and the *corrupting slavery* they impose upon it.

5.5.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

Paul is the most explicit writer up to this point in our study concerning the nature of the cosmic transition. He does not spell out exactly how the cosmic transition will occur, but he does indicate that there will be continuity and discontinuity between this age and the age to come.

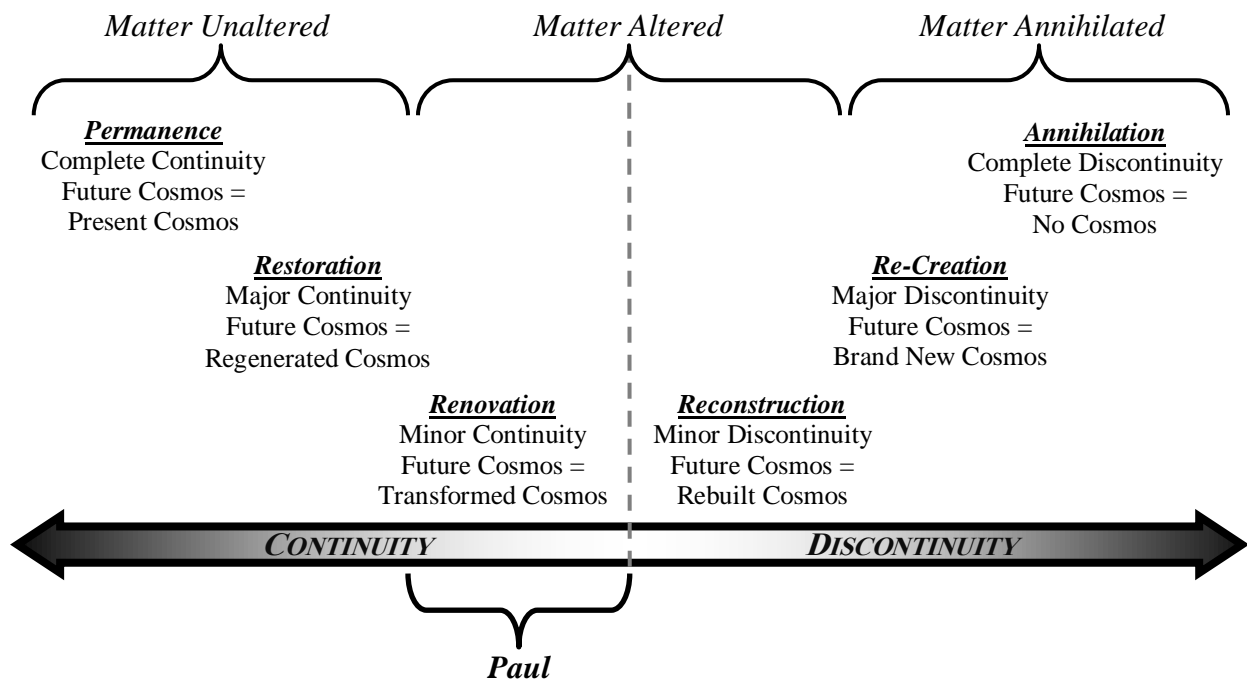
¹³⁴ On “this age” or similar expressions in Paul see Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6-8; 3:18; 2 Cor 4:4; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:21; 2:2; 1 Tim 6:17; 2 Tim 4:10; Titus 2:12.

Paul's primary image for depicting the cosmic transition is *the liberation of creation from slavery* (Rom 8:19-22). On account of human sin, God subjected the created world to futile powers (Rom 8:20). These powers, having received authority during this age, have enslaved the created world to "corruption" (Rom 8:21). But through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has already begun the process of reclaiming the created world as his own, effectively bringing an end to this age, while at the same time inaugurating the age to come (1 Cor 15:21-22; Gal 4:2-5, 8-9; Col 1:18-20). Thus, for Paul, the futile powers have already been defeated (1 Cor 2:8; Col 2:15) and the cosmos is already in the process of transition. As Paul emphasizes, the "form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31) and the "new creation" has already begun to emerge (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). At the parousia, then, Christ will bring to completion the victory and salvation of his death and resurrection by overthrowing the hostile powers of the universe (1 Cor 15:24). As a result, creation will be liberated, "set free" by God to experience the reign of glorified humanity in the age to come (Rom 8:21). In this way, Paul describes the cosmic transition predominantly as a *transfer of dominion*.

We can now attempt to categorize Paul's stance concerning the future of the cosmos. Given that Paul suggests a cosmic transition that will involve both continuity and discontinuity, he does not affirm either the *permanence* or *annihilation* of the cosmos. In addition, since "the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31), it is unlikely that the world to come will take on the same "form" as the present one (cf. 1 Cor 15:35-57). Thus, the cosmic transition will involve more than a *restoration* to original conditions. Paul also implies that the cosmic transition will not involve *reconstruction* or *re-creation* because the transition has already begun (1 Cor 7:31; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). This is also supported by Paul's contention that the present creation "itself" is the object of God's redemptive activity (Rom 8:21; Col 1:20; Eph 1:10). God

subjected it “on the basis of hope” because he planned to liberate it from the beginning (Rom 8:21). Thus, the created world “eagerly anticipates” the glorification of humanity because it will mean that its time of liberation has come (Rom 8:19). Therefore, in light of the evidence above, Paul probably conceived of the cosmic transition in terms of the *renovation* of the cosmos, the thorough transformation of this world into the world to come. We can visually represent Paul’s place on the spectrum in Figure 5.1.

FIGURE 5.1: PAUL AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



5.5.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

Paul provides only a few details about what the future world will be like in the age to come.

First, it will be reconciled by Christ, without the corruption of sin and death (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; Col 1:13-14, 19-20; Eph 1:9-10; 2:7). Second, it will be a world that is different in “form” from “this world,” which is passing away (1 Cor 7:31). This implies some sort of materially

transformed state, probably something akin to the resurrection of humanity (Rom 8:19-25), where the corruptible/perishable becomes incorruptible/imperishable in the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:35-55; 2 Cor 5:1-5). Third, Paul's main topic of concern is discussing who will rule the future world. The hostile powers which held the world captive (even after their defeat on the cross) will be no more (1 Cor 15:24). Instead, the world to come (i.e. the kingdom of God) will be ruled by Christ and his joint-heirs, the children of God. Having received the world as their inheritance (Rom 4:13; 8:17, 32), redeemed humanity will once again take up the charge of administering God's glorious rule over the non-human creation (cf. Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8:4-9). Paul describes this rule as "the freedom produced by the glory belonging to God's children" (Rom 8:21). Thus, in contrast to the enslaving rule of futile powers, the rule of God's righteous children will be freeing to the cosmos. This likely suggests that the non-human creation will flourish and abound with life, having been freed from its bondage to death. Within this picture Paul writes that "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

6 Hebrews and the Future of the Cosmos

We now turn to the book of Hebrews and the views of its writer.¹ The primary text under consideration in this chapter will be God's "shaking" of earth and heaven in Heb 12:25-29. I will also examine 1:10-12. Before delving into the interpretation of these passages, I will survey how others have interpreted them, and then discuss the cosmology and eschatology of the book of Hebrews as a whole. Ultimately, I will suggest that the writer of Hebrews looks forward to humanity regaining dominion over a materially transformed cosmos in the world to come.

6.1 Interpretations of Hebrews and the Future of the Cosmos

The cosmological language of Heb 1:10-12 and 12:26-27 has been variously interpreted with no clear consensus on the matter.² Furthermore, many interpretations are nuanced in such a way as to make categorization difficult. Nonetheless, we can lay out four general approaches to interpreting these texts (esp. 12:26-27), recognizing that not every proposal fits neatly into this scheme.³

¹ The writer is unknown, but appears to identify himself as a male with the masculine participle *διηγούμενον* in 11:32. On introductory issues such as authorship see William L. Lane, "Hebrews," *DLNT* 443-58. On the potential streams of thought that may have influenced the writer see C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 363-93; L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought*, SNTSMS 65 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); James W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, CBQMS 13 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1982); Kenneth L. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice*, SNTSMS 143 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ALGHJ 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1970); Wilfried Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich: Die mittelplatonische Umformung des Parusiegedankens im Hebräerbrief*, BZNW 116 (New York: de Gruyter, 2003).

² For another survey see Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970), 76-83.

³ For example, based on the notion that the writer of Hebrews reinterprets the Day of the Lord in terms of Middle Platonic thought, Eisele argues that 12:26-27 refers to the "day" when a person dies and faces judgment before God (*Ein unerschütterliches Reich*, 428). There are also some who interpret Heb 12:26-27 in reference to the

(1) For the majority of interpreters, Heb 12:26-27 describes the *annihilation of the cosmos* at the end of the age.⁴ In other words, the material universe will be utterly destroyed and will not be created anew. All that will remain is the immaterial heavenly realm, the kingdom of God. As James Thompson describes it, “the author reads his text of Hag 2:6 in such a way as to find the annihilation of the created order and the abiding of a sphere which is unaffected by the final catastrophe.”⁵ Along similar lines Robert Smith writes, “The whole visible world will vanish in order that what cannot be shaken may remain, so that finally only the spiritual reality of God’s kingship and the heavenly city will abide alone and unrivaled forever. The tangible world, apparently so durable and so trustworthy, will grow old and be discarded like a tattered garment.”⁶

(2) Hebrews 12:26-27 describes the *destruction of the cosmos* at the end of the age.⁷ This view distinguishes itself from the previous by arguing that creation will be destroyed, but not

destruction of the Jerusalem temple, e.g. Randall C. Gleason, “The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 110-11.

⁴ Schenck, *Cosmology*, 122-32, 142-43; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 664-71; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 334-36; Herbert Braun, *An die Hebräer*, HNT 14 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1984), 443-44; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 363-65; David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 470-73; Erich Grässer, *An die Hebräer*, 3 vols., EKKNT 17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990-1997), 3:331-36; Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*, SP 13 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2007), 288; James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1924), 221-22; Hugh Montefiore, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, HNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 235-36; Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 689-92; Hans Windisch, *Der Hebräerbrief*, 2nd ed., HNT 14 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1931), 115; J. H. Davies, *A Letter to the Hebrews*, CBC 12 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 129; Cynthia Long Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning*, LNTS 297 (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 269; Marie E. Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, JSNTSup 73 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 207-208; Alexander Stewart, “Cosmology, Eschatology, and Soteriology in Hebrews: A Synthetic Analysis,” *BBR* 20 (2010): 558. Harold W. Attridge claims that the universe will be “annihilated,” but then mentions the possibility that the shaking may involve “something other than a literal cosmic catastrophe” since believers “already possess” the kingdom (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], 381-82).

⁵ Thompson, *Beginnings*, 49. Also cf. idem, *Hebrews*, PCNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 263-64.

⁶ Robert H. Smith, *Hebrews*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 166.

⁷ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC 35 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 596-97. Roy A. Stewart think destruction is most likely in view, although he leaves open the possibility that the cosmos might be annihilated (“Creation and Matter in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *NTS* 12 [1966]: 293). Paul Ellingworth appears to fit loosely into this view (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

reduced to nothing (i.e. annihilated). God will then re-create a new heaven and a new earth where he will dwell with his people. Edward Adams most clearly expresses this view, contending that Hebrews envisions “a cosmic catastrophe that results in the dissolution of the cosmos,” where heaven and earth “will be reduced to their pre-created, *material* condition.”⁸ Yet, despite this act of destruction, Adams suggests that the writer hints at “the re-making of the material creation.”⁹

(3) Hebrews 12:26-27 describes the *transformation of the cosmos* at the end of the age.¹⁰ God’s judgment of “all things” will have a discriminating function, dividing what is removed from what remains. As Ben Witherington states, “The ‘shake-up’ does not have to do with the complete dissolution of the material realm but rather of the sorting of all things and putting them right.”¹¹ Thus, the change will involve a transition to a higher state of existence. N. T. Wright explains, “Heaven and earth alike must be ‘shaken’ in such a way that everything transient,

1993], 688-90). He comments that “destruction may be implied, but total annihilation probably lies beyond the author’s horizon,” and that if the universe is destroyed, the author’s thought “has no place for a new heaven and a new earth” (688). Thus, Ellingworth ultimately appears to suggest that an invisible, yet material “place” is the final kingdom where believers will reside (689-90).

⁸ Edward M. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 190-91 (italics original).

⁹ Adams, *Stars*, 198.

¹⁰ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 200-204; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 97-100; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 8th ed., KEK 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), 324-26; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 494-97; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, BTCP (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 406; Ceslas Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 2 vols., EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1952-53), 2:411-12; Albert Vanhoye, *The Letter to the Hebrews: A New Commentary*, trans. Leo Arnold (New York: Paulist, 2015), 216; Jon Laansma, “Hidden Stories in Hebrews: Cosmology and Theology,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham, et al., LNTS 387 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 9-19. Koester claims that “there is both transformation as well as annihilation,” by which he attempts to stress the continuity and discontinuity between this world and the world to come (*Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 36 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001], 547-48). B. F. Westcott appears to move in the direction of transformation (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*, 2nd ed. [New York: MacMillan, 1892], 419-21). He states, “It is impossible to say how far he anticipated great physical changes to coincide with this event. That which is essential to his view is the inauguration of a new order, answering to the ‘new heavens and the new earth’” (421).

¹¹ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 346.

temporary, secondary and second-rate may fall away. Then that which is of the new creation, based on Jesus himself and his resurrection, will shine out the more brightly.”¹²

(4) Hebrews 12:26-27 metaphorically describes the *divine judgment of humanity*.¹³ In other words, the writer is uninterested in what happens to the cosmos; he is focused on God’s visitation for the purpose of condemning and saving humanity. William Lane argues that the writer’s language of shaking is “a fixed metaphor for divine judgment” upon humanity.¹⁴ Thus he concludes, “The ‘shaking’ of heaven and earth are not intended to describe a coming historical event, namely the future transformation of the world or its ultimate destruction.”¹⁵

6.2 The Cosmology and Eschatology of Hebrews

Any sufficient interpretation of Heb 1:10-12 and 12:25-29 must account for the cosmology and eschatology of Hebrews. While I do not have time nor space to offer a full treatment of the subjects here, I will attempt to briefly explain my view.¹⁶ The following will lay the critical contextual groundwork for my interpretation of 1:10-12 and 12:25-29.

¹² N. T. Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 165. Also cf. idem, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 457-61.

¹³ Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 88-89; Juliana M. Casey, “Christian assembly in Hebrews: a fantasy island?” *TD* 30 (1982): 333; Kenneth J. Thomas, “The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews,” *NTS* 11 (1964): 318.

¹⁴ William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 vols., WBC 47A-B (Dallas: Word, 1991), 2:480.

¹⁵ Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:480.

¹⁶ See the discussions in Koester, *Hebrews*, 97-104; Barrett, “Eschatology,” 363-93; Lincoln, *Hebrews*, 92-100; Thompson, *Beginnings*, 41-52; Stewart, “Creation,” 284-93; Edward Adams, “The Cosmology of Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 122-39; Paul Ellingworth, “Jesus and the Universe in Hebrews,” *EvQ* 58 (1986): 337-50; Jon Laansma, “The Cosmology of Hebrews,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. J. T. Pennington and S. M. McDonough, LNTS 355 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008), 125-43; Ole Jakob Filtvedt, “Creation and Salvation in Hebrews,” *ZNW* 106 (2015): 280-303; George W. MacRae, “Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *Semeia* 12 (1978): 179-99; Lincoln D. Hurst, “Eschatology and ‘Platonism’ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1984 Seminar Papers*, ed. Kent H. Richards, SBLSP 23 (Chico: Scholars, 1984), 41-74; Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2/223 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

6.2.1 Heaven and Earth as the Totality of the Cosmos

The writer of Hebrews employs the terms “heaven” and “earth” in two different ways. First, heaven and earth are used in a complementary fashion to describe *the two regions of the physical universe*. “Heaven” is the upper region, the “sky” (1:10; 4:14; 7:26; 11:12; 12:26). “Earth” is the lower region (1:10; 12:26).¹⁷ Taken together, they designate the totality of the cosmos, or “all things” (1:2, 3; 2:8, 10; 3:4; 12:23). In describing the cosmos, the writer emphasizes that: it was created by God (1:2, 10; 2:10; 3:4; 4:3-4; 9:26; 11:3), it exists “for him” (2:10), and it is being sustained by the powerful word of the Son (1:3). Thus, generally speaking, the writer appears to view the physical universe in a positive light as God’s creation. He does not disparage it or view it as inherently evil.¹⁸

However, when it comes to the destiny of the cosmos, Hebrews appears to make contradictory claims. On one hand the writer states that “all things” are the inheritance of the Son (1:2). Furthermore, the Son will share his reign over “all things” with his co-heirs (i.e. faithful humanity) in the world to come (2:5-18; 12:28). These statements imply the continued existence of the created world into the eschaton. But on the other hand, the writer states elsewhere that heaven and earth will “wear out” and be “rolled up” like clothing (1:11-12), and will succumb to being “shaken” and “removed” (12:26-27). These texts seem to imply that the cosmos will be destroyed or annihilated, suggesting that there will not be a cosmos left for the Son to inherit. One could attempt, like Adams, to solve this apparent contradiction by positing that the cosmos will be destroyed amid God’s shaking of the cosmos (12:26-27) and then re-created anew in a separate event that is not spoken of (at least explicitly) in the text.¹⁹ But there

¹⁷ Hebrews also uses $\gamma\eta$ to refer to the “ground” or “land” (6:7; 8:9; 11:9, 29, 38).

¹⁸ The writer will, however, discuss its present shortcomings and inferior status as “this world” in comparison to “the world to come.”

¹⁹ Adams, *Stars*, 197-99.

seems to be little support for this conclusion in Hebrews. As pointed out by most interpreters, the writer does not appear to envision a reconstruction or re-creation of the cosmos after its apparent destruction or annihilation in 12:26-27. The Son, then, appears to inherit whatever “remains” after God shakes the created world (12:27). Given these seemingly opposing inferences, we must face the question: How does the writer of Hebrews reconcile these ideas?²⁰ It is here that the eschatology of Hebrews comes into play.²¹

When the writer speaks about the destiny of the created universe, he does so within a two-age apocalyptic framework where there are two “worlds” (i.e. this world and the world to come). This is likely the idea behind the writer’s remark that the “worlds” (*αἰών*) were created by God (1:2; 11:3).²² In Hebrews, “this world” is understood as the *present* manifestation of the cosmos, whereas “the world to come” is understood as the *future* manifestation of the cosmos.²³ The writer refers to “this world” when he uses the term “world” (*κόσμος*, 4:3; 9:26; 10:5) or the phrase “of this creation” (9:11). He refers to “the world to come” when he uses the phrases “the world to come” (*τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν*, 2:5; cf. 1:6) and “the city to come” (13:14).²⁴ We can illustrate this *temporal* framework with the following diagram (fig. 6.1).

²⁰ I assume here that the writer is a coherent thinker based on the intricate work he has produced.

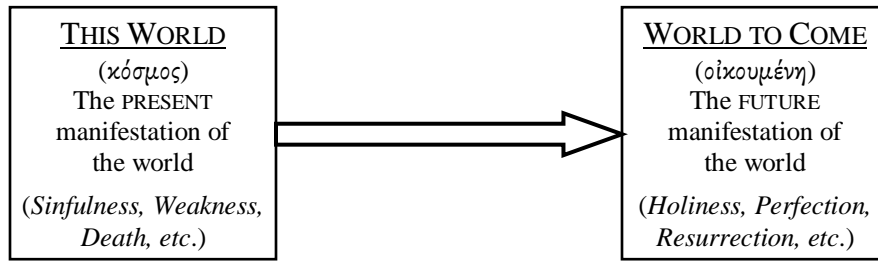
²¹ My view of the eschatology of Hebrews is probably closest in line with Barrett, “Eschatology,” 363-93. The writer’s predominate point of view is Jewish apocalyptic, yet he is free to draw upon Platonic categories.

²² Although *αἰών* can be strictly temporal in meaning (cf. 6:5), it most likely has a spatio-temporal meaning in 1:2 and 11:3 given the context of creation. So Adams, “Cosmology,” 124-25; Filtvedt, “Creation,” 284; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 96; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 52-53; Hermann Sasse, “*αἰών*,” *TDNT* 1:204. A Platonic duality between the phenomenal and the noumenal in 1:2 and 11:3 seems unlikely, contra Thompson, *Beginnings*, 74-75; Stewart, “Creation,” 288-29.

²³ The idea that the “world to come” is of a materially transformed nature in Hebrews is highly debated. I will return to this issue below.

²⁴ On the distinction between *κόσμος* and *οἰκουμένη* see Albert Vanhoye, “L’*οἰκουμένη* dans l’*épître* aux Hébreux,” *Bib* 45 (1964): 248-53.

FIGURE 6.1: THE TEMPORAL WORLDS OF HEBREWS



6.2.2 Heaven and Earth as Two Kingdoms/Realms

Now, while the writer uses the temporal framework above to communicate the difference between the present and future worlds, it is important to recognize that he also employs *spatial* categories. Here we can explore the second way the writer employs the terms “heaven” and “earth.”

Hebrews also uses “heaven” and “earth” spatially to describe *two distinct kingdoms or realms of reality*. “Heaven” is the sphere *above*, the dwelling place of God (8:1; 9:23, 24; 12:23, 25).²⁵ This realm is the kingdom of God (1:3-4; 8:1), the “true” reality of the universe (9:24). It is also the sphere of the heavenly sanctuary where God is seated along with the Son, who has completed his high priestly work and has been exalted (7:26; 8:1-2; 9:23-24). Thus, the heavenly realm is the sphere from which the new covenant is revealed (12:25). As a result, the new covenant community “has come” to the heavenly realm (i.e. Mount Zion) through the blood of Christ (12:22-24). They are members of God’s kingdom in the present (3:1; 6:4), but also

²⁵ The writer also refers to this “higher heavenly realm” by referring to Jesus passing through the lower heavens (4:14; 7:26). Also see the writer’s use of the term “heavenly” (ἐπουράνιος) to describe this realm (3:1; 6:4; 8:5; 9:23; 11:16; 12:22).

look forward to entering fully into their heavenly fatherland in the future (11:13-16). All of this indicates that the heavenly realm is *superior* to the earthly realm.²⁶

The “earth” is the sphere *below*, the dwelling place of humanity (8:4; 11:13; 12:25).²⁷ It is a kingdom ruled by angels (Heb 2:5, 7).²⁸ Some of these angels serve God (1:14; 2:2; 12:22), while others like the Devil, work against him (2:14-15).²⁹ Ultimately, the earthly realm is under the authority of the Devil because he is the one who holds the power of death (cf. 1:11; 9:27). Because of his reign, this realm is a “shadow” or “copy” of the true heavenly realm (8:5; 9:23; 10:1). The earthly realm is also the sphere of the first covenant, which was delivered by the angels (2:2; cf. Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19). It prescribed cultic rituals to be carried out by its mortal priesthood within the earthly sanctuary (built with mortal hands).³⁰ Believers, despite living in this world, “have not come” to this earthly reality (i.e. Mount Sinai), which remains captive to the “fear of death” (12:18-21; cf. 2:15; 13:6). Thus, believers are to consider themselves strangers and foreigners “on earth” while they wait for the emergence of the world to come (11:13-16). All of this indicates that the earthly realm is *inferior* to the heavenly realm on

²⁶ Note the writer’s extensive use of “better” to describe the heavenly realm in relation to the earthly realm (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24).

²⁷ The writer also uses the terms “world” (*κόσμος*) in 10:5; 11:7, 38, and “earthly” (*κοσμικός*) in 9:1 to describe this realm.

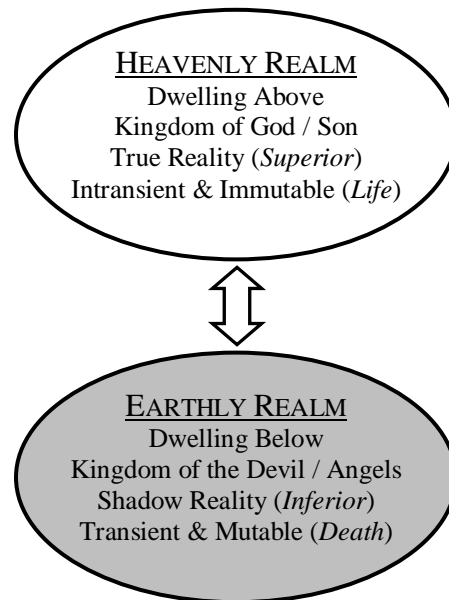
²⁸ The writer’s note that the “world to come” is not subject to angels (2:5) seems to imply they currently rule over “this world.” It is in this world that the human Jesus was, and humanity is, “lower than the angels” (2:7), implying subjection. As noted in previous chapters, the idea that angels ruled the world was a common belief in second temple Judaism based on Deut 32:8 LXX (also cf. Ps 82:1-8). This appears to be assumed by the writer. So Bruce, *Hebrews*, 71; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 93; Westcott, *Hebrews*, 41; Schenck, *Cosmology*, 57; G. B. Caird, “Son By Appointment,” in vol. 1 of *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. William C. Weinrich (Macon: Macon University Press, 1984), 75-77; L. D. Hurst, “The Christology of Hebrews 1 and 2,” in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 154.

²⁹ The hostility of the Devil in Hebrews may be grounded in the idea of angelic envy regarding God’s plan for humanity. See the discussion in Georg Gäbel, “Rivals in Heaven: Angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings: Origins, Development and Reception*, ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, and Karin Schöpflin, DCLS Yearbook 2007 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 357-76.

³⁰ This is not to suggest that the first covenant originated from the Devil. Hebrews contends that the first covenant originated from God (1:1; 12:25) and was delivered through angels. However, the first covenant is inferior in the sense that it cannot provide a solution to death, the main power of the Devil.

account of its subjection to death.³¹ We can illustrate this spatial framework with the following diagram (fig. 6.2).

FIGURE 6.2: THE SPATIAL REALMS OF HEBREWS



6.2.3 Merging the Temporal and the Spatial

It is important to recognize that, as an apocalyptic thinker, the writer of Hebrews *combines spatial and temporal categories*. The earthly realm (i.e. the kingdom of the Devil) is the reality to which this world is subject and conformed. The heavenly realm (i.e. the kingdom of God) is the reality to which the world to come will be subject and conformed. As a result, *the created world manifests the concrete reality of the kingdom which governs it*.

For example, under the reign of angelic powers, most notably the Devil, this world is subject to death. While Hebrews does not appear to consider angelic reign as wholly evil (since some appear loyal to God while others are not), it is less than ideal. As inferior rulers in

³¹ This is where I think a Platonic reading of Hebrews falters. It identifies the inferiority of this world with its created and material nature. See e.g. Thompson, *Beginnings*, 152-62.

comparison to the Son, angels do not possess the ability to “sustain all things” (1:3), nor are “enemies” made subject under their feet (1:13), particularly the Devil (2:14). As a result, this world is beset with sin, weakness, fear, ignorance, corruption, and mortality (2:14-15; 4:10; 5:2-3; 7:23, 27-28). Furthermore, the covenant delivered through angels proved ineffective because it could not overcome the Devil and death (7:11-28; 9:1-28). Therefore, *this world is a transient and mutable reality*. What is currently *seen* eventually will become *unseen*, ultimately disappearing from sight (8:13). Thus, believers should not treat this world as a permanent residence or covet its things (10:34; 11:13-16, 26; 12:16).

We can observe also how the heavenly realm (i.e. the kingdom of God) becomes manifest within the world to come. Under the dominion of the superior heavenly realm, the world to come will be subject to the resurrected Jesus and his co-heirs. This is when the “enemies” of the Son (i.e. the Devil and death) will be made subject under his feet (1:13; 10:12-13), and he will reign forever (1:8). Thus, the world to come will be an ideal state, the ultimate fulfillment of God’s purpose for the created order (1:2; 2:5-8). It is the outcome of Jesus’ work to enact the new covenant through his blood, by which he made “purification for sins” (1:3), and overthrew the Devil and the power of death (2:14). Thus, the plight of this world will be brought to an end in the world to come (9:26-28). As a result, the world to come (i.e. the cosmos in its future materially transformed state) will exist in holiness, perfection, confidence, relationship, incorruptibility, and life/resurrection (3:1; 4:9-11; 5:9; 6:2; 8:10-11; 10:14, 19; 11:35; 12:14).³² Therefore, the world to come will be an *intransient and immutable reality* (1:8; 12:28; 13:14).

Now, while the heavenly realm (i.e. the kingdom of God) is primarily associated with the world to come, it cannot be overlooked that it already impinges upon this world. Hebrews

³² As Barrett comments, “For him [i.e. the writer of Hebrews], what lies between heaven and earth, God and man, is not the difference between the phenomena of sense-perception and pure being, but the difference between holiness and sin” (“Eschatology,” 388).

maintains that Jesus entered into this “world” (2:9; 9:11, 26; 10:5) and became the “pioneer” of salvation (2:10; 6:19-20; 10:19-22; 12:2). As a result, he has opened access to the heavenly realm for believers, which can be experienced now through the Holy Spirit (2:2-3; 6:4-5; 12:22-24). However, present participation in the heavenly realm is limited since believers still live in this world. What this means is that the heavenly realm is experienced during this age as a *promise* that awaits *fulfillment* in the world to come (4:1; 8:6; 10:36; 12:28).³³ Thus, the heavenly realm is not understood or experienced in this world through the senses (12:18), but by faith (11:1-3, 7, 9-10, 13-16).³⁴ Therefore, while the heavenly realm is currently *unseen*, the faithful believe that they will *see* it manifested throughout the entire cosmos in the world to come.³⁵ As a testimony to the concrete nature of this coming reality, God has performed signs, wonders, and miracles, and has allotted gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:3-4; 3:9; 6:4-5). But for the most part, the heavenly realm is not visible within this world. Thus, the faithful continue to experience oppression, imprisonment, and the loss of possessions (10:32-36). They do not yet *see* “all things” subjected under their feet (2:8). But they do *see* Jesus, who has gone before them and will soon bring the fulfillment of God’s promises with him when he comes to reign over “all things” (1:2-3, 13; 2:9; 9:28; 10:12-13). As a result, the world to come is an object of hope, the heavenly reality that is to be pursued in the present over all earthly realities (10:34; 11:13-16, 26; 12:16). The writer is fully convinced that what is currently unseen is more real

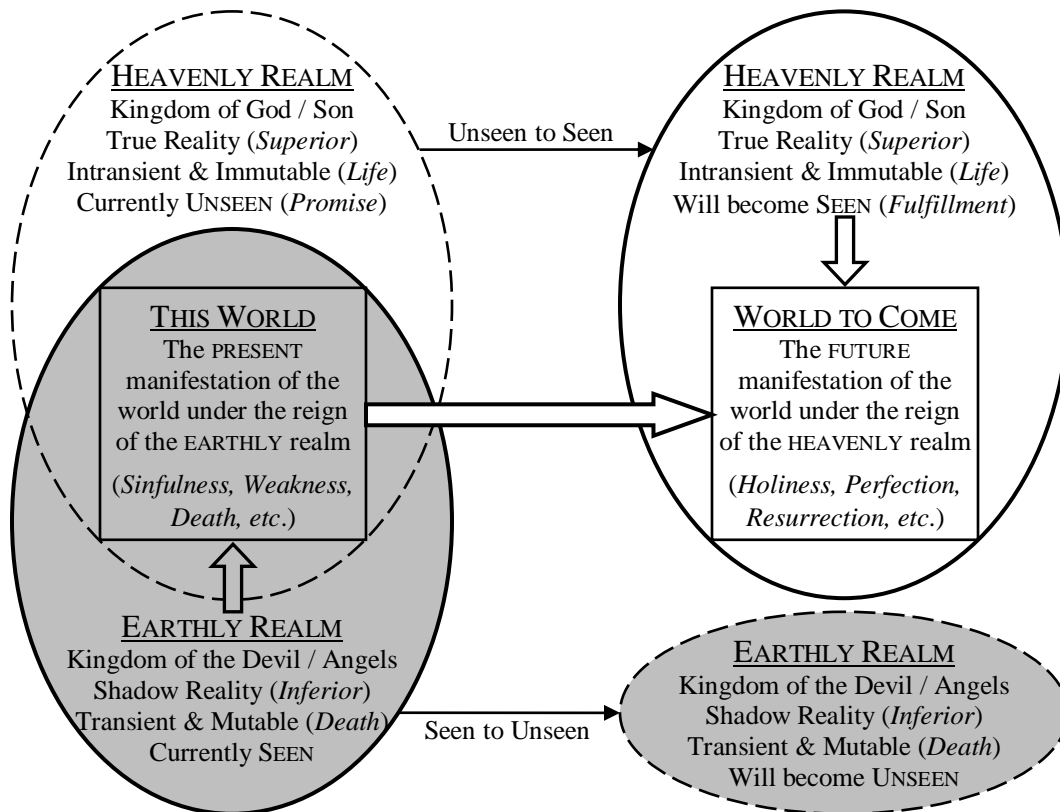
³³ See Barrett, “Eschatology,” 391; Stewart, “Cosmology,” 548-49.

³⁴ “Faith” in Hebrews is more than the conviction that unseen things are real. It is the conviction that what is unseen is real *and* will ultimately become seen. As Robert Brawley argues, “Faith in 11:1, in other words, has to do with the reality of the ultimate subjection of all things to Christ, which is hoped for and not yet seen” (“Discursive Structure and the Unseen in Hebrews 2:8 and 11:1: A Neglected Aspect of the Context” *CBQ* 55 [1993]: 85).

³⁵ Thompson interprets “what cannot be touched” (12:18) as “a code-word for ‘earthly’ in a metaphysical sense” (*Beginnings*, 45). He then infers that the heavenly Mount Zion (12:22-24) is understood by Hebrews as the “intelligible world” of Platonism. However, the present invisible expression of the heavenly realm (12:22-24) must be distinguished from its future concrete expression in the world to come (2:5-8). In other words, the reality of Mount Zion is unseen and untouchable in the present, not because it is *immaterial* in nature, but because it is a *promise* still awaiting concrete *fulfillment* when Christ returns as Lord of “all things.” So Hurst, “Eschatology,” 70-71; Filtvedt, “Creation,” 297.

than what is currently seen. We can attempt to depict the writer’s understanding of the relationship between cosmology and eschatology with Figure 6.3.³⁶

FIGURE 6.3: THE RELATION OF THE TEMPORAL WORLDS AND SPATIAL REALMS IN HEBREWS



6.2.4 The Underlying Story of the Cosmos

We can attempt to summarize this brief discussion of cosmology and eschatology by appealing to the narrative substructure (i.e. underlying story) of Hebrews, particularly as it relates to the current plight and ultimate destiny of the cosmos.³⁷ The key text is Heb 2:5-18, especially the writer’s citation and commentary on Ps 8:4-6 (8:5-7 LXX). God created “all things” to be

³⁶ It must be stated that no diagram can adequately capture the complexity of the cosmology and eschatology of Hebrews. Nonetheless, I think Figure 6.3 offers one way to conceptualize the writer’s thought.

³⁷ On the narrative substructure of Hebrews see Schenck, *Cosmology*, 51-77; Craig Koester, “Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 110-12.

subject to humanity (2:5-8).³⁸ But this world has a problem: “*all things*” are not subjected to them (2:8).³⁹ This world is currently subject to angelic powers and “the one who holds the power of death, that is, the Devil” (2:14). Despite being what is presently seen, then, this world is transient and mutable, a shadow that is fading away. But creation’s plight is not hopeless. It was into this world that Jesus entered in order to “help” humanity (2:9, 16-18; 9:28; 13:6). And by the means of his own flesh and blood, he made purification for sins and overthrew the Devil and death. Thus, God has exalted him to his right hand, so that he might reign over “all things” (1:3-4, 8; 2:9; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1; 10:12). However, “all things” are not yet “subject under his feet” (or humanity’s for that matter). Psalm 8 has not yet come to complete fulfillment. But eventually God will return to set things right (9:28; 10:25, 30-31; 12:26-27). At that time the Devil and death will be subdued (1:13; 10:13), and this transient and mutable world will be rolled up and exchanged like clothing for the world to come (1:10-12). Then “all things” will be subject to the Son and faithful humanity (2:5-8).

This appears to be the storyline that will be resolved in Heb 12:25-29. In other words, the writer probably looks forward to the ultimate fulfillment of several important OT texts in the events of 12:25-29.

- Deut 32:35-36; Hab 2:3-4 (Heb 10:30, 37-38) – God coming to judge
- Ps 110:1 (Heb 1:13; 10:12-13) – God overthrowing the enemies of the Son
- Ps 102:25-27 (Heb 1:10-12) – The Son exchanging this world for the world to come

³⁸ It is frequently debated whether the “son of man” in Heb 2:5-8 refers to Christ or humanity. I find that it refers to humanity, with the recognition that the Son became human in order to “pioneer” the fulfillment of Ps 8 for humanity. As a result, humanity has a destiny to rule over “all things” with the exalted Jesus. See Craig L. Blomberg, “But We See Jesus’: The Relationship between the Son of Man in Hebrews 2.6 and 2.9 and the Implications for English Translations,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham, et al., LNTS 387 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 88-99; Gäbel, “Rivals in Heaven,” 362-65; Hurst, “Christology,” 151-64; Westcott, *Hebrews*, 41-47; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 148-50; Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 101-102. For a christological interpretation see George H. Guthrie and Russell D. Quinn, “A Discourse Analysis of the Use of Psalm 8:4-6 in Hebrews 2:5-9,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 235-46.

³⁹ The problem is not as James W. Thompson claims, “the heavenly world is remote from them,” by which he means the readers felt distant from the transcendent world of Middle Platonism (“Strangers on the Earth: Philosophical Perspectives on the Promise in Hebrews,” *ResQ* 57 [2015]: 193).

- Ps 8:4-6 (Heb 2:5-8) – God bestowing upon faithful humanity their full inheritance through the Son: glory, honor, and dominion in the world to come

Having explored some of the contours of the writer’s cosmology and eschatology, we can now turn to the interpretation of Heb 1:10-12 and 12:25-29. We will deal with Heb 1:10-12 first because it lays the groundwork for understanding 12:25-29.

6.3 Hebrews 1:10-12

Hebrews 1:10-12 is one of seven OT citations in 1:5-14 designed to substantiate the claim that the Son is superior to angels (1:4).⁴⁰ Here the writer quotes Ps 102:25-27, following the LXX (101:26-28) with minor differences. Hebrews 1:10-12 reads as follows.

¹⁰ καί· σὺ κατ’ ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας,
καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ οὐρανοί·
¹¹ αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμένεις,
καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται,
¹² καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἐλίξεις αὐτούς,
ὡς ἱμάτιον καὶ ἀλλαγήσονται·
σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἔτη σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν.

¹⁰ And in the beginning you, Lord, established the earth,
and the heavens are the works of your hands;
¹¹ they will perish, but you remain,
and all things, like clothing, will become old,
¹² and like a cloak you will roll them up,
like clothing they also will be changed;
but you are the same, and your years will not cease.

There are four differences worth noting when comparing Hebrews to Ps 101:26-28 LXX. First, in Heb 1:10a the writer adds “and” (καί) and moves “you” (σύ) forward to link the quotation of the Psalm to Heb 1:8-9. Thus, 1:10-12 continues what God has said of “the Son” (1:8) in

⁴⁰ On the structure of 1:5-14 see the discussion in Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:22-24.

contrast to “the angels” (1:7).⁴¹ Second, in 1:11a the writer shifts the tense of διαμένω from future (“you will remain”) to present (“you remain”). This likely serves to emphasize the Son’s present and continuous abiding nature, thereby strengthening the contrast with the ephemeral nature of the cosmos. Third, in Heb 1:12a the writer has “you will roll up” (ἐλίξεις) instead of “you will change” (ἀλλάξεις). Whether this is a deliberate alteration of the LXX is open to debate, since the reading ἐλίξεις is also attested in some manuscripts of the LXX.⁴² Regardless, this clause appears to be influenced by Isa 34:4, which states, “and heaven will be rolled up like a scroll” (καὶ ἐλιγθήσεται ὁ οὐρανὸς ὡς βιβλίον). Finally, in 1:12b the writer adds “like clothing” (ὡς ἱμάτιον). This addition adds symmetry to a chiasmic arrangement (see below), and extends the clothing imagery for another clause. Often overlooked, the addition of ὡς ἱμάτιον also initiates a change in the meaning of καί in 1:12b. Instead of functioning as a simple coordinating conjunction (i.e. “and”), it now most likely functions adjunctively (i.e. “also”), which places emphasis on the verb “they will be changed” (ἀλλαγῆσονται) as a key addition to the writer’s argument.

Given that Hebrews pairs 1:10-12 with 1:8-9 as words spoken of “the Son” in contrast to what is spoken of “the angels” (1:7), it is important to interpret 1:10-12 in light of 1:7-9. The primary contrast underlying 1:7-12 appears to be the intransience and immutability of the Son versus the transience and mutability of angels.⁴³ The Son holds a superior position as King and Creator, whereas angels are servants and creatures. Thus, the writer’s quotation of Ps 102

⁴¹ As noted by most, the LXX encourages a reading of Ps 101:26-28 as God’s response to the Psalmist instead of the Psalmist’s description of God, thereby opening the door for a messianic interpretation. See the discussion in Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:30.

⁴² So Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 128-29.

⁴³ Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:30-31; Grässer, *Hebräer*, 1:92; Koester, *Hebrews*, 202-203; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 79-81. On the relationship between Jesus and the angels see Gäbel, “Rivals in Heaven,” 357-76; Isaacs, *Sacred*, 164-77; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, WUNT 2/70 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), 119-39.

supports the idea that the Son is superior to the angels by emphasizing his creation of the cosmos and his sovereign ability to bring it to an end.

In Heb 1:10, the writer affirms the Son's role in the creation of the cosmos (cf. 1:2). By altering Ps 102:26 LXX, the writer places the Son in the position of Yahweh, calling him "Lord." Thus, the Son stands outside of the cosmos as its Creator. In 1:11-12, the focus shifts from the Son's role at the beginning of the world to his role at the end. The writer appears to employ a chiasmic arrangement at this point, which can be charted as follows:⁴⁴

- | | |
|---|-------|
| (a) ¹¹ they will perish, | (11a) |
| (b) but you remain, | (11b) |
| (c) and all things, like clothing, will become old, | (11c) |
| (d) ¹² and like a cloak you will roll them up, | (12a) |
| (c') like clothing they also will be changed; | (12b) |
| (b') but you are the same, | (12c) |
| (a') and your years will not cease. | (12d) |

This arrangement contrasts *the intransience and immutability of the Son versus the transience and mutability of the created order*.⁴⁵ The main focus of the contrast is certainly on the Son, which again substantiates his superiority to the angels (cf. 1:4). However, the contrast also tells us about the destiny of the cosmos.

The first two lines of the chiasm (1:11a-b) contrast the transient nature of the cosmos with the intransient nature of the Son. The writer states that heaven and earth are subject to the power of death, for "they will perish" (*ἀπολοῦνται*). The Son, however, will continue to live into eternity, for he "remains" (*διαμένεις*). Thus, while the cosmos will come to an end, the Son will not. This contrast between life and death is further reinforced by the final line of the chiasm

⁴⁴ The parallelism in the chiasm is not exact, but see Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 113; Allen, *Hebrews*, 183; Vanhoye, *Hebrews*, 67; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 127-28.

⁴⁵ For clarification, I use "(in)transience" to refer to temporal longevity, and "(im)mutability" to refer to changeability. The ideas are closely related.

(1:12d), which implies that “will perish” stands in contrast to “your years will not cease.”

Therefore, the cosmos is not eternal. It will endure only as long as the Son “sustains” it (1:3).

The three central lines of the chiasm (1:11c-12b) utilize the imagery of a garment being changed in order to emphasize the mutability of the cosmos in contrast to the Son, who is “the same” (1:12c). The clothing imagery follows a natural progression from a garment wearing out (1:11c), to it being taken off and rolled up (1:12a), to it being exchanged for a new piece of clothing (1:12b). We can discuss each aspect of the progression.

Building off of the idea that the cosmos is transient in nature, the writer explains “all things, like clothing, will become old” (1:11c). Because the cosmos is not eternal in nature, the fact that it “will become old” or “wear out” (*παλαιωθήσονται*) is inevitable. The writer uses this same verb to describe how the new covenant has made the first one “obsolete,” and then comments that “what is becoming obsolete [*παλαιούμενον*] and growing old [*γηράσκον*] will soon disappear” (8:13).⁴⁶ Thus, by stating that the cosmos will become old, the writer affirms once again that it will come to an end. Some infer from the word “disappear” that the cosmos will be annihilated or destroyed.⁴⁷ But this inference is not required. “Disappearing” only conveys that the present cosmos will no longer be seen; it does not explain *how* it will vanish. It could be annihilated, destroyed, or transformed in such a fundamental way that its present expression as a transient and mutable reality will no longer be evident.

At the center of the chiasm, the writer emphasizes the Son’s action to bring an end to the present created order, “and like a cloak you will roll them up” (1:12a). Thus, the cosmos will not

⁴⁶ Note that the writer uses a different verb in 8:13 to communicate “growing old” (*γηράσκω*). This may suggest that something like “obsolete” is a better translation of *παλαιόω* in 1:11.

⁴⁷ E.g. Adams, *Stars*, 184.

simply “wear out” or come to an end on its own through natural processes. Its end will involve an explicit act of the Son, the Creator, Sustainer, and Heir of all things (1:2-3).

The final line in the center section of the chiasm adds another layer to the progression of the writer’s clothing imagery, “like clothing they also will be changed” (1:12b). The majority of interpreters suggest that “will be changed” (*ἀλλαγήσονται*) communicates nothing more than the idea of discontinuity (cf. 12:27).⁴⁸ In other words, the cosmos will be “changed” by being brought to an end, removed, or discarded like old clothing. But this line of interpretation of should be questioned.

First, I find it difficult to restrict the meaning of *ἀλλαγήσονται* to something like “will be ended/removed/discarded.” Besides being lexically improbable, this sort of interpretation undercuts the natural progression of the writer’s clothing imagery, which accentuates *the exchange of an old garment for a new one*. Thus, the word communicates more than simply getting rid of the old (i.e. discontinuity); it also implies its replacement with something new (i.e. continuity). This sense of “exchange” is also necessary to account for the explicit contrast between the mutable cosmos, which “will be changed,” and the immutable Son, who is “the same” (1:12b-c). The contrast would cease to function properly if “change” simply meant “end/remove/discard.”

Second, as discussed above, the writer’s addition of “like clothing” in 1:12b alters the meaning of *καί* from “and” to “also,” thereby underscoring the verb *ἀλλαγήσονται* as an important addition to the writer’s clothing imagery. In other words, it does not simply reassert what has already been said in 1:11c-12a. Instead, it advances the clothing imagery by implying

⁴⁸ E.g. Koester, *Hebrews*, 196; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 113; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 61; deSilva, *Hebrews*, 100-101. Adams is in essential agreement on this point, but then eventually states that it leaves open the possibility of a reconstructed cosmos (*Stars*, 184, 197).

that when the cosmos comes to its useful end in the purposes of God, it will be rolled up and “exchanged” like a garment for a new piece of clothing, “the world to come” (2:5). Thus, the idea that the cosmos “will be changed” does not contradict that it will “perish,” “become old,” or be “rolled up.”⁴⁹ Rather, it brings the clothing imagery to its natural conclusion, the exchange of the old worn out garment for a new and “better” garment. This coheres with one of the major themes of the sermon as a whole: the inferior (i.e. the transient and mutable) is to be replaced, or better yet, *brought to fulfillment*, by the superior (i.e. the intransient and immutable).⁵⁰

Third, I will argue below that the writer describes a similar scene in 12:26-27. When God shakes the entire cosmos, he will not only judge humanity on earth, he will also overthrow the angelic powers in heaven, most notably the Devil and death (12:26). As a result, God will transform this world by removing all forms of transience and mutability, so that it might remain as an intransient and immutable reality (12:27).⁵¹ In other words, he will exchange this world for the world to come.

Finally, support for this interpretation of “will be changed” (*ἀλλαγῆσονται*) is found by observing similarities in thought between the writer of Hebrews and the apostle Paul, who also uses clothing imagery to describe a closely related concept: the transition between the present mortal body and the future resurrection body.⁵² We can look at two passages where Paul discusses this change using clothing imagery.

⁴⁹ Just as we have worn [*ἐφορέσαμεν*] the image of the man of dust, we will also wear [*φορέσομεν*] the image of the man of heaven. ⁵⁰ What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold, I will tell you a mystery! We

⁴⁹ Contra Adams, *Stars*, 184.

⁵⁰ See the writer’s use of “better” (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24).

⁵¹ I will argue below that the term *μετάθεσις* in 12:27 carries both a sense of “transformation” and “removal.”

⁵² Paul also uses clothing imagery to discuss the present transformation of someone who is in Christ (cf. Rom 13:12, 14; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24; 6:11; Col 3:10, 12).

will not all die, but we will all be changed [ἀλλαγησόμεθα], ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed [ἀλλαγησόμεθα]. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on [ἐνδύσασθαι] imperishability, and this mortal body must put on [ἐνδύσασθαι] immortality. ⁵⁴ When this perishable body puts on [ἐνδύσασθαι] imperishability, and this mortal body puts on [ἐνδύσασθαι] immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:49-55)

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed [ἐπενδύσασθαι] with our heavenly dwelling— ³ if indeed, when we have taken it off [ἐκδυσάμενοι] we will not be found naked [γυμνοί]. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed [ἐκδύσασθαι] but to be further clothed [ἐπενδύσασθαι], so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Cor 5:1-7)

We could note all kinds of similarities here between Paul and the writer of Hebrews in terms of language and thought. For example, both writers highlight the problem of transience and mutability, which at its core is a problem of death.⁵³ But important for our purposes, Paul does not use clothing imagery to describe the transition merely in terms of discontinuity. Paul employs clothing imagery to communicate both discontinuity and continuity between what is and what will be. If we can assume that the destiny of believers is tied to the destiny of the cosmos, an idea which both Paul and the writer of Hebrews seem to support (cf. Rom 8:18-25; Heb 2:5-8), then the re-clothing of believers with a resurrected body in Paul appears to offer a parallel to the re-clothing of this world in Heb 1:11-12.

⁵³ We could also briefly mention the following common elements: (1) the contrast between transience/mutability and intransience/immortality, (2) the contrast between the earthly and heavenly, (3) objects in the heavenly realm are “not made with human hands,” but created and “prepared” by God, (4) objects being kept in heaven waiting to be revealed in the world to come, (5) suffering in this present world, (6) the perishable nature of objects in this world, (7) the contrast between this world and the world to come, (8) the present redemptive work of God in this world, (9) the idea of promise and fulfillment linked to the Spirit, (10) the necessity of living by faith over sight, and (11) our present home away from the Father versus our home with the Father in the future.

Therefore, in light of the discussion above, it does not appear that “will be changed” (*ἀλλαγῆσονται*) can be limited to the idea of discontinuity. It most likely carries a sense of *discontinuity* and *continuity*. When the Son decides that this world has reached its useful end in the purposes of God, he will roll it up and exchange it like a garment for the world to come. As a result, this inferior world, characterized by transience and mutability under the reign of the Devil and death, will be replaced by the world to come, a materially transformed world characterized by intransience and immutability under the reign of the resurrected Jesus.

6.4 Hebrews 12:25-29

We can now turn our attention to Heb 12:25-29, where the writer envisions the eschatological consummation in terms of an all-inclusive shaking. We can begin with an overview of Heb 12:18-24.

6.4.1 The Earthly and Heavenly Mountains (Heb 12:18-24)

William Lane rightly describes Heb 12:18-29 as “the pastoral and theological climax of the sermon.”⁵⁴ It is in this section that the writer draws together many of the threads woven throughout his sermon. In 12:18-24, he establishes a contrast between the two realities of Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.⁵⁵ This contrast appears to summarize several important themes in the book. For example, it highlights the differences between the first and new covenants, the effectiveness of each covenant revelation in regards to dealing with sin, Moses and Jesus as the mediators, the earthly and the heavenly nature of the respective revelations, and what is understood and experienced through the senses versus faith. But ultimately, the writer seems to

⁵⁴ Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:448.

⁵⁵ On this contrast see Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 267-68.

use the images of Mount Sinai and Mount Zion to reflect on how Jesus has “set free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (2:15). At the core of the contrast, then, is the difference between a reality that leads to *death* and a reality that leads to *life*.

The writer explains that his readers “have not come” to a reality resembling Mount Sinai (12:18-21).⁵⁶ In the presence of the overwhelming sights and sounds of the Sinai theophany, the people of Israel responded with sheer terror. They could not handle being near to the presence of God, nor could they bear any of his words. To get too close to the holy God meant certain death. And under the reality of the first covenant, there was no solution to this problem, no pathway to enter into his presence (cf. 7:11; 9:8-10; 10:1). The writer highlights that even Moses trembled with fear. Thus, the people were stuck, bound by “the fear of death” (2:15).

However, because of the high priestly work of Jesus, believers “have come” into the new covenant reality of Mount Zion (Heb 12:22-24). Here believers are able to enter into the presence of the “living God” and participate in the festive celebration. But by entering the city they also have come to “the Judge, who is God of all things” (12:23). This description of God almost seems out of place at first sight among the joyous and inclusive atmosphere of Zion, but it is important to recognize that God’s holy character, fully on display in the description of Mount Sinai, remains unchanged.⁵⁷ The difference is that Jesus has opened a new and living pathway into God’s presence (10:19-22). As a result, believers are no longer subject to the “fear of death” in the presence of God like those at Sinai (cf. 2:15; 13:6). The new covenant blood of Jesus speaks of grace and salvation rather than condemnation.

⁵⁶ Cf. Exod 19:12-16, 21-23; Deut 4:11-12; 5:22-26; 9:19.

⁵⁷ Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 656.

6.4.2 Beware That You Heed God's Voice (Heb 12:25)

Based on the differences between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion (12:18-24), the writer issues a solemn warning in 12:25a, "Beware that you do not refuse the one who is speaking."⁵⁸ The warning to not "refuse" suggests a comparison to the story of Israel, who could not bear listening to the voice of God and "begged" that he no longer speak (12:19).⁵⁹ Implicit in their refusal is a rejection of God. Thus, Heb 12:25a is another *warning against apostasy* (cf. 2:1-4). "The one who is speaking" most likely refers to God, who has spoken twice in two covenants through his chosen agents (cf. 1:1-2a).⁶⁰

Why must the readers heed God's voice? Because condemnation is certain for those who refuse him. Hebrews 12:25b-c is a conditional sentence that employs a lesser-to-greater (i.e. *a fortiori*) argument, "for if those did not escape after refusing the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we turn away from the one who warns from heaven?"⁶¹ The writer's reasoning is based on the differences between the realities of the first and new covenants. It was the exodus generation who "did not escape" after rebelling against God (3:16-18). As a result, they were not allowed to enter God's "rest." God held them accountable according to the revelation they had received. The rhetorical question of 12:25c serves to underscore the movement from lesser-to-greater, which is based on the fact that believers have received a greater revelation from God under the new covenant, a warning that comes "from heaven" (i.e. Mount Zion). Thus, there is greater responsibility and accountability. Therefore,

⁵⁸ The form of the warning is similar to 3:12 (cf. 3:12-19).

⁵⁹ The verb "refuse" (*παραιτέομαι*) is used in both 12:19 and 25 but with different meanings. See Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 683; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:475.

⁶⁰ Some interpreters identify two speakers: Moses and Jesus. However, 12:26 clarifies that only one speaker is in view. See the discussions in Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:475-77; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 379-80; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 334; Gene Smillie, "'The One Who is Speaking' in Hebrews 12:25," *TynBul* 55 (2004): 275-94.

⁶¹ Note the similarities in form and content to 2:2-3a. See Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 661-63. For other lesser-to-greater arguments cf. Heb 2:2-3; 9:13-14; 10:28-29; 12:9.

members of the new covenant community *will certainly not escape condemnation for apostasy* under the greater heavenly revelation.

6.4.3 The Past and Promised Shakings (Heb 12:26)

Hebrews 12:26-27 has a dual function. First, it provides the writer's reasoning, via scriptural argument and explanation, why the apostate will not escape condemnation (12:25b-c): God the Creator and Judge of the cosmos has promised a final, all-inclusive judgment. Second, it provides the writer's reasoning why the readers ought to give thanks and worship God (12:28b): Because God will bring to fruition an "unshakable kingdom" (12:27b-28a). Thus, it is important to recognize the movement in 12:25-29 from the threat of condemnation (12:25) to the hope of salvation (12:28). Our interpretation of 12:26-27 must account for this transition.⁶² These verses read:

²⁶ οὗ ἡ φωνὴ τὴν γῆν ἐσάλειψεν τότε, νῦν δὲ ἐπήγγελλται λέγων· ἔτι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σείσω οὐ μόνον τὴν γῆν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν οὐρανόν. ²⁷ τὸ δὲ ἔτι ἅπαξ δηλοῖ [τὴν] τῶν σαλευομένων μετὰθεςιν ὡς πεπονημένων, ἵνα μείνη τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα.

²⁶ His voice shook the earth at that time; but now he has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." ²⁷ This phrase, "yet once more," indicates the transformation of what can be shaken—that is, created things—in order that what cannot be shaken may remain.

6.4.3.1 The Past Shaking of the Earth (Heb 12:26a)

Concerning God at Mount Sinai, the writer states, "his voice shook the earth at that time" (12:26a; cf. Heb 12:18-21; Deut 4:11-12; Exod 19:18-19). At first glance the idea of "shaking" seems to recall Exod 19:18 (MT), which states that "the whole mountain shook violently." However, this appears unlikely given that the writer normally follows the LXX, which replaces

⁶² So Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 88-89.

the above phrase with “and all the people were exceedingly amazed.” Thus, the writer probably echoes one of several poetic descriptions of Sinai as a *theophany* of Yahweh.⁶³ Not only does Mount Sinai play a central role in the theophany tradition of the OT, one of the standard features of the tradition is the “shaking” of the natural world as Yahweh steps forth to act for purposes of condemnation and salvation.⁶⁴

Observing that only the “earth” was shaken, some interpreters remark that the writer of Hebrews is restrained in his description of Sinai compared to other contemporary Jewish writers, who describe it as an event that shook the entire cosmos (cf. 4 Ezra 3:17-18; 2 Bar. 59:3; LAB 11:5; 23:10; 32:7-8).⁶⁵ First, it is important to recognize that these contemporary Jewish writers did not use such language to emphasize a cosmic catastrophe that accompanied the giving of the Law.⁶⁶ Instead, they employed the language to highlight the glory and magnitude of Yahweh coming to deliver the Law because they considered it to be “the fundamental act of God’s self-disclosure.”⁶⁷ But in Hebrews, the Sinai event is not viewed as the ultimate revelation of God. It has been superseded by the “better” revelation of God through the Son (1:1-2), which will come to fruition in a full disclosure of God himself at the consummation (cf. 9:28; 11:27; 12:14, 26b). Therefore, the reason for the writer’s “restraint” (so to speak) is the continuation of his lesser-to-greater argument. God’s lesser revelation at Sinai only shook the lower portion of the cosmos.

⁶³ Cf. Judg 5:4-5; Pss 68:8 [67:9 LXX]; 77:18 [76:19]; 114:7 [113:7].

⁶⁴ We have already encountered the theophany tradition in Matt 24:29-31, Mark 13:24-27, and Luke 21:25-28. For a discussion of the Sinai theophany tradition see Jörg Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer Alttestamentlichen Gattung*, WMANT 10 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1965), 100-11.

⁶⁵ E.g. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:478; Adams, *Stars*, 187-88.

⁶⁶ Contra Adams, *Stars*, 187.

⁶⁷ Otto Betz, “The Eschatological Interpretation of the Sinai-Tradition in Qumran and in the New Testament,” *RevQ* 6 (1967): 89.

6.4.3.2 The Promised Shaking of Earth and Heaven (Heb 12:26b)

In 12:26b the writer shifts to the present revelation of God, which carries a promise concerning the future shaking of the cosmos.⁶⁸ He writes, “but now he has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.’” The majority of this verse consists of a quotation from Hag 2:6 (LXX).

Before looking at how the writer of Hebrews has adapted Haggai for his own purposes, we can make a few observations about Hag 2:6 in its original context (also cf. 2:21). Haggai 2:6 was a word of encouragement and hope from the Lord for the post-exilic Jewish community struggling to rebuild the temple. The people were to take strength from knowing that God promised to be with them in their efforts (2:5). Furthermore, they were to take courage because the Lord pledged to “shake” the cosmos and the nations so that the wealth of the nations would flow to the temple and fill it with splendor (2:6-8). The language of cosmic catastrophe in Haggai belongs to the theophany tradition of the OT.⁶⁹ However, instead of emphasizing the reaction of the created universe to the presence of God, Haggai stresses *God’s initiative within the created world to act on behalf of his people*.⁷⁰ God was promising to supply the materials needed to “fill this house with glory” (2:7), so that “the glory of this house will be great, the latter more than the former” (2:9). Haggai uses the same action-focused language of theophany for a different purpose in 2:21-23. There the Lord says that he is about to shake the cosmos and the nations in order to install his chosen ruler. Thus, in both 2:6 and 2:21 “shaking” does not

⁶⁸ On the temporal shift see Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:478; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 664.

⁶⁹ So Jeremias, *Theophanie*, 66-69; David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 67; Ralph S. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, WBC 32 (Waco: Word, 1984), 157-58; Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*, ApOTC 25 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015), 69-70.

⁷⁰ See Jeremias, *Theophanie*, 66-69. Also note that Haggai uses the active voice (“I will shaken”) instead of the passive voice, which occurs in most theophany accounts (cf. Judg 5:4-5; Ps 18:6-12; Nah 1:5; Hab 3:3-6; Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25).

indicate the concrete means by which God would act.⁷¹ Instead, “shaking” is a metaphor for the Lord *causing* his purposes (one could even say his promises) to be fulfilled within history.⁷² It is possible that Hebrews uses Hag 2:6 in a similar fashion.⁷³ However, it is noteworthy that 2 Baruch alludes to Hag 2:6 in order to describe the dissolution of the cosmos, followed by its renewal (31:5-32:6). Thus, it is also possible that Hebrews follows a different route. Fortunately for us, the writer of Hebrews reveals how he understands Haggai by: (1) framing Hag 2:6 as a promise, (2) making adaptations to Haggai, and (3) offering his own interpretation of the verse in Heb 12:27.

By framing Hag 2:6 as something that God “has promised” (ἐπήγγελται), the writer underscores the continuing significance of this text as an unfulfilled prophecy. Furthermore, this description suggests that, for the writer of Hebrews, Hag 2:6 is not merely an oracle pertaining to judgment.⁷⁴ The idea that God makes (and is faithful to fulfill) promises is one of the major themes of the book and is in every instance positive in nature, always pertaining to the blessing, salvation, and inheritance of God’s people.⁷⁵ Therefore, by framing Haggai’s prophecy as a promise, the writer emphasizes his interest in *the salvific aspect of God’s shaking of the cosmos*, even though it will certainly involve judgment.⁷⁶ This will be an important point to recall when

⁷¹ Contra Adams, who essentially reads Hag 2:6 as a literal description of events when he writes, “A comprehensive cosmic quake is envisaged as a *means* of judgment on the nations,” although he goes on to say that the cosmic quake “is not a world-ending catastrophe” (*Stars*, 48, italics added).

⁷² The “shaking” of Haggai 2:6 appears to have worked itself out in the concrete events of history recorded in Ezra 5:1-7:28 (esp. 6:3-10, 22; 7:14-23, 27-28). See Petterson, *Haggai*, 70. To suggest this historical application does not rob the language of its intrinsic eschatological import. As explored in earlier chapters, historical instances of Yahweh’s activity were often understood to embody and anticipate his future activity at the end of the age.

⁷³ For discussions on Hebrews’ interpretation of the OT see G. B. Caird, “The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *CJT* 5 (1959): 44-51; Ronald E. Clemens, “The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews,” *SwJT* 28 (1985): 36-45; R. T. France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” *TynBul* 47 (1996): 245-76.

⁷⁴ So Mitchell, *Hebrews*, 288; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 494-95. Contra Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:479. It is also more than simply “an unfailing word of God” as deSilva suggests (*Hebrews*, 470).

⁷⁵ See “to promise” (ἐπαγγέλλομαι) in 6:13; 10:23; 11:11; 12:26; and “promise” (ἐπαγγελία) in 4:1; 6:12, 15, 17; 7:6; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9, 13, 17, 33, 39; Koester, *Hebrews*, 110-12. Ellingworth recognizes the positive force of the word, but then strangely suggests that it does not pertain to the writer’s use of Haggai (*Hebrews*, 686).

⁷⁶ So Westcott, *Hebrews*, 419; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 665.

the writer turns to elaborate on the meaning and purpose of Hag 2:6 in 12:27. His interpretation of Haggai will likely focus on the *salvation* brought about by God’s shaking of the cosmos rather than judgment. As a result, the readers/listeners can be fully confident that Haggai’s prophecy will lead to their “promised eternal inheritance” (9:15; cf. 1:14; 4:1; 6:11-12; 10:35-36; 12:27-28).

Besides framing Hag 2:6 as a “promise,” the writer also alters the text to highlight certain features. We can look at the verses side-by-side for comparison purposes (Table 6.1).

TABLE 6.1: A COMPARISON OF HAGGAI 2:6 AND HEBREWS 12:26B

<u>HAGGAI 2:6 (LXX)</u>	<u>HEBREWS 12:26B</u>
ἔτι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σείσω τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ τὴν ξηρὰν	ἔτι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σείσω οὐ μόνον τὴν γῆν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν οὐρανόν.
Yet once more I will shake the heaven and the earth and the sea and the dry land.	Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.

We can observe three changes made to Hag 2:6. First, the writer eliminates Haggai’s reference to “and the sea and the dry land.” Second, he switches the order of “heaven” and “earth.” And finally, he adds the wording “not only ... but also.”⁷⁷ These changes all highlight the fact that the writer wants to draw attention to *the shaking of heaven*.⁷⁸ This is the new element which God’s eschatological shaking will bring in comparison to Mount Sinai, which only shook the earth (12:26a).

⁷⁷ The addition of “but” (*ἀλλά*) alters the meaning of *καί* from “and” to “also.”

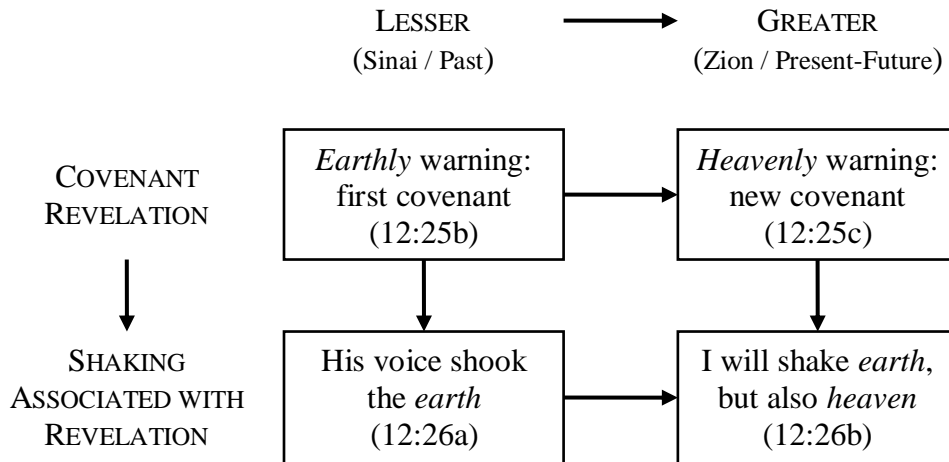
⁷⁸ So most interpreters, e.g. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 380; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 686; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 665; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:480; Koester, *Hebrews*, 547; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 494; Davies, *Hebrews*, 129.

Why does the writer stress this point? Based on the writer's discussion in the immediately preceding paragraph concerning the participation of believers in the heavenly realm (12:22-24) and their impending judgment (12:25), some interpreters suggest that the shaking of heaven refers to God's judgment of the heavenly realm (i.e. they interpret "heaven" as referring to God's dwelling above as opposed to the "sky").⁷⁹ This, it is argued, preserves the contrast between the earthly and heavenly realms in 12:18-24, and underscores that believers will not escape judgment (12:25). However, it is unnecessary to assume that God will shake his own dwelling (for it is unshakable),⁸⁰ or that believers actually dwell in the heavenly realm during this age. According to the writer, despite already having a share in God's kingdom, believers remain firmly entrenched as created beings *on earth* during this age. Furthermore, the writer transitions from talking about the earthly and heavenly covenant revelations in 12:25b-c to the *cosmological effects* of each covenant revelation in 12:26. In association with the earthly covenant delivered at Sinai (12:25b), God shook the earth (12:26a). But in association with the heavenly covenant delivered through the Son (12:25c), God will shake earth and heaven (12:26b). This movement can be illustrated with the following diagram (fig. 6.4).

⁷⁹ E.g. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:480; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 665-66; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 495; Thompson, *Hebrews*, 263-64; Filtvedt, "Creation," 298-99; Thomas, "Old Testament," 318.

⁸⁰ This also misunderstands the nature of a theophany, where the created universe shakes in response to the coming of God from his dwelling.

FIGURE 6.4: THE COSMOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF EACH COVENANT REVELATION



Therefore, the combination of “earth” and “heaven” in 12:26 most likely refers to *the totality of the cosmos*.⁸¹ This coheres with the use of “heaven” and “earth” in 1:10-12, which envisions the same event using different imagery. Thus, the shaking that will accompany God’s final theophany will be greater in scope than the one which accompanied his Sinai theophany.⁸² No “created thing” will be able to escape the Day of the Lord, the day when “all things” will have to stand in the presence of the Judge (4:13; 12:23).

But even the recognition that the entire cosmos will be shaken on the Day of the Lord does not fully account for the writer’s emphasis on the shaking of heaven. The writer could have accomplished this emphasis simply by omitting “the sea and the dry land” from Hag 2:6. Yet, he went on to switch the order of “heaven” and “earth,” and add “not only ... but also.” Why, then, does the writer emphasize this theme with such force?

⁸¹ So most interpreters, e.g. Adams, *Stars*, 188; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 687; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 380; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 235-36; Davies, *Hebrews*, 129; deSilva, *Perseverance*, 471; Grässer, *Hebräer*, 3:332-33; Weiss, *Hebräer*, 689-91; Braun, *Hebräer*, 443; Michel, *Hebräer*, 324; Smith, *Hebrews*, 166; Mitchell, *Hebrews*, 288.

⁸² Since the writer seems to view the shaking of the earth at Sinai as a concrete occurrence, he also probably conceived of the promised eschatological shaking as a concrete occurrence on a larger scale. So Adams, *Stars*, 189. Contra Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 88-89; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:480.

Overlooked or underestimated by nearly all interpreters, the answer appears to be that God will not only judge humanity on earth, he will also judge *the angelic powers in heaven* (cf. Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25).⁸³ It should be recalled that the first two chapters of Hebrews are dedicated to establishing the superiority of the Son over these angelic beings, particularly the Devil, the one who holds the power of death over this world (2:14).⁸⁴ One of the core texts that the writer uses to substantiate the exalted status of the Son is Ps 110:1 (see Heb 1:3-4, 13; 8:1; 12:2), which the writer interprets in relation to the cross *and* the parousia, “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, ‘he sat down at the right hand of God,’ and since then he has been waiting ‘until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet’” (Heb 10:12-13). The Day of the Lord, then, is the time when the “enemies” of the Son will be overthrow once and for all, thus bringing to completion the victory of the death and resurrection of Jesus over the Devil and death.⁸⁵ As a result, God’s judgment of the angelic powers will facilitate a change in who holds dominion over the cosmos, ushering in the world to come by “subjecting all things” under the feet of the Son and faithful humanity (Heb 2:5-8; cf. Ps 8:4-6).⁸⁶ *The shaking of the angelic powers, then, is the reason why the writer frames Hag 2:6 as a “promise” pertaining to the salvation of believers.* God’s overthrow of the Devil and death will remove the last impediment to humanity receiving glory, honor, and dominion over an “unshakeable kingdom” (12:28).

Since the writer of Hebrews will draw out the meaning and purpose of 12:26 in 12:27, it is vital to take into account the writer’s emphasis on God’s shaking of heaven, particularly as it

⁸³ Briefly mentioning the judgment of angelic powers, but not drawing out its implication is Koester, *Hebrews*, 547.

⁸⁴ On the relation of Heb 1-2 see Hurst, “Christology,” 151-64; Caird, “Exegetical Method,” 44-51.

⁸⁵ Besides the Devil and death, the “enemies” also likely include those who persecute the faithful (10:32-24; 11:35-38; 12:2-3), and the apostate (6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:16-17). But these groups are on “earth.”

⁸⁶ Paul draws a similar connection between Pss 110 and 8 in reference to Christ’s defeat of angelic powers at the parousia (1 Cor 15:24-26).

relates to God's judgment of the Devil and death. With the final overthrow of the Devil and death, the last step in God's redemption of all things is reached, clearing the way for that which is characterized by death (i.e. what can be shaken) to become that which is characterized by life (i.e. what cannot be shaken).

6.4.4 The Writer's Interpretation of Haggai (Heb 12:27)

In Heb 12:27 the writer offers an interpretation of Hag 2:6, particularly as it relates to the future of the cosmos. He writes, "This phrase, 'yet once more,' indicates the transformation of what can be shaken—that is, created things—in order that what cannot be shaken may remain."

By highlighting the phrase "yet once more" (ἔτι ἄπαξ) the writer draws attention to the *finality* of the promised shaking (cf. 9:26, 28; 10:2).⁸⁷ God's shaking of the cosmos, then, is the decisive event looked forward to throughout the entire book. It is the moment when the promises of God will come to fruition. The writer explains what Haggai's phrase "indicates" by elaborating on the meaning of God's shaking for the cosmos (12:27a) and the purpose behind it (12:27b).

6.4.4.1 What Can and Cannot Be Shaken

The expressions "what can be shaken" (τῶν σαλευομένων) and "what cannot be shaken" (τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα) are open to a variety of interpretations. Most interpreters generally agree that the former describes this world, whereas the latter describes the world to come. But this is where agreement ends. So, we must try to answer the following questions. (1) What are the

⁸⁷ See Johnson, *Hebrews*, 335; Spicq, *Hébreux*, 2:412.

unspecified objects underlying these phrases?⁸⁸ (2) What does it mean to be “shakable” and “unshakeable?”

(1) We can begin by trying to identify the unspecified object underlying “what can be shaken” (τῶν σαλευομένων). The writer states in 12:26 that “heaven” and “earth” will be shaken, and 12:27a elaborates on the meaning of this event. Thus, “what can be shaken” most likely retains a reference to the totality of the cosmos.⁸⁹ The writer reiterates the comprehensive scope “of what can be shaken” by placing “that is, created things” (ὡς πεπονημένων; lit. “as of what has been made”) in apposition to it. It is noteworthy that the writer has already used ποιέω in 1:2 to express God’s creation the universe. Additionally, “as” (ὡς) does not draw a comparison to “what can be shaken,” but “indicates a real property” pertaining to it (cf. 3:5-6).⁹⁰ Thus, “what can be shaken” is defined by its createdness. Therefore, it is highly probable that the unspecified object underlying “what can be shaken” is *the totality of the cosmos*.⁹¹

Most interpreters identify a different object underlying “what cannot be shaken” (τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα), the heavenly/immaterial kingdom of God.⁹² This conclusion is often based on the idea that the writer utilizes a Platonic dualism in 12:18-29 between the world of sense perception and the world of forms. And since it is assumed that the former is utterly destroyed in 12:26, “what can be shaken” and “what cannot be shaken” are two wholly discontinuous worlds. But this conclusion should be questioned. It must be stressed that the writer unambiguously uses the

⁸⁸ This question seeks to identify the *what* in “what can(not) be shaken.”

⁸⁹ Some interpreters want to limit the underlying object to the negative result of God’s judgment (i.e. what is condemned) as opposed to all things, e.g. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:481-82; Filtvedt, “Creation,” 299-300; Lincoln, *Hebrews*, 98-99; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 496. However, 12:27a “indicates” the *meaning* of the cosmic quake, not the *result* of it, which is not stated until 12:27b.

⁹⁰ So Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 688; BDAG, 1104.

⁹¹ So most interpreters, e.g. Adams, *Stars*, 190; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 688; Koester, *Hebrews*, 547; Mitchell, *Hebrews*, 288; Smith, *Hebrews*, 166; Davies, *Hebrews*, 129.

⁹² See e.g. Thompson, *Beginning*, 41-52; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 689; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 381; Grässer, *Hebräer*, 3:332-35; Weiss, *Hebräer*, 689-92; Davies, *Hebrews*, 129; deSilva, *Perseverance*, 471-72; Smith, *Hebrews*, 166; Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 221-22; Mitchell, *Hebrews*, 288.

designation “all things,” to describe *both* this world (1:3; 2:10; 3:4) and the world to come (1:2; 2:8). In other words, the writer identifies the totality of the cosmos as the object underlying “what can be shaken” *and* “what cannot be shaken.” This is not to suggest that this world and the world to come are of the same material nature, since one is “shakable” while the other “unshakeable,” but it does imply that the same essential object stands behind each reality. Therefore, the unspecified object underlying both “what can be shaken” and “what cannot be shaken” is *the totality of the cosmos*. This implies a certain level of *continuity* between this world and the world to come.

(2) The writer emphasizes a level of *discontinuity* between this world and the world to come with the contrasting descriptions “shakable” and “unshakeable.” What does it mean for the writer to describe the totality of the cosmos as “shakable” during this age but “unshakeable” during the age to come? As most interpreters agree, this contrast provides the writer with a means to emphasize *the transient and mutable character of this world as opposed to the intransient and immutable character of the world to come*.⁹³ But again, many interpreters think that the writer conceives of this contrast in Platonic terms. As a result, these interpreters equate “shakable” with earthly/material (12:18-21), and “unshakeable” with heavenly/immaterial (12:22-24). This interpretation of the contrast is not entirely without basis, but it is inadequate nonetheless. According to the writer of Hebrews, identifying “what can be shaken” with materiality fails to probe the depth of the problem affecting this world; correspondingly, identifying “what cannot be shaken” with immateriality fails to probe the height of God’s salvation of this world.

The foremost problem affecting the cosmos from the perspective of the writer is not that it is material in nature, but that its materiality is transient and mutable on account of death. All

⁹³ E.g. Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 667; Adams, *Stars*, 190.

things will wear out and perish (1:10). The primary solution, then, is not to remove materiality altogether, but to do away with death. According to the writer of Hebrews, this is precisely why Jesus entered into this transient and mutable world, “in order that, through death, he might destroy the one who holds the power of death, that is, the Devil” (2:14). But despite Jesus’ victory on the cross, which has enabled believers to be set free from “the fear of death” (2:15; 12:18-21), and enter into the presence of the “living God” (12:22-24), the Devil and death are not yet vanquished. Their utter destruction must wait until the consummation, when God *has promised* to shake not only the earth, *but also the heaven*. God’s judgment of the angelic powers of heaven will overthrow the “enemies” of the Son (1:13; 10:13; cf. Ps 110:1), namely the Devil and death, thereby “subjecting all things” under the feet of the Son (2:8; cf. Ps 8:6), so that “all things” might become his inheritance (1:2). All of this implies that, at its core, “shakableness” is not a problem of materiality for the writer of Hebrews, but *a problem of enslavement to the Devil and death*.

Having been liberated from the Devil and death, the totality of the cosmos will become “unshakeable.” As commonly observed, “what cannot be shaken” alludes to a fixed idiom in the LXX where God’s kingdom and his people share in his unshakable character.⁹⁴ The writer adds that this intransient and immutable reality will “remain” (μένω). In Hebrews, the exalted Son is the prime example of what “remains” (1:11; 7:24).⁹⁵ He is the one who lives by “the power of an indestructible life” (7:16), and is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8). This implies that what is unshakeable “remains,” not because it is immaterial in nature, but because it

⁹⁴ See e.g. 1 Chron 16:30; Pss 16:8 [15:8 LXX]; 46:5-6 [45:6-7]; 62:2 [61:3]; 93:1 [92:1]; 96:9-11 [95:9-11]; 125:1 [124:1]; Prov 3:26; G. Bertram, “σαλεύω,” *TDNT* 7:65-67.

⁹⁵ Note especially the connection here to “remain” (διαμένω) in 1:11. So Adams, *Stars*, 190.

shares in the abiding nature of the resurrected and exalted Jesus.⁹⁶ Furthermore, this implies that the world to come will be a *materially transformed world*, consistent with the writer's belief in resurrection.⁹⁷ In other words, the world to come will be materially superior or "better" compared to this world, free from the ravages of death.⁹⁸ As the writer states, "here we do not have a lasting [μένουσαν] city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (13:14; cf. 11:10, 16; 12:22).

In conclusion, I have argued that the writer does not hold a negative view of materiality, nor does he conceive of salvation as an escape from materiality. To describe the totality of the cosmos as "shakable" during this age means that it is *a transient and mutable reality subject to the Devil, the one who holds the power of death*. Correspondingly, to describe the totality of the cosmos as "unshakeable" during the age to come means that it is *an intransient and immutable reality subject to the Son, the one who holds the power of an indestructible life*. There is continuity and discontinuity between this world and the next.

6.4.4.2 The Meaning of Μετάθεσις

The writer describes what God's shaking will do to the transient and mutable world with the term *μετάθεσις*. In other words, the writer uses this term to explain the transition between "what can be shaken" and "what cannot be shaken." *Μετάθεσις* has a basic meaning of "removal" (in a

⁹⁶ Contra Adams, who claims that the kingdom is unshakeable because it "is not liable to the mighty convulsion" (*Stars*, 191).

⁹⁷ The resurrection of the dead is stated as basic teaching in Hebrews (6:1-2), and it is distinguished from mere resuscitation (11:35). Eisele claims that the writer no longer expected the resurrection of the dead (*Ein unerschütterliches Reich*, 421-25). But this is surely misguided, see Wright, *Resurrection*, 457-61; William L. Lane, "Living a Life of Faith in the Face of Death: The Witness of Hebrews," in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 247-69.

⁹⁸ So Lincoln, *Hebrews*, 96-97; Wright, *Hebrews*, 165. As Wright affirms, the future hope in Hebrews is "for the world that will last, a world more solid, more real than the present one" (*Resurrection*, 459).

spatial sense from one place to another) or “change/transformation.”⁹⁹ The majority of interpreters opt for the former¹⁰⁰ as opposed to the latter.¹⁰¹ However, I think the writer suggests a blended meaning, a “transformation” that entails a “removal.” This conclusion is supported by the following evidence.

(1) When the writer uses *μετάθεσις* elsewhere in Hebrews (7:12; 11:5), he employs both senses of the word.¹⁰² In 7:12 he states, “For when the priesthood is changed [*μετατιθεμένης*], by necessity there is also a change [*μετάθεσις*] in the law.” The writer goes on to explain what he means by this “change” in 7:18-19, “For on one hand there is a *setting aside* [*ἀθέτησις*] of the former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect), but on the other hand there is an *introduction* [*ἐπισημαγωγή*] of a better hope, through which we approach to God.” In 7:12, then, *μετάθεσις* involves both the setting aside of the inferior (i.e. the levitical priesthood and the first covenant) and the bringing in of the superior (i.e. Jesus the high priest and the new covenant). Both a removal and a change are implied. The same is true of 11:5, where the writer states, “By faith, Enoch was taken [*μετετέθη*] so that he did not experience death; and ‘he was not found because God took [*μετέθηκεν*] him,’ for before his removal [*μεταθέσεως*], he had received approval that ‘he had pleased God.’” This verse also combines the idea of “removal” (i.e. Enoch was removed from earth and taken to heaven) with

⁹⁹ BDAG, 639.

¹⁰⁰ Those arguing for “removal” include: Attridge, *Hebrews*, 380-81; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 688; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:482; Koester, *Hebrews*, 547; Adams, *Stars*, 189-90; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 235-36; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 495-96; Thompson, *Hebrews*, 269; Thompson, *Beginning*, 48-49; Mitchell, *Hebrews*, 288; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 335; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 667-68; Lincoln, *Hebrews*, 98; Schenck, *Cosmology*, 127; deSilva, *Perseverance*, 471-72; Moffatt, *Hebrews* 221-22; Filtvedt, “Creation,” 299; Grässer, *Hebräer*, 335-36; Windisch, *Hebräerbrief*, 115; Braun, *Hebräer*, 444; Vanhoye, *Hebrews*, 216; Smith, *Hebrews*, 166.

¹⁰¹ Those arguing for “change/transformation” include: Christian Maurer, “*μετατιθημι, μετάθεσις*,” *TDNT* 8:161; Witherington, *Letters*, 345; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 202; Michel, *Hebräer*, 325; Spicq, *Hébreux*, 2:412; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 85-87.

¹⁰² Also see the related terms “transfer/change” (*μετατιθημι*) in 7:12; 11:5; “unchangeable” (*ἀμετάθετος*) in 6:17, 18; and “annulment/removal” (*ἀθέτησις*) in 7:19; 9:26.

the idea of “change” (i.e. Enoch was transformed from a mortal being into an immortal being). In other words, Enoch experienced a “translation” both into a new sphere and into a new form of life.¹⁰³ Thus, lexically speaking, the writer seems to use *μετάθεσις* to communicate a transformation that involves a removal.

(2) Some interpreters support the choice of “removal” by identifying a contrast in 12:27 between *μετάθεσις* and *μένω* (“remain”).¹⁰⁴ However, while there is certainly a contrast between “what can be shaken” and “what cannot be shaken,” it is not so clear that there is also a contrast between *μετάθεσις* and *μένω*. It bears observing that the primary relationship between 12:27a and 12:27b is not one of contrast, but purpose (*ἵνα*). Following this logic, the translation “transformation/removal” makes excellent sense. We could paraphrase by saying that God’s shaking in 12:26 “indicates the transformation of the created universe via the removal of death, in order that it may remain as an intransient and immutable reality.” What the writer describes, then, is the transformation of the cosmos from shakable to unshakable, a change that necessarily involves the removal of all that is transient and mutable on account of death. If this is correct, 12:27 envisions God’s redemption of the cosmos by conforming it to the abiding nature of its Lord and Heir, the resurrected Jesus.

(3) A blended meaning of *μετάθεσις* also coheres with my interpretation of Heb 1:10-12, a text which clearly relates to 12:26-27. In 1:10-12, the writer utilized clothing imagery to describe the fate of the cosmos. Like a garment, heaven and earth “will become old,” the Son “will roll them up,” and they “will be changed.” The word in 1:10-12 which most closely aligns

¹⁰³ So Middleton, *New Heaven*, 202.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:482; Koester, *Hebrews*, 547; Adams, *Stars*, 190; Thompson, *Beginning*, 48-49.

with *μετάθεσις* is “they will be changed” (*ἀλλαγῆσονται*).¹⁰⁵ Once the present cosmos comes to its useful end in the purposes of God, the Son will roll it up and “exchange” it like a garment for a new and “better” piece of clothing, the world to come. Note that the idea of an “exchange” once again combines the notions of transformation and removal. The “lesser” (i.e. this world) is replaced and brought to fulfillment by the “better” (i.e. the world to come). There will be both continuity and discontinuity.

In conclusion, the evidence above suggests that the most probable rendering of *μετάθεσις* is “*transformation*,” with the recognition that it also entails a “*removal*.”¹⁰⁶ Both continuity and discontinuity are involved, and the tendency to push for one sense to the exclusion of the other should be resisted.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, what will God’s shaking do to this world? It will transform it by taking it beyond the threat of the Devil and death.

6.4.5 Giving Thanks for the Unshakable Kingdom (Heb 12:28)

In Heb 12:28 the writer infers what God’s transformation of the cosmos means for believers and exhorts them to respond appropriately. He writes, “Therefore, since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe” (*διὸ βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες ἔχωμεν χάριν, δι’ ἧς λατρεύωμεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους*).

¹⁰⁵ So Witherington, *Letters*, 345. Adams (*Stars*, 190) suggests that *μετάθεσις* aligns with “they will perish” (*ἀπολοῦνται*) in 1:11 on account of the contrast with the Son who “remains.” But this is a lexically improbable.

¹⁰⁶ I agree with Adams that the writer certainly envisions this world coming to an end, but his contention that heaven and earth “will be reduced to their pre-created *material* condition” is highly speculative (*Stars*, 191 [italics original]). Furthermore, while Adams affirms a future act of re-creation (*Stars*, 197-99), I think that he underestimates the force of texts like 1:2 and 2:5-8, which must be read alongside 1:10-12 and 12:26-28.

¹⁰⁷ Koester moves in this direction when he states concerning God’s shaking, “There is transformation as well as annihilation” (*Hebrews*, 547-48).

Most interpreters struggle to identify how the writer’s flow of thought moves from 12:26-27 to 12:28a. As Lane comments, “It is not immediately apparent to a modern reader that there is an allusion to the reception of ‘an unshakable kingdom’ in the quotation of Hag 2:6 LXX or its interpretation in v 27.”¹⁰⁸ As a result, scholars propose several OT texts as the background of 12:28a in order to explain this movement.¹⁰⁹ Many of the suggestions probably contribute to the writer’s thought at some level. However, if we attend to the underlying story of Hebrews, the connection becomes clear. The writer has already spoken of God promising to give faithful humanity an “unshakable kingdom” (without using those exact words) in 2:5-8b:

⁵ For [God] did not subject the world to come, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶ But someone has testified somewhere saying,
‘What is humanity that you remember them,
or mortals that you care for them?
⁷ You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned them with glory and honor;
⁸ you have subjected all things under their feet.’

For in subjecting all things to them, He left nothing that is not subject to them.

This, of course, is primarily a citation of Ps 8:4-6 [8:5-7 LXX].¹¹⁰ It is important to recognize that: (1) the writer of Hebrews reads Ps 8 as an unfulfilled prophecy concerning the world to come, and (2) Heb 12:26-27 is the event that will bring Ps 8 to fulfillment. Thus, Heb 12:26-27

¹⁰⁸ Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:484.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Pss 46:4-7 [45:5-8 LXX]; 93:1 [92:1]; 96:9-10 [95:9-10]; 125:1-2 [124:1-2]; Dan 5:31; 7:14, 18, 27; Hag 2:21-23. For a discussion see Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:484-86; Michel, *Hebräer*, 326; Vanhoye, “L’οἰκουμένη,” 248-53.

¹¹⁰ This translation reflects my view that writer of Hebrews uses Ps 8 to speak of humanity. Yet, it was the human Jesus who became the first to fulfill it. We can also note that Hebrews leaves out one clause of Ps 8:7, “and you have set them over the works of your hands.” The writer probably omits this clause as unnecessary in light of his emphasis on “all things” becoming “subject” under humanity’s feet. So Blomberg, “But We See Jesus,” 95; Koester, *Hebrews*, 214. It is also probable, as suggested by Moffatt (*Hebrews*, 22), that the writer omits the clause because he has already used an identical phrase while citing Ps 101:26 LXX in Heb 1:10, “the works of your hands” to refer to the present transient world that is subjected to angels. In other words, humanity is not currently “set” over the created order. Omitting the clause maintains the writer’s stress on the world to come, which will be subject to humanity through the work of the exalted Jesus.

not only depicts God's transformation of the cosmos as all things are subjected to the Son, it also implies that the Son will share his reign over the world to come with faithful humanity.¹¹¹

The fact that believers "are receiving" (*παραλαμβάνοντες*) a kingdom does not indicate that they actually possess the kingdom during this age.¹¹² The writer concedes this very point when he states, "we do not yet see all things in subjection to them" (2:8c). Instead, the present continuous aspect of the participle *παραλαμβάνοντες* suggests that the faithful are in the *process* of "receiving" their kingdom.¹¹³ This process has already begun because of the work of Jesus. The writer continues, "but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (2:9). Thus, Jesus is the one who has championed the cause of the faithful, having gone before them as their "pioneer." He will ultimately lead faithful humanity to glory, honor, and dominion over all things (2:10-18).¹¹⁴ When the Son's "enemies" are finally overthrown (1:13; 10:13), then the faithful will receive their kingdom as "brothers and sisters" of the exalted Jesus, the heir of "all things" (1:2; 2:10-18).

With the promise of an "unshakable kingdom" as a ground, the writer exhorts his readers that the appropriate response is gratitude, "let us give thanks, by which we offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe" (12:28b). This call to worship may allude to Ps

¹¹¹ Many scholars deny that believers will exercise any sort of reign with Christ in the coming kingdom, primarily because they conceive of the kingdom in immaterial terms. Koester is typical of most when he states that receiving a kingdom "does not mean that people obtain kingly power . . . , but that they receive a place in God's kingdom, under the rule of God and Christ" (*Hebrews*, 557). This is true to a certain extent, but the world to come envisioned by the writer looks for humanity to reign along with the exalted Jesus. I do not see another way to interpret the recurring language of subjection in Heb 2:6-8 (also cf. Matt 19:28; Rom 8:21; 1 Cor 6:2).

¹¹² So Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 236; Spicq, *Hébreux*, 2:413. Attridge seems to think that believers already possess this kingdom in fullness (*Hebrews*, 382). But this does not take into account the promise-fulfillment dimension of the kingdom.

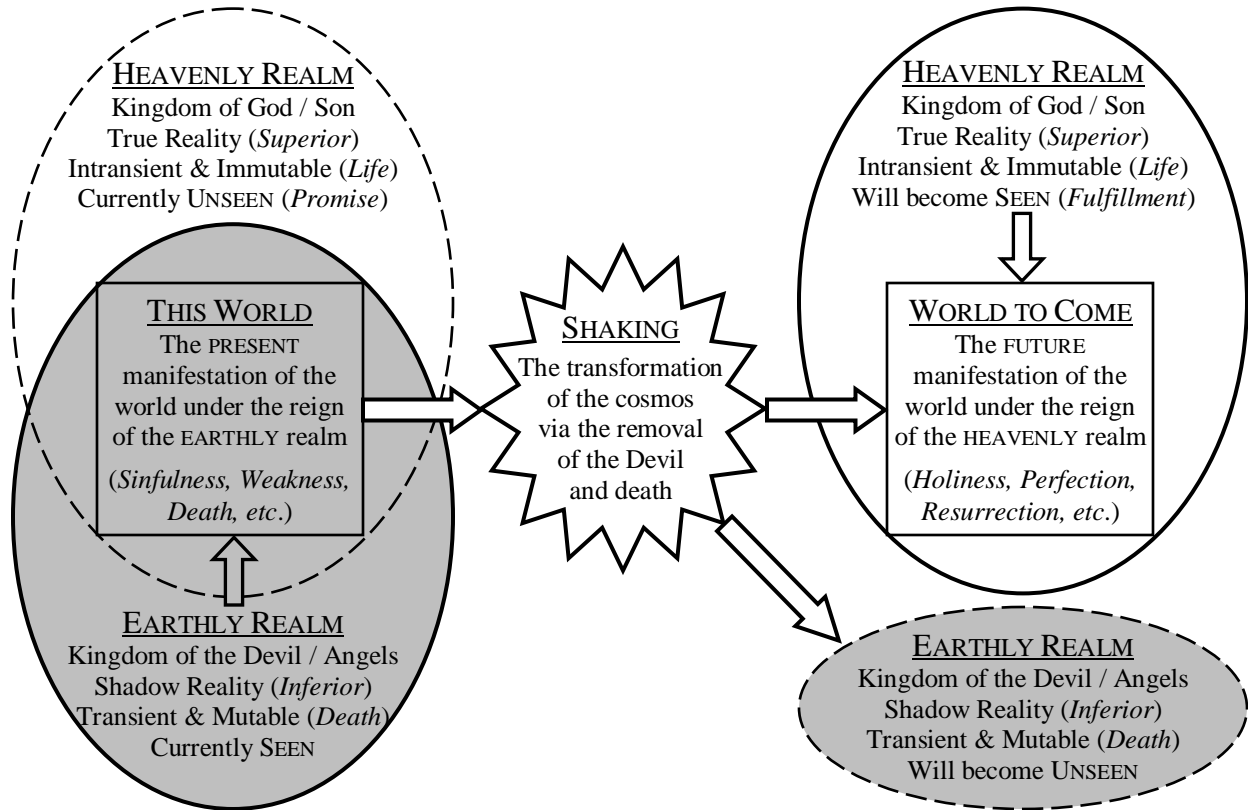
¹¹³ So Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:484.

¹¹⁴ It is noteworthy that both Schenck (*Cosmology*, 54-59) and Koester ("Hebrews," 110-12) articulate this same train of thought concerning Jesus securing "glory" and "honor" for humanity, but then stop short of emphasizing that Jesus also secures "dominion" for humanity. But this does not seem to carry the writer's logic to its full conclusion.

96:9-10 [95:9-10 LXX], “Worship [προσκυνήσατε] the Lord in his holy court; let all the earth shake [σαλευθήτω] before him. Say to the nations, ‘The Lord reigns [ἐβασίλευσεν]! For, indeed, he has established the world [τὴν οἰκουμένην], which will not be shaken [οὐ σαλευθήσεται]; he will judge the people in uprightness.”¹¹⁵ This is the suitable response to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, we can return to the diagram offered above in the section on the cosmology and eschatology of Hebrews (see fig. 6.5).

FIGURE 6.5: THE SHAKING OF THE COSMOS IN HEBREWS



¹¹⁵ See Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:484-86; Vanhoye, “L’οἰκουμένη,” 248-53.

God's shaking of the cosmos is the key moment when this world will transition to the world to come. The cosmos will be transformed as God removes this transient and mutable world like a piece of clothing and replaces it with the intransient and immutable world to come. In this way the Son's enemies, the Devil and death, will be subjected under his feet once and for all, resulting in a world that shares in the glorious nature of its Ruler. What "remains," then, will be something comparable to a new heaven and a new earth (see Isa 66:22).

6.4.6 God the Consuming Fire (Heb 12:29)

In Heb 12:29 the writer provides a final reason why the faithful should respond in thanksgiving and worship (12:28b) and heed the voice of the one speaking from heaven (12:25a), "for our God is a consuming fire" (*καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκον*). This verse alludes to Deut 4:24, which is a message from Moses to those who are on the verge of entering the promised land (or as the writer of Hebrews has framed it, God's "rest"), warning them not to forget their covenant with the Lord and not to make idols, "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." Drawing on the image of God as a consuming fire recalls several references in Hebrews to the condemnation of the apostate. They will face the "curses" associated with breaking covenant with God (6:8; 10:27; cf. 12:18). Fire, then, is a description of God's wrath and condemnatory judgment against the apostate.

6.5 Hebrews' Theology of the Future of the Cosmos

6.5.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

In Hebrews God is the primary figure who creates, reveals, promises, makes covenants, judges, and reigns. Seated at his right hand is Jesus the Son, who is the primary facilitator of creation,

revelation, fulfilling promises, mediating the covenant, judgment, and establishing God's kingdom. Thus, Hebrews portrays the Son as enacting the will of God. They work in harmony with one another. It is no surprise, then, that Hebrews envisions the participation of both God and the Son in bringing about the cosmic transition. God is the one who has promised to come and "shake" the world (12:26). He also is the "Judge," who will come on the Day of the Lord (10:25, 30-31; 12:23). As part of his judgment, God has promised to overthrow the "enemies" of the Son, subjecting them under the Son's feet (1:13; 10:13). Along with these actions of God, the writer can also talk about the exalted Jesus "being seen" at the parousia (9:28). Furthermore, the exalted Jesus is the one who will "roll up" this world and "exchange" it for the world to come (1:12). Thus, the writer clearly envisions both God and the Son acting in unison amid the cosmic transition.

6.5.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

The writer of Hebrews connects the cosmic transition to the coming of God on the Day of the Lord (12:26-27) and to the parousia of Christ (1:12; 9:28). These events appear to be one and the same for the writer. In terms of the Day of the Lord, the writer does not offer any firm statement about when it will occur. He may have expected it to happen in the near future on account of his comment that the faithful should encourage one another "all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (10:25). Along similar lines, the writer also states, "For yet 'in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith'" (10:37-38).¹¹⁶ However, these expectations should be tempered by the fact that the writer makes both of these comments to encourage endurance (cf. 10:23, 36). Thus, the cosmic transition, like the Day of the Lord, could happen at any time.

¹¹⁶ Hebrews 10:37-38 is most likely a conflation of Isa 26:20 and Hab 2:4.

6.5.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

Hebrews frames the main problem affecting the cosmos during this age in terms sin, death, and dominion. Because of the realities of sin and death, this world is transient and mutable, beset with sin, weakness, fear, ignorance, labor, corruption, and mortality (2:14-15; 4:10; 5:2-3; 7:23, 27-28). This adverse condition is closely tied to who holds dominion over the cosmos. The writer contends that humanity was created to rule over all things (Heb 2:5-8; cf. Ps 8:4-6).

However, the writer observes that this is not a reality at the present time (2:8). Instead, the Devil rules this world because he holds the power of death (2:14), a power which he exerts over both humanity (2:15; 9:27) and the entire cosmos (1:11). Despite the Devil's reign, God has already begun the process of returning dominion over all things to humanity through Jesus Christ, who entered into this world as a human being to provide a solution to sin and death (2:9-18). He defeated the Devil through his own death, thus God has exalted him to his right hand so that he might reign over all things. Even so, all things are not yet subject to him. The Devil and death remain as "enemies" that must be overthrown by God at the consummation (1:13; 10:12-13; cf. Ps 110:1) when God will shake heaven in addition to earth (12:26). This will clear the way for the Son, along with his faithful brothers and sisters (i.e. humanity), to inherit and reign over all things in the world to come. Therefore, the cosmic transition will occur in order to bring to completion the victory of Jesus Christ over the *Devil*, *sin*, and *death*, thereby returning dominion over all things to humanity in a world that is no longer transient and mutable, but intransient and immutable.

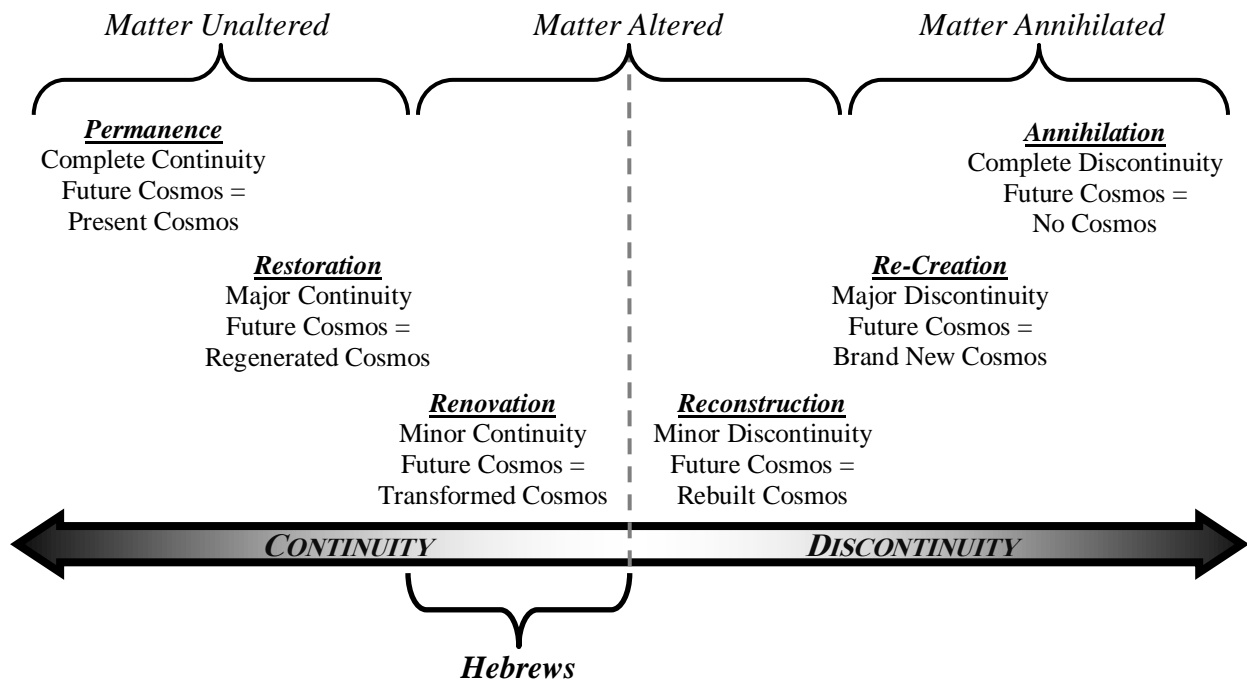
6.5.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

The writer of Hebrews uses two powerful images to portray the nature of the transition between this world and the world to come. First, he speaks of heaven and earth *as clothing that will be changed* (1:10-12). As an impermanent reality, this world will eventually reach its useful end in the purposes of God; it will become obsolete like a worn out piece of clothing. When Jesus returns at the consummation, he will “roll up” this world like a garment and “exchange” it for the world to come, that is, a “better” garment that will not grow old or wear out because it will be of an abiding nature. Second, the writer uses the image of *God shaking the cosmos* (12:26-27). Most interpreters understand this convulsion as a cosmic catastrophe that will bring an end to the material universe. However, I have suggested that the writer interprets the shaking as an act of salvation that will radically transform the cosmos via the removal of death. Amid this transformation, all that is transient and mutable will be removed and replaced by what is intransient and immutable. In other words, what is currently seen as reality will disappear, whereas what is currently invisible as a promise awaiting fulfillment will appear.

What do these images imply about how the cosmic event will unfold? Both images suggest continuity and discontinuity between this world and the world to come. On one hand, because the writer appears to emphasize “all things” (i.e. the totality of the cosmos) as the object underlying both this world and the world to come, he expresses a strong sense of continuity between the worlds. Thus, he does not conceive of the transition in terms of *annihilation*, the idea that the cosmos will be utterly destroyed in favor of an immaterial heavenly realm. Furthermore, because the writer does not appear to envision an act of new creation after God’s shaking of the cosmos, it is unlikely that he saw the cosmic transition in terms of either *re-creation* or *reconstruction*. Whatever remains after God’s shaking of the cosmos appears to be

the new world. On the other hand, because the writer stresses that heaven and earth will be exchanged, and that this exchange will inherently involve a removal, he also expresses a strong sense of discontinuity between this world and the world to come. Thus, he does not conceive of the transition in terms of *permanence* or *restoration*. This leaves us with the most probable option: *renovation*. God will most likely fundamentally transform of the cosmos by replacing this world with the world to come. We can visually represent Hebrews' place on the spectrum of continuity and discontinuity below (see fig. 6.6).

FIGURE 6.6: HEBREWS AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



6.5.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

The writer of Hebrews provides multiple images to describe “the world to come” (2:5; 6:5; 10:1; 13:14). He speaks of a re-clothed world (1:12), an “unshakeable kingdom” (12:28), “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (11:10; 12:22; 13:14), and a “rest” similar to the

promised land (3:7-4:11). These images communicate several ideas about the future world. First, the world to come will be without sin since ungodliness will be barred from entering (2:1-3; 3:18; 10:39; 12:16-17, 25). Second, the world to come will be intransient and immutable, unsusceptible to the ravages of death (2:14; 9:15; 12:22, 28). In other words, it will be a reality founded on life and will share in the abiding nature of the resurrected Jesus (5:7-9; 6:2; 7:16; 11:19, 35; 12:2). This implies that the world to come will be a materially transformed world, “better and more lasting” in comparison to this world (10:34). Third, the world to come will be ruled by the exalted Jesus and his kindred (Heb 2:5-8; cf. Ps 8:4-6). While the Devil exercises dominion over the present world through the power of death, the Son will exercise dominion over “all things” through the power of the living God. Having been crowned with glory and honor through the work of Jesus, faithful humanity also will be able to share in this reign. Finally, by comparing the world to come to the “rest” of the promised land, the writer implies that the world to come will be an inheritance for humanity, a place of covenant blessing full of life and abundance in the presence of God (6:12; 11:8; 12:17).

7 Peter and the Future of the Cosmos

Quite possibly the most thorough description of the cosmic transition is set forth by the writer of Second Peter.¹ The main passage under consideration in this chapter will be 2 Pet 3:4-13, where Peter employs the imagery of fire in relation to the Day of the Lord. After a brief survey of interpretations, I will discuss two issues that relate to the interpretation of this passage: (1) the text of 3:10d, and (2) the conceptual framework underpinning Peter's argument. Then I will offer an interpretation of 2 Pet 3:4-13, concluding that Peter envisions the eschatological judgment of all things by means of a fire that not only will test all things but also destroy that which does not pass the test. The outcome will result in a new heavens and a new earth. Finally, I will discuss how Peter answers the five correlative questions regarding the future of the cosmos.

7.1 Interpretations of 2 Peter 3:7-13

God's eschatological judgment in 2 Pet 3:7-13 is normally interpreted in one of two ways concerning the future of the cosmos.² Before exploring these two interpretive positions, it must be stated that the following survey is my best attempt to discern the various emphases of each

¹ I will use the name "Peter" to designate the writer without necessarily asserting Petrine authorship. Most interpreters contend that the work is pseudonymous. For discussion see Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Waco: Word, 1983), 158-62; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 123-30.

² There are a minority who argue that Peter focuses solely on divine judgment and not the future of the cosmos, most notably Anton Vögtle, *Der Judasbrief, Der 2. Petrusbrief*, EKKNT 22 (Solithurn and Düsseldorf: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994), 224-61; idem, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970), 121-42.

interpreter. Sometimes categorization was made difficult by the ambiguity with which some interpreters use the term “destruction.”³

(1) Peter describes the *annihilation and re-creation* of the cosmos by fire.⁴ Thus, the present cosmos will be completely burned up, and then God will create an entirely new cosmos. As Bo Reicke states, “the solar system and the great galaxies, even space-time relationships will be abolished. All elements which make up the physical world, both on the earth and in the stellar regions..., will be dissolved by heat and utterly melt away.”⁵ Generally speaking, many of the interpreters who take this position opt for a text-critical reading of 3:10d that implies the utter destruction of the earth, such as οὐχ εὐρεθήσεται (“it will not be found”) or κατακαήσεται (“it will be burned up”), or suggest that Peter borrows his ideas primarily from the Stoic theory of cosmic conflagration.

(2) Peter describes the *destruction and transformation* of the cosmos by fire.⁶ This view distinguishes itself from the previous by arguing that the cosmos will experience some degree of

³ Some appear to use the word synonymously with “annihilation” to imply that the present cosmos will be utterly destroyed. Others, however, use the term to mean something like “ruin” or “dissolve” to imply that the present cosmos will be devastated (but not annihilated). For clarity’s sake, I will use the term more in keeping with the second sense.

⁴ See e.g. Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter*, ConBNT 9 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977), 60-78; J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, BNTC 17 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1969), 360-68; Eric Fuchs and Pierre Reymond, *La deuxième épître de saint Pierre. L’épître de saint Jude*, 2nd ed., CNT 2/13b (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1988), 113-22; Wolfgang Schrage, *Die “Katholischen” Briefe: Die Briefe des Jakobus, Petrus, Johannes und Judas*, NTD 10 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 148-52; Johann Michl, *Die Katholischen Briefe*, 2nd ed., RNT 8/2 (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1968), 179-82; Ceslas Spicq, *Les Épîtres de Saint Pierre*, SB 4 (Paris: Gabalda, 1966), 248-60; Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 213-15, 294-99; Earl J. Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 378-85; Daniel J. Harrington and Donald P. Senior, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, SP 15 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003), 287-92; Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 269-79. Leaning toward annihilation, but leaving open the possibility of transformation is Henning Paulsen, *Der Zweite Petrusbrief und der Judasbrief*, KEK 12/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 170-71.

⁵ Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, 2nd ed., AB 37 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 180.

⁶ See e.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 299-326; Davids, *2 Peter*, 271-93; Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 200-235; Daniel Frayer-Griggs, *Saved Through Fire: The Fiery Ordeal in New Testament Eschatology* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 227-42; Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 321-35; Michael

destruction as God purges it of all corruption, but it will not disappear or be reduced to nothing (i.e. annihilated). In other words, there will be some degree of material continuity between the present and future cosmos (albeit a transformed materiality). Within this general position, there is a diversity of opinion regarding the precise level of destructive ruin envisioned by Peter. One could label the positions (2a) and (2b). If we imagine a spectrum similar to the one presented at the end of every chapter, some scholars, such as Edward Adams, lean toward the prospect of cosmic annihilation (i.e. stressing the *destruction* of the cosmos), yet still maintain that material continuity between this world and the world to come is in view.⁷ Other scholars, such as Al Wolters, lean toward the prospect of cosmic renovation (i.e. stressing the *transformation* of the cosmos), yet still maintain that some form of destructive ruin is in view.⁸ The primary difference

Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, rev. ed., TNTC 18 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 142-55; Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, AB 37C (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 235-44; Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 157-68; Duane F. Watson, "The Second Letter of Peter," *NIB* 12:356-57; Ben Witherington III, *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter*, vol. 2 of *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 374-82; David Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, EC (London: Epworth, 1998), 178-83; Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, NIBC 16 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 213-20; Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter & Jude*, THNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 166-73; Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 153-63; Karl H. Schelkle, *Die Petrusbriefe, Der Judasbrief*, 5th ed., HThKNT 13/2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 224-30; N. T. Wright, *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John, and Judah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 116-21; idem, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 462-63; David M. Russell, *The "New Heavens and New Earth": Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, SBAL 1 (Philadelphia: Visionary, 1996), 186-97; J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 189-200; Al Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10," *WTJ* 49 (1987): 405-413; Gale Z. Heide, "What is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," *JETS* 40 (1997): 37-56; Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *JETS* 49 (2006): 463-691; Jonathan Moo, "Continuity, Discontinuity, and Hope: The Contribution of New Testament Eschatology to a Distinctively Christian Environmental Ethos," *TynBul* 61 (2010): 30-38; Craig A. Blaising, "The Day of the Lord Will Come: An Exposition of 2 Peter 3:1-18," *BSac* 169 (2012): 387-401; Matthew Y. Emerson, "Does God Own a Death Star? The Destruction of the Cosmos in 2 Peter 3:1-13," *SwJT* 57 (2015): 281-93. Leaving open the possibility that annihilation is in view is Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 377-92.

⁷ Adams advances an interpretation based on Stoic philosophy, concluding that the cosmos will be reduced solely to fire, which God will then use to remake the cosmos (*Stars*, 200-235). Adams stresses near-annihilation because his intent is to critique N. T. Wright, who follows Al Wolters by suggesting that 2 Pet 3 involves some kind of transformative cosmic purge. Yet, Adams is in essential agreement with Wolters and Wright concerning the purging effect of God's eschatological fire and argues that the future cosmos will have some form of material continuity with the present. See the insightful discussion of Adams' position and his disagreement with Wolters and Wright in Middleton, *New Heaven*, 196-98.

⁸ Wolters, "Worldview," 413.

between these camps is the perceived degree of continuity and discontinuity between this world and the world to come.

My own view is closer to the second position (2b). I do not think that Peter envisions the annihilation of the cosmos. He certainly emphasizes discontinuity between the present and future cosmos, but he also likely expected some form of material continuity. Thus, God's eschatological judgment of the cosmos by fire will purge the cosmos of all corruption, transforming it into a new heaven and a new earth.

7.2 Interpretive Issues Pertaining to 2 Peter 3:4-13

Before presenting an interpretation of 2 Pet 3:4-13, we must deal with two pressing issues that have played a significant role in the history of interpretation. (1) What is the most probable text-critical reading of 3:10d? (2) What is the conceptual framework underpinning Peter's argument?

7.2.1 The Text of 2 Peter 3:10d

One of the changes introduced by the latest critical edition of the Greek New Testament, the NA²⁸, is to the final clause of 2 Pet 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, on which the heavens will pass away with a load noise, and the elements will be dissolved in the great heat, and the earth and the works in it *will not be found*." Previous editions, going all the way back to Tischendorf (1872), and Westcott and Hort (1881), have ended the verse with the verb *εὑρεθήσεται* ("will be found"), whereas the NA²⁸ opts for *οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται* ("will not be found"). The change is significant because it represents a one hundred and eighty degree shift from a positive assertion about "the earth and the works in it," to a negative one. If *οὐχ*

εὑρεθήσεται is adopted, it virtually requires the interpreter to espouse an annihilationist position.

As a result, this text-critical issue deserves special attention.

According to the *Editio Critica Maior (ECM)*, there are eight attested readings for the final word/clause of 2 Pet 3:10d.⁹ In addition, scholars have proposed at least 11 conjectural emendations (as far as I am aware).¹⁰ The eight variant readings from the *ECM* along with the primary witnesses for each can be listed as follows:

- (1) οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται (it will not be found) – sy^{ph mss} sa cv^{vid}
- (2) εὑρεθήσεται (it will be found) – Ⲛ B P 1175. 1448. 1739^{txt}. 1852. sy^{ph mss txt} sy^{hmg}
- (3) εὑρεθήσονται (they will be found) – 398. arm^{mss}
- (4) εὑρεθήσεται λύμενα (it will be found dissolved) – P72
- (5) ἀφανισθήσονται (they will disappear) – C arm^{mss}
- (6) κατακαήσεται (it will be burned up) – A 048. 33. 81. 307. 436. 442. 642. 1611. 1739^{v.1.}. 2344. Byz vg^{cl} sy^{ph mss v.1.} sy^h; Cyr
- (7) κατακαήσονται (they will be burned up) – 5. 1243. 1735. 2492
- (8) καήσονται (they will be burned up) – 2464

While this text critical issue is extraordinarily difficult to assess, both the external and internal evidence appears to favor εὑρεθήσεται.

First, we can examine the external evidence. Except for the papyrus P72 (3rd–4th c.), εὑρεθήσεται is attested in the earliest Greek witnesses (Ⲛ B, 4th c.). Furthermore, it is highly attested in the consistently cited witnesses of 2 Peter. The troubling fact about οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται is that it lacks attestation in any Greek witnesses. It appears only in Syriac (the Philoxeniana) and

⁹ See Barbara Aland, et al., *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior; Vol. 4: Catholic Letters; Part 1: Text; Installment 2: The Letters of Peter* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000), 252. It is also possible, although unlikely, that the whole of 3:10d should be omitted (Ψ vg^{st.ww}; Pel).

¹⁰ I will not discuss any of these emendations since none has gained widespread support. For further discussion see Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 317-18; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 234-35; Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Society, 1975), 705-706; William E. Wilson, “Εὑρεθήσεται in 2 Pet. iii. 10,” *ExpTim* 32 (1920): 44-45; Frank Olivier, “Une correction au texte du Nouveau Testament: II Pierre III 10,” *RTP* 8 (1920): 237-78; Hellmut Lenhard, “Ein Beitrag zur Übersetzung von II Ptr 3:10d,” *ZNW* 52 (1961): 128-29; idem, “Noch einmal zu 2 Petr 3 10d,” *ZNW* 69 (1978): 136; Frederick W. Danker, “II Peter 3:10 and Psalm of Solomon 17:10,” *ZNW* 53 (1962): 82-86; Wolters, “Worldview,” 405-413; David Wenham, “Being ‘Found’ on the Last Day: New Light on 2 Peter 3.10 and 2 Corinthians 5.3,” *NTS* 33 (1987): 477-79; Aaron K. Tresham, “A Test Case for Conjectural Emendation: 2 Peter 3:10d,” *MSJ* 21 (2010): 55-79.

Coptic (the Sahidic and Dialect V versions). Therefore, the external evidence firmly supports *εὔρεθήσεται* as the most probable text.

We now turn to the internal evidence. First, *εὔρεθήσεται* can lay claim to being the most difficult reading. This coincides with a second point, *εὔρεθήσεται* most likely explains the rise of the other variants. It is hard to imagine how any of the other variants could have spawned the others. Even *οὐχ εὔρεθήσεται* and *εὔρεθήσεται λυόμενα* are unlikely original because a copyist probably would not have felt compelled to emend these readings. Thus, in order to account for variants like *κατακαθήσεται*, one would likely have to propose that either *οὐχ* or *λυόμενα* was accidentally omitted early on in the transcription process leaving only *εὔρεθήσεται*, which then gave rise to the other variants. This is not impossible, but not nearly as probable (in my opinion) as seeing all the variants as attempts to improve upon *εὔρεθήσεται*. *Λυόμενα* was probably added later in order to harmonize 3:10d with 3:10c, which ends with the same verb (*λυθήσεται*). *Οὐχ* was also probably added later in order to harmonize 3:10d with other apocalyptic texts that employ some form of *εὐρίσκω* with the negative (cf. Ps 16:3 [LXX]; Dan 2:35 [Theo]; Dan 11:19; Rev 16:20; 18:21; 20:11). As a consequence, *εὔρεθήσεται* appears to be the best reading that is able to explain the rise of the other variants.

The problem with accepting *εὔρεθήσεται* has always been making sense of the verb in context. The passing away of the “heavens” and the dissolving of the “elements” naturally leads one to expect some form of fiery dissolution in 3:10d. Thus, at first glance *εὔρεθήσεται* seems out-of-place, whereas *οὐχ εὔρεθήσεται* and other variants make logical sense (which, of course, is probably why they arose). So, while *εὔρεθήσεται* can lay claim to being the *lectio difficilior*, it

can be argued that it is *too difficult* to accept.¹¹ This appears to be the conclusion of the editors of the *ECM* who write, “There is a question whether these [readings] preserve the original reading or a conjecture. In this instance the primary line [οὐχ εὔρεθήσεται] may offer a conjecture that is both attractive and reasonable.”¹² The editors appear to be saying that despite the favorable external and internal evidence in support of εὔρεθήσεται, the context of 2 Pet 3:10d demands another reading.

I would contend, however, that we can make sense of εὔρεθήσεται within context. Interpreters have consistently struggled with εὔρεθήσεται because they tend to focus exclusively on the theme of cosmic destruction. However, if Peter’s main emphasis is *God’s eschatological judgment of all that he created*, then “will be found” functions as a climactic conclusion to Peter’s argument regarding the Lord arriving to judge all earth-dwellers. This is precisely the context within which Peter employs εὐρίσκω just a few verses later, “strive to be found [εὔρεθῆναι] by him at peace, without spot or blemish” (3:14). Peter’s readers are to be prepared for the Day of the Lord because the Lord will *discover* their deeds when he comes to judge. It is worth noting that I am not alone in this assessment of the evidence. Ever since the appearance of Richard Bauckham’s monumental commentary on 2 Peter (1983), a scholarly consensus has emerged that εὔρεθήσεται can sufficiently be interpreted as portraying God’s eschatological judgment of humanity.¹³ Nearly every major commentary and study since Bauckham has embraced εὔρεθήσεται,¹⁴ with only a few favoring alternatives.¹⁵ Therefore, in light of the

¹¹ E.g. Fornberg, *Early Church*, 75-76.

¹² Aland et al., *Editio Critica Maior*, 24.

¹³ Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 303, 316-22.

¹⁴ In chronological order see M. Green, *2 Peter*, 151; Wenham, “Being ‘Found’ on the Last Day,” 477-79; Wolters, “Worldview,” 405-413; Fuchs and Reymond, *La deuxième épître de saint Pierre*, 117-19; Duane F. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, SBLDS 104 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 133; Paulsen, *Zweite Petrusbrief*, 167-68; Neyrey, *2 Peter*, 243-44; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 234-38;

evidence presented above, I will base my interpretation of 2 Pet 3:10d on the text-critical reading *εὐρεθήσεται*.

7.2.2 The Conceptual Framework Underlying 2 Peter 3:4-13

Another issue influencing the history of interpretation is the conceptual framework underlying 2 Pet 3:4-13. In the form of a question: What is the worldview or system of ideas underpinning the writer's argument? Some interpreters emphasize that Peter frames his description of the Day of the Lord using primarily the philosophical ideas of Stoic thought,¹⁶ while others contend that he draws upon the ideas and imagery of Jewish apocalyptic thought.¹⁷ Now, Peter was probably aware of both streams of thought, but the majority of interpreters favor Peter's dependence on Jewish apocalyptic thought for the following reasons. First, the OT and other Jewish literature

Roselyne Dupont-Roc, "Le motif de la création selon 2 Pierre 3," *RB* 101 (1994): 106-107; Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 190-91; Russell, *New Heavens*, 190-94; Heide, "What is New," 53; Horrell, *Epistles of Peter*, 180-81; Watson, "Second Peter," 12:357; Richard, *2 Peter*, 382; Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 385-87; Davids, *2 Peter*, 286-87; Adams, *Stars*, 224-29; Christian Blumenthal, "Es wird aber kommen der Tag des Herrn": Eine textkritische Studie zu 2Petr 3,10, BBB 154 (Hamburg: Philo, 2007); Reese, *2 Peter*, 169-72; Witherington, *1-2 Peter*, 380; John Dennis, "Cosmology in the Petrine Literature and Jude," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. J. T. Pennington and S. M. McDonough, LNTS 355 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 177; G. Green, *2 Peter*, 330-31; Donelson, *II Peter*, 277; Moo, "Continuity," 31; Tresham, "Test Case," 55-79; Blaising, "2 Peter 3:1-18," 396-98; Emerson, "Does God Own a Death Star?," 288; Frayer-Griggs, *Saved Through Fire*, 236-42.

¹⁵ Favoring the addition of *οὐχ* or *λυόμενα* to *εὐρεθήσεται* is Schrage, *Die "Katholischen" Briefe*, 150; Ulrich Mell, *Neue Schöpfung: Eine traditions-geschichtliche und exegetische Studie zu einem soteriologischen Grundsatz paulinischer Theologie*, BZNW 56 (New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 142; Pieter W. van der Horst, "'The Elements Will Be Dissolved With Fire: The Idea of Cosmic Conflagration in Hellenism, Ancient Judaism, and Early Christianity,'" in *Hellenism – Judaism – Christianity: Essays on Their Interaction*, 2nd ed., CBET 8 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 288-89. Harrington favors either *οὐχ εὐρεθήσεται* or punctuating the verse as a question (2 Peter, 289). Convinced that *εὐρεθήσεται* is a "corruption" is G. A. van den Heever, "In Purifying Fire: World View and 2 Peter 3:10," *Neot* 27 (1993): 107-118.

¹⁶ E.g. Adams, *Stars*, 200-235; Frayer-Griggs, *Saved Through Fire*, 227-32; Bigg, *St. Peter*, 294-95; Reicke, *Epistles of Peter*, 177; van der Horst, "The Elements Will Be Dissolved," 271-92; J. Albert Harrill, "Stoic Physics, the Universal Conflagration, and the Eschatological Destruction of the 'Ignorant and Unstable' in 2 Peter," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 115-40; Gerald F. Downing, "Common Strands in Pagan, Jewish and Christian Eschatologies in the First Century," *TZ* 51 (1995): 196-211.

¹⁷ E.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 300-30; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 227-28; Davids, *2 Peter*, 273-74; G. Green, *2 Peter*, 322-23; M. Green, *2 Peter*, 142-45; Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 377-78; Kraftchick, *2 Peter*, 157-59; Horrell, *Epistles of Peter*, 178; Donelson, *II Peter*, 269-71; Dennis, "Cosmology in the Petrine Literature," 175-77.

provide ample precedent for God's eschatological judgment of the world by fire.¹⁸ Second, as opposed to the pantheistic belief of Stoicism, Peter emphasizes God as the monotheistic Creator and Judge of all things who directs history according to his word. Third, Peter conceives of history in a linear fashion, heading toward a consummative event, whereas Stoicism embraces a cyclic pattern. Fourth, Peter envisions a future cosmos that will be materially transformed rather than merely materially rejuvenated as in Stoicism. Finally, Peter emphasizes throughout 2 Pet 3 (and the entire letter) that eschatological judgment is coming and is inescapable (e.g. 3:7, 10-12, 14). Thus, Peter does not introduce cosmology for its own sake. Rather, he employs it to reinforce his theological and ethical purposes.¹⁹

Therefore, while acknowledging that certain readers might have drawn parallels with Stoic philosophy, I also think that the evidence favors the view that the writer of 2 Peter is operating from the perspective of *Jewish apocalyptic thought*. This conclusion is also born out of the exegesis of 3:4-13 below, where I think the Stoic-based interpretive options are simply less probable than the Jewish apocalyptic options.

Now, given that Peter does not appear to be communicating anything new to his readers, but "reminding" them of things they already "know" (1:12-15; 3:1-2), it would be reasonable to expect comparable images of God's eschatological judgment in other NT writings. And in fact, several other NT writers offer similar (although not nearly as detailed) pictures of God's fiery

¹⁸ Cf. Deut 32:22; Ps 97:3; Isa 29:6; 30:27-33; 33:11-14; 66:15-16, 24; Ezek 38:22; Joel 2:3, 30; Amos 7:4; Nah 1:6; Zeph 1:18; 3:8; Zech 12:6; Mal 3:2-4; 4:1 [3:19 LXX]; 1 En. 1:6-7; 52:6. Some interpreters even hypothesize that Peter utilizes a Jewish apocalyptic text as a source document, e.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 140, 283-85, 296-97, 304-306, 323-24; Daniel von Allmen, "L'apocalyptique juive et le retard de la parousie en II Pierre 3:1-13," *RTP* 61 (1966): 255-74.

¹⁹ So Dennis, "Cosmology in the Petrine Literature," 157. Adams argues that cosmology takes precedence over eschatological judgment in 2 Pet 3 since it is "the main interest of these verses," and "the author is presenting a concentrated argument for cosmic destructibility; the theme of judgement, as we will see, is introduced *in support of* that case, supplying a reason for God's destruction of the world" (*Stars*, 215-16, italics original). But this assessment ignores the sweep of the entire letter as a reminder of ethical behavior in light of eschatological judgment and as a polemic against the parousia mockers. The coming of the parousia and eschatological judgment is the main focus. This is not to imply that cosmology is unimportant in 2 Pet 3, but it must be interpreted as *subservient* to the theme of judgment.

eschatological judgment.²⁰ The notion that eschatological judgment involves an all-encompassing fire upon the earth is suggested by Jesus' cryptic sayings, "For everyone will be salted with fire" (Mark 9:49), and "I came to bring fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49). Furthermore, while the predominant image of God's eschatological judgment in Hebrews is of cosmic "shaking" (Heb 12:26-27), the writer also uses fire to emphasize God's condemnation of the wicked. For the ungodly, the Day of the Lord holds "a terrifying prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries" (10:27). Furthermore, Hebrews portrays God himself as "a consuming fire" who will come to destroy the wicked (12:29).

Even more pronounced are similar lines of apocalyptic thought and argument in the writings of Paul, with which the writer of 2 Peter is familiar (3:15-16). Paul presents a striking picture of Jesus at the parousia, when he will be revealed "in flaming fire" in order to inflict God's wrath upon the disobedient (2 Thess 1:6-8). Furthermore, Paul could speak of God using fire as a means of eschatological judgment in order to test the "works" of his servants.

¹³ the work [τὸ ἔργον] of each builder will become visible [φανερὸν], for the Day will show it, because it will be revealed with fire [ἐν πυρὶ ἀποκαλύπτεται], and the fire [τὸ πῦρ] will test [δοκιμάσει] the quality of each person's work [τὸ ἔργον]. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which has been built upon the foundation remains, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up [τὸ ἔργον κατακαήσεται], the builder will suffer loss, but the builder will be saved, yet only as through fire [διὰ πυρός]. (1 Cor 3:13-15)

The scene depicted in 1 Cor 3:13-15 has observable similarities with 2 Pet 3:7 and 3:10d. In both texts "fire" is used by God as a *means* of facilitating eschatological judgment. Paul also emphasizes the dual function of fire to *test* all things and *destroy* what does not pass the test.

This is the same dual function of fire highlighted by Peter in 3:7. Finally, Paul also refers to the

²⁰ Adams rejects the idea that other NT texts refer to a cosmic conflagration (*Stars*, 200). He is correct to say that no other NT text explicitly treats the topic in the same manner as 2 Peter. However, we can observe glimpses of comparable ideas in several writers.

“works” of humanity becoming “visible” amid the fire, or as Peter puts it, “being found” by God for judgment (3:10d). Thus, Peter and Paul most likely are discussing the same general scene of eschatological judgment by fire, albeit applying the picture to different situations (also cf. 2 Clem. 16:3; Did. 16:5).²¹

Most prominently, 2 Pet 3:7-10 shares similarities with Paul’s argument in Rom 2:3-8. I have highlighted certain words and phrases for comparison purposes.

³ But do you consider this [λογίζῃ δὲ τοῦτο], whoever you are, when you judge those who practice such things and yet do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you treat with contempt [καταφρονεῖς] the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience [μακροθυμίας], disregarding [ἀγνοῶν] that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance [μετάνοιαν]? ⁵ But according to your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up [θησαυρίζεις] wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God [ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὀργῆς καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως δικαιοκρισίας τοῦ θεοῦ]. ⁶ For he will render to each person according to their works [κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ]. ⁷ On the one hand, to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will render eternal life. ⁸ On the other hand, to those who are self-seeking and who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, he will render wrath and fury. (Rom 2:3-8)

Now, while Paul does not explicitly discuss the cosmic scope of God’s eschatological judgment, or fire as the means by which God will judge the cosmos, Paul essentially advances an argument similar to 2 Pet 3 (esp. 3:7-10). We can list the comparable features between the two texts.

- (1) Knowledge that the opponents have ignored, disregarded, failed to consider, or treated God’s eschatological judgment with contempt (Rom 2:3-4; 2 Pet 3:5, 8).
- (2) The need for “repentance” (μετάνοια) in response to the “patience” (μακροθυμία / μακροθυμέω) and mercy of God (Rom 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9, 15).
- (3) The image of “storing up” (θησαυρίζω) something for eschatological judgment (Rom 2:5; 2 Pet 3:7).
- (4) The dual purpose of judgment and condemnation on the Day of the Lord (“day of wrath and revelation of righteous judgment” in Rom 2:5; “day of judgment and destruction” in 2 Pet 3:7).

²¹ So Moo, “Continuity,” 34-35. On the common tradition likely underlying these texts see Harm W. Hollander, “The Testing By Fire of the Builders’ Works: 1 Corinthians 3.10-15,” *NTS* 40 (1994): 89-104.

- (5) God entering into a judgment of humanity's "works" (ἔργα) (Rom 2:6; 2 Pet 3:10d).
- (6) God repaying humanity according to the quality of each one's works (Rom 2:7-8; 2 Pet 1:3-11; 2:2-3, 12, 15; 3:11, 14).

These comparable features most likely imply that Peter and Paul are discussing the same basic eschatological scenario, grounded in a Jewish apocalyptic worldview. Peter may even be advancing a similar argument based on his knowledge of Pauline theology.

Having identified Jewish apocalyptic thought as the most probable conceptual framework behind 2 Pet 3, I also think that Peter identifies a specific tradition within apocalyptic thought that he uses to describe God's judgment of the cosmos on the Day of the Lord: *the tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah*. I will not advance this thesis in detail here since I have done it elsewhere, but I can summarize its three main arguments.²² (1) Before 2 Peter was written, the tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah had developed into an archetype for God's eschatological judgment of the wicked on the Day of the Lord. Thus, it was a viable option for Peter to use in describing the Day of the Lord. (2) The context of 2 Peter suggests that Peter employs the tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah as a paradigm for writing about eschatological judgment. In 2:5-8, Peter emphasizes a judgment by water (the flood) and a judgment by fire (Sodom and Gomorrah). In 3:6-13, Peter reiterates the same movement of judgment by water and fire. (3) Peter uses a number of terms, phrases, and themes in 2 Pet 3:7-13 that correspond to components of the Sodom and Gomorrah tradition.

In my opinion these arguments make it probable that Peter uses the tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah as typological framework for writing about the Day of the Lord in 3:7-13. This is not to suggest that Peter does not weave other traditions into his description of the Day. The writer is certainly familiar with Paul (3:15-16), the Jesus tradition (e.g. 1:16-18; 2:20; 3:10a), the

²² See Ryan P. Juza, "Echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of the Lord: Intertextuality and Tradition in 2 Peter 3:7-13," *BBR* 24 (2014): 227-45.

flood tradition (2:5; 3:6), and the tradition of the Watchers (2:4). Yet, an apocalyptic development of the tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah appears to play at least a supplementary role in Peter's conception of God's fiery judgment of the cosmos.

7.3 2 Peter 3:4-13

We are now in a position to offer an interpretation of 2 Pet 3:4-13. Given that 3:5-10 is Peter's response to an objection put forth by the mockers, we will begin at 3:4.

7.3.1 The Objection of the Mockers (2 Pet 3:4)

Peter attributes these words to the mockers, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (ποῦ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ; ἀφ' ἧς γὰρ οἱ πατέρες ἐκοιμήθησαν, πάντα οὕτως διαμένει ἀπ' ἀρχῆς κτίσεως). The rhetorical question in 3:4a indicates the *subject* of the mockers' ridicule: the promise of his coming. The *reason* why the mockers ridicule the promise of his coming is stated in 3:4b.

The form of the rhetorical question, "Where is the promise of his coming?" emphasizes the disdain of the mockers.²³ The implied answer is: "Nowhere! God has failed to make due on his promise." Many interpreters understand the "promise" (ἐπαγγελία) as Jesus' own promise to return (cf. Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26).²⁴ However, Peter and the other writers of the NT normally use the word in reference to God's promises (cf. 2 Pet 1:4; 3:9, 13).²⁵ Thus, the "promise" most likely refers to God's promise in the OT to come forth for purposes of judgment and salvation on

²³ Cf. similar taunts in Jer 17:15; Mal 2:17; Joel 2:17.

²⁴ E.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 290; Witherington, *1-2 Peter*, 371; Kraftchick, *2 Peter*, 152; Horrell, *Epistles of Peter*, 176; Hillyer, *2 Peter*, 212-13; M. Green, *2 Peter*, 138-39; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter*, 356.

²⁵ Also cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33, 39; Rom 4:13-20; Gal 3:15-29; Heb 4:1; 6:12; 9:15; 10:36.

the Day of the Lord.²⁶ Yet, it is important to recognize that Peter probably interpreted this OT promise of God’s coming christologically, so that he conceived of it as a promise “of Jesus’ coming” (τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ). In other words, Jesus’ parousia would be the fulfillment of the OT promise of God’s coming on the Day of the Lord.²⁷ Thus, what the mockers appear to disparage is *the OT promise of God’s coming on the Day of the Lord that early Christians claimed would be fulfilled by Jesus’ parousia*. The mockers evidently thought that the parousia prophecy was a “cleverly devised myth” crafted by the apostles (1:16). So, by means of their rhetorical question the mockers point out that Jesus has not yet *fulfilled* of the OT promise of God’s coming, and by means of their mocking tone they insinuate that *he probably never will*.

The mockers substantiate their ridicule of the promise with a twofold observation in 3:4b. The first clause, “ever since the fathers fell asleep,” underscores a *temporal observation*. The majority of scholars argue that “the fathers” (οἱ πατέρες) refer to the first generation of Christians, particularly the apostles.²⁸ This implies that the mockers were objecting to the so-called delay of the parousia on the grounds that Jesus had promised to return within a “generation” (i.e. *before* the apostles died), but had failed to do so.²⁹ But this meaning of “the

²⁶ Peter is likely referring to the general witness of several OT texts rather than one specific text. Cf. e.g. Isa 13:9-13; 34:1-10; 66:15-24; Joel 2:1-32; Amos 5:18-20; Mic 1:2-7; Hab 3:2-15; Zeph 1:2-18. Also note that Peter refers to the Day of the Lord in 2:9; 3:7, 10, 12. These OT prophecies are likely the referent of the “words spoken in the past by the holy prophets” that Peter exhorts his readers to remember in 3:2, precisely because the mockers are going to challenge them.

²⁷ This coheres with the common NT practice of associating the Day of the Lord with the parousia (cf. Matt 24:29-31, 36-44; Mark 13:24-27, 32-37; Acts 2:20-21; 17:30-31; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13-5:11). This also makes sense of how Peter could refer to the parousia as both the “coming” of Jesus (1:16) and the “coming” of God (3:12), and his willingness to refer to Jesus as “God” (1:1) and “Lord” (1:2). While acknowledging the intersection of these traditions, Adams seems to overlook that Peter likely interpreted the “promise of his coming” christologically and thus asserts that christology “is not the focus of attention” in 3:5-13 (*Stars*, 203-204, 221). But the close association between God’s Day and Jesus’ parousia is best left intact as assumed by the writer, especially when he uses material associated with Jesus’ teaching in 3:9-10 (cf. Matt 24:43-51; Luke 12:39-48).

²⁸ E.g. Fornberg, *Early Church*, 62-63; Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 290-93; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 216, 218-20; Wright, *Early Christian Letters*, 117; Witherington, *1-2 Peter*, 372; Horrell, *Epistles of Peter*, 176; Schelkle, *Petrusbriefe*, 224; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter*, 355-56; Harrington, *2 Peter*, 285; Spicq, *Saint Pierre*, 246-47.

²⁹ Cf. Matt 10:23; 16:28; 24:34; Mark 9:1; 13:30; Luke 9:27; 21:32.

fathers” is improbable for a number of reasons. First, it is unattested in other literature.³⁰ The writers of the NT normally use the term to refer to the OT fathers (e.g. the patriarchs, the exodus generation, or other Jewish ancestors).³¹ Second, the OT fathers are most likely the ones who received the OT “promise” of his coming (3:4a).³² Finally, if “the fathers” refer to the first Christian generation and/or the apostles, the objection of the mockers should stress that nothing happened *before* they died. However, the observation of the mockers is that nothing has happened “since” (i.e. *after*) the fathers died.³³ Thus, Peter most likely uses “the fathers” in its traditional sense to refer to the OT fathers, the ones who originally received the promise of God’s coming.³⁴

Therefore, “ever since the fathers fell asleep” demarcates *a lengthy period of time* extending from the death of the OT fathers to the time of 2 Peter’s writing. The mockers evidently thought that this prolonged length of time was a justifiable reason for mocking the parousia promise, probably because many of the OT texts which describe the coming Day of the Lord speak of its *nearness*.³⁵ Thus, the obvious *delay* provided the mockers with ample grounds to jeer. Peter will address the issue of delay in 3:8-10.

Conditioned by their temporal observation, the mockers also make a *cosmological observation*. Ever since the fathers died, “all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” Scholarly discussion of this clause has generally centered around identifying the underlying philosophical position of the mockers. Two proposals are normally advanced. (1)

³⁰ Bauckham suggests comparable usages of the term in 1 Clem. 23:3; 2 Clem. 11:2 (*2 Peter*, 290-93), but this seems unlikely. See the discussion in Davids, *2 Peter*, 263-67.

³¹ Cf. Matt 23:30-32; Luke 1:55, 72; 6:23, 26; 11:47-48; John 4:20; 6:31, 49, 58; 7:22; Acts 3:13, 25; 5:30; 7:11-52; 13:17, 32, 36; 15:10; 22:14; 26:6; 28:25; Rom 9:5; 11:28; 15:8; 1 Cor 10:1; Heb 1:1; 3:9; 8:9.

³² Note the frequent connection between the OT “fathers” receiving “promises” (cf. Luke 1:55, 72; Acts 13:32; 26:6-7; Rom 9:4-5; 15:8).

³³ See Adams, *Stars*, 205; Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 291-92; Davids, *2 Peter*, 266-67. On the idiom “since” (ἀφ’ ἧς) see BDAG, 105 (2.b.γ).

³⁴ So Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 373; G. Green, *2 Peter*, 317-18; Davids, *2 Peter*, 265-67; Reese, *2 Peter*, 164.

³⁵ Cf. Isa 13:6; Ezek 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14 [4:14 LXX] Obad 1:15; Zeph 1:7, 14; Adams, *Stars*, 205.

The mockers reject the parousia because they do not believe in *divine intervention*, similar to the Epicurean denial of providence.³⁶ (2) The mockers reject the parousia because they believe that the *cosmos is indestructible*, similar to the Platonic and Aristotelian belief in the eternity of the cosmos.³⁷ In their own way, both views suggest that the cosmos is immutable, thus negating the possibility of Jesus fulfilling God's promise. However, while it is possible that the mockers held one of these philosophical positions, Peter does not provide enough information to attribute either one of them to the mockers. Second Peter 3:4b does not appear to assert that the cosmos can *never* change or that God *cannot* change it. Furthermore, Peter does not appear to focus on refuting these specific positions in his counterargument.

Peter attributes to the mockers only the observation that the cosmos has not changed in comparison to its original state during the period in question (i.e. since the fathers died).³⁸ Thus, the underlying assumption of the mockers appears to be: if Jesus had fulfilled God's promise, then the created world would have experienced change from its original state. If this is the assumption of the mockers, the logic of their argument can be traced as follows:

Hypothetically:

- (a) If Jesus had fulfilled the promise of God's coming,
- (b) Then the created world would have experienced change from its original state.

But in Reality:

- (c) Because the created world has remained unchanged in comparison to its original state since the promise was announced (3:4b),
- (d) Therefore Jesus has not fulfilled the promise (3:4a).

³⁶ This is the majority position, e.g. Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter," *JBL* 99 (1980): 407-31; Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 293-95; M. Green, *2 Peter*, 141; G. Green, *2 Peter*, 318; Kraftchick, *2 Peter*, 152-53.

³⁷ E.g. Adams, *Stars*, 206-209; Bigg, *St. Peter*, 292; von Allmen, "L'apocalyptique juive," 257.

³⁸ The phrase "from the beginning of creation" is often taken as a temporal statement. But this should be questioned. First, Peter has already indicated the time period in question with the phrase "ever since the fathers fell asleep." Second, the adverb "just as" (*οὕτως*) suggests a comparison where "from the beginning of creation" functions as a *point of reference* in order to compare how the cosmos has "remained" unchanged. Thus, it does not function as an indicator of time, but as an indicator of the state of creation.

When the mockers observe that the cosmos remains the same, they are pointing out the obvious: evidence of God’s decisive judgment or a new heavens and a new earth are nowhere to be seen! But since creation persists in its original state, *the promise remains unfulfilled*. Therefore, by observing that the cosmos remains unchanged, the mockers provide *cosmological proof* that “the promise of his coming” has not been fulfilled. Peter will address the relationship between God’s word (by which he made the promise) and the world in 3:5-7.

In conclusion, what is often overlooked in many discussions of 2 Pet 3:4 is that Peter seems to view the scorn of the mockers as a challenge to *the faithful character of God and the integrity of his word/promise*.³⁹ In other words, the mockers are not so much denying an intellectual idea as they are the “Lord and Savior” (1:1-2, 8, 11, 14, 16; 2:20; 3:2, 18). Furthermore, what makes the statement of the mockers so dangerous is that there is nothing “incorrect” about what they observe. It was plain for everyone to see that the parousia promise had remained unfulfilled. Even Peter will grant that, from a human perspective, it *has been* a long time since God issued his promise (3:8-9), and that fiery judgment and the new heavens and new earth *have not yet* arrived to bring change to the cosmos (3:7, 10, 13). So, what the mockers observe is not the problem. The problem from Peter’s perspective is how the mockers “twist” the truth (cf. 2:3; 3:16) through their *unspoken assumptions* about God and his promise.

In 2 Pet 3:5-10 Peter responds to the mockers by addressing the two interconnected rationale they use to justify their rejection of the promise (cf. 3:4b). In 3:5-7 Peter responds to the claim that continuity in the created world proves that the promise is unfulfilled. In 3:8-10 Peter responds to the claim that the lengthy period of delay since the promise was announced proves that God has not been faithful. Both sections are introduced with similar headings regarding what the mockers “ignore” (3:5), and what the readers must not “ignore” (3:8).

³⁹ So Davids, *2 Peter*, 267; Neyrey, *2 Peter*, 232.

7.3.2 What the Mockers Deliberately Ignore (2 Pet 3:5-7)

In 2 Pet 3:5-7 Peter focuses on the relationship between God’s word and the created world. He starts by saying that the mockers are in error, “for they deliberately ignore this fact” (λανθάνει γὰρ αὐτοὺς τοῦτο θέλοντας) (3:5a). I have translated this phrase in a way that highlights the intentional disregard of the mockers, but not all interpreters agree. The problem is that the demonstrative pronoun “this” (τοῦτο) could be the subject of the verb (λανθάνει), as I have translated, or the object of the participle (θέλοντας), which would imply that the mockers have inadvertently overlooked something. Since the position of τοῦτο is closer to the participle, some scholars prefer to translate the clause something like, “For when they maintain this, it escapes them.”⁴⁰ However, τοῦτο is probably the subject of the verb for the following reasons. First, the parallel construction in 3:8 places τοῦτο as the subject of λανθανέτω. Second, Peter uses τοῦτο with a postcedent in other introductory clauses (cf. 1:20; 3:3, 8). Finally, Peter regularly uses the language of volition to attribute negative behaviors to the mockers (cf. 1:20-21; 2:10; 3:3). Thus, it is more likely that Peter portrays the mockers as *deliberately ignoring* something, probably something that should be remembered from scripture (cf. 3:2).⁴¹

What do the mockers deliberately ignore in 3:5b-7? Instead of providing a direct answer, Peter discusses three events.⁴²

⁴⁰ See e.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 297; Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 375; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 224.

⁴¹ So Watson, “Second Peter,” 12:356; Witherington, *1-2 Peter*, 373; Spicq, *Saint Pierre*, 247.

⁴² There is another text-critical issue at the beginning of 3:6, where the NA²⁸ (δι’ ὕδατος) has altered the text of the NA²⁷ (δι’ ὧν). The reading “through which” (NA²⁷) has better external support, but the reading “on account of which” (NA²⁸) makes better sense of the context. This reading is also accepted by Mayor, *Second Peter*, 152. I have chosen the text of the NA²⁸ because it identifies “the word of God” as the clear antecedent and eliminates the seemingly unnecessary repetition of “by water.” Regardless of whether one accepts this reading, “the word of God” should be included as part of the antecedent.

⁵ λανθάνει γὰρ αὐτοὺς τοῦτο θέλοντας ὅτι οὐρανοὶ ἦσαν ἔκπαλαι καὶ γῆ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ δι' ὕδατος συνεστῶσα τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ ⁶ δι' ὃν ὁ τότε κόσμος ὕδατι κατακλυσθεὶς ἀπώλετο. ⁷ οἱ δὲ νῦν οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἡ γῆ τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ τεθησαυρισμένοι εἰσὶν πυρὶ τηρούμενοι εἰς ἡμέραν κρίσεως καὶ ἀπωλείας τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἀνθρώπων.

⁵ For they deliberately ignore this fact, that the heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, by the word of God, ⁶ on account of which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But the present heavens and earth, by the same word, have been reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly humanity.

Observing the structure 3:5b-7 is important for its interpretation. Many scholars follow the lead of Bauckham who writes, “the argument of vv 5-7 requires a *threefold parallelism*: God created the heavens and the earth, he has destroyed them once by water, he will destroy them again by fire.”⁴³ Those who follow this line of interpretation tend to focus almost exclusively on the flood as analogous to the consummation event, since both supposedly emphasize the destruction of the cosmos as opposed to its creation.⁴⁴ However, this understanding of 3:5b-7 should be questioned. While Peter certainly discusses three distinct events in these verses, he only emphasizes a *twofold parallelism*.⁴⁵ He does this in two ways. First, Peter organizes 3:5b-7 according to a *temporal contrast* that divides history into two ages: the past (3:5b-6), and the present (3:7).⁴⁶ Second, Peter *compares* the content of 3:5b-6 with 3:7 through *parallelism*. The parallel features, especially the comparable choice of words and their order, can be observed in Table 7.1.

⁴³ Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 299 (italics added). Making similar statements are Russell, *New Heavens*, 188; Adams, *Stars*, 213; Harrington, *2 Peter*, 287; G. Green, *2 Peter*, 321-22; Donelson, *II Peter*, 269.

⁴⁴ I can be counted as one who previously followed this line of thought, see Juza, “Echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah,” 230.

⁴⁵ The observation that “the word of God” appears as the primary catalyst in all three events/verses does not contradict a twofold parallelism. Second Peter 3:5b-6 is bound together by references in each verse to: (1) the past, and (2) water.

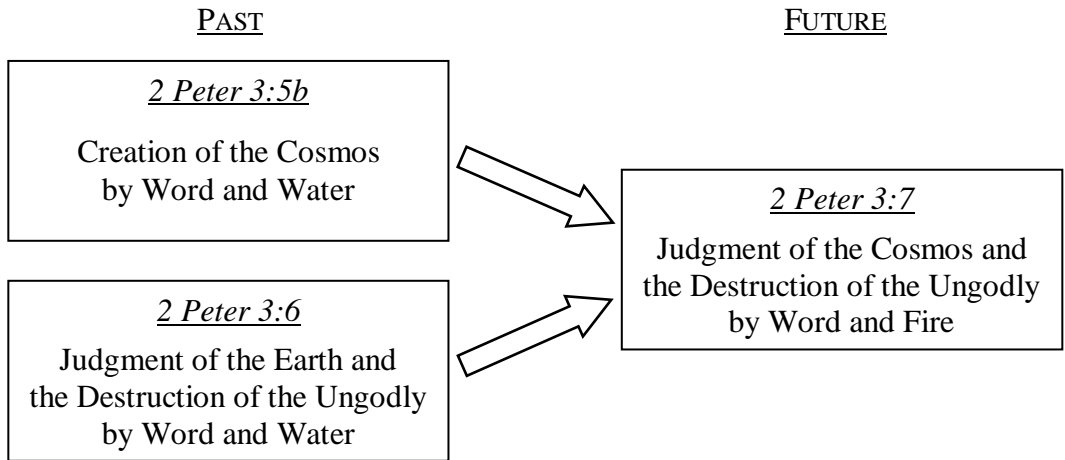
⁴⁶ It is significant that the only conjunction separating the three events is at the beginning of 3:7 (δέ). This again implies that 3:5b-6 is a unit. Some interpreters contend that the contrast is between “water” and “fire.” But this is unlikely given that Peter treats them as analogous.

TABLE 7.1: THE PARALLELISM BETWEEN 2 PETER 3:5-6 AND 3:7

2 PETER 3:5-6	2 PETER 3:7
For they deliberately ignore this fact, that	but
the heavens [οὐρανοὶ] existed long ago [ἔκπαλαι] and the earth [γῆ] was formed out of water and by means of water	the present [νῦν] heavens [οὐρανοὶ] and earth [γῆ]
by the word of God [τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ] on account of which	by the same word [τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ] have been reserved
the world of that time [ὁ τότε κόσμος] was flooded with water [ὑδατι] and perished [ἀπώλετο]	for fire [πυρὶ] being kept for the day of judgment and the destruction [ἀπωλείας] of ungodly humanity [τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἀνθρώπων]

This contrast and parallelism implies that Peter views both the creation and flood events (3:5b-6) as analogous to the consummation event (3:7), albeit in different ways. Peter seems to view the creation event (3:5b) as analogous to the consummation (3:7) because they are both *cosmic in scope*. He seems to view the flood (3:6) as analogous to the consummation (3:7) because they are both *judgments by God that destroy the ungodly*. Thus, Peter draws unique parallels from both the creation and flood events to describe the eschatological consummation (see fig. 7.1).

FIGURE 7.1: ANALOGOUS POINTS BETWEEN 2 PETER 3:5-6 AND 3:7



We can explore these analogies more in detail by discussing each verse individually.

7.3.2.1 Creation by Word and Water (2 Pet 3:5b)

The first event recalled from Scripture is the creation of the cosmos, “by the word of God, the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by means of water” (οὐρανοὶ ἦσαν ἔκπαλαι καὶ γῆ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ δι’ ὕδατος συνεστῶσα τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ) (3:5b). Here Peter alludes to the creation account in Gen 1, where God’s word plays a central role.⁴⁷ In recounting the creation event, Peter does not emphasize the creation of the “heavens.” He only mentions that they “existed long ago.” He appears more interested in highlighting the creation of the “earth,” which “was formed out of water and by means of water.” Several scholars downplay this unique emphasis by claiming that both the “heavens” and the “earth” should be considered the subjects of the participle “was formed” (συνεστῶσα).⁴⁸ However, grammatically speaking, “earth” (γῆ) is the only proper subject of the participle. Thus, Peter appears to emphasize God’s formation of the earthly realm using water.⁴⁹ The two prepositional phrases appear to express the separation and emergence of the earth (i.e. land) from the waters (cf. Gen 1:9). Some interpreters view “by means of water” as problematic because it seems to go beyond the Genesis account.⁵⁰ However, if water was the only material present at the beginning (Gen 1:2), then

⁴⁷ Cf. Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24; Pss 33:6 [32:6 LXX]; 148:5; Wis 9:1; John 1:1-3; Heb 11:3.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 296; Davids, *2 Peter*, 268-69; Adams, *Stars*, 210; Fuchs and Reymond, *La deuxième épître de saint Pierre*, 112.

⁴⁹ So Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 375. This stance does not necessarily imply, as some have speculated, that the heavens were created separately before the earth.

⁵⁰ E.g. Kraftchick, *2 Peter*, 156. This is one of the reasons why Adams claims that Stoic philosophy it at work in 3:5-7 (*Stars*, 210-13). He contends that “out of water and through the medium of water” (his translation) describes the writer’s *scientific* attempt to describe the creation of the world. However, his argument is strained and unconvincing. First, his argument fails to demonstrate relevant textual parallels to either ἐξ ὕδατος or δι’ ὕδατος in Stoic literature and thought. Second, and more problematic, he speculates that Peter envisioned “a state of pure fire” existing *before* the Gen 1 creation account, which then gave rise to the “water” out of which creation was made. Third, Peter frames 2 Pet 3:5-10 as truths that should be *remembered from Scripture* (3:2), not ideas drawn from Stoic philosophy.

God's separation of the waters did not just *uncover* something that was already there (i.e. land), but also was the *means of creating* it.⁵¹ This is consistent with Genesis' portrayal of God using the "waters" as his means of creating sea creatures (1:20), as well as "land" being God's means of creating vegetation (1:11-12) and animals (1:24). Thus, Peter could speak of the earth emerging both "out of" and "by means of" water by reflecting upon Gen 1.

7.3.2.2 Judgment by Word and Water (2 Pet 3:6)

The second event recalled from Scripture is the Noahic flood, "on account of which [i.e. on account of the word of God] the world of that time was flooded with water and perished" (3:6). Here Peter alludes to the portion of the flood story recorded in Gen 6:5-7:24 that emphasizes God's judgment upon the world of the ungodly. The initial prepositional phrase "on account of the word of God" stresses once again the prominence of God's speech in declaring his intention to judge and destroy the wicked (cf. Gen 6:7, 13, 17).

At first glance, "the world of that time" appears to summarize the created "heavens and earth" (3:5b), and stand in temporal contrast to "the present heavens and earth" (3:7). As a result, some scholars interpret the "world" here with a cosmological sense.⁵² However, there is good reason to think that Peter uses *ὁ τότε κόσμος* to refer to the world of ungodly humanity at the time of the flood.⁵³ First, *κόσμος* is not strictly a neutral cosmological term in 2 Peter synonymous with "heaven and earth." It can refer to the cosmos or to humanity and is always

⁵¹ So the majority of interpreters, e.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 297-98; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 225-26.

⁵² E.g. Adams, *Stars*, 214; Fornberg, *Early Church*, 66; Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 298-99; Davids, *2 Peter*, 271; Donelson, *II Peter*, 268-69; Paulsen, *Zweite Petrusbrief*, 161; Reese, *2 Peter*, 166; Horrell, *Epistles of Peter*, 177; Fuchs and Reymond, *La deuxième épître de saint Pierre*, 113; Schrage, *Die "Katholischen" Briefe*, 148; Michl, *Katholischen Briefe*, 179-80; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter*, 359.

⁵³ So H. Sasse, "κόσμος," *TDNT* 3:890; H. Balz, "κόσμος," *EDNT* 2:311; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 226; idem, *Zukunft*, 134-36; Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 377; Moo, *2 Peter*, 171; G. Green, *2 Peter*, 320-21; M. Green, *2 Peter*, 142; Witherington, *1-2 Peter*, 374; Richard, *2 Peter*, 378; Hillyer, *2 Peter*, 213, 215; Bigg, *St. Peter*, 294.

associated with corruption and unrighteousness (cf. 1:4; 2:5, 20). Second, according to the twofold parallelism charted above, “the world of that time” (ὁ τότε κόσμος) is parallel with “ungodly humanity” (τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἀνθρώπων) in 3:7. Both of these groups are said to suffer “destruction” (ἀπώλετο and ἀπωλείας) amid God’s judgments. Third, this same parallelism is found in 2:5, where God “did not spare the ancient world [ἀρχαίου κόσμου], but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly [κόσμῳ ἀσεβῶν].” Thus, 2:5 makes the connection between the “world” and “ungodly humanity” explicit. Fourth, in every other instance where Peter uses the word “perish/destroy” (ἀπόλλυμι, 3:9) or its cognate “destruction” (ἀπόλεια, 2:3; 3:7, 16), what is destroyed is ungodly humanity, not the cosmos. Finally, an emphasis on the destruction of ungodly humanity is consistent with how the rest of the NT employs the story of the flood. It is always the ungodly who are destroyed, not the cosmos (cf. Matt 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27; Heb 11:7; 1 Pet 3:20). Therefore, when Peter speaks of “the world of that time,” he most likely refers to *the world of ungodly humanity*.

By implication, if “the world of that time” refers to the wicked generation of the flood, then Peter does not portray the flood as a cosmic-wide event that destroyed the totality of heaven and earth.⁵⁴ It is more likely that Peter is simply portraying the flood as God’s judgment upon the *earth alone* in order to purge it of its corrupt inhabitants.⁵⁵ Restricting the scope of the flood to the earth also coheres with Peter’s unique emphasis on God’s watery creation of the “earth” alone in 3:5b. Just as the earth “was formed out of and by means of waters,” it was also “flooded

⁵⁴ Contra the majority of interpreters, e.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 298-99; Adams, *Stars*, 214; Fornberg, *Early Church*, 66; Fuchs and Reymond, *La deuxième épître de saint Pierre*, 113; Schrage, *Die “Katholischen” Briefe*, 148; Michl, *Katholischen Briefe*, 179-80; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter*, 359; Horrell, *Epistles of Peter*, 177; Kraftchick, *2 Peter*, 157; Spicq, *Saint Pierre*, 248; Dennis, “Cosmology in the Petrine Literature,” 173-75.

⁵⁵ So Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 377.

with water.” In other words, the “heavens” were not affected by the flood. If this is the case, it renders unnecessary attempts to find apocalyptic parallels that portray the flood as a cosmic catastrophe (e.g. 1 En. 83:3-5).⁵⁶ It also calls into question the frequent line of reasoning among interpreters that God destroyed the entire cosmos once in the flood, therefore he will do it again at the consummation. Peter conceives of the flood as a judgment that was *smaller in scope* than the consummation.

This, of course, does not imply that the earth itself was not affected by the flood. Peter likely assumed that it was damaged to some degree, but he does not make this clear. It seems unlikely that Peter believed the earth was utterly destroyed (i.e. annihilated), or even reverted to pre-creation chaos during the flood, because he does not refer to an act of re-creation or re-ordering after the flood.⁵⁷ And given the nature of ancient Jewish cosmology, which did not view the earth as a “globe,” but more like a flat surface of “land” resting on the waters below, it may be possible that Peter conceived of the flood as something like an *effacement* that scoured the face of the earth in order to cleanse it of its wicked inhabitants (cf. Gen 6:7; 7:4, 23). This is of course speculative, but for ancient people familiar with how a flood would wipe clean or sweep away everything in its path from the face of the land, the idea of effacement seems like a natural possibility. Whatever his precise belief may have been, the key point to recognize is:

*Peter does not elaborate on the cosmological effect of the flood.*⁵⁸ Thus, Peter’s main concern in

⁵⁶ Also unnecessary is the proposal of Adams, who concludes that Peter describes the flood as a “*cosmic cataclysm*,” and that “the closest parallel to what is imagined in 2 Pet. 3.6 is the Roman Stoic notion of a cosmic deluge, corresponding to the cosmic conflagration” (*Stars*, 214, italics original). But in light of the evidence above, this conclusion is highly improbable.

⁵⁷ The fact that Peter delineates between the cosmos of the past (3:5), present (3:7), and future (3:13) does not necessarily mean that Peter conceives of multiple “worlds” that have been destroyed and re-created. Those who propose such a scheme must assume a re-creation event between 3:6 and 3:7. More likely, these designations simply separate periods of *time* regarding the history of the world.

⁵⁸ So Witherington, *1-2 Peter*, 374.

evoking the flood tradition is not to prove that the cosmos is destructible.⁵⁹ Rather, he emphasizes that *in the past God used water as his means of condemning the ungodly*. Therefore, Peter uses the flood story as an analogy for the consummation to identify *the target of God's condemnation* (i.e. ungodly humanity), not the scope of his judgment.

7.3.2.3 The Judgment of Creation by Word and Fire (2 Pet 3:7)

The third event is the eschatological consummation, “But the present heavens and earth, by the same word, have been reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly humanity” (3:7). As argued above, by contrasting the “present” (3:7) with “long ago” (3:5b), and by paralleling “heaven and earth” (3:5b, 7), Peter draws an analogous link between creation and consummation.⁶⁰ Peter appears to align the creation and consummation in order to stress the *cosmic scope* of the Day of the Lord. Everything that God created will stand before him on “the day of judgment.”⁶¹ It will be a judgment more comprehensive than the flood since the consummation will also affect the heavens in addition to the earth (cf. Heb 12:26).

Just as God’s “word” spoke the created order into existence and decreed his intent to flood the ancient world, it is “by the same word” that the present cosmos “has been reserved for fire.” For Peter, it is the power of God’s word that *predetermines* the course of history.⁶² In other words, the present cosmos has been predestined for judgment by fire because God has already declared it so. Thus, the specific “word” mentioned here most likely refers to a word of God recorded in scriptural prophecy that Peter closely associated with “the promise of his

⁵⁹ Contra Adams, *Stars*, 214-20.

⁶⁰ So Vögtle, 2. *Petrusbrief*, 226; idem, *Zukunft*, 134-35.

⁶¹ This analogous relationship also lays the groundwork for Peter to speak of the consummation as resulting in a new heaven and new earth (3:13).

⁶² So Schelkle, *Petrusbriefe*, 225-26.

coming” (3:4; cf. 3:2).⁶³ There are several OT passages that speak of God coming in judgment by fire, many of which share an association with the tradition of God’s fiery judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah.⁶⁴

Most interpreters contend that the phrase “reserved for fire” implies the dissolution of the cosmos, or even its annihilation.⁶⁵ For example, Adams writes, “It is quite clear from the context that what the writer means by ‘reserved for fire’ is *reserved for fiery destruction*. He anticipates a judgement by fire which parallels the earlier judgement by flood, which had *destroyed* (*ἀπώλετο*) the world of that time.”⁶⁶ But this and similar conclusions should be questioned. I agree with Adams that Peter parallels God’s judgments by water and fire. However, the parallelism charted above reveals that the main point of comparison between the flood and consummation is between “the world of that time” (3:6) and “ungodly humanity” (3:7) since both suffer “destruction” respectively by water and fire. Therefore, the main point of comparison between the flood and the consummation is not the destruction of the cosmos, but *the destruction of the ungodly*. Peter still may believe in the former, but as with the flood, he does not make this explicit here.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the final participial clause of 3:7 indicates the *purpose* of the fire for which the present heavens and earth have been reserved.⁶⁸ Peter does not say that the cosmos is being kept for fiery destruction, but “for the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly humanity.” Therefore, it would be more fitting to say that “reserved for fire” implies: (1) the present cosmos is *reserved for fiery judgment*, and (2) ungodly humanity is

⁶³ Watson, “Second Peter,” 12:356; Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 301.

⁶⁴ Deut 32:22, 32-35; Pss 17:2-4 [16:2-4 LXX]; 97:3 [96:3 LXX]; Isa 30:30; 34:8-9; 66:15-16; Ezek 38:22; Zeph 1:18; 3:8; Mal 4:1 [3:19 LXX]. See Juza, “Echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah,” 227-45.

⁶⁵ E.g. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 299-301; Kraftchick, *2 Peter*, 157-59; Horrell, *Epistles of Peter*, 178; M. Green, *2 Peter*, 143; Harrington, *2 Peter*, 287; Witherington, *1-2 Peter*, 374-75; Donelson, *II Peter*, 269-70; Davids, *2 Peter*, 271; Reese, *2 Peter*, 166-67; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter*, 360-61; Reicke, *Epistles of Peter*, 175.

⁶⁶ Adams, *Stars*, 215 (italics original).

⁶⁷ So M. Green, *2 Peter*, 144.

⁶⁸ Moo, “Continuity,” 35.

*reserved for fiery destruction.*⁶⁹ Again, this does not preclude Peter from asserting (perhaps in 3:10-13) that God's fiery judgment of the cosmos and destruction of the ungodly *also* will destroy the cosmos. But Peter does not stress cosmic destruction in 3:7.

What, then, is the nature of God's eschatological fire? Peter certainly emphasizes its destructive nature. But this appears to be only part of the picture. As we have just discussed, Peter states that the purpose of fire is to serve as God's means of: (1) judging all things, and (2) condemning the ungodly. Thus, as a means of judgment, fire will *test* all things; and as a means of condemnation, fire will *destroy* that which does not pass the test.⁷⁰ In other words, when Jesus fulfills the parousia promise, fire will engulf the entire cosmos in order to test all things, and as a part of the process of testing, it will destroy that which is deemed unfit for the new heavens and new earth. This seems to imply, then, that fire will be God's agent to *purge* the cosmos of "corruption" (cf. 1:4), transforming it by destroying that which cannot enter the "eternal kingdom" (1:11).

This brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of our discussion of 3:5-7: What do the mockers "deliberately ignore" (3:5a)? By using an observation from the created world to prove that the parousia promise is null and void (3:4), the mockers emphasize the primacy of the created order over God's word. In other words, they reason from the continuity of the cosmos to the invalidity of the promise (i.e. God's word). But Peter rejects their reasoning. He responds by pointing out three events that all draw attention to the relationship between God's word and the created order. In each event, God's word is the primary catalyst that dictates what happens in the created world. As a result, Peter turns the reasoning of the mockers on its head by emphasizing the primacy of God's word over the created order.

⁶⁹ The writer of Hebrews offered a similar twofold description of the Day of the Lord, describing it as "a terrifying prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries" (Heb 10:27).

⁷⁰ So Wright, *Early Christian Letters*, 119.

Therefore, what the mockers “deliberately ignore” is that *God’s word takes precedence over the created world*. In other words, the validity of God’s promise is not dependant on what can be observed from the created order. Thus, the mockers are absolutely wrong to argue that continuity within the created order proves anything! When the Creator spoke, all things came into existence (3:5b), and when the Judge of the earth spoke, the ungodly were deluged (3:6). Therefore, since the Judge of all creation has already spoken, promising to come and thereby reserving the cosmos for fire (3:7), it is *certain* that judgment is coming and that the created order will not remain the same forever. Jesus is coming and a new heaven and a new earth are coming with him. It is not a question of if it will happen, but when. This brings us to the issue of timing.

7.3.3 What the Beloved Must Not Ignore (2 Pet 3:8-10)

In 2 Pet 3:8-10 Peter continues his response to the mockers by addressing the apparent “delay” between God’s announcement of the promise and its fulfillment in Jesus’ parousia. Peter signals this shift with an introductory clause similar to the one in 3:5, “But do not ignore this one thing, beloved” (3:8a). Whereas the mockers “deliberately ignore” the primacy of God’s word (3:5-7), the beloved must not “ignore” that God’s perspective of time is radically different from a human perspective of time. It should be noted that Peter’s exhortation to not “ignore” is part of his broader call to “remember” (3:1-2; cf. 1:12-15). This implies that 3:8-10 is not new information, but something that needs to be reemphasized in light of the challenge presented by the mockers.

⁸ Ἐν δὲ τούτῳ μὴ λανθανέτω ὑμᾶς, ἀγαπητοί, ὅτι μία ἡμέρα παρὰ κυρίῳ ὡς χίλια ἔτη καὶ χίλια ἔτη ὡς ἡμέρα μία. ⁹ οὐ βραδύνει κύριος τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ὡς τινες βραδύτητα ἡγοῦνται, ἀλλὰ μακροθυμεῖ εἰς ὑμᾶς μὴ βουλόμενός τις ἀπολέσθαι ἀλλὰ πάντας εἰς μετάνοιαν χωρῆσαι. ¹⁰ Ἦξει δὲ ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς ἐν ἧ ἡ οἱ οὐρανοὶ ῥοιζήδον παρελεύσονται, στοιχεῖα δὲ καυσούμενα λυθήσεται, καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὐρεθήσεται.

⁸ But do not ignore this one thing, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved in the great heat, and the earth and the works in it will be found.

7.3.3.1 One Day is Like a Thousand Years (2 Pet 3:8b)

Peter expresses the content of what the beloved are not to lose sight of in 2 Pet 3:8b, “with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day.” Here Peter alludes to Ps 90:4 (89:4 LXX), which was employed by some contemporary writers as an exegetical formula for interpreting a “day” as “one thousand years.”⁷¹ A few modern interpreters think that Peter also uses this strategy to interpret the “day of judgment” (3:7) as a judgment of one thousand years.⁷² However, given that Peter introduces a new topic in 3:8a, it is unlikely that he uses the Psalm to comment on 3:7. Furthermore, Peter’s argument in 3:8b-10 appears to demand a different understanding of the Psalm.⁷³ The point seems to be a contrast between human and divine *perspectives of time*. Whereas one thousand years seems to be a monumental length of time to humans, it is merely like a single day to God. In other words, the mockers view time from the limited perspective of their own earthly existence, while God views time from the grand perspective of all of history.

⁷¹ E.g. Barn. 15:4; 2 En. 33:1-2; Jub. 4:29-30; Justin, *Dial.* 81; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.28.3.

⁷² E.g. von Allmen, “L’apocalyptique juive,” 261-62. Neyrey proposes that Peter alludes to God delaying Adam’s punishment for one thousand years (2 *Peter*, 238).

⁷³ So the majority of interpreters, e.g. Vögtle, 2. *Petrusbrief*, 230. It may be possible that Peter is alluding to a tradition of thought found in later Rabbinic literature, see Bauckham, 2 *Peter*, 306-10.

7.3.3.2 The Lord is Patient (2 Pet 3:9)

Because of these different perspectives of time, Peter draws the following inference, “the Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (3:9). Peter does two things in this verse. First, he rejects the conclusion of the mockers that the parousia is delayed (3:9a). Second, he offers an alternative explanation for why God appears to be “slow” in fulfilling the parousia promise (3:9b).

Because of the mockers’ limited perspective of time, Peter emphatically rejects the notion that God is “slow about his promise, as some think of slowness.”⁷⁴ In 3:4b the mockers objected to the parousia promise based on a temporal observation that a lengthy period of time had passed “since the fathers fell asleep.” Thus, God was “slow” in their opinion. But according to Peter, since the mockers (and all humans for that matter) have a limited perspective of time (3:8b), they are unable to judge whether God is indeed “slow.” Delay is only an issue for those, like the mockers, who hold God to a human perspective of time. By implication, Peter does not deny the delay of the parousia from a *human* perspective. Instead, his argument takes issue with *who is qualified* to evaluate God’s timing. He concludes that that humans lack the necessary perspective.

After rejecting the conclusion of the mockers, Peter offers his own reason why God appears to be “slow” from a human perspective, “but [the Lord] is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (3:9b). Peter grounds his alternative understanding of delay in the Lord’s character as a *patient* God.⁷⁵ Thus, the parousia has not yet occurred

⁷⁴ Note that 3:9 begins with the negative adverb (οὐ) for emphasis. Peter probably alludes here to Hab 2:3; Isa 13:19-22.

⁷⁵ Cf. Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15 [85:15 LXX]; 103:8-10 [102:8-10 LXX]; 145:8-9 [144:8-9 LXX]; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:3; Nah 1:3; Wis 15:1.

because the Lord exercises his long-suffering disposition toward humanity, specifically in regard to delaying his *judgment of humanity*. God is patient with humanity because he desires to forgive and save rather than condemn and destroy. Thus, God’s patience is an expression of his *merciful* character. As a result, Peter implies that the judgment associated with the parousia has not yet occurred because God is graciously allotting time for (ideally) “all” humanity to repent. He does not want them to “perish” (*ἀπολέσθαι*) amid the fire of eschatological judgment (cf. *ἀπωλείας* in 3:7) as Noah’s generation did during the flood (cf. *ἀπώλετο* in 3:6). Peter’s primary concern here is with his readers who have followed the mockers. Peter is attempting to persuade them to repent and avoid God’s condemnation. However, if they refuse, they will suffer a worse fate than those of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁷⁶ Ultimately, God’s delay is for redemptive purposes.

7.3.3.3 The Day Will Come Like a Thief (2 Pet 3:10a)

Even though God is patient, Peter underscores that God’s long-suffering nature should not be taken for granted, “but the Day of the Lord will come like a thief” (3:10a). As recognized by most interpreters, this saying can be traced back to Jesus and his exhortations in regard to God’s eschatological judgment (cf. Matt 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40).⁷⁷ The implied point of the contrast between 2 Pet 3:8b-9 and 3:10a is that anyone who presumes upon the Lord’s “delay” by using it as an opportunity to sin (and by implication not repent) will find themselves in danger of condemnation (i.e. perishing) when the Lord “comes” unexpectedly (cf. Matt 24:45-51; Luke 12:41-48). Thus, Peter once again frames the “Day of the Lord” as a “day of judgment” (cf. 2 Pet 2:9; 3:7). In other words, the Lord will fulfill the parousia promise when his merciful patience with the ungodly comes to an end, and it will catch them unaware.

⁷⁶ See Juza, “Echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah,” 234-35.

⁷⁷ Also cf. 1 Thess 5:2-4; Rev 3:3; 16:15; Did. 16:1; Gos. Thom. 21. Some interpreters think that Peter may be alluding here to 1 Thessalonians because of the similarities between the verses.

Peter depicts the events of the Day of the Lord with a three part relative clause (ἐν ᾗ). On that Day: (1) the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, (2) the elements will be dissolved in the great heat, and (3) the earth and the works in it will be found. Peter also restates the first two events in 3:12b-c with minor variations. Given the amount of uncertainty and debate surrounding these clauses, I will discuss each separately.

7.3.3.4 The Heavens Will Pass Away (2 Pet 3:10b, 12b)

First, Peter writes, “the heavens will pass away with a loud noise” (οἱ οὐρανοὶ ῥοιζήδῳν παρελεύσονται) (3:10b). The “heavens” here refer to the upper portion of the cosmos, the counterpart of the “earth” (cf. 3:5, 7, 12, 13). Peter indicates that they will come to an end, for they “will pass away.”⁷⁸ As most scholars note, “loud noise” (ῥοιζήδῳν) is an onomatopoeic adverb that was commonly used to describe a vivid range of noises, especially something moving through the air with great force and speed.⁷⁹ For example, it was used to describe the whizzing noise of an arrow as it passed through the air or the cracking noise of thunder. It is difficult to know exactly what Peter describes here. He may be describing the thunderous voice of the Lord as he comes to judge (cf. Ps 18:13-15 [17:14-16 LXX]; Amos 1:2; 1 Thess 4:16).⁸⁰ He may be describing the deafening sound of the heavens being “rolled up like a scroll” by God (cf. Isa 34:4; Rev 6:14).⁸¹ Or he may be describing the sound of the heavens burning with fire.⁸² If Peter is alluding to the tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah, he may be describing something like

⁷⁸ This may allude to Jesus’ statement regarding the “passing away” of heaven and earth (cf. Matt 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33). Alternatively, he may be alluding to Isa 34:4 (“and the heavens will be rolled up as a scroll”) since he only refers to the “heavens.”

⁷⁹ BDAG, 907.

⁸⁰ Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 315.

⁸¹ Michl, *Katholischen Briefe*, 181.

⁸² The majority of interpreters, e.g. M. Green, *2 Peter*, 150; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 233-34.

a firestorm that rained fire-like lightning upon Sodom and Gomorrah.⁸³ All of these interpretive options would cohere with Peter's restatement of 3:10b in 3:12b, "the heavens will be dissolved by being set ablaze" (οὐρανοὶ πυρούμενοι λυθήσονται). Whatever Peter's use of the language may entail, the Day of the Lord will not arrive unnoticed. The heavens will be subjected to fire when he comes.

7.3.3.5 The Elements Will Be Dissolved (2 Pet 3:10c, 12c)

Next Peter writes in 3:10c, "and the elements will be dissolved in the great heat" (στοιχεῖα δὲ καυσούμενα λυθήσεται), which he restates in 3:12c as "the elements will melt in the great heat" (καὶ στοιχεῖα καυσούμενα τήκεται). The main point of contention in this verse is not so much what happens to the elements. They will be dissolved/melted from the heat of the fire. Rather, the debate among interpreters is: What is the meaning of "elements" (στοιχεῖα)? There are three main lines of interpretation.⁸⁴

(1) The "elements" are the basic physical components of the universe (i.e. earth, air, water, and fire).⁸⁵ This was a common use of the word.⁸⁶ Proponents of this position normally suggest that the pairing of the "heavens" and the "elements" in 3:12b-c appears to designate the totality of the cosmos. Thus, it is reasoned that the "elements" refer to the constituent parts of the earthly realm, which are burned up and destroyed. However, it is highly improbable that Peter has essentially substituted the word "elements" for "earth," and that he uses the "heavens"

⁸³ See Juza, "Echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah," 237.

⁸⁴ On the basic usage and history of the term see BDAG, 946; G. Dellling, "στοιχεῖον," *TDNT* 7:670-87; H.-H. Esser, "στοιχεῖα," *NIDNTT* 2:451-53.

⁸⁵ Adams, *Stars*, 222-24; Frayer-Griggs, *Saved Through Fire*, 237-38; Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 384; Neyrey, *2 Peter*, 242-43; G. Green, *2 Peter*, 330; Moo, *2 Peter*, 190; Fuchs and Reymond, *La deuxième épître de saint Pierre*, 118; Reicke, *Epistles of Peter*, 180; Wolters, "Worldview," 490; Dennis, "Cosmology in the Petrine Literature," 175; Harrill, "Stoic Physics," 129.

⁸⁶ Cf. Wis 7:17; 19:18; 4 Macc 12:13; Sib. Or. 2:206-207; 3:80-81; 8:337-39; Philo, *Cherubim*, 2.35.

and the “elements” as a pair to refer to the totality of the cosmos. Peter consistently uses the standard biblical pair of “heaven” and “earth” to designate the totality of the cosmos everywhere else in his letter (3:5, 7, 10, 13). Furthermore, Peter most likely indicates that the “elements” are an *additional feature* of his description of the Day of the Lord by inserting them in-between “heaven” and “earth” in 3:10. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the “elements” refer to the physical components of the universe.

(2) The majority view is that the “elements” refer to the heavenly bodies (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars).⁸⁷ This was another common use of the word, although it is not attested in other literature until the second century CE.⁸⁸ This meaning is supported by the following observations. As mentioned above, Peter inserts the “elements” in-between “heaven” and “earth” in 3:10, which implies that they are a part of the cosmic whole. Second, Peter implies that the “elements” belong to the “heavens” because he closely associates the two by pairing them in 3:12b-c, and by using a common verb with each (λύω). Third, by writing that the elements “will melt” (τήκεται) in 3:12c, Peter probably alludes to Isa 34:4 (LXX), “and all the powers of the heavens will melt” (καὶ τακῆσονται πᾶσαι αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν).⁸⁹ The “powers of the heavens” in Isa 34:4 refer in part to the heavenly bodies, which are destroyed by God on the Day of the Lord. Therefore, the “elements” most likely refer to the heavenly bodies. Peter’s imagery suggests that God will strip away the heavens (3:10b) and the heavenly bodies (3:10c) as he comes to judge the earth (3:10d). Now, while this view makes excellent sense of

⁸⁷ E.g. Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 234; Russell, *New Heavens*, 190; Fornberg, *Early Church*, 74; Watson, “Second Peter,” 12:357; Kraftchick, *2 Peter*, 163; Harrington, *2 Peter*, 289; Donelson, *II Peter*, 276-77; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter*, 364; Mayor, *Second Peter*, 158-60; Michl, *Katholischen Briefe*, 181; Spicq, *Saint Pierre*, 254-55; Bigg, *St. Peter*, 296-97.

⁸⁸ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.102; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad. Autol.* 1.4-6; 2.15, 35; Justin, *2 Apol.* 5.2; *Dial.* 23.2-3.

⁸⁹ This text is found in the Vaticanus (B) and Lucian (L) texts of the LXX. So Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 316; Davids, *2 Peter*, 285, 291; Donelson, *II Peter*, 277; Fornberg, *Early Church*, 74; M. Green, *2 Peter*, 151, 154; Kelly, *Peter*, 364, 367; Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 384, 391; Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 234, 242-43.

στοιχεῖα, it must be combined with the third proposal in order to account for Peter's anticipation of the eschatological judgment of hostile powers.

(3) The third position builds on the second and identifies the “elements” as heavenly powers (i.e. hostile spirits).⁹⁰ This usage of the word is probably found in Paul (although this is debated), where hostile spirits elicit worship and exercise control over the natural world (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20).⁹¹ It was commonly believed in the ancient world that the heavenly bodies (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars) were living beings, spiritual powers that governed the affairs of earth. As noted in previous chapters, this belief can be observed in texts like Isa 34:4-5 where Yahweh not only destroys the heavenly bodies, but also slays the hostile spirits that oversee and elicit worship from Edom.⁹² This dual focus can also be observed in subsequent allusions to Isa 34:4 LXX, where “the powers of the heavens” are interpreted by some writers as the “sun, moon, and stars” (Rev 6:12b-13; Apoc. Pet. 5:4 Eth.) and by others as “invisible spirits” (T. Levi 4:1). Furthermore, we have already encountered other NT passages that identify the sun, moon, and stars with heavenly powers (cf. Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25).⁹³ And finally, in the tradition of the Watchers, a tradition to which Peter clearly alludes (2:4), the “watchers” (i.e. rebellious angels) are identified as “stars” and subjected to fiery judgment (cf. 1 En. 10:6-13; 18:11-19:3; 21:1-10; 86:1-88:3; 90:24).

Several interpreters do not mention this third interpretive possibility, or suggest that it is contextually inappropriate.⁹⁴ However, it is often overlooked that Peter has already set the clear

⁹⁰ See Friedrich Spitta, *Der zweite Brief des Petrus und der Brief des Judas: Eine geschichtliche Untersuchung* (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1885), 260-72; Schrage, *Die “Katholischen” Briefe*, 150; Wilson, “Εὐρεθήσεται in 2 Pet. iii. 10,” 44-45.

⁹¹ Also cf. Eph 6:12; Jub. 2:2; 1 En. 60:12.

⁹² Spitta, *Der zweite Brief des Petrus*, 265-66.

⁹³ Also cf. Rev 12:4, where the “stars” likely refer to “angels” in league with Satan.

⁹⁴ E.g. Adams, *Stars*, 222-23; M. Green, *2 Peter*, 151; Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 384.

expectation in 2 Peter that hostile powers will face eschatological judgment on the Day of the Lord.

First, Peter emphasizes in 2:4 that the angels who sinned “are being kept for the judgment” (εἰς κρίσιν τηρουμένους). The judgment for which they are being kept, of course, is the Day of the Lord. God has taken a similar action against the mockers, since he knows how “to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment” (ἀδίκους δὲ εἰς ἡμέραν κρίσεως κολαζομένους τηρεῖν) (2:9; cf. 2:17). Thus, Peter sets the expectation that both sinful angels and sinful humanity are being kept by God for judgment on the Day of the Lord. Thus, when Peter returns in 3:7 to the idea of God “keeping” (τηρούμενοι) heaven (i.e. the abode of angels) and earth (i.e. the abode of humanity) “for the day of judgment” (εἰς ἡμέραν κρίσεως), he almost certainly has in mind that God intends to condemn hostile angels and ungodly humanity. In Peter’s description of the Day of the Lord, then, God’s fiery judgment of the heavens will result in his condemnation of the heavenly bodies/powers (3:10c), and his fiery judgment of the earth will result in his condemnation of ungodly humanity (3:10d).

Second, Peter appears to anticipate the condemnation of hostile powers again in 2:12 by stating that the mockers “will be destroyed” (φθαρήσονται) in the same “destruction” (φθορᾷ) experienced by the ones whom they slander. The “glorious ones” (δόξας) whom the mockers slander are most likely evil angelic powers (2:10b-11; cf. Jude 8-9).⁹⁵ That Peter calls these angels “glorious ones” would seem to contradict the idea that they are evil, but Peter appears to be drawing another connection between these hostile powers and the light-emitting (i.e. glorious)

⁹⁵ Second Peter 2:12 is notoriously difficult to translate. It appears most probable that the antecedent of “their” (αὐτῶν) in 2:12 is “whom” (ἐν οἷς) from the previous clause, which most likely stands for the object of “slandering.” For a discussion of the interpretive options in this passage and support for the conclusion above see Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 261-64; Witherington, *1-2 Peter*, 357; Dennis, “Cosmology in the Petrine Literature,” 169-70. For an argument against this position see G. Green, *2 Peter*, 274-77.

sun, moon, and stars. The mockers slander these evil angelic powers because they “despise lordship” (2:10a). They tout their “freedom” to practice whatever immoral behaviors they desire, likely claiming in boldness and without fear that the evil angelic powers have no control over them (2:19).⁹⁶ Yet, the mockers are “ignorant” of the fact that the hostile powers have enslaved them, and as a result they will be destroyed along with these hostile angelic powers (2:12). Thus, Peter seems to set the expectation once again that God will condemn both hostile angels and ungodly humanity on the Day of the Lord.

Therefore, the most probable meaning of *στοιχεῖα* is a combination of proposals (2) and (3) above.⁹⁷ It takes on a blended meaning of heavenly bodies (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars) and heavenly powers (i.e. hostile spirits). The dissolution of the elements by fire, then, most likely refers to *God’s dissolution of the heavenly bodies, an act which serves as his condemnation of the heavenly powers*. Thus, the hostile powers in the heavens will be overthrown when Jesus comes in power as the Lord of the universe (cf. 1:16).

7.3.3.6 The Earth and the Works in it Will be Found (2 Pet 3:10d)

The third clause in Peter’s description of the Day of the Lord focuses on God’s judgment of the earthly realm, “and the earth and the works in it will be found” (*καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὐρεθήσεται*) (3:10d). As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, I think the primary challenge facing interpreters of 3:10d is a text-critical issue. While the NA²⁸ opts for the sparsely attested “will not be found” (*οὐχ εὐρεθήσεται*), I have argued that the reading of the NA²⁷, “will be found” (*εὐρεθήσεται*), should be maintained. I will proceed according to this determination.

⁹⁶ So Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 262.

⁹⁷ So Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 315-16; Davids, *2 Peter*, 283-86; Schelkle, *Petrusbriefe*, 228; Horrell, *Epistles of Peter*, 180; Hillyer, *2 Peter*, 217. Open to the possibility is Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 234; Paulsen, *Zweite Petrusbrief*, 167; Moo, “Continuity,” 32-34.

The “earth” here refers to the lower portion of the cosmos, the counterpart of the “heavens” (cf. 3:5, 7, 13). It is the dwelling place of humanity, just as the heavens are the dwelling place of the elements (i.e. the heavenly bodies/powers).⁹⁸ Thus, Peter uses the “earth” to stress the all-inclusive scope of God’s judgment of humanity. No earth-dweller will be able to escape it.

Some have argued that “the works in it” refer to the contents of the earth as the creative acts of God,⁹⁹ or the creations of humanity (i.e. cities, buildings, structures, etc.).¹⁰⁰ However, if “earth” is understood as the dwelling place of humanity, “the works in it” most naturally refer to the deeds done by humanity as residents of the earth.¹⁰¹ This is how Peter employs his only other use of the term. Referring to the ungodly inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter writes that Lot was “tormented in his righteous soul by their lawless works [ἔργους]” (2:8). Thus, God’s discovery of the “earth and the works in it” most likely depicts his all-inclusive judgment of the deeds of humanity (cf. 2 Clem. 16:3; 1 Cor 3:13-15).

Given the perceived difficulty of the reading “will be found” (εὐρεθήσεται), several proposals have been made in order to account for its background and meaning. Worth discussing here is the influential work of Al Wolters, who advances a three-pronged argument in favor of: (1) accepting εὐρεθήσεται as the best reading of 3:10d, (2) rejecting the “common assumption” that 2 Pet 3 depicts “the coming judgement as a *cosmic annihilation*, a complete destruction or abolition of the created order,” and (3) interpreting εὐρεθήσεται as “a *metallurgical* term appropriate to smelting and refining.”¹⁰² In other words, Wolters suggests that Peter envisions

⁹⁸ Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 320.

⁹⁹ E.g. Fornberg, *Early Church*, 74-75.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. Moo, *2 Peter*, 191; Schrage, *Die “Katholischen” Briefe*, 150; Michl, *Katholischen Briefe*, 181.

¹⁰¹ So Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 236.

¹⁰² Wolters, “Worldview,” 405-413, here 407-408 (italics added).

something like a *meltdown* of the cosmos as God purges it of evil so that what “will be found” is the result of a process of purification.¹⁰³

In support of this position, Wolters notes that a common word used for something burning up (*καίω*) is absent in 3:10-12. Furthermore, the words that Peter does use (*καυσόω* and *πυρόω*) can refer to the heating of metals until they are red hot, as in a smelting furnace. As a result, Wolters suggests that Peter alludes to Mal 3:2-4 (cf. Mal 4:1-2), where the Lord comes as a “refiner’s fire” to purify Israel’s priesthood until they present “right offerings.” In apocalyptic fashion, Peter has modified the imagery to include the entire cosmos.

With this background in view, Wolters contends that *εὑρεθήσεται* takes on a *positive* nuance, which he claims is also found in 2 Pet 3:14, “strive to be found [*εὑρεθῆναι*] by him at peace, without spot or blemish.” He concludes that “to be found” refers to “*eschatological survival*,” having a connotation of “‘to have survived,’ ‘to have stood the test,’ ‘to have proved genuine.’”¹⁰⁴ Wolters finds further support for this interpretation in 1 Pet 1:7, “so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—might be found [*εὑρεθῆ*] to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Wolters contends that the passive form of *εὐρίσκω* here also describes “the surviving of a purifying fire.”¹⁰⁵ In the end, Wolters hypothesizes that a “special development” has occurred in the passive form of *εὐρίσκω* when used in an absolute sense.¹⁰⁶ He states, “Its meaning would then be something like ‘emerge purified (from the crucible),’ with the connotation of having stood the test, of being tried and true.”¹⁰⁷ This leads him to the ultimate conclusion that

¹⁰³ Wolters, “Worldview,” 409.

¹⁰⁴ Wolters, “Worldview,” 410 (italics original).

¹⁰⁵ Wolters, “Worldview,” 410.

¹⁰⁶ Wolters, “Worldview,” 411.

¹⁰⁷ Wolters, “Worldview,” 412.

εὐρεθήσεται should be taken as the best reading of 3:10d because it makes excellent sense of the context of 2 Pet 3 when it is interpreted as a metallurgical term.

In assessing Wolters' position, I have already indicated that I agree with the first prong of his argument, that εὐρεθήσεται is the best reading of 3:10d. I am also in agreement with his second point, that 2 Peter does not envision the annihilation of the cosmos (we will return to this matter below). Here I will discuss the third prong of Wolters' argument, that εὐρεθήσεται should be interpreted as a *metallurgical* term. I cannot accept this portion of Wolters' argument because it is beset with weaknesses that appear to make it untenable.

First, while it is possible that Mal 3:2-4 (and 4:1-2) informs Peter's conception of the Day of the Lord, it is unlikely that εὐρίσκω is a part of an allusion to Malachi. The term does not appear in Mal 3:2-4 or 4:1-2. Furthermore, Peter provides no indication from the context of 2 Peter that a metallurgical use of εὐρίσκω is in view. This is markedly different from the supporting texts cited by Wolters, where the refinement of metals in fire is explicitly mentioned (e.g. Mal 3:2-4; Zech 13:9 [LXX]; 1 Pet 1:7; Rev 1:15; 2 Clem. 16:3). Thus, a metallurgical background of the term is difficult to establish. Wolters even acknowledges that a metallurgical sense of εὐρίσκω "is not found in the lexica, and is based largely on the two occurrences in Peter" (the "two occurrences" being 1 Pet 1:7 and 2 Pet 3:10d).¹⁰⁸

Second and more significantly, the four primary texts cited by Wolters as evidence for a metallurgical sense of εὐρίσκω do not support this conclusion. Rather, the following texts imply that εὐρίσκω should be interpreted with a *judicial* sense.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Wolters, "Worldview," 412.

¹⁰⁹ So Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 316-21; Wenham, "Being 'Found' on the Last Day," 477-79; Vögtle, 2. *Petrusbrief*, 235; Danker, "II Peter 3:10," 82-86.

(1) In 2 Pet 3:14 Peter writes, “strive to be found [εὑρεθῆναι] by him at peace, without spot or blemish.” Commenting on this verse Wolters states, “the expression ‘to be found,’ like the phrase ‘without spot or blemish,’ apparently refers to the *eschatological survival* in the third world [i.e. the new heavens and new earth] of righteousness begun in the second [i.e. the world after the flood].”¹¹⁰ But this conclusion is highly improbable since it collapses the phrase “without spot or blemish” into the meaning of “to be found.” Εὑρεθῆναι does not describe what *survives* God’s judgment, but *the judgment itself*. “Without spot or blemish” clarifies the state in which Peter desires his readers to “be found” by God. Put another way, everyone will “be found” by God when he comes to judge, but only those who are “without spot or blemish” will survive his judgment. The whole point of Peter’s exhortation is to be ready for judgment because his readers will be *discovered* (i.e. found) by the Judge on the Day of the Lord (cf. 3:11-13).¹¹¹ Therefore, εὑρεθῆναι (and by implication εὑρεθήσεται in 3:10d) should not be interpreted with a metallurgical sense. Both occurrences most likely refer to *God’s discovery of people for judgment*.

(2) Concerning 1 Pet 1:7, Wolters correctly observes that εὐρίσκω is “used absolutely, without predicate” in both 1 Pet 1:7 and 2 Pet 3:10d. What he means is that εὐρίσκω is not modified by a predicate nominative adjective in either text.¹¹² Thus, it is true that we have

¹¹⁰ Wolters, “Worldview,” 410 (italics original).

¹¹¹ Wolters also draws a faulty connection at this point between 2 Pet 3:14 and 1 Cor 3:13-14 by suggesting that “to be found” (εὑρεθῆναι) is comparable to “will survive” (μενεῖ). However, the most comparable wording to εὑρεθῆναι in 1 Cor 3:13-14 is not μενεῖ, but “will become manifest” (φανερὸν γενήσεται) for purposes of *judgment*.

¹¹² Wolters’ phrase “absolutely, without predicate” has caused confusion among several interpreters. It is doubtful, as Adams asserts (*Stars*, 227), that Wolters claims that we have an *unqualified* use of εὐρίσκω in 1 Pet 1:7 (in the sense that nothing modifies the verb), since εὐρίσκω is clearly modified by a prepositional phrase of result (“to result in praise and glory and honor”). Even more doubtful is that Wolters intends to say that εὐρίσκω stands on its own *without grammatical relation* to the rest of the sentence as taken by van den Heever, “Purifying Fire,” 109; and followed by Frayer-Griggs, *Saved Through Fire*, 242. It is more likely that Wolters is arguing that neither passive form of εὐρίσκω in 1 Pet 1:7 and 2 Pet 3:10d is modified by a *predicate nominative adjective*. For evidence that this is his meaning compare Wolters’ argument pertaining to 1 Pet 1:7 (“Worldview,” 410), with his further

comparable usages of the term. However, *εὐρίσκω* does not carry a metallurgical sense in 1 Pet 1:7. In 1:6-7, Peter uses smelting imagery to describe how present trials function to test and purify the faith of his readers. These trials, like fire, will purify the genuineness of their faith so that it “might be found [*εὐρεθῆ*] to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Wolters is incorrect to say that *εὐρίσκω* “refers to the eschatological result of a purification process.”¹¹³ It is true that what will be “found,” if Peter’s readers remain faithful, is their genuine faith. But in focusing on *what* is found, Wolters overlooks *who* does the finding. *Εὐρίσκω* is almost certainly a divine passive here, just as in 2 Pet 3:10d, 14. Thus, “being found” does not describe the outcome of a metallurgical process, but the outcome of “*the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (*ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*). When Jesus is revealed as judge of the world, then he will “find” (i.e. discover) whether or not Peter’s readers have genuine faith (cf. Matt 24:46). *Εὐρίσκω* lacks predication (i.e. predicate nominative adjectives) in both 1 Pet 1:7 and 2 Pet 3:10d because it is *undetermined what state* God will “find” humanity in when he comes to judge.¹¹⁴ Presumably, God will “find” some with genuine faith and others without it. Therefore, *εὐρίσκω* does not have a positive metallurgical sense in 1 Pet 1:7 or 2 Pet 3:10d. Again, the term is best interpreted within a *judicial* context.

(3) The Epistle of Barnabas may suggest a positive sense of *εὐρίσκω*, “Become ones who are taught by God by seeking what the Lord demands from you, and do it, in order that you may be found [*εὐρεθῆτε*] in the day of judgment” (21:6). “That you may be found” appears to support the idea of surviving judgment as opposed to being “destroyed” (cf. 21:1). But despite this

comments on predicate adjectives and the absolute use of *εὐρεθήσεται* (“Worldview,” 411-12). All he is saying is that if a writer wanted to communicate the specific *state* in which something “was found,” they regularly used a predicate nominative adjective to explicitly communicate it. But no such predicate nominative adjectives are used in 1 Pet 1:7 or 2 Pet 3:10d (cf. 2 Pet 3:14 where predicate nominative adjectives do modify *εὐρίσκω*).

¹¹³ Wolters, “Worldview,” 410.

¹¹⁴ This is why Peter follows 2 Pet 3:10d with the question, “What sort of people ought you to be” (3:11)?

apparent positive use of the term, there is nothing in the immediate context of the Epistle of Barnabas that refers to fire, melting, or anything associated with smelting. Thus, there is no substantial reason to suggest we have a metallurgical use of the term. The idea still seems to concern judgment. Believers are to strive to be discovered faithful by God when he comes to judge.

(4) Finally, 2 Clem. 16:3 states, “But you know that the day of judgment is already coming like a blazing furnace, and some of the heavens and all of the earth will melt like lead melting in the fire, and the secret and known works of humanity will appear [φανήσεται].” Wolters is correct to observe along with others that “will appear” probably is parallel in thought to “will be found” in 2 Pet 3:10d.¹¹⁵ However, just because Clement uses metallurgical imagery to describe the “day of judgment,” it does not necessarily imply that φανήσεται (and thus εὑρεθήσεται) are metallurgical terms. In fact, “will appear” more likely implies a judicial context where the works of humanity become visible to the eyes of the Judge through the medium of fire (cf. 1 Cor 3:13).

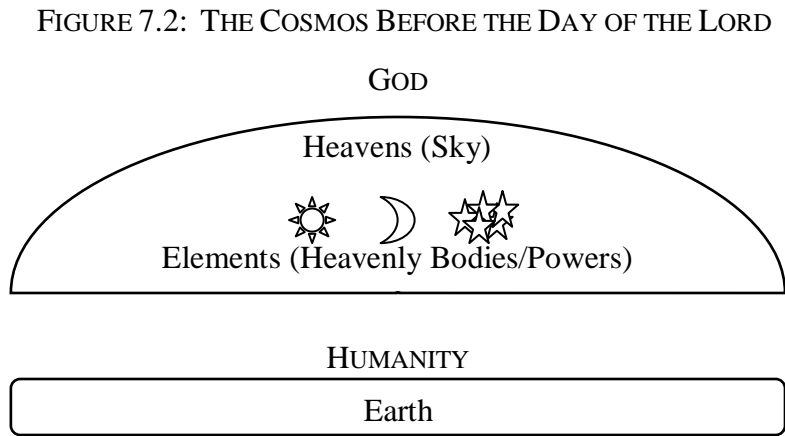
In conclusion, Wolters’ case for a metallurgical sense of εὑρίσκω in 2 Pet 3:10d cannot be sustained. Not only is a metallurgical background for the term improbable, the texts summoned by Wolters suggest a different conclusion. “Being found” does not refer the positive results of a smelting process. Instead, it refers to the idea that “the earth and the works in it” *will be discovered by the Judge of the universe on the Day of the Lord* (cf. Matt 24:46). There will be both positive (i.e. salvation/transformation) and negative (i.e. condemnation/destruction) results stemming from his judgment. This judicial interpretation of “will be found” may be another striking feature of 2 Pet 3:7-13 that alludes to the tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah, where the

¹¹⁵ Wolters, “Worldview,” 411. Also cf. Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 304-305, 319-21.

Lord goes down to the cities in order to witness the deeds of the people and see if he can “find” (i.e. discover) righteous people (cf. Gen 18:20-31 LXX).¹¹⁶

If we visualize the scene depicted in 2 Pet 3:10, it becomes apparent that Peter is describing God’s systematic judgment of the cosmos. We can follow the progression of the scene with the following diagrams.

(1) Before the Day of the Lord the dwelling places of God and humanity are separated by the heavens (the sky) and the elements (the sun, moon, and stars). In a sense, the earth is not directly visible to God as long as he remains in his heavenly dwelling (see fig. 7.2).



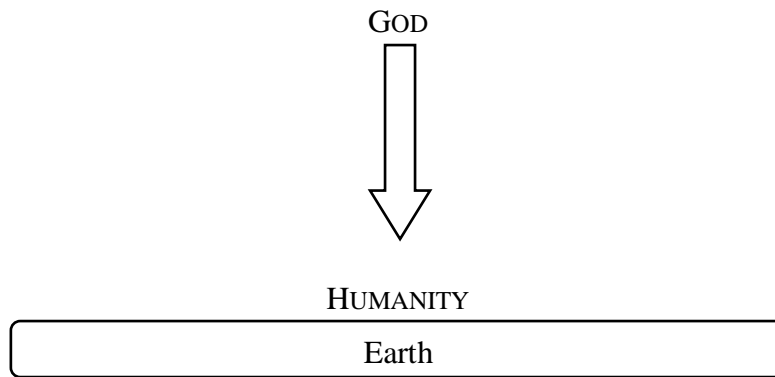
(2) On the Day of the Lord, the Day when God will come from his heavenly dwelling to the dwelling of humanity, he will set the heavens on fire (3:10b, 12b). Amid this judgment of

¹¹⁶ See Juza, “Echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah,” 239-40. Bauckham concluded that “the attempt to find a comparable usage of מצא (‘to find’) in the OT and εὕρισχεν (‘to find’) in the LXX is not wholly successful” (2 Peter, 318-19). However, the idea that “to find” means “to subject to judgment” fits with the usage of the word in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (cf. Gen 18:26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32). Furthermore, recent work on מצא has discerned the meaning “to find, deem, evaluate, judge,” where the term is used “to designate the results of an investigation or evaluation.... In most instances the reference is to the evaluation of circumstances, characteristics, and ethical qualities regarding certain people” (S. Wagner, “מצא,” TDOT 8:474-75).

the heavens, the elements will be dissolved in the great heat, thereby condemning the evil heavenly powers who exercise control over the earth (3:10c, 12c).

(3) With the heavens and the elements no longer obstructing God’s view of the earth, “the earth and the works in it” will become visible from a divine point of view (3:10d).

FIGURE 7.3: THE DESCENT OF GOD FOLLOWING THE JUDGMENT OF THE HEAVENS



Therefore, “will be found” depicts the climactic point in the scene where humanity is discovered by God for judgment. William Wilson captures the thought well,

The author of 2 P. with a fine sense of climax makes the passing away of the heavens and the destruction of the intermediate spiritual beings, while terrible in themselves, even more terrible in that they lead up to the discovery, naked and unprotected of the earth, of men and their works by God. The judgment is here represented not so much as a destructive act of God, as a revelation of him from which none can escape.¹¹⁷

Ultimately, the scene depicted in 2 Pet 3:10 is a vivid description of a *theophany* of God on the Day of the Lord. No creature in the entire cosmos, whether angelic or human, will be able to escape his coming. The entire cosmos will be subject to its Creator and Judge. Furthermore, it is important to observe that the scene depicted in 2 Pet 3:10 *stops short of describing what actually*

¹¹⁷ Wilson, “Ἐύρεθήσεται in 2 Pet. iii. 10,” 44-45. Also cf. Vögtle, *2. Petrusbrief*, 236-37.

happens, cosmologically speaking, to the earth. Just as in 3:7, Peter's main concern has been to highlight God's judgment. As a result, Peter discusses only the events leading up to God's discovery of the earth and its inhabitants for judgment, and then transitions to exhortation (3:11-18a). What, then, does Peter imply will happen to the earth in 2 Pet 3:10d? Before offering a tentative answer, we can recall the following considerations.

First, when Peter contrasts the defining characteristics of the present cosmos and the new heavens and new earth, he frames the contrast in terms of *quality*. The present is characterized by moral and physical "corruption" (1:4), whereas the future will be characterized by "righteousness" (3:13). This likely implies that God's eschatological fire is not designed to annihilate the earth, but to purge it of all moral and physical corruption. As a result, the new heavens and new earth will likely exhibit some kind of materially transformed existence under the righteous reign of God.

Second, the stated purpose of God's eschatological fire is to serve as the means of: (1) God's *judgment* of all things, and (2) God's *condemnation* of the ungodly (3:7). As a result, fire will *test* all things, but only *destroy* that which does not pass the test. This probably implies that some things will pass the test. Gale Heide seems to capture this emphasis well when he states, "Physical alteration appears at most to be an expression of the extent of God's judgment rather than its intent."¹¹⁸ Thus, whatever material effect fire will have on the earth, it appears to be a consequence of God's ultimate goal to purge the cosmos of moral and physical corruption.

Third, based on Peter's analogy between the flood and the consummation, God is unlikely to annihilate the cosmos at the consummation because he did not annihilate it during the flood. Rather, Peter stressed that God used water to wipe out ungodly humanity (3:6), possibly implying something like a scouring or effacing of the earth. This may imply a similar form of

¹¹⁸ Heide, "What is New," 54.

material ruin as part of the consummation, where God’s primary goal again will be to purge the cosmos of all forms of moral and physical corruption. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that Peter’s analogy between God’s use of water and fire may suggest that God will use fire in a creative way. Just as God used water to bring forth the earth (3:5b), he apparently will use fire to bring forth the new heavens and new earth (3:13).

Finally, given that both “the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire” (3:7), it seems reasonable to infer that what will happen to the “heavens” (cf. 3:10a, 12b) will also happen to the “earth,” even though Peter does not make this explicit.¹¹⁹ If this is the case, then it appears that the earth will also “pass away” (παρέρχομαι) and “be dissolved” (λύω). These verbs do not seem to imply annihilation, but more likely some form of material breakdown or transformation that undoes the present reality of the cosmos.

In light of the above considerations, we can tentatively suggest that *the earth will experience some degree of material ruin, possibly something like an effacement, which functions as part of God’s plan to purge the earth of corruption in preparation for the new heavens and new earth*. Ultimately, it is difficult to quantify the extent of the material ruin envisioned by Peter. He most likely conceives of the conflagration as a physical event that will elicit dramatic upheaval and sweeping change across the entire cosmos. Yet, he refrains from discussing the cosmological fate of the earth. Whatever the precise material outcome of consummation may be, God’s eschatological fire will engulf all things in order to test them and whatever cannot withstand the heat (i.e. whatever is unfit for the new heavens and new earth) will be destroyed.

By closing 2 Pet 3:8-10 with a judgment scene, Peter completes his response to the mockers regarding the parousia promise and the judgment associated with it. Despite the

¹¹⁹ This also would concur with similar statements in the NT that both heaven *and* earth “will pass away” (cf. Matt 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33).

number of years that have passed since God announced the promise, the promise is not dead.

The Lord is being patient, allowing ample time for repentance on account of his merciful nature.

Yet the Day is still coming, a day when the entire cosmos will face the fire of its Creator, Judge, and Redeemer.

7.3.4 What Sort of People Ought You To Be? (2 Pet 3:11-13)

After leaving his readers with a startling image of the Lord manifest and primed to judge the earth, Peter asks the pertinent question, “Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, while waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved by being set ablaze and the elements will melt in the great heat” (3:11-12)?¹²⁰

Most interpreters think that the opening clause of 3:11, “since all these things are to be dissolved in this way” (τούτων οὕτως πάντων λυομένων), summarizes all of 3:10, implying that the “heavens,” “elements,” and “earth” are all to be dissolved.¹²¹ However, Peter never says anywhere in 3:7-10 that the “earth” will be “dissolved,” which makes it an unlikely antecedent. Furthermore, Peter’s addition of “these” (τούτων) most likely narrows the focus of “all things” to the “heavens” and the “elements,” which are closely associated in 3:10b-c and 3:12b-c, and share the same verb (λύω; cf. 3:10c, 11a, 12b). Therefore, “since all these things are to be dissolved”

¹²⁰ It is possible that present passive participle λυομένων (3:11a), which I have translated with a future sense (“to be dissolved”), should be translated something like “is being dissolved.” This would of course imply that the action is already taking place. However, since Peter is referring to events which he has already described as future, he probably uses the present tense to underscore his *certainty* that the parousia promise will be realized (cf. 1 Cor 7:31; 1 John 2:17).

¹²¹ E.g. Adams, *Stars*, 229; G. Green, *2 Peter*, 332; Schreiner, *2 Peter*, 389. This interpretation is often based on an understanding that the “elements” refers to the “earth” instead of the “heavenly bodies/spirits,” or that 3:7 is included as part of Peter’s referent.

most likely summarizes God's actions in the *heavenly realm* (3:10b-c).¹²² This once again reinforces that the hostile powers will be overthrown and that the "earth" will be left exposed to the terrifying prospect of eschatological judgment (3:10d), thus providing a trenchant reason for the question "what sort of people ought you to be?" The obvious answer is that Peter's readers should not follow the example of the mockers, who do not exude lives of "holy conduct and godliness." As a result, they will face the condemnation of the Lord on "the coming day of God" (3:12).

Peter grounds his exhortations on the two future outcomes associated with God's judgment of all things: (1) the possibility of condemnation, and (2) the hope of salvation. Peter has already detailed the threat of condemnation in 3:7-12. In 3:13 he turns to emphasize the hope of salvation by reassuring his readers that the fulfillment of the parousia promise will lead to "a new heavens and a new earth" (cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22; Rev 21:1). This is an explicit connection between the promise of God's coming, to be fulfilled by Jesus, and the arrival of the new world. It is important to recognize that Isa 66:15-18 also connects God's coming in judgment with the appearance of the new world. He writes, "the Lord will come as a fire" and "all the earth will be judged by the fire of the Lord" before the appearance of "the new heavens and the new earth." God's holy fire will purge the world of all things unbecoming of his presence.

By qualifying the future cosmos as a place "in which righteousness dwells," Peter emphasizes that the primary goal of God's eschatological judgment is to *extend his righteous reign over the cosmos and purge it of all corruption*. It will be the "spotless and blameless" who are deemed worthy of the new world when he comes to judge (3:14), being allowed to enter "into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (1:11; cf. 1 Cor 15:24, 50; Heb 12:28),

¹²² So Davids, *2 Peter*, 287-88.

and “become sharers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of lust” (1:4; cf. Rom 8:11, 17-18; Col 3:4).¹²³

7.4 Peter’s Theology of the Future of the Cosmos

7.4.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

Peter identifies God and/or the exalted Jesus as the primary actor(s) in the cosmic event. Peter clearly thinks that both are involved in one way or another since he explicitly refers to both (3:2, 12). However, when he describes the transition in detail, he uses the personal pronoun “his” (3:4, 13, 14), and the title “Lord” (3:8, 9, 10, 15), both of which could refer to God or Jesus. I have suggested above that Peter probably refers to God in these verses, but this should not be pressed too hard given that Peter likely saw Jesus as fulfilling the OT promise of God’s coming at the parousia (3:4). Thus, God and Jesus appear to act in unison.

7.4.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

Peter explains that the cosmic transition will occur on the Day of the Lord (3:10, 12), the day when Jesus fulfills the OT promise of the coming of God at his parousia (3:4). Many interpretations of 2 Pet 3 are governed by the notion that Peter is responding to the problem of “the delay of the parousia,” the idea that the early church suffered a theological crisis when the first Christian generation was coming to an end because Jesus was supposed to have returned within this timeframe.¹²⁴ However, Peter may not be responding to this issue in 3:5-10. The objection of the mockers seems to be concerning the lengthy amount of time that had passed since God issued his promise (3:4). Furthermore, when Peter attempts to justify God’s delay, he

¹²³ The notion of “partaking in the divine nature” most likely refers to future glorification and resurrection provided by the Spirit after God’s defeat of corruption and death (cf. Rom 8:10-11, 18-25; 1 Cor 15:35-58).

¹²⁴ See Richard J. Bauckham, “The Delay of the Parousia,” *TynBul* 31 (1980): 3-36.

does not indicate that an alleged deadline had passed.¹²⁵ Instead, he speaks of God’s perspective of time compared to humanity’s (3:8), and God’s merciful character and desire to save (3:9).

Thus, Peter does not appear to be stressing either the imminence or delay of the parousia.

Instead, Peter underscores his absolute conviction that the Day “will come” (3:10a).¹²⁶ But at the same time, the manner in which it will come will be “like a thief.” Therefore, the certainty of his coming plus the possibility that he could come at any time requires that Peter’s readers be vigilant as they wait for the fulfillment of the promise (3:11-12). This is essentially the same message communicated by the other writers of the NT concerning the timing of the parousia (cf. Matt 24:36-25:46; Mark 13:32-37; 1 Thess 5:1-11). Thus, when the cosmic transition will occur is unknown.

7.4.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

According to Peter, the main problem affecting the cosmos is “the corruption that is in the world because of lust” (τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθορᾶς) (1:4). Thus, the “world” is not inherently corrupt, but has been corrupted by the “lust” of its inhabitants.¹²⁷ The “corruption” that plagues the world appears to entail both moral and physical corruption (i.e. sin and death). Furthermore, it probably involves the enslavement of the world to hostile spiritual powers (2 Pet 2:18-20; cf. Rom 8:21). It is only by God’s own “divine power” that believers are able to “escape” and partake in “life and godliness” (as opposed to death and sin) by becoming “participants of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:3-4). Believers appear to become “participants/sharers” through the Holy Spirit, who enables them to escape moral corruption in the present (2 Pet 2:18-20; cf. Rom 8:1-

¹²⁵ So Adams, *Stars*, 231.

¹²⁶ Note the forward position of “will come” (ἔξει) in 3:10 for emphasis.

¹²⁷ Peter appears to have similarities to Paul at this point (cf. Rom 1:24). He also seems to echo the story of the Watchers, whose lust brought corruption into the world (cf. Gen 6:1-4; 1 En. 6:1-2; 8:1-3; 10:4-9). Thus, lust comes from both human and angelic sources.

17), and physical corruption in the future (2 Pet 1:11; cf. Rom 8:11, 17-18, 23-25).¹²⁸ Those who remain on the path of corruption will ultimately reap “destruction” (φθορά / φθείρω), the same fate awaiting the hostile spiritual powers at the parousia (cf. 2:12; 3:10c). Therefore, the cosmic transition will occur in order to eradicate all forms and sources of *corruption* from the cosmos.

7.4.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

Out of all of the NT writers treated in this study, Peter offers the most detailed description of how the cosmic transition will unfold. Yet even his account stops short of describing everything in detail (e.g. what effect fire will have on the earth in 3:10d). This is because his main concern is to demonstrate the validity of the parousia promise and its accompanying judgment (3:5-10). This much is clear, however: Peter stresses *discontinuity* between the present and future cosmos. This was essential for rhetorical purposes because he needed to rebuff the position of the mockers, who pointed to the *continuity* of the cosmos as a sufficient reason to deride the parousia promise (3:4b).

Before discussing how the events will unfold on the Day of the Lord, Peter states the *means* by which God will facilitate the cosmic transition: fire. Just as God used water to create the earth and bring it under judgment (3:5b-6), he will use fire to bring the entire cosmos under judgment (3:7) and ultimately create a new heavens and a new earth (3:13). Peter also discusses the *manner* in which the Day will come, “like a thief” (3:10a). Thus, however the events will unfold, the transition will happen unexpectedly. This is why Peter summons his readers to

¹²⁸ Peter does not elaborate on the Spirit’s role in believers escaping corruption. However, the Spirit’s role in announcing the prophecies of God (1:21), which contain the “promises” by which believers become “participants of the divine nature,” appears to make this sufficiently clear, especially if we recognize that Paul makes a similar argument in Rom 8.

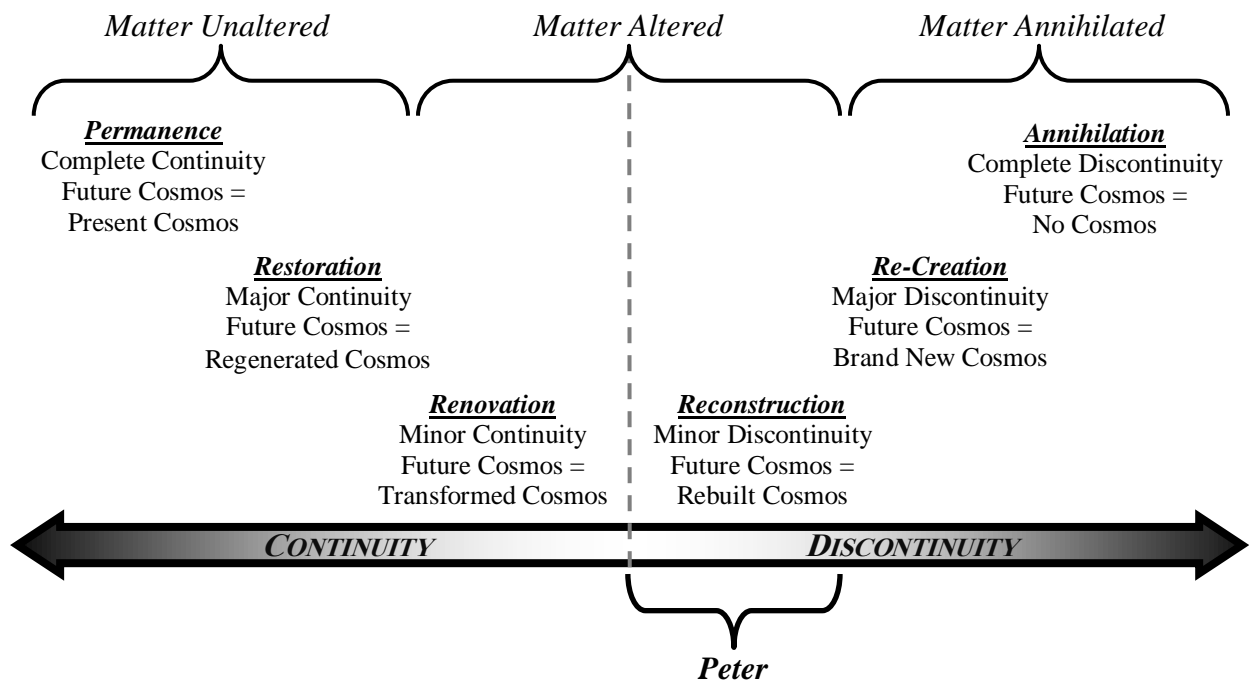
actively practice godly behavior as they “wait” for the fulfillment of the promise and the cosmic transition to occur (3:11-13).

Peter describes the transitional events themselves in 2 Pet 3:10b-d and 3:12b-c. First, “the heavens will pass away with a loud noise” (3:10b) and “will be dissolved by being set ablaze” (3:12b). Second, “the elements will be dissolved in the great heat” (3:10c) and “will melt in the great heat” (3:12c). Third, “the earth and the works in it will be found” (3:10d). As interpreted above, these verses appear to present the picture of God unleashing fire upon the cosmos in order to purge it of corruption and establish a new heaven and new earth. First, Jesus will enter into judgment upon the heavenly realm by subjecting it to fire. In the great heat, the sun, moon, and stars will be dissolved, thereby overthrowing hostile powers associated with them. Jesus will take their place as the undisputed Lord of the universe. Having completed his judgment of the heavens, Jesus will then turn his attention to the earth and the works of its inhabitants, setting the earth on fire in order to test all things and destroy the ungodly. What exactly happens to the earth beyond this is left unsaid, but whatever cannot withstand the heat of God’s eschatological fire will be judged and removed, leaving only that which is fit for the new heavens and new earth. This implies that God’s eschatological fire will purge the cosmos, resulting in both material destruction and transformation (the ideas are not mutually exclusive). Whatever the precise outcome, Peter suggests that the cosmos will experience a definitive and all-encompassing change, a change that involves material ruin, but also a change that will lead to a new heavens and a new earth.

In conclusion, Peter emphasizes discontinuity in the transition between the present cosmos and the new heavens and new earth. Thus, he does not envision the *permanence* of the cosmos or its *restoration* to an original state. These positions are also made improbable because

of Peter’s expectation of a transformed human existence, most likely involving resurrection (1:4). On the other end of the spectrum, because Peter also sees a certain degree of continuity between the present and future cosmos, namely in his expectation of a new heavens and a new earth (3:13), he resists the position of *annihilation* without a re-creation. He also does not appear to embrace the idea of the annihilation and *re-creation* of an entirely new cosmos. This leaves us with the two options at the center of the spectrum: *renovation* and *reconstruction*. Because there is ambiguity in regards to the degree of material ruin envisioned by Peter, it is possible that he expected a transformative *renovation* of the cosmos. However, it is more probable, given his destruction-oriented language (e.g. “dissolve, melt, etc.”), and his overall emphasis on discontinuity, that Peter understood the cosmic transition as a *reconstruction* (i.e. a breakdown of the present cosmos and its rebuilding into a new heavens and a new earth). We can visually represent Peter’s place in Figure 7.4.

FIGURE 7.4: PETER AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



7.4.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

Peter offers a limited description of the future cosmos. He describes it as “a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (3:13). The “new” cosmos does not appear to be brand new, but new in the sense that it has been purged of moral and physical “corruption” (1:4), resulting in a materially transformed world. In other words, the new world will no longer be plagued by ungodly behavior and death under the reign of hostile spiritual powers and its wicked inhabitants. Rather, the new world will be characterized by “righteousness” under the reign of God as “the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:11). Thus, the reign of Christ will bring with it a new incorruptible existence for humanity and the entire cosmos (1:4; 3:13).

8 John and the Future of the Cosmos

One would think that John would have all kinds of things to say about the future of the cosmos given his abundant use of the term “world” (*κόσμος*).¹ But as it turns out, he rarely uses the term neutrally to designate the “universe,” especially in 1 John. Furthermore, John prefers to draw his beliefs about the future into the present so as to emphasize “realized” eschatology. As a result, John actually has little to say about the future of the created universe. Suffice it to say, then, this will be our shortest chapter. I will explore only 1 John 2:17.

8.1 1 John 2:17

8.1.1 The “World” in 1 John

The “world” (*κόσμος*), according to John, is hostile.² He essentially uses the term as a shorthand summary for all that is in opposition to God and his purposes. The world is under the rule of evil powers, particularly the Devil (3:8; 5:19; 4:3). It is a fraudulent reality that is propagated by “false prophets” (4:1-5). It does not see the “light” of God and so is characterized by “darkness” (1:5-6; 2:8-11). It does not “recognize” God as the bestower of love, with the result that it does not “recognize” believers (3:1), and even more so “hates” them (3:13). It is a system of values and behaviors which must be rejected by believers (2:15-17; 3:17). Yet, it is also the realm into which Christ was “sent” to redeem humanity (4:9), to die for its sins (2:2), and become its

¹ The Gospel and Epistles of John account for 102 of the 186 uses of the term in the NT (55%).

² On Johannine cosmology see N. H. Cassem, “A Grammatical and Contextual Inventory of the Use of *κόσμος* in the Johannine Corpus with Some Implications for a Johannine Cosmic Theology,” *NTS* 19 (1972): 81-91; H. Sasse, “*κόσμος*,” *TDNT* 3:894-95; J. Guhrt, “*κόσμος*,” *NIDNTT* 1:525-26; H. Balz, “*κόσμος*,” *EDNT* 2:312-13; Edward W. Klink III, “Light of the World: Cosmology and the Johannine Literature,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, LNTS 355 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 74-89.

“Savior” (4:14). As a result, Christ has brought victory to believers so that they can share in his “conquering” of the world (4:4; 5:4-5). Thus, they are to live in the world emulating God in “love” (4:17).

This brief analysis reveals that when John uses the term *κόσμος*, it is not so much a cosmological designation as it is a theologically laden term which draws upon several contrasts, or dualisms, often associated with apocalyptic thought.³ Spatially, the “world” is characterized as the earthly realm (i.e. below) as opposed to the heavenly realm (i.e. above). Thus, it is corrupt and does not reflect true reality. Temporally, the world is transient (i.e. “this age”) as opposed to eternal (i.e. “the age to come”). Thus, it will not last. Ethically, those who order their lives according to the values and behaviors of the world are disobedient as opposed to obedient. Thus, believers are to reject conformity to the world’s values and behaviors. Therefore, the *κόσμος* in 1 John is *the present world order which stands in opposition to God*.⁴ Believers live in this world, but are not to be of this world.⁵

8.1.2 The World is Passing Away (1 John 2:17)

In 1 John 2:15a John offers a prohibition to his readers, “Do not love the world or the things in the world.” This exhortation has two components. First, believers are not to give any sort of allegiance to the “world,” the present world order. Second, believers are to reject “the things in

³ For more on dualism in the Johannine Epistles see Judith M. Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, NTT (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 80-87; L. J. Kreitzer, “Apocalyptic, Apocalypticism,” *DLNT* 55-68.

⁴ See Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970), 93; Ben Witherington III, *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John*, vol. 1 of *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 477-78; Judith M. Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 92-93; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, rev. ed., WBC 51 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 76-77; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 142-43.

⁵ Georg Strecker writes, “Anyone who lives ‘in the world’ (*ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ*) and is, at the same time, ‘of the world’ (*ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου*), is ruled by that which belongs to the world: *ἐπιθυμία*” (*The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 58-59).

the world.”⁶ While this phrase appears at first sight to refer to created things within the natural world, John suggests another meaning. These “things” are not “from the Father” (implying that he did not create them), but include “the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the pride of lifestyle” (2:16).⁷ These “things,” then, are actually human *responses* to things in the created world, manifestations of a life guided by “love” for the “world.”⁸ Thus, believers are not to get entangled by the perverse wants and boastfulness of worldly living.

John provides two reasons for this prohibition in 2:15b-17.⁹ First, he states that love for the world and love for God are mutually exclusive (2:15b-16).¹⁰ John explains their incompatibility spatially by contrasting from where the “things in the world” originate. They do not come “from the Father” (i.e. from heaven above), but “from the world” (i.e. from the earth below).¹¹ Thus, loving the world is not living according to the true reality of God’s heavenly realm. Second, believers should not love the world because it is coming to an end, “And the world is passing away with its desire, but the one who does the will of God remains forever” (*καὶ*

⁶ For the phrase “in the world” see 1 John 2:15, 16; 4:3, 4, 17; Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, AB 30 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982), 325-27. Also cf. John 1:10; 9:5; 12:25; 13:1; 16:33; 17:11, 13.

⁷ The genitives here are probably subjective, so Smalley, *1 John*, 79-80; Witherington, *1-3 John*, 478; David Rensberger, *The Epistles of John*, WBCComp (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 33. Robert W. Yarbrough argues for objective (*1-3 John*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 132). Lieu suggests that attempting to identify the genitives presses for too much precision (*1 John*, 94-95).

⁸ Rensberger, *Epistles*, 33. B. F. Westcott writes, “With ‘the world’ are joined ‘the things in the world,’ all, that is, which finds its proper sphere and fulfillment in a finite order and without God” (*The Epistles of St. John* [London: Macmillan, 1883], 61).

⁹ So Westcott, *Epistles*, 61, 65; Smalley, *1 John*, 78, 82; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 93-94; Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 96; D. Edmond Hiebert, “An Exposition of 1 John 2:7-17,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 432.

¹⁰ The phrase “the love of the Father” is most likely an objective genitive (i.e. “love for the Father”) as opposed to a subjective genitive (i.e. “the Father’s love”). An objective genitive appears to make more sense of the thought expressed by the conditional statement. This, of course, is not to deny that John considers a believer’s love for God as grounded in God’s love for the believer (cf. 3:1; 4:7-12, 19-21). See Lieu, *1 John*, 93; Smalley, *1 John*, 78-79; Westcott, *Epistles*, 62.

¹¹ For the phrase “from the world” see 1 John 2:16; 4:5. Also cf. John 8:23; 13:1; 15:19; 17:6, 14, 15, 16; 18:36.

ὁ κόσμος παράγεται καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ, ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα)

(2:17). We can explore this verse more fully below.

When John speaks of the “world” and “its desire,” he essentially repeats the two subjects from his initial prohibition, the “world” and “the things in the world” (cf. 2:15a). In other words, John is talking about the present world order which stands in opposition to God and currently holds sway over the created universe. He uses the label “the darkness” to characterize this evil reality in 2:8. John contrasts the present world order and its desire with “the one who does the will of God.” This helps to confirm here that John is thinking more in terms of ethics than cosmology (i.e. he evokes an ethical dualism to contrast behavior).¹² Thus, it is important to recognize that John does not characterize the created universe as evil. Instead, the created universe is a battle ground where Christ has secured victory, yet the powers of evil still resist and attempt to challenge his authority (4:4; 5:4-5).

In addition to contrasting ethical behavior, John also contrasts permanence. Temporally speaking, whereas the world “is passing away,” the righteous one will “remain.” To say that the world and its desire “is passing away” (*παράγεται*) in the present tense implies that John understood it to be disappearing in his day. He uses the same verb in 2:8 to say that the darkness “is passing away” (*παράγεται*). There the darkness was passing away because of Christ’s entry into the world as the “light” (cf. John 1:5-9).¹³ This implies, then, that John probably conceived

¹² Smalley, *1 John*, 82. Marshall suggests the possibility that “desire” is a “case of the abstract noun representing the concrete reality, the person who desires the world” (*Epistles*, 146). This seems to move in the right direction by acknowledging an ethical contrast, but probably presses it a bit too far.

¹³ Kruse, *Letters*, 96; Rensberger, *Epistles*, 35; Witherington, *1-3 John*, 480; Yarbrough, *1 John*, 135; John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, SP 18 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2002), 194-95.

of the world “passing away” through the triumph of the “light” over the “darkness,” manifest in the ethical victory of believers over the world (1 John 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5).¹⁴

So, what is John saying about the future of the cosmos when he declares “the world is passing away with its desire” (2:17)? Essentially, John assures his readers that the created universe will not remain under the seductive power of the “world” forever. Thus, John’s main focus is not so much that the created universe is transitory, but that the “world” (i.e. the present world order/darkness) is transitory.¹⁵ Yet the two remain related. The present state of the darkness of the universe will be brought to an *end*. Similar to Paul in 1 Cor 7:31, then, John does not indicate *how* the universe will experience the transition (i.e. through some form of transformation or destruction). Instead, John is content to highlight *discontinuity* by describing *what* will not remain after the cosmic transition occurs. God will ultimately deal with the presence of evil in the created universe by bringing the victory of Christ’s death and resurrection to completion.

8.2 John’s Theology of the Future of the Cosmos

8.2.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

Because John never overtly discusses the future of the cosmos, he does not indicate who will bring about the cosmic transition. However, since John stresses the intimate bond between the “Father” and the “Son,” it is likely that he saw them as acting in unison.

¹⁴ Rudolf Schnackenburg asserts that this means John has removed an “eschatological accent” from the verb, presumably meaning that John stresses realized eschatology (*The Johannine Epistles: Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Reginald and Ilse Fuller [New York: Crossroad, 1992], 123). However, in my opinion, this does not remove the eschatological significance of the term.

¹⁵ Contra Schnackenburg, *Epistles*, 123-25. So Brown, *Epistles*, 314; Rensberger, *Epistles*, 35; Smalley, *I John*, 82-83; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 94; Westcott, *Epistles*, 65; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, EKKNT 23/1 (Zurich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991), 142. Lieu states, “In affirming the passing of the world the author probably did not have in mind any cosmological eschatological catastrophe” (*I John*, 96).

8.2.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

John does not articulate a time when the cosmic transition will occur, although, he seems to imply that it will happen in conjunction with the parousia based on his discussion of the glorification of believers (1 John 2:28-3:3; cf. Rom 8:19-22). Rather than looking forward, John's main concern is to ground the cosmic transition in a past event, the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, when the cosmic transition will occur is unknown.

8.2.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

John frames the main problems affecting the cosmos during this age in terms of *sin*, *death*, and the *Devil*. John's primary focus is on the evil and darkness of "the world and its desire" (2:17). This present world order reflects the character of the Devil, since "the whole world lies under the power of the evil one" (5:19).¹⁶ God has already acted to resolve these problems in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which have enabled people to live according to truth and love (3:8). Thus, the cosmic transition will occur in order to bring to completion the victory of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection over the "world" and the powers of evil that stand behind it.

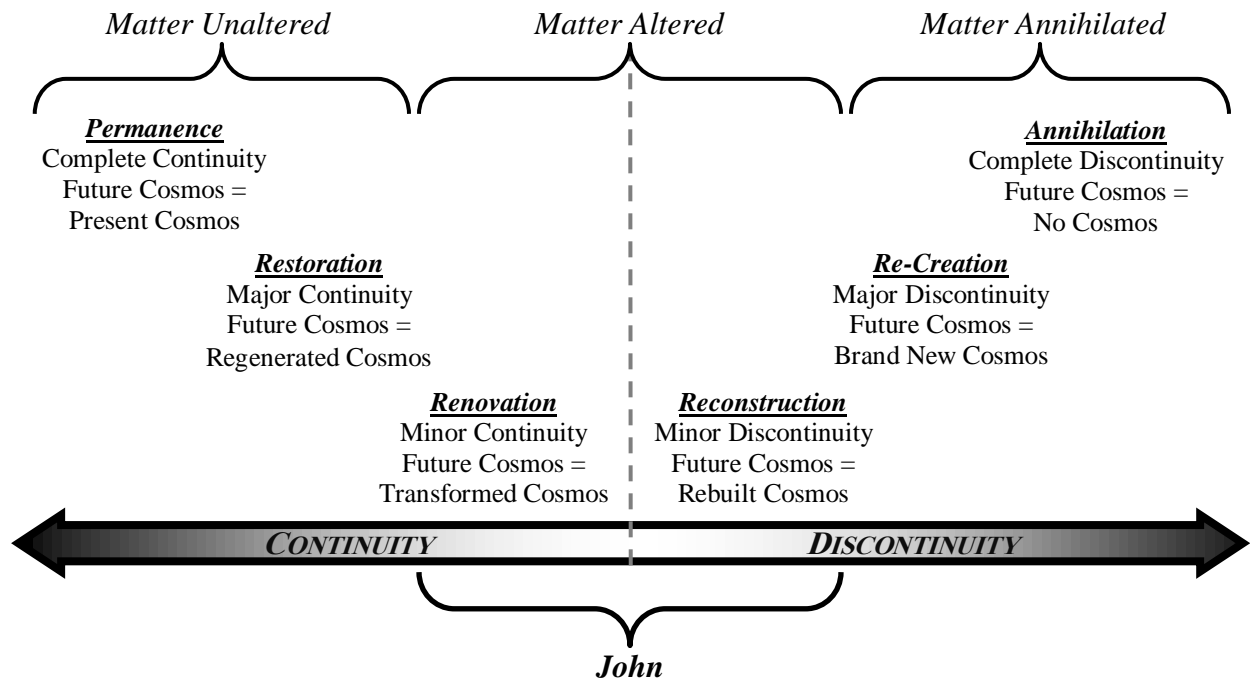
8.2.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

John never discusses the cosmic transition other than to say it has already begun because of Christ's entry into the world for purposes of judgment and redemption (2:8, 17). However, he does discuss the closely related topic of the glorification/resurrection of believers in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are God's children, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know

¹⁶ Cf. "the evil one" (1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18, 19; John 17:15) and "devil" (1 John 3:8, 10; John 6:70; 8:44; 13:2).

that when he is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.” This verse indicates that believers will be conformed to the likeness of Christ at the parousia. Becoming like him most likely involves both ethical transformation and material transformation (i.e. resurrection). Paul conveys a similar idea (cf. Col 3:4; Phil 3:21; Rom 8:17, 19, 29), but also connects the glorification of believers with the transformation of the cosmos. If John is thinking along the same lines here, which appears likely, this may imply that he believed in the future transformation (i.e. *renovation*) of the cosmos. Yet, John does not provide us with enough information to come to a firm conclusion. This much is clear. Because he affirms some level of continuity and discontinuity between the present and future worlds, John probably did not embrace the positions of either *permanence* or *annihilation*. Furthermore, John’s belief in resurrection suggests that the future cosmos will not simply be a *restoration* to original conditions (cf. 1 John 3:2; John 5:28-29; 11:24-26), and his stress on realized eschatology suggests that he envisioned more continuity than *re-creation* (i.e. annihilation followed by an entirely new creation) allows. This leaves us with two possibilities. John may have believed that the present cosmos would be transformed (*renovation*) or destroyed and rebuilt (*reconstruction*), with the former being more probable. We can chart the possibilities below on Figure 8.1.

FIGURE 8.1: JOHN AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



8.2.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

With his primary emphasis on “realized” eschatology, John never offers an explicit description of the future world. Yet, it is clear that he envisions a world without sin, death, and the dominion of the Devil (1 John 2:8, 17; 3:8; 5:11-12). Thus, in the future world, the exalted Jesus will reign (1 John 2:28; cf. John 18:36), believers will be conformed to the likeness of the resurrected Jesus (3:2), and the will of God will be carried out (2:17). These descriptions seem to imply some kind of materially transformed world in the age to come, but John never explicitly discusses such an idea.

9 John the Seer and the Future of the Cosmos

The final writer to be examined in this study is John the Seer.¹ The primary text under consideration will be Rev 21:1-5a, where the writer sees a new heaven and a new earth. I will also treat a number of other texts in Revelation that belong to the so-called theme of the “eschatological earthquake” (Rev 6:12-17; 11:15-19; 16:17-21; 20:11). As with several other chapters in this study, I will begin with a survey of interpretive views regarding the future of the cosmos in Revelation. Then I will briefly explore the cosmology of the book as a whole. Then, after discussing the theme of the eschatological earthquake, I will offer an interpretation of 21:1-5a, a text which I think envisions the material transformation of the cosmos.

9.1 Interpretations of the Future of the Cosmos in Revelation

John’s vision of a new heaven and new earth has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Most interpreters tend to embrace one of the following possibilities, although several choose to leave the question open,² or combine the ideas of replacement and renewal.³

¹ The writer identifies himself as “John” (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). Whether this is the same person who wrote the Gospel and/or the Epistles of John is disputed. I leave this question open.

² E.g. David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1998), 139-40; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, HNTC (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 401, 409-12; David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21:1-22:5*, JSNTSup 238 (New York: Sheffield, 2003), 37-39. Eugenio Corsini argues that the scene in Revelation 21 is wholly spiritual and portray the effects of the death and resurrection of Christ (*The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ*, trans. and ed. Francis J. Moloney, GNS 5 [Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983], 391-92).

³ E.g. Mark B. Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal? The Meaning and Function of New Creation in the Book of Revelation*, WUNT 2/307 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 258-63; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1031-32, 1039-41; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 793-95, 802-803; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 49-53; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 372-73, 376-77; Traugott Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, NTD 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 132-33; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Wendy Pradels (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004),

(1) John describes the *annihilation and re-creation* of the cosmos.⁴ Thus, the present cosmos will be utterly destroyed, followed by an act of *creatio ex nihilo*. Jürgen Roloff illustrates this position, “The subject matter is that of a completely new beginning. The old cosmos has disappeared forever. In its place God now creates a new one.”⁵

(2) John describes the *destruction and reconstruction* of the cosmos.⁶ This view distinguishes itself from the previous by arguing that the cosmos will be dissolved or returned to primeval chaos, but not annihilated. Edward Adams advocates for this position when he writes, “the first creation is taken back to its pre-created, chaotic state and a new creative act takes place.”⁷

578-79, 589-92; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 516, 523-25; Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John*, NTCon (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), 404, 406-408.

⁴ David Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., WBC 52A-C (Dallas: Word; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997-1998), 3:1101, 1115-20; R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1920), 2:145, 193, 204; Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, HNT 16a (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1974), 262-63; Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, trans. Maria Poggi Johnson and Adam Kamesar, ITSRS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 323-24, 327-28; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 720-21, 729-31; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation: An Exegetical Commentary*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1992-1995), 2:438-40; Christopher Rowland, “The Book of Revelation,” *NIB* 12:715, 720-21; Andreas Hock, *The Descent of the New Jerusalem: A Discourse Analysis of Rev 21:1-22:5*, EUSST 23/769 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 117-25; Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1994), 229-30; Celia Deutsch, “Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rv 21-22,” *ZNW* 78 (1987): 115-16.

⁵ Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John E. Alsup (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 235 (cf. 231). Also cf. idem, “Neuschöpfung in der Offenbarung des Johannes,” in *Schöpfung und Neuschöpfung*, ed. Ingo Baldermann, Ernst Dassmann, and Ottmar Fuchs (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 125.

⁶ E.g. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, NTM 22 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1990), 142, 144; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 271-72, 275-76; Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC 39 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 361-62. Open to both annihilation and destruction is J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*, JSNTSup 70 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1992), 160-62, 190-93.

⁷ Edward M. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 347 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 238. Adams' main argument for a destructionist reading of Revelation is based on 6:12-17. Despite his recognition that the nature of the transition between the first heaven and earth and the new heaven and earth is heavily debated, Adams essentially asserts without substantive argumentation concerning 20:11 and 21:1 that “the writer of Revelation anticipates the end of the world, in a fully cosmic and destructionist sense” (*Stars*, 239).

(3) John describes the *transformation* of the cosmos.⁸ This view holds that John does not foresee the destruction of the cosmos, but its radical transformation so as to result in a new world. As Ian Boxall states, “John sees a profound renewal of that which is already there, a heaven and earth which have been judged, purged of those powers which threaten them, now destined to be transformed from the very depths of their being.”⁹

(4) John describes the *salvation of humanity* in cosmological terms.¹⁰ This view suggests that John’s vision of a new heaven and a new earth does not stress a cosmological message, but communicates God’s judgment in terms of condemnation and salvation. As C. H. Giblin states,

⁸ David M. Russell, *The “New Heavens and New Earth:” Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, SBAL 1 (Philadelphia: Visionary, 1996), 205-209; N. T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 189; J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 204-206; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1966), 258-59, 261-63; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 220-21; M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Revelation: Holy Living in an Unholy World* (Grand Rapids: Francis & Taylor, 1990), 311-12, 314-15; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, PC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 109; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, SP 16 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993), 203, 207, 209-10; J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, TPINTC (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990), 296-99; Roy A. Harrisville, *The Concept of Newness in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960), 99-105; Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21-22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition*, WUNT 2/129; Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 267-69; Klaus Haacker, “Neuer Himmel, neue Erde, neues Jerusalem: Zur Bedeutung von Apk 21,1-4,” in *Studien zur Johannesoffenbarung und ihrer Auslegung: Festschrift für Otto Böcher zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn and Michael Wolter (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2005), 333-35; Gale Z. Heide, “What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation From Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” *JETS* 40 (1997): 45; Douglas J. Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 449-488.

⁹ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 293.

¹⁰ George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 305-308; Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, RNT (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1997), 446, 451-52; Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington D. C.: Corpus, 1968), 270-78; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 375, 380-81; Akira Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, KEK 16 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 398-99; Ulrich Mell, *Neue Schöpfung: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Studie zu einem soteriologischen Grundsatz paulinischer Theologie*, BZNW 56 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 126-35. Anton Vögtle argues that the imagery of 20:11 and 21:1 certainly communicates the annihilation and re-creation of the cosmos; however, John does not intend for the reader to draw cosmological implications from the imagery (*Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, KBANT [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970], 112-21); idem, “‘Dann sah ich einen neuen Himmel und eine neue Erde...’ (Apk 21, 1): Zur kosmischen Dimension neutestamentlicher Eschatologie,” in *Glaube und Eschatologie: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Erich Grasser and Otto Merk (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 303-33.

“John does not concern himself with physical geography but with the final destiny of mankind according to God’s judgment and personal favor (grace).”¹¹

9.2 The Cosmology of the Book of Revelation

Offering a full treatment of the cosmology of Revelation is out of the question.¹² However, we can touch upon a few essential points pertaining to the future of the cosmos. First, it would be a mistake to assume that John offers a straightforward description of the origin, structure, and destiny of the cosmos. He does appear to adopt a view of the cosmos similar to the ancient Hebrew conception of the universe illustrated in chapter 1 (see fig. 1.2).¹³ However, John’s cosmological language is often *metaphorical* and must be understood as a part of the symbolic world of the Apocalypse. In other words, John is more interested in communicating a worldview than a view of the world (although the two are not mutually exclusive). Thus, the cosmology of the book of Revelation is a *theological cosmology*.

Second, having stated that John’s cosmological language is often metaphorical does not imply that it does not refer to objective reality.¹⁴ On the contrary, much of what John sees actually refers to concrete entities within the real world, *but these entities are described metaphorically so as to infuse them with theological significance*. In this way, John offers his

¹¹ Charles H. Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, GNS 34 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 192.

¹² See Paul S. Minear, “The Cosmology of the Apocalypse,” in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in honor of Otto A. Piper*, ed. William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 23-37; Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, LNTS 355 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008), 178-88; Gert J. C. Jordaan, “Cosmology in the book of Revelation,” *IDS* 47 (2013): 1-8, doi.org/10.4102/ids.v47i2.698; John Painter, “Creation, Cosmology,” *DLNT* 254-55.

¹³ The throne of God appears to be in heaven (i.e. the abode of God), resting on the waters above (i.e. “the sea of glass” in 4:6). Then, there is the sky and the heavenly bodies. The earth is below along with the sea, which is also connected to the abyss and the underworld (11:7; 13:1; 20:13).

¹⁴ See the section on “Metaphorical Language” in chapter 1.

readers a compelling new way in which to see and interpret the world around them.¹⁵ For example, from the earthly perspective of John's readers, the entire world is governed by the imperial rule of Rome. Yet, John casts Rome as Babylon the Great so as to reveal its true identity and relationship to God. From God's heavenly perspective, then, Rome does not rule the world, but is actually a whore, representative of a counterfeit and destructive world order that does not worship the true Creator. Thus, within the symbolic world of Revelation, John depicts reality, but it is a theologically interpreted reality.

Third, the key domains of John's cosmology are "heaven" (οὐρανός), "earth" (γῆ), and "sea" (θάλασσα). John uses these terms in multiple ways. First, he uses them in a *complementary* way to describe the totality of the cosmos. Second, he uses them in a *contrasting* way to describe the kingdoms of God and Satan. Sometimes he even appears to combine these senses. Nevertheless, we can discuss each usage separately as long as we recognize that these categories overlap at certain points.

9.2.1 Heaven, Earth, and Sea as the Totality of the Cosmos

First, John uses the terms "heaven," "earth," and "sea" in a complementary way to describe *the primary regions of the physical universe*. Understood in the way, "heaven" is the "sky" (6:13, 14; 8:10; 11:6; 13:13; 16:21), the "earth" is "land" (6:13; 11:18; 12:16; 16:18), and the "sea" stands for bodies of water (4:6; 7:1; 8:8; 18:17). Taken together, they constitute God's creation, the totality of the cosmos (5:13; 10:6; 14:7).¹⁶ In addition, John can use the terms "world"

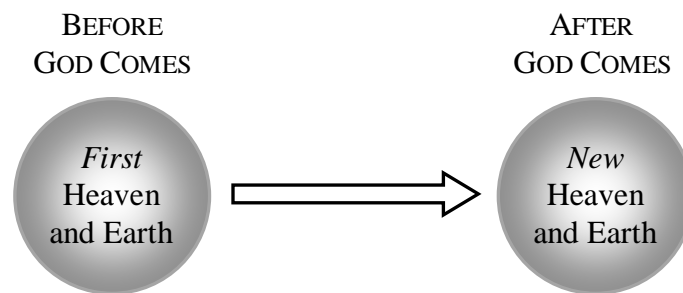
¹⁵ See David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis," *Int* 38 (1984): 39-50; David A. deSilva, "The Construction and Social Function of a Counter-Cosmos in the Revelation of John," *FFF* 9 (1993): 47-61; Craig R. Koester, "Revelation's Visionary Challenge to Ordinary Empire," *Int* 63 (2009): 5-18; Bauckham, *Theology*, 7-9, 17-22.

¹⁶ In some instances John also adds components like the "under the earth" and "springs of water" to round out the fullness of the created order.

(11:15; 13:8; 17:8) and “all things” (4:11; 21:5) to refer to the cosmos in summary fashion. As God’s creation, John speaks of the cosmos in highly positive terms. Its destiny is to worship its Creator (4:11; 5:13; 14:7).

John also speaks of “heaven” and “earth” within a temporal framework as an expression of his eschatology (see fig. 9.1).

FIGURE 9.1: THE TEMPORAL WORLDS OF JOHN’S APOCALYPTIC ESCHATOLOGY



The present manifestation of the cosmos, “the first heaven and the first earth,” is a scene of conflict, full of mourning, pain, and most notably death (21:1). Yet, John envisions this world becoming “a new heaven and a new earth” through a new creative act of God (21:1, 5). In the world to come, conflict will be resolved, death will be overturned, and healing will abound.

9.2.2 Heaven, Earth, and Sea as Kingdoms/Realms in Conflict

John also uses “heaven,” “earth,” and “sea” in a contrasting way to describe *distinct kingdoms or realms of reality*. In this usage John employs the terms *spatially*, taking advantage of the idea of a three-storied universe where heaven is above, the earth is below, and the sea/abyss is under the

earth.¹⁷ But these are no mere cosmological domains in John thought. He attaches significant *theological weight* to each realm.

“Heaven” is the realm above, the kingdom of God.¹⁸ This transcendent realm is the dwelling place of God (3:12; 11:13; 16:11), the Lamb (5:6; 7:17; 8:1), the Spirit (4:5; 5:6), and angels (10:1; 18:1; 20:1). It is also the dwelling place of righteous humans, both dead and alive, although John demonstrates that believers who are alive have a foot in both heaven above and earth below (4:10; 6:9; 7:3, 9; 13:6; 18:4, 20).¹⁹ One of the most prominent images of the heavenly realm is the “throne” upon which God is seated (4:2-11). Heaven is thus where God resides and his will is done. Throughout the book various voices come “from heaven” to communicate God’s pronouncements, plans, and judgments (10:1-6; 11:12; 14:13; 18:4-8), and it is “out of heaven” that New Jerusalem descends (3:12; 21:2, 10). Furthermore, heaven is the realm where many of the visions are witnessed (4:1; 11:19; 15:5). Therefore, “heaven” is the realm of God and of all who give their allegiance to him. It is God’s kingdom where he reigns and is worshiped as God (5:13).

In contrast to the heavenly kingdom, the “sea” is associated with the “abyss” (ἄβυσσος) and the underworld, the kingdom of Satan. The “sea” as a theological realm is most likely drawn from the Ancient Near Eastern notion of the primeval abyss, the reservoir out of which chaos and evil may emerge.²⁰ John probably alludes to these ideas when he speaks of the “sea of glass” before the throne of God (Rev 4:6; 15:2) and the ancient serpent, the dragon (12:3, 9, 15; 20:2). It is also “out of the sea/abyss” that the beast arises (13:1; cf. 11:7; 17:8). By associating the sea

¹⁷ This is the spatial axis of apocalyptic eschatology, see L. J. Kreitzer, “Apocalyptic, Apocalypticism,” *DLNT*, 63-66.

¹⁸ See H. Bietenhard, “οὐρανός,” *NIDNTT* 2:188-196.

¹⁹ This appears similar to the Pauline idea that believers have “citizenship in heaven” (cf. Phil 3:20).

²⁰ In the OT, it is the home of the dragon and other evil beasts (Pss 74:13-14; 89:9-11; Isa 27:1; 51:9-11; Dan 7:2-3). Thus, the sea is a menacing realm which must be restrained (Job 7:12; 38:8-11; Ps 104:5-9; Prov 8:27-31; Nah 1:4).

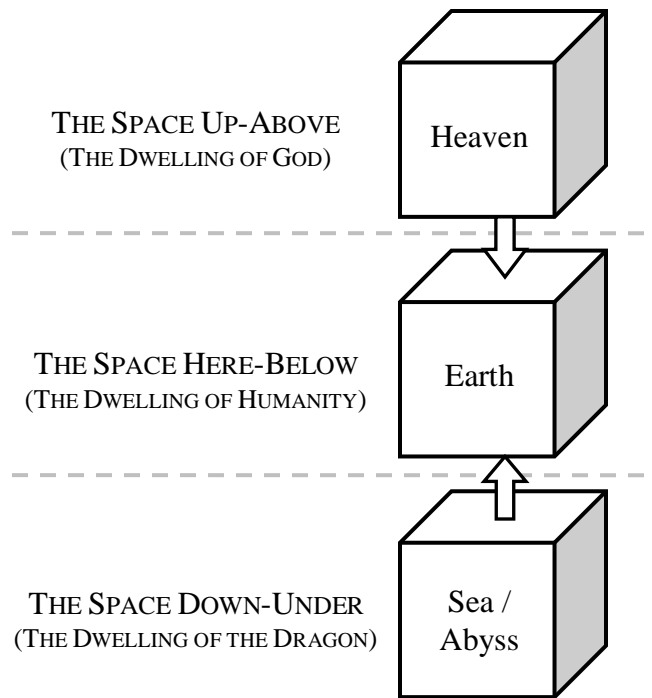
with the “abyss,” John also connects the sea with the realm of the “Destroyer” and his demonic horde (9:1-11). Finally, John adds negative connotations to the sea by associating it with “Death and Hades” (20:13). Therefore, the “sea” is the realm of evil and all that is in opposition to God. Its removal will constitute one of the defining features of the new heaven and new earth (21:1c).

Situated between heaven and the sea is the “earth.” As a theological realm, the earth is contested territory. Now, there is no question in Revelation that the earth remains under the sovereign control of God (1:4; 4:8; 10:2, 5; 11:4). However, John often characterizes the earth *negatively* because Satan and his henchman from the sea have been “permitted” to exercise authority over it for a time (2:13; 6:4, 8; 11:2; 12:9, 12; 13:2, 4, 5, 7, 14, 15). As a result, the dragon has attempted to establish his own kingdom on earth through the beast (13:1-3, 7-8), the false prophet (13:11-15), Babylon the Great (17:5; 18:2-3), and wicked humanity, the dwellers “of the earth.”²¹ The earth as a theological realm, then, is an extension of the kingdom of Satan during this age, a realm that stands in opposition to God and his purposes (3:10; 12:9; 16:14). Yet God has not abandoned his efforts to redeem the earth and its inhabitants through the witness of the gospel (5:6; 11:10; 14:3, 6) and the administration of wrath (8:5; 16:1). Ultimately, he will destroy “those who destroy the earth” (11:18), and New Jerusalem will descend from heaven to earth (21:2, 9).

We can illustrate these three spatial realms with the following diagram (fig. 9.2).

²¹ The earth-dwellers include: inhabitants (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8), kings (6:15; 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:19), every tribe, and language, and people, and nation (1:7; 5:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6), merchants (18:3, 11), and magnates (6:15; 18:23). For more on the earth as a realm in opposition to God see Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 261-269; James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 152-153.

FIGURE 9.2: THE SPATIAL REALMS OF JOHN'S APOCALYPTIC ESCHATOLOGY



John uses these three spatial realms to illustrate the ongoing conflict between the kingdoms of God and Satan. As commonly recognized, John often expresses this conflict using *parody*.²² Put another way, John often casts the kingdom below (i.e. the earth as corrupted by the sea) as a counterfeit imitation of the kingdom above (i.e. heaven). This can be observed by comparing the deities, kings, prophets, principal cities, and inhabitants of each kingdom.

(1) John contrasts God and Satan as the deities of heaven and earth, each of whom has his own throne and receives worship from the inhabitants of his kingdom (cf. 4:1-11; 7:11; 13:2-4). For John, God is the Creator of all things, the one who gives life (4:11; 10:6; 14:7; 21:5),

²² See e.g. Sophie Laws, *In the Light of the Lamb: Imagery, Parody, and Theology in the Apocalypse of John*, GNS 31 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 36-95; Joe E. Lunceford, *Parody and Counterimaging in the Apocalypse* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 227-61; Stephen D. O’Leary, “A Dramatistic Theory of Apocalyptic Rhetoric,” *QJS* 79 (1993): 388-89.

whereas Satan is the Destroyer, the one who brings death (9:11; 11:18). And whereas God has founded his kingdom on truth (1:8; 6:10; 16:7), Satan operates through deception (12:9; 20:8).

(2) Closely associated with God and Satan are their chosen rulers/kings. Whereas Jesus is God's chosen Messiah, the one who shares God's throne in heaven (3:21; 22:3), the beast is the one with whom Satan shares his throne on earth (13:2).²³ Furthermore, as the representative of "the one who was and who is and who is to come," Jesus' parousia signals the coming of God (19:11-16). In contrast, as the representative of Satan, the beast who "was and is not and is to come," will ultimately go to destruction (17:8). And while the resurrected and exalted Jesus is worshipped by the inhabitants of heaven as "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered" (5:6-14), the beast is worshipped by the inhabitants of earth as one who "seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed" (13:3-4).

(3) Propagating the worship of the chosen kings (Jesus and the beast) are the prophets of each kingdom. On one hand, two witnesses are given authority by God to prophesy and perform mighty acts of God as a testimony to Jesus (11:3-10).²⁴ On the other hand, the false prophet exercises the authority of Satan to perform great signs and deceive the people of the earth (13:12, 13, 14; 19:20).²⁵

(4) John also contrasts the principal cities of heaven and earth: New Jerusalem and Babylon the Great.²⁶ Within the symbolic world of the Apocalypse, John uses these complex images to refer to places, people, and the deities who live there. Furthermore, John personifies

²³ The beast is most likely to be identified with Emperor Nero, or some Nero-esque figure, although the portrayal also transcends one person. See Koester, *Revelation*, 570-71, 580-81; Beale, *Revelation*, 690-93.

²⁴ The two witnesses are most likely representative of the church or its martyrs as God's prophetic voice in this world. For discussion see Beale, *Revelation*, 572-76; Koester, *Revelation*, 496-98.

²⁵ The false prophet most likely represents any civic leader that promoted the imperial cult (i.e. emperor worship). For discussion see Koester, *Revelation*, 588-90. Some suggest that the false prophet is a parody of the Holy Spirit, but this seems unlikely. John closely associates the Holy Spirit with God (1:4; 4:5), Jesus (3:1; 5:6), and the church (1:10; 2:7; 3:22). Parodying the work of the Spirit is the activity of unclean spirits and demons, who are closely associated with Satan, the beast, and the false prophet (9:20; 16:13-14, 18:2).

²⁶ On this contrast see Bauckham, *Theology*, 126-32; Deutch, "Transformation of Symbols," 106-26.

each city as a woman in order to describe their theological dispositions. New Jerusalem represents the glorious heavenly order that will preside over the new creation and the people who live there in the presence of God and the Messiah (21:2, 9-10).²⁷ Babylon the Great, on the other hand, represents the corrupt earthly order that presides over this world and the people who live there under the deception of Satan and the beasts (17:5, 18; 19:2).²⁸

(5) Finally, John contrasts the human inhabitants of heaven and earth. The location of a person's dwelling in Revelation indicates his/her kingdom allegiance. The inhabitants of heaven worship God (4:10; 15:3-4), receive "the seal of the living God" (7:2; 9:4; 14:1), and have their names written in the book of life (21:27). The inhabitants of the earth worship the dragon (13:4, 7-8), receive "the mark of the beast" (13:3-4, 16; 14:11; 16:2), and do not have their names written in the book of life (13:8; 17:8).

In summary, when John contrasts heaven and the earth (as corrupted by the sea), he frames them as two opposing kingdoms vying for worship and allegiance. Heaven is the realm of ultimate reality. Earth is the realm of distorted reality, a parody of the heavenly kingdom. We can compare these incompatible kingdoms with Table 9.1.

²⁷ On the nature of New Jerusalem as place, people, and presence see Bauckham, *Theology*, 132-43; Stephens, *Annihilation*, 232-33; Osborne, *Revelation*, 733; Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1122.

²⁸ It seems relatively clear that Babylon the Great should be identified with Rome, the *concrete manifestation* of this corrupt earthly order in John's day. However, John's portrayal of Babylon cannot be restricted to Rome, since this corrupt earthly order transcends it. He compares it to other wicked cities/kingdoms such as Babylon (Jer 51:6-8, 25), Nineveh (Jonah 1:2; 3:2-3), and Tyre (Isa 23:16-17). In other words, there were, and there will be, other Rome-like "cities" that manifest an order in opposition to God. This is comparable to New Jerusalem, which cannot be restricted to an actual city. See Koester, *Revelation*, 683-84; Beale, *Revelation*, 591-93, 754-55; Mulholland, *Revelation*, 179. Caird writes, "Rome is simply the latest embodiment of something that is a recurrent feature of human history. The great city is the spiritual home of those John dubs inhabitants of earth; it is the tower of Babel, the city of this world, Vanity Fair" (*Revelation*, 138).

TABLE 9.1: THE OPPOSING KINGDOMS IN REVELATION

	<i>True Reality</i>	<i>Deceptive Reality</i>
<i>Kingdom</i>	Heaven (above)	Earth & Sea (below)
<i>Deity of Worship</i>	God	Dragon/Satan
<i>King/Ruler</i>	Jesus the Messiah	The Beast
<i>Prophets/Witnesses</i>	The Two Witnesses	The False Prophet
<i>Governing City/Order</i>	New Jerusalem	Babylon the Great
<i>Human Inhabitants</i>	Heaven-dwellers	Earth-dwellers

As we approach the end of the Apocalypse, the earthly kingdom will be removed (20:11) and its corrupting influence the sea will be no more (21:1c). Then Lord God Almighty will descend with his own kingdom to rule over the entire cosmos (21:2).²⁹

9.3 The Theme of the Eschatological Earthquake

We are now in a position to address one of the central themes of the Apocalypse, the so-called “eschatological earthquake.”³⁰ An exploration of this theme will help address the question: How does John employ the language of cosmic catastrophe within the symbolic world of the Apocalypse?³¹ We will look at four texts within this theme (6:12-17; 11:15-19; 16:17-21; 20:11), followed by a few concluding remarks.³²

²⁹ On the establishment of God’s rule over all creation in Revelation see Jan A. du Rand, “‘Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven’: The Theological motif of the Apocalypse of John,” *Neot* 31 (1997): 59-75; Franz Mussner, “‘Weltherrschaft’ als eschatologische Thema der Johannesapokalypse,” in *Glaube und Eschatologie: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Erich Grasser and Otto Merk (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 209-27; M. Eugene Boring, “The Theology of Revelation,” *Int* 40 (1986): 257-69.

³⁰ See Richard Bauckham, “The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John,” *NovT* 19 (1977): 224-33.

³¹ Based on the question above, I take for granted that the language of cosmic catastrophe must be interpreted as *metaphorical* language. For example, the sixth seal (6:12-17) or the seventh bowl (16:17-21) are not literal descriptions of events any more than the other six seals or bowls.

³² Also cf. Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:13.

9.3.1 Revelation 6:12-17

With the opening of the sixth seal, John sees an initial glimpse of the Day of the Lord, which will be God's ultimate answer to the plea of the souls under the altar who were slaughtered for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (6:10).³³ After an undisclosed period of waiting (6:11), God will come to execute judgment against "the inhabitants of the earth" (6:12-17). The text reads as follows:

¹² I looked when he opened the sixth seal, and there came a great earthquake; and the sun became black like a sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. ¹⁴ And the sky split apart like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place. ¹⁵ And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free person hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ while saying to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of the One who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Revelation 6:12-17 is primarily a collection of OT allusions derived from passages related to a theophany of God on the Day of the Lord.³⁴ The passage can be divided into two main parts.³⁵ Revelation 6:12-14 depicts the coming of God as Judge. Revelation 6:15-17 describes the fearful response of those who are faced with the prospect of wrath.

The central image of 6:12-14 is a "great earthquake" (σεισμός μέγας). In the OT, earthquakes commonly symbolize the coming of Yahweh to overthrow a specific city, nation, or

³³ So Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 72; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 64.

³⁴ Other general allusion besides the ones listed below may include Isa 13:10-13; 24:1-6, 17-23; Jer 4:23-28; Ezek 32:6-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15-16 [4:15-16 LXX]; Nahum 1:5-6; Hab 3:6-11; T. Mos. 10:3-6. Also note the similarities to Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Acts 2:19-20. For discussion of the OT allusions see Beale, *Revelation*, 396-401; Aune, *Revelation*, 1:413-23; Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 158-66; Jacques van Ruiten, "Der alttestamentliche Hintergrund von Apokalypse 6:12-17," *EstBib* 53 (1995): 239-60.

³⁵ Proposing that 6:12-17 is composed as a "ring composition" (i.e. chiasm) is P. G. R. de Villiers, "The Sixth Seal in Revelation 6:12-17," *AcTSup* 6 (2004): 1-30. This is ingenious, but seems doubtful.

kingdom.³⁶ John may allude here to Ezek 38:18-23, where a “great earthquake” (σεισμός μέγας) occurs as Yahweh comes forth to execute his wrath upon Gog on the Day of the Lord.³⁷ In Revelation the quake is cosmic in scope. The stars fall on account of the great quake just as unripe figs fall “when shaken by a great wind” (ὕπὸ ἀνέμου μεγάλου σειομένη). Furthermore, the imagery of violent shaking explains why the sky “was split apart” (ἀπεχωρίσθη), and why the mountains and islands “were moved” (ἐκινήθησαν) out of place. John uses the image of an earthquake on numerous occasions in Revelation to symbolize a theophany of God for the purpose of judgment (8:5; 11:19; 20:11), often involving the destruction of Babylon the Great and its kingdom (11:13; 16:17-21).

As part of the cosmic quake, John states that the sun became black as sackcloth and the whole moon became red like blood (6:12c-d). This imagery alludes to Joel 2:31 (3:4 LXX), where these heavenly phenomena herald the coming of Yahweh on the Day of the Lord.³⁸ The descriptions of “sackcloth” and “blood” may symbolize mourning and death as God comes in wrath to judge the powers of the heavens (see on 6:13 below) and the inhabitants of the earth (cf. 14:20), thereby avenging the “blood” of the souls under the altar (cf. 6:10; 18:24; 19:2).³⁹ This picture also coheres with God’s judgment of the kingdom of the beast (i.e. the whole earth), which “was plunged into darkness” (16:10; cf. 13:3). In any case, the darkening and ruin of these heavenly lights appear to be a direct result of the coming of God in *radiant glory*. John

³⁶ See Exod 19:18; Judg 5:4-5; Ps 68:7-8 [67:8-9 LXX]; Isa 13:13; 24:18-20; Jer 4:23-26; Joel 2:10-11; Mic 1:3-4; Nah 1:5-6.

³⁷ So Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 146.

³⁸ Also cf. Isa 13:10; 34:4-6; Joel 2:10; 3:15 [4:15 LXX]. The sun becoming like “sackcloth” may allude to Isa 50:3. Charles suggests that John was familiar with T. Mos. 10:5 on account of the addition of “whole” (*Revelation*, 1:180).

³⁹ So Koester, *Revelation*, 402.

reports that in the new heaven and new earth, the light of the sun and moon will be unnecessary because the glory of God and the Lamb will provide light (21:23; 22:5).⁴⁰

In Rev 6:13 the cosmic quake causes the stars to fall from the sky. This verse alludes to Isa 34:4 (LXX), which depicts Yahweh waging war against the stars/heavenly host on the Day of the Lord before descending upon the nation of Edom. As discussed in previous chapters, the people of the ancient world routinely associated the heavenly bodies with heavenly beings (i.e. angels/hostile powers) and thought that these beings were assigned to various nations.⁴¹ John appears to make this association as well (see Rev 8:10-12; 9:1; 12:4). These hostile powers are influential in gathering the kings and inhabitants of the earth for “the war of the great day of God the Almighty” (16:13-14), which presumably is the same as “the great day of their wrath” depicted here (6:17). Therefore, the falling of the stars appears to symbolize *the overthrow of hostile powers by God and the Lamb on the Day of the Lord* (cf. Matt 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-26).⁴²

In order to emphasize the descent of God from the heavenly realm above to the earthly realm below, John says that he saw “the sky split apart like a scroll being rolled up” (Rev 6:14a). This image is also drawn from Isa 34:4. Some interpreters prefer to translate ἀπεχωρίσθη as “vanished” or “disappeared,”⁴³ but “split apart” is more in keeping with the word’s lexical sense of “separate” or “divide.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, John appears to have added this verb to Isa 34:4 in order to connect it to the imagery of a theophany quake. The image of the sky being ripped open and peeled back vividly depicts the coming of God from his dwelling to the dwelling of

⁴⁰ Similarly, the glory of the Son of Man is the reason why the sun and moon become dark in Matt 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-26.

⁴¹ See Deut 32:8 (LXX); Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 73; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 184-87.

⁴² So Boxall, *Revelation*, 118; Caird, *Revelation*, 89; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 146; Sweet, *Revelation*, 145.

⁴³ Aune, *Revelation*, 1:415; Blount, *Revelation*, 139.

⁴⁴ So BDAG, 125; Mounce, *Revelation*, 151; Giblin, *Revelation*, 90; Smalley, *Revelation*, 167.

humanity (cf. Isa 64:1-3).⁴⁵ In this way, the splitting and rolling up of the sky *exposes the earth for judgment*.⁴⁶

The final image is the displacement of every mountain and island by the great earthquake (6:14b). In the OT, the shaking of mountains commonly portrays a theophany of God for the purpose of judgment.⁴⁷ John also may allude here to Ezek 26:15-18, where God's judgment of Tyre elicits the shaking of the islands, although as G. K. Beale notes, "islands" can refer to the Gentile nations in the LXX.⁴⁸ In Revelation it seems noteworthy that Babylon the Great is seated on "seven mountains" (17:9) and portrayed as "a great mountain" burning with fire (8:8).⁴⁹ Coupled with a reading of 16:18-20, which appears to depict the same scene as 6:12-17 using slightly different imagery, the displacement of the mountains and islands appears to signal *the coming of God in judgment against the kingdom of Babylon the Great*, a kingdom which encompasses the entire world.

So, what does the imagery of Rev 6:12-14 communicate? Considering John's allusions to the OT and how he employs this imagery in the rest of the Apocalypse, the language of cosmic catastrophe appears to metaphorically portray *a theophany of God and the Lamb on the Day of the Lord for the purpose of executing judgment upon the kingdom of Babylon the Great and the hostile powers that stand behind it*.⁵⁰ Similar to the OT, then, the language of cosmic catastrophe signifies a coming of God in judgment against a particular kingdom and the heavenly

⁴⁵ Adams claims that "the rolling up of the heavenly canopy seems to be a fairly clear image for the dissolution of the material heavens" (*Stars*, 246). But this inference is not "clear" given John's allusion to Isa 34:4, which does not portray the dissolution of the heavens, but a theophany of God for the purpose of judgment upon Edom. Adams acknowledges this possibility.

⁴⁶ So Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 73; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 188; Roloff, *Revelation*, 92.

⁴⁷ E.g. Ps 18:7 [17:8 LXX]; Isa 5:25; 64:1; Jer 4:23-26; Ezek 38:20; Mic 1:4; Nah 1:5; Hab 3:6.

⁴⁸ See Gen 10:32; Ps 71:10 [72:10 MT]; Isa 42:10; 49:1, 22; 51:5; Zeph 2:11; Beale, *Revelation*, 399; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 74.

⁴⁹ Also cf. Rev 17:16; 18:8, 21; Jer 51:24-25 [28:24-25 LXX].

⁵⁰ Similar conclusions are reached by Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 71-75; Beale, *Revelation*, 398; Smalley, *Revelation*, 168; Mulholland, *Revelation*, 176-78; Sweet, *Revelation*, 143-45; Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 163-66.

powers associated with it. In Revelation, however, the kingdom under judgment is the entire world of evil (i.e. the earthly realm below as corrupted by the sea). This implies that Rev 6:12-14 is not merely a vision of the demise of a singular kingdom, such as the Roman Empire, but the final overthrow of all that stands in opposition to God.⁵¹ It is a picture of the final judgment depicting God and the Lamb coming to “judge and avenge” the blood of the souls under the altar (6:10; cf. 19:2).⁵²

The above interpretation of Rev 6:12-14 is further supported by 6:15-17, which describes the terrified response of the people.⁵³ The seven groups of people listed in 6:15 portray the totality of ungodly humanity (cf. 19:18).⁵⁴ John describes their reaction by saying that they hid in fear. Some interpreters suggest that the people hid because they were afraid of the physical calamities taking place around them.⁵⁵ But that does not seem to be what John draws attention to here. First, ungodly humanity is not hiding from something, but someone, the *presence* of God and the Lamb (6:16). The attempt to conceal themselves from God is made all the more apparent by John’s allusions to Isaiah 2:10-21 (esp. 2:10, 19, 21) and Hosea 10:8.⁵⁶ Ungodly humanity hides because they are afraid of the *wrath* of God and the Lamb (Rev 6:17).⁵⁷

⁵¹ Those who adopt a linear chronological reading of the text argue that 6:12-17 does not depict the consummation (e.g. Charles, *Revelation*, 1:179; Thomas, *Revelation*, 1:451-52; Patterson, *Revelation*, 188-89). However, see Beale, *Revelation*, 397-99. Boring (*Revelation*, 126-27) is right to stress that what we have here is more than the overthrow of an oppressive political entity or a social revolution (contra Wright, *Revelation*, 67).

⁵² Revelation 6:10 and 19:2 are the only verses that pair the verbs “judge” and “avenge.” See Richard Bauckham, “Judgment in the Book of Revelation,” *ExAud* 20 (2004): 9.

⁵³ It is common in Revelation for John to use audition (i.e. spoken words) to clarify what is seen (e.g. 7:13-17; 12:10-12; 16:5-7; 21:3-8). John makes plain what is happening in 6:12-14 through 6:15-17. So Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 75.

⁵⁴ This group likely particularizes the “inhabitants of the earth” (6:10), who now find themselves under judgment. So de Villiers, “Sixth Seal,” 9. See Beale, *Revelation*, 399-400; Osborne, *Revelation*, 294; Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 164-66.

⁵⁵ E.g. Adams, *Stars*, 243; Thomas, *Revelation*, 456.

⁵⁶ Furthermore, how could anyone run and hide in mountains that are being tossed out of place? See Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 75-76.

⁵⁷ Note that the ὄπι- clause (6:17) states the reason why the ungodly hid in fear. Also cf. cf. Joel 2:11; Nah 1:6; Mal 3:2.

At this point, the scene of the Day of the Lord comes to an abrupt end. We are not told what happens to the inhabitants of the earth or how God and the Lamb execute their wrath. Rather, John turns to answer the question posed by the inhabitants of the earth in 6:17 by describing those who are able to “stand” in the presence of God at the final judgment (7:1-17).⁵⁸ However, the scene described in 6:12-17 will be recapitulated throughout the course of the book (11:15-19; 16:17-21), ultimately being brought to a conclusion in 20:11-15, where all people will “stand” before the One seated on the throne for the final judgment.⁵⁹

What, then, does Rev 6:12-14 imply concerning the future of the cosmos?⁶⁰ There seems to be little doubt that John anticipates dramatic cosmological changes to occur when God comes on the Day of the Lord (21:1). Yet, if the above interpretation has merit, then the “world” which crumbles before God and the Lamb in Rev 6:12-14 is not so much the cosmos itself, but the world of the ungodly (i.e. the worldwide kingdom ruled by Babylon the Great and the powers of evil that stand behind it).⁶¹

⁵⁸ So Giblin, *Revelation*, 90; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 83; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 215.

⁵⁹ I take the stance that John uses a form of recapitulation with regard to the seals, trumpets, and bowls, but also that there is literary progression throughout the book. See Beale, *Revelation*, 121-144; Charles H. Giblin, “Recapitulation and the Literary Coherence of John’s Apocalypse,” *CBQ* 56 (1994): 81-95; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 160-166.

⁶⁰ Based on the description in 6:15-17 that the inhabitants of the earth survive the events of 6:12-14, Adams argues, “the narrative of 6.12-17 does not get us to the point where the cosmos is actually dissolved, but this does not rule out an ‘end of the cosmos’ interpretation since the portrait could be that of the created universe in *process* of collapse” (*Stars*, 246 [italics original]). But why are we to suppose that John is interested in communicating such an elaborate cosmological position, and how does a cosmological statement genuinely answer the question of those under the altar in 6:10, or that of the guilty in 6:17?

⁶¹ As Caird states, “when John comes to speak of the shaking of the earth, he is thinking not so much of the dissolution of the physical universe as of that earth which is the spiritual home of earthly men” (*Revelation*, 88).

9.3.2 Revelation 11:15-19

The blowing of the seventh trumpet takes us once again to the consummation of the age.⁶²

Important for our purposes, Rev 11:15-19 briefly describes the transition that will occur when God establishes his kingdom.

¹⁵ And the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.” ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and begun to reign. ¹⁸ The nations were enraged, and your wrath came, and the time to judge the dead, and to reward your servants, the prophets and the saints and those who fear your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.” ¹⁹ And the temple of God in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, and rumblings, and peals of thunder, and an earthquake, and large hailstones.

John appears to frame this passage as the fulfillment of Ps 2, where the nations come together against the Lord and his Messiah, but the Lord responds with wrath and installs his Messiah as King, giving him the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession.⁶³ In addition, John appears to frame this passage as a fulfillment of the heavenly throne scene in Rev 4-5, where God’s reign is actualized on earth as it is in heaven (cf. 5:13).

The initial words spoken by the voices in heaven proclaim a transfer of dominion, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever” (11:15b). There are different ways to construe the phrase “the kingdom of the world” (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου). First, τοῦ κόσμου could refer to “all things” (i.e. the cosmos and all that is in it) or the system of human sin in opposition to God (as in Johannine theology).⁶⁴

⁶² Charles interprets 11:15-19 as describing the time of the millennial kingdom (*Revelation* 1:294). But this seems unlikely, see Beale, *Revelation*, 611-19.

⁶³ So Boxall, *Revelation*, 168-71; Caird, *Revelation*, 141; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 363.

⁶⁴ Roloff suggests the narrower meaning of “the realm of humanity and the nations” (*Revelation*, 137). But the reign of God here certainly includes dominion over the whole cosmos, including hostile angelic powers.

Here the former is more probable on account of John's other uses of the term in the Apocalypse (cf. 13:8; 17:8). Furthermore, there are strong connections in 11:15-19 to the creation theology of chapters 4-5.⁶⁵ Second, ἡ βασιλεία could refer to a territory under rule (cf. 16:10; 17:12, 17) or the act of reigning (cf. 12:10; 17:18). Either is a possibility.⁶⁶ The former is suggested by a similar phrase in Matt 4:8, where Satan tempts Jesus by showing him all "the kingdoms of the world."⁶⁷ But John does not seem to be emphasizing a change in territory here as much as he is a change in dominion over a territory, which is specified as the cosmos. Furthermore, the similarity between the wording of Rev 11:15 and 12:10 suggests the act of reigning. Thus, the most probable meaning of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου is something like "the rule over all things."⁶⁸ Understood in this manner, the loud voices in heaven proclaim that *rulership over all things has been transferred to the Lord and his Christ*. They are declaring that the kingdom of God has become manifest throughout the entire cosmos (cf. 21:1-2; 22:3-5).⁶⁹

John specifically connects this transfer of sovereignty over the cosmos to the coming of God in judgment (11:17-19). Up to this point in the book of Revelation, John has regularly referred to God as the Lord God Almighty, "the one who is and who was and who is to come" (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος) (1:4, 8; 4:8).⁷⁰ But in 11:17 the elders in heaven sing, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was [ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν], because you have taken

⁶⁵ See Stephens, *Annihilation*, 192-95.

⁶⁶ See BDAG, 168-69.

⁶⁷ So Charles, *Revelation*, 1:294.

⁶⁸ This interpretation assumes that τοῦ κόσμου is an objective genitive, becoming the object of the verbal idea implied in the head noun. Others advocating the same interpretation include: Beale, *Revelation*, 611; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 188; Boring, *Revelation*, 148; Mounce, *Revelation*, 226; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 270; Stephens, *Annihilation*, 192-93; Sweet, *Revelation*, 192; Wright, *Revelation*, 102-103. Via a different route, some argue that the phrase refers to the territory belonging to the sinful world, which then becomes the territory of the Lord (e.g. Aune, *Revelation*, 2:638; Painter, "Creation, Cosmology," 254; Smalley, *Revelation*, 289). While I think this translation is less likely, it essentially arrives at the same conclusion.

⁶⁹ Yarbro Collins writes, "This manifestation of the kingdom of God is salvation from a cosmic point of view" (*Apocalypse*, 74).

⁷⁰ Revelation 4:8 varies slightly by reversing "who is and who was."

your great power and begun to reign.”⁷¹ By dropping the final participle in this recurring phrase, John implies that he is witnessing the time when the Lord *has come* to powerfully “take” his reign over all things.⁷²

Now according to John, because God is the Creator of all things, he has always remained in sovereign control of the cosmos (4:8-11; 10:5-6; 14:7). Nevertheless, God has allowed other powers to exercise authority over the world for a period of time. They have sought to usurp God’s sovereign power by setting up their own kingdom in opposition to God. In Revelation these hostile powers are: the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, Babylon the Great (the city and its inhabitants), and Death and Hades. Instead of administering the holy and life-giving reign of God throughout the cosmos, these hostile powers have instituted their own reign of corruption and death, and thus are labeled “those who destroy the earth” (11:18; cf. 9:11; 19:2; Jer 28:25 LXX [51:25 MT]).⁷³ Here in the seventh trumpet, John envisions the time when God has come along with his chosen ruler, the Messiah, to reclaim the world as his own. God accomplishes this reclamation of the cosmos through judgment, specifically by executing his wrath against the destroyers.

The announcement in Rev 11:18 that God has come “to destroy those who destroy the earth” (διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν) offers a glimpse into John’s viewpoint concerning

⁷¹ Also cf. 16:5.

⁷² Mulholland suggests that the omission of “who is to come” implies the time immediately following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the point at which God came and took his reign (*Revelation*, 210). Similar is Corsini, *Apocalypse*, 203. But 11:15-19 is most likely a picture of the consummation.

⁷³ John certainly places an emphasis on Babylon the Great as the destroyer of the earth, but all hostile angelic powers who stand behind it and human entities associated with it are implicated as well. Thus, the “destroyers” cannot be limited to ungodly humanity (e.g. Roloff, *Revelation*, 138). Ultimately, the “destroyers” are all those who experience God’s wrath and are throw into the “lake of fire.” So Stephens, *Annihilation*, 198; Bauckham, *Theology*, 52-53; Caird, *Revelation*, 143-44; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 190; Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:113; Boxall, *Revelation*, 171; Harrington, *Revelation*, 126; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:296. For examples of how the “destroyers” bring moral and physical ruin upon the earth see Koester, *Revelation*, 516-17.

the future of the cosmos.⁷⁴ As pointed out by several interpreters, this judgment is an example of *lex talionis* (“the law of retaliation”), the administration of a punishment that squarely fits the crime (also cf. 16:6; 18:6; 22:18-19).⁷⁵ This correspondence between crime and punishment in 11:18 is enabled by the dual meaning of the verb διαφθείρω, which can mean both “destroy” in a physical sense, and “corrupt” in a moral sense.⁷⁶ In addition to Jer 28:25 LXX, this unique wordplay probably alludes to a similar instance of *lex talionis* using the cognate καταφθείρω in the Genesis Flood narrative. After observing that the earth “had been corrupted” (κατεφθαρμένη), because all flesh “had corrupted” (κατέφθειρεν) its way upon the earth, God declares, “I am destroying [καταφθείρω] them and the earth” (Gen 6:11-13, 17). The essential point in both Genesis and Revelation is that “God’s wholesale destruction of those who are ruining his creation is justified as necessary for the preservation of his creation and its salvation from the evil they are doing to it.”⁷⁷ In other words, God exercises his wrath as part of the process by which he brings salvation to the cosmos.⁷⁸

There is, however, a noteworthy difference between Genesis and Revelation. In the Flood narrative, God states that he is going to destroy “the earth” along with all flesh (Gen 6:13). But here in Revelation, Satan and his kingdom are the ones destroying the earth. John does not include God in this category. He is the Creator (Rev 4:11; 10:6; 14:7).⁷⁹ Furthermore, John

⁷⁴ Some interpreters argue that the “earth” in 11:18 is a metonym referring to the people of God (Beale, *Revelation*, 615; Osborne, *Revelation*, 447) or people in general (Aune, *Revelation*, 2:645; Smalley, *Revelation*, 293). However, the meaning is probably cosmological in light of: (1) the cosmological context regarding “the kingdom of the world,” (2) John’s allusions to Gen 6:11-13 and Jer 28:25 LXX [51:25 MT], where “the earth” is cosmological, and (3) “the earth” is likely being used in reference to the location of ruin (cf. 12:4, 9, 12, 13, 16). See Stephens, *Annihilation*, 196-97.

⁷⁵ Bauckham, “Judgment,” 2; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:645-46; Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 186.

⁷⁶ BDAG, 239; Bauckham, “Judgment,” 2; Smalley, *Revelation*, 293.

⁷⁷ Bauckham, “Judgment,” 2. Cf. Stephens, *Annihilation*, 197; Rowland, “Revelation,” 12:644.

⁷⁸ See Stephens, *Annihilation*, 198-99; Bauckham, *Theology*, 47-53.

⁷⁹ Stephens, *Annihilation*, 198-99. On God as “Creator” in Revelation see Bauckham, *Theology*, 47-53.

portrays God as actively punishing those who corrupt and ruin the earth. As chapters 12-22 (esp. 19:11-20:15) will show, every “destroyer” will be overthrown by God and his Messiah.

John links 11:15-18 to the theme of the eschatological earthquake in 11:19 (cf. 11:13), which underscores that 11:15-18 is another picture of God coming to judge the world and establish his reign.⁸⁰ In this way, 6:12-17 and 11:15-19 appear to depict the same event from different angles, *a theophany of God as King and Judge of the world, whereby he executes his wrath on the “destroyers” of the earth, the earthly kingdom of Babylon the Great and the hostile powers who stand behind it.*

What, then, does Rev 11:15-19 imply concerning the future of the cosmos? According to John, God does not appear to be interested in destroying the earth so that he can replace it with another one. Rather, he seems set on replacing the hostile powers who currently govern it so that his kingdom can become manifest not just in heaven, but also on earth.⁸¹ In this way, the transition from this world to the world to come is envisioned as a *change of dominion*. The enactment of God’s final judgment, then, will liberate the earth from the destructive powers of evil (both angelic and human), so that the earth, in addition to heaven, will lie under the holy and life-giving reign of God and his Messiah. As G. B. Caird writes,

The salvation of individual souls is not, however, enough to vindicate the purposes of God. God is the Creator: ‘You have created the universe, by your will it was created and came into being’ (iv. 11). Merely to destroy what he has made would be a confession of failure, a negation of omnipotence. It is the enemies of God that are ‘destroyers of the earth’ (xi. 18). The purpose of the Creator can be complete only when ‘the whole creation, everything in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea’, joins in the worship of the heavenly choir (v. 13). The world must not be abandoned to the final control of demonic

⁸⁰ I take the “great city” which suffers a “great earthquake” in 11:13 to be Babylon the Great (cf. 16:19; 17:18; 18:16, 18, 19, 21).

⁸¹ So Bauckham, *Theology*, 51-53; Boxall, *Revelation*, 171; Koester, *Revelation*, 512-22; Stephens, *Annihilation*, 197-99.

powers. There must come a time on earth when it is true to say: ‘The sovereignty of the world has passed to our Lord and to his Christ’ (xi. 15).⁸²

9.3.3 Revelation 16:17-21

Parallel in many ways to the seventh trumpet, the seventh bowl describes the culmination of God’s judgment at the end of the age, for with the completion of this plague “the wrath of God is ended” (15:1).⁸³ Within the flow of the immediate context, the pouring out of the seventh bowl depicts the events which follow the gathering of the forces of evil “for the war of the great day of God the Almighty” (16:12-16; cf. 19:19). The text reads:

¹⁷ The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” ¹⁸ And there came flashes of lightning, and rumblings, and peals of thunder, and a great earthquake, such as there had not been since humanity came to be upon the earth, so great was the earthquake. ¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ And every island fled, and the mountains were not found; ²¹ and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, came down from heaven upon humanity, and humanity blasphemed God because of the plague of hailstones, because its plague was exceedingly great.

The scene opens with the bowl being poured into the “air,” which produces an exceedingly severe storm.⁸⁴ It entails “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, a great earthquake..., and huge hailstones.” But this is no ordinary thunderstorm. These images once again portray a theophany of God for the purpose of judgment. At the heart of these images are

⁸² Caird, *Revelation*, 299-300. Along similar lines, Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of the plague visions is not destruction but the liberation of all humanity and the whole earth from oppressive and destructive powers” (*Revelation*, 79-80).

⁸³ Again, those advocating for a linear chronological reading do not see this as the consummation (e.g. Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:273-74). However, see Beale, *Revelation*, 841-42.

⁸⁴ Some interpreters suggest that the “air,” along with the “earth” (16:2), “water” (16:3, 4, 12), and “fire” (16:8), refer to the four elements of the world in ancient Greek thought (e.g. Aune, *Revelation*, 2:899; Blount, *Revelation*, 307; Osborne, *Revelation*, 596-97). But John does not appear to draw a connection between these elements in the Apocalypse, nor does he put them in successive order here in the bowls. The location where the bowl is poured usually has a direct connection to the plague itself. Here, the “air” is where the devastating thunderstorm arises. So Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 246. Furthermore, given that John has already associated the air with demonic spirits (Rev 9:2-3; cf. Eph 2:2), the pouring of the bowl in the “air” probably suggests God’s judgment of the hostile spirits (16:14; 18:2). So Boxall, *Revelation*, 235; Mulholland, *Revelation*, 272; Smalley, *Revelation*, 413; Sweet, *Revelation*, 250; Wright, *Revelation*, 148.

three OT allusions that John blends into one composite picture.⁸⁵ First, John alludes to God's descent upon Mount Sinai, which was accompanied by thunder, lightning, and the shaking of the mountain (Exod 19:16-18). Second, he ties this image to the plague of hail which God sent upon Egypt (Exod 9:13-35). Finally, John appears to connect the previous two texts to the Day of the Lord by alluding to God's coming forth in wrath against Gog, a text which entails a "great earthquake" that results in the destruction of the cities of the earth, and a judgment of "hailstones" (Ezek 38:18-23).⁸⁶ Overall, John has carefully constructed this recurring set of images depicting a coming of God in judgment throughout the course of the Apocalypse by adding to the list of phenomena every time it occurs (cf. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19).⁸⁷ John develops the list in 16:18-21 by elaborating on the unrivaled severity of both the earthquake and the plague of hail.

Compared to Rev 11:19, John adds that the earthquake is "great" (*μέγας*) and describes its calamitous effect upon the world (16:18b-20; cf. 6:12; 11:13). Its magnitude is unlike anything that has ever been experienced.⁸⁸ The quake causes the "great city" (i.e. Babylon the Great) to be split into three parts and the cities of the nations to fall. In other words, the whole world of opposition against God is overthrow.⁸⁹ Babylon the Great had made the nations drink "the wine of the fury of her immorality" (14:8; 17:2; 18:3), but now God will give her and her

⁸⁵ See Bauckham, "Eschatological Earthquake," 228-29.

⁸⁶ The connection in Ezek 38:18-23 between the eschatological earthquake and the fall of cities, when "every wall on the earth will fall" (38:20), is apparently overlooked by Bauckham when he discusses the fall of Jericho as a possible OT antecedent ("Eschatological Earthquake," 229-31). For an alternative explanation see James S. Murray, "The Urban Earthquake Imagery and Divine Judgement in John's Apocalypse," *NovT* 47 (2005): 142-61.

⁸⁷ See Bauckham, "Eschatological Earthquake," 226-27.

⁸⁸ Cf. Exod 9:18; Dan 12:1. On the experience of earthquakes among the cities of Asia Minor see Murray, "Urban Earthquake," 142-61; Bauckham, "Eschatological Earthquake," 229-31.

⁸⁹ Some interpreters identify the "great city" with Jerusalem on account of 11:8, e.g. Lupieri, *Apocalypse*, 245-46; Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:275; Patterson, *Revelation*, 314-15. However, the "great city" always seems to refer to Babylon (11:8; 17:18; 18:16, 18, 19, 21), so Beale, *Revelation*, 843-44; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:52; Koester, *Revelation*, 662-63; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 475-76; Roloff, *Revelation*, 192; Smalley, *Revelation*, 414-15.

kingdom “the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath” (cf. 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10).⁹⁰ The image of “every island fled, and the mountains were not found” underscores the utter decimation of the world of the ungodly (16:20; cf. 6:14; 20:11). The kingdom in opposition to God collapses completely. Furthermore, the removal of the mountains appears to make way for the “great and high mountain” (presumably Mount Zion) upon which New Jerusalem will descend (21:10; cf. 14:1).

Also in comparison to 11:19, John elaborates on the severity of the hailstorm (16:21). The extraordinary nature of the plague is emphasized by the sheer weight of the hailstones, which were “great” (μεγάλη). In response, the people do not repent, but “blaspheme” God (cf. 16:9, 11). Their response suggests that they have fully adopted the profane nature and actions of the beast (13:1, 5, 6; 17:3). Thus, by forsaking the opportunity to repent, it appears that the seven plagues have functioned to harden these people for judgment.⁹¹ However, as in 6:12-17 and 11:15-19, the seventh bowl comes to a close without a description of the final judgment. Instead, John turns to elaborate on God’s judgment of Babylon the Great and its significance for the people of God (17:1-19:10).

What, then, does Rev 16:17-21 imply concerning the future of the cosmos? There is little reason to conclude that this text portrays the dissolution of the cosmos any more than 6:12-17 and 11:15-19.⁹² The target of God’s judgment is once again the kingdom of Babylon the Great, which John highlights through a repetition of the word “great” (μέγας) in 16:17-21.⁹³ Note, a *great* voice announces God’s definitive judgment against the *great* city, Babylon the *Great*, and her allies, using a *great* earthquake that was *greater* than any other, and an exceedingly *great*

⁹⁰ This is another clear example of *lex talionis* (“the law of retaliation”).

⁹¹ So Beale, *Revelation*, 811. In this way the plagues function as they did in Exodus.

⁹² Wright, *Revelation*, 148.

⁹³ So Giblin, *Revelation*, 157.

plague of *great* hailstones.⁹⁴ The implication is that John is focused on the judgment of the world of the ungodly in 16:17-21. Thus, while John certainly expects cosmological changes to occur on the Day of the Lord, his emphasis here appears to be on the judgment of all that is in opposition to God. Furthermore, we should recall that the seven bowls (as well as the seven trumpets) are modeled after the Exodus plagues (cf. Exod 7-12). The point of the plagues was not to destroy the cosmos, but to warn God's enemies of impending doom and to liberate God's people. John appears to adopt a similar usage. In Revelation, the plagues do not appear to destroy the cosmos, but the earthly kingdom set in opposition to God (8:5; 16:1). In this way, the kingdom of Babylon the Great is warned of its impending doom (8:13; 9:20-21; 16:9, 11, 21) and God brings salvation to his people (15:3-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-8). Therefore, the images of a devastating thunderstorm and a violent earthquake do not appear to imply the dissolution of the cosmos. Rather, they vividly depict a theophany of God on the Day of the Lord for the purpose of executing judgment upon the world of the ungodly.

9.3.4 Revelation 20:11

John has utilized the theme of the eschatological earthquake throughout the book to emphasize a theophany of God, particularly his coming in judgment against the corrupt earthly kingdom of Babylon the Great and the powers of evil who stand behind it (cf. 6:12-17; 8:5; 11:13, 15-19; 16:17-21). Revelation 20:11 brings this theme to its climax by amplifying earlier texts, most notably 6:14-16 and 16:20 (see Table 9.2).

⁹⁴ This is clearly another instance of "the law of retaliation" (*lex talionis*). Also cf. 18:6.

TABLE 9.2: A COMPARISON OF REVELATION 6:14-16, 16:20, AND 20:11

6:14, 16	16:20	20:11
<p>καὶ πᾶν ὄρος καὶ νῆσος ἐκ τῶν τόπων αὐτῶν ἐκινήθησαν....</p> <p>κρύψατε ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ καθήμενου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου</p>	<p>καὶ πᾶσα νῆσος ἔφυγεν καὶ ὄρη οὐχ εὐρέθησαν</p>	<p>Καὶ εἶδον θρόνον μέγαν λευκὸν καὶ τὸν καθήμενον ἐπ’ αὐτόν, οὗ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου</p> <p>ἔφυγεν ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ τόπος οὐχ εὐρέθη αὐτοῖς</p>
<p>and every mountain and island was moved from its place...</p> <p>hide us from the presence of the One who sits on the throne</p>	<p>and every island fled, and the mountains were not found;</p>	<p>And I saw a great white throne and the One who sat on it, from whose presence</p> <p>earth and heaven fled, and a place was not found for them.</p>

By closely drawing upon portions of 6:12-17 and 16:17-21, John appears to depict a similar event in 20:11.

In the book of Revelation, God’s “throne” is the center of true reality (cf. 4:2-11). Not only is it the place where God resides, it symbolizes his sovereign reign over all things.⁹⁵

Normally the throne is located in the heavenly realm above, but here (as in 6:16) it becomes

⁹⁵ Because John remarks in Revelation that the exalted Jesus shares God’s throne (3:21; 12:5; 14:14; 22:1, 3), some interpreters speculate whether “the One who sits” on the throne includes Jesus. But whenever John uses this phrase, he always refers to God (4:2, 3, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5). Thus, it is most likely God’s “presence” which causes earth and sky to flee (cf. Rev 6:16; Dan 7:9-10). See the discussions in Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 577; Mounce, *Revelation*, 375; Beale, *Revelation*, 1031.

visible to the earthly realm below. Thus, the spatial boundary between above and below begins to break down as God descends in order to judge.⁹⁶

In reaction to the coming of the King and Judge of the entire universe, earth and sky “fled from God’s presence” (οὐ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου ἔφυγεν). Some interpreters take the verb “fled” as a metaphorical expression for the destruction of the cosmos.⁹⁷ But “fleeing” does not necessarily communicate the destruction of what flees in Revelation. Instead, it portrays an attempt to escape from someone or something (9:6; 12:6; 16:20). In this case, earth and sky attempt to flee “from God’s presence.” Fleeing, then, emphasizes the reaction of the created world below to the coming of God into its sphere (cf. Ps 114:3, 7). Thus, as most interpreters agree, the personified flight of earth and sky enhances John’s description of a *theophany* of God.⁹⁸ Having been corrupted by sin and death (see Rev 20:12-15), the cosmos is unable to stand before the holy and living God.

What flees from God’s presence is “earth and sky” (ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ οὐρανός). Most interpreters treat the phrase as equivalent to the cosmological designation “heaven and earth.”⁹⁹ However, the word order here is striking.¹⁰⁰ In every other instance where “heaven and earth” appear as a unit in Revelation, “heaven” comes before “earth” and they have a deliberate cosmological meaning in reference to God’s creation (5:3, 13; 10:6; 14:7; 21:1). Why, then,

⁹⁶ So Harrington, *Revelation*, 203; Boxall, *Revelation*, 289; Sweet, *Revelation*, 294.

⁹⁷ E.g. Blount, *Revelation*, 373; Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:429; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:193.

⁹⁸ So Stephens, *Annihilation*, 225; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 113-14; idem, “Dann sah,” 305; Russell, *New Heavens*, 207; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 204-205; Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1081, 1101; Giblin, *Revelation*, 192; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 446; Mell, *Neue Schöpfung*, 128; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 578; Smalley, *Revelation*, 516.

⁹⁹ E.g. Beale, *Revelation*, 1032; Rowland, “Revelation,” 12:715. Giesen (*Offenbarung*, 446) and Beasley-Murray (*Revelation*, 300-301) suggests that “earth and heaven” refer to people.

¹⁰⁰ Semantically speaking “heaven and earth” is a set phrase in biblical literature. Louw and Nida classify it under one lexical heading as a “fixed phrase . . . equivalent to a single lexical item” referring to the totality of the cosmos (L&N, 1). Thus, reversing the order of the phrase certainly draws attention and may suggest a different meaning or theological emphasis. Hoek suggests that the significance of the inverted word order is logical, “the heaven is the last to disappear and the first to be recreated” (*Descent of the New Jerusalem*, 116). Lupieri also observes the inversion and recognizes that it emphasizes the “earth,” but then suggests several seemingly implausible possibilities as to why this is the case (*Apocalypse*, 323-24).

does John reverse the sequence here? It appears that John reverses the natural order of the phrase in order to draw a spatial distinction between the heavenly realm *above*, which is where God’s “throne” is located, and the earthly realm *below*, which is God’s creation (i.e. “earth and sky”). Thus, what flees from God’s presence as he crosses the boundary between above and below is the created world. But this recognition alone does not appear to exhaust the meaning of the phrase. By drawing this spatial distinction John also indicates an important theological point. As the realm below, “earth and sky” is the sphere which has been corrupted by “those who destroy the earth” (i.e. the powers of evil that rise from the sea/abyss and the ungodly inhabitants of the earth). In other words, “earth and sky” is the realm where Satan has established his kingdom in opposition to God and where God has unleashed his wrath against rebellion.¹⁰¹ What flees from God, therefore, is *the cosmos as a place of sin and death*. When confronted by the holy and living God, it must flee.

The final phrase of 20:11 reads, “and a place was not found for them” (*καὶ τόπος οὐχ εὑρέθη αὐτοῖς*). This clause alludes verbatim to Dan 2:35 (Theo), which describes the destruction and removal of all earthly kingdoms by the kingdom of God, which then fills the whole earth and lasts forever (cf. 2:44).¹⁰² John has already alluded to this text when he described the removal of Satan and his angels from God’s heavenly dwelling above in Rev 12:8, “and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven” (*οὐδὲ τόπος εὑρέθη αὐτῶν ἔτι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ*). Thus, it appears that 12:8 and 20:11 are linked. If this is the case, what we appear to have in Revelation’s

¹⁰¹ This coheres with two other places in the Apocalypse where John has reversed the order of “heaven” and “earth” to make a spatial distinction between above and below. In the judgments of the trumpets and bowls, plagues originate from the heavenly realm above and are thrown upon the “earth” below (8:5; 16:1). In order to reiterate this spatial distinction, John switches the cosmological order of 14:7 (i.e. heaven, earth, sea, and springs of water) in the first four trumpets and bowls, where the earth is struck first, followed by the sea, the rivers and springs of water, and finally the heavens (8:7-12; 16:2-9). Also note how the plagues target the earthly kingdom and its inhabitants (8:8-9, 10-11, 13; 9:4, 20-21; 16:2, 5-6, 8-9, 10-11, 19, 21; 18:4; 22:18). A similar point is made by Stephens, *Annihilation*, 221; Russell, *New Heavens*, 200.

¹⁰² See Beale, *Revelation*, 1032.

narrative is a twofold movement whereby the spatial realms above and below are liberated from Satanic influence.¹⁰³ First, Satan and his angels are removed from the heavenly realm above (12:8), and then Satan and all his allies are removed from the earthly realm below (19:11-20:10), all of which culminates with the removal of Satan's kingdom (i.e. the corrupt and transient earth and sky) immediately after he is thrown into the lake of fire (20:11). In other words, there is nowhere for the cosmos in its corrupt state to escape when God descends. It does not belong in his divine plan for the future. Therefore, it cannot remain. This picture certainly emphasizes *discontinuity* between this world and the world to come. However, whether this scene implies the destruction of the cosmos or its utter transformation *is left unstated*. In any case, when God comes in judgment, this world as a place of sin and death must come to an end (cf. 2 En. 65:5).

9.3.5 Initial Conclusions

In this section I have examined several texts that contribute to the theme of the eschatological earthquake (6:12-17; 11:15-19; 16:17-21; 20:11). What do these texts imply concerning the future of the cosmos? John focuses on a theophany of God, a glorious and powerful coming of God from heaven to earth in order to execute judgment. The primary target of God's judgment in these texts is the earthly kingdom of Babylon the Great and the powers of evil who stand behind it. Therefore, the world which crumbles before God is not so much the cosmos (although cosmological changes are certainly expected as in 20:11), as it is the corrupt world below that stands in opposition to God. Ultimately, the theme of the eschatological earthquake emphasizes discontinuity between this world and the world to come.

¹⁰³ Coming to a similar conclusion is Corsini, *Apocalypse*, 391.

9.4 Revelation 21:1-5a

Having analyzed the theme of the eschatological earthquake along with its climactic scene of judgment, we are now in a position to interpret Rev 21:1-5a. As virtually all interpreters recognize, Rev 20:11 and 21:1 share an inherent connection.¹⁰⁴ Thus, much of what I will say here is related to my interpretation of 20:11 above. We can begin by observing that Rev 21:1-5a is arranged chiastically.¹⁰⁵

- | | |
|---|--------|
| (a) I saw a new [καινὸν] heaven and a new [καινήν] earth | (1a) |
| (b) First [πρῶτος] heaven and first [πρώτη] earth passed away [ἀπῆλθαν] | (1b) |
| (c) The sea is no more [οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι] | (1c) |
| (d) New Jerusalem descends out of heaven from God [θεοῦ] | (2) |
| <i>(Shift from seeing to hearing)</i> | |
| (d') God [θεός] will dwell with his people | (3-4a) |
| (c') Death, crying, and pain will be no more [οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι] | (4b) |
| (b') First things [τὰ πρῶτα] passed away [ἀπῆλθαν] | (4c) |
| (a') Behold, I am making all things new [καινὰ] | (5a) |

The repetition of specific words, phrases, and themes hold this chiasm together. The first half of the chiasm recounts what John saw (21:1-2), and the second half of the chiasm recounts what John heard (21:3-5a). Given that what John hears in the book of Revelation often interprets or adds another dimension to what he sees, 21:3-5a becomes important and helpful for understanding 21:1-2.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ On the numerous other literary connects between 20:11-15 and 21:1-8 see Jan Lambrecht, "Final Judgments and Ultimate Blessings: The Climactic Visions of Revelation 20,11-21,8," *Bib* 81 (2000): 362-85.

¹⁰⁵ So Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1113-14. For a slightly different arrangement of the chiasm involving the placement of 21:4a, which is transitional, see Mathewson, *A New Heaven*, 33; Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 267; Jacques van Ruiten, "The Intertextual Relationship Between Isaiah 65,17-20 and Revelation 21,1-5b," *EstBib* 51 (1993): 475-77. For a limited version of the chiasm see Satake, *Offenbarung*, 398. Questioning the chiasm on grounds that the parallelism is not exact is Smalley, *Revelation*, 522.

¹⁰⁶ So Caird, *Revelation*, 73; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 33-37; Sweet, *Revelation*, 125-127.

9.4.1 Revelation 21:1a, 5a

John opens the scene by recounting, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (καὶ εἶδον οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινήν). Revelation 21:1 clearly draws upon Isa 65:17 (cf. 66:22), which speaks of God engaging in an act of new creation in order to remedy the former troubles of the Babylonian exile.¹⁰⁷ Isaiah also connects this act of new creation with the renewal of Jerusalem (65:18).

The objects that become new are “heaven” and “earth,” which taken together refer to the totality of the cosmos. This is confirmed by the chiasmic parallel in 21:5a, “See, I am making all things new” (ἰδοὺ καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα).¹⁰⁸ John replaces heaven and earth with “all things” (πάντα), which was the object of God’s original creative act (cf. τὰ πάντα in 4:11). This implies that the object of God’s new creative act is none other than the original creation itself, which has led several interpreters to point out that God does not make “all new things,” but “all things new.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, the transition between the first and the new involves a level of *continuity* because the underlying object remains the same. This implies that the prospects of cosmic annihilation and re-creation are unlikely.¹¹⁰ John does not expect the present cosmos to be replaced by another through an eschatological act of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Nor does John expect a minor refurbishment of the cosmos or its restoration to original condition. In some sense, the new heaven and new earth is a new beginning, a world that is *discontinuous* from the first heaven and first earth. Significantly, John describes the nature of the transition between the first and the new in terms of a fresh creative act of God. He “makes

¹⁰⁷ Some interpreters think John draws this allusion from the MT, while others favor the LXX. See the discussions in Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 227-30; Mathewson, *A New Heaven*, 32-39; van Ruiten, “Intertextual Relationship,” 477-84.

¹⁰⁸ Revelation 21:5a probably alludes to Isa 43:19 in combination with Isa 65:17; 66:22.

¹⁰⁹ Boring, *Revelation*, 220; Blount, *Revelation*, 376; Harrington, *Revelation*, 208; Ladd, *Revelation*, 276; Russell, *New Heavens*, 208; Stephens, *Annihilation*, 239; Moo, “Nature,” 466; Heide, “What is New,” 44.

¹¹⁰ So Adams, *Stars*, 238; Caird, *Revelation*, 265; Harrisville, *Concept of Newness*, 99-100.

new” (καινὰ ποιῶ) all things (21:5a). John has already described God as “the One who made [τῶ ποιήσαντι] the heaven and the earth and the sea and the springs of water” (14:7). In 21:5, God declares that he is going to engage in another creative act whereby he gives the old world a new form of existence. Thus, there is a *temporal and qualitative* difference between the first heaven and earth and the new heaven and earth, a difference that comes from the hand of God. The Creator is doing something new with the old world.

What, then, is “new” (καινός) about the new heaven and new earth? Some interpreters try to answer this question on lexical grounds, but only the context can fill out the meaning of the word.¹¹¹ In Revelation, John always uses καινός to emphasize eschatological newness, something that is radically different from the old because it is grounded in the redemptive work of God and the Lamb (2:17; 3:12; 5:9; 14:3; 21:1, 2, 5). Again, the word has both temporal and qualitative connotations. Ultimately, John develops what “newness” looks like in what follows.

9.4.2 Revelation 21:1b, 4c

John offers the reason why he saw a new heaven and a new earth in Rev 21:1b, “because the first heaven and the first earth passed away” (ὁ γὰρ πρῶτος οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ πρώτη γῆ ἀπῆλθαν). While drawing once again upon Isa 65:17, this clause also looks back to Rev 20:11, where the cosmos in its sin-damaged and transient state fled from the presence of God.

¹¹¹ Johannes Behm contends that John’s choice of καινός rather than the synonym νέος (which John does not use in Revelation) is significant under the assumption that the former denotes qualitative newness and the latter temporal newness (“καινός,” *TDNT* 3:447-450). This would imply that the new heaven and earth is a transformation of the cosmos as opposed to a re-creation. However, registering a critique against Behm is Harrisville (*Concept of Newness*, 1-20, 106-108), who has demonstrated that both adjectives can communicate newness in quality and time. This is not to suggest that καινός and νέος are identical, but do have significant overlap. See BDAG, 496-97, 669; H. Haarbeck, H.-G. Link, and C. Brown, “καινός,” *NIDNTT* 2:669-674; H. Haarbeck, “νέος,” *NIDNTT* 2:674-676; Jörg Baumgarten, “καινός,” *EDNT* 2:229-232.

In Revelation, John uses the word “first” (πρῶτος) in three primary ways. First, it describes the sovereignty and power of Jesus, who is “the first and the last” (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). Second, it differentiates one entity from another entity within a list (4:7; 8:7; 13:12; 16:2; 20:5, 6; 21:19). For example, John speaks of the “first” of four living creatures and the “first” of seven angels. In this usage, “first” is followed by “second” (δεύτερος), and so on. Finally, πρῶτος refers to a former condition or state, which is compared to a current condition or state (2:4-5, 19).¹¹² In speaking to the church at Ephesus, John rebukes the church by saying that they have ceased doing things that they previously did (2:4-5). As a result, John draws attention to a *change in the condition* of the church that has taken place over a *period of time*. Similar to John’s use of “new,” then, there are both *temporal and qualitative* aspects to the word. John appears to employ this final usage in 21:1b and 21:4c when he contrasts the “first” with the “new.”¹¹³ In other words, John sees a temporal and qualitative difference between this world and the world to come.¹¹⁴

John describes the temporal and qualitative transition between the first and the new with the verb “passed away” (ἀπῆλθαν). Most interpreters understand this verb as virtually synonymous with “fled” (ἔφυγεν) in 20:11, and for good reason.¹¹⁵ However, there is a notable difference between the verbs. Whereas “fled” conveys a sense of spatial movement away from the presence of God, it is unlikely that “passed away” conveys precisely the same thing. In Revelation, John uses the verb ἀπέρχομαι to communicate two ideas: spatial movement (10:9;

¹¹² There is some discussion concerning whether John used πρῶτος as a substitute for the comparative “earlier” (πρότερος), which does not occur in the Apocalypse. See BDAG, 892-894; BDF, 34.

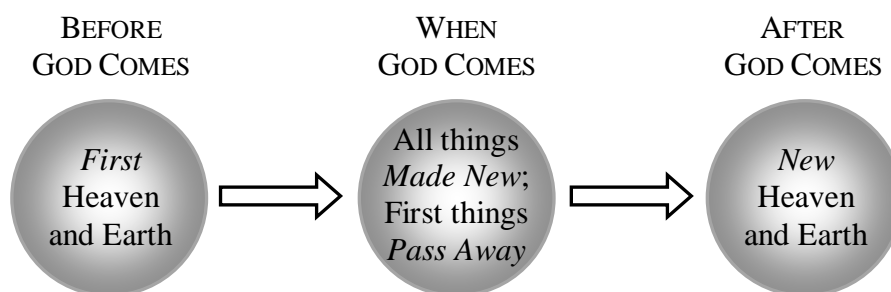
¹¹³ So Hoeck, *Descent of the New Jerusalem*, 119. Had John wanted to emphasize that God created a brand new cosmos, separate from the first heaven and earth (i.e. the idea of annihilation and re-creation), he probably would have called it “a second heaven and a second earth.” See Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 272.

¹¹⁴ So Bauckham, *Theology*, 49.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Adams, *Stars*, 239; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 116; Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1117; Roloff, *Revelation*, 231; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:204; Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 229; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 404.

12:17; 16:2; 18:14), and the temporal cessation of a condition or state (9:12; 11:14). John’s uses in 21:1b and 21:4c most likely belong to the latter category for the following reasons. First, in 21:1a-b John does not appear to be using spatial categories (i.e. above and below) as he was in 20:11. Instead, the transition from the first to the new assumes a temporal and qualitative change where the first world comes to an end and the new world begins. Second, when John does use the verb ἀπέρχομαι to communicate spatial movement in other parts of the Apocalypse, he does not employ the verb metaphorically to convey the destruction of the subject. Therefore, ἀπῆλθαν most likely refers to the *temporal cessation of a condition or state*.¹¹⁶ In other words, “passed away” does not indicate *how* the first heaven and first earth come to an end, but only the fact that they will come to an end.¹¹⁷ In this way, “passed away” (ἀπῆλθαν) is a counterpart to “make new” (καινὰ ποιῶ) in 21:5a. Both ideas are necessary to understand the temporal and qualitative aspects of the transition between the first and the new (see fig. 9.3).

FIGURE 9.3: JOHN’S DUAL DESCRIPTION OF THE TRANSITION BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THE NEW



Thus, “passing away” and “making new” are *two interlocking sides of the same transitional event*. However, neither idea communicates precisely how the transition takes place.

¹¹⁶ See BDAG, 102; Koester, *Revelation*, 794; Haacker, “Neuer Himmel,” 333-34.

¹¹⁷ See my similar conclusions regarding the cognate verbs *παρέρχομαι* (Matt 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33; 2 Pet 3:10) and *παράγω* (1 Cor 7:31; 1 John 2:17) in previous chapters.

What are the qualitative aspects of the “first” heaven and earth? John describes these things in 21:4c as “the first things” (τὰ πρῶτα). Here John continues to draw upon Isa 65:16-18, where “the former things [τῶν προτέρων] will not be remembered or come to mind” in the new creation.¹¹⁸ The “former things” in Isaiah refer to the “first tribulation” (τὴν θλίψιν αὐτῶν τὴν πρώτην) experienced during the Babylonian exile (65:16), including such things as weeping, crying, premature death, the displacement of people, labor pain, and beastly violence (65:19-25). John alludes to these ideas when he writes that death, mourning, crying, and pain are all connected to “the first things” (Rev 21:4b-c). Thus for John, the first heaven and first earth is *the cosmos as a place of sin and death under the reign of Satan*. This is the place where the faithful experience the “first tribulation.”¹¹⁹ The perpetrators of these sufferings in Revelation are “those who destroy the earth,” that is, the kingdom of Babylon the Great and the hostile powers who stand behind it.¹²⁰ John will summarize the removal of these destroyers and the affliction they cause by saying that “the sea is no more” (21:1c), a phrase to which we now turn.

9.4.3 Revelation 21:1c, 4b

The final clause of Rev 21:1, “and the sea is no more” (καὶ ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι), has garnered considerable attention because of its numerous interpretive possibilities.¹²¹ Whatever the “sea” may be, it appears to sum up for John all that is wrong with the first heaven and the first earth. It is connected to death, mourning, crying, and pain, all of which “will be no more” in

¹¹⁸ Also cf. Isa 43:18-19.

¹¹⁹ So Beale, *Revelation*, 1042-43; Stephens, *Annihilation*, 237-38.

¹²⁰ See 1:9; 2:9-10, 13-14; 6:8, 10; 7:14-17; 11:7-10; 12:13, 17; 13:7, 15; 17:6; 18:24.

¹²¹ For an overview of possibilities see Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That is No More: Rev. 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John,” *NovT* 51 (2009): 148-67; Beale, *Revelation*, 1041-43; Koester, *Revelation*, 795-96; Alan J. Beagley, “Beasts, Dragon, Sea, Conflict Motif,” *DLNT* 127-129.

the new world (21:4b). As a result, the removal of the “sea” functions as a negative descriptor of the new heaven and new earth.

Like “earth and sky” (i.e. the earthly realm below) in 20:11, John uses the “sea” in 21:1c to designate a spatial realm. In this way it stands in contrast to “heaven” above in 21:2. In other words, the “sea” is not merely a reference to a body of water. Instead, it refers to the sphere below the earth, the primeval abyss.¹²² Throughout the Apocalypse, this realm is the home of the dragon and the reservoir out of which evil may emerge to threaten the cosmos. In the first heaven and first earth, the powers of evil kept “coming up” (*ἀναβαίνω*) out of the *sea* to wreak havoc and destruction (9:2; 11:7; 13:1; 17:8). But in the new heaven and new earth, the sea will be no more and New Jerusalem will “come down” (*καταβαίνω*) out of *heaven* from God to bring healing and life (21:2, 9). The elimination of the sea, then, is one of the key descriptions of what will separate the first heaven and earth from the new heaven and earth.

That the sea “is no more” (*οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι*) certainly has implications for believers. Recalling Isa 65:16-25 once again, God’s solution to the “first affliction/tribulation” is to create a new heaven and a new earth, which includes God declaring, “See, I am making Jerusalem a rejoicing, and my people a gladness” (65:16-18).¹²³ As a result, the sorrow of the “former

¹²² So most interpreters, e.g. Caird, *Revelation*, 65-68, 262; Adams, *Stars*, 239; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 140; Blount, *Revelation*, 377; Boxall, *Revelation*, 293-94; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:204-205; Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 144; Giblin, *Revelation*, 194; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 452; Harrington, *Revelation*, 207; Kiddle, *Revelation*, 411; Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 269; Middleton, *New Heaven*, 169; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 408; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 592; Roloff, *Revelation*, 235; Smalley, *Revelation*, 524; Sweet, *Revelation*, 297; Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:440; Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 116-17; Wright, *Revelation*, 190. In addition to the notion of chaos, Boring suggests that the removal of the “sea” represents the removal of all barriers to human relationships (*Revelation*, 216-17). Arguing that the “sea” refers to ungodly humanity represented by Babylon the Great is Thomas E. Schmidt, “‘And the Sea was no More’: Water as People, Not Place,” in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor of Robert H. Gundry*, ed. Thomas E. Schmidt and Moisés Silva, JSNTSup 100 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1994), 233-49. Mealy discusses the disappearance of the sea above, the sea on earth, and the sea below (*After the Thousand Years*, 193-212).

¹²³ On allusions to Isa 65:16-25 and 51:10-11 see Beale, *Revelation*, 1042-43. On potential echoes of a new exodus see David Mathewson, “New Exodus as a Background for ‘The Sea was no More’ in Revelation 21:1c,” *TJ* 24NS (2003): 243-58.

things” will be replaced by joy and gladness. “No more” (οὐκέτι) will there be weeping, crying, premature death, the displacement of people, labor pain, and beastly violence (65:19-25). John picks up on this list when he expands upon the meaning of the sea’s absence in 21:4b, “death will be no more; mourning, and crying, and pain will be no more” (καὶ ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι οὔτε πένθος οὔτε κραυγὴ οὔτε πόνος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι).¹²⁴ Thus, the elimination of the sea underscores the release of God’s people from the suffering and pain of “the first tribulation” spoken of by Isaiah.¹²⁵ In the context of Revelation, this seems to mean that believers will no longer suffer at the hands of Babylon the Great, which was judged by being thrown into the “sea” and “will certainly not be found any longer” (οὐ μὴ εὑρεθῆ ἔτι) (18:21-24). This act leads to the rejoicing of the people of God in heaven (19:1-8).

That the sea “is no more” also has cosmological implications. The elimination of the sea underscores the utter victory of God over the powers of evil. Not only does God remove all manifestations of evil from the cosmos (19:11-20:15), he even removes the *possibility* of evil returning by eliminating the realm from which it springs. As a result, the new heaven and new earth is made completely secure from the threat of destruction wrought by all forms of chaos and evil.¹²⁶ If this is the case, then it seems to further imply that the transition between the first and the new does not involve the reversion of the first world to watery chaos, followed by its reconstruction into a new world.¹²⁷ John’s point seems to be that the primeval waters will no longer have any power over the cosmos. In other words, *they will not be allowed to exercise one last moment of conquest to overwhelm the world as they did in the Noahic flood.* God’s new

¹²⁴ Cf. Rev 7:16-17.

¹²⁵ Also cf. Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19.

¹²⁶ So Stephens, *Annihilation*, 236-37.

¹²⁷ Contra Adams, who claims without much argumentation, “the first creation is taken back to its pre-created, chaotic state and a new creative act takes place. The picture is indeed that of the renewal of creation, but the renewal is accomplished precisely by destruction and re-creation” (*Stars*, 238).

work eliminates the primeval abyss so that the flood cannot happen again (cf. 4:3).¹²⁸ As

Richard Bauckham explains,

The waters of the primeval abyss, that represent the source of destructive evil, the possibility of the reversion of creation to chaos, are finally no more. So the judgment of the old creation and the inauguration of the new is not so much a second Flood as the final removal of the threat of another Flood. In new creation God makes his creation eternally secure from any threat of destructive evil. In this way Revelation portrays God as faithful to the Noahic covenant and indeed surpassing it in his faithfulness to his creation: first by destroying the destroyers of the earth, finally by taking creation beyond the threat of evil. Only then does it become the home he indwells with the splendor of his divine glory.¹²⁹

What we appear to have, then, is a thoroughgoing transformation of cosmos, whereby God radically alters the fundamental structure of the cosmos as a whole.¹³⁰ All things will remain (i.e. *continuity*), but will not be the same (i.e. *discontinuity*).¹³¹

9.4.4 Revelation 21:2, 3-4a

Besides the absence of the sea, John's other primary symbol for describing what is "new" about the new heaven and new earth is New Jerusalem, "and I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having been prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2).¹³² John's association of Jerusalem with a new creation flows directly out of Isaiah, where God's act of creating a new heavens and a new earth is parallel to his act of making "Jerusalem a rejoicing, and my people a gladness" (65:17-19).¹³³ John also appears to draw upon a number of

¹²⁸ On the significance of the "rainbow" around the throne of God see Bauckham, *Theology*, 51-52.

¹²⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 53.

¹³⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 1040. Although he contends that destruction is still a possibility.

¹³¹ So Koester, *Revelation*, 803.

¹³² Revelation 21:2 is a general statement about New Jerusalem that is particularized in 21:9-22:9 (so Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1120; Ladd, *Revelation*, 276; Mulholland, *Revelation*, 315). It connects John's vision of a new heaven and a new earth (21:1-2) to his vision of New Jerusalem (21:9-22:9). Based on an unwarranted attempt to reorder the text, Charles differentiates the New Jerusalem of 21:2 from the one in 21:9-22:2, which he takes to describe the heavenly Jerusalem, the center of the millennial kingdom (*Revelation*, 2:205; cf. 2:144-54).

¹³³ In the MT, God declares "For behold, I create" in both 65:17 and 65:18. For the emphasis on salvation here see Vögtle, *Zukunft*, 117-19.

other OT texts that speak of Jerusalem's redemption and preparation as a bride (cf. Isa 52:1-10; 61:10; 62:1-5).¹³⁴

Some interpreters argue that the image of "New Jerusalem" (Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10) refers exclusively to the people of God.¹³⁵ But this interpretation is too restrictive. Throughout the course of this chapter, I have taken the position that New Jerusalem is kingdom imagery, which can refer to a place, a people, and a reign all at the same time.¹³⁶ Thus, New Jerusalem symbolizes the kingdom of God made manifest throughout the entire cosmos. In other words, it is the heavenly world order that will govern the new heaven and new earth, making it the place where the saints will live with God forever under his rule.¹³⁷ In this way, John contrasts New Jerusalem with the city of Babylon the Great, the earthly world order that governs the first heaven and first earth.

What does it mean that New Jerusalem was "coming down out of heaven from God" (*καταβαίνουσαν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ*)? It is important to observe that John uses two prepositional phrases to highlight different aspects of New Jerusalem's descent. Whereas "out of heaven" emphasizes the spatial movement of New Jerusalem (i.e. its descent), "from God" emphasizes the origin or source of New Jerusalem (i.e. its Creator).¹³⁸ We can look at the meaning and implications of each phrase.

¹³⁴ For discussion on these allusions see Mathewson, *A New Heaven*, 39-49; Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 230-34.

¹³⁵ E.g. Robert H. Gundry, "The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People," *NovT* 29 (1987): 254-64; Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 271-72; Mounce, *Revelation*, 382.

¹³⁶ See Bauckham, *Theology*, 132-43; Stephens, *Annihilation*, 232-33; Osborne, *Revelation*, 733; Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1122; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 594-95.

¹³⁷ As Richard Bauckham suggests, "The description of the New Jerusalem is a remarkable weaving together of many strands of Old Testament tradition into a coherent and richly evocative image of a place in which people live in the immediate presence of God" (*Theology*, 132).

¹³⁸ So Hoek, *Descent of the New Jerusalem*, 130; Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 270; Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:442.

By describing New Jerusalem as “coming down out of heaven,” John focuses on the spatial movement of the city.¹³⁹ “Heaven” does not simply refer to the “sky” in this instance, but to the heavenly realm above, the dwelling place of God (cf. 4:2).¹⁴⁰ In this way, “heaven” stands in contrast to the “sea” (21:1c) as the realms of God and Satan. John confirms this when he elaborates upon the descent of New Jerusalem to the earthly realm, “See, the tent of God is among humanity, and he will dwell among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be among them, and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (ἰδοὺ ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ σκηνώσει μετ’ αὐτῶν, καὶ αὐτοὶ λαοὶ αὐτοῦ ἔσονται, καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς μετ’ αὐτῶν ἔσται [αὐτῶν θεός], καὶ ἐξαλείψει πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν) (21:3-4a).¹⁴¹ Thus, when John describes the descent of New Jerusalem, he is speaking in terms of the spatial axis of his apocalyptic eschatology.¹⁴² The city descends from the heavenly realm above (i.e. the dwelling of God) to the earthly realm below (i.e. the dwelling of humanity). This implies that the separation between the heavenly realm above and the earthly realm below is finally eliminated.¹⁴³ Therefore, the descent of New Jerusalem “out of heaven” indicates *the merger of the home of God with the home of humanity*.

By describing New Jerusalem as “coming down ... from God,” John focuses on the origin of the city. New Jerusalem is God’s handiwork, something that he has made.¹⁴⁴ And given the fact that God sets his handiwork within the earthly realm, New Jerusalem becomes the

¹³⁹ Nearly every time John uses *καταβαίνω* in Revelation, he adds the phrase *ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ* (3:12; 10:1; 12:12; 13:13; 16:21; 18:1; 20:1, 9; 21:2, 10). The one exception is 12:12, but “out of heaven” is still implied.

¹⁴⁰ So Roloff, *Revelation*, 235.

¹⁴¹ On the background and imagery of 21:3-4a see Koester, *Revelation*, 797-98, 805-806; Beale, *Revelation*, 1046-48.

¹⁴² So Stephens, *Annihilation*, 233-34; Rowland, *Revelation*, 153; Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 270; Deutsch, “Transformation,” 118.

¹⁴³ John is not claiming that there will no longer be a cosmological “sky” in the new world. The future world is still characterized as a new heaven and a new earth.

¹⁴⁴ Note connections here to Gal 4:26; Heb 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14. In the Book of Revelation, the forerunner of New Jerusalem appears to be the kingdom of God as manifest within in the marginalized and persecuted church prior to the consummation (cf. 11:2; 12:1-6, 13-17; 18:23; 19:7-8; 20:9).

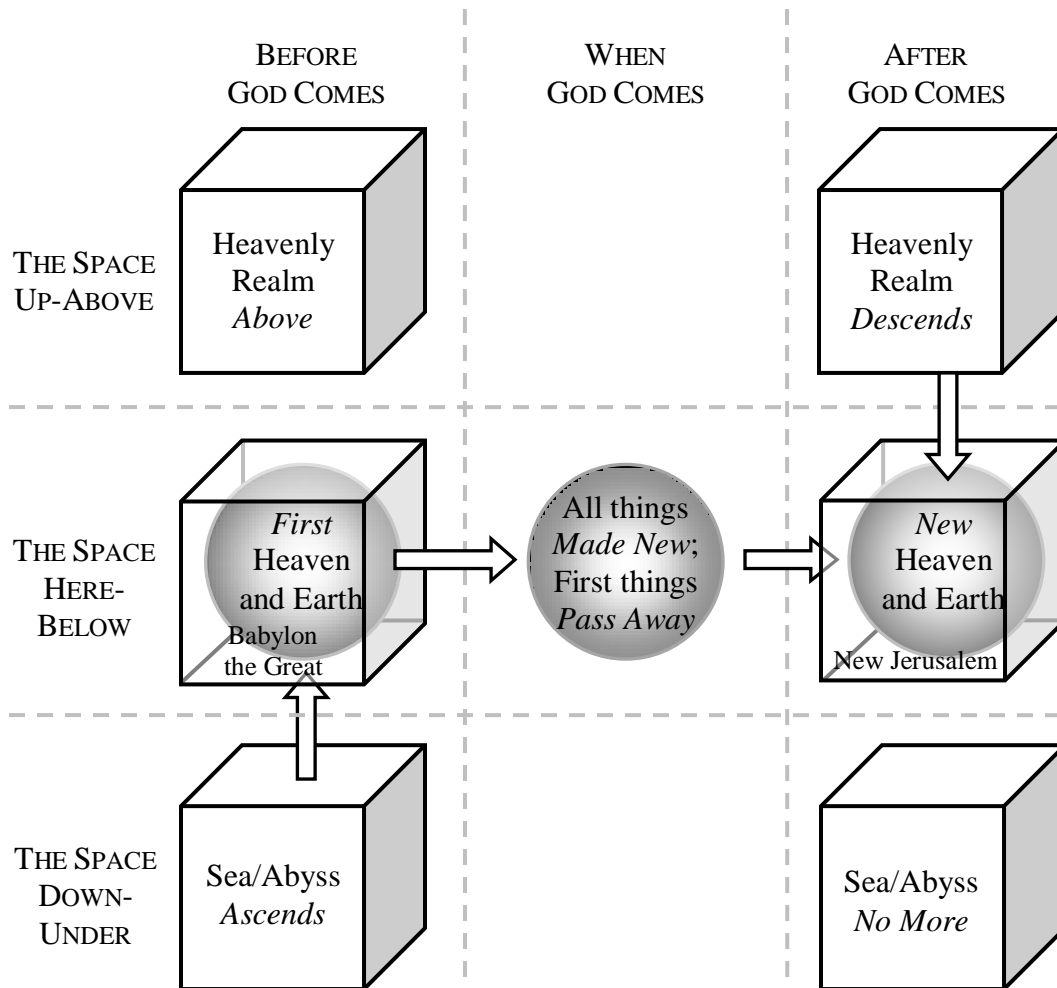
defining feature of what is new about the new heaven and new earth (21:9-22:9). This is God's city, the embodiment of *heaven on earth*. Therefore, the descent of New Jerusalem "from God" indicates a fresh creative act of God whereby his kingdom becomes manifest throughout the entire cosmos. In this way, the kingdom of God descends upon the earth to replace the kingdom of Satan that had ascended from the sea (cf. 11:15).

9.4.5 Summary: Depicting the Transition

We are now in a position to try and sum up John's description of the transition between the first and the new. John uses both temporal and spatial language to describe the transition, all of which indicates a temporal and qualitative change to the cosmos. While no picture can fully capture all the intricacies of John's thought, based on the analysis above, we can depict the cosmic transition with the following diagram (fig. 9.4).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Admittedly, there are limits to the diagram below, since it fails to adequately assimilate all the features of John's thought. For example, it can be recalled that John uses spatial language in 20:11 to describe the flight of the earthly realm (i.e. "earth and sky") from the presence of God. Yet, there was nowhere to indicate such a movement in this diagram without making it three dimensional. Along similar lines, it is not entirely correct to say that the heavenly realm does not descend until "after God comes," for the heavenly realm comes with him. Yet, John indicates this descent in a separate vision. All of this indicates the inherent difficulty in portraying visionary reality.

FIGURE 9.4: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL ASPECTS OF JOHN'S APOCALYPTIC ESCHATOLOGY



If this interpretation of the temporal and spatial aspects of Revelation does justice to John's thought, the implication is that John describes the transition between the first and the new as a radical transformation of the cosmos.

9.5 John the Seer's Theology of the Future of the Cosmos

9.5.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

Bolstered by a number of significant designations for God (1:8; 4:2, 8, 11; 21:5, 6), it is well known that the theology of Revelation is “highly theocentric.”¹⁴⁶ God is the One who sits on the throne as the Creator, Lord, and Redeemer of all things. Thus, John probably views God as the primary actor in the cosmic transition (20:11; 21:5). This, however, does not exclude the involvement of his chosen Messiah, the exalted Jesus. Not only does the Lamb open the scroll of God's divine plan (5:1-14; 12:5), he comes to execute judgment with God (6:16-17; 11:15; 19:11-16), and reigns over the New Jerusalem with God (21:22-23; 22:1, 3). Thus, the Lamb appears to work in harmony with God to bring about the cosmic transition. Finally, John suggests that the redeemed people of God have a minor role in the final events. They appear to participate in the parousia (19:14), coming with the Lamb in war to inherit the new world and reign over it with him (2:26-28; 3:12, 21; 21:2, 7).

9.5.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

John connects the cosmic transition to the coming of God and the Lamb in judgment on the Day of the Lord (6:12-17; 11:15-19; 20:11-21:8). Whether this final judgment is the same event as the parousia of Jesus Christ is highly debated (14:14-20; 19:11-21). At issue here is the interpretation of the millennium (20:1-10). If the millennium (interpreted literally) is taken as an intervening period between the coming of Christ and the coming of God, then the Seer disassociates the cosmic transition from the parousia. On the other hand, if the coming of Christ and the coming of God are taken as describing the same consummative event, and the

¹⁴⁶ Bauckham, *Theology*, 23.

millennium (interpreted symbolically) precedes both of them, then the Seer likely associates the cosmic transition with the parousia. While this is one of the most perplexing interpretive issues in the entire book, I think the latter is more probable.¹⁴⁷

Concerning the timing of the eschatological consummation, John describes the parousia or the coming of the kingdom as “soon” (1:1; 2:6; 3:11; 11:14; 22:6, 7, 12, 20) or “near” (1:3; 22:10).¹⁴⁸ Thus, he may have expected the consummation to occur in the near future. However, an imminent expectation of the consummation is tempered by several features that appear to highlight delay. John builds a sense of delay into the structure of the book by using interludes to interrupt the movement toward final judgment (7:1-17; 10:1-11:14), the second of which appears to emphasize a period of witness and repentance (cf. Matt 24:9-14; 2 Pet 3:9). He also highlights periods of waiting and persecution (6:10-11; 11:2), and repeatedly calls for believers to endure (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). Ultimately, John was supremely confident that the consummation would occur since he writes that it “must” take place (1:1; 22:6). But how “soon” it was to take place is open to interpretation, for it could happen at any time (16:15).¹⁴⁹ Thus, when the cosmic transition will occur remains unknown.

9.5.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

According to John, the main problems affecting the first heaven and first earth are *sin*, *death*, and the *dominion of evil powers*. The present world is subject to corruption (i.e. sin and death) by “those who destroy the earth” (11:18), that is, the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, Babylon

¹⁴⁷ The parallel wording of 12:9 and 20:2 appears to suggest that 20:9 is a retelling of 12:9, which involves the victory of Christ’s death and resurrection over the powers of evil. This would imply that the millennium began with the death and resurrection of Christ. See the discussion in Beale, *Revelation*, 972-1031.

¹⁴⁸ This is consistent with several descriptions of the Day of the Lord (e.g. Isa 13:6, 22; Ezek 30:3; Joel 2:1; Hab 2:3; Zeph 1:7, 14). Also cf. Dan 2:28, 29, 45.

¹⁴⁹ For further discussion see Bauckham, *Theology*, 157-59; Koester, *Revelation*, 222-23.

the Great, and Death and Hades. In other words, these hostile powers and their earthly counterparts subject the cosmos to various forms of moral and physical corruption (6:8, 10; 9:11; 12:9, 16; 13:3-8, 12-14; 17:1-6; 21:4). Closely related here is the issue of dominion. Satan and his allies from the “sea” have established their own corrupt kingdom throughout the cosmos in an attempt to usurp the power and authority of God. Yet, God has enacted a plan to overthrow them through the death and resurrection of the Lamb (5:5-10; 12:5-9).¹⁵⁰ As a result, Satan and his allies have already been removed from the heavenly realm above (12:9). All that remains is for God and the Lamb to come and remove them from the earthly realm below. Ultimately, God will bring destruction upon these destroyers (19:20; 20:10, 11, 14, 15). Therefore, the cosmic transition will occur in order to fulfill the plan of God enacted in the death and resurrection of his Messiah, thereby eliminating moral and physical corruption from the cosmos and restoring complete sovereignty to the Creator of all things (5:13; 11:15).

9.5.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

John uses three images to portray the nature of the transition between the first heaven and earth and the new heaven and earth.

First, he uses the image of the *eschatological earthquake* to depict a theophany of God as the King and Judge of the cosmos (6:12-17; 11:15-19; 16:17-21; 20:11). The primary target of God’s judgment is the earthly kingdom below as corrupted by Babylon the Great and the powers of evil. Thus, the world that crumbles as God comes is the world that stands in opposition to him, the cosmos as a place of sin and death. As a result, the theme of the eschatological earthquake emphasizes discontinuity between this world and the world to come. This world must come to an end in preparation for a new heaven and a new earth.

¹⁵⁰ Note that the followers of the Lamb also participate in this plan (12:11).

Second, John frames the transition between the first and the new as a *transfer of sovereignty*. The contrasting kingdoms of “heaven” up-above and the “sea” down-under mark one of the key differences between the first heaven and earth and the new heaven and earth. During this age, evil ascends from the “sea” and manifests its reign on earth through the rule of Babylon the Great. But in the age to come, the “sea” will be no more. Instead, God himself will descend out of “heaven” and manifest his reign on earth through the rule of New Jerusalem.

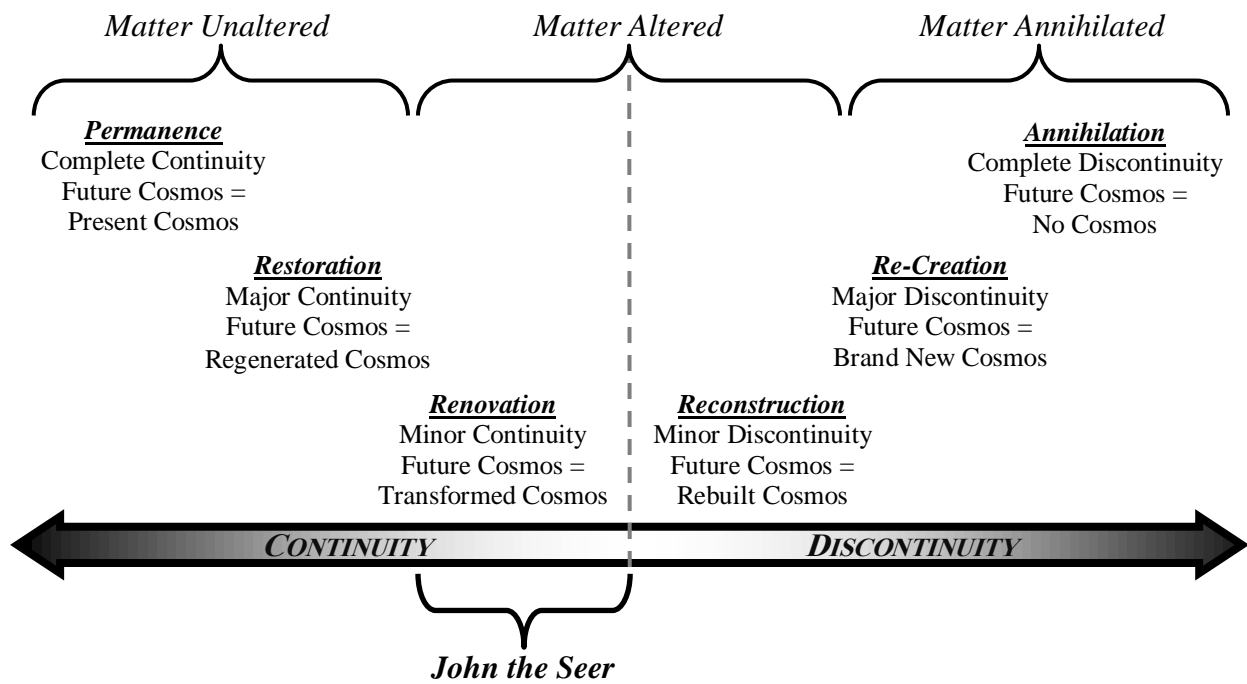
Finally, John describes the transition as an act of *new creation*. The process by which the new heaven and new earth will emerge involves the “passing away” (21:1b) of the first things and the “making new” of all things (21:5a). These verbs must be held in tension. There will be both continuity and discontinuity between this world and the world to come.

What do these images imply about how the cosmic transition will unfold? These images suggest continuity and discontinuity between the first world and the new world. John emphasizes continuity when he identifies “all things” as the object of God’s act of new creation (21:5; cf. 4:11). In some sense, the new world will be continuous with the old. Thus, John does not conceive of the transition in terms of *annihilation* or its *re-creation* out of nothing. It also is unlikely that John envisioned the transition in terms of *reconstruction* (i.e. the dissolution of the cosmos, followed by its reformation), because he depicts God as judging “those who destroy the earth” (11:18). God is the Creator who makes all things new by merging the heavenly and earthly realms, not by allowing the primeval sea to exercise one last flood. As Boxall suggests, “The only thing that is destroyed is that which is set on destruction itself.”¹⁵¹ This does not imply that there will not be a significant degree of discontinuity between the first and the new. Simply the fact that God engages in an act of new creation certainly implies that the new world will be markedly different from the first world. Furthermore, the absence of such entities as the

¹⁵¹ Boxall, *Revelation*, 293.

sea and death imply dramatic transformations that cannot be attributed to minor changes. Thus, John does not conceive of the transition in terms of *permanence* or *restoration*. These views underestimate the radical differences that the new heaven and earth will exude. This leaves us with the most probable option: *renovation*. God will most likely fundamentally transform the cosmos by making it his home. We can visually represent John’s place on the spectrum of continuity and discontinuity below (fig. 9.5).

FIGURE 9.5: JOHN THE SEER AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



9.5.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

Compared to the other writers of the NT, John offers the most extensive description of the future cosmos; although his depiction is highly symbolic. John’s primary images are Isaiah’s prophecy of “a new heaven and a new earth,” and the descent of “New Jerusalem” (21:1-2; 21:9-22:9).

While I do not have time, nor space, to offer an extensive treatment of these images, we can

highlight some of their more prominent features.¹⁵² The key feature of the new world is that the dwelling of God will be merged with the dwelling of humanity (21:3). In this setting, the threat of the sea and its hostile powers will be removed and New Jerusalem will descend (18:21; 19:20; 20:10, 14; 21:1, 2, 9). As a result, death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more (21:4). Furthermore, nothing unclean or accursed will enter the city (21:27; 22:3; cf. 21:8). Thus, sin will be no more. Essentially, the new heaven and new earth will be a place infused with the presence and glory of God and the Lamb. They will reign over the new world, providing life, blessing, guidance, and security for all in a place that recalls Jerusalem, the people of God, the temple, and the Garden of Eden all at once. This stockpiling of imagery suggests that the new heaven and new earth will be a materially transformed world that is qualitatively superior to the first heaven and first earth. In this way, God will fulfill his purposes for the created world. As Mark Stephens writes, “The overall message is that creation is not to be left behind, so much as taken up to a qualitatively higher plane, where its original goals and purposes are realized in surpassing measure.”¹⁵³ This is the world which humanity will receive as an inheritance (21:7). In the end, life on earth will be as it is in heaven, face to face with the One who is the first and the last, the beginning and the end (5:13; 22:13).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² See the many studies that give detailed attention to New Jerusalem, e.g. Bauckham, *Theology*, 126-43; Stephens, *Annihilation*, 226-57; Mathewson, *A New Heaven*; Lee, *New Jerusalem*; Hoeck, *Descent of the New Jerusalem*.

¹⁵³ Stephens, *Annihilation*, 256.

¹⁵⁴ Caird, *Revelation*, 301.

10 The New Testament and the Future of the Cosmos

In this chapter I will take up the task of correlation, which brings together the interpretive work of the previous chapters.¹ The first order of business, then, will be to revisit the five correlative questions asked of each NT writer in order to compare and contrast their views concerning the eschatological fate of the cosmos. After this, I will discuss whether we can speak of a clear and coherent message (i.e. a NT theology) pertaining to the future of the cosmos that relates to the larger unity and diversity of the NT witnesses. In conclusion, I will offer some closing remarks.

10.1 Correlating the Voices of the New Testament Writers

Having completed some initial correlative work with regard to writers who authored more than one book, we are now in a position to examine the unity and diversity of the NT witnesses concerning the eschatological fate of the cosmos. As outlined in the first chapter, this portion of the study will bring together the writers of the NT who have spoken about the future of the cosmos for a roundtable discussion of the topic.² These writers are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, the writer of Hebrews, Peter, John, and John the Seer. In order to facilitate the discussion, I will return to the five correlative questions posed in each chapter concerning the cosmic event that determines the future of the cosmos. These questions are:

- (1) Who is the actor (i.e. the one who takes action) in the cosmic event?
- (2) When will the cosmic event happen?
- (3) Why will the cosmic event take place?³
- (4) How will the cosmic event unfold?

¹ See David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 337-60.

² The “conference table” approach originates with G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, compl. and ed. L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 18-26.

³ In other words, what do the writers tell us about the problems associated with this age/world?

(5) What will be the result of the cosmic event?⁴

In what follows, I will attempt to honor the various theological perspectives of each writer, while at the same time attempting to identify common ground. Put negatively, I do not want to impose a false sense of unity or diversity. My goal here is explore what we can say about the future of the cosmos from the NT as a whole.

10.1.1 Who is the actor in the cosmic event?

The writers of the NT emphasize different actors in the transition between this world and the world to come. On one hand, Matthew, Mark, and Paul highlight the role of the exalted Jesus in the transition. He will come at the parousia to exercise his victory over the hostile powers of this world (Matt 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; 1 Cor 15:24-27). On the other hand, the writer of Hebrews, Peter, and John the Seer underscore the role of God in the transition. He is the one who will shake the cosmos (Heb 12:26-27; Rev 6:12-17; 20:11) and douse it with fire (2 Pet 3:10). Luke and John do not explicitly identify an actor in the cosmic event, although they affirm its divine origin. Finally, it should be noted that Paul and John the Seer also mention the involvement of redeemed humanity as participants of the parousia, but only in an ancillary role (Rom 8:19; Rev 19:14).

Whether God or the exalted Jesus is the primary actor in the cosmic event appears to be a matter of emphasis among the writers of the NT rather than a major difference of opinion. Those who focus upon the exalted Jesus identify him as coming with the attributes of God himself on the Day of the Lord (Matt 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; 1 Cor 15:28). Those who focus on the coming of God are quick to point out that the exalted Jesus also plays a role (Heb 1:12; 9:28; 2 Pet 3:4; Rev 6:16-17; 11:15; 19:11-16). Therefore, the writers of the NT maintain that the

⁴ In other words, how do the writers describe the age/world to come?

transition between this world and the world to come is a *divine act*. The exalted Jesus appears to be God's primary agent in bringing about the transition.

10.1.2 When will the cosmic event happen?

None of the writers examined in this study indicate when the cosmic transition will occur other than to connect it to the parousia of Jesus Christ, which they understand to be the eschatological coming of God on the Day of the Lord (Matt 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Acts 3:20-21; Rom 8:19-22; Heb 1:12; 12:26-27; 2 Pet 3:4-13; 1 John 2:28-3:3; Rev 6:16-17; 11:15-19). The possible exception to this is John the Seer, who may separate the parousia (Rev 19:11-21) from the final coming of God and the cosmic transition (20:11-21:8) with the millennium (20:1-10). If this is the case, then the cosmic transition will occur a thousand years (or whatever length of time one assigns to the millennium) after the parousia.

Ultimately, identifying the cosmic transition with the parousia is unhelpful for discerning when the cosmic transition will occur because the timing of the parousia remains unknown (Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7; 17:31; 1 Thess 5:1-11; Heb 10:36-38; 2 Pet 3:8-9; Rev 16:15). The Gospel writers suggest that the parousia will follow an indistinct period of suffering and witness that includes the destruction of the temple and other messianic "birthpangs" (Matt 24:4-14; Mark 13:5-13; Luke 21:9, 24; cf. 2 Pet 3:9; Rev 10:1-11:14). But this information is vague at best. Other writers suggest that the parousia is "near" (Heb 10:25, 37-38) or will happen "soon" (Rev 1:1; 22:7, 12, 20), but then temper these expectations with calls to endure (Heb 10:23, 36; Rev 1:9; 13:10; 14:12). Essentially, the writers of the NT are fully convinced that parousia will occur, but also recognize that it could happen at any time. Thus, they continuously exhort believers to be vigilant and ready through obedience. Therefore, the cosmic transition will occur

in connection with *the parousia/final theophany of God*, but when this event will occur remains *unknown*.

10.1.3 Why will the cosmic event take place?

The writers of the NT have different ways of expressing the problems affecting the cosmos during this age, but they all essentially identify the same core issues: sin, death, and the dominion of hostile powers. Paul, Peter, and John the Seer discuss the problems of sin and death on a cosmic scale by talking about moral and physical “corruption,” which functions to taint and destroy God’s creation (Rom 8:20; 2 Pet 1:4; Rev 11:18). The writer of Hebrews also underscores the cosmic influence of sin and death by indicating that they are the root causes of the transience and mutability of this world (1:11; 2:14; 7:23). When John negatively describes the present world order (i.e. human society without reference to the rule of God) as the “world” (1 John 2:17), he implicitly suggests that sin and death affect the entire cosmos. And while the Gospel writers do not explicitly address the cosmic effects of sin and death, these problems serve as a backdrop to the ministries of Jesus, his disciples, and the early church. Not only is the bulk of Jesus’ ministry aimed at confronting the realities of sin and death through forgiveness, teaching, healing, and exorcism, his death and resurrection is framed as God’s ultimate solution to sin and death (Matt 26:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 1:68-79; Acts 2:22-38). Thus, the cosmic transition will occur in order to deal with the problems of sin and death.

Closely related is the problem of dominion. The writers of the NT agree that, during this age, the cosmos is under the reign of hostile angelic powers, most notably Satan (Matt 4:8-9; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:5-6; Rom 8:20; 1 Cor 2:6-8; Gal 4:3, 8; Eph 2:2; 6:12; Heb 2:14-15; 2 Pet 1:4; 2:19-20; 1 John 5:19; Rev 12:9). These hostile powers, who go by many names and titles,

hold the created world captive to the debilitating effects of sin and death (Rom 8:20; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:14; 2 Pet 1:4; Rev 11:18). God has already taken decisive action to overthrow these hostile powers of evil in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matt 27:45; 28:18; 1 Cor 2:6-8; Gal 4:3-4; Col 2:13-15; Heb 1:3-4; 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Rev 5:5-10; 12:5-9). Yet Jesus' victory will not be fully implemented until the parousia, when he comes to judge the world and rule over all things (Matt 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Acts 17:31; 1 Cor 15:24-27; Heb 9:27-28; 10:12-13; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:10; 1 John 2:28; Rev 19:11-16).

All of this suggests that the cosmic transition will occur in order to bring to completion the victory of Christ's death and resurrection, thereby liberating the cosmos from the destructive effects of *sin*, *death*, and *the dominion of hostile powers*.

10.1.4 How will the cosmic event unfold?

The writers of the NT use a variety of images to describe how the cosmic transition will unfold.

(1) Several writers employ the image of *shaking*. In Matthew and Mark, the coming of the Son of Man shakes the heavenly bodies/powers, which removes them from their positions of authority in the sky (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25). John the Seer also speaks of an eschatological earthquake that will shake the entire cosmos, overthrowing the heavenly bodies/powers and bringing an end to the earthly kingdom that stands in opposition to God (Rev 6:12-17; 16:17-21; 20:11). Finally, the writer of Hebrews emphasizes the positive outcome of God's promised shaking, which will transform the cosmos by overthrowing the powers of evil and removing all forms of sin and death (Heb 12:26-27).

(2) Paul uses the image of *liberation from slavery* to describe the cosmic transition (Rom 8:19-22). When Jesus comes at the parousia, he will overthrow the futile powers of darkness and

set the cosmos free. Similar here is John the Seer's description of the consummation as a transfer of dominion, when "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah" (Rev 11:15).

(3) In addition to the image of shaking, the writer of Hebrews describes the cosmic transition as an *exchange of clothing* (1:10-12). At the proper time, the exalted Son will bring this world to an end and exchange it for the world to come. This concept appears to have some parallels in Pauline thought (1 Cor 15:49-55; 2 Cor 5:1-7).

(4) Peter uses the image of *fire* to describe the cosmic transition (2 Pet 3:7-13). The purpose of this fire will be to test all things and then to destroy that which does not pass the test. Several other NT writers also appear to envision fire as a part of God's eschatological judgment, but do not connect it explicitly to the cosmic transition (cf. Mark 9:49; Luke 12:49; 1 Cor 3:13-15; 2 Thess 1:6-8; Heb 10:27; 12:29; Rev 20:9).

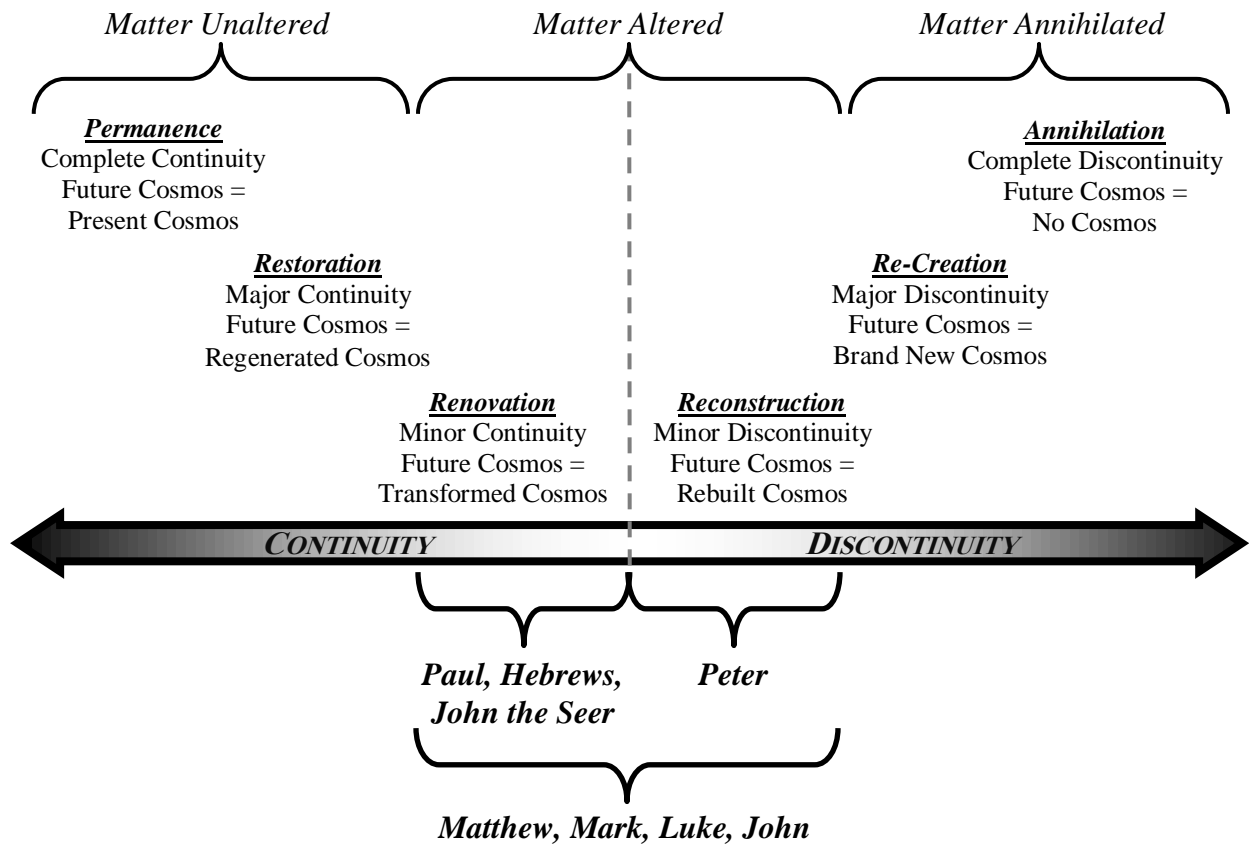
(5) Most of the writers in this study employ the image of the cosmos *passing away*. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the Seer envision this as a future event (Matt 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; Rev 21:1), while Paul and John suggest that it is already in the process of happening on account of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 7:31; 1 John 2:17). Peter also seems to think that the entire cosmos will pass away at the coming of God, but he only mentions the heavens (2 Pet 3:10).

(6) Several writers use the image of cosmic *renewal*. Matthew describes the age to come as a "regeneration" of the world (19:28). Luke describes this same future period as the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). John the Seer says that New Jerusalem will descend upon the earth and God will declare "Behold, I am making all things new (Rev 21:2, 5). And finally,

with an emphasis on the present, Paul states that the “new creation” has already begun (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

All of these images highlight to varying degrees continuity and discontinuity between this age and the age to come. If we return to the six interpretive options proposed at the beginning of this study, we find that the writers of the NT gravitate toward the center of the continuum of continuity and discontinuity. On one hand, they do not support the ideas of *permanence* or *restoration*. These positions emphasize too much continuity with regard to the future of the cosmos. Thus, the cosmic transition will not be a smooth transition that will leave the cosmos unaffected. Neither will it simply reset the cosmos to its original pristine state. These options do not stress enough discontinuity. On the other hand, the writers also do not support the ideas of *re-creation* or *annihilation*. These positions emphasize too much discontinuity with regard to the future of the cosmos. Thus, the cosmic transition will not be so catastrophic that it will involve the annihilation of the cosmos, even if it were to be re-created anew. These options do not stress enough continuity. On the whole, the writers of the NT adopt positions that emphasize nearly equal levels of continuity and discontinuity, either *renovation* or *reconstruction*. While Paul, the writer of Hebrews, and John the Seer probably look forward to the *renovation* of the cosmos, Peter probably expects the *reconstruction* of the cosmos. And Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John could favor either position because they do not provide us with enough information to make a firm judgment. We can illustrate these positions with Figure 10.1.

FIGURE 10.1: THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS



Are there points of contact between the various images listed above to describe the cosmic transition? First, given the range of interpretive possibilities, it is noteworthy that every writer in this study ended up in either the category of *renovation* or *reconstruction*. The fact that both of these positions fall within the “Matter Altered” category (see the three categories concerning “matter” in Fig. 10.1) implies two things. (1) Regardless of whether God renovates or reconstructs this world, it remains as the object of God’s redemptive work. In other words, God will not annihilate the created universe amid the cosmic transition; rather, he will demonstrate his faithfulness to it. Therefore, the writers of the NT look forward to the redemption of *this world*. Continuity will be evident in the fact that the world to come will be an

identifiable counterpart to this world. (2) Regardless of whether God renovates or reconstructs this world, God's redeeming work will result in a "higher" state of existence. In other words, God will not allow this world to remain as it currently stands; rather, he will perform an act of new creation upon it. Therefore, the writers of the NT look forward to the *material transformation* of this world. Discontinuity will be evident in the fact that the world to come will be something new and separate from this world. All of this suggests that the writers of the NT held continuity and discontinuity in close tension when contemplating the future of the cosmos.

Second, all of the writers who discuss the cosmic transition connect it to a *theophany* of God and/or Christ. Thus, the question of how the cosmic transition will occur cannot be separated from the coming of God for purposes of judgment and salvation. Within this theological framework, the writers of the NT describe the cosmic transition in accordance with how they want to portray the final coming of God. They do this in two ways. (1) When the writers want to emphasize the coming of God in *judgment*, they tend to utilize the language of *cosmic catastrophe* (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 6:12-17; 20:11). Nothing is able to stand in a tainted or imperfect state at the coming of the Almighty Judge. (2) Conversely, when the writers want to emphasize the coming of God for *salvation*, they tend to utilize the language of *cosmic renewal* (Matt 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom 8:19-22; Rev 21:1-5).⁵ The coming of God will bring about the redemption of the world. All of this suggests that the degree of continuity and discontinuity expressed by each writer appears to be directly related to their purpose in writing about the final theophany of God. If this is the case, then it seems to further

⁵ Also cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 1:15-20. The writer of Hebrews appears to balance both the themes of judgment and salvation. He utilizes the language of cosmic catastrophe in Heb 12:26, thereby substantiating the warning of judgment (12:25). But at the same time, the writer goes on to interpret Haggai by emphasizing the language of cosmic renewal (12:27), thereby providing a clear basis for the inference of 12:28 concerning salvation.

imply that the language of cosmic catastrophe and the language of cosmic renewal are not so much incompatible as they are *complementary*. Both perspectives are necessary in order to understand the final coming of God and what it means for the future of the cosmos. The old will pass away and the new will be revealed. Thus, both the language of cosmic renewal and cosmic catastrophe can be accepted without necessary contradiction as expressions of various levels of continuity and discontinuity.

Finally, it appears that all of the NT writers in this study display the conviction that the cosmic transition will be accomplished through a *transfer of dominion*. This world is under the rule of hostile powers that must be overthrown at the consummation (Rom 8:20-21; 1 Cor 15:24-28; Rev 11:15). This emphasis comes through above all in the writers that utilize the language of cosmic catastrophe (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Heb 12:26; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 6:12-14).⁶ These texts all draw specific attention to God's judgment of the heavenly realm. The main point seems to be that when God comes, *he will overthrow the angelic rulers of this age*, deposing them from their positions of power over the earth. And given the close association in ancient thought between these heavenly powers and the heavenly bodies (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars), God's judgment of the heavenly powers likely will involve the actual destruction of the sun, moon, and stars (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 21:23; 22:5). Yet, the destruction of the heavenly bodies does not seem to entail the destruction of the entire universe. Instead, their downfall is evidence of an unmistakable transfer of dominion, whereby Satan is ultimately defeated and the kingdom of God is established throughout the entire cosmos.

⁶ Adams overlooks this important connection in his study on the language of cosmic catastrophe in the NT.

10.1.5 What will be the result of the cosmic event?

The writers of the NT use a variety of images to describe the world in the age to come. Matthew describes it as a “regenerated” world, as well as a “kingdom” and an “inheritance” (5:5; 19:28; 25:34). Luke speaks of the “time of the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:20-21). Paul uses the image of creation-personified being liberated from slavery (Rom 8:19-22), and states that it will be the inheritance of humanity (Rom 4:13). He also implies that it will have a new appearance since “the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). The writer of Hebrews builds upon the image of an exchange of clothing, comparing the future world to a new garment (1:12). He also associates the world to come with a heightened form of the promised land by calling it a “rest” (3:7-4:11). Furthermore, he describes the world to come as God’s city, “the heavenly Jerusalem” (11:10; 12:22; 13:14), and an “unshakeable kingdom” that humanity is already in the process of inheriting (12:28). Peter utilizes Isaiah’s prophecy of “a new heaven and a new earth” to describe the new world, adding that “righteousness” will dwell there (2 Pet 3:13). John the Seer also employs Isaiah’s prophecy, adding that it will be humanity’s inheritance (Rev 21:1, 7). Similar to the writer of Hebrews, the Seer describes the world to come in terms of the descent of “New Jerusalem” out of heaven from God (Rev 21:9-22:9). Finally, Mark and John do not offer specific descriptions of the world in the age to come. Overall, these diverse descriptions offer several unique perspectives concerning the world to come, each with its own emphasis.

While the writers of the NT use these various images to describe the world in the age to come, they share a number of common ideas. First, they all appear to envision a future world *without sin* (Matt 13:41; 24:29-31; Mark 9:43-48; 13:24-27; Acts 17:31; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; Heb 3:18; 10:39; 12:25; 2 Pet 3:13; 1 John 2:8; Rev 21:1, 27; 22:3). The final judgment of God and/or Christ will result in a world that is purified of evil. Thus, the future cosmos will be a

place characterized by holiness. Second, the writers agree that *death will be eliminated* in the world to come (Matt 13:43; 19:29; 25:46; Mark 10:30; 12:23-27; Luke 14:14; 20:33-38; Acts 4:2; 24:15; Rom 8:20-21; 1 Cor 15:1-58; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Heb 2:14; 12:28; 2 Pet 1:11; 1 John 5:11-12; Rev 21:4). This implies that the world to come will be intransient in nature, sharing in the eternal nature of its Redeemer and Lord. As a result, it will be a suitable dwelling for the living God and resurrected humanity. Life will abound. Third, the world to come will be *ruled by God and Christ* (Matt 19:28; 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 1:33; 22:28-30; Acts 3:20-21; 1 Cor 15:24-28; Heb 2:5-8; 10:13; 12:28; 2 Pet 1:11; 3:13; 1 John 2:28; Rev 22:1-5). Thus, the hostile powers that formerly enslaved the world will be vanquished, thereby establishing the kingdom of God in fullness throughout the entire cosmos. As an additional component of this theme, Matthew, Luke, Paul, the writer of Hebrews, and John the Seer suggest that humanity will participate in ruling over the new world (Matt 19:28; 25:21, 23; Luke 12:44; 22:28-30; Rom 8:19-22; 1 Cor 6:2; Heb 2:5-8; 12:28; Rev 2:26; 3:21), which will be their inheritance (Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; Heb 6:12; 9:15; 12:28; Rev 21:7).

In conclusion, with the overcoming of sin, death, and the dominion of hostile powers, the writers of the NT surveyed in this study all emphasize that the main problems affecting the cosmos during this age will be resolved amid the cosmic transition. The new world, then, *will reflect the salvation and victory of Jesus' death and resurrection in all its fullness*. It will be a materially transformed world, free from the devastating effects of sin, death, and the powers of evil.

10.2 New Testament Theology and the Future of the Cosmos

Having explored some of the similarities and differences between the writers of the NT involved in this study, we can now discuss whether they present a clear and coherent message pertaining to the future of the cosmos that relates to the larger unity and diversity of the NT witnesses.

As mentioned at the outset of this study, it is generally accepted among interpreters that there are two strands thought in the NT regarding the future of the cosmos. Some texts appear to envision a cosmic catastrophe (i.e. discontinuity) at the end of the age, while others anticipate a cosmic renewal (i.e. continuity). This distinction is not without warrant, but the results of this study suggest that the distinction can be overemphasized, particularly if the two strands are viewed as antithetical options. For example, in his classic work on eschatology, R. H. Charles stated that the writers of the NT hold irreconcilable beliefs concerning the future of the cosmos, and thus present an inconsistent theology.⁷ But this conclusion seems to overstate the differences at the expense of common elements.

It can be recalled from the previous section that the writers of the NT were in general agreement concerning the answers to four out of five correlative questions pertaining to the future of the cosmos (who, when, why, and what). The question which provoked the most diverse answers was: *How* will the cosmic event unfold? Here the writers of the NT provide an array of images to describe the cosmic transition, ranging from images of *renovation* to *reconstruction*. Yet, it should be recognized that while these two categories remain distinct, they are not all that far removed from one another when viewed along a continuum of continuity and discontinuity. They both occupy a middle ground that holds continuity and discontinuity in close tension. Thus, while these categories use different images to describe the cosmic transition, they

⁷ R. H. Charles, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*, 2nd ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), 365-69.

both look forward to the same result, *a materially transformed world*. In other words, it will not suffice to polarize the two, which would create a false dichotomy between continuity and discontinuity. The world to come will be a recognizable counterpart to this world *and* a radical renewal of it. Both continuity and discontinuity must be affirmed simultaneously.⁸ The writers of the NT do not appear bothered by this tension.

Perhaps the most helpful analogy to describe this tension between continuity and discontinuity is the resurrection body (see e.g. Matt 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-12, 36-43; John 20:1-29; 1 Cor 15:35-58).⁹ On one hand, discontinuity is evident in the fact that the original body will pass away and the resurrection body will be a new and different (i.e. materially transformed) body, brought about by a new creative act of God. On the other hand, continuity is evident in the fact that the resurrection body will be an identifiable counterpart to the original body; it will be the same person. Along similar lines, this world will pass away and a new world will emerge from the hand of God, yet the world to come will be an identifiable counterpart to the old. Thus, the ideas of continuity and discontinuity cannot be separated.

What then is the essential message put forth by the writers of the NT concerning the future of the cosmos? Broadly speaking, they assert in various ways that *God and/or Jesus* (who?), *will come on the Day of the Lord* (when?), *in order to eliminate sin, death, and the reign of hostile powers* (why?), *by materially transforming this world* (how?), *so that the salvation and victory of Christ's death and resurrection might become fully manifest throughout the entire cosmos* (what?).

⁸ So Matthias Remenyi, "Apokalyptischer Weltenbrand oder Hoffnung für den ganzen Kosmos? Theologische Überlegungen zum Ende der Welt," *TQ* 188 (2008): 66-68.

⁹ See Remenyi, "Apokalyptischer Weltenbrand," 63-66; Wilbert W. White, *The Resurrection Body*, 3rd ed. (Albany: Frank H. Evory, 1923), 15-22. For a recent and helpful discussion on the nature of the resurrection body in Paul see James Ware, "Paul's Understanding of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36-54," *JBL* 133 (2014): 809-35.

Therefore, despite their unique language and diverse emphases, the writers of the NT appear to hold a common set of beliefs concerning the future of the cosmos and thus present a clear and coherent message that relates to the larger unity and diversity of the NT witnesses.

10.3 Conclusion

This study has been an exploration into the cosmic eschatology of the NT, including both texts of cosmic catastrophe and cosmic renewal. My goal has been to: (1) ascertain what each NT writer teaches about the future of the cosmos, and (2) determine whether we can synthesize their teachings into a coherent message that relates to the larger unity and diversity of the NT. I have attempted to achieve these goals through a close grammatical-historical reading of certain NT texts, followed by asking each writer a set of correlative questions. The answers to these questions were then compared and contrasted in order to highlight common and distinctive teachings among the writers of the NT.

The results of this study suggest that the writers' contemplation of the future of the cosmos cannot be separated from their reflections on the ongoing significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and on the final coming of God for purposes of judgment and salvation. These events have cosmic implications for the writers of the NT. As a result, the writers anticipate the kingdom of God becoming manifest throughout the entire cosmos in a materially transformed world. As Anthony Hoekema concludes,

If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory. For then Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But Satan did not win such a victory. On the contrary, Satan has been decisively defeated. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when he shall renew this very earth on which Satan

deceived mankind and finally banish from it all the results of Satan's evil machinations.¹⁰

Then, as the apostle Paul anticipates, "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

¹⁰ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 281.

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